

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY &  
ACCOUNTABILITY: TRACKING  
OUR MOVEMENTS AS  
FEMINIST PEDAGOGUES

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*Johnston considers negotiating boundaries as a form of feminist activism: a dynamic process of articulating the ethics of our research practices. As a white, female, postdoctoral researcher teaching at a predominantly white, middle- and upper-class university in the Mid-Atlantic, she conceptualizes “ethical practice” as methods that challenge students to stretch the limits of their privileged comfort zones—methods that may not be feasible, desirable, appropriate, or indeed “ethical” in other settings where feminist research happens. To contend with our differing positionalities as feminist researchers, Johnston suggests a conceptualization of “ethical” as “accountable”—one that can travel across the diverse “spaces, conditions, cultures, and migrations” (Kirsch & Royster, 2013) in which we do feminist work; for the borders demarcating those contexts; and for how borders change in relation to our own geographic, positional, ideological movements.*

Over the past decade feminist rhetoricians have taken up research methods and methodologies with renewed interest, navigating the vast terrain of how feminist researchers “sustain scholarly work” (Schell & Rawson, 2010, p. 3)—particularly during a cultural moment when feminism has been declared “dead.” As our research increasingly permeates the naturalized boundaries between “local” and “global,” “private” and “public,” “academy” and “community,” we risk losing boundaries altogether. Boundaries protect, they help us navigate chaos. Yet if boundaries become rigid, we risk perpetrating the very violence our work resists.

This chapter considers boundary-setting as a feminist intervention: a dynamic process of negotiating the ethics of our research practices in relation to the material, embodied needs and desires of participants in our studies. As a

white, female, postdoctoral researcher fresh out of graduate school, teaching at a predominantly white, middle- and upper-class university in the Mid-Atlantic, I conceptualize “ethical” as practices that question the borders of students’ privileged comfort zones—practices that may not be feasible, desirable, appropriate, or indeed “ethical” in other settings where feminist research happens. To contend with our differing positionalities as feminist researchers, I suggest a conceptualization of ethical as accountable, a framing of ethics that can travel across contexts, temporalities, and career stages, and that accounts for the diverse “spaces, conditions, cultures, and migrations” (Kirsch & Royster, 2013) in which we do feminist work, as well as how our own geographic, positional, ideological movements (re)shape those materialities.

Accountability signals a need for checking the intentions, desires, assumptions, and beliefs that inform our practices. *Who and what do we deem worthy of research, and why? Where does our research physically happen? In classrooms, online spaces, non-profit organizations, medical labs, courtrooms, movie theaters, archives? At what point in our careers do we take on particular subjects of study? When and why do we postpone others? Do we collect data electronically, manually, aurally, visually, or even spiritually? Who is impacted by our processes of collection, and how?* Asking such questions can help us track where we enter, depart from, or avoid altogether different feminist conversations.

To be sure, feminist scholars have already posed similar questions regarding the ethics of our work (Royster & Kirsch, 2012; Schell & Rawson, 2010; Royster, 2003; Lunsford, 1995; Harding, 1987). For example, Sandra G. Harding (1987) articulates how feminist research raises epistemological questions of “who can be a knower,” “what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge,” and “what should be the purposes of the pursuit of knowledge” (p. 181). These questions are inherent in any research process, regardless of the degrees to which researchers explicitly take them up. Understanding ethical as accountable reveals how ethical practices are measured by how we answer, but more importantly, by having asked such questions in the first place. Questioning our practices is an ongoing setting and resetting of boundaries around what it means to be feminist, what legitimates our contributions to feminist research, what counts as a contribution, and why.

Conceptualizing accountability as an ethics-checker for our practices allows us to consider methodology itself as an accounting system. If we approach methodology etymologically—*method* + *-ology* = *the study of our methods*—we can discern how tracking our research methods holds all researchers accountable for how we use, and the effects of, the methods we select—choices that necessarily foreground and exclude particular subjects, locales, evidences, and theories. Approaching methodology as an accounting system allows us to recognize—to

become conscious of again—methodological invention as an always-already feature of research. In other words, whether or not we articulate our methodologies, what Harding (1987) describes as our “theory and analysis of *how research does and should proceed*” (p. 3), they already exist, determined by the methods we do and do not employ, as well as by how our positionalities constrain our use of particular methods at any given moment. Constraints are not obstacles to overcome, but limitations to account for as rhetors “always fail” (Crowley & Hawhee, 2004, p. 32) to identify with all readers and listeners; failure “allows knowledge to grow and change” (Crowley & Hawhee, 2004, p. 32). Always partial and imperfect, determined by the methods we select *as well as how we use them*, methodology is the very impetus of scholarly work—a negotiation with ourselves, feminist colleagues and allies, and the communities in which we research.

Conceptualized relationally, methodology and accountability spotlight our own feminist practices as an exigent, ethical domain of inquiry. Moreover, conceptualizing methodology and accountability relationally reveals how all research demands response and reinvention. As Mieke Bal (2002) explains, concepts themselves “travel” (p. 24) across boundaries demarcating disciplines, academic communities, and individual scholars. Concepts’ tendency towards “travel” allows us to take notice of what concepts (such as methodology) *do*, how they are *used*, and the *effects* and *risks* of those usages. Characterizing not just our concepts, but also feminist researchers ourselves in strikingly comparable linguistic movements to Bal, the aptly-titled collection, *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods & Methodologies* (Schell & Rawson, 2010) explicates how motion defines our work. Feminist rhetors inhabit, *Rhetorica in Motion* argues, the in-between. Given our own and our concepts’ propensities for movement, becoming more conscious of what we are doing, how we are doing it, and how our doings *move* our research participants, again and again and again, is a feminist intervention. Conceptualizing methodology and accountability in relation to one another can help us approach the complex, often discomfiting process of knowledge-making as one of negotiating what we know, have known, and have yet to know.

## METHODOLOGY & ACCOUNTABILITY IN A CITIZENSHIP LITERACY CLASSROOM

To exemplify the methodological accountability I propose, I turn to interrogating my own pedagogical practices in teaching what I call *citizenship literacy*: the desire to critically read, listen, speak, and write about—i.e., to rhetorically engage with—our rights and responsibilities, as university members and global citizens, in confronting gendered injustices. In what follows, I examine my

methods in a classroom-based study while teaching an undergraduate general education course cross-listed in English and Women's and Gender Studies, "Gender in the Humanities: Gender Violence in Global Contexts," at a Midwestern university (Johnston, 2013) in which I tested and further developed this concept of citizenship literacy. I outline the goals of citizenship literacy, and how I enacted these goals in the course. I reflect on how my intentions, desires, assumptions, and beliefs shaped the course design, as well as how students may or may not have gained from and determined the benefits of citizenship literacy.

Interrogating my pedagogical practices in the citizenship literacy classroom *is* a feminist intervention; it not only enacts the kind of methodological accountability I propose in this chapter, but it also explicitly links our work in the classroom with issues of social (in)justice that often catalyze our work in the first place. Moreover, interrogating my practices exposes the falsity of claims that "feminism is dead." In short, the course in which I did this study, my analysis of it, and the writing of this chapter *are* feminist interventions.

I developed the course as an interdisciplinary exploration of composition and gender through the lens of violence—a writing-intensive inquiry into how gendered norms, roles, and stereotypes can create a culture of violence and moreover, how such violence implicates all genders. The course aimed to help students identify their own rights and responsibilities in responding to issues of gendered violence, and to develop practical courses of action for ending such violence in their own communities. To investigate the relationships between gender and violence, and to develop community-based strategies for intervening in injustices we bore witness to in course content and our daily lives, I assigned a wide range of genres for students to read and produce, facilitated listening-based discussions, and required students to research local programs, groups, and/or other initiatives related to antiviolence.

## GENRE DIVERSITY

By assigning readings across print and digital genres, I sought to advance students' engagement in a wide range of literacy learning. Genre diversity in the citizenship literacy course emphasized how "text," broadly understood, can tell us much about the rhetorical functions of a wide range of "material practices" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 61)—from conventionalized scholarly articles and literary texts that students typically expect in an English classroom, to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014) updated legal definition of rape, which was unfamiliar to the majority of students in the course, and social media coverage of Robin Thicke's and Miley Cyrus's twerking performance of "Blurred Lines" at the 2013 MTV Music Awards (Islandfabrics,

2013). Emphasizing literacy learning as an ongoing dialogic process of crafting a tool that Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000) calls “*critical imagination*,” genre diversity worked to facilitate the course’s simultaneous interrogation of “knowledge as truth” and its reimagination of knowledge as an assemblage of *both* what appears on the page, screen, or other medium *and* our speculations about “what is not there” and “what could be there instead” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 20). In putting different kinds of texts into conversation with one another, with attention to the affordances and limitations of different genres and modes, the course design mirrored how textual meaning is inflected by a writer’s and a reader’s beliefs and assumptions about the world, which change across time and space. In sum, genre diversity in the citizenship literacy course functioned as a catalyst for critical inquiry into gender.

In addition to advancing students’ engagement with a wide range of literacy learning, I also utilized genre diversity to promote literacy learning as a form of civic engagement. Assigning readings across genres worked to trouble the naturalized divide between academic writing and public writing, which normalizes academe’s de-authorization of students as knowers. *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology* (Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2006) inducted students into the intersectionality of violence, and offered writings by scholars, activists, poets, policy makers, and community organizers imagining, “What would it take to *end violence against women of color*?” (p. 4). *Women Write Resistance: Poets Resist Gender Violence* (Wiseman, 2013) modeled writing about embodied experience, in poetic form, of surviving rape, incest, domestic violence, bigotry, colonization, war, and other forms of violence born from misogyny. *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Larsson, 2008; Yellow Bird & Oplev, 2009; Columbia Pictures & Fincher, 2011) opened up discussions of mass media and its ubiquitous representations of rape. By exposing students to these and other critical and creative texts, I intended to provide multiple modal, discursive, representational access points for students to take up course content.

As student responses to our readings revealed, genre diversity elicited an often-painful, yet determined coming-into-consciousness. For example, encountering *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in both literary and cinematic modes provoked, for one female student, empathic grief and a burgeoning awareness of how rape systematically traumatizes women. She described the difference between reading and then watching rape scenes in *Dragon Tattoo* as what she called a “brutal” physiological experience: “Although reading about [rape] had made me uncomfortable, actually seeing it brought me many emotions that had given me a scratchy neck. . . I could see [protagonist] Lisbeth crying and how painful she took the rape . . . with any type of gender violence, it destroys who you really are.” Another female student’s attempt to describe reading and watching

Lisbeth's rape produces a temporary interruption of speech (marked by ellipses), ultimately leading her to articulate her own feminist positionality, as well as a personal resolve to mitigate rape trauma by raising awareness of its misogynist roots: "I can't ignore these [rape] scenes and I need to just. . . try and process what they were for Lisbeth and what it means for women and what it means to me. . . Both incidents are vile displays of control. . . I feel really passionate about it. It's why I see myself as a feminist."

Both student writing samples convey a personal identification with Lisbeth as a female victim of rape, perhaps elicited by the experience of witnessing rape scenes in print as well as on screen. These and other female students in the course enacted a larger-scale feminist identification that went beyond the fictionalized rape victims in *Dragon Tattoo*, deepened their understanding of the long-term trauma of rape, and affirmed (or initiated) their positions as feminists. As these two student-journal excerpts exemplify, genre diversity in the course facilitated my goal of helping students acquire citizenship literacy through a wide range of literacy learning and an emphasis on literacy learning as a form of civic engagement.

Despite the generic diversity of readings, I privileged readings oriented towards feminized, victimized representations of gendered violence. I downplayed readings, discussion topics, writing prompts, and other course activities that explicitly dealt with masculinity or men; with non-cisgender identities such as intersex, bigender, gender fluid, gender non-conforming, genderqueer, and gender variant; and/or with perpetrators or perpetration. These exclusions, in retrospect, stem from what I failed to imagine, to borrow Royster's term—a failure to engage in "making connections and seeing possibility" (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 19). I made a series of assumptions based on the very gendered, racialized paradigms that the course purported to interrogate: *Students need to start with the familiar if I am going to ask them to engage with traumatic material, and "familiar" for students means heterosexual and cisgender. White men are already at the center, so their experiences of victimization are less problematic, less traumatic, less important. Why should we consider perpetrators anyways? They committed crimes; they don't deserve our attention—especially in a feminist course.* While I did not recognize my *failure of imagination* until after the course had ended and I was well into writing this chapter, accounting for assumptions I made, embodiments I overlooked, and prejudices I rationalized as justice becomes a feminist intervention, making explicit my own internalized white misogyny.

## LISTENING-BASED DISCUSSIONS

In addition to genre diversity in my selections of course readings, I also enacted course goals by facilitating listening-based discussions centered on Krista Rat-

cliffe's (2005) concept of *rhetorical listening*: negotiating our understandings of ourselves in relation to each other, and unpacking the very cultural logics that drive any claim to knowledge (p. 33). Each class began with journaling about three routine questions, in relation to the assigned readings that day, which students then shared in peer groups. *What is this text telling you about gender, violence, and relationships between gender and violence? How does the text align with what you already know, feel, believe, think, sense about gender and/or violence? How does the text extend, challenge, complicate, diverge from what you already know, feel, believe, think, sense about gender and/or violence?* I designed these questions around Ratcliffe's explication of rhetorical listening as a process of identifying "(un)conscious presences, absences, unknowns" (p. 29) that different discourses provoke. In asking students to first engage in "standing under" (p. 28) discourses and reinventing what they read in relation to core concepts in the course, to then put their listenings into dialogue with their peers' listenings, I wanted to cultivate a collective experience of "listening to the texts." I wanted to ingrain this listening practice as a prerequisite to confronting gendered injustices represented in the texts—just as grassroots activist groups listen to the communities they serve to assess the particular needs of the communities, and to allow those needs to drive activist initiatives and strategies.

Listening-based discussions "legitimated as knowledge" (Harding, 1987, p. 181) the experiential knowledges students brought to the table as a result of "standing under" their own and their peers' discourses. Yet as students' contributions in class revealed, these three routine questions may not have actually promoted rhetorical listening as a framework for (or boundary around) class discussions. I assumed students needed no examples of, discussions about, or other forms of explicit guidance in responding to the questions. Distinguishing feeling, believing, sensing, and thinking from one another, I assumed, made sense to students. Further, I denied students the opportunity to examine how these different ways of knowing intersect; thought informs feelings, feelings inform beliefs, beliefs inform worldviews, worldviews inform actions. As juniors and seniors who had already fulfilled core curriculum requirements in composition and communication before taking this course, students, I assumed, already possessed the terminology and broader frameworks essential for transferring (Yancey, Robertson & Taczak, 2014) prior knowledges, feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and sensory experiences into written and spoken language. I overlooked the importance of helping students develop a language for transfer as a basis for rhetorical listening.

Some students readily distinguished thoughts, feelings, and other forms of knowing, transferring them into language with relative ease, such as the students previously discussed who were writing about rape scenes in *Girl with the Dragon*

*Tattoo.* However, other students failed to transfer their listening into language altogether, as was evident in blank journal pages and “I don’t know” or “I have no relevant experience” statements. On the final day of class, one male student said he wished we had read more “light” material. When asked to elaborate, he stated that he left class most days “feeling badly about being a man.” The majority of male students in the class expressed agreement, nodding their heads as he spoke. As this student’s remark and his peers’ agreement exemplify, the listening-based discussions may have marginalized students who did not have a language for, or who resisted, sitting with what they perceived as negative emotions that should not come up in a university classroom—at least not in ours. Rather than approaching resistance as a tool for understanding more about themselves and others, students such as he equated resistance with failure: a failure of the course design to meet their learning needs, and a failure within themselves to recognize points of intersection with course content without becoming overwhelmed by self-loathing. Rather than prompting inquiry into the personal, cultural logics at play in male students “feeling badly,” our listening-based discussions triggered a compulsion to fix, change, or reject altogether the perceived source of that feeling (course material and having to respond to it vis-a-vis the three routine questions).

Beyond assuming that students needed no explicit guidance in how to participate in listening-based discussions, I also assumed that they could navigate on their own the tension between *being assessed for a grade* and *becoming vulnerable* in class. At a time when U.S. college campuses are facing increased rates of sexual assault and rape (Gray, 2014), a course on gendered violence can be especially unnerving for students, the majority of whom have likely been witnesses to, survivors, or even perpetrators of sexualized violence themselves. While a classroom setting can provide a safe space for crucial dialogue about rape culture, it can also lead students to censor themselves for fear of how their contributions might impact not only their peers’ perceptions of them, but also their grades, GPAs, and career prospects. As became evident in the waning of active participation over the course of the semester, I inadvertently conflated class discussions with everyday conversation, neglecting to recognize how my own positionality as authority figure may have impacted how students engaged in the course.

Students may have also avoided participation as a result of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or vicarious trauma (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995), a form of secondary traumatization that impacts people who come into contact with others’ experiences of trauma. The “loss of context” (Rak, 2006, p. 60) or inability to differentiate a narrator’s from a reader’s experience can silence students with PTSD or vicarious trauma. Traumatic triggers may have been at play. Engaging in the course might have meant confronting personal experiences of



violation—something students may not have been ready and/or willing to do, particularly in a setting where their engagement would be assessed for a grade. Fearing student withdrawal or shutdown by my calling attention to trauma, I avoided the subject of PTSD altogether.

Relegating trauma to the margins contradicted what I know about the effects of traumatic experience on the brain's memory functions, on language, and on our ability to express an experience in narrative form, if at all (Caruth, 1995; Herman, 1997; Scarry, 1985; van der Kolk, 2014). Verbal communication may not have been (consistently) possible for students who had encountered rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, partner abuse, stalking, sex trafficking, pornography, incest, child abuse, and/or other forms of gendered violence in the course material. Nor may verbal communication have been (consistently) possible for students who empathically engaged with course content to such a degree, they temporarily or chronically lost hope, focus, motivation, or interest—like the student who wanted “lighter” material to offset his negative feelings about being a man. The syllabus bore no explicit mention of trauma's tendency to disorient; or how silence could function productively as a form of rhetorical listening (Glenn & Ratcliffe, 2011). Assuming that students could decide for themselves what forms of participation in the course would be most productive and safe for them, I did not adequately prepare students to engage at their own levels of experience, or to recognize any resistance as a productive site of critical inquiry.

While this course was one of several students could choose from to fulfill the University's Language in the Humanities general education requirements, the element of “requirement” may have compounded the frustrating, challenging, or traumatizing aspects of the gendered violence theme. As a graduate student instructor doing a teaching internship (a requirement of my doctoral program), I was eager to finally teach a course in my primary research area. I believed that my enthusiasm would be more than enough for the entire class, and that my enthusiasm would mitigate any trauma responses. I never explicitly acknowledged the tension between “you have to be here” and the mind-body engagement I was asking from students. That is, I failed to acknowledge how the subject matter might interfere with students' abilities to participate in the course. Without explicating how to engage at varying levels of vulnerability, I simply implemented policies I regularly use in first-year writing courses I teach: active participation, regular journal writing, and writing projects that require students to document their learning in relation to any given rhetorical task.

While many students consistently spoke and listened in class discussions, others became virtually (if not completely) silent. While some students demonstrated investment in engaging with texts, others became withdrawn, writing

increasingly briefer, more formulaic journal entries. To be sure, multiple factors may have accounted for this dynamic, some of which may have had nothing to do with my failures: exhaustion/lack of sleep, meeting the demands of heavy workloads in other classes, job responsibilities, homesickness, and other common stressors for college students that can affect participation. Some students may have believed that a classroom was not an appropriate or safe space for vulnerability. Silence may not have at all signified what teachers often construe as “fear, boredom, resistance, or ignorance” (Rak, 2006, p. 53), but rather that students were “confronted by material which literally stopped daily life for a time” (Rak, 2006, p. 54). Regardless of why some students’ participation waned or never seemed to really “take off” in the first place, my assumption that successful modes of engagement in the course should and would function just as they do in others rendered student-silence an ignored, untapped source of engagement in the course.

On paper, I implied that the course content might interfere with students’ abilities and desires to actively participate. The syllabus outlined a basic list of expectations for cultivating classroom community: “Treat our class as a supportive learning community working towards common goals; Speak honestly, openly and respectfully; Listen honestly, openly and respectfully; Be willing to change your mind; Have the courage to hold your ground” (Johnston, 2013). I then followed this list up with a detailed statement about ways to engage in the course: “active participation includes coming thoroughly prepared to every class; consistently earning high scores on reading quizzes; actively listening to one another; contributing relevant and productive questions, ideas, and comments to class discussions; taking copious notes in class; volunteering to take on leadership roles in the classroom, when needed; and offering our talents, ideas, and sustained attention to one another” (Johnston, 2013). Setting expectations is critical for the functionality of any safe, productive community or group endeavor. However, setting expectations is not enough. I needed to also explicitly *model* how to speak about and listen to fear, shame, anger, numbness, and other emotional states that course content evoked. I needed to make space for discussions *about* discussion. While the syllabus identified different options for participating, allowing flexibility for times when students may not have felt comfortable speaking, it did not explicitly acknowledge how course content might affect students’ participation from one class session to the next. Put simply, my framing of (the boundaries I set around) the course policies as policies that may have applied to any number of discussion-based classes rendered invisible the very shaming, silencing effects of gendered violence. As feminist rhetoricians, we have a responsibility to model in the classroom the messiness of cross-cultural communication and to offer tools for navigating the mess.

I wanted the course to feel familiar, typical, everyday. I did not want the class to stand out as somehow “special” or “exceptional” *because* it was centered on a controversial theme. Just as gendered violence has become normalized, I wanted to normalize openly speaking, listening, and writing about gendered violence. Thus in addition to outlining course expectations in the syllabus, I also instituted the same participation policy that I use in other composition classes I teach—one that rewards students who consistently and proactively participate:

I do not designate a particular grade percentage for participation. Rather, a student’s final grade will reflect the quality and extent of her/his/their participation throughout the term in the form of an increased, maintained, or decreased final grade. For instance, if a student earning an A on all assignments for the course demonstrates poor or inconsistent participation, the final grade may drop to a B or below. Conversely, if a student earning a B or C on assignments demonstrates strong and consistent participation, the final grade may bump up to an A or B. If a student earning an A on assignments demonstrates strong and consistent participation, the final grade will likely stay at an A. (Johnston, 2013)

This student-centered participation policy has worked well for fostering participation in other courses, encouraging students with writing anxieties that they can still excel by showing up and getting involved. However, in this course, such a policy may not have been appropriate. It may have proved antifeminist, reinforcing the shame and blame that are all too common for victims or bystanders of sexualized violence, who “freeze” or otherwise feel immobilized by violence. It may have also given license to already-dominant voices to take up more space. Just as perpetrators exert power and control over others to instill fear, dominant voices can interrupt, speak louder than, or speak over others. My participation policy may have sent the message to students to keep talking lest their grades would suffer—a highly gendered, male form of listening that relies on challenging, proving, winning—even if they were excelling in other aspects of the course; even if their silence was trauma induced by the course.

## REQUIRING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In addition to assigning readings in different genres and facilitating listening-based discussions, a third way I enacted course goals was requiring students to integrate, in their writing projects, primary research from local organizations and local contacts invested in confronting gendered violence in some way, such

as interviewing faculty members doing research on gendered violence, staff members of campus programs providing sexual assault prevention services, and in some cases, students who had witnessed gendered violence themselves. Through these projects I hoped that students would transfer what they were learning in class into on-the-ground strategies for intervening into injustices in their communities. I hoped that making these connections would help students figure out how they might get involved in, or utilize themselves, community antiviolenace resources.

Students demonstrated a range of uptakes of the required community involvement, which were highly gendered in and of themselves. Some women in the class wrote about how the plethora of local programs serving victims of gendered violence pointed out women's ongoing status as second-class citizens, despite progress made by feminists. While researching for a project on dating violence, one student emailed me music videos representing women as sexual property, noting parallels with several recent reports of sexual harassment on our University campus. Another emailed me an article about rape myths, expressing her despair in hearing male peers (in and outside of our class) claim that women make false reports of rape, or that women "ask for it" by wearing tight clothing and flirting. Others felt moved to present their research to the class. One presented a blog entitled "The Case Against Female Self-Esteem" (Forney, 2013), in which the blogger describes women's need for self-esteem as "one of the most disastrous social engineering experiments of the modern era;" the student warned the class that "this mentality is '*disastrous*' for women." Another student joined the campus chapter of Bedsider.org, a national nonprofit birth control network advocating safe-sex, while researching preventions for sexualized violence. Urging other students to get involved, she distributed buttons, stickers, and pamphlets about consent.

Many women wrote about personal traumas and what they perceived as their inevitable lot in life to be victimized by men. One woman admitted to deep-seated rage: "when I think about men who are violent in whatever way, I see pigs who have no right to be around." Her anger suggests a feeling of solidarity with other women in what she perceived as a collective experience of being violated by men. Another woman echoed this sense of solidarity, writing, "As a young woman, I have, like all other women, been the victim of sexual harassment. . . . I honestly encounter uncomfortable and unwanted attention pretty often." Yet another student expressed a chronic fear of men, describing how this fear keeps her hypervigilant, at the same time as she second-guesses herself for feeling afraid: "I walk to class every day and to my internship. Every time I walk home, there are cars that stop, honk, wave, and stare. It gets me nervous and sometimes thinking is anyone going to pull over and grab me. I could be

overreacting but it's always in the back of my head." As these excerpts from student writing exemplify, the campus involvement requirement in course projects helped many female students connect course material to their daily lives. While they did not always follow those connections up with (explicit commitments to) getting involved on campus or utilizing community resources themselves, they laid the important groundwork of rhetorically listening to our environments as a strategy for assessing and intervening in gendered violence in the community.

Several female students initiated meetings with me outside of class to talk about how our class was "popping up" in other aspects of their lives, leading them to rethink a turbulent relationship or reevaluate an unwanted sexual encounter. They expressed fear that men in the class might perceive them as just another woman "lying about rape" or "seeking attention" to get back at an ex-boyfriend. One felt so enraged by the research she unearthed about sexualized violence on college campuses, she visited my office after the semester was over, asking how she might get involved locally to promote antiviolence. While I also met with male students outside of class, none of them discussed personal matters with me. They simply wanted to go over drafts of their papers to ensure they would earn the highest grades possible. By and large, men expressed agreement that gender inequality continues to pervade society, yet when it came to gendered violence, they tended to assume more distanced standpoints than women.

Male students did not tend to express personal identification (Burke, 1969) with respect to issues of gendered violence on campus, often reiterating versions of rape culture mentality that render sexualized violence interpersonal. For example, one male student argued that acquaintance rape stems not from systems of power and control, as many feminists argue it does, but from a breakdown of communication: "If a person doesn't want to have sex but doesn't say no, how is the other person supposed to know she doesn't want to have sex. . . . If someone doesn't want to have sex then they should just communicate that feeling by saying no." His comment places the onus on the (potential) victim for preventing rape and obscures the paralyzing fear women experience about saying "no" in the face of assault when they experience such assault as a life-threatening act of violence. Moreover, it assumes that simply verbalizing "yes" or "no" is the only form of consent that is necessary or appropriate in sexual encounters.

Related to this perception of acquaintance rape as an interpersonal issue that can be resolved through better communication, the majority of men in the class perceived violence in romantic or sexual relationships as a two-way street. They claimed that men are often stereotyped as perpetrators, while women are never held accountable for violating men's reputations, describing scenarios in which they believed women falsely claimed rape for attention or vengeance. As one male student wrote, "The bottom line is that if a girl is flirty and promiscuous

with a guy when they are both drunk. . . chances are something is going to happen. The next morning, a guy would rarely if ever say anything about this decision, even if it was a regret. On the other hand, it is a lot more common for the girl to say that they guy acted with force and that it may have been a situation like a rape or sexual violence.” According to this student, acquaintance rape is almost a misnomer, resulting from women denying personal responsibility in sexual encounters. Moreover, his use of “rarely” to describe men’s nonchalance about sexualized assault, and “a lot more common” to describe women’s alleged overreaction to these encounters, suggests that eradicating rape is a woman’s job of changing her perceptions. As these excerpts from male student writings exemplify, the campus involvement requirement in the course shored up men’s egos, exposing an underlying fear of or anger about being (perceived as) perpetrators. They did not write about specific strategies for changing such normalized perceptions, beyond reiterating versions of rape myths that women falsely “cry rape,” and should just understand that men will inevitably want to have sex with women who pay attention to them.

## A CONCLUSION

Writing this chapter, I found myself resisting accountability at every turn. “Standing under” my students’ discourses and my own approaches to teaching the citizenship literacy course brought my own experienced *and* perpetrated violations into sharp relief. I have long been engaged in researching violence against women, bearing witness again and again to the utter collapsing of boundaries victimization generates. I have worked in women’s shelters, and a women’s substance abuse program in which every single client who walked through our doors had not only chemical dependency issues, but also histories of rape, incest, and/or domestic battery—often, “all of the above.” I have my own history of victimization, as well as of retaliation in the face of such victimization. I am a survivor. I have been cracked by rape, emotional abuse, physical violence, stalking, and harassment perpetrated by men. Countless female friends, colleagues, mentors, and family members have also been cracked.

When I “out” myself as a survivor, a necessary move in accounting for my pedagogical practices in this chapter, it threatens to scramble the years of therapy that have brought me back in positive communication with my body. Recognizing my limitations means recognizing that my work, however well-intended, enacts its own forms of violence. Downplaying perpetration overemphasizes victimization as *the* catalyst for inventing antiviolence strategies. Doing so inadvertently perpetuates the belief that victims, not perpetrators, must be the ones to end gendered violence. Embodied knowledge is always partial and evolving, and

as a feminist, I have an ethical responsibility to account for what I cannot (yet) perceive, at the same time as I cannot (or will not) perceive it. Accounting for my pedagogical methodology in the citizenship literacy course helps me recognize *that I fail, where I fail, and to do my work anyway.*

While I have not yet taught this course again, writing this chapter has me *strategically contemplating* (Royster & Kirsch, 2012) the citizenship literacy course design as a collaboration with students. Such contemplation exposes my methodologies, “how [I] process, imagine, and work with materials” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 85), in relation to my actual experience of teaching the course, the “outward journey in real time and space” (Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 85). Put simply, *strategically contemplating* permeates my boundaries. I am letting go of controlling how a course may unfold. During the time when I taught the citizenship literacy course, 2013, I was raped by a white man I knew. My boundaries violated, I became increasingly insistent that students speak up in moments of silence in the classroom—what I perceived as a male unwillingness to engage that spread to female students in the class, causing them to self-censor. The more I called on students at random, the more stilted discussions became.

Rather than becoming vulnerable myself, by way of sharing (in some form) my own experience of assault, I assumed that students needed to push through their anxieties about speaking up by requiring them to do so. While I recognize that a teacher sharing personal stories of victimization with students can be highly problematic, and the possibility that such sharing may not always be appropriate or productive for either teacher or students, I also recognize that by asking students to routinely interrogate their own positionalities in relation to course content, I was asking students to do what I would not or could not do myself.

Teaching the citizenship literacy course was at once empowering and traumatizing. On the one hand, focusing the course on women and victimization, for many female students, worked to denaturalize rape myths that represent women as perpetrators of their own wreckage (e.g., why didn't she just leave?), and represent male perpetrators as victims of traumatic childhoods, violent male role models, and other environmental conditions beyond their control that compel them to perpetrate violence. On the other hand, avoiding men, maleness, masculinity, non-cisgender identities, perpetrators, and perpetration contradicted the larger insight I hoped students would gain: that many of us move in and out of different gender identities; that we may all be victims and perpetrators, at different times or in different spaces; that no one is exempt from responsibility for gendered violence.

I am left with many more questions than I started with: *How can I, having been silenced by violence myself, require students to talk openly about it with relative*

*strangers, and in a setting where they were being assessed for a grade? How can a course promote community, collaboration, and openness at the same time as I, the instructor, single-handedly design it without allowing space for students' needs and interests to shape its contents? Was it the right decision for me not to disclose my own trauma history? Would disclosing have helped? Would it have harmed? What was I afraid of?*

As these questions suggest, accounting for our practices can be a painful process with painful results. Accounting for our practices exposes congruences, but also gaps, between student uptakes and our very best pedagogical intentions. Yet in approaching methodology as an always-already feature of my research, I can refine how I gather and interpret information from my students—movements that impact the effects of their conclusions. It can help me recognize where and how my embodied experiences shape my movements; how my assumptions can silence, shame, or marginalize students, regardless of my good intentions to do ethical, feminist work. It can also help me more appropriately engage student rhetors who may become tomorrow's feminist activists. When we account for our practices, we move our work forward, in closer alignment with the feminist futures we imagine.

## NOTES

1. Julie Jung seminar. Many thanks to my mentor, Professor Julie Jung in whose doctoral seminar, *Rhetoric Saves Lives*, I first encountered this way of analyzing concepts in terms of what they do, how they are used, and the risks and effects of their usages.
2. Students of the class (English 128, Fall 2013). The Informed Consent Form for this IRB study can be accessed at [https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/feminist/media/Johnston\\_ConsentForm.docx](https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/feminist/media/Johnston_ConsentForm.docx).
3. I'd like to thank my colleagues Lauren Rosenberg and Emma Howes, two other contributors to this edited collection, for their role in shaping this chapter, which originally started as a feminist trilogy collaborative piece about feminist methodologies.

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