

The Ribbon and the Rose : Visual Rhetorics Against Violence to Women

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Article abstract

After the December 6, 1989 massacre of fourteen young women at Montréal's École Polytechnique, Canadian women's anti-violence groups and a now international men's campaign against men's violence to women adopted a variety of resonant visual images in commemoration and protest. The striking differences underlying women's and men's choices of images also reflect tensions at a rhetorical level about the appropriateness of men speaking out against violence to women. To explore these tensions, this article uses a method of rhetorical analysis that maps associations among "men's" and "women's" images, situates these associations within particular social contexts, and suggests some possible effects of these images and their messages on various audiences. While some activists feared that the men's white ribbon — rather than the women's rose or other symbols — might dominate the public imagination as a generalized protest against violence to women, a brief joint billboard campaign displaying the white ribbon and the rose side by side represents the possibility of women and men working with and through the power inequalities that exacerbate gender differences.

THE RIBBON AND THE ROSE

Visual Rhetorics Against Violence to Women

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A National Tragedy

In the late afternoon of December 6, 1989, at the University of Montréal's École Polytechnique, fourteen young women were shot and killed. All but one were students in the School of Engineering. The killer, twenty-five-year-old Marc Lépine, walked into the school carrying a semiautomatic rifle, shot one woman in a corridor, then entered a classroom and ordered the women to one side of the room. "You're all a bunch of feminists," he shouted, "and I hate feminists" (Bergman 1991: 18; Came 1989: 14; Scanlon 1994: 75). He opened fire on the women. Six died. Lépine then made his way to the cafeteria, "firing at diving, ducking students as he went" (Came 1989: 15), and there, killed three more women. Going back upstairs to another classroom, he opened fire once more, and four more women died. Finally, the killer shot himself. His suicide letter, not published until a year after the killings, said that he wanted "to send the feminists, who had always ruined my life, to their Maker [...] the feminists have always enraged me. They want to keep the advantages of women [...] while seizing for themselves those of men" (Wildemar 1991: 180-81).

For many Canadians, this "American-style carnage" (Pelletier 1991: 33) shattered an image of Canada as a relatively safe and peaceful country. Yet what most profoundly shocked Canadians from coast to coast was not only the killings, but also the hatred of "feminists" that inspired them. While a number of American feminists were also saddened and outraged by the Montréal massacre, their Canadian counterparts experienced a moment, frozen in time, of deep personal

horror, anger, and fear. As a Canadian who lived thousands of miles away from Montréal, I felt not only horror at the news, but also a sense that I could just as easily have been a victim. Cultural critic Elspeth Probyn, a professor at the Université de Montréal, recounts that she was in England during and after the event. Even so, she felt caught up “in the nightmare” of the killings (1993: 8). I have since found that other Canadians — women and men — remember vividly where they were and what they were doing the moment they heard about the massacre, just as many Americans remember exactly what they were doing when they first heard about John F. Kennedy’s assassination.

According to one journalist, mass media coverage of issues concerning women and violence increased sixfold between 1989 and 1992. Canadian magazines published over 52 “violence against women” stories in 1992 compared to 11 in 1989. Major urban newspapers like the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Montreal Gazette* printed five to seven times as many stories about violence to women as they did in 1988 and 1989 (Hemsworth 1992 B6) — an output undoubtedly inspired first by the massacre, then by the 1991 Act of Parliament declaring December 6 as a national day of mourning and remembrance. Indeed, perhaps the only good thing about the Montréal massacre is the unprecedented amount of discussion it has generated about violence against women. What was once barely whispered behind closed doors is now being debated loudly in Ottawa and Washington. In the words of Canadian political scientist Brian Lee Crowley, “If ever a single event could be said to have awakened society from its dogmatic slumbers, [the massacre] was it. Suddenly, the problem of violence against women, in all its forms, was given a focus and a face” (1994: 2).

Violence Against Women: Women’s and Men’s Visual Rhetorics


In part, this public discussion is fueled by the visual symbols or images associated with Canadian feminist and male feminist (profeminist) activists. With the massacre as catalyst, large lobby groups like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (roughly equivalent to the U.S.’s NOW in political influence); action groups like the December 6 Coalition; local groups like Toronto’s METRAC; and profeminist groups like Men’s Network for Change and the White Ribbon Campaign have either intensified or, in the case of men’s groups, created an increasingly strong public and political presence. Along with written and spoken texts, such activist groups also rely on resonant

visual images to help convey anti-male-violence messages and, more specifically, to commemorate the Montréal massacre. Whereas women's groups have used a range of images to commemorate the December 6 massacre — including bullets (in Québec), purple ribbons and buttons, and roses and lace — the stark image of a white ribbon has been adopted by Canada's largest men-only initiative against violence to women, the White Ribbon Campaign (WRC), begun by a group of Toronto profeminists in 1991.

The fact that these groups have been careful to differentiate “women’s” images from “men’s” suggests, I argue, some tension about men’s increasing presence in what has been implicitly defined as a feminist forum. The white ribbon, motivating men to think about and take action to help end men’s violence, heralds men’s unprecedented entry into this feminist forum. While also serving as motivators, women’s images represent a long and established history of anti-violence activism. One effect of these images, among others, is to establish women’s right to govern the discourse about the violence committed against

White Ribbon Campaign

MEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



50% of Canadian women are assaulted in their lifetimes.
57% of women are afraid to walk in their own neighborhood at night.

The White Ribbon Campaign is a call to men to help end men's violence against women.

By wearing the White Ribbon button, you are stating that you will neither commit, condone, nor remain silent to acts of violence against women.

You are opposed to violence, abuse and harassment touching the lives of all women who are




Figure 1. White Ribbon Campaign

them. Some activists argue that such governance includes the right to define events like December 6 as women-only in order to protect women's work from appropriation by men.

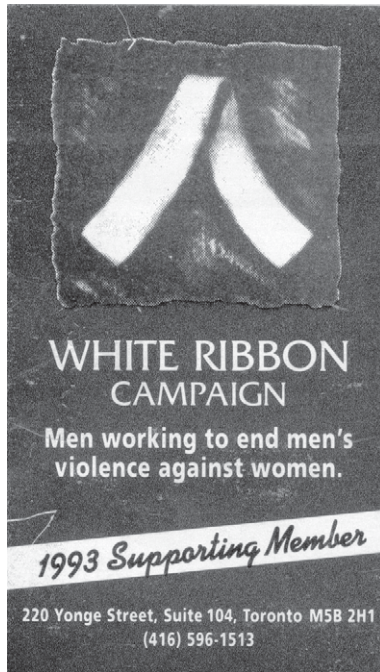


Figure 2. White Ribbon Campaign.

WRC literature referred to as “hundreds of thousands” of men to wear white ribbons was receiving inordinate media attention, with the effect of pushing women's perspectives and work to the back of the public stage.

However, as the boldness of women's anti-violence images suggests, feminist groups have not hesitated to defend publicly their work, resources, and safe spaces against possible male appropriation (even when the possibility is remote or moot). For example, the YWCA Canada, the December 6 Coalition, NAC, and numerous individual women activists have asserted a notable amount of control over how the WRC conducts itself in relation to women's groups. In 1994, the

But an equally important effect of these images is to reinforce public perceptions of gender difference: in this case, that a large gap exists between men's and women's experiences with male violence and — by extension — with power inequity. As members of the WRC discovered, even well-meaning men with feminist sympathies may be seen as potential oppressors of women, because, as some feminist critics and rhetoricians have argued,¹ elite men have traditionally enjoyed greater access than most women to the resources and channels producing influential public discourse and decision-making. Indeed, during the first full year of the WRC's operation, some feminist groups were concerned that the men's push to get what some

1. Feminist rhetorical critics who have focused on relations between what Michel Foucault calls “discursive formations” and power include Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (1988), Teresa de Lauretis (1987), Kathy Ferguson (1984), Sonja Foss (1996), Hilary Lips (1991), and Jantine Oldersma and Kathy Davis (1991).

White Ribbon Campaign and the YWCA of Canada produced a joint billboard featuring a white ribbon and a rose. The success of this project represents a possibility that women's and men's groups can negotiate the fine line between respecting differences and finding the common ground necessary for achieving the goal of ending men's violence to women. But the symmetry of the ribbon-and-rose billboard might also be an effective visual representation of women's power to control men's potential power to silence or oppress women.

Figure 3. *White Ribbon Campaign.*

I am very grateful to the White Ribbon Campaign for its permission to reproduce these artifacts, Figures 1 to 3.



Mapping the Associations Created by Visual Rhetorics

That visual symbols constitute a language and that “visual language” (Kostelnick and Hassett 2003: 1) mobilizes considerable persuasive power are now truisms in the burgeoning field of visible rhetoric. In her 1988 analysis of Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*, Sonja Foss placed visual imagery within the scope of rhetoric by arguing that “colors, forms, images, textures, and other elements,” like text, have the rhetorical effect of influencing people’s “thinking and behavior” (1996: 206). Since the early 1990s, scholars in disciplines ranging from technical communication to fine arts have continued to explore relations between the visual rhetoric and sociocultural trends: critiquing the effects of “visual codes in the transference of dominant cultural narratives” (Hoechsmann 1996: 166); articulating an ethics of “information density” in graphic art (Tufte 1990: 37-38); and analyzing the cultural and political power of logotypes (González 1998). A 2001 conference at Indiana University addressed such topics as “the relationship between visual rhetoric and collective memory, social controversy and dissent, political style and representation, postmodern media communities, and race, gender, and identity politics” (*Visible Rhetoric* 2001). The importance of situating visual language within its

appropriate social contexts has been most recently argued by Kostelnick and Hassett, who acknowledge the strides in rhetorical theory defining discourses and genres as social acts, and emphasize the importance of “situating visual as well as written language within social and historical contexts — [as] part of social practice” (2003: 3).

Feminist criticism has a long tradition of showing how visible language inscribes gender as a social practice. In trying to tease out relations between gender and visual imagery,² a range of feminist critics have attacked images generated by the media, Hollywood, and Madison Avenue, demonstrating how these images control, discipline, sexualize, dominate, or silence women. On the other hand, women’s images — as products of their experiences — may represent “a submerged group” in the process of surfacing. For Foss, the visual rhetoric of *The Dinner Party* reveals strategies that “empower and legitimize women’s authentic voice” (1996: 211). Chicago’s insistence on representing women’s achievements and experiences with no reference to men poses, Foss argues, an alternative to male-dominated discourse (212).

What happens, though, in a case where the tables are turned? In my study of the interrelations among, and the visual language used by, the White Ribbon Campaign and women’s groups engaged in anti-male-violence activism, I found intriguing rhetorical tensions resulting from initial attempts of the men’s campaign to create a unique visible and textual identity. To some extent, the striking differences between women’s and men’s choices of anti-male-violence images parallel tensions arising during the first few years of the WRC about the appropriateness of men speaking out against violence to women. The various associations generated by the men’s white ribbon had a variety of effects — not all positive — on the attitudes of feminist groups, policy-makers, the media, and the public toward the idea of men taking an active role in a feminist project.

This essay analyzes the visible rhetoric of the WRC’s white ribbon, the YWCA Canada’s rose-and-lace design, women activists’ purple ribbons and buttons, and The Body Shop Canada’s “daisy” T-shirt, and suggests how these images implicitly convey arguments about men’s and women’s power to influence public attitudes about men’s violence to women. Given the important role of these images for motivating

2. For examples of such analyses that are particularly applicable to processes of persuasion, see di Lauretis 1987; Mulvey 1975; Goffman 1976; Foss 1996.

discussion about men's violence to women — and given that these images generate many possible messages — I have chosen a method of analysis, “cluster criticism,” that maps associations among these messages, situates these associations within particular social contexts, and suggests some effects of these images and their messages on various audiences. In their adaptations of this method from Kenneth Burke's technique of “reading” attitudes in literary and historical texts³, rhetorical critics (see especially Foss 1996: 367-70; Coe 1995; Rueckert 1982) have suggested three major steps, which I also follow in this article: finding key terms or themes, teasing out associations among these themes, and looking at these themes and associations in relation to their opposites or agons.

Part of “finding key themes” may involve measuring their frequency (for example, see Crowell 1977) or looking at where they are placed within a document or visual artifact, as Foss (1996) and Coe (1995) suggest. But it is also essential to determine a “key theme” by viewing how it is used within particular political and cultural contexts and by particular groups. Much meaning and emotional power derive from these contexts and from the extent to which the theme represents a shared group experience. By seeking out major themes and patterns, charting their occurrences within particular contexts, and noting their interrelationships with associated or even opposing themes, a critic can theoretically gain insights into a rhetor's motives. Indeed, exploring motive is Burke's original goal of cluster criticism (see Foss 1996: 367).

Moreover, as I have found in analyzing numerous textual and visual discourses arising out of the WRC, cluster criticism can indicate a group's sense of its power or powerlessness in relation to other groups. Using certain textual or visual symbols can have several possible effects in

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3. Cluster criticism (also see Foss 1996: 367-370) was created by Kenneth Burke (1937 vol. 2, 1957) for exploring the role emotions play in structuring literary and historical works. This method — which may also be used with Pentadic analysis (see Cooks and Descutner 1993) — attempts to explore what Burke calls “the full drama of a discourse” by teasing out the associations *and* oppositions within a document and among related documents. Adapted by various rhetorical critics as a means of exploring the emotional effects of discourses on readers, cluster criticism is also an accessible method for teachers and students of rhetoric and composition wishing to analyze relationships between attitudes and power relations within a range of discourses: poetry, advertisements, web sites, and — as I argue here — visual rhetorical artifacts.

terms of power: apparently increasing a group's ability to govern public discourse (as many feminists believe is necessary for women's concerns to be taken seriously), apparently decreasing or conceding power (as the WRC has appeared to do in "stepping away" from December 6), or even apparently redefining the nature of power (as the WRC — which shares some beliefs of radical profeminism⁴ — and some of its feminist supporters believe is necessary for women and men to achieve equality). Because an important overall goal of cluster criticism is to discern the nature of power relationships among groups, this method can provide insights into such critical issues as "ownership" of voice, appropriation, or control over certain discourses and media. In this case, my goal is to illuminate how the visual images used by activist women and men in the wake of the Montréal massacre can provide insights into attitudes about who (if anyone) controls the power to speak, and in what manner, about an issue that many women and men associate with "women" and women's experience.

Analyzing the Men's White Ribbon Symbol

The two years following the Montréal massacre saw an outpouring of writing by women about the violence women experience at the hands of men (see especially *Canadian Women Studies/Les cahiers de la femme*, Summer and Fall 1991; Malette and Chalouh 1991). Between 1989 and 1991, there was little sense of a widespread active male involvement in commemorating or protesting the massacre. But in 1991, after two years of listening to women's experiences with violence, and after several women in Toronto had been violently murdered (Layton 1993), a small number of men involved in Toronto's Metro Men Against Violence and the Men's Network for Change conceived the idea of a national "white ribbon campaign" that would signal male protest against violence against women and provide a vehicle for educating men about violence and its prevention.

Notably in Canada, the U.S., and Britain, men had been organizing in support of feminist projects and against sexism since the early 1970s.

4. The term "profeminism" is preferred by men who ground their beliefs in political and social reform on feminist principles, but who believe that men cannot be "feminists" because feminism "is a theory emerging from women's experience" (Kaufman 3 Dec. 1993). Also see Clatterbaugh (1990) for a full explanation of profeminist and radical profeminist philosophies.

But the Montréal massacre was catalytic in forming what the WRC's founders believe was the world's first national men's initiative focusing on a feminist issue — male violence against women (Editorial Collective 1992). The campaign grew out of a conviction that if male attitudes to women, violence, and masculinity itself, were “the problem,” then a change of male attitudes must and should be “part of the solution” (White Ribbon Campaign 1991).

In search of a simple, effective vehicle for conveying this message, the WRC's co-founders — a group including Michael Kaufman, Jack Layton, and Ron Sluser — chose a white ribbon as the campaign's symbol. According to Kaufman, the color “white” represents “peace, laying down arms” and in China, mourning (18 July 1993) — meanings still stressed in current WRC literature — and the cloth for making a ribbon represents an easily accessible material (I discuss these aspects of the ribbon's symbolism in more detail below). The campaign's first “White Ribbon Week” in early December 1991 saw men on the streets asking other men for donations to help fund anti-violence programs and women's shelters. At this point, the white ribbon was defined as a call for men to “lay down their arms” against women (White Ribbon Campaign 1991), to remember the women killed on December 6, and to support the eradication of male violence against women. After the 1991 campaign, the WRC began stressing in a variety of documents (such as FAQs) that the ribbon also represents a symbolic act: a pledge or commitment “not to condone, commit, or remain silent about violence against women.”

In Figure 4, I have “charted” relationships between the WRC's attitudes about the color “white” and its arguments that men must be active in helping to end violence against women. Roughly modeled on the ways Carol Berthold and Sonja Foss illustrate associations among terms in a document, this method focuses on the power of visual imagery to reinforce both positive messages and what Burke would call “the Negative” — or opposing — messages. Rooted in shared experiences within particular social contexts, these positive and negative associations give rise to and reinforce complex, often even contradictory, arguments about a controversial issue.

Symbol	Message	Opposite Concept	Argument
WHITE	peace	war	•men are at war against women
	surrender	fight	•men must lay down arms against women but still fight against male violence
	mourning	ignoring	•women are war casualties (Dec. 6); this must be remembered/acknowledged

Figure 4. *The White Ribbon as Symbolic Act*

I have indicated opposing concepts in this chart (negative messages that are often unspoken and “understood” by feminists working against male violence) in order to emphasize the “positive” or proactive messages which the WRC associates with the color “white.” The terms most often clustered with “white” in the many WRC documents I surveyed are “peace” and its negative (agon) “war”; “surrender,” defined by the image of men “laying down arms”; and “mourning,” which is linked to the Montréal massacre either through the phrase “Montréal massacre” (as in the inaugural statement) or the date “December 6.” The dominant “positive” images of men’s surrender and mourning are particularly persuasive when implicitly contrasted with negative images of “the war against women.” For the public (read “average men”), this interplay of warlike images associated with “white” emphasizes how serious and ubiquitous the problem is; for feminist groups, associations with “the war against women” indicate that this group of men is knowledgeable and sympathetic about feminist perspectives on male violence.

Besides relying on messages associated with the color “white” to help raise men’s awareness of how serious the problem of men’s violence is from women’s perspectives, a number of WRC publicity documents also emphasize how important it is that the ribbon be a highly visible, inexpensive, and accessible vehicle. As the 1993 version of the WRC’s “Frequently Asked Questions” document states, “Most people without even knowing it have white ribbon somewhere in their home (at the bottom of a closet or at the back of a drawer). White ribbon can also be purchased from most shops including your corner grocery store.” In

Figure 5, I chart how the interplay between messages of visibility and accessibility and their opposing concepts creates arguments in favor of men taking action:

Symbol	Message	Opposite Concept	Argument
RIBBON	visible	invisible	•need for conspicuous sign of men's "laying down arms"
	accessible	hard to find/ obscure	•"any man can wear a ribbon"; action against violence is OK for average guy
	bottom/back ("drawer," "closet")	top/front	•need to break men's silence; bring men's responsibility into the light

Figure 5. *The White Ribbon as Visible and Accessible*

Going beyond noting how easy it is to find white ribbons, other arguments arising out of this cluster of associations reinforce how something so common (ribbon/violence against women) has been so easily overlooked or taken for granted (by men). The images of drawers and closets implicitly contrast what should be visible (men's awareness and action, i.e. taking responsibility) with what has formerly been hidden (this same awareness and willingness to act).

Another image conveying the importance of men acting against men's violence to women, as well as identifying the campaign, is the WRC white ribbon logo. In use since 1992, the logo features a stylized white ribbon (half-twisted so it looks like an upside-down V) inside a black or, more recently, a red square.⁵ This logo continues to be used on ads, letterheads, proclamations, FAQs, brochures, posters, educational packages, buttons, and even clothing. In 1995, I noticed that the WRC was one of several non-profit groups displaying its logo on a series of white T-shirts sold in department stores (a label attached to the shirt stated that a portion of the purchase price would be donated to the campaign). To this day, the WRC distributes leaflets to supporting retailers.

5. Currently, the White Ribbon Campaign displays the stylized white ribbon against a red background. See <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/>

The white ribbon logo has remained the campaign's main symbol: associated not only with the white ribbon's anti-male-violence message but with soliciting operating funds and donations (see Figure 2). One button, used mainly in 1994, is a small square enamel lapel pin. Superimposed in red on the WRC logo is the text "Men Against Violence Against Women" (see Figure 3). In Figure 6, I show how the interplay of the black-and-white logo with the red text creates complex associations and arguments concerning men's role in perpetuating and ending violence against women:

Symbol	Message	Opposite Concept	Assumption
LOGO: white ribbon	peace, men's commitment; in China, color of mourning	•violence	•male commitment to peace and change; mourning the victims
LOGO black square	death, men's violence	•change/ commitment	•remembrance of dead women
TEXT	stated commitment	•empty	•need to clarify male symbol commitment
RED	blood/ danger	•peace, safety	•women as war casualties

Figure 6. *WRC Logo and Text*

Placing a white ribbon against a black background reinforces the ribbon's associations with death and mourning. The red text is not only highly visible against the logo, but the associations of red with blood echo the warlike imagery of men's surrender in the war against women. While the ribbon by itself is intended to symbolize mourning and protest, coupling it with a written promise of commitment transforms the ribbon into a speech act whose emotional resonances are intended to motivate thought and action. Thus, joining text with image more clearly defines the ribbon as a symbol of men's commitment to act against violence to women.

Indeed, the main advantage of buttons over ribbons is that they can display text specifying a group's main purpose or *raison d'être*. Combining the visual appeal of the white ribbon logo with the text "Men Against Violence Against Women" addresses several important rhetorical goals: (1) responding to the concern of some feminist groups that the ribbon alone isn't a clear enough indication of men's willingness to take action; (2) emphasizing to *men* the extent of men's commitment to the specific issue of violence against women; and (3) more clearly identifying the campaign. By itself, the white ribbon image provides public recognition and carries multiple emotional resonances. Burke (1957) might suggest that the white ribbon is "the dancing of an attitude" against men's violence to women. But as some critics of the WRC pointed out during the campaign's first full year, this resonant image by itself cannot convey specific messages about men's attitude and actions. The WRC chose to combine the symbolic languages of imagery and text not only to persuade men that they must act to end men's violence, but to convince women's groups that this men's campaign is sincere, its motives trustworthy.

It is perhaps no coincidence that such a balanced rhetorical strategy has aided the campaign's success since the 1990s. As of this writing, the WRC has gained a noteworthy amount of ethos as a global anti-male-violence campaign. The WRC's web site exemplifies how a persuasive campaign associates a resonant image with specific textual symbolic acts. While the site provides free access to a wide range of information about violence against women, WRC activities, and things "guys" can do "to put an end to this" [violence], the campaign also implicitly recognizes and does not hesitate to exploit the power of a single, simple "unifying" image which, as the WRC explains, "symbolizes men of all cultures and backgrounds supporting the issue of ending men's violence against women" (White Ribbon Campaign 2004).

In Burkeian terms, the WRC's attempt to infuse the white ribbon with meanings that are proactive for men and not threatening for women rhetorically narrows the gap of estrangement between women and men: in short, achieving what Burke calls "consubstantiation," by which he means closeness or merging with others (1969: 21). Jan Swearingen (1991: 236-37), and Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin (1992), imply that Burke's consubstantiation is somewhat compatible with aspects of feminism that emphasize dialogism and relational concerns. Indeed, an important effect of the white ribbon image is to persuade the public that consubstantiation is possible between feminism and men.

The White Ribbon and Images of Division

However, Burke insists that consubstantiation is only part of the persuasive process. A major reason for desiring consubstantiation is that individuals or groups are, as Foss and Griffin also point out, inherently “distinct” or estranged from other individuals or groups. “In being identified with B, A is ‘substantially one’ with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives” (Burke 1969: 20). Burke clearly stresses that

... there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity (1969: 22).

At several points since 1991, divisions have occurred between the WRC and feminist groups. Initially, these divisions appeared to have fragmented men’s and women’s attempts to address violence against women together, but in effect, they also motivated and enabled what many members of the WRC and some of its feminist contacts believe is a productive dialogue about differences and power inequalities.⁶

A major site of contention and division, as well as a generator of powerful visual symbols representing and motivating feminist activism against men’s violence to women, has been December 6: the anniversary of the Montréal massacre. December 6 has been contentious for the WRC because in 1991 and 1992, the campaign defined that day as the culmination of its major yearly campaign, its “White Ribbon Week.” Then starting in 1993, “White Ribbon Week” in Canada was moved so it began in late November and ended several days before December 6. To some degree, this tension around whether men should participate actively alongside women in events commemorating December 6 centered on men’s power to appropriate women’s work or voices. If men are allowed to speak, said some critics (including other profeminist

6. One WRC mandate has been to encourage the formation of “liaison committees” consisting of WRC members and feminist activists. The main purpose of these committees is to solicit constructive criticism, advice, and feedback to help guide WRC policy-making. The women have chosen not to hold any voting or decision-making power on these committees, but have exercised considerable power to shape such WRC policies as the decision in 1993 to “step back” from December 6 by moving White Ribbon Week to late November.

men), will they drown out women's voices? If women allow men to share the stage, will men push their way into the center?⁷

The WRC's decision in 1993 to "step back" from December 6 was the WRC's main response to concerns raised by feminists and women's groups that men were taking over a day of mourning that should be centered on women. As the WRC garnered ethos, the Canadian head office reinstated December 6 — Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women — as the culmination of White Ribbon Week, though the campaign officially discourages men from organizing events or speaking publicly on that day. The stated reason — "Because we think it should be a day for men to step back and listen to the voices of women" (White Ribbon Campaign 2004) — utilizes the very same rhetoric of conciliation, of withdrawal from centre stage, the WRC first used in 1993 to make it clear to women's groups that men had no intention of dominating a feminist forum.

It must also be said that some of this concern about December 6 arose out of practical difficulties. First, when the campaign began in 1991, a number of women (myself included) wore a white ribbon on December 6, believing that the ribbon was a "generic symbol of opposition to men's violence" (Kaufman 1992: 6). While the WRC wished to create a close relationship with feminism by initially equating the white ribbon with December 6 and encouraging men to make this connection, the campaign maintains that the ribbon as a symbol of *men's* commitment to ending violence against women. Second, however horrific the Montréal massacre may be on any international scale as an exemplar of extreme male rage against women, much of the rhetorical power or resonance of "December 6" derives from the specific experience of being Canadian on that dark day in 1989 — being "here" when the illusion of Canada as a peaceful haven was shattered. When in 1993, Australian profeminist men launched a White Ribbon Campaign in Melbourne and Brisbane, organizers quickly found that "December 6" had no real power to motivate. In 1994 they moved White Ribbon Week to September (Goldrick-Jones 2002: 148-149). Currently, White

7. In fact, some Canadian men do speak publicly against male violence on December 6, but to my knowledge this has raised no major criticism or concerns. Many women active against male violence welcome the support.

Ribbon Week events outside Canada now begin on November 25, the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women.

Analyzing Women's Images of December 6

In many respects, concerns about the meaning of December 6 are represented by the emotional resonances of women's visual images. While the white ribbon defines men's need to participate in the feminist project of ending men's violence, the emotional resonances of the women's symbols define women's right to govern the discourse of violence against women — and, by extension, to preserve December 6 from male appropriation.

Arguments in favor of December 6 symbols that are distinctly associated with women arose early in 1992, when the WRC received a number of responses from activist feminists and profeminists about the inaugural White Ribbon Week. One sympathetic critic rejected the idea of “a single symbol for a bi-gendered issue” and argued that there needed to be “two symbols for this campaign [against violence to women]” (Lee 1992).⁸ While conceding the importance of defining the white ribbon as a men's symbol, another respondent argued that women needed to display “a companion symbol to the white ribbon” (Crossman 1992). In making their case for a women's symbol, these critics are acknowledging the history of women's extensive work against violence to women and particularly, women's lived experiences with men's violence. From a rhetorical standpoint, a women's symbol defines and demarks women's power to influence public discourse about the issue.

The most widely known women's December 6 symbol, the “red rose and lace” created by Toronto artist Joss MacLennan, first took form as a poster commissioned by NAC. In 1991, the December 6th Coalition asked MacLennan to adapt her design for buttons, to be sold during the weeks before December 6 to raise money for violence prevention and women's shelters. The Coalition's initial order of 3,000 buttons “completely sold out” (Carter 1992: 13). At the same time,

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8. In her memo to the WRC (1992), Lee also suggested that “roses or purple ribbons could be purchased by men and given to women as a gesture of respect, commitment and honouring their survival and contributions to ending violence against women”. While the money would obviously go to women's shelters and programs, I am uneasy about the idea of men presenting women with roses as a gesture of respect. It smacks very strongly of traditional courtship, with all its traditional power inequities.

the YWCA of Canada offered to distribute the rose buttons nationally, in conjunction with its own campaign, “Community Awareness of Violence Against Women.” The YWCA rose button features a portion of MacLennan’s design: a single, partly opened red rose against a white lace background. The text around the edge of the button reads — “In commemoration of the 14 women killed in Montréal, December 6, 1989 and all women who have suffered from violence.” (See Figure 7, “Flower Images on Buttons.”) Bundles of rose buttons are still distributed through the YWCA each fall to women’s groups, who then sell them to members, family, and friends. The YWCA has also distributed bookmarks with the December 6 rose design and text on one side and on the other, an explanation of the YWCA’s “Community Awareness” campaign for preventing violence to women (see Figure 11, “YWCA December 6 Bookmark”).

As MacLennan explained to me, the design of red roses against white lace is intended to contrast domestic “safety” (lace curtains) with the reality of what happened at École Polytechnique, where red roses were placed shortly after the massacre. The poster also features the text “First mourn, then work for change.” MacLennan based this slogan on a quote by the famed American Industrial Workers of the World organizer Joe Hill, who was murdered in 1932. But Hill’s — “Don’t mourn, organize” — seemed too harsh. As MacLennan notes, “You can’t say ‘Don’t mourn’ to women,” especially given the circumstances of the massacre and what many women see as its relationship to larger problems of male violence. While MacLennan intends her design, in conjunction with the text, to commemorate not only the fourteen women murdered on December 6 but “all women who die every year,” some critics of the White Ribbon Campaign argue that rose buttons, *not* white ribbons, are synonymous with the Montréal massacre: “[The buttons] were designed by a woman to accomplish this task. They [women] had a vision of the rose button becoming as common and accepted as the poppy [worn on Nov. 11, Remembrance Day]” (*White Ribbon News* 3, 1995).⁹

9. While women’s groups were making their case about the rose as a symbol of national importance, some male news anchors sympathetic to the White Ribbon Campaign were fighting a losing battle in 1991 and 1992 for the right to wear a white ribbon during their TV broadcasts. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) claimed that “company policy... discourages making personal statements on the air”. However, both the WRC and some CBC staff maintained that, if news anchors are allowed to wear poppies on their lapels on



Figure 7. Flower Images on Buttons.
I am most grateful to Joss MacLennan and the YWCA Canada for their permission to reproduce the rose and lace design.

Indeed, there are unmistakable links between the symbolism of the rose and that of the red felt poppy-pin commemorating the dead of World Wars I and II and worn by many Canadians on November 11. As Figure 8 illustrates, the interplay among these associations not only reinforces arguments that, as victims of male violence, women are war casualties, but effectively equates December 6 with November 11 as a day for national remembrance:

SYMBOL ----> red poppy		
Vehicle red felt pin	Message <ul style="list-style-type: none">•honoring memory of men's sacrifice•mourning war dead	Argument <ul style="list-style-type: none">•traditional, national symbol of remembrance
SYMBOL -----> red rose(s) against white lace		
Vehicle poster or button	Message <ul style="list-style-type: none">•honoring memory of men's victims•mourning "war dead"	Argument <ul style="list-style-type: none">•violence against women merits national remembrance/attention

Figure 8. The Poppy and the Rose as Commemorative Symbols.

Remembrance Day to honor the war dead, they should be allowed to wear white ribbons on December 6 to honor the dead in the war against women. "How do we communicate to women that we are appalled?" one CBC anchor asked (Habib 1991: C1).

The rose-and-lace design is not the only established “women’s” anti-violence symbol to emerge after the Montréal massacre. Some local women’s groups have used purple ribbons or buttons for the same purpose. Figure 9 shows some associations between “purple” and cultural values shared by certain women’s groups that help convey the importance of women’s struggle against men’s violence:

Symbol	Message/assoc.	Argument
PURPLE	---> mourning, trad.	• women’s blood spilled by male violence; color of blood; women as victims
	---> “Purple Heart”	• women’s wounds, courage, bravery
	---> womanism/ lesbianism	• “womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” (Alice Walker, <i>The Color Purple</i>)

Figure 9. *Uses of Purple in Women’s Campaigns Against Men’s Violence.*

The uses of purple in symbols like ribbons and buttons rely to some extent on a broad range of associations shared among the public. For example, it’s inconclusive that women in this community would necessarily associate “purple” with “womanism” in the way I have suggested. I’ve drawn these associations together, however, to show the broadest possible range of links between “purple” and the beliefs and principles shared among feminist groups whose goal is to end violence against women or to empower women in other ways. In that sense, “purple” stands as a reminder of struggle.

However, when used in conjunction with December 6, purple effectively demarks that day as one for centering women’s concerns and efforts to counter men’s violence. In this context, purple symbols convey resonant messages about women’s right to govern public discourse about the issue of violence against women. For example, in 1991, feminist activists in Nova Scotia promoted the wearing of purple ribbons to commemorate the Montréal massacre.¹⁰ Quite independently of the WRC, the Nova Scotia women used a ribbon as a reminder of

10. My sources for information about the purple ribbon were the WRC’s 1992 FAQ, a 1992 memo to the WRC from the director of a battered women’s clinic in Ontario (Lee 1992), a 1992 column by an Edmonton journalist (Faulder 1992), and an article by another journalist (Hodgkinson 1992). I have no first-hand confirmation of a women’s “purple ribbon” campaign in Nova Scotia.

the issue and as a vehicle to secure donations. In fact, according to an Edmonton columnist, women “initiated” the concept of wearing a ribbon to symbolize male violence. This columnist creates a cause-and-effect link between the women’s purple ribbon and the effectiveness of the white, asserting — “If [the WRC] is successful, it’s because women have done the legwork” — that is, spent over twenty years raising public awareness about male violence (Faulder 1992: B11). Another news article suggests that women and men should employ bi-gendered separate visual symbols in a common cause: “... the white ribbon campaign was started by men... by introducing the purple ribbon, women can participate in remembering the Montréal massacre as well as help combat a societal problem” (Hodgkinson 1992).

During the days leading up to and including December 6, the Toronto women’s anti-violence group METRAC distributes buttons in public places (like subway stations) in exchange for donations. The buttons depict a purple design against a white background; the design is strongly suggestive of a woman’s upright form in fluid motion as well as of a three-petaled flower. Similar to the red rose and lace design, METRAC’s button combines a color that has strong emotional associations with the image of a flower (see Figure 7, “Flower Images on Buttons”). One effect is to convey a complex set of messages about women’s relationship to men’s violence: ranging from anger, assertiveness, action, to delicacy — even innocence.

Such associations are also apparent in the image of the daisy used in 1994 and 1995 by The Body Shop Canada for its Violence Against Women Campaign T-shirt.¹¹ Retailing for about \$12, the T-shirt displayed a yellow-and-white daisy against a blue backdrop. The daisy is missing half its petals. The slogan “You have the power” is printed in red beside the daisy, and beneath it is the text “In the name of love — Stop Violence Against Women.” According to the Body Shop, \$2 from the sale of each T-shirt was donated to anti-violence programs organized by the YWCA and the Canadian Women’s Foundation, a charitable organization. While T-shirt sales were relatively short-lived, the Body Shop Canada continues to support a “STOP Violence Against Women” campaign as part of its “Profits with Principles” mandate, still in partnership with the Canadian Women’s Foundation. The half-daisy

11. When I first approached the Body Shop Canada, its head office would not allow me to reproduce the “daisy” design on the T-shirt for the purposes of research. But anyone can view the current daisy design at <http://www.thebodyshop.ca/home.asp?Lang=EN&CName=Home>

with the broken-off petal remains the predominant image of the campaign. Potential supporters are invited to “join the daisy chain,” another resonant theme associated with the image (The Body Shop Canada 2004).

In nineteenth century American usage, a “daisy” meant anything first-rate, particularly a lovely or charming young female. A Body Shop spokeswoman confirmed that the daisy was chosen partly because of its associations with something fresh, unspoiled, or innocent. But with half its petals missing, the daisy is also spoiled, second-rate, irreparably damaged. Indeed, according to the Body Shop, the designer’s purpose for depicting it with half its petals missing was to symbolize that roughly fifty percent of Canadian women suffer some form of violence or abuse. The Body Shop also explicitly equates the image of missing petals with another cultural commonplace — the “he loves me/he loves me not” game (The Body Shop Canada 2004). In this case, the game clearly ends with “he loves me not.”

Figure 10 suggests that the daisy design conveys many simultaneous, at times even contradictory, messages about women’s victimization and empowerment. The Body Shop’s reliance on our ability to associate the daisy with various cultural commonplaces creates an interesting set of rhetorical tensions in which women are depicted as both innocent and as active agents for change:

Daisy Symbol	Message	Opposite Concept	Argument
FRESHNESS	women as innocent	•women as careless or provocative to be victimized	•women don’t ask
“LOVE OF YOU”	expectations of love/respect	•reality of hatred/disrespect	•women deserve love, but get abuse
MISSING PETALS	spoilage, damage “he loves me not”	•wholeness “he loves me”	•male violence damages/destroys
SLOGANS “The power”	women as agents	•women as objects	•women don’t have to be victims
“In the name of love, Stop”	men responsible for their actions	•men tend to be abusive	•loving women means actively stopping violence

Figure 10. *The Body Shop T-Shirt’s Anti-Violence Imagery.*


The daisy image and text construct women as simultaneously active agents and passive objects; as linked to men both by love and by violence. Possibly, these apparent contradictions do not simply reflect notions of men as oppressors and women as victims. To some extent, they may also try to subvert these polarized arguments by suggesting that, in daily life, women can also be empowered and men also loving.

But how subversive or transformative can an image be if it's designed to sell a mainstream product? It is hard not to link the freshness of the daisy to young women, and from there to the Body Shop's main goal: profiting from the sale of beauty aids. The potential for tension between profit and social improvement also underlies Hoechsmann's 1996 critique of Benetton's "colors" advertisements. Viewing these ads in terms "of a representational politics where commerce and social issues are being yoked together into an awkward alliance" (175) raises questions, notes Hoechsmann, about overly simplistic metaphors equating a particular graphic or image — and ultimately a product — with an easy ability to engage or solve complex social problems.

The Ribbon and the Rose

The White Ribbon Campaign's initial push in 1991 and 1992 to "sell" white ribbons for donations also raised criticisms about the campaign's sincerity and motives, and caused some feminist groups to wonder whether this group of men might dominate or appropriate women's work against men's violence. In the face of some activists' fears that the "men's" white ribbon — rather than the "women's" rose or other symbols — might dominate the public imagination as a generalized protest against violence to women, it is significant that the WRC and the YWCA formed a coalition in 1994 whose main goal was to put up billboards "across Canada" featuring both the white ribbon *and* the rose, "with the message to end men's violence against women" (*White Ribbon News* 3 1994: 1).

The idea of allying the rose with the ribbon was being discussed in 1993, when the WRC was still working out responses to some of the criticisms and advice from feminist groups and liaison committees. Appearing in the minutes of a WRC business meeting in June, 1993 was the note: "Relation to 'Rosebud' Campaign of YWCA... Need visible cooperation with women's groups. PURSUE IMMEDIATELY" (The White Ribbon Campaign 25 June 1993: 2). The minutes of a




YWCA
of/du Canada

For over 100 years, the YWCA movement in Canada has been a source of public education on women's issues and an advocate of social change, working for the empowerment of women and girls.

YWCA of/du Canada Member Associations provide community-based services including counseling and support groups, child care, health/wellness and employment and training programs and a host of other services in a caring, supportive environment.



Our Associations also provide a network of shelters for survivors of violence as well as residences, special needs, second stage and permanent affordable housing for women and their families.

The YWCA of/du Canada is proud to sponsor the December 6th commemorative button as part of our struggle to end violence against women and children.



**Community Action on
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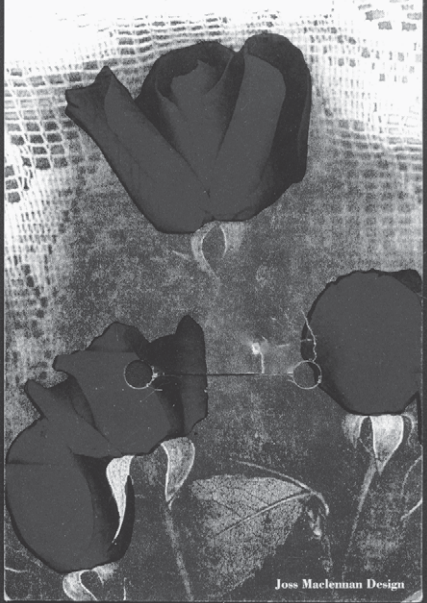
December 6th

is Canada's National Day
of Remembrance and Action
on Violence Against Women.

On this day in 1989, 14 women
were killed by one man in
Montreal, Canada.

Violence is a global issue.
Women and girls around the
world face emotional and
physical abuse, rape, sexual assault,
genital mutilation, dowry deaths,
sexual slavery, female infanticide . . .

Violence is a *chosen* response.
Men must take responsibility for
their actions. Every community
and every institution must work to
build a culture of safety, equality
and justice for women and children.



Joss MacLennan Design

Figure 11. YMCA December 6 bookmark.

WRC executive meeting in August 1993 state: "Suggestions were also made concerning the WRC's association with the YWCA's Red Rose campaign; perhaps the WRC and the Red Rose campaign could be merged."

By late 1993, Mike McGee and Ron Sluser both mentioned in interviews that meetings were being planned with the YWCA for a joint white-ribbon/rose campaign. An advertising company offered to put up billboards nationally with the WRC logo; the campaign agreed under the condition that "we'd like to share this resource with women's groups" (*White Ribbon News* 3 1994: 1). As a 1995 WRC newsletter reported, "In conjunction with the YWCA... we launched a national billboard campaign with signs that read: "Help End Men's Violence Against Women" (*White Ribbon News* 3, 1995: 1).

The billboards themselves, officially unveiled on November 17, 1994, graphically represent a creative tension between what Burke would call identification and division. The board is divided in half vertically.¹² The left half displays the MacLennan red rose and white lace button against a black background; the right half shows the WRC white ribbon logo against a white background. The text "Help end men's" appears in white above the rose button, while "violence against women" is in black below the WRC logo. The uses of black and white juxtapose messages of mourning with working for change, and stress the distinctness of each symbol for representing women's and men's perspectives on violence. The fact that the two halves touch, but do not merge, also serves to reflect the contingent nature of this coalition. On a practical level, the billboard visually embodies the concept "working together and separately." On a more theoretical level, as Burke suggests, the billboard shows how "antithetical sets" of terms and motives can lead into or complement each other, creating a dialectical relationship rather than simply an antithetical or opposing one (1966: 252).

The joint billboard campaign ended after December 6 and was not repeated in 1995. Thus, I am reluctant to generalize about the success of this one-time effort. Indeed, WRC supporter and METRAC activist Susan Van der Voght believes more permanent arrangements are preferable to one-time coalitions like the one producing the "ribbon/

12. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain a good-quality photo of the billboard for reproduction here.

rose” billboard. However, WRC administrator Richard Barry told me (4 Dec. 1995) that the billboard campaign was helpful in continuing to build trust with women’s groups. It is also unclear whether this temporary coalition eased tensions over whether the white ribbon, rather than the rose, has become the better-known symbol for December 6. In a February 1994 letter to the editor of *The Globe and Mail*, a nationally distributed newspaper, a woman matter-of-factly referred to December 6 as “White Ribbon Day” (Jackson 1994: D7). Possibly one rhetorical effect of the December 1994 billboard campaign (at least in English Canada and in large urban centers) is to help establish both the rose and lace design and the white ribbon as bi-gendered images commemorating the women killed on December 6 and other victims of male violence.

The fact that the ribbon and the rose existed side by side, even for a short while, is an encouraging sign that women and men can work together toward the universally beneficial goal of eliminating violence to women. By representing visually how gender differences may be acknowledged and transformed into a persuasive call to action, the placing of these different images side by side has the positive effect of suggesting that women and men can work with and through differences created by gender roles and inequalities in power.

However, while many WRC workers and supporters believe women and men can and must be allies, the contingent nature of the billboard coalition reflects the fact that a patriarchal system concentrating power in the hands of men makes it highly problematic for the sexes to work together full-time. As several WRC members have told me, as long as gender inequalities exist, women and men involved in the work against violence cannot be “partners.” For this reason alone, bi-gendered images — including those associated with December 6 — will figure prominently for some time to come in the rhetorical landscape of discourse about men’s violence to women. These images not only represent women’s and men’s different perspectives and experiences but symbolize their struggles for the right to speak the unspeakable.

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