

Not Quite a Clean Sweep: Rhetorical Strategies in Grose's "Cleaning: The Final Feminist Frontier"

A woman's work is never done: many American women grow up with this saying and feel it to be true.¹ One such woman, author Jessica Grose, wrote "Cleaning: The Final Feminist Frontier," published in 2013 in the *New Republic*,² and she argues that while the men recently started taking on more of the childcare and cooking, cleaning still falls unfairly on women.³ Grose begins building her credibility with personal facts and reputable sources, citing convincing facts and statistics, and successfully employing emotional appeals; however, toward the end of the article, her attempts to appeal to readers' emotions weaken her credibility and ultimately, her argument.⁴

In her article, Grose first sets the stage by describing a specific scenario of house-cleaning with her husband after being shut in during Hurricane Sandy, and then she outlines the uneven distribution of cleaning work in her marriage and draws a comparison to the larger feminist issue of who does the cleaning in a relationship. Grose continues by discussing some of the reasons that men do not contribute to cleaning: the praise for a clean house goes to the woman; advertising and media praise men's cooking and childcare, but not cleaning; and lastly, it is

just not fun. Possible solutions to the problem, Grose suggests, include making a chart of who does which chores, dividing up tasks based on skill and ability, accepting a dirtier home, and making cleaning more fun with gadgets.⁵

Throughout her piece, Grose uses many strong sources that strengthen her credibility and appeal to ethos, as well as build her argument.⁶ These sources include, “sociologists Judith Treas and Tsui-o Tai,” “a 2008 study from the University of New Hampshire,” and “P&G North America Fabric Care Brand Manager, Matthew Krehbiel” (qtd. in Grose).⁷ Citing these sources boosts Grose’s credibility by showing that she has done her homework and has provided facts and statistics, as well as expert opinions to support her claim. She also uses personal examples from her own home life to introduce and support the issue, which shows that she has a personal stake in and first-hand experience with the problem.⁸

Adding to her ethos appeals, Grose uses strong appeals to logos, with many facts and statistics and logical progressions of ideas.⁹ She points out facts about her marriage and the distribution of household chores: “My husband and I both work. We split midnight baby feedings ...but ... he will admit that he’s never cleaned the bathroom, that I do the dishes nine times out of ten, and that he barely knows how the washer and dryer work in the apartment we’ve lived in for over

eight months.”¹⁰ These facts introduce and support the idea that Grose does more household chores than her husband. Grose continues with many statistics:

[A]bout 55 percent of American mothers employed full time do some housework on an average day, while only 18 percent of employed fathers do. ... [W]orking women with children are still doing a week and a half more of “second shift” work each year than their male partners. ... Even in the famously gender-neutral Sweden, women do 45 minutes more housework a day than their male partners.¹¹

These statistics are a few of many that logically support her claim that it is a substantial and real problem that men do not do their fair share of the chores. The details and numbers build an appeal to logos and impress upon the reader that this is a problem worth discussing.¹²

Along with strong logos appeals, Grose effectively makes appeals to pathos in the beginning and middle sections.¹³ Her introduction is full of emotionally-charged words and phrases that create a sympathetic image; Grose notes that she “was eight months pregnant” and her husband found it difficult to “fight with a massively pregnant person.”¹⁴ The image she evokes of the challenges and vulnerabilities of being so pregnant, as well as the high emotions a woman feels at

that time effectively introduce the argument and its seriousness. Her goal is to make the reader feel sympathy for her. Adding to this idea are words and phrases such as, “insisted,” “argued,” “not fun,” “sucks” “headache,” “be judged,” “be shunned” (Grose). All of these words evoke negative emotions about cleaning, which makes the reader sympathize with women who feel “judged” and “shunned”—very negative feelings. Another feeling Grose reinforces with her word choice is the concept of fairness: “fair share,” “a week and a half more of ‘second shift’ work,” “more housework,” “more gendered and less frequent.” These words help establish the unfairness that exists when women do all of the cleaning, and they are an appeal to pathos, or the readers’ feelings of frustration and anger with injustice.¹⁵

However, the end of the article lacks the same level of effectiveness in the appeals to ethos.¹⁶ For example, Grose notes that when men do housework, they are considered to be “enacting ‘small instances of gender heroism,’ or ‘SIGH’s’—which, barf.”¹⁷ The usage of the word “barf” is jarring to the reader; unprofessional and immature, it is a shift from the researched, intelligent voice she has established and the reader is less likely to take the author seriously. This damages the strength of her credibility and her argument.¹⁸

Additionally, her last statement in the article refers to her husband in a way that weakens the argument.¹⁹ While returning to the introduction's hook in the conclusion is a frequently-used strategy, Grose chooses to return to her discussion of her husband in a humorous way: Grose discusses solutions, and says there is "a huge, untapped market ... for toilet-scrubbing iPods. I bet my husband would buy one."²⁰ Returning to her own marriage and husband is an appeal to ethos or personal credibility, and while that works well in the introduction, in the conclusion, it lacks the strength and seriousness that the topic deserves and was given earlier in the article.²¹

Though Grose begins the essay by effectively persuading her readers of the unfair distribution of home-maintenance cleaning labor, she loses her power in the end, where she most needs to drive home her argument. Readers can see the problem exists in both her marriage and throughout the world; however, her shift to humor and sarcasm makes the reader not take the problem as seriously in the end.²² Grose could have more seriously driven home the point that a woman's work could be done: by a man.²³

Works Cited

Grose, Jessica. "Cleaning: The Final Feminist Frontier." New Republic. The New Republic, 19 Mar. 2013. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.

Notes

1. Hook
2. Context
3. Article author's claim or purpose
4. Thesis
5. Summary of the article's main point in the second paragraph (could also be in the introduction)
6. Third paragraph begins with a transition and topic sentence that reflects the first topic in the thesis
7. Quotes illustrate how the author uses appeals to ethos
8. Analysis explains how the quotes show the effective use of ethos as noted in the thesis
9. Transition and topic sentence about the second point from the thesis
10. Quote that illustrates appeals to logos
11. Quote that illustrates appeals to logos
12. Analysis explains how the quotes show the effective use of logos, as noted in the thesis
13. Transition and topic sentence about the third point from the thesis
14. Quotes that illustrate appeals to pathos
15. Analysis explains how the quotes show the effective use of pathos, as noted in the thesis
16. Transition and topic sentence about fourth point from the thesis
17. Quote illustrates how the author uses appeal to ethos
18. Analysis explains how quote supports thesis
19. Transition and topic sentence about fourth point from thesis
20. Quote illustrates how the author uses appeal to ethos

21. Analysis explains how quote supports thesis

22. Conclusion returns to the ideas in the thesis and further develops them

23. Last sentence returns to the hook in the introduction