Guilt is an emotion common to most individuals. It is also a less common rhetorical device used to persuade an audience toward making one decision or another. Yet, when we look at the history of rhetoric, Aristotle in particular, there is no mention of guilt as a tool used to motivate. Although it is fairly common device today, little research into guilt as a motivator has been done. Because we see guilt in advertising rhetoric as well as rhetoric of social movements, it is important to look at how and why this emotion has become a part of rhetorical messages. Guilt as a motivator has been used in the past, and it appears frequently in conduct literature, especially that literature directed at women.

Guilt as a rhetorical device as it relates to women makes its effectiveness as a social motivator interesting as it is a combined use of the body, or physical attributes, as well as the mind and emotions. Guilt as a motivator can be used as a device to develop certain political and intellectual ideation, but it can also be used as an emotional tool that orients the mind on the physical and physical attributes. This has been done in the past in order to secure the place of women in the social/cultural structure, as well as to enable a broad view of women as less effective than men in many fields.

This paper will focus on the exploration of the role of guilt as a rhetorical device in creating specific views of the body and woman in order to persuade. The information used for the presentation of this paper will come from modern communications publications, rhetorical publications as well as from older literature. This discussion of guilt as a social motivator is important to the body because a great deal of this rhetorical device’s power is centered on the body, especially of women. It can be found in body image, sexual identity, women’s roles in society as well as myriad other applications dating from the distant past to advertising in today’s media. It is the intention of this paper to bring about awareness of guilt as a rhetorical device.