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Emperor Porter
Writing 150

Rhetorical Analysis: Bridges of Change

The question of a woman's role in society plagues the current generation. In certain cultures, this question holds even more weight, and though many may not be aware of the problem, some women are daily facing the question of how they fit into society. In "Mormon, Childless and Constantly Condescended To" Jennifer Purdie relates the trials and judgments that she, and others, have faced as older, unmarried women in a Church whose members strongly believe that a woman's role is that of a dutiful wife and mother. Purdie does not, completely disagree with this view but gently argues that unmarried, successful women should hold just as much significance in LDS culture as married women. In her paper, Purdie establishes ethos through personal experiences, speaks with informal diction, uses dialogue/quotes, and creates situational irony all to build a connection with members of the LDS church in order to release them from the single mindset they have developed concerning the role of women.

Through the duration of her entire essay Purdie is careful to establish ethos with her audience. She doesn't talk about her loving husband or kids and how she is heartbroken for women who feel judged because of their single status. No, Purdie clearly establishes the fact that she is thirty-eight years old and unmarried, and though this may mean nothing to the world, it is a big deal in Mormon culture. After alas she states "for Mormons, family is everything" (84). Already, Purdie has ascertained that she is personally connected with this topic. Her audience knows that she isn't merely making assumptions but, rather, she is opening

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Commented [BA1]: This isn't entirely necessary but helps to make clear that the following prepositional phrase applies to all of the items previously listed and not just to situational irony.

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Commented [BA3]: Although its archaic meaning "to make certain, clear, or definitely known" applies, in more modern usage it is more commonly defined as "to learn". I'd suggest a different word here, more along the lines of "demonstrated" "indicated" or "established" perhaps?

herself up, allowing them access into her own insecurities. Purdie's numerous personal stories show the readers all the different ways that she has been judged by fellow church members for still being unmarried and childless. Some people may consider these stories to be weakening Purdie's argument—after all, they aren't cold, hard, undeniable facts. This is an invalid justification because Purdie's focus is on a personal matter where the use of logistical statistics would just distance the author from both the audience and topic, leading to a decline in the arguments persuasive powers. When Purdie tells in Relief Society, members "receive lessons on families, and women complain/brag about their children's exploits for the week" she is proving that she belongs with them; that she isn't some outsider trying to understand a new perspective but a fellow saint who knows just as much as they do about the powers of women as wives and mothers. Through her experiences, Purdie turns herself into a bridge upon which traditionalist members can use the familiarity of her membership to cross over their fear of change into a land of new perspective.

Purdie also utilizes the technique of direct quotation and dialogue when retelling her personal experiences, which has several effects on the audience. Without these quotes and dialogue, Purdie's experiences would be akin to those of a second-hand story and would once again distance her from the readers. When she inputs dialogue, however, the members feel like they are also experience the painful judgements that she has. These incidents are no longer some far-off tale but are happening to us—those judgmental looks are being directed at us and those criticizing words are spoken directly to us. Not only are members now connected to a new side of this topic through vicarious means, but Purdie has successfully shown that this issue is real. She has faced judgement for her unmarried status so much that phrases such as

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Commented [BA4]: "Tell" is usually a transitive verb (i.e., it takes an object: e.g, she tells me, or she tells them). However "tells how" is becoming more acceptable. "Tells that" can also work. You could change this to Purdie tells how in, tells that in, or Purdie tells us that in, or change tells for another verb.

Commented [BA5]: I get what you're trying to say with this, and it's a beautiful way of saying it, however "fear of change" is a little vague just in that I don't think it's fear of change that is keeping them from seeing a new perspective. Just from what I've read so far in your paper I would consider replacing "their fear of change" with something like "the gulf of their preconceived notions," (or biased views or misunderstandings)

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“Aren’t you seeing anyone?” and “How are you going to start a family at your age?” are so familiar she can quote them almost seventeen years later (88). Clearly, this is something that Purdie has had to deal with for a long time, and people are showing no sign of changing their viewpoint, leading to the need of some sort of external stimulation.

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Inputting dialogue into her piece also serves to rattle things up—endless words on a page can easily blur together, but a quote, with its unique punctuation markings, instantly draws the eye and provides the reader with something different. Purdie describes how another single friend, the president of a ward's Young Women was asked to find a guest speaker who, as Purdie restated, was an “ ‘exemplary woman’ ... ‘Preferably one who has married in the Mormon temple and has a family, to speak on the joys of being a woman.’ ” (86). By using a direct quote at this point, Purdie not only grabs the reader's attention with the change of pace but she draws attention to supporting evidence in her argument. The feelings expressed in this quote clearly suggest that unmarried, childless women are inferior to their ‘better, married halves’. This argument itself is fine, but it becomes powerful when Purdie uses quotations, because it shows how this is the expression of somebody else's opinion. Members reading her paper are forced to look at the insulting ways in which this statement could be interpreted and how even the things they say may be offensive.

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Purdie doesn't only connect with her audience by sharing her personal experiences but she also uses casual diction to evade a feeling of distance. In formal writing, authors often use bulky, didactic language that, though strengthening the author's ethos, constructs a barrier between the reader and writer. Purdie chose not to take this route and instead decided on making the audiences experience more up close and personal. In her essay, Purdie tells us how

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she “grabs dinner” with friends and “gripes about work”. Both phrases are very informal—~~they~~ ~~are~~, not in any way the type of language one would use when speaking at a conference, but rather ~~they are what~~ would be used when conversing with a friend. In this way, Purdie suggests that she and the audience are sitting down for a nice friendly chat where she can bring up her concerns, as one would ~~with~~ a friend. All throughout her argument, Purdie’s main focus is establishing ~~a~~ friendly connection with all members of the church so that love and concern for their ‘new friend’ will open their minds to her viewpoint and motivate them to follow her ~~advice as any good friend would.~~

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~~In~~ her paper, Purdie uses personal experience to introduce a moment of situational irony. She shares a time from her childhood when her mother, in reference to an older, unmarried ward member, commented “He needs kids in his life” (87). This sets off Purdie’s memory of how she once imagined living a “typical Mormon” life: going to college, getting married in the temple, having a large family. In fact she was so excited at the idea of having children that she picked out names for her future children, names that will now go unused. From a young age, Purdie had a particular picture of how her life would turn out, an image that matched perfectly with the Mormon ideal. Now, about three decades later, her life is obviously different than what she had anticipated. Despite originally following her mother’s mindset and ~~pitying~~ that older, unmarried man, Purdie has learned that people who choose not to marry or to whom the opportunity never arises do not need the sympathy of others. They in no way hold any less value than married members. ~~Instead~~, as she has recognized first hand, such people should be esteemed for the unique knowledge they have to share with others. In re-counting her own transformation, Purdie is proving to ~~all member~~ of the LDS church that a similar

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transformation is possible for them. The Mormon culture may place extreme pressure on women to get married and bear children, but the choice is ultimately ours. The standard, empathetic mindset towards unmarried members is not our only option; if members simply opened their minds a bit they would realize that we are a church of variety and such variety should be celebrated.

In her essay, Purdie effectively conveys her discontent at being pitied by members for an aspect of her life that she cherishes. Purdie focuses on building a relationship with all members of the church so that they can understand the depth to which her feelings on the topic go. By sharing personal experiences, the members are able to recognize her sincerity and the reality of the situation. Her casual diction does not come between them and herself but rather puts readers at ease with its friendly chat-like feel. The use of quotes and dialogue not only adds variety to the writing but helps members know what it feels like to be in her situation. Finally, by introducing situational irony, Purdie proves that it is possible for us to change our mindset; just because we have always believed women were destined to be mothers doesn't mean we are right. The emotional pull attached to Purdie's argument makes her link to the audience a vital aspect in the success of her influence. Everything that Purdie does is aimed towards creating that bridge that allows members to see things from a new perspective, and her essay is successful at both establishing and strengthening that bond.

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Commented [BA12]: I love the bridge analogy. Did that come from the article, or did you make that up? Either way, I love how you ended with it.