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Not Just Another Feminist: Emma Watson's *HeforShe Campaign* Speech

Actress Emma Watson is widely known as J.K. Rowling's beloved female character, Hermione, aiding Harry and Ron with the destruction of evil in the *Harry Potter* book series. In both the first book and movie, Hermione is saved by Harry and Ron, and quickly becomes their best friend. From there, Hermione guides the boys, handling tough situations, and often times, saving them from monsters. Just like in the books, Hermione displays courage in the face of danger, intelligence when given impossible decisions, and positivity when all hope seems lost. Hermione evolves into a brilliant character, is just as essential as her male counterparts. She is labeled as a feminist character. She is a logical thinker, fiercely loyal to her friends, and above all, dynamic. In many ways Watson is much like Hermione—doing her best to make the world a better place.

A few years after the final *Harry Potter* movie wrapped, she joined in the fight for gender equality. In July of 2014, at the age of 24, Watson was appointed a Goodwill Ambassador for United Nations Women. Here, she solidified her new role of humanitarian. A graduate from Brown University, she bravely used her platform to fight for the right of women everywhere:

Being asked to serve... is truly humbling. The chance to make a real difference is not an opportunity that everyone is given and is one I have no intention of taking lightly. Women's rights are something so inextricably linked with who I am, so deeply personal and rooted in my life that I can't imagine an opportunity more exciting. I have still so much to learn, but as I progress I hope to bring more of my individual knowledge, experience, and awareness to this role," (Watson).

Her speech for the *HeforShe Campaign* was delivered on September 20, 2014 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. What sets this particular speech apart from those like it, is how Watson draws attention to the negative connotation of the word “feminism,” and how perception of the term needs to be reformed. Another thing that she does is emphasis why both men and women need feminism, despite the widely accepted opinion already in place. Watson artfully employs **strategic essentialism**, **resignification**, and **social power**, with the support of the three classical appeals, **ethos**, **logos**, and **pathos**, to create a narrative between the incorrect notion of feminism, why feminism is truly needed, and how she plans to use her role to make change happen.

#### *Aristotelian Approach to #HeforShe*

On page 15 of *Rhetoric in Civil Life*, **ethos** is defined as, “that which is in the character of the speaker,” (Palczewski). Aristotle believed that this is the most important aspect of any rhetor’s message. In order for an audience to receive a message, they must trust who is delivering the message. Within her speech, Watson weaves in the fact that she has been a part of gender equality long before she was speaking on it in an official platform:

I started questioning gender-based assumptions a long time ago. When at eight, I was confused at being called “bossy,” because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents—but the boys were not. When at 14 I started being sexualized by certain elements of the media. When at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their beloved sports teams because they didn’t want to appear “muscly.” When at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings. I decided that I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me, (Watson).

This is an illustration of how her character developed in order to make her a credible source to deliver the message of gender equality to her audience. She was a witness to how inequality affected those people around her. As a child and teenager, Watson was not searching for a way to deliver a speech as an ambassador, but simply noticing what was happening around her. She was

not creating a narrative, she was witnessing one. What is important to note in her account is how both male and female friends were affected by the same issue.

**Logos** is defined as “that which relies on argument itself, by showing or seeming to show something,” (15). Watson uses logic to call for the need for gender equality:

This is the first campaign of its kind at the UN: we want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for change. And we don't just want to talk about it, we want to make sure it is tangible... For the record, feminism by definition is: “The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes... No country in the world can yet say that they have achieved gender equality... In 1997, Hilary Clinton made a famous speech in Beijing about women's rights. Sadly, many of the things that she wanted to change are still true today... But what stood out for me the most was that less than 30 per cent of the audience were male. How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?... Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too... We don't often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes but I can see that they are and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence. If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted, women won't feel compelled to be submissive. If men don't have to control, women won't have to be controlled, (Watson).

She weaves in her experiences with both men and women along with how a change in the current social order would affect both genders. She uses facts to back up what she is saying, and she also talks about what the goal for the campaign is in regards to the action that she would like to take in making the logical happen.

Watson uses the appeal to **pathos**, or “that which leads the audience to feel emotion,” (15). While most of her speech is rooted in emotion, there are several key moments in which Watson alludes to specific issues that cause her to pause and emphasize the specific emotional connection that employs her to deliver this speech:

I am from Britain and I think it is right that I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and the decisions that will affect my life. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men. But sadly, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to

receive these rights... These rights I consider to be human rights but I am one of the lucky ones. My life is a sheer privilege because my parents didn't love me less because I was born a daughter. My school did not limit me because I was a girl. My mentors didn't assume that I might go less far because I might give birth to a child one day. These influencers were the gender equality ambassadors that made me who I am today. They may not know it, but they are the inadvertent feminists who are changing the world today. We need more of those... (Watson).

This is the building block of her speech. She creates a sense of who she is through an emotional emphasis on how she recognizes the need for the campaign for others who may be facing the same conditions or worse. She also uses her own identity as a plea for her audience to pay attention to what she has to say.

Additionally, she uses pathos to address a wider audience who may reject her message due to a prejudice:

Because to date, I've seen my father's role as a parent being valued less by society despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother's. I've seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them less of a man. In fact, in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49; eclipsing road accidents, cancer, and coronary heart disease. I've seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don't have the benefits of equality either... Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong... It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals. If we stop defining each other by what we are not and start defining ourselves by who we are—we can all be freer and this is what *HeforShe* is about. It's about freedom. I want men to take up this mantle, so their daughters, sisters, and mothers can be free from prejudice but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too—reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned and in doing so be a more true and complete version of themselves, (Watson).

Pathos is effective within this section of the speech because it draws attention to an audience who may wonder why a “feminist campaign” is relevant to them if they do not identify themselves as feminists. She places men and women in an equal role. She expands on the idea of the actual campaign itself--weaving the two ideals together. It is a crucial part of the speech.

Finally, the use of pathos is effective when Watson decides to play into yet another potential rejection of her message. She addresses the gap between who may be considered a “qualified” speaker, and who she “really is.”

You might be thinking who is this Harry Potter girl? And what is she doing speaking at the UN. It’s a good question and trust me, I have been asking myself the same thing. All I know is that I care about this problem. And I want to make it better... In my nervousness for this speech and in my moments of doubt I’ve told myself firmly—if not me, who, if not now, when? If you have similar doubts when opportunities are presented to you I hope that those words might be helpful. Because the reality is that if we do nothing it will take 75 years, or for me to be nearly a hundred before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work. 15.5 million girls will be married in the next 16 years as children. And at current rates it won’t be until 2086 before all rural African girls can have a secondary education. If you believe in equality, you might be one of those inadvertent feminists that I spoke of earlier. And for this I applaud you. We are struggling for a unifying word but the good news is that we have a unifying movement. It is called *HeforShe*. I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen, and to ask yourself, if not me, who, if not now, when? Thank you very very much, (Watson.)

The question of whether she is qualified or not to speak on this topic is a very crucial part of the speech. Some may feel that there is no need for her to define who she is in relation to the validity of this speech, and others may feel like that she really does need to address how a “Harry Potter girl” is the right person to be the voice for men and women everywhere. Either way, each opinion yields a different emotional reaction from how Watson delivers the speech.

The intertwining of emotions within the majority of the speech is in itself a rhetorical strategy that Watson uses to further illustrate the narrative she is creating within the overall message she delivers. It is true that many of these parts of the speech, which are grouped together to fit into a specific appeal, do, in fact overlap with one or both of the other Aristotelian appeals, but it is the introduction of other concepts that allow the overall message to emerge.

#### In Additional to the Aristotelian Approach

**Strategic Essentialism** defined as “the process of making an identity ingredient the core part of one’s persona that legitimizes the right to speak,” (Spivak 174). This concept is reliant on

the understanding of how parts of the speech fit into each classic appeal. Strategic essentialism allows for a fluid manifestation of parts of the speech. Borrowing the idea from how Watson uses ethos to place herself into the conversation of gender equality is her experiences as a young girl, teenager, and now woman. She is a key part of the feminist debate because she is a woman herself. She identifies as a member of the oppressed group. She witnessed how other girls were responding to the notion of how “appearing muscly” was a problem, and therefore what caused them to stop playing sports, despite loving them. Watson also does this with a personal account of how engaging in the same behavior as her male counterparts caused her to be labeled as bossy, a negative reaction, instead of how boys were viewed.

Watson also places herself within the group of people most legitimate to speak on this issue by using logic. She speaks about how “no country has achieved gender equality.” The equal rights that she is demanding are for all humans, and because she is, in fact, and human, she is the right person to speak on this issue. Additionally, Watson clearly defines what feminism is. She is acutely aware of the definition of what she is advocating for, so she is, again, qualified to speak out on the issue. Logos and strategic essentialism work well together to explore the *HeforShe Campaign* because it is such a complex issue. “The identity ingredient” is what makes a person who they are. Watson feels as though she is compelled to speak on this issue not only because of who she is but also because of her morals.

This is where pathos is relevant in regards to emotions. Watson strategically emphasizes her emotions very close to the core of the speech. She not only uses her own personal identity as the catalyst of the speech, but that of the other people that line up with her identity as well. Her whole speech is a combination of emotion driven by logic and a clarification of a single term.

The term “feminism” is something that Watson feels the need to redefine. The logical approach to this strengthens the speech.

Her deliberate defining of “feminism” is an explicit use of **resignification**. She addresses the negative reaction that she is so knowledgeable on based on her past experiences—an ode to her ethos. Without this act, the speech may not reach as many people who may believe in the notion that feminism means something that it does not. This is the foundation of her speech. It is important that the distinction between her use of the word feminism is not tangled with how an opposing audience may interpret it. Resignification works well with logos, or the logic surrounding a message. It is impossible for an individual to make an informed decision regarding an issue without knowing all of the facts. Watson uses the basic definition of feminism to promote a positive social change.

**Social Power** is defined as “the influence that people possess within a particular social structure, and that enables them to induce others to act, (175). All three of the classical appeals are weaved together to establish Watson’s social power. She is delivering the speech as a newly appointed Ambassador of United Nations Women. She is able to reach a wide audience simply because she is a part of a globally recognized organization, but more importantly, she is a member of the same group that she is interested in helping. Her approach begins with calling for a need for women to be equal to men, but she ultimately calls for the complete equality between both genders. This is an appeal to ethos.

Her use of logos within social power is how she names herself as underqualified to speak on such a political issue because she is just “some actress,” however, her humble nature is, in fact, an effective use of logic. Her internationally known work in as an actress, namely the *Harry Potter* series, is the catalyst to how she is in the correct place, addressing a large audience, and

able to deliver the speech. The logic of her celebrity platform is the basis of the rhetorical situation. She intelligently weaves her influence of an entire generation into a carefully constructed, subtle, logical approach to delivering her message of equality for men and women.

Finally, the pathos of Watson's social power is deeply rooted in the anecdote that she offers about growing up as a girl surrounded by boys, both in her family and outside of it. She is a part of the group that she is striving to help. She is also striving to empower all people to be a part of the *HeforShe* campaign. She emphasizes the societal need for community. Watson speaks to all people, men and women, because she wants everyone to be equal. This is reliant on people finding a piece of themselves within Watson's identity. Perhaps someone else was treated differently because of their gender. Perhaps a young boy was bullied into "acting tough" because he was shunned for being sensitive. Maybe a young woman was labeled as less than because she demanded an equal voice to that of her male classmates. Social power is what Watson wants everyone to have, and she uses the three appeals to do just that.

#### Analysis of the Approach

When examining Emma Watson's *HeforShe Campaign* speech, it is important to note how all of the approaches overlap. The three appeals, all serve as the bedrock of which the other three rhetorical terms gain their momentum. The carefully crafted speech makes great use of all rhetorical devices. The success is derived from the subtle hint of all elements. The speech follows a logical pattern, beginning with her experiences as a young child, which spawned her desire for equality. Next, the speech highlights her journey to an Ambassador of the UN. The speech is riveting, intelligent, and special. Emma Watson's *HeforShe Campaign* speech is a valuable rhetorical artifact.



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