

# Peitho

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**The Journal of the Coalition of Women Scholars  
in the History of Rhetoric & Composition**



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# Peitho

The Journal of the Coalition of Women Scholars in  
the History of Rhetoric & Composition

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## Editors' Introduction

# Looking Forward: The Next 25 Years of Feminist Scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition

Jessica Enoch and Jenn Fishman

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The Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition celebrated its 25th anniversary at the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Indianapolis, IN, and in just a few weeks, Coalition members will travel to Arizona State University for the tenth biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference. These milestones represent a quarter century of vibrant work. From the start, the group Kathleen Ethel Welch conjured has been a learned society of dedicated “scholars who are committed to feminist research throughout the history of rhetoric and composition” (“Our Mission”). Since Welch, Marjorie Currie Woods, Winifred Bryan Horner, Nan Johnson, and C. Jan Swearingen signed the Coalition’s constitution, the organization has upheld a two-fold mission: “the advancements of research throughout the history of rhetoric and composition” and “the education of women faculty and graduate students in the politics of the profession” (“Our Mission”). With the act of coalition as its *techne*, the CWSHRC has always been engaged in moving the field of feminist rhetoric and composition forward and supporting and mentoring feminist scholars along the way.

In this special issue of *Peitho*, we mark and celebrate the Coalition’s achievements. Rather than offering an extended retrospective, however, we take a different tack. Together with our thirty-six contributors and *Peitho*’s editorial staff, we invite you to join us in looking ahead to the next 25 years as we ask, “What should our shared concerns, priorities, and prerogatives be? What topics should we address? Where should we direct our attention—and that of others—and why?” At first, this invitation to consider the future may seem strange, especially since we include the term “history” in the title of our organization. A retrospective of any sort might thus make more sense. However, as Barbara L’Eplattenier and Lisa Mastrangelo note in their introduction to the first peer-reviewed issue of this journal, *Peitho* shares in the Coalition’s mission to promote feminist research that connects the past to the present as a means of envisioning the future. In our case, working together on this issue has heightened our awareness of our field’s deep and abiding investment in the transformation of now into then, today into yesterday, last month into

last year or the last 25 years, and so on. In *Electric Rhetoric*, Welch reminds us, “New rhetorics’ have proliferated at various moments in the 2,400 year construction of traditional Western rhetorical theory,” and the work we include here testifies to their proliferation in the twentieth and early 21st centuries (53). Of course, history is a cumulative process, and Welch gives us the phrase “next rhetoric” to name each wave, acknowledging its relationship to both previous rhetorics and forthcoming ones.

In essence, then, we asked “What’s next?” when we circulated our call for contributions a year and a half ago. In seeking scholarship to “commemorate the first 25 years of the Coalition,” we were eager to learn about the topics our colleagues would identify as both urgent and emergent, and we were curious to see the methods and methodologies they were taking up—or making up—to engage with exigent rhetorics. As the work included here reveals, contributors did indeed pursue historiographic questions, but they also looked beyond them to pedagogy and present-day rhetorical concerns and made use of new methods and methodologies along the way. Not surprisingly, the work they accomplish substantiates the claims made by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa A. Kirsch when they write, “Feminist rhetorical practices are not only changing research methods but also research methodologies—the guiding assumptions and theoretical principles that underlie all research—what counts as data, how we gather and interpret data, what role researchers play in relation to participants, what ethical stance they assume, and so on” (29). In dialogue with Royster and Kirsch, contributors to this issue offer examples of changing methods and methodologies while they address the question “What’s next?” in one of three main ways: through brief key concept statements, through extended scholarly texts, and through the virtual display of the Digital New Work Showcase originally presented at CCCC 2015.

As a genre, key concept statements serve a particular purpose. Bounded by brevity (each is 1200-1500 words), they not only describe but also embody and verbally enact ideas we believe are critical to unlocking the next 25 years. In name, key concept statements echo two familiar resources, Raymond Williams’ *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* and Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle’s recently published book of threshold concepts of writing studies, *Naming What We Know*. The former is a nearly forty-year-old work of cultural philology, representing Williams’ efforts to understand the shifting, often contradictory connotations of the 109 terms he identifies as the main vocabulary (at least in British English) for articulating contemporary culture and society (xxviii). By contrast, Jan Meyer and Ray Land introduce threshold concepts in a 2003 paper that both acknowledges their ubiquity and situates them squarely in the realm of instruction, particularly academic teaching and learning. As they explain, threshold concepts are crucial framing ideas or

“portals” that open specific ways of thinking about a subject “without which the learner cannot progress” (1). As a result, threshold concepts, whether in writing studies or elsewhere, are both valuable and troublesome. In a Burkean sense, they are helpful because they pronounce what seem to be common concerns and values and offer ways for us to identify with one another. But they are problematic too because in their terministic *selection* there is also *deflection*: while so much is said, so much is unsaid (45).

We understand the key concepts discussed in this issue—history, coalition, inclusion, agency, feminism and language rights, material, embodiment, and service—as heuristics for us to consider our work in the coming 25 years. Of course, readers may add to or subtract from this list (and indeed we expect they will). We see this genre as one that encourages imaginative response, and we hope it will drive others to compose, assign, and circulate subsequent statements through any number of available means. By bringing one bunch together here, in a special, edited section of this issue, we hope to initiate this process and at the same time affirm alternative forms of scholarly communication. As Wendy Sharer writes in “Opening the Scholarly Conversation,” “our traditional and (still) most esteemed genres of scholarship have, with few exceptions, been constructed in a way that serves to exclude the voices of a great many faculty” including those “who, often by choice, work at teaching-heavy institutions that do not place as much value on or expend as many resources in support of traditional processes and genres of scholarship” (np). Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry concur, considering the same issues from an international perspective, underscoring “the need to decentre Anglophone-centre control [of academic publishing] and to reimagine the kind of knowledge production, evaluation, and distribution practices currently governing scholars’ practices and experiences” (155). Over the next 25 years, feminist scholars and scholarly publications can—and should—be at the fore of imagining, establishing, and legitimating what comes next with regard to all aspects of knowledge production, including publication, and we see these key concepts as an attempt to do so.

If you click through this issue in order, key concept statements provide initial frames for interpreting the seven full-length scholarly texts that follow. Each one offers a rich example of the topics, methods, and methodologies the authors believe should be “next” on our radar. Starting with Stacey Waite’s “Cultivating the Scavenger: A Queerer Feminist Future for Composition and Rhetoric” and Jessica Restaino’s “Surrender as Method: Research, Writing, Rhetoric, Love,” these two essays offer powerful, distinctive meditations on some of the most personal aspects of feminist scholarly work. For Waite, that work is feminist and queer as well as pedagogical, and it is best understood as what Judith Halberstam terms a “scavenger methodology” or a way

of organizing inquiry that “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other” (13). Describing the “profound political and personal stakes” of bringing scavenging into the writing classroom, Waite argues “that all writers must commit to learning to disrupt, to read differently, to ask more of texts, to ask more of the world than linear, normative functions allow.” For Restaino, who writes with (and in memoriam to) Susan Lundy Maute, the stakes for feminist research are nothing less than life and death. From this profound rhetorical situation, Restaino asks these questions: “In what ways [ . . . ] can feminist methods for knowledge-making sustain us in explorations of that which we can never fully understand, like illness and love? To what extent is our work in feminist rhetorical study rooted in a willingness to merge the struggles of our lives with the goals of our work? How might care, love, and intimacy serve as spaces in which research might be reinvented and re-envisioned?”

The personal comes to the fore in conjunction with performance throughout this issue, affirming both as vital to feminist endeavors, including scholarly ones. In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Royster and Kirsch identify particular elements of the personal as factors that make current feminist academic projects meaningful to us. Looking “beyond notions of rescue, recovery, and (re) inscription” to map groundbreaking work in our field, they pay primary attention to colleagues’ engagement with gender (and sexuality), race and ethnicity, and status along with geographical sites, rhetorical domains, genres, and modes of expression (43). The examples they select demonstrate some of the many ways scholars’ identities and identifications operate in our field’s most important current projects, and they also reveal the various types of performance feminist scholars study and themselves enact. Similarly, we showcase a broad range of positionalities and performances in this issue of *Peitho*. As Waite and Restaino engage in scavenging and surrender, respectively, they perform the traditional scholarly essay in ways that foil different aspects of its usual arrangement, style, and delivery. Considered alongside Adela C. Licona and Karma R. Chávez’s “A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities” and Jordynn Jack’s “Objects at Play: Rhetoric, Gender, and Scientific Toys,” the essay is hardly a form ripe for retirement, as Adam Banks declared in his 2015 CCCC Chair’s Address. Instead, at least at the hands of these scholars, it is a mode of expression readily adaptable to next rhetorics, especially feminist ones.

As much as this issue embraces the future of the scholarly essay, it also celebrates the communicative possibilities that *Peitho*’s new format affords, both now and next. For Licona and Chávez, *Peitho*’s multimodal platform makes it possible to enact the relational literacies they theorize in the extended essay that frames their video. As they explain, relational literacies are interactive occasions that create “coalitional possibilities” by engaging people

directly in “connecting, understanding, knowing, recognizing, and acting with one another.” Their video, “A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities,” captures two examples of such literacies through footage of queer youth in a community-based project and Licona’s ailing mother. Individually, each example would illustrate how relational literacies can invite “new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics.” Remixed in an experimental format, the footage becomes an occasion that challenges us to find meaning in the deliberately disorienting swarm of images and sounds we encounter.

Like Licona and Chávez, Jack’s interest in play catalyzes knowledge and identity formation, focusing on children and their play with scientific toys. Her webtext, punningly titled “Objects at Play,” takes as its subject an often under-studied (or even unstudied) group within feminist rhetorical scholarship: children, and explores how the discursive and material rhetoricity of scientific toys makes assertions about gendered expectations and practices. Arguing that “[p]lay is a crucial vector through which children develop what Pierre Bourdieu calls *habitus*,” Jack examines the ways children’s interactions with popular toys such as Erector Sets, LEGO, Goldie Blox, and Roominate have “the potential to disrupt, reproduce, or reconfigure gendered habitus even as [children] are first learning them.” Likewise, by offering her readers different paths for navigating her webtext, Jack cultivates scholarly play with similar possibilities for feminist rhetorics.

Our inclusion of peer-reviewed scholarship in genres and modes new to *Peitho* opens a veritable Pandora’s box of questions for feminist scholars to address over the next 25 years. Collectively, we may need to answer questions that challenge the legitimacy of webtexts and videos as scholarship. Along with the scholarly publications that have established a precedent in our field, we can turn to a variety of professional resources, including CCCC position statements on “Scholarship in Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans, and Department Chairs” and “Promotion and Tenure Guidelines for Work with Technology” as well as the Modern Language Association’s “Guidelines for Evaluating Work in Digital Humanities and Digital Media.” Both individually and together, we also need to ask ourselves why we should choose one or another available mode of scholarship when we embark on our own next projects. For indeed we are deciding among a nested set of functional, critical, and rhetorical possibilities when we do (Selber 25). Thus we must learn to take into account our own compositional abilities, the arguments we want to make, and the affordances different formats offer us as well as our audience, the readership of *Peitho*.

While these are decisions all multi-literate scholars must make in a digital age, we welcome them as feminist scholars, for they prompt us to take into account how different formats can (or cannot) help us achieve feminist ends. As



Jack illustrates, even when particular scientific toys do not explicitly encourage children to resist interpellation into rigid gendered roles, play enables them to discover the agency to do so anyway. Likewise, Licona and Chávez demonstrate through their scholarship and the community work they highlight how remix can be an act of resistance. They align this strategy with the practice of relational literacies and thus with women-of-color feminisms, literacy studies, and queer temporalities: a coalition with “the capacity to produce knowledge and to connect to home knowledges and abuelit@ wisdoms.” The authors of the remaining three scholarly texts also work in this spirit, suiting their media to their messages, while addressing what we might consider our final key concept might be: women. That is to say, individually and together, Patricia Bizzell and K.J. Rawson, Nicole Khoury, and Alexandra Hidalgo cast in relief our ideas and assumptions about women along with the roles this term and its embodied realities play in feminist scholarship writ large and the future of the Coalition more particularly.

In “Coalition of Who? Regendering Scholarly Community in the History of Rhetoric,” Bizzell and Rawson have an intergenerational dialogue about the politics of gender identification both in general within feminist scholarly communities and specifically within the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. Their video-recorded conversation, which they term a “thought experiment,” invites us to think with them about how the Coalition in name and orientation will translate into the next wave of academic activism for feminist scholars in our field, including the Coalition’s first women members such as Bizzell; early-career transgender scholars such as Rawson, and others. A provocative exchange, their piece illustrates the phenomenon A. Finn Enke observes in the inaugural issue of *Transgender Studies Quarterly*: that “[g]ender becomes legible through acts of translation that betray disciplinary success and failure simultaneously” (242).

While Bizzell and Rawson engage questions of gender and the rhetorical sustainability of “women” as a priority for feminist scholars, Khoury invites us to consider how transnational concerns also trouble and complicate any stable sense of this term. In “Enough Violence: The Importance of Local Action to Transnational Feminist Scholarship and Activism,” Khoury explains how Lebanese women are not a political category per se, and they have very few civil (as opposed to religious) protections. In this context, feminist organizing around human rights requires not the translation of international language and law into a Lebanese vernacular but intense mediations of cultural difference across legal, public, and private spheres. With the activist NGO Kafa as her example, Khoury speaks in concert with Bizzell and Rawson, and together they challenge us to consider trans issues of all kinds in the next 25 years,

improving our ability to work across the shifting borders that distinguish genders, generations, religions, and nation-states.

As both a complement and a challenge to these engagements with “women” as a guiding term for our work, we offer a final documentary, Hidalgo’s “Lifting as We Climb.” Building on the “digital docu-history” Michelle Eble and Wendy Sharer composed with Mary Hocks in 2008 for a session at CCCC entitled, “Learning from our Histories” (19), Hidalgo’s standalone video examines the initial development of the Coalition with an eye toward its future. Filmed at CCCC 2014 during the 25th anniversary festivities, “Lifting as We Climb” celebrates the Coalition’s greatest successes, including *Peitho*, and identifies the group’s greatest challenges. On one hand, then, as Jacqueline Jones Royster comments in the video, “I return to the fact that we’re still here as the greatest success. [ . . . ] And we have done good work. I don’t see that there’s anything more important than that.” On the other hand, there is plenty of work to be done, especially with regard to expanding the Coalition’s membership and the group’s commitment to diversity. As Royster summarizes: “I think that there’s lots of work to do yet on trying to convince all of us that gender is a part of a human enterprise, just as race is a part of a human enterprise, just as sexuality is a part of a human enterprise, just as geographical location is a part of a human enterprise.” As we look to the future, Hidalgo’s work challenges us to see not only the Coalition’s work but also feminist work more broadly as deeply human work, which we engage at the intersections of identity.

Just as we begin this issue with a special edited selection of key concept statements, we conclude with special edited content. Following in the tradition begun when *Peitho* was a newsletter and editors included scripts of the presentations given at the Wednesday night CCCC Coalition meeting, we offer here a digital version of the New Work Showcase hosted by the Coalition at CCCC 2015. Celebrating the next 25 years as well as the journal’s new multi-modal platform, we are proud to help make the Coalition’s annual scholarly event accessible over time to a wide audience. As *Peitho* readers will discover when they click the link, the digital showcase features new work by ten of the 2015 session’s eleven participants, all of whom remediated their original displays for publication. As the overview included in this special section explains, Jenn organized the New Work Showcase in her role as Coalition president. Participants were nominated by colleagues and selected by a committee that included both regular members of the Coalition and members of the Coalition’s Advisory Board. Additional colleagues served as participants’ mentors, and Trish Fancher curated the digital version, working in collaboration with Tarez Graban. At CCCC, close to three hundred conference-goers spent an hour walking among the new work on display, talking with presenters and with each other. We encourage you to spend extra time with this part of the

issue, clicking through the digital showcase and getting to know the kind of work we are sure you will be seeing again and again in the next 25 years.

Together, all thirty-six contributors to this special issue offer a glimpse of the work that lies ahead of us. In reviewing the topics and scholars featured here, some readers might applaud the range of material and even the demographic diversity of this thirty-six, considered across age and academic rank, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, ability, and institutional affiliation. Others, however, might rightly ask important questions about what is missing from this issue and what a future predicated exclusively on its contents might mean. As editors, we second these concerns, for even with the presence of varied positions and perspectives, there is indeed absence. We hope, though, that the absences in this issue, whether topical or demographic, can serve as heuristics not only for critique but also for action—including scholarly acts that fill available spaces and create new ones for rich and diverse feminist research in our field.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler remarks on the “embarrassed etc.” that closes so many attempts to list all of the attributes of feminist subjectivity. For Butler, the invariable failure of such exercises is instructive, and the “illimitable *et cetera* [. . .] offers itself as a new departure for feminist political theorizing” (182). Of course, there is much more that feminist scholars of rhetoric might consider as they look to the future. There is much, much more to say (thankfully). We hope whatever *Peitho*’s audiences see when they peruse this issue, it looks like an invitation to participate, whether participation takes the form of an audio essay or hypertext, whether it is composed in ALT DIS or hybrid discourse, whether it proposes new topics or challenges the ones identified here. Whatever the case, we look forward to what’s next over the next 25 years—and beyond.

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## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Coalition: A Meditation

Cheryl Glenn and Andrea A. Lunsford

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Coalition. When we look at this word, the first in the title of our organization, the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CWSHRC), we fix on “co.” The “co” in “coalition” is key to us because it invokes more than one: in it we hear doubling and redoubling along with the reverberations of other key words beginning with “co”: collaboration, coordination, cooperation. So “coalition,” with its connotations, seems pretty dead on for the ongoing work of the CWSHRC.

But why, more precisely? Why choose this particular word to capture the guiding vision of our group? Why not “collective” or “alliance” or “association” or “organization”? While any of these words might have been chosen, none of them signifies in precisely the way that “coalition” does. For starters, “coalition” denotes a group of distinct individuals who come together to cooperate in joint action toward a mutual goal (or set of goals)—not forever, but for however long it takes. In the case of CWSHRC, individual scholars work to coalesce across differences in academic rank and standing (including students), institutional type, research agendas, teaching interests, and cultural/ethnic backgrounds. The individual interests, concerns, and values at the table are disparate, ranging from those who focus on feminist historical recovery work and those who enact feminist research principles in composition studies to those who perform feminist pedagogy and engage in global collaborations—and much more. (Early on, in fact, it took a vote to decide whether to include both rhetoric and composition in the title of the organization.) But as Toni Morrison admonishes, “the difference was all the difference there was” (qtd. in Bhabba and Farred 36).

Crucial to the formation of the group was a desire to move beyond the perceived patriarchal (hierarchical and competitive) structures of our disciplines and professional organizations and the masculinist practices that had long guided them. In spite of differences among participants (who ranged widely in age, came from public and private, two-year and four-year colleges, and professed a range of interests, from a narrow focus on writing processes, for example, to rhetoric as an overarching art and theory in ancient Greece), the goal of resisting hierarchies through nurturing research by and about women—and supporting the women doing that research at every step of their

careers—has helped bridge those differences to allow for strategic action. Such action has resulted in continued resistance to “a” rhetorical history or “the” set of composition practices, and a unified—while still complex—sense of who “we” are.

“We” are many different people, coalescing across our individual agendas and biases to contribute our physical and emotional energy, our thinking, our research, our money, and our time to develop the potential of our field and our members—their teaching, speaking, writing, researching, and mentoring talents. As in any coalition, we do not always agree: we have differed, over the years, on how best to strike a balance between “composition” and “rhetoric” in our title, with some members lamenting a perceived turn in the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) away from rhetoric and especially the history of rhetoric and others applauding that turn. But whenever possible, we aim to use our disagreements heuristically, as rhetorical invention for deliberating on our next steps. Taking inspiration from Sojourner Truth, we are “keeping the thing going while things are stirring” (110). And that has meant, for the Coalition, careful attention and mindfulness to how we structure our programs, to who is invited to speak at these meetings, and to how we represent ourselves on the website and now in our journal, *Peitho*.

Now that our Coalition is 25 years old and well established within CCCC, what might we aim for in the next 25? We expect serendipity will continue to play a role in the direction the Coalition takes: we think particularly of the current moment when many of our members are making strong international connections, traveling and speaking and teaching and leading workshops in countries from Sweden to South Africa, from Chile to China, and many places in between. Might these occasions help us to strengthen the international or global focus of the Coalition? In fact, might they lead to an International Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition? While such a goal is exciting and worthy, it is also one the current Coalition should pursue with caution, mindful once again of the importance of difference and of listening long and hard to those with whom we wish to join causes.

One step the Coalition can take toward such a goal, however, presents itself immediately: focus in the next years on inclusiveness at home. In spite of their differences, the women who started the Coalition were almost without exception white and predominantly middle class. Given the fact that members were resisting the strongly masculinist (and white) tradition of rhetoric, we shouldn’t and didn’t ignore the irony of the situation. As a result, the Coalition has more members of color than it did originally—but the group is still far too pale. So an immediate goal of the Coalition should be to ask what about its practices and procedures are less than inviting to scholars and teachers of color and to devise strategies for honoring greater inclusivity and building

a Coalition that better represents the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity within the United States.

The next 25 years will offer both challenges and opportunities for the Coalition. Here's hoping that the group will seize kairotic moments as they arise and keep the central goals of supporting research by, about, and for women and mentoring young scholars squarely in its sights. The "co" in "coalition" will continue to underscore these aims.

So: coalition. Strategic, often temporary and shifting, valuing "togetherness in difference" (to use Lu Ming Mao's powerful phrase), and devoted to action. A most fitting word to launch the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. And a fitting word to make another very bold move, when the time is right and just, to launch an *International* Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. What might such a group be capable of doing to foster transnational and cross-cultural understanding and to develop a rhetoric of peace, social justice, and inclusivity? Surely such a goal is worthy of the Coalition's next 25 years.

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## About the Authors

**Cheryl Glenn** is Liberal Arts Research Professor of English and Women's Studies, John Moore Teaching Mentor, and co-founder of Penn State's Center for Democratic Deliberation. Over the course of her career, she has won countless research, scholarship, teaching, and mentoring awards and has delivered lectures and workshops across North America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Professor Glenn's scholarly publications include *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*; *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*; *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*; *Rhetorical Education in America*; *The St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*; *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook*; *Making Sense: A Real-World Rhetorical Reader*; *The Harbrace Guide for College Writers*; *Harbrace Essentials*; *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Feminism*, and numerous articles, chapters, and essays. She and J. Michael Hogan co-edit "*Rhetoric and Democratic Deliberation*," a Pennsylvania State University Press series. With Shirley Wilson Logan, she co-edits the Southern Illinois University Press series, "*Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms*."

**Andrea Abernethy Lunsford** is the Louise Hewlett Nixon Professor of English, Emerita and Bass Fellow in Undergraduate Education at Stanford University. The Director of Stanford's Program in Writing and Rhetoric from 2000 through 2012, she has designed and taught undergraduate and graduate courses in writing history and theory, rhetoric, literacy studies, and women's writing and is the editor, author or co-author of many books and articles on writing and rhetoric. Her most recent book is a collection, edited with Cheryl Glenn, of *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Feminism, 1973-2000*. She and Cheryl are currently working on the second volume, *Landmark Essays on Rhetoric and Feminism, 2000-2015*, and hope to add a third volume on essays on global rhetoric and feminism.



## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

## History

Nan Johnson

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In this celebratory issue of *Peitho*, we have a significant opportunity to imagine new directions. This moment is like pulling off onto one of those scenic view-spots on mountain and ocean roads: we have the chance to see the vistas in back and in front of us. From there, how does the key concept *history* look for the future? Can we pursue new pathways to exploring the history of rhetoric and composition? We can look back across the last 25 years and see how, as feminist scholars working together, we have expanded the history of women's rhetorical practices and our understanding of the pedagogies that have affected women. My question is: how can we widen the view even further?

How can we widen the view on central questions such as *what and where is rhetorical performance*, and *where and how is pedagogy happening*? These questions have kept us looking for the undiscovered and overlooked places where women were doing and learning rhetoric. The scholarly goals of depth and inclusivity have sponsored our assumption that the more we discover and record, the greater is our understanding of the role of rhetoric and writing in women's lives. We have moved through and past looking for canonical incarnations of rhetorical theory and examples of model practices. As feminists, we have seen the problematic underside of "tradition" and the "exemplary" and headed steadily in the direction of the ordinary and everyday ways that rhetoric and writing are experienced. Widening the view of historical explanation means making that direction even more real by being able to identify more rhetorical practices, more pedagogical sites, and more women's lives.

In my own work, I have been trying to widen the view by engaging with the question: Where and how is pedagogy happening? Having charted academic pedagogy as well as popular uptakes of academic theory in my earlier work, I am now challenging myself with the question: Where *else* has rhetoric and writing pedagogy happened? Following that reliable methodological hunch, seek and you shall find, I have focused recently on locating and studying evidence materials (mostly ephemera) that lie well off the usual research track. The ephemera evidence trail has lead me to surprising sources of pedagogy that have added complexity to my understanding of how women could have acquired rhetoric and composition skills in earlier eras. I would like to share

two of these sources as examples of how ephemera evidence can open up new research pathways.

The *Little Blue Book* series was a popular mail-order venue selling thousands and thousands of volumes for over fifty years. Between 1918 and 1970, *Little Blue Book* sold countless pocket-size volumes (5 cents each) on a range of topics including history, literature, economics, and language. In the 1920's, the *Little Blue Book* series offered readers an entire course of study in rhetoric and writing: *How to Write Letters*, *Punctuation Self-Taught*, *Grammar Self-Taught*, *Common Faults in Writing English*, *Spelling Self-Taught*, *English Composition Self-Taught*, and *Rhetoric Self-Taught* (1925).<sup>1</sup> The clearly demarcated constituents of the *Little Book* curriculum (letters, punctuation, grammar, spelling, composition, and rhetoric) are revealing in terms of how pedagogy was defined for non-academic audiences in the 1920's. The volumes also contain appeals to authorities that are notable. *Rhetoric Self-Taught* includes a summary of "John F. Genung's Rules essential to Paragraph structure" (28). This prompted me to ask, "Hey, exactly how long *did* the late nineteenth-century rhetoric curriculum exert its influence on twentieth-century pedagogy?" The *Little Blue Book* series warrants more study and would certainly raise many research questions beyond mine. That possibility is exactly why I have become so intrigued as a scholar with the layer of evidence the *Little Blue Book* series represents.

Since I have widened my research beyond academic materials, I have been surprised by how much evidence of pedagogical activity I have found. A *Manual for Trade Union Speakers* (1936), a mail-order pamphlet published by the Rand Book Store, is another good example of how ephemera become evidence that implies new directions. The inside cover includes this manual as one the "Important Books and Pamphlets for Students of the Labor Movement." Author August Claessens is described on the title page as "Instructor in Public Speaking, Rand School for Social Science; International Ladies' Garment Workers and other trade unions." This booklet immediately makes me wonder what we could be finding out about the Rand School of Social Science and how it promoted a rhetoric and composition curriculum in the 1930's. Similarly, here is evidence that the Ladies' Garment Worker's Union sponsored rhetorical education. Where are those archives? How did the Ladies' Garment Worker's Union promote Claessens' claim in the "Introduction" that "Every intelligent member of a union should be able to stand up on his or her feet and speak clearly and convincingly"? *A Manual for Trade Union Speakers* seems to provide clear evidence that rhetoric and composition pedagogy was promoted by agencies we have yet to document.

*A Manual for Trade Union Speakers* and the *Little Blue Book* series are but two types of texts representing a rich layer of historical evidence about how pedagogy has been dispersed that we have barely incorporated into our

scholarship so far. In charting the history of pedagogy, textbooks, curricular evidence, and institutional records and histories will remain indispensable. However, if we want to continue to build an inclusive picture of rhetorical education, I believe we must seek out ways to embrace and integrate print texts like the *Little Blue Book* series and *A Manual for Trade Union Speaker* as well as artifacts of popular and material culture as equally revealing sources of historical evidence.

Multiple kinds of ephemera promise to tell us more about pedagogy: tourist souvenirs, campaign materials, recordings, garments, trade catalogues, postcards, commemorative plates, photographs, newspapers, magazines, children's toys, vintage writing tablets, advertising signs, and entertainment programs.<sup>2</sup> This is a representative list and quite deliberately not an inclusive one. My work so far suggests to me that the key to recognizing ephemera as evidence does not lie in trying to identify all possible configurations. In fact, that is not really possible in the best sense. Ephemeral materials and modes are everywhere around us. Instead, I gaze now with an abiding curiosity: In what unlikely forms has pedagogy been dispersed or inscribed?

Ephemera materials hold untapped potential for filling gaps in our knowledge about the true range of how rhetoric and writing has mattered in people's lives. I would like to encourage us to have more conversations about the complex historical picture we can develop when we recognize evidence that lies outside formal academic contexts. The collection of ephemera may yield evidence that alternative and counter-pedagogies flourished in venues and modes that up to now have escaped our attention. Stable terms like "teaching," "learning," "composing," "text," "process," and "purpose" may be revised or challenged. We may come up against the altogether unexpected. I am crossing my fingers for that.

Just the idea that there is so much more evidence out there to find is an inspiring way to think about future work and how to widen our view. A wider history is out there, but we do have to look for it. We do have to collect it. They don't call ephemera "ephemera" for no reason. These texts and artifacts are marginalized, fragile, and quickly disappearing. Often ephemera are simply material that no one has yet categorized as important. As feminists, we should understand that dynamic very well. We are truly in a race against time and perception. Artifacts to us are discards to many. Now is the moment.

## Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Lisa Mastrangelo and Wendy Sharer for helping me collect *Rhetoric Self-Taught*.

- 2 Recently collected artifacts in my archive that promise new research pathways include a monthly feature, "Correct Speaking and Writing," in *The Ladies Home Journal* (September 1903; 31); and the *Little Bird Speller* (1912), a children's board game containing punch-out letters for children to place in the proper sequence to name illustrations of birds. *Little Bird Speller* has gotten me excited about the history of how young people have been taught writing in the twentieth century, particularly since so many authors of children's materials were women.

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## About the Author

**Nan Johnson** is Professor of English at The Ohio State University where she specializes in the history of rhetoric, feminist rhetorical theory and history, rhetorical criticism, and the teaching of composition. She is the author of *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (1991), *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910* (2002), and several book chapters, articles, and reviews on rhetorical theory and education, historiography, and women's rhetoric.

## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Inclusion

Stephanie L. Kerschbaum

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The question of inclusion has long been a concern for feminist scholars in the history of rhetoric. As these scholars have shaped and reshaped the rhetorical canon, they have uncovered, recovered, addressed, and highlighted various chasms and gaps in how rhetorical history has been studied and disseminated, and they have done so from a broad—but not yet broad enough—range of perspectives. For example, my experiences as a deaf white woman lead me to identify myself as part of a long tradition of rhetoricians, but I am still frequently reminded of the many ways that I am not represented or reflected in versions of rhetorical traditions most readily available for study. Similar motivations have driven other feminist and postcolonial scholars to revise the presentation of rhetorical practice as overwhelmingly male, white, agonistic, able-bodied, and Westernized, and they have asked questions that may now be familiar to many of us: *Where and how are women represented? Where and how are minority communities represented? Where and how are oppressed and marginalized populations represented? Where and how are disabled bodies represented?* At each turn, the development of feminist rhetorical historiography has reflected the people involved as well as the available theories and evidence. In the next 25 years, we need to continue to use these positions and resources to resituate and retheorize our work, creating new and more relational approaches to the study of rhetorical history.

Within feminist rhetorical historiography, the project of inclusion was first approached as an additive process, as scholars identified female rhetoricians, teachers, speakers, and writers and worked to highlight their contributions within an overwhelmingly male canon (Campbell; Donawerth; Glenn; Logan; Lunsford; Miller and Bridwell-Bowles; Ritchie and Ronald). As this first wave of feminist scholarship emerged, historiographers also began to witness how attending to women in the rhetorical tradition also changed conceptions of the tradition itself. Not surprisingly, what it means to “do rhetoric” changes when the people who are identified as doing rhetoric changes (Biesecker; Dolmage; Enoch; Haas; Lipson and Binkley; Walters; Wertheimer). In recent years, feminist rhetorical historiographers have called for even more radical changes in rhetorical terrain as they have challenged processes of canonization

altogether and come to develop new methodologies for theorizing rhetorical history (Ballif; Schell and Rawson). Such work sets the stage for feminist historiography to invite, even demand, heightened attention to inclusivity in rhetorical practice by making available new ways for scholars to position both themselves and their rhetorical subjects.

In calling attention to the work of inclusion in this key concept statement, my aim here is not only to encourage the addition of new names, groups, perspectives, and/or practices to those that are regularly studied in rhetorical history; it is also to call scholars and teachers to resituate and retheorize the very ways they conceptualize rhetoric and rhetorical practice and to develop related historiographical methods. Such moves are necessary in order to understand how processes of inclusion (and yes, of exclusion, too) orient feminist rhetorical scholars to figures, groups, and practices. As Cristina Ramírez pointed out at the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication, if only one or two Latinas are taken to stand in for an entire period within the rhetorical canon (as is often the case with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Gloria Anzaldúa), then it is hardly the case that Latina rhetorics are *included* in a particular rhetorical history. Likewise, neither de la Cruz nor Anzaldúa can be effectively understood or contextualized in any such isolated study of their work (see also Mao). To conduct more inclusive research in feminist rhetorical historiography, feminist scholars must develop ways to identify, describe, and understand the rhetorical work that has been vital to the survival and success of myriad individuals and groups throughout rhetorical history. It further calls scholars to read and engage rhetorical practices from vantage points beyond the still-canonical lens of male Western agonistic rhetoric.

That gendered rhetorical practices attributed to women still get labeled “women’s rhetorical practices,” while “men’s rhetorical practices” are rarely referred to in that way only underscores my point: approaches to inclusion must continue to examine how women—defined broadly—are part of the rhetorical tradition. To begin the work of resituating and retheorizing rhetoric and its practices, then, we need to reconsider the category of “women” and indeed, gender itself. We also need to reassess how these categories are created and re-created through the methods and practices of feminist historiography. For example, K.J. Rawson in “Queering Feminist Rhetorical Canonization” brings both queer and trans bodies and practices within the purview of feminist rhetoric while at the same time pointing out the inherent exclusion involved whenever canons are invoked. Too, Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson challenge categorical constructions of gender by connecting disability to all forms of rhetorical embodiment, including gender, race, and sexuality.

Bodies are always rhetorical, and rhetoric takes shape from bodies, two points that Dolmage reinforces again and again in *Disability Rhetoric*. His

reminders underscore the point that scholars' personal identifications and relationships still matter to the way they do research and situate themselves within the field. Academia remains a highly gendered, racist, and sexist environment (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González and Harris), and thus, acts of inclusion must continue to involve acts of self-identification and self-positioning. As feminist rhetorical scholars have taught us, such acts are vital to building credibility and authority within our field. Indeed, all members of the profession need to account for who they are and why they are here as they construct their scholarly personae and convey their commitments to what they study. Of course, the construction of *ethos* through self- and group representations is complex and differently conceived within different communities (Cushman; Royster). As a result, it is necessary for scholars to build relationships with audiences, communities, and texts of all kinds. Each one of us must examine not only our own positions in relation to what we are studying but also the connections we are forging with different people within the field through the circulation of our work. Put another way, it is not enough to identify women's rhetorics or women in rhetorical history. It is necessary also to understand how those of us who are performing this kind of recovery work situate ourselves within our lines of inquiry and how our positionalities inform our efforts. Whether we see ourselves as exploring our own personal history(ies) and traditions or attending to rhetorics and rhetorical cultures very different from those that may have shaped our own experiences, tracing these roots and interconnections must constitute a key element of feminist historiographical work.

To retheorize inclusion by carefully orienting to positions and relationships also requires us to attend to issues of representation, which require ongoing vigilance (Martinez). In a forum recently published in *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, editor P. Gabrielle Foreman and forum contributors name some of these issues. They write as feminist teachers and researchers protesting ongoing displacement and tokenization of black women scholars within their fields. Collectively, the contributors share experiences that go beyond individual circumstance or one-time mistakes. They recount numerous surprised reactions to their presence and again and again, having their experiences and expertise passed over (Foreman; Foreman et al.). Gender and race are only some of the social constructions that reflect structural forces that directly affect rhetoricians and rhetorical practices of all kinds, and rhetorical performances—including those of our own scholarship—always occur within gendered, raced, classed, and disabled environments. As a consequence, doing inclusion in the present scholarly moment means paying even more attention to the embodied and contextual identities of rhetors, rhetoricians, and rhetorical subjects. Asking new questions about inclusion and finding new

ways to practice it are vital for feminist historiographers of rhetoric if we are to continue to critically engage with our subjects and one another. Such inclusive moves are especially important now, as we look to the next 25 years of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, because they speak to the kinds of things we expect to learn as well as whom we expect to participate in the field. New modes of inclusion are also important because they provide a space to continue exploring difficult, intersectional questions about how our histories are composed along with the identity categories we use to organize ourselves and the work we ultimately produce.

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## About the Author

**Stephanie L. Kerschbaum** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Delaware, where she teaches courses in writing studies and the history of rhetoric. Her book, *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference* (NCTE, 2014) received the 2015 CCCC Advancement of Knowledge Award. Her articles have appeared in CCC, Rhetoric Review, Profession, Kairos, and most recently, Composition Forum. She is currently at work with Margaret Price on a study of disabled faculty members.

## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Agency Matters

Megan McIntyre

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For scholars of rhetoric and especially feminist scholars and scholars of women's rhetoric, agency has always mattered. Agency still matters. Agency will always matter. Agency mattered/matters/will matter because agency is epistemic (Foss), agency is formative (Foss; London Feminist Collective; Geisler), and agency is a matter of life and death (London Feminist Collective).

Agency has mattered because the Western rhetorical tradition was once about a good man speaking well (Quintilian), though an extensive cross-section of feminist scholarship from the 1980s and 1990s challenged this long-standing tradition. The scholars who produced this work, including Barbara Biesecker, Susan Jarratt, Andrea Lunsford, and others, offer a thoughtful reengagement with historical rhetorics that features women as historical, rhetorical subjects (Ballif; Campbell) and emphasizes disrupting existing, individualistic, women-less histories of rhetoric, often by turning attention to alternative subject formations and non-logocentric ways of knowing (Biesecker; Enoch; Jarratt).

As important theorists of rhetorical agency, feminist historiographers challenge not only the logics of traditional histories of rhetoric but also the centrality of the actor-hero-rhetor within them. For example, in their work, both Jarratt and Biesecker concentrate on the communal nature of ancient Greek and Roman rhetorical practices, and in doing so, they work to disrupt Enlightenment notions of individual agency. This move away from individual autonomy has had important ramifications for theories of rhetorical agency. An idealized, rational, autonomous individual has been portrayed as the primary possessor of rhetorical agency from Quintilian to Kenneth Burke. Though Burke's pentad and related ratios emphasize the roles of other participants in rhetorical situations, his work ultimately reinscribes the single human animal as the central progenitor of rhetorical agency. Instead of continuing to privilege individual rhetorical action, however, feminist approaches to rhetorical history emphasize the role of communal practice, with Biesecker arguing for revisionist, inclusive histories of rhetoric that "[work] against the ideology of individualism" (156-7). Further, as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell argues in "Agency: Promiscuous and Protean," agency must be "communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are

material and symbolic" (2). Communal practices of rhetorical agency emphasize, as Campbell does, participation and connection: scores of humans come together – even if only momentarily – for some shared purpose.

Theories of posthumanism offer feminist scholars of rhetoric another set of alternative frameworks for theorizing rhetorical agency. As D. Diane Davis posits in *Breaking Up (at) Totality*, traditional notions of agency, which draw on Enlightenment concepts of subjecthood and agency, cannot accommodate "the posthumanist notion that humans are always already functions of other functions" (23). As a result, "the (saving) power of rationality and, therefore, human agency have become suspect" (18). Indeed, she argues:

*there never was*

*any autonomous*

*agency,*

*intention*

*or will . . . not even within the subject positions into which we are*  
called (44)

Seeking positive rather than negative responses to the disquiet that accompanies this loss of control, Davis proposes different forms of laughter not as individual acts of rhetorical agency but as communal tactics for producing shared agency and affirmative alliances. By opening itself to networks of causes and to nonrational ways of knowing, posthuman agency allows us to better account for how real-world change is often affected: political and cultural changes are the results of a myriad of extended, messy, sometimes inexplicable interventions.

Posthuman agency matters to feminist rhetoricians because the networks of material and immaterial forces that inform rhetorical agency have always mattered and will continue to matter. Human rhetors cannot achieve their goals without relying on and/or responding to other humans and without relying on and/or being constrained by surrounding nonhumans. Consider, for example, the act of teaching: in order to achieve anything in my classroom, I require students, desks, computers, materials for class discussion, authors, and any number of other humans and nonhumans. These other people and things comprise the network of my classroom and any agentive act must account for and/or respond to these participants. Acknowledging the existence and power of these networks allows us, particularly as feminist scholars, to more thoughtfully and deliberately engage with the other actors who guide and influence our participation in scholarly, political, and social conversations. This move to networked agency serves a number of purposes identified by Jaqueline Jones Royster in "'Ain't I a Woman': Using Feminist Rhetorical Practices to Re-set the

Terms of Scholarly Engagement for an Iconic Text.” As Royster argues, feminist inquiry is characterized by (among other things) “poly-logical patterns of inquiry, textually and contextually grounded analyses, the connecting of local analyses to more global enterprises, [and] consistency in linking ethical concerns more explicitly to our commitments to responsible rhetorical action” (60). Though Royster does not identify her work as posthuman, it is consistent with posthumanist notions of networked action, an approach to understanding rhetorical agency that serves feminist scholars well because it closely matches the kind of communal creation that Jarratt, Biesecker, and Campbell associate with feminist practices of inclusion.

How we formulate agency as feminist scholars matters and will continue to matter because arguments about our bodily rights, our democratic rights, and our human rights are constantly challenged by the whims of civic leaders, the consequences of culturally embedded attitudes, and the violence people wreak on each other. Agency will continue to matter because women still earn \$0.77 for every \$1 men make; white women are still more likely to gain employment than women of color, and on and on. Over the next 25 years, these life and death problems must be best addressed communally. With Diane Coole and Samantha Frost, we may work to identify the “infinitesimally small causes” of large events, the infinitesimal acts, like the flap of a butterfly’s wings, that “can transform successive conditions [ . . . ] such that they end up having massive but unanticipated effects” (14). Following Campbell’s call for a more participatory communal agency and building on Biesecker’s arguments against a totalizing history of rhetoric that relies on a central narrative of individual action, we can work to make room in our theories of rhetorical and material agency for the others – human and nonhuman – who have always worked against, with, and alongside human rhetors.

Agency mattered. Agency matters. Agency will matter.

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## About the Author

**Megan McIntyre** is the Assistant Director of Dartmouth College's Institute for Writing and Rhetoric. She teaches undergraduate classes in writing, rhetoric, and technology. Her research interests include digital rhetoric, social media, postpedagogy, and writing program administration.

## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### **Feminism and Language Rights: Emerging or Converging?<sup>1</sup>**

Staci Perryman-Clark

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As I reflect on the task of helping to set an agenda for the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CWSHRC), I am inclined to think about the scholarship I have produced over the past five years as a tenure-track assistant professor and Writing Program Administrator. Thinking about the work I included in my recently submitted tenure dossier, I see two primary threads: one, the promotion and celebration of the Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL) Resolution in relation to African American Language (AAL) speakers and writers (including all students); and two, contributions by African American women to both feminism and composition. During the process of composing projects related to both threads, I've often desired to write about language rights and its *intersection* with the status of African American women in the academy to show how, together, these topics might form a new, combined area of inquiry.

Although extant scholarship related to African American women has significant implications for language rights and linguistic diversity (Troutman; Richardson; Smitherman "Testifying"), I have personally been unsuccessful bringing them together in a single manuscript.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, my inability to make these connections has not been for lack of trying. Instead, reviewers consistently could not see these two issues as related in my work. To be clear, I do not suggest they were wrong. Rather, I question to what degree we as a field may be missing key conversations on not only a well-defined area and methodology for pursuing Black feminist intersections with language rights, but also a nuanced understanding of Black feminism (or feminisms). As a result, I am calling for us as scholars in the CWSHRC to actively, conceptually engage intersections between Black feminism and language rights in our intellectual work.

My own response to this problem was to investigate the relationships between language rights and feminism, and my starting place was Jacqueline Jones Royster's definition of Afrafeminism as a means of "mak[ing] overt connections [ . . . ] between the everyday understanding of African American

women" (274). Taken up and extended as an approach to the study of SRTOL, Afrafeminism offers pedagogical, theoretical, and rhetorical means of directly engaging with language rights in relation to both Black feminism and histories of African American women. Looking ahead to the Coalition's next 25 years, my wish is for readers of *Peitho*—as well as scholars working in the histories of women's rhetoric more broadly—to join me in developing Afrafeminist studies of language that identify and affirm the contributions of African American women to struggles for language rights. Specifically, I see two main locations for this work: historical scholarship about language rights and biographical scholarship of key language rights scholars. In both locations, however, how we must understand feminism is key.

Turning to the history of SRTOL, one cannot ignore the leadership of women of color on the Conference on College Composition and Communication Language Policy Committee, including not only Geneva Smitherman but also Guadalupe Valdés and Ana Celia Zentella (Wible 88). While most of us are familiar with the breath and depth of Smitherman's contributions, we tend to be less aware of how she connects language rights, alternative perspectives on feminism, and African American women's experiences. Yet Smitherman herself never shied away from this combination of topics. In *Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans*, of feminism, Smitherman writes: "I wanted a feminism that would allow me to explore who we are as women—not as victims. One that claimed the powerful richness and delicious complexities inherent in being black girls now—sistas of the post-Civil rights, post-feminist, post-soul, hip hop generation" (104). Read through an Afrafeminist lens, it appears Smitherman also wanted to link feminism and language. In fact, in an interview with Austin Jackson and Bonnie Williams, she explains that it was "Students' Right to Their Own Language that really started [her] thinking about the relationship between language and gender" (129).

Afafeminism not only helps make these connections visible, but it also helps us understand why they have been so hard to see. Typically, the struggle for language rights is positioned alongside the struggle for racial rights (Smitherman "CCCC's Role"; Smitherman "Foreword"), even when class politics are taken up (Parks). Within this racialized framework, although the work of women scholars of color has been prominent, the subject of gender has not (Troutman; Smitherman; Richardson "To Protect and Serve"). One result is there has been little discussion about African American women's distinctive feminist practices. As Tamika L. Carey writes:

Because African-American women's historically marginalized social positions frequently result in their efforts to exercise the authority to engage in sociopolitical action is often interpreted as 'going against



the grain' of the general culture's dominant values and expectations, entering such spheres of argumentation can require them to be overtly strategic. (132)

Further, as Smitherman suggests, our feminism may include elements of the "post-Civil rights, post-feminist, post-soul, hip hop generation" (104). To conduct historical Afrafeminist studies of language rights, then, including studies of SRTOL, we must find ways to work *with* rather than *against* the grain of contributing African American women scholars' experiences and beliefs.

Similarly, taking Black feminisms into account is crucial to Afrafeminist biographical scholarship. Already, scholarship by Scott Wible as well as Austin Jackson and Bonnie Williams offers strong examples of how we might turn from the what women of color contributed to language rights struggles to the examples set by these women themselves. To further mine NCTE and CCCC archives along with other resources and better understand Smitherman's and others' contributions, we also have to see how someone like Smitherman herself draws specifically on feminism in her own work.

Here again, Tamika L. Carey provides essential insight. In "Firing Mamma's Gun: The Rhetorical Campaign in Geneva Smitherman's 1971-1973 Essays," she observes:

Smitherman's work is rarely tapped beyond its informational or historical value in contemporary rhetorical scholarship. Given the challenges she describes [ . . . ] our delay in examining the rhetorical strategies she must have used to gain such an authoritative role on African-American language and culture during such a contentious period is an oversight that obscures the complexity of her argumentation and her contributions to understandings of African-American women's rhetoric. (132)

Here Carey does more than help us connect language rights with the contributions of African American women. She also reminds us: We need ways to examine and honor female scholars of color such as Smitherman for more than their scholarly contributions or productivity. We also—and more importantly—need ways to understand and distinguish the feminist nature of their labor and its powerful impact on our field.

While I have identified two specific locations for Afrafeminist work in language rights, there are many more. Afrafeminist approaches can be broadly applied to issues of linguistic diversity including emerging discussions about transgender language rights. I also acknowledge that from a racial perspective, the promotion of SRTOL is certainly not a black/white issue. As Royster suggests, Afrafeminist methods include "*careful acknowledgement of passionate attachments, attention to ethical action, and commitment to social responsibility*"

across color and gender lines (emphasis in original, 279). Nonetheless, starting the conversation by identifying and honoring the women of color who began the struggle for students' rights is a necessary component for designing future projects. Framing this honor publicly—and especially in our peer-reviewed and published scholarship—serves as one of the most powerful tools we have as rhetoricians to lay new ground.

## Notes

- 1 The title of this essay is inspired by Geneva Smitherman's research study, "Black English, Diverging or Converging?: The View from the National Assessment of Educational Progress," published in *Language and Education* 6.1 (1992): 47-61. This study found that students' uses of Black English have converged with edited American English over the past 20 years. Borrowing and revising Smitherman's title, this essay seeks to merge Afrofeminism with language rights, thus converging the two topics in ways that are explored more extensively.
- 2 I briefly mention implications for gendered discussion in relation to language rights in two articles, "Black Intellectuals in the Academy: Inventing the Special Topics Course," published in *Composition Forum*, and "Troubling the Boundaries: (De)Constructing WPA Identities at the Intersections of Race and Gender," published in *WPA: Writing Program Administration* (co-authored with Collin Craig).

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## About the Author

**Staci Perryman-Clark** is an Associate Professor of English with a joint appointment in Gender and Women's Studies at Western Michigan University, where she also directs the First-Year Writing Program. She has published and edited two books: *Afrocentric Teacher-Research: Rethinking Appropriateness and Inclusion* (Peter Lang, 2013), and (with David E. Kirkland and Austin Jacks on) *Students' Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook* (Bedford/St. Martin's and NCTE, 2014). Her current projects examine the intersections of Black feminist rhetorics in relation to gender, language rights, and Writing Program Administration. She is the 2015 recipient of Western Michigan University's College of Arts and Sciences Faculty Award for Research, Scholarly and Creative Activity.

## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Material

Elizabeth Fleitz

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You know that we are living in a material world  
And I am a material girl.

—Madonna, “Material Girl”

#### *I. Material (n.): the matter from which a thing is or can be made.*

The chorus of the 1984 hit “Material Girl” declares both pop icon Madonna’s obsession and contemporary culture’s fascination with surface-level beauty and decoration. This kind of attention to the physical aspect of human lives, while praised in the song, is often denounced as inferior and shallow. However, in feminist rhetorical studies, scholars are just as fascinated by material culture as the original Material Girl. Materiality is of great significance to scholars of women’s rhetorics, particularly in relation to the physical body (see especially Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny, this issue). Gesa Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster, in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, note that scholars are paying attention to genres of composing that involve material practices, including needlework, cookbooks, and journal and letter writing, among other forms (61). As Jack Selzer argues, the physical components of a subject have rhetorical power to at least the same, if not a greater, extent than language (8). Carole Blair illustrates this concept in her analysis of U.S. memorials, noting that “rhetoric’s materiality constructs communal space, prescribes pathways, and summons attention, acting on the whole person of the audience. But it also allows a rhetorical text to ‘speak’ by its mere existence” (49-50). As these scholars explain, rhetoric can be a concrete presence, acting on and through bodies and spaces to produce communication.

#### *II. Material (adj.): denoting or consisting of physical objects rather than the mind or spirit.*

a) A focus on the body is central—may I say, material—to the study of women’s rhetorics. Simone de Beauvoir observes that “the female, to a greater extent than the male, is the prey of the species,” going on to note that women’s bodies regularly impact and disrupt women’s lives, while men’s bodies

do not (60). Women's bodily functions are often uncomfortable, painful, and focused nearly exclusively on procreation. Sherry Ortner continues this argument, proposing that women's oppression is based upon the fact that women are regarded as being closer to nature (body), while men are closer to culture (mind) (355). Indeed, throughout the history of European and American art, "men act and women appear," according to John Berger (47). Further, women's bodies and their close associations with procreative functions often put women in less respected tasks in society, such as childcare and housework. By contrast, Ortner suggests that due to this close connection to nature and the physical body, women have a unique perspective on humanity (356). Because women have historically been excluded from public discourse, they have frequently adopted the available means to communicate, often taking advantage of the gendered body-mind dichotomy and focusing on the bodily forms rhetoric takes. For scholars of women's rhetorics, this focus on the material body is fitting, as it can help to expose not only women's bodies and work but also the innovative ways women have used the available means of persuasion in order to construct meaning.

b) Debra Hawhee explores not only the material but also the productive nature of bodily rhetoric in her work on the connection between athletic and rhetorical training in ancient Greece. She observes that the pedagogical strategies of both activities are parallel, noting that in ancient Greece, a persuasive encounter "is more than perception—mind meets (and masters) matter—instead, it is a bodily production, a mutually constitutive struggle among bodies and surrounding forces" (150). In this context, as scholars of women's rhetorics know, privileging mind over body is a fallacy. Instead of working with this dichotomy, these scholars seek out and value studies of the body, embodied communication practices, and ways of knowing that reflect women's unique knowledge about the materiality of daily life (Ebert 25). Hélène Cixous notes that women should take advantage of their physical experience to explore their identity, famously noting "woman must write her body" (287). She argues that this focus is subversive (288). In fact, an exploration of the physical body can help to explode familiar definitions of rhetoric. As Philippa Spoel argues: "[A] feminist approach to embodied rhetorics opens up possibilities for re-integrating bodily, emotional ways of knowing [ . . . ] into the process through which rhetors and audiences generate together socially and historically situated knowledges" (201). Studying the body, then, allows feminist rhetorical scholars to explore the productive power of rhetoric.

*III. Material (n.): facts, information, or ideas for use in creative a book or other work.*

a) Material conditions of women's lives, from their bodies to their living situations, have historically had a major influence on their ability to be literate and produce rhetoric. Virginia Woolf, writing in *A Room of One's Own*, makes the argument for material conditions that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). The act of writing is difficult, she notes, even with material privileges; she explains that especially for women, "these difficulties were equally more formidable," to speak nothing of the open hostility women writers often endured as well (52). The issue of the material roadblocks women face is central to scholars of women's rhetorics.

b) The overall complexity of women's material conditions offers much in the way of rhetorical study for scholars of women's rhetorics. For example, Carol Mattingly explains how in the Victorian era, dress became not just a way of disciplining women, but in fact a way to resist—thus, "women made dress speak for them" (7). Wendy Dasler Johnson, writing on corsets of the Victorian era, argues for women's bodies as rhetorically productive texts (207). Like corsets, discourses of power are both repressive (binding in traditional expectations) as well as productive (producing new discourses) (213). Elaine Hedges, describing the rhetorical power of American women's embroidery from the Victorian era to today, links the material text directly with the women's body, asserting that "the textile artifact had become women's own self-habitation, dark with both suffering and her hidden potentials, the skein her very skin" (350). Scholarship like this uncovers the rhetorical power of the material dimension, illuminating the variety of alternative rhetorical practices unique to women.

#### *IV. Material (adj.): important; essential; relevant.*

Within the very definition of this term is an argument for the importance of the material to feminist rhetorical scholarship. Studying women's working and living conditions, as well as their composing practices, enables scholars of women's rhetorics a fuller, multidimensional approach to ongoing and new inquiries. In particular, rhetorics explicitly involving the body, physical space, and/or everyday objects call for expanded historiographical practices. Kirsch and Royster confirm this idea, describing feminist historiography as diverse and inclusive of a variety of avenues of study, especially material rhetoric. They also identify research into women's rhetorical practices as characterized by a variety of methods, all of which are considered equally useful and relevant. Calling for even greater attention to embodied materiality, Wendy Hesford and Wendy Kozol, in their introduction to *Haunting Violations*, argue for making direct connections between a woman's body and her agency, noting how women's identities are formed through "negotiation of the material and discursive domains" (6). Thus, it is important for scholars of women's

rhetorics to explore these connections and develop ways to study the intricacies and diversity of women's material experiences (6).

Similarly, studying material rhetorics involves careful attention to the various ways rhetoric can be made manifest. This charge challenges the mind-body dichotomy by seeking to equalize the components involved in rhetorical production in order to arrive at a better understanding of material rhetorical practices unique to women. Adrienne Rich argues for this kind of focus, writing, "[Women must be] locating the grounds from which to speak with authority as women. Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it" (213). Indeed, feminist rhetorical scholarship must continue to remap, reinscribe, reinvent, reinterpret, and most importantly reclaim the body along with other aspects of material culture and experience. Thus, the concept of material is material to women, and to scholars of women's rhetorics, as we are all Material Girls.

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## About the Author

**Elizabeth J. Fleitz** is an Assistant Professor of English at Lindenwood University. She teaches courses in first-year and advanced writing, grammar, and the teaching of writing. She recently launched a new minor in Writing and Professional Communication. She received her PhD in Rhetoric and Writing from Bowling Green State University in 2009 with her dissertation exploring the rhetorical practices of women through the process of sharing and collecting recipes. She is also co-editor of the Reviews section of *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*.



## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics

Maureen Johnson, Daisy Levy, Katie Manthey, and Maria Novotny

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To think about rhetoric, we must think about bodies. To do this means also to articulate how scholars' own bodies have intimately informed our disciplinary understanding of rhetoric. The links between embodiment and rhetoric consistently appear in both discourses *about* bodies and research emphasizing the material *body itself*. Scholars of rhetoric, particularly those in feminist rhetorics, have worked to reveal the inequitable distributions of power across groups. We echo these scholars' concerns about the ways women and their bodies have been obscured in conventional scholarship. We also suggest there is more work to do: by recognizing the inherent relationship between embodiment and rhetoric, we can make *all bodies* and the power dynamics invested in their (in)visibility visible, thereby strengthening the commitment to feminist rhetorical work.

One approach is to cultivate an even more expansive view of embodied rhetorics, one that supports our discipline's movement beyond seeing the body in binary terms as either objectified or subjectified. Granted, feminist rhetorics has recognized embodiment by connecting areas like labor, literacies, cultural practices, and the bodies who regulate/are regulated by such. But what if we could *recontextualize* bodies and experience the physical body as an entity with its own rhetorical agency? This re-vision can provide insights, experiences, and questions into areas like ethics, community, pedagogy, and meaning-making.

In order to experience the physical body's rhetorical power, we start here: the physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. *All bodies* do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function. Embodiment encourages a methodological approach that addresses the reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher from feminist traditions and conveys an awareness or consciousness about how bodies—our own and others'—figure in our work. Just as considerations of our positions as researchers are critical to understanding our individual and collective commitments to arguments about the role of bodies and rhetoric, our bodies inform our ways of knowing. We offer some tactics for such an approach, and some

examples of the ways we have tried to broaden the idea of “embodiment” as a research topic.

Daisy, whose own body is marked by scars and stories of dance, injury, recovery, age, gravity, and clumsiness, asks: How does a body carry meaning over time? What is its relation to cultural practice, location, and other bodies? As one way to answer these questions, she turns to dance and movement education and theorizes rhetoric as an always movement-oriented phenomenon: insofar as we are intellectuals, we are also physical beings whose very physicality and movement employs rhetorical tactics beyond language. Of course, different sites of study reveal meaning-making in distinctive ways; these differences (both of the sites themselves, and the practices and tactics within) led Daisy to ask how her methodological commitments must respond. If we are as much physical as we are intellectual, then research must be undertaken with attention to bodies and practices, not just artifacts and textual residue.

In addition to the *rhetorical power* of the material body, we acknowledge the ways the body also carries *signifying power*, articulating some of any body’s many affiliations. This bodily signification is only one link to a particular group, which is complicated by other links (cultural, historical, geographical, linguistic, etc.). It helps connect individuals and groups to others in complex arrangements characterized by power distribution, access, and mobility. In many ways, these links between each signifying body and cultural groups are most visible as our field’s recognition of “other rhetorics.”<sup>1</sup> Simply put, our disciplinary tendency is either to presume one normative body (white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, abled) that is neither labeled “cultural” nor “signifier,” or to recognize an “other” body, which is both. We argue that this tendency strips our disciplinary work of the complex mechanisms through which some traditions become the norm and some are assigned to the margins, mechanisms we also believe feminist rhetorics has been committed to exposing. We call for emerging scholarship to go beyond exposing these mechanisms, and intervene. One method for intervention, which we model here, incorporates the meaning-making *our bodies* carry with and through *our scholarship*. As we have already argued, all bodies have rhetorical power, but so too do they all signify. As Malea Powell has claimed, in order to have anything meaningful to say about the last 10,000 years of rhetoric at all, we have to look at all of it—the good, the bad, and the ugly.<sup>2</sup>

We echo Powell’s claim about the history of rhetorics and posit that the concept of embodiment can renew feminist rhetorical commitments that have historically been marked as “othered.” This requires expanding the understanding of embodiment, and by extension, feminist rhetorics, which demands an ethical reading of bodies and recognition of bodies as *people*—not objects. Living in a fat body that has been deemed “unacceptable” by institutions such

as the beauty industry led Katie to a methodological approach that combines dress studies, fat studies, and cultural rhetorics to theorize dress as forms of rhetorical practice. Her approach insists that we not “read” people just by looking at them, but instead catch ourselves before we pass judgment and acknowledge our own biases. This act of reading a body ethically is informed by decolonial theory, which resists the fetishization of bodies as text and recognizes the multiple layers of *people and their bodies* as necessary to understanding. In the case of Katie’s body, an outsider looking at her likely sees a 5’4” woman who weighs 245 pounds. What’s invisible is how Katie is orientated to her size—the reasons she looks the way she does such as her genetic makeup, her emotional connection to food, her previous experiences that led her to find comfort and power in being “fat.” For Katie’s project, as with decolonial work, scholarship that intervenes in maintaining subject/other relationships invests in an understanding of rhetoric as an interrelated dynamic between material and cognitive worlds, a methodology sharing the feminist rhetorical goal of asking how to approach embodied research while maintaining an ethical methodology.

In addition to posing questions about ethical methodology, we ask: What alliances might exist among different communities and their frameworks for knowing? We are reminded that much of our current rhetorical tradition relies on multiple misunderstandings of embodiment (i.e., whiteness, heteronormativity, classlessness). We are also reminded of the important challenges that work on embodied rhetorics poses to these prominent misconceptions.<sup>3</sup> When feminist rhetorics research aligns with these efforts, it often relies on one or more extra-disciplinary knowledge framework (i.e., performativity, non-normativity, paracoloniaity scholarship), and as a result can provide an effective means of understanding *all rhetorics*. Each of these knowledges helps us to consider power relationships as nonlinear and dynamic.<sup>4</sup> In particular, we find decolonial theory useful in clarifying multiple frameworks, insisting that we not only cultivate awareness of how power structures and bodies are tangled, but also persist daily in un-tangling them from the “colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo 16).

The challenge of un-tangling pushes us to ask how bodies interact *actively* with discursive and linguistic rhetorical practices, which in turn compels Maureen to try to disrupt the recirculation of subject/other relationships between language and bodies. Specifically, the use of rhetoric to mark bodies including her own, leads Maureen to examine how the fat body is mocked in media and how humor operates as a form of subjectification. Media subjectifies fat bodies through humiliation (e.g., fat shaming) and self-deprecation (e.g., fat people making jokes to reject their own bodies). Maureen resists praxes that involve marking some bodies and turns to embodied rhetorics to assert

the agency of all bodies. This theoretical re-orientation is itself a disruption, which expands beyond one view of embodiment, and encourages listening to multiple voices. As Royster and Kirsch suggest, we must both *ask* new questions and *hear* multidimensional voices respond. Their proposed topology in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* is another model for shifting and accounting for the embodied experiences of rhetorical research.

The methodology of rhetorical listening proposed by Krista Ratcliffe is one such feminist practice that supports Royster and Kirsch's topology by broadening methods to recognize new sites of rhetorical research-- and the bodies within them. For instance, Maria's practice of rhetorically listening to her own body and its unease with cultural pressures to undergo fertility treatments revealed two imperatives within an embodied methodology: one, acknowledgement that the body is a legitimate and valid site of rhetorical research; and two, an understanding that embodied methodology supports feminist rhetorical commitments. While bombarded by Western medical discourse to "resolve" her infertility by undergoing expensive, invasive fertility treatments, Maria evaluated such pressures by embodying the practice of rhetorically listening. That is, she surveyed the multiple sites and voices that her infertile body encountered: Western medicine, Western cultural constructions of the heteronormative family and her own internal voice. She asked, what new sites of feminist rhetorical research may result when we rhetorically listen to the negotiations and practices of resistance that exist within our own bodies?

As highly relational practices, embodied methodologies and embodied rhetorics encourage complex relationships among past, present, and future, as well as across multiple identifications. We hope work in feminist rhetorics during the next 25 years will approach embodiment through these complex relationships to emphasize the role of the physical body in all rhetorics, to complicate the ways bodies are understood to work and perform as rhetorical agents, and to intervene in the ways bodies both inscribe and are inscribed upon. Just as we call for *bodies* to be seen for their multiplicity as conglomerates of intricate layers, forces, and parts, so too should we experience *rhetorics*. Both are assemblers of and assembled by their orientations to larger cultural forces. In this way, both are also inherently connected through feminist rhetorics to make visible the many valences through which power is attributed to particular groups and the impacts therein.

*We are all moving, breathing, thinking, rhetorical bodies.*

## Notes

- 1 African, African-American, Chinese, Native, Subaltern, Xicana Rhetorics, et al. We hope to *join* our conversations about embodiment/rhetorics with cultures/rhetorics.
- 2 See "Stories take Place: A Performance in One Act," CCCC Chair's Address, 2012.
- 3 See Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace, "The Queer Turn in Composition"; Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, *Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive*; Gwendolyn Pough, "Bad Rhetorician: Pondering Why . . ." (Cultural Rhetorics Conference 2014).
- 4 See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*; Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*; Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*.

## About the Authors

**Maureen Johnson** is a third-year doctoral student at Texas Woman's University. Her research focuses on embodied rhetorics, particularly depictions. She has taught first-year composition courses and serves as a mentor to other graduate teaching assistants as the graduate assistant for First-Year Composition. She has a MA in English and a Bachelor's in journalism from Marshall University in Huntington, WV.

**Daisy Levy** is an Assistant Professor at Southern Vermont College, where she is also the Composition Coordinator. She teaches courses in rhetoric, creative writing, literature, and first-year writing. Her research theorizes the physical body as a rhetorical site, through movement education, kinesiology, and modern dance. She is one of the founding members of the MSU Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, as well as one of four co-editors of an upcoming special issue of *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*.

**Katie Manthey** is an Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at Salem College in Winston-Salem, NC. Her research and teaching are focused on cultural rhetorics, dress studies, and civic engagement. She is a body positive activist and moderates the website *Dress Profesh*, which highlights the ways that dress codes are racist, cissexist, ageist, classist, etc. Her work has appeared in *Feminist Spaces*, *Jezebel*, and *The Body is Not An Apology*.

**Maria Novotny** is a PhD student in Rhetoric & Writing at Michigan State University. Her research explores how medical discourses of infertility interact with embodied ontologies of infertility. This interdisciplinary perspective bridges rhetorical studies and medical humanities, examining the rhetorical assemblage of the infertility patient, fertility provider and infertility advocacy. She partners with *The ART of Infertility*, an art, oral history and portraiture project collecting and exhibiting the diverse experiences of infertility. Her research has been published in journals such as *Enculturation* and *Feminist Formations*. She received the 2015 CCCC Gloria Anzaldúa Rhetorician Award for her infertility research.

## KEY CONCEPT STATEMENT

### Service

Heather Brook Adams, Holly Hassel, Jessica Rucki, and K. Hyoejin Yoon

Submitted on behalf of the Conference of College Composition and Communication Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP)

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The term “service” is vexed, particularly when understood as gendered labor central to the work of rhetoric and composition. Over the past thirty years, rhet/comp scholars have defined and redefined service in order to better identify, represent, and measure it as the demographics of the field have changed. The 1987 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) position statement “Scholarship in Composition: Guidelines for Faculty, Deans and Department Chairs” underscored service as a hidden activity that lies outside the most recognizable and compensable categories of professional work. By 1994, the American Association of University Professors labeled service a “vital contribution” to academic life warranting “appropriate recognition and reward” (46). Rhet/comp scholars extended these conversations by connecting the devaluation of service with the rise in writing program administration. By 1998, the Council of Writing Program Administrators championed “refiguring” WPA work in its “many manifestations” from service to “scholarly and intellectual” labor. Such developments can be charted against shifting gender demographics: in the mid-1980s, one-third of WPAs were women and two-thirds men, whereas by 2007 those proportions were reversed (Charlton and Rose 118-19).

More generally, service remains an important professional expectation that shapes the work of rhet/comp teacher-scholars. Simultaneously, feminists teaching composition have a complex relationship to service because of a key paradox. On the one hand we realize that through service we gain “opportunities to make a difference” (Adler-Kassner and Roen 2) individually and institutionally, thereby shaping the teaching and learning conditions of our colleagues and students. On the other hand, those same opportunities risk undermining feminist principles, key among them the equitable distribution of labor and power. Increasingly, service work in rhet/comp—especially program administration—falls to women and continues to be invisible or devalued despite efforts to raise its intellectual and institutional profile.

Given these circumstances, women teaching composition and performing service (as rhet/comp scholars, instructors, current or future WPAs, etc.) are, in many ways, still the titular “women in the basement” (Miller 121) laboring for a psychic income that is too often their only reward (Schell 38). Further, the changing figurative and material economics of higher education and an increasingly neoliberal climate in academia make the time ripe for reassessing the feminization of composition studies (see Hogan). Most universities now structure their labor force so that contingent faculty are left out of opportunities for professional development, decisions about curriculum, and discussions about student learning outcomes and program development, etc.<sup>1</sup> This exclusion is deeply gendered, entrenching a largely female workforce in low-status and disempowered positions relative to the work they do.

In light of ambiguous definitions of service—encompassing everything from committee work to governance which is often limited to the permanent/tenure-track faculty, as well as the ongoing decline in those positions—we question the implications of concentrating programmatic leadership in fewer hands. Furthermore, we are concerned with the resulting increase in the distance between the curricular, theoretical, and scholarly work that informs the development of the teaching of writing and the women on the frontlines teaching these courses. In addition, the rapid recent decrease in permanent lines will inevitably reshape contemporary service expectations of the rhet/comp field and its sizeable, female-dominated, contingent workforce. Finally, we are concerned with how new trends, such as online course delivery, will increase the invisibility of some work, including both teaching and service (see Steiger).

In response to these unsatisfactory labor conditions, the CCCC’s Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession seeks to further a feminist understanding of women’s current service, particularly in relation to contingency and gendered working conditions (Committee). We aim to create a more well-defined picture of service in our field through a crowd-sourced, data-driven “map” of service activities in rhet/comp (CSWP, “Service Map”). The project currently reflects the service experiences of 120 women professionals in our discipline. A majority of respondents are tenured faculty members (39%) who report “Program Coordinator” as their most commonly held primary service responsibility. This preliminary result leads us to consider the relationship between service and administrative work, especially the forms of administrative work pursued by women writing professionals. We wonder, for example, how different institutions value this work and how women are compensated for it. Knowing that at least some administrative roles are construed as service, or institutional housework, we also wonder when and under what



conditions they are also understood as critical work undertaken by change agents (Hart).

Conducting further analyses, collecting additional data, and reviewing statements like the Portland Resolution guidelines for WPAs<sup>2</sup> are all necessary steps toward accurately mapping service in the profession. Ultimately, we hope our efforts, in conjunction with others, can help our field set an agenda for fully seeing and assessing service by:

- characterizing the complex local, institutional sites and types of service taken up within our field, especially by women,
- investigating the impact of service on institutional and programmatic survival,
- considering service in light of increasing contingency.

These three aims position us to transform our map from a spotty and two-dimensional representation to one with increasing dimensionality. Expanding the service map will deepen discussions meant to:

- advocate for greater recognition of service as intellectual labor of content experts,
- challenge hierarchies perpetuated by institutional practices detrimental to women's personal and professional well-being,
- reframe and revalue service and individuals' dynamic relationships to it.

We invite *Peitho* readers to help by [participating in our survey](#) and encouraging others to do the same. We also invite readers to deepen their awareness of service, feminism, and ever-changing institutional landscapes, particularly by attending (and proposing) conference sessions on such issues, attending the Feminist Workshop and the CSWP's Feminist Network SIG at the CCCC annual convention, and actively participating in the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric. Conversations within these networks can help us all more fully situate and understand service as a key concept for feminist scholars in our field.

## Notes

- 1 See Schell and Stock; Mendenhall; Doe; Harris; see also Fall 2007 and September 2014 *Forum* newsletters and pieces by Arnold et al., Bilia et al., Cubberly, Cucciare et al., and Zobel in a *College English* special issue on contingency.

- 2 The Portland Resolution provides guidelines for the work of WPAs, including statements on working conditions and the broad scope of responsibilities and resources required for the job.

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## About the Authors

**Heather Brook Adams** is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Alaska Anchorage and a member of the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession and the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. A feminist historiographer, Heather explores issues of motherhood, reproduction, and rhetorical shaming. Heather's additional projects investigate visuality, feminism and indigeneity, qualitative and rhetorical research methods, and rhetorical genre theory. Her recent publications appear in *Women's Studies in Communication and Composition Forum*. At UAA, Heather teaches *Rhetorical Theory and Gender Rhetorics*.

**Holly Hassel** is Professor of English and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County in Wausau, WI, where she began teaching in 2002 after earning a Ph.D. in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her work on teaching and learning in first-year writing and women's and gender studies courses has appeared in *Feminist Teacher*, *College English*, and *College Composition and Communication*. She is the co-author of *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies* (Routledge, 2015) and incoming editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*.

**Jessica Rucki** recently graduated with her Master's degree in English from West Chester University. Her academic background is a diverse mosaic of undergraduate and graduate level studies in theoretical linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies. Her scholarly interests center on ethnographic writing, qualitative research, and visual rhetoric, in addition to the professional narratives of women scholars in higher education. In her free time Jessica volunteers at a non-profit writing center for inner city youth in Philadelphia. She is currently applying to PhD programs.

**K. Hyoejin Yoon** is Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at West Chester University of Pennsylvania. She is Professor of English and focused her scholarly work on feminist/critical pedagogy, affect, gender and race studies. Her work has been published in *JAC*, *College Literature*, *RSA's Re/Framing Identifications*, and a forthcoming chapter on graduate writing co-authored with former graduate students in *Postgraduate writing pedagogies and research literacies in the 21st century*, ed. Cecile Badenhorst and Cally Guerin. Her most recent focus has been on institutional concerns regarding gender, race, equity and labor, including a qualitative research project on the experiences of women rhet/comp professionals in the field. She is co-chair of the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women, and co-chair of the Asian/Asian American Caucus. At WCU, she is co-chair of the President's Commission on the Status of Women.

# Cultivating the Scavenger: A Queerer Feminist Future for Composition and Rhetoric

Stacey Waite

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**Abstract:** *This essay argues for and enacts queer and disruptive possibilities for the teaching of writing and for the production of writing itself. Drawing from feminist scholarship and from Judith Halberstam's assertion that queer methodologies are "scavenger methodologies," the essay explores potential outcomes for scholars and students as they engage with unconventional composing processes and as they imagine and write the future of Composition and Rhetoric in queerer ways.*

**Keywords:** *queer theory, pedagogy, feminist, disruption, composition*

The methodology I want to discuss and enact in this essay emerges out of my investments in queer theory and composition. In the introduction to *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam describes one way of understanding queer theory's approach, writing that a "queer methodology is [. . .] a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information" (13). Halberstam argues that a "queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (13). Both in my writing and in my classroom, I am interested in experimenting with what it might mean to approach composition through a "scavenger methodology." In this essay in particular, I work to illuminate the ways scavenging, as a writing practice, can disrupt traditional understandings of writing and normative notions of practice and process. I argue that the "scavenger" might complicate and deepen some aspects of composition profoundly valued by feminist and queer scholars within and outside of composition in two significant ways: by disrupting ways of knowing that seem dominant, taken for granted, or obvious *and* by valuing contradiction—what we might also call messiness, fragmentation, or even confusion.

For me, this work has profound political and personal stakes. In Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's essay "Queer and Now," she describes "becoming a perverse reader," a development that she claims is "a prime resource for survival" for young queers. She writes, "We needed there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other" (3-4). This need is crucial for the survival of those of us who don't "line up," those of us whose identities don't signal in conventional ways. And I want to argue that all writers must commit

to learning to disrupt, to read differently, to ask more of texts, to ask more of the world than linear, normative functions allow. This essay invites readers to think about and experience logics that contradict, tenses that shift, genres that mix, futures that are messier than what the present moment seems to allow. Further, it asks scholars of composition and teachers of writing to *become* scavengers and to make seemingly disconnected worlds collide.

The truth is: this essay makes me anxious—the idea of speaking to Composition and Rhetoric’s “next 25 years” of feminist work is unruly, contradictory, and perhaps even, in some ways, impossible. But even as I try, in the face of this impossibility, to articulate some small shard of how work in queer composition might contribute to this conversation about the feminist future, I also consider the ways the future itself is bound to normative ideas about progress. Some scholars in queer theory<sup>1</sup> might even say “fuck the future.” This expression is a way of refusing the heteronormative and linear constructions of time and space that are often used against those of us who are queer and feminist in the service of the dominant narratives—narratives that seek to compel us to “grow up,” to reproduce, to invest financially and emotionally in our normative genders, or to select “properly” gendered partners with whom to couple and marry.

Additionally, I have in my mind Karen Kopelson’s 2008 article “Sp(l)itting Images; or, Back to the Future of (Rhetoric and?) Composition,” in which she invites us to think about “how we might move away from the types of self-referential discussions of our own disciplinarity [. . .] in order to further our status as an interdisciplinary, knowledge-making field of study” (753). Kopelson examines “evidence that we are continuing to preoccupy ourselves *with ourselves*” (774, emphasis mine). It could seem that the answer to this obsession with ourselves would be to look outside ourselves, but that binary logic is precisely the kind of logic that dictates we must either look inside or outside; we must choose either theory or practice; we must either write narrative or scholarship; we must be men or women, scholars or poets. So, with queer values in mind, I want to propose there is a way we can both look at ourselves *and* outside ourselves at the same time; there is a way we can look forward in time and simultaneously problematize the notion of the future; there are ways to embrace the contradictions in our field, in our scholarly writing, and in our classrooms.

Imagining a future, for me, has always been about imagining other worlds, other ways of being outside the ones I had always known. I remember in 1986 when Halley’s Comet was about to rise over Long Island somewhere around three in the morning. I was nine years old, and my mother (against my father’s wishes) snuck me out of bed. It was March, so not quite cold but not quite warm. And my mother watches from the window, doses off from time to time

as I lay on the cool blacktop of the driveway and wait with my cheap grade-school telescope, to see something fleeting, unknowable, and beautiful—to see something that I knew I might only see once. I never did find the comet that night. But it mattered less that I saw it, and more that I imagined doing so. It mattered more that I was up past my bedtime, looking out at a world I knew was beyond my understanding or grasp, wondering about what might be possible.

In third grade, I had a teacher named Mr. Schellhorn. I distrusted him, my first male teacher—his dark mustache, his hard full chest and thick-rimmed glasses. I never raised my hand to lead the class during the singing of “John Brown Jalopy.” I didn’t raise my hand to turn the pages of afternoon stories. No matter how hard the other children laughed at his character voices, no matter how many times he praised my drawings and even my terrible handwriting, I would not budge. I would not, as it were, love him. Then the science fair. And I hate the other students—their maps of constellations lighting up on cardboard, their mud mound volcanoes erupting over desktops. I don’t want to make anything. I don’t want anything to explode or light up. I don’t want the bad-smelling oak tag, the construction paper dry against my fingers. I would rather make up math problems sitting on the radiator. For a few days, Mr. Shellhorn leaves me there. He doesn’t ask what my project will be. But by the time the light-up planets begin to show he’s back there with black construction paper and a handful of orange tissue paper. He folds the black paper in half and cuts for what feels like a half hour, moving the big “teacher scissors” in curves and inside out holes. And when he opens the paper, it’s wings. He glues the orange tissue paper behind them. “It’s a monarch butterfly,” he says. “They are perfectly symmetrical. Do you know what symmetrical means?” And I’m still not budging. “I don’t care,” I answer, directing my stare through the back window towards the school lot where the cars are lined up in a green blur. I do care. I want to know what symmetry means. I like the sound of it, how his teeth joined at the ‘s,’ his lips touching at the ‘m’ and curling together to end on the ‘try’ of the word. I do love him, you understand. I do make five more butterflies when he goes. And as for symmetry, the dictionary said, “match exactly.”

So, instead of a science project proper, I wrote what I called “a science book” entitled “The Monarch,” and I remember drawing pictures of my family, giving them butterflies as faces. Alongside my father and mother, my siblings and their butterfly heads, I composed narratives that made use of all the science projects I could see in the room. I remember writing down the names of planets, which I used as the names for the characters with the butterfly heads, who were also my family. I remember there were volcanoes, and I remember trying to describe the anatomy of a fly—something Joey Lavarco, who had to repeat third grade twice and who I loved for his irreverence, was working on

in the back row. This is the first time I remember writing queerly and having a teacher who celebrated that sensibility in me.

So in case it's hard to see what's queer about my family with butterfly heads, named after the planets, hanging out with volcanoes and descriptions of a fly body, I'll try to articulate what I see as queer moves, or queer methodologies for composition, methodologies I employ as I try to push against notions of conventional scholarship, methodologies I also try to teach my students.

My body is not coherent. One might say, for example, "This is not a girl" or "This is not a boy." My trajectory as a writer is also incoherent. One might have said, in response to my third-grade "science project," that it was a book of non-fiction, or even science-fiction, "not a science project." One might even say this is not exactly an academic article or not a very dutiful one. And all these claims might be true, and that might be what is so queer about this scavenging, about refusing coherence, about combining that which seems separate or seemingly unrelated.

This, I believe, is deeply political work—feminist and queer work—work we must do as scholars in composition and work our students must do in order to be more complicated thinkers and better writers. To be clear, I don't necessarily mean that we should all assign our students braided, collage-like, narrative essays that look like the ones I tend to write. I mean more that we must find ways to blur the boundaries, so that we can push them, so that we can take our field and our students outside the bounds of where we think we can go, outside the bounds of what kinds of knowledges we can access, and how. If part of our work as scholars of Composition and Rhetoric is to prepare students to fully and complexly engage in a writing public and in civic discourses, then we need to more fully invest in new logics, new approaches, new ways of thinking about a problem. The scavenger methodology can cultivate disruptive thinking, patterns of thought that move against the normative regulations of gender, sexuality, and literacy.

Composing queer and composing feminist means pushing against the normative conventions of gender and sexuality, yes, but it also means pushing against normative conventions of scholarship, of essay, of article, of "student essay." In this sense, much of the work in multi-modal, digital, and collaborative composition is linked to what I am talking about here—work on remixing, work on digital composing, work that troubles our previous notions of originality, linear construction, and single author, single subject cohesion.<sup>2</sup> This is also work that can take us to queerer places, places where possibilities for composing move further outside the norm than we can even imagine them. This has been our project throughout the field's history—to revise and revisit what it means to compose. I want to articulate one possible future among many futures that feminist and queer work in composition makes possible.



I think quite often about that third-grade year. I am pretty sure I was the only third grader who tried to cut gym. When it was time to change clothes, I'd sneakily head down to the library to see if I could get the librarian to talk to me about books long enough to miss gym class and give me a pass. It worked the first couple of times. And I felt relieved of the responsibility of taking off my clothes in the girls' locker room. Instead, I talked incessantly about Jupiter Jones, the star character in *The Three Investigators* series I was reading that year. But eventually my absences were noticed by the gym teacher, who called my mother. *You love sports*, my mother said. *Why would you cut gym class?*

In "Feminism and Methodology in Composition Studies," Patricia Sullivan calls for feminism to become a "more fully realized voice within composition studies," urging that if our field did not "understand issues of gender difference and sexual politics, we [could] never hope to achieve the full understanding of composing that has been the goal of composition studies from its inception" (138). Nearly two decades later, in 2009, Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace articulate a call to action about the "critical power of queerness," which, they argue, "remains an under-explored and under-utilized modality in composition studies" (301). They ask questions about "what it means to take the queer turn in composition" (302). I consider it a pedagogical imperative to invest in what this queer turn *could* mean, particularly in relation to the generative overlap between feminist and queer visions of our field—not only for composition's longstanding commitment to diversity and social change, but also for students (and for scholars in the field) *as writers*. In this sense, my call for a scavenger-like methodology is both a formal and political argument taking into account both *what* we write and *how* we write (and teach others to write) in our field. If we think of queer composition as offering us, as teachers of writing and writers, the opportunity to consider new methodologies, how might Halberstam's idea of the scavenger function as a methodology for both doing and teaching composition? And what might be the impact on students as composers in their writing classrooms? I focus on this scavenger approach to queer composition, one that while not an entirely new way of composing is worth considering more closely from a queer perspective.

Joey Lavarco was a troublemaker, didn't wash his beautiful red hair very much at all, and had a lisp. Sometimes it was hard to tell whether he was left back because he failed third grade or because he wouldn't survive without Mr. Schellhorn, the generous king of all us weird kids. My parents divorced that year. And I had decided not to talk at school. I don't remember why. But I made exceptions to talk to Joey, who stole erasers from the other kids' desks and wandered off to look at insects during recess. Nothing made sense about Joey, and I loved him with my whole queer heart.

## Disrupting Epistemologies

It's useful, in discussions of methodology and field, to consider a framework of epistemology, to give careful consideration to what it means to "know" or to write in the field of composition. In closing her essay "Making Room for New Subjects: Feminist Interruptions of Critical Pedagogy Rhetorics," Shari Stenberg reminds us that when cultivating feminist perspectives in our work we need to "bring in alternative knowledge" (146). And part of the question Stenberg, and others, raises is about how to "bring in alternative knowledge" in a way that shapes student writing, public discourse, and our pedagogical approaches.

In Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins makes an important distinction between what she calls "alternative knowledge claims" and "alternative epistemologies"—simply put the difference between a mere counter-claim to dominant knowledge and actually changing *the way* we think, the way we arrive at questions or conclusions. For Collins, actually making changes in racist, sexist, or other logics of dominance and superiority means interrogating the ways conclusions are drawn and finding new ways to go through the process of thinking itself. It is about changing patterns of thought and the ways of knowing that *produce* these systems; it's not simply a matter of telling sexists, for example, that their claims about gender are "untrue." Collins writes:

Alternative knowledge claims in and of themselves are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms. Much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic process used by the powerful to legitimate their knowledge claims. (219)

This passage, to me, seems hugely significant in thinking about the field of composition and its future connections to feminist studies. Like Stenberg's article, much feminist scholarship in composition focuses on interruption and/or disruption—using archival, historical, rhetorical, and/or pedagogical study to create a fissure in dominant ideologies, to put a wrench in the wheel of conventional thought.<sup>3</sup> One reason that composition is such a generative field for this kind of work is our commitment to looking to other disciplines to disrupt ourselves, a kind of scavenging itself. In his 2010 article as part of *College Composition and Communication's* Special Issue entitled "The Future of Rhetoric and Composition," Bronwyn Williams uses the solar system as a metaphor for our field and writes, "Ideas and research beyond our scholarly solar system often catch the attention of our field like passing comets" (128). In Williams'

metaphor, of course, I recall the memory of Halley's Comet—or, rather, the memory of never having seen it. In our best moments, comets that catch our attention would actually transform the way we understand our solar system rather than affirm it and change the way we conceive of the field in which we work rather than be a mere passing over of light in the night sky. Many of us seek to create comets for our students, to show them some text, some method, some memory, some critical theory or experience that changes the way they see the solar systems of their lives and political contexts. Particularly for queer and feminist scholars and teachers, the use of the word “system” is quite significant here, signaling that all lives, all areas of study, all knowledges are systemic and therefore require disruption. One way, and perhaps the most common way, we come to know is by learning how systems work and then thinking inside those systems, “logically.” But, of course, the system already predetermines the logic, formulates the bounds of what it is possible to think. But what if we thought another way? What if, instead of thinking systematically, we thought in less obedient, even less “logical” ways?

I want to use, as an example of thinking inside a system, a student essay from a first-year writing course I taught in 2012. I have permission to use this student's work, but he prefers here to be referred to only by the name AJ. In response to an assignment (given after a reading from Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender*) that asked students to explore the ways that others' expectations about their identities influenced or affected them powerfully, AJ wrote a paper about his father expecting him to become a doctor (his father and grandfather were both kinds of surgeons). The essay is a really powerful piece of writing that evolved in my course, and I am going to draw from relevant excerpts below to discuss the ways his process and a more scavenger approach to his writing disrupted usual ways of thinking and improved the quality and complexity of his essay.

In talking about the way society views doctors, AJ composed the following sentence in his first draft: “When you go to a doctor, you assume he is going to have great knowledge and skill and that he will be able to solve your ailments” (3). First, I want to use Collins' distinction between alternative knowledge claims and alternative epistemologies in order to imagine how I, as a teacher of writing, can respond to this sentence alone. *Option 1*: I can circle the word “he” and write “or she”—highlighting to AJ that he should add this to the text, illustrating to him that academic conventions have changed, that I have an alternative knowledge claim, as Collins would put it, and that my knowledge claim has more authority in the system of my course than his knowledge claim (if we could count a choice of pronoun as a knowledge claim, which I think we should). Of course not only would this decision employ the logic of correction, but as all writing teachers know, it would not work. Besides, “he or she” just

makes the world sound like it's filled with only two kinds of people and a queer approach would always seek to disrupt that "or" between any two categories. *Option two*: I think about how to get AJ to articulate *how* and *why* he arrived at this knowledge claim; I think about how to engage him in the systems that produced his writerly choice of "he." I wonder what question(s) might be the comet that gets his attention. I ask him (and this is a quote, however embarrassingly long, from my marginal notes on his essay): *how did you decide to use the pronoun "he" here? What patterns of thought do you, as a writer, use to make decisions about the words you choose? Or, put another way, did you make the conscious choice to use this word? And if not, what does that tell you?*

This is not one of those moments where readers should be "wowed" by my pedagogical move. In fact, I am sure, given the audience for a piece like this, most readers have made moves like this when talking with students in office hours or responding to papers. But I also think we can all remember times when we have taken the short cut—perhaps even because of our anger, because of how sick we might be of hearing anyone (not just students, to be clear) make those dominant, inside-system assumptions about profession and gender. But if we are willing to truly disrupt our systems (ours genders, our writing, our field), we have to take the time to interrupt the very patterns of thought that produce our genders, our writing, and our field. I want to suggest that both in our field and in our classrooms, our writing risks becoming too linear, too cohesive, too bound to the conventions that stand before us—even as we seek to disrupt. To do this, we have to be willing to accept that, like our students, our ways of knowing are limited, fleeting, and sometimes impossible to see with the naked eye. Much like Halley's Comet, indeed.

But even in my response to AJ's writing above, I am dissatisfied with the options I have for disrupting. And I begin to understand that the systemic problem of *many* writers thinking of the pronoun "he" when they think of a doctor is a problem of great epistemological significance. And that, in order to truly disrupt how writers come to know or understand the world through dominant systems of logic, I might have to teach more unruly kinds of composition; I might have to teach writers to compose outside or beyond the bounds of the system.

## Scavenger Writer

Mr. Schellhorn had a habit of taking me (or any other kid exhibiting behaviors that indicated a rough patch) for walks, leaving the teacher's aid to manage the classroom. When one of the "real girls" in the classroom exclaims loudly that I have hair on my neck, Mr. Schellhorn redirects her to practicing her times tables. *Let's take a walk, champ!* he says, patting my back. I follow him to the courtyard. We walk together along the chain link fence, looking into the

backyards of houses that lined the grounds of the school. *Let's collect things*, he says. And we pick up oak leaves, twigs, wrappers tossed along the path. I gather some pebbles in the front pocket of my hooded sweatshirt. We bring the collection back, leaving the items on the activity tables. *We'll use these*, he says.

Articulating part of what feminism and composition have in common, Susan Jarratt, in the introduction to *Feminism and Composition Studies* (1998), asserts that both areas of study “resist purity of approach and the reduction of their scope by moving in and around many contemporary critical theories and disciplines” (3). The two ideas here—resisting purity and “moving in and around”—are essential to enacting and teaching the kind of scavenger approaches I describe. Of course, these approaches are not without their risks. I was once warned, for example, in writing the kind of “scavenger” book I have been working on since graduate school to “be careful”—that perhaps one needs to earn the right (through obeying the conventions) to break the rules, or to work outside the systems already in place. But I know no other way to write, or teach, that wouldn't feel like coming up with the same answers, like conjuring up that male pronoun for the doctor every time.

What I propose is that we “move in and around” and look even for those things that don't fit, or don't seem to. Feminist scholars are no strangers to being warned about their unconventional approaches or subjects, and scholars who employ disruptions of writing traditions in their fields are always warned of their risks. But think of the texts<sup>4</sup> we would not have available to read if these warnings were heeded—warnings about cohesion, warnings about using too much personal narrative, warnings about making one consistent argument. Since the nineties feminist scholars have been advocating for and exploring the potential and power of personal narrative as part of how knowledge is made.<sup>5</sup>

When Halberstam describes queer methodology as “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other,” we are asked to consider the possibility that we might write in ways that go against each other, write in ways that purposefully create tension and friction, write in ways that “refuse the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (13). On some level, many of us in composition already encourage this kind of writing when we ask students, for example, to try writing essays *outside* their five-paragraph training, or when we try to complicate our students' writing rules (rules like *don't shift tenses* or *never use the first person in a critical essay*, etc.). We know when we trouble these writing rules, students can feel off-balance or hesitant about how to approach their writing if these kinds of structures are removed or not needed. So we can likely all imagine what might happen if we asked students to (on purpose) draw from sources that *don't* fit together, to write in multiple modes in the same piece of writing, to switch

tenses on purpose, to, essentially, disrupt every basic assumption about writing they (and we) have. I challenge my students to do this kind of scavenger work all the time, and I see it as an essential part of queer pedagogies that seek to interrupt those dominant epistemologies Collins describes.

As Amy E. Winans suggests in “Queering Pedagogy in the English Classroom: Engaging with the Places Where Thinking Stops,” queer pedagogy “entails decentering dominant cultural assumptions, exploring the facets of the geography of normalization, and interrogating the self and the implications of affiliation” (106). We don’t often think of our assumptions about writing as being “cultural assumptions” or as having a “geography of normalization” explicitly, but we do have a great body of feminist work that reminds us of the ways rhetorical performance is bound to gender, race, class, and all aspects of identity.<sup>6</sup> Work in queer composition needs to ask more questions about how to think further about our “geography of normalization.” If what we want is students who can think in disruptive, non-normative, and contradictory ways (I know these are the values I want to cultivate), we must ask them to write this way. And we must write this way. We must cause more trouble in our own field, in academia. And if we are to ask our students to question the processes by which identity/writing is made, if we are to ask our students to decenter themselves in relation to the materials of our courses, our teaching and research must also embody this very decentering—not merely *apply* the concept of decentering to teaching. As Kopelson suggests in her article “Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary: ‘Reconstructed Identity Politics’ for a Performative Pedagogy,” queer pedagogy “strives to confuse, as it strives to push thought beyond circumscribed divisions—strives to push thought beyond what can be *thought*” (20).

Some scholars are talking about this pushing “beyond circumscribed divisions” as experimental writing. Take for example, Patricia Suzanne Sullivan’s *Experimental Writing in Composition: Aesthetics and Pedagogies*, which offers both theoretical and historical views of composition’s relationship to experimentation. Sullivan’s book is one way of thinking about what I am describing, though the scope of Sullivan’s project does not extend to thinking through queer politics and queer theory as having a bearing on how we think about forms of writing. But what might be useful about doing so? To think about this question, I return to AJ’s work.

The first draft of AJ’s paper began with a general to specific introduction about expectations as AJ went on to tell the story of how he was pressured to be pre-med in college since he was in grade school. It’s a solid narrative with a linear argument that could be summed up in a “parents shouldn’t pressure their kids into doing stuff” kind of way. AJ even quoted the Butler essay we read and included two quotes from a psychologist about parenting and the

impact pressure has on high-achieving students. It is a tidy and logical essay, maybe even an “A” essay in many contexts. In our conference, I talked with AJ about the essay being, well, boring. I told him it was boring and full of stuff we (the members of his writing community in class) have heard repeated for years: that parents should let their kids be who they want, that perfectionism is no good, that kids shouldn’t have to be who their parents believe they should be. I talked about the piece as having a conventional approach, which then also meant it was only able to say conventional things—otherwise known as dominant clichés about life.

*So what should I write?* AJ asked. *Just do the whole paper over?*

So the question I take from Halberstam here is: How can I teach AJ to be a scavenger, to draw from more surprising places, to disrupt himself and his usual ways of “knowing” how to write a “paper,” to bring things together that may not, at first, seem to belong together. In one sense, this isn’t queer at all. Creative writers have been saying this for years—that you need to surprise a reader, take turns they can’t predict. And feminist compositionists have told us many complicated things about the use of narrative, about self-implication, about how the personal narrative can interrupt or disrupt conventional knowledge. So how is the scavenger methodology different, or how could it be different?

So I told AJ to go collect some scraps. I talk to my students a lot about scraps, little pieces of the world you pick up as you move through. If Halberstam is right, that a queer methodology is a scavenger methodology, then it might be useful to think about scavenger hunts whereby we look for certain categories of objects to bring together. I asked AJ: If you were on a scavenger hunt for certain categories of things to bring into this essay, what kinds of things would they be? What would you tell yourself to go find? This, of course, was a puzzling question (it’s a puzzling question to me, too), but because AJ is being a good sport and a thoughtful person, he tries it out. *I’d tell myself to find something that goes against what it’s supposed to be?* “OK, write that down,” I said. “Keep going.” AJ ended up with a list of three tasks for his scavenger hunt. His list read: *1. find something that goes against what it’s supposed to be 2. find something that puts pressure on something else and 3. find something disappointing.* I told AJ to find these things and to find a way to bring them into the essay. And so he did. And the second draft was a glorious mess and wonderfully strange. Here’s a piece of it:

My Dad’s a doctor. My grandfather’s a doctor. And I was supposed to be one too by now. When my father and grandfather look at me, they see a doctor. And it’s pretty weird how whenever we look at something, we see what we want to see. I guess I do it, too. Today

when I was walking trying to find the things for this weird scavenger hunt, I noticed myself thinking about this girl I like in my bio lab and how she laughs at my jokes a lot. And I was thinking about how it's probably because she likes me too, and I thought about this paper and how this could be part of my scavenger hunt for related stuff. I am seeing what I want to see, too. But my dad being a doctor doesn't mean I am a doctor, and laughing at someone's jokes doesn't mean you want to hook up.

Down the street at the capital building, some men are arguing about the Keystone pipeline, a bunch of them putting pressure on the other ones to get them to do what they want. Does this count as something putting pressure on something else?

Full disclosure. I love this writing, and perhaps many writing teachers wouldn't (though I think any feminist teacher should be delighted to receive such a piece of writing from any student). But that's not the important part; the important part is what AJ said about the draft in his author's note, which in part, reads:

I tried to do what you said, but honestly my first paper seems a lot more responsible. This one feels like just random stuff. So I'm really sorry if I mistook what you said.

I am focused on AJ's term "responsible," particularly when, in the first draft, he critiqued his family for thinking being a doctor was more "responsible" than liking history courses. AJ apologizes; he seems to feel his second draft is a disappointment, something to be ashamed of. And, well, that's how doing something queer, something that moves against what seems evident, "natural" even, feels inside a dominant culture. I wasn't proud of that weird science book in third grade, though I admit to being proud of it now and really wishing someone had saved it.

AJ's final draft brought the brief mentions he makes above together quite interestingly in an essay that ends up being about power—about the power of influence, and because of the girl in his bio lab, it also becomes about gender. And not because I told him to get some gender politics in his work, but because he found a way to look around, to scavenge, and to worry about coherence later, or maybe not at all. More composition could happen this way because it is deeply political indeed to be able to see the connections between things—connections that maybe no one wants you to see. As AJ said, we see what we want to see—that is, until something else is brought into view.

I was a senior in college when I heard the news from my father that Mr. Schellhorn had died. In fact, I was in the middle of writing my undergraduate



honors thesis—a collection of disobedient poems that took biblical figures and rewrote their narratives from queer and feminist perspectives. Early that afternoon, before my father called, I had been looking up the word *anachronistic* in, of all things, a dictionary. I was looking it up because one of the professors on my thesis committee, a professor of Religious Studies, had given me feedback on my poems and said they were “going overboard with the anachronism” in the passages of poems where Noah was shopping at Wal-Mart before heading to the ark, and poems where Ruth was stealing rape kits from the local precinct. Looking back, the irony does hit me—that I am now a writing teacher, writing an article about the ways writers might gather seemingly contradictory, impossible combinations to make new knowledge, or to make new pathways to knowing.

### Contradiction, Confusion, Cohesion

In “Confronting the ‘Essential’ Problem: Reconnecting Feminist Theory and Pedagogy,” Joy Ritchie argues that courses that “allowed ideas to be held up to reexamination, to contradiction, and to the multiple stories of women’s lives hold at least some promise to counter the absolutist forms of thinking that prevail in our society and to allow more students to remake their view of the world” (101). Like Collins, Ritchie points to patterns of thought, to “forms of thinking.” And if we think in forms, and write in forms, why not change the forms in order to arrive at different content? We can change the content, yes. We can ask students to write *about* more civically engaged or politically conscious positions. But will that change *the form of the thinking*? Will it change how we come to know in the first place?

In “Queer Pedagogy and Its Strange Techniques,” Deborah Britzman asks:

What if one thought about reading practices [and perhaps writing practices as well] as problems of opening identifications, of working the capacity to imagine oneself differently precisely with respect to how one encounters another, and in how one encounters the self? What if how one reads the world turned upon the interest in thinking against one’s thoughts, of creating a queer space where one’s old certainties made no sense? (55)

The scavenger methodology I explore with my students is very invested in the idea of “thinking against one’s thoughts” and embracing (rather than avoiding) contradictions. I am sure all writers can remember a time when a teacher indicated they were “contradicting themselves.” And this indication meant, of course, that contradiction was not something that was supposed to happen in an essay—that an essay was something that made *consistent and linear* points that did not go against one another. From the perspective of queer theory

particularly, I want to argue that going “against one’s thoughts” and becoming curious and writing *into* our contradictions is both what we want to do as scholars and what we want to teach our students to do. We are living in a political moment of “either/or”—we either can carry guns into Taco Bell or we cannot bear arms, we either socialize medicine or privatize it, and so on. The last thing I want to teach my students is to write an essay that fits itself into one of these either/or’s. Rather, I want my students to notice the contradictory nature of the issues themselves. Just as queer theory tries to honor the complex and often contradictory nature of identity, so composition must do the same, even when it is uncomfortable to do so.

When I ask students to make essays from scavenged parts, from seemingly unrelated fields, styles, areas of their lives, voices, and so on, I am inviting their contradictions into their essays, rather than creating assignments that help students keep their contradictory selves at bay. And I try, in the scholarship I generate, to honor that work—bringing in the aspects of self and story that shape the pedagogies I advocate, disrupting and interrupting myself. Working as a queer person on the subject of queer pedagogies, I have been asked many times some version of the question: *Are you just interested in queer pedagogies because you’re queer?* I get asked this as a kind of “gotcha moment.” But the answer is what the answer could only be: yes, absolutely. I advocate for queer methodologies because I am queer, because queer teenagers all over the world are killing themselves at horrifying rates, because if oppression is really going to change, it’s our civic duty to think in queerer ways, to come up with queer kinds of knowledge-making so that we might know truths that are non-normative, and contradictory, and strange.

I already discussed one interesting moment of contradiction in AJ’s writing—the conflict between his essay (where he critiques the notion of what is “responsible” in the eyes of others) and his author’s note (where he feels guilt that his essay is less “responsible” than perhaps others he has written—others that were likely more tidy, more cohesive than the essay I have urged him to compose). In his subsequent revisions, I asked AJ to push more into this contradiction, to think more about why it’s a contradiction in the first place, and perhaps even about why it might always remain a contradiction. The temptation with contradictions is to *resolve* them. But in writing, as in life, some tensions are not resolvable. And sometimes that impossible resolution is perfectly productive. AJ writes:

The term responsibility is thrown around a lot for manipulation. Who doesn’t want to be responsible? When you tell someone what the responsible thing to do is, you are basically telling them there is no other option. Responsibility is a weapon our parents use against us so

that we then learn to use it against ourselves and people we interact with in our lives.

This passage reflects AJ's commitment to pressing into the contradiction, to thinking closely and carefully about the concept of *responsibility* as it works on, against, for, and in us. To accept *responsibility* as good, as right, is the most normative move we can make in our minds. To question that which seems obvious, to, as Britzman says, "think against our thoughts" is to do the real work of composition.

I got mostly A's in elementary school, but I didn't think of myself as a smart kid. I always gave the second answer I thought of, because I thought of my first answer (my instincts) as weird or inappropriate. I learned this from Mrs. Walsh in second grade. I remember being so excited when Charlotte wrote nice things in her web in order to save Wilbur from being slaughtered. I remember that feeling that writing could save me, too. So when Mrs. Walsh asked a question on the quiz about what saved Wilbur, I was supposed to write "Charlotte" but I wrote "writing" instead. She marked it wrong. When I tried to protest, it was of no use. "You have to be more specific," she said. I remember she said my answer was "kind of out there."

## Re-Vision The Future

Most scholars in English are likely familiar with Adrienne Rich's assertion: "Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (339). As I understand Rich, re-vision is "the act of looking back," but also the act of acknowledging the present and the act of looking forward simultaneously. And that "contradiction" is not only possible but also an imperative for the field of composition. Further, it matters very much *how* we look and from what "critical direction," as Rich calls it. For example, in "Composing a Rhetorical Education for the Twenty-First Century," Jessica Enoch invites us to reconsider the angle from which we look; she calls us to search outside traditional educational contexts, especially to activist communities, in order to "energize our understanding of rhetorical education" (167). Similarly, but with a very different focus, Halberstam argues, in *A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, that "part of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space" (2). This is precisely what makes queerness integral to composition. There is something queer about writing—something indescribable, something contradictory, something, at times, dare I say impossible to "teach" in the traditional ways. So if we think of our scholarship (and our students' writing) as having "alternative relations to time and

space," the scavenger methodology is just one way of making those alternative relations visible. And if we take Enoch seriously that, as compositionists, we need to look to our activist communities to illuminate what might be possible in our classroom communities, then the activism of our queer communities should also inform our teaching. This inevitably means we will need to misbehave, to disobey our own disciplinary rules, to push the boundaries of what we think we already know about teaching and writing, to take on the work of teaching students "sexual literacy," as Alexander calls it.

Those of us who work in Composition and Rhetoric know that the field has a deep anxiety about its "home." Some writing programs have broken off from their English Departments, some compositionists are less respected in their more conventional English Departments; and yet the imperative that students must "learn to write" remains explicitly on the shoulders of our field. In thinking about the possible connections between work in queer theory and work in composition, I cannot help but think of Halberstam's "Reflections on Queer Studies and Queer Pedagogy" in which we find a musing on queer theory's location in academia:

The liability of not having an institutional home, of course, is that the study of sexuality is central to no single discipline or program and in fact may be taught everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. However, the advantage of the stealth approach to the study of sexuality is that it remains multidisciplinary, a promiscuous rogue in a field of focused monogamists. (362)

One can hear the same said of composition—that it is "central to no single discipline or program" and that it "may be taught everywhere and nowhere simultaneously." After all, to whom does the teaching of writing *belong*? What fields are *not* the site of composition? In the spirit of queering composition and pedagogy, it is my hope that we truly embrace our multidisciplinaryity, that we more fully become this "promiscuous rogue in a field of focused monogamists." The scavenger, after all, is promiscuous, licentious—perhaps even, in the best ways, irresponsible.

As we look forward to the coming decades in Composition and Rhetoric and particularly as we think about continuing to define and redefine what it means to do feminist work, I invite us to look for more contradictions, more confusion to generate more questions, more dynamic interplay, more reaching for comets outside our solar system. I want us to make more messes, to invite students to make a mess, to be completely *unsystematic* in order to put pressure on the systems we already have in place for thinking about identity *and* about writing.

Perhaps it's naïve to think that changing our patterns of thought can change the world, but, well, I think it can. When Audre Lorde explains, in several of her essays and speeches in *Sister Outsider*, that there is a distinct difference between "revolution" and "reform," I think of changing our methods, our approaches, our ways of knowing as part of the revolution—and as the only way to catalyze changes in consciousness. I've never talked to my student AJ about queer theory explicitly. I never asked him to write a paper on gay marriage, or abortion, or gun violence. But I do believe that the processes he practiced in my course could not lead him to any of the same old binary positions on these matters. I believe he'd have something very complicated to say, maybe even something contradictory. In his final reflective essay for my course, a response to my request that students discuss what they've learned about writing, AJ writes:

Maybe it seems odd, but I think the thing that's improved my writing the most is learning that the first thing I think of is probably not the most well thought out thing I've ever said. In addition, I learned that in some cases outlining an essay before I write it is like a prison and I need to leave myself room for unexpected ideas.

AJ's reflection suggests a way to understand what the scavenger methodology can teach writers. His idea that "the first thing" he thinks of is "not the most well thought out thing" is another way of expressing what it means to think beyond whatever our current patterns and systems of thought allow, or beyond whatever prescriptions might have been constructed for us as we learned to think and write critically. AJ's recognition that an outline has the potential to become "a prison" and that he needs to create the space "for unexpected ideas" signals a dramatic shift in his approach, a shift that means neither his essay nor his thoughts have to obey the logics set before him or conform to predetermined structures or clusters of belonging.

Mr. Schellhorn took us on frequent field trips. And there are some parts of field trips I hate: the bus rides, the lining up, the public bathrooms of visitor centers and rest stops. For one trip, we visit the Long Island Central Pine Barrens. I'm fascinated by the nearly 100,000 acres of plant life said to be growing on "infertile" soil. I'm obsessed with telling my parents, after the trip, "The pine barrens need to burn in brushfires to survive." The idea that sometimes something needs to burn in order to live really appeals to me. Mr. Schellhorn walks me through the woods, along the Peconic River. He tells me this is really the last part of Long Island that is truly wilderness. *Everything else is kept in order by landscapers*, he says.

What I remember perhaps most vividly about third grade was leaving Mr. Schellhorn's classroom on the last day of school, turning to look at the room

as I made my way down the hall. The place was a mess. Unsafe even. Scissors everywhere, dead insects scattered around the microscope, wet paintings hanging in the coat closet. By some measure, he was a terrible teacher—disorganized, partial to particular kinds of misfit students, prone to letting the room “get out of control,” as I heard my father put it. But it was in that room I learned the weird stuff I wrote counted for something and that writing *did* save Wilbur, even if it can’t save all of us. We can, at least, still teach it like it could.

## Notes

- 1 See, for example, Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, David Halperin’s *What Do Gay Men Want?*, Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place*, Michael Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal*, among others.
- 2 See, for example, Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber’s “Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage” in *Computers and Composition*, Lisa Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford’s “Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship” in *PMLA*, the work of Cynthia Selfe, Annette Vee, and of course many others.
- 3 I am thinking here of work by Jessica Enoch, Joy Ritchie, Shirley Wilson Logan, Jenn Fishman, Krista Ratcliffe, Gwendolyn D. Pough, Andrea A. Lunsford, Michelle Gibson, Karen Kopelson, Cheryl Glenn, Jacqueline Rhodes, Jonathan Alexander and the list could go on.
- 4 I am thinking of, and this is just a short list, texts like: Richard Miller’s *Writing at the End of the World*; Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*; Susan Griffin’s *A Chorus of Stones*; Vershawn Ashanti Young’s *You’re Average Nigga*; Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*; Deborah, Michelle Gibson and Martha Marinara’s 2000 article “Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender and Sexuality”; Jennifer Sinor’s *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing*. These are just a few from a wide range of selections. This list could go on.
- 5 See, for interdisciplinary examples, Ruth Behar’s *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*, Emily Schnee’s “Writing the personal as research” in *Narrative Inquiry*, Sidonie Smith’s “Who’s Talking/Who’s Talking Back? The Subject of Personal Narrative” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, or Nancy K. Miller’s *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*, among others.
- 6 This, of course, is the basic premise of books like Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald’s *Available Means: An Anthology of Women’s Rhetoric(s)*, Cheryl Glenn’s *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, or most recently Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch’s *Feminist*

*Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies.*

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## About the Author

**Stacey Waite** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln and teaches courses in Composition and Rhetoric, Queer Theory, and Gender Studies. Waite has published articles and essays on the teaching of writing in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Literacy in Composition Studies*, *Writing on the Edge*, and *Feminist Teacher*. Waite has also published four collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *Butch Geography* (Tupelo Press, 2013).

## Surrender as Method: Research, Writing, Rhetoric, Love

Jessica Restaino, with Susan Lundy Maute (in memoriam)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *This essay examines challenges to research and writing in feminist rhetorical studies in the context of terminal illness. Drawing on qualitative data from a two-year ethnography project I conducted with my friend, Susan Lundy Maute, who was living at the time with stage IV breast cancer, I explore divisions between knowledge-making in the humanities and social sciences, and the stakes of emotionality, love, and friendship in the research relationship. I argue for the necessity of feminist methods and research in rhetorical studies rooted in unpredictability and uncertainty.*

**Keywords:** *illness, medical rhetorics, feminist research methods, ethnography, breast cancer*

Since we don't have time, we must rescue time by putting it into our discourses and holding it there, learning to speak and write not argumentative displays and presentations, but arguments full of anecdotal, personal, and cultural reflections that will make us plain to all others, thoughtful histories and narratives that reveal us as we're reaching for the others [ . . . ] the world wants speed, efficiency, and economy of motion, all goals that, when reached, have given the world less than it wanted or needed. We must teach the world to want otherwise, to want time for care.

Jim Corder, "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" (1985)

In the summer of 2012, I taught a class titled "Rhetoric of Sport" in which I aimed to explore the ways rhetorical concepts and terminology might serve as access points for understanding how we define athleticism, athletes, and competition. The course syllabus posed a series of questions linking language and physical accomplishment, including: "How are athletic 'heroes' constructed in words? In what ways do athletes rely on language to explain or even understand their own bodily performances?" (Restaino syllabus). When I look back now on what first inspired me to ask those questions, I realize that I was awestruck, moved completely, by the fact that I was, at the time—literally—running alongside an athletic marvel, my friend Susan Lundy Maute. Sue and I were teammates in a women's field hockey league, playing most months of

the year, indoors during the winter. She was the core of our team; a former division I scholarship athlete; our center midfielder, she commanded the field. Most striking and yet most unapparent about Sue: she had been diagnosed with stage IV breast cancer in 2009. This serious diagnosis came after a long journey following the birth of her fourth child when she was just 35 years old;



surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy had ultimately not produced a cure. As of this writing, it's now been 12 total years of breast cancer for Sue and these last months have been particularly hard. But in the summer of 2012 she was anything but "sick" and I wondered how she reconciled her athleticism and her disease, her physical strength and agility with the diagnosis of terminal breast cancer. To what extent was Sue's orientation to her physical body—a body that exists on the fault lines of exceptional prowess and terminal illness—a rhetorical one, hinged to words as a means by which to understand, to endure, and even to master

her experience?<sup>2</sup> As my students and I explored rhetoric as a link between the body's striving and the mind's interpretation of such effort, I knew that Sue had a crucially important story to share. I invited her to visit our class; she accepted. And so began a project of writing and talking, of journeying alongside Sue as her ethnographer these last two years. This is a project that has continued even as—and maybe because—Sue's condition has become more complex and more threatening. Ultimately what emerges here is a story, one that has unfolded between us, which threads together the personal with the professional, the need to understand the human experiences we share with the scholarly tools we have at our disposal.

Given its roots in terminal illness, in relationship, in intimacy, the central project of this essay is to raise questions about how and why we do research in rhetoric, to push on the pulse points I see as central to research and writing. In what ways, I ask, can feminist methods for knowledge-making sustain us in explorations of that which we can never fully understand, like illness and love? To what extent is our work in feminist rhetorical study rooted in a willingness to merge the struggles of our lives with the goals of our work? How might care, love, and intimacy serve as spaces in which research might be reinvented and re-envisioned? While the arc of this work is sustained by much that has come before in feminist scholarship—an interest in materiality and

rhetorical embodiment, an urgency to disrupt traditional qualitative methods, an openness to collaboration and also care—I want nevertheless to cast this project as something of a necessary anomaly, a story that stands on its own but that, I hope, might serve as a framework for others interested in exploring rhetoric at the edges of intimacy, illness, and love. I have written this piece in constant conversation with Sue and hold her as my collaborator, teacher, and inspiration.

In my efforts to organize hours of recorded conversations, many pages of my transcription of those audio files, numerous written texts between us (personal writing that Sue decided to share, written responses to questions I had posed, email exchanges early in our project), I am able to chart three major periods of this work. For each, I will offer some comparative scholarly touch points in the field that will serve at once to demonstrate influences and alignments, while also operating as markers for just how far Sue and I have traveled together. We began with a more reliable, traditional frame, one with roots in the goals of my course syllabus and which positioned me as “researcher” and Sue as “participant.” As our interviews rolled open into conversations, our discussions became both more exploratory and also more mutually reflexive: What questions do we share? What are the limits of what we can each understand about where the other sits? What are the boundaries of our common ground in bodily experience, in our questions about illness, and in our ability to learn from each other? This middle period ultimately delivered us to where we exist now, which I hope to characterize as a state of transformation (on my part, for sure, as a researcher and as a person), tremendous connection, and mutual understanding.

These three major periods have coincided, too, with an increasing intimacy of place. We began in my classroom, among students, and then moved into my office at my university; but soon we were whispering at Sue’s chemo treatment, recorder balanced on a footstool. She has made room for me beside her in hospital beds; I have curled up on the couch where she rests at home; and I have swept strips of her hair up off her kitchen floor. Throughout any given week, we typically have an “off the record” conversation running via text message chatter, and we have spent countless hours together without any formal recording or note-taking process underway. In other words, the moments when we are “doing” and “not doing” this project have sometimes collapsed, or the fact of the project itself has seemed either less or more important as illness and our connection to each other has taken center stage. The inclusion here of these most intimate spaces and moments is perhaps my great risk in this essay, as I want to argue that such intimacy has its place in the most textured kinds of rhetorical research and analysis. I believe, too, that existing feminist scholarship has long-provided the necessary groundwork through which

such boundary-pushing work can happen without exploitation or sensationalism, and in a spirit of reflexivity and respect.<sup>3</sup> My goal, again, will be to inspire questions about how and why we do research in rhetoric and writing, and to imagine some new or extended avenues for feminist approaches to analysis, collaboration, and knowledge-making.

## Tradition and Structure

I have titled this section with some hesitancy, as there seems embedded in the naming—tradition and structure—an element of confidence and certainty that I am sure I lacked at the project's beginning. I can say that I did rely to a certain extent on a more formalized framework that I built based upon my original course syllabus. Still, I felt great uncertainty about what ultimately the project might yield and also real trepidation about my questions being burdensome to Sue who is, by nature, a generous spirit. As I review my course description once again, a few key questions designed to focus the class itself also invite Sue's initial connection to this work:

To what extent is our competitive drive bound up with our self-definition, with who we say we are or who we want to be? [ . . . ] How are athletic 'heroes' constructed in words? In what ways do athletes rely on language to explain or even understand their own bodily performances? To what extent is our definition of what makes someone an 'athlete' rhetorical—persuasive, symbolic, and convincing—and to what extent can this language be confining? Conversely, can it be expansive and inclusive? (Restaino syllabus, May 2012)

I had given this description to Sue in advance of her visit to class. In response, she prepared a short piece of writing for my students that provided them with the basics of her medical history along with some grounding in her orientation to the questions of our course. She began this essay with the words, "I've been an athlete my entire life" (Maute 5/12). This identity, of course, offered a way of seeing and orienting to her terminal cancer diagnosis: "I've decided to channel my competitive energies into not only surviving, but thriving in my life."

The room to articulate a purpose and to assign a value to athleticism as a mode of survival is at the core of Sue's first writing for my students. I want to suggest, too, that the closing of Sue's piece might be read as both parallel to and predictive of where—or at least *that*—our work together would go forward as an unfolding process or evolution, complete with a refusal to operate within expected boundaries:

As I continue to walk through this journey, I find myself fascinated by the amazing ability of the human body [ . . . ] I feel stronger than I did

15 years ago. The fact that I can keep up with a bunch of 20 some-things on a hockey field at the age of 45, with all that I've been through mentally and physically, makes me believe anything is possible. I have become incredibly in tune with my body so I know when something is not right. My doctors don't know what to do with me because I have pushed the limits on what is expected given my diagnosis. I do things most healthy people can't do [ . . . ] And it will continue. It's a process. For me, it's a way of life. (Maute 5/12)

Students found this piece of writing inspirational and, to a certain extent, I think, mind-boggling since Sue's terminal diagnosis likely predicted someone who might appear ill; yet, she sat before them looking well and vibrant. At the time, she was using her body in ways that exceeded the behaviors of an average person without her diagnosis, and so she was in all respects a boundary-pusher in flesh and also in mind. This piece was ultimately coupled with a wonderful classroom conversation with Sue, and together we made many connections to the various foundational rhetorical concepts we had been studying all semester.

Sue and I spent the next months following her visit to my class talking informally about her situation and some of the questions the class opened up between us. We stood around after games and we talked about her latest health news, and our monthly hikes with a group of friends turned into longer, more emotional discussions about what Sue described candidly as the "mind fuck" of terminal cancer. We agreed tacitly on the "value" of the big questions that had emerged between us, that there was more to explore beneath and around them, though I could not have articulated at the time a clear position on what this "value" might have been to Sue. She would nod and say, "I'm an open book. Ask me whatever you want." And as interested as I was in pursuing some of the initial threads that emerged in our class conversation, in Sue's first piece of writing, and through the discussion that these first experiences seemed to sustain, I struggled immensely with what I perceived then as the triviality of my interests in light of Sue's struggle for survival. Quite frankly: who gives a shit about rhetoric, about language, about how bodies are made and lived and shared in words, when you are fighting for your life?

In order to better illustrate where we began, then, I want to cast our start against the undeniable structure of the traditional qualitative research project. My aim here is not to undermine or question the value of research traditionally practiced in the social sciences, for example, and I acknowledge there is a place for this genre of scholarship in rhetoric-composition, particularly in work that pursues data which can help us codify and understand sweeping trends or the perspectives of many participants at once. But I believe my collaboration with Sue affirms the value of something entirely other in scholarly

work. In fact, my initial trepidation towards the work, my uncertainty about the usefulness of my questions, or the potential contribution such engagement might stand to make in Sue's life signal much of my divergence from where the responsible social scientist might begin. This hit me with utter clarity at a panel presentation on "big data" at the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) as I listened to an insightful talk by Jason Swarts, which heralded the importance of Peter Smagorinsky's 2008 essay, "The Method Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Research Reports." In this piece, Smagorinsky laments the many poorly executed studies he has reviewed over the years and isolates their roots as such:

Authors go awry when they either pose no research questions, or pose different questions at different points in the manuscript, or pose questions that are not answerable through the data, or pose answerable questions but present results that appear unrelated to the questions. In my experience, studies work best when an author poses a limited set of answerable questions and then designs the paper around them. (405)

That it took Sue and me until the spring that followed my summer class to sit together in my office for our first recorded "interview," despite our months of rich conversation, speaks to the likely absence of the linearity Smagorinsky describes. I have retraced the opening of this first recorded conversation, listening and reading again, and it begins with my asking Sue to reread the piece she originally wrote for my students months before. I then prompt her, "So you just read that . . . how would you add to or revise it now?" (Interview 5/13). Given that this piece of writing was, originally, a response to the questions posed on my course syllabus, my thought was that this could be a fine starting place for extending and building upon those initial framing questions.

Sue's response, however, quickly pushed us beyond the confines of that preliminary frame. She begins by stating, "Well, I wouldn't go back and change anything, but I would add more to where this ended about where I am today" (Interview 5/13). "Today," Sue explains, involves an added "spiritual and emotional piece," which perhaps was always there but which her illness has brought into a "culmination." Again, hanging on to my focusing questions—though clearly off any kind of script—I ask: "So, does this more spiritual component impact your relationship with your body? Where do you locate yourself in your body?" My goal here was to be responsive to what Sue had to say, while working to pull us towards the initial framing questions that motivated my course and Sue's first piece of writing. This move is not unprecedented, and in her major work on feminist methodology, *Liberating Method*, Majorie Devault

advocates for “involvement” as an “element of method” in the interview process that, ultimately, might deliver feminist scholarship towards a “more disciplined use of the personal” (71).

Already, then, in Sue’s responses and even in my questions during our first recorded interview, I feel the pull away from solid ground and Smagorinsky’s urging that we pursue “answerable questions.” On the heels of my questions about her relationship to her body and her “location” in it, Sue answers:

From early on, I didn’t get angry at God. It was never ‘Why me?’ but ‘Why not me?’ Disease and tragedy are non-discriminatory. I’m not angry at God. I do believe in free will. It may not exactly be what was supposed to happen [ . . . ] I feel like I’m learning how thoughts affect the body, down to the cellular level. Thoughts get changed into chemicals, hormones, throughout your body . . . so that’s a daily struggle. There’s always a kneejerk reaction, but when I’m able to step outside of that [ . . . ] I can step out and analyze. (5/31/13)

Here Sue operates between the conceptual and material, working to articulate a relationship that might give me some sense of her “location” somewhere in the middle, or somehow composed of both the abstract and the concrete. This, of course, has been a subject of great scholarly interest and, ultimately, navigating some of this amorphous in-between space came to characterize much of our work together as our research developed. I am reminded of the epigraph from Judith Butler that Sharon Crowley uses to open her “Afterword” to *Rhetorical Bodies*: “I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought [ . . . ] [they] tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies ‘are’” (quoted in Crowley 358).

While I will give more attention to this component of our work in my discussion of the next period, in the first months I did aim to articulate, in collaboration with Sue, boundaries for our project. After transcribing our first three recorded conversations, I decided that we should take a fresh moment to reassess comparatively—and blindly—our respective understandings of “what” exactly this research project was about and for. This move was influenced by a number of foundational voices in research ethics, including those of Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, Thomas Newkirk, and Patricia Sullivan. In her essay, “Ethnography and the Problem of the Other,” Sullivan questions: “Who is telling the story, the researcher or the researched? After all, whose story is it to tell?” (104). My sense, as our work unfolded, was that around the very same project, Sue and I might each have a story, one which evolved differently, and which held different meanings and value given our respective positionalities (Chiseri-Strater).



Accordingly, I composed a set of questions to which we would each write responses privately and then share. I opened this document with, again, the course description from my original syllabus as a point of reflection. In response to my first question, which asked each of us to explain our “initial understanding of the purpose of our conversations,” Sue writes, “I came with a completely open mind and decided to let your questions guide the dialog” (Maute 8/13). This response positions me clearly in a researcher role, a role with which I was already struggling. In my own response to the same prompt, I write, “I’ve found myself asking questions for which I knew perhaps neither Sue nor I had any simple answers (or perhaps any answers at all), and so it’s fair to say that in some ways we’ve moved away from focused research and more towards a kind of investigative, conversational journey” (Restaino 8/13). This first prompt was followed by a question about personal meaning in the work. Given that I had worried initially about whether the project might merely be burdensome for Sue, I felt compelled to ask: “Can you describe the value, if any, of our conversations to *you*? What purpose or point might they serve for you?” (Restaino 8/13). While I wanted to make room for Sue to claim that the project did not carry personal meaning for her, I was concerned that she might tend too much to my feelings and not answer this question honestly. I thus added a caveat, “(It’s okay if the answer is ‘none’ beyond ‘helping Jess with a project’)” (8/13). Sue’s response instead affirms her own stake in our work together:

Having come with no expectation, I have to say I was blown away at how much I got out of our conversations. It’s very hard to see what I look like from outside of this body and mind without having some kind of external feedback. From my perspective, I’m just doing what I need to do with what I’ve been handed, nothing more. (8/13)

In an email in advance of this writing, Sue offers: “I enjoy sharing all of this, it helps confirm for me that there is more to all of this than me being just another victim of the big ‘C’” (6/13). These two texts were the first to indicate that our work together—talking and writing—had some potential value for Sue beyond the scope of my original course design. Along the way, its value for me, too, began to shift and expand. My multiple roles—researcher, writer, friend—are now often in motion, moving back and forth between us. I might say they function in synthesis, each role rooted in the other. *A desire to understand, to witness (and be seen), to be with, to question, to document, to put words to experience*: these are acts of writing, research, and friendship for us, all at once.

## Reflexivity, Disruption, and Our Bodies

In her introduction to *Rhetorica in Motion*, Eileen E. Schell describes “feminist rhetorical methods and methodologies as movement, as motion, and as action,” which, for Patricia Bizzell, require “methods which violate some of the most cherished conventions of academic research, most particularly in bringing the person of the research, her body, her emotions, and dare one say, her soul into the work” (quoted in Schell 4-6). For my purposes, I want to consider the role of material, of our bodies and the senses, and the ways such materiality pushed Sue and me towards a depth of rhetorical exchange that exceeds words alone. My move here follows on the heels of more feminist scholarship than I can rightly acknowledge, but I owe a primary debt to Debra Hawhee’s efforts to explore the historical roots of rhetoric as an art of “the body as well as the mind” (144).<sup>4</sup> In her examination of the interrelatedness of athletic and rhetorical training, Hawhee isolates “the three Rs [ . . . ] rhythm, repetition, and response” (145). Most notable is the extent to which these three factors ensure both structure and unpredictability concurrently. Hawhee explains through analogy:

It is the interrelation between the generalized path of the riverbed with its interruptive rocks and sediment on the one hand, and the force of the water’s current on the other, that produces the eddies and swirls, the sudden shifts in direction within the general flow—herein lies the rhythm. Rhythm therefore produces distinctive movements within a generalized direction; it combines fixity with variability. (148)

The pattern—and lack of pattern—that Hawhee highlights here functions similarly as a shaky blueprint for Sue and me in our collaboration, particularly as our conversations have happened around and about and through a body that exists in a state of uncertainty. This balance of “fixity and variability,” informed by athleticism as Hawhee’s work predicts, serves also as a means by which Sue understands her relationship to her cancer. The second period of our project illustrates the ways such rhythm—and our ability to physically feel and hear it—became a methodological tool for deeper rhetorical analysis.

Spring rolled into summer, and July 2013 brought Sue increased hardship: the tumor growth on her liver was on the rise and she lost a very dear friend who shared her exact diagnosis. We had, at this point, recorded several hours of conversation—one that took place during a chemo treatment—and logged reflective writing about our work together. Unprompted, Sue sent me a piece of writing she titled, “Rough Times July 2013,” in which she expresses her anguish over her friend’s decline, and her worries for her own family; she also

describes the fight and uncertainty she faces in light of her terminal status. At the time—and as it had been from my first introduction to Sue—she also continued to compete as an athlete. In this case, she uses a recent tennis match as a metaphor for her struggle against this “horrible disease.” She begins her description of the match as follows:

Anyway, it was a grueling match. I was on the defense the entire way, and starting to feel my mental state break down again. I was starting to give up in the middle of the match. The weekend away must have made a difference because I found some strength to tell myself to just stay in it. Keep fighting. Don't give it away. Make her work for it. So, that is what I did. (Maute 7/13)

She ultimately won the match and goes on, later in the piece, to give me news of a recent doctor's appointment—I had been eagerly awaiting this update and skimming the lines to find it—which ultimately was positive: recent growth of the tumor on her liver had been slightly abated by the current chemo treatment, and her tumor markers were down significantly. As Sue puts it, “THAT is huge” (Maute 7/13). She closes this piece with a reflection on athletic competition as a metaphor for living with terminal cancer:

I walked out of his office feeling good. Not great. Just good. It's hard to get excited over these things because at the end of the day, I still have cancer on my liver [ . . . ] and like any humble athlete knows, on any given day you can find yourself on the other side of this victory. So you take the 'win' for what it is and you don't over celebrate it or rub it into the opponent. We will meet again, and all you can hope for is that you have done all the preparation and training so that you can find yourself on that 'winning' side once again, and once again, respect and acknowledge the fight that the opponent has brought to the table. (Maute 7/13)

In this writing, we hear an emphasis on repetition, “we will meet again [ . . . ] and once again,” and yet—in such repetition—the expectation of surprise and unpredictability since, “on any given day you can find yourself on the other side of this victory.” This combination is wisdom “any humble athlete knows,” and it reverberates clearly with Hawhee's examination of the blending of athletic and rhetorical education in an ancient wrestling manual: “the opponent's moves and the attention to specificity they require introduce difference to the repetition, demanding a new move in between each of the throwing directives. Stylistically, the manual captures the difference between repetitions, demanding and producing its own kind of rhythmic response” (149).

My initial response to Sue's "Rough Times" piece was tremendous gratitude and humility: she had written something *for* me, in a sense, and without my asking, though—of course—she also must have written for herself. Was the impulse to write something for me to read borne of our conversations together? Did she previously consider herself a writer? What—to draw on Hawhee—was *our* emerging rhythm and what might be my response? By education, Sue is a mathematician and computer scientist, and when we met four days after she wrote "Rough Times" for a recorded conversation, I asked her about her motivation to write. Her response was pivotal in driving our work forward: "I hadn't talked to you and I was in a really bad place. I felt like I gotta get this down. And I wanted to get it down before I got my results. Because I didn't want my results to change or affect how I felt that day" (7/13).

Two utterly crucial factors are at work in this response. First, I become here synonymous with communication—in talk and in writing—and I am an expected recipient: "I hadn't talked to you [ . . . ] I felt like I gotta get this down." Since we hadn't spoken verbally, Sue created a written text which she immediately sent to me and that, just days later, became the focus of our next verbal dialogue. My role—researcher? confidant? reader?—had moved into a central position dedicated to the processing and sharing of information about Sue's status and her experiences, both physical and emotional. Second, in her response, Sue models an inevitable wrestling to separate mind and body, a struggle with which we all—regardless of the severity of our medical conditions—contend with by virtue of operating in thinking bodies, "I didn't want my results to change or affect how I felt that day." As Sharon Crowley argues, post-structuralism's "displacement of body/mind into a continuum" serves us by "open[ing] a space for thinking about the relations that obtain between body and mind, and for speculating about the difficulty of distinguishing the limits of either in relation to the other" (359).<sup>5</sup> While Sue's motivation to write stems from a desire to isolate her feelings from the reality of her body (whatever the results of her latest scan), in fact this text comes to exemplify the very continuum Crowley describes. Sue's cancer is as much a physical experience as it is an intellectual one, and her writing is a work of synthesis.

There are myriad challenges and riches around this shift in our project and its value to each of us, and as a person I felt (and continue to feel) the pull of our dynamic in both heart and mind. I am willingly on the rollercoaster ride with Sue—sometimes recorder and notebook at my side, sometimes not—and my responses have been typically both intellectual and emotional. From a methodological perspective, the task before me as a researcher has been, essentially, to surrender to the pull of the work and to the evolving connection between us. Interestingly—though perhaps not surprisingly—Sue's challenge, too, has been at certain points to surrender her own struggle for control, even

as she has pushed herself in her fight. In one of our early recorded conversations she explains, “We don’t have the control we think we do. Surrendering—again—is about learning not to worry. I don’t let it take another day from me” (6/13).

For sure, order and procedure have their rightful place in the research process, and certainly in the one Smagorinsky describes. But the challenge posed in my work with Sue has been to recognize that this collaboration demands the opposite. This relinquishing of control is founded upon a willingness to hear and feel what emerges rhetorically and to continue to follow even in uncertainty. To an extent, work in rhetorical listening—including Cheryl Glenn’s work on the poignancy of rhetorical silences—speaks to the need to be open to what is not immediately clear, to what does not present unequivocally.<sup>6</sup> Lisa Mazzei’s 2004 essay, “Silent Listeners: Deconstructive Practices in Discourse-Based Research” models this practice in the context of qualitative research in education. Mazzei describes her study of teachers’ racial identities in which her conventional training in research methods proved a mismatch for what she ultimately found in the voices—and the silences—of the teachers she studied. Perhaps this emergence, too, was fostered by Mazzei’s tendency to “introduce[e] very few prepared questions,” preferring instead to build her facilitation on the insights raised by the teachers themselves during group discussions (29). The data generated seemed to call for an equally unscripted approach, as traditional methods “resulted in a troubling resistance” and reading transcripts cut her from the experience of the teachers’ voices (29). Mazzei goes on to ask, “How was I to establish intimacy with the conversations of participants in the absence of their voices?” (30).

Interestingly, this notion that intimacy is a necessity—“How was I to establish intimacy?”—is certainly not universally important, even in some approaches to feminist scholarship that work to disrupt traditional methods. After reading her transcripts “quickly as one has to do to ‘get through’ a massive amount of material,” Mazzei ultimately decides to sit, eyes closed, and listen to her recordings in order to “live with the narratives” (30). Here she draws on Derrida: “something [ . . . ] calls upon us and addresses us, overtakes (surprises) and even overwhelms us, to which we must respond, and so be responsive and responsible. Endlessly” (quoted in Mazzei 31). The experience of being “overtaken” and “overwhelmed” has threaded through much of my work with Sue, and I have been grateful for all of it, as a person. But what are the dangers to research when the researcher is moved beyond words, brought—emotionally—to her knees?

In 1997, Patti Lather and Chris Smithies published *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS*, a work in which Lather operates as researcher, following support groups facilitated by the social worker, Smithies, for women

living with HIV/AIDS at a moment at which this diagnosis still meant, for most, a life cut drastically and quickly short. Lather and Smithies ultimately construct a book that resists easy reading and refuses to privilege any singular voice—researcher, participants, scholarship itself, the women’s narratives—with pages broken into competing blocks of text. The reader must move from one block to the next around any given page: a woman’s narrative; a piece of health information for HIV/AIDS patients; writings by Lather as academic and by Smithies as social worker facilitating the groups. Reflecting on Lather’s work, Mazzei takes seriously this warning: “I am reminded by Lather (1993) to be attentive to the methodological perils involved in such a practice, to be attentive to how I might use the ‘deconstructive move which avoids simple reversal and simple replacement’” (32). Mazzei goes on to clarify, for her purposes, with a question: “In other words, ‘To what do I unknowingly give preference [ . . . ]?’” (32).

While the initial challenge here is of course to be deeply reflective as a researcher, for Lather the next steps are twofold: first, that there exists no “privileged” voice, as illustrated in the textual construction of *Troubling*; and second, and perhaps even more poignantly, that the reader be denied the greatest intimacies of the work, its deepest and inevitable emotionality be kept private, off limits, and preserved. In “Postbook: Working the Ruins of Feminist Ethnography,” published four years after *Troubling*, Lather describes a “methodology of getting lost,” one in which “the practice of failure is pivotal for the project of feminist inquiry in negotiating the crisis of representation” (203). For Lather, *Troubling* is designed to enact such a failure of “knowing”:

[T]he book reflects back at its readers the problems of inquiry at the same time an inquiry is conducted. Such a practice strikes the epistemological paradox of knowing and not knowing, knowing both too little and too much in its refusal of mimetic models of representation and the nostalgic desire for immediacy and transparency of reference. (205)

Interestingly, and particularly frustrating for Lather, is that readers’ curiosity about representation extended to her own emotional experience of conducting the research. In “Postbook,” she describes the experience of being asked by readers if she cried over the struggles and ultimate loss of participants throughout the duration of the project:

Why the need to know I cried? [ . . . ] Seeking some undramatized, largely effaced narrator versus the ‘Oprah-ization’ of this era of confessional talk has been complicated by the effort to both deny the tidy text and yet appeal to a broad public horizon [ . . . ] I sought an authorial presence that was both embodied and yet avoided the

'nostalgia-provoking, emotional-yanking' sort of narrative move that is used to sell everything from empathy to hammers. What I have come to call the 'validity of tears' brings me great discomfort. (211)

Multiple factors are at work in Lather's discussion here, and surely her association of emotionality with "selling" is of particular importance. In fact, the association of "confessional talk"—"Oprah-ization"—with commercialism—"used to sell everything from empathy to hammers"—suggests that any such move on the researcher's part endangers the ultimate seriousness of the project itself, shifting it from intellectual work to something made cheaply for public consumption. This is further enforced by Lather's term, "the 'validity of tears,'" which threatens to affirm the "value" of scholarship not by its academic rigor and contribution but rather by the emotional effect of the work on the researcher.<sup>7</sup> For Lather, such a move would be understood as a show, a mere performance put on to foster interest and perhaps book sales.

I want to be clear on a couple of fronts in light of Lather's discomfort. First, I find integrity in her protectiveness of her study participants and in her conviction that her own emotional modesty is necessary to extending their privacy. At the same time, I take seriously Lather's very own charge in "Postbook" that "ethnography becomes a kind of self-wounding" in which we must be "accountable to complexity, thinking the limit becomes the task, and much opens up in terms of ways to proceed for those who know both too little and too much" (202). Accordingly, as we contemplate the future of research in feminist rhetorics, I pose (and take up) this challenge: might there be some necessary place to which we can travel, somewhere beyond the scope of "emotional-yanking" and performativity, where the fact of intimacy and even the presence of tears, have their rightful place in communicating the limits of what we can understand?

## **Collaboration, Surrender, and Love**

March and April 2014 were months of unexpected joy for Sue and those who love her, in large part because the preceding late fall and winter months had cast her into an increasing state of liver failure which a risky radiological procedure performed in December was ultimately able to interrupt. From December through February Sue rarely left her home, as she convalesced from this procedure and awaited its results. Our time together was nevertheless consistent, though mostly I left my recorder and notebook behind during my visits. It was, interestingly, during this "gap" in our formal project that our collaboration's fuller value came into clearer focus, marking yet another and, essentially the ultimate, shift in our work together. During this time, I sometimes did my own reflective writing following our visits as I tried to make sense of Sue's struggle, and I routinely anguished over my own perceived uselessness.

While Sue herself had put an initial, early stop to my disciplinary self-doubt (“Who gives a shit about rhetoric [ . . . ]?”), when her abdomen swelled painfully, we sat together in despair and words failed me. Much in the way Mazzei discovers, however, in this quiet emerged new purpose and new rhetorical tools—material, emotive, and transformative—which, I argue, open and extend avenues for knowledge-making in the depths illness and love.

On my way to Sue’s house one cold day in February, I was equipped with an unusual present. Our teammates had organized a “care package” for her, and we were each to include some “inspirational” quotes to help lift her spirits. Before I arrived at her house to drop off my contribution to the care package, I received a short text message from Sue: “Sitting here wondering if it’s time to shave my head” (2/14). It had been years since a chemo treatment had rendered Sue bald, but the latest treatment was doing just that. When I arrived, she was sitting on her couch, balls of hair in her hands. I sat next to her and we laughed quietly, an easier alternative at the time, at the many pieces of hair that now clung to me as well. We discussed the reasonable move of just shaving it all off, and then tabled the possibility so I could present my addition to the care package: inspirational quotes *from her*. The document I prepared had a note to her at the top, explaining, “I wanted to share with you some of the things you’ve said over the past year and a half that have especially taught and inspired me” (Restaino 2/14). These quotations from Sue talked about surrender and control, one of our recurring topics of discussion, as well as the “glory” of the underdog in sports. Most striking among these, for me, was a quotation from June 2013, before winter had rendered her so ill, in which she expresses a faith, ultimately, in collaboration:

I get feelings of like, I’m going to be ok. I feel like—generally—we’re here to love each other and grow together and serve. And that’s why I always want to give back, to use my experience to help someone else. Just take that first step. Talk to one person. (Maute 6/13)

When Mazzei reflects on what was “missing” in her initial approach to her treatment of interview data, she recalls the following experience: “In a conversation with one of my peer reviewers she remarked that, by the time she began to write the analysis section of her study, she had practically memorized her tapes” (30). Mazzei goes on then to lament her own lack of familiarity and—of course—“intimacy” with her participants’ voices and particularities. In the process of preparing my care package contribution for Sue, at a moment when I was certain I had nothing to say (and quoting others felt equally superficial), I discovered I had memorized her words after hours spent listening and transcribing and reading, that they were there exactly in my mind and, perhaps, the only words that were just right. I knew where to find certain



statements she had made; I wanted to use the words that shook me the most. These words, in particular, challenge this notion of what it means to “be ok,” suggesting that human togetherness and service might determine such status in ways that the measure of a lifespan cannot.

While the impulse to mirror Sue’s words back to her served us both in a non-academic context, I want to suggest that at root here is in fact a kind of intellectual practice that has its place in our research and writing, as well. Towards the end of that emotional visit in February, Sue finalized her decision: we would shave her head. Actually, the work took two of us: her husband operated the razor while I scooped and gathered her hair up off the floor for the garbage. It was, really, the only option and the experience was a hard one, which Sue handled with resolve. Later that night, I wrote the following reflection on the experience: “There was nothing else to do but sweep and shave in long strips, to follow the threads of hair exiting your scalp. The choice was singular, to merely honor the pace, to recognize the dissent [ . . . ] descent [...] of your hair. *Let’s jump*, you said” (Restaino 2/4).

The significance of hair loss is particularly high in the context of terminal cancer, and while it wasn’t lost on Sue in this moment—“the last time it was like, it’ll grow back, but this time [ . . . ]”—she modeled that day a kind of aware, even controlled, “surrender” which was not about despair or chaos (Restaino 2/14). I tried to describe this later in my reflection:

You made a joke. You made a plan about springtime, coaching your daughter’s lacrosse team again. You told a story completely unrelated to the strips falling to the floor [ . . . ] You joked about looking like an old man, no hair and a big gut. You laughed more. You hugged me and then went upstairs to take a shower so you could wash the rest off. (Restaino 2/14)

I quote my own reflection on the experience here at some length for the sake of illustrating in lived, bodily experience, the work of surrender which Sue has modeled in ways that are at once informed, deliberate, and also honest. This very material experience, one that could occur only in the confines of intimacy and facilitated by the inevitability of hair loss, has come to function more broadly in our collaboration and, perhaps surprisingly, to instruct me as a researcher and a writer. I am, undoubtedly, one person through which Sue has fulfilled her goal to “use my experience to help someone else” (6/20/13).

In 1985 Jim Corder published “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” a lyrical essay in which he stakes out the bold position that our most “flushed, feverish, quaky” conflicts, those that “[don’t] seem to give us opportunity to reduce threat,” demand an openness that exceeds resolution (24). Corder goes

on to illustrate a degree of conflict and conviction so stark that traditional tools of negotiation and rhetorical persuasion inevitably fall short:

[W]here we are beyond being adversaries in that strange kind of argument we seldom attend to, where one offers the other a rightness so demanding, a beauty so stunning, a grace so fearful as to call the hearer to forego one identity for a new one. (24)

I have discovered, in these months of my collaboration with Sue, our talk and writing about this awful thing that will not be cured, a nearly seamless fit with Corder's call. In this space of terminal cancer, a space in which I have been honored to sit with Sue, we have relied on a rhetorical practice that exceeds the boundaries of fixing, formulating, or merely answering. For Corder, "Invention wants openness; structure and style demand closure. We are asked to be perpetually open and always closing" (29). Much as Hawhee's wrestlers must respond, expecting a rhythm at once repetitive and also disrupted, so too must collaboration and rhetoric in spaces of illness and love operate within recognizable boundaries while also exceeding and dismantling them. This practice unhinges us from where we sit, forcing us to see each other and ourselves newly in a privileged, if fleeting, moment. Corder explains, "Invention is a name for a great miracle—the attempt to unbind time, to loosen the capacities of time and space in our speaking" (29). That we are inevitably bound to time, of course, we find ourselves necessarily moving back and forth, as Corder describes, between space and structure, alternatingly open and closed. In this willing fluctuation, we embody Corder's ultimate argument: "Rhetoric is love" through which we might "[learn] to speak and write not argumentative displays and presentations, but arguments [ . . . ] that will make us plain to all others, thoughtful histories and narratives that reveal us as we're reaching for the others" (31). With this move, perhaps, we might exceed the kind of final impasse imposed by truly irresolvable conflicts, by terminal cancer, by time itself.

For Sue, as for all of us, time rolls on. Mid-March 2014 brought surprising news: the risky radiological procedure, performed three months earlier, had produced optimal results in her liver, destroying many of the tumors that had overtaken it. While Sue remained terminal, this procedure gave her liver the opportunity to heal enough that it could become more functional once again. Days before this news, she sat in the passenger seat of my car and, while we waited at a red light, pulled her lower eyelid down, "Look! No yellow. I think I'm getting better." Indeed, it was true—to my shock—all I saw was white where once there was yellowing, a clear mark of liver failure. When a CT scan showed, days later, her liver's tremendous response, Sue and all those who love her rejoiced, even within the context of terminal cancer. What was imminent death opened into possibility, time. Moved and grateful, Sue decided to

write an email to the many people who had helped her over the hardest last months—"you have laid in bed with me, have cried with me, and have been with me through some dark days"—and she went on to list as many of the gestures of generosity she could remember (Maute email 3/20/14).

What Sue especially wanted to share in this email was a video in which a cancer patient's female family and friends surprise her by shaving their heads in solidarity. She offers the explanation for her choice, "[D]o not mistake my sharing this with any particular need I have," but rather the woman's reaction "is exactly how I feel with all that you do for me" (3/14).<sup>8</sup> Over the course of this four-minute video, women old and young are visually transformed as their heads are shaved so that, by the time the woman in treatment—Gerdi—arrives, bald herself, they are nearly indistinguishable from each other. There is a visual beauty to the women's sameness and, for my purposes here, a demonstration of the kind of transformation for which Corder calls, where we are "beyond being adversaries [ . . . ] where one offers the other a grace so fearful as to call the hearer to forego one identity for a startling new one" (24). In the context of terminal cancer, the women surrounding Gerdi cannot live her disease; they cannot be, bodily, in her shoes. But in the act of visual solidarity and bodily transformation, there is a crossing over, a desired transgression of the impasse of their stark, oppositional locations (healthy versus ill) into a solidarity that only, for Corder, "emergence" and "love" can deliver.

I could not wait for our next recorded conversation following both Sue's groundbreaking medical news and her email of tremendous gratitude, which I received while in Indianapolis at CCCC 2014. One of the first questions I had for Sue was about the difference between her reaction to the medical news and that of those around her. Were there gaps in how she and others interpreted this news? She explained:

I've been here before so it's like...part of me is like, ok, I got this good news but [ . . . ] you learn that it's such a rollercoaster that I don't get over the moon. And then I was like, but don't deny yourself [ . . . ] the joy [ . . . ] you know, grab it while you have it. You know that's a learning curve for me. Because I've learned to not get too excited when things are good. And then I've learned to not get too low when things go bad. Because [ . . . ] it's a dance you have to do and learn not to set yourself up in a way. (Maute 3/24/14)

Once again this notion of a "dance," steps at once learned and yet also unpredictable, echoes of both Hawhee's wrestlers and Sue's tennis match: each operate rhythmically and responsively. But I was curious, as Sue is surrounded by a large network of family and friends, about just how attuned others might be to the necessity of her dance. For some, did the latest news erroneously

suggest a cure? And if so, was this confusion between the sidestepping of imminent death and “cure” frustrating for her, particularly as she would continue to live and struggle in treatment? In response, Sue first reflected on the observations of her cancer counselor:

[That’s] what [she] always accuses me of: ‘You make it look easy for people. You don’t wear it.’ And I’m like, I know [ . . . ] but it’s just funny [ . . . ] and some people just need this for their own sanity: she’s cured. It’s done. You know what I mean? Because it’s like they can’t imagine something so uncontrollable and stealth and unpredictable, with no rhyme or reason, could just pop up like that. (Maute 3/24/14)

Indeed, existence amid great uncertainty defines much of Sue’s experience, and for Corder, the project is similar: “We can learn to dispense with what we imagined was absolute truth and to pursue the reality of things only partially knowable” (28). Methodological “surrender,” which most fully characterizes the third and current period of our collaboration, must be willing, as Sue has said of her own practice of surrender, to “let go of the outcome” (3/24/14).

### **Closing Thoughts: How and Why We Do Our Work**

Surrender, risk, and love—which ultimately shape my collaboration with Sue—have a rightful place in the study of rhetoric and in our writing, as a function of method. This is not a one-size-fits-all practice, and my intention is not to suggest that research and writing grounded in the “partially knowable” is optimal for every research agenda. I am not writing here in generalized ways, nor am I attempting to posit Sue’s story as a tidy “victory narrative,” nor my role in this work as heroic. Rather, there are embedded here potential, perhaps private, lessons about what and how we write and do research. These lessons open big questions about the role of research and writing in feminist rhetorical studies. Most essentially, in what ways does our scholarly work, our methods for research and writing, offer us avenues for understanding and exploring the most inexplicable and yet most constant corners of our lives, those of illness, intimacy, and love? When I asked Sue, in our recorded conversation in late March 2014, about writing her “gratitude email,” she spoke about her experience from a place of wonder:

That one [ . . . ] I couldn’t tell you [ . . . ] that one just came out of nowhere [ . . . ] And cancer’s taught me this: it’s not about me. It’s about allowing people to give and it makes them feel better. They’re doing something and they’re part of something. And I get that now. I get that more than I ever did [ . . . ] and when I saw that video, I was like, this is it [ . . . ] that’s when it was divine. Like I didn’t [ . . . ] I couldn’t

[ . . . ]. I don't know if I could rewrite that again [ . . . ] it just seemed to fit right. It just worked. And I just let it go. (Maute 3/24/14)

In my own experience as a researcher in this project, which, if pressed, I would call an "ethnographic rhetorical analysis," I have been challenged to routinely "let it go" and I hope to have the courage for continual release. Smagorinsky's predictions for the worst kinds of research in the social sciences—"different questions at different points [ . . . ] questions that are not answerable"—are all fully at work in our collaboration, in my process as a writer and researcher, and in my willingness, in this role, to follow Sue's example and just "let it go" to places that exceed the boundaries we might otherwise have drawn. This, I would argue, clears a path by which we might exist in Corder's "beyond" where, even if for a moment, we might "loosen the capacities of time and space into our speaking" (29). I had to cut our recorded conversation short in late March due to a meeting back on campus. On the audio, I can be heard apologizing and lamenting the narrow timeframe; we had so much, after all, to discuss. Sue responded, encouraged by her recent medical news, "I know [ . . . ] well, we'll continue. We'll have time" (3/24/14). For Corder, yes and then, again, no: we never really have time, but we can embrace the "partially knowable," which is a linguistic, rhetorical space in which time is held captive between us.

While, at the time of this writing, Sue has experienced continuous ups and downs, hospital stays interrupted by periods of increased energy, April 2014 was a month of some steady progress. I arrived at her house one afternoon, recorder and notebook in tow, and she surprised me and suggested we go out for lunch. I had become accustomed to her more limited mobility, to kicking off my shoes and settling into her couch for our conversations, recorder between us and notebook on my lap. So when we arrived at the restaurant, I realized I had left my "research tools" in my car; we were suddenly just two friends out to lunch, something we had done many times before. We ordered food and started to chat when she interrupted: "I just remembered something I wanted to mention, related to what we discussed last time [ . . . ]" (4/14). She pulled her bag onto her lap and began to dig through it. Suddenly she handed me a pen and two narrow strips of paper, her bloodwork reports from her last chemo treatment: "You can write on the back." She went on to describe the difficulty in trying to operate in her life while ill, balancing involvement and relationships with the limits of her body. In my notes I have quoted her, "I'm not good at that in-between thing" (4/14). These two strips of paper have become tremendously dear to me; in fact I carry them in my wallet rather than risk losing them in the large file of notes I have accumulated during our project. Double-sided, one side a quantitative medical report, the other my scribbles while we talked, these two strips of paper embody much of our dynamic together, our perpetual "in-between" dance, back and forth between the reality

of illness and the room to interpret, the intimate pull to make sense and to question all that we can only “partially know.” This is rhetorical work, much as Hawhee uncovers among the Sophists: “This manner of learning entails ‘getting a feel for’ the work—following and producing a rhythm. The body itself becomes a *sundromos*, an intensive gathering of forces [ . . . ] Entwined in the body in this way, rhetorical training thus exceeds the transmission of ‘ideas,’ rhetoric the bounds of ‘words’ (160). It seems to me our field has thus long-known the riches of surrender, the methodological release into which words, conceptual and material, might find their fullest expression, and I encourage work that seeks and explores the fault lines of what we can fully understand. I look forward with hope and anticipation for expanded, extended, and continued feminist scholarship that might boldly trace and reinvent the rhythms of rhetoric as love.

## Notes

- 1 I hold Sue Maute as my “verbal coauthor,” as I wrote this piece while in constant conversation with her, and she reviewed a draft upon its completion. Sue passed away on August 29, 2014, just over two months following submission of this essay for review. I dedicate this work to her memory and have left all references to her in the present tense, as her influence on me and the conversation that runs between us in my mind continue today. She was tremendous in every way, and I hope this work might communicate some of her great light.
- 2 Scholarship in Disability Studies has much to offer this question and yet, while I did read in this area as I worked, references to Disability Studies are notably absent from this essay. Sue did not identify with the term “disability,” and thus its absence from this essay stands as an extension of our collaboration, my effort to represent her in ways consistent with her own self-conceptualization. This absence further opens some room to consider the inevitable disconnects between the uniquely “personal” and the relatable trends or more generalizable concepts of any given scholarly focus area.
- 3 While worthy scholarship to this end is too abundant to cite comprehensively, Jacqueline Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s *Feminist Research and Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* (2012) is a recent and integral contribution. See also Peter Mortensen and Gesa Kirsch’s (eds), *Ethics and Representation in Qualitative Studies of Literacy* (1996). Issues of feminist ethics in qualitative research practices extend to Nel Noddings’s “ethic of care,” which has been long discussed, critiqued, and revised. For a useful and refreshing angle on

ethical decision-making and persuasion in the research process, see Ellen Barton's "Further Contributions from the Ethical Turn in Composition/Rhetoric: Analyzing Ethics in Interaction" (2008).

- 4 For a foundational collection on rhetoric and the body, see especially Crowley and Selzer (eds.), *Rhetorical Bodies* (2000); see also Susan Wells, *Our Bodies, Ourselves and the Work of Writing* (2010), and Rebecca Moore Howard's excellent bibliographic entry, "Embodiment and the Posthuman."
- 5 The influence of post-structuralist theory here is substantial and exceeds the bounds of this essay. Again, Selzer and Crowley (eds.) provide a solid overview of the uses of this work in rhetorical studies.
- 6 I am not giving deserved full attention here to foundational work by Krista Ratcliffe, Cheryl Glenn, and others; however this work continues to be key in informing my own thinking.
- 7 Recent scholarship on empathy is both emergent and exciting, and I am unable to give it due attention here; see especially Lisa Blankenship's 2013 dissertation, "Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy."
- 8 Video, "Anything for Love," available at <http://vimeo.com/88160637>.

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## About the Author

**Jessica Restaino** is Associate Professor of English and Director of First-Year Writing at Montclair State University. Her research and teaching interests include feminist and activist rhetorics, community literacy, composition pedagogy and theory, rhetorical theory, and writing research methodologies. Her publications include *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground* (2012) and (w/co-editor Laurie Cella) *Unsustainable: Re-Imagining Community Literacy, Public Writing, Service-Learning, and the University* (2012).

## Relational Literacies and their Coalitional Possibilities

Adela C. Licona and Karma R. Chávez

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**Abstract:** *“Relational literacies,” informed by women-of-color feminisms and literacy studies, implies the desire and possibility for shared action and conocimiento. It is a third-space concept related to borderlands rhetorics, coalitional gestures, relational knowledges, and queer migration politics that can intervene into the delegitimation of particular bodies/bodies-of-knowledge. They can also be understood as multimodal, participatory, and embodied meaning-making practices and performances. Relational literacies, at play in the accompanying experimental video, are related to queer temporalities that are both past- and future-oriented at once and have the capacity to produce knowledge from home spaces, abuelit@ wisdoms, and wild imaginings.*

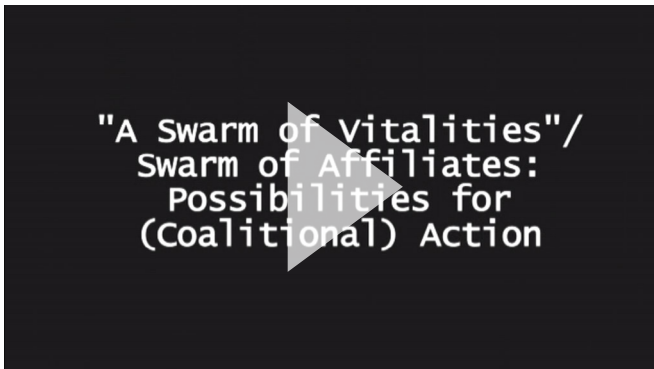
**Keywords:** *Coalitional gestures, borderlands, remix, embodiment, participatory media, relational literacies, queer, Chican@ feminism*

Relational literacies<sup>1</sup> are ripe with coalitional possibility as they can open people to new ways of understanding, learning, imagining, and being in relation to others' stories, interests, and contexts. As such, they can be understood as both events and practices. As events, relational literacies are interactive occasions. Shirley Brice Heath understands a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes” (93). While we maintain an emphasis on process, interaction, and context, we move from Heath's engagement with alphabetic literacy to also include non-alphabetic literacies. Therefore, an event for us implies interaction around “a piece of writing” as well as around multimodal, technological, embodied, imagined, and/or performed works (see Martin). Understood as practices, relational literacies imply the labor of making meaning, of shared knowledges, or of producing and developing new knowledges together. In other words, relational literacies are understandings and knowings in the world that are never produced singularly or in isolation but rather depend on interaction. This interdependency animates the coalitional possibilities inherent in relational literacies. The rhetorical function of relational literacies is to treat “community histories as meaningful [and to] make people and places knowable and understandable”—legible to one another for purposes of shared social action (Licona and Russell 2). Relational literacies and

the coalitional possibilities they imply and generate are of vital importance to understanding an array of often-marginalized rhetorical practices, histories, and events.

Our understanding of coalition differs slightly from conventional definitions, which often situate coalition in the realm of the temporary and the politically expedient. Coalitions can certainly be these things, but our view draws upon that of María Lugones, who defines coalition more expansively as “always the horizon that rearranges both our possibilities and the conditions of those possibilities” (ix). In this way, coalition is “a space of convening” that might be a brief juncture or an enduring alliance (Chávez 7). As a horizon, coalition is that which divides and that which brings together; it exists in the present—the land we sit or stand upon is a horizon; a horizon that is simultaneously in our vision.<sup>2</sup> Relational literacies create such horizons of possibility for convening, and those horizons in turn function to open to new and deeper relational literacies. Put concretely, relational literacies enable the space for new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics.

To begin to see the coalitional possibility present in relational literacies, we offer a short experimental video titled “A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities” as an illustrative case.



*Click on the image above to view this video and transcript online.*

We produced this video as a part of a yearlong dialogue we conducted in preparation for a presentation at the 2014 Rhetoric Society of America conference, where we were one of several dyads invited to create a public dialogue in recognition of the 100th anniversary of the split of communication from English departments. Knowing the origin of our work is important because it indicates how we came together—as partners in a dialogue not necessarily

collaborators on a research project. This origin story also signals the audience and occasion for which the initial ideas were designed: an audience of rhetoric scholars from both English and communication on an occasion where many were considering what the division between the “two” rhetorics means after 100 years. Our dialogue was titled, “Coalitional Gestures, Third Spaces, and Rhetorical Imaginaries: A Dialogue in Queer Chican@ Feminism.” Perhaps because of our situatedness on different “sides” of rhetorical studies, we did not know each other well upon beginning the dialogue in the spring of 2013, but we very quickly realized that the resonances and connections in our scholarship and activism were profound.

For example, we both agreed that much of the rhetorical scholarship on social movements neglected attention to community organizing and coalition building, two key components to movement work. We also recognized the dearth of queer Chican@ feminist perspectives in rhetoric, which in our shared view, also limited whose rhetorical practices would be deemed legitimate for rhetorical analysis and the construction of rhetorical theory. These affinities in our work made our extended dialogue very generative as we sought to practice and invent relational literacies that would be personally and politically beneficial, while also enhancing rhetorical studies. Our goal in the dialogue was to generate ideas by encouraging one another to work with still-forming questions.

“A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities” emerged in response to one of the many prompts we created for one another in our collaboration; this one about our wildest imaginings of coalitional possibilities. The video features several instantiations of relational literacies that point toward coalitional possibilities by displaying communicating bodies across generational contexts engaged in relationship/s and (attempted) reciprocal exchanges. As a snapshot of the extensive practices of varied relational literacies, the video juxtaposes exchanges both from segment to segment and also within each segment. Adela produced it, drawing upon footage from both a community-based, action-oriented participatory media project she was involved in with queer youth and imagery of her then ailing mother. “A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities” calls viewers to consider what Jane Bennett describes as a wide-ranging and distributive agency as well as vital forces or “swarms of vitalities” that include the non-human and compel broad considerations of coalition and justice (32). Such a view compels a consideration of agency as an always contingent and contextualized relational practice as well as a possibility for action (see Herndl and Licona). This view also serves our considerations of the relationship between literacy and coalition as always change-oriented and relational practices premised on new understandings.

The video begins with Adela's mother, Grannie Dottie, lying in her in-home hospice bed, oxygen tube under her nose. During the edit, the frame rate is tripled creating a sense of urgency and commotion (perhaps unrest) that both suggests and keeps viewers from knowing what might have come before and what might come next. Together, the high-paced scene created in our edits and in the potential flashpoints embody, for us, a queer temporality that resists a normative temporal order and instead compresses time to "propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others" (Freeman xxii). Our understanding of queer temporality here also recalls Jose Muñoz's notion of ecstatic time as signaled in "contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present or future" toward greater openness and relational possibilities (32).

In looking back at the scene during the editing process, Adela confronted the reality that she and her mother had very little time left together and realized that each was living these final days in a kind of double-time. She recognized her mother as *both* living *and* dying. Viewers, by contrast, might experience the scene and subject as incongruent. Chronological time then is effectively remixed in this segment to signal a disordering of a linear understanding of past, present, and future through the dispersal of vitalities and in order to imagine those dispersals as absorbed relationally and across multiple temporalities. The video here establishes a "tempo of always becoming" (Puar xvii). Jamie A. Lee, following Jasbir Puar, argues that a flashpoint is a moving frame that elucidates a relational opportunity for viewers to experience the past and the future in and as transformation. Viewers watch Grannie in conversation with an unknown interlocutor while amazing and vibrant squares of refracting sunlight dance across her body. A mobile of mirrors hanging outside Grannie's bedroom window produces this effect, reflecting, refracting, and co-mingling images of light, of Grannie, and an ever-shrinking world comprised of the life inside and outside her bedroom window.

This sequence in our production, focusing on the dancing sunlight and refracted images of Grannie produced by the mirror-mobile, calls to mind Bennett's curiosity about the "ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). The productive possibilities of the inanimate made their way into our own imaginings about how things and people interact in the world and how those interactions might be at play in purposeful change. In actively reflecting the disintegration and dispersal of the body, its histories, and its wisdoms, the refractions and reflections of the dancing mirrors in the video animate the distributive agency Bennett's work can elucidate. These effects call us to imagine how dispersals of generational wisdom, lived histories, love, light, and life might interact in the world and to what effects. These uncertainties together with the possibility and promise of these

ideas are expressed as a meditating hum or buzz that softly vibrates through the modulation of Adela's voice in the scene, providing an odd contrast to the images of Grannie who even in failing health appears lively, perhaps even frenetic due to the edited video speed. The hum is meant to signal a swarm, a shared experience, and an exploration of (the possibilities of) uncertainty.

A quick transition in the video shifts the temporality rather abruptly to a slower tempo. As the sound cuts from peaceful to playful, viewers must shift their listening to hear the voices and see the images of a group of Tucson youth assembled in a circle, talking and laughing in what appears to be an art gallery.<sup>3</sup> These youth were participants in an anti-racist youth art and activism summer camp (see Licona and Gonzales). They filmed their video to address the limitations of abstinence-only sexual education at the same time the state of Arizona was working on banning Ethnic Studies. To produce the video, youth interviewed one another to learn about their distinct and shared experiences of sex education in their schools. They then cut up their stories and agreed to mix up—remix—the narratives so participants would read narratives they did not necessarily write. They purposely remixed their voices, stories, and images to co-create a call for action around access to knowledges and resources they need and want. In the video, the identities being claimed by the voices and the bodies featured in the images don't always match. Through the remix, viewers can get several senses of what it might mean to be in coalition by engaging with and producing "artivism" that addresses issues of identity, health, and bodies. In the excerpt we incorporated into our video, viewers witness acts of young people creating together, confirming each other's positionalities and social locations. Viewers also see them learning to empower themselves and their desires for particular knowledges and resources while working to protect their bodies and their right to know. Again, the remix accomplished here indicates a queer temporality, one reflecting empathy as a relational understanding, in the moments when youth temporarily inhabit the positionalities and speak the experiences of one another with great care.

The youth whose work is incorporated in this video make themselves and their histories legible to one another as remixed bodies producing and collectively making claims and building coalition. We consider such productive practices and performances valid, seeing them as valuable hermeneutics for im/possibly re/imagined histories and futures. The possibility of such practices is especially vital within the context in which they were produced: the state of Arizona, where dehumanizing, criminalizing, pathologizing, xenophobic, transphobic, and deficit-driven discourses have produced powerful, if fictitious, images. The images and discourses continue to generate social and sexual panics and social controls—as well as resistances—while also cultivating a context for what Tsianina Lomawaima has referred to as a *regressive suite of legislation*.<sup>4</sup>

Students and faculty in Arizona have experienced the banning of ethnic studies in high schools; the establishment of a parent bill of rights that threatens abstinence-only education; authorized racial profiling; adoption preference laws; the privatization of prisons and detention centers; the vibrant production of the school-to-prison pipeline, which is always overrepresented by minoritized youth; and a plethora of proposed regressive legislative measures including considerations of “anchor baby” legislation and, most recently, the bathroom bill (proposed as SB 1045) and the religious freedom restoration act (proposed as SB 1062).<sup>5</sup> The rhetorical force and function of these legislative bills is to re-entrench racism, homophobia, and transphobia while targeting queer, trans, and non-white populations legislatively while tacitly offering support for further non-legislative attacks against these groups. The collectively produced video and its participatory context intervene in such delimitations. By featuring the remixed voices and stories of some of those most compromised by and implicated in these legislative measures, the video offers viewers an imagined and performed alternative to coalitions across multiple identity registers.

Through their remixed stories and their acts of stepping into the voices and narrated lived histories of one another, the youth in the video perform the disarticulation of the body, sex, gender, and desire. In so doing, we propose they are engaged in rhetorical gesturing that enacts relational literacies, which in turn create possibilities for intervening in the delegitimation of their bodies and their lived knowledges across generational contexts as well as across racialized, sex/ed, and gender/ed locations. The young people in the video demonstrate a shared understanding of the power of knowledges to both do and undo. Their performance moves viewers to ask if such relational literacy practices might be the challenge Judith Butler imagined when she wrote about the “radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life,’” and, we would add, ways of knowing that count as knowledge. Such a production can “expand the very meaning of a valued and valuable body—that at once desires and produces knowledge-in the world” (*Bodies* 22).

In our video production, both young and old bodies express, produce, and desire knowledge. After the final youth voices announce their identities, as the last of their faces flash across the screen, Adela’s meditating hum introduced earlier in the video re-enters the soundscape, and for only a moment Grannie Dottie, too, returns. Here she can be read as an elder in the mix, as the words, “vital material conjunction: locating possibilities for action” appear, flicker in rhythm with the checkers of sunlight, and finally disappear. The dissipating assemblage of words at the end of this brief video calls viewers to consider not only how knowledges might be remixed, refracted, and dispersed but also

how those same knowledges might inform (possibilities for) participatory culture as well as relational, intergenerational, and coalitional action. As Henry Jenkins asserts, participatory culture can shift “the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement whereby new literacies involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking.” This is akin to what we are calling relational literacies, which “build on traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and crucial analysis skills” (4).

For Jenkins, remix is a product of appropriation and transformation. This idea calls into question the potential for multimEDIATED queer performance to achieve queer temporality and to operate as a critical, coalitional gesture of intervention into the violences of the normative across multiple contexts (see Martin; Muñoz, *Cruising*). We understand these performed remixes of bodies and narratives as assemblages of “bodies-so-far,” a concept that, following feminist geographer Doreen Massey, encapsulates the dynamism implicated in becoming rhetorical bodies (Licona 2013). Too, the youths’ distinct embodiments serve to demonstrate multiple iterations of gendered performances that can destabilize any notion of fixed and permanent identities. In advocating for one another’s right to express and to access knowledge, to be visible in history and in their differently embodied performances, these youth were purpose-driven and coalitional. Their demonstrations of and calls for particular knowledges and specific information were made not necessarily by the writer of the narrative, but in coalition with an/other youth. It is an affirmation and production of multiple and unhinged author/ities, what we consider to be everyday experts, seeking knowledge and disseminating information through relational literacies and engendering swarms of vitalities and affinities as well as coalitional possibilities.

Our framing of their performances remixed with the images of Grannie signals one such possibility for the source of knowledges and authority—*abuelit@* wisdoms that simultaneously endure through the development of intergenerational coalitions and relational literacies and fade with the diminishing of life and mind. We return here to queer temporalities and recall Mimi Nguyen’s treatment of the “copy-image of a beloved body” as “an idea of a thing of the past, especially in a serial form [that] generates new feeling-states to shape a particular historical consciousness about the present” (86). For Nguyen, the photograph (and for us the moving image of Grannie as the embodiment of *abuelit@* wisdom) can elicit “the past’s profound resonance in our experience of the present” (Nguyen 83).

The embodied rhetorics performed in the video fuel and fire rhetorical possibilities. Through their connections to one another, knowledge production, and bodily movement, they rhetorically gesture to “mobilize new stories and new expressive possibilities” (Dolmage 8; see also Hawhee). In so doing,



the youth in relation to each other and in juxtaposition to Grannie evidence the possibility for building what Aimee Carrillo Rowe calls “coalitional subjectivities,” or the understanding of other people’s subjectivities and struggles as so integral to one’s own it is impossible to separate them from one’s self. Such a subjectivity is also a *subjectivity so far*, one that is as fragile as it is full and recognized as “not yet,” in process, “yet to come,” and always becoming (see also Halberstam; Muñoz, *Cruising*).

Returning to Grannie’s presence and the expression of compressed time, viewers might imagine the range of embodied performances Grannie has had access to and herself performed over time. Her presence suggests coalitional possibilities and understandings across generational boundaries and thereby disrupts any notion of an impassable generational divide. As Bennett notes, “[w]hen diverse bodies suddenly draw near and form a public, they have been provoked to do so by a problem” (100). Demands for desired, relevant, and meaningful knowledges and information were often dislocated from particular bodies that could be read as “exceptional” to those that could be read as “deviant.” But those demands shifted back and forth, slipping in between producing and being produced by a kind of disorientation that functions to make delegitimated bodies legible as those that produce and desire knowledges (see Britzman, *Lost Subjects*; Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*; Licona, “Remixed Literacies”; Martin, “Spatiality of Queer Youth”; Muñoz, *Disidentifications* ). The relational practices in this segment of the video demonstrate a drawing near of diverse bodies and lived histories together with a keen recognition of the problem of positioning particular youth as exceptional and therefore others as unworthy. This reading and understanding of the world is disrupted by the youth through collective, disidentificatory practices and demonstrated coalitional gestures (see Muñoz, *Disidentifications*). As such, the bodies in this video are an unstable assemblage of *stories so far*: embodied spaces for articulatory practices—remixed literacies of and in the flesh—to be understood as embodied tools and performed tactics for rhetorical gesturing, storytelling, history-and-change-making, and possible coalition.

The juxtaposition of Grannie in our remix, especially in her visual dispersal through the refracted mirror images, is a reminder of the context in which this video was made—a context that included the ban on Ethnic Studies. Grannie, marked generationally by her advanced age and declining health, serves as a visual reminder of what we have introduced here as the *abuelit@* wisdoms that can be at play in young people’s home communities and that are relevant to them in their calls for the right to access particular knowledges and histories. Rhetorical theorist and Disability Studies scholar Jay Dolmage contends that rhetoric is perhaps best made dynamic by a range of bodies fighting against imposed ideological limitations (see also Juarez). Through

accomplished disorientations, disarticulations, and incoherencies of whose-bodies-are-speaking-whose-knowledges, histories, and desires, the bodies in motion in this video effectively scramble any normative matrix of coherent sexed, gendered, and bodily norms as well as the potential for exceptionalism to stick to any one body or narrative (see Halberstam).

"A Swarm of Vitalities/A Swarm of Affinities" affects a remixed literacy that insists on bodies and beings as dynamic, relational, sexual, participatory, and porous productions of and for knowledge exchange and desire and, in so doing, the video demonstrates coalitional possibilities, re-imaginings, radical openness, and relational literacies. Relational literacies (as both practices and events) imply, create, gesture toward, engender, and enable coalitional possibilities and also re-imaginings and so radical openness (see hooks). Remixing can also be an example of relational literacies but it is not necessarily so. One way to practice and develop relational literacies, as demonstrated here, is through remixing—a practice that disarticulates and delegitimizes normative logics and affirms/creates new, alternative shared knowledges. For those of us interested in rhetorical processes within and for coalition building, a consideration of relational literacies is thus of vital importance.

## Notes

- 1 Relational literacies is a concept named and taken up explicitly in Londie Martin's 2013 dissertation titled *The Spatiality of Queer Youth Activism: Sexuality and the Performance of Relational Literacies through Multimodal Play*.
- 2 Undoubtedly, this view of coalition and the metaphor of the horizon will remind some readers of José Esteban Muñoz's discussion of queerness as always on the horizon. As Chávez notes in her uptake of this metaphor and engagement with Muñoz's definition of the queer, coalition and queerness certainly resonate with one another, but here coalition *is* the horizon of possibility, not a potentiality *on* a horizon.
- 3 Please go to the following URL, <https://mcclellandinstitute.arizona.edu/crossroads/letstalkaboutsexed>, to see "Let's Talk About Sex Ed," the video youth produced as participatory media at the anti-racist summer youth art and activism summer camp (a portion of which was used here in "A Swarm of Vitalities / A Swarm of Affinities,").
- 4 Lomawaima made this reference at the "Arizona at the Crossroads 2010" presentation sponsored by the University of Arizona's Faculty Governance and President's Office, University of Arizona, 10 September 2010.

- 5 These each refer to legislation proposed or considered in the state of Arizona. In 2010, controversial State Senator Russell Pearce considered introducing a bill that would have denied citizenship to Arizona-born children of undocumented immigrants. In 2013, Arizona lawmakers proposed a bill (SB 1045) that would have protected businesses if they wanted to deny transgender people access to the bathroom of their choice. Also in 2013, the Arizona legislature approved (though Governor Jan Brewer vetoed) SB 1062, which would have exempted people or entities from abiding by state laws if doing so violated their exercise of religion.

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## About the Authors

**Adela C. Licóna**, Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Arizona is affiliated faculty in Gender and Women's Studies, Institute of the Environment, and Mexican American Studies and serves on the Faculty Advisory Committee for the UA Institute for LGBT Studies. Licóna is co-editor of *Feminist Pedagogy: Looking Back to Move Forward* (JHUP, 2009) and author of *Zines In Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric*, (SUNY Press, 2012). Adela is co-founder of *Feminist Action Research in Rhetoric, FARR*, a group of feminist scholars engaged in public scholarship and community dialogue.

**Karma R. Chávez** is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Arts and affiliate in *Chican@ and Latin@ Studies and Gender and Women's Studies* at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She is co-editor of *Standing in the Intersection: Feminist Voices, Feminist Practices* (with Cindy L. Griffin, SUNY Press, 2012), and author of *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities* (University of Illinois Press, 2013). Karma is also a member of the radical queer collective *Against Equality*, an organizer for *LGBT Books to Prisoners*, and a host of the radio program, "A Public Affair" on Madison's community radio station, 89.9 FM WORT.

# Objects in Play: Rhetoric, Gender, and Scientific Toys

Jordynn Jack

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**Abstract:** *In the last 25 years, feminist scholars have worked tirelessly to recover women's rhetorical theories, productions, and actions that were historically excluded from histories of rhetoric. Rhetoric scholars, many of them feminist scholars, have also worked to address others who have been excluded from the rhetorical traditions. Here, I argue that children have also been largely excluded from rhetorical study. As the next step in the search for more inclusive rhetorical histories, I call here for feminist rhetors to consider rhetoric by children, rhetoric about children, and rhetoric for children. This article examines, in particular, how gendered identities develop in childhood. By studying childhood, we can see how gender and other hegemonic systems that constitute identities work, and we can identify potential disruptions and fissures in them. Since these systems are multivalent, to study them means to examine not only discourse and language but also material, temporal, and spatial arrangements. In this webtext, I conduct a comparative analysis of scientific toys and their marketing. I examine how these toys seek to inculcate a gendered habitus (visual, manual, or bodily ways of doing and being that are typically associated with a particular sex/gender), how marketing materials offer particular gendered roles for boys and girls playing with toys, and how toy makers have sought to develop social networks for boys and girls to participate in as users of the toy. I argue that, insofar as boys and girls are encouraged to play with different types of toys based on assumptions about their sexed abilities and gendered interests, they develop different kinds of knowledge, different ways of perceiving the world, and different kinds of skills. Yet, children's material compositions offer evidence of how children at play have the potential to disrupt, reproduce, or reconfigure a gendered habitus even as they are first learning them.*

**Keywords:** *rhetoric, gender, technology, objects, toys*



*Click on the image above to view the full article online.*

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## About the Author

**Jordynn Jack** is professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where she directs the Writing Program and teaches courses in rhetorical theory, rhetoric of science, women's rhetorics, writing in the natural sciences, and composition. Her scholarly work focuses on the rhetoric of science, women's rhetorics, and genre. She is the author of *Science on the Home Front: American Women Scientists in World War II* (University of Illinois Press, 2009) and *Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks* (University of Illinois Press, 2014), *How Writing Works* (Oxford, 2016), and an edited collection, *Neurorhetorics* (Routledge, 2012). Her articles have appeared in *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, and *Women's Studies in Communication*.

## Coalition of Who? Regendering Scholarly Community in the History of Rhetoric

Patricia Bizzell and K.J. Rawson

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**Abstract:** *This 20-minute video captures our conversation about issues regarding feminist and transgender rhetorics that we believe are crucial to the Coalition's future. Here we ask: Should the organization continue to provide spaces for people the world sees as women? Should it acknowledge that biological gender has become a fluid category, just as femininity did for feminists of Pat's generation? Should the organization redefine its mission to include anyone who self-identifies as feminist? Is "feminist" even the right word to use? In sum, our conversation explores how the wide-ranging scholarly work on women, feminism, and gender produced throughout the past few decades might impact the purpose and future of the Coalition.*

**Keywords:** *transgender rhetorics, women's rhetorics, feminists and feminism, queer theory*



*Click on the image above to view this video and transcript online.*

Perhaps best regarded as an extended thought experiment, this 20-minute video captures our conversation about issues we believe are crucial to the Coalition's future. This introduction offers some brief background to better contextualize how we, a founding member of the Coalition (Patricia Bizzell) and a rising young scholar (K.J. Rawson), came to be sitting together on May 19th,



2014 to discuss the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition.

When Pat Bizzell came to Holy Cross in 1978, no courses on literature by women were being offered. She taught the first course, and she also redesigned a traditional rhetoric course to include material on rhetorics of white women and men and women of color. Her colleagues showed little interest in intersections among literature, rhetoric, gender, and sexuality. Thus for Bizzell, the creation of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition in 1989, which provided easy access to like-minded researchers, was a long time coming. She was a founding member of the Coalition and remains committed to its prosperity.

Over the years, the faculty and the curriculum in the Holy Cross English Department diversified, and though queer theory was taught, it was not taught by Pat. She knew little about transgender rhetorics until what she remembers as a landmark moment in her thinking: when she read K.J. Rawson's essay in the collection he co-edited with Eileen Schell, *Rhetorica in Motion*. When K.J. became Pat's colleague in 2012, Pat looked for opportunities to learn from the younger scholar. And when the anniversary of *Peitho* approached, she realized this might be an opportunity to share her learning experience with others. Pat wanted to testify to K.J. about the importance that work and work spaces still defined as "women's" retained for her. At the same time, she wanted to learn more about how to honor the Coalition's tradition of inclusion. Could the Coalition widen its tent to welcome transgender experiences at large, and to include people who are male-identified, whether cis- or trans-?

At the same time, K.J. realized that he had little awareness of the situation of struggle that gave rise to the Coalition. In his graduate education, feminist work seemed firmly entrenched, mainstream, even old school—certainly not the kind of work that needed a protected space. He was keen to learn more about the context within which the Coalition was founded. Although he had never perceived the Coalition as welcoming the kind of research on transgender rhetorics that engages his scholarship, there were no other spaces in the field that readily lent themselves to scholarly community on this topic. Could the Coalition widen its circle of inclusion to provide an intellectual and mentoring community for scholars like K.J.? In light of the goals and purposes of the organization, would such a move even be desirable?

We didn't want to engage these issues via typical academic agonistic argument. We wanted to experience and record a scholarly yet informal conversation directed by theoretical conversations that are crucial to the center of the field. Should the organization continue to provide those safe spaces for people the world sees as women? Should it acknowledge that biological gender has become a fluid category, just as femininity did for feminists of Pat's

generation? Should the organization redefine its mission to include anyone who self-identifies as feminist? Is “feminist” even the right word to use for the scholarly and political agendas that still inspire passion in long-time Coalition members, if attracting new and diverse scholars is desired?

Without providing answers to these questions, we place them on the table in productive dialogue. Our aim is not to make an argument to point the Coalition in any particular direction, but rather to model the kinds of serious collaborative conversations that we hope can move the Coalition forward.

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## About the Authors

**Patricia Bizzell** has taught academic writing at the College of the Holy Cross since 1978, where she has also directed a writing-across-the-curriculum program and trained writing tutors. Her book *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* earned the National Council of Teachers of English Outstanding Book Award in 1992. Bizzell's scholarship and service to the profession won her the Exemplar Award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication in 2008. Among her current interests are global English literatures, translingual approaches to teaching English, and rhetoric and religion. A 1975 Ph.D. in English literature from Rutgers, Bizzell received a Masters in Jewish Studies from Hebrew College in 2013. Now a Distinguished Professor of English at Holy Cross, Bizzell is spending the 2015-16 academic year as the Cardin Professor of Humanities at Loyola University Maryland.

**K.J. Rawson** is an Assistant Professor of English at the College of the Holy Cross. With Eileen E. Schell, he co-edited *Rhetorica in Motion: Feminist Rhetorical Methods and Methodologies* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010) and his scholarship has appeared in *Archivaria*, *Enculturation*, *Present Tense*, *QED*, and several edited collections. He recently began work on the *Digital Transgender Archive*, an online digital repository of transgender-related historical materials.

## Enough Violence: The Importance of Local Action to Transnational Feminist Scholarship and Activism

Nicole Khoury

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**Abstract:** *This article provides a rhetorical analysis of a gender violence media campaign launched by KAFA, an NGO based in Lebanon, modeling the kind of empowerment possible when activists not only adopt but also adapt transnational resources to suit local contexts and local rhetorical situations. KAFA's gender violence campaigns have opened a cultural space for the public discussion of gender and women's rights in Lebanon, raising questions about the state's responsibility to protect its citizens from violence and redefining domestic violence as violence. KAFA's leadership includes adopting and adapting transnational examples for local use and also managing the media; they use print, visual, and social media simultaneously to keep the issue of gender violence at the forefront of public discourse. This article further provides guidelines relevant to feminist scholars doing transnational work at the intersection of multiple national constituencies and discourses, including public, legal, religious, and private ones. Transnational concepts, such as women's rights, are constantly negotiated within local contexts and used in grass-roots activism within marginalized communities as powerful language that can challenge oppressive discourses.*

**Keywords:** *gender, domestic violence, women's rights, family law transnational feminism, media campaign, Lebanon, Middle East*

In the winter of 2011, during a trip to Lebanon to visit family, I noticed a billboard that stood out among the many along the Beirut highway advertizing everything from perfume to lingerie. The billboard that caught my attention wasn't selling a product, however. Instead, it pictured of a pair of women's hands grasping off-white bed sheets, a wedding band clearly visible [Figure 1]. The text that accompanied this powerful image said simply in Arabic, "Rape is a crime, no matter who commits it," with the word *rape* in red text. This billboard intrigued me and not only because it offered a public service announcement rather than an ad. Sponsored by a group named KAFA: Enough Violence and Exploitation (kafa means "enough" in Arabic), the billboard promoted awareness of marital rape, which is an issue generally regarded as private in Lebanon and therefore seldom included in public discourse. Throughout my

stay that winter, I came to realize the billboard was part of a larger media campaign organized by KAFA to raise awareness about a law the group proposed in 2008 to protect women from family violence. Together, the proposed law and media campaign continued to incite vigorous public debate three years later, challenging normative definitions of gender and family as well as the patriarchal underpinnings of Lebanese society.

As I learned when I began researching KAFA, the organization has been leading women's rights efforts in Lebanon since 2005, and in doing so the group has continually—and successfully—negotiated the complexity of transnational human rights rhetorics. In practice, some NGOs serve less as mediators of transnational activism and more as one-directional conduits carrying transnational objectives into local contexts. Similarly, within the academy transnational feminist scholars often focus on how international ideas and values, especially legislation, translate into local settings. Yet, KAFA's activities illustrate the directionality of this thinking is as limiting as a strict focus on lawmaking. Laws alone cannot change a society, and in the case of women's rights in Lebanon, a single law would not be enough to protect women from family violence. As KAFA members knew, for such a law to pass, its purpose



Figure 1. "Rape is a crime, no matter who commits it. Do not distort the bill on the Protection of Women from Family Violence."

would need to seem exigent to a disparate audience, and for such a law to be effective, were it passed, it would need to be enforced by police willing to address and document each incident; it would have to be supported by doctors and hospitals willing to provide medical attention as well as further documentation, and it would need to be upheld by judges willing to rule in favor of women plaintiffs. Accordingly, KAFA focused as much on culture work as advocating legislation, and in doing so the group accomplished a great deal more than simply translating transnational ideas into a Lebanese key. As an example, I return to the billboard: anyone inclined to approach KAFA thinking strictly in transnational terms is likely not to see what is missing. Notably, KAFA's public service message mentions rape but not marital rape, and the absence of that one word speaks volumes.

When KAFA began consciousness-raising about domestic violence, the organization faced three main, site-specific obstacles that are easily lost within globalizing generalizations about human rights and transnational feminism. First, ahead of increasing public awareness of domestic violence, KAFA had to establish the existence of the problem, since there are few public records to consult. As Ghida Annani, Lebanese founder and director of ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality and former program coordinator of KAFA, points out, the failure of police and hospitals to report incidents of domestic violence compounds the problem of violence itself. "Every year more than 500 women seek help at women's centers in Lebanon," Anani explains, but there are only four safe houses that can accommodate a total of forty women ("Lebanon: Move"). Thus in 2007 KAFA collaborated with Oxfam and the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women to conduct a study, which involved 1415 Lebanese women of various ages, educational backgrounds, religions, and incomes. In total, 35% of this group reported having experienced domestic abuse (Usta et al. 208-19). These statistics are not widely known, and KAFA had to explicitly establish the existence of domestic violence as a problem before it could propose a law protecting women from it.

The second and third obstacles KAFA faced are interlocking, and they stem from the classification of domestic abuse as a private matter. This distinction relegates adjudication of domestic violence cases to religious rather than civil courts. In Lebanon, which is governed by a political system known as Confessionalism, all Lebanese citizens are identified by one of seventeen religious communities into which they were born, and each community has its own court, which is authorized to establish personal status laws for its members (Tabet 15). As a result, Lebanese women do not exist as a single political group; instead, they are legally and socially affiliated with their particular religious community. To campaign for effective state-sponsored laws against domestic violence within this system, KAFA had to do more than persuade

people to see their point of view. They had to redefine domestic violence and specifically marital rape as a civil concern, making the state responsible for protecting women against it. KAFA also had to shift national discourse from multiple private, religious spheres to the public sphere, and they had to constitute their audience as participants in a shared, secular court of public opinion. Given these challenges, KAFA's accomplishments between 2005, when they began actively campaigning against domestic violence, and the present are a testimony to the power of using local knowledge to make local change while in dialogue with transnational human rights activism.

In this essay, which showcases KAFA as an exemplar for transnational feminist scholars, including scholars of rhetoric and composition, it is important to understand the organization as part of an intricate web of transnational activists. In their campaign against domestic violence alone, KAFA established its objectives in collaboration with the UN and representatives from eleven Arab countries, including national and international NGOs. On the ground, KAFA worked not only with lawyers and legislators but also with a variety of grass-roots organizations. In this way, KAFA provides a counter to all-too common examples of structural inequality within transnational activism. As Arabella Lyon and Lester C. Olson caution, especially when human rights become an impetus for legal change, the resulting discourses can become "tools by which elites manage or control otherwise already disenfranchised or marginalized, ostensibly 'autonomous' individuals" and communities (206). As Lyon and Olson make clear, however, activists "can, at times, find human rights vocabularies to be powerful resources for revealing hypocrisy, making radical claims on elites for recognition, inclusion, and justice within communities and affirming their stature as fully human within dehumanizing and oppressive cultures" (206). I argue KAFA is exemplary in this regard because its members were able to engage and, importantly, transform available human rights vocabularies to advocate powerfully for human rights and women's rights specifically. As the 2011 billboard illustrates, they did so by negotiating social structures and audience expectations both rhetorically and multi-modally. As such, as I discuss below, KAFA models the kind of empowerment that is possible when activists not only adopt but also adapt transnational resources to suit local contexts as well as local rhetorical situations.

In naming KAFA an exemplar for transnational feminist scholars, including scholars in rhetoric and composition, I seek to highlight their rhetorical strategies and savvy rather than their success. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell warns, "In a social movement advocating controversial changes, failure to achieve specific goals will be common, no matter how able and creative the advocates, whether male or female" (Campbell qtd. in Buchanan and Ryan 8). Thus, she recommends, "critics must judge whether the choices made by the rhetors were

skillful responses to the problems they confronted, not whether the changes they urged were enacted" (8). Campbell's is the critical lens through which we should view KAFA's efforts, not least because at the time of publication the law the group proposed continues to be debated in Lebanon. Affirming rhetoric as a stochastic art and KAFA's particular artistry does not deny the desirability of their success. Passage of the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence stands to improve the lives of countless Lebanese women and their families. All the same, KAFA's initial and continuing success lies in its ability to challenge normative definitions of gender in a climate deeply entrenched in patriarchal, religious, and sectarian politics. Further, as part of the act of challenging, KAFA has opened a cultural space in Lebanon for the public discussion of gender and women's rights. Just as the organization continues to mediate between transnational and Lebanese legal discourses, KAFA has enabled a wide variety of constituents—activists, politicians, bloggers, and protestors—to participate in nation-wide deliberations that concern not only women's right to protection from family violence but also women's status as citizens in Lebanon.

## **The Letter of the Law**

The legislation KAFA proposed in 2008, the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence, combined with the initial responses it provoked created the occasion—and the need—for their media campaign. The law itself purported not only to criminalize all forms of family violence (i.e., physical, mental, verbal and economic) including marital rape, but also to place such crimes under the jurisdiction of civil rather than religious courts. In developing the draft law, KAFA worked with Association Najdeh, a secular Lebanese group that serves Palestinian women and refugees; Young Women's Christian Association, the oldest volunteer association for young women in Lebanon; the Beirut Women's Association of Lawyers, three judges, and a senior official of the International Security Forces (ISF) among others. The result of this collaboration was a law that included numerous provisions designed to protect women within the family, allowing victims to lodge criminal complaints free of charge, and it specified a range of sentences for convicted perpetrators, ranging from mandated anger-management counseling to fines and prison sentences. Further, the draft law included provisions to force convicted perpetrators to pay their victims' medical expenses plus housing and alimony, and it mandated the establishment of specially trained police units within the Internal Security Forces.

For all its apparent novelty, the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence was not new. In 1997, the Lebanese government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women or CEDAW, a treaty established by the United Nations 20 years earlier. A kind

of declaration of rights for women, CEDAW contained thirty articles, which enumerated different forms of discrimination against women the UN sought to prevent. Of course, as different countries around the world signed the accord they also modified it. In Lebanon's case, the government opted to exclude three articles by entering formal reservations against them: Article 9 concerning nationality laws; Article 16 concerning equality within marriage and family life; and Article 29 concerning arbitration between states by the International Court of Justice. While the finer points of each reservation are complex, the result, most simply put, was the codification of gender inequality in specific ways. In particular, by entering a reservation to Article 16, Lebanon denied men and women equality in state laws governing personal status (i.e., divorce, marriage, inheritance and child custody). At the same time, the Lebanese government opted to uphold several existing religious laws that discouraged women from seeking protection against domestic abuse from either state or religious courts. As a result, although Lebanon adopted CEDAW, the Lebanese state side-stepped many of the specific human rights issues CEDAW was designed to address, and it failed to provide women with protection from domestic violence.

A decade later, in 2008, KAFA proposed the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence, and two years after that the Lebanese Council of Ministers approved it. Following their decision, the draft law was sent to a parliamentary sub-committee, and almost immediately several religious authorities began to voice their objections to it, pressuring committee members to make amendments. In particular, critics of the law took issue with the term marital rape, claiming it was a foreign term that had no place in Lebanon's law books. In particular, Dar al-Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority, posted a direct response to the draft law on its website, *Naharnet*. They wrote: "Islam is very aware of and concerned with . . . resolving problems of poor treatment [of women]. . . but this should not happen by cloning Western laws that encourage the breakdown of the family and do not suit our society" ("Dar al-Fatwa"). Casting the term marital rape as a Western concept, Dar al-Fatwa refused to acknowledge such a crime existed in Lebanon. In fact, it could not exist in Sunni and other religious communities where marriage contracts granted husbands the right to their wives' bodies. Affirming this position, Dar al-Fatwa insisted the law would "have a negative impact on Muslim children . . . who [would] see their mother threatening their father with prison, in defiance of patriarchal authority, which [would] in turn undermine the moral authority" of not only fathers in individual families but also all men in society. From this perspective, the bill was not simply threatening; it was heretical. Thus, Dar al-Fatwa asserted: "We must continue to follow sharia (Islamic law) as concerns the Muslim family."



In response to public criticism by religious authorities, the parliamentary subcommittee made a series of amendments to KAFA's draft law. First, they changed the title from "Protection of Women and Family Members Against Domestic Violence" to "Protection of Women and Other Family Members Against Domestic Violence." Second, the subcommittee excised the phrase "marital rape" from the law along with any inference of the act. Initially, the draft law mandated legal repercussions for "Whoever forces his wife, with violence and threat, into sexual intercourse [is punished]." Article 3, on marital rape, was amended to state, "Whoever shall, with the purpose of claiming his/her marital right to intercourse, or because of the same, intentionally beat his spouse or harm the same, is punished pursuant to Articles 554-559 of the Penal Code." By striking direct reference to marital rape and replacing the phrase with "claiming his marital right," both the phrase and the issue were excluded.

Amendments to the draft law essentially gutted it, destroying its capacity to protect women against marital abuse. Along with the removal of the phrase "marital rape," another amendment specified if the law were to conflict with any religious community's personal status code, the code would prevail. Thus, the changes also confirmed the power of religious rather than state authorities to define marriage and marital relations. Rhetorically, the revised law served as clear reminder that gender issues and specifically women's rights function as a kind of fulcrum in the delicate balance of power between secular and religious authorities in Lebanon, with greater force being exerted by the latter. For KAFA to respond effectively, the organization could not focus exclusively on legislation. Instead, they had to go outside the political sphere and make public arguments capable of moving diverse audiences composed of individuals with wide-ranging, often conflicting subjectivities. To do so, and to make meaningful social and legal change, the draft law's success rested on the need to challenge the definition of marital rape as a foreign concept that does not exist in Lebanese society. KAFA contested the dynamics between different religions on one hand and the secular state on the other, while testing the perceived opposition between indigenous and foreign influences. KAFA's response to criticism of the draft law was to create a context and vocabulary for public sphere discourse about women's rights, domestic violence, and, ultimately, marital rape. Doing so required carefully crafted arguments that could withstand public scrutiny and challenge normative definitions of family and gender in Lebanon.

## **The Court of Public Opinion**

The billboard I noticed in the winter of 2011 was by no means the work of activists new to national campaigns. In fact, KAFA had been making public

arguments about human rights for more than six years before that billboard ran, and they had developed a robust repertoire for raising transnational issues in Lebanese contexts. KAFA was also not new to campaigning specifically for women's rights. In 2005 they launched the first annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, simultaneously taking up and reinventing an international effort by the same name. Begun by the United Nations in 1991, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence took place around the world every year between November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and December 10th, which is Human Rights Day. KAFA found opportunities for developing the international UN campaigns in site-specific ways. For example, the initial 16 Days campaign included UN initiatives, such as the Clothesline Project, a visual exhibition of a display of shirts on a clothesline designed by survivors of domestic violence or relatives of women killed by domestic violence, a visual representation of airing out dirty laundry—making public what was once considered private family issues. They also incorporated the Silent Witness National Initiative into the campaign, which is a visual exhibition of a series of cardboard female silhouette cutouts, each with the story of a woman killed by domestic violence. KAFA organized these visual exhibitions each year during the 16 Days of Activism campaign since 2005, narrating the stories of Lebanese victims of domestic violence. All of the above serves to challenge the normative discourse on gender and sexuality in Lebanon and open familiar institutions such as “family,” “public” and “private” to greater scrutiny than they were usually accorded. By challenging definitions of private and public issues, KAFA gradually changed public discourse on domestic violence, including marital rape.

These early actions set the stage for the campaign KAFA mounted during 16 Days of Activism in 2011. As deliberations about the draft law continued, KAFA committed to supporting the law through culture work: namely, they set out to create a shared sense of the need for state legislation to protect women from marital rape. To accomplish this goal, they had to make marital rape a publicly acknowledged, secular national problem rather than a private matter best addressed in religious courts or an imported, international and specifically Western bogey. As KAFA shifted attention from the legal courts to the court of public opinion, it would be an understatement to say theirs was a complex and difficult rhetorical task. What makes them an exemplary organization is not only the series of multimodal arguments they developed, including print, visual, and social media; it is also the way they served as leaders of activist efforts related to the draft law, engaging others ongoing public deliberation and action over an extended period of time.

To initiate their 2011 campaign, KAFA started 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence with a press conference for journalists from several

leading newspapers, including *Assafir*, *al Akhbar*, *al Mustaqbal*, and *The Daily Star*. They did not stop there, however. In order to bring attention to the draft law and the distortions the parliamentary subcommittee imposed on it, KAFA also marshaled a wide range of additional media. At the outset, their campaign included visual art and photography exhibitions such as the Clothesline Project; live public performances in cities across Lebanon, including Ashrafiyeh, Hamra, and Ein el Mreyseh; promotional media including eighteen billboards in different areas across Lebanon; and flyers distributed with popular newspapers *al Joumhouria*, *Assafir*, *Annahar*. The group also launched a social media campaign utilizing Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, and they built on opportunities that arose both during and well beyond the annual sixteen days of activism. Indeed, as the campaign gained momentum, KAFA took their message to unscripted television talk shows, scripted television dramas, and live theater—a *Symbolic Trial on Marital Rape* played in Babel theater, Hamra, and was covered by *The Huffington Post*, *al Hayat*, *L'Orient le Jour*, *The Daily Star*, *Women News* and *Assafir*.

As their campaign expanded, KAFA consistently used multimodal arguments to create public discourse about not only the draft law but also its most controversial subject, marital rape. Returning to the billboard as a representative example, the verbal message on display identifies rape as a crime, while the visual message of a woman's hands clutching the bedclothes, wedding band prominently displayed, signals both marital rape and the violent nature of the crime. This complex message is a response to the significant gap between state and religious understandings of domestic violence. While the billboard argues marital rape is a violent crime against women, it makes this argument in a society in which neither marital rape nor domestic violence can, in a technical sense, occur. In the eyes of religious courts, which are ruled by clerics, family relationships are deemed private, and many of the acts that what would elsewhere be classed as domestic violence are understood as the prerogative of male heads of household. Critics of the draft law followed this line of thinking in their arguments against the use of the term marital rape. They regarded marital contracts as consensual agreements to a private arrangement, which includes husbands' and wives' access to each other's bodies. Lisa Hajjar explains the end result: "In contexts where intrafamily violence is not prohibited by law (i.e., criminalized), perpetrators enjoy legal impunity," and impunity often leads to "a reluctance or resistance to recognizing and dealing with intrafamily violence *as violence*" (3).

By portraying marital rape as rape and thus a violent crime against women, KAFA's billboard works strategically against social norms. The billboard shows a pair of hands wearing a wedding band grasping bed sheets. The assumption is that the person who is being attacked in the photograph is in her marital

bed. It introduces the concept of rape as it occurs between two married people. The use of the visual argument on a billboard advertisement places the visual representation of the “private affair” literally on the streets, a rhetorical strategy of providing the audience with a voyeuristic window into the homes of Lebanese women. The visual representation of marital rape brings to light a private issue that has no name within the local context. But the audience cannot ignore the existence of human rights abuses when directly faced with it. By visually representing a term they are trying to introduce into the local context, KAFA makes it nearly impossible for authorities to argue against the existence of marital rape. What are we seeing in the billboard, if it is not marital rape, then? How can we ethically allow the violation of the body within the marital relationship? The assumption KAFA is making here is that we cannot turn a blind eye to such human rights violations. It is this message that enables KAFA to recast private relations between husband and wife as a matter of state concern and, even more importantly, state intervention. To make this argument, KAFA drew from an international human rights legal framework, specifically from CEDAW, which defines women’s rights and human rights, and human rights as universal. KAFA’s proposed draft law pursues these ideas by reframing rape as violence, and placing responsibility on the state for preventing it. Similarly, the public arguments KAFA put forward visualized and dramatized these ideas, while making them unavoidable.

Along with print media, social media in particular turned formerly private affairs into public ones, while the pervasiveness of KAFA’s messages created a sense of the pervasiveness of the problem of marital rape. KAFA’s social media campaigns were effective at reaching large groups of people, flooding public attention with messages about marital rape. The influence of social media can be measured quantitatively: During the 16 Days campaign in 2011, 3,155 people liked KAFA’s Facebook page, 543 people signed an online petition supporting the draft law, and 3,860 hits on YouTube videos of the TV spots. KAFA also indirectly influenced face-to-face events, televised events, written discourse, and political positions on the issue of domestic violence. Various individuals and activist organizations began taking public positions, deliberating on the issue, marching in the streets, organizing and protesting, writing blog posts, publishing opinion articles in newspapers, tweeting, commenting on Facebook, tagging (graffiti), and participating in a variety of other activities through the use of social media as a tool for activism that lasted well beyond the end of the 2011 campaign. The debate on marital rape also included political figures taking public positions on the draft law. For example, several public political figures came out in support of the campaign, and in support of the draft law, including parliament member and leader of the Lebanese Forces political party Samir Geagea and parliament member Elie Kayrouz. KAFA

promoted public discourse by managing the media and capacitating other organizations for participation, providing information to journalists, activists, and public figures, and encouraging them to deliberate on the issue.

## Think Globally, Act Locally

Within the transnational network of human rights activists of which KAFA was a part, the United Nations was only one source of support. KAFA also turned frequently to more immediate neighbors in the Global South, particularly Arab nations involved in the social movements now known collectively as the Arab Spring. Together the revolutions, uprisings, and large-scale protests that swept through more than two-dozen countries between 2010 and 2012 created a new context for human rights advocacy. As Ghida Anani, explains, “[T]he power of people [today]—women and men—on Arab streets is palpable. We, the rights holders, are now holding our governments, the duty bearers, accountable... If toppling a government is possible, what is not possible?” (Amani 2). This question resonated through KAFA’s activities, even while their relationship to the Lebanese government was substantially different. Unlike protesters who worked to topple corrupt governments, KAFA sought to strengthen the state by authorizing the government to protect women against family violence. They raised questions about the state’s responsibility to protect its citizens from violence. KAFA was able to redefine domestic violence *as violence*. Thus while Arab Spring protesters expanded human rights discourse in one way, by including the protection of individuals from their own governments, KAFA sought greater government protections for Lebanese citizens, particularly women, in the form of the draft law. Nonetheless, KAFA learned a great deal from Arab Spring protesters, adapting and adopting some of their examples to suit their own rhetorical purposes.

KAFA’s repurposing is nowhere more in evidence than in the ads that ran during the 16 days campaign in 2011, created to shame those members of parliament who revised the draft law. The democratic currents that took place in 2011 in the Middle East illustrated that political figures can and should be held accountable for human rights violations, and the ability to achieve national unity is through popular protests. For example, the toppling of Egypt’s government after thirty years of dominance demonstrated that popular protests are able to challenge the government and change the political landscape. As a result of the Arab Spring uprisings, the discourse on human rights has broadened to include individual security from one’s own government and representatives. KAFA’s rhetorical strategy is to accuse the government of harming its own citizens through their refusal to pass the draft law. By doing so, KAFA does not fall into simplistic “men as perpetrators of violence” and “women

as victims” analytic that often pervades discussions of gender. KAFA instead places the responsibility on the state to protect citizens from individual harm: women’s rights are violated by individual men, and also by the Lebanese government who refuses to protect them. Following this strategy, KAFA put up billboards featuring portraits of all eight members of the parliamentary subcommittee assigned to work on the draft law. The text that accompanied the portraits included two concise statements, which together issued a stern accusation: “Marital rape is a crime” and “The law is your reflection” [See Figure 2]. By using shame as a rhetorical strategy, KAFA locates the responsibility of the protection of women on the state, instead of the individual perpetrator of domestic violence. KAFA argues for the recognition of women’s citizenship and for the responsibility of the state to protect women. The rhetorical strategy of public shaming in the billboard holds individual political figures accountable for the distortion of the law. The “your” in this public service announcement refers to the eight individual parliament members, placing blame on the eight people responsible for passing the law. By identifying the eight members on the subcommittee in the Lebanese media, KAFA took up a rhetorical strategy used during the Arab Spring to communicate shame and honor, a rhetorical move drawing on discourse that resonates within the local culture.

The PSAs were placed on TV and on busses whose route took the message across Beirut. The act of public shaming and identification of the term marital

rape with the individuals responsible was a purposeful means of thrusting these individuals into the public spotlight. The purpose of using the portraits was to identify those individuals who can provide further information and reasoning for the lack of protection of women, putting them on the spot, so to speak. Several lawmakers and religious authorities attempted to censor the ads to protect the individuals identified in the



Figure 2. “Dear representative... Marital rape is also a crime! The law is your reflection! Do not distort the bill on the Protection of Women from Family Violence.”

campaign, but KAFA refused to take down the advertisements, maintaining that the media plays an essential role in civil society (“Stop Airing”). As a result of the PSA, two of the subcommittee members, Shant Janjanian and Nabil Noula, stepped down from the subcommittee so as not to be associated with others who were stalling the draft law. They were then able to publicly address the issue, which they were unable to do while they were on the parliamentary subcommittee.

KAFA's repurposing and use of shaming as a rhetorical strategy was effective in the Lebanese context because of the political and religious landscape. KAFA used the portraits to elicit statements from the parliament members that are derived from religious ideology, in order to highlight their inconsistencies with the liberal ideological foundations of the Lebanese government. This rhetorical strategy is particularly effective in a public sphere such as Lebanon because arguments refuting marital rape as a crime in the public sphere reveal the contradiction between such views, based in religious ideology, and the liberal values on which the Lebanese government is grounded. This rhetorical strategy associates individual parliament members with religious ideologies in order to discredit their arguments against the term marital rape. This strategy casts the parliament members as holding beliefs that are inconsistent with human rights values and congruent with religious conservative ideologies, which have no place in the Lebanese penal code.

KAFA's leadership included not only adopting and adapting transnational examples for local use but also managing the media. In this regard, KAFA operated as a behind-the-scenes tour de force, working to encourage public deliberations about the draft law among numerous interlocutors. Not only did KAFA play a pedagogical role, sharing information and rhetorical strategies with other organizations; KAFA also directed the Lebanese media to draft law advocates ready and willing to play a role in national deliberations. For example, a popular Lebanese activist group called Nasawiya publically debated the law in both the Lebanese and international media. One such public debate aired on Al Jazeera's online streaming channel, AJ Stream. Nadine Mouawad from Nasawiya and Souhay Nouh from Dar Al-Fatwa appeared to debate the issue, moderated by international human rights lawyer and journalist Bec Hamilton. Nadine's arguments for the domestic violence bill echoed those KAFA had established throughout the 16 Days of Activism Campaign. By providing activists with the arguments and information to publicly debate the issue, KAFA publically shared responsibility for pushing the draft law through parliament.

As public discourse about the draft law grew, so, too, did the range of arguments in circulation. On one hand, the proliferation reflected the many perspectives of people who supported the law; on the other hand, some



*Figure 3. Fight Rape (Graffito).*



*Figure 4. Occupy Beirut (Graffito).*

emerging arguments threatened to diffuse the focus of public discourse by merging arguments for the draft law with arguments about other issues. For example, as the debate on domestic violence waged on during the end of 2011 and well into 2012, activists began to spray paint images associated with the cause on walls around Beirut. One of the most common images was a woman shouting with her fist in the air [See Figure 3]. The accompanying slogan, "Fight Rape," implies more than an attempt to pass the draft law. The iconic image of a raised fist and its accompanying English-language command connected the Lebanese fight to change the government to a history of populist activism around the world, particularly the Black Power movement. While sometimes this figure appeared alone, it also frequently appeared near two other notable images. In one, protestors used the colors of the Lebanese flag to highlight the English-language slogan "Occupy Beirut," connecting protests over the draft law with the Occupy Wall Street movement, which began in New York City in 2011 and addressed widespread economic and structural inequalities in the United States [See figure 4].

The Occupy Beirut and the Occupy Wall Street movements were both inspired by the social media-fueled Arab Spring and connected in their call for addressing structural inequalities. The other prominent graffiti featured a question and answer posed in Arabic, which together openly opposed



Lebanon's sectarianism [See Figure 5]. Asking, "When will the civil war end?" the graffiti answers: "When the sectarian regime falls" [See Figure 5]. This rhetorical move associates the Lebanese civil war, which took place over the course of fifteen years between 1975-1990, with the sectarian political structure. This argument is one that has been hotly debated in Lebanese public discourse since the beginning of the civil war, and as such is a logical extension of KAFA's arguments for the domestic violence law. Its placement next to the "Fight Rape" logo and the "Occupy Beirut" logo associates the arguments against domestic violence with the sectarian political system, clearly making the connection between violence against women and the government system that permits it. By engaging in these rhetorical acts, the association of images and words paint a larger picture of political corruption that directly affects the status of women, drawing from secular/sectarian dichotomies that shape the discourse on gender violence.

KAFA's campaign illustrates the way public discourse about the draft law, legislation ostensibly focused on a transnational feminist goal, was never divorced from the local national context in which it circulated. The campaign illustrates, too, how the issue of protecting women from domestic abuse could be connected to other Lebanese issues, whether recent ones such as the international Occupy movement or longstanding ones

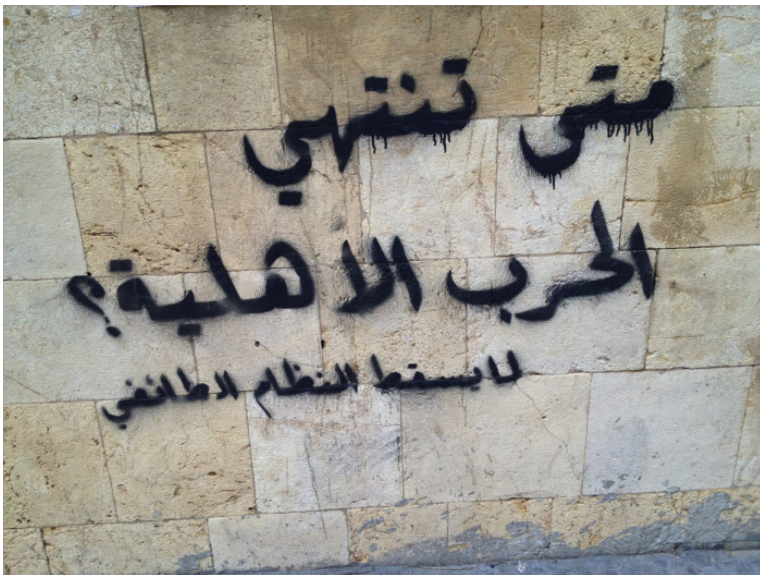


Figure 5. "When will the civil war end? When the sectarian regime falls."

such as criticisms of the sectarianism structured by Confessionalism. For decades many Lebanese have argued for a unified civil law as the solution, and KAFA's campaign was shaped by it as much as it gave those older arguments new shape. As one Lebanese blogger explained: "We have to start with the creation of a civil personal status law in Lebanon. Only that can lay the foundations (legal, civic and institutional) and structure to debate and regulate matters like marital rape. Anything else is putting the carriage before the horse" (Hamoui). So while KAFA's campaign did not directly address the lack of a unified civil law, by allowing the campaign on marital rape to be shaped by local bloggers, political figures, and activists, it provided opportunities for others to make the logical connection.

## Reality Check

The parliamentary sub-committee completed their revisions of the draft law in August 2012, reinserting the term marital rape and establishing mechanisms for women to report abuse as well as special training for a section of the International Security Forces (ISF). However, this version of the law does not actually criminalize marital rape. Instead, according to KAFA, the new law ensures "the harm that accompanies it" would be penalized but not the act itself ("Joint Committees Approve"). This would mean that marital rape is not considered a crime, but the effects of the violence can be penalized. One year after the draft law was approved it sat languishing in parliament due to other political issues that kept parliament from meeting. During this time, KAFA continued their advocacy efforts and launched a new campaign on July 5, 2013: "I haven't died, but many others have." This campaign featured the testimonies of two women, Rim Zakaria and Zainab Awada, both of whom survived murder attempts by their husbands (Merhi). These women's video-recorded testimonies were featured in media outlets across Lebanon. Addressing the parliamentary speaker of the house, Nabih Berri, directly, these women urged him to put the draft law at the forefront of the agenda. Their testimonies aired on television only two days before Berri complied, although parliament was at a standstill due to other political issues. However, it wasn't until the death of Roula Yaacoub became headline news that the draft law was finally approved.

Roula Yaacoub, 31, was found comatose in her home in Akkar, Halba, on July 8 2013, and she later died in a local hospital. According to her family, she was severely beaten by her husband Karam al-Bazzi, but a 13-page report, including an autopsy claiming Yaacoub died from an aneurysm, cleared him of any wrongdoing (Rainey). The controversy that unfolded through intense media coverage was tragically kairotic. It occurred while public discussions about domestic violence were prominent alongside stories about parliamentary deliberations over the draft law. Against this backdrop, Yaacoub's family

refused to accept the results of the autopsy and requested to have her body exhumed. Roula's mother, Leila Khoury, was widely quoted as insisting "she would not rest until the criminal was punished" (Abou Jaoude). Eventually, neighbors came forward to report that al-Bazzi regularly beat Yaacoub and their five children. As the story was reported over and over again, Yaacoub became a nationally known martyr, standing in for the 24 women killed that year alone by their spouses (Aziz). As pictures of her smiling with her daughters in her lap circulated, she also became the face of KAFA's campaign. Thus when a judge ordered Bazzi to be released from jail, the community as well as the country reacted with outrage. The victim's family and KAFA members worked together to organize protests in her hometown, while activists were protesting in Beirut.

It is difficult to say whether Roula Yaacoub ultimately got the justice her family and thousands of others sought for her. On one hand, the draft law was approved on July 22, 2013 (Ayoub), and a parliamentary human rights committee met the next day to discuss its implementation, calling it a "first step with many positive aspects" ("Rights Committee"). On the other hand, her husband was recently acquitted of all charges on January 25, 2014. Zoya Rouhana, KAFA's director, called Yaacoub's case "an issue of justice," stating: "This case has not been given the special attention it should have been given. There has been some sort of conspiracy, which has led to this conclusion" (Rainey). By contrast, the death of Manal Assi almost a year later garnered a different response. Assi was bludgeoned to death with a pressure cooker by her husband, Mohammad al-Nhaily. During his fatal attack, al-Nhaily fought off neighbors as well as the Civil Defense ambulance, threatening to shoot anyone who tried to stop him (Majed). At trial, Assi's daughters informed the public their mother had been beaten on previous occasions, and the judge hearing the case reacted. Unlike the judge in Yaacoub's case, Judge Fouad Murad issued an indictment against al-Nhaily, accusing him of premeditated murder and recommending the death penalty.

Although Murad's decision was unprecedented (Khraiche), the fight to protect women from domestic violence in Lebanon is far from over. The draft law, while in effect, remains watered down, and the case against al-Nhaily remains in criminal court today. Meanwhile, protests continue, ensuring the public remains aware of domestic violence and the inadequacy of the current law. In March 2014, only a month after Assi's murder, KAFA organized a protest just outside the Justice Palace in Beirut in observation of International Women's Day. Over 5,000 people participated in an event acknowledged as "one of the largest [protests] in recent memory on a social issue in Lebanon" (Qiblawi). When Maya Ammar, a spokesperson for KAFA, commented on this event, she connected the two women's deaths, and she credited public discourse with

playing a key role in the cultural change represented by the protests. She said: "I think people are really changing in their attitudes about this subject, and I think this is all because Roula Yaacoub's family broke the silence about it" (Qiblawi). To ensure the issue remained both prominent and exigent, KAFA launched a series of television PSAs about the law in conjunction with 16 Days of Activism in 2014. Known as the Zalfa campaign, these PSAs provided information on the rights and protections women are afforded under the law number 293 for the protection of women against domestic violence.

One of the most important elements of KAFA's success in raising awareness and changing public discourse on domestic violence is their responsiveness. Key to their advocacy strategy is their ability to immediately respond to unforeseen events, such as Yaacoub and Assi's murders, and limitations to the draft law, such as the watered-down version amended by the parliament subcommittee and religious cleric's rejection of the term marital rape. As another example, at the end of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in 2011, KAFA was preparing to their campaign, "I haven't died, but many others have," and while the Zalfa campaign aired on television, they worked with ISF officers to prepare them for responding to incidents of domestic violence effectively. As events unfolded, KAFA effectively continued to organize around the issue of domestic violence. They used print, visual and social media simultaneously, keeping the issue at the forefront of public discourse.

## Global Positioning

Considered in local national context, KAFA's efforts to advocate not only for women's right to protection from domestic violence but also for women's rights in general have been effective, whether efficacy is measured in the passage of the draft law, even in its diluted state, or in relation to changing legal and social practices. Considered from alternative locations, how should we evaluate their impact? As scholars how should we approach further study? Particularly as feminist scholars of rhetoric and composition, what can and should we glean from KAFA's example?

As a transnational feminist scholar having lived in the Middle East, my approach to feminist issues is nuanced; we need to pay better attention to the ways we are shaped by competing and often conflicting discourses and to the assumptions under which we operate. However, as a Lebanese citizen, I am also aware of the ways such an approach to issues of identity often creates fractures of communities, dividing a society instead of providing opportunities for coalitions. As a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country, Lebanon's various religious, cultural, and social communities attempt to negotiate definitions of gender roles within a climate deeply entrenched in political strife, kin-based communal relations, and patriarchal structures of power.

Middle Eastern states “have imagined their citizens to be differentiated by religious attachments and primordial identities and loyalties preceding the state” (Joseph 11). As such, the nation is seen as a series of smaller communities. Muslim and Christian communities and religious institutions have elevated the religious status to that of civil status. By doing so, they have supported a patriarchal structure and engendered citizenship (Joseph 11). In addition, such a fractured public discourse and sense of identification poses problems for building coalitions across communities. To return to the billboard at the beginning of this essay—my reaction was one of awe. How would KAFA be able to form coalitions for women’s rights across the fractured sectarian communities that plague Lebanon? How would such coalitions successfully challenge normative definitions of gender and family in Lebanon?

Turning collectively to KAFA as feminist scholars of rhetoric and composition, we do well to take up the framework offered by Wendy Hesford and Eileen Schell. In “Configurations of Transnationality: Locating Feminist Rhetorics,” they write:

At this historical juncture transnational feminism might best be characterized as an interdisciplinary analytic, attentive to the constraints of neoliberalism and to the power differentials and inequalities that shape geopolitical alignments. (467)

Further, they note, “we are interested in how transnational publics, which emerge as processes, are bound to and intersect with national publics and their discourses” (Hesford and Schell 467). Their approach highlights the recursive relationship not only between transnational and local national discourses, but also among the legal, religious, and public-cultural discourses that animate the local scene. Certainly, all of the latter, local discourses come into play when Lebanon is the subject of study and human rights, particularly women’s rights, are the focus. As I have argued throughout this essay, to understand the complexity of such situations and to appreciate the rhetorical acumen of a group like KAFA, transnational feminist scholars must do more than trace the dissemination of transnational ideas, practices, and laws into local national contexts. Instead, scholars must examine the ways in which local contexts inform activists’ reinvention of available resources, including legislation as well as advocacy and protest praxes. To that end, drawing on what I have learned from my study of KAFA, I offer the following heuristic as a complement to the framework Hesford and Schell provide through their call to transnational work. These guidelines are especially relevant to feminist scholars doing transnational work at the intersection of multiple national constituencies and discourses, including public, legal, religious, and private ones.

**Analyze legal examples in conjunction with related culture work, including activism, artistic production, and so on.** As Sally Engle Merry argues in *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, in order for transnational concepts of human rights to translate into social change, they need to “become part of the consciousness of ordinary people around the world” (3). By using transnational concepts of human rights to argue for women’s rights, groups like KAFA have had to address the definitions of human rights within the local contexts. In the case of Lebanon, arguments between KAFA and religious communities centered on definitions of the term “marital rape.” KAFA focused on pushing legislation to protect women by redefining domestic violence as violence against a citizen of the state, taking it out of the private family context. In order to push for such legislation, it is important that normative, local definitions of gender are challenged, in addition to cultural definitions of marriage, family, and sexuality. KAFA’s work, while unsuccessful at the level of the law since the draft proposed is not the one that eventually passed, is a shining example of the way in which local culture can be challenged.

**Pay attention to the nature and directionality of the dissemination of transnational ideas and practices.** As the example of KAFA illustrates, transnational concepts, such as human rights, are constantly being negotiated within local contexts and used in grassroots activism within marginalized communities as powerful language that can challenge oppressive discourses. As transnational feminist scholars, we need to critically examine the systemic forms of inequalities that operate globally connecting these forms of misogynistic violence in women’s lives by tracing the relationship between transnational public and national publics. One way of doing this is by following the process of implementing human rights concepts into the local, as in the example of KAFA’s campaigns. However, as I have illustrated throughout this essay, tracing legal framework within local contexts limits our understanding of how local activist groups shape and are shaped by larger transnational social movements. As researchers interested in transnational feminist rhetorics, we need to pay attention to the local reinvention of transnational ideas, and consider not only the transfer of ideas and practices from global organizations and powers (i.e., the United Nations, the United States) to individual nations but also the exchange of ideas and practices between different countries and regions. KAFA’s campaigns illustrate the transfer of ideas and practices are open to influence by transnational social movements that resonate with the larger population, such as the popular uprisings during the Arab Spring that changed transnational human rights discourse.

**Approach discourse broadly, paying attention to verbal and visual language in use as well as media praxes.** In order to best reach a larger population, KAFA’s consistent use of media in all its forms and their continuous

campaigning across all platforms provided an effective approach to challenging dominant discourses on gender and domestic violence in Lebanon. The 2011 media campaign helped propel the normative understanding of gender into the public sphere, providing opportunities for a once-private issue to be debated publicly among citizens of the state. KAFA encouraged deliberative oratory because it was able to benefit a larger population, instead of making their arguments heard only within a judicial context. KAFA used a variety of media for their campaigns. Print media enabled them to include journalists in the public discussions and distributed flyers with local newspapers. KAFA was careful to pay attention to the written language used in their media campaigns, as evidenced by their “marital rape” billboard, and the visual arguments, as illustrated by their television ads and talk show deliberations. They used print, visual, and social media as pedagogical tools, to propose arguments, to challenge cultural definitions, to disseminate information, and to provide opportunities for the Lebanese public to participate in the public deliberations.

***Place feminist issues at the fore.*** Transnational feminism has often focused on how international legal language can be translated into the local to affect change in the legal systems of nation-states. Rita Sabat calls this the “process of norm diffusion” (23). In her work on norm diffusion in campaigns on violence against women in Lebanon, Sabat observes that successful campaigns involve reframing international norms in ways that do not disrupt the patriarchal honor system embedded in local culture. In other words, although international norms are redefined within in a local context, they are often met with such resistance that they are redefined to fit within sociocultural structural inequalities to the extent that their potential for substantive social change is greatly diminished.

An example is that KAFA’s 2011 campaign defined gender violence as violence against married Lebanese women. However, violence against women in Lebanon is not confined to married women, and certainly not directed only towards Lebanese women. Violence against migrant workers, for example, is neatly kept out of KAFA’s campaign, and instead addressed in a separate campaign. KAFA’s campaigns to challenge discourses on gender remain within the structure of the family and within normative heterosexual gendered definitions, without taking into account the marginalization of homosexual and transgendered communities, and the sex industry in Lebanon. This does not mean that KAFA has not addressed violence in the migrant community and rights for migrant workers. In fact, it is one of the important causes that KAFA champions. However, violence in these marginalized communities is addressed in separate campaigns. While strategically such separations make sense—laws that protect migrant workers are separate from those that

address violence against Lebanese citizens.—it also prevents coalition building around gender-focused anti-violence initiatives.

The diffusion of activist efforts also has a negative impact on how Lebanon is regarded both internally and externally. As campaigns against gender-based violence of all kinds proliferate, the message they send is that Lebanon is a culture of unstoppable misogyny. This kind of characterization feeds stereotypes at the same time it limits national and international activists' ability to address systemic structures of violence, which operate both locally and globally. The violent acts against women that occur in Lebanon may be culturally situated but they are also not unique to Lebanon alone. They do not happen because Lebanon is "backwards" or "culturally violent" as a result of the 15-year civil war. They do not happen because of Islam and people's religious affiliations. Gender violence systemically occurs in many parts of the world with little or no legal repercussions in many nations. KAFA's campaigns address the larger global structures that permit such violence, while also addressing the local institutions and discourses on gender. Importantly, KAFA never positions "Lebanese men as oppressors" and "woman as the oppressed." Instead of placing blame on individual men, or Lebanese culture, they address the absence of protections of women by the government. In doing so, they rightfully accuse the Lebanese government of being complicit in the violation of women's human rights. By addressing the larger political and government structure, KAFA places blame on the larger institutional inequalities that give rise to human rights violations, successfully challenging systems of oppression.

As transnational scholars, we need to acknowledge the challenges groups like KAFA face in cultural, social and politically rich contexts such as Lebanon. We need to pay attention to how groups like KAFA form coalitions across fractured communities of identification. In the Middle East context such as Lebanon, where regional and religious identifications are often stronger than national identities, successful campaigning should include careful attention to culture work, attention to competing discourses, and attention to the effectiveness of transnational movements that may resonate within local practices. Further research on the nuances of how this process is employed through various mediums in differing locations and political landscapes may help us further understand the complexity of how discourses are shaped on the ground. As KAFA has illustrated, transnational concepts, such as women's rights, are constantly being negotiated within local contexts and used in grassroots activism within marginalized communities as powerful language that can challenge oppressive discourses. Working within a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and often fractured political climate, KAFA is a shining example of grassroots activism that has formed coalitions across political and religious identifications to emphasize the importance of feminist issues.



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## About the Author

**Nicole Khoury** earned her PhD in Rhetoric, Composition, and Linguistics from Arizona State University. She currently teaches writing at the University of Illinois, Chicago and serves as a member of the Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession. Her dissertation, (Re) Positioning Lebanese Feminist Discourse: A Rhetorical Study of Al-Raida (Pioneer) Journal, 1976-1985, recovers foundations of modern Middle Eastern feminist discourses as they are articulated throughout the first decade of the journal's publication. Her research focuses on Middle Eastern women's rhetorical strategies and discourse, with particular interest on the intersections between gender and religion in the Middle Eastern context, Islamic feminist discourse, and public arguments for gender equality. Recent publications include "Religiously Gendered: Online Political Discourse the 2011 Egyptian Revolution" in *Global Women Leaders: Studies in Feminist Political Rhetoric*; "Lebanese Women and Non-Violent Activism During the Civil War" with Rita Stephan in *Women, War and Violence*, and "Lebanese Feminist History: Rose Ghurayyib's Editorial Letters in Al-Raida from 1976-1985," in *Women and the Arab Spring: Resistance, Revolution, Reform*. Her digital project, *Pioneering Feminisms in Lebanon and the Middle East: A Timeline, Reading Al-Raida for Histories of Arab Feminism*, appears in the *New Work Showcase for the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition*.

# Lifting as We Climb: The Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition 25 Years and Beyond

Alexandra Hidalgo

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**Abstract:** *This 20-minute documentary showcases interviews with founding members and past presidents of the Coalition in order to tell the story of the organization's first quarter of a century. The film details the Coalition's origins, successes, challenges, and goals for the next quarter of a century. By allowing viewers to watch and listen to the women who have made the Coalition's journey possible, "Lifting as We Climb" provides a personal and lively version of the organization's history and its hopes and aims for the future.*

**Keywords:** *documentary, film, history, origins, future, mentoring tables, social media, digital spaces*



*Click on the image above to view this video and transcript online.*

This 25-minute documentary seeks to both capture the history of the Coalition and provide viewers with an experiential sense of what being a member of the Coalition today looks, sounds, and feels like. We may never be able to gaze into Sappho's eyes or lose ourselves in the cadence of Sojourner Truth's speech, but history today is brimming with recorded images and voices. As with most historical developments, this is a mixed blessing. Along with the extraordinary power of seeing and hearing women who have lived through

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the Coalition's history share their stories comes a number of limitations. Chief among them, perhaps, is the inability of a short documentary to go into the depth that a book or even an article invites. There is also a limitation in the number of voices a short film like this one can represent.

When planning this project, the Coalition's Advisory Board provided me with a list of 40 potential women to interview, all amazing and, no doubt, able to contribute fascinating stories about their involvement in the organization. From this list, I chose six. With this number of interviewees, a short film can display a variety of perspectives while also inviting us to know the women speaking. We can experience their personalities and views in a way that will hopefully linger, as if we had them over to our homes, our living room reverberating with not just their stories but also their essence.

When selecting participants for this project, I wanted to feature a mix of generations, races, and types of involvement with the organization. As a result, I interviewed four Coalition presidents—Kathleen Welch, Andrea A. Lunsford, Joyce Irene Middleton, and Elizabeth Tasker-Davis. This group stretches all the way from our founding president to the current one (at the time of filming). I also interviewed two women, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Suzanne Bordelon, who, while not having served on the board, have been faithful attendees of Coalition meetings and have supported the organization in a multitude of ways throughout their careers.

Besides sharing these six women's experiences, the documentary also provides viewers with a first row seat at the 25th Anniversary Gala. While viewers will not be able to taste the delicious cake that was served to attendees, they will hear the sound of dozens of forks on plates, laughter, and applause as Coalition members and their guests enjoy the event and their celebratory dessert. More importantly, viewers will see parts of the Gala interspersed with the interviews, so that the Gala presentations of past Coalition presidents Barb L'Eplattenier, Shirley Wilson Logan, and Nancy Myers also add their thoughtful and witty voices to the film.

While the camera spends much time focused on the podium and the speakers, it also explores the audience. Throughout the documentary, there are images of the group discussion that followed the session's main speakers, the mentoring tables, and informal conversations scattered across the room: all aspects of what makes the Coalition valuable to its members. The documentary closes with a discussion of the future, both from the interviewees and Gala presenters. The dreams and challenges captured here include working to increase the Coalition's diversity in various ways—from race to gender to place of birth. How do we continue to reach academics while also stepping outside the ivory tower? How do we cross national boundaries to find international publics?

In addition, as the film shows, great hope is placed on rethinking our scholarship to include digital media such as moving images, podcasts, and web texts. Of course digital texts by themselves do not ensure wide audiences. Figuring out how to disseminate such texts through new types of scholarly publication, social media channels, and whatever digital worlds are dreamt up by the technological witches of the future—and, yes, we need more women developing digital platforms!—may be just as crucial as creating the texts themselves if we are to reach beyond our traditional ranks and lift ever higher as we climb in the next quarter of a century.

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## About the Author

*Alexandra Hidalgo is an assistant professor of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures at Michigan State University. Her documentary work has screened at national and international festivals and her video essays are forthcoming in Enculturation and Computers and Composition Digital Press. She is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of agnès films, an online community of women filmmakers that fosters and helps promote feminist and woman-centered films and videos.*



## From Installation to Remediation: the CWSHRC Digital New Work Showcase

Heather B Adams, Erin M. Andersen, Geghard Arakelian, Heather Branstetter, Lavinia Hirsu, Nicole Khoury, Katie Livingston, LaToya Sawyer, Erin Wecker, and Patty Wilde with Trish Fancher, Tarez Samra Graban, and Jenn Fishman

**Abstract:** *This website contains presentations from the Coalition's session at CCCC 2015 that showcase emerging scholarship and "new work" in feminist research, histories of women, and studies of gender and sexuality in our field.*

**Keywords:** *Remediation, emerging scholarship, installation, digital scholarship, feminist research, histories of women, gender, sexuality.*



*Click on the image above to view showcase of work online.*

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