

Examining The Role of Women in the Development of Public Relations

Suzannah A. Patterson

This essay documents the contributions of women to the history of public relations. It discusses the work of 27 noteworthy women who actively used public relations strategies, tactics, and tools to evoke significant social change. Women were selected on the basis of their effective or innovative use of public relations, their contributions to society through the use of public relations, and the inspiration they engendered through public relations. Though severely limited by the social norms of their times, these women made creative use of numerous public relations strategies, tactics, and tools including symbolism, public debate, positioning, printed material, the media tour, and oratory.

Introduction

This essay, based on historical analysis, comprises a history of public relations as developed by women. Their contributions to the early development and implementation of public relations strategies and tactics makes their work meritorious of being compiled into this history.

With women representing up to 90 percent of students engaged in the study of public relations in most universities, they must be provided an appropriate history that includes appropriate role models. Today's women public relations students not only wish to make a living in the practice of public relations, but like their predecessors, wish to evoke change through their effective use of public relations. In addition, the early contributions of women to the development of public relations are both noteworthy in their own right and essential to a comprehensive understanding of the field.

These early women provided voices for those silenced, marginalized, and disenfranchised. Furthermore, these early women spoke in the service of a free, peaceful, equitable, and civil society.

Method

The history of public relations, like many other histories, was not recorded as it evolved. Thus, a typical starting point for a history of public relations is an arbitrary one. In this essay, historical analysis is used to systematically explore and document

Suzannah A. Patterson, Ph.D., APR, is an Assistant Professor at Valdosta State University, spatters@valdosta.edu.

women's contribution to the history of public relations. The selections are governed by four criteria. First, included are women noteworthy for their effective or innovative use of public relations strategies and/or tactics. Second, women are included who are noteworthy for their contribution to society through their use of public relations. Third, women deemed noteworthy for "the inspiration they might engender" while using public relations strategies (Cutlip, 1995) are included. Like all histories, this one is incomplete due to limits of time and space. The intention, however, is to be more inclusive than exclusive.

The women thus selected used public relations strategies and tactics similar to or the same as the ones that fill the history pages of public relations texts. Intentionally included are outstanding women from the well known to the lesser known. The well known are included because they can easily be seen as having used traditional public relations strategies and tactics. Lesser known women are included to demonstrate how their role as nurturers led ordinary women to find ways of reaching segmented publics. Despite the lack of traditional public relations tools, these ordinary women found powerful ways to communicate their causes.

Because public relations as it is practiced today is largely an American invention, this history begins with the development of this nation. It begins with seventeenth century women activists who sought to rectify injustices of their times. Like their descendants, these women identified causes and devoted themselves to those causes with a vengeance, often dedicating their entire lives to this work. The eighteenth century women included operated inside the system of power as presidential wives. Other significant women in this history began their work in the fight for abolition, women's rights, and temperance in the nineteenth century, not achieving their goals until the twentieth century. And finally, discussed are women who were involved in the newly developing field of communication in the early twentieth century. These more contemporary women had limited access to the tools of public relations; nevertheless, they experienced great success with the avenues that were available to them. This success was due primarily to the skills they shared with their predecessors. They were inspired speakers, talented writers, and strong organizers. And while some of these women may have been referred to as ordinary to differentiate them from the more famous ones, all the women included in this history are quite extraordinary.

The Seventeenth Century

Many women came to the New World in search of religious freedom. In their efforts to secure that freedom, women of this period were largely restricted to the use of their own voices in the form of oratory or in one noteworthy case, martyrdom. The exemplars representing the seventeenth century are Anne Hutchinson and Mary Barret Dyer.

Unable to freely practice Puritanism in England, Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) and her family came to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1638 (Traister, 1997). Using the tactic of open meetings in her home, she eloquently espoused her belief that clergy

were not needed as intermediaries, that faith alone was enough to achieve salvation. In opposition to clerical thought, Hutchinson asserted that one could pray directly to God. Governor John Winthrop disagreed and expelled her and her family from the colony in 1638, citing as justification, Hutchinson's insistence on practicing religion as she chose and for preaching herself (Rogers, n.d.). Excommunicated and banished from Massachusetts, she moved her family to Rhode Island, then following her husband's death, to Pelham Bay, Long Island, where in 1643 she and her remaining five children were killed in an Indian attack on the colony.

Today Hutchinson is remembered as an advocate of freedom of religion, the right to free assembly, and women's rights. Her only offenses, according to LaPlant (2004) consisted of building up a power base from which she challenged the colony's established church and government. If she had lived during the twentieth century, we would recognize Hutchinson as a formidable spokesperson and organizer of considerable note.

Mary Barret Dyer (unknown-1660), a follower of Anne Hutchinson, was also a faithful Puritan who settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony with her husband in 1635 (Plimpton, 1994). Convicted and banished several times for preaching heretical ideas, Dyer eventually became a Quaker while exiled in England. She returned to Massachusetts and was convicted of violating the colony's statute against preaching Quakerism. Dyer's radical views were based on her search for a religion that held women to be equal to men. A notable speaker, Dyer refused to save her life by leaving Massachusetts and was hanged June 1, 1660.

Hutchinson and Dyer are included in this work for their use of oratory, and in Hutchinson's case, for organizing a power base. While neither of them lived to experience the results of their work, their cause, ultimately, prevailed.

The Eighteenth Century

Abigail Adams and Dolley Madison used more creative strategies and tactics than their Puritan ancestors because they had access to more resources. More than 100 years after Hutchinson and Dyer, as the new country emerged, these two presidential wives effectively used the letter and special events and personally experienced the results for their endeavors. Some of those results endure today. Adams and Madison became a part of the new American scene by virtue of being married to revolutionists who later became presidents.

Adams (1744-1818), who became not only wife of the second president of the United States, but also mother of the sixth president (Whitney, 1947), used a popular channel of communication open to women at the time—the letter. Wielding the letter as a persuasive tool, Adams wrote to her husband in promotion of her ideals and to others in support of her husband's ideals (See Gelles, 1998; Sweetnam, 1996). Her earliest use of the letter for other than social reasons was during the American Revolution, when she is said to have provided her husband with some of the best intelligence he

received from war-torn Massachusetts (Gelles, 1998).

The writer of thousands of letters (Gelles, 1998), Adams was passionate about politics, actively participating in the promotion of her ideals and her husband's career to the extent that the times allowed her. Letters to her husband indicate she served as his advisor, discussing fully his presidential aspirations (Gelles, 1998; Sweetnam, 1996). Today, we would call her a public relations consultant.

Dolley Madison (1768-1849), who first served as unofficial first lady for President Thomas Jefferson, was the official first lady to her husband, James Madison (Anthony, 1949; Morgan, 1946). A Southerner by birth, she was a master at staging special events to promote her husband's work, thereby becoming the center of Washington society. Her Wednesday evening receptions are said to have helped to soothe tensions between the Federalists and Republicans at a time when such a forum was very much needed. It was Madison who presided over the nation's first inaugural ball, given in 1809. The Easter Egg Roll on the White House lawn, another of her special events, is today a time-honored activity, continuing to annually make front-page news. Today, Madison would be called an events planner and manager.

Operating within the system and with direct access to those in power, Adams and Madison made effective use of the letter and special events. The efforts and influence of Adams and Madison are admirable precursors to activities in the White House, which are today performed by press secretaries, communication officers, and their large staffs.

The Nineteenth Century

During the nineteenth century, two causes greatly occupied the minds and time of those willing to battle tradition. These two reform movements were for the abolition of slavery and for women's rights. Since each of these movements called for fundamental changes in the nature and function of society, women in these movements had to apply extraordinary persuasive power to further their agendas. Women of the nineteenth century also worked for temperance and other humanitarian issues. Because the Abolitionist Movement gained support earlier than the Women's Rights Movement, women whose work in abolition that can be analyzed in terms of public relations strategies are presented first. It is impossible, however, to recognize the work of individual women for one movement without acknowledging their work on the other.

Continuing the use of oratory and letters, women advocating abolition in the nineteenth century added the autobiography and positioning to advocate on behalf of that which most considered essentially a movement for human rights. The women selected as advocating abolition using public relations strategies include Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Tubman, and the Grimké sisters.

The Abolitionist Movement

Like her peers in earlier centuries, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) put her considerable oratorical skills to use and put herself in personal danger as she traveled the country on foot speaking for abolition and women's rights. Born a slave in the eighteenth century, Truth gained her freedom at the age of 30 (Bernard, 1990; Mabee, 1993; Pauli, 1962). From her emancipation until her retirement due to ill health, she traveled and lectured on issues of human rights. Her eloquence and the power of her voice were reportedly amplified by her stature. Truth stood more than six feet tall, physically looking down on almost everyone of her day. Most noted for her "Ain't I a Woman" speech delivered in 1851, Truth spoke before Presidents Lincoln and Grant. To support her speaking tours, she wrote and sold her autobiography. In addition to functioning as a fund-raising strategy, her autobiography carried her messages to diverse audiences and provided a lasting record of her many accomplishments. Today Truth would likely be considered a movement or organizational spokesperson or a motivational or celebrity speaker representing a movement or organization.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) is a noteworthy woman in the history of public relations for her early use of positioning. Stowe was born to a middle class white family in Connecticut. After marrying and moving to Cincinnati (Hedrick, 1994), she became an ardent abolitionist. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she enjoyed the full support of her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, and her husband, Calvin Ellis Stowe. In her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly*, published as a serial between 1851 and 1852, Stowe transformed the concept of slavery by positioning it as a moral issue, becoming the first person to use positioning as a tactic. The serial, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an ideal vehicle for this positioning due to its wide circulation.

Harriet Tubman (1820-1913) placed herself in even more danger than Truth. One could say she became an event planner for the Underground Railroad. Born into slavery in Maryland, she married John Tubman, a free man of color, in 1845. Unfortunately, her marriage did not provide her with emancipation, and she lived with the constant threat of being sold to slaver owners in the South. Escaping from slavery in 1850 with the aid of a white neighbor, Tubman became the most famous member of the Underground Railroad (McDevitt, 2003). As one of its leaders, Tubman helped stage the nineteenth century's single greatest campaign event. Like a campaign planner or strategist today, she was mindful of the effect of the environment, choosing winter for its long, dark nights of travel. She personally made about 19 trips into "enemy territory," three of which were to rescue her own family. Risking her own life to help more than 300 slaves escape to Canada, Tubman was reportedly so personally persuasive that none of those she shepherded to safety ever reversed course.

Two lesser-known abolitionists are the Grimké sisters of Charleston, S.C. (Birney, 1969; Lerner, 1967), who like Hutchison, Dyer, and Truth applied their oratorical skills to the cause with enviable success. Sarah Grimké (1792-1873) and Angelina Grimké (1805-1879) were born into the landed gentry of the antebellum South but somehow developed during childhood the belief that all people, including slaves,

were created equal. As young women, they moved to Philadelphia where they met and later became Quakers, members of the Friends of Society (Newman, 1972).

The Grimké sisters made a strong and successful public relations team, working together in all their writings and speaking engagements (Birney, 1969; Lerner, 1967; Lumpkin, 1974). They were the first women to speak to “mixed” audiences of men and women, and Angelina was the first woman to address a legislative body in the United States (Birney, 1969; Lerner, 1967). Angelina was a strong writer, and the first publication of one of her anti-slavery letters made both sisters famous (Lumpkin, 1974). She later published the pamphlet, *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the Southern States*, in which she urged white women readers to oppose slavery on moral grounds and “to identify with their slave sisters” (Campbell, 1989; Birney, 1969; Lerner, 1967; Lumpkin 1974). These publications drew enormous attention, putting both women in great demand as abolitionist speakers.

Women’s Rights

Women's Rights is the second of the two major human rights issues battled by women throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The Women’s Rights Movement, as an organized entity, dates from 1848 when the first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, N. Y. (Flexner, 1959, 1996). During what was to be a gathering of monumental import, *The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions* was delivered. Through a combination of oratory and public debate, convention participants, some 300 strong, formulated the ideology that would be articulated during the long public relations campaign for women’s rights. By combining oratory with public debate into a new and powerful public relations tool, those struggling for equal rights set the agenda for the remainder of the Women’s Rights Movement. In addition to oratory and public debate, the strategies, tactics, and tools used to propel the Women’s Rights Movement forward, included event planning and management, positioning, lobbying, symbolism, and writing for various media including the magazine.

Throughout the nineteenth century, women’s magazines were the primary channels of communication for women. Life for most women was physically demanding, both in terms of keeping house and bearing and rearing children. These magazines aimed at making life a bit less grueling, providing the latest information on inventions of the day, such as the sewing machine. Many, however, were founded for the primary purpose of supporting women’s rights. Even traditionally “housekeeping” magazines were noted to add women’s rights materials to their publications. This channel of communication was particularly significant since women had ready access to these magazines, and they could consume the contents in private.

An early advocate for women’s rights, Lucy Stone gave her initial speech on this topic from the pulpit of her brother’s church in 1847 (Lewis, 1999). The following year, she was hired as an agent/organizer for the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) (Carver, 1999). As a paid employee of the AASS, she traveled widely, speaking for both abolition and women’s rights. Her employers became displeased with her constant injection of suffrage into her speeches; and at their insistence, she began separating the

ventures, weekends for the AASS and weekdays for women's rights. As a gifted orator she drew large, but often hostile audiences. In 1850, she converted Susan B. Anthony to the women's cause. In support of the 14th Amendment, Stone became a leading organizer of the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) in 1969. An accomplished writer and editor, as well as orator, Stone and her husband founded the AWSA's weekly newspaper, *The Woman's Journal* in 1870.

The public life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) began auspiciously when she delivered her first speech, *The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolution*, in Seneca Falls, N. Y. She founded the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869 and served as its president for the next 21 years (Banner, 1980; Faber, 1972; Griffith, 1984). This organization provided Stanton the vehicle through which to have a substantial impact on American customs, traditions, and laws that concerned the rights of women. She advocated a broad range of issues including divorce, abortion, suffrage, work laws, property rights and education.

Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) joined forces for suffrage following their introduction by Amelia Bloomer in 1851 (Banner, 1980; Faber, 1972). Both women were seasoned campaigners from the Abolitionist Movement. Like Stone, Anthony had been a paid agent for the AASS in 1856. In this position she had arranged meetings, made speeches, put out posters, and distributed leaflets. In their work for women's rights, Stanton and Anthony were, in fact, the ideal public relations team. Stanton was a "silent" partner, the writer, who took a back seat to the orator, Anthony, the even more famous feminist. Stanton usually stayed at home with her husband and seven children, while Anthony toured the lecture circuit (Harper, 1908). Although both women were competent writers and speakers, Stanton was a strong and prolific writer and Anthony a strong and more frequent speaker. They collaborated on all their work except for Stanton's books (Faber, 1972).

Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898) joined the movement in 1853 and co-authored with Stanton and Anthony the first three volumes of *The History of Woman Suffrage* (Wagner, 1998). She also used her writing skills as editor of the NWSA suffrage paper, *The National Citizen and Ballot Box*, for four years. She co-authored, with Stanton, the *Declaration of Rights for Women* (1876). To achieve impact, the women presented this work at the Independence Day ceremonies of 1876 in Philadelphia. A strong speaker as well as writer, Gage was a suffrage supporter throughout her life.

While thousands of women worked on the local and state levels to achieve women's suffrage, time and space preclude their inclusion here. One of them, however, provided such inspiration that she serves as an exemplar of them all. Madeline McDowell Breckenridge (1872-1920) of Lexington, became the most influential woman in Kentucky despite great personal hardship (Harrison & Klotter, 1997). A niece of Henry Clay, Breckenridge lost a leg to tuberculosis of the bone while quite young and suffered a stroke at age 32. Despite these obstacles, between 1912 and 1915 she utilized powerful public relations strategies and tactics, planning and managing suffrage marches and delivering speeches that demonstrated her ability and humor, in addition

to her strong lobbying efforts.

Unfortunately, although the movement began in 1848, the courageous women discussed above saw little change in their lifetimes. They did not even live to see the passage of the 19th Amendment, awarding women the right to vote. Luckily, there were younger sisters ready and willing to take up the struggle and see it through.

Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947) was the younger sister who would spearhead the program to get the 19th amendment ratified by enough states for it to become law. Catt organized a campaign that permeated every level of American politics, from local districts to the U.S. Congress (Fowler, 1986; Hardesty, 1989; Sanders, 1979). To get the message out in 1917, she developed a new public relations tool, the auto tour, which was really an early media tour. Rented cars with enormous banners across the back carried women speakers/campaigners from town to town. The banner would be lowered only long enough to let a campaigner stand in the back seat of the open cab to address a crowd. *The New York Times* described the campaign as being "run with all the method of experienced men politicians" ("Suffragists' machine," 1917, p. 8). This article also points to an important part of the campaign's organization, its Publicity Council. The duty of the women on this council was to plan events such as parades and what the *New York Times* referred to as "stunts." Catt's campaign also included the targeting of specific audiences. For example, her machine worked with The League of Mexican Feminists, organized in Laredo, Texas and with Ida B. Wells-Barnett's all-black organization, Alpha Suffrage Club in Chicago (Flexner, 1959/1996).

As a writer, editor, and later as an orator, Wells-Barnett (1862-1931) worked for women's suffrage and lobbied for anti-lynching legislation in Memphis, Tenn. Born into slavery in 1862, she lost her parents to yellow fever at age sixteen (Moreau, 2001). While teaching in 1891, Wells-Barnett wrote a series of articles about the inequality of Memphis's segregated schools, and the school board dropped her contract. She then became editor and partner of the Memphis militant newspaper, *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* (Lamb, 2001). When a white mob kidnapped and lynched three local black grocery store owners, she began a campaign to end lynching. In an editorial, she called for an economic boycott of the city, urging black workers to leave Memphis. In response, black families left Memphis by the hundreds, draining the economy and alarming the white business community, which reciprocated by wrecking Wells-Barnett's office and destroying her press. Out of town at the time, she never returned to Memphis. Wells-Barnett moved to Chicago where she crusaded as an orator and writer against lynching and for civil rights. She lobbied against segregation in public transportation and schools and established the first black women's suffrage club, the Alpha Suffrage Club in 1913 (Duster, 1970). Wells-Barnett spent her life using both her voice and her pen in the cause of a more equitable and civil society.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) is most noteworthy for her use of the public relations strategy of positioning in the Women's Rights Movement similar to Stowe's use of positioning in the Abolitionist Movement. Gilman was one of hundreds of women who worked directly with Carrie Chapman Catt (Gornick, 2003). Catt

asserted that Gilman had “the most original and challenging mind” (p. 43) that the movement had produced Gilman was a writer, philosopher, and theoretician. In her seminal work, *Women and Economics*, she positioned women’s rights as an economic issue, stating equality could not be found without economic independence. This positioning extended the issue of women’s rights well beyond securing the vote. In similar fashion, Katherine Dexter McCormick (1875-1967) positioned women’s rights as a fight for political power and spent her life educating women in the political process (Whitesell, 1998).

While Catt and her followers were using the auto tour and campaigning state by state to gain popular support for the cause, Alice Paul (1885-1977) lobbied Congress for an amendment to the Constitution that would guarantee women the right to vote. Paul focused on ratification by the federal government (Lewis, 1999) working first within the National American Woman Suffrage Association and later in her own rival organizations. Taking her case directly to Congress and President Woodrow Wilson, Paul adopted the British strategy of holding the party in power responsible. She disrupted Wilson’s inauguration with a huge suffrage parade and initiated the public relations tactic of picketing the White House. These demonstrations became so frequent that she was thrown in jail on several occasions. Her incarceration transformed her into a power symbol, a martyr, for the cause.

Women’s Temperance

Although lacking the monumental importance of abolition and women’s rights, temperance was a cause that occupied the persuasive powers of numerous women activists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In many towns in Ohio and New York in the fall of 1873, women concerned with the destructive power of alcohol met in churches to pray and then marched to local saloons to ask the owners to close their establishments (Kerr, 1997). They met with limited success of temporary duration. Disappointment and dismay led them the following year to establish the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union—the oldest continuing non-sectarian woman's organization in the world.

As the second president of the WCTU, Frances Willard (1839-1898) skillfully positioned suffrage as a roundabout vehicle to achieve and assure sobriety and positioned the WCTU as a school for women (Parker, 1997). The first woman president of a college granting degrees to women, Willard left academia in 1874 to work full time for temperance. But she did not leave education nor abandon women as students. Instead, she framed the WCTU as an avenue through which women might gain the education otherwise denied them. In this role, Willard traveled the nation, lecturing, writing books, and editing WCTU publications. Under Willard’s leadership, the WCTU became the largest organization for women in the U. S. She simultaneously served the cause of suffrage by teaching women that temperance could only be achieved through the ballot box—suffrage, therefore, became the means to temperance.

Anna Howard Shaw (1847-1919) joined the fight for temperance armed with a keen intellect and a battery of oratorical skills. From a childhood of poverty, Shaw rose to earn graduate degrees in theological and medicine (Brown, 2001). She was ordained by the Methodist Protestant Church in 1880; but when she met Susan B. Anthony in 1888, she decided to spend the rest of her life fighting for temperance and women's suffrage. She waged her campaign throughout the country at the grass roots level, and in 1904 she was elected president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. During World War I, she was chair of the Woman's Committee of the United States Council of National Defense. For her tireless work, Shaw became the first woman to be awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. So persuasive was her oratory that she lectured in support of world peace and for the League of Nations at the request of Presidents Wilson and Taft.

Carry Nation (1846-1911) is perhaps the most famous and well-remembered activist in the Women's Temperance Movement. Her public relations strategies included physical destruction (Schwarz, 1900/ 2000) and the symbolic manipulation of her weapon of choice. The victim of an alcoholic husband, Nation sought to rid herself of her thankless life and did so using the only tools she knew. Standing six feet tall and fearsome in appearance, Nation entered saloons wielding a hatchet with which she destroyed everything in sight. Using her best promotional and fundraising skills, she financed her saloon-smashing campaign by selling tiny, hand carved wooden replicas of her famous hatchet. Nation's use of symbolism as a public relations tactic is certainly not original to her, but it is indeed an exemplary application.

Humanitarian Efforts

While not as high profile as their counterparts in the social movements just discussed, a number of women devoted their lives to narrower individual issues that had an impact on both women's lives and the well being of their families. In an editorial appearing in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Sarah J. Hale observed, "This heart service in the cause of humanity belongs naturally to women." The women discussed below deftly and with admirable results applied the public relations strategies and tactics of lobbying, writing, oratory, symbolism, martyrdom, and use of celebrity. These dedicated women are important to remember to prevent the belief that public relations requires the backing of a large organization and abandonment of our individual initiatives.

Dorothea Dix (1802-1887) was a noteworthy activist who sought to transform notions of mental health in the nineteenth century (Brown, 1998). A genteel woman, Dix began lobbying the Massachusetts legislature in writing in 1841 and eventually launched the American Asylum Movement. Troubled by the conditions she discovered while teaching Sunday school in a Boston area jail, she toured every jail, every house of ill repute, and every house of corrections in Massachusetts before she submitted her report to the legislature. She published her findings in a pamphlet, sought a transformation, and promoted a revolution in the perception and treatment of insanity. Working quietly behind the scenes, Dix continued to investigate and file reports in state after state, using local papers to publicize the terrible conditions she found.

Although she was a feminist, a civil rights activist, a patriot, and a humanitarian, Clara Barton (1821-1912) is most well known as the founder of the American Red Cross (Updike, 2000). In that capacity she developed lobbying and fundraising tactics still in use today. To get the first Red Cross chartered in the United States, she made her case directly to the U.S. Congress and finally prevailed in 1881 (Berry, 1997; Gumpert, 1938). The program of fundraising she established included use of the broadside, button or pins, window stickers, and personal contact to solicit and acknowledge every penny received. Hers was always a grassroots effort, a strategy followed today in successful fundraising.

In an effort to improve working conditions, Kate Mullany (1845-1906) became a leading labor organizer in the nineteenth century (Foner, 1979; Turbin, 1978). She emigrated from Ireland to Troy, N.Y. and went to work in a local laundry at age 19 following her father's death. In response to the dangerous, unhealthy working conditions and low wages she confronted, Mullany organized the women workers into the Collar Laundry Unions shortly after she went to work in 1864. At a July 18, 1864 labor movement picnic, before an audience of about 4,000, Mullany showed her union's appreciation of support through the public relations tactic of symbolism. She presented Iron Molders No. 2 with a large, elaborately embroidered banner with a picture of an interior of a furnace on one side and a depiction of "Justice" topped with an eagle on the other side. Mullany's use of the time-honored symbols of American liberty and justice in conjunction with the union cause was a creative use of symbolism through identification, a strategy still used today.

Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) is important to the history of public relations due to her use of positioning. Sanger worked as a nurse and observing first-hand the enormous health hazards associated with pregnancy, both wanted or unwanted (Chesler, 1992; Douglas, 1970; Lader, 1955). Her intention was to free women from the dangers of unwanted pregnancies by teaching and advocating birth control. To achieve her goal and to overcome opposition, she positioned birth control as a health issue rather than a moral issue. In 1916, she opened a birth control clinic with her sister, Ethel Byrne. It was closed down in 10 days, and the sisters were arrested because it was against the law to advocate the use of contraception. Undaunted, Sanger wrote newspaper articles on feminine hygiene, published a militant journal, *Woman Rebel*, and a pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, in which she coined the term, "birth control" and called for the legalizing of contraception. Because she used the United States Post Office to mail her materials, Sanger was indicted for violating postal laws and was forced to flee first to Canada, and then to England. A year later she returned, the charges were dropped, and she began lecturing widely; and in 1921, Sanger founded the American Birth Control League, forerunner of Planned Parenthood .

In addition to positioning, Sanger is important to public relations because she used speeches, publications, public demonstrations, press conferences, symbolism and even confrontations with the law. One of her most newsworthy actions was taken in 1929 when she called a press conference at which she had her mouth taped shut

because Boston authorities refused to give her permission to speak (Chesler, 1992; Douglas, 1970; Lader, 1955). Of this action she astutely observed, "As a propagandist, I see immense advantage in being gagged. It silences me, but it makes millions of others talk and think the cause in which I live" (Wilcox, et al., 1998, p. 45).

Annie Oakley (1860-1926) may seem an odd inclusion in this chapter. She is, in fact, most remembered for her 16-year career in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show (Annie Oakley, n.d.). In addition, she was not the founder of a large social movement, nor was she the founder of a social service organization. She can, however, be recognized for her early use of public relations tactics due to her use of her own celebrity around which she planned events. Oakley endured five operations after a spinal injury sustained in a train accident in 1901 that effectively ended her career. The accident did not prevent her from performing. She developed a shooting show that she performed for charity events to help orphans, widows, and underprivileged women. She publicly campaigned for women's rights, especially for their right to hold paid employment, for their right to earn equal pay, and for their right to participate in sports, all of which she had done. Oakley's staging of special events to raise funds is a common tactic used today by public relations practitioners who work in fundraising.

The Twentieth Century

With few exceptions, women discussed thus far used public relations strategies and tactics on behalf of social issues for which they had compelling personal concerns. In a sense, they were driven to use public relations strategies because society was flawed, and they were determined to repair those flaws. Forced from the private or "appropriate" place for women into the public arena, these women only had access to tools of their own making. In addition, they were often scorned or viewed as interlopers in the business realm. Early in the twentieth century, however, women were becoming professionals at public relations, working to develop their craft, devising new strategies, tactics, and tools that would allow them every available means of persuasion. Instead of devoting their efforts to one or two social issues of personal concern, they applied public relations to a variety of issues, publicizing the causes, interests, or businesses of others. Though they seldom had public relations titles, they were becoming public relations guns for hire. Many developed direct access to media outlets, had staffs to support their efforts, and in some cases had direct access to power.

Although Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) never identified herself as a public relations practitioner, she was an ardent and skillful user of public relations tools and tactics. She was a proud member of the Women's Rights Movement and the Labor Union Movement, both cited above (Cook, 2000). She was also a supporter of the peace movement and the movement for racial justice.

During the life of her husband, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt focused her attention on his political agenda, but she kept the social issues about which she cared deeply close at hand. It was not until her husband was paralyzed by polio in 1921 that she became a public figure (Dougherty, 2003). After he

was elected governor of New York in 1928, she became his political representative (Beasley, 2000). Eleanor Roosevelt became the equivalent of a full-time public relations practitioner, a planner and spokesperson, using the public relations tools and tactics of holding her own press conferences, touring the country, writing newspaper columns, hosting radio shows and later, television shows.

While the earlier presidential wives, Adams and Madison, exercised the power of persuasion behind the scenes, Roosevelt had direct access to the media in Washington and on the road (Beasley, 2000). The first presidential wife to hold her own press conferences, the first 350 of which were only for women reporters, she viewed them as fulfilling two functions simultaneously—publicizing the activities and initiatives of her husband's administration that were of particular interest to women and elevating the status of women reporters. She also frequently used the cross-country tour for dual purposes. During her travels she gathered information for her husband about public sentiment but at the same time used her access to audiences and the media to publicize her own causes (Dougherty, 2003).

Roosevelt was almost an artist in her use of the media as a public relations tool. Between 1933 and 1962, she had four newspaper columns; her daily and most noteworthy "My Day" column, published 1936-1962, was syndicated in hundreds of newspapers in the U. S. (About Eleanor Roosevelt, 2003; Morris, 2000). Although Roosevelt ostensibly wrote "My Day" to tell readers about the events in her day as a presidential wife, in actuality she demonstrated that an independent, middle-aged American woman could think for herself (Morris, 2000). Not surprisingly, Roosevelt often used the column to disagree with the president's policies, occasionally forcing him to respond in print. In similar fashion, Roosevelt used radio for dual purposes, hosting several shows between 1941 and 1951. An avid believer in the power of media, Roosevelt ventured into the new arena of television, hosting "Prospects of Mankind" on WGBH-TV in Boston from 1959-1962.

Doris Fleischman (1892-1980) is the earliest woman recorded to make her living as a public relations practitioner. She was an astute strategist and used all current public relations tactics, but she also experienced limitations due to her gender, as had her women counterparts in earlier generations (Cutlip, 1995). Her perseverance made her a trailblazer for women aspiring to careers in public relations in the twentieth century. Fleischman's early career was spent writing for newspapers and magazines. The segment of her career for which she is best known, however, began in 1919 when she joined the public relations firm owned by Edward Bernays. Fleischman proved to be an excellent editor and had the ability to judge and understand people quickly and accurately. Because the agency's major function was to counsel businesses in the use of public relations, her skills in interpersonal perception made her invaluable. Bernays, described her as being more useful than a Gallup poll.

What Fleischman believed to have been her most significant work as public relations professional was when Bernays was retained to work for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1920 (Henry, 1997).

The organization's first Southern convention was to be held in Atlanta in a few weeks and it wanted positive publicity for the meeting. While Bernays worked with Northern newspapers, Fleischman went to Atlanta to meet with Southern white editors and elected officials to help ensure a peaceful meeting.

When Fleischman and Bernays married in 1922, she kept her maiden name at her husband's insistence (Henry, 1997). Although he insisted that she sign a fifty-fifty partnership in the firm, Bernays maintained responsibility for all client contacts. History seems to accept that Fleischman was content with the role of "originating and developing programs for action" (p. 4), but in her unused notes for her book, *A Wife is Many Women*, found in Doris Fleischman Bernays Papers, carton 1, file 19, Schlesinger Library, she recorded, "I made contacts before marriage, but not after."

Discussion

This analysis documents the work of 27 rather magnificent women who made significant contributions to the development of the discipline of public relations. Women with very little support produced, through their skillful use of public relations strategies, tactics, and tools, enormous social change. They revealed possibilities to other women where none were visible before; and along the way, thousands of women followed them down the trails they were blazing.

The practice of public relations involves the negotiation of power. Those with power can exercise coercion to mandate change. Those without power must be persuasive to evoke change. From the seventeenth century until they won the right to vote in 1920, women determined to change the structure or function of society had little choice but to employ public relations strategies, tactics, and tools. That they did so with such great skill and success should surprise no one. History is filled with examples in which women have encountered obstacles, viewed those obstacles as challenges, and met those challenges head-on to move forward. Women in public relations are no different. Women overcame prohibitions against women speaking in public by speaking there anyway even if they had to build their own podiums. The perseverance of early women reformers/activists made it easier for those who followed. These 27 women used every conceivable public relations strategy, tactic, and tool, many of which were their own creations, and did so with passion.

This essay is inclusive, but it is far from exhaustive, so the researcher encourages scholars to join in the development the history of women using public relations, especially in areas such as health care and child labor. History left too long unrecorded is eventually lost. Let that not be the case in our discipline.

References

- Anthony, K. (1949). *Dolley Madison: Her life and times*. NY: Doubleday.
- Banner, L. W. (1980). *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a radical for women's rights*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Beasley, M. H. (2000). Eleanor Roosevelt's press conferences: Case study in class, gender, and race. *Social Science Journal*, 37:4. 517-529.
- Bernard, J. (1990). *Journey toward freedom: The Story of Sojourner Truth*. NY: Talman.
- Berry, N. O. (1997). *War and the Red Cross*. NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Birney, C. H. (1969). *The Grimké Sisters*. Greenwood, CN: Greenwood Press.
- Bober, N. (1996). Abigail Adams: Witness to a revolution, *Horn Book Magazine*, 72 (1), 38-41.
- Brady, K. (1989). *Ida Tarbell: Portrait of a muckraker*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Brown, D. A. (2001). *A voice from the wilderness: The story of Anna Howard Shaw*. NY: Houghton.
- Brown, T. J. (1998). *Dorothea Dix: New England reformer (Harvard Historical Studies, No. 127)*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Campbell, K. K. (1989). *Man cannot speak for her: Vol. I, a critical study of early feminist rhetoric*. Westport, CT: Press.
- Carver, M. (1999). Lucy Stone: Apostle for a 'new woman,' *Women & Language*, 22:2.
- Chesler, E. (1992). *Woman of valor: Margaret Sanger and the birth control movement*. NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Cook, B. W. (2000). Woman of the century. *Women's Review of Books*, 17:10. 22-23.
- Cutlip, S. M., (1995). *Public relations History: From the 17th to the 20th century, the Antecedents*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dougherty, R. (2003). First lady of the world. *National Parks*, 77:3/4. 44.
- Douglas, E. T. (1970). *Margaret Sanger: Pioneer of the future*. NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

- Duster, A. (Ed.). (1970). *Crusade for justice: The autobiography of Ida B. Wells*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eleanor Roosevelt.(n.d.). Retrieved Oct. 5, 2003, from <http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/abouteleanor/erradiotv.html>
- Faber, D. (1972). *Oh, Lizzie: The life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton*. NY: Pocket.
- Flexner, E. (1959/1996). *Century of struggle: The woman's rights movements in the United States*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Foner, P. S. (1979). *Women and the American labor movement from colonial times to the eve of World War I*. NY: Free Press.
- Fowler, R. B. (1986). *Carrie Catt: Feminist politician*. Boston: Northeastern University.
- Gelles, E. B. (1998). *First thoughts: Life and letters of Abigail Adams*. NY: Twayne.
- Gornick, V. (2003). Charlotte's Web. *Nation*, 277:4, 42-44.
- Griffith, E. (1984). *In her own right: The life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gumpert, M. (1938). *Dunant, the story of the Red Cross*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hardesty, C. (1989). *Carrie Chapman Catt and Woman Suffrage*. Iowa City, IA: State Historical Museum of Iowa.
- Harper, I. H. (1908). *The life and work of Susan B. Anthony*. Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press.
- Harrison, L. H. & Klotter, J. C. (1997). *A new history of Kentucky*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- Hedrick, J. D. (1994). *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A life*. NY: Oxford University Press.
- Henry, S. (1997). Anonymous in her own name, *Journalism History*, 23(2), 51-63.
- Kerr, K. A. (1997) *American temperance and prohibition*. Retrieved from <http://prohibition.history.ohio-state.edu/>.
- Lader, L. (1995). *The Margaret Sanger story and the fight for birth control*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Lamb, D. (2001, Apr.). *How scholarship helped Ida B. Wells in her anti-lynching campaign*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Southern States

Communication Association, Lexington, KY.

LaPlant, E. (2004). *American jezebel: The uncommon life of Anne Hutchinson, the woman who defied the Puritans*. San Francisco: Harper.

Lerner, G. (1967). *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels against slavery*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Lewis, J. J. (1999). *Alice Paul biography* Retrieved September 25, 2003, from <http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php?action=viewo>.

Lumpkin, K. D. (1974). *The Emancipation of Angelina Grimké*. Chapel, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Mabee, C. (1993). *Sojourner Truth: Slave, prophet, legend*. NY: New York University Press.

McDevitt, T. (2003). African American women and espionage in the Civil War. *Social Education*, 67: 5. 254-259.

Moreau, S. (2001). Crusader for justice. *American History*, 35:6. 18.

Morgan, H. L. (1946). *Mistress of the White House: The story of Dolley Madison*. Philadelphia: Westminster.

Morris, J. (2000). Woman of the century. *New Statesman*, 129:4496. 52-53.

Newman, D. (1972). *A procession of friends: Quakers in America*. Garden City NY: Doubleday.

Parker, A. M. (1997). *Purifying America: Women, cultural reform, and pro-censorship activism 1873-1933*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Pauli, H. E. (1962). *Her name was Sojourner Truth*. NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Plimpton, R (1994). *Mary Dyer: Biography of a rebel Quaker*. Boston: Branden Publishing.

Sanders, B. (1979). *Women's American History*. Washington, DC: Office of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 186 343).

Schwarz, F. D. (1900/2000). Carrie Nation, *American Heritage*, 51(3), 107-109.

Suffragists' machine perfected in all states under Mrs. Catt's rule. (1917, Apr. 29). *The New York Times*, 8.

- Sweetnam, S. L. (1996). "New" letters from an indefatigable writer, *Christian Science Monitor*, 88(60), 13-14.
- Traister, B. (1997). Anne Hutchinson's 'monstrous birth' and the feminization of antinomianism. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 27:2. 133.
- Turbin, C. (1978). *Working women of Collar City: Gender, class and community in Troy, New York, 1864-1886*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Updike, W. A. (2000). Angel of the battlefield. *National Parks*, 74 97/8), 1c.
- Wagner, S. R. (1998). *She who hold the sky: Matilda Joslyn Gage*. Sky Carrier Press.
- Whitesell, P. S. (1998). *The University Record*. Created/Last modified January 28, 1998. The University of Michigan. Retrieved: September 25, 2003, from <http://www.umich.edu/~urecord/9798/histrec.hrm>.
- Whitney, J. (1947). *Abigail Adams*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Wilcox, D. L., Ault, P. H., & Agee, W. K. (1998). *Public relations Tactics and Strategies*. NY: Longman.