

CHAPTER 16.

A PEEK INSIDE THE MASTER'S
HOUSE: THE TALE OF FEMINIST
RHETORICIAN AS CANDIDATE
FOR U.S. CONGRESS

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In 2006, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Geneva Smitherman proclaimed “the master’s tools can be used to bring truth to the master’s house,” a twist on Audre Lordé’s statement that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” In 2012, I made the decision to “peek inside the master’s house,” as a candidate in U.S. electoral politics. I ran for a seat in the U.S. Congress (Ohio-5), cognizant that both my opponent, a three term-incumbent with a radically conservative agenda, and my district, a traditionalist fourteen-county area which had never elected a woman, would provide fertile ground for delving into auto-ethnographic research. Although my opponent engaged in rhetorical techniques such as silencing (refusing to debate in a public forum), there were equally powerful rhetorical approaches that could be creatively employed to circumvent the double-bind. This is the narrative of that experience interwoven with feminist rhetorical theory.

“The notion that women were uniquely fashioned for the private realm is at least as old as Aristotle,” writes Amanda Vickery (Morgan, 2006, p. 75). Women were to operate in the “oikos,” the domestic realm, while men functioned primarily in the “polis,” as citizens. “Within this system, the minds and words of women are considered complementary, and inferior, to those of men; masculine intellect is seen as transcending the feminine character, which is biologically driven and firmly bound to the body and the home,” continues Cheris Kramarae (Foss, Foss and Griffin, 2004, p. 43). The voices of women were (and are) constrained, and yet, our creative foremothers found ways, within and through these limitations, to make their voices heard. Much of the scholarship in the area of women’s

rhetoric(s) has been done in an earnest effort to faithfully rescue, recover and re-inscribe that which has been lacking in the traditional rhetorical canon, including the voices of women. Now, however, even as the aforementioned work must continue, scholars such as Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch have issued a clarion call to expand the scope of study, including a broader range of voices. Patricia Bizzell writes, in the forward to Royster and Kirsch's 2012 work *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition and Literacy Studies*, that "scholars soon realized that research on women and rhetoric needed to go beyond traditional scholarly methods," (p. x). Indeed, traditional scholarly methods can have the unfortunate result of marginalizing the very subjects with whom the scholarly content seeks to engage. Furthermore, continue Royster and Kirsch, as they reflect upon scholarship methods and practices, "We must pay attention also to *living* [emphasis in original] women . . ." (p. 38).

Recent writing studies scholarship considers ways in which researchers can more fully engage with community activism to engender social change (George, 2018, this collection): In this chapter, I offer my lived experience as an activist scholar in my community, as a subject of rhetorical interest, responding to Royster and Kirsch's invitation. My voice is an intersectionality, the voice of a feminist, an activist academic and a politician: as Kramarae notes, "The distinction between rhetors within and outside of academia is not always clear: These 'states are not mutually exclusive . . . sometimes the academic woman *is* also the activist in the community,'" (Foss, Foss and Griffin, 1999, p. 54). To wit, Royster, a leading scholar in the arena of rhetoric(s) and feminism(s) defines herself as precisely one who straddles the boundaries, "an academic activist," (Royster and Kirsch, 2012, p. 8). And yet, as Jacqueline Schiappa (2018, this collection) reminds us in "Two Slutwalks," the intersectionality of which I speak and the positionality from which I write as a white heterosexual middle-class female is clearly quite different from that of many of my feminist sisters, and I want to be clear in claiming only where I stand. I do not seek to over-generalize my experience.

To ground the situation in context, I was teaching full-time in the General Studies Writing Department at Bowling Green State University when I mounted a serious campaign for a seat in the United State House of Representatives, OH-5. I had served on the county school governing board (Lucas County Educational Services Center, now the Educational Services Center for Lake Erie West) for more than four years, having recognized my desire to dissolve the dichotomy between the academy and the mainstream world. This next, more extensive move into the national political arena resulted in an opportunity to reflect from a unique positionality. At the same time, I was well aware that "any considerations of deliberately taking time away from the relentless march of making progress in the completion of a scholarly project. . . have not been

viewed as strength moves for serious scholars,” (Royster and Kirsch, p. 86). I hope these musings will encourage others to be brave enough, when the time seems right, to disavow the traditional white, male, elite forced and false binary of academy/mainstream world with as much rigor as we seek to escape the idea of the separate spheres of “oikos” and “polis.” *In the current political milieu, as in the academy, greater mindfulness and reflective practice is sorely needed, and this is the first reason for which I write:* the second is elucidated below.

Entering into the realm of public political life, I was grateful to those who had gone before me. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (2005) address the continuing issue of disempowerment of women, but also enthusiastically discuss the work that has been done in recent history: “Like their nineteenth-century sisters, twentieth-century liberal feminists attempted to address the unequal distribution of power through reform of public legal and political institutions. On the other hand, second wave radical feminists made central the theoretical insight that the ‘personal is political,’ that power relations operate in personal as well as in public life,” (p. 52). The work that was done on both of these fronts enabled me to make the decision to become a candidate for U.S. Congress; I was legally granted the right to fulfill certain obligations (gathering signatures, paying a small fee), and have my name placed on the ballot. But this technical “equality” to my male opponent, while a pivotal first step, could threaten to diminish or overshadow the material *inequality* in access to power and privilege between the two of us. Therein lies the second purpose for this writing: not simply to encourage others to take up the mantle and become involved, but to *shine the light on the reality of the experience of congressional candidacy for one woman—me—in a specific context. I understand that my experience is not in any way universal, but there are parts and pieces which may serve to illuminate the path for those who follow.*

bell hooks wrote over twenty-five years ago, “there remain many unexplored areas of female experience that need to be fully examined, thereby widening the scope of our understanding of what it is to be female in this society We might better understand our collective reluctance to commit ourselves to feminist struggle, to revolutionary politics or we might also chart those experiences that prepare and enable us to make such commitments,” (Foss, Foss and Griffin, p. 61). Regrettably, not enough has changed in the past quarter-century: Chantal Maille, professor of Women’s Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, names one of these sparsely inhabited and under-explored public spaces in her 2015 article “Feminist Interventions in Political Representation in the United States and Canada: Training Programs and Legal Quotas,” explaining that “The alarming reality is that American women are still vastly underrepresented in elected office all across the nation, and are losing ground when compared to

other nations,” (p. 2). Indeed, not only are women underrepresented in political campaigns and elected office, but *reflections on the experience* from the perspective of a feminist “insider” are woefully absent. What a timely coincidence that in the very year I launched the congressional campaign, Royster and Kirsch foregrounded the idea that it is “not enough to focus mainly on the fact of women’s existence in rhetorical history,” arguing instead for an understanding of rhetoric as a “lived and thereby embodied experience,” (p. 132, p. 42). This chapter is both the story of a feminist rhetorical intervention as lived, embodied experience—and, in the recounting, the story *itself* becomes intervention.

For all intents and purposes, this story began when, in the 2009 book *Turning the Noose that Binds into a Rope to Climb: A Textual Search for Rhetorical and Linguistic Gender-Markings in Speech Samples of Three Contemporary Female Orators*, I posed the question: “If a woman remains and works within the system, is she necessarily a fool, catering to a cruel patriarchal regime?” (Zimmann, p. 175). In that study, I found that “there will be moments when perhaps they [women] must ‘play the game’—and there will be other moments when the words these women speak and the actions they choose can work to undermine the very system that has placed them in positions of power,” (p. 175). I wanted to live into that research for myself, mindfully exploring those moments which might possess the potential for feminist intervention. At my dissertation defense, Dr. Sue Carter Wood, a member of the panel, offered these closing words: “Don’t sit on this important work. Keep going.”

For me, this challenge was taken up by stepping into public political service. Yet, as Audre Lorde notes, “white women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power. . .for white women [as opposed to their Black sisters] there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools,” (cited in Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2005, p. 340). The lure of the system is strong, and the incentive to embrace the privilege proffered to those who are willing to turn their backs on the oppressed and maintain the status quo is not insubstantial. I was afraid, fearful that, perhaps, I would be absorbed into the very machine I had set out to battle. “Pursuing freedom from oppression involves recognizing the ways in which systematized exclusions are distinctive *and yet also* emerge and are sustained by intersecting dominant cultural logics,” writes Schiappa. Indeed, I had been both an object of exclusionary cultural logic, *and yet also* not wholly oppressed, and not identically oppressed. It is into this subjective, intimate and paradoxical space that I step, offering the beginnings of a rhetorical analysis of my 2012 run for a seat in the United States House of Representatives in Ohio’s 5th Congressional District, and how feminist intervention happened (and didn’t) along the way.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on *three specific methods of feminist rhetorical intervention* (again, these methods could be modified and emulated in a variety of settings). The first is the *appropriation of technology*, specifically YouTube and Facebook, to garner national support and increase public awareness of the campaign. The second and third interventions were of a much more personal nature, and centered on *private conversations*: in the case of the second intervention, tens of thousands of private conversations to secure funding for taking the campaign to a television audience. In the case of the third intervention, there was one conversation, resulting in the endorsement of a major regional newspaper. There were necessarily dozens of other feminist rhetorical interventions that occurred throughout the course of the campaign, many of which were illuminating in myriad ways, but for the purpose of this writing, the focus will be on the three feminist rhetorical interventions delineated above.

This chapter focuses upon my experience as a candidate for the United States House of Representatives (OH-5), explores and illuminates the laborious and often intensely solitary and lonely feminist rhetorical interventions which were foundational to the campaign. The subsequent feminist rhetorical interventions, aiming to give voice to the thousands of women experiencing political marginalization at the hands of an ultra-conservative legislator, were entirely dependent upon the preliminary intimate and private conversations which took place throughout the earlier stages of the campaign: my public presence was limited by the typical Western, male, elite patriarchal privilege of my opponent.

While this chapter is case-specific, the concepts have substantial implications far beyond the traditional political realm. This chapter seeks to galvanize feminists working in all spheres with the understanding that rhetorical interventions are often not the grand-scale public work of known rhetors, but can happen in any space or time: the momentary, whispered exchange on a parade route may, in fact, be the most life-altering intervention imaginable. In this way, whether functioning in the “oikos” or the “polis,” the academy or the mainstream world, (or, more probably, some combination of the two), feminist rhetors are poised to stage effective interventions for the betterment of society.

THE FIRST INTERVENTION: ENTERING THE MILIEU

The assumption that feminist rhetorical interventions are primarily the province of the rhetor with access to a traditional public arena for communication has been challenged through the advent of advancing technology. Where at one time only those holding positions with considerable public resonance were able to communicate with a wide audience, the genesis of YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and a host of other social media sites now enable participation by a much wider

constituency. Royster and Kirsch note that, “as technology changes rapidly, so do different sites of rhetorical agency. Scholars have only begun to study small fragments of the vast array of new rhetorical activities unfolding via the Internet . . .” (p. 66).

The first intervention took place on December 15th, 2011, when a friend with a video camera met up with my husband and my nominally-paid local campaign manager at an area park, and we shot an unrehearsed, forty-two-second video parodying Texas Governor Rick Perry’s “Strong” commercial: Strong. Then, they posted the video to the internet. “Rhetors who do not conform to normalizing processes are ultimately forced to occupy and to function in whatever spaces are left”—and in this case, “the space left” was the internet (Royster and Kirsch, 2012, p. 103). Unheralded by traditional media sources, our campaign took to the web.

The next day, we received a phone call from Max Rosenthal at *The Huffington Post*. HuffPo had picked up the video, and ran it here: Strong Parody on Huffington Post.

Within less than twenty-four hours, the video had thirty-six thousand views. Suddenly, our homespun campaign was on the radar of a few more people—still a very small number in an e-world where millions of views mark the beginning of renown, but we were nearly a year out from election day and instead of the few dozen friends who were initial supporters, we had a wider base: and a well-known progressive web publication that was interested in us.

While we continued to shoot videos (all at no cost, as friends made in-kind donations of their time), none were ever quite so widely circulated as the “Rick Perry Parody.” However, it was quickly becoming clear to us that the internet could provide a low-cost and possibly effective channel for quickly spreading the word about the campaign.

The next opportunity arose when, purely by chance, I stumbled across Democracy for America’s website for “Grassroots All-Stars.” The website invited progressive congressional candidates to post a simple picture and biography, and invite people to vote for them. The ten top vote-getters were then asked to submit a video so the public could vote again, and the top five would receive the DFA endorsement, which carried both cash funding for the campaign and the promise recognition that would result in a wider network of support.

Initially, I was not excited but horrified to see that this site existed and *I had no knowledge of it*. I quickly entered our information and formulated a plan: we needed to drive friends and supporters to the website to vote. There were dozens of candidates, and I was nearly dead last.

The internet race was on. Emails worked, some. This was prior to the popularity of Twitter, but Facebook was a possibility. About a year before Amina Tyler

employed Facebook to declare her frustration with the Tunisian government (Ouellette, Chapter 14, this collection), our campaign turned to Facebook to seek a pathway into the governmental structure. We began to message people, then recruit the campaign team to message people in real-time, when they were clearly online, and ask for a vote. We created a standard message which could then be personalized as hour after hour we worked.

Days passed, and we moved up in the rankings, within striking distance of the top ten. The decision was made to visit local coffee shops, the student union at a university where I was employed, and other public areas, with the DFA website pulled up on our laptops, asking for votes. As the voting closed, we were in the top ten. Now, it was time for another video.

Again, with no funds to pay for professional videographers, and with me out of town for a school board meeting, friends and family came together to produce this video: Chelsea Says Vote for Angela! There was a special power in having a little girl ask for the voter to support her mother. In my dissertation, I had identified the linguistic tendency for women to publicly identify powerful men in order to win public support; instead, I looked to the authority of a female child, thereby empowering her and inviting others, typically disempowered, to understand that in this campaign, all people mattered (*Turning the Noose that Binds into a Rope to Climb*).

Huffington Post ran an article on the Grassroots All-Stars including this quote: "Another relatively unknown 'All-Star,' Angela Zimmann, has grabbed attention with her homemade campaign videos. Zimmann, running in Ohio's 5th District against incumbent Bob Latta, submitted a video starring her young daughter as part of her push to win Democracy for America's approval." (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/16/howard-dean-democracy-for-america-_n_1283117.html).

And we won—we finished in the top five.

We were lucky, we worked hard, and we believed that if people saw what we could do, we had a chance. Greater accessibility via the internet demonstrates, in this case, the potential of new technology to undermine the pervasive, disingenuous and often disempowering notion that feminist rhetorical interventions, particularly of a political nature, must begin in the traditional public sphere, and are only possible for those with significant capital and powerful connections. Yet, as Jessica Ouellette powerfully demonstrates, one cannot control the amplification of a message on the internet, and the directions in which it travels: my opponent appropriated a piece of one of my videos and used it to his own advantage: to be fair, my campaign manager also took footage of my opponent, and clipped it to our advantage. At any rate, We certainly could have and would have performed differently with increased resources, and these additional resources

became increasingly necessary in order to be granted credibility within the system, as will be discussed below—but at this point, following in the footsteps of our courageous feminist forebears, we refused to be thwarted by our lack.

THE SECOND INTERVENTION: RAISING THE MONEY

On the Democracy for America Grassroots All-Stars page in February of 2012, I enthusiastically reported that the campaign had over one hundred and fifty financial supporters. That number would grow, by the end of the race, to over two thousand individual donors, including individuals from every state in the US. But in February and March of 2012, I had not yet grasped the significance of fundraising and financial resources in the current political climate of the United States. We had made our videos on a shoestring budget—could we not do the entire campaign using the same methodology? Couldn't we show constituents a dedicated, compassionate, energetic, intellectually engaged candidate for whom they would be inspired to vote without spending a fortune? The answer I was given was a resounding “No.”

Let me set the scene:

“A hundred thousand dollars of your own money, minimum,” the dark-haired young political operative, easily fifteen years my junior, says to me, without so much as glancing at the carefully prepared professional CV I hand to him.

We sit in a small conference room at the headquarters of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee offices on 430 S. Capital Street in the heart of Washington, DC. I am dressed for the occasion, as instructed, with minimalist jewelry, bedecked in the signature red blazer purchased at Savers, the local thrift shop back in Northwest Ohio. My mind is spinning, and my faith in the party I have loved all of my life is withering.

Blinking, and sitting up straight, I remind myself that I am an elected official already, entering my second term on the local Educational Services Center Board, where my colleagues appointed me president. Could my bona fides truly not matter? I have three degrees—a bachelor's in Engineering, a Master's in Divinity, a Ph.D. in Rhetoric. I am a wife, a mother, a foster parent, an ordained pastor. My children are the fifth generation to own the same small patch of farmland which is now a part of Ohio's Congressional District #5. My background check dating to my teen years is clear: one marriage, no police record, no drugs, no underage drinking in college. No late credit card bills, or late bills of any kind. A credit rating over 740. A few speeding tickets. Ran a stop sign once. This is the type of squeaky-clean that is almost annoying.

But there is no wealthy relative in my back pocket; no “Daddy Warbucks” to come in and save the day. Raised in a lower-middle-class family, I was once

again bumping up against the hard edges of the patriarchal preference for the elite. A hundred thousand dollars is a second mortgage on the house where our family lives. I don't have it, can't give it, and so the man nearly young enough to be my son dismisses me, barely disguising his disgust at having to bother with this burdensome conversation.

Pushing myself to my feet, I leave the building with a gracious smile and a shattered heart. There will be no help here, no assistance from the political party which I have enthusiastically supported since casting a ballot for William Jefferson Clinton in 1992. Born on the wrong side of the socioeconomic divide, no amount of merit or virtue will close the gap in this case.

There is a decision to be made.

In order to run this race with any degree of impact, to have my voice heard, to intervene in a way that might have measurability, to avoid being dismissed immediately, I realize that I must pose a legitimate threat to the re-election of my ultra-conservative opponent, a three-time incumbent and the son of a popular former Congressman. While I can shake hands and knock on doors day after day, the size of the district (fourteen counties, mostly rural), prohibits grassroots campaigning from having a powerful effect. I must use media to deliver the message, and the most efficient and effective media, still, is the traditional television. And television advertising is prohibitively expensive. A hundred thousand does not begin to cover the costs.

Either I raise the money, and go on television, or I go away: back to the classroom, back to the pulpit, out of the public eye.

Thus began an immersive experiment, a feminist intervention into the potential for rhetorical training to impact authentic experience in the contemporary political realm through that bane of all political activities: fundraising.

Political fundraising is, in itself, an arduous process, universally loathed by politicians of all stripes. For a challenger from a congressional district that has not elected a Democrat since the time of Roosevelt, it often felt like a gut-wrenching and debasing exercise in futility.

For upwards of eight hours a day (sometimes longer, because I could call people on the West Coast until about 11 PM EST), I sat in a tiny room with no windows, with huge signs and goals taped to the walls, and I talked. The hundreds of thousands of phone calls were generally to strangers, although occasionally I would recognize a name: George Soros, for instance. (While I am certain that George would have appreciated my campaign, I never was able to penetrate the barricade of administrative assistants who answered his phones—although I tried about a dozen times.)

I smiled when I talked, as women are often told to do. It made my voice sound better.

I was polite, but firm. My general message was tailored to the audience, but the theme was generally the same: you don't know me, but I have been endorsed by Democracy for America and I am running for U.S. Congress in Ohio. My opponent is an ultra-right-wing conservative, and we have a chance to win—but I cannot win without the help of people like you. Here, you can check out my website, or this video that was picked up by *The Huffington Post*. I can send you a pledge letter, or would you like to speak to my assistant and donate online right now?

More than once, I had a surprised Californian or shocked New Yorker exclaim, “*Are you the actual candidate?*” I’m going to donate just because it is *you* making these calls, and not some other staffer.” Women, traditionally, have not had the legions of secretaries at their beck and call—we do it ourselves, and so I did. Yes, certainly, it was me making the call.

It was in this rhetorical space that I learned the power, without knowing the term, of what Royster and Kirsch label “tacking in” and “tacking out” (p. 87). “Tacking in can be described as an inward journey, focusing on researchers noticing how they process, imagine and work with materials; how creativity and imagination come into play. . .,” while “tacking out” is “more in line with traditional notions of fieldwork,” according to Royster and Kirsch (p. 85), and this tension between the two poles is illustrated by Kathleen Wider, who writes: “I had to go out into the world and deep within myself” (p. 69). Indeed, that is what I had to do: even as I called donors from every state in the union, I had to reach deep within myself. As I listened closely to my conversation partners, I listened too to “the visceral changes in mind, heart, backbone and stomach that the discovery proves occasions” (Royster & Kirsch, p.87).

It would be more glamorous, certainly more stunning and memorable, to recount that I delivered a speech, participated in a debate, conducted a town hall meeting, dazzling the listeners with compassion, brilliance and policy initiatives guaranteeing revitalization of our ailing corner of the Midwest. But the truth is, my opponent refused to debate, the few town halls I did conduct by myself early in the campaign were sparsely attended, and speeches were often largely ignored by the traditional media outlets.

Another truth: Going away was not an option. I was going on television. And in order to make that happen, the political would become deeply personal as I doggedly staged feminist rhetorical interventions in a small, windowless room at the rear of the campaign office in a rented strip mall in Perrysburg, Ohio: I would make telephone calls and fundraise. Forty hours each week, for nine months, I would sit in the tiny windowless blue room (or stand, when the sitting became unbearable), across from a paid operative who would hand me sheets with names and numbers. I would dial and dial and dial for dollars, us-

ing feminist rhetorical interventions in the most intimate and private of spaces, talking and listening my way into the hearts, minds, and financial contributions of over two thousand individuals, encompassing all fifty states, and raising just under half-a-million dollars. Eventually, I talked my way to television.

THE THIRD INTERVENTION: LEGITIMIZATION

The final feminist rhetorical intervention began before the other two, but did not bear fruit until nearly a year later.

On a cold December afternoon in 2011, I traveled from Toledo, Ohio, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: the Boulevard of the Allies office of the editor/publisher of *The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, John Robinson Block. Block Communications, Inc., also owns *The Toledo Blade* newspaper, the largest daily publication within the congressional district. In the 2010 election cycle, *The Blade* had offered their endorsement to my incumbent opponent, Robert Latta. While I understood that statistically, the likelihood of victory was quite small, I had full confidence in my ability to serve the constituents with a compassionate heart and a critical mind, and regardless of what happened on Election Day, I was certain that I would be the better-qualified representative for the people of Northwest Ohio. Although it sounds like hubris to female ears well-trained in the practice of self-effacement, I saw no reason to hesitate in seeking the endorsement of the publisher of *The Toledo Blade* (or anyone else, for that matter).

My campaign manager had arranged for the meeting, and when we arrived at the *Gazette*, we had no idea what to expect. Anecdotally, we had heard that Block was a bit of an eccentric who valued independent thought, and he was also quite politically savvy. The campaign manager was not invited to accompany me on the elevator to the publisher's office; instead, he waited downstairs in the lobby. Alone, I entered the large and ornate office of the publisher of *The Pittsburgh-Post Gazette*, and took a seat on the sofa. He sat across from me, and the questions began, ranging from foreign policy to domestic funding for education, renewable energy to labor negotiations. On and on we talked, for three hours. The sun set over Pittsburgh, and outside the windows the day was shifting into evening. The executive assistant gathered her personal belongings and left.

Throughout that long afternoon, although I had neither a bathroom break nor a glass of water, I did have support from a most unusual and unexpected source: the beautiful basset hound, Clementine, John Robinson Block's beloved canine companion, who saw fit to lay on the couch next to me, her head in my lap, while I responded to the seemingly endless volley of questions. Clementine, as it turned out, was quite ill and died on March 14th. Because of her presence with me during that challenging interview, I felt a kinship to Clementine: when

she died, I sent a note and flowers to John Robinson Block. He responded, thanking me. Although it was no intentional feminist rhetorical intervention, I suppose that this “ethic of rhetorical care,” (about which Mary Anne Taylor writes in her 2014 dissertation *She the People: Personal Politics and Feminist Advocacy as the Democratic Ideal*) may indeed have been the follow-up to the initial meeting wherein I was able to illustrate my compassion for the suffering of others in real-time, with no audience.

At any rate, as I headed toward the elevators on that cold December evening, hoping that my campaign manager had not left the building nor the city, John Block walked out with me.

“You realize,” he stated, “that your chances of winning are one in a hundred? Maybe?”

I shrugged. “I’m not afraid to work. I’m a fighter.”

The elevator door closed, and he was gone.

On October 2, 2012, I received the official endorsement of the Toledo Blade: “Ohio’s redrawn 5th U.S. House District favors the re-election of incumbent Republican Bob Latta. But Democratic challenger ANGELA ZIMMANN offers ideas, energy, and a commitment to overcoming the stalemate in Congress that make her a better choice for the district” (<http://www.toledoblade.com/Editorials/2012/10/02/Zimmann-for-U-S-House.html>).

The endorsement legitimized the campaign, and indeed, we won Lucas County, which included part of Toledo, with 49,575 votes (<http://www.co.lucas.oh.us/DocumentCenter/View/55188>)

The rhetorical intervention was personal, authentic and unmediated, and it required boundary-breaking and courage. There was no invitation to sit for a formal endorsement interview; there was no protocol to follow. Instead, like the feminist rhetors in whose footsteps I humbly follow, I was playing by my own rules, bending, breaking, re-inventing, and pushing through the extant conventions to make a place for myself and the men and women I hoped to represent.

CONCLUSION: WE MAKE A WAY

I lost the race with just under forty percent of the vote.

Yet, it is time to “renegotiate traditional notions of success,” Royster and Kirsch proclaim (p. 139). Citing Katrina M. Powell’s extensive work on the writing of Virginia mountain women who challenged the federal government, Royster and Kirsch call for a definition of success that includes rhetorical moves representing agency and the finding of a voice, as well as demanding accountability and establishing “dignity, moral values and rights as citizens” (*The Anguish of Displacement, Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, p. 139).

Although I lost by the numbers, the campaign was celebrated (by most of those involved) as a success. I went on television, and I forced my opponent to engage in the race, buying his own television advertisements (unprecedented!), sending mailings, and, finally, depleting his cash reserve of nearly two million down to that magic number which the DCCC had insisted I have on hand—a hundred thousand dollars.

The immediate question in the days following the election was “When will you run again? Will you run next time?” The answer was no, although I appreciate the supportive response, and authored the following article for *The Toledo Blade* as a means of encouraging those who might feel compelled to enter the fray: *I Can't Run, But Rep. Latta Needs a Challenge*.

Will I run again?

I entered into this writing endeavor with the full knowledge that self-disclosure and critical rumination on the patriarchal capitalist-political system and the military-industrial complex that supports it will likely render me unelectable in the future—at least at the federal level. In essence, I find myself faced with a classic double-bind: if I speak (or write), my electoral voice will be silenced, and yet if I do not speak, *I am silenced already*. For me, the choice is clear and the price is worth paying, although I fully sympathize with and encourage my sisters (and feminist brothers) who opt, instead, to toil forth in silence, hoping to make a sliver of difference through election to office. This writing represents a lifting of the veil, a peek into the master's house; since I could not dismantle it with his tools, at least I can open the door and reveal a fresh, first-hand perspective. *Turning the Noose that Binds Into a Rope to Climb* details how three women rhetors have successfully negotiated the double-bind of being a woman and a powerful rhetor: however, that body of work could not go deeply enough. By looking only at the finished productions of white women already occupying positions of power, I failed to see beneath—what preceded and precipitated their rise to public prominence. Through my own lived experience, I offer one account of that which “comes before”—the journey through the campaign and a select few of the rhetorical interventions employed.

I posit that, bearing in mind the twinned mantras that the “personal is political” and “all politics is local,” it is a logical assertion that feminist rhetorical interventions in politics may conclude, but seldom begin, in public spaces. Very little, in fact, of what we consider to be “politics” actually happens in the eye of the larger community. Similar to the interventions staged in our campaign (and I use the word “our” with purpose, since it truly was a group and not an individual undertaking), much of the work of the politician happens behind closed doors, in small groups, or one-on-one. Happily, due to the very nature of feminist philosophy, which is built upon the ideals of community, reciprocity

and mutual respect, rhetorical interventions are most likely to emerge in relationship: healthy relationships form through personal communication. There it is, the gift(!) of the oppressors to the oppressed: because of the very constraints placed upon women, they are perfectly situated to slip the double-bind and use these avenues of interpersonal communications for rhetorical interventions that are powerful and politically effective.

It would be remiss not to mention that such an assertion has significant implications across genres. In a variety of settings, including the academy, what is spoken, written, and otherwise communicated within the context of a one-on-one interaction can be a feminist rhetorical intervention of stunning magnitude, particularly when coupled later with communication in the public sphere. Consider the teacher who spends hours with an individual student, and then stands in front of the classroom lecturing—the words spoken in the public space resonate much more clearly when they are heard within the context of a relationship built in the private sphere, for good or ill. Likewise, the administrator, the pastor or preacher—any public figure who also spends a significant amount of time in private, “oikos”-type conversations—when she speaks in the public sphere, the “polis” (boardroom, pulpit, faculty meeting), the groundwork for successful interventions has been laid.

I began this chapter by providing two reasons for my writing and your reading: one, to encourage others to participate in the broader life of politics and society, and secondly, to illuminate how far we have yet to go by telling my story. I echo feminist scholar Jen Almjeld (2014), as she introduces her ethnographic research on computer-mediated dating—a dissimilar topic with analogous implications: “Like other feminist scholars, I continue to believe that the personal is truly political and that our lived experiences shape who we are and the questions we ask in our research. Feminist theory is often rooted in individual experience, and one way to explore texts and spaces is to speak from within them,” (p. 72). While I composed from within this space, rooted in my own subjective experience, I experienced a third reason for writing: not merely to share a tale, but to hear the story myself again for the first time. Paulo Freire writes, in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love,” (cited in Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2006, p. 469). In writing the story, re-living the experiences, I was powerfully taught that, (while I am no revolutionary) the most successful feminist interventions are grounded in love and seeking after dignity: for our sisters, our brothers, those who came before us and those who will follow. When I acted out of love, out of a rhetoric of care, whether it was compassion for the people of U.S. Congressional District OH-5, care for Clementine the beloved basset hound, or even benevolence toward my

difficult opponent, interventions spun themselves inexorably and joyfully forth, unbidden and unstoppable.

Finally, I turn to my current milieu, and the material impact that living into the positionality of subject-researcher has had upon the quotidian reality of my life. I serve as the Vice-President for Advancement at United Lutheran Seminary. In this role, I recognize and consciously, regularly practice the feminist interventions noted above: I fundraise, collaboratively and in community, by listening and talking, discovering shared values and highlighting the importance of putting our tangible resources into the place where our ideologies lie. The rhetoric of care permeates my work as a feminist-scholar-servant-leader. I anticipate further reflection on this next phase of the journey.

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