

“Making It” in the Academy through Horizontal Mentoring

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Abstract: *This essay productively engages the exigencies facing early-career feminist academics by developing and detailing an approach to horizontal mentoring. This approach emerged through our own horizontal mentoring relationship, which we situate in relation to feminist scholarship on mentoring within rhetoric and composition as well as other fields. We share seven specific practices for horizontal mentoring.*

Keywords: *feminist mentors, peer mentoring, horizontal mentoring, professional development*

Early-career feminist scholars confront a range of challenges as we work toward “making it” in the academy. As Karen Kelsky of the popular website *The Professor Is In* notes in her book by the same name, graduate students go on the job market “in an era of Olympics-level competition for today’s almost nonexistent tenure track slots” (*Professor* 25). But even for those who do obtain the positions they desire, the challenges have only just begun. The “academic job search” is so grueling, Kelsky explains, “that even when it is successful, and you get the coveted tenure track position, you cannot stop feeling anxious, inadequate, panicked and insecure” (“Job” n. pag.).¹ The challenges of navigating new academic positions are particularly pronounced for “academics from marginalized backgrounds,” as Eric Anthony Grollman documents in his blog, *Conditionally Accepted*. Conditionally accepted scholars may include those “who are women, of color, lesbian, trans*, bisexual, gay, queer, disabled, working-class or poor, immigrants, fat, religious minorities, and/or single parents” (n. pag.). These academics, in addition to negotiating roles new to all early-career scholars, “are faced daily with the difficult tension between academia’s narrow definition of success and their own politics, identities, needs, happiness, and health” (n. pag.). Seeking out guidance on how to navigate such tensions, early-career scholars find no shortage of published advice. Quite the

1 For further discussion of “emotional labor” and the academic job market in rhetoric and composition, see Sano-Franchini. Guidance on navigating the job market can be found in Kelsky; Hume; Mack, Watson, and Camacho.

contrary, Kelsky and Grollman's sites are incredible resources—and, as this essay moves forward, we will draw from and share a range of other books and articles that offer useful advice.

However, as early-career academics consult this advice, we are confronted doubly with the challenge of wading through a virtual onslaught of potentially overwhelming and sometimes conflicting information. Published guidance is necessarily generalized and, when graduate students and new faculty encounter it in relative isolation, information that was meant to be helpful may simply exacerbate anxieties. Once we have become familiar with the general guidance, the real challenge becomes finding ways to adapt that advice in order to apply it within very specific rhetorical situations. These situations vary based on not only our own positioning, as Grollman details, but also the specificities of our institutions, departments, programs, colleagues, and students.

With the goal of productively engaging the anxieties faced by early-career feminist academics, this essay offers one approach for attempting to navigate these specificities: "horizontal mentoring."² We understand horizontal mentoring, quite simply, as mentoring (the offering of help, guidance, and training) that is carried out within a horizontal rather than hierarchical relationship (between peers, as opposed to a more and less experienced mentor and mentee). For scholars of rhetoric and composition, this concept of horizontal mentoring likely calls to mind other terms, such as "peer mentoring," that circulate in particular ways within our field. Ultimately, we have chosen to use the term "horizontal" in this essay in order to accentuate its distinction from power-laden, vertical mentoring dynamics. When we first developed the horizontal mentoring relationship we describe herein, we were graduate students going on the job market. As we exchanged materials, practiced interviews, and strategized about campus visits, we called ourselves "job market buddies." Because this initial experience with horizontal mentoring was so helpful, we made a conscious decision to continue our collaboration during our early years as assistant professors, at which point we started to think of ourselves as "assistant professor buddies." Whatever term readers prefer, what we offer here is an explicit framework for how to intentionally begin and sustain such mentoring.

Through our experience, we have identified seven specific practices for horizontal mentoring that we share in this essay. These practices include: choosing a horizontal mentor, holding regular Skype sessions, making lists and setting goals, exchanging book project writing, discussing and re-framing the concept of work-life balance, acknowledging and celebrating successes, and developing a network or team of mentors. Before turning to these practices, we situate our culturally and institutionally located account in relation

2 For other discussions of mentoring, see Boice; Eble and Gaillet; Mack, Watson, and Camacho.

to existing feminist scholarship on "making it" in the field of rhetoric and composition.

Locating Feminist Conversations about "Making It"

In sharing our approach to horizontal mentoring, we build on a rich body of rhetoric and composition scholarship about strategies for "making it" as feminist academics. As Michelle Ballif, Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford write in *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*, the "feminization"³ of rhetoric and composition means that women in our field "face different challenges and issues (if not in kind, certainly in degree) than do other female academics" (1)—particularly with respect to pay, administrative expectations, and tenure and promotion.⁴ With the issues already widely documented, Ballif, Davis, and Mountford focus on "how women have succeeded in spite of these challenges" (3). Their study considers the strategies of scholars that survey respondents deemed "successful." In tenured positions primarily at research-intensive institutions, these are scholars whose names are widely recognized in conjunction with their innovative research and prolific publication records.

In fact, "most of the people who work in the field, according to the definition proposed by Ballif, Davis, and Mountford, have not made it, nor can they," insist Kristin Bivens, Martha McKay Canter, Kirsti Cole, Violet Dutcher, Morgan Gresham, Luisa Rodriguez-Connal, and Eileen Schell. In "Sisyphus Rolls On: Reframing Women's Ways of 'Making It' in Rhetoric and Composition," Bivens et al. ask, "In a field predominantly based in contingent and graduate labor, how can we re-think 'making it' as a more productive and inclusive term?" (n. pag.). For the reasons these scholars identify, the question of how to navigate the challenges of developing an academic career, while simultaneously attending to the multiple shapes such careers might take, is complex in our field. We are faced, on the one hand, with a persistent illusion handed down from prior generations—that anyone with a PhD in rhetoric and composition will be able to find a tenure-track job—and, on the other hand, with a pressing reality—that an increasingly high percentage of undergraduate writing courses are taught by adjunct faculty.

It is crucial in our field, then, that feminist discussions of "making it" leave room for a multiplicity of located experiences while encouraging flexible, adaptive strategies. In outlining our approach to horizontal mentoring, we underscore its adaptability; we see its primary advantage in terms of how those involved in any given horizontal mentoring relationship may use the seven practices we detail in order to reinvent the widely available career advice

3 On the feminization of composition, see Enos; Lauer; Miller.

4 Documentation of these challenges can be found in Enos; Phelps.

for their own situations. That said, because we developed these practices through our experiences with horizontal mentoring, we do write from particular positions. Especially as feminist scholars, we are cognizant of the ethical and political imperative to acknowledge and account for these locations in both cultural and institutional terms (McKee and Porter; Royster; Royster and Kirsch). We are both married women who grew up in rural, largely working class areas of the Rust Belt. Pamela writes as a queer-identified white woman from the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan; she was a first generation college student. Steph writes as a straight white woman who grew up in western Pennsylvania. The examples we share from our personal experiences are inevitably tied to these cultural locations, but we work to engage a broader range of experiences by drawing on scholarship about mentoring and tenure-track academic life. Especially as two white women, we consider it crucial that our discussion is informed by the writing of scholars of color.⁵

In institutional terms, we are both tenure-track junior faculty at research institutions. Steph is an assistant professor in her first year at the University of Virginia, and she was in her second year at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) when we began to collaborate on this essay. Pamela is in her third year as an assistant professor at Old Dominion University. Again, we work throughout to acknowledge how the examples we share from experience are informed by the expectations we face—and the varied resources available to us—as faculty at universities designated research-intensive. We also want to note that neither of us are tenured. Our status as untenured faculty does impact our writing here, in that we are both relatively cautious about the degree and types of details we share. As such, some readers may desire descriptions of the challenges we have faced that are more vivid than we feel comfortable sharing in print at this time. Still, when it comes to stepping into important feminist conversations about mentoring, we are adamant about not operating according to a “wait until after tenure” mentality. While we find it helpful to hear from feminist scholars who have “made it” in the field, we also want to encourage more exchange among those of us who are in process of “making it”—who are *practicing* at making it—rather than waiting until we reach some mythical point of success. Further, in light of the hateful rhetorics and actions that have escalated as a result of the 2016 presidential election, we believe that it is especially crucial for women and minorities attempting to “make it” to take it upon ourselves to support and sustain each other through strategic mentoring.

That said, we conceive of horizontal mentoring as an accompaniment rather than a replacement for formal mentoring. In our case, as we first developed

5 In addition to the scholars cited throughout the essay, see Dace; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, and Harris; Mack, Watson, and Camacho.

our horizontal mentoring relationship, we worked to model our interactions after the productive mentoring relationships we experienced in graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh. One of our feminist faculty mentors was a real inspiration, as she encouraged graduate students at our institution to form writing groups and other informal support networks, all while modeling feminist principles of mentoring in her interactions with us. Yet, as scholars JaneMaree Maher, Jo Lindsay, Vicki Peel, and Christina Twomey urge, horizontal mentoring may supplement more traditional structures of mentorship by offering "a unique opportunity...for a frank sharing of issues of professional development" (29).

This frank sharing is key because, even in the most ideal of traditional mentoring relationships, power dynamics are real. As Jennifer Sano-Franchini writes in her study of the job market in rhetoric and composition, for instance, graduate students and recent graduates planning to go back on the job market may be hesitant—and understandably so—to openly discuss difficulties with the people on whom they rely for letters of recommendation. As one participant in Sano-Franchini's study explained, "[e]xposing the emotional circumstances of the job market is something that I don't really have a space to do because the people I'm talking to about the job market are largely my professional references" (118). The same can be said not only for those early-career scholars needing references on the job market, but for all scholars aware of how relationships and departmental politics may impact tenure decisions. While we may be fortunate to have excellent mentors from graduate school and/or at our new institutions, there remains a limit to how much many of us feel comfortable sharing with mentors who have such power over our career trajectories.

Moreover, even as discussions with horizontal mentors offer a space in which to strategize about navigating power dynamics, there remain structural inequalities not addressed through individualized mentoring relationships. These structural equalities impact early-career feminist scholars in uneven ways. As Kerry Ann Rockquomore and Tracey Laszloffy explain in *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure — Without Losing Your Soul*, "While institutional hierarchies leave all junior faculty in a vulnerable position, the difficulty associated with the probationary period is intensified for faculty who occupy a disadvantaged position within one or more of the social hierarchies structured around race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality" (2). Structural inequalities of course require "structural solutions." Thus, as Rockquomore emphasizes elsewhere, "long-term institutional policy changes are important" (vii). But discussions of needed policy changes "too often overlook the health and well-being of individuals who are currently navigating the job market and

tenure track. In other words, current cohorts of graduate students and new faculty members can't wait for the implementation of 10-year diversity plans or the enactment of diversity recommendations issued by strategic planning task forces—much less the eradication of racism, sexism, and homophobia” (vii).⁶ Rockquemore and Laszloffy thus offer in their “guidebook...both a map of the potential minefields and a set of tools to navigate the difficult terrain” (2).

We understand our own account of horizontal mentoring as a complement to the guidance and narratives already collected in Rockquemore and Laszloffy; Ballif, Davis, and Mountford; and Bivens et al. Even as horizontal mentoring cannot resolve structural problems, and while our essay is limited by what we are comfortable sharing at this point in our careers, we invite readers to join with us in having these conversations in multiple ways—to approach us at conferences, to talk with us over a coffee or beer, to chat in convention center hallways and in digital spaces. In discussing these strategies with other feminist scholars thus far, including at the 2015 Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) conference, we have felt validated in the potential usefulness of this approach for colleagues who are in different cultural and institutional locations. Our investment here is in how early-career feminist scholars “make it” *together*—in conversation and collaboration with supportive peers—whether as graduate students, adjuncts, lecturers, or junior faculty on the tenure track. Indeed, as we emphasize in our first horizontal mentoring practice, it is key to enact this approach with a peer who knows first-hand the particularities of your own location in the academy.

1. Choosing a Horizontal Mentor

Choosing the *right* peer mentor is crucial to a productive horizontal mentoring collaboration. It is important to choose a person with analogous goals and work habits—someone who is willing to make a real commitment to you and your work.⁷ Because we had worked together in graduate school on various projects and during our job searches, we already had a good sense of each other's working styles and goals before we decided to formalize our mentoring relationship. In other words, we did not simply decide to become peer mentors because we were friends, though that happened to be true in our case as well. Rather, our decision was based on a shared vision of what we wanted to learn and accomplish through our mentoring relationship.

While it is not absolutely necessary, it may be a good idea to choose a mentor who is at the same academic stage. Doing so will enable you to help each other jump through similar hoops, as well as vent, strategize, and get

⁶ Hall makes a similar point.

⁷ For advice on how to find a mentor, see Boice (247-8).

feedback and advice about the challenges you will both face during a particular stage of your academic careers. For example, it has been especially helpful to compare notes about how to navigate our service responsibilities as new assistant professors. Many scholars have noted the overwhelming nature of service responsibilities for new faculty (Connelly and Ghodsee; Rockquemore and Laszloffy; Seltzer). Since neither of us had much experience with the kinds of committee work we were being tasked with, it was reassuring during our first year to talk through these issues with someone who was going through the same thing.

When selecting a horizontal mentor, it is also important to consider the ways we may prefer or need a mentor who shares our cultural location(s). For faculty navigating sexist, racist, classist, and/or homophobic systems and microaggressions within academic life, talking with someone who shares our experiences may offer crucial space for validation and support. As Dwayne A. Mack recounts in *Beginning a Career in Academia: A Guide for Graduate Students of Color*, "mentoring from other academics of color has contributed to my professional development and abilities to deal with microaggressions. For example, some faculty of color served as my liaison to the surrounding community of color" (173). For Mack, this community "contributed to a meaningful off-campus life" that was key to withstanding microaggressions within campus life.⁸ For us, as white women both under the age of 40, it was helpful for our horizontal mentoring relationship to involve a shared, experience-based recognition of the subtly sexist comments sometimes made about our appearances and age, especially in terms of not "looking like a professor."

In other ways, however, the challenges we face differ, and this will likely be the case on at least some accounts for all horizontal mentoring relationships. In these cases, we recommend selecting a horizontal mentor who has previously demonstrated their ability to listen, understand, and act as a supportive ally when you face discrimination or microaggressions, whether due to sexism, racism, ableism, classism, or homophobia. Like many partnered graduate students who go on the job market, for instance, Pamela planned to move with her fiancé. Unlike her engaged colleagues in straight relationships, though, she could not count on her spouse-to-be getting coverage under her insurance plans or other benefits in the state of Virginia in 2014. Though some schools where she interviewed offered domestic benefits regardless of gender, the university where she was offered a tenure-track position did not. So, even after she married her partner in another state, they were preparing to uproot their lives (and, in her spouse's case, leave a good job), all while knowing their relationship would not be recognized legally in their new home. The

8 For an intersectional discussion of the toll such microaggressions take, particularly for women of color, see Alexander.

uncertainties and fears surrounding this part of the moving process were incredibly stressful, especially given Pamela's prior experiences of living amidst poverty as a child.

During this period of stress—marked by blatant homophobia built into state law and university policy—it was absolutely necessary to have a horizontal mentor who, even if she did not face the same challenges, could listen, understand, and offer support. While Pamela did not anticipate the above challenges when beginning to work with Steph as “job market buddies,” it was clear from conversations about dating, relationships, and family during the first months of our friendship as graduate students that she was a supportive ally. Her support as a horizontal mentor made a difference in multiple situations—when homophobic responses from family to Pamela's wedding threatened to distract her from interview preparation, when the Pulse shooting was foremost in her mind and heart as we met to discuss summer writing goals, etc. Based on these experiences, we encourage those selecting a horizontal mentor who does not share certain experiences to give careful consideration to the potential mentor's history of meeting your needs for allyship.

In addition to academic stage and cultural location, another factor when choosing a mentor is whether the person works at a different institution. While mentors at your own institution serve important purposes, as Mack writes, “you should also have off campus mentors with no affiliation to your institution” (173). Having a horizontal mentor from another institution is important because an outsider's perspective can be very useful. There will inevitably be times when you cannot or do not feel comfortable asking questions to people in your own department (e.g. early in your career, you may not know yet which colleagues you can trust with the kinds of questions you might want to ask; you may be afraid that you will come across as incompetent or inexperienced). Additionally, the type of institution where you and your potential mentor are employed should be a consideration. In our case, working at places with parallel expectations makes it easier for us to be on the same wavelength when it comes to things like goal setting and feedback. The fact that we both have the goal of publishing a book before going up for tenure, for instance, has motivated us to develop a shared system of practices that enables us to make progress toward that goal—something we will discuss in more detail below.

2. Holding Regular Skype Sessions

A second practice that we find productive is holding regular video conference sessions via Skype. We treat these hour-long sessions as scheduled meetings that we are required to show up to and be prepared for—just like any other “official” work meeting. Scheduling our meetings in advance helps us commit to checking in frequently; it also makes our sessions feel more like

a deliberate part of our work schedules, as opposed to something extra that we have to tack on to our to-do lists during non-working hours.

Each of us prepares an "agenda," or list of topics we want to discuss, to bring to the meetings. Keeping a running list of agenda items between meetings, which usually occur every two weeks, ensures that we each get a chance to get feedback on the issues we feel are most pressing at the time. After doing this for the first few months, we both realized that the simple act of writing these thoughts down as they come to us has a therapeutic effect. Rather than stewing over something until the next meeting comes around, writing down the issue serves as a reassurance that it will get dealt with later. For example, during the second year of her first tenure-track position, Steph applied to (and eventually accepted) another job. At each stage of the application process it was difficult for her to focus on her current job without being in a constant state of stress. Writing down and tabling these concerns to discuss at later meetings helped Steph be more present for her colleagues and students in the midst of a major career change. In other words, because our meetings are a dedicated time to think through problems, we spend less time worrying about things outside of the meetings. It is also important to mention that we purposefully save all of our meeting agendas. Reviewing these at the end of our first and second years has allowed us to identify patterns and see what we are still struggling with, as well as track our growth and progress from the start of our jobs until now.

The discussions during our Skype sessions are often focused on questions about particular research and teaching-related issues, how to navigate our new departmental roles, and how to deal with emotional swings, such as the ups and downs that we have experienced during the process of working on our first books. Based on our agenda notes, it is clear that the most productive sessions have involved talking about our anxieties. The first year of any new job is stressful, and it is normal to have doubts about your abilities, or about belonging in academia (i.e. "imposter syndrome"). As feminist scholar Roxane Gay writes in "Typical First Year Professor," "Most of the time, I feel like the kid who gets to sit at the adult table for the first time at Thanksgiving. I'm not sure which fork to use. My feet can't reach the floor" (28). Rather than keeping all of our worries to ourselves and letting them accumulate, acknowledging and sharing our anxieties during the first year was very productive. Knowing that someone else is having similar doubts or worries amplifies the fact that you are not the only person who feels this way, which is a huge help in coming to terms with the transition from graduate student to faculty member.

However, acknowledging and sharing anxieties is not a magical solution for making them go away. What we have needed to learn is that it takes practice living with the type of anxiety that is an inevitable part of being an academic.

Therefore, we have come up with some strategies to help us work through the stress and worry. The first is pep talks; cheerleading has been essential to our success. One of the biggest differences between being a graduate student and being a faculty member is that, as a grad student (if you are fortunate), you have advisors and professors who are there to encourage you and keep you on track. As a faculty member, no one is watching over your shoulder to make sure your projects are going well, or to give you a confidence boost when you need one. Thus, we decided to take on that role for each other. Simply reminding the other person about what she has accomplished already—about how what she is doing now is nothing she has not been able to do in the past—is extremely affirming.

Another key strategy we use is reframing. When discussing anxieties, there is always the risk that your conversation will spiral into an unproductive freakout session. While we take the time to validate and compare notes about each other's fears and anxieties, we also make sure to reframe them in a more balanced and realistically positive way. For example, at one point we had both agreed to give an unusually large number of invited talks and conference papers in a single semester, which was a major source of stress. We were worried that these talks would take too much time away from our shared main goal: to finish our respective book manuscripts. While it was tempting to see these invitations as "extra work," however, we reframed them as opportunities to tailor our research for different audiences and, in that way, to continue developing the relevance of our book projects for a wider readership. That is, we decided to make these talks work *for us*; we used them to forward our own scholarly agendas and goals by presenting on projects that we were already working on but still refining. In general, we have made a conscious decision to leave room for anxiety in our Skype meetings, but we also make sure that at some point the conversation shifts to a more productive, forward-thinking, can-do mentality. That reframing continues to make a big difference in how we approach stressful situations.

3. Making Lists & Setting Goals

List-making and goal-setting have proven to be indispensable practices for us. In addition to making weekly lists to provide ourselves with a specific work plan, we develop lists for things such as yearly goals for research, teaching, and service; summer/winter break tasks; and 5-year research plans. While list-making has always been an important part of our productivity as individuals, we had never considered sharing these personal documents with anyone else. After reading Donald E. Hall's *The Academic Self*, a book that encourages academics to be self-reflexive and open about their daily habits and practices, we were inspired to treat our private texts just as seriously as the other kinds

of public writing that we do. As part of our horizontal mentoring relationship, then, we decided to make our personal documents available to one another for feedback.

We do not simply create these lists at the beginning of the term and then forget about them. Instead, we upload all of our documents to a shared Dropbox folder for easy access. Then, at various times throughout the year, we conduct a peer review of each other's lists. During these designated peer review sessions, we discuss the progress we have made toward our respective goals and "to-do" items, as well as offer suggestions for revising our lists in an effort to keep each other in check. For example, on several occasions during the past couple years (most often during spring break or over the summer), we were both attempting to do too much in a limited time frame. We ended up drafting overly ambitious lists of research tasks that we wanted to get done "while we had the time." What we came to realize through peer review, however, was that the amount of work we desired to get done was unrealistic. These lists set us up for potential failure (i.e., at the end of the break, we would feel dissatisfied due to all of the remaining un-crossed off list items), and would have left us with no time for rest or self-care during our "breaks." Thus, the peer review process we developed has been crucial because it gives us an opportunity to talk through and adjust our expectations about goal and to-do lists, which ultimately helps us teach each other to design more reasonable, manageable work plans.

In addition to the typical lists focused on research, teaching, and service, there are two other kinds of lists that serve as a way to address the larger questions guiding our mentoring collaboration. These lists are titled: 1) What kind of academics do we want to be? and 2) What kind of lives do we want to live? Creating these lists allows us to reflect on what we would like our ideal careers and lives to look like and develop strategies for enacting those ideals—as best as we can—in our current positions. For example, Steph's initial list indicated that she wanted to be the kind of academic who engages in trans-disciplinary discussions about sound, which is one of her primary research areas. Because there was not an established community of sound scholars actively sharing work at UMBC (where she held her first tenure-track position), she did some research and found out that UMBC's humanities center was accepting proposals for new faculty working groups. Instead of chairing a sound studies faculty working group herself—probably an unwise move at this busy stage of her pre-tenure career—Steph found a colleague who was interested in co-chairing with her. Co-chairing this working group allowed Steph to create and actively shape a community that she wanted to be a part of, as opposed to just accepting that such a community did not exist at her university or deciding to wait until a later stage of her career to pursue her interests. Taking the

initiative to form this group was one of the ways that Steph started working toward the academic identity that she outlined in her list.

Using our lists to think through big questions about our scholarly identities allows us to begin cultivating habits and practices that can help us get closer to our ideal careers and lives—a point to which we will return in our discussion of work-life integration below. As Hall states, “An emphasis on ‘owning’ one’s professional self-identity entails a willingness to articulate one’s values and priorities, a willingness to engage critically and openly one’s sense of what a professor ‘is’ and ‘does’” (10). Swapping and critically engaging with our personal texts has proven helpful for us, though we realize that the list-making and goal-setting practices we describe in this section may seem over-the-top or unnecessary to some readers. In fact, we felt the same way at first and often made fun of ourselves for being so obsessed with lists. Yet, we now understand that these lists play a huge role in our productivity and well-being. While the types of lists that individuals want or need to share for review will obviously vary based on stage of career, institution, and personal values, we do recommend trying some version of this peer mentoring strategy.

4. Exchanging Book Project Writing

Another practice we find advantageous is our book project writing exchange. Especially because we are both at research institutions, finishing our book manuscripts in a timely manner was a priority for us. We began this process by reading and discussing a few books on the subject, including William Germano’s *From Dissertation to Book* and *Getting It Published*. After taking notes on the key strategies outlined in these books, we each set a concrete revision schedule and goals for the first year. This included figuring out what to finish each month, when to collect new sources on a specific topic or chapter, and when to exchange drafts and return feedback to each other. Our structured approach helped us finish developing the first drafts of our manuscripts in that first year. While such a task seemed impossible initially, we committed to this being a priority above all else and stuck to that commitment. Even when we needed to be flexible and adjust deadlines or goals slightly, we did not allow it to get us off track.

One of the major benefits of participating in a formal book project writing exchange is that it has allowed us to get to know each other’s writing very well. Every writer has her quirks, but it can be difficult to notice your own writing issues when you are completely immersed in a big project (like writing a book). In graduate school, we both had dissertation advisors who were able to provide us with feedback that genuinely helped us improve our writing. The effectiveness of their feedback was due, in part, to the fact that they had been reading and responding to our work for years. During the first year of

our book project writing exchange, we developed a similar kind of intimate familiarity with each other's manuscripts. For example, we both helped one another identify writing issues that were holding us back in some way (e.g. Pamela's habit of being unnecessarily concerned with making the sections of every chapter perfectly parallel and balanced; or Steph's habit of glossing over key terms or concepts). This sort of response from a reader who really knows your writing is invaluable and hard to find post-PhD.

One unexpected result of our book project writing exchange that has come about rather organically is that it got us both thinking about our second books. As we were discussing and explaining ideas from our manuscripts, we often asked each other questions or stumbled upon topics that were beyond the scope of our current projects. For instance, Steph was frustrated because she kept trying (and failing) to incorporate a chapter about a particular pedagogical experience into her first book. The experience seemed relevant, but it didn't quite fit within the overarching framework she created. After asking more questions about the significance and complexity of the experience, Pamela prompted Steph to see how this topic might be more productively explored in a second book project. Talking with Steph also helped Pamela formulate plans for the second book. As Pamela worked on a new essay that returned to an earlier archive, but to explore a different set of questions about the same-sex relationships of nineteenth-century teachers, she raised concerns about the essay's place within her overarching research agenda. Mulling over these concerns with Steph, Pamela realized the questions could direct her next archival research for the second book project.

Rather than ignoring these ideas or pushing them aside for later, we capitalized on these moments by brainstorming together and doing some informal writing that was directed toward our next books. This has ended up being a very productive practice for us. As Robert Boice writes in *Advice for New Faculty Members*, working on more than one thing at a time "helps reduce the sameness of writing...and it leads to interplay of ideas and working styles" (155). Working on multiple projects helps to break up the monotony of a singular writing task, and it has enabled us to see possible intersections between our first and second book topics. Additionally, our writing exchange provides a space where we can try out ideas before they are fully formed; it is a space that allows us to plan for and get excited about future projects.

5. Discussing and Re-framing the Concept of Work-Life Balance

A fifth practice we find helpful is actively discussing the concept of work-life balance. Rena Seltzer's *The Coach's Guide for Women Professors* offers many

useful suggestions for women “who aspire to the very difficult combination” of both “a successful career” and “a well-balanced life” (ix). In our experiences reading as well as talking with colleagues in the field, the most widely shared (if not followed) advice for achieving this “difficult combination” is suggested by another of Seltzer’s titles: “To Find Happiness in Academe, Women Should Just Say No.” In Skype discussions and goal-setting, we instead find it helpful to reframe our notions from “work-life balance” to “work-life integration,” from the need to defensively say “no” to possibilities for strategically saying “yes.”

This reframing holds perhaps obvious implications for service. As Rachel Connelly and Kristen Ghodsee explain in *Professor Mommy*, junior scholars are usually urged to say “no” in order to protect our time, because “service officially counts for almost nothing”—at least with respect to tenure and promotion (141). Connelly and Ghodsee acknowledge that service does count, however, in that, “Your colleagues will develop grudges against you if you try to avoid the service you are assigned” or do not “carry your fair share” (and rightly so). Connelly and Ghodsee thus advise saying “no” to “anything beyond what is required” (141). But in shifting our focus to strategically saying “yes,” we find it important to join committees and get involved with initiatives that we want to be associated with, as a way of becoming the sort of scholars we want to be. For Pamela, this has meant developing a dissertation writing habits group in conjunction with PhD students in English, getting involved with interdisciplinary initiatives in support of sexuality studies and LGBTQ students, and serving on a college research committee through which she has learned more about writing effective grant and fellowship applications. Rather than striving to say “no” as much as possible, in other words, you may work on learning how to allocate “yeses,” choosing service activities that will help you to build the scholarly identities and communities that you want to integrate into your life. Indeed, as Boice notes, “well-chosen kinds of service have been observed as useful in replacing the usual helplessness and anomie of new faculty with a sense of self-worth and belonging” (253).

Certainly saying “no” and protecting your time remains important to the professional survival of faculty without tenure—especially women and scholars of color who are often overburdened with expectations for “invisible labor” (Grollman, “Invisible”). The tendency for women to perform more service work than men is widely documented and discussed, especially by feminist scholars (Jaschik). In addition, faculty of color face not only the usual service expectations, but a “cultural taxation”—an added expectation they will “invest their time on campus mentoring students of color, fulfilling the racial and gender quotas on committees and panels, and undoubtedly serving as the institution’s spokesperson for racial issues” (Mack 171). In the case of black faculty in particular, “many begrudgingly realize that, because they are one of few black

faculty on campus, they face disproportionately higher service requests than their colleagues, are overwhelmed by black students seeking a role model, and are expected to 'prove' themselves in ways that their white colleagues are not" (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 3).⁹ Given these expectations facing faculty of color and women, it is imperative to say "no." We do say "no." Pamela said "no," for example, when asked to co-chair a search committee for an advanced assistant or associate hire although she had only been at the institution for two years herself (she said "yes" to serving as a member of the committee). Still, we notice that our own lives feel most integrated, contented, and interesting when we focus our attention on what makes us excited to say "yes."¹⁰

In addition to well-chosen service, we would be remiss not to mention saying "yes" to parenting, which is perhaps the most discussed issue regarding work-life balance among women academics. As untenured faculty, however, this is a particularly risky discussion to have in terms of our personal decisions about whether or not, when, and how to have children. As the authors of *Professor Mommy* remind us, it is important for women to be "careful with appearances when you are pre-tenure," because planned and actual parenting by men and women in a department is often perceived and treated differently based on gendered expectations, even by otherwise progressive colleagues (Connelly and Ghodsee 39).¹¹ Without revealing specific details about our private decisions and plans, however, we do want to acknowledge that motherhood presents real opportunities and challenges for women academics, and thus should absolutely figure into horizontal mentoring conversations. Books like *Professor Mommy* offer useful advice for early-career scholars who hope to enjoy parenting while navigating these challenges. But again, the advice is necessarily general and broad. As such, we want to urge that discussing with a horizontal mentor how to apply and adapt such advice—while developing adaptive, flexible strategies, like we have tried to do throughout this article—is also essential when it comes to questions of parenting.

9 See also June; Morales-Díaz.

10 We would also like to thank Carolyn Kyler for this useful advice, which she generously shared with Steph in an email exchange about learning when to say "no."

11 As Connelly and Ghodsee explain, "Yes, you may see photos of children in the offices of the junior men in your department, but remember that men get extra credit for being involved parents and are less likely to be viewed as slackers when they rush off to tend to a sick kid during a faculty meeting. As a woman, our society grants you no special recognition or heroic honors for being an involved parent. The important thing is to pay careful attention to the institutional culture of your department. If your colleagues don't talk about their children (or they do not have children to talk about), you should exercise some discretion" (39).

Finally, we use our horizontal mentoring relationship to encourage each other to say “yes” to self-care—to rest, fun, and the important relationships in our lives. While the specifics vary for each of us here, our regular Skype conversations are spaces in which we both support each other’s individual efforts by emphasizing that it is okay to take time for self-care, to not work constantly during waking hours. We remind each other that we work steadily and consistently, and it is equally crucial to take time off on evenings and weekends as much as possible, and to truly enjoy that time, letting go of any guilt associated with not working. While such advice can come across as cliché, we hear it differently when it comes from the mouth of our trusted peer mentor who knows our work habits so well.

6. Acknowledging and Celebrating Successes (Even Small Ones)

Another vital practice involves celebrating our successes, even the small ones. During and often in-between our regular Skype sessions, we always share with each other any good news about our research, teaching, service, and professional development. At key moments, we send each other care packages whether for purposes celebratory or encouraging. At the end of each semester, we reflect again on our goal lists discussed above, this time in order to develop a new list of what we accomplished. Actually writing down each and every accomplishment, and then sharing the long lists with each other, helps us to pause, appreciate, and enjoy what we managed to get done. We underscore the celebratory nature of these end-of-semester meetings with beer toasts (though wine or chocolate would work just as well).

While it perhaps goes without saying that acknowledging and celebrating successes can be inspiring, two other benefits are noteworthy. Celebrating successes is important, first, in order to cultivate resiliency in the face of failures and rejections. As sociologist Crystal Fleming writes, most academics—particularly early in their careers—will face rejections (difficult reviewer comments, grant and fellowship rejections, less-than-ideal responses from presses, etc.). These rejections do not necessarily reflect failings in one’s work. Meritocracy is a myth as much in academia as in the culture at large, Fleming emphasizes. Those who experience discrimination of one type or another are especially at risk for the value of their work going under- or unrecognized. But at the same time, all academics face some rejection: “Wildly ‘successful’ and ordinary academics alike, the folks who benefit from layers of privilege and the ones who have overcome multiple dimensions of disadvantage, usually have one thing in common: Resilience” (n. pag.). This being the case, “Aside

from luck and various forms of privilege, the number one factor in academic success/survival is resilience in the face of rejection and failure."

Fleming underscores how important self-care, discussed above, is to cultivating this resiliency. We also find that celebrating our successes develops resiliency. As our collective list of accomplishments grows on screen and in our minds—and as we develop a sense of pride in the other's work as well as our own—each minor setback or outright rejection becomes a bit easier to weather. In some ways, this is simply a matter of developing the *thick* skin required to persist in a line of work that requires repeated self-exposure and critical evaluation accompanied by the real possibility of rejection. But rather than focusing on thick skin, we like to think of our academic selves as made *supple* through self-care and the celebration of successes, so our metaphoric skins are resilient in their elasticity and flexibility.

Along with cultivating resiliency, a second reason for celebrating small successes encompasses the need for self-promotion of one's scholarly work. Along with the myth of meritocracy, "One of the biggest myths of academia is that you only have to be smart enough and have good ideas to succeed" (Connelly and Ghodsee, "Value" n. pag.). As Connelly and Ghodsee urge, "Nothing could be further from the truth." "For better or worse," they explain, "the marketization of academia and the persistence of 'old boys' clubs' in universities around the world means that who you know is just as important as what you know." Extending and deepening the circles of "who we know" ideally occurs in part through mentoring networks, which we go on to discuss next. In addition to relying on mentors to facilitate connections, however, it is necessary to facilitate them ourselves through self-promotion.

Like many scholars, and especially many women scholars, we feel a bit uncomfortable with the idea of promoting ourselves. But the practice of sharing small successes with each other has helped us find approaches to self-promotion that seem more doable. As we learn of each other's successes, we promote each other—e.g. circulating news via social networking sites about new publications, upcoming talks, awards, etc. And when it comes to those tasks Connelly and Ghodsee associate with self-promotion—sending article offprints, keeping our websites updated, speaking at conferences, giving invited talks, applying for grants—we resort to our pep talks, airing any mixed feelings we have about self-promotion and encouraging each other about its importance. In this way, our celebration of successes is not totally private.

7. Developing a Network or Team

The seventh practice within our approach to horizontal mentoring consists of developing a network or team of mentors. The significance of strong mentors, whether peer-based or more "traditional," is well established (Boice).

What we want to emphasize here is the importance of having multiple mentors of different types (Rodrigo et al.). Along similar lines, writer and composition scholar Lynn Z. Bloom offers a “mosaic” metaphor for mentoring teams. She contemplates how scholars, developing a “do-it-yourself ethos” (89), “can experience the mosaic of mentorship, acquiring the elements of what we need to know and do to survive, even prevail, in professional situations” (87). Reflecting on her own varied experiences with this approach, Bloom concludes that, “The mentoring style—of receiving and giving—that has evolved over the course of my life has to me been far more satisfying than it would have been to model my life after a single person” (97). In another iteration of do-it-yourself mentoring in teams, composition scholars Rochelle Rodrigo, Susan K. Miller-Cochran, Duane Roen, Elaine Jolayemi, Cheri Lemieux Spiegel, and Catrina Mitchum theorize it through the metaphor of the “network.” They specifically recommend building “individualized networks for mentoring and learning that will match [your] own career goals” (n. pag.).

Rodrigo et al. and Bloom’s recommendations for networks and mosaics of multiple mentors address a more pressing exigency in situations where a single mentor is unavailable or unable to speak to specific aspects of your professional goals or other identities. But in our experience, their suggestions are relevant even *with* strong mentors. We are both very fortunate to have our peer mentoring relationship with each other, as well as excellent mentors among our former dissertation chairs and readers and our new senior colleagues. But none of us can rely on just one person for everything in our professional lives. It is important to have different people with different kinds of expertise, experiences, etc., so you can go to the person who is best able to mentor you on a particular issue.

We have found it crucial for our mentoring teams to include people from at least three domains. First, even in the absence of formal mentoring programs, ideally you have mentors at your home institution. Not only will they know the specifics of your department and program, but also you may need people to go to bat for you in your department and other parts of the institution. Second, it is of course important to make contacts in the field (and any subfields or interdisciplinary area studies) more broadly. We can start building these professional networks early on in our careers, especially with the support of our horizontal mentoring relationship. In our Skype sessions, we talk about networking—about how to do it, but in a manner that feels comfortable for us. In this way, in addition to what our collaboration makes possible between us, it also supports our reaching out to others (e.g. at conferences, via Twitter, by email).

Third and finally, our mentoring networks include partners and friends in addition to academics, people who can help with different things, not just

work. For instance, Pamela joined a running group immediately after relocating. This group helped her not only find people to run with, but also learn about what was an entirely new city and region of the country. The group provided friends to talk with about non-work stuff and maintain perspective on life as much bigger than a single job or a career trajectory. Other possibilities here include cultivating mentors within activist networks, specific cultural communities, spiritual groups and religious institutions, etc. Whichever nodes are most important to your own network, we recommend a dispersed model of mentorship so that your horizontal mentoring relationship is supported by a large, diverse, and flexible team.

Conclusion

The above practices have helped us to “make it” in our first two and a half years as new faculty on the tenure track. While we have experienced greater contentment and success than we believe we would have without this mentoring collaboration, we want to emphasize that the purpose of writing this article is not to sell some sort of self-help program for feminist scholars of rhetoric and composition. The horizontal mentoring practices we have outlined are not the only ways to approach mentoring, and they did not solve all of our problems. As previously discussed, many of the challenges facing early-career academics are the result of structural and material forces that individual strategies simply cannot undo. Nor did horizontal mentoring strategies make our worries disappear entirely. We are still working through many of the issues we cite above, and we will need to continue to develop strategies for coping with these and other issues that will inevitably emerge as we advance in our careers.

It is also important to note that horizontal mentoring has its own challenges. For example, one of the characteristics of our mentoring collaboration that we named as an advantage—that we are both at the same academic stage of our careers—can, at times, be a drawback. Though our book project writing exchange has been productive for the most part, we can only offer feedback based on the knowledge and experiences that we have accumulated so far. Thus, the fact that neither of us has written a book before prevents us from providing the kind of insight that a mentor who is further along in her career would be able to. Indeed, we did experience some initial setbacks and slowdowns with our book projects that we were unprepared for. Our relative inexperience has affected other parts of our mentoring relationship as well (e.g. trying to give advice to each other about professional situations that are new to both of us). While there are still major advantages to horizontal mentoring, these problems amplify the importance of developing an extended network of mentors who can help you with the things that your peers cannot.

Another challenge that we encountered during this process is trying to deal with the fact that we sometimes work at different paces. It is much easier to exchange work and set shared goals when we are both on a similar writing schedule, but that is rarely the case. It has been difficult to sync our schedules due to obligations like conferences, talks, grading, etc. Additionally, not everyone writes at the same speed, so there are times when one of us is further along than the other on her book project, or times when we are working on different projects altogether. We have dealt with this challenge by accepting that some of our Skype meetings or feedback sessions focus on just one person rather than involving a mutual exchange. We had one session, for instance, in which one of us was working on a book chapter as planned, while the other had paused progress on the book manuscript for a week or two in order to write an upcoming conference talk.

These are just a few examples of the difficulties we have navigated thus far during our mentoring collaboration. Despite these challenges, however, horizontal mentoring has allowed us to develop productive habits and practices that we will continue to develop and revise as we enter different stages of our careers. Indeed, we want to stress that horizontal mentoring is not only a good idea for new faculty members. Mentoring relationships are crucial at every stage in an academic career, and we hope that readers will find ways to apply the flexible strategies we have offered in this article to their own unique lives and careers.

We also hope that this is not the end of our conversation about horizontal mentoring. When we presented on this topic at the 2015 Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) conference in Tempe, Arizona, we were encouraged by the enthusiasm of those who attended our talk. There is clearly a real need for sharing these practices, which is in part what prompted us to write this piece. Yet, as our FemRhet audience suggested, it can be very hard to find the “right” peer mentor on your own. The conversation after our presentation that day convinced us that offering more formal opportunities to learn about and participate in horizontal mentoring would be a valuable resource for many feminist scholars. So we are in the early stages of brainstorming possibilities for a horizontal mentoring event at a future Feminism(s) & Rhetoric(s) conference. Ideally this event would provide a forum to help people find other scholars who are interested in being a mentor, as well as to welcome a broader and more diverse range of voices into the conversation about horizontal mentoring. We are still working out the details (please stay tuned!), but we look forward to joining you all in a conversation about how our horizontal mentoring networks may best support our work.

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank editor Jen Wingard and our two anonymous reviewers for guidance during the revision process and feedback on an earlier version of this essay. We are also grateful to everyone who shared their experiences and offered insight during our presentation at the 2015 Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) conference. Finally, we thank Jess Enoch, feminist mentor extraordinaire, whose model we aspire to.

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