

Peitho

The Journal of the Coalition of Feminist
Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and
Composition



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Peitho seeks to encourage, advance, and publish original feminist research in the history of rhetoric and composition and thereby support scholars and students within our profession. For submission guidelines and requirements, please see peitho.cwshrc.org.

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Editor's Welcome

Jen Wingard

v

SPECIAL CLUSTER ON GENDERED SERVICE IN RHETORIC AND WRITING STUDIES

Transforming the Value of Gendered Service through Institutional Culture Change 255

Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips

Administration, Emotional Labor, and Gendered Discourses Of Power: A Feminist Chair's Mission To Make Service Matter 279

Michelle Payne

Is it Worth it to "Lean In" and Lead? On Being a Woman Department Chair in Rhetoric and Writing Studies 308

Eileen E. Schell

ARTICLES

Advocating *Comadrisimo*: A Feminist Mentoring Approach for Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition 334

Ana Milena Ribero and Sonia C. Arellano

Rhetorical Future(s) and Accounting for Rhetorical Debt 357

Kellie Sharp-Hoskins

Electric Girl No More: Nineteenth-Century Technofeminism, Constructions of Physical Strength, and Scientific Expertise 380

Elizabeth Lowry

Toward a Rhetoric of Body as Space 404

Kelly A. Moreland

Facebook Feminism: Moderating Story and Visibility in Pantsuit Nation 426

Alicia Brazeau

ARTICLES (CON'T)

Learning from The Identity Project: Accountability-Based Strategies for Intersectional Analyses in Queer and Feminist Rhetoric 454

Laura Tetreault

Applying Archival Methods and Methodologies to Public Open Records 481

Jessica Estep

Digital Curation as Collaborative Archival Method in Feminist Rhetorics 505

Pamela VanHaitsma and Cassandra Book

BOOK REVIEWS

Bessette, Jean. *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives: Composing Past and Futures*. Southern Illinois UP, 2017. 202 pages. 532

Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne

Booher, Amanda K. & Jung, Julie. *Feminist Rhetorical Science Studies: Human Bodies, Posthumanist Worlds*. Southern Illinois UP, 2018. 260 pages. 538

Erin A. Frost

Lorimer Leonard, Rebecca. *Writing on the Move: Migrant Women and the Value of Literacy*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2017. 182 pages. 547

Kaia Simon

Vinson, Jenna. *Embodying the Problem: The Persuasive Power of the Teen Mother*. Rutgers UP, 2018. 236 pages. 553

Kim Hensley Owens

Walden, Sarah W. *Tasteful Domesticity: Women's Rhetoric & the American Cookbook 1790-1940*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2018. 220 pages. 559

Elizabeth J. Fleitz

Editor's Welcome

Jen Wingard

There has never been a better time to review for, publish in, or edit *Peitho! Not only* is the Coalition for Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition celebrating its thirtieth year as a significant feminist organization in our field.¹ *Not only* is the journal about to embark on a quarterly production schedule. *Not only* have we developed a new section devoted to cultivating and sharing archives, which will appear in at least one issue of *Peitho* a year.² And *not only* are we about to publish a series of excellent and timely special issues over the next three summers—the first in 2019 on the Legacy of *Our Bodies Ourselves*; the second in 2020 on Transgender Rhetorics³; and the third a co-produced issue with *Constellations* on the intersections between feminism and cultural rhetorics!

But the real reason to become involved with *Peitho* is because some of the best feminist scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition is being published here. And issue 21.2 is a clear example of that excellence.

This will be the last mega-issue of *Peitho*. Our move to quarterly production will allow for fewer essays per issue, and potentially more focused clusters of essays. In fact, there will be a cluster on the centennial of women's suffrage in 2020, so look for a CFP sometime in late summer 2019. Our move to quarterly will also see *Peitho* move to a digital native journal. This allows us to support fully multimodal and interactive texts in the journal. This is something we are all excited to embrace beginning with our Fall 2019 issue.

All of this news is to say that as *Peitho* continues to grow, please continue to read and submit your work here. It is an exciting journal with a long history of feminist commitment and scholarly support in the field of rhetoric and

1 <http://cwshrc.org/blog/2018/09/01/re-examining-intersectionality/>

2 <http://peitho.cwshrc.org/news/call-for-submissions-new-peitho-feature-recoveries-and-reconsiderations/>

3 <http://peitho.cwshrc.org/news/call-for-papers-transgender-rhetorics/>

composition. And it is certainly continuing to be a thriving place for intellectual work.

And this current issue is no exception. It is chock-full of feminist goodness, the likes of which would even put a smile on Lisa Mastrangelo's bad-ass grandmother's face which adorns our cover. (Thank you, Lisa, for the use of your family photo.) And the work covers a rich array of feminist topics: gendered service and raced mentorship; archival methods engaging with new technologies; digital spaces as potentially emancipatory; and historical figures and literary texts as embodied. We also have a slate of five book reviews of current feminist work. The entire issue is well worth a read.

So with that, I invite you to enjoy 21.2, the Spring 2019 issue of *Peitho*. And remember as you attend the CCCCs in Pittsburgh to visit us at the Editor's Roundtable during the Research Network Forum. I'd love to hear your ideas for essays, special clusters, or archives you'd like to share. Also be sure to check out the terrific feminist panels aggregated by the Coalition of Feminist Scholars, too.⁴ It is an exciting time to be a feminist in our field, and it is an equally exciting time to think about *what it means* to be a feminist in our field. The folks publishing in *Peitho* are certainly taking that question seriously, and I thank them for it.

4 <http://cwshrc.org/blog/2019/03/01/coalition-curated-guide-to-4c19/>

Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies:

I. Transforming the Value of Gendered Service through Institutional Culture Change

Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips

Abstract: *Using the lens of feminized labor, we argue that the ways in which the academy defines success are misaligned with the service that is required to fulfill the mission of our institutions and meet the learning needs of students. Those who perform feminized labor and service, particularly in Composition, are at a disadvantage in every way "success" is measured in the academy (teaching, professional development, and service). Transforming how feminized labor is valued involves reexamining institutional missions and then redefining service, research, workload, and expertise in a way that aligns labor with institutional values. This process includes a) redefining and assessing labor and workload in terms of how it supports the institutional mission; b) defining and assessing professional development as work that supports the institutional mission; and c) valuing, supporting, and developing the expertise that is required for sustaining the labor of institutions.*

Keywords: *Feminized labor, service, gender, composition*

Every month, there is another career advice piece on "how to succeed" in higher education that makes the rounds on social media. These pieces often tell overcommitted faculty that the path to success involves learning to say no: *Chronicle* blogger Natalie M. Houston offers specific advice about how and when to say no in "Five Guidelines for Saying No" and "Should You Say Yes or No?" Likewise, in "To Find Happiness in Academe, Women Should Just Say No," Rena Seltzer defines a "strong research profile" as the "prize" for increased happiness in academia (see also Wilson). A refrain of these pieces is "beware of service commitments." Especially for women faculty, service is painted as an adversary to success and promotion. These advice articles highlight the service paradox of labor in higher education. On the one hand, it is clear from data about labor and the profession (see Massé and Hogan, Modern Language Association) that service commitments are holding women back

from advancing in higher education. On the other hand, the labor of service is increasingly necessary to support institutions and has a significant impact on student learning and success. Moreover, service work can be an important form of faculty development, as it helps faculty better understand students, which also contributes to becoming better instructors and citizens of the institution. Finally, service can be an important avenue to effect change, which is needed to challenge the gendered ways that labor is valued in academia. We should not solely be talking about how to avoid doing this work; rather, we should be talking about how to value that work in the context of institutional missions. We need to make the value of this service work visible to our institutions and our departments in order to change the (problematic and gendered) historical narrative of faculty professional success.

The “learn how to say no” directive from publications or well-meaning colleagues is indicative of why inequity continues to plague higher education, because it is representative of a larger problem about the way labor by marginalized groups other than the white cis-male population is valued in academia. While MLA, ADE, and AAUP have tracked data on gender and race in higher education and the discipline, there is less data about the ways in which such have been impacted by service work. However, others have been calling for attention to this problematic dynamic and the feminization and devaluing of the labor of these populations for decades.¹ As institutional models of higher education continue to change and shift more labor onto faculty (see Ginsberg; Schell), the service paradox continues to grow. While cautioning faculty about their service load is important advice as they work toward tenure, it is even more important that tenured faculty work to change a system of values that ignores the labor of service, its functions in an increasingly exploitative labor

1 See “The New Old Labor Crisis,” where Tressie McMillan Cottom writes that African-American scholars are 50 percent more likely to end up off the tenure track and that black faculty and students have been protesting the “ghettofication of black scholars in adjunct roles” since the 1960s. See also Gutierrez y Muhs et al’s collection *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, specifically the chapters in Part V: Tenure and Promotion.

environment, and the expertise required to sustain institutions of higher education.²

The root cause of inequity is that the labor that supports institutional missions, specifically feminized labor, has been and continues to be devalued in higher education—and often at the expense of students. This problem is a systemic one, and it is shaping the labor conditions in higher education, and more acutely in English. The national (AAUP) and disciplinary (MLA) data, provided by Schell, Massé and Hogan, and others, have shown that gender inequity correlates to the amount of service women in the academy do. In 2011, Karen Pyke called for these changes in *The Profession*: “Nothing short of a dramatic cultural shift in the meaning and value given to service labor is necessary if we are to forge gender equity among faculty” (86). When it comes to gender inequity, we seem to be good at identifying the what (through national data and reports on the status of women), and even the why (through the lens of feminized labor), but we have not been able to identify and make effective changes to reduce these inequities.

In this article, we argue that the key to transforming how feminized labor is valued is to use institutional missions to redefine service, research, workload, and expertise in a way that realigns labor with institutional values. We draw from our experience in various faculty and administrative roles at a two-year access institution to demonstrate both the problems with and the need for this transformation of values. We argue that this process of transformation includes a) redefining and assessing labor and workload in terms of how it supports the institutional mission; b) defining and assessing professional development as work that supports the institutional mission; and c) valuing, supporting, and developing the expertise that is required for sustaining the labor of institutions. Instead of unstated hierarchies that privilege traditional patriarchal values, values which have feminized Composition within English departments, we need clearly defined values and rewards that are directly connected to the missions of institutions and those who perform labor.

2 In a qualitative study on women associate professors, none of the women talked about changing the value structures that had created the barriers they faced (service, particularly), nor did the researchers point that out in their analysis. The interviews very much reinforced the values implicit in “just say no.” (see Terosky et al).

Misaligned Institutional Values: How Feminized Labor Makes Service Invisible

Since its inception in *Composition*, the feminization metaphor has provided a useful lens through which to critique the way labor is valued in English and in academia. It has also been used as a theory to examine the kinds of work that are privileged and rewarded in higher education. *Composition theory* in the early 1990's identifies how the work of composition instructors is feminized (see Flynn, Miller, Stuckey). In 1992 Schell articulated three hallmarks of feminized labor in composition: the "service course" intended to teach, the "drudge" work that is labor-intensive and low-paying, and the predominance of women performing the labor. The continued existence of these hallmarks, over 20 years later, underscores how entrenched we are in a values system that has done little to support the work of writing teachers. For example, an MLA and Association of Departments of English (ADE) report shows how those in feminized positions lag behind their counterparts: while the number of women in English is almost equal to the number of men, men continue to outnumber women in positions of privilege and prestige and women continue to outnumber men in the more feminized positions in our discipline (26). These inequities point to larger problems within the discipline of English itself: it is not just a gender inequity that is visible in these patterns, but an inequity in the way the labors of the profession are valued. Likewise, the significance of feminized labor has grown beyond the strict constraints of gender and represents how the labor of marginalized populations is systemically devalued.

Inherent in these gendered inequities are the outdated and static values of a discipline steeped in patriarchy. For example, within the discipline of English, *Composition* courses are still considered "skills" courses, and their teaching (and therefore staffing) is not a priority for many departments; they are a service that faculty tolerate, or that are essentially "contracted out" to contingent laborers. Members of the CCCC Status of Women Committee³ discuss how service is synonymous with teaching composition and rhetoric courses:

First-year writing courses are "service courses." These offerings are often (mis)understood as non-specialist, non-major, "content-less" courses that serve students by preparing them to meet the writing expectations of other faculty. They also are considered to "serve" the university by providing students with academic writing instruction. Importantly, these courses also generate massive student credit hour production and tuition. Writing teachers (predominantly women and

3 This committee was changed to a standing group in 2016, the "Feminist Caucus."

instructors working in contingent positions) serve students as university gatekeepers. Writing teachers thereby serve higher education in material and ideological ways (Adams et al).

In other words, despite over two decades of research and criticism of feminized labor in the academic workforce, its value remains unchanged, and the classification of this work as unimportant service in practice has codified its value as such within departments and institutions alike. For all of these reasons, the work that women do in Composition as well as for their institutions continues to perpetuate their inequity.

Indeed, the teaching of Composition remains one of the lowest paying and least prestigious types of work in academia, whether it exists in standalone programs or under the umbrella of an English department. Composition's increasingly contingent workforce of adjunct instructors and graduate assistants demonstrates its diminished value. English departments that were built by and for experts in Literature often have neither fully accepted nor understood the importance of Composition as a distinct and equally (perhaps even more, depending on the institution) fundamental part of teaching, research, and scholarship in the discipline of English.⁴ If Composition instruction and scholarship are not valued by departments, then English perpetuates Composition's vulnerability as a non-essential, and therefore feminized, discipline. As tenure-track positions have become an increasingly smaller percentage of instructors at all types of higher education institutions, departments have also had fewer opportunities and resources to incorporate Composition into their extant organizations. There is no reason to hire experts, especially with increasingly less financial resources to do so.

Finally, the majority of writing courses continue to be taught by women. The issue of gender equity in English departments is a common problem at higher education institutions across the country. As the data shows, 70 percent of part-time instructors at Associate's institutions are women, while only 44 percent of women are full-time tenured faculty at Doctoral institutions. Therefore, the percentages of employed women in English increase as one moves from research institutions and toward two-year colleges, and also as one moves from full-time to part-time employment. While the overall number of women in English implies gender equity, a breakdown of the data reveals that less prestigious, less secure, and more labor-intensive positions are overwhelmingly held by women. These statistics bear out in our English

4 With the declining number of English Language and Literature majors across the country, it has become even more critical to reexamine the structural implications of housing Composition in English. See U.S. Department of Education et al.

department at our access institution—female faculty outnumber male faculty 19 to 12, and female instructional academic staff outnumber male instructional academic staff 39 to 23.

Despite the many women working in academia, inequity continues to dog institutions, with little to no success in identifying the root cause for inequity. In 2013, 67 female faculty in our own institution, University of Wisconsin Colleges, were given salary adjustments after an external study on salary compression revealed that women's salaries were significantly lower than those of their male counterparts. Our institution took the well-traveled path to addressing inequality: instead of investigating the reasons for the problem, the administration superficially addressed inequity by creating a formula based on rank and years of service, and adjusting select salaries based on that formula. The salary adjustments resulted in a wide variety of reactions across the institution, and may have created a bigger divide and more misunderstanding about inequity, forcing many to focus on who was receiving a salary increase rather than the reasons for those differences in the first place. Our administrators' messages repeatedly assured us that this inequity was "inexplicable," revealing both the naivete and privilege of those in positions of power.⁵ There was, of course, anger and shock from many women among the faculty upon realizing that they had been making significantly less money for no apparent reason. Many of us were stunned to hear how bad the disparities were. We also felt hopeless to effect change on our own because such a large level of sustained inequity seemed to be the only reason for change. This reaction is not uncommon across academia. Chronicle Vitae columnist Kelly Baker wrote about how she was "overwhelmed by the evidence of bias against women in higher education" and that the process of researching this topic made her "profoundly weary and sad." The amount and extent of sexism can contribute to a feeling of paralysis when thinking about how to make change. In our case, we felt we understood the ways we were impacted by sexism, but these salary inequities made visible layers of inequity that made any kind of transformation of values seem impossible. The denial of explanation and investigation into its causes did little to reassure us the matter was resolved; rather, it made us see that if we wanted change, we would need to be proactive.

But our experience in academia told us that we would have to look outside of the more traditional strategies to achieving success. We knew that the reasons for inequity are often, and accurately, attributed to the economic and

5 See Terosky et al for discussion of how "accumulated disadvantages" affect women's progress and increased disparity (60). See also Clark, Corcoran and Lewis; Cole; Valian; and West and Lewis.

social realities of women's lives (see Baker). In their research study examining gender disparity in service loads, Guarino and Borden conclude that there is a "pervasive gender effect. . . transcending departmental context, suggestive of a deeper sociological difference between men and women in relation to service tasks or simply the effects of discrimination" (690). We also saw a parallel to the labor dynamic at work in our extensive service commitments, reflecting how women are often told they are not participating in the systems of academia in the right ways and are spending time on service and teaching instead of on more valuable work like research. But the research on feminized labor also reveals that the root cause of inequity is the way the academy defines success. While we can acknowledge that the external realities of women's lives inhibit traditional measures of success, this explanation ignores the current value structure of academia. Guarino and Borden suggest that service inequities could be addressed through mentoring women to "show more selectivity in their service-related choices and cultivate their ability to say no to requests" (690). Not unlike Houston and Seltzer's assertions, this study suggests that solutions to service inequity rely on women learning to better navigate a problematic system. It is ineffective, even damaging, to posit academic enculturation (that women should become more literate in working within the academy's current inequitable structure) as a solution.

As we will show in the next section, the lens of feminized labor also reveals that institutional values built on gender inequity can influence everyone's labor environment negatively. When institutions rely on dated and unrealistic definitions and expectations of the labor and expertise required to effectively support their educational missions, they fail to reward and value the work that sustains them. Instead, they replicate the "gendered bureaucratic structures" that contribute to inequity (Bird 205).

The Problem of Feminized Service

The lens of feminized labor allows us to see a systemic problem in the way that value systems are structured in academia. Those who perform feminized labor and service, particularly in Composition, are at a disadvantage in every way "success" is measured in the academy (research, teaching, and service). Just as the MLA and ADE data reveal that the work women do is undervalued, research on the labor of service further shows a clear relationship between service and gender, employment status, and promotion. In our experience, there are three problematic perceptions of service that contribute to the devaluing of this work. These perceptions are what enable a large portion of an institution's labor economy to remain invisible and undervalued. As a result, we need to rethink the criteria on which we assess success in order to transform the value of that work.

The first problematic perception of service involves the “just say no” approach that we discussed in the opening of this article. This advice is problematic and often ignorant of institutional needs—it implies that saying no to service in its many forms is how “real” work gets done. In a sense, it is true—saying no to service work (if one is privileged enough to have the power to be able to say no) is a way to free up time for research and publication. However, this advice ignores the essential value and contributions of service work and undermines the work itself, forever marginalizing service in the academy, regardless of institutional mission. In some ways this advice is an institutional form of victim-blaming and internalized oppression.⁶ Women are both asked to and expected to do disproportionate amounts of service, and then blamed and punished for “making a choice” to perform this labor (see Misra et al). Institutions and departments need to ask themselves the following questions:

- Why is saying no to research and publication not an option?
- What are we losing as an institution by continuing to send the message that service should always come after research and publication?
- How can we critically assess the decision to say no to service—especially that which comes without compensation or time?

There are consequences for colleagues, students, and institutions when someone avoids service. And depending on the institutional context, those consequences may be more serious than saying no to more traditionally valued forms of labor like research. For example, a typical form of invisible service like building resources for and mentoring new writing instructors would have a significant impact on our institution: there are few instructors with the background required to effectively mentor or build writing program resources, so saying no means that work will either not be done or will be concentrated on the few who are qualified to do that work. Like English departments at most institutions, we regularly hire new instructors (some even at the last minute), many of whom have little to no experience teaching writing to the academically at-risk students we serve. Without a set of comprehensive resources or an experienced mentor to assist them through their first semester or year, they are on their own to design, draft, and prepare curricula. These instructors teach the greatest number of writing courses and students, and the effects of having neither resources nor mentoring are significant. In our institution, the students in these classes (lower-quartile students) are ineligible to transfer to four-year institutions until they successfully complete our writing program or improve their grades. For the most part, when they are not retained at our access institution’s two-year campuses, they are not retained

6 For further discussion see Armstrong et al.

to higher education. Because mentoring and support of instructors falls into a category of service, saying no has a potentially significant impact on student learning and retention.

In addition, the ability to say no to service correlates directly with one's privilege. It is considered acceptable, even encouraged, to say no to service when working on research or publications. But the consequences for tenure-track faculty and students can be much more severe when the choice is the other way around (see Payne; Schell). It is worth asking what happens when research goes unpublished or is completed in a longer time-frame: while it may directly impact retention and promotion of faculty, it most likely would have little impact on students at a two-year institution like ours. While we are not diminishing the critical role of research, we think it is important to interrogate its proportionate value, especially when the majority of advice columns in our disciplinary publications tell women to focus on achieving a goal that may or may not contribute to their institutional missions. In many cases, the gendered bureaucratic structures of institutions have already made traditional research time, resources, and publishing trajectories more than difficult: we should reconsider why we continue to privilege it above other labor. As Park argues, "[T]he notion that women should improve their research productivity by refusing anything more than minimal teaching and service responsibilities arises from a masculine perspective that mirrors sexist attitudes that exist outside the academy" (61). Depending on the institutional context for the work, research may be valuable to only an individual or to a much smaller group of people, yet its elevated importance perpetuates a value structure that contributes to gender inequity.

The second problematic perception shared by many in academia is that service is a chore to be completed, an item to be checked off a list, or a requirement that needs to be fulfilled in order to meet the minimal expectations of the job. As such, service is usually recorded in list form on faculty assessment documents. As a result, quantity is often valued over quality, and those who are assessing the quality of service often are uninformed (or do not consider) the amount of work required for different service obligations. Moreover, quantity can be misleading: it is possible for faculty to serve on multiple committees and do very little work, while others can serve on just one committee that requires a great deal of commitment. In our institution, annual review forms or promotion documents do not ask faculty to describe how their service contributes to their teaching, research, department, or institution. Without that description, both the quantity and quality of service are obfuscated and the actual labor of service remains invisible or inaccurately understood.

Another consequence of how we (do not) assess service is that acts of service are seen as unspecialized work, as though it could be done by any faculty member rather than one with specific experience, training, or expertise that makes one more qualified to complete that job. While publishing an article can reward the writer with tenure, promotion, additional release time, or grant funding, completing quality service work often only leads to more service. When the academic environment does not openly acknowledge the expertise required to complete certain service tasks, faculty with that training or expertise who perform those jobs often become pigeon-holed into keeping such service as an expected, and often uncompensated, part of their workload. If that expertise is not valued in policy or evaluation criteria, that work is devalued, and often considered something that particular faculty member likes to do because they are good at it. For example, in our institution, mentoring is not listed in our policy documents as an example of campus or institutional service, despite the labor required and its important role in effective teaching. Because such a small percentage of faculty are qualified or willing to provide effective mentoring, very few people in a position of authority understand the labor and skill required to do this work when it comes time for evaluation or promotion. Instead, the few people who are effective mentors are rewarded with additional mentees, while those who do not do it well or at all have little to no consequences. In our department, like many other departments, the irony is that while service tasks are seen as interchangeable, the same group of faculty keep doing them.

Problematic perceptions of service begin even before one is hired. Because service expertise is not a priority when hiring faculty, the process contributes to the problem of devaluing service. Many of the service tasks that are required to run an institution and/or department require background or training in specific fields as well as leadership, organizational, and communication skill sets, yet job requirements for faculty positions emphasize academic credentials and the labor related to research and teaching. When we were hired as faculty six years apart, neither of us had a clear expectation of what our service requirements would entail, not unlike other faculty hires. (For a somewhat typical explanation of the service expectations for a faculty job, see the Council of Graduate School's "Faculty Roles and Responsibilities," which identifies service expectations as service to "the institution, the external community, and the larger academic community," varying slightly depending on the type of institution). This vague concept of service perhaps contributes to gender inequity in that women often aren't aware of the service discrepancies between men and women until they are told or until they research the disparity themselves (see Flaherty 2017). The invisibility of gendered service, coupled with the fact that there are very few training and professionalizing experiences

for graduate students, future faculty, and new faculty, ensures that the cycle of devaluing and de-prioritizing service is repeated. When hiring new faculty, rarely does the job requirement include background or training in important service areas, nor a discussion about how that expertise is important to serve the mission of the institution.

An additional problematic perception of service is perhaps the most obvious—service that is highly visible within an institution is much more valued than the service that isn't. Labor-intensive and uncompensated work including mentoring; creating and building resources; conducting workshops; drafting and editing documents and materials; curricular revisions; and course policy changes tend to be focused and disciplinary; and often seen by a limited number of people. If people in the institution are unfamiliar with the work, it will be rewarded less in evaluations processes. When work isn't compensated with time or money, it automatically is seen as less valuable by those who don't understand that work. For example, it is not uncommon for many two-year institutions to engage in long battles to convince administrators to support a writing program coordinator position (see Klausman). At our institution we have to make the case to keep our Writing Program Administrator position, with no travel budget or funding for curricular and professional development, even though this position serves over 100 instructors and 14,000 students, 13 campuses, and an online program.

These problematic perceptions of service are only a few of the ways that the labor of service is obfuscated. Service is defined neither clearly nor consistently during graduate study and preparation for work in higher education, during the hiring process, and service and its value remains unclear throughout the stages of the tenure process and beyond. Without a clear way of defining and assessing this work, the implicit and inequitable demands for devalued labor create and maintain a gendered service divide.

Transforming Begins: Assessing the Institutional Mission

In many ways it is difficult to imagine what it looks like when feminized labor is valued in a university setting. The history of service indicates that the changing structures of the university mitigate the way we review, reexamine, and even revise institutional missions. Bird acknowledges the disjunctures between university-level missions and the complex system of colleges, departments, and/or divisions that arise from them. It is often from these disjunctures that values become misaligned with labor, and usually at the expense of service work that is integral to the institutional mission.

Both Ward and Bird acknowledge that examining and possibly revising institutional missions is an important step in the changing landscape of the university. As Ward says:

The administration must be clear about campus mission and the role that service and engagement play in this mission. Is there a clear call for service in the campus mission statement? How is it defined? Does the mission statement need to be rewritten? How does the campus use the mission statement? How does faculty work play into it? How do students fit? How does the campus relate to the community? Campus conversations need to take place regarding the mission and scope of engagement initiatives. Campuses need to be aware about the ratio of lip-service to action. Are faculty being encouraged to do service and getting rewarded for it? Has there been ample opportunity for faculty to have a voice in how the mission is shaped? (153)

Ward's list of questions demonstrates how complex the task of defining missions is, and different types of institutions may have very different answers to these questions. Of course, because feminized labor is indeed invisible, not all administrators are aware of the labor of the university in its entirety. What is more, it seems daunting to ask those in administration to invest time and labor into a process that could unseat power structures that support their own positions.

For example, if we look to our own state and the UW System, we can see how institutional missions do and do not align with the labor of the respective institutions. The University of Wisconsin System has long been synonymous with the Wisconsin Idea, that "the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state" ("The Wisconsin Idea"). Ward refers to the Wisconsin Idea as ". . . one of the most relevant developments with regard to the state university and its role in service" (43), as its main goal is to "serve the state" (44) and "improve people's lives" ("The Wisconsin Idea") by extending university resources outside the borders of the campus.

While all UW institutions share the Wisconsin Idea, they all serve the state in different ways. The mission of the UW Colleges, the two-year transfer institution of the system, emphasizes preparing students for success and providing access to an affordable general education:

The University of Wisconsin Colleges is a multi-campus institution committed to high quality educational programs, preparing students for success at the baccalaureate level of education, providing the first two years of a liberal arts general education that is accessible and affordable, providing a single baccalaureate degree that meets local

and individual needs, and advancing the Wisconsin Idea by bringing the resources of the University to the people of the state and the communities that provide and support its campuses. ("Mission, Goals, and Vision")

In contrast, the mission of UW Madison, the research university flagship of the system, emphasizes the creation of knowledge as a way to transform the world:

The primary purpose of the University of Wisconsin–Madison is to provide a learning environment in which faculty, staff and students can discover, examine critically, preserve and transmit the knowledge, wisdom and values that will help ensure the survival of this and future generations and improve the quality of life for all. The university seeks to help students to develop an understanding and appreciation for the complex cultural and physical worlds in which they live and to realize their highest potential of intellectual, physical and human development. ("Mission Statement")

Inherent in these two missions (as well as the range of missions among the other 12 UW institutions) are the different kinds of labor required to support them. It makes sense, then, that the way work is valued at an institution should depend on institutional contexts. Instead, institutional value systems tend to be static across contexts, and are often influenced by research institutions.⁷ Likewise, as Ward notes, from the beginning of the twentieth century then-President Van Hise struggled to enact teaching, research, and service roles while serving the people of Wisconsin (45). This structure has been in conflict with a service mission for quite some time, even at a research institution such as UW-Madison. Adhering to this value system at an access institution like ours means that we end up rewarding labor that that does not support the mission, often at the expense of the work that does.

Instead, institutions of higher education should work to create their own value systems that support their own missions. Developing contextual value systems allows research universities to value and reward work differently than access institutions. In "Scholarship Unbound: Assessing Service As Scholarship in Promotion and Tenure Decisions," Kerry Ann O'Meara argues that "institutions with strong teaching and service missions which develop faculty reward systems that favor research will likely experience a fragmentation of sorts, characterized by faculty dissatisfaction with the disconnection

7 Indeed, data from the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Promotion and Tenure (2005-6) shows that expectations at research universities often "creep" disproportionately into the expectations at other institutions.

between and among institutional mission, faculty interests, faculty workload, and rewards” (3-4). This disconnection is evident at an institution like the UW Colleges, which structures tenure, promotion, and merit around the triumvirate of “research, teaching, and service.” With the majority of courses offered at the freshman-sophomore level, and the average student not meeting ACT benchmarks for College Readiness, emphases on retention, pedagogical support for instructors who work with academically at-risk students, curricular development that supports student learning, and support for the emotional labor required to teach these students should heavily influence the way work is valued and rewarded. Instead, we experience disjunctures as faculty and administrators work within a value system that conflicts with the service mission of the institution. As we will show in the next section, changing this value system involves a major transformation of how academic work is defined.

Transforming the Value of Research and Teaching

While the missions of higher education institutions vary widely from vocational to research, the values used to assess and reward faculty performance, or to define success, are quite similar. In 1996 Park published “Research, Teaching, and Service: Why Shouldn’t Women’s Work Count?” in *The Journal of Higher Education*, in which she identifies the skewed values of success in academia and argues for an integrative approach to scholarship. Park builds on the work of Ernest Boyer’s *Scholarship Reconsidered*, in which he calls for seeing and valuing the multiple integrated scholarships that comprise faculty work: Discovery, Teaching, Application, and Integration. Park uses the following table to illustrate the criteria and the traditional hierarchical value structure that corresponds to them in institutions of higher education (50):

TABLE 1
Criteria for Tenure and Promotion

Research	Teaching	Service
Publishing professional journals professional books monographs applied pedagogical		
Publishing textbooks instructional materials		
Conference presentations	Classroom performance graduate undergraduate upper division lower division	
Editing/reviewing for a journal		Professional service University service administration committees student clubs
	Advising/counseling students	

Research, teaching, and service are not only seen as distinctly separate aspects of the work that faculty do, but also as a hierarchy of values with research at the top and teaching and service at a distant second and third place, respectively. Park identifies many of the assumptions that underpin this hierarchy, such as “everyone teaches and serves, so research is what sets individuals apart,” “research enhances institutional reputations,” and “research is the creation of knowledge.” Park, like Boyer and Bird, deconstructs many of these assumptions and calls for a new paradigm of defining, valuing, and assessing

Nevertheless, these assumptions persist throughout higher education. While research and publishing are valuable in many institutional contexts, the value placed on publishing and independent research is altogether too uniform across different types of institutions of higher education. For example, the “Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion” demonstrates how the hierarchical value system Park identifies is being replicated and intensified at all types of institutions in the discipline of English:

the demands placed on candidates for tenure, especially demands for publication, have been expanding in kind and increasing in quantity. While rising expectations have been driven by the nation’s most prestigious research universities, the effects ripple throughout all sectors of higher education, where greater emphasis has been placed on publication in tenure and promotion decisions even at institutions that assign heavy teaching loads. (Modern Language Association)

Indeed, working for an access institution while managing a 4-4 teaching load and service obligations can and quite frequently does preclude the time and resources that independent research requires. Valuing independent research at a teaching institution is complex and can have a ripple effect that impacts other areas of work. For example, if a faculty member privileges research and publishing at the expense of effective teaching and performing their share of service, their work could be at odds with the mission of the institution.⁸ In addition, independent research is often not valued in context: research that advances the career/interest of the researcher may even be privileged over research that advances the mission of the institution. A problem we encounter at our teaching institution is how to assess research and publications that are disconnected from the mission and curriculum of our institution. While sometimes the work is a clearly-articulated disciplinary contribution. Valuing research equitably is not the same as valuing it equally. In

8 See Payne in this issue for a discussion of how Boise State has reduced workload and evaluation with its institutional mission.

"Rewarding Multiple Forms of Scholarship: Promotion and Tenure," O'Meara questions this very phenomenon:

why hasn't the [engagement] movement pushed back and suggested that all scholarship—including theoretical work in journals and basic science—be considered for issues of impact, relevance, and contribution to public issues? Why are there not more faculty asking of their colleagues, "Who will use this research?" or "How will it make a difference?" (285)

O'Meara's questions will not be addressed until the hierarchical structure of values changes. For example, given the mission of our institution, research and publication that supports student learning and effective teaching should be valued above research and publication that specializes in areas not directly connected to engaging and advancing students at the institution. At the same time, we acknowledge that engagement in the profession and the many disciplines that fall under English is the way that we maintain our credentials and expertise. Thus, research's value and valuation are problematized in institutions like ours that require immense teaching and service workloads. To address this problem, our department has worked to articulate research and professional development standards that value peer-reviewed publication on Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as much as peer-reviewed disciplinary research. By doing so, we hope to acknowledge that in an institution such as ours, research related to teaching practices is more closely connected to our mission. Moreover, privileging research that is connected to the mission offers a more equitable way to support professional development that directly impacts students and pedagogical growth.

As Park and Boyer's work demonstrates, research should not be seen as separate from teaching and service—each informs the other in a way that helps an instructor understand best practices, students, and the classroom and institution in which they work. Teaching should be valued in proportion to its labor, the measure of which depends on institutional contexts (and may vary greatly within institutions themselves). In the case of a teaching institution, faculty members who can demonstrate their teaching effectiveness should be rewarded accordingly. The work of teaching is labor-intensive and requires ongoing professional development, especially in process-driven courses like composition. While the specific pedagogies vary across the disciplines, the research on effective teaching points to student-centered learning.⁹ These practices that support student learning are time-consuming: ongoing

9 See Weimer's *Student-Centered Learning: 5 Keys Changes to Practice*; Susan Ambrose et al's *How Learning Works*.

self-assessment and revision of curricula, in-class activities and formal assignments that assess student learning, and multiple levels of feedback to guide learning. In addition, reflective instructors who develop and revise their courses rarely do so (or will not be able to do so) without the support of service; that is, they benefit from working with mentors, colleagues, instructional resources, assessment coordinators and/or committees, professional development activities, and peer feedback on classroom instruction¹⁰. This service work, as we have shown above, relies on both disciplinary expertise and institutional research—in many ways, this service work is the research work of an access institution.

Ultimately, to transform the value of research, teaching, and service and move toward an integrative culture of faculty work, institutions must articulate clear learning goals, foster the pedagogies that support student learning, and then create a culture of accountability, assessment, and feedback that rewards instructors for effective teaching practices. But such a culture is only possible if we articulate how service plays an integral role in effective teaching and learning and interrogate assumptions about the value of research in our institutional contexts. As we show in the next section, the traditional value system is one that disconnects service from the important contributions that it makes to effective teaching. The hegemony of such a system keeps the status quo in place by marginalizing service rather than seeing its work as informed by expertise.

Valuing and Leveraging Expertise

In addition to valuing research, teaching, and service in relation to the institutional mission, it is important that we give attention to the training, expertise, and scholarship that informs and supports the labor of service. From ad-hoc committees, to shared governance, to administrative tasks, to student support—"service" covers a broad array of labor at any given institution. Some tasks come with visibility, even accolades, along with compensation in the form of release time or stipends, while some are virtually invisible. As a result, it is difficult to capture the qualities of expertise required to perform this work effectively. Nevertheless, if the labor of service is going to be valued appropriately and in accordance with institutional missions, the expertise required to do the work well should be defined and acknowledged. This acknowledgement is what moves service from the realm of unskilled, interchangeable, and inessential labor and more toward a "scholarship of engagement" that Boyer outlines in *Scholarship Reconsidered*. In this section we outline strategies to transform the value of service.

10 See Giordano, Hassel, Heinert, and Phillips.

One way to value the labor of service is to clearly define the relevant skills and expertise that it requires. An abiding assumption that service is unskilled labor works to devalue it. While this type of service may exist, it is much more common for service to require at the very least experience, and more often, expertise. Service related to the writing program requires disciplinary expertise (knowledge of national standards, familiarity with research on writing pedagogy and theory, and facility with disciplinary resources) developed from graduate coursework, disciplinary engagement, and/or teaching experience that reflects changing national disciplinary standards. Only a handful of our faculty and instructional staff have terminal degrees in writing, and only half of them might meet these criteria of expertise. Among faculty alone, that percentage is even smaller. It is not a coincidence that those with expertise are also the few who perform almost all of the department's service related to the writing program.

An obvious but increasingly rare way to support the disproportionate service load in our discipline is to find ways to compensate it. Keeping track of the responsibilities, time, and other costs and expectations is a way to argue for compensating this work with a course release or a stipend, while also increasing the visibility of the work. In our institution, this strategy helped us secure a Developmental Reading and Writing Coordinator and a somewhat tenuous Writing Program Administrator position. While this strategy may be more of a long-term goal, it is important to consider how to transition critical service roles from uncompensated to compensated by building the work into positions (or creating positions out of the work). In the face of a changing student population, administrators might be more receptive to the creation of positions that allow them to deal directly with the pressures to address cost-effective learning and a decreasing number of faculty positions.

Changing the service landscape also involves helping our peers develop the expertise required to perform it. One way is to provide faculty development related to the writing program—if there aren't many people in the department who are experts in writing studies, then departments should provide opportunities for them to become so. In our department, reading circles, workshops, conferences, training, research projects, and grants, all work together as professionalizing opportunities. Department members who are trained, and therefore understand the labor of effective writing pedagogy, can help contribute to a culture shift that allows us to make progress. It also increases the number of people who are able to perform service tasks that require writing expertise. The drawback is that these kinds of professional development experiences often require a lot of (often uncompensated) work to create and sustain. However, through hiring, professional development, and

mentoring, our department is approaching a critical mass of people who recognize and value writing studies expertise and the service that supports it.

Another way to value expertise is to ensure it informs the governance structures of an institution. Unfortunately, existing governance structures may be reinforcing an outdated value system. As Bowen and Tobin argue in *Locus of Authority: The Evolution of Faculty Roles in the Governance of Higher Education*, an institution's ability to address problems facing higher education today are increasingly hampered by an outdated system of governance practices (1). In order to make changes, then, we need to make changes to governance, or "the location and exercise of authority" (ix).

We must ask whether it is reasonable to expect a century-old structure of faculty governance to enable colleges and universities of all kinds to respond to new demands for more cost-effective student learning. Will institutions that educate growing numbers of students from first-generation, under-represented, and disadvantaged backgrounds be able to make the organizational and pedagogical changes that preserve higher education as an engine of social progress? (4)

In our case, while we have made some progress with isolated goals, we know that sustainable change is not possible without addressing institutional culture and the way labor is valued in relation to our mission. Therefore, as Bowen and Tobin show, governance structures need to transform as part of a larger institutional culture-shift (205). While governance at all levels has long been the job of faculty alone, changing structures to allow for representation from and for contingent faculty and non-traditional students is vital to transforming governance. This means changing the charges of committees, who should comprise their makeup, how they are elected and/or appointed, and how they conduct their work. Perhaps it means creating entirely new committees based on a revised institutional mission. Ultimately, it means that the very way in which governance has operated needs to change to allow for inclusive representation, or at the very least representation that more accurately represents the workforce at the institution.

When employed collectively, these strategies have the potential to greatly impact institutional culture and values in critical ways. However, enacting culture change is a form of labor in itself, and it is important to anticipate the toll of the inevitable challenges and backlash. As a result of shifting value structures to privilege student learning and teaching over more traditional measures of success, those who have achieved success under those traditional measures will likely feel threatened. Bowen and Tobin discuss how faculty frequently claim "academic freedom" as a reason to reject change (201). Instead, they argue, faculty are bound to the twin responsibilities of professional expectations

and freedom: autonomy is not autonomy from disciplinary knowledge about teaching and learning, but autonomy within disciplinary knowledge about teaching and learning (202).

We continue to find ways that traditional values have a stranglehold on our institution: there is a dearth of diversity represented in the leadership and administrative positions in our institutions; the problematic traditional values we have discussed above still dictate faculty hiring as well as promotion and merit decisions; we experience a great deal of pushback trying to implement change and disciplinary standards in first-year writing; and, of course, the majority of uncompensated service is still performed by women. Nevertheless, we must continue to work toward a transformation, not of the surface-level structures, but of the values that underpin the labor of our institution. These transformative practices are the only way to make sustainable changes to the persistent inequities on which academia is built.

Saying Yes to Valuing Service

After decades of research on gender and the service economy in higher education, it is clear that we cannot expect to challenge the gendered bureaucratic structures that reinscribe service's low status without challenging and redefining institutional values. Instead of a universal set of new values, values should be derived from institutional-specific contexts and missions.

Instead of advising our colleagues to "learn to say no" to service, we should advise them to ask, "how does this work support the mission of my institution?" and to seek out work that does. We should not be training a new generation of faculty who say no. We should be training a new generation of faculty who know how to effect change, who understand the mission of the institution of which they are a part, and who value the work that supports it accordingly. In addition to mentoring our colleagues as they work toward the increasingly rare opportunity of tenure, as tenured faculty we should use the privilege that tenure conveys to change the problematic values and structural inequities of institutions. This includes creating a tenure that is an indicator of meaningful work in support of the institutional mission. In other words, an important part of transformation is learning how to advocate for and create sustainable equity—learning how to say yes to undertaking the challenges presented by the changing labor landscape of higher education.

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Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies:

II. Administration, Emotional Labor, And Gendered Discourses Of Power: A Feminist Chair's Mission To Make Service Matter

Michelle Payne

Abstract: *Michelle Masse' and Katie Hogan's edited collection, Over Ten Million Served (2010), argues that "complaining about service is not the same as critically analyzing service as a significant dimension of academic labor" (15). Nor, as Phillips and Heinert argue, is the admonition to "just say no" an ethical solution to the gendered inequity of academic labor. In this essay, I not only illustrate the consequences of saying yes to service and analyze its significance, but I illustrate the ways that service positioned me to advocate for change at my own institution. More specifically, I focus on the unique administrative role of the Department Chair, particularly in terms of the gendered emotional labor required to sustain an academic department and the "incongruous, gendered bureaucratic structures" (Bird) that have essentially institutionalized and naturalized "emotive dissonance" as an inevitable consequence of being a chair. I argue that interrogating this emotive dissonance—these "outlaw emotions"—is critical not only to exposing how those structures perpetuate inequity, but also to transforming gendered service and redefining the power and authority of academics, more generally. In making this argument, I draw upon sociological theories and research on emotion studies, research on academic administration, and my own administrative experience, including the strategies I developed based on my own "outlaw emotions" to disrupt these gendered discourses by 1) reconfiguring the definitions of and rewards for "service" within my department, and 2) initiating an institutional conversation about Department Chair labor that led to several policy changes.*

Keywords: *Department Chair, English department, Emotional labor, Gender, Feminized labor, Higher education, Service*

A progressive model of service is one in which we are willing to force change, even incremental change—to disrupt without destroying. This kind of service is not in service to the institution but in service to the constituencies with whom one's loyalties lie, whether it be women faculty, untenured faculty, or any particular group, configuration, or cause.

Paula Krebs, "Not in Service"

Because emotions express the valuations of a community, descriptions of how we work must address the way emotion structures our professional activities. Emotion is a central component in social relations and is intertwined with issues of power and status in the work world....If we are to posit good work practices..., we need to address the ways in which our profession produces emotional dispositions for its workers.

Laura Micciche, "More Than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work"

Introduction

Written almost a decade after Laura Micciche's important article on emotional labor and WPA work, Michelle Masse' and Katie Hogan's edited collection, *Over Ten Million Served* (2010), adds to the growing research on the gendered nature of academic service and argues that "complaining about service is not the same as critically analyzing service as a significant dimension of academic labor" (15). Nor, as Phillips and Heinert argue, is the admonition to "just say no" an ethical solution to the gendered inequity of academic labor. In this essay, I not only illustrate the consequences of saying yes to service and analyze its significance, but I illustrate the ways that service positioned me to advocate for change at my own institution, to "use the privilege that tenure conveys to change the problematic values and structural inequities of institutions" (Phillips & Heinert). More specifically, I focus on the unique administrative role of the Department Chair, particularly in terms of the gendered emotional labor required to sustain an academic department and the potential role Department Chairs can play as leaders in transforming gendered service in higher education.

Scholars like Micciche, Masse' and Hogan, and a handful of others have begun to address administrative labor by analyzing "the way emotion structures our professional activities" (Micciche 452). I hope to build upon that work by analyzing the emotional labor of Department Chairs and its significance in the overall labor of a department. This labor occurs within what Micciche calls

the “culture of disappointment in the academy and its ever-widening scope” (433), a culture that my colleagues and I have been examining in this issue: the corporatization of the academy, inequitable and exploitative working conditions for faculty, gender inequities within the structure of academic labor and its reward systems—the “disappointed hope” we and others have experienced in our professional lives (Micciche 446), as women, as faculty, as administrators. Micciche argues that such an analysis “can be one basis for exploring the relationship between work practices and emotional dispositions that contributes both to the larger discourse on administration and to an understanding of those factors that create a culture of disappointment in the academy” (434-435).

One of those factors for Department Chairs is the “rupture” between faculty desires for a supportive, collegial department climate and the institutional disdain for the emotional labor that is critical to creating such an environment, disdain that is reflected in university policies, university reward systems, disciplinary principles, and the day-to-day interactions between a chair and those she leads. Furthermore, these ruptures are sustained by “incongruous, gendered bureaucratic structures” (Bird) that privilege a masculine faculty identity over a feminized administrative identity, despite the institutional power of a Department Chair, and have essentially institutionalized and naturalized “emotive dissonance” as an inevitable consequence of being a chair.

I argue that interrogating this emotive dissonance—these “outlaw emotions”—is critical not only to exposing how those structures perpetuate inequity, but also to transforming gendered service and redefining the power and authority of academics, more generally. In making this argument, I will draw upon sociological theories and research on emotion studies, research on academic administration, and my own administrative experience, including the strategies I developed based on my own “outlaw emotions” to disrupt these gendered discourses by 1) reconfiguring the definitions of and rewards for “service” within my department, and 2) initiating an institutional conversation about Department Chair labor that led to several policy changes.

First, however, I want to acknowledge my own positionality as a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper-middle class full professor. Gender is my only minoritized identity, which means my privilege in this academic and cultural context positioned me differently to advocate for the changes I describe here than if I were not white, for example, or not upper-middle class. That gender is my only minoritized identity has also shaped my experiences with academic service differently from those who have many

minoritized, intersecting identities.¹ My administrative narrative, therefore, does not and cannot represent the experiences of ALL faculty who identify as female, nor is it the only feminist approach to transforming gendered service. I offer it as one example, using many theoretical lenses to understand both my situated, embodied experiences and my ethical responsibilities as a privileged academic administrator.

On Saying Yes to Administrative Service

My professional narrative is likely familiar to many of us who are or have been administrators: In my second year as an Assistant Professor I became the Assistant Director of the Writing Program at Boise State, collaborating with my colleague and friend, Bruce Ballenger, who was the Director. Together we oversaw a gradual but significant transformation in the program's curriculum and pedagogical orientation, in the morale and working conditions of our writing instructors, in the training of our teaching assistants, and in the administration's respect and support. We developed an assessment program that was lauded as a model across campus. We did administrative work in the summers without pay, earning tenure and promotion for the traditional scholarly publications we wrote in between fragments of time, not for the administrative service that consumed more than 50% of our workload.

But we were largely invisible. The Dean noticed us because first-year writing students had stopped coming to his office to complain. Our chair noticed us because we were hiring too many of our former MA students. Our MFA Director noticed us because our application process was—in his view—frightening potential students away. We became visible, in other words, to the degree that we were or were not serving someone else's needs.

My perspectives on gender and academic service were honed during the nine years I was the Assistant and later the Director of the Writing Program. Although my tenure and promotion were not negatively affected by my administrative service, I was increasingly aware that over half of my workload, half of my professional identity, did not matter in any tangible way—not in terms of release time, additional compensation, or public recognition. It DID matter, however, to the students, TA's, and instructors with whom I worked.

1 Research has shown, for example, that faculty of color are often overtaxed with committee assignments, and female faculty of color can be even more so. This over-taxation can have detrimental effects on tenure and promotion as well as emotional and psychological well-being. E.g., see Porter; Lawrence, Ott, & Bell; Museus, Ledesma, and Parker; Ross and Edwards. See also Gutiérrez y Muhs, et al; Schnackenberg and Simard on the experiences of women of color, queer, and transgender administrators.

And it mattered to me—as an academic, a teacher, an administrator, and a person. I learned to live with the dissonance, as so many of us do, with the disappointment (as Micciche argues) that seemed a “natural” consequence of the emotional disposition that was inscribed in the role of a WPA.

Laboring Emotions

What I was experiencing, in retrospect, is what sociologists define as “emotive dissonance.” Although the term is frequently defined from a positivist perspective as the dissonance created between a worker’s “true self” and the “fake self” he/she is expected to display, a post-structuralist perspective defines it as the tension between an individual worker’s “preferred identity” and his/her “required identity” (Tracy 262, 264, 272). My “preferred identity,” in this case, conflicted with my “required identity” as a faculty member who accepted that her labor as a WPA would not be rewarded or recognized within institutional discourses. The emotional labor of being a WPA, as Micciche and others have demonstrated, is all the more challenging because of this dissonance. But, as I’ll illustrate later, that dissonance can become transformative when we choose to take our “outlaw emotions” seriously, when we see that dissonance as “unconventional emotional responses” (Jaggar 160) that are potentially subversive to the status quo.

Department Chairs experience a similar kind of emotive dissonance. When one becomes a chair, that labor is tied to the chair’s unique position within the university’s power structure, a position fraught with sometimes-contradictory responsibilities and contradictory rhetorics about being chair. Those contradictions and consequent emotive dissonance are part of the incongruous, gendered, bureaucratic structures within the academy: first, because a chair’s job requires emotional labor, but within an institutional culture that devalues that work²; second, because the role is constructed around gendered binaries that are often regarded as a diminution of the ideal academic worker (a faculty member)—as a loss of one’s preferred identity; and third, because the university’s bureaucratic structure confers power and authority on the chair’s role, but its reward system renders the work invisible. In other words, the feminized emotional labor of chairs (or other academic administrators) is necessary to their own power, authority, and effectiveness, even as it undermines their status in the academic community.

2 The emotional labor of administrative service has been addressed by a number of scholars in the field (Micciche; Jacobs and Micciche; Holt, Anderson, and Rouzie; Strickland; Hogan and Masse).

What is Emotional Labor?

Originally described by Arlie Hochschild in 1983, emotional labor characterizes a wide range of jobs (teachers, administrative assistants, flight attendants, etc.), jobs that are most often performed by women or are feminized because the nature of the work is associated with feminine qualities. As sociologist Amy Wharton notes, “a job requires emotional labor when its performance involves making voice or facial contact with the public; when its performance involves producing an emotional state in the client or customer; and when the employer has an opportunity to control workers’ emotional displays” (Wharton 157). A large portion of a Department Chair’s job requires him/her to interact with people—in meetings, phone calls, emails, complaints, interruptions, performance evaluations, etc.—and to manage his/her own emotions in order to motivate faculty, for example, or present an argument to the Dean for new resources, or respond to a student complaint. Expressing and managing emotions becomes labor when it is necessary to performing one’s job: “a pleasant emotional facade is part of the commodity bought and sold” for service professionals in the travel or entertainment industries, for example; for emergency personnel, emotional labor is central to providing their service (Tracy 263); for managers or others in leadership positions, one’s emotional control is used strategically to “purposefully control emotions in an effort to appear more powerful, masculine, and rational” (Tracy 263).

As managers as well as the “face” of the department, chairs are expected to control their own emotions, discipline the emotions of those they supervise, and display appropriate emotions for delivering “good customer service.” They are, in sociological terms, “privileged emotion managers” (Wharton 153): when I receive hostile emails from faculty, for example, I am expected to control my hurt and anger and respond calmly; when the department has to make severe budget cuts, I am expected to convey calm and measured optimism; when a faculty member or student weeps in my office, I am expected to keep calm and balance my empathy with the goals of the meeting. At the same time, I have to address the emotions of others in ways that are consistent with university policy and federal laws, behaviors from colleagues and staff that range from inappropriate outbursts to misuse of power to disrespectful and irresponsible comments and actions.³ As a privileged emotion manager, I am “the boss,” “the Man,” a cog in the panopticon charged with overseeing my colleagues and friends—as well as myself.

3 And these expectations weren’t simply implied. They were clearly stated in the university’s Statement of Shared Values, for example, and in the position guidelines for Department Chairs.

Emotional Labor as Leadership

This emotive dissonance seems to be an inevitable consequence of being a chair, particularly when one reads the advice literature. As Hecht, et al note, "Department Chairs are both managers and faculty colleagues, advisors and advisees, soldiers and captains, drudges and bosses." They differ from administrators above them in part because of the particular kinds of emotional labor required.⁴

The dean and the vice president ... do not have to say good morning—every morning—to their colleagues in the department; they do not have to teach several times a week alongside their colleagues; they do not have to maintain a family relationship with their faculty members. The Department Chair, on the other hand, must be acutely aware of the vital statistics of each family member including births, deaths, marriages, divorces, illnesses, and even private financial woes. This intimate relationship is not duplicated anywhere else on the campus because no other academic unit takes on the ambiance of a family, with its personal interaction, its daily sharing of common goals and interests, and its concern for each member. (Hecht, et al)

The emotional labor of Department Chairs, as Schell also illustrates, is unique in part because it is tied to the intimate relationships that characterize families.⁵ And the consequences are tangible: How a chair manages these relationships contributes to a department's overall climate, which in turn affects how well faculty are able to work collegially and handle conflict productively (Portath 24; Cipriano).

Given the findings of a number of studies, a chair's emotional labor can have a greater impact on faculty retention than a chair's administrative labor. As Robert Cipriano notes, "climate, collegiality, and culture are more important to early career faculty than workload, money, and tenure clarity" (Cipriano 17), a claim that is reinforced in the latest (2014) report from the Collaborative

4 Deans and Provosts perform emotional labor, as well in many of the same ways, depending on the size of their units and their approach to leadership.

5 Feminist scholar Kathy Ferguson notes, "[e]motional laborers are required to take the arts of emotional management and control that characterize the intimate relations of family and friends ... and package them according to the 'feeling rules' laid down by the organization" (qtd. in Mumby and Putnam 472).

on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) (2). In fact, a “study by August and Waltman (2004) found that the factor of collegiality was the most significant predictor of career satisfaction for all faculty women regardless of rank” (Terosky, et al 60). In addition, research in the social sciences has established clear links between department culture and faculty retention, identifying several key influences (all under the purview of the chair): “professional development resources, work-life climate, the clarity and fairness of the tenure process, transparency, person-department fit, and collegiality” (Campbell & O’Meara 53). Faculty satisfaction, in other words, is affected by the way a chair manages emotion.

Developing such a culture requires what management scholar Ronald Humphrey describes as “leading with emotional labor”: that is, when “managers or other leaders . . . use emotional labor and emotional displays to influence the moods, emotions, motivations and performance of their subordinates or followers” (Humphry, et al , 153). To effect change, however, I would argue that leaders must also take seriously the emotive dissonance and outlaw emotions they and their colleagues experience. Leading with emotional labor is essential for a department to be effective, to be functional, to retain faculty and staff, to teach and research effectively, and to fulfill the institutional mission.

Department Chair: A Less-Than-Ideal Worker

Leading with emotional labor, however, contrasts sharply with academia’s masculine model of the “ideal academic worker.” This ideal worker “is married to his or her work, can move at will, and works endlessly to meet the demands of tenure” which are “built upon men’s normative paths and assumes freedom from competing responsibilities, such as family, that generally affect women more than men” (Wolf-Wendel & Ward 237). Not surprisingly, these ideals are reflected in much of the literature about becoming a Department Chair. Walter Gmelch and Val Miskin, for example summarize the transition from faculty member to Department Chair by contrasting the characteristics of a faculty member’s work with that of chair, a contrast which highlights gendered binaries:

Faculty Member/Ideal Academic Worker Masculine	Department Chair Feminine
Solitary, independent	Social, collaborative

Focused; uninterrupted time	Fragmented; interrupted time
Autonomy	Accountability
Manuscripts	Memoranda
Private (closed door)	Public (open door)
Professing	Persuading
Stability (movement within discipline)	Mobility (mobile, visible within university structure)
Client (requesting, expecting)	Custodian (dispensing resources, managing space and materials)
Austerity	Prosperity (perception of more control over resources and greater pay)

(Gmelch & Miskin)

It's no wonder that new Department Chairs are greeted with condolences rather than cheers: being a chair can mean the death of one's research agenda, a loss of autonomy and academic prestige, the pity of one's colleagues, constant interruptions, and days filled with mundane rhetorical and administrative tasks and the problems of unruly faculty colleagues. It can mean the loss of one's identity as an ideal academic worker. Despite the visibility, recognition, and—in some quarters—prestige of being a Department Chair, research has shown that most faculty who become chairs do so out of a sense of obligation ("It's my turn"), a commitment to helping their department, or a sense of "altruism, fear, or a need for change" (Carroll and Wolverton 8), and rarely do they choose the role as a form of career advancement. In fact, only 20% of chairs go on to other administrative roles (Carroll and Wolverton 6) (although the number is higher for chairs in hard sciences (Carroll and Wolverton 5)). Depending on the institution and its values, in a culture that grants the highest status to the masculine role of faculty scholars and teachers, Department Chairs, despite their limited institutional authority, also occupy a feminine role of service that often garners very little "real" status among faculty peers, regardless of the gender of the chair.

However, the reality is that, as institutional leaders, Department Chairs make "up to 80 percent of all administrative decisions...in colleges and

universities” (Carroll and Wolverton 3), from hiring faculty to scheduling classes to resolving grade appeals and requesting resources. Tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty perceive Department Chairs “to be the most important players in issues involving faculty’s work roles and workload, chances for promotion, salary/compensation, role in governance, professional development, academic freedom, and professional status” (O’Meara, “Scholarship Unbound” 6). As a Senior Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs said, “chairs are essentially running a small company. They are responsible for as many as 30-40 full-time faculty, a dozen staff members, several hundred students, millions of dollars of research funds and several millions of dollars in operating budgets. Why are we preparing them like they are going to be running a lemonade stand?” (quoted in Enyeart).

Given how central emotional labor is to Department Chair work, then, I would extend Carroll and Wolverton’s claim above and say that 80% of the decisions made at an institution depend on the administrative AND emotional labor of Department Chairs. And yet that labor is not valued in the reward structure of most institutions of higher education.⁶ As countless studies and institutional policy documents have demonstrated, it is rare that Department Chair service is counted toward promotion or rewarded with stipends, course reassignments, or permanent salary increases. As Phillips and Heinert also note, like other service activities on a CV, “Department Chair” is simply one item in a long list— implicitly equal to being a member of a College committee or consulting with community members or organizing a reading—and collectively relegated to the least important category of faculty work.

The Consequences of Saying “Yes”

“Institutional barriers to gender equality are embedded in everyday taken-for-granted university practices, making them difficult to recognize, let alone be transformed.”

Karen Pyke, “Service and Gender Inequity among Faculty”

My own experience when I was a first-term chair exemplifies the consequences of saying yes to highly consequential, feminized, administrative labor. I narrate it here to explain what motivated me to initiate changes, how my outlaw emotions became central to my advocacy work and eventually—ironically—led me to continue as chair for several more terms. I’m also well aware of the emotional labor I have to exercise as I narrate and analyze my experience

6 Some institutions do seem to be rewarding this labor more frequently, however, based on anecdotal evidence.

here. I just recently stepped down as chair and many of the people involved are still in my department; I am making public an event that those involved could not, given confidentiality rules around Promotion and Tenure; I was/am in a greater position of power than my colleagues; and I want to emphasize my analysis of what happened and why, not place blame or reinscribe a victim narrative. I also do not want to imply that my experience is representative.

Like Eileen Schell, I was asked to run for chair well before I felt ready, and I was able to say no for a while. But I said yes about four years after tenure and promotion to Associate Professor, before my daughter was even in preschool. I found the work demanding, sometimes exhausting, but ultimately fulfilling and transformational. Two years into my first term as chair, I chose to apply for promotion to full professor. I had published two editions of a co-edited textbook, an extensive Instructor's Manual (254 pages), and several textbook chapters in addition to presenting at a large number of national, regional, and local conferences. I'd also been in significant administrative roles since my second year and several of my accomplishments fit the WPA's criteria for intellectual work. After consulting with several colleagues across campus on the merits of my case, I decided to apply. I was one of four applicants for Full in our department that year, and for the other three candidates I continued in my role as chair: I reviewed their materials and, per policy, sat in their interviews, silently observing.

Unlike my colleagues, for my interview with our six-person committee, I did not have someone to sit as the chair's proxy during P & T interviews, so I was without an institutional representative and without the separate evaluation that the chair usually provides. It hadn't occurred to me to request either one. But as the unusually tense and awkward interview progressed, I began to wish I'd thought about asking for both. After my interview, the committee chair stopped by my office and delivered the vote: the members voted 4 to 2 against recommending me. I was stunned and confused. The two male colleagues had received unanimous, glowing support. The other female colleague who applied for Full initially received no support for her case, even though she had a book contract in hand. I was struggling to make sense of what was happening.

Within a week I found myself sitting in our conference room with the Promotion and Tenure Committee, appealing their initial vote, documents spread in front of me. Toward the end of the meeting, a senior faculty member stood up and began to defend the committee's decision.

"You have not lived up to your potential," he said, "nor to the expectations we had of you when you were hired."

My colleague seemed to be winding up for more criticisms about my work and my career choices. I'd been offering numerous pieces of evidence for my case and asking for clarity on the criteria they were using. The department

didn't have specific criteria for promotion, only general guidelines from the College and University policies that indicated service could not substitute for research. One member told me that I'd made a bad career choice when I chose to become chair instead of focusing on research, so I shouldn't expect to be promoted. For half the committee, my work as chair and as the former WPA did not matter to my promotion. It was irrelevant. And now my senior colleague was driving that point home as passionately as he could: I had presented at national conferences but never turned those into juried articles; I focused on textbook materials, which were not juried (according to my colleague), not considered research, and of little scholarly consequence. My assigned workload in service and research didn't matter. "Surely you'd agree that the Dean has a heavier workload than you do," my colleague said, "but he's still publishing academic articles. Why should we hold you to a different standard?"⁷

Before anyone could see my tears, I began packing up my materials and stood up in the middle of his speech. "This meeting is over," I said. "I'm done."

After I left, the committee voted on my appeal, this time splitting evenly, three to three. That same week, after an appeal from the other female candidate, they unanimously reversed their vote and recommended she be promoted to full professor.

It was September of 2008. A month earlier, the day before classes began, one of our long-time linguistics faculty members had died in a sudden wildfire that consumed half of a dozen houses in a matter of minutes. I received the call while I was in the parking lot of my daughter's school, having just dropped her off for her first day of first grade. The news was devastating—indeed, traumatic—for the department and for my colleague's students, even the larger Boise community. It was devastating to me, as well, although I couldn't show it. I had to exude calmness and provide reassurance. I had to keep the department's activities moving forward as I also created space for everyone's grief. I had to talk to the press. I had to find replacements, meet with all her classes, and hold informational meetings for students and faculty where they could express their grief.

Then, in the same week that Mary Ellen died, my mother called from the hospital to tell me my father had had a heart attack. A few days later, my husband at the time was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Regardless, I had memorial service to help plan, where I gave a eulogy to the friends, family, students, and colleagues who packed a ballroom on campus. But even in our collective grief and celebration of Mary Ellen's life, I was primarily alone, separate

7 The Dean had not, in fact, been publishing.

from my colleagues, the one who needed to lead the way through this tragedy and manage her own grief privately.

When I walked into my first meeting with the Promotion and Tenure Committee, all of my colleagues knew what I had been dealing with, at home and at work. Our department had the “ambiance of family.” That knowledge, however, did not seem to affect the manner in which they communicated their decision. Their decision and how it was conveyed was business, not personal; it was rational, not emotional; it was about upholding the scholarly standards that were being eroded by the university. It was a given that I was expected to fulfill the duties of chair that the committee saw as an obstacle to the masculinist ideal of full professor. All of us were adhering to the implicit emotion rules that had always governed professional and academic life: emotion (or certain kinds of emotion) had no place in decisions about performance. They were private, untouchable.

The evidence before the committee was simply that, evidence. The fact that they could not agree on what that evidence meant within the institution’s promotion policy bespoke deeper conflicts about what constitutes scholarship, who gets to decide, and what those definitions mean for faculty identity and power. For three members, definitions of scholarship from the MLA, CWPA, and CCC were either not persuasive, not relevant, or could be ignored: “Those committee members who oppose promotion see that Dr. Payne’s decision to devote so much of her limited writing time to conference presentations and on these supplementary textbook materials rather than on juried publications has hurt her ability to produce the high-quality research that marked her career here a decade ago.”

Although all six members likely believed they were using rational, objective standards as the basis for assessing the evidence for promotion, their disagreement was about more than simply having different criteria. It was reflective of the university’s “incongruous, gendered bureaucratic structures” (Bird 205). The “decentralized decision-making structures” we value in academia also “permit disjunctures between formal expectations and reward structures at university level and department level, and between formally stated and informally reinforced university and department expectations and reward structures for faculty” (Bird 205). Regardless of what had been going on for me personally, my colleagues and I were wrestling with university policies; a lack of department policy or criteria; and past promotion decisions that had reflected disciplinary standards not stated in policy.

Not only was the vote about my promotion not personal; it was, in many senses, professional. Service was perceived as largely irrelevant to tenure and promotion compared to excellence in research and teaching. I did not fit the white masculine model of individualized labor, the “ideal worker.” At that time,

I was an Associate Professor who had spent the previous nine out of ten years devoting 40-80% of my workload to administration and service and less than 20% to research (often 5-10%), but I was being assessed based on what my non-administrative colleagues were: the unspoken expectations of a 20% research workload. So it was true, I was not able to produce traditional scholarship at the same rate as my colleagues who did very little service.

Half of the committee believed I should have just said “no” to being an administrator if I wanted to be promoted to full professor. In their letter to the Dean, they wrote,

There is no question that Dr. Payne’s many service contributions have affected her research productivity. The question is whether this factor is a mitigating factor. Those who oppose promotion argue that it does not, that Dr. Payne has charted her own career and that her decisions have resulted in a level of scholarly productivity that does not meet the standard of a Professor at Boise State.

The day that my then-husband had prostate surgery, I was in his hospital room reviewing the promotion dossiers of the three colleagues who had been unanimously recommended for promotion to Full and composing my own assessment of their cases—as Department Chair, absent any emotion—knowing full well that my own might be denied.

“Man Up”

When I ran for chair in 2006, I heard secondhand that a female colleague didn’t think I could handle the pressure because I was too sensitive, not tough enough. I had a reputation for being empathetic, kind, and nurturing. In fact, those qualities had been publicly acknowledged two years earlier: I had received the Larry Selland Humanitarian Award, which is given to those who “exemplify Dr. Larry Selland’s caring nature, his compassion, his integrity and his encouragement to women and people of color.” I also had a collaborative managerial style, one I’d developed based on feminist principles, and that, too, was well known. Not surprisingly, after I was elected chair, a male colleague sent me an email telling me to “man up.” Be decisive. Be a leader. Stop soliciting feedback. Be a man.

Later, both of these colleagues would oppose my promotion.

I shouldn’t have been surprised, but I was. I had two interrelated responses: I managed my grief and anger privately and mostly alone, upholding the positivist epistemology that demands such emotions be set aside, and I continued with the professional demeanor I’d developed over years of managing my emotions. I was getting on with my professional life, so to speak. At the same time, I began to develop strategies for disrupting that positivist epistemology.

To use philosopher Alison Jaggar's term, I took my "outlaw emotions" seriously. "Outlaw emotions," according to Jaggar, are those that "are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values" and are typically experienced by the marginalized and subordinated (160). I questioned my anger and humiliation. Had I made a bad career choice? Was I not, in fact, a scholar anymore? Was I in denial about standards for promotion, not able to see the ways I'd failed? Did I get what I deserved? Did I still have a right to judge my colleagues' work as their chair? Did I have a right to feel angry, humiliated, ashamed? Were my colleagues right?

I WAS angry and humiliated, but couldn't act that way, both because I was the chair and because I was a woman, a woman known to be "emotional." I had to deal with the emotive dissonance. The promotion review process was, ideally, supposed to be impartial, rational, and not personal, so why should I be angry at the outcome? I could simply withdraw my application, wait until I was finished being chair and devote that time to producing the research expected, then apply for promotion again later. I could work within the status quo, return to being an ideal academic worker and accept that my administrative service would remain invisible.

Except that I didn't agree with the status quo—as an academic, a chair, a feminist, a Comp/Rhet scholar, and a woman. I also wasn't the only chair on campus who had encountered resistance from her department promotion committee, so mine was not an isolated incident. I also knew that my Dean believed administrative service should be counted toward promotion, and the university was well on its way to integrating the Boyer model of scholarship into its practices, but not yet its policies.

My experience galvanized my resolve to initiate significant change within my department, change that would be informed by critically reflecting on my emotions, interrogating them with evidence and research, and drawing on that dialogue to transform the way we valued, assessed, and rewarded ALL areas of our work. In taking my own outlaw emotions seriously, recognizing the sources of my emotive dissonance, and working from my authority as chair, I set about disrupting gendered discourses and structures, those that devalued faculty service in general and emotional labor in particular, as well as the "privileged emotion managers" who were expected to uphold them.

Disrupting Gendered Discourses: Changing department Culture

Although these events came together in one particular year, the events themselves are far from unique in the life of a Department Chair, and they illustrate the pattern my colleagues and I have been addressing. The culture

of my department at that time was not unique, of course. Higher education research has identified these types of gendered patterns since 1986: As Terosky, et al note,

women academics find themselves in vulnerable positions in regard to career advancement because they carry disproportionately higher workloads in the areas of teaching, service, and lower level administration. Women are no longer fully blocked from entering the profession, but gendered expectations within the promotion process for publication productivity is misaligned with the workload women face. (Terosky, et al 60)

Like many English departments across the country, we too had a higher percentage of men in the full-professor rank (67%) than women (33%) given the actual gender distribution of the full-time faculty (49%/51%). In addition, all the previous WPA's and Department Chairs had been men with one exception (in the 1980s). They had either been promoted to Full before becoming chair or went up after stepping down; their children were either adults or their spouses/partners assumed primary care of domestic life. I was the second woman to be the WPA and to be chair, one of only two in the eleven departments in the College of Arts and Sciences. Like Eileen, I had postponed child-bearing until after tenure, but I needed rounds of fertility treatments to conceive my only child, learning later that I couldn't have any more children. I was also both the primary provider and caretaker in my family. But I was not the academy's "ideal worker" (Hoschild; Terosky, et al 61). I'd spent my career in a feminized field, a feminized profession, doing feminized work as a researcher and as an administrator.

But AS an administrator, I did have a degree of influence and authority, and I didn't take that for granted. When I became chair (two years prior to my promotion experience), one of the first things I did to recognize and compensate service activities was to adjust administrative workloads in the department, pay faculty for summer duties, compensate part-time faculty for service work⁸, and reduce the number of contingent faculty crammed into offices. I focused on continuing to build a stronger sense of community within the department, using our new collaboratively-defined mission and goals to guide our decisions. Several years after my own promotion experience, I began to see tangible changes in the professional lives of my colleagues and in the ways we assessed our work. Ironically, the poor career choice I evidently made to be a Department Chair is the very one that enabled me to facilitate

8 I did so through strategic enrollment management and the revenue sharing funds we began receiving for our summer offerings.

the transformation of gendered service in my department. It also positioned me well to advocate for similar changes on the institutional level.

Taking Emotions Seriously

As we've noted throughout our essays, the gendered discourses of service are complex, and strategies for disrupting those discourses will vary across institutions. In my case, institutional culture and history were critical to the changes I and others have initiated in the past few years. The strategies I outline here developed somewhat organically, as responses to my own experience as a faculty member in an English Studies department, as a WPA and a Department Chair; to my intellectual commitments to feminism, student learning, rhetorical theory and practice, and ethical labor practices; to the leadership styles of our Dean and Provost; and to the institutional change that began in earnest after 2003, when we hired a new President.

When Dr. Robert Kustra arrived, Boise State had only been a university for about 30 years, and the effects of that transition were still palpable. Having begun as Boise Junior College during the Depression, Boise State University began to emerge in the 1970s, adding a German research model to its existing liberal arts/teaching mission⁹ and all the complications that came with such a change. Faculty who had been teaching five courses per term prior to the 1970s were reduced to four; tenure and promotion based on research productivity was instituted in the 1980s; and by the time I arrived in 1997, about half the full-time faculty in the English department were teaching three courses per semester. Research was becoming a defining feature of faculty roles across campus, displacing the historical emphasis on teaching and service. "Our long-term goal," Dr. Kustra said in his university-wide address in 2003, "is to become a metropolitan research university of distinction. To achieve this goal, we must be collaborative, entrepreneurial and competitive." A key measure of our success would be to move from the Carnegie Classification of a Masters 1 institution to a doctoral research institution,¹⁰ and our strategic plan would get us there.

By the time I became chair in 2006, Boise State was well into what Adrianna Kezar and others term the "mobilization stage" of our transformation, having begun "to question and challenge the current status quo—practices and policies that are enmeshed within the current institutional culture" (Kezar and

9 The University retained its community-college mission until just recently, when the College of Western Idaho began.

10 Boise State was recognized as a doctoral research institution in January, 2016.

Sam 59). Over the next several years, we were immersed in the “implementation stage” (Kezar and Sam 59-60): “focusing on creating infrastructure and support for the reform” (Kezar and Sam 60). We had been challenging the status quo, questioning the values that drove it, working collaboratively across units to develop changes, and implementing specific structural and policy changes. Change wasn’t only in the air; it was in offices and classrooms and the foundations of new academic buildings.

After 2008, by the time I began initiating changes within my own department and advocating for change institutionally, “the values, norms, and underlying assumptions that guide behaviors” (Kezar and Sam 58) at Boise State had been reshaped, creating opportunities for change that had not been apparent before.

Changing department Culture: Developing Performance Criteria

A key component of the strategic plan was increasing our research productivity, and it was clear that department initiatives would need to be aligned with those goals and values. Among the changes our department implemented, we developed an enrollment management plan that allowed us to reduce teaching loads without extra costs or increased caps. Faculty who had demonstrated consistent scholarly/creative activity were reduced from a 60% teaching load to 50%. At the same time, we needed to restructure the way we administered our degree programs, so we had separate Discipline Directors for each curricular area. As the number of faculty directors increased, a number of faculty began to complain privately that it seemed only Associate Professors were carrying the department’s service load. The resentment was beginning to build from this tension between research and service.

Faculty resentment is one of those emotions chairs tend to avoid but need to manage; it can undermine collegiality and community very quickly. Rather than dismiss it as “what faculty do” or as simply the “sour grapes” of one or two people (i.e., see it as an individual, personal problem), I took the emotion seriously. I decided to look at the data and see what we needed to address, either as a community and/or as individuals.

As it turned out, we did indeed have a problem, one that was much bigger than I had thought and one I wouldn’t have noticed if I’d ignored that pesky and all-too-common feeling of resentment. Instead, I realize in retrospect, I engaged the department in what Jaggar would call “critical reflection on emotion” that led to reassessing our practices and stated values—that led, in other words, to political action on a micro level. As Phillips and Heinert argue, we

began to transform gendered service by “redefining and assessing labor and workload in terms of how it supports the institutional mission.”

During our fall semester retreat in 2010, I integrated a discussion of shared governance and performance criteria into our yearly strategic planning conversation.¹¹ In our retreats, I had made it a practice to emphasize the progress we’d made on our goals each year, tracking our accomplishments visually in a table, and then using retreat time to plan for the coming year. We were getting used to talking about our work in relationship to something larger than ourselves, no matter how tenuous or conflicted it was.

We started with three questions designed to help us connect our strategic plan to performance criteria:¹² 1) Given our vision, mission, and goals, what kinds of activities will help us get there? 2) What are we already doing that is helping us achieve these goals? 3) What kinds of activities do faculty and staff need to engage in to help us reach that vision?

I divided faculty into groups for each category of our strategic plan and asked them to 1) list what we are already doing toward those goals; 2) list what we could be doing; and 3) translate those lists into performance criteria to answer the third question above. We had a positive and lively discussion.

Not surprisingly, during the conversation some faculty raised their concerns about the inequities they perceived in service workloads. By focusing on our mission and goals during the retreat, I had intentionally created a context within which they could voice their concerns publicly, but do so without being perceived as complainers. I then returned to those concerns when we shifted to shared governance and displayed the data I’d found. I illustrated the changes that had occurred in faculty workload capacity over the past twelve years, departmentally and by program. We had increased our contributions in all three areas of teaching, research, and service, and our administrative release time had almost doubled. At the same time, some areas in the department were contributing more to shared governance than others, notably the smaller areas of technical communication, rhetoric and composition, and linguistics. When we looked at the data by faculty rank, it was quite clear that Associate Professors were doing more of the administrative work AND more of the committee work than Full Professors and Assistant Professors. In fact,

11 We’d been holding semester retreats for about seven years at that point, so faculty were accustomed to using that time to tackle big issues—from curriculum revisions to strategic planning to university initiatives. They have been one of the key means of changing department culture.

12 See also Ward for a discussion of similar approaches for addressing service.

55% of all the administrative roles in the department were held by Associate Professors, while only 23% were held by Full Professors. The data suggested a pattern that couldn't be dismissed offhand.

Aligning Service to Mission and Goals

Instead of focusing on the “complainers,” we focused on the larger system—our mission, goals, and values—looked at the evidence, and saw a problem that was not about individualized labor or “just saying no.” Associate Professors were carrying an undue service burden, Full Professors were relatively inactive, and Assistant Professors who had heard they should minimize service were missing important opportunities.¹³ We asked what we could do within our unit to define service expectations and rewards for all faculty so they aligned with our mission and values. We didn't ignore the resentment and we didn't embrace it; we used it to fuel our ideas for change.

As a result of this work, we drafted performance expectations; our committee memberships became more diverse by rank; and more Full Professors began participating in department and college-level governance. We instituted stipends for part-time adjuncts who served and full-time nontenure-track lecturers were included on all tenure-track faculty hiring committees, along with faculty outside the subdiscipline. In addition, more adjuncts and lecturers began attending department meetings.

Developing performance criteria for the English department took almost two years, but resulted in a policy that not only defines expectations in all areas, but adopts Ernest Boyer's definitions of scholarship and therefore recognizes certain kinds of service and community engagement as research. Promotion and Tenure Committee members in the department are now expected to assess a candidate's dossier using his/her assigned workload in each area and the definitions of scholarship within his/her discipline. In addition, we borrowed from the University of California-Berkeley's policy on service expectations by rank and created our own, clearly identifying the kinds of activities expected at each level, including full-time nontenure-track faculty.¹⁴ With new

13 Our local data gave evidence to what the women in Terosky, et al's study also said: they “blamed their departmental colleagues for their disproportionately high administrative and service workloads; they criticized their senior colleagues for refusing to perform a fair share of service work” (65). They also said that “their ‘local colleagues’ failed (or continued to fail) to guide them in navigating workload distribution, institutional politics, and/or the tenure/promotion process” (65).

14 See also O'Meara, 10.

faculty, I ask that they identify their service goals for the next five years, thinking about their “service agenda” as they do their “research agenda,”¹⁵ and then together we choose appropriate service activities given their roles, disciplinary expertise, the time assigned for service, and the needs of the department/ College/University.

This approach is an example of Phillips and Heinert’s third factor in transforming service: “valuing, supporting, and developing the expertise that is required for sustaining the labor of institutions.” It helps the faculty member and the chair move away from “service-as-sacrifice-for-the-good-of-the-order” and reframe it as integral to achieving one’s overall professional goals, to developing new skills, to contributing one’s unique talents to a particular area, and to fulfilling the goals of the university (see also Jean Filletti). Tenured faculty can mentor junior faculty in these decisions and the chair can facilitate an appropriate distribution of service across all faculty members.¹⁶ When faculty have a degree of institutional literacy, they are less likely to personalize certain decisions, which is a consequence of individualizing our work. And, as a study by O’Meara demonstrates, having clear expectations and criteria can have “a powerful psychological effect in reducing the stress and resentment faculty felt at being under-valued, over-worked, and under-paid”(“Scholarship Unbound” 15).¹⁷ In short, faculty, staff, students, and institutions benefit when service is recognized, rewarded, and assigned based on an individual’s expertise as well as the institution’s mission.

Changing our department’s culture and taking emotions seriously is challenging work for a Department Chair, and while it doesn’t relieve the amount of emotional labor in the job, it directs that labor to the productive tensions where theory and practice meet, where outlaw emotions emerge and then

15 I ask faculty to respond to the following prompts: 1) List your professional goals for the next five years; 2) List your particular talents and strengths (e.g., detail-oriented, conceptual thinker, task-oriented, etc.; assessment knowledge, curriculum development, online teaching, teaching with technology, etc.); 3) Given your goals and strengths, what kinds of professional development activities and service activities might help you match the two?

16 See Filletti for questions to help a department discuss criteria for assessing service (346) and an example of how to measure service quantitatively depending on the type of institution (349). See O’Meara, as well (11).

17 “The policies made service scholars feel safer, more appreciated and understood, and thereby made them feel more committed and loyal to their institutions” (O’Meara, “Scholarship Unbound” 15).

challenge privilege and hierarchy. As labor, according to sociologists, emotion management serves the bottom line, not the worker. Consequently, privileged emotion managers like chairs often experience emotive dissonance because their ideological orientation conflicts with the values implied in performing emotional labor as a commodity. And yet, I would argue that THAT's the art of administration. That's one reason I continue to enjoy my work as chair, in spite of my experiences. In taking emotions seriously, I try to attend to those that are pushed to the margins or dismissed as threatening or ridiculous. I engage faculty (and staff and students) in critically reflecting on those emotions as they would any other idea as we try to realize our own emotional commitments, our values, our principles.

Advocating for Change in Department Chair Roles and Rewards

The changes that would support the incorporation of emotion work into a more sophisticated vision of academic life would include moving away from the notion of the individual scholar toward a more social model of intellectual activity.

Mara Holt, et al, "Making Emotion Work Visible in Writing Program Administration."

As I was facilitating change in my own department, I had an opportunity in my second term as chair to challenge gendered service more broadly. I was invited to participate in the President's Leadership Academy (PLA)—a semester-long workshop¹⁸ focused "on how leaders effectively move their organizations from the current state to a desired future state that aligns with the strategic mission and vision of Boise State University" (<https://president.boisestate.edu/leadershipacademy/projects/>). Participants were expected to develop a "strategic improvement project," as individuals or in groups, that had impact beyond a single unit; could be launched or completed within the spring term; and resulted in "an improvement or innovation that is tangible, measurable, and aligned with the strategic mission and vision" (<https://president.boisestate.edu/leadershipacademy/projects/>). My project focused on

18 Every two weeks we met for about five hours and addressed an aspect of leadership in higher education. We focused on change management, organizational culture, interpersonal and organizational communication, management principles, performance management, problem-solving, innovation, data-driven decision making, and action planning.

recruiting and retaining Department Chairs: to “develop a culture, incentives, and ongoing training for Department Chairs, as well as a way to retain chairs and increase their effectiveness in the ‘New Normal.’”¹⁹

I gathered research on best practices at other institutions and studies on leadership in higher education; the Director of Professional Development for Academic Affairs and I gathered information about the specific challenges facing chairs at our institution (frequent turnover in chairs and staff; challenges in recruiting chairs; inefficient and ineffective department operations; expectations to lead without training, incentive, or time, etc.); and eventually the Provost convened a task force that included the Vice President for Human Resources, the Provost, the Director of Professional Development for Academic Affairs, and the Employee Learning & Development Manager. We conducted a survey, analyzed data, and developed recommendations which I then was asked to present to the President and the Executive Council.

In making our recommendations, we explained the institutional costs to maintaining the status quo, particularly given our mission, vision, and goals; the significant role that chairs played in achieving the President’s goals; and the benefits we predicted would result if changes were made, including increased productivity and efficiency on an operational level; reduced turnover and greater stability within departments; higher faculty investment in AND participation in change. If we wanted to become a metropolitan research university of distinction, our existing models of the ideal academic worker would have to change.

chairs were too consumed by daily tasks and putting out fires to focus on leadership, so we needed to restructure the way work was done by staff and chairs. chairs also needed a leadership program similar to the PLA, one that developed the skills needed to lead a department. And finally, if we wanted to recruit and retain chairs, we needed a different compensation model, one that didn’t penalize chairs financially or professionally for serving their departments and the institution.²⁰ We needed, in other words, to align service with the university’s mission and goals, to help faculty develop the expertise

19 From the project proposal.

20 At Boise State during this time, IF a Department Chair received a stipend, the amount varied by college, and until 2014, the stipend was excluded from salary raise calculations. When a chair stepped down, his/her salary was essentially the same as if he/she had never served; serving as Department Chair made little if any difference in one’s base salary over the long term. chairs also worked during summer months even though they were not officially on contract.

needed for this particular service, and then reward this highly consequential feminized labor.

Throughout the project we collaborated with chairs, Deans, and other campus members. With the Provost's support, the Director of Professional Development for Academic Affairs and I co-facilitated an Academic Leadership Program for new chairs which spanned an academic year. Around the same time, the Provost began a revision of the university's strategic plan, and one of the five goals that emerged was to "transform our operations to serve the contemporary mission of the university." This goal included restructuring academic departments and revising the roles of Department Chairs, so a broader group of stakeholders were brought together to develop a plan. At the same time, the Provost and the Faculty Senate began reviewing policies and reward structures more generally, but also specifically to address some of the inequities in how chairs were valued and assessed. Administrative labor needed to be recognized within the university's policies, including equitable release time across units, additional compensation for summer work, time for research, and criteria in promotion policies that accounted for being a Department Chair. Our change efforts, as Bird asserts, needed to "address the subtle means by which systemic barriers are constructed and maintained" (Bird 211).

As I noted earlier, institutional change occurs when the values and norms of the status quo are questioned (the mobilization stage) and when the policies and practices that reflect those values and norms are revised to reflect new values (the implementation stage) (Kezar & Sam). In addition, institutional change happens when key administrators participate in and support change efforts, and it happens when policies have accountability measures embedded (Bird 211). Given the changes we were arguing for in Department Chair roles, our reward structures (an accountability measure) needed to demonstrate that the university took Department Chair work seriously and was committed to recruiting and retaining excellent leaders.

Within a couple of years those changes were underway, changes that began to disrupt the gendered binaries on which the ideal academic worker is based. An external consulting firm experienced with higher education conducted an internal assessment of department operations, and several of their recommendations are being pursued. In addition to improving operational issues (e.g., data management, initiatives management, staffing, etc.), the consultants' report also included several recommendations for "Department Chair Remuneration and Support" that became action items for the Provost's Office, including a principled formula for stipend levels across campus (now being considered); changes to contract lengths; enhanced sabbaticals and support for research (both delegated to Deans); and a review of promotion

policies to include reconsidering the “prohibition of counting chair service toward promotion to Professor.”

During this period, the Faculty Senate was beginning to review our Promotion and Tenure Policies, at the request of the Provost, so the recommendation about chair service was forwarded. Dozens of people were involved in the lengthy conversations about this policy, and a final version was approved in 2015. What emerged reflected a significant shift in values and norms. First, the revisions reflected the key principles that Phillips and Heinert identify for transforming gendered service. Notably, the new university policy defines research and creativity using the Boyer model of scholarship, which means that faculty work is now defined more broadly and tied more closely to institutional mission. In addition, the preamble emphasizes that “faculty members seeking tenure and promotion should be cognizant of these plans as they may reflect the University’s and the Colleges’ priorities with respect to professional activities that should be undertaken by faculty.” departments are required to have written criteria for determining promotion to each level and must assess a faculty member’s work based on workload assignment in each area. Now, a candidate must include “a statement describing the relationship between the faculty member’s accomplishments and his/her workload assignments” (from Summary of Changes), which means faculty should be assessed not on the nebulous standard of the ideal academic worker producing research, but on the actual workload expectations in the areas they have been assigned.

Most importantly for this discussion, candidates must now also include “a statement of service philosophy followed by supporting evidence of service accomplishments.” Faculty cannot simply “say no” to service. Instead, a faculty member must explain why he/she has chosen particular service activities and how those choices reflect a philosophy about service. In addition, he/she must demonstrate what has been accomplished, all in terms of university, college, and department mission and goals.

These principles also apply to administrative work (Department Chair, Director, etc.). In the new policy, administrative work must be considered in light of assigned workload:

[I]f a candidate’s workload assignment requires more service (such as serving as Department Chair) and less teaching and research, the expectation for excellence in teaching and research shall not be compromised but the expected volume of teaching and research may be reduced. Faculty asked to fill significant administrative roles, such as Department Chair, should negotiate their performance evaluation criteria and workloads with their

departments and colleges before taking on such roles; these workload assignments shall be considered in evaluating these faculty members' achievements in teaching and scholarship. (<http://policy.boisestate.edu/academic-affairs-faculty-administration/policy-title-faculty-promotion-guidelines/>)

Had this requirement been in place when I applied for promotion, the committee would have had to assess the quality of my research activities within my discipline's standards, the productivity within the less-than-10% of workload I had been assigned since becoming chair, and the qualities of my administrative work.²¹

The new Promotion and Tenure policy inscribes a very different model of an ideal academic worker, one that is based on local context, local values, and local needs while also remaining connected to the institution's broader mission and goals. This ideal academic worker is expected to do more than publish and teach according to incongruous, inequitable, implicitly gendered expectations. In fact, this model disrupts those gendered discourses and the rhetoric of individualized labor. As a result, the emotional labor of service activities, while not directly acknowledged as such in policy, is nonetheless valued, rewarded, and supported.

Conclusion

Hope is an emotional investment that we develop collaboratively; it is an act of mutuality that is nourished by our collective expectations. Teaching, learning, and administration are not simply intellectual activities that one masters, but a complex blend of emotional and professional issues that involve the whole person.

Laura Micciche, "More Than a Feeling: Disappointment and WPA Work,"

Evaluating and rewarding service, however, requires that faculty members develop institutional literacy—an understanding of the discourses, processes, and power relationships within a university—and that "literacy sponsors" in

21 In the past, chairs applying for promotion had to be reviewed by their department first and did not have someone to fill the usual role of a chair during a candidate's application process. Now, "the dean or his/her designee shall take the place of the Department Chair in the promotion process" and the chair's "application shall be forwarded directly to the dean or his/her designee." This separate review process reinforces the chair's authority, no longer puts faculty in the position of evaluating their supervisor, and signals that an administrator's work will be assessed based on clear standards.

the workplace—that is, supervisors and administrators—support that development. The masculine model of the ideal academic worker doesn't require such literacy because its privilege depends on the feminized labor of others. That is, navigating the discourses, processes, and power relationships within a university feels "natural" to those with privilege, but is predicated on ignoring those who often do the work that enables the privileged to maintain degrees of power. And yet if universities are to respond to the pressures of corporatization and neoliberalism, faculty members themselves must change this ideal.

I have been arguing that intellectual engagement with emotions is important to transforming gendered service in the academy, and chairs are well positioned to facilitate such change, depending on their institutional context. Such engagement is not to be confused with "emotional intelligence," however, a term that Shari Stenberg argues is about "harnessing particular emotions so as to produce a subject with 'capacity for skills and efficiency as well as . . . good character and rule obedience'" (5). Certainly as "privileged emotion managers," chairs are expected to perform such labor, but leading with emotional labor is very different. It requires that a chair understand "emotion as a 'tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meaning'" (Worsham, qtd in Stenberg 2). It requires that a chair take "outlaw emotions" seriously and not view emotive dissonance as simply an inevitable cost of academic labor. We can, as Micciche argues, "use disappointment for a framework for effecting change, however compromised and tempered such change may be" (Micciche 442). We can, that is, enact the other side of disappointment. Hope.

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Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies:

III. Is it Worth it to “Lean In” and Lead? On Being a Woman Department Chair in Rhetoric and Writing Studies¹

Eileen E. Schell

Abstract: *This essay will consider the specific challenges and opportunities of the gendered service of being a woman academic department chair. Questions addressing the timing, sacrifices, benefits, opportunities and effects on one's life, both personal and professional, are likely to come to mind for women academics considering whether or not to become department chairs. To engage these questions, I draw on insights from feminist academic labor studies and intersectional higher education scholarship on the roles and challenges faced by women department chairs. I also draw on my own experiences serving a five-year term as a department chair. Through these two sites of inquiry, I analyze how the struggles women department chairs face are connected to specific patterns of feminized labor (Holbrook, Miller, Schell), embodied experience, and service across higher education, what Sharon Bird refers to as “incongruous, gendered bureaucratic structures” (204). I conclude with specific advice and strategies for those considering whether or not to take on the position of department chair.*

Keywords: *Department Chair, Gender, Family Formation, Intersectionality, Service, Women leaders*

1 This set of clustered articles originally started as a CCCC panel presentation addressing the question of gendered service sponsored by the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession. My fellow panelists Michelle Payne, Jennifer Heinert, and Cassie Phillips worked via conference calls to bring this cluster of articles into being. I am grateful for their hard work in revising and compiling these pieces, especially in the midst of busy lives academic lives and family duties. Special thanks, too, to the women department chairs that I've had the pleasure of working with or observing over the years. You have inspired me with your example, mentoring, and endurance: Lois Agnew, Alice Gillam, Rebecca Moore Howard, Linda Pratt, Jane Nardin, Michelle Payne, Louise Wetherbee Phelps, and Carol Lipson.

This essay will consider the specific challenges and opportunities of the gendered service of being an academic department chair. While Sheryl Sandberg, author of the bestselling business tome *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* argues that women should embrace and seek out leadership roles in business and other walks of life, there is an inevitable list of questions that such roles raise for women academics who are unlikely to receive the same kinds of financial rewards as their corporate counterparts. Questions addressing the timing, sacrifices, benefits, opportunities and effects on one's life, both personal and professional, are likely to come to mind for women academics considering whether or not to become department chairs:

- Why should women academics make the sacrifice in energy, time, and scholarly and familial roles to take on a department chair position when the faculty role may be challenging enough as it is?
- When—if ever—is the time “right” in one’s career to take on a department chair position?
- What do department chairs have to negotiate and undergo to become effective leaders? How might those conditions be complicated by specific embodied, intersectional experiences, especially since women faculty members, as Sharon Bird notes, “perform a disproportionate share of academic departments’ care work and emotion labour, and spend more time teaching” while men faculty members, “on average, spend less time in teaching and service activities and more hours in research, and are over-represented among full professors and senior administrators (Bird et al., 2004; Park, 1996)” (Bird 204).
- What difference does this service and leadership make to our academic units and colleges/universities?
- What is gained and lost in serving one’s department and making sure the scholarship and service of one’s colleagues is valued, especially since American colleges and universities, like businesses, are “guided by hegemonic masculine ideals,” by principles that “stipulate the allocation of greater financial rewards for employee efforts that enhance the organization’s financial welfare than for activities that enhance the general welfare of colleagues or clients” (Bird 204)?
- In particular, how can women department chairs be leaders in transforming the labor conditions and structures of service in departments (see Payne, this issue)?

To engage these questions, I draw on insights from feminist academic labor studies and higher education scholarship on the roles and challenges faced by women department chairs. I also draw on my own experiences

erving a five-year term as a department chair. Through these two sites of inquiry, I analyze how the struggles women department chairs may face are connected to specific patterns of gender and feminized labor (Holbrook, Miller, Schell), intersectionality (Crenshaw), and gendered service across higher education, what Sharon Bird refers to as “incongruous, gendered bureaucratic structures” (204). However, as I argue below, focusing solely on studying gender in academic leadership scholarship leaves us with an incomplete picture.

Intersectional Interrogations of the Role of Women² Department Chairs

In *Challenges Facing Female Department Chairs in Contemporary Higher Education: Emerging Research and Opportunities*, Schnackenberg and Simard call for intersectionality to be a focal point for addressing the different material experiences and embodied locations of women department chairs (56). They argue that referring to a “collective we” of women department chairs fails to consider the specificity of varied experiences, locations, power relations, and biases that women chairs may experience (56). In particular, the presumed “we” of department chairs in academic leadership scholarship usually implies that the focus group is white cisgender women, thus failing to account for the embodied experiences of women of color, queer, and transgender department chairs.

Addressing this gap in “How Does It Feel to be a Problem: A Conversation Between Two Black Queer Femme Chairs,” Mel Michelle Lewis and Shannon J. Miller analyze the ways in which their “intersections as Black queer women” shape their understandings of the biases and challenges they face as well as their strategies of mutual support and survivance as they lead their academic departments and navigate their institutions. Lewis and Miller address the

2 For the purposes of this essay and especially since I draw on my own embodied experiences, I use the categories woman or women in this article; however, I am mindful of the ways that these categories fail to account for a spectrum of gender expression and mindful of the ways that academic leadership scholarship must continue to explore contested and complex notions of gender and gender expression. A case in point is the situation faced by Department Chair Richard Crosby, a non-binary and trans faculty member, who was removed from the department chair role (while keeping his faculty role) for reasons that he argued had to do with “bias against him for his gender identity and bias against his research projects that focused on gay sex and HIV prevention and trans women of color” (n.p.). More on the case can be found in the *Blade* article by Chibbarro.

importance of "margin talk" in their lives, the ways in which they speak to their "situatedness" in their academic departments and tell truths about what their leadership experiences entail from their embodied locations (80). "Margin talk" for Lewis and Miller becomes a way of healing, identifying common problems and strategies for survivance, and building solidarity among black women. Lewis and Miller's work is part of a growing body of narratives and scholarship on women of color (WOC) in department chair and academic leadership positions (Davis and Maldonado; Lewis and Miller; Logan and Dudley; Patitu and Hinton). This literature explores how WOC address and meet the challenge of patterns of resistance and response, microaggressions, and challenges to their leadership and authority, as well as ways that institutions can create structures, policies, and networks for diversifying academic leadership.

Even as scholars of higher education leadership have begun to interrogate and complicate the department chair role, it is also important to acknowledge the relative privilege that accompanies such roles in institutional hierarchies. The labor of department chairs is buttressed by the labor of others who make the university work: faculty members, both contingent, non-tenure-track and tenure-track, and also the labor hierarchies that support the work of the academic enterprise, such as cafeteria workers, childcare workers, custodial staff, and support staff (Riedner 123). "[I]ntellectual labor in a university," Rachel Riedner argues, "depends upon the physical and reproductive labor of women and people of color" (123). However, the intersectionality of labor is often not addressed in the scholarship on higher education leadership, even though "this reproductive labor and these reproductive laborers make [universities'] global identifications and influence possible" (125).

Acknowledging these complexities and power relations in our studies of academic leadership and labor are vital, not only for acknowledging differences between embodied locations and experiences, but also for acknowledging how simultaneously privileged and, at the same time, challenging these academic leadership positions are. My own privilege as an able-bodied, cis-gender, white academic woman on the tenure-track at a predominantly white institution (PWI) with a research focus made my passage into a becoming a department chair one that was encouraged and expected by my colleagues and the institution; however, that does not mean the work I performed on a daily basis was without its challenges, losses, and power struggles. The factors that made becoming a department chair challenging for me initially were negotiations around timing, dual academic career couple issues, and family formation issues. These issues inform my analysis of my own experiences around the timing of taking on the department chair role.

Becoming Chair: When is the Time Right?

When I interviewed for an Assistant Professorship position at Syracuse University, a private doctoral granting research university in 1995-6, it was clear that being an administrative leader would be in the cards for me if I were offered the position. The academic unit I was joining was and is an independent Writing Program³ that split from an English Department in 1986. The current department chair and faculty members on the search committee made it clear that they were searching for an Assistant Professor who, after tenure, could eventually serve as department chair and in other departmental leadership roles.

As someone who had spent two of three years of my first Assistant Professorship as Co-Director of a large Writing Program and who had served as an Assistant WPA in graduate school for two years, I didn't mind the eventuality of becoming a department chair. Although I wasn't sure how administrative duties would fit in timing-wise with starting a family or meeting scholarly requirements at a research-intensive university, I agreed to take on such a role in the distant future. I was offered and took the tenure-track Assistant Professorship, safe in the knowledge that I wouldn't have to be a WPA or department chair until I was tenured.

For the first two years of my faculty position, it was an unaccustomed luxury to be relieved of administrative duties and to just be a faculty member. I basked in the opportunity to focus on my teaching and scholarship. Although I was engaged in various committees and TA training endeavors and increasingly making connections with my colleagues in Women's and Gender Studies, I was not in charge of any major components of the Writing Program. I finished and published my first single-authored book, began co-editing a collection of essays, published several articles, taught a host of new undergraduate and graduate courses, undertook community engagement opportunities, and served on various committees, thus continuing to build my case for tenure.

3 I will refer to the academic unit I joined as a department throughout this piece even though the status of department was not officially conferred until 2016 as a name change from Writing Program to the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition. Even though our academic unit was considered to be a program, we met all the criteria for a department from the late 1990s-on. We became a doctoral degree granting program in 1997, began granting a BA in Writing and Rhetoric in 2008, and held our own faculty lines from 1998-on. Many thanks to department chair Lois Agnew for making this name change possible.

At the start of my third year into the job, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences called me into his office and asked if I would be willing to consider becoming department chair in a year. Our current chair was leaving to accept a lucrative senior position at another university, and he wanted to fill the leadership gap.

"I'm not tenured," I stammered. "I am willing to be chair down the road, but not until after I have tenure. I have three more years until I even come up for tenure."

"Well, your colleagues tell me you could come up early for tenure in the coming year and potentially be chair right after that," the Dean said, looking at me almost sternly.

I expressed my concern about timing, but I said politely that I was flattered to be considered and that I would confer with my colleagues. I walked away, head reeling. How could I become a department chair at age 34 with three years left on my tenure clock and a commuter relationship? My partner, also an academic, unable to find full-time tenure-track work in the area after coming with me to the university, had recently relocated to Brooklyn, New York to take a tenure-track position, a five hour drive from our home, which meant we could only be together on the weekends. How would the chair position fit in with our plan to commute between our two jobs and have a family in the next few years?

I discussed my concerns over becoming chair on this timetable with my senior colleagues, who understood my situation even as we had a limited number of tenured/tenure-track colleagues who could serve as chair, and some had already held the role or had other responsibilities. The Dean was informed of my concerns, and a senior faculty member, who had already been chair before, agreed to be the interim chair for a year. After that, we hired a new Associate Professor who, agreed to serve as chair for a three-year term, even though the timing of her becoming chair was not in her plans at the time either.

Meanwhile, as I continued on as an Assistant Professor, I pitched in and became Associate Director of Writing for a year, assisting the interim chair with expanding our upper-division writing course offerings and setting up the architecture for a Writing and Rhetoric major and minor. After I completed the Associate Director role, other administrative roles came my way like a ball machine firing in rapid succession: a stint as Director of Graduate Studies from January 2001-January 2005 and, concurrently, a stint as Chair of the Humanities Council 2002-2004.

Once again in 2004, the Dean summoned me to discuss the option of becoming department chair now that I was tenured. At the time of this conversation, my daughter, born in 2002 after I was awarded tenure, was two years old.

The chair timing, once again, seemed off-kilter; there were other senior faculty members willing to be chair, and I was the only tenure-track faculty member in my department with a child under the age of 5; my partner, who had finally managed to land an academic job closer to Syracuse, commuted 75 minutes each way to a nearby college where he was striving to earn tenure. Between a small child and a commuting academic spouse who was untenured, I was hard pressed to see myself taking on a leadership role as time-consuming as department chair.

I declined the role again, but I promised to take on the position after the term of the next chair. I had just “said no” to administrative service again, an oft-used advice tactic that Jennifer Heinert and Cassie Phillips address in their piece in this issue. They point to the ways that women academics are advised to ensure success by saying “no” to service work, with the irony being that service work is vital to the functioning of academic units and the institutional mission of colleges and universities. Even though I said no to the chair role, I became involved in the time-consuming work of the Arts and Sciences Tenure and Promotion committee, serving as Associate Chair and then Chair of the committee. “Say no to one service opportunity only to say yes to another” is likely a more realistic stance for many women academics. As Kerryann O’Meara argues, many women faculty see service as a “communal role and local commitment” rather than an individual choice; not doing service is letting down one’s colleagues or not supporting the organization (15-16).

My turn to become department chair finally came around three years later. My daughter was in her final year of daycare and preschool before starting kindergarten. My partner had earned tenure and was now established in his academic position. I had served in all of the program director roles I could contribute in my unit and served out my term on the College’s Tenure and Promotion Committee; my publication record was solid and would set me up for promotion to Full Professor in due time. More importantly, I felt I had a strong knowledge of the department and the university and was a more experienced faculty member. The Dean and my faculty colleagues concurred that I was the next logical choice to take on the position. This time I said yes to the position, which I held for a five-year term.

The decisions that guided the timing of me becoming Department Chair involved the consideration of family formation and dual career couple issues. I was going through what scholars refer to as the “make or break” period for academics in higher education, which takes place “roughly between the ages of thirty and forty,” the time “when most academics get tenure track jobs and receive tenure. These are also the years when most babies are born” (Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden 4). As Mary Ann Mason, Nicholas H. Wolfinger, and Marc Goulden argue, the timing of tenure and promotion decisions, the desire

to start a family and have a relationship with a partner affect many women's trajectories within academia. Mason et al's research indicates that

only one in three women who takes a tenure-track university job before having a child ever becomes a mother, and women who obtain tenure are more than twice as likely as their male colleagues to be single twelve years after earning their Ph.D. Women are also much more likely to be divorced than men in similar career circumstances. (3)

As this research acknowledges, women struggle with the timing around reproduction, relationships, and the coinciding of the expectations and demands of tenure. In their article "Academic Mothers: Exploring Disciplinary Perspectives," Lisa Wolf-Wendel and Kelly Ward argue that women academics often face competing messages about whether or not they should have a family (20). Once they decide that they should, they often end up *individually—not institutionally*—negotiating and creating support structures and systems that help them balance their home and work responsibilities (32).

To remedy these labor issues, Wolf-Wendel and Ward call on institutions to "enact policy and practices that do not solely rely on women to make individual choices and career modifications to advance their careers and manage work and family choices on their own" (32). They recommend "policies for pre-tenure professors (both male and female) with family demands (e.g., tenure stop clock policies, lactation support, access to affordable day care, family leave)" (32). In negotiating my own family formation challenges, I was fortunate to be at an institution that had recently created a faculty parental leave policy ("Leave, Faculty Parental"), which allowed me to work part-time at full pay for a semester after my daughter was born. As I made use of the university's family leave policy, senior colleagues affiliated with the Department of Women's and Gender Studies reminded me that they had worked tirelessly to advocate for a family leave policy on our campus. They also reminded me of the material conditions of their lives as academic parents who had had to return to work shortly after giving birth without time off for their own recovery and infant care responsibilities. One colleague even described how she was still bleeding from giving birth a few weeks prior, and yet she still had to teach anyway in order to maintain her professorship. Stories such as these were a reminder that the architecture for institutional change had been built on the backs of earlier generations of women faculty members who had had to gut it out on their own even as they advocated for a better future for junior colleagues like me.

Even with the protections of a family leave policy and part-time work for the first seven months of my daughter's life, I often struggled, as most working

parents do, with balancing the demands of caring for an infant and attending to my career and administrative responsibilities. In the first three years of my daughter's life, I directed my department's doctoral program and did not have any family around other than my partner to help with childcare responsibilities. As is the case for many academics, my extended family lives far away, on the other side of the country. While my mother visited to help me for a few weeks when my daughter was born and made annual trips to visit for the Thanksgiving holiday, she could not afford to visit more frequently.

With little familial support and a series of infrequently hired babysitters, I took my daughter to work when she was an infant, toting her to faculty meetings and into the graduate program office as I met with students. I worked from home in conference calls when I could, and graduate students came to my home, as needed, to meet with me while my daughter napped or played nearby. My colleagues were supportive, but administering a graduate program with an infant in tow was often a challenge. Although I felt torn about it, I enrolled my daughter in part-time daycare when she was 7 ½ months old so I could better balance my administrative and pedagogical duties.

Recognizing that family formation and a myriad of other factors affect academic trajectories, the Academic Affairs Committee of the University Senate at my institution, chaired by one of our Writing colleagues, worked on a tenure clock flexibility proposal that passed our University Senate in 2008. The policy spelled out that the tenure clock could be stopped if "a request for parental, maternity, family medical, military or disability leave, disrupt[ed] one or more semesters of work during the probationary period" ("Tenure Clock Flexibility," n.p.). In addition, the clock could be stopped for "fulfillment of extraordinary institutional service, such as teaching abroad or serving in an administrative position during the probationary period, where these circumstances interrupt or substantially slow progress toward tenure." ("Tenure Clock Flexibility" n.p.). This policy allowed for a flexible response to the finite nature of the tenure clock and the material conditions of individual faculty members' lives. Such policies as these are, as Lisa Wolf-Wendel and Kelly Ward note, a vital part of ensuring that academic institutions respond, collectively rather than individually, to the needs of a diverse array of faculty members rather than leaving those faculty members to negotiate these challenges on their own (32).

Implementing the Role and Labor of Being a Department Chair

You're doing WHAT?

Why would you want to do THAT?

You'll derail your scholarship!

Haven't you already suffered enough as a WPA?

These were some of the questions and comments I received when I told colleagues across the country that I had accepted the position of department chair. These questions and comments are not surprising when one considers the rhetoric surrounding the chair role. The chair's job is often referred to as the "hardest" job in higher education or the "last worst job," as a fellow chair said to me once. As Linda Hanson argues, in "Herding Cats: Feminist Practices and Challenges in Chairing an English Department," the department chair role is an "equivocal" one; the "chair inhabits a pivotal space at the bottom of a hierarchical chain of command with a business model and at the forefront of a collegial model of governance" (184). The chair is often

placed in a position of meeting differing, sometimes contradictory expectations of administrators and colleagues, a position that fosters a perhaps desirable ambivalence in straddling both administrative and academic expectations. The chair has responsibilities conferred on him or her, but often and certainly at my institution lacks authority to act unilaterally to meet those responsibilities. (184)

As the University Provost at my institution once said to an assembled group of department chairs at our annual retreat, "you have the harder job, and you make my job possible." While the department chair job is billed as a notoriously difficult and often thankless position, it is a job that has often **not** been occupied by women. As Carol Mullen argues in her article "Challenges and Breakthroughs of Female Department Chairs Across Disciplines in Higher Education," "while women have advanced in leadership positions, progress has been slow; their representation in such *masculine-typed* elite jobs as department chair is modest at best and, in prestigious research universities, rare" (5). The situation of appointing women to department chair positions is uncommon enough that universities still send out press releases to higher education publications to celebrate the fact that they have appointed one or more women department chairs.

As I looked around the table at my fellow chairs at our monthly college-wide chair's meeting, I saw Mullen's claim in action. Most department chairs in the room were white men over the age of 50. A handful of us were women, and an even smaller group were women or men of color. I was also 5-10 years younger than most department chairs around the table, and one of the few chairs to have a young child at home and a commuting academic spouse. Over my five-year term, the number of women chairs around the table increased, and we often talked with and supported one another, forming an informal network of hall conversations, emails, and phone calls as needed.

Fortunately for me, the anomaly of being one of the only women chairs around the table did not apply to my department's leadership history. My academic unit had been directed and founded by Dr. Louise Wetherbee Phelps (see Phelps "Becoming a Warrior"), and two other women, Dr. Rebecca Moore Howard and Dr. Carol Lipson, had served in the chair role prior to me. These former chairs offered valuable advice during my time in the office. Also, I was able to turn to my colleague who was Director of Undergraduate Studies (Lois Agnew) for advice and daily support as well as supportive staff members in my unit. This network of women colleagues made a big difference in my ability to get work done and feel supported. Even with this support, I had many questions about how to understand the labor and priorities of the department chair position. I turned to the scholarship on writing program administration for ideas, but I found that most scholarly explorations of WPA work did not encompass the scope and scale of the duties I was facing in managing a large academic department.

Like most academics, I went to the one place where I had always gone to find answers—the library. Returning home with a large stack of books with scintillating chapter titles like *Managing the Academic Department* and *Surviving your Days as Chair*, I noticed that these guidebooks were written in a tone that swung from grimness to cheerful optimism. Chapters in these books dealt with an array of topics, from strategic planning to handling the day-to-day duties to the delicate topic of managing difficult colleagues or recalcitrant deans or provosts. These books indicated that department chairs are expected to fulfill often polarized roles: serving as effective advocates, defenders of the department, and also as nurturing and supportive colleagues. Often department chairs are constructed as masculinist "commanders in chief," expected to embrace a traditional model of gendered authority, speech, and a defensive or "strong" posture toward deans and higher administrators.

While I picked up useful general strategies from these books, I also felt a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the stock portraits of the imagined department chairs offered in their pages. Many of these guide books implied that the department chair was a straight white man, a **Chairman** who could already assume well-established authority; a **Chairman** with suitable physical stature and command to take over; a **Chairman** with a deep and booming voice. As I read these guidebooks, I remembered what a former chair from another department had once said to me: "A department chair must be someone **who can talk down to the Dean,**" a masculinist dominance-based model to be sure.

In contrast to this dominance model, the department chair is also expected to be a "manager" and a "housekeeper" who takes care of departmental details and manages personalities and work flow. Most department chairs face

expectations to assume these dual roles, but women and people of color in particular, bear additional freight around the caretaking and emotional labor they have already been asked to undertake from their embodied locations as faculty members. In addition, women faculty members experience the family formation issues I mentioned earlier and face a wage gap, earning "less than men, on average, at each faculty rank and at all types of institutions" (Curtis 4), and are underrepresented 2 to 1 at the highest rank of Full Professor (Curtis 2). Moreover, gendered climate issues persist on campuses; women have their authority, competence, and knowledge questioned more than men counterparts, especially if they are women of color (Harris, and González 3). Sexual harassment and gendered climate issues also make institutional environments a challenge as well. These factors were seldom mentioned in the chair guidebooks I consulted. Over time, I found my way to the interdisciplinary scholarship on intersectionality and department leadership that informs my perspective now, but those first few years as department chair were a study in trial and error and searching for answers.⁴

Chair as Collaborator

In the midst of figuring out how to proceed as chair, I saw that it was important for me to develop a leadership style that would encompass my embodied location, my political sensibilities as a feminist, and my administrative capabilities and strengths, keeping in mind some of the barriers I might face as a woman leader and as a feminist. One of the strengths I brought to the job was that I had been in charge of programs before becoming chair: co-directing a writing program at a large state university before coming to Syracuse (Schell "Who's the Boss") and a mid-sized graduate program, as mentioned earlier. I had accumulated a history of committee service, leadership, and activism, both inside and outside the department and in the community, and I enjoyed working collaboratively with my colleagues. Going into the chair position, I was determined to proactively create structures and opportunities for the department and not just react to internal crises and external challenges.

4 A key feature in Mullen's study of 121 female Department Chairs is that the role of Department Chair is often one that no one wants. Even as many of the women in Mullen's study were incredibly accomplished and qualified to assume their roles as Chairs, they noted that taking the job was "a politically expedient decision, as in "We have a rotating chair and nobody really wants the position. It was my turn and I'm relatively sane," and "It's a hard job that no one else wanted" (11).

While Chair, I worked with faculty, fellow administrators and staff of the Writing Program to build new initiatives and opportunities:

- to hire new faculty members and to work to promote three senior women colleagues to the rank of Full Professor;
- to work with the Director of Graduate Studies to revise and update the doctoral program curriculum and undergo an external review;
- to revise and update the second writing course in the lower-division writing sequence with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and a team of instructors and TAs;
- to actively build and implement, with the Director of Undergraduate Studies and our faculty and staff, an undergraduate writing major;
- to create a Distinction Program for undergraduates working on thesis projects;
- to make arguments to the Dean to correct salary inequities that were in place for women faculty members;
- to redesign department processes to be in compliance with a union contract as part-time faculty in our unit and across the university unionized;
- to found a community writing group for veterans with a colleague;
- to work with our Assistant Director for Writing Technologies to sponsor a summer "Tech Camp" to encourage learning and experimentation in digital writing pedagogies;
- and also to establish a Nonfiction Reading Series that enhanced our signature undergraduate offerings in creative nonfiction among other work.

Of this list of specific endeavors, one of my favorite projects was to collaborate with the Assistant Director for Writing Technologies to create the aforementioned summer technology camp or "Tech Camp" for teachers of all ranks. This week-long summer workshop, which we ran for three years, became a space for faculty, staff, and graduate students to experiment with digital pedagogies, take risks, and revamp their assignments and syllabi in a fun and supportive atmosphere that encouraged dialogue and sharing of information.

All of these initiatives were about building structures and curricular opportunities, and they were central to advancing the department with my colleagues and also to sustaining an intellectual and curricular community. To say there were only productive components of my time as chair, though, would be disingenuous. There were also many failures and challenges that happened, including initiatives or opportunities that I and my colleagues had to drop or

could not pursue due to lack of time or support; disputes with the college administration over a seminar writing course that was set up against our unit's wishes and staffed by post-docs; a failed search; disputes over priorities and funding; conflicts both internal and external that would be too numerous and detailed to unpack in these pages.

Mentorship and Advocacy

One constant in the chair position was the work of mentoring and supporting colleagues. In my role as chair, I spent hours writing proposals to the Dean and negotiating for the resources to support the research and special endeavors of faculty members, including their participation in national leadership roles and funding requests. I also spent many hours with colleagues hiring faculty and writing faculty reviews, from annual reviews to third year reviews and tenure and promotion reviews as well as supporting and putting forward three promotion cases for women faculty members in the span of two years. With a backlog of senior women faculty members who had not yet been promoted to the rank of Full Professor, I saw these promotions as one of my highest priorities, especially given the dearth of women full professors at research institutions. I also visited and wrote reviews of the classes of part-time faculty colleagues, moments that I relished as it allowed me to see how the curriculum was being enacted.

Assigning Service

Another key component of my work as department chair was channeling the labor and work flow of the department: assigning faculty members to committees, charging committees with specific tasks, undertaking curricular reform and new initiatives, and responding to problems, mandates, and opportunities. I saw my role as chair as not only creating opportunities for new initiatives but also as someone responsible for the "engine" of service: how curricular work and departmental goals were to be met through channeling the work of one's colleagues and staff. This work, of course, requires judgment, skills and a sense of timing. The chair must determine who is best equipped to undertake this work and must consider how this service work fits into balancing workloads across rank and positions as well as how this service will be rewarded and recognized (see Payne, this issue).

Building Relationships and Community

In addition to assigning service, it was also part of my daily labor to build relationships and community, work that falls under the category of emotional labor as Payne describes it in this article cluster. This relationship and community building often involved significant outlays of my time and energy, but

were among my most favorite and challenging duties as chair: hosting receptions to mark key occasions, acknowledging and celebrating awards and achievements, taking colleagues out for lunch or coffee to hear about their work, processing losses, disagreements, and disappointments, and being responsive to challenges and life events that my colleagues across ranks were dealing with—whether illness, grief and loss, divorce/separation, childbirth, or other matters. Moments like these required empathy as well as the ability to direct colleagues to university resources that they might need for support. Moments like these were opportunities to lead through presence and through understanding.

Scope and Scale

What was different about being chair than the other roles I had held as graduate director or WPA, though, was the scope and scale of the job—the sheer volume of work and the fact that the work touched on **all areas** of the department and the lives of every single faculty member, whether tenure-track or non-tenure-track, staff member, or TA. In a given day, I might meet with and resolve problems and concerns connected to a TA, a staff member, a faculty member, and receive a call or email from an angry parent or a frustrated faculty member from another unit. I might meet with the Dean to ask for specific resources or be engaged in meeting mandates for reports or assessment required by the college or the university.

The scope was all-encompassing, and the job never turned off; I was always on duty, day or night. I could go to bed at midnight, wake up at 6:00 a.m. and find anywhere from three to five “urgent” and pressing emails and requests waiting for time sensitive responses from various individuals. Often, I found that I would gear up to respond to and take action on a “crisis-oriented” email only to find that within 24 hours, the person or persons who had written the email had cooled down and rethought the initial response and that the situation had dissipated or been transformed. While I would be ready to respond to the initial emotions and situation that led to the “crisis,” the situation had often changed, leaving me with a dramatically different terrain to navigate. I learned to slow down the process of email interaction, asking for face-to-face appointments and moving the charged interaction off email as soon as possible. I learned to define what a “crisis” really was and to respond in appropriate and ethical proportion to the perceptions and emotions of others, part of the work of “emotion management” and emotional labor addressed in Payne’s piece in this issue. As Chair, though, it is tempting to assume the role of first responder, to see one’s role as “putting out fires” and “staving off threats.” At the same time, taking on that role and mindset can turn being a departmental leader into being a crisis manager who is reactive rather than proactive.

The Second and Third Shift

Even with a supportive staff and colleagues to assist me in the day-to-day work of department chair duties, I found that addressing the needs and emotions of those in my academic unit was immediate, pressing, and often overwhelming and exhausting. The emotional and situational labor of managing department affairs didn't go away once I went home at night. After putting in a full day at the university most days until 5:00 or 5:30 p.m., I picked up my daughter from her after school program, picked up the dog from dog daycare, and went home for my second shift of cooking dinner, doing dishes, and helping my daughter with her homework and bedtime rituals. My partner also had his own second shift of engaging in household chores and errands after teaching all day and commuting for over two hours. In the evening, I often thought of other chairs I knew who had stay-at-home spouses or spouses who worked part-time who shouldered most of the domestic duties.

After my daughter went to sleep at night, I started my third shift of the day, logging into my institutional email to do more work, prepare reports, write back to colleagues and students, read and grade student work, and prepare assignments as well as prepare for the next administrative work day. My family complained about my non-stop schedule, and they were disappointed that I was, in their words, "always working." I tried to explain what the job entailed, and they tried to understand, but they could not fully empathize with my situation. They wanted my time; they wanted my attention, and my job was interfering with their lives, happiness, and connection with me because I brought the department chair work home every night. Two years into the job, my daughter began sentences with *"When you're not chair, we can. . ."* Clearly, the impact of the position was registered in my daughter's life and in her mindset.

Sustainability versus Work-Life Balance

In the midst of juggling chair work and domestic labor, self-care became an increasing struggle. I gained weight, suffered from bouts of insomnia, got sick more often, and struggled to find time to exercise as much as I wanted to. An annual physical exam revealed that I had borderline high cholesterol, which woke me up to the fact that I was stretching my body beyond capacity and not attending enough to my eating and exercise habits. I started scheduling time in the gym during my lunch hour; I changed my diet to include healthier options and more regular meal-times in the course of the work day. I also started talking to a counselor to deal with some of the anger and frustration that I started to feel about having so little time to myself, whether at work or home. My work-life balance was out of whack, but, as I came to realize, it was

not just a question of balance, but one of how to have a **sustainable** schedule and life.

Researchers Athena Perrakis and Cynthia Martinez argue that instead of speaking of work-life balance, which implies that an individual can simply be a better manager of time and “do more with less, function on less sleep with fewer resources, and sacrifice their own well-being in pursuit of excellence both at home and in the workplace” (216) we should seek in faculty and leadership roles the concept of sustainability:

Perhaps, though, in focusing on balance and thereby implying that there is in fact a way to have it all and achieve excellence across all aspects of life regardless of the sacrifices entailed along the way, we have overlooked one very significant reality: Anyone can do anything for short periods of time. What matters in the long run is how sustainable our life and work practices are. To maximize our potential and be fully present in all aspects of our lives we must be physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually intact. The notion of sustainability invites consideration of our total wellness as working women and challenges our ability to maintain a standard of living and working that benefits all the many stakeholders in our lives without forcing us to sacrifice our own well-being in the process. (216)

Perrakis and Martinez’s concept of sustainability, as opposed to the concept of “work-life balance,” helped me revise my thinking about how to engage a sustainable pace as chair and work toward realistic goals that would not deplete my family or me.

In my quest to create more sustainable structures for being chair, I began to work very hard at staying connected to my scholarship. I collaborated on two co-edited collections while chair, which allowed me to have intellectual partners and be in regular contact with scholars in my areas of expertise. Thus, I sought to avoid the isolation and sense of loss that many chairs face when administrative work overwhelms their scholarship and intellectual lives.

Attending conferences to present papers and giving invited lectures also became a lifeline for me to other scholars and an unaccustomed luxury and pleasure, a chance to get outside the bubble of my own administrative world. Prior to becoming department chair, I found the pressure of presenting papers at conferences stressful; now it seemed like a luxury to have a flight and a hotel room to myself and a few days ahead where nothing but attending and listening to panels or presenting my own work was on the agenda (save the times I received desperate emails from staff or faculty or phone calls from higher-level administrators demanding a response and my nightly calls home to check-in on my family). Thinking about sustainable work structures pushed

me to create space for my intellectual work through collaborative writing projects and conference attendance.

Life After Being Chair: Sorting through the Meaning of it All

"I'm glad you're not chair anymore, Mom, because you won't be on your computer all the time. You can take me to the craft store without telling me to wait for 10 minutes and then 30 minutes and then two hours before we can go." —Autumn Kerr, age 10, my daughter, giving an impassioned speech at my chair retirement party in front of the Dean and assembled colleagues.

After five years of being department chair, I felt that I had accomplished what I had set out to do and that the department needed fresh leadership and perspective. With the faculty and Dean's approval, I was able to hand off the chair responsibilities to an accomplished and effective colleague. I was granted a hard-won, year-long research leave directly following the completion of my five-year term. During that leave, I wrote several chapters of a new book and articles, went for long runs and hikes with my dog, and spent more time with my family and friends. I also began thinking through my past and future career trajectory. What had my time as Chair meant? Was it worth it? Would I recommend the role to others considering it? Should I go into higher-level leadership roles? I cast around for answers to those questions over the next few years as I went back to teaching full-time and took on a variety of service responsibilities within the department and college. I also turned down two leadership roles in higher education administration that I was offered since neither appealed to me and since my home duties were still pressing. I still felt exhausted. I often joked that I was in "recovery" as chair and that there was no way I was ever going back into administrative work.

In 2015, three years after leaving the chair position, I was scheduled to present on a panel on feminist leadership of writing programs at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. I struggled to figure out what I wanted to say that would be legible and transferrable to others about my time as chair. As I finalized my remarks, I surprised myself by writing and speaking forcefully about the need for feminist colleagues to take on leadership roles, to equip and prepare for them, and to ask for the resources they need to be successful. I realized that I had been transformed through the experience of being chair, and that I felt that feminists should seek out or at least strongly consider leadership roles in higher education.

In the question and answer session for the feminist leadership panel I gave at CCCC, panel attendees had questions about what they needed to negotiate

to become effective leaders, wanting to know how to handle questions around the timing of becoming chair, finding mentorship, gaining resources, implementing program and curricular change, developing a leadership style, and solving crises. By way of a conclusion, I offer some general advice and lessons of survivance from the job that, while incomplete, may help those considering whether or not to pursue the chair role and what they need to do as they prepare for it.

Mentoring and Professional Development⁵: Being chair can be a lonely enterprise, especially if you are one of the few women chairs and WOC chairs in your college/university. It is imperative to seek professional development, training, mentoring, networking, and solidarity opportunities while chair. In addition to whatever might be available at a given institution or in the region for academic leadership mentoring and development, there are opportunities to attend national workshops for department chairs, such as the Association of Departments of English (ADE) summer workshop for new chairs or the Women's and Gender Studies Director or Chair workshops within the National Women Studies Association. At the same time, women department chairs can create informal networks across institutions at professional conferences, seeking out and finding peers among national colleagues and support for their intellectual and programmatic work.

Miller and Lewis's dialogue piece, mentioned at the beginning of this article, demonstrates the kinds of dialogue and support that can happen based on shared experience and struggles, especially for those in minority positions. As they point out, there are gaps in existing chair networks, especially when those networks are set up for mainly white women (80). Dr. Monica Cox, a Professor and Chair of the Department of Engineering Education at The Ohio State University, one of three black women department chairs at the entire institution, founded a network for Women of Color in Department Chair Roles in the fall of 2018. The goal of the network is to "provide real-time confidential support for women with similar experiences," and to address biased responses, assumptions, and microaggressions that women of color chairs often experience (Rogers). As Cox notes, "There are so many women who are one and onlys. Few people may understand your specific troubles. People are

5 Of "the 50,000 chairs in America, one in five turn over every year, and while it takes 10,000 hours of practice to reach competence [the equivalent of about eight years of service]. . . only 3% of Chairs receive training in leadership" (Gmelch qtd in Payne).

just lonely and isolated and there's a hunger for it" (qtd in Rogers, n.p.). Such networks are significant for support, survival and for gathering strength to proceed in often challenging institutional and departmental settings.

Compensation

Anyone taking on a chair position should consider the vital role that compensation and release time from teaching or other duties can play in incentivizing the job and also making sure that one's service is noticed and institutionally rewarded (see Payne). The women chairs in Mullen's study indicate that "Department Chairs" face "an enormous workload and a low -to moderate pay-off" (12). Thus, it is important for new chairs to negotiate financial resources for themselves and for their units as they consider the position. Compensation is also important as a safeguard against the disadvantage of losing time for one's scholarship and teaching and closing the wage gap that exists for women and people of color in higher education. Without adequate compensation or release time as part of the chair position, *saying no* to the position may be the best answer.

Coming in to my first term as chair, following in the footsteps of the preceding chair, who was a skilled resource negotiator, I was able to make the case for a sizeable discretionary fund as well as a 1-0 teaching load so I could manage the job. My administrative salary was 1/9 of my total salary on top of my load, so I was well compensated for my labor as chair. These resources positioned me for success during my first term as chair. While my second term as chair did not bring the same level of resources due to a new Dean offering lessened discretionary funds, I had a strong start with my first term and was able to build on what I had already achieved.

Building Transformative Opportunities

According to Caroll and Wolverton, 80% of university decisions are made at the department level (qtd in Payne n.p.). A chairship brings visibility and opportunities for advocacy, for carrying out a progressive feminist agenda such as improving working conditions for non-tenure-track colleagues; hiring, mentoring, tenuring and promoting women and people of color; revising curricula and courses to be more diverse and more inclusive; creating family friendly policies and inclusive policies. These are parts of the job that align well with feminist values even as other parts of the job may be more of a challenge.

Developing a Sustainable Work Plan

Having a well-articulated strategic work plan for one's chairship that ties into or builds on a department's yearly goals or long-term plan is vital. Such a plan needs to be negotiated with colleagues, with one's Dean, and also with

trusted mentors and advisors. Having time in the work week to return to that plan and assess what has been done to make progress on its implementation is important. Creating structures that encourage collaboration and communication across administrative positions is important as well, whether in the form of strategic Executive Committee meetings, faculty meetings, task force or working group meetings. My department had a well-established structure of staff and directors' meetings as well as faculty meetings and standing committees where updating and communicating about priorities and projects was part of the regular functioning of the department. When time for such meetings is limited or impossible or agendas are already packed, surveys and calls for feedback and input on department matters on listservs or open office hours can be used to encourage and solicit feedback and dialogue, especially in larger units where it is not possible to visit all department members' office hours and talk in person.

Building Community and Communication

The chair's role is not only about getting work done; it's about being present: listening, and communicating and honoring the achievements, ideas, and needs of one's colleagues. Creating structures and rituals for interaction and exchange, listening (even in the midst of disagreements and frustrations), and recognition are an important part of the chair position. Lunches, coffee dates, open houses, retreats, happy hours, annual holiday parties are important ways to come together and socialize across an academic department. Likewise, announcing achievements in a department newsletter, on a listserv, or on social media are important ways to recognize one's colleagues. The chair attending award ceremonies, readings, and events honoring colleagues is equally important; there is no substitute for simply being there to support and witness these moments.

Addressing Family Friendly Policies and Wellness

While many universities are designing and implementing family friendly and wellness centered policies and practices, such policies often have loopholes and gaps that fail to account for the specific material conditions and lives of university employees across embodied locations, rank, and position. For instance, I worked with staff and colleagues in my department to address the fact that the university at the time had no official maternity leave policy for graduate students, leaving such provisions up to an individual department. Working with a supportive set of staff members, I worked to provide accommodations for graduate student parents, nursing mothers, and those facing elder care situations.

When I was chair, I also made it clear to colleagues that I had family duties and understood what it meant to juggle academic work and family along with my own self-care. I brought my young daughter to work frequently, especially on her sick days since our University day care center didn't accommodate sick kids and sent them home to be cared for by working parents (a problem for many of us in the department and across the university). Other colleagues and graduate students saw me with my child on campus and told me they felt safe to bring their children in to work when necessary or talk to me about support for their care labor situations.

I also made a point of being public about including work-outs in my work day, especially after receiving a diagnosis, part-time way through my time as chair, of high cholesterol and knowing my family history of heart disease (a father who died at age 53 of heart attack). In my chair's office, I changed into my gym clothes at noon and went to work out in the campus gym or went running near campus. Some of my colleagues and TAs told me that it was inspiring to see me working out in the midst of my work day and that they were inspired to work out, too. I also founded an online exercise social media group called "Take the 100 or 1,000/1,200 mile Challenge" on facebook with the goal of spurring on the pursuit of health and wellness among colleagues and encouraging others to do so at other institutions in the midst of often sedentary academic lives.

Even as I was able to work toward perpetuating feminist values as a laborator and community builder in my own unit, my stint on the Women's Concerns Committee of the University Senate and also my time chairing the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, which coincided with my time as department chair, helped me see the larger scope of the work of fighting inequities on campus and in the field. These committees gave me the opportunity to work on projects combatting inequities and exclusions even while recognizing limitations and constraints within the structures at hand.

Conclusion: The Answer is Yes

From the vantage point of six and a half years of distance on the Chair position now, my answer to the question is "It Worth it to Lean in to Lead?" is still **yes**. Yes, it is worth it, or, at least it was for me, and yes, it was costly and time-consuming and often a fraught and unpredictable ride to be Department Chair. As the old cowboy saying goes: "If you climb in the saddle, be ready for the ride." My hope is that more feminists in rhetoric and writing studies will lead our academic departments—whether English Departments or independent writing programs or units—and that when we attend chairs' meetings at our colleges and universities, we will look around the table and see a more diverse and inclusive cast of institutional leaders who also said **yes**. At a time

when universities are mired in neoliberal economic models and where we daily witness academic labor practices that run counter to feminist and progressive ideals and against a national backdrop of xenophobia, racism, sexism, and transphobia, among other issues, such leadership is needed now more than ever.

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Advocating *Comadrisimo*: A Feminist Mentoring Approach for Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition

Ana Milena Ribero and Sonia C. Arellano

Abstract: *This article outlines comadrisimo as a culturally specific mentoring approach for Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition. The authors discuss the value of mentoring practices based on a kinship relationship and explore seven themes—kinship, fuerza, networks of care, empathy, collaboration, paying it forward, and tangible support—that constitute comadrisimo mentoring. Grounded in the literature on mentoring in Rhetoric and Composition, this article draws on the experiential knowledges of Latina academics to argue that scholars must attend to the specific needs of Women of Color in order to recruit and retain diverse voices in the discipline.*

Keywords: *Latinas, mentoring, retention*

In *Presumed Incompetent*, the groundbreaking collection about Women of Color academics, Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. González argue that despite the increasing diversity of the US university student population, white men and women continue to occupy the overwhelming majority of full-time faculty positions at colleges and universities (1). Furthermore, they state, the numbers of Women of Color decrease with rising academic rank, with only 3.4% of full professors in 2007 being Women of Color (2).

Unsurprisingly, we can see these national trends reflected in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition. While our discipline is exceptionally inclusive of white women, Women of Color continue to be only minimally represented, as a cursory look at our major journals and conference programs can attest. Indeed, taking membership in the Conference on College Composition and Communication as a measure (a data set that is not without its limits), it appears that in the last 20 years Rhetoric and Composition has become less—not more—diverse. In his 1999 article in *College Composition and Communication*, Victor Villanueva admonishes the discipline's dire representation of People of Color. He writes, "We can do better than 7% among our teachers and scholars of color, better than a representation that is statistically insignificant in our journals" (552). By 2017, the number of CCCC members identifying as

other than “white—non-latino/hispanic/Spanish” had decreased to a staggering 5.23%. The breakdown among different demographic categories was as follows: .32% identified as “American Indian or Alaska Native”; 1.09% identified as “Asian, including Asian Indian or Pacific Islander”; 1.72% identified as “Black/African American”; 1.47% identified as “Latino/Hispanic/Spanish”; and .63% identified as “two or more races.”¹ While these demographic data are not intersectional (for example, they do not show what portion of those 5.23% identify as female, queer, etc.), we can infer that the number of Women of Color in the discipline is quite low.

As Latinas in academia, we live these numbers every day. At our universities, we are often the only Latina in the room and one out of just a handful of Women of Color in the department. We are very aware that we may be the only Women of Color professors that our undergraduate and graduate students will ever meet. This lack of diversity reproduces itself, with fewer students of color choosing the discipline, fewer scholars of color entering the profession, and fewer faculty of color publishing articles and monographs that address issues of race and racism. Consequently, Latinas in academia may feel alone, with little to no culturally relevant guidance on how to succeed in graduate school and on the tenure-track. Without many allies in tenured and administrative positions, Women of Color in academia may also “find themselves ‘presumed incompetent’ as scholars, teachers, and participants in academic governance” (Harris and González 1).

This article, a collaboration between two Latina feminists in Rhetoric and Composition, contributes to the conversation about how to increase representation of Women of Color in the discipline. While we agree with Villanueva that we need more representation of writers of color in our journals, as well as a continued critical engagement with race and racism in our conferences and publications (652), we add that more purposeful feminist mentorship of students and junior scholars of color is also a necessity.

Fatima Chrifi Alaoui and Bernadette Calafell argue that even though mainstream research on mentoring in academia shows the importance of mentoring relationships to academic career success, the assumption of a white middle-class mentoring model leaves the needs of Women of Color academics unattended. They write, “Specifically, women of different historically marginalized groups may have different needs and expectations from a mentoring relationship than other women may have” (62). As a discipline, we therefore need better mentoring practices for Women of Color, inasmuch as we care about recruiting and retaining diverse academics. In this article, we forward *comadrismo* as a feminist mentoring practice that attends to some of the

1 These numbers are unofficial but otherwise accurate.

needs and expectations of Women of Color academics. With a long history of practice (Camacho, Scholz, de Hoyos Comstock), *comadrisimo* refers to a feminist reciprocal relationship among women. As a mentoring model, *comadrisimo* is built upon a trusting kinship relationship and functions among women with deep commitments to anti-racist work. We argue that *comadrisimo* as a culturally specific mentoring model can help provide Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition with the holistic support they need to succeed in academia. Furthermore, *comadrisimo* can help diversify our discipline, not only by helping retain Women of Color in our field, but also by encouraging those women to center anti-racist feminist work in their teaching and writing.

In what follows, we ground *comadrisimo* in the conversation about mentoring in Rhetoric and Composition and demonstrate that we have much to learn from how mentoring is discussed and practiced in other disciplines. We then provide a brief review of the concept of *comadrisimo*, a term rooted in Latin American feminist community practices. Finally, we outline the characteristics of *comadrisimo* as a mentoring model. We base this model of mentorship on our personal experiences as Latina scholars in a purposeful move to value the experiential knowledges of underrepresented populations and dispute the hegemony of objectivity. In an attempt to avoid essentialism, we frame our discussion of *comadrisimo* as a dialogue in order to highlight the diversity of our perspectives and experiences as Latinas in academia.

We hope this article provides some specific ideas about what mentoring Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition can entail. We have also written this article in a way that readers may take from it what works best for their particular circumstances. In other words, while we present *comadrisimo* as a mentoring model among Latinas, we also believe that some or all of what we propose here may be useful to people of different positionalities. Our aim is not only to provide practical tools, but also to engage the discipline in a conversation about how to better mentor Women of Color—an important piece in the work of diversifying and decolonizing Rhetoric and Composition.

Understanding Mentoring Relationships in Rhetoric and Composition and Beyond

Mentoring has long been a concern for Rhetoric and Composition scholars, with some attention to mentoring women and People of Color. Overall, the scholarship illustrates the variety of approaches to mentoring in the discipline, as scholars have argued for mentoring that is contextually situated and attentive to the inherent power dynamics in this complex practice. For example, Jenn Fishman and Andrea Lunsford problematize the idea of mentoring, expressing their ambivalence to the concept as it replicates structures

of power and requirements for assimilation (22). They propose that mentoring is sometimes practiced as a form of control, with even the ways that we talk about mentoring—for example the use of the clunky “mentee” to describe those being mentored—invisibilizing the agency of students and junior faculty (28).

Indeed, mentoring can often seem bent on shaping the scholar to the white dominant academy and not on transforming the institution into a space that values minoritized ways of knowing and being in the world. For example, in *Women's Ways of Making it in Rhetoric and Composition*, which is often referred to as the landmark text on women in the discipline, Michelle Ballif, et al. recommend that junior faculty “pursue the study of languages, especially Greek and Latin,” “learn more classical rhetoric,” “publish like crazy,” and “act professional at all times, be confident and assertive, yet gracious and collegial” (86-89). This advice takes on an assimilationist stance that can be particularly devastating for women and academics of color who feel that they are unable and/or unwilling to perform the “meritocratic” competitive academic culture. To challenge assimilationist models of mentorship, scholars of mentoring in Rhetoric and Composition have theorized feminist, critical, and activist mentoring in order to advocate for underrepresented scholars in the discipline (Kynard and Eddy, Okawa, VanHaitsma and Ceraso).

Pamela VanHaitsma and Steph Ceraso provide a possible alternative to power-laden mentoring through horizontal mentoring—a mentoring strategy that embodies the ethos of “making it together” (215) through the rejection of the traditional hierarchical relationship of “mentor and mentee.” Yet, the authors also recognize the limitations of horizontal mentoring, or of any individual attempt to remedy the structural inequalities of the university: “Many of the challenges facing early-career academics are the result of structural and material forces that individual strategies simply cannot undo” (228). Their research highlights the reasons why structural critique, advocacy, and activism should be part of any critical mentoring practice.

Kathryn Gindlesparger’s and Holly Ryan’s reflections on their “failing” feminist mentor group illustrate how conflict and change can be important parts of feminist mentoring. They write, “Feminist mentoring is acute, rhetorical, and must be carried out on a variety of fronts, with different mentors for different projects (there are different mentors for different needs). We must be adaptable and open to change and even dissolution if that is to the advantage of those involved” (67). In their article, the authors make a distinction between mentoring with the goal of fostering professional advancement (e.g., publishing) and mentoring for professional identity development (e.g., going from the position of graduate student to that of writing program administrator), implying that these two realms of an academic’s life are mutually exclusive.

This separation, however, seems to stem from their positionality as white, middle-class scholars—a position that the authors acknowledge. For academics of color, however, professional identity is closely related to professional advancement. As Ersula Ore poignantly describes, “From the moment I step into the building I am marked an outsider. Regardless of external signifiers of a teacherly *ethos*... I am still assumed to be a student. My black body in these clothes, in this space, denies me any other identity” (9). As Women of Color minoritized in and out of academic spaces, our abilities to teach and research are directly affected by the ways in which our bodies and identities are perceived.

A mentoring model for Women of Color in the discipline must account for the obstacles along intersecting lines of race and gender that we face in white dominant academia. On this there is much to be learned from scholarship on mentoring People of Color in Rhetoric and Composition. For example, Carmen Kynard and Robert Eddy forward “critical mentoring” as a vital retention practice for students and academics of color and as a practice that helps “[undo] the toxic effects of racism on individual students and on ourselves” (W35). Critical mentoring teaches students and academics of color that there are various paths to success in academia and that assimilation into white hegemonic norms is not the only option. Diverse models of success can be particularly valuable for Latinxs in academia (Cavazos). In her doctoral dissertation², Alyssa Guadalupe Cavazos suggests that mentoring can help students to trouble dominant narratives about what it takes to succeed in white dominant academia. Rather than a singular trajectory, Latinx graduate students and junior faculty must see many and diverse examples of Latinx success in academia that move beyond assimilation and adherence to white normative academic culture. Mentoring of Latinx students and junior faculty must reflect that Latinx academics can succeed on our own terms. For this to happen, Cavazos argues, it is important for there to be more Latinx faculty in our discipline, rather than a tokenized few.

Mentoring of people of color in Rhetoric and Composition can be the sort of activist practice that works against the hegemony of whiteness in writing studies and in academia. Gail Y. Okawa notes that advocacy must be an important part of mentoring as activist practice. It is not enough to mentor students on how to enter the white academy. Activist mentors must intervene in the name of their students in cases of injustice and help them navigate the white institution with the goal of transforming it into the type of structure that does not privilege whiteness. This sort of mentoring, however, is time

2 Cavazos’ dissertation is the only text that specifically approaches mentoring of Latinx academics in Rhetoric and Composition, yet it does not deal with issues of gender identity or other intersections.

consuming and laborious, and it creates an undue burden on faculty of color who may themselves be struggling to survive as professionals in the white institution (Kynard and Eddy). Because of the invisible emotional labor that mentoring programs create, Ballif, et al. call on Rhetoric and Composition scholars and administrators to consider who is taking on a disproportionate amount of the labor in mentoring programs aimed towards underrepresented populations. Additionally, they ask scholars and administrators to create practices that remedy the disproportionate distribution of labor along lines of race and gender.

While much can be gleaned from scholarship on mentoring People of Color and other underrepresented populations in Rhetoric and Composition, an intersectional approach to mentoring in the discipline remains largely underdeveloped. Specifically, the discipline needs to theorize an approach to feminist mentoring for Latinas. We now look to scholarship outside our discipline, particularly in education, that discusses successful Latina mentoring in higher education and addresses the conditions that facilitate Latina success at the PhD and junior faculty levels.

The importance of interconnectedness is evident in scholarship about Latina mentorship. For Latinas, success in higher education comes *with* community and *for* community. Moreover, mentoring relationships provide support by valuing personal experience as epistemic. The work of education scholar Juan Carlos González demonstrates these points by analyzing the academic socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students to understand how support systems aid student success. González found that while Latinas were negatively and positively affected by a variety of factors (e.g., earlier schooling experiences, institutional support systems, financial support, tokenism, assimilation, and cultural isolation), their success often depended upon finding and creating “networks of resistance” that allowed them to “integrate with similar minded scholars who supported and encouraged their resistance” to normative academic socialization (359).

One such network is described by Lucila Ek, et al., who illustrate how Latina junior faculty in education formed a pre-tenure support group that provided a space for transformational resistance and “*muxerista* mentoring” in preparation for promotion and tenure. Ek, et al. describe *muxerista* mentoring as a process that values Women of Color epistemologies and lived experiences, and as a result, validates the difficult experiences Latinas face in academia (545). Additionally, in facilitating the retention of Women of Color, *muxerista* mentoring “establishes a feeling of cooperation instead of competition” and facilitates professional support and growth (548). *Comadrisimo* as a mentoring practice echoes the *muxerista* ethos of resistance and cooperation, as we see networks and connections among Latinas as crucial to our success

in predominantly white institutions. Cooperation among Latinas ensures that our experiences and knowledges are valued and that our successes also benefit our communities. *Muxerista* mentoring demonstrates how we work in solidarity with other Latina academics and non-academics for the welfare of our community and to lift each other up as we labor in a society that continues to bring us down.

Mentoring among Latinas always involves a practice of resistance, and critical consideration of intersectional identities is key to building mentoring relationships. In other words, Latina mentoring relationships are necessarily political and personal. For example, Rebeca Burciaga and Ana Tavares discuss a pedagogy of sisterhood, which they define as “a purposeful friendship rooted in political activism” that eventually evolves into a “pedagogical strategy that sustains [Latinas] in academia” (133). They claim that the relationship they developed working together on an anthology challenged the isolation and individualism valued in academia, which is why they see creating sisterhood as an act of resistance and survival (138). Moreover, Burciaga and Tavares look to and learn from Women of Color in academia who have challenged patriarchal structures: “Our learning in this supportive environment among feminist scholars is organized differently from that of the classroom—we become central to the curriculum in creating our own pedagogy” (138). Such a sisterhood created and influenced by Women of Color provides a learning approach to facilitate Latina success.

Scholarship on mentoring outside of Rhetoric and Composition offers tangible solutions to encourage Latina retention and success in higher education. For example, González calls on policymakers to facilitate change and address institutional climate concerns. He proposes that academic leaders and institutional change agents need to realize that to sustain higher education for an increasingly diverse student population, they must address the difficulties Latinas and other Women of Color face succeeding in institutions of higher learning (362). Similarly, Ek et al. argue that universities need to focus on retaining faculty of color and offer specific approaches such as prioritizing cluster hires and increasing the number of Latina recruiters. They also suggest providing financial support, institutional legitimacy, and space to mentoring groups that focus on faculty of color. Lastly, they suggest engaging in formal and informal dialogues with Latinas about their experiences in academia (550). Each one of these scholars argues that mentorship and institutional change are crucial for the success of marginalized and minoritized populations in higher education. In the next section we provide some context to the concept of *comadrisimo* on which we base our mentoring model for Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition.

Comadrisimo: a Brief Framing

"[Comadrisimo] encompasses some of the most complex and important relationships that exist between women. *Comadres* are best friends, confidants, coworkers, advisors, neighbors, godmothers to one's children" — Nora de Hoyos Comstock (ix)

The term *comadre* comes from the Latin *commater*, which means female sponsor or godmother. Traditionally, children baptized in the Catholic Church are given a '*comadre*,' a godmother who is supposed to guide them through their young spiritual life. Outside of the religious context, Paul Allatson defines *comadrisimo* more broadly as "the complex set of relationships, reciprocal duties and dependencies, and mutual support networks and friendships between women that are not necessarily determined by the obligations of traditional godmother status or familial ties, but which nonetheless confirm a place in a constructed community of women" (76). Whether the term is used within a religious or secular context, *comadre* clearly refers to women whose relationships have strong kinship.

Additionally, the term *comadre* can imply a relationship based on political awareness and attention to social change. Melissa Camacho explains that in Puerto Rico the term refers to a "feminist icon" and "empowered leader" who advocates for her community through her activism (124), while Cristina Herrera describes "*comadrazgo*" as an "adopted sisterhood" and more importantly as "a strong female alliance used to combat the cultural and familial strains placed on [Latina]³ women" (52). Both Camacho and Herrera acknowledge the key role *comadres* serve for one another and their communities in surviving colonial and patriarchal challenges.

Building on this general understanding of *comadre*, we draw from Teresa Maria Linda Scholz's notion of *comadrisimo*, an intersectional feminist framework that attends to asymmetrical power relations and challenges hegemonic forces to consider the agency of Women of Color. Scholz proposes that *comadrisimo* functions "as a way to highlight the complex relationships between discursive and material counterhegemonic practices, and between victimhood, voice, and agency, within transnational communities" (83-84). *Comadrisimo* is an intersectional approach to social justice that complicates the binaries of "agency and victimhood" and "discourse and materiality" to account for the diverse lived experiences of Women of Color.

3 Here Herrera says Chicana because she is discussing a Chicana fictional character. However, her work includes the larger Latina community. For the purposes of this article, we inserted Latina.

In our work, we build on three main points of Scholz's *comadrisimo* framework: *comadrisimo* embraces the complex, collective actions of Latinas, values the political potential of counternarratives, and challenges feminist work that universalizes women's experiences. The key here is that the *comadre* paradigm moves beyond the "maternal and Western neoliberal individual" to focus on those who are "communally connected" (Scholz 88). In our experiences as Latina academics, community is key to sustainable and effective mentorship practices, as we always see ourselves working collectively for Latinas and Women of Color and not just for ourselves.

Additionally, Scholz claims that counternarratives from *comadres* "can provide the richest theoretical insight into women's discursive and material resistance and self-representation" (89). According to Aja Martinez, counternarratives, and more specifically counterstories, highlight "that the experiential and embodied knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices" (69). In an academic context, counternarratives can highlight university practices that are unjust and harmful for Latinas. Moreover, the power in sharing stories of injustice can create "a space of support and nurturing" because as "stories are recounted, women's experiences with repression are understood within a broad relational system" (Scholtz 92). In other words, when we share our stories, we understand how systems of oppression operate, and we are then in a position to challenge those systems and advocate for political change.

Perhaps most importantly for the field of Rhetoric and Composition with its substantial tradition of feminist scholarship, using a framework of *comadrisimo* can help feminist scholars to challenge models of feminism that reproduce universalized ideas of women's experience. As Latinas, we are often made to feel too sensitive or too angry when we experience microaggressions and often our peers do not believe or address the grievances we bring to superiors. *Comadrisimo* challenges hegemonic feminism by creating a framework that reveals how Latinas "respond to overlapping systems of oppression" (Scholz 96). *Comadres* call out feminists who are not intersectional or who are not actively working towards justice for all women. Here the concept of *comadrisimo* disrupts individualistic actions and promotes collective work among Latinas.

4 In Scholz's work women share their stories with other *comadres* in prison to understand the sexual and physical violence they experienced. We are not comparing experiences but focusing on the importance of sharing of stories.

Comadrismo as Model for Mentoring Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition

In the remainder of this article, we present *comadrismo* as a framework with which to create mentoring relationships in Rhetoric and Composition that challenge hegemonic models of feminism while supporting the success and development of Latina academics. Harris and González emphasize that in order to survive and thrive in white dominant academic environments, Women of Color must “recognize and honor the connections among body, mind, culture, and spirit—connections that are denied by the rationalist and masculine-dominated culture of the academy” (7). Accordingly, we draw on our experiences with mentoring as connected to body, mind, culture, and spirit to propose seven themes that facilitate the practice of *comadrismo* mentoring.

In this section, we use a dialogue format to discuss *comadrismo* as a mentoring model in order to illustrate that even though we are both Latinas in Rhetoric and Composition working in R1 public universities, our backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs differ, so it would be inappropriate for us to speak in a single voice. Therefore, we use a first-person dialogue format to structure this section in order to work against singular narratives of identity and experience and to avoid essentializing one Latina experience through academia.

The format of a dialogue framed by seven key themes emerged organically in our collaborative process. In order to effectively convey our dialogical and dynamic relationships to one another and with other mentors and mentees, we knew the format of this article must be different from a typical academic genre. We initially wrote about our individual experiences as mentors and mentees. Then we exchanged those writings and discussed the salient points and experiences, some having to do with one another and some having to do with common mentors and mentees. We identified the most prominent themes that emerged and named them according to their contributions to *comadrismo*. We decided to present these themes in a dialogue format in order to emphasize the relational characteristic of *comadrismo* as well as each of our individually nuanced perspectives on our mentoring experiences. In the final part of this process, we revised and expanded those initial writings, taking time to respond to each other in writing in order to create a dialogue. Each part of this collaborative process was incredibly organic; the themes came from the experiences we had in common, and the dialogue seemed to be the best way to show how we each experienced the mentoring that was happening. Our experiences shaped the themes and dialogue of the article so that we could highlight our individual experiences, together.

Theme 1: Kinship

Comadre 1: For me, kinship is an essential part of what demarcates *comadrisimo* from other mentoring approaches. Here, I would define kinship as chosen family whose connectedness is founded in social relationships. For Latinas, academia can be isolating in two ways: we are geographically separated from our families who raised us—and we are often, but not always, very close to these families—and we are in a predominantly white environment that at times contradicts some of our cultural values. Therefore, we often attempt to build relationships with other Latinas seeking cultural commonalities, and sometimes those relationships grow into a new chosen family.

The chosen families that we nurture grow from a genuine desire to see other Latinas be successful. To paraphrase Afro-Latina rapper Cardi B, instead of adopting a competitive “why her and not me?” mentality, kinship advocates a “how can I get next to her?” mentality that is genuinely invested and personally involved in the success of other Latinas. Just as my successes belong to my family as much as they belong to me, my successes also belong to *comadres* that have provided not just mentorship, but kinship. Additionally, in my experiences, the chosen families we build in academia overlap with our families who raised us, which makes the kinship rhizomatic. I've attended weddings, visited newborn babies, cared for children overnight, and even gone on family trips with *comadres*. My interactions with other Latinas in academia almost always necessarily mean interactions with their partners, children, parents, siblings, etc. This deep and intimate level of involvement with one another demonstrates how kinship addresses the whole person.

Of course here I want to reference our relationship because it epitomizes kinship to me. Very early in our friendship you demonstrated a personal commitment to me as a person. You were one of the first people I told about my mom's cancer diagnosis, and your continued support through the most difficult experience of my life, losing my mom, made me feel less alone in this already isolating journey as a Latina in a PhD program. You understood my familial obligations as a Latina that are specific to our cultural expectations. For me, this experience established the practice of confiding in you, a mutually respected person with whom I've built a long-term, trusting relationship, a relationship that enables me to sustain myself and that continually facilitates my successes. I also attempted to provide this same personal support when you were navigating the job market and pregnant. I went shopping with you for job market clothes because I knew how much you didn't want to go. And when your child was born and I was gone for the summer, I offered up my house for your visiting relatives in hopes of supporting you in any way I could, even though I couldn't physically be there.

Because academia does not often offer enough support to graduate students (and even faculty) who are experiencing family changes, academics often have to depend on networks of friends to provide help during such times. In fact, academia continues to operate in a manner that challenges women who are caregivers and mothers by having meetings, classes, and other mandatory service or informal yet important socializing outside of 9-5 work hours. Both of our life-altering experiences—a death in my family and a birth in yours—demonstrate that when academia falls short of understanding the particular responsibilities that fall on Latinas in such instances, we must rely on one another, *nuestras comadres, para ayudar*.

Comadre 2: I remember the night you told me about your mom. We cried together outside of our Critical Race Theory classroom. I also remember the kindness with which your mom and dad always treated me and my husband. Getting to know your family has made our friendship stronger, and I believe it has contributed to our ability to be honest and trusting with one another—qualities that academic collaborations depend on.

Kinship and care do not mean that *comadre* relationships are always without conflict. Disagreements and disappointments are often part of the important relationships of our lives, and with *comadres* it is just the same. You and I have had some difficult conversations, yet we trust each other enough to be able to see that our conflict comes from a place of care. The kinship that we've built over the years has allowed us to become more than colleagues and more than friends. We are *comadres*.

This kind of kinship can be built through an effort to get to know and to mentor the whole person. *Comadres* should create space for conversations about issues outside of academia. What is going on in your *comadre's* life? What are the external factors contributing to or hindering professional success? How can we help *comadres* to reach the ever-elusive work-life balance? What are the emotional obstacles in the way of completing a dissertation, an article, or a book manuscript? These are important questions to explore in mentoring the whole person. Now, I'm not insinuating that *comadres* pretend to act as mental health professionals or life coaches. However, without making space to address personal issues that might be going on, any other sort of advice, feedback, or mentorship can falter. Making space for personal conversations that may make *comadres* vulnerable may require that the senior *comadre* open up first about her personal life. A few words about family, hobbies, or even weekend plans can change the dynamic of the conversation so that the junior *comadre* feels safe in sharing some of her own experiences.

Theme 2: Fuerza

Comadre 2: To be a Latina in academia—to be a Latina in general—you need a lot of *fuerza*. When you are trying to navigate an institution that was not created with you in mind, it is easy to feel weighed down by the intersectionality of oppression. This is an obstacle that many of us continue to face when we are one of the handful of People of Color in our departments. We can either be marginalized or most often tokenized—used to provide the “much needed” diversity to an otherwise white faculty. Both of these result in the disempowerment of Women of Color in academia.

Latina academics need *fuerza* to not only persist and survive, but also to be able to turn the negative into positive. What I mean here is that in order to not just survive, but to actually thrive, we need the skills to be able to take the anger and discouragement that comes from being a Latina in academia and make it the driving force of our anti-racist practice. For example, if I am angry that my department’s history of rhetoric curriculum does not incorporate any minoritized voices in a significant way, instead of swallowing the anger, I must have the *fuerza* to speak up about it and fight for its change.

A good *comadre* to me is an example of *fuerza*. They have turned the racism of the academy into the motivation for their anti-racist scholarship. They are a model of how to fight back and avoid complacency, despite the risks that we take as graduate students or junior faculty of color when we confront the academic status quo. A *comadre* is an example of how to turn obstacles into opportunities for critical work. She can teach me how to have the *fuerza* to push past the pain, to be productive through the tears.

Comadre 1: Being confidently outspoken in spaces that make me feel unwelcome (like academia) does not come easily for me. I have found that it’s necessary to have this behavior modeled for me and to in turn model it for others. I learned not to accept the inequities I experience by listening to other *comadres* and watching their actions. I have seen many fearless *comadres* fight against injustices—sometimes for themselves and other times on behalf of those in more precarious positions—and stand up to powerful people and institutions. This is an important aspect of *fuerza* because I have also been told to keep my mouth closed and my head down in order to survive the tenure track. However, seeing that such actions only benefit the individual and not the community, I’ve taken the advice of and modeled myself after *comadres* that have demonstrated *fuerza* to thrive despite the relentless challenges of the university.

Additionally, *fuerza* provides an impetus to continue to be vocal and visible when challenging negative forces in academia and to work on scholarship that reflects my political commitment to anti-racist work. I know that younger or more junior Latinas are watching and listening to learn from me as well. I

want to be the *comadre* that demonstrates we will not stand for mistreatment and the *comadre* whose work overtly states my commitments to social justice.

Theme 3: Networks of Care

Comadre 1: When you are a first-generation college graduate, like myself, graduate school can be a complicated maze. Networks of other Latinas can help facilitate success for those of us who are new to navigating what can be a very traditional institution. Or when Latinas face hardship, they can provide advice for other Latinas so that they do not experience similar hardships. Such networks are rhizomatic: they function multidirectionally.

For example, a group of Latina professors at my current institution maintains a non-university email group to not only share good news, events, and everyday life experiences, but also to ask where to turn and how to deal with troublesome situations. Within the past week, members of this group, which only has eight people, have asked for resources concerning a hiring discrimination incident in a Latina's department, discussed how to deal with a white colleague who expressed frustration about a Latina professor's medical leave taken to receive cancer treatment, and strategized approaches to a meeting called by a Latina's chair with all white colleagues (asking if she should attend with a union representative). Because the members of this group span various departments across the university, varied titles and positions of power, and many previous experiences at other universities, the group is a hive mind of knowledge to help others navigate difficulties. These networks help *comadres* navigate academia to survive and address the material conditions we face, often at predominantly white institutions.

Comadre 2: Networking among Latinas can be difficult, particularly when a graduate student or junior faculty is the only Latina in her entire department. Structured networking possibilities, like an email group, make it easier for Latinas to connect with other *comadres* and share knowledge. There are also less structured networks of support that more advanced *comadres* should help build for their junior *comadres*. For example, one of my graduate school mentors connected me with the woman who helped me negotiate my job offer, and this connection has not only opened up opportunities to engage with communities of color in my current institution, but has also introduced me to supportive people in my new town who have become dear friends. A *comadre* is a nexus, creating a network of Women of Color who look out for each other.

Theme 4: Empathy

Comadre 2: When graduate students come to my office hours, they are often looking for someone who will understand how they feel as young women and young Women of Color in a white male dominated institution. (It is

interesting, yet not entirely surprising, that male students don't often seek me as a mentor.) These women want to talk about experiences of exclusion and marginalization. They share with me the crushing weight they feel, especially as new graduate students with heavy course and teaching loads. They fear the university will force them to assimilate into the normative academic culture that mimics capitalist, heteropatriarchal, Euroamerican cultural norms.

What I have to offer these students, at least initially, is empathy. I nod my head. I tell them that I understand how they feel. I assure them that I have been in a similar position and that I made it through. As a *comadre*, I try to put myself in their shoes. I think this can be very valuable and encouraging for female graduate students of color. In my empathy, I become an example, not of bootstrapping my way through academia, but of shared vulnerability and strategic perseverance. By sharing my own experiences with, for example, the incessant microaggressions of the institution, I show them that I am also vulnerable, that academic life also gets me down. A *comadre* commiserates with her fellow *comadres*, not as a way to show pity, but as a way to show understanding. But the empathy of a *comadre* should not be understood as passive inaction. Empathy comes with the urgency to persevere, not through assimilation but through strategies that sustain the soul.

I remember one of my graduate school *comadres* telling me, when I feared that a conference presentation on immigration and neoliberalism would not be received positively, that as a Latina academic standing in front of a room of fellow scholars and speaking my piece, I was already bound to upset some folks who are not accustomed to Women of Color taking the lead. My *comadre* helped me to reflect about my place in academia. She helped me to realize that I was probably always going to feel like an outsider; but instead of being discouraging, this thought reaffirmed my purpose. I, like the Women of Color that I now mentor, need to persevere in academia because academia is in dire need of dissenting voices. I see my place in academia as the perpetual outsider, not the tokenized minority who will bring unthreatening diversity to higher education, but the one who will ruffle some feathers. I still must remind myself of that when I am feeling doubtful about my place in academia or when I think how much easier it would be to just keep my head down.

I echo the words of my *comadre* and remind the young Women of Color that I mentor that their presence in academia is already a radical move, since academic spaces are not often designed with them in mind. By helping them see the important role of dissent and difference in academia, I hope to encourage them to persevere while holding on to their critical values and beliefs.

Comadre 1: Empathy really gets at what makes *comadres* special in our lives. A common understanding of the challenges we face is a necessary foundation for the urgency we feel to persevere. Just as I talk with senior colleagues

about the challenges I face, I also listen carefully when other women come to me with their stories that need to be heard. Your comment about graduate students coming to you resonates as I look back at my graduate student experience. This interaction was common between my mentor and me; simply listening and acknowledging that she understood my frustrations and struggles was significant.

As there are few Latina PhDs, it's quite difficult to find Latina professors (and even Women of Color professors) in our field at primarily white institutions. I constantly recognize that simply encountering me is important for students. As you mention, just being in this space is a radical move. I was in my PhD before I encountered a Latina professor, so I know that I may be the only or one of few Women of Color professors students encounter. With this in mind, I consider how my empathy can be expressed when I interact with students. One way I do this is by normalizing conversations about race and racism in the classroom. Not only do I assign readings that address issues of race and other intersections but I also take the lead in talking openly about race and racism, usually in a gendered way. In doing this, I attempt to open the door between myself and Women of Color students so that they feel comfortable coming to talk with me.

Theme 5: Collaboration

Comadre 2: I think you and I have been strong *comadres* who not only support each other emotionally but who are invested in each other's success in academia. Collaboration has been key to our *comadrisimo*. I think I have presented in more panels with you than with any other person, starting with that first panel presentation that we did together at the TYCA West conference in Mesa, Arizona.

A *comadre* looks for ways to collaborate with her *comadres*. While collaboration makes sense between *comadres* at different points in the academic track (for example, between graduate student and faculty mentor, or between junior faculty and senior faculty), collaboration is also valuable when done horizontally, between peer *comadres*. In today's hurried academic environment, many faculty members are not willing and/or able to collaborate with students. In my seven years of graduate school, I never had a real opportunity to write with a faculty member, not even with some of my most dear and influential *comadres*. Women in academia often take a disproportionate portion of the service and administrative work. This leaves very little time for them to work on and publish their own research, let alone to mentor and collaborate with graduate students. Horizontal collaboration (VanHaitsma and Ceraso) fills the gap when collaboration between junior and senior *comadres* is not possible.

Of course, the senior *comadre* may have connections that the junior will not have, and that's one of the benefits of this sort of collaboration. While this may not necessarily be the case in horizontal collaboration, fellow *comadres* can still draw on each other's strengths when collaborating, even if they have equal amounts of political capital.

Comadre 1: I would say you and I have engaged in a mutually beneficial professional relationship. Very early in our friendship we gained trust in providing thoughtful, thorough, and critical feedback to one another's work and writing. We've rehearsed countless conference presentations for one another in hotel rooms. We've provided rounds of feedback on seminar papers, grant applications, conference proposals, job materials, and publications. We've collaborated on conference presentations, as conference organizers, and on publications. I trust that your feedback will ask tough questions with the intention of improving my argument, not to needlessly poke holes in it.

Because the academy is a place with a white middle class model of mentorship, it's important to receive feedback from other *comadres* who understand not only where you are coming from and the premises upon which you build your arguments, but also from *comadres* who value the type of knowledge production you are engaging in. Mentorship from white peers on writing can steer Latinas to use concepts from only white scholars or delegitimize non-traditional epistemologies. Importantly, the intersectionality of our various subjectivities has been crucial in this process. For example, as a Colombian immigrant, your feedback continually decenters my non-immigrant, Mexican-centric viewpoints and challenges me to be more inclusive in my scope. To feel comfortable giving and receiving that type of feedback, *comadres* must trust one another and know that we have our professional well-being in mind.

Theme 6: Paying it forward

Comadre 2: An imperative for me as I think of how I mentor other Women of Color and female identified graduate students is the idea of paying it forward. Drawing on the National Association of Colored Women's motto of "lifting as we climb," paying it forward denotes the importance of helping other women as we learn to successfully navigate academia. Paying it forward also implies the debt that we as Latina academics owe to other women, Latinas and others, who have helped us along the way. Like you, I was fortunate enough that I had a really strong network of *comadres* during graduate school. Of course, I consider you to be one of these *comadres*. These women were a support network for me emotionally, academically, intellectually, and professionally. The fact that I was lucky enough to have *comadres* makes me want to pay it forward. I have not climbed these walls of academia by myself. Other women lifted me and now it is my turn to lift those who come after me.

Comadre 1: I love the NACW's concept of "lifting as we climb" because I feel so lucky to have had others do that for me throughout the years. I try to do this in any way I can, whether it be providing feedback on job materials for my peers, helping with childcare when single mom *comadres* need help, or advocating for other graduate students who were in more vulnerable positions than I was. I particularly remember mentoring a first-generation Latina undergraduate student when I was in my PhD. We were paired through a program, and we met once a month for lunch to chat about her classes and life in general. Although I didn't feel like I was doing much, I reminded myself that I would have loved to have someone—anyone—help me navigate the university as an undergraduate student because I had no idea what I was doing as a first-generation college student. She worked a lot and had trouble in her writing classes, but by the time I graduated, she was talking about going to graduate school. I tried in all the ways to pay it forward so that she would know that she belonged at the university just as much as the next student.

Additionally, I pay it forward with other women and Women of Color colleagues who are graduate students. I've advised friends on searching for an academic job, collaborated with others on writing projects and conference panels, and helped with grant applications that I've previously won. I am always eager to share my successes to facilitate the successes of others. I've heard stories of other academics being protective of their materials and not wanting to share their work. However, you provided me with a perfect example of how a *comadre* pays it forward. As you were a year ahead of me, you shared your dissertation proposal and your job search materials with me. You were successful, so I followed your model, and I was successful as well. For this, I am grateful.

Theme 7: Tangible Support

Comadre 1: As academics, we often like to think of what we do in abstract terms: contributing to knowledge production, effecting change through teaching and scholarship, and engaging with the community. However, we often fail to address the fact that this is a job, just like many others, where we have to meet certain criteria to ensure job security, where we are often paid unequally based on our race and/or our gender, and where we have to consider our health insurance and retirement benefits. In other words, we do not talk often enough about the material conditions of academia. For me *comadrisimo* does not only support the scholarly self, but also considers, recognizes, and facilitates the material self in the world. *Comadres* have helped me significantly in tangible ways, and such tangible support is worth consideration when focusing on mentoring the whole person.

One concrete way to support *comadres* is to help with the cost of conferences. Conferences are important professional development opportunities, especially for graduate students and junior scholars (who also tend to be the least financially able to attend multiple conferences a year for various reasons). Sharing hotel rooms with graduate students or covering the cost of a meal can do a great deal to lower the costs for other *comadres*.

Many times during graduate school, a tenure-track *comadre* invited me to share her hotel room that was paid for with her annual travel funds so that I didn't have to pay for lodging. This particular *comadre* even rotates the various graduate students she offers to share a room with so that she can help as many people as possible. She made me understand that this was an important part of mentoring: easing the financial burden for those who are in more precarious financial positions than yourself. While there are many discussions in the field about how senior faculty can help junior faculty and graduate students, there is not much discussion about how Latinas and other Women of Color especially benefit from tangible support.

Comadre 2: You are right in saying that we don't talk about the financial and material conditions of labor in academia. The first time that I read Villanueva's *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, I was surprised at how candid he was about the financial difficulties that junior faculty of color can face. I had never heard academics talk about money in this way. The unstable job market in academia is such that when a recently minted PhD gets a job, she is supposed to be grateful, no matter the labor conditions. Not to mention, we are so accustomed to being underpaid and overworked as graduate students, that any income above what we were making as GTAs seems like a winning lottery ticket. But the conditions of labor—whether they be teaching load, service expectations, pay, benefits, cost of living—can help or hinder success in academia.

A *comadre* is aware of these aspects of the job, does what she can to help ease the strain on graduate students and junior faculty, and works to make these labor conditions visible. When I was on the job market, I was told by the department head that salary for my position was not negotiable. One of my *comadres* helped me to figure out what *was* negotiable, to outline what conditions of labor would help me to succeed (e.g., summer pay, research funds, pre-tenure course release), and to negotiate for those conditions. Without that mentoring, I would have never known that I should be negotiating. In fact, I've spoken to many female junior faculty who have told me they did not negotiate at all.

Conclusion: Living Comadrisimo

Within the context of academia, Sara Ahmed refers to diversity work in two ways: “the work we do when we are attempting to transform an institution” and “the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of an institution” (91). We see *comadrisimo* as embodying both types of diversity work. By employing *comadrisimo* in our interactions with others, we are attempting to transform the institution so that it is a space that welcomes, serves, and retains Women of Color. By employing *comadrisimo* in our mentoring practices, we are not only recognizing that we don’t always inhabit the norms of the institution, but we are also trying to help others who don’t inhabit these norms. This difficult work takes dedication, passion, and vulnerability, but has the potential of transforming our institutions, our disciplines, and ourselves.

By committing to *comadrisimo* as a feminist mentoring practice—through kinship, *fuerza*, networks of care, empathy, collaboration, paying it forward, and tangible support—Latinas can provide holistic support to one another as humans, teachers, and scholars who are committed to anti-racist, feminist work. Together, the seven characteristics of *comadrisimo* create a mentoring approach that is culturally specific, that values the ways of knowing and being of Women of Color, and that recognizes the importance of community for academic survival. Advocating for such culturally specific mentoring models will help Rhetoric and Composition to support and retain Women of Color, thereby diversifying the field, the students we attract, and the research we do. *Comadrisimo* can also influence the discipline’s hierarchies of knowledge by making salient the ways of knowing and being of Women of Color and other underrepresented communities in academia. Insofar as we care about valuing diverse contributions and supporting people of color in our field, we must consider mentoring models that reject a white middle class status quo.

Finally, practicing *comadrisimo* injects a much-needed feminist ethos into academic life. The ability to be vulnerable and to recognize the connections between our personal and emotional lives and the academic work we do can be deeply fulfilling. As we reflect on our diverse paths in academia, we feel fortunate to have had *comadres* who have helped us along the way. We also acknowledge the spiritual satisfaction that comes from mentoring a *comadre* in ways that do not attempt to silence her truth. Practices of *comadrisimo* seek to feed the soul as well as the CV. Ultimately, it is our belief that academia at large would benefit from discouraging assimilation to white middle class norms and would benefit immensely from encouraging, highlighting, and valuing the ways of being and ways of knowing that Latinas bring to academia.

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Rhetorical Future(s) and Accounting for Rhetorical Debt

Kellie Sharp-Hoskins

Abstract: *This article posits accounting for rhetorical debt as a feminist attitude and practice that acknowledges how our futures are bound to and bound by our rhetorical accounts. The accounts we offer, I argue, construct rhetorical boundaries for our work, which not only point to our rhetorical futures—what is made possible, recognizable, and important by our accounts—but our rhetorical debts. After tracking out the complicated rhetorical affordances (and constraints) of the economic implications of debt, I review feminist and decolonial scholarly practices of acknowledging rhetorical terministic and genealogical debts. Building on this work, I suggest that scholars must acknowledge both explicit debts as well as the conditions of possibility that allow them to emerge.*

Keywords: *accounting, credit decolonization, debt, economics, feminist practice, futures, rhetoric*

In the wake of economic collapse and recalibration over the last ten years, scholars in critical anthropology and social theory have begun to demystify debt, questioning, like economist David Graeber, “Why debt? What makes the concept so strangely powerful? Consumer debt is the lifeblood of our economy. All modern nation-states are built on deficit spending. Debt has come to be the central issues of international politics. But nobody seems to know exactly what it is, or how to think about it” (5). Graeber traces the concept’s influence to two myths—primitive barter economies and existential social debt—which combine to mark debt as the logical, and inevitable, conclusion of economic and social progress. But he rejoins the “assumption that debts *have* to be repaid” with “the remarkable thing about the statement ‘one has to repay one’s debts’ is that even according to standard economic theory, it isn’t true” (3). In response to this only apparent inevitability of debt, Graeber asks, instead, what seems a rhetorically motivated question: “What does it mean to imagine our responsibilities as debts?” (67). While Graeber ultimately argues *against* this metaphorization of responsibility as debt, suggesting that the equation is inadequate to explain debt’s conceptual and social ascendance, in the following project I argue *for* a conceptualization of rhetorical debt precisely *because*

of the perspective it offers on responsibility. More specifically, I posit *accounting for rhetorical debt* as a feminist attitude and practice that foregrounds relationships between rhetorical possibilities and ethics. The accounts we offer, I argue, construct rhetorical boundaries for our work. They not only point to our rhetorical futures—what is made possible, recognizable, and important by our accounts—but to our rhetorical debts: how our futures are bound to and bound by the accounts we give.

In this project I engage the concept of debt through multiple lines of inquiry, beginning by discussing the rhetorical force and effects of debt as an economic term. I then trace out rhetorics of debt articulated in feminist and decolonial projects, which ground and give shape to (read: indebt) the ethics of this project by calling attention to differential relations of credit and debt, before investigating the complications of accounting for debt at all. Thereafter I proffer a conceptualization of rhetorical debt that demands an account even as it belies the very possibility of doing so. This *accounting for rhetorical debt*, I ultimately argue, can be a feminist rhetorical practice that not only acknowledges intellectual traditions and relations but admits differential conditions of possibility and recognition for such.

Economic Metaphors and/in Debt

As indicated by my framing here, this work does not eclipse economic metaphors associated with debt, but purposefully draws them out in what I will call rhetorical accounting—which uses debt as a trope to organize and study rhetorical investments. This economic framing has precedent within both economics and rhetoric that range from studies of the rhetoric of economics (McCloskey; Edwards; Ziliak) to rhetoric as economics (Herring and Longaker) to implications of economics on rhetoric (Borkowski; Heath; Horner; Lindquist; Zebroski) and the political economy of composition (as represented by the 2016 special issue of *College Composition and Communication*, for example). As William Rodney Herring and Mark Garrett Longaker argue of the 21st century, “linguistic and economic assumptions” ground both economics and rhetoric such that both “incline toward a belief that value depends on future fungibility” (250, 249). But this framing also—and necessarily—invites critique, especially, as in the words of Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, “States have used their dwindling financial resources as an effective alibi to abet the transformation of universities into commodified knowledge factories or refashion them into extensions of the military-industrial complex” (58). This alibi might be seen at work, for example, in the concept of accountability in education discourses, as explained by Linda Adler-Kassner and Susan Marie Harrington. Accountability, they suggest, “tends to reflect business-oriented definitions that speak to systemized, standardized accounts of ‘value added,’

rather than situating this concept within an institution and its specific students and programs" (85). Indeed, accountability gleans much—or perhaps most—of its traction in public discourses in relationship to markets. Not only do public companies cite accountability to stockholders when justifying practices and policies, accountability is also invoked in political debate on discussions of public programs, which must be accountable to taxpayers. While market accountability in educational and public discourse profits from its associations with transparency and/as ethics, it simultaneously provides coverage for practices and policies that privilege a bottom line above all else, as evidenced, for example, by the complicity of Penn State in the Sandusky scandal, which provided coverage for a sexual predator to protect the university's financial stake in sporting activities (see Giroux and Giroux), or of the accounting firm Arthur Anderson in the Enron scandal, which cost investors their homes, pensions, and even livelihoods. Accountability, like accounting, is neither neutral nor objective, but rhetorical: it takes on meaning and value within particular discourses and logics.

In addition to the spurious connotations of economic metaphors writ large, the concept of debt itself invites sharp criticism from diverse sources that include, for example, the findings from France's Committee for a Citizen's Audit of Public debt that declared 60% of France's public debt as *illegitimate* (Keucheyan). France's audit follows an international trend toward investigating debt, revealing it as a political construction which benefits certain groups at the expense of others. Interestingly, the audit reveals not what debt *is* but what it *does*, its rhetorical and performative functions.

Maurizio Lazzarato theorizes the function—or doings—of debt in *The Making of the Indebted Man* in terms of a neoliberal logic of subjectification. He follows Nietzsche to explain that "The constitution of society and the domestication of man . . . result neither from economic exchange (contrary to the thesis advanced by the entire tradition of political economists, from the Physiocrats to Marx by way of Adam Smith), nor from symbolic exchange (contrary to the anthropological and psychoanalytic theoretical traditions), but from the relationship between creditor and debtor" (39). This relationship, he goes on to explain, is based on a "promise of payment" such that "the task of a community or society has first of all been to engender a person capable of *promising*, someone able to *stand guarantor for himself* in the creditor-debtor relationship, that is, capable of honoring his debt" (40, emphasis in original). Far from creating parity among debtors, Lazzarato argues that "Credit is 'one of the most effective instruments of exploitation man [sic] has managed to create, since certain people, by producing credit, are able to appropriate the labor and wealth of others'" (21). By way of example, we might compare Detroit citizens—whose water was shut off based in July 2014 due to their

“debt” to the Detroit Water and Sewer Department—to the state of Michigan itself, which owes millions to the same company but has yet to see its own water shut off. The individuals’ debt(s) are marked and moralized within a “debts must be paid” capitalist logic that does not—and cannot—extend to more powerful entities.

The relationship between subjectivity and debt is historicized by Graeber, who explains how

[D]uring the ‘70s oil crisis, OPEC countries ended up pouring so much of their newfound riches into Western banks that the banks couldn’t figure out where to invest the money; how Citibank and Chase therefore began sending agents around the world trying to convince Third World Dictators and politicians to take out loans (at the time this was called ‘go-go’ banking); how they started out at extremely low rates of interest that almost immediately skyrocketed to 20% or so due to tight U.S. money policies in the early ‘80s; how, during the ‘80s and ‘90s, this led to the Third World debt crisis; how the IMF then stepped in to insist that, in order to obtain financing, poor countries would be obliged to abandon price supports on basic foodstuffs, or even policies of keeping strategic food reserves, and abandon free health care and free education; how all of this had led to the collapse of all the most basic supports for some of the poorest and vulnerable people on earth. (2)

This brief explanation reveals the historicity of debt as imbricated in global neocolonial projects, which inculcate disadvantaged, oppressed, and vulnerable peoples in a market logic that makes debt inescapable. As economists Michael Kremer and Seema Jayachandran explain of the legal doctrine of odious debt: “sovereign debt incurred without the consent of the people and not benefiting the people is odious and should not be transferable to a successor government, especially if creditors are aware of these facts in advance.” And yet, individuals around the world are not only born into debt but subjectivized and socialized (without consent) as debtors who need credit extended for education, for housing, for food, for life itself. And, clearly, this subjectification reaches and shapes the doors of the academy. As Henry Giroux cites, “Too many students [who] are buried under huge debts . . . have become a major source of celebration by the collection industry because it allows them to cash in on the misfortune and hardships of an army of indebted students.” The effects of this indebtedness are no less than limiting (rhetorical) futures and (rhetorical) lives. Lazzarato explains that while “[t]he world must contain indeterminations . . . that is, a ‘present’ which encompasses possible alternatives, and thus, possibilities of choice and existential risk. It is these possibilities and

these unpredictable alternatives that debt seeks to neutralize" (70). Or, summarized another way: "The logic of debt is stifling our possibilities for action" (71).

As Lazzarato and Graeber (among others) show, debt is entangled in a complex history of privilege and deprivation, assigning value and ownership for some at the expense of others while "plung[ing] us into the existential condition of the indebted man, at once responsible and guilty for his particular fate" (Lazzarato 9). To posit debt as an ethical, feminist, rhetorical trope, then, is risky. But I propose that it is not despite, but because of, its ethical entanglements that the figure of debt—and its attendant econo-centric vocabulary—offers unique possibilities for feminist rhetorical inquiry. That is, I do not (and I cannot) use debt or other economic terms as neutral signifiers, but in order to call attention to this project as implicated in and bound to not only economies of meaning but the economics of material possibility that construct the boundaries of our rhetorical imagination by marking objects, attachments, concepts, bodies, and lives as recognizable, as possible, as livable. In other words, I draw on an economic vocabulary to foreground my own—and this project's—enmeshment in systems and relations of value, which include capitalist logics that sponsor the conditions of recognition for my argument. It is *within* these systems (including discourses of academia, higher education, and disciplinary expertise), that is, that this project can signify as valuable.¹

My acknowledgement of an implication in economic rhetoric also performs the premise on which this argument for rhetorical accounting rests: that our accounts can never escape the terms in which they are offered. Our use of terms indebts us to their work, to the tokens or fragments of discourse they carry.² This is, to be sure, a well-worn argument in rhetoric; to argue that terms do work, name situations, select reality, is one definition of rhetoric itself. But acknowledging terms as rhetorical does not mean that we have adequately accounted for our *use* of terms—particularly those that go without saying, that mark us *in debt*. To wit, we cannot qualify the function and work of all the terms that we use (which would prevent us from engaging in any

1 To clarify, I am not suggesting that economics, or capitalist logic, alone sponsor the conditions of possibility for value. Rather, as Mike Edwards, I seek a vocabulary motivated by "the rich tradition of economic scholarship that allow[s] for the recognition of possibilities for complex economic agency" (257).

2 Here this language is indebted to Matthew Jackson's discussion of fragments of discourse in "The Enthymematic Hegemony of Whiteness" (*JAC* 2010).

other intellectual, service, and ethical projects); and even if we could attend to every term, we could do so only by way of using additional terms, which would require yet more qualification. Possibility aside, any project seeking totalizing accounts would undermine rhetoric's epistemological commitment to the partiality, contingency, and the vulnerability of language.

Accordingly, accounting for our terms (our signifiers, our tropes, our narratives, our commonplaces) can neither be motivated by absolution nor resolution. Neither can we hope, to use another economic metaphor, for a perfectly balanced ledger—so long as we are using terms, we will be indebted to them, and our debts can neither be erased by the contributions we make back to the rhetorical inquiry, nor blotted out just because we have mentioned their presence. Accounting for rhetorical debts, I will argue in the balance of this article, comes not only as we acknowledge that our indebtedness to the discursive and material conditions of possibility we rely on sponsor our work—that they construct the boundaries that make our work recognizable—but as we do so in the context of a rhetorical indebtedness always prior to and in excess of explicit accounting. Or, in short, to imagine feminist futures we must account for rhetorical debts.

Acknowledging Rhetorical Debts

Whereas economics—as a concept and metaphor—has invited considerable scholarly interest in rhetorical studies, economic debt hasn't received the same attention. It nonetheless haunts the field, lived out daily in the student debt that pays tuition as lawmakers' fear of debt induce them to slash education funding. It is lived by faculty—tenure stream and adjunct—whose student loans and other debts (personal, medical, domestic) make salaries inadequate to repayment. It is lived differentially, of course. Historic and contemporary gendered, racialized, classed, and colonial inequities inflect who succeeds in academia: who has the credit that merits loans, who can afford to attend school on a small stipend, who has the resources to “go on the market,” who has the affective capital to perform interest and fit for a job,³ who can afford to move for a job, and so forth. The differential allocation of debt further shapes whose and which projects emerge in the discipline—whose job affords time to publish? Who can take risks in scholarship (with parallel risk to economic security)?

Although these questions haven't been addressed in the field explicitly in terms of economic debts, figures of credit, debt, and indebtedness are

3 Jennifer Sano-Franchini explores the costly relationships between emotional labor, affective capital, and normative performances of academic job searches in her 2016 article in *College Composition and Communication*.

invoked by a number of scholars in their citation practices.⁴ That is, whereas the oft-mentioned image of Burke's parlor as an ideal representation of academic discourse suggests that many scholars in rhetoric studies imagine "catching up" to the conversations of the field but then entering it of their own accord, within a few rhetorical circles, scholars frame their own entrances in terms of the conditions of possibility for such, crediting not only those who preceded them in conversation but how those predecessors paved the way for and/or started new conversations. This form of acknowledgment in terms of debt both draws on and departs from the economic valences of the term. Whereas the economic consequences of debt are ignored by this usage—I found no evidence of acknowledgments to Federal Student Aid, Sallie Mae, or Wells Fargo—the relational aspects of debt are celebrated. This is especially well represented in feminist rhetorics, where scholars explain how their own paradigms and projects were set in motion by—and thus indebted to—the scholars and scholarship that preceded them.

As Andrea A. Lunsford suggests of her edited collection, for example, "The authors of *Reclaiming Rhetorica* hope, then, to add to recent work—particularly in books by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, Miriam Brody, and Sonja Foss, and in articles by scholars such as Catherine Peaden, Nan Johnson, Anne Ruggles Gere, Susan Miller, Karyn Hollis, Sue Ellen Holbrook, and others, who are currently carrying on the archaeological investigations necessary to the success of this project" (6). Similarly, introducing her own co-edited collection, Eileen E. Schell suggests: "In titling this volume *Rhetorica in Motion*, we acknowledge the historical image of Rhetorica, a queen bearing a sword. We also acknowledge the work set in motion by Andrea Lunsford and the members of Annette Kolodny's graduate seminar at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) who inspired the volume *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, the first edited collection of women's rhetoric in the field of rhetoric and composition" ("Introduction" 1). Schell also quite specifically indebts the collection to Jacqueline Jones Royster. "In part, this volume," Schell explains, "takes as its inspiration the insightful, self-aware, and self-reflexive approach of afrafeminist research methods and methods of Jacquelines Jones Royster. . . . Her sites of critical regard have inspired me and a number of the contributors to think through our ethical, social, and political choices as feminist researchers" (4). Indeed, Royster's oeuvres itself provides many examples of

4 Amy Robillard does explain, however, that the pervasive "plagiarism-as-theft" metaphor that underwrites our discourses of citation relies on "social norm[s] of attribution" wherein *credit* is morally, rather than economically, inflected ("Pass" 422). She further argues that "if we reconceive of the object of theft as credit, new ways of doing things become possible" (426).

acknowledging intellectual debts. For example, Royster suggests that “in my own work, I view forebears such as [Anna Julia] Cooper and [W.E.B.] DuBois, and a legion of others, as having established a legacy of trailblazing, entering uncharted spaces and raising voices of resistance to hegemonic practices” (“Introduction” 5); and elsewhere explaining her afrafeminist ideology, Royster suggests that “we can imagine, as African American women have traditionally done, that the ‘public’ arena is a place where negotiation can be with words rather than with weapons, and we can commit ourselves, as African American women writers have done, to turning our thoughts towards action in making a better world for all of us” (“A View” 231). Connecting her ideology and method to these traditions, Royster positions her work in relation to that which has come before: hers is not a project *ex nihilo*; it is indebted to the traditions and rhetorics of African American women. Making a similar rhetorical gesture, Jessica Enoch indelbts her definition of a Chicana feminist rhetoric—“a rhetoric that infuses rhetorics of/from color with concerns of gender and class”—to three historical women: Maria Renteria, Sara Estela Ramirez, and Astre (21). She, like Royster, posits these women and their work as necessary for the possibility of her own as well as for the argument she makes.

Scholars working in decolonial and indigenous rhetorics also demonstrate their commitment and approach to acknowledging the debts of contemporary intellectual traditions and work, which is especially important as these strains of scholarship contextualize the Western canon as just one of many intellectual traditions that have shaped not only the discourses of the field but the discourses of the Americas. Malea D. Powell suggests, for example, that the intellectual “story” she tells is “anchored in the practices of alliance and adaptation that have been important to the tribal nations of this continent for thousands of years, [that she] must give credit where credit is due” (“Down” 40); and Angela M. Haas “positions American Indians as the first-known multimedia workers and intellectuals in the Americas” (“Wampum” 78). Both scholars investigate the rhetoric and writing practices of American Indians, demonstrating, in contradistinction to the rhetorical canon often taken for granted, that rhetoric studies must acknowledge its debts in far broader terms than those that move from classical Greece through Europe and on to Colonial American and the contemporary university. Articulating the genealogy of contemporary traditions, tactics, and tropes, this acknowledgement of rhetorical forebears also frames an epistemological and ontological relationship to the Americas that contests the erasure and absence of indigenous peoples. Moreover, this and other decolonial work points to the *ongoing* debt incurring as academic and intellectual work ignores its continuing situatedness in colonial discourses that relegate American Indians to historical stereotype, where the “stories being told about them insist on nobility or ignobility, that cannot afford to see

Indian people as humans" (Powell, "Rhetorics" 399). And the debt only increases, we might say following Ellen Cushman, as scholars continuously "reproduce . . . colonizing ideology when we maintain a distance from people" ("The Rhetorician" 11). Disrupting this iteration of colonialism—or, I might suggest, accounting for debt—she continues, "begins with a commitment to breaking down the sociological barriers between universities and communities" (12). This work acknowledging both historical and contemporary bodies and perspectives that have been erased and marked absent—not only rhetorically, but through centuries of systematic genocide, oppression, and disregard—does not merely secure these fields; it also more radically contributes to what Scott Richard Lyons calls rhetorical sovereignty, "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires . . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" ("Rhetorical" 77). Linking this concept back to the project at hand, we can observe that in order to acknowledge rhetorical debt, we must recognize rhetorical sovereignty.

Importantly, and in apparent contrast to the ways that Schell acknowledges the debts of feminist rhetorics to scholars and scholarship that authorizes *motion* in the field (crossing borders, breaking boundaries), Lyons's explains that rhetorical sovereignty, "even though thoroughly rhetorical and intersubjective, requires a sense of boundedness or separation. . . . It is not something that is easily meshed. If anything, sovereignty requires the making of a fence, not to keep things out, but to keep the important things in" ("Fine" 79). Although Lyons makes this argument in a particular context—to preserve indigenous language practices and rights over and against hasty calls for hybridity or code-meshing—his explanation is also helpful in understanding rhetorical debts as more complicated than underwriting *moving on* from those who (and whose work) came before. For Lyons, the function of a fence (creating an entry in a ledger, acknowledging a specific history) is not only restrictive in the negative, partially blocking off a view of what lies beyond; it also creates habitable space, provides a dwelling place. As Lyons explains, "neither natural nor permanent, fences can create the conditions for good neighbors to meet" (103). As such, they not only divide; they also create the conditions of possibility for acknowledging rhetorical debts. This boundary work is not only essential, as Lyons argues, to acknowledging the rhetorical sovereignty of American Indians and other groups discursively and materially stripped of their rights, "to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse" ("Rhetorical" 77), but, I argue, to define feminist and decolonial rhetorical projects. Rather than simply opposed to the *motion* sought by Schell and Rawson, Lyon's fence-building metaphor helps us identify the

rheterical grounds of feminist and decolonial scholarship, giving it place, orientation, and terms of recognition.

Feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition studies take up this work of fence building/recognizing limits, in myriad ways. Gesa E. Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie, for example, explain that their “postmodern feminist perspective” prompts them to “continually question our ability to locate ourselves as researchers and to locate the participants in our research” and to “take into account what psychoanalytic, hermeneutic, and postmodern critics have already shown us about the limitations of our ability to fully understand our own motivations and perspectives” (142). Like Lyons, Kirsch and Ritchie demonstrate the inseparability of location and limitation: the locations of a researcher are circumscribed by her limits, and her limits are the debts of her locations. Royster acknowledges her own limits in terms of territory, when she explains how “in forging ahead in uncharted territory, I have . . . had to confront directly, in the rendering of text, my own status as a researcher who identifies unapologetically with the subjects of my inquiries” (“A View” 206-07). This statement demonstrates that Royster recognizes the limitations of her own perspective, limits imposed—debts incurred—by the borders she uses to chart new intellectual territory. Susan C. Jarratt argues quite strongly against those who would refuse to impose limits because they recoil from *mis*representing others:

If, as teachers and scholars we retreated from the risk of representation, punctiliously refusing any occasion of speaking for others ourselves and vigilantly pointing out any instance of metaphoric substitution in others, we would avoid making a theoretical error. But, as Linda Alcoff points out, “the desire to find an absolute means to avoid making errors come perhaps not from a desire to advance collective goals but a desire for personal mastery, to establish a privileged discursive position wherein one cannot be undermined or challenged and thus is master of the situation.” (“Beside” 175)

In the context of her argument about postcolonial feminist writing, Jarratt here enjoins teachers and scholars to commit to the “risk of representation,” which is necessary to engage in ethical work. While Jarratt acknowledges that we “can’t control the processes of representation,” she maintains that locating ourselves and the texts we use in “their geopolitical contexts . . . places us ‘beside, alongside, among, and in common with, with the help and favor or, in the midst of’ others” (175). In other words, it is only when we risk representation, impose a limit and thereby incur a debt, that we are able to live with others, or returning to Lyons’ words, to meet our neighbors.

In addition to signaling the value of imposing limits vis-à-vis representation, we might also say that in this passage Jarratt alerts us to terministic or representational debts; as scholars track both the authorizing and delimiting functions of the terms they use, they acknowledge debts. For example, historicizing the success of James Berlin's representation of composition studies (in his monograph *Rhetoric and Reality*) over and above its contemporaries, Louise Wetherbee Phelps acknowledges both her own representational work as well as the effects of that representation on her analysis. In the article, "Paths Not Taken," Phelps explains that her analysis will be framed "in terms of the figure of 'a path taken' and its shadow counterpart of unrealized possibilities, or 'paths not taken';" however, later Phelps acknowledges the fault lines of her frame, concluding that "in principle nothing can finally be lost from history as a path to an alternate future" ("Paths" 41, 52). Here Phelps' analysis does not evidence a gap or gaffe, a mistake she made and corrected. Rather, her work demonstrates what many in the field argue is one of rhetoric's most important characteristics: our ability to work with language as always already partial and biased. As Royster explains, "we have deeply vested interests, which, by their very subjectivity, lay claim, not to biases as an abnormal condition but to biases as a normal condition and to levels of commitment to the work that such biases are likely to engender" (*Traces* 276).⁵ In effect corroborating this claim, and after having acknowledged her own project's indebtedness to Royster, Schell enacts another example of acknowledging rhetorical debt when she questions the side-effects of scholarly projects in feminist rhetorical research:

A significant component of feminist rhetorical research, especially research in a rhetorical vein, has involved the reclaiming of women rhetors who have been undervalued, lost, or forgotten. In the process of doing this important rhetorical reclamation work, how do we, as feminist rhetoricians, potentially reinscribe normalizing discourses about gender, race, sexuality, and the body? (Schell, "Introduction" 17)

Even as Schell seeks to solve this problem of reinscription by attending to the normalizing discourses that feminist reclamation projects rely on, her question at the end of this passage suggests that far from eliminating (to use Jarratt's words again) the "risks of representation," any and all rhetorical goals—even good feminist goals—demand that we delimit our work such that it necessarily occludes other (good) goals.

5 In order to alleviate the ablest connotations of "normal," we might now (twelve years after the publication of this text) shift to a terminology of obligation or necessity such that we recognize biases as obligatory or unavoidable rather than accidental or volitional.

Kathleen A. Boardman and Joy Ritchie address a similar point when they discuss feminist rhetorical historiography, explaining that in rereading and retelling composition's past from a feminist viewpoint, many of us are trying to reclaim our own past, and, ironically, that is only partly possible. We have to reread in terms of our vision of the present. Our words about the past now are infused with our postmodern sensibilities about what words mean. (143)

Following this admission of the inescapability of bias, however, Boardman and Ritchie also acknowledge the work this bias makes possible:

Individual, self, voice: words like these we thought of as connections between revisionist teaching in composition and feminist practice in the 1970s. Now, seen through feminist theories of the 1990s, these terms are problematic. The current interest in feminist theory and methodology in composition also alerts us to the absence of explicit and systematic theorizing about gender in the professional and scholarly documents of the discipline in the 1970s and early 1980s. Yet, while the hindsight provided by feminist theory allows us to note these absences, it also enables narratives of composition's *connections with* and *disruption by* feminism. (143-44)

Borrowing Phelps' figure, we might say that Boardman and Ritchie understand the essential connection between "paths taken" and "paths not taken"; they acknowledge that their work—the privileged perspective of hindsight that misrecognizes historical context—sponsors their ability to imagine connections and disruptions as feminist activities. Thus, of their project we might say, in the words of Bruce Horner, that there is "tension (and ambivalence) [that] is felt in how we understand and name who we are, what we do, with whom, and our reasons for doing so" (*Terms* xv).

Such tension and ambivalence can prompt us to consider the paths taken—and not—in scholarly projects and to question which and how debts have been acknowledged, articulated, and accounted for (and not) in our disciplinary ledgers. Rather than submit what Mary Soliday and Jennifer Seibol Trainor critique as "audit culture," however, wherein exchange is the only measurable value, rhetorical accounting can call into relief how rhetorical debts fund our rhetorical work. These debts can include genealogical and terministic debts—as represented by the scholarship cited above—as well as material debts: political, physical, and fiscal. In her 2014 *College English* article Laura R. Micciche introduces material "writing debts" as represented in scholarly acknowledgments, for example, which "begin to sketch a reality of writing perhaps more true to lived experience than existing models of writing have yet recognized: writing is part and parcel of the dwelt-in world" (501). So articulated, these debts not only reverberate with the field's recent interest in new

materialisms but echo a longstanding American Indian intellectual rhetoric of, in the words Gabriela Raquel Ríos, “Indigenous relationality [which] recognizes that humans and the environment are in a relationship that is co-constituted and not just interdependent” (64). As renowned scholar and activist Winona LaDuke, “Native American teachings describe the relations all around—animals, fish, trees, and rocks—as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas” (2).

Although Micciche cites numerous scholars who indebted their work to non-human forces and things, however, and both new materialist and American Indian rhetorics call for acknowledging “all our relations” (LaDuke), explicit instances of acknowledging economic debts are scarce in rhetoric and composition studies. This might be attributed to, in Tony Scott’s words, “the spread of neoliberal policies,” wherein

More of human life becomes economically rather than politically governed, and realms of human life that were formerly seen as public and political have been conceptually cleaved away from politics. So problems like income inequality or rising debt have been seen and treated as individualistic and not related to larger interdependent, ideologically constructed, and changeable “political” economies. (15)

Even in a field ostensibly well-equipped to consider the subjectivizing effects of economics, then, scholars nonetheless themselves matriculate and publish in a political economy in which “Debtors are alone, individually responsible to the banking system . . . [and] [d]ebtors interiorize power relations instead of externalizing and combatting them. They feel ashamed and guilty” (Lazzarato, *Governing* 70). Lazzarato explains how this individuating effect of debt “is the technique most adequate to the production of neoliberalism’s *homo economicus*” (70) and, more damningly, how “the American University is the ideal realization of the creditor-debtor relationship” (64). As reported by *Forbes* in 2017, “Student loan debt is now the second highest consumer debt category—behind only mortgage debt—and higher than both credit cards and auto loans” (Friedman).

While the adjunctification of composition and realities of the academic job market are receiving increased scholarly attention (see, for example, Cox et al.; Daniel; Sano-Franchini; and the *College English* Forum on Issues about Part-Time and Contingent Faculty), the impact of economic debt remains a seldom-acknowledged guarantor of our discipline and profession. Student debt not only sponsors our own degrees but our enrollments, our writing programs, our majors, our graduate programs; or, as Lazzarato argues, “Students’ debt mortgages at once their behavior, wages, and future income” (70). Combined with other economic debts—personal, medical, auto, and home loans, to

name a few—student debt sponsors academic life writ large (see also Daniel, “A Debt”).

In this context of debts that includes the material, rhetorical, and relations between them, any simple call for acknowledging rhetorical debts becomes unanswerable, impossible even. Horner provides a telling example in his attempt to consider what it means to study the materiality of writing:

the materiality of writing . . . may be understood in terms of writing technologies. . . . Or it might be understood more broadly to refer to a host of socioeconomic conditions contributing to writing production. . . . Yet more broadly, the materiality of writing might be understood to refer to networks for the distribution of writing, controls over publishing (in whatever forms), and global relations of power articulated through these. . . . Similarly, the materiality of writing may be understood to include social relations . . . physical classroom conditions . . . the teacher’s physical health and office and library resources; clerical support, teaching load, salary and job security; intra- and interdepartmental relations between composition staff and other faculty; characteristics of the student population; relations between the academic institution and the state and commercial institutions; relationships among the Composition ‘profession’ and between those member and other organizations and constituencies; and teacher’s lived experiences of the histories of these relations. (xviii-xix)

Working from a cultural materialist perspective, Horner corroborates that “as these lists suggest, no representation of teaching or writing can exhaust the full range of their materiality but must be understood as focused, and thus partial and selective in all senses” (xix). In other words: to name all of the debts that sponsor academic work is unimaginable. Consider, for example, just one of material debts of this article: electricity. Although I can recognize and name its importance in lighting my office, supplying energy to my computer and printer and mini-fridge, I lack the language, expertise, and time to account for all the ways electricity has sponsored this work. Where would such a description start? Where would it end? What level of detail and description would mark it sufficient? Any attempt I might make to offer such description necessarily selects specific matter at the expense of other selections and frames such descriptions with vocabulary that directs attention to some matter(s) and not others.⁶

6 Here I draw on, combine, and indebt this work to Kenneth Burke’s articulation of terministic screens alongside Richard Lanham’s work on *The Economics of Attention*, which helps frame selections as debt.

But here I would submit that an economic perspective on materiality is again instructive in punctuating the need for offering such accounts, insofar that it can prioritize—rather than reject or ignore—relations that allow debts to emerge. According to the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB),

Information is material if its omission or misstatement could influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of the financial statements. Materiality depends on the nature and amount of the item judged in the particular circumstances of its omission or misstatement. Given the pervasive nature of materiality, it is difficult to consider the concept except as it relates to the qualitative characteristics of relevance and faithful representation. Thus, materiality is a screen or filter used to determine whether information is sufficiently significant to influence the decisions of users in the context of the entity, rather than as a qualitative characteristic of decision useful financial information. (Par 30)

Materiality in this frame is not an ontological given. It only takes on value and meaning in relation. What matters, what needs to be accounted for—the credits and debts, holdings and debts—emerges in relation. Thus, for example, a \$1,000 discrepancy in the accounts of a small company would *matter* in relationship to a \$10,000 operating budget. Or, in shorthand, we might say it *is* material. But a multi-million dollar discrepancy might be marked immaterial in the context of a larger company or institution; in short, it does not matter. What's more, within financial accounting there is no standard relation or ratio established to mark materiality: it is determined vis-à-vis professional judgment. Materiality takes shape within particular contexts of size, value, and acceptable risk as determined by governing organizations.

The concept of materiality shifts attention to the politics of debt, to how some matters, some paths, some debts emerge as such. As I explain below, this emphasis not only reverses the relationship between accounting and transparency but realigns debt with responsibility. Moreover, rhetorical accounting invites us to question the presence (and absence) of debt(s) in the discourses of our field and performs a decolonial feminist commitment to acknowledging rhetorical debts that extends far beyond balancing any (economic) ledger.

Recognizing Debt

Although the seeming hallmark of accounting, transparency can never live up to its promise of complete disclosure. David L. Wallace enlists Judith Butler to remind rhetoric and composition scholars that we (including our language use) are never transparent to ourselves. Wallace explains that “complete self-knowledge or self-definition is not possible because we are all reliant on

social norms beyond our control not only for our understanding of ourselves and our position in the world but also for the means to engage with that world in meaningful ways" (*Compelled* 6). In other words, any possibility for self-understanding comes through rhetorical debt; in Butler's words, "there is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence" (*Giving* 7). For Butler, as for Wallace, accountability is not volitional; it is the condition of social and rhetorical possibility. It is also the condition of social and rhetorical *responsibility*. Butler argues that her "postulation of primary opacity to the self that follows from formative relations has a specific implication for an ethical bearing toward the other. . . . [I]t may well be that it is precisely by virtue of the subject's opacity to itself that it incurs and sustains some of its most important ethical bonds" (21).

The opacity that Butler theorizes thus offers another necessary qualification to and complication of the possibility of accounting for rhetorical debt. That is, whereas the scholarship synthesized above comes together to ground a model of accounting for rhetorical debts in terms of both intellectual genealogy, terministic analysis, and materiality, the concept of opacity emerging from essential relationality invites us to imagine rhetorical debts that exceed the terms we already complicate, those terms that give us a dwelling place without bearing the traces of our more transparent identifications. And it is with this conceptualization of opacity—the sense that even with our best intentions, utmost care, and developed capacity for rhetorical intervention we still do not completely know ourselves, our work, the effects of our terms—that we must approach the rhetorical futures we imagine, the rhetorical accounts we give.

In other words, rather than succumb to the appealing disciplinary narrative that because we work with language we will always already recognize the effects of our terms, we can enlist the concept of opacity to remind us that our rhetorical debts have not yet been—and never will be—fully accounted for: they will never be paid. We can enlist the concept of opacity to remind ourselves that, borrowing Lynn Worsham's words, "we do not see things that are right before our eyes; we know things before we know them; we forget, if only momentarily, other things as we try to hold together the pieces of a hard-won knowledge" ("After Words" 346). We can further follow Butler to acknowledge that this same opacity signifies the ethical obligations we have to continue to offer accounts, follow Jarratt to take the "risk of representation"; and we can follow Worsham to take up the challenge to "keep working . . . terms, texts, theories, and figures, to keep working the stories we tell about who we are and who we were" (351).

Moreover, we can draw on Diane Davis, who further complicates our understanding of accounting for rhetorical debts, when she argues that "there is

another, prior intersection of rhetoric and solidarity" that precedes any rhetorical activity we participate in. She goes on to explain that

for there to be any sharing of symbolic meaning, any construction of a common enemy or collective goals, any effective use of persuasive discourse at all, a more originary rhetoricity must already be operating, a constitutive persuadability and responsivity that testifies, first of all, to a fundamental structure of exposure. If rhetorical practices work by managing to have an effect on others, then an always prior openness to the other's affectation is its first requirement: the 'art' of rhetoric can be effective only among affectable existents, who are by definition something other than distinct individuals or self-determining agents, and whose relations necessarily precede and exceed symbolic intervention. We are talking here about an intersection of rhetoric and solidarity that would be the condition not only for symbolic action but the symbol-using animal itself. (*Inessential* 3)

In effect offering the inverse argument of Butler's, where accountability acknowledges rhetorical debt to an other, Davis argues that rhetorical indebtedness makes accountability and responsivity possible. From Davis' perspective, rhetoricity—as affectability—is central to our understanding of the "art" of rhetoric, or any rhetorical activity we imagine ourselves engaged in, which means that rhetorical indebtedness founds (and funds) rhetoric itself. Returning to Davis' terms, it is rhetoric's "first requirement," or in the terms of this argument, rhetoric's first debt. Applying this definition to the project (and possibility) of accountancy, our rhetorical debts become not only more opaque (preceding any conceptualization we have of them), but we also become less capable—that is to say, incapable—of erasing them from our rhetorical ledgers. Rather than obviate our capacity to account for our debts, a "fundamental structure of exposure" substantiates the responsibility that we have to do so: we exist only *in* debt.

Accounting for Rhetorical Debts

Articulating rhetorical accounting as a specifically feminist attitude and practice suggests that Butler's and Davis' claims must be qualified and clarified in the context of the scholarship on rhetorical accounting previously reviewed, wherein it is marginalized and oppressed people (women, people of color, and indigenous people) who have born and continue to bear the burden of rhetorical accounting (acknowledging forbears and limits), even though, as Powell and Haas explain, they have also "funded" the debts of colonial, patriarchal, and white supremacist projects. That is, to hastily make the claim that all subjects exist in debt and thus must account for that debt (even/especially when

it can never be repaid) potentially ignores the historico-political arrangement of bodies and scholarship in rhetoric and composition studies whereby ethical responsibilities (including rhetorical accounting) are taken up by marginalized subjects. To argue that all scholars in the discipline must account for rhetorical debt erases the privileges that some scholars and scholarly projects already enjoy at the expense of others. This argument also elides the accounting work already done by those to whom the field stands in debt. Enjoining Butler's concept of opacity and Davis' theory of rhetorical indebtedness cannot begin with a blank ledger: it has already been inscribed by blood, bodies, shame, and violence.

Returning to the feminist, decolonial accounting work cited earlier, however, we can nonetheless understand how debts might come to matter in the larger field. Feminist and decolonial commitments to acknowledging bodies, difference, forebears, and relations directs us to rhetorical practices whereby debts are neither disavowed nor paid but credited, wherein indebted relations are not monetized but contextualized as conditions of possibility for imagining rhetorical futures. Rhetorical debts, from this perspective, exist both on and off the books, and our rhetorical futures are beholden to how we create our accounts.

By way of example, consider (some) of the rhetorical debts of *this* argument—the rhetorico-material credits that make this argument recognizable within certain limits. That is, while the scholars and texts explicitly cited are easily recognizable in this argument (indebting it to the work and intellectual genealogy of specific scholars, publications, and disciplinary boundaries), it also stands in debt to terms and concepts that function as limits of recognition, terms and concepts that generate opacity for this project.⁷

I have consistently relied on, for example, the term “bodies” to indicate individual, human bodies capable of being affected by rhetorical violence. So while elsewhere I might complicate the boundaries of the human to show its emergence and enmeshment in a world of systems and objects and things, here I drew on the humanist connotation of bodies in order to establish the stakes of accounting for debts. This is not a debt that I can or seek to reverse or pay back. It is a feminist investment that makes this project meaningful, giving not only (logical) appeal, but ethics. This project is also stabilized by and stands in debt to “accounting” as a term and concept that gains meaning and value through economic discourses. Of course, accounting, like bodies, transgresses the boundaries of its representation here, but tracing out its financial

7 My use of the concept of opacity is itself indebted not only to the scholars cited above but to the way it was articulated, in passing, by Steven Katz at the 9th Triennial Conference of the Kenneth Burke Society.

and narrative implications allows me to foreground the limits of representation of creating (rhetorical) accounts.

Additional opaque debts include those to my own intellectual forebears: generous advisors and colleagues,⁸ those with whom I share commitments, and those whose work helps me identify a fence and with whom this argument is a neighbor. But this argument also stands in debt to systems of privilege and exclusion that funded my education, that allowed applications to be read within frames of recognition that marked them as valuable, allowed loans (federal and private; mortgage, student, and car) to be approved when attached to my name, and allowed my institutions and neighborhoods to be built on colonized lands. Such systems recognitions—carried out by institutions, committees, algorithms, and colonial logics—indebt this work to the applications that were denied and the loans marked too risky as well as to racialized, global capitalist projects that contribute to the conditions of possibility of the US academy.

Each of the debts incurred in this article precipitate—or extend credit for—rhetorical futures: the paths taken require paths not taken, the fences built require and create a particular relation to neighbors. But it is by *accounting for rhetorical debts* that I take responsibility for the paths and the fences, the limits that circumscribe perspective and possibility. A theory and practice of accounting for rhetorical debts commits feminist scholars (and scholarship) to a more robust conceptualization of the emergence of rhetoric, wherein the terms, theories, and concepts that we credit do not function independently of our debts but, rather, allow us to imagine our debts as the sponsor and guarantor of rhetorical future(s), rhetorical life itself.

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Electric Girl No More: Nineteenth-Century Technofeminism, Constructions of Physical Strength, and Scientific Expertise

Elizabeth Lowry

Abstract: *Lulu Hurst, an iconic nineteenth-century “electric girl”—that is, a young female performer ostensibly endowed with extraordinary strength— uses her autobiography to explain scientifically how her stage illusions are accomplished. Hence, Hurst helps to create a new social identity for women when she trades in the mythos of supernatural strength for an unusual Victorian-era scenario: a woman “expert” in science. Drawing on Sarah Hallenbeck’s scholarship on “technofeminism” I argue that Hurst helped to transform perceptions about women’s bodies by resisting the fetishization of feminine weakness; challenging exoticized and mystical explanations for feminine strength; and creating a rhetorical space for women in scientific discourse.*

Keywords: *Women, technofeminism, science, nineteenth-century, performance, identity, supernatural, morality, literacy*

Introduction

Sixteen year-old Lulu Hurst, also known as the “Georgia Wonder,” first traveled to New York City with her parents in the summer of 1884 to provide public demonstrations of her allegedly superhuman powers of resistant strength.¹ Hurst’s demonstrations as an “electric girl” typically involved a gentleman from the audience joining her onstage along with his walking stick or umbrella. According to various newspaper reports, Hurst casually broke these umbrellas and walking sticks with her bare hands, but audiences were infinitely more thrilled by the way that she hurled male opponents (whom she refers

1 In the 1850s and 60s, women who offered demonstrations of so-called occult phenomena were typically harassed and accused of witchcraft, but in the 1870s, the social climate began to change. By the 1880s, when Hurst was performing, exhibitions of this ilk were mostly understood to be entertainment and no longer seemed to engender fear or hostility.

to in her autobiography as “experimenters”) to and fro as if they were “jackstraws.” Notably, Hurst never came into direct physical contact with her opponents; rather, they would attempt (usually unsuccessfully) to pull a walking stick or umbrella from her iron grasp. Following Hurst’s success, a number of young women imitated her act—they were known as “electric girls” or “magnetic girls” because their uncanny strength was likened to the unseen forces of electricity that powered engines and machinery (52). Again and again, with their mysterious displays of resistant strength, these electric and magnetic girls defied the commonplaces that dictated women’s “natural” physical abilities.² But with the publication of her 1897 autobiography *Lulu Hurst: Georgia Wonder*, Hurst attempts to de-mythologize herself—that is, to separate herself from discourses of the supernatural in order to publicly embrace empirical science and positivism. This article contextualizes the autobiographical writings of the “Georgia Wonder” with respect to Victorian-era discourses of gender and technology in order to illuminate how such discourses intertwined to form a proto “technofeminist” movement—a movement that ultimately helped to transform nineteenth-century commonplaces about women and science.

In *Claiming the Bicycle*, her work on nineteenth-century “technofeminism,” Sarah Hallenbeck describes the “collected” rhetorical activities of women—with respect to technology—as being “highly varied” and “broadly distributed” (246). According to Hallenbeck, such rhetorical activities are performed by women

who are not part of a discrete organization or collective and whose individual actions are not significant in themselves, but whose loosely coordinated efforts nevertheless generate rhetorical effects through their repetition and visibility. (246)

The “rhetorical effects” to which Hallenbeck refers resonated across multiple communities. The idea of social transformation occurring through “collected” rhetorical activities applies to the “electric” and “magnetic” girls of the nineteenth century because, although these women acted independently of one another, all engaged in repeating a highly gendered performance in the public sphere. However, while I draw on Hallenbeck’s scholarship to support my argument about the transformative potential of Lulu Hurst’s rhetorical activities as an electric girl, I also discuss how Hurst’s work offers a unique perspective

2 Hurst-inspired performances were to be found “springing up all over Georgia: Mattie Lee Price of Bartow County, Mamie Simpson of Marietta, and Dixie Haygood of Milledgeville” (Harrington 207). Dixie Haygood, who later took the stage name “Annie Abbott,” was nicknamed the “Georgia Magnet,” and she was perhaps Hurst’s most celebrated successor.

on current understandings of nineteenth-century gender roles and technology. That is, Hurst's autobiography becomes a feminist intervention in that she acknowledges how, in the nineteenth-century public sphere, discourses of the mystical and supernatural were often feminized and constructed to be at odds with reason and mainstream science. Hurst explains how these discourses became a site of rhetorical invention for her self-construction as an electric girl, but perhaps more significantly, she highlights and then challenges these discourses in order to formulate her new identity as a scientist. As a scientist, Hurst uses her autobiography to take ownership over discourses of empirical truth, ultimately asserting that dismantling superstition is a moral imperative.

Further, Hurst's autobiographical writing becomes a feminist intervention in that she uses it to exhibit feminine strength—but the strength that she dramatizes in her writing is neither the hard-won physical strength exhibited by Hallenbeck's cyclists or the illusion of physical strength demonstrated by the electric girls on stage. Rather, through her autobiography, Hurst demonstrates an intellectual strength and rhetorical acumen that was rarely recognized in a woman of that era—that is, Hurst defers exhibitions of her "real" intellectual strength until after she garners an audience for her illusory displays of strength. She then trades the supernatural and spurious for the scientific and genuine. However, like physical strength, this intellectual strength—this aptitude for hard science—must also be enacted. With their anomalous expressions of strength, the electric girls built ethos as skillful performers, but were not necessarily recognized as being consistently strong, adept, or capable women. Hence, through her discussions of how the electric girl used science to create her illusions, Hurst convinces audiences not only of her skill as a performer, but of the fact that she is intellectually capable also. As such, she imagines new social roles for women and presents unorthodox ways of challenging commonplaces about feminine limitations.

Part I: Challenging Cultural Commonplaces

Although Hurst describes herself as a "country lass," she was likely quite well-educated. Born in 1869 in Cedartown, Georgia, Hurst was home schooled by her mother, who had apparently benefitted from excellent schooling herself. According to historian Christie Ann Farnham, Southern women of the antebellum era were far better educated—particularly in the sciences—than Northern women, because Southern men were more permissive. That is, Southern men did not see educated women as likely to compete with them for jobs within the region's agrarian economy. Farnham stresses that in the South, female graduates were allowed to read their commencement speeches before an audience and were encouraged to show off their talents. In contrast, Northern women were expected above all to be modest and were strongly discouraged

from speaking in public (Farnham). Hurst, who was only in her teens when she began her electric girl demonstrations, seemed unusually comfortable before an audience. But at eighteen, after only a few years of performing, Hurst retired rather abruptly, married her manager Paul Atkinson, and was not heard from again until she published her autobiography in 1897. Once Hurst had retired, the media speculated as to why her career had ended so quickly. It was rumored that Hurst's "powers" as an electric or magnetic girl had dissipated. (Hurst's critics noted that she had never been one hundred percent successful in overpowering all of her "experimenters.") Moreover, Hurst was rumored to have (inevitably) worn out her allegedly freakish strength and to have retired out of sheer embarrassment. And finally, many assumed that public exposure had been unhealthy for Hurst, and that she had sought a quiet domestic life—one more suited to a young lady.

The issue of women entering the late nineteenth-century public sphere was hotly contested. When it came to "the woman question,"³ scientific findings seemed to give patriarchy "a decisive authority in matters social as well as strictly scientific" (Russett 63-69). Laws of nature alleging male superiority were considered to be objective truths, meaning that nineteenth-century science saw a "stress on differentiation and hierarchy;" and biologically predetermined attributes were thought to form character (Russett 146-50). More specifically, women were believed not only to have weak bodies, but also weak minds—the assumption being that the female body was so intent upon preparing itself for reproduction that it could have no energy left for the cultivation of intellect. Or, as Elaine Showalter puts it "medicine and science warned that...ambitions would lead to sickness, freakishness, sterility, and racial degeneration" (39). But *fin de siècle* constructions of the New Woman suggested that there was such a thing as women's physical strength, capability, and intelligence. The rise of the New Woman suggested that it was time to *be* strong rather than simply to *appear* strong, and—as Hallenbeck aptly notes—strength was often defined by adopting and transforming activities, interests, and behaviors that had previously been coded masculine. In her discussion of Burke's concept of "perspective by incongruity" Hallenbeck explains that "technofeminists" of the *fin de siècle* often "paired femininity with what audiences believed to be the most masculine of activities" (3491). To the nineteenth-century audience, "femininity" was not a monolithic concept, yet

3 In the late nineteenth century, social roles were changing for women as they pushed for civil rights and social equality. For patriarchal power-holders, engaging the "woman question" meant discussing women's rights and deciding how and when certain privileges of citizenship should (or shouldn't) be granted. (Parkman 16).

a focus on clothing, particularly skirts, dresses, and hats made specifically for cycling suggested that women were finding more convenient and flexible ways to be “feminine,” while successfully engaging in “masculine” activities. Women engaged in strenuous activities such as cycling proved that gendered science could be challenged by providing conflicting physical evidence: With respect to the appearance of nineteenth-century women cyclists in the public sphere, Hallenbeck notes “the cumulative force of firsthand embodied performance and observations can serve as a powerful rhetorical resource for combating medically or scientifically authored cultural commonplaces” (445). Hallenbeck describes how women cyclists acted as role models for one another, undermining commonplaces about women’s physical weakness and general ineptitude. Women cyclists provided evidence that countered prevailing cultural beliefs, suggesting that the “scientific truths” about women’s bodies needed to be re-examined. Similarly, I assert that the images of the nineteenth-century magnetic or electric girls in pretty dresses flinging grown men to the ground must have offered a comparable rhetorical resource. Hence, with the rise of the electric girl, images of women exhibiting physical strength came alive in the public consciousness. For instance, images of Hurst as the Georgia Wonder circulated extensively through cities in which she performed, appearing in newspapers and on billboards. While seeing these images must have had an effect on the public, viewing the performance in a theater must have been more powerful still.⁴

Promotional images of electric girls reflect ways in which they challenged gendered nineteenth-century commonplaces. For example, in these images, the electric girl was depicted surrounded by men, but she was always the center of attention. Posters of both Annie Abbott and Mattie Lee Price produce a memorable effect by visually separating a vibrant electric girl from a group of drab-looking men. In a colorful poster print of Annie Abbott, Abbott wears a red dress, while the men around her appear in black, looking identical to

4 According to *New York Times* articles about Hurst’s limited run at Wallack’s Theater in 1884, her audience would have mostly been middle class or upwardly mobile Americans. Hurst herself suggests that her audiences were predominantly male and describes them as “a splendid class of gentleman,” referring to herself as a mere “country lass” in comparison (82). The posters and billboards advertising her show would therefore most likely have been placed in areas where such men would have seen them—in the business and theater districts of the city. Further, Wallack’s Theater was not known as a vaudeville venue, rather as a theater that produced dramas and comedies (Burnham 74).

one another. With a coquettish smile, Abbott reaches out to one of the men. Below her likeness, a caption reads: "Can you lift her? Twenty men a night try and fail." **[Fig. A]**. Similarly, in a promotional photograph of Mattie Lee Price, Price appears in a bright white dress—in sharp contrast to the shadowy men around her. Here, Price stands to the left of the frame, her hand touching the middle of a walking stick, while three men contort themselves in a collective attempt to hold the walking stick in place. The electric girl looks calm and relaxed, exerting almost no effort at all, the pallor of her hand set off by the dark suits of her experimenters. **[Fig. B]**. As electric girls, these women's bodies were depicted as being sources of power, energy, and vitality. For instance, in separate pen and ink illustrations, Hurst and Price are both constructed not only as conduits, but as generators of electricity, their bodies pulsing with a seemingly uncontainable power **[Figs. C and D]**. Significantly, Mattie Lee Price occupies the entire frame of this illustration surrounded by what appears to be a force field of power, energy emerging from every part of her body. Sparks of "electricity" form an aureole around her head, and the ground beneath her feet appears to be breaking apart as a result of her power. Price wears a pale floor-length dress, and has a serene look on her face, staring off at something to the side of the frame. **[Fig. C]**. In an illustration of Hurst, the electric girl occupies center-frame with what look like lightning bolts shooting from her hands. Hurst looks directly at the audience. The eye is drawn to her form as the "electricity" emerging from her hands seems to be moving the men around her up into the air, as if she were the center of the cosmos with the experimenters in orbit around her. **[Fig. D]**. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, these "electric girls" are represented not only as figures of strength and capability but also as being able to outperform and to physically overpower men. For instance, pen and ink illustrations of Annie Abbott **[Fig. E]** and Mattie Lee Price **[Fig. F]** both show multiple men piled uncomfortably upon a single chair that is easily lifted by the electric girl. For instance, Abbott stands to the right of the frame, her head the highest point in the image. On a single chair, her male experimenters face each other, one straddling the other, while a third man lies across their laps. Abbott gazes at them impassively, stooping slightly to lift the chair upon which they sit **[Fig. E]**. Price is only a small figure to the bottom right of the frame. She wears a pale dress and is lifting a chair. The chair, with the three men on it, occupies the center of the image, emphasizing the size and weight of the men in contrast to Price's petite frame **[Fig. F]**. With the exception of this final image, which highlights the size of Price's hapless experimenters rather than Price herself, electric girls are depicted as being unusually visible both as individuals and as women. In these images, women command physical and metaphorical space, asserting their authority within the public sphere. In this sense, while these images reify the notion of the

supernatural feminine, they also counter prevailing cultural beliefs about the passivity and weakness of the female body

Part II: Exigency

Hurst's autobiography responded both to sexism and to what she saw as the dangerous popularity of Spiritualism. Her text promotes reason and scientific knowledge, warning that Spiritualism's discourses of the supernatural render the American public vulnerable to exploitation. The central tenets of Spiritualism—a New Religious Movement—maintained that the living could communicate with spirits of the dead and appeal to them for guidance. Expressing guilt over her former career as an electric girl (in which she ostensibly tricked her audience into believing she had supernatural powers), Hurst suggests that she has a moral obligation to promote scientific literacy in the face of Spiritualism's threat to empirical truth and rational thought. In this manner, Hurst uses Spiritualism as an exigency to reveal the "truth" behind her seemingly mystical manifestations.

Hurst demonstrates her knowledge of mechanical science in her autobiography in order to undermine Spiritualist ideology. Although she counted many Spiritualists among her friends, Hurst did not balk at publicly opining that she considered their beliefs about the spirit world to be backward and dangerous, referring to Spiritualists as being warm and generous although (sadly, "deluded" by their beliefs (Hurst 143).⁵ But Hurst's relationship with Spiritualists was decidedly complicated because—in part—she owed her success to them. Hurst's act as an electric girl attracted numerous Spiritualists who believed that she was a psychic medium and that her powers of resistant strength were due to the assistance of the spirits. In deploying the exigency of disproving Spiritualist beliefs as a reason to write her autobiography, Hurst builds her ethos as a reasonable and truthful person. Significantly, in order to address her audience's potential resistance to a woman writing about science, she argues that she writes not for her own gain, but from a sense of social responsibility: "I greatly preferred the sweet, domestic calm, peace and solitude of my home life to any notoriety or emolument I might gain by the publication of this volume. But outside of and above all other considerations, I realized as I grew older that the consciousness of a duty faithfully performed is in itself the greatest reward" (262). Not only is Hurst aware that she is supposed to prefer the womanly sphere of the hearth; she also deploys a trope typical of female

5 Hurst does not explicitly name her Spiritualist friends, but in the preface to her autobiography, she dedicates the book in part "to my dear friends of beautiful Cedar Valley, all of whom were most steadfast and enthusiastic believers in the occult nature of 'the great unknown power'."

autobiographers at that time, that is, to claim that her autobiography was produced because of a sense of civic obligation—as a form of public service. Hurst strives to create the impression that, as she grows older, she realizes her social responsibility and recognizes the need to sacrifice her preference for “domestic calm” in favor of a higher calling that may mean the added burden of “notoriety.”

But by publishing (as part of her autobiography) a didactic account of how an electric girl’s illusions are accomplished, by emphasizing her text’s scientific worth, and by declaring her own technological prowess, Hurst also reclaims rhetorical control over her narrative, relinquishing her faded reputation as a public figure and reinventing herself as a promoter of scientific literacy.⁶ Believing that it is her duty to correct misinformation, Hurst apologizes to her readers for having helped—through her stage performances—to perpetuate a belief in Spiritualism, expressing guilt for having done so (109). Hurst insists that, as a general rule, she has always “viewed everything by nature’s rules, which are never set aside by freak nor accident, and whose laws are never abrogated” (145). Because of this, Hurst repeatedly claims that superstition is an assault on rationality and that she must atone for prior deceptions by teaching people the “truth” about her manifestations of power. Thus, in her autobiography, Hurst promises to reveal exactly how—as an electric girl—she accomplished her feats of strength: “I will make an explanation of the ‘MYSTERIOUS FORCE’ which so astonished and mystified the entire public, and demonstrate the fact that I have at last succeeded in unraveling and solving the ‘GREAT SECRET’” (1). Having made this pronouncement, Hurst eventually reveals that the ‘great secret’ is basic mechanical science and claims that now, having studied physics, she is in a position to offer a tutorial of how her illusions are accomplished. She therefore closes her autobiography by emulating a science textbook, complete with photographs, diagrams, and didactic descriptions.

6 The idea of Hurst reclaiming control over her own experience is especially meaningful when considering that she may have done so in response to her debunkers. In penning her own account of how her illusions were created, she was able to wrest narrative authority from scientists like Dr. Nelson W. Perry, whose article “An Expose of the Electric Girl” appeared in the December edition of *The Telegraphic Journal and Electrical Review*. In this article, Perry explains how a so-called “electric girl” such as Lulu Hurst (who is mentioned by name) deployed the basic principles of leverage to use her experimenters’ weight and strength to her advantage as she moved them (695).

Part II is dedicated to “Explanation and Demonstration.” In the first chapter of this section, Hurst begins by disclosing that “part of the explanation was to found in an *undiscovered or unrecognized principle of leverage applied in the DEFLECTION OF FORCES*” (206). As Hurst crafts this didactic portion of her text, she makes frequent use of capital letters and italics to set off key information. In order to explain how leverage, resistance, and deflection work, Hurst labels the first photograph of herself and a man with a billiard cue. The cue and the experimenters on either side of it are marked with different letters in order to facilitate Hurst’s explanation of what happens when pressure is exerted on (or released from) different points on the cue.

I hold the cue *BA* out in front of my chest, grasping it at *D* and *C*, with the elbows bent at almost right angles, the experimenter taking the position as shown in the cut. I request them to push as hard as they please directly against me, as shown by the line *EF*, and not upward toward my head, and to push steadily. Now you will observe their lines of force begins at their feet, as a base, continues through the muscular system of the body and passes along the arms and hands to the billiard cue. They necessarily strain and bend forward their bodies, as shown in the cut, in their efforts to push me, and this position naturally prevents their force from being exerted toward my head in the direction of the line *GH*, but tends rather to carry it horizontally toward my chest, and rather in a downward direction than upward...I exert only enough resisting force to hold the billiard cue up and in place and keep it from being pressed downward by the reclining weight and somewhat downward pressure of my opponent in the test....With the parties in the position shows in figure 1, no amount of pressure could push me off one foot. (214)

Hurst labels all of the photographs (which she refers to as “cuts”) in this manner, using letters of the alphabet to explain where and how pressure is being exerted. She describes each image in detail, focusing on how a particular feat—a man struggling to throw her off balance, or move a stick or an umbrella—is achieved. Essentially, she is asking her audience to imagine—as if they were watching a motion picture—to visualize a sequence of steps and their accompanying mechanics. The language that Hurst uses is purely didactic—she does not refer to herself as an electric girl in these descriptions, making it clear that this is a role she is no longer identified with. Significantly, the language that Hurst uses here is quite different from the language that Dr. Nelson W. Perry uses to debunk Hurst in his 1891 article in the *Telegraphic Journal and Electrical Review*. Below, Perry describes the same experiment that Hurst describes above. Along with this description, Perry includes a pen and

ink illustration showing a very small woman facing two men, a billiard cue between them:

[...] the subject is enjoined to hold the stick perfectly rigid. The girl, on account of the immense leverage she has, with but very slight pressure on the ends of the stick can move not only the stick but the arms and body of the subject. This she does slightly at first, increasing her efforts gradually. These are opposed with increasing force until she thinks he is exerting himself sufficiently, when she suddenly either relaxes her efforts entirely or exerts them in another direction. Totally unprepared for this change of base the victim is thrown off his balance and is then at her mercy (695).

While both descriptions discuss the concept of leverage, Hurst's description is more detailed, providing an account of how resistant force works in this scenario. She invites the audience to understand the experiment not only scientifically but from her point of view—from the perspective of the person who is in control of it. On the other hand, Perry's description appears to anticipate hapless male "experimenters" as an audience, and hence attempts to help them to avoid becoming "victims" should they decide to confront an electric girl onstage. Perry warns experimenters that by taking up certain positions in relation to the electric girl they are "unconsciously assisting" her and that they are succumbing to her "trickery" (695). In this sense, the small innocent-looking electric girl in Perry's illustrations is cast as being a wolf in sheep's clothing, whereas, in Hurst's "cuts" or photographs, Hurst and her male "experimenter" are cast as collaborators in the production of knowledge—with Hurst playing the role of a dedicated instructor of science. Apparently, Hurst hoped that such schooling would turn Americans who had fallen prey to New Religious Movements into more reasonable, and therefore (by implication) "better" people. Hence, Hurst's autobiography becomes part of a moral reform effort.

Hurst links discourses of science and truth to discourses of moral reform by repeatedly referring to her beliefs about what is "right": namely, the importance of empirical science in determining a universal and objective truth (216). As a pastor's daughter, and as a proponent of empirical knowledge and scientific literacy, Hurst seems also to associate reason with virtue. Hurst's rhetoric when she discusses the relationship between reason and superstition is similar to, and perhaps influenced by, that of nineteenth-century moral reform movements such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Specifically, while the WCTU argued that women were morally superior to men and could therefore temper an assumed male penchant for alcohol and violence, Hurst argues that science and rationality is morally superior to superstition and must be used to curb unruly discourses of the supernatural. But,

although Hurst's linkage of morality to scientific literacy reflected some social purity arguments (such as those used by some members of the WCTU), they were different in that social purity rhetoric relied on gender essentialism—that is, moral reformers argued that, because of their biological makeup—women were inherently morally superior to men.⁷ In contrast, Hurst's moral pursuit of scientific truth pushes back against essentialist arguments. While temperance rhetoric tended to assert that women had a natural "ability to stand above politics as extrawordly angels" (Hoganson 129), Hurst insists that women are not "other" or "extrawordly." By pulling electric and magnetic girls out of the realm of fantasy, Hurst symbolically reclaims women's participation in the public sphere. Women were not to "stand above" or "other" from men—they were to educate themselves so that they could be equal rather than essentialized.

Hurst's preoccupation with scientific literacy is especially significant within the context of the nineteenth century when literacy (of all kinds) was, as Deborah Brandt describes, "a moral imperative" (485). That is, according to Brandt, in the nineteenth century, literacy was directly tied to the notion of being a "good person." To be "better," one had to be more literate. Thus, by promoting scientific literacy in her autobiography, Hurst believes herself to be promoting morality and the pursuit of "truth." She declares that "every real, true fact" must be explained by Nature's "external laws of cause and effect" and "that anything which contradicts these laws is a snare and a delusion, and is neither a truth nor a fact, and...in every department of thought and knowledge these eternal laws of Nature and Reason are and must be supreme and immutable! He Who engraves this supreme law on the tablets of his mind can never be a slave to superstition or a dupe to any form of delusion" (216). Hurst's dogmatic language suggests that as "the supreme law" science is godly and that only science can reveal the absolute truth. Similarly, in his work on

7 Despite leaning toward gender essentialism, moral reformers such as Francis Willard, founder of the WCTU, also championed women's education—particularly in the sciences. To Willard, reason and knowledge-building are linked to virtue. For instance, Willard writes: "Innocence may be founded on ignorance, but virtue is ever more based upon knowledge. In the presence of temptation, one is a rope of sand, the other a keen Damascus blade" (326). Willard goes on to explicitly connect Christianity with "knowledge" and "virtue," asserting that Christianity is responsible for "individualizing woman, uplifting her to higher levels of education and hence of power" (327). Thus, science becomes "Christianity's handmaid" (336). The universal truths discovered through empirical science are nothing less than sacred—and are accessible primarily to the literate.

ethical ideals of science, Randall Collins explores what “truth” means to scientific idealists. Collins describes truth as “a Durkheimian sacred object” in that

it refers to a transcendental world in the same way that the sacred sphere of its totems and gods rises beyond the mundane life of a tribe. To be more precise, Truth is most similar to the sacred object of a monotheistic religion. Scientific Truth has no other gods before it...Like Durkheimian religious symbols, scientific truth arises from a social community and symbolizes membership in it. One recognizes a scientist first of all as someone who participates actively in this Cult of Truth. (303)

Here, Collins compares scientific idealism to a kind of religion, a sacred discourse analogous to a god. To scientific idealists, truth, or more specifically, “Truth” arrived at via the scientific method, is reason’s guiding principle. Much of Hurst’s language, in particular the “god terms” she uses to describe scientific truth, is comparable to what Collins describes as the discourse of “scientific idealists.” Hurst speaks frequently of being a “seeker after truth,” a term that is often used in reference to a spiritual quest. And when Hurst refers to “the supreme law” committed indelibly upon the “tablets of...[the] mind,” she invokes the tablets upon which Moses engraved the Ten Commandments. To Hurst, scientific truth is no less than the word of god.

The battle between superstition and science was in full force at the *fin de siècle*. Discourses of the supernatural were feminized (Spiritualism was often associated with women because the majority of mediums were women), while empirical science and discourses of reason were masculinized. Like Hallenbeck’s nineteenth-century woman cyclists, Hurst’s autobiography challenged gendered scientific discourse in that she (a woman) explained mechanics to her audience and depicted herself performing and teaching its principles. Drawing on her knowledge of mechanics, Hurst confirms in her autobiography that the supernormal “strength” exhibited by the electric or magnetic girl is not otherworldly in origin—rather, it is merely a stage illusion. In demystifying and demythologizing the figure of the electric girl, Hurst points out that women are no more capable of superhuman strength than men, but by the same token, she challenges beliefs that women are unable to “do” science or work with the kinds of complex mechanical principles typically associated with male stage magicians. Hence, Hurst’s autobiography destabilizes longstanding convictions about women’s physical and intellectual limitations by re-entering the public sphere to challenge cultural commonplaces about women’s “natural” abilities and proclivities. As an electric girl Hurst had challenged preconceived notions about women’s potential for physical strength and how such strength

could or should be used—however, as an autobiographer, Hurst challenges preconceived notions about women’s intellectual capacity.

Part III: A Scientific Explanation

In her autobiography, Hurst demonstrated the principles of science with as much alacrity as she had once performed her role as electric girl, providing images and information about how she achieved her illusions of strength. Further, she undermined gendered commonplaces by “teaching” masculinist discourses of science and by moving into a dominant, active “instructor” role. In this manner, Hurst was able to correct unsubstantiated information disseminated to the public and to relieve herself of the guilt she felt as a result of having once taken advantage of people’s credulity.

The first half of Hurst’s autobiography appeals to those intrigued by her occult persona, and the second half debunks occult beliefs in order to deliver a lesson about science. The narrative arc of Hurst’s autobiography therefore moves from the mystical to the rational, from superstition to enlightenment, and from the occult to the transparent. In keeping with its ostensibly supernatural subject matter, the cover page of Hurst’s text bears an illustration of a young woman with lightning bolts shooting from her hands, wreaking havoc upon a stage full of men **[Fig. D]**. Here, one frightened looking gentleman hovers in a chair several feet off the ground, and another is trapped between what look like dueling billiard cues. Two men hang for dear life onto a chair carrying them toward the ceiling, two struggle with inside-out umbrellas, and two more assume undignified poses on the floor; one lies flat on his face, while another has evidently just endured a painful pratfall. The scene evokes both the sublime and the ridiculous, whetting the reader’s appetite to learn more about Hurst’s “Marvelous Power.” Thus, it is the Spiritualist insistence on the presence of mysticism that initially draws the reader in.

The opening chapters of Hurst’s autobiography describe peculiar phenomena at her childhood home: hickory nuts from the tree outside raining into rooms through closed windows, pebbles falling from the ceiling, and her aunt’s undergarments strewn around the house. But later, toward the end of the autobiography, Hurst offers a confession; the “phenomena” supposedly sparked by her extraordinary powers had all been her own childish pranks:

I mischievously adopted other methods to deepen the mystery and carry on my childish fun. It is simply astonishing to me now how slyly and dexterously I carried it out. I slyly took garments out of my cousin’s trunk, and placed them in other rooms, hanging them on pictures, cornices, etc. Sometimes I would secrete these garments about my person, and then when we were all sitting in a room would

dexterously flirt them across the room on to a picture or chair. My quick movements being unseen by the family, they would be completely mystified by these occurrences. In the same way I tossed pebbles and pieces of sulphur and glass etc. about the house. No one ever suspected me for a moment...In the same sly way, and with the same mischievous motive in view, I tossed hickory nuts about the house and through the rooms—doing this often while the windows were closed, so that these nuts could not be thought to have bounced in through the open windows in falling from the ‘Electrical Hickory Nut Tree’ as the hickory tree had gotten to be called. (253)

Hurst explains how she orchestrated each of the mysterious events that were rumored to have occurred at her childhood home. The repetition of the word “dexterous” evokes comparisons with male stage magicians who were admired for their cleverness and manual dexterity. Hurst also attempts to frame her actions as being mischievous—attributing her misbehavior to that of a playful child rather than a duplicitous woman. As for Hurst’s public performances as an electric girl, she confirms that there was no ethereal “electricity” involved, only the mundane machinations of stagecraft: the use of simple physics. Here, Hurst makes a rhetorical shift by attributing her abilities to mechanical engineering, which was at that time considered to be among the most rational and “masculine” branches of science (Namenwirth 19; Keller 78). The effect of this—a description of the strange phenomena followed by a confession—seems intended to support Hurst’s own claims to veracity when she discusses the science behind her performances as the “Georgia Wonder.” Hurst’s movement from supporting rumors of otherworldly powers to promoting the laws of hard science thus marks a sharp break with the past—a journey from falsehood to fact.

In her scholarship on women’s autobiography, Leigh Gilmore defines confession as a “discursive practice that both produces and polices ‘truth,’ ‘gender,’ and ‘identity’”(14). That is, female narrators were considered to be untrustworthy and thus often needed to be endorsed by a male authority figure. But a woman could build her authorial ethos in other ways—for instance,

if she “confessed” to times at which she had resorted to telling falsehoods.⁸ Coming clean about her childish pranks indicates Hurst’s ability to self-police with regard to truth claims. The revelation of truth—that is, Hurst’s confession—is deferred until the final section of her autobiography, perhaps to ensure that readers finish the book with a clear sense of what is sanctioned “truth” and what is not. In addition, Hurst’s deferral of information prompts readers to recognize their own credulity (and thus, complicity) in believing the tale recounted at the beginning of the autobiography, their susceptibility to accepting an unexamined “truth.” In her discussion of the “relationship between truth-telling and agency,” Gilmore notes that “authority in autobiography springs from its proximity to the truth claim of the confession—a discourse that insists on the possibility of telling the whole truth while paradoxically frustrating that goal through the structural demands placed on how one confesses” (107). In other words, the more truthful an autobiographer is believed to be, the more authority she is able to claim, which paradoxically allows her to bend the truth. The confession therefore becomes a rhetorical trope by which an author attempts to convince readers of a commitment to a fixed truth by disclosing potentially embarrassing information—perhaps to avoid disclosing *even more* embarrassing information. And, as Gilmore points out, this confession can arouse suspicion in that the disclosure of one truth may serve to obscure others, due to the “structural demands” of the confession itself—that is, the construction of oneself as a reliable narrator—precisely because one has strategically chosen to admit to unreliability. Further, “structural demands” of the confession reinforce the authority of the writer over the reader, in that the writer is able to make choices about which information to disseminate at certain points in the narrative for maximum effect.

8 According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, the “confession” as a literary genre emerged in the fourth century with St. Augustine’s *Confessions*—a genre characterized by a “double address...directed to God and the human reader who needs a narrative explanation of sinfulness and redemption” (104). The purpose of confession is absolution and personal transformation, usually through a higher power. Smith and Watson write “Confessional life narrative may be a record of some kind of error transformed; it may also be the narrator’s attempt to reaffirm communal values or justify their absence” (78). In this case, Hurst is attempting to point out the dangers of Spiritualism, and the importance of science literacy, suggesting that she feels compelled to “confess” for the greater good. But Hurst’s confession is not just about absolution, or atoning for her prior work as an “electric girl.” It is also a form of self-justification—explaining that the adults around her encouraged her performance.

Gilmore's claim regarding the female autobiographer's bid for truthiness, her quest to be perceived as reliable by offering "confessions," addresses a gendered assumption that women are inherently duplicitous. By structuring her autobiography as a confessional, and by exhibiting—and then correcting—a falsehood (after which she reveals still more truth), Hurst partially reifies nineteenth-century assumptions of feminine duplicity. However, Hurst also uses her autobiography to challenge gendered assumptions by going beyond simply "confessing" to her prior falsehoods and proclaiming her commitment to truth: specifically, Hurst lays bare the inner machinations of how she achieved her stage illusions. By explaining how such illusions were accomplished, Hurst more than atones for her prior infractions. In essence, she earns back her ethos as a truth-teller by debunking her own alleged production of otherworldly phenomena. Finally, Hurst's confession demonstrates that she has reclaimed control over her own narrative. She uses the confession to wrest the agency of determining the "truth" from her audience and claims it for herself. In doing so, she illuminates a moral journey—a process by which she corrects misinformation and chooses fact over falsehood.

To further dramatize the move from falsehood to fact, images included in Hurst's autobiography corroborate her narrative in that they begin with sensationalized illustrations—such as Hurst shooting lightning bolts from her hands **[Fig. D]**—and end with sedate photographs of the author performing the techniques that allow her to create her illusions of strength **[Fig. G and Fig. H]**. The photographs are a form of bona fides—at that time, the photograph was believed to be a near-transparent reflection of reality (Corbey). Similarly, during that period, technical writing was widely believed to be transparent. Hallenbeck speaks of "the false notion that writing—whether technical, personal, fictional, or otherwise—is *peripheral to*, rather than *constitutive of*, a technical object itself and is thus not a transparently or neutrally written directive, but a rhetorically crafted, ideologically significant mediator of material realities" (174). Acknowledging that technical writings are not transparent helps us to reinterpret them—to understand how they can become sites "for reproducing, transforming, and challenging dominant values and power relations of the contexts from which it emerges" (Hallenbeck 313). Hence, Hurst's tutorial, along with her photographs, becomes a site for "challenging dominant values" in that the sepia photographs of a staid Victorian-era couple **[Fig. G and Fig. H]** posing with billiard cues and walking sticks depict and reflect a knowledge of physical and mechanical science but also "transform and challenge" the status quo in that the woman will ultimately deploy her scientific prowess to overpower the man.

These two photographs contrast strongly with earlier images of Hurst—particularly with the iconic illustration in which Hurst appears to be

using a supernatural power to throw men up into the air [Fig. D]. The photographs evoke seriousness, and a sense of reverence for the scientific method, whereas the illustration of Hurst as an electric girl [Fig. D] evokes the sensational. In this illustration, Hurst boldly faces audience members as if she is challenging them, whereas in Hurst's photographs [Fig. G and Fig. H] she does not face the audience. Instead, Hurst keeps her gaze fixed on the implements she is using to demonstrate how she will conduct her illusions. She portrays herself as a scientific expert, dressed in a demure but fashionable women's suit. She appears somber and professional, conveying her rejection of heavily feminized discourses of superstition and mystification and confirming her commitment to positivism and objectivity. As the instruction of mechanical science is considered to be a "masculine" activity, Hurst ensures that her pictures will project a certain gravitas, even as she poses daintily with a billiard cue. Further, the careful placement of her arms, hands, and feet are exaggerated to help demonstrate the importance of positioning in order to gain leverage over her opponent. The precision in these photographs of Hurst, a sensible woman on equal footing with a man—her ostensive "experimenter"—provides a dramatic contrast to the chaotic scene depicted in the electric girl illustration [Fig. D]. Finally, while in the electric girl illustration men are seen to be humiliated and defeated, Hurst's male opponent in the photographs joins her in teaching viewers how to accomplish stage illusions. The man is also an instructor, one who demonstrates that a man who understands Hurst's science need not end up humiliated.

Conclusion

Hurst's leveraging of power by intellectual means draws on nineteenth-century discourses regarding viable ways to achieve gender equality. That is, the intellect was considered to be a viable way to leave essentialist arguments about gender roles behind. However, feminist scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz have long argued that this assumption is a double-edged sword because it suggests that women must transcend their bodies in order to be taken seriously—that they are considered successful *in spite of* their bodies. While electric girls attempted to transcend the female body's perceived limitations through their apparently supernormal powers, Hallenbeck illustrates how women achieved such transcendence by learning how to ride bicycles. Significantly, these women succeeded in the world of bicycling not through mystical means, but in the same way that men did: through perseverance, practice, and hard work.

However, Hurst's story of her involvement in the physical sciences is told not (as Hallenbeck describes) to provide evidence of female strength and endurance. Instead, Hurst uses physics and the genre of the textbook

(positioning herself as a scientific authority) to explain how she *appeared* to her audience to have had supernormal strength. Thus, while Hallenbeck's cyclists were able to defy sexist medical science and to blur gender boundaries by exhibiting *genuine* physical strength, electric girls could only provide an *impression* of strength. Nonetheless, Hurst's rhetorical activity brings legitimacy to the notion of her work as an electric girl as having been a feminist intervention. Although Hurst does not possess Herculean strength, she deploys the scientific method, meaning that her "strength" is not entirely illusory: if a woman knows the right science, she can overpower a man metaphorically, and perhaps literally. Hence, Hurst implies that knowing the technology means that the ostensive manifestation of "electric" or "magnetic" strength is not necessarily a hoax because technological skill requires a kind of strength in its own right. Technological skill means intellectual strength. This skill, coupled with Hurst's claim to have studied physics, is designed to earn her an ethos above and beyond that of a mere stage performer. However, the significance of Hurst's work extends beyond her contribution to the collected rhetorical activities of nineteenth-century technofeminists and reflects broader cultural efforts to distinguish between science and the supernatural and to strengthen the relationship between morality and empirical "truth."

Acknowledgements

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Appendix

Fig. A



Fig. B



Fig. C



MATTIE LEE PRICE.
THE ELECTRIC GIRL.

Fig. D



Fig. E

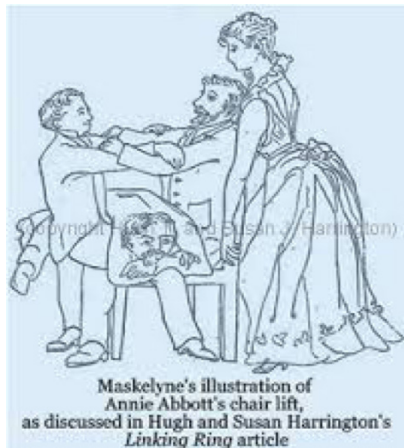


Fig. F

Wonderland

Curtis Street, near Seventeenth
WM. H. LAWLER, - - Sole Proprietor

WEEK OF JANUARY 6th



The illustration depicts a woman, Mattie Lee Price, sitting on a chair with three men on her lap. To her left are two posters: the top one reads 'MAGNETIC GIRL'S HOME, ATHENS, GA.' and the bottom one reads 'THE TUG OF WAR !!'. Below the posters is a sign that says 'MAGNETIC GIRL AND SIX MEN'. To her right is a sign that says 'MAGNETIC GIRL LIFTS WITHOUT EFFORT THREE ENORMOUS MEN AT ONE TIME!'.

MATTIE LEE PRICE, THE MAGNETIC GIRL FROM GEORGIA

A remarkable being who has puzzled the scientists for the past ten years. MATTIE LEE PRICE is a delicate woman, weighing only 50 pounds. She challenges the strength of six powerful men. She lifts, without exertion, three of the heaviest men in the audience with her open hands. Twists a grove hickory, all its two inches in diameter into splinters with the palm of one hand. Raises on one foot and defies six four men to push her from her balance. She does the tug of war opposed by six men. Her marvellous manifestations of a mysterious power that she cannot explain has astonished and mystified the scientists of Europe and America.

Fig. G



Fig. H



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Toward a Rhetoric of Body as Space

Kelly A. Moreland

Abstract: *This article introduces a rhetoric of body as space that exemplifies historical-cultural embodiment, rhetorical embodiment, and physical embodiment as points of analysis. To illustrate the theory the author constructs Precious, the protagonist of Sapphire's novel Push, as a rhetorical space, employing Roxanne Mountford's notion of rhetorical space as a springboard. Bringing in additional theories of embodiment, disability, and trauma, the article proposes that the rhetorical space of Precious' body affects her (in)ability to achieve self-acceptance by the story's end. The example application suggests that a theory of body as space allows for further exploration into embodied rhetoric as feminist rhetorical practice.*

Keywords: *embodiment, space, feminism and rhetoric, material rhetoric, rhetorical theory*

In their 2015 Key Concept Statement—"Embodiment: Embodying Feminist Rhetorics"—Maureen Johnson, Daisy Levy, Katie Manthey, and Maria Novotny affirm the need for a new trajectory in feminist rhetorical practices that focuses on embodiment. They call for approaches that recognize complex relationships across times and identities "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" (42). It is no secret in the 21st Century that bodies create meaning, and are therefore rhetorical. Similarly, several scholars have made the same argument for places (e.g., Johnson, Mountford, Purdy and DeVoss). This article addresses Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny's call for scholarship on embodied rhetoric by constructing a body—Precious, from Sapphire's novel, *Push*—as a rhetorical space, not only juxtaposing rhetorics of place and embodiment but intersecting them.

In her acclaimed novel, Sapphire develops a protagonist who adheres to many cultural stereotypes of African American women. Precious, the protagonist and narrator, is abused sexually, physically, mentally, and verbally by her parents. She is obese. She is illiterate. And she is, as she discovers late in the novel, HIV-positive. It is no question that any reading of *Push* elicits compassionate emotion from readers, with its deep focus on the social stigmas of poverty and abuse. What is particularly interesting about Sapphire's characterization of Precious in this novel, though, is her portrayal of Precious' journey of

self-acceptance. Employing a theory of body as space to Precious, I argue here that though she may begin to pursue self-acceptance by the novel's end, the space of Precious' body does not allow her to achieve the full self-acceptance she desires. I therefore exemplify Precious, employing intersecting theories of feminist embodiment, disability, and trauma, to demonstrate how a rhetoric of body as space might contribute to current understandings and applications of rhetoric.

Intersecting Space, Embodiment, Disability, and Trauma

This article constructs the body as a rhetorical space—an argument that assumes bodies operate in similar enough ways to spaces, or indeed *are* spaces. In suggesting bodies are rhetorical spaces I exemplify a new approach to rhetorical analysis—body as space—that might be applied to any number of other bodily constructions. This application of theory suggests that bodies communicate constantly, whether intentionally or unintentionally; that bodies are indeed rhetorical. Additional applications of this research and further inquiry on bodily rhetorics would help theorists answer questions about how and why cultural norms on bodies are developed and how these norms, in turn, affect certain bodies.

I employ Roxanne Mountford's (2003) theory of rhetorical space as a springboard for this analysis. Mountford bases her argument on pulpits, suggesting that preachers' spaces are not only gendered, but gender biased. For her, rhetorical space is defined as "the geography of a communicative event" (Mountford 17). She argues that rhetorical space, "like all landscapes, may include both the cultural and material arrangement, whether intended or fortuitous, of space" (17). She is clear earlier in the same paragraph that she is speaking solely of physical, material spaces—rooms, within buildings—in which people communicate. These spaces, she writes, "also have material dimensions that affect what we do there" (17).

Mountford cites the work of scholars in several fields—such as philosophy and anthropology—to further explain her theory of rhetorical space. Most notable for my approach to body as space is Mountford's use of Susan Ruddick's and Henri Lefebvre's works. Ruddick's role in Mountford's rhetorical space lies in her theory of the "social imaginary," which Mountford suggests "exists in and forms the boundaries of human behavior. The 'social imaginary' is, therefore, the cultural dimension of space: it is that sense of locations as having hierarchies and forming relationships between human residents" (24). For Mountford, the social imaginary is important for constructing pulpits as hierarchically gender-biased toward male preachers. A rhetoric of body as space

suggests that the social imaginary can be applied to bodies to construct them as hierarchically biased, too.

Henri Lefebvre is important to Mountford for his work with the material aspect of space. She suggests that Lefebvre essentially puts Ruddick's "social imaginary" into action. Mountford writes, "For Lefebvre, material space and the social imaginary work in tandem: material spaces can trigger the social imaginary because of the historical and cultural freight attached to the space" (24). This is perhaps better explained through the example Mountford supplies. She writes, "when I see a church, I think 'location for Christian worship,' whether or not the church is still being used for religious purposes" (24). Mountford, then, indicates that Lefebvre sees material space as a sort of "trigger," if you will, for the social imaginary.

She further argues that Lefebvre "suggests that particular spaces can move us in two ways: by suggesting symbolic associations and by causing us to form relationships with each other and the space through its structures" (24). Material space, for Mountford, cannot be separated from the symbols it triggers or the way it forces people to communicate through its physical structure. In an application of Lefebvre's ideas, Mountford argues, "Spaces exercise heuristic power over their inhabitants and spectators by forcing them to change both their behavior (walls force us to turn right or left; skyscrapers draw the eye up) and, sometimes, their view of themselves" (25). Thus, many times rhetorical spaces affect communication through sheer force; they have ultimate power over the people occupying the space.

While Mountford is careful to make it clear that her theory of rhetorical space is meant to be applied to material locations, it is equally clear how easily this theory can be applied to human bodies. After all, Mountford herself writes that "it is really not possible to think about rhetoric without drawing in considerations of the body" (8). For her, that consideration is how the body—and therefore communication—is affected by the material spaces in which bodies are located. The buildings and rooms our bodies occupy foster, inhibit, and affect communication. But in contemplating bodily rhetorical space—body *as* space—the consideration is perhaps more self-reflective, or reflective of the space of the body itself. While buildings and rooms certainly matter, in other words, there is another element of the body's own space at work; the body itself is always already a space of its own. When considering rhetoric's relationship to bodies we might consider how we make meaning from particular bodies and how bodily constructions affect communication.

There is, of course, an ethical undercurrent to this work. I advocate for a new theory that views bodies as spaces—material beings that are always already rhetorical, influencing and effecting communication that takes place about them and in them. Unlike spaces such as rooms and buildings, bodies

carry and are subject to emotion: We feel our bodies; we *are* our bodies. In light of this, Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny call for “an ethical reading of bodies and recognition of bodies as *people*—not objects” (40). The rhetoric of body as space demonstrated in this article responds to their call by exhibiting meaningful intersections between embodiment, disability, trauma, and space. The theory seeks to de-objectify bodies—in the example here, Precious’ body—by attending to communicative relationships (e.g., interpersonal, self-to-body) rather than “‘read[ing]’ people just by looking at them” (41). A rhetoric of body as space attempts to account for the whole person—the situation and context of the bodily space; *not* the space of a decontextualized, objectified body.

Moreover, a rhetoric of body as space works to contribute to purposeful, contextual applications. In seeking to understand how and what bodies contribute to rhetorical situations, applications of this theory should not only value bodies as people, but they should represent “a purposeful decision to include embodied knowledge and social positionalities as forms of meaning making,” as A. Abby Knoblauch suggests when she defines embodied rhetoric (52). Rather than attempting to analyze bodies as spaces for theory’s sake, applications of this rhetoric work toward extending understandings of worldly situations and, in particular, how bodies contribute to, affect, and change them. We all have bodies—a rhetoric of body as space suggests that our bodily positionalities, our bodily spaces, contribute to our own and others’ understanding of the world.

My application of rhetorical space to Precious’ body also relies on three additional theories: feminist embodiment, disability, and trauma. In *Extraordinary Bodies*, Rosemarie Garland Thomson discusses non-normative bodies and disability, writing that “representation attaches meaning to bodies” (5). She argues that both disability and womanhood are marks of abnormality, and she cites Erving Goffman’s notion of the “normate” to suggest that normalcy is mostly a myth. Yet to be normal, as Thomson implies, is to be acceptable to society, and as I assert in my application of rhetorical space, to be acceptable to oneself. As we will see in later sections, normalcy and self-acceptance are crucial to the implications of Precious’ rhetorical space.

Elizabeth Grosz’ argument in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* also plays a crucial role in the construction of bodily space through her discussion of Cartesian dualism, or the philosophical mind/body split. Grosz stresses that dualism presents problematic implications for feminism because the mind, seen as superior, is historically attributed to males, while the body, seen as inferior, is attributed to females (6-7). However, any denial of a mind/body split as Grosz’ feminist argument would suggest might also prompt the denial of one crucial aspect of rhetorical space, which is that the subject be a

physical location. Cartesian dualism seems to suggest that the mind resides in the body, which would make the body a “space” or capsule meant to house the mind. Grosz gets around dualism by connecting with Spinoza’s theory of substance: that “body and mind ... are merely different aspects of one and the same substance, inseparable from each other” (11). Spinoza’s substance allows for characteristic differences between mind and body, but it also requires a unifying threshold that constructs both as parts of a single whole (Grosz 10-11). Through substance, Grosz dismisses the binary male/mind/superior female/body/inferior alignments by suggesting that ultimately there is no material difference between mind and body; therefore the binaries and their alignments cannot exist. Her dismissal of these hierarchical alignments motivates her argument for the importance of the body in theory.

Theories of disability and trauma further suggest the need for discussions of bodies in scholarship and for this application of rhetorical space. Jay Dolmage revisits Thomson’s and Goffman’s notion of the construct of normalcy, arguing “Rhetorically, normalcy functions not to define itself, but to mark out what it is not” (9). We do not typically describe things as normal; rather we use the concept of normalcy to point out what is abnormal. Because as Dolmage claims “all bodies must be read through a normative matrix” (89), disability-as-abnormality plays an important role in the construction of disabled bodies, in particular, as rhetorical spaces. If all bodies are always already being compared according to (problematic) notions of “normalcy,” and disabled bodies are always already “abnormal,” then by virtue of their rhetorical space disabled bodies are always already disadvantaged or outcast. Trauma can play an equally important role for applications of bodily rhetorical space in that it acts similarly to disability. Trauma separates people into abnormal “others” by acting as a unique, individualized experience. Thus, normalcy acts as a thread that weaves disability and trauma together. Thomson suggests that disability is perhaps more “threatening” to those who identify as normal because of the possibility that anyone could suddenly become disabled at any time (14). Because disability could and often does have deep connections to traumatic events—though, to be clear, it does not always—trauma has the ability to change individual, societal, and cultural perceptions of bodies through the act of disabling.

Body as Rhetorical Space

The analysis in the following sections incorporates theories of space, feminist embodiment, disability, and trauma to construct Precious’ body as a rhetorical space. Precious Jones, the protagonist of Sapphire’s novel *Push* and the title character of Lee Daniels’ 2009 film, is a 16-year-old woman from Harlem who has been the victim of incestuous rape by her father. She delivered their

first child when she was 12 years old, and she is pregnant with their second at the beginning of the novel. Precious is black, obese, illiterate, and HIV-positive. Although Precious may not self-identify her disabilities, she certainly understands her non-normativity. Throughout the novel she expresses hatred and self-deprecation because of her body. Body as space provides a lens through which to better understand Precious' experience of disability as a result of trauma and non-normativity in light of societal norms.

Therefore, I construct Precious' body as a rhetorical space in order to suggest that Precious' perception of her own body affects her inability to achieve full self-acceptance by the novel's end. Returning to Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny, this analysis suggests that Precious' bodily space has implications for how she is perceived holistically as a character—including her self-perception. How she sees her own body is, of course, heavily influenced by the ideology of normalcy that pervades her society and culture. Moreover, her physical body is influenced by the disabilities she has acquired—HIV, obesity—as a result of traumatic abuse. In constructing Precious as a rhetorical space, I demonstrate how her communication with herself—i.e., her self-perception and self-acceptance—and with others is affected by the space of her body. I further argue, then, that any number of bodies can be constructed as rhetorical spaces. Through analysis as space, all bodies contribute to rhetorical notions of identity and thus affect understandings of worldly positionalities.

Many locations in Precious' life could be constructed as rhetorical spaces according to Mountford's framework—for example, her mother's home, or her classroom at Each One Teach One, the alternative school she attends in order to learn to read and write. No place influences Precious' communication more than the space of her own body, however—which is disabled as a result of traumatic abuse. Revisiting Mountford's notion of rhetorical space, in the remaining sections of this article I share how Precious' body might be viewed through a lens of body as space, beginning with historical and cultural influences on embodiment and moving through communicative acts and physical attributes. From this analysis, I conclude that Precious' bodily rhetorical space has implications for her character's self-acceptance. Moving toward a rhetoric of body as space, I suggest that such analyses lead toward greater understandings of how we position bodies in rhetorical situations—how bodies contribute to meanings we make and take from embodied communications, embodied being.

Historical-Cultural Embodiment

Like any physical space, Precious' body is shaped by a history and culture, as Mountford suggests rhetorical spaces are, and as Thomson and Grosz both suggest bodies are. When considering body as space, we might think of this

notion as a historical-cultural embodiment. Such a lens suggests that rhetorical bodies carry traces of historical and cultural notions of “the body,” of embodiment. This lens positions bodies in relation to one another and in conversation with bodies, situations, objects, and contexts that have been before and will be after. Furthermore, historical-cultural embodiment reminds rhetoricians, to refer back to Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny, that bodies are people, not objects; that bodies exist in/as histories and cultures and in relation to, in conversation with other people. In considering historical-cultural embodiment to position bodies as rhetorical spaces, we might be better situated to locate bodies in rhetorical situations and to account for bodily rhetorics as integral contributions to rhetorical practice.

This concept of historical-cultural embodiment applies to Precious in two ways: first, Precious’ body is shaped by the sequential history of her life and the culture in which she was raised. Second, Precious is shaped by the historical and cultural history of her race and her gender. Precious has been abused in practically every way by her parents. Her father, Carl Kenwood Jones, has been raping her since she was an infant, a fact that her mother, Mary, is keenly aware of and yet does nothing to stop. In fact, her mother hasn’t only played a passive role in Precious’ sexual abuse; she has both participated in Carl’s abuse of Precious and raped Precious herself in Carl’s absence. Moreover, Mary has verbally and physically abused Precious countless times, accusing her of “stealing her husband” (whom she coincidentally was never married to, because he has a wife and kids of his own). This history of abuse is what primarily shapes Precious’ life and actions throughout the novel, and she wonders what life may have been like had she escaped these situations earlier. “I don’t blame nobody,” she says. “I just want to say when I was twelve, TWELVE, somebody hadda help me it not be like it is now. ... Why nobody put Carl in jail after I have baby by him when I am twelve? Is it my fault because I didn’t talk to polices?” (Sapphire 125). Precious cannot separate her body from what her parents have done to it. Thus, her body, as a space, is influenced by its history.

Precious’ body is shaped by its culture, then, in a similar way. She has grown up among drug addicts in Harlem; has gone to school among bullies and teachers who did not care about her or her education. Perhaps most importantly, though, she has grown up in Mary’s household, where she must abide by her rules. Mary is presumably one of the only role models Precious had. We see Precious’ body affected by this culture most specifically in her obesity.

Early in the novel, Precious provides evidence that even her own eating habits have been explicitly controlled by her mother—a mother who, it’s worth mentioning, Precious says has gotten so big that she physically cannot fit into their bathtub. Precious describes a scene where, when she was twelve (and

pregnant for the first time), Mary made her cook dinner for the two of them, after she had physically and verbally abused Precious. Cooking the entire meal by herself—collard greens, ham hocks, corn bread, fried apple pies, and macaroni and cheese—wasn't enough, though. Even after Precious told her mother she wasn't hungry, Mary forced her to eat two heaping plates full of the food. "Eating," Precious narrates, "first 'cause she make me, beat me if I don't, then eating hoping pain in my neck back go away. I keep eating till the pain, the gray TV light, and Mama is a blur; and I just fall back on the couch so full it like I'm dyin' and I go to sleep, like I always do" (21). Her final statement here suggests that this is a regular occurrence, and it is no question that this behavior would contribute to her obesity. Thus, the culture Mary has created in their home has directly influenced the physical shaping of Precious' body as a space.

Furthermore, the passage suggests another attempt for Precious to reclaim her bodily space. In her effort to eat until she "sleeps" or "dies," Precious attempts, unsuccessfully, to gain the control of her body Mary has taken away. Because Precious eats the food as her mother directs, she is not exerting any fundamental control over her body. Furthermore, by going to sleep, she inadvertently allows Mary to sexually abuse her after the meal. Thus, Precious again loses control of her body despite her initial attempt to claim it. This is another example of the social imaginary at work in the novel. Precious allows the space of her body to control her actions by eating out of fear of pain, and she allows her body to control Mary's actions by not stopping her abuse, which she knows is coming. Her fear of being beaten—damage to her bodily rhetorical space—outweighs any control she could have over how her body is treated.

While Precious' own history and culture has played a large role in the shaping of her body as space, her body has also been shaped by the history and culture of her race and her gender. Thus, part of this second argument for Precious' historical-cultural embodiment lies in her identity as an African American girl from Harlem. For this argument I turn to Riché Richardson's 2012 article "Close-up: Push, Precious, and New Narratives of Slavery in Harlem." Richardson argues that *Push* and its film adaptation, *Precious*, parallel the structure of slave narratives and neoslave narratives in order to demonstrate similarities between contemporary traumas of African Americans (rape, illiteracy, etc.) and slavery. Much of his argument deals with how African Americans continue to rise above these limitations.

For Richardson, Precious' abused body acts as an indirect successor of slavery. He writes,

It is important to frame the ongoing expropriation of Precious' body for sexual abuse throughout her childhood by both of her parents in relation to the pervasive contemporary global sex trading and

trafficking of women's and children's bodies, a modern outgrowth of the institutionalized abuse, public display, and objectification of black women's bodies within the patriarchal system of slavery during the antebellum era. (Richardson 165)

Richardson, in other words, sees Precious' abuse in the larger context of sex trafficking among African Americans, and in turn he sees this sex trafficking as a successor of the ways in which black women's bodies were abused in slavery. Both of Precious' parents inflict abuse on her, thus replicating historic abuse of female slaves on her body. Therefore, Precious' body, in its abused state, is shaped by history and culture through that of the African American race. As a rhetorical space, then, Precious sees herself living under a constant normative disadvantage. Her cultural and historic shaping according to the treatment of female African American slaves suggests a racial disadvantage, and that disadvantage suggests to her that she is inferior as a black woman. As a result, she wants to change or "rearrange" her bodily rhetorical space into one that is more normative. "Why I not born a light-skin dream?" she asks. "Why? Why?" (Sapphire 87).

Moreover, I suggest it is Precious' identity as an African American *woman*, specifically, that is most important in shaping the space of her body. Tracey Owens Patton suggests that all American women, and specifically black women, are held to the same Euro American—white—standard of beauty, and that this ultimately creates adversity between black and white American women. Essentially, again, Owens Patton sees all women held to the normative standards described by Grosz, Thomson, and Dolmage. She provides a history of American beauty standards that seems particularly relevant to Precious' body in *Push*. Owens Patton argues that black women have been expected to conform to Euro American ideals of beauty—particularly in skin color and hair—since slavery in the 17th Century. While female field-working slaves typically had darker skin and wore their (kinky or wavy) hair wrapped in scarves, for example, slave women working in the house (i.e., in close proximity to white people) usually had lighter skin and were expected to have straight, styled hair. Often, Owens Patton suggests, non-conformity to these standards in the house resulted in harsh consequences. Thus, "adopting many White European traits was essential to survival" for black women slaves (Owens Patton 28).

This history and culture of American beauty standards applies directly to Precious in many instances throughout the novel. Similarly, Precious often imagines herself in a different body. But the body Precious is often imagining for herself is nothing like her own. Precious is making a conscious effort to place herself in what Owens Patton's research reflects is a typical Euro American body, and what Grosz, Thomson, and Dolmage suggest is a normative perception of beauty. This perception, as I have discussed, is not only

culturally constructed, but it is largely fictional—very few people actually look this way, yet Precious shows that the “normate” body is the one she feels like she should have. If she “had” this body, she would see herself as capable of “being” it—thus eliminating her perceived mind/body dualism.

We see this in the novel when Ms. Rain, Precious’ teacher, has asked the class to write in their journals a construction of their “perfect self.” Precious says, “I tell you one thing right now, I would be light skinned, thereby treated right and loved by boyz. Light even more important than being skinny; you see them light-skinned girls that’s big an’ fat, they got boyfriends.” She continues by illustrating how she would be thin, her hair would be tame, her breasts would be small, and she would be a virgin (Sapphire 113-14). Precious’ “perfect self” reflects the typical beauty standard of the time, which leaves no room for her race, her obesity, or her abuse. It follows, then, that the space of Precious’ body is shaped by the history and culture of African American women by its non-adherence to typical standards of American beauty.

This passage in which Precious constructs her “perfect self” depicts one of the only passages in the novel where she acknowledges the convergence of her bodily traits. Usually, Precious fixates on one “flaw” that she is particularly interested in eliminating—her blackness or her obesity. But here she shows how all of the small traits come together to create one, whole, perfect body. Precious sees the fictional “perfect body”—the normate—as “allowed” to be whole, while her own real body must always be fragmented. This further indicates how Precious feels incomplete in her current body, and how she therefore cannot accept herself as a whole/complete person.

Precious’ non-adherence to perceived beauty standards bother her the most, toward the end of the novel, in her obesity. Even when she is beginning to accept herself as black, and is learning to read and starting to deal with her trauma, she still has trouble accepting that she is fat. In her essay “It’s a Big Fat Revolution,” Nomy Lamm illustrates the social changes she sees necessary for the world’s acceptance of obesity, and more importantly why “fat girls” have so much trouble accepting their bodies. She shares the struggles she has had personally with obesity, but also declares that she has finally accepted her own body for what it is—fat *and* beautiful. She argues that the two should not be, and are not, mutually exclusive.

Lamm’s idea of a beautiful-fat identity is something Precious never achieves. And Lamm, as a white middle-class female, discusses how difficult it must be for someone like Precious to achieve this self-acceptance: “I have to take into account the fact that I’m an articulate, white, middle-class college kid,” Lamm writes, “and that provides me with a hell of a lot of privilege and opportunity for dealing with my oppression that may not be available to other oppressed people” (456). In fact, according to Paul Ernsberger, author of

“Does Social Class Explain the Connection Between Weight and Health?,” there are strong connections between weight and socioeconomic status in adulthood. He writes that while “there is some evidence that poverty is fattening, there is much stronger evidence that fatness is impoverishing” (Ernsberger 32). Ernsberger’s work suggests that Lamm is right to note that “dealing with” her weight might be easier because of her privilege, despite her struggle in doing so. But what might this mean for Precious’ acceptance of her weight? If Lamm—who self-identifies as privileged—has trouble owning her obesity, then how can an underprivileged girl like Precious learn to accept her own fat body? Even Precious notes, in imagining her “perfect self” (Sapphire 113-114), that accepting her obesity would be easier if she were light-skinned. Lamm and Ernsberger’s arguments both suggest that social stigma plays a bigger role than any other in making underprivileged obese girls like Precious take shame in their bodies.

The complex relationship between Precious’ identities as poor, undereducated, and fat illustrate how her non-adherence to beauty standards shapes her historical-cultural embodiment. While Precious’ non-normativity is sustained through the social stigma of her obesity, it is the intersection of her obesity and her black skin that continues to limit her self-acceptance. Located through historical-cultural embodiment, Precious’ body—Precious—is positioned as space, providing a more holistic lens through which to rhetorically situate and analyze her character.

Rhetorical Embodiment

For her framework, Mountford suggests that rhetorical spaces must affect and influence communication in that space. Working toward a rhetoric of body as space, we might consider a frame of rhetorical embodiment: No matter how we enact it, communication is a bodily act; bodies are inherently rhetorical. When we position bodies as integral stakeholders in rhetorical situations, we emphasize *people*, literally in body, as rhetors and place them at the center of rhetorical communication. Rhetorical embodiment, then, suggests that bodies should not be ignored in analyses of communicative events. For Precious, a lens of rhetorical embodiment suggests that both her internal self-communication and her communication with others are influenced by her bodily space. Precious’ communication with others serves to show her how/whether they accept her body, which largely influences, as Thomson and Dolmage suggest, how she is able to accept herself.

Firstly, Precious communicates with herself through her own bodily self-acceptance. By continuously judging herself on her physical appearance and comparing herself to “beautiful” light-skinned women, Precious is negatively, or perhaps mis-, communicating with herself; she is telling herself that

she's ugly, while others like Ms. Rain are telling her she's beautiful. We can see this sort of internal dialogue especially playing out when Precious is desperately trying to reverse or correct her life situation. Her revelation about her body toward the end of the novel best illustrates this concept:

I just don't always want to be crying like white bitch on TV movies. Since I ain' no white bitch. I understand that now. I am not white bitch. I am not Janet Jackson or Madonna on the *inside*. I always thought I was someone different on the inside. That I was just fat and black and ugly to people on the OUTSIDE. And if they could see *inside* me they would see something lovely and not keep laughing at me, ... that Mama and Daddy would recognize me as...as, I don't know, Precious! But I am not different on the inside. Inside I thought was so beautiful is a black girl too. (Sapphire 125)

In this excerpt Precious is having an internal self-communication about her own body. Furthermore, her body is affecting and influencing the way she can communicate with herself, because she bases much of her self-worth on her body's appearance. We know this because of instances where she says things like, "If [my father] did [really see me] he would know I was like a white girl, a *real* person, inside" (Sapphire 32, emphasis in original). Her perception of beauty, and therefore her physical self-worth, is highly, if not entirely, based on normative culture. Because the society around her says that beauty, as Owens Patton reflects, must be white, blonde, skinny, and altogether non-disabled, Precious assumes that she is not beautiful. Seen through a lens of body as space, Precious' self-communication on beauty demonstrates her rhetorical embodiment.

Precious' bodily space also affects and influences the communication she has with others. Although Precious is the only "inhabitant" of the space of her body, aside from her father when she is raped, other people must still communicate with her while she is in her bodily space. In this sense, the space of Precious' body affects and influences her communication with others in addition to her communication with herself. Her body does this primarily through its interpretation according to cultural norms. We first see this in the novel when Precious describes being bullied in school. She says,

I always did like school, jus' seem school never did like me. Kinnergarden and first grade I don't talk, they laff at that. ... Secon' grade they laffes at HOW I talk. So I stop talking. What for? Secon' thas when the 'l'mma joke' start. When I go sit down boyz make fart sounds wif they mouf like it's me fartin'. When I git up they snort snort hog grunt sounds. So I just stop getting up. What for? (Sapphire 36)

The other students at Precious' school mock her because of her body, outwardly, in that she is obese and black—attributes that do not reflect their normate ideology. They mock her too, however, because she is not talking. As we already know by this point in the novel, she isn't talking because of the abuse she suffers at home—another body issue.

Precious' silence, moreover, is part of her bodily response to the traumatic experience of rape. Since her body is the site of her traumatic experience, it, as Michelle Balaev asserts in *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, "defines the value of trauma" (xv) for Precious. In other words, when Precious is in the space of her body, she is constantly remembering the trauma that occurred there. The people she communicates with at school, however, do not know this. So when they ridicule her because of her bodily rhetorical space, she sees no other option than to be silent. She has nothing to say in defense of the place where her trauma occurred. Therefore, Precious' body directly influences how other characters react to and communicate with her, further influencing her self-communication. This is another example, too, of how Precious' body exercises heuristic power—it controls her ability to speak, therefore also controlling her schoolmates' reaction to her. As Thomson and Dolmage imply, perception of normativity relies on the cultural construction of normalcy, and Precious has been shown by others that her body does not comply with the standard. Thus, she cannot effectively self-communicate normalcy.

Precious' normalcy—and therefore communication—is further affected because the traumatic event that occurred in her bodily rhetorical space led to one of her disabilities. Precious learns later in the novel, as I have discussed, that she is HIV positive as a result of her father's rape. Just as she had started making breakthroughs in her recovery and self-acceptance, she regresses in her progress by shutting down when she discovers this news. She writes in her journal, "I was fine til HIV thing" (Sapphire 101). Even before she is diagnosed, though, Precious begins to despair because her mother tells her that Carl (her father), who has died, had the virus. "I got AIDS?" she asks. "HIV? What's the difference? My son got it? Lil Mongo [her daughter]? How I gonna learn and be smart if I got the virus? Why me? Why me? ... I think about this later. It make me feel stupid crazy, I mean stupid crazy" (88-89). Precious cannot effectively communicate a sense of bodily normality because she is constantly surrounded by the space where her trauma occurred. Her HIV, then, further disables her, which makes her more aware of her problematic bodily rhetorical space. Precious' body is positioned at the center of her self- and social communication, demonstrating how rhetorical embodiment might contribute to a rhetoric of body as space.

Physical Embodiment

Mountford suggests that all spaces have “material dimensions that affect what we do there” (17)—i.e., they are rhetorically arranged. A rhetoric of body as space suggests that bodies, too, are “arranged” and that these arrangements influence how bodies are culturally and personally perceived. We might think of this arrangement as physical embodiment: bodily, material compositions that are not always easily changed but that are nevertheless rhetorical. Physical embodiment allows us to think about bodies at the micro level, to consider how one body or a group of bodies are composed and how their compositions contribute to holistic rhetorical situations.

Precious’ physical embodiment is exemplified through her black, obese, and female body—identifications that contribute to her material arrangement. Precious, as the narrator of the novel, does not provide a complete physical description of herself, perhaps intentionally. Instead, she usually focuses on describing one particular aspect of her body when it is what she currently would most like to change about herself—this tends to be either her size or her skin color. While Precious does not provide a comprehensive description of herself, she does compare her own material arrangement to her mother’s. She narrates, “Mama look bad, don’t have to get close to know she smell bad. But then I look Mama and see my face, my body, my color—we bofe big, dark. Am I ugly? Is Mama ugly? I’m not sure” (Sapphire 84). Here, the reader sees Precious’ perception of her and her mother’s bodies, which she is comparing to cultural norms of ugliness, and therefore normativity—because normalcy, as Dolmage asserts, is determined by what it is not, and ugly is not normal by cultural standards. This material arrangement of “big” and “dark” suggests for Precious that she and her mother may be ugly. This passage indicates, though, that Precious is conscious enough of her material arrangement, and thus its sociocultural perception, to ask whether her body is ugly.

Cartesian dualism seems like a simple description for physical embodiment. For Descartes, the body and mind are completely separate entities, only interacting so the mind can control the body. But as we see with Grosz and Thomson, Cartesian dualism presents problems for female and non-normative/disabled bodies in its hierarchical insistence that people should be disassociated with their bodies, especially when certain bodies are culturally deemed inferior. Thus, Grosz turns to Spinoza, who argues that everything—mind and body—is a different aspect of one whole unit—substance. As a space, Precious’ body is marked by non-normativity and disability through her identities as female, African American, obese, illiterate, and HIV positive, the last of which she doesn’t know until later in the novel. Precious struggles with each of these identifications throughout her story despite, as Michelle Jarman

notes in “Cultural Consumption and Rejection of Precious Jones,” never expressly identifying as disabled.

Jarman argues that while Precious does not self-identify as disabled, she does so in effect through claims she makes regarding “problem embodiment” (qtd. in Jarman 3)—traits such as her HIV and her identity as the mother of a daughter with Down syndrome. Jarman suggests that because Precious sees her differences as “problems,” she self-identifies as disabled. She further qualifies her argument by suggesting that Precious exhibits a “multilayered identity” that combines her heroic traits of overcoming the odds with the disability that continues to stain her life (Jarman 3). Jarman makes it clear that Precious sees herself (for much of the novel) as multilayered—she thinks the person on the “inside”—the mind—is different from the person on the “outside”—the body. Through disability studies Jarman is able to imply that Precious constructs for herself the kind of Cartesian dualism Grosz rejects, and in doing so, Precious demonstrates her physical embodiment.

Precious does not see the problematic nature of constructing her body in this way. Seen through a lens of body as space, Precious marks herself as other because she sees her bodily space as problematically different. Her self-perception provides an example of how people—especially trauma victims—are commonly portrayed as differentiating their minds and bodies. Trauma theorists suggest that as human beings we are able to separate ourselves from our own bodies by imagining ourselves as someone else; as someone or something outside of our physical bodies. In her 2002 essay “Surviving Sexual Abuse with an Out-of-Body Experience,” Carla Wills-Brandon shares her own harrowing account of abuse, which she quotes from her then-upcoming book *A Glimpse of Heaven* (2003). Wills-Brandon’s account exemplifies how Precious’ similar experience signifies a separation of mind and body through out-of-body experiences, demonstrating Precious’ physical embodiment.

Wills-Brandon labels her dissociation from her body as an “out-of-body experience” (OBE), a term first coined by Robert Munroe in 1958. Generally speaking, an OBE occurs when someone experiences the feeling of being somewhere outside of his/her physical body, usually while involved in a traumatic event. In some cases, the out-of-body experiencer can view the event happening to her/his body while s/he is not in it. In her personal account, Wills-Brandon writes,

I’m watching them (my offender and myself at age 5) from above and can see everything crystal clear. It’s very frightening and I feel sick to my stomach as I stare at the scene below, but I can do nothing to protect her.

Thank goodness I had an OBE! Dissociating from my body, leaving my physical self while he hurt me, enabled me to not have to feel, emotionally, physically or spiritually, the incredible shame, pain and terror, (the offender) was inflicting upon me. (Wills-Brandon 234-35)

She further explains that OBE is a common experience among trauma victims, and especially victims of sexual abuse.

Precious, too, faces out-of-body experiences in times of trauma when she similarly separates herself from her physical body in times of abuse. One instance of this is the first time she vividly narrates her father's incestuous rape. Precious says, "I fall back on bed, he fall right on top of me. Then I change stations, change *bodies*, I be dancing in videos! In movies! I be breaking, *fly*, jus' a dancing!" (Sapphire 24, emphasis in original). She extracts herself from her physical embodiment in order to cope with—or escape—the sexual abuse occurring there.

Precious is further able to separate herself from her body in a similar way to Wills-Brandon. In the excerpt below, Precious is dreaming about the sexual abuse she experiences from her mother:

That night I dream I am not in me but am awake listening to myself choking, going a huh a huh A HUH A HUH A HUH. I am walking around trying to find where I am, where the sound is coming from. I know I will choke to death I don't find myself. I walk to my muver's room but it look different, she look different. I look like little baby almost. She is talkin' sweet to me like sometimes Daddy talks. I am choking between her legs A HUH A HUH. ... Her hand is like a mountain pushing my head down. I squeeze my eyes shut but choking don't stop, it get worse. Then I open my eyes and look. I look at little Precious and big Mama and feel hit feeling, feel like killing Mama. But I don't, instead I call little Precious and say, Come to Mama but I means me. Come to *me* little Precious. (59, emphasis in original)

Precious' scene and Wills-Brandon's depict vivid OBEs, but what is most relevant is that in both situations the victim envisions herself watching the abuse take place from an outside location. This is the one time where Precious has not transported herself completely somewhere else, like a music video; she is watching it take place and wanting to do something about it. Seen through body as space, Precious' body mirrors Mountford's understanding of a rhetorical space through its inhabitability, as demonstrated through out-of-body experiences. Precious' body is a space that she sometimes feels the need to "leave." In this sense, her body's inhabitability is increased. Just as physical rooms are still places when no one is occupying them, Precious' body is a place because she feels the need to leave it.

However, Precious takes her OBEs even further when she effectively imagines herself as a different person. As we can see in the previous example, she can leave her body in order to imagine herself somewhere else, but she can also leave her body in order to imagine herself as *someone* else. In this sense, her body acts as a physical space because she can change locations—she can see and feel herself inhabiting different spaces. Precious first introduces this kind of experience when she imagines her mother defending her (Precious) to her father. Precious painfully reflects that her mother never “come in here and say, Carl Kenwood Jones—thas wrong! Git off Precious like that! Can’t you see Precious is a beautiful chile like white chile in magazines or on toilet paper wrappers. Precious is a blue-eye skinny chile whose hair is long braids. Git off Precious fool!” (Sapphire 64). Here, Precious is able to un-attach herself from her real body—black, obese and abused—to what, in her eyes, is a more desirable body—white, blue-eyed and skinny. This ability further defines her body as a physical space because she can envision herself with a physical embodiment other than her own, thus separating her mind and body as a result of personal trauma.

As the excerpts above suggest, trauma also plays a role in the construction of Precious’ physical embodiment. Her continuous abuse at her father’s hands makes her body a space in these moments. He forcefully inhabits the space of her body, and as a result she mentally goes somewhere else. Her individuality is tarnished by his forcefulness, too, because she does not want to occupy the same space as him. In essence, he was not invited to share her bodily space, so she leaves while he is there. His presence, however, has forever changed the space, which contributes to Precious’ strong desire to own/become a different space. She wants to claim a body that has not been spoiled by someone else’s uninvited presence.

This uninvited presence Precious experiences in the novel is the perfect example of the heuristic power of rhetorical spaces: Precious’ body controls what happens in/to it, sometimes without her consent. Though Precious in no way wants her father’s sexual advances, she describes her body’s reactions to the rape. “I start to feel good,” she narrates, “stop being a video dancer and start coming. I try to go back to video but coming now, rocking under Carl now, my twat jumping juicy, it feel good. I feel shamed” (Sapphire 24). She feels “shamed” at her body’s physical reaction to the rape. Precious did not invite Carl to her space—she did not welcome his advances—and yet she cannot control how her body physically reacts with pleasure. The space of her body is controlling her communicative power. Furthermore, Carl comments on her reaction by saying, “See, you LIKE it! You jus’ like your mama—you die for it!” (24, emphasis in original). Even though she does not like it, her body is telling him that she does. This is an example, too, of the social imaginary at work. The

space of Precious' body is forming hierarchies between its residents, establishing Carl as superior to Precious because her body is "obeying" his actions rather than her desires. The most she can do, then, is feel ashamed by her body's betrayal.

Implications and Applications of Body as Space

This analysis demonstrates how Precious' bodily space contributes to her character's rhetoric in *Push* through historical-cultural embodiment, rhetorical embodiment, and physical embodiment. Each of these points of analysis positions the space of Precious' body as rhetorical, from macro-level influences to micro-level individual traits. Therefore, I take up two goals to conclude my argument: first, to explore the applications of a rhetoric of body as space for Precious—what does this analysis mean for her character? Second, I suggest possible implications of a rhetoric of body as space as it might be applied to any number of rhetorical bodies.

Implications (for Precious)

When Precious finally seems to realize that she is the same on the inside as she is on the outside, she says,

I just don't always want to be crying like white bitch on TV movies. Since I ain' no white bitch. I understand that now. I am not white bitch. I am not Janet Jackson or Madonna on the *inside*. I always thought I was someone different on the inside. That I was just fat and black and ugly to people on the OUTSIDE. And if they could see *inside* me they would see something lovely and not keep laughing at me, ... that Mama and Daddy would recognize me as...as, I don't know, Precious! But I am not different on the inside. Inside I thought was so beautiful is a black girl too. (Sapphire 125)

This passage can be read in two ways—self-accepting or non-self-accepting. While most readers might think that Precious is feeling body-positive at this point in the novel—finally accepting her body as it is—I see it in a different light. By saying at the end, "Inside I thought was so beautiful is a black girl too" (Sapphire 125), Precious is admitting that she is the same on the inside as she is on the outside. At this point she has finally eliminated (for her own self-image) the distinction between her "outside" and "inside" selves, creating one whole *disabled* self. Although she is beginning to acknowledge her own bodily complexity as un-fragmented, she is still seeing it as flawed; and because she does not come to terms with the individual flaws she focused on throughout the novel, she has not yet fully accepted the space of her body. Moreover, the

space of her body will not *allow* her self-acceptance because she sees it as wholly flawed, instead of wholly normal.

The implications of Precious' non-self-acceptance are twofold. Firstly, because the rhetorical space of Precious' body does not allow her to accept herself, the ending of the novel—which depicts Precious at the Advancement House (a women's shelter) reading a book to her son—may not be as positive as many readers assume. Precious makes great strides toward literacy, but she still has many obstacles in her way by the novel's end. She does not have a job, and therefore any money, nor does she have custody of her daughter (though she does have both of her children at the end of the film adaptation). While Precious has made several life improvements in the novel that give her—and readers—hope for the future, she still has a lot of work to do in order to be the person she wants to be. My argument in this article, however, is not that hope for Precious does not exist; I think it does. Rather, I argue that the ending of the novel leaves room for several more obstacles, in addition to hope. Precious will have to work incredibly hard to achieve freedom from her struggles, and this should not be forgotten because she has learned how to read and write. Her bodily struggles continue, and freeing herself from the bodily space that serves as a constant reminder of her traumatic past will not be easy. That separation is, however, necessary to her full self-acceptance, which in turn is necessary for a positive future.

Before Precious recognizes her body as a complete entity, she begins to accept her blackness. In the following passage, she is reflecting on how she and the girls at Each One Teach One treat each other and how she fears her son (Abdul) will someday treat people with bodies like hers. She says,

At least when I look at the girls I see *them* and when they look they see *ME*, not what I looks like. But it seems like boyz just see what you looks like. ... When [Abdul] grow up he gonna laff big black girls? He gon' laff at dark skin like he got? One thing I say about Farrakhan and Alice Walker they help me like being black. I wish I wasn't fat but I am. Maybe one day I like that too, who knows. (Sapphire 95-96, emphasis in original)

In this scene, one of the last times in the novel Precious reflects on her self-image, she can see how being black is OK—but she still cannot accept her obesity. She also directly mentions the gender discrepancy she's been dealing with throughout the novel. She fears that her son will laugh at people who look like her, because she has had so much experience as a non-normative woman being laughed at by men.

Interestingly, Precious never mentions acceptance of her HIV in this passage, because admitting to that requires admitting to her father's abuse, which

continues to send her into out-of-body experiences. We see one last short example of an OBE when Precious is at her first incest survivors meeting with Rita (a friend she meets in GED preparation class). Even as Precious is raising her hand to share her story, she describes how she has to push through “the smell of Mama” and the image of her father. And, after she has done that successfully, she cannot manage to say more than a few words (130). This shows that while Precious may be on the way to self-acceptance, she is not quite there yet. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of this scene with her fears for her son suggests that she does not trust men and is still heavily influenced by their perceptions of her. She cannot articulate her traumatic experience or reconcile her disability, then, because her bodily space does not allow it.

Applications (for Rhetoric)

Body as space, as a theory, has applications far beyond Precious Jones and *Push*. While this kind of direct theoretical application is in many ways necessary to demonstrate how a theory of body as space might operate, virtually endless applications of this theory might exist. Just as Mountford's notion of rhetorical space, while she applies it most directly to sacred spaces, comes with limitless possibilities—such as this remediation—so might the notion of body as space I've outlined here be applied, expanded upon, remediated, questioned, and problematized. To summarize, I submit that body as space includes three points of analysis: historical-cultural embodiment, rhetorical embodiment, and physical embodiment. While it could be appropriate to focus on one or two of these points of analysis individually, I caution readers against applying body as space in ways that might objectify, de-personify, bodily spaces. Rather, when historical-cultural, rhetorical, and physical embodiments are joined to form one holistic approach, we have a rhetoric of body as space that provides a fuller picture of the body's contribution to rhetorical situations.

As the authors of *Peitho's* Key Concept Statement on Embodiment remind us, “All bodies do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function” (Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny 39). How we do that rhetoric—how bodily spaces create meaning, affect situations, contribute in discourse—can be interpreted through analyses of body as space. Moreover, not only can we apply this rhetoric to varied material bodies, but in addressing Johnson, Levy, Manthey, and Novotny's statement that “embodied methodologies and embodied rhetorics encourage complex relationships among past, present, and future, as well as across multiple identifications” (42), I argue that we *must* continue to explore multiple body-spaces, across identifications, to note the exceptional, intersectional ways material bodies matter. The theory presented in this article provides a move toward a rhetoric of body as space that might address such a call.

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Facebook Feminism: Moderating Story and Visibility in Pantsuit Nation

Alicia Brazeau

Abstract: *This essay examines the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group as one example of an emerging digital, feminist, rhetorical tradition. Drawing on recent research of political activism online, I analyze the implications of Pantsuit Nation's assertion that "storytelling is activism." In particular, I demonstrate how the Facebook group invites participants to engage in an ongoing, moderated construction of feminist identities and values through the use of shared narrative frames. Given the popularity of politicized social media groups like Pantsuit Nation, I assert that identity-based and story-based platforms such as Facebook are uniquely well-suited for inviting new participants into a feminist and political action, and afford members and moderators the ability to continuously revise and expand community narratives.*

Keywords: *Social media, storytelling, identity, intersectionality, politics*

"The relationship between storytelling and activism is nothing new. Stories are fuel. They are the why. Stories give meaning to action and meaningful action is the only way to drive long-term, sustainable change. . . . What Pantsuit Nation showed us in those first weeks and months after the election is that we are *all* storytellers. And so, we are all powerful."

Libby Chamberlain, creator of the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group

On November 8, 2016, I visited my local polling station to cast my vote for the 45th president of the United States. I wore a pantsuit. I posted on Facebook about my excitement to cast my ballot for the candidate I then assumed would be the first woman to become President of the United States. Throughout the day, I checked in to a private Facebook group, called Pantsuit Nation, where nearly three million members were also posting stories about their reasons for supporting Hillary Clinton and pictures of their own pantsuits worn in homage to Clinton's iconic wardrobe staple. On that day, I shared in the excitement and joy of the Pantsuit Nation community, and, in the weeks that followed, I

also shared in the grief, frustration, anxiety, and determination expressed by contributors in that space that was at once public and private, personal and political. Over the course of a year, as I read and reacted to posts, I began to think more critically about the way these rhetorical acts constructed and were constructed by this digital community, about how community members were defining the purpose and scope of feminist work, and about the significance of *Pantsuit Nation*¹ as feminist discourse.

Libby Chamberlain, creator of the *Pantsuit Nation* Facebook group and editor of a published collection of stories by the same name, contends that “storytelling is activism.” For this reason, I chose to begin with my own story. In doing so, I seek to reciprocate the intentions and candor of the contributors to *Pantsuit Nation*. I also wish to provide context for how I am situated as both a member of *Pantsuit Nation* and as a researcher. I joined the Facebook group in early November 2016 out of personal interest and have read and reacted² to the content posted there as a like-minded member of that community. As a researcher, beginning formally in February 2017, I collected and catalogued posts. Recognizing that I am inextricably enmeshed within the community and discourse I am examining, I also seek to echo the approach taken by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Wendy Sharer in *Vote and Voice: Women’s Organizations and Political Literacy, 1915-1930*, Carol Mattingly in *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric*, and Joann Campbell in “Afterword: Revealing the Ties That Bind.” Asserting that “stories matter,” Royster and Kirsch make clear that they “claim and celebrate feminist rhetorical studies as a professional identity while underscoring . . . how important it is – as professionals in this field – to critique this work and to fashion and sustain a strong sense of professional accountability” (3, 4). Throughout my research and writing about *Pantsuit Nation*, I have sought to emulate the practice Royster and Kirsch lay out: to recognize and interrogate my own connection to the subjects I analyze, and to examine and critique this feminist rhetorical space in a systematic, ethical way.

The discussion that follows, then, is a critical, rhetorical, and at times emotional engagement between a feminist researcher and a digital feminist community of which she was a part. This community, moreover, is one that both

1 Here, and throughout, the *Pantsuit Nation* Facebook group will appear unitalicized, while I do italicize the title of the *Pantsuit Nation* book.

2 Facebook distinguishes between two forms of response for a post: commenting and reacting. Reacting refers to contributing a “like,” “love,” etc. but does not involve written commentary. I have reacted, but not commented, on posts in Facebook Nation.

agrees with and exemplifies the meaning of Royster and Kirsch's contention that "stories matter" (3). The discourse visible in *Pantsuit Nation* demonstrates the role digital platforms serve in allowing participants to use storytelling to gain visibility for themselves and the issues important to them, to articulate their own arguments for the purpose of feminist and political activity, and to interact with a community engaged in the process of identifying feminist issues. Through a series of narrative options, *Pantsuit Nation* gives participants the chance to engage in feminism as a personal and collective process; the digital group is a low-stakes and high-feedback place to share experiences and interact with others also engaged in the process of articulating a feminist identity and of learning about the issues important to the feminist work members might engage in offline. In particular, the storytelling in *Pantsuit Nation* allows members and moderators to increase the visibility of specific feminist issues, aiding participants in constructing personalized arguments for the purpose of feminist work, and helping members learn about offline activist activities. Moreover, as one example of an increasing number of political social media groups, *Pantsuit Nation* offers insight into the limitations and affordances of private social media communities as feminist and political organizations, especially their ability to successfully include a diverse range of voices and to serve as foundations for offline social and political change.

Social Media and Digital Feminist Rhetoric

Feminist rhetorical research has increasingly investigated digital spaces and modes of discourse, rethinking how digital tools and sites are reshaping what it means to do feminist work. Andrea Lunsford (1999), Amy Koerber (2000), Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette (2013), Royster and Kirsch (2012), and other scholars, for instance, have considered the implications of digital tools and sites for feminist, rhetorical, and historical research methods. Likewise, Buck (2012), Black (2006), and Grasmuck, Martin, and Zhao (2009) investigate specific sites of discourse online, engaging questions of access and identity. More particularly, Jacqueline Rhodes (2002), Mary Queen (2008), and Gail E. Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan (1998) trace how the "fixity and fluidity" of online spaces shapes the construction, circulation, and implications of feminist activity there where meaning is "made, changed, and transformed in the movement, rather than the stasis, of texts" (Rhodes, 118; Queen, 475). Communication research and media studies have also examined feminist activity online, with scholars such as Ryan Bowles Eagle (2015), Carrie Rentschler (2015), Sherri Williams (2016), and Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Reneger (2006) highlighting feminist, activist rhetoric and community building on Twitter and other social media spaces.

A theme in these recent examinations of feminist activity in online social groups has been how writers have used public venues like Twitter, private listserv, and social media groups to circulate protests, find like-minded people, and even gain visibility and voice in a space that seems safer and more accessible than physical spaces of protest. Both Williams and Eagle, for example, investigate how women's activity on Twitter allows contributors to gain visibility while still offering a sense of (physical) safety. Emboldened by the disconnect between the digital and the physical, women, especially those under-represented or mis-represented by other media outlets, can gain visibility. Williams in particular contends that social media platforms can be vital spaces for raising awareness of violence against black women "because [they enable] anti-violence advocates to connect with the public and one another in real time without relying on the traditional news cycle or the mainstream media's problematic framing of sexual violence and black women" (342). In *Digital Sisterhood: A Memoir of Fierce Living Online*, Ananda Kiamish Madelyn Leeke likewise attests to the value of online spaces such as blog communities that allow women, especially women of color, to connect, collaborate and build communities of support.

As Eagle, Williams, and Leeke describe, the Pantsuit Nation Facebook group is a virtual space that simultaneously affords public visibility and physical safety for women while they discuss and circulate a range of intersectional feminist issues. As a by-invitation-only community, moreover, Pantsuit Nation is part of a trend of private social media groups that are created around a community that shares social or political goals. Other large-scale, private Facebook groups include FIN (originally Female in Nigeria, now Female IN) created by Lola Omolola in 2015, the Isreali Supergirls group started by Maria Green Povarchik and Reut Reuveni in 2015, and the Binders Full of Women Writers group, and network of sub-groups, which first appeared in 2014. These Facebook groups function as restricted online communities where women can discuss issues and explore feminist identities while controlling the boundaries of participation and circulation. As both Libby Chamberlain and Lola Omolola describe in their respective explanations for why they created Pantsuit Nation and Female IN, private social media groups allow contributors to give voice to ideas and experiences they were afraid to share in more public venues like Twitter. In an interview with Maxine Williams, the Global Chief Diversity Officer for Facebook, Omolola asserts that groups like Female IN "provide a supportive community where women can speak and be our best selves, and feel like we can be honest and not be judged." As digital platforms that are easy for many individuals to access and allow for the growth of a large, geographically dispersed community, social media groups like Pantsuit Nation offer the promise of easily achieved diversity. At the same time, their private nature

and restricted membership process can, and has, resulted in the creation of problematically homogenous groups, where it is difficult for members or moderators to develop truly intersectional paradigms of feminism. The shifting name of FIN demonstrates Omolola's response to this challenge, as she worked to change the digital groups' identity from centering around women's experiences in Nigeria only (Females in Nigeria) to embrace more women's experiences globally (Female IN). The storytelling most visible, and most valued, on Pantsuit Nation likewise offers an illustration of how members and moderators must negotiate the broad options for entry afforded by digital sites in order to cultivate more intentional inclusion.

At the same time, private social media groups do valuably offer members the chance to observe and participate in the process of constructing and defining a feminist community. In "Redoing Feminism: Digital Activism, Body Politics, and Neoliberalism," Hester Baer examines #yesallwomen and ultimately argues that social media sites supports "process-based political actions" that "emphasize the process of searching for new political paradigms, languages, and symbols" instead of traditional forms of offline activism (30). Baer speaks to the value of individuals "searching" for language and identities through their contributions and interactions on public online sites. Members of private Facebook groups engage in similar "process-based political actions," but also contribute to the construction, definition, and policing of a set of community values for feminist work. In doing so, I would argue that groups like Pantsuit Nation prompt active participants to work through new, personalized paradigms of feminism in a virtual safe space. Chamberlain, in her contention that the storytelling in Pantsuit Nation can act as "fuel" for offline activism, and Omolola, in her similar contention that discussions on FIN are the "foundation" for "disrupt[ing] the status quo," point to the valuable role private groups can play in bringing like-minded individuals together, offering safe visibility, and moderating the discussion of feminist issues, identities, and activities. In essence, private social media groups provide members a low-stakes way to engage in feminism as a process of personal and social discovery.

This in-process feminist work is enabled in part through the particular way that discourse circulates and generates feedback in social media communities. The continuously interactive nature of all rhetorical acts on social media makes this discourse different from the print and oral texts scholars have traditionally studied. In "Transnational Feminist Rhetorics in a Digital World," Mary Queen traces the circulation of an Afghan women's rights organization, arguing that rhetorical acts online, particularly those on social media sites are not static. Rather, they evolve as they circulate and as others interact. This is visible on private sites such as Pantsuit Nation, where members may return to a post months after the original posting to react or comment, and contributors

may in turn edit or add to their post in response to these comments and reactions. It is this circulation and interaction that affords participants the chance to negotiate meaning, validate or invalidate certain language or stories, and situate personal stories as part of a collective social and political cause.

Moreover, for Queen, the reality of this continuous circulation and reinterpretation requires researchers to rethink their methodologies. She advises and enacts what she terms a “rhetorical genealogical” approach. Rhetorical genealogy is “a process of examining digital texts not as artifacts of rhetorical productions, but, rather, as continually evolving rhetorical actions that are materially bound, actions whose transformation can be traced through the links embedded within multiple fields of circulation” (476). That is, researchers must emphasize actions rather than products, understanding that the objects studied in online spaces are at once the result of an originating rhetorical act, and are still in the process of acting in digital circulation. It is important to note that Pantsuit Nation, and other Facebook groups, are not absent of a hierarchy or systems of power. Contributors create posts, but these posts must first be approved by a group administrator. Then, members of the community attach new meaning, and potentially validity and power, through their responses to it – responses that either boost a post repeatedly into primary viewing on the page, or cause the post to sink into the partial obscurity created by the sheer volume of contributions. In my exploration of Pantsuit Nation, then, I am, as Queen suggests, not only concerned with the original text of a contributor, but also with the life of that text after the original posting: the reactions it generated and how long the post continued to receive reactions, and the nature of the comments and their interpretation of the meaning of the post. I am also interested in the role moderators play in influencing the type of posts that will be validated by the community at large.

This examination of Pantsuit Nation is the result of a year-long exploration of both the private and public Facebook groups and the edited collection by the same name.³ The private Facebook group was created by Libby Chamberlain on October 20, 2016 with the description: “Wear a pantsuit on November 8 – you know why.” The group was, and is, private: new members must be invited by someone else who is already a member and posts in the group would not be seen in any non-member Facebook feeds. Between October 20th and November 8th 2016, the group grew to three million members. Before and on election day, members posted about their support for Clinton. After the election, the group shared emotional responses to the results and discussed

3 Because the majority of the activity on Pantsuit Nation took place in a private group, all of the texts I quote below will come from the *Pantsuit Nation* book or public Facebook group.

actions to take in response. In early 2017, Chamberlain set up a more formal Pantsuit Nation organization with charitable outlets and began compiling an edited collection from contributors who agreed to have their posts published, thus creating a public face to the private Facebook group.

As a particularly large and well-known private Facebook community, Pantsuit Nation offers important insights into new forms of feminist work in digital spaces. Rooted in Chamberlain's assertion that "storytelling is activism," Pantsuit Nation, like Female IN and other groups, demonstrates how digital feminists use social media posts to engage in critical storytelling, storytelling that both allows individual participants to articulate their sense of a feminist identity and purpose, and inspires the community as a whole to circulate the ideas and experiences that will define the Pantsuit Nation brand of feminism. Scholars such as Aja Martinez, William Broussard, Victor Villanueva, Malea Powell, and Anh Hua have explored the power of storytelling, and the use of counterstory, to disrupt and broaden cultural narratives and to prompt social change. Tracing the use of narrative by Black diaspora women writers, Hua asserts that "by writing one's self into history and narrative using autobiographical stories . . . one can achieve narrative empowerment" (37). The members of Pantsuit Nation rely on the empowering, disruptive, and community-building possibilities of narrative and the affordances of a private, digital space to increase visibility for issues facing women, to support arguments for the purpose of feminist activity, and to help members learn how to engage in politics and activism offline. The types of stories privileged by the group, particularly narratives of self-identity, motherhood, history, or civic activity, provide insight into how individuals are using virtual spaces to connect personal stories to collective feminist ideologies and causes. Members' and moderators' interactions with these narratives, moreover, reveal how the digital community struggled to cultivate a diverse representation of women's experiences and to emphasize the ability of storytelling to act as a foundation for offline activist work.

Telling Their Stories

Few are unfamiliar with the primary content of Facebook: posts articulating the writer's sense of self and often idealistic, boastful representations of life experience. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the primary rhetorical work of Pantsuit Nation reflects this trend, emphasizing the creation of short biographies in which contributors introduce themselves to the Pantsuit Nation community and, in word and in image, display how they identify themselves as feminists. Possibly inspired by the original posts of the group before and on election day, in which many members introduced themselves to the community by posting pictures in pantsuits with statements about why they supported Hillary Clinton, many of the posts in Pantsuit Nation feature contributors

introducing themselves to other members with a short story about their life experiences and personality that they then connect to their social, political, and feminist values. Regan, for instance, one of the early contributors in the private group and a subsequent contributor to *Pantsuit Nation*, submits a picture of herself at a Pride parade and narrates her process of self-discovery: "I'm an optimistic person and I smile often, but do you see that smile? That smile is different. It's one of hard-won self-acceptance and paralyzing truthfulness and, eventually, openness. I've had to fight hard for that smile, and some days I still have to go looking for it" (Chamberlain 1). Regan, then, like many other contributors, connects this personal history and sense of identity to her activist purpose: "I want [my nephew] and my future kids and your kids and your brother's ex-girlfriend's cousin's kids to grow up in a world where they know that feelings don't fit properly in closets I don't want their brightest smiles to be so fought for. And that's why I'm with her" (Chamberlain 1). Participants responded to this post, as they did with so many other similar posts, by offering words of support, praise, and solidarity.

It is common, on both the private and public sides of *Pantsuit Nation*, to encounter posts like Regan's; posts in which the contributor tells a story about themselves that they suggest or assert defines their identity as a person, and as a feminist. At times, contributors will comment on *Pantsuit Nation* being a "safe space to tell your story," as a November 2016 contributor does, or will explicitly state "here is my story." "I am" statements are common, as contributors make connections between their history or experience to construct a story about who they are. In this practice, contributors echo the mission outlined by Libby Chamberlain and other group moderators in their calls for members to embrace the power of sharing their personal stories. This practice is also in keeping with the purpose Omolola describes for Female IN, where she makes clear that the goal for that community, and value of private groups in general, is to give women a space "where they feel like they can say 'here I am' and they can stand in their truth" ("Community Voices"). It is equally clear, in telling "their story" and articulating their sense of identity, that contributors seek to give voice and visibility to the values and issues they believe are, or should be, important to the feminist community. Regan, quoted above, does this clearly in presenting her narrative of "hard-won self-acceptance" for her sexuality and connected desire to see other young people "grow up in a world where they know that feelings don't fit properly in closets" (Chamberlain 1). Here too, Regan is not alone. Contributors repeatedly offer stories of their experience as an immigrant or as the daughter of an immigrant, of their encounters with discrimination, or of their successes as a religious or racial minority in a traditionally white, male-dominated sector.

In this way, contributors take advantage of both the safety and size of the digital community to use storytelling as a means of increasing awareness of important issues and to revise and address cultural narratives about their racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual identity. Many writers, scholars, and activists have used storytelling as way to give voice to experiences that have been repressed and to rewrite dominant cultural narratives. In their scholarly work, Malea Powell and Victor Villanueva both model and argue for the significance of narrative, with Villanueva in particular asserting that “the narrative of the person of color validates. It resonates. It awakens, particularly for those of us who are in institutions where our numbers are few” (15). Anh Hua in “Black Diaspora Feminism and Writing: Memory, Storytelling, and the Narrative World as Sites of Resistance” and Aja Y. Martinez in “A Plea for Critical Race Theory Counterstory: Stock Story versus Couterstory Dialogues Concerning Alejandra’s ‘Fit’ in the Academy” articulate the role narrative, particularly counterstory, plays in inspiring and sustaining resistance. Martinez explains that counterstory “is a method of telling stories by people whose experiences are not often told. Counterstory as methodology thus serves to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (38). Many storytellers in *Pantsuit Nation* take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the digital community’s mission of “storytelling is activism” to relate narratives about themselves that “expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege,” or, perhaps even more frequently, that expose and challenge cultural narratives about Muslims, immigrants, or LGBT persons (Martinez 38). Further, while Martinez, Hua, and others highlight the value of narrative and counterstory in traditional print mediums, Facebook groups like *Pantsuit Nation* offer storytellers the additional ability to receive immediate and ongoing feedback on their narratives, and to respond back on a personal level to individual commenters. Such feedback and response can be incredibly positive, as other community members support and affirm the contributor as a person, articulate the effect the story had on them as readers, and even validate and extend the story with declarations of similar experiences and identities. Indeed, moderator rules in *Pantsuit Nation*, *Female IN*, and other groups stress that kind, supportive, and respectful responses to contributor stories are the only kind of commenting that will be tolerated. Such rules protect the digital community as a safe space for sharing counterstories and for giving voice to feminist identities. It is equally true that such rules cut off the growth of critical discussions about members’ stories, discussions that might help problematize the privileges enjoyed by some contributors. Thus, by design, the storytelling in protected, digital spaces like *Pantsuit Nation* limit the potentially valuable interaction members might have engaged in if they could

have critiqued and disagreed more, even as the platform fosters the cultivation and circulation diverse narratives that can build an intersectional feminist community.

The interplay between the limitations and possibilities of a private social media group further plays out in the way that Pantsuit Nation members use pictures to construct their stories and to serve as visual displays of a feminist identity. As noted previously, the concept of visibility is important in the Facebook group; numerous posts featuring the kind of identity-based stories I consider here also include such statements as “this is what a veteran looks like” or “this is what the daughter of a refugee looks like,” or declare, as one contributor did in June 2017, that “we all want to be seen.” Encouraged, then, both by the group name and the image-heavy content of Facebook itself, contributors seeking to tell their story continuously use pictures of themselves and others displaying or, more specifically, wearing their sense of identity and feminist values. In her book, Chamberlain claims that “the pantsuit symbolized this moment in history, and I wanted to wear that symbol – to embrace it and embody it and celebrate it” (xi). Chamberlain cites, as do others in the group, the repeated references made to and critiques of Clinton’s appearance throughout the presidential campaign, and to a broader cultural preoccupation with what women wear. Some contributors, then, draw deliberate and thoughtful connections between what they are wearing, the identity they embody, and their sense of purpose in political and social action. Importantly, group members also quickly adopted the pantsuit as a symbolic garment that could be represented by a variety of clothing types. Mical, for example, introduces herself to the community picture of herself in military uniform and a story that explains:

the best pantsuit I ever wore was green, adorned with accomplishments, and finished off with classic jump boots. I was part of the first gender-integrated Basic Training cycle . . . I am also one of the few women that managed to graduate Jump School and stay active in the 82nd Airborne Division . . . Every time I heard, ‘No . . . you’re just a girl.’ I said, ‘Watch me.’ (Chamberlain 6).

Like many others, Mical acknowledges that the symbolic power Chamberlain ascribes to the pantsuit can be represented in a variety of clothing types. Other contributors to the book, such as Afsheen who declares “I am a Muslim physician, wearing hijab” (Chamberlain 8), and thousands of group contributors who submitted pictures of their vastly varying versions of “the pantsuit,” including doctors’ scrubs, uniforms, feminist slogan t-shirts, and even protective jumpsuits for welding, link their feminist identity with the clothing there are wearing, treating a variety of different articles of clothing as the symbolic,

powerful pantsuit Chamberlain invokes. As with the open and inclusive call made by group moderators for members to tell their story, the trend toward literal visibility on Pantsuit Nation created a space for increased, visible diversity, as members could – and many did – use their appearance and their picture to highlight the ways their feminist experience intersected with race, religion, or gender identity.

In *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*, Carol Mattingly examines how women rhetors used dress to fashion their public ethos, noting that “women made dress speak for them. Clothing not only allowed them a way to construct the image they would project. It also represented a manner of expression or supplement to voice for a group restricted and discouraged from expressing itself publicly” (7-8). For the nineteenth-century women Mattingly investigates, certain forms of dress, such as the mid-century “Bloomer” outfit, helped them to establish and justify a public, rather than domestic, space for female rhetors (47). The sociopolitical context Pantsuit Nation members face is quite different from and considerably more open to women’s public and political presence than nineteenth-century America. Nonetheless, the members of Pantsuit Nation demonstrate a similar belief in the ability of dress to establish an identity for themselves as individuals and as members of a feminist collective, at times “as an expression or substitute to voice” (8). The use of the pantsuit as a means of not just wearing but embodying a political statement is, in many ways, a remarkably safe strategy; although once a symbol of women’s movement into the professional sector, the pantsuit is by now ubiquitous, though not trendy. Yet, in a society where women are repeatedly told that fashion is a medium of self-expression and self-presentation, the pantsuit symbol does allow women an easy-access, low-risk way to make a visual, rhetorical statement about themselves and their values. Moreover, the fact that contributors quickly re-defined the “pantsuit” as a variety of different types of outfits that correlated to jobs or religious or lifestyle affiliations speaks to the fact that the women of Pantsuit Nation saw an implied symbol behind the pantsuit Chamberlain invoked: clothing that in some way “voiced” public, professional, social, or political values. A pantsuit could be personalized – like all of the politics in the group – and still allow the wearer to display a political persona and to tell a story.

Some contributors articulate meaningful connections between the images they include in their posts, including the pantsuit they wear, and their own sense of clothing as a rhetorical and political tool. One election-day contributor, for instance, posts a picture of herself in a pantsuit, noting that although she is afraid to start a conversation about politics, she feels stronger wearing the pantsuit that so many other community members are wearing as well. A June contributor echoes this post, outlining her journey into a career in politics

and declaring that she feels as though, in wearing a pantsuit, she is both representing and taking the Pantsuit Nation community with her to work. Both posts generated a great deal of response: two thousand people reacted to the June post and provided comments of support and excitement. Indeed, the continuing popularity of this post type suggests how much contributors wanted to see themselves, and more importantly for others to see them, as feminists, as activists.

It is important to note, however, that while many contributors used the image of the pantsuit, in whatever form, to make such clear connections between their story and feminist identity, some contributors also use the image as a replacement for personal narrative and omit any critical consideration of the relationship between their appearance and a sociopolitical ethos. The activity within Pantsuit Nation is extensive, and some of its features very simple posts that consist of little more than a picture of a member wearing a pantsuit or carrying a protest sign or donning a voting sticker. The Facebook platform and the pantsuit story thus provide members with an easy and uncritical way to enter the community, but do not necessarily demand a great deal of engagement on their part. It is only through the interaction of other members and the work of moderators, who boost posts like the two described above by commenting on them and advertising them on the public page, that the group establishes a preference for more developed stories and picture posts. Likewise, the broad invitation for members to introduce themselves to the community through a story, whether textual or image-based, opens the door to the critical inclusion of a diverse range of visual and textual stories that could help all members better understand what an intersectional, digital feminism might look like. Again, however, the sheer size of the group enabled by the digital platform and the fact that the moderators intentionally set guidelines for participation that are broad, inclusive, and supportive-by-necessity, means that it is just as easy for Pantsuit Nation members to be uncritical in their contributions and interactions. Much as Cynthia L. Selfe articulates in her explorations of how digital tools shape and reshape composition studies, what private social media groups like Pantsuit Nation most clearly present to contemporary feminist movements is a system of affordances that participants may or may not use.

Telling Stories that Empower: Motherhood and History

Importantly, one of the possibilities that digital spaces like private Facebook groups afford their participants are multiple options for entry. So, while many participants take advantage of Pantsuit Nation's call for storytelling

as activism to articulate a story about who they are and correspondingly why they espouse certain social and political ideals, other contributions to the group include narratives accounts of motherhood and the writer's family history. Participants not only use these histories and motherhood stories to explain their individual feminist and political values, but also to validate and justify an implicit argument that a specific goal or goals should be important to all women.

In invoking motherhood as the foundation for an argument about political and feminist activity, many contributors set up a problematic assumption that the majority of Pantsuit Nation members will identify with mothering experiences. Nonetheless, motherhood themes and references work their way into a vast array of contributions to Pantsuit Nation, where contributors reframe their identity as mothers as a core component of their identity as feminists and activists. In this, the contributors to Pantsuit Nation are returning to an old practice, visible, for example, in rhetorical constructions of a Republican motherhood in the 18th century and in articulations of the "cult of domesticity" in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Broadly speaking, both paradigms reinforced conservative beliefs about the importance of a domestic sphere for women, while simultaneously suggesting that, in protecting families and especially children, women had a stake in the outcome political and social movements. Lindal Buchanan, in *Rhetorics of Motherhood* and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, in "Social Constructions of Mothering: A Thematic Overview," interrogate historical models of motherhood, delineating it as a cultural construction with deep symbolic power that always serves to relegate the (lower) status of women within a patriarchal society. Nonetheless, Buchanan makes clear that appeals to a common motherhood have also been effectively used to build community and support by "encourage[ing] identification and [inspiring] a predetermined emotional response" (6). Likewise, in describing the ways women of the Women's Christian Temperance Union redeployed conventional ideals of womanhood in order to make their arguments and activities compelling for a wide audience, Carol Mattingly notes that "WCTU women also deftly made use of women's prescribed role both to establish their authority and to challenge traditional limits for women, thereby refashioning an image of women that better satisfied their own needs and wishes" (*Well-Tempered* 40). In this way, ideals of motherhood have been constructed and manipulated by women's groups in the past to establish common ground and lend authority to their mission.

The contributors of Pantsuit Nation make use of a similar strategy, framing their own narratives of motherhood to support and validate own social and political values, and to argue that other members of the community should espouse the same goals. One contributor to the private group and to

the book, Anna Allen, submits a picture of her four daughters and asserts that “I’m with her because I want them to always know that they are the ones who are able to make their own decisions about their bodies. . . . I’m with her because I want them to always be kind and respectful and loving of all people regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, and everything in between” (Chamberlain 59). The emotional response the post creator no doubt hoped for was achieved in a volley of comments of support and praise for the children. It is equally clear, however, that Allen’s strategy of writing as a mother has allowed her to safely, even altruistically, articulate her own political and social values, values she would like to insist should be learned and adopted by the country at large. By rhetorically structuring a political assertion as the hopes or fears of a mother, contributors like Allen protect their claims from any real dissent. At the same time, however, in claiming political agency as part of a motherly ethos, these contributors suggest or imply discomfort in claiming those rights for themselves. Talamieka N. Charles Brice, for instance, a frequent and prominent contributor to the group, to the book, and even to the *Pantsuit Nation* podcast, asserts in one post, featuring a picture of her holding her young son, that she will “fight like hell” for her son and exhorts readers that “if you care about our country, our future, you will do the same,” effectively calling on other women in the community to build on their identity as mothers to also become activists (Chamberlain 242). It is important to note, as well, that for many participants, motherhood narratives like Brice’s are compelling and effective; Brice’s post quoted here elicited 39 thousand reactions and nearly five thousand comments.

While Buchanan’s examination of the rhetoric of motherhood prompts her to contend, correctly, that motherhood is often “coded in ways that disregard intersectional differences [and] create institutional impediments for non-traditional women,” some writers, like Brice, actually use descriptions of their experiences as mothers as a means of representing complex racial, sexual, cultural, and bodily identities (21). Brice, for instance, whose post was quoted above, crafts a purpose for her text that is rooted in her identity as the mother of a son who will be “in the blink of an eye . . . a black man” (Chamberlain 242). She uses the frame of her concern as a mother to reflect on her awareness of, and teach community members about, the cultural narratives surrounding black manhood: “born into a narrative he did not create” (Chamberlain 242). Comments on her post reflect the community’s recognition of the value of her reflection, with some commenters suggesting that all community members need to read the post. Moderators further promoted Brice’s story by adding their own supportive comments, and then inviting her to join them on the public *Pantsuit Nation* podcast and contribute to the book. In this way, Chamberlain and other moderators use their influence to encourage the *Pantsuit Nation*

community to use narratives of motherhood to incite and extend discussion of intersectional issues. Brice, moreover, was not the only contributor to use their story of motherhood to raise awareness for other important issues that women face. Numerous contributors describe their concern for their children's encounters with normative gender identities or challenges in seeking citizenship, while other contributors describe their experience in parenting with a same-sex or transgender partner. Motherhood and parenthood, in these posts, becomes the vehicle through which a diverse range of writers can claim a shared identity, emotional life, and sociopolitical mission with the other members of *Pantsuit Nation*, while at the same time highlighting issues of difference. Stories like Brice's function to make visible the reality that Patricia Hill Collins describes in her exploration in "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood" where she makes clear that "motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender, . . . racial domination and economic exploitation profoundly shape the mothering context, not only for racial ethnic women in the United States, but for all women" (45).

The moderators of *Pantsuit Nation* are eager to promote and celebrate discussion of the "interlocking structures of race, class, and gender" in members' experiences of motherhood. Yet, it is equally clear that the use of motherhood stories in *Pantsuit Nation* is problematic: because these stories often reinforce simplistic gender binaries and heteronormative expectations, and because, as with the identity-based stories described in the previous section, the mandate to demonstrate only kindness and support in commenting practices discourages critical discussions of how privilege and context shape mothering experiences. Glenn, Buchanan, Collins, and Linda Kerber all examine how ideals of motherhood operate on problematic binaries that disadvantage women. Kerber, reflecting on the influence of theories of Republican motherhood, contends that part of what limits such perspectives is that "women could claim political participation only so long as they kept their politics in the service of the men in their family, using it to ensure republican authenticity on the part of their husbands and their sons" (25). While the stories in *Pantsuit Nation* obviously extend that service to include daughters, contributors like Allen and Brice do situate the purpose of their activist work as residing almost exclusively in the welfare of their children. Moreover, in centering the emotional appeal of their posts and the goals of the feminist community on the needs and wellbeing of children, many of these contributors demonstrate an assumption that, in speaking to a feminist community, they are necessarily speaking to a community of mothers. In this way, the popularity of the motherhood experience as a narrative frame and the relative absence of posts that might act as counterstories deemphasizing the primacy of motherhood as

the foundation of a feminist mission serves to implicitly reinforce what Lee Edelman has described as a heteronormative, “compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (21). For Edelman, such “compulsory narratives” are situated as impossible to argue against and, as is visible in the Pantsuit Nation posts quoted previously, privilege the imagining of the rights of future generations over the freedoms of current (adult) persons.

Moreover, while the book and the official Pantsuit Nation page are filled with mother-stories representing racial, religious, and sexual diversity, many contributions to the private group do not list considerations of racial discrimination or fears for immigration status. More importantly, since the guidelines for interaction in the group discourage members for critiquing one another, posts featuring motherhood stories that offer an uncritical reflection of white, heteronormative privilege do not inspire any kind of discussion highlighting this privilege or pointing out how such narratives might contrast with the counterstories provided by contributors like Brice. Collins argues that “survival, power and identity shape motherhood for all women. But these themes remain muted when the mothering experiences of women of color are marginalized,” and subsequently argues that re-centering our focus on the experiences of minority mothers serves to broaden and deepen our understanding of motherhood as a whole (61). While Pantsuit Nation does not marginalize the mothering experiences of women of color, the functioning of the digital platform, which deemphasizes tension and makes the intentional organization of posts impossible – since posts appear first in order of submission and then shuffle in prominence based on the reactions of community members – means that complex, critical considerations of motherhood and feminist purpose are not always centered in the content of the group.

At times interlinked to the conception of political motherhood insofar as contributors reflect on their own mothers and grandmothers, the articulation of a familial history is another common narrative frame used by members of Pantsuit Nation to claim authority and purpose. From the very first days of the private group, Pantsuit Nation writers presented stories and images of family members who had inspired them to take political action or who had “paved the way” for the possibilities now available to them as women. In the introduction to her edited collection, Chamberlain draws attention to a small selection of posts (including a couple mother-oriented ones), but the first three posts she describes as excellent exemplars of storytelling are histories of women who struggled with, and at times defied, cultural expectations for women. Chamberlain particularly mentions reading about “Hank,” the grandmother of an early contributor, Susan. Susan’s post features a picture of her grandmother, Henrietta, in a stewardess uniform in front of a TWA plane. She describes Henrietta’s journey into medical school in the 1930’s and, ultimately,

her life as a mother and science teacher, but reflects, more importantly, on her own understanding of Henrietta's experience: "For a long time, it was hard for me to understand why she quit and got married – quitting wasn't her style. Then one day I read the scrapbook she kept from her time at med school, including the news articles and letters. It floored me. Blatant sexism oozes from every word. I started to understand the overwhelming forces she was pushing against" (Chamberlain 33). Susan then describes her vote for Hillary Clinton as being in dedication for "my single mother who had a career on Capitol Hill and fought for universal healthcare, and for my Grandma Retta. She would have made one heck of a doctor" (Chamberlain 33). Frequently alongside black-and-white pictures, posts like Susan's craft a history of women's experience, telling stories of women who struggled against systemic sexism, who died from unsafe abortions, who immigrated to a new country, or who wanted to vote or attend law school. Writers craft these stories to serve as an argument for the relevance of a particular cause for women in the digital community and feminists in general, whether it be the importance of reproductive rights or the necessity of immigration reform.

Of all the strategies employed by the participants in *Pantsuit Nation*, telling of a family history seems the least bound up in negative and contradictory implications, as is the case with contributors' use of motherhood. Many posts consist almost entirely of the story of a female relative, and conclude with a declaration that "I'm with her because of them" (Chamberlain 13). The stories contributors weave illustrate their dawning understanding of the challenges these women faced in an unjust society and, correspondingly, contributors' desire to take advantage of the opportunities denied to their predecessors and to ensure that future women have equal or more freedom. Lauren, for example, introduces her grandmother, Elizabeth Cavanaugh, who "wanted to go to be a lawyer, but was sent to secretarial school" (Chamberlain 13). She describes her grandmother's pride when she herself graduated from law school, "watching her granddaughter have the opportunity she never had," and then, like many other contributors, Lauren asserts that in "voting in a pantsuit on November 8 in memory of my grandma" she is both honoring the disadvantages her grandmother faced and ensuring a more gender equal society in future (Chamberlain 13). Deborah Leoci, likewise, includes a picture of her grandmother as a young woman and recounts that she "never got to meet [her] because she died after having an abortion during the Depression" and then declares that "I'm with her because I do not want to go back to the Dark Ages. I voted in her memory. Let's go forward and continue to support and love one another because we're better together!" (Chamberlain 64). Invoking one of Clinton's campaign slogans, Leoci condemns the lack of reproductive choices faced by her grandmother and calls on other members of *Pantsuit*

Nation to “go forward,” presumably to work to ensure greater reproductive freedom for women. Importantly, the narratives Leoci, Lauren, and Susan construct, do not call for political or feminist action in the name of their children, but rather use the challenges faced by their grandmothers to argue for the necessity of an equal and just society for themselves and other members of the Pantsuit Nation community.

As a member and researcher of Pantsuit Nation, these family histories were also my favorite narrative, perhaps because these posts offered visual and narrative evidence of a community outside the boundaries of the Facebook group. Ideals of motherhood are powerful, if limiting, but the writing of a history and the creation of a legacy has a legitimizing power too. And, of course, part of the power of this particular rhetorical strategy is that it provides contributors the autonomy and authority to craft that historical reflection in a way that serves their present goals. One December 2017 contributor to the private group, for example, shared a reflection on her grandmother who was a Democrat and civil rights advocate. Admitting that it is difficult for her to imagine the realities of her grandmother’s life, as a Jewish woman in turn-of-the-century Alabama, the writer nevertheless asserts that she is certain her grandmother would be proud of her, would have voted for a recent state Democratic candidate, and joined the writer and her family at the Women’s March. Many other writers make use of a similar strategy: simultaneously uncovering and celebrating an ancestor or older family member, and then using that sense of history to support and justify the writer’s current political endeavors. Here, the writers of Pantsuit Nation recreate a history of women’s experiences for their digital community, an act that, like wearing a pantsuit and establishing their authority as mothers, makes them feel powerful.

Storytelling and Activism

Beginning with the Women’s March in January 2017, a new narrative emerged on Pantsuit Nation: stories of a participant’s recent civic or political activity. During the weekend of the Women’s March (January 21), in particular, it became obvious that many members of Pantsuit Nation were also participants in the Women’s March group as well. In presenting and describing their political activity offline, participants used these stories about political activity as a means of making specific political and social stances visible to the community, much as they did with the other narrative frames dominant in the group. In addition, however, numerous contributors sought use their story of political or social action to inspire other community members to act, and to educate them in how to do so. In this way, Pantsuit Nation participants address one of the primary critiques of political groups on social media: that they

replace traditional, offline action with ineffective discussion among members who already agree with one another and share very similar experiences.

The nature of the activities described varies, but, most frequently, posts in the private group about political action center around the writer's first experience calling a state representative, voting for a certain candidate, or volunteering to help at the polls. Posts in the public group highlight community members who are running for office or organizing groups in their (offline) local communities. No matter the activity described, these posts emphasize the contributor's personal desire to make a difference in a specific way and offer strong encouragement for other members to act similarly. In a December 2017 post in the private group, for instance, one of many contributors shares her first experience calling a state representative. She offers a description of the phone call itself and reflects on her own emotional journey; first describing her anxiety about making the call and her wish to honor her grandmother's memory by overcoming this fear, the contributor ultimately asserts that the act made her feel powerful. This particular contributor is not alone; many posts in *Pantsuit Nation* offer similar narratives where the writer describes their anxiety in calling a representative for the first time and their sense of accomplishment afterwards. Comments on these posts commonly feature other members indicating that they too have begun calling representatives and, often, post threads feature members contributing information about how to make such calls and what to say. Similarly, many posts feature pictures of the contributors leaving a voting station, adorned with the requisite sticker, and describe the writers' sense of pride either in being a lone "blue dot" in a red state. It is common, likewise, on the private and public pages for contributors and moderators to circulate information about upcoming elections. At times, these posts present straightforward information, rather than a story. However, more commonly, contributors provide stories about why they are voting a particular way or why they decided to run for election.

Moderators often further promote these posts by adding them to the public page as well. In November 2017, for example, the public page featured a story by Aryanna Berringer. As other members had previously done, Berringer introduces herself to the community wearing a sweatshirt declaring "this is what a veteran looks like" and offers a description of her history: "I grew up poor with a dad who was black and mom who is white. I went to war. Got out, got a job and joined my union. I went to college." Berringer then describes her sense of purpose in running for office:

I think it's time we start electing people who understand what it means to be the very backbone of our economy. . . . By all accounts, given where I started in life, my family should be generations away from

ever running for office. But here I am. I am running for Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania because if we are ever going to change the hearts and minds of politicians who sit around the table making all the decisions, then it's time we had someone at the table who has firsthand experience at how those decisions can affect your life.

In this way, Berringer uses her story to make an argument to the community about the need for more diverse representation in the government. While the Pantsuit Nation group does not necessarily overlap with the population who could actually help elect Berringer, the social media group does give her a large community of support – on the private page, her post generated three thousand comments of support and of agreement with her argument – and a large platform to share her argument about the value of women's and minority leadership.

The connection between social media groups and subsequent offline activism and political activity is a relatively new subject of study. Research conducted by Thomas J Johnson, et al. (2011), Summer Harlow (2011), Bart Cammaerts (2011), Dana Rotman, et al. (2011), and Georgetown University's *Dynamics of Cause Engagement* research initiative has examined the extent to which political interaction on social media correlates or supports offline political activity. Johnson, et al., in particular, found that while political engagement on social media did not necessarily predict political activity, social media use did correlate to civic activity, such as volunteering for local organizations, and serve as a way for those already interested in political action to find and circulate information (187). Harlow, Rotman, et al., and the *Dynamics of Cause Engagement* study, however, suggest that there is a correlation, if not causation, between social media activity and offline political activity. Data from *Dynamics of Cause Engagement* reveal that, from a research population of 2,000 Americans over the age of eighteen, "social media promoters" are "twice as likely to volunteer their time (30% vs. 15%) and to take part in an event or walk (25% vs. 11%) [and] they are more than four times as likely to encourage others to contact political representatives (22% vs. 5%) and five times as likely to recruit others to sign petitions for a cause or social issue (20% vs. 4%)" ("Slacktivists," 1). These data suggest that the contributors to groups such as Pantsuit Nation are as likely or more likely to engage in social and political activity offline, as the posts to Pantsuit Nation attest. This is not to say that all members of Pantsuit Nation participate equally – in the Facebook group or in offline activities – but rather that the high-profile contributions to the group and the narrative preferences of the group do support political action beyond the confines of social media.

Importantly, Pantsuit Nation moderators are keen to promote stories of political activity and regularly encourage members to post such narratives:

by asking directly, by posting information about how to call representatives or contribute to a cause, by posting stories about their own efforts to enact change offline, and by promoting certain member stories, like Berringer's, on the public side of the group. In this, the moderators and "high profile" contributors behave in a way similar to what Harlow found in "Social Media and Social Movements: Facebook and an Online Guatemalan Justice Movement that Moved Offline" where she discovered a difference in behavior between low-frequency and high-frequency contributors; the less-engaged members of the Facebook group might, indeed, have been critiqued as "slacktivists," but, by contrast, "the online Facebook activity of high-frequency posters also translated into offline participation . . . [and they] likewise were successful in their attempts to engage others, as their comments, which were more likely to be motivational and a call to arms, were 'liked,' or endorsed, more often" (238). One of the characteristics of social media groups like Pantsuit Nation is their size and diversity of population. This trait is valuable in that it affords participants the ability to circulate a broad range of ideas among a large membership, but the size of their populations also means that the group inspires varying levels of participation. Harlow's study suggests that those members most active and visible in the group are also likely to be individuals who are also active offline in their communities or in running for office. It is impossible to know the overall effect of social media groups on such individuals: whether online activity is just an extension of their ongoing political engagement or whether participation in groups like Pantsuit Nation serve a purpose in supporting and encouraging them to become more active. In late 2017, Chamberlain posted a survey to the private group in an attempt to learn just this: how members had used the Pantsuit Nation group and how it might have influenced their offline decisions. By the end of 2017, participation in this survey revealed that over 7,700 "relied on Pantsuit Nation for self-care," while over 7,400 reported that because of their participation in Pantsuit Nation they had "learned about a progressive organization or individual" and over 6,500 reported that they "participated in a political action (calling reps, etc.)." Over 5,000 respondents also said that they had attended a march or community event, or donated to a nonprofit or a candidate. One hundred and ten people reported that they decided to run for office "because of, at least in part, Pantsuit Nation." Given that the total membership of the group is about 3 million, these numbers are relatively small. Nonetheless, the survey results do suggest that for a contingent of active members, perhaps similar to those "high-frequency posters" Harlow studied, participation in and contribution to the Facebook group was a part of their movement offline into political action.

Storytelling is activism. Some members of the Pantsuit Nation group dismiss Chamberlain's claim that, in sharing stories, the participants of that

digital community were engaging in a powerful and political act. And this dismissal is not without merit. Pantsuit Nation, as a private Facebook community, places obvious limits on the circulation of the stories it claims are so powerful. Does participation only within a private group of fellow participants count as activism? Not all members of the group would give the same answer. In "The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation," W. Lance Bennett discusses the rise of "personalized politics" through social media. Bennett argues that the personalization of politics has been defined in part by "the rise of crowd-sourced inclusive personal action frames (e.g., "We are the 99%") that lower the barriers of identification" where participation is "channeled through often dense social networks over which people can share their own stories and concerns" (21, 22). Bennett further argues that the prevalence of personalized, political social networks can be problematic: on digital platforms with limited leadership and an emphasis on emotion over evidence "participants can pick their own outlets for anger," leading to fragmented rather than collective participation and goals (23). Such a critique could certainly be aimed at Pantsuit Nation, whose original mission – "wear a pantsuit on November 8 – *you know why*" (Chamberlain 1, emphasis mine) – was broad and an open invitation for members to provide their own individual answers for, or rather stories about, the political and social values of the group. This phrasing was intentional on the part of the group creators and is valuable in that it allows for many members to feel included. This mission of intent also failed to define, at the outset, the diverse and intersectional cause, and the push for offline activity, that Pantsuit Nation executives would later create and try to promote.

Even a casual survey of the private Facebook group in early 2017 would demonstrate that posters to Pantsuit Nation were overwhelmingly white. The whiteness of the Pantsuit Nation group was an is a symptom of already present social segregation rather than conscious creator intent. The group was originally created by a white woman for her friends, and subsequent Facebook users could only join the group if one of their friends was already a member. Thus, the demographics of the group was and is a reflection of an ever-extending friend circle originating with Chamberlain herself. Given this membership structure, it is no surprise that the make-up of Pantsuit Nation resembles Chamberlain and her friends. The Women's March, which also began on Facebook, was also disproportionately white. Undeniably, the struggle of Pantsuit Nation and the Women's March to cultivate a diverse membership in the beginning represents a significant downfall of social media-based political groups as they are currently structured, one that future social media organizers and contributors will have to recognize and consciously work against.

At the same time, Chamberlain and group moderators did work hard, after the fact, to create a diverse group of moderators and executives, and, more importantly, to promote contributions that highlighted the importance of race, class, and sexuality in feminist politics. One such post, by Grace, was featured prominently in the *Pantsuit Nation* book and demonstrates the extent to which the early Pantsuit Nation community was troubled by a lack of diversity and by members who did not agree on the importance of intersectional feminism. Grace begins by noting that “I have seen many posts saying, ‘We are all women,’ ‘I don’t see color,’ or ‘What does race have to do with anything?’ This is not only dismissive, it’s color-blind and very hurtful” (Chamberlain 146). The rest of the content of Grace’s post offers readers a lesson on privilege, racism, microaggressions, and intersectional feminism. The post generated a great deal of response on the private group before it was featured in the book, and is one of many examples of posts that were conspicuously re-promoted on the public side of Pantsuit Nation as moderators worked both to define the group as intersectionally feminist and to encourage more members to submit personal narratives that supported this mission.

Regular surveys of my own Pantsuit Nation feed reveal that, over time, more posts did indeed present narratives and identities complicated by intersections race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The structure of private Facebook groups makes it difficult to systematically research the posting history of the group page; research is best done “in real time” as group members actually participate. While the posts will always exist, it is impossible to conduct a search within a specified period: a search for “June,” for instance, will not generate a list of posts time-stamped from the month of June. Likewise, the sheer volume of posts, and the ability of commenters to move old posts forward on the timeline, means that it is also nearly impossible to retroactively read through the year-long timeline of the group. Thus, in order to track the overall progression of themes and topics in the group, I needed to regularly check in to the page, making notes and copying content to save at the time of their posting. There are obvious limitations to this research method. Nonetheless, the discussion I was able to track in my own Facebook feed indicates that by 2018 diverse, intersectional narratives were far more visible on Pantsuit Nation and were, additionally, far more likely to be reposted in public pages. This suggests that moderators were successful in reshaping the visible narratives of Pantsuit Nation and demonstrates the important role moderators and high-frequency contributors play in ensuring that the stories and discussions in digital groups reflect the experiences of a diverse range of women. While digital footprints remain indefinitely, social media platforms revolve around the content that is immediately current and popular. Moderators can use this function to revise the ongoing narratives that are defining the

identities and values of social media communities by boosting contributions that feature the stories they value and by explicitly calling for members to submit more contributions of this type, as the leaders of Pantsuit Nation did.

Thus, while the invitation-based membership structure and the storytelling focus of the group is always at risk of resulting in a fragmented sense of purpose or a homogenous representation of contributors, Pantsuit Nation also demonstrates the possibilities for digital groups to foster diversity and encourage offline engagement. Bart Cammearts, in "Technologies of Self-Mediation: Affordances and Constraints of Social Media for Protest Movements," reflects on the affordances and limitations of social media for promoting activism; he posits that traditional activist discourses "tend to be geared toward the building of collective identities, and they would generally advocate for collective solutions and call for collective actions. This is at odds with the individualistic and capitalist values inherent to the rationale and *raison d'être* of social media platforms" (106). The challenge Pantsuit Nation moderators faced in trying to, belatedly, establish a collective set of goals on a platform designed to be open to diverse, personal views and stories was significant. At the same time, however, this lack of cohesion means that participants are always still in the process of defining the space and can expand the narrative possibilities encouraged by the platform. The community discourse is always in flux, is continuously subject to commentary, revision, and recreation. While it would be a gross misrepresentation to suggest that the Pantsuit Nation group visibly presents *all* the diverse and complex stories of the 3.3 million members, it does succeed in presenting and inspiring multiple stories, and in so doing exposes Pantsuit Nation readers to a different set of narratives than they might have otherwise encountered on their general Facebook page. For some participants, too, these narratives, whether stories about wearing pantsuits, about mothers, histories, or political activity, offer information on important social issues and lessons in civic participation.

Moreover, members of Pantsuit Nation adopt and enjoy the power of storytelling on social media as a means of bringing themselves, their political and social goals, and their own histories into visibility in a broad digital community. Pantsuit Nation is not the only place they could do this as most participation on social media engages self-definition and narrative creation. What Pantsuit Nation offers, then, is an evolving set of narrative frameworks that participants can personalize and adapt, and a digital platform where moderators and members have never completed, and are always still in the process of, reshaping and redefining what the feminist community will look like.

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Learning from The Identity Project: Accountability-Based Strategies for Intersectional Analyses in Queer and Feminist Rhetoric

Laura Tetreault

Abstract: *This article forwards a rhetorical methodology based on the concept of accountability, responding to recent calls in rhetoric and composition for more work on activism across differences in positionality. An accountability-based framework for rhetorical analysis shifts the questions researchers of activist rhetorics can ask in order to foster practices that are more responsible to communities facing intersecting oppressions. To demonstrate this methodology, the article engages in an accountability-based rhetorical analysis of an example of queer digital arts activism, The Identity Project. Asking to whom and for what an example of activist rhetoric is accountable, in what ways, and with what effects can offer a productive way for researchers to analyze such rhetorics in a way that moves beyond a limiting oppression/resistance or assimilation/radicalism framework.*

Keywords: *Activist rhetorics; digital activism; activism; research methods; feminist rhetorics; intersectionality; queer rhetorics; race; colonialism; social justice*

Introduction

Recent media coverage has highlighted a specific trend in the use of LGBTQ identifications: a proliferation of creative and remixed terms for describing sexual and gender identifications. For example, Facebook now provides 58 unique options for users to identify their genders, with an additional option to write in their own if none of the pre-provided options fit (Wong). A 2013 *New York Times* article titled “Generation LGBTQIA” claims that younger activists are “forging a political identity all their own, often at odds with mainstream gay culture” by using creative terms to describe their gender and sexuality (Schulman). In 2014, responding to this growing public exigence to complicate understandings of LGBTQ identities, photographer Sarah Deragon started the digital project *The Identity Project*. The project consists of individual portrait photographs taken by Deragon, each paired with a written identity label chosen by the portrait subject to describe their queer identifications. As

Deragon states, the project “seeks to explore the labels we choose to identify with when defining our gender and sexuality” and looks in particular for “participants who are POC [people of color], trans*, bisexual, youth, elders, disabled, immigrants and otherwise identify outside of the mainstream lesbian and gay culture” (“FAQ”). The identity markers that participants choose often creatively combine identifications, such as “provocateur lesbian dandy,” “sassy switch femmeboi,” or “other queer unicorn,” and the project has become known as a telling example of this trend toward creative remixing in LGBTQ communities. Some of these terms only signify in the context of queer communities, or have different resonances there, while others invent new identifications. *The Identity Project* exists as a website consisting of photographs organized into galleries by the city where they were taken (U.S. cities with the exception of Taipei, Taiwan, and St. Petersburg, Russia, where Deragon was invited as part of an underground QueerFest) (identityprojectsf.com). As of this writing, the project has thirteen galleries and over 500 photographs. [See Fig. 1]



Fig. 1. *The Identity Project* website by Sarah Deragon.

The variety of identities represented in *The Identity Project* is framed in liberal media thinkpieces as evidence of a generational shift welcoming an expansive array of genders and sexualities. For instance, in its first year of existence, the project was covered in articles with headlines such as “27 Powerful Portraits Challenging the Definition of What It Means to Be LGBT” (Bennett-Smith); “‘Identity Project’ Portrait Series Redefines What It Means To

Be LGBTQ" (Riley); and "Powerful Photos Fearlessly Redefine What It Means to Be LGBTQIA+" (Everyday Feminism). These moves largely characterize the project as a force of change, "redefining" or "challenging" what it means to be LGBTQ or how these identities are understood in popular discourse. Many commentators deploy specific examples of identity labels in the project to illustrate the wide variety of identifications represented. Marisa Riley of *Bustle* writes, "Whether you're a "queer femme wifey," a "versatile dandy boyfriend," or anyone in between (or even lightyears away from 'between'), the possibilities are endless when it comes to gender and sexual identity." Referencing some of these possibilities, Jessica Nemire of *San Francisco Weekly* comments, "Participants have come up with every phrase from 'Genderweird Queerdo Carebear' to 'Black Gay Queer Feminist Cisgendered Man.'" Meredith Bennett-Smith of *Mic.com* lists: "Unicorn. Bottom. Dandy. These are just some of the many ways members of the LGBT community identify themselves." These commentators, shaping public discourse on *The Identity Project* within its first six months, specifically pull out identifications from the gallery's many labels that they mark as more uncommon than others.

The Identity Project presents a rhetorical understanding of queer identity terms as a resource for invention rather than a form of static representation; as Deragon explains, "This project, if anything, is showing the power of the invention of language, and how language, like our identity, is and can be ever changing and fluid" (qtd. in Tsou). Like many of the media commentators above, I was drawn to *The Identity Project* because of this creative, invention-based approach to queer identity labels, in addition to its celebration of queer self-definition as a form of resistance. However, the more I engaged with it, the more I also came to see the project's tensions and telling omissions, especially in terms of advocacy across differences in positionality. If identity terms can be resources for rhetorical invention, as *The Identity Project* conceives of them, then it is also necessary to ask where these resources come from and what they do as they circulate.

In some ways, *The Identity Project* could be framed as a rhetorical success, an instance of a marginalized group critiquing dominant, limiting conceptions of LGBTQ identity. The project has had a wide and overwhelmingly positive uptake in liberal, feminist, and queer digital media. It raised \$10,000 on the crowdfunding site Indiegogo, and it has traveled to numerous U.S. cities and has started to expand internationally. Photographs from the project have been exhibited in public spaces, such as the Russian QueerFest Exhibition and an LGBTQ History Month display at Ohio State University ("Cool"). The participant testimonials included on *The Identity Project* website express feelings of gratitude for a sense of validation ("Testimonials"). The project has also inspired spin-off projects internationally, including a popular version of

the project by photographers in France (“Cool”). If rhetoricians looked at this body of evidence of the project’s reception and diverse impacts, asking how it functions as a form of resistant rhetoric, we might draw conclusions celebrating the project as a queer intervention into dominant approaches to LGBTQ identities. Alternately, pointing perhaps to evidence of commodification such as *The Identity Project’s* collaboration with the vodka brand Smirnoff (“Love”), *The Identity Project* could be framed as ultimately too assimilative, ineffective as a queer rhetorical production because it is limited by a logic of visibility that includes more and more groups under the LGBTQ umbrella but does not change systemic oppressions (see Kopelson; Hennessy; Wingard). However, in this article, I want to consider what other questions scholars of activist rhetorics can ask to read this project and others in ways that do not stop at anti-assimilationist critique but that consider more complex questions of positionality and accountability to multiply marginalized communities.

The Identity Project articulates an activist mission to push against the normativization of some LGBTQ identities at the expense of others—specifically, increasing visibility and acceptance for mostly white gay and lesbian U.S. citizens who are able to assimilate into normative structures. For instance, advances in LGBTQ rights such as marriage equality continue to improve circumstances for those already privileged, but do little to improve the lives of populations such as queer and trans women of color. This normativization represents what Lisa Duggan has termed “homonormativity”: “A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions... but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (179). By representing LGBTQ identities beyond those usually most visible, *The Identity Project* attempts to resist not just hetero- but also homonormativity. As Deragon says in a media interview, “Because of the marriage equality push [...] I feel like the world is like, ‘OK, gay is OK. We got some people on *Grey’s Anatomy* and all this shit’—but it’s bigger than that. It’s almost like, ‘We’re still here. You think you know us, [but] you really don’t know us.’ I wanted the project to be very queer and provoking a conversation that we’re not done” (qtd in Tsou). This message—“You think you know us, [but] you really don’t know us”—is key to *The Identity Project’s* mission.

The Identity Project’s focus on activist goals like challenging homonormativity makes the project an example of what Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre describe as “digital activism.” Sandoval and Latorre frame such work as “a convergence between ‘activism’ and digital ‘artistic’ production” that is “created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism” (81-2). As Ana Milena Ribero and Adela C. Licona write, “The potential of digital art to create social change has garnered much attention from those who are

interested in the power of visual rhetorics in digital contexts" (160). Thus, as an example of digital art with activist goals, *The Identity Project* offers an interesting site for rhetorical analysis. In particular, *The Identity Project* raises generative questions about intersectionality in rhetorical production and analysis not only due to the wide variety of identities represented in its digital galleries, but also because of its white queer photographer's stated goal of advocating across differences in positionality.

The Identity Project attempts to counter homonormativity by representing LGBTQ identities beyond those commonly considered most normative, but it is limited in its ability to challenge dominant heteronormative *and* homonormative assumptions because both sets of assumptions are also inextricably connected to race, class, and other axes of identity and oppression. The project demonstrates the limits of some recovery projects: in the pressure to recover and celebrate some less visible gender- and sexuality-related identities, it is boxed into a mission of celebrating these identities and is structurally unable to critique any uses of identity terms. However, my purpose here is not to tear down *The Identity Project* through critique, or to celebrate it through recovery, but instead to ask what questions emerge from an intersectional reading of this project and what such a reading can tell rhetoricians about studying and producing activist rhetorics. In order to study complex activist productions in ways that enact social justice rather than reinforcing oppressions, rhetoricians need new methodological frameworks and tools for activist-oriented rhetorical analysis that help us work across differences in positionality. In this article, I offer a methodological framework for rhetorical analysis grounded in the concept of accountability.

Intersectionality and Accountability in Queer and Feminist Rhetorics

Intersectionality, a concept rooted in Black Feminist traditions, is crucial to accountability. Intersectionality aims to understand and critique how multiple axes of power interact to shape lived experiences of oppression (see Combahee; Collins; Crenshaw; Davis). In the decades since Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to understand Black women's experiences in the legal system, it has become a widely mobilized term in feminist discourse but also a buzzword in popular culture. Especially since the 2016 presidential election, intersectionality has often been referenced in popular media in a limiting way that focuses only on representing overlapping identities but not on developing critical interventions into power structures. As women and gender studies scholar Vivian May writes about the concept of intersectionality, "being

widely talked about does not necessarily signal changed social, philosophical, or institutional relations" (94).

In rhetoric and composition, recent conversations about cross-community work have focused on how rhetoricians can develop better tools for intersectional analyses. For example, from a queer rhetorics perspective, Eric Darnell Pritchard argues that "disrupting hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity cannot be fully accomplished if we only reinforce normative power by treating heteronormativity as an exclusively sexuality-based phenomenon, ignoring the way in which it remakes itself through race, ethnic, gender, class, ability, or national hierarchies in the moving target of power and privilege along identity lines" (43). David Wallace asks how rhetoricians can engage in "responsible cross-boundary discourse" given "that very few of us are disenfranchised or privileged in all situations" (547). Adela Licona and Karma R. Chávez foreground the importance of relationality and "rhetorical processes within and for coalition building" across axes of embodied difference (104). In the study of digital rhetorical productions, Jennifer Sano-Franchini argues that rhetoricians need more strategies to "not only do analysis but also build a heuristic for a more culturally reflexive approach to analyzing, producing, and organizing bodies in digital texts" (55), and Leah DiNatale Gutenson and Michelle Bachelor Robinson argue that those who study digital spaces need ways to "become race-cognizant multimodal scholars" (87). As these scholars show, rhetoric and composition is engaging in conversations about how to become more inclusive, build coalitions, work across axes of difference, and become more aware of how differences interact, all with the goal of developing concrete actions out of this awareness. There is a clear need for more explicit methodologies designed for analyzing activist rhetorics, especially across differences in positionality.

I am a white, queer, able-bodied, cisgender woman and a United States citizen who has benefited from colonialism. I must remain actively engaged in examining my own positionality and how I live in relationality with others with differing backgrounds in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, and other axes of identity. Further, I am committed not just to an examination or summary of my own positions and privileges, but also to finding ways to advocate for oppressed communities across differences in positionality. One place I can start is in the academic context of my own daily life. I acknowledge and disrupt the academy's complicity in oppression as a colonialist structure, and do not pretend that this deeply entrenched oppression can change through any one scholarly practice. However, the difficulty of change, intensified by the weight of oppressive histories, does not excuse scholars from developing ways to intervene and imagine more equitable futures. In this article, I attempt

to use my position as a scholar of activist rhetoric to develop one such intervention into the academic study of cross-community advocacy.

Rhetorical scholarship needs more work on how communities advocate for each other in the context of intersecting power dynamics—and how they sometimes miss opportunities to do so. Even within groups united by resistance to a particular form of oppression (e.g., heteronormativity), there are complex dynamics at play that raise questions of how rhetors can advocate not only for themselves but also as allies to others. As Victor Del Hierro, Daisy Levy, and Margaret Price explain from a cultural rhetorics perspective, being allies means “understanding—and feeling—what it means to interact in a space where every person is coming from multiple, overlapping communities and identities; where no one occupies the center or the margin all the time; and where privilege and oppression overlay one another like stitches in a knitted shawl” (5-6). Dynamics of positionality change according to the context, including who is present, what the purposes and goals of the group are, and other factors. In the study of activist rhetorics, rhetoricians are in a position to intervene in complex discussions about advocacy and positionality as they unfold in the contexts of our own research sites and other spaces, but we also need to be better equipped to work across differences in a way that aims not only for more inclusion, but more accountability.

The Identity Project offers an occasion for thought about tensions between inclusion and accountability in activist rhetorics, with implications for intersectional queer and feminist work. As a digital activist production, *The Identity Project* reveals these tensions well: it is a project by a white queer artist that aims to challenge homonormativity by *including* an enormous array of overlapping identities, with attention to how race, class, ability, and other axes intersect with queerness, but the project is also not necessarily structurally equipped to enact *accountability* to marginalized queer populations. However, a critique that ends only by pointing out the limits of inclusion-based activist claims is inadequate. Rather, a methodology of accountability allows rhetoricians to ask more complex questions about activist productions from an intersectional perspective.

A Methodology of Accountability: Beyond an Oppression/Resistance and Assimilation/Radicalism Model

Conversations about activist rhetorics have often scripted such rhetorics into two related sets of binaries: oppression/resistance and assimilation/radicalism. In the oppression/resistance binary, a marginalized population uses rhetorical action to resist a form of top-down oppression, and rhetorical critics

might evaluate the action based on whether or not it is successful in its articulated goal of resistance. In a related binary, activist rhetorics are often evaluated based on whether they are too assimilationist—making inclusion-based claims or assimilating into the dominant, rather than challenging dominating structures—or whether they are successfully radical in terms of disrupting structures. As Pritchard explains, “The dichotomous ‘oppression then resistance’ model is the way that literacy practices of people from oppressed and marginalized groups are generally rendered,” but this model is limited because it scripts marginalized groups’ rhetorical actions into “reductive narratives that show literacy use solely for resistance to or defiance of oppression and marginality,” ignoring a much wider array of purposes (37). Further, an assimilationist/radical model measures rhetorical resistance by the degree to which it is able to counter the dominant, rendering both of these spheres more monolithic than they are and leading to analyses that either celebrate a rhetorical action as radically resistant or critique it for assimilating into the dominant. This binary is itself a product of colonialist logic that ignores the complex webs of relationality behind any rhetorical action (see Powell; Riley-Mukavetz).

Stopping at the critique of a rhetorical production as assimilationist or celebration of such a production as radical misses other questions rhetoricians can ask that more accurately and responsibly explore how those in positions constructed by intersecting oppressions enact resistance, who is centered in that resistance, and with what effects. As Julie A. Bokser argues for feminist rhetoric, it can be especially productive to refuse characterizations of a rhetor or their work as either wholly “subversive iconoclast” or “purveyor of hegemony” (146) and instead engage in readings that examine how resistant and dominant discourses are interwoven in particular contexts. From a queer perspective, Jean Bessette argues that instead of a binary “oppositional, reactionary orientation of queerness against normativity” (150), rhetoricians can contribute a contextual view of queerness that allows us to ask not whether something is queer or normative once and for all, but instead “Queer to whom? When? Where, and how? Normative to whom? When? Where, and how?” (157). This framework of refusing a queer/normative binary pushes us to ask more complex questions about how queerness is contingent and connected at different times—in both marked and unmarked ways—to various discourses, ideologies, and other aspects of identity.

Such a contextual focus is certainly helpful for studying and crafting activist messaging. However, in order to balance the need for rhetoric capable of both widespread systemic critique and improving specific material conditions for those most vulnerable, rhetoricians need not only to ask what is queer and normative to whom across space and time, but also to ask to what degree does an example of activist rhetoric center its most vulnerable communities

and with what impacts. This move helps take rhetorical analyses beyond deconstruction, which tends to ask only what we are tearing down or critiquing and stops there (Powell; Riley-Mukavetz). A move beyond deconstruction requires a commitment to ask what futures can be built after critique, and a social justice approach asks how these futures can center the needs of those who have been oppressed. Such an approach also aligns with a decolonial orientation to activist and academic work, a focus of cultural rhetorics. For example, in “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics,” The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab draws from Shawn Wilson’s understanding of decolonial practice as “both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist” (qtd in Powell et al). To move work in rhetorical analysis closer to this future-building orientation toward knowledge, rather than stopping at the practice of critique, rhetoricians need revised methodologies.

The major shift I am advocating here entails not only asking questions typical of rhetorical analysis, such as “what audience(s) is this speaking to?”, “what kinds of appeals are present here, and how does this construct its appeals?”, and “what context(s) is this responding to?”, but supplementing these moves with close attention to questions like “to whom is this accountable?” Foregrounding accountability helps us answer not only questions like “for what audience(s) is this produced, when, and for what purposes?” but also more activist-oriented questions such as “whom does this rhetorical production center, and with what effects?” For instance, as author and activist Mia McKenzie, founder of Black Girl Dangerous Media, asserts, the experiences and perspectives of women of color, especially queer and trans women of color, “push feminist conversations to places where it would never be equipped to go,” and so “to be able to fully benefit from these analyses, they must be *centered*, not simply ‘included’” (“How Can”). Audience, of course, remains vital, but audience also has some troubling assimilationist threads that must be challenged. In asking to whom a rhetorical production appeals, we are often asking to what degree such a production is made hearable or unhearable by the dominant, and to what degree it is resistant. As Kristi McDuffe argues, rhetoricians sometimes evaluate the success of public rhetoric without “question[ing] these measures of success” (77). For instance, McDuffe explains that rhetoricians often focus on how an example of public rhetoric is “effective for a broad, hegemonic audience” but not how it might “affect marginalized populations, such as disenfranchised people of color” (82).

A methodology for rhetorical analysis based on accountability can lead rhetoricians to ask not only in what contexts a rhetorical production is resistant or dominant, assimilationist or radical, but also to whom it is accountable, what it is accountable for, who is positioned at the center, who is positioned

as marginal, and how these dynamics of accountability and positionality are rhetorically constructed and with what effects. The purpose of this strategy is to foster practices that enable rhetoricians not only to study and deconstruct social justice rhetorics, but also to *enact* social justice principles through our research by building accountability to vulnerable communities. In the following section, I develop this framework of accountability and then demonstrate an accountability-based rhetorical analysis of moments of cross-community tension in *The Identity Project*.

Defining Accountability for Activist Rhetorical Analysis

In rhetoric and composition, a strong body of scholarship in community engagement addresses how to build accountability to groups like community partners (Mathieu; Cushman; Ridolfo; Golblatt). Work in cultural rhetorics has also theorized accountability in community research, especially from a decolonial perspective. For example, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz draws on Wilson's concept of relational accountability as an indigenous research paradigm to develop a cultural rhetorics methodology for intercultural research (112). Here, I listen to and build alongside these cultural rhetorics approaches to researcher accountability through a methodological framework for rhetorical analysis. In rhetorical analysis—where researchers may deal with public texts, archival materials, or other artifacts without a specific community to interact with—researchers have few tools for unpacking how examples of public rhetoric enact or fail to enact accountability to threatened communities. In the case of rapidly changing and widely circulating digital rhetorics, enacting accountability becomes further complicated because communities may not be bounded by place, time, or shared identities and experiences, but may instead be disparate and constantly changing. However, power structures remain and rhetoricians still need ways to maintain accountability to multiply marginalized populations even in complex and ever-changing contexts like rhetorical analyses of digital activism.

Accountability is used as a concept in activist organizing to help facilitate conversations about oppression by foregrounding the experiences of those made most vulnerable by intersecting oppressions in a specific context and asking how other communities can be responsible to those most vulnerable (Johnson). Here, I use the term accountability specifically as it is theorized in transformative justice, an activist framework that develops responses to intra- and inter-community harm in ways that aim to *transform*, rather than *punish*, an individual or group that has engaged in oppressive behavior. Transformative justice a movement ideology that starts from the premise that

even oppressed communities do harm to each other, often through internalized power dynamics. Punitive responses to community harm only reinforce oppression because power works through punishment, in the form of state violence, policing, surveillance, and other mechanisms. In response to this need for creative ways to address harm that move beyond the punitive, transformative justice and trauma-informed activists have developed the concept of community accountability. As the radical feminist of color activist group INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence defines it, community accountability is a process through which a community can “commit to ongoing development of all members of the community, and the community itself, to transform the political conditions that reinforce oppression and violence.” Community members work toward this transformation by holding each other accountable for their actions and for how those actions can reinforce oppressive structures. Importantly, holding each other accountable does not mean making each other feel guilty or inflicting shame, but instead enacting a shared commitment to admitting complicity in oppression and ending oppressive practices.

This particular vision of community accountability emerges from the specific context of abuse and violence, but it has also been applied more broadly. As Chicana studies scholar Clarissa Rojas, co-editor of the INCITE anthology *Color of Violence*, writes: “community accountability is more than an antiviolence project. It is a liberation project that creates the potential and space for autonomous radical transformation in our lives and communities, seeking to transform the roots of violence” (79). Violence is understood here not only as a physical act, but also as psychological and as rhetorical: systemic inequity works insidiously and persuasively to inflict violence on those who are oppressed and to *normalize* this violence through the ways community members interact with each other. As Rojas writes, community accountability can be a pedagogical strategy as well—a way of learning to listen for evidence of violence, center those who have been wounded, and commit to moving forward in transformative ways (77). Such a strategy can also enrich rhetorical analysis and provide a tool for learning how to recognize violence.

Accountability works as a rhetorical methodology in the following ways. For one, it aligns with existing discussions of positionality and reflexivity in rhetorical analysis. For example, Krista Ratcliffe’s work on rhetorical listening includes accountability as one of the “fundamental rhetorical stances” offered through a rhetoric of listening meant to engage difference, building on bell hooks’ insistence that accountability is not meant to cause guilt or blame but rather to unite around a shared commitment to ending racism (“Racism” 158). However, an over-emphasis on listening can also potentially allow researchers to deflect responsibility and avoid action; for example, by placing too much of the burden on communities of color when they are constantly

asked to educate white communities. A deeper focus on accountability builds a way to supplement rhetorical listening with a more active allyship process. Accountability as a rhetorical methodology frames emotional reactions as a rhetorical exigence for self-interrogation, and insists that relations with others across differences in positionality and power are integral to rhetorical action. It also seeks to develop strategies to foster contextual awareness of who is vulnerable and in what ways, and how this shapes any interaction. Further, a focus on the impact on vulnerable communities becomes a key measure of a rhetorical action's efficacy, one that is especially suited to tracking rhetorical circulation. Accountability as a framework is also well suited to rhetorical analysis because practicing accountability is highly context-dependent. As Del Hierro, Levy, and Price explore, "Being conscious of our relationship to a discourse allows us to think about when we should center ourselves or when we should move to the margins" (4-5). In particular, interrogating who is rendered central and who is rendered marginal in a discourse can help ask how this discourse enacts or fails to enact accountability to threatened communities. The role of the researcher shifts beyond just being a critic and into a more responsible advocate.

In terms of rhetorical analysis, asking who is positioned at the center of a discourse invites us to consider how this positioning is constructed and with what effects, including what alternative effects might be possible if others were positioned at the center. For example, a feminist rhetoric that centers women of color deliberately places their experiences at the center of its messaging, leading to very different effects if it had instead centered white women. When struggles do not integrate frameworks that focus on those most vulnerable in a given context, this often leads to the reinforcement of a mainstream model of single-issue liberal politics that assumes what Cherríe Moraga calls a "trickle down effect" from the privileged to the less privileged, which actually only serves to improve circumstances for the privileged few while worsening conditions for all those who are left behind (xviii). Asking questions like *who is positioned at the center?* and *who is rendered marginal?* allow us to conduct more complex, intersectional analyses than those afforded by questions that might stop with "who is included?"

There are two important dimensions of accountability I want to unpack further here: being *accountable to* and being *accountable for*. The idea of being *accountable to* is more audience-oriented, asking to what groups or communities a rhetorical production is directly or indirectly accountable and to what extent a rhetorical production centers those most vulnerable in the context(s) it is working within. The idea of being *accountable for* is more rhetor-oriented and involves the extent to which a rhetor examines their power and privilege in a given context as a way of being accountable for addressing power

differentials in the context within which they are working. Combined, these aspects of accountability can help rhetoricians ask more productive questions about activist rhetorics that move beyond characterizations of dominance/resistance or assimilation/radicalism and into deeper examinations of power and privilege. The following section will demonstrate a rhetorical analysis based in the questions “to whom is this accountable in this context and to what affects?” and “for what is this accountable in this context and to what affects?” through a close reading of specific tensions in *The Identity Project* and its circulation.

An Accountability-Based Rhetorical Analysis of *The Identity Project*

Centering accountability in activist rhetoric requires changing the questions rhetoricians ask as a way of seeing dynamics of power and positionality that might otherwise go overlooked. This section applies the questions “accountable to whom?” and “accountable for what?” to an analysis of moments of tensions in *The Identity Project*. This framework offers productive ways for researchers to read moments of tension or difficulty in activist rhetorics that attempt to speak across differences in positionality.

Accountable to Whom?

One aspect of accountability in activist communication involves asking to *whom* a rhetorical production is accountable and with what effects. To determine to whom something is accountable, rhetoricians can ask questions like: What communities are *included* in this, and what communities are *centered* in this, and how do we tell the difference? What audiences is this produced for, and what audiences may still experience its impact despite not being at the center of the messaging?

Starting from and centering the perspectives of those not usually represented in a given context can generate new and more productive questions about intersecting oppressions. From a Black Feminist perspective, bell hooks has clarified how living on a margin can provide “an oppositional world view—a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors” and that the most transformative feminist theory can emerge from this worldview (9-10). Patricia Hill Collins writes that “those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries” (70). More recently, Brittney Cooper argues that centering black women’s embodied theorizing in knowledge production can help feminist scholarship move beyond the “recovery imperative” (19). As Collins details, centering one group does not mean others cannot participate, but they must do so in ways that are explicitly responsible for furthering social

justice (37-8). As these scholars show, because new knowledge emerges when margins are moved to center, asking who is centered, not only who is included, is one way to access deeper questions about the transformative potential and the limits of rhetorical action in a given context. Rhetorical action that aims to *include* without also *being accountable* to specific communities risks stopping short of enacting this commitment to social justice. To explore the complexities of *being accountable to* in *The Identity Project*, I analyze a specific widely circulated image from its galleries and the circulation to consider what could change if rhetorical critics asked not only “who is included?” but also “to whom is this accountable, who is centered, and why?”

One image in *The Identity Project*'s first gallery, the Bay Area gallery, features a person from the waist up, shirtless, looking at the camera with eyes encircled by heavy black makeup. [See Fig. 2] The person wears a necklace and has placed their hands on the sides of their head. The image is labeled “Three Spirit.” This image was featured as the first image in a series of portraits from the Bay Area gallery in a March 7, 2014 article in the web magazine *PolicyMic* titled “27 Powerful Portraits Challenging the Definition of What It Means to Be LGBT.” Soon afterward, on March 12, 2014, a post began to circulate on the social media site Tumblr by user *shitrichcollegekidssay*, who argues about the use of the term “three spirit”: “I will be blunt. This is *racist*. Definitely and absolutely. The term ‘three spirit’ is an appropriative bastardization of Native Two-Spirit identities, roles which have very specific meaning that cannot be preserved outside of that cultural context” (emphasis in original). The post goes on to explain how the use of this term ties into a long history of appropriation of such terms, implicating the person who uses the identity label “three spirit,” Deragon for including it in the gallery, and *PolicyMic* for featuring it. According to statistics on the Tumblr post's page, as of October 2016 it had been liked, commented on, or reblogged on Tumblr more than six thousand times. Most interactions with the post are a reblog (which re-posts it to a user's own Tumblr site) without additional commentary, although some add a short commentary of their own, reinforcing the argument in the post with elaborations like the existence of many other terms to describe gender fluidity that are not appropriative, or pointing out possible caveats like the fact that without full context there is no way to be sure that the person in the image is white. While this post spread widely through Tumblr, I could not find any direct response from Deragon or *PolicyMic* to this critique. My argument is not that Deragon should be more of a gatekeeper or policer of the identity terms allowed in her project. Instead, I want to focus on the ways in which taking a complex look at this image and its reception as part of *The Identity Project* can reveal to whom this project fails to be accountable and with what effects.



Fig. 2 Photograph by Sarah Deragon.

This widely shared Tumblr post critiquing both the “three spirit” image and media circulation of this image presents an important critique of the queer self-determination celebrated across much commentary on *The Identity Project*. As detailed in the introduction to this article, the reception of the project has focused primarily on the power of visibility for LGBTQ individuals outside the “mainstream,” and the authority to choose one’s own identity labels as a corrective to dominant policing or erasure of LGBTQ identities, framing *The Identity Project’s* forms of visibility and authority as resistant acts. However, this Tumblr post’s critique of the “three spirit” image reveals the danger of celebrating an individualistic conception of authority over self-determination. As hooks insists, this type of liberal individualism is dangerous because of its easy co-optation into oppressive systems (8). While there is a lot of power in queer people naming their own identities against a culture that often refuses the validity of those identities, there is also a danger in celebrating queer self-identification without attention to the larger dynamics of privilege and positionality that allow some to claim any identity labels they want, to re-name themselves with self-invented terms or cherry-pick terms from other contexts, while others are still struggling for the recognition of identities with long histories. Thus, while this one photograph represents only one among a vast array of images and identity labels in *The Identity Project*, it is a telling example of the dangers of purely celebratory orientations toward queer articulations of

identity that do not enact accountability to those whose identities are especially threatened.

Identity terms like “two spirit” come from specific cultural locations that have been colonized, and the appropriation of such identities by white LGBTQ individuals and communities participates in ongoing colonization. Using those terms in a way that divorces them from their histories and cultural contexts constitutes an act known as cultural appropriation. The piecing-together orientation toward identity that *The Identity Project* advocates can inadvertently reinforce colonialist processes of appropriating identities, a process that works against queer aims of challenging dominant power structures. The “three spirit” image and subsequent critique also echoes discourses on the erasure of indigenous people in queer movements and queer theory. Such lack of attention enacts what Malea Powell describes as a willing act of unseeing the contemporary and historical oppression of Native bodies (4). As Qwo-Li Driskill summarizes, “This un-seeing—even if unintentional—perpetuates a master narrative in which Native people are erased from an understanding of racial formations, Native histories are ignored, Native people are thought of as historical rather than contemporary, and our homelands aren’t seen as occupied by colonial powers” (78). In addition, as Scott Lauria Morgenson details in his work on settler homonationalism, “critical reckonings with settler colonialism rarely have arisen in normatively white U.S. queer spaces, where the need for them is dire” (122). Morgenson emphasizes that non-Native queers are particularly accountable for these reckonings: “A first step for non-Native queers thus can be to examine critically and challenge how settler colonialism conditions their lives, as a step toward imagining new and decolonial sexual subjectivities, cultures, and politics” (124). *The Identity Project* is a digital arts activism project by a white queer woman that attempts to reckon with a variety of exclusions and erasures in mainstream queer discourse, but it does not specifically reckon with colonialism—enabling the “three spirit” image to go unchallenged in the project itself. The “three spirit” image, included as one in many of a uniformly designed digital gallery of photographs, at first blends into the pattern, one entry in the project’s argument about complex identities. It is listed in some media commentary as one item in a laundry list of difference; in June 2014, the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* describes *The Identity Project’s* gallery “a heady mix of the familiar and the unique, containing lovely twists like ‘Three Spirit,’ ‘Sober Celibate Daddy-Father Punk,’ and ‘Xicanita y Cubanita,’” lumping the “three spirit” image in with others as a “lovely twist,” continuing to divorce these terms from their histories in order to mobilize them instead as part of a broad argument for contemporary explosions of LGBTQ identity terms.

Part of the problem here is that *The Identity Project's* intervention is framed entirely as a response to hetero- and homonormativity, but not as a response to colonization or white supremacy—which are also conditions that shape queerness and queer articulations of resistance. *The Identity Project* lacks any apparatus for interrogating the use of identity terms beyond the mission of celebrating queer self-determination. By trying to include everyone, it does not center anyone. By not specifically building practices to encourage such accountability, the project misses a chance to enact a deeper critique into colonialism and racism. This missed chance at intersectionality reveals the affordances and limitations of discourses of inclusivity versus accountability; instead of asking “Whom are we including here?”, a more productive question for challenging interconnected oppressions is “To whom are we accountable here?” One way to access these larger systemic questions is through asking to whom a rhetorical production is explicitly or implicitly accountable and how this accountability is enacted or not.

More specifically, a strategy to work against the pervasive construction of certain positions as the default (ex. whiteness, straightness, etc.) is by explicitly centering another positionality in activist messaging and examining what positions others present in the messaging occupy in relation to the center. It is important that this centering is explicit and consistently enacted, or else even well-meaning activist projects can slide into the tendency to serve those already privileged while leaving those most vulnerable behind. Further, to explore dynamics of privilege and positionality, activist rhetorics must not only ask to *whom* they are accountable, but also *for what* they are accountable, as the next section details.

Accountability for What?

Another aspect of accountability involves asking *for what* is a rhetor(s) accountable in a specific context. To mobilize this idea in research, rhetorical critics can ask questions like: Is the rhetor working against differential locations of power and privilege, and how do they account for that? To what extent can those from differing social locations than the rhetor interact with and talk back to a rhetorical action? To what degree does the rhetor work to center the voices of those most threatened in the context the rhetorical action is responding to? Is the model only additive (adding more people, more voices, more diversity) or does it build structures for accountability (asking what about the action *changes* if different people are centered in that action's development)?

It is important to frame the idea of *being accountable for one's privilege* in a given context as different from *apologizing for* that privilege. Apology in anti-racist discourse often serves as a form of self-defense in which the privileged insist they did not intend a racist act, which re-centers the privileged in the

discussion and allows for an avoidance of accountability (Ratcliffe 88-9). I want to clarify here that my goal is not to condemn *The Identity Project* or Deragon as a rhetor in a way that assigns blame. My goal is instead to use *The Identity Project* as an occasion to ask how rhetorical critics can engage in more productive readings of cross-community activism.

In a reading strategy for accountability-based rhetorical analysis, one way to move away from assigning blame and toward interrogating accountability is to ask what is marked and what is unmarked in the context under study. As Moraga explains, sometimes asking what is absent can tell us even more than examining what is present: "It is not always a matter of the actual bodies in the room, but of a life dedicated to a growing awareness of who and what is *missing* in that room; and responding to that absence. *What ideas never surface because we imagine we already have all the answers?*" (xix) In the case of *The Identity Project*, whiteness and cisgenderedness are two telling absences in the galleries. As of this writing, in the galleries of photographs and identity labels, the word "white" does not appear at all. Only one photo features the word "cisgender" ("black gay queer feminist cisgendered man"). This leads to instances where, for instance, a white, cisgender individual may be able to identify as just "lesbian" while those who do not occupy these usually invisible subject positions may append other identity labels to the term, such as "trans lesbian" or "lesbian of color"; here, the image of the white, cis lesbian has inadvertently reified conceptions of the white, cis gay subject as universal, an enduring problem in queer theory and activism. As Annette Harris Powell describes, whiteness is "the normative principle that defines the American experience historically, socially, and politically" (21). As a normative principle, whiteness is intricately tied to heteronormativity, patriarchy, and other systems of oppression, meaning that resistant formulations of queerness that only challenge heteronormativity without considering these other systems will inevitably remain limited, and often "haunted" by unmarked whiteness (Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe).

Staying conscious of the fact that many *Identity Project* photo subjects are multiply marginalized and trying to work against that marginalization, participant choice cannot be left out here, and I cannot infer anything about the participants based only on their images and chosen text (for instance, a trans woman may choose not to identify as trans in this context, or a person of color may choose to foreground other identity labels for the purposes of this project, choices that are valid just as their opposites are). However, it is telling that the project did not *enable* any participants to identify as white, and only a limited number to identify as cisgender. This lack of white or cisgender identifications is not the specific fault of the participants; it is instead a limitation of the project's messaging and mission, which shape participant actions such

as their choice of identity labels. The overall attitude of the project indicates that participants should choose identity labels they are proud of and want to celebrate. Of course, the celebration of whiteness or cisgenderness would be at odds with the mission of the project and would be deeply troubling in itself, as these are categories already unfairly privileged in society. However, there are other ways to examine privileged categories like whiteness, especially as a mode of critique; for instance, as Tammie M. Kennedy, Joyce Irene Middleton, and Krista Ratcliffe write, naming whiteness can serve “*not* to reify the category *white* and uphold an oppressive social structure of *whiteness* but, rather, to name the terms and engage them as a means of understanding their operations and collaborating in the dismantlement of their oppressions, being always cognizant of power differentials associated with differing cultural locations” (8). A wholly celebratory orientation toward resistant rhetoric does not allow for a deeper examination of the dynamics behind who gets to choose which identity labels, what they do with them, and what histories of power and oppression are engaged in these choices.

As “The Identity Project Story” on the website explains, “Sarah believes that *The Identity Project* resonates with people because the photo project pushes up against the preconceived notions of what it is to be LGBTQ in today’s society. Not only are the portraits striking, the participants in the project are playing with language, making up entirely new terms (transgenderqueer or inbetween) and showing pride in their complex and ever-changing identities.” These ideas—pushing against homonormative, preconceived notions of LGBTQ identity, playing with language to make up terms, and showing pride in identities—enable certain kinds of action but constrain others. They enable the construction of counter-messages to hetero- and homonormativity, but not interrogations of how these are deeply connected with other systems of oppression. Celebrating an acontextual queer self-determination thus risks reinforcing a discourse of individualism that goes hand in hand with assumptions of white universalism that, as whiteness scholar Robin DiAngelo explains, “allows whites to view themselves as unique and original, outside of socialization and unaffected by the relentless racial messages in the culture” (59). *The Identity Project* does not interrogate the racial messages that always intersect with and shape heteronormativity. This lack of connection leads to juxtapositions where a white person may be able to claim a totally invented identity term because of the presumption of being “unique and original,” next to someone claiming a term with a long and complicated history as a way of locating themselves in that history—ideas that are very much an unexplored tension across the photographs. A deeper challenge to hetero- and homonormativity as it shapes queer choices to identify would need to intersect with racism and

other axes of oppression in order to develop a fuller understanding of the power dynamics that enable and constrain certain kinds of identification.

By aiming for inclusivity but not building structures for enacting accountability, *The Identity Project* inadvertently reifies the white queer subject as able to claim an identity as “just” queer, or trans, or anything else they choose, without interrogating these positions and the reasons why they are able to claim them without question. And because these interrogations are not deliberately foregrounded in the project itself, the absences get reproduced in the media circulation of *The Identity Project*. This celebration without interrogation is characteristic of much popular discourses on LGBTQ identity terms that champion individualism, but do not pay close enough attention to the limits of individualism for systemic change. However, interrogating one’s own positionality in relation to others is a key element of an accountability-based activist rhetoric. As Del Hierro, Levy, and Price posit, engaging with others across differences brings to light “the need to make unreflective practices visible, and call[s] for accountability of all present bodies” in the form of “a willingness of all present bodies to mark themselves in public, as part of a larger effort, and in relationship to each other” (8-9). Such “marking” or identifying is not only a celebration of individual bodies, but also a deeper consideration of relationality (Riley-Mukavetz). Pritchard describes unmarked positions as “the slippages around identity, power, and privilege that every scholarly discourse aimed at social justice must confront,” arguing that “such slippages cannot be corrected through silence, present-absence, guilt, or overlooking the calls and models for intervention. Rather, redress means action” (44). *The Identity Project* enables such “slippages” to occur where certain dynamics of power and privilege are left unmarked.

The Identity Project’s messaging in part enables participants to participate in an act of resistance against a dominant culture that polices or silences their identities, refusing them the authority to describe their own embodied experiences. However, the messaging also constrains the ability of participants to not only celebrate, but also interrogate their identities. This interrogation would be most useful for those who may not think to identify as something like “white” or “cisgender” because the interrogation itself might reveal that they had been considering those terms invisible defaults that did not need to be marked. For example, participants could be invited to interrogate the idea that cisgender is a universal norm, whereas transgender is represented as a deviation from the norm—as opposed to a view that cisgender and transgender are different ways of relating to the gender one was assigned at birth, or even that assigning gender at birth can be understood as a form of coercion. This interrogation can reveal how the framing of cisgender as a default or

universal is a function of a dominant culture that is oppressive to transgender people—a culture deeply in need of disruption and troubling.

My argument is thus not that whiteness, cisgenderedness, or any other forms of privilege should be named in *The Identity Project* as an end goal. Instead, asking whether forms of privilege are named in a specific context can be one heuristic strategy that encourages participants to ask deeper structural questions, like why might a particular environment be predominately white, cisgender, or made up of other privileged categories; what impediments may there be to changing this dynamic; how it could be different; and what we are seeing and not seeing based on our positions and the fact that privilege can often cause someone to overlook oppressions they do not experience. In short, naming various aspects of positionality and placing them in relation with others present in a given context helps us ask new questions that aim not only to recover the ways in which communities advocate for themselves, but also how communities advocate for each other.

Conclusion

In the study and production of activist rhetorics, being *accountable* to vulnerable communities in a given context and *accountable for* the positionalities one brings to this context can enable deeper interrogations of societal power structures and more complex questions of advocacy across power differentials. For instance, what would *The Identity Project* look like if its mission were to be specifically accountable to trans women of color? It would be quite different from what it is now. A project like this, perhaps instead of trying to include everyone, could center on and enact accountability to a specific community *and* work in coalition with other projects who are primarily accountable to other communities.¹ Of course, no one activist project can represent all LGBTQ communities or solve all problems related to systemic oppressions. However, coalitional models can get closer to this goal by developing specific tools for acting responsibly to improve conditions for multiply marginalized communities.

As rhetoricians expand our analyses into more sites of activism and continue investigating what changes about rhetorical theories and praxes through the incorporation of more communities, we also need to remain conscious of the fact that all axes of identity and oppression are always in

1 For additional examples of queer activist photography projects in digital spaces that represent a variety of positionalities, I suggest the following: Meg Allen's *Butch*; Joan Lobis Brown's *New Alternatives*; Toni Latour's *The Femme Project*; Rachel Lee Smith's *Queer Youth in Focus*; Zanele Muholi's *Faces & Phases*; and Berndt Ott and Emily Besa's *All the People*.

dynamic relationship with other identities, histories, and systems of power. To ask more generative questions about cross-community advocacy and relationality, it is necessary to develop methodologies for rhetorical analysis that ask not only what axes of identity and oppression are included, but also what is centered and to what effects. A rhetorical methodology based in the concept of accountability offers one such way to study complex activist rhetorics by not stopping at critique or reinforcing an assimilationist/radical binary, but instead understanding the complex dynamics of relationality and positionality behind any example of activist rhetoric. Most importantly, an accountability-based rhetorical methodology provides generative questions for researching and analyzing activist rhetorics in ways that are responsible to communities made vulnerable through intersecting oppressions.

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Applying Archival Methods and Methodologies to Public Open Records

Jessica Estep

Abstract: *This article examines the public comments citizens submit to local government agencies and explains how those texts can be incorporated into archival research practices. The central case study traces the processes a state-wide government agency—the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)—undertook to solicit citizen feedback about a major public works project and the two thousand comments that GDOT received in response. Through a rhetorical analysis of these texts, the author argues that feminist scholars have a responsibility to encourage transparency in public engagement processes by accessing and analyzing open records, offering up competing narratives when possible.*

Keywords: *archives, open records, public engagement, transportation, public rhetoric, feminist methodologies*

In October 2015, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) proposed reengineering two miles of Peachtree Road, a major north-south connector in Atlanta, to improve safety and traffic flow. According to GDOT's proposal, between 2009 and 2013, there were 801 crashes on this section of road—fifty-three with bicyclists and pedestrians. In addition, left lanes in both directions were rarely used except for turning. Following state policies for "Complete Streets"—which ensure road access and safety for pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and transit users alike—GDOT redesigned the street to add bike lanes and a left turn lane. Based on the transportation engineers' models, the new design would improve traffic flow and make crashes less likely. The transportation engineers presented their model at a community open house and then opened up the project for public comment. Within the three-week comment period ending November 16, 2015, GDOT received a staggering 1,916 public comments. On December 11—less than a month later—GDOT withdrew the project, stating explicitly that they decided not to go forward with the street improvements because the public comments were overwhelmingly against it.

This decision may seem like a win for civic engagement and public participation. After all, if citizens speak out against a project, their voices should be

heard; government agencies should represent the desires of their constituents. However, when I heard news that the project had been scrapped, I was baffled. I wondered how public comments could lead transportation engineers to bypass written Complete Streets policies and knowingly forgo a street design that would improve public safety. As a driver and bicyclist in Atlanta, I had supported the road improvements and trusted the traffic models that GDOT provided, which showed that traffic would flow more smoothly for cars and bicycles alike. I found the citizens' pushback against GDOT's careful and inclusive street plan surprising, and I was curious to read these public comments to understand how and why they led to GDOT's reversal. In exercising my right to examine these public comments through open records laws, I found I was tapping into not only public opinion but also an archival research space largely untouched by historiographers in rhetoric and composition.

In an era of "alternative facts" and "fake news,"¹ archives are a bastion of information—and also of transparency. Rather than serving as gatekeepers, archivists serve as beacons, making visible historical records that force institutions of our present democracy to be held accountable for their actions and decisions.² Feminist historiographers, meanwhile, have also sought to "democratize" archival research to include women, minorities, and other marginalized voices through several avenues: by broadening the definition of an archive to include less traditional sites (Glenn and Enoch); by seeking to increase access to archival resources, particularly through digitization and meta-data (Graban; Gutenson and Robinson); by encouraging previously marginalized groups to create their own representative archives (Cushman); by rhetorically analyzing the silences within the archives to augment the stature of those who have been silenced (Enoch; Gerald); and by encouraging the use

1 In a January 22, 2017, interview with NBC host Chuck Todd on "Meet the Press," Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to President Donald J. Trump, defended Press Secretary Sean Spicer's inflation of the crowd size at Donald Trump's inauguration. Conway stated, "You're saying it's a falsehood. And they're giving—Sean Spicer, our press secretary—gave alternative facts." In response, Todd said, "Alternative facts aren't facts; they are falsehoods." The phrase "alternative facts" as well as "fake news"—the unverified stories that tend to propagate through social media sites—have become popular terms since Trump's election.

2 The Society of American Archivists' Core Values Statement states, "By documenting institutional functions, activities, and decision-making, archivists provide an important means of ensuring accountability. In a republic such as ours, accountability and transparency constitute an essential hallmark of democracy."

of critical imagination (Royster and Kirsch). These feminist archival research methods and methodologies have had success in creating archives that are more transparent and are more inclusive of historical and extant publics.

Through national and state-level open records laws, our government allows its citizens open access to public records for similar purposes. While GDOT and other government agencies actively seek out public participation, particularly by soliciting citizens to submit comments about specific projects, they do so in order to make decisions, not to understand the subtle narratives within public discourse. However, by applying feminist archival research processes to these public comments—by treating them as artifacts—we can tease out multiple narratives as a means of challenging dominant institutional narratives, particularly by focusing in on current public discourse. In “Finding the Grimké’s in Charleston: Using Feminist Historiographic and Archival Research Methods to Build Public Memory,” (2016) Amy Gerald, drawing on Jessica Enoch’s work of examining the silences of marginalized historical figures, argues that feminist historiographers have a responsibility to fill in the silences not only in the archives but also in public memory and current public discourse about these figures. Coming upon a limited historical record of her research subjects, Gerald recognized that her responsibility was not only to build up the historical record of the Grimke sisters but also to insert them into public discussion. Gerald set to “shifting my original goal of analyzing the sisters’ early rhetorical influences to actually doing the rhetorical work of creating public memory” (100). In other words, equally as important as digging into the past is staking ground in the present and making tangible change. Similarly, in “Looking Outward: Archival Research as Community Engagement,” (2017), Whitney Douglas argues that feminist historiographers should use archival research as “generative community literacy practice” that “integrates the knowledge and expertise of both contemporary and historical community members” (31). This “rhetorical work” of feminist historiographers can be augmented by open records research. Open records research allows feminist researchers to engage with current community members and interact with current public discourse in order to shape “public memory,” rather than relying on government officials to interpret it. As feminist researchers and historiographers, we should challenge institutionalized narratives that government officials build from public comments, particularly since we have free and open access to these public comments.

In this article, I use the Peachtree Road case study to demonstrate how feminist historiographers and researchers can leverage open records laws to examine public comments submitted to government institutions. Through the act of analyzing these public narratives, I both challenge GDOT’s clear-cut decision-making process and also untangle webs of discourse that demonstrate

competing narratives and metaphors regarding the role of the street and the community—metaphors that are steeped in Atlanta’s complex and often racist historical policies. I argue that feminist archival researchers should lend our expertise to open records to assemble, publicize, and interpret the findings from public comments as a means of further democratizing archival research.

What Are Open Records?

“Open records” laws allow people to access most documents and other related media created by, about, or for the government, starting with the federal government’s 1966 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Every state has passed similar laws that give citizens access to state records. The stated intention of open records is to provide a check on elected officials, underscoring the belief that democracy functions best when its citizens are informed, in a timely manner, about what their governments are doing.³ Harvard’s Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society notes that FOIA discourages the red tape that can come with government bureaucracy; without it, they believe that “information-seeking citizens would be left to the whims of individual government agencies, which often do not give up their records easily.” We can imagine that without more traditional archives, specifically those housed in most universities, the situation would be the same—government agencies or people might be unwilling to provide information that the public has a right to access.

For historiographers, open records are a unique type of archival research space, particularly in that there is no traditional archivist standing between the archive and the researcher; the government serves as the archivist. In addition, these open records are available to researchers almost immediately after they are created. While some researchers still find evidence of “red tape” or

3 The Georgia Open Records Act states, “The General Assembly finds and declares that the strong public policy of this state is in favor of open government; that open government is essential to a free, open, and democratic society; and that public access to public records should be encouraged to foster confidence in government and so that the public can evaluate the expenditure of public funds and the efficient and proper functioning of its institutions. The General Assembly further finds and declares that there is a strong presumption that public records should be made available for public inspection without delay.”

burdensome bureaucratic processes,⁴ particularly when accessing historical information, the real problem with open records is the slapdash manner in which they are often assembled. Many of the principles of archival research that Sammie Morris and Shirley K Rose explain—including questions of provenance, of a single creator, and of handling and preserved aged documents (55-58)—do not (always) apply to open records. Open records reflect larger publics and more recent histories, and the record-keepers who maintain them are often beholden to speed, not care, due to political pressure and public scrutiny. Combine the incalculable number of documents available for public scrutiny⁵ and a legal deadline of three business days to process the request (or at least to provide a timeline of when the materials will be available),⁶ and the challenges of utilizing open records as archives become quite obvious.

For example, in 2017, the City of Atlanta had to make almost a million and a half documents available to the public because of an open records request that was made in response to rumors of a bribery scandal. Then-Mayor Kasim Reed scrambled to make the documents public as soon as possible in order to avoid seeming shady or untrustworthy; within a month, the million and a half documents were prepared for the journalists who requested them—printed and delivered in four hundred boxes. However, according to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, this “document dump” did not make for a useful archive.

4 Archival researchers Neal Lerner and Jennifer Clary-Lemon lamented difficulties they had in accessing FOIA-protected records; Lerner was directed to the University of Illinois President to gain permission to access historical documents about his research subject, while Clary-Lemon, seeking access to artifacts related to Margaret Thatcher from the 1970s, had significant problems accessing those records through FOIA, particularly because of “exemptions” and “closed files” on “politically sensitive” information (396).

5 According to Georgia’s Open Records Act, these public records refer to “all documents, papers, letters, maps, books, tapes, photographs, computer based or generated information, data, data fields, or similar material prepared and maintained or received by an agency or by a private person or entity in the performance of a service or function for or on behalf of an agency.”

6 According to the Georgia Secretary of State’s website, “All open records requests will be processed within three business days of receipt of request. If the records exist, but are not immediately available, the Open Records Officer’s response will include a description of the records and a timetable for their release.”

Many of the documents were blank or illegible, printed on font too small to read; in addition, born-digital documents were printed when they would have been easier to access—and search through—if they had remained digital. *AJC* columnist Bill Torpy complained that the documents were released “in no particular order,” and as “an act of political theater,” particularly as then-Mayor Reed gave a press conference with the four hundred boxes stacked like a wall behind him. Clearly, this open records request led to the creation of a flawed archive, but the flaws do not make the documents within the archive less worthy of inspection—particularly as the allegations of the bribery scandal proved to be true. In fact, given the problems with open records documents (and public comment processes, which I will explore in more detail in the next section), I argue that historiographers and archival specialists have a special responsibility to engage with these documents, providing insight, alternate readings, and perhaps even guidance on how to use, store, and interpret them.

The fact is that open records, while (or perhaps *because*) they are messy, are also democratizing. In many cases, the researcher/citizen, simply by asking for the documents, becomes the creator of the archive. As with other archives, as Alexis E. Ramsey explains, inquiring into a collection can “cause the collection to get a level of preferential treatment and a timelier processing schedule”; however, oftentimes in more traditional archives, materials that end up being processed are the ones that people pay to have archived (Ramsey 80-83). In other words, a wealthy estate may be able to hire someone to archive and preserve records, but this is a luxury few can afford; this practical imbalance skews the archives that are available and housed in, say, Harvard’s Houghton Library. However, open records laws have no such limitations; documents are required to be archived and accessible regardless of these financial limitations. This means that in the government’s records, the wealthiest citizen’s words are filed right alongside the poorest citizen’s, making these archives more representative of the whole community—and thus, an important research space for feminist historiographers.

As I will demonstrate, feminist historiographers can leverage open records particularly as a means of examining citizens’ public comments, which allow us a lens into the everyday thoughts and lives of those citizens. I define public comments as written and/or oral narratives or responses that citizens provide to a government agency when that government agency solicits feedback about an existing project, proposal, or idea. These public comments allow a glimpse into broader swaths of current public discourse, another unique aspect of these archives; feminist historiographers can use public comments to study what publics are responding to an isolated issue or exigency. As Michael Warner explains, such publics are “called into being by virtue of being addressed” (67). For example, by examining public comments submitted

about the redesign of Peachtree Road, we can get a glimpse into the public Peachtree Road creates: a still life of the discourse of diverse citizens who feel called to respond to this exigency. These public comments are rich texts that allow us to view the current discourse of citizens writing about or toward government entities and officials. We can access these documents as a means of witnessing democracy in action: seeing how government officials receive and respond to citizens and what types of discourse engage these same citizens. In the following sections, I will apply these concepts to the Peachtree Road project, explaining briefly how GDOT organized and drew conclusions based the public comments and then detailing the alternative, feminist methods I used to read and analyze the same comments.

GDOT's Approach to Archiving Public Comments

Less than a month after the public comment period ended, GDOT released a statement touting their successful citizen engagement process and announcing the decision they had reached to abandon the bike lane portion of the project. Their press release, titled "Peachtree Road Project: Public's Voice Heard in Planning Process - No Bike Lanes" states:

Georgia DOT announced today that, after intensive review of public comments and public needs, the Peachtree Road project...will move forward...without the addition of bike lanes. "This is the public involvement process at work," said GDOT Chief Engineer Meg Pirkle. "Throughout the planning and development of this project, we have consistently looked for meaningful ways to engage the public; to listen to the concerns and ideas of various audiences; and to make sure that their input and comments were properly reflected."

GDOT used the comments to determine to forgo the project, demonstrating the kind of swift decisiveness desirable in a government agency. However, as we might imagine, a transportation engineer's "intensive review" of citizens' narratives differs from the kind of "intensive review" a feminist historiographer might undertake. After reading this press release, I was curious to understand how GDOT "listen[ed] to the concerns and ideas of various audiences" and ensured that these audiences' "input and comments were properly reflected." Where and how were these comments "reflected" in the decision? How were "various" audiences identified and defined, and how were the comments organized based upon this information? None of these questions are answered in the press release. In fact, in the press release, GDOT tallies the public comments quantitatively. They note that seventy percent of people submitting public comments were against the project (specifically the bike lanes),

but GDOT does not explain how they surmised based on narratives (*not* votes) these citizens' perspectives.⁷

In order to understand GDOT's decision, I accessed the public comments to see both what the comments said and the methods by which they had been categorized. In a more traditional archival research process, my first step might have been to search a database like WorldCat, visit the archives, and/or contact a local archivist. However, with open records that are current and project-specific, like the Peachtree Road project, there is no such database, physical archive, or archivist in charge of this material. I had to leverage my local knowledge in order to know where to begin my research. First, I contacted an acquaintance who works at GDOT and asked her how to submit an open records request. She provided me with the name of a paralegal at GDOT whom I could contact and told me what information to include in my request—specifically, the number and name of the project.⁸ I submitted an open records request via email on January 28, 2016, and I received a response on February 2, 2016. The paralegal for GDOT provided me with a link to a GDOT website where I could download requested records, which were in PDF files under her name with the title “Open Records Request” and a corresponding number, with the comments organized into sixteen folders. These sixteen folders were labeled based on how the comments were received (whether over email, through GDOT's website, via mail, or in person) and what the commenter's position on the project was (whether for, against, undecided, or in conditional support of the project).⁹

To illustrate: a comment that was emailed in and determined to be “against” the project was categorized in one of the sixteen folders; a comment

7 On April 7, 2016, GDOT provided a more complete response letter to citizens who had submitted comments, breaking down specific concerns that were noted. However, this letter came four months after the decision to cancel the project was announced, suggesting that the decision was made before a more thorough analysis was undertaken.

8 I recognize that many researchers might not have a personal or professional connection to the organization from which they are seeking records. However, a Google search for “open records” and the name of the organization also led me to a document that explained the same information. Remember that a written request cannot legally be ignored; a citizen must receive a response within three business days.

9 I deduced these designations after spending time with the data; there was no legend or key explaining these codes.

that was sent in via postal mail and determined to be “undecided” about the project was placed in another folder. From this original order, we see that GDOT chose to highlight a commenter’s perceived stance on the project (whether for, against, or other) and the material means by which the comments were submitted (whether electronically or in physical copies). Comments submitted in person or via mail (39% of the comments) tended to be submitted on GDOT’s prepared comment card, which had four boxes that citizens could check, indicating that they were in support, against, uncommitted, or in conditional support of the project. On the other hand, emailed or electronic comments (the remaining 61% of the total) tended to be much more free-form in their content because they were not tethered to a comment card or a checked box; they were typically composed of narratives or lines of text. However, regardless of the method of submission, nearly all the comments (91%) were categorized in folders “for” or “against” the project.

When I opened this archive of sixteen folders, I first looked at the comments to see what markings GDOT had made on them. From this reading, I deduced that National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysts¹⁰ highlighted some language on each comment and, based on their highlighting, categorized the comment into one of four categories (support, opposition, conditional support, or undecided). Most of the language that the NEPA analysts highlighted indicated the commenter’s stance on the project. For example, the most commonly highlighted word in the “against” category was “oppose,” which was highlighted 201 times, followed by the similar “opposition,” which was highlighted 32 times. The word “against” appeared 22 times on scanned comment cards, which had the “against” box checked, or “against” was highlighted as part of a sentence 38 times. Other common words that were highlighted were “concern” (28 times) and “object to” (10 times). Isolating language that indicated a rigid and clear position on the project likely allowed the NEPA analysts (and by extension, GDOT) the ability to tally and quantify the public comments in order to elucidate a majority opinion in support or opposition to the project—a majority opinion they indicated in their press release just weeks after the submission period closed.

However, public comments are more complicated and a richer data set than a survey or vote. As a result, the conclusions that are drawn from public comments can (and should) be more complicated than the commenters’ “stance” on the project. In fact, many comments, particularly those submitted over email, where space is unlimited, were long narratives—not short emails

10 The analysts’ names were stamped on several pages of the documents, so it is very likely that they did the highlighting, particularly since NEPA analysts are in charge of gathering public engagement data.

that indicated a quick nod of support or opposition to the Peachtree Road project. It is clear from reading these comments that citizens often think of the public comments as a place where they will be listened to—extensively. Many people submitted comments that were very personal, reflecting on their unique positionality as citizens in Atlanta, or offering up anecdotes about the project and its impact on their daily lives. For example, in her email, commenter 1584 goes into detail about her personal relationship to bicycling, to Atlanta and its suburbs, to her friendships and her marriage, etc. I am only showing a snippet of this email, but it is 468 words—a short essay. She writes:

My name is [redacted], and I have lived in the Atlanta area for most of my life. I grew up in [a suburb], about 45 minutes south of the City, attended Georgia Tech... During my time in Atlanta proper over these past five years, I've seen the city, and my interaction with it, transform. Living in the suburbs, it never occurred to me that I could use a bicycle as transportation... however, [I] quickly saw that not only was it possible to use a bicycle for transportation, it was affordable, healthy, and fun. My social network grew around bicycling - I even met my husband on a bicycle ride, and we now live in [an Atlanta neighborhood]. I worked at a job in [an Atlanta suburb] for years and eventually decided to make a change in part due to my inability to reach it safely or quickly by alternative means of transportation. I know that I'm not alone in this....

Commenter 1584 goes on to explain why she supports the implementation of a bike lane, but the level of detail above demonstrates that her support of the project is related to a larger, much more personal, context as a citizen.

Of commenter 1584's 468-word comment, NEPA analysts highlighted the following words: "greatly support the center turn lane, 4 travel lane, and 2 bike lane option for the corridor and will be happy to see it in any form. I strongly," suggesting with their highlighter that those pieces of information were the most important to record. Commenter 1584's comment was grouped in the file that indicated she submitted an email supporting the project, and perhaps this is a sufficient characterization of her comment for GDOT's purposes, since they were trying to make a concrete decision about whether to implement a bike lane. While there are some critiques in other disciplines about how

government agencies use public engagement processes to reach decisions,¹¹ this article is not intended to be a critique of GDOT's methods of reading public comments nor of their public engagement processes more broadly. Let us assume that government organizations have methods and goals that are simply different from ours—specifically, that they need to make design or policy decisions quickly, whereas we do not.

Feminist historiographers, as compared to policymakers and other government decision-makers, do not have the burden of coming to a fast “practical” or quantitative decision or outcome based on their readings of public comments. Archival methods and methodologies—or their combined and overlapping material “research processes,” as Jennifer Clary-Lemon calls them—require on the one hand, selection, access, examination (methods) and on the other hand, interpretation and positionality (methodologies), but these research processes do not require that researchers make concrete decisions. Clary-Lemon explains, “Archival research cannot in every case follow a particular predetermined series of steps that guarantee scientific ‘results’” (382). If feminist historiographers admit that rigorous archival research processes do not require us to reach a “decision” or a “consensus,” that admission frees up historiographers to step into the space of analyzing public comments in order to dissect the public narratives that lay between public participation and policy “outcomes.” As a feminist historiographer, I can create space for examining anecdotes, metaphors, emotional language, and context, concepts that a government agency might overlook or simply not have time to consider.

In the case of commenter 1584, the rich text of the complete email allows us a glimpse into one person's life and connection to her community. She responds to the call for public comments about Peachtree Road not only

11 Geography professors Karen Bickerstaff and Gordon Walker argue that governments and researchers have put too much emphasis on encouraging public participation and not enough time into understanding how the participating publics' discourse actually leads to changes in policies and institutions (2138). Bickerstaff and Walker believe there is little observable connection between public participation in creating policies and the policies that are ultimately adopted. In fact, they conclude that citizens are often unsure how their participation and narratives lead to actual policy change; citizens often believe that their participation is just a check in the box, a justification for a pre-determined decision (2130). Along these same lines, policy scientist Roger A. Pielke, Jr. notes that “the policy scientist who emphasizes context, unpredictability, uncertainty, trial-and-error, and normative commitments may easily appear to stand upon a ‘lower plane’” (213), and as a result, he believes these methods are often overlooked in decision-making processes.

because she wants a bike lane on the road but also because, for her, bicycling is connected to her personal relationships (including the one with her husband) and the decisions she has made about where and how to live her life. Because feminist historiographers are not tasked with making a decision about how to pave a road, we have an opportunity to access these public comments in order to elucidate contexts and cultural narratives. While there is nothing wrong with an outcome-driven emphasis on quantitative methods—again, policy decisions often must be made expediently—such methods are insufficient for what I, as a feminist historiographer, consider an “intensive review” of public narratives, particularly when the goal is to understand competing public discourses. Thus, the task of analyzing public comments for context-driven, expressive, and rhetorical narratives should fall to rhetoric and composition scholars, particularly those feminist historiographers trained in archival research methods and methodologies. In the following section, I employ feminist archival research methods to read and analyze the public comments to both complement and complicate GDOT’s initial reading.

Applying Feminist Methodologies to Public Comments

My analysis of these narratives, which follows, is intended to offer a partial and constructed history of the public comments—an alternative reading—not to argue for a different outcome of the transportation project. While I do not hope to change the outcome of the project, I do want to understand how people talk to and about their government and public space. I detail my research processes with open records in the hope that other historiographers can learn from them. Like Neal Lerner, I did not “imagine some pure narrative” (196) emerging within the archives—or, in this case, support for a particular decision on the transportation project. Instead, I recognize that the narratives that I weave are one of many possible interpretations of the same data.

As I mentioned, my first step in understanding the public’s discourses was to read the 1,916 narratives submitted to GDOT. I did so not to categorize citizens as “for” or “against” the project; instead, I read the comments as an archive outside these dichotomous bounds in which they had been placed, considering the larger rhetorical situation and attempting to draw out competing narratives that reflect publics’ discourse about their community space. In reading the public comments, I noted three things: 1. the language that the NEPA analysts for GDOT had highlighted (as I explored earlier), 2. commenters’ personal anecdotes, and 3. any other descriptive, emotional, and/or metaphorical language about the street or the community. The latter two elements had been mostly excluded from GDOT’s analysis, as I showed with

the example of commenter 1584. It is this less objective and more abstract or intimate language that I sought out as a feminist historiographer, particularly as a means of understanding citizens' reflections on their personal connection to the street and to their neighborhoods. From my analysis, I gleaned that citizens have multiple definitions of what a street and a community actually are, and these competing definitions lead them to expect very different things from both. While some people view Peachtree Road as a connection point well integrated into the community, others see it as a barrier wall protecting the "real" community inside. I found that these competing perceptions of the street's purpose lead to competing ideas about how their street—and, by extension, their neighborhood and their city—should function around them.

Nearly all commenters agree that Peachtree Road is integral to the community—not surprising, given their decision to submit public comments about the street. However, while citizens agree on Peachtree Road's importance, their views diverge about what it means for a road to be "important." For example, some commenters see Peachtree Road as the "heart" of the city, as a place they are drawn to gather, while other commenters see Peachtree Road as an "artery," intended for pushing people out and away as efficiently as possible. Commenter 1748 states that Peachtree Road is a "route that cuts through the heart of Atlanta" and as a result, should have bike lanes on it, as its central location makes it necessary to ensure that all types of commuters are able to use it. However, for some, Peachtree's central location also makes it a place to get through quickly; it is not a desirable destination. Commenter 393 believes that it would be crazy to redesign this "artery" for a handful of people on bicycles, who would harm the overall efficiency of the road. He writes, "THIS IS ABSURD!! Who wants them [the bike lanes] is the question—could be more than 10 people who would use [sic] and half of them are Jimmy Johns delivery guys—who are fine—but we can't change the traffic patterns on Atlanta's most famous artery for the Jimmy John's guys." Commenter 393 recognizes that Peachtree Road is a key street in Atlanta and should serve the majority of users, who drive cars. His use of the term "artery" invokes a body part that is essential for pumping blood and keeping systems moving—not a space where one should be delayed or linger. It is interesting that the commenters choose two words for heart, one a synecdoche for the heart, and the other the entire heart itself. This word choice reflects the idea that some people see the street as a tool of the city and other people see the street as the city itself.

As the "heart" of the city, there is a clear consensus Peachtree Road is a "major" street; the road is at turns referred to by three commenters as "our marquee street" (commenter 1301), "a major thoroughfare" (commenter 845), or as the "most important north-south motorway in our city" (commenter 396). However, as shown just from these three commenters, few people agree

on what “major” means: whether as a destination itself, as an area to speed through efficiently, or as an easily accessible space. Metaphors abound within the public comments, as people try to explain what the street means to them. The two most common metaphors invoked were a river and a wall, with the former metaphor suggesting a mutable, shifting expanse, and the latter summoning a solid, material obstruction. This disagreement on how to both categorize and describe the street leads to crucial questions about the streets’ purpose and function. In addition, the mutable concept of the “streets” cannot remain undecided forever. The concrete must be poured.

Let us turn to the metaphor of the “river.” Many commenters view Peachtree Road as fluid part of the neighborhood, necessitating ease of access and openness in order to be integrated into the community. Commenter 1738 argues that improving access to the road augments the diversity of Atlanta. He writes, “We live in a diverse city with many different types of users including drivers, bike riders, and transit riders. All major public thoroughfares, except limited access highways, should be open to all of these citizens.” Commenter 1738 believes that openness of the city and openness of the street are intertwined concepts. Commenter 1625 writes that she would like to see Peachtree Road become a “community” street, one worthy of a neighborhood. She writes:

If you want to discourage commuters from using Peachtree as an alternate route, stop allowing Peachtree to be a 6-lane superhighway where drivers rule and everyone else is put at risk. Make it into a road that is safer for pedestrians, cyclists and drivers—a road that is friendlier to our community... Do the right thing and return Peachtree to the neighborhood road it used to be!

Commenter 1625 believes that opening the road up to more users will improve the flow and integration of the road into the neighborhood. Allowing additional types of traffic will push the street to expand, as opposed to clogging it up. Other commenters see Peachtree Road’s integration of multiple modes of transportation as crucial to connecting and improving community relationships, particularly as the city becomes denser in the future. Commenter 1809 writes, “...I have been riding [a bicycle] in Atlanta for 30 years and believe having a connection in Buckhead is a necessity. The city is planning a network of bike lanes and some already exist north of this area, which I have ridden. This stretch would help...by adding pieces of bike lanes through the city until one day they connect all areas.” He sees Peachtree Road not as a crowded street that is beyond its capacity but as a connection point with other areas of the city. Likewise, Commenter 1825 wants to see changes that will allow Peachtree to be better integrated into the community. She writes:

The proposed Peachtree Road lanes would fill a dramatic need, making an important corridor navigable by bike...Building good cycling infrastructure will make our community healthier and happier. And people on bike or on foot are also much more likely to talk to their neighbors or people they meet, which increases social solidarity and cohesion. I find I now have much closer relationships with my neighbors than when I was driving. Bike lanes are good for individuals and good for our communities. I hope the plans will be implemented!

In this text, commenter 1825 reveals that she believes that increasing the accessibility of the street to multiple users will open the street up to allow for improved community and neighbor relationships, which she finds valuable. Her perspective demonstrates that she sees what she calls an “important” street not as a space to be avoided but as a public space that should be better integrated into the community, as it is a fluid space. Imagined as a river, the street improves as its function as a public space when more people are allowed to enter it. Closing it off to different types of commuters means cutting off the flow of water (or blood) to this part of the city.

However, this concept of fluidity as the benchmark of a good public space is not established across the board. Several commenters view Peachtree Road not as a river but instead as a barrier protecting other public and private spaces, expressing their fear that increasing access to this space or otherwise changing it will cause destruction of their neighborhoods. Imagined this way, if Peachtree Road can no longer contain car traffic, then, like a broken dam, it will allow a flood to pour into their homes and their neighbors’ homes. Commenter 363 notes his concerns along these lines: “As a resident of [a Buckhead neighborhood], I am outraged at the thought of bike lanes. The congestion would choke Peachtree... The thought of the NIGHTMARE of traffic that would spill over to residential streets is overwhelming...” (363). He views Peachtree Road as a space to be avoided—a border and barrier protecting his neighborhood from cars. Similarly, Commenter 443 writes, “The traffic on Peachtree is already congested. [Adding the bike lanes] would aggravate the problem. This would also cause impatient drivers to feed into our neighborhoods.” Commenter 280 writes, “This proposal will gridlock Peachtree, forcing traffic into our neighborhoods and devaluing our property values.” Citizens are concerned about “spillage” from Peachtree Road both because of property values, as commenter 280 writes, and because they worry about the safety of their children who want to play in their neighborhood streets. Commenter 1148 writes:

This plan will increase congestion and the commuters will move to our neighborhood streets for relief from a more congested Peachtree. My

street and many others have no sidewalks, but we have over 40 kids on our street. My kids can't ride their bikes during the evening commute because of cut through commuters trying to get on 75. Your plan will only increase the volume of cars. Let the bikes use our neighborhood streets and keep the cars on Peachtree. Bikes don't pay tax but cars do - the plan seems very ill thought out. What about the walkability of my own neighborhood and my kids?!? I am doing my best to prevent obesity in my own kids and your plan hurts all parents in Buckhead who are trying to let their kids play outside. I am an active citizen and won't give up on this issue.

From this comment, it is clear that commenter 1148 views Peachtree Road as a sort of blockade to protect her neighborhood. Like the other commenters above, she is nervous about the idea of vehicle traffic spilling over into her neighborhood. She sees her neighborhood as a place where her children can ride bicycles; she views Peachtree Road as a dangerous space where one should not ride bicycles. She is concerned about the safety of her children were this blockade to be removed. Her and the other commenters' view of the street as a wall suggests that they may feel insecure about public spaces and more comfortable with private spaces that they can control directly. A street imagined as a wall is a solid barrier against the untamable, unknowable publics outside one's private property.

Along those same lines, commenters seek to keep domestic spaces safe from the public streets. Commenters who seem to have female-identifying names in particular invoke children as needing special protection from the violent wave of cars hemmed in on Peachtree. Commenter 1917 writes, "Added congestion on Peachtree Road will exacerbate the problem we have with cut through traffic in our neighborhood that endangers the safety of our streets for our children." Commenter 1919 writes, "Imagine the increase of cut through traffic on neighborhood streets where our children play. This will be dangerous to our families, possibly increase crime and decrease property values." These commenters believe that cars need to be kept on Peachtree Road, out of local neighborhoods, so that their children can be kept enclosed and safe. Children are intended to remain inside established, knowable spaces, not to enter into the city itself, which de Certeau calls "a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places" (103). These commenters want the streets to remain unchanged in order to preserve and protect their private and domestic spaces.

Commenters write in with fears not only of car traffic flooding their neighborhoods or endangering their children but also of being trapped inside their own neighborhoods if the Peachtree Road barrier is changed. Commenter 1016 writes, "Our neighbors are already facing cut through traffic... I can't

imagine trying to get out of my neighborhood if this proposal is approved. Please help us preserve our neighborhoods and keep driving safe and less congested on Peachtree.” Commenter 1016 drives a car and wants car traffic to flow on Peachtree Road but does not want car traffic to come into her neighborhood. She believes that her neighborhood should be “preserved” and unharmed by the flow of car traffic on the streets. Along those same lines, Commenter 1153 states that he feels “landlocked” in his Peachtree Road townhome because of current traffic patterns: “For the last two years I have lived in a townhouse community...[with] no light at the point of our ingress and egress to Peachtree Rd.... I believe my community in particular would be rendered landlocked much of the day, should this project be completed.” He indicates that he is “an avid biker” and goes on to propose that GDOT “route bikers to Midtown with an elevated bridge” over a nearby road. However, he views Peachtree Road as an impermeable barrier composed of cars and sees that his “community” is outside this barrier of the road; the two are not integrated.

As we see, commenters use different language and metaphors when they speak about Peachtree Road. Some commenters view the street as a flowing, connective tissue within the community, while other commenters consider the street a barrier that, at turns, shields, protects, barricades, isolates, or cuts off the community. The first perspective recognizes the fluid nature of the streets, while the second suggests that the streets are stable spaces. It is, of course, difficult to create a street that is simultaneously an accessible barrier, and so designing a street that integrates both ideals is nearly impossible; however, in the push and pull between the street as a fluid, open space or as a border protecting private neighborhoods, it seems that the latter metaphor was the most pervasive or most heard, particularly since GDOT decided against implementing the proposed changes to the street. However, while it is unlikely that GDOT perceived the idea that they were accepting or rejecting a particular metaphor or narrative of public space, we can see that the commenters’ different perceptions of what a street or community actually is led to the commenters’ conclusions about how these spaces should function. These perceptions, of course, are not accidental, but have a historical basis and context, as I will briefly discuss.

Reaching into the Archives

When I began this project, I intended to analyze these public comments as an isolated data set—a contemporary archive that would allow me to seek out the voices of regular citizens in current discourse. Unsurprisingly, however, my findings from the public comments also led me to ask what historical influences may have led to present-day conversations about Peachtree Road. As I analyzed present conversations about Peachtree Road, I felt a natural curiosity

to uncover past conversations about the development of the road. Returning to Gerald's idea of "creating public memory," we should seek not only to insert forgotten historical figures into their deserving historical places but also to connect current discourse to forgotten (or ignored, or neglected) histories. Thus, my research into these public comments led me to seek out a university-sponsored archive housed at Georgia State University called "Planning Atlanta," a relatively new collection devoted to preserving city planning and urban design documents for the city.

In examining twentieth century planning documents from this digitized archive, particularly two lengthy plans from 1952 and 1970, I quickly realized that discussions of Peachtree Road's metaphorical purpose had been ongoing since the road was annexed to Atlanta in 1952 as part of the neighborhood of Buckhead. Even then, the road was regarded as central—a "heart" of the city. According to a 1970 Planning Atlanta document, "At that time [1952], small local specialty shops were concentrated primarily in a cluster around the intersection of Roswell Road and Peachtree Road, and often referred to as the '*heart of Buckhead*'" (italics mine). Historically, I learned that Buckhead was noted for its location in one of the most "prosperous areas...where median household incomes range from two to four times the city-wide average," a prosperity that is still very much alive in Buckhead today. However, in the 1950s and beyond, city leaders' concerns about sustaining and supporting this prosperous heart were intertwined with explicit and implicit policies that kept what they considered to be undesirable populations out of the area—specifically, African American residents.

The narrative description of Buckhead in a 1970 Planning Atlanta document, put out by the city of Atlanta, reads almost like a travel brochure for the neighborhood, enticing people to live in this desirable area, with its private schools, private clubs, and exceptional public amenities.¹² While the 1970 planning guide recognizes that high-density buildings were expected to emerge along Peachtree Road and that traffic congestion would increase on Peachtree and neighborhood streets, the major concern related to this increase in car traffic appears to be scaring away people who live in the "high-quality" single-family homes to the west of the Peachtree:

12 The 1970 Planning Atlanta document states, "The North Buckhead Area contains several large private social and educational institutions including three country clubs and several private preparatory schools. Several city-owned parks are scattered throughout the area. The largest, Chastain Memorial Park...contains an 18 hole golf course, amphitheater, large picnic areas and tennis courts. The City Parks Department operates a number of outstanding recreational programs in this area..."

West of Peachtree Road and Roswell Road, the large single-family residential area is retained as the high-quality residential area it currently is. The major threats to this area, however, are several: increased traffic on local neighborhood streets, the possibility of reduced maintenance, and flooding problems.

At the same time as the neighborhoods along Peachtree Road were prospering, other parts of the city were crumbling in poverty. In particular, the downtown area, just a few miles south, was described as a crumbling, "blighted" area with primarily African American residents.¹³ In a 1952 regional land-use planning document, the Atlanta Regional Commission specified that it sought to eradicate "the serious concentration of Negroes in unhealthy and inadequate downtown neighborhoods" just south of Buckhead, for which "the pressure to expand has pushed this group into white neighborhoods and tensions have resulted" (39). Atlanta planners blamed African Americans' expansion into white neighborhoods on the problems and (often the crime) cropping up in the community; this 1952 land use planning document outlined explicit "negro expansion" plans to push these citizens out of the north Atlanta/Buckhead area under the pretense of not having enough segregated schools to serve them (88-90).

By the 1960s, following *Brown v. Board of Education*, such explicit segregationist policies could not be written into government texts, but the sentiment was still apparent, and the effects of the policies up to the 1950s were still felt across the city. The 1970 Planning Atlanta report notes that during the previous decade, 35,000 white people moved out of Atlanta and 50,000 "non-white" people moved in—a common migratory pattern during this era of "white flight."¹⁴ However, during this same time period, the report notes that Buckhead saw an increase in its white population and a decrease in the "non-white" population, which dwindled from 698 to a mere 494 people. In other words, intentional policy implementation that discouraged access to the

13 The 1970 Planning Atlanta document states, "Income patterns vary within the city from area to area, but one definite trend is apparent. Lower income families tend to concentrate in areas around the Central Business District where health and welfare services and facilities are centralized. The moderate and affluent areas lie farther out. The most prosperous areas are located in the northern portions where median household incomes range from two to four times the city-wide average."

14 I recommend Kevin Michael Kruse's book *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* for a more thorough, Atlanta-based study of this phenomenon.

areas just to the west or north of Peachtree Road led to the “preservation” of Buckhead as an isolated, wealthy, and white space—and ensured continued prosperity along this route that endures today. Surely, this briefly stated history of planning and land use informs the current language that citizens use when discussing Peachtree Road at turns as a barrier or an access point: a river to be crossed or a flood to be dammed in.

I momentarily call attention to the historical practices that informed the development of the community along Peachtree Road because government agencies likely have neither the time or space to thread such narratives within the context of current planning discussions. In addition, citizens submitting public comments might not realize the connectivity between current public discourse and past planning decisions. While one might argue that such explicit, government-sponsored language from the 1950s about “negro expansion” plans and coded language from the 1960s and 1970s about “urban renewal” programs are long gone, we can connect current public comments to trace how these policies have echoed within our communities, particularly through the metaphors that are adopted. While we would like to assume that segregationist practices—whether overt or occluded—are long dead and that each individual public project is considered based on its own merits, the truth is that each project is connected to others that have come before it. As Candace Epps-Robertson explains, “If we are to challenge racist ideologies, we can remain vigilant only when we recognizing the connections between past and contemporary expressions” (118). Just as Peachtree Road remains the “heart” of Buckhead, concerns remain about how streets are accessed and by whom; maybe the language has morphed while these concerns have remained the same. If we as feminist researchers use open records as a means of accessing current public discourse, we can more easily draw out these connections between present and past government policies and decisions. Again, I have only briefly drawn such a connection here, but the potential for additional scholarship in this realm is limitless.

Concluding Thoughts

In an ideal world, quick access to comprehensive, carefully-constructed archives of recent histories would allow feminist historiographers and researchers to consistently make transparent extant and institutionalized corruption and prejudice, particularly against minorities, women, and other marginalized groups. In the absence of these archives, researchers can leverage open records laws to access public comments as texts that offer us a snapshot of our present-day democracy—and allow us to better enter into current discussions about it. As I have shown in the case study of Peachtree Road, accessing public comments through open records gives us a glimpse into citizens’ cultural

discourses, and we can use these archival research tools to map out broader narratives that shape our culture.

While government agencies may seek out public comments as a means of making quick, finite decisions about projects or policies, feminist historiographers can consider the narratives contained within these public comments subjectively and/or holistically, putting them in a larger context within time and space. Now more than ever, feminist historiographers must turn their lenses to current public discourses and the functioning of our government. As we move deeper into what Jennifer Wingard calls in the Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *Peitho* “one of the most divisive presidential administrations we have ever witnessed as a country, one that is demonstrably changing how political rhetoric and even policy-making are performed and circulated,” and as calls for a “wall” on the Mexican-United States border infiltrate our everyday discourse following the longest partial government shutdown in history, feminist historiographers can look to public comments as a means of interrogating present-day government policies and offering up narratives that question or contradict them—narratives that augment the voices of regular citizens, particularly those who risk marginalization or silence. Considered from this lens, open records are a tool not only for research but also for activism.

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Digital Curation as Collaborative Archival Method in Feminist Rhetorics

Pamela VanHaitsma and Cassandra Book

Abstract: *Our essay advocates for digital curation as a collaborative archival method for feminist research and pedagogy. Based on our work together in a graduate seminar, we describe a repurposing of the Pinterest platform to feminist curatorial ends. Specifically, our class used Pinterest to collaboratively curate existing archives, construct new “lower-case-a archives,” and build community as history was made in the present. We argue that such digital curation is fruitful for scholars interested in bringing together our field’s established strengths in feminist historiography with emergent digital communication technologies.*

Keywords: *curation, digital, collaboration, archives, historiography, methods, Pinterest*

As scholars of feminist rhetorics who advocate for digital curation as a collaborative archival method, we are in good company. Curation is commanding attention across both academic and non-academic domains. In the words of Krista Kennedy, “curation has moved out of the museum and into popular discussions of working with almost any everyday collection, most particularly digital ones” (*Textual* 5). Use of the term curation is so widespread that, as archivist Sammie Morris tweets, even the collection of ingredients for yet another snack bar is branded as such. “It’s official,” Morris quips, “the word ‘curate’ has now lost all meaning.” Kennedy echoes Morris: “The problem with this increasing ubiquity of the term is that along the way, we’ve robbed it of its meaning” (*Textual* 5). Following Kennedy, rather than snack bar marketing, we understand curation as “a category of compositional craft” that requires “a rhetorical, dynamic skill set” involving “filtration, recomposition, and composing for findability and navigation” (7, 28). Recognizing that curation occurs in multiple sites—museums, archives, galleries, textbooks, encyclopedias, digital exhibits, and social media—our understanding of curation as a rhetorical craft nonetheless resists imprecise applications of the term to any “loose collection of links and opinions” (76). Indeed, the labor involved in the craft of curation is extensive, requiring the collaboration of multiple institutions, technologies,

and people. As we might expect, however, women's labor on large curatorial projects is frequently devalued if not entirely erased.¹

One "highly feminized digital platform" for curation is the social bookmarking site Pinterest (Wilson and Yochim 233). Women's participation on the site is visible but dismissed in equal measure. That platforms like Pinterest "are often denigrated by the culture at large further signifies their feminization," as Elana Levine writes in *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn* (1). Levine's title likely brings to mind any number of gendered, sexualized, racialized, and classed images associated with Pinterest. These images are examined by scholars of communication, digital rhetoric, and media studies; yet, women's varied and complex uses of Pinterest remain ripe for further research (Almjeld; Alperstein; Conlin, McLemore, and Rush; Gantz; Levine; Simpson and Mazzeo; Wilson and Yochin). Instead, this essay focuses on our own scholarly participation in Pinterest, as we collaboratively repurposed the site for curation in the service of archival research and pedagogy in feminist rhetorics.

Although feminist rhetorical scholarship takes many forms, it is marked by particular strengths in historiographic work and archival methods. As Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch note in their 2012 account of thirty-plus years of scholarship, "feminist rhetorical practices have been honed particularly on historical rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription" (20). In the words of Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette, writing about feminist rhetorics and the digital humanities, "Feminist recovery...depends on the archive" (637). While traditional brick-and-mortar archival research remains central to the study of feminist rhetorics, we also "see new horizons emerging," with one "vista" consisting of attention to new communication technologies and their "impacts and consequences" for feminist rhetorics (Royster and Kirsch 149-50). In the realm of historiography, such attention tends to focus on work with digital archives.

These digital formations are marked by archival abundance and user participation. Enoch and Bessette list a number of digital archives that may ground research on women's rhetorics: "HEARTH: The Home Economics Archive; Digital Schomburg: African American Women Writers of the 19th Century; the Victorian Women's Writers Project; the Poetess Archive; the Gerritsen Collection; the Women and Social Movement database; the Queer Rhetoric project; the Orlando project; and Women Working, 1800-1903; among many (many) others" (638). Enoch and Bessette note how "these examples suggest archival abundance—a stark contrast from feminist historiographers'

1 Kennedy notes women's contributions to the analog and digital encyclopedias that she studies (*Textual* 76-7, 140). Bessette considers the curatorial practices involved in lesbian archival activism (*Retroactivism*).

former scholarly situation" (638-39). "Whereas we once confronted a seeming dearth of archival evidence," they continue, "now it seems that opportunities for digital recovery are everywhere" (639).² This apparent abundance intensifies further as we consider not only digitized versions of existing manuscript collections, but a full range of born-digital artifacts and archives now available. Digital archives—or "archives 2.0," in the words of Alexis E. Ramsey-Tobienne—include born-digital collections.³ They are characterized, most especially, by user participation. "The most basic conception of archives 2.0," Ramsey-Tobienne explains, "is grounded on the idea of collaboration within a digital space" (5). Users collaborate to construct digital archives by uploading files, posting commentary, and recirculating archival materials via social media, including Pinterest.⁴

2 On "archival overabundance," see also Enoch and Gold (106); Rosenzweig. It is important to keep in mind that such abundance is accompanied by new forms of often gendered absence (Moravec).

3 Ramsey-Tobienne elaborates on the concept of archives 2.0 as theorized by Theimer.

4 User participation in archives 2.0 raises questions of copyright. While Pinterest (the company) is likely protected by Section 512 and "the safe-harbor provisions in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act ('DMCA)," the liability for copyright infringement of individual users is another matter (Carpenter 10). Assessing this potential for liability, Carpenter concludes that fair use likely protects most Pinterest users (11). Carpenter's evaluation seems relevant to most *archival* activity on Pinterest, which involves non-commercial uses that transform (in terms of purpose, even if not appearance) already-published materials in order to organize and comment on them. Whereas collecting and re-pinning found archival materials is one matter, uploading new images is another. As Gard and Whetstone explain, Pinterest's Terms of Use "clearly state that a member must be the owner of the material posted or have authorization to post it; anything she posts must not be in violation of a third party's copyright or a violation of any other intellectual property right" (272). Where we see potential for copyright infringement, then, is when a scholar uploads new photographs taken of brick-and-mortar archival materials, especially unpublished ones. In this case, as when seeking to publish such photographs in scholarly journals, researchers would need to discuss copyright and the formal written permissions process with the archive in question.

Ramsey-Tobienne's concept of archives 2.0 aligns with longstanding investments in collaboration among feminist scholars (Lunsford and Ede; Enoch, Bessette, and VanHaitsma). Still, the collaborative possibilities afforded by digital archives for feminist research should not be romanticized (Enoch and Bessette; Graban, Ramsey-Tobienne, and Myers; Haskins). Whereas many women utilize Pinterest, affording users increased access to some forms of information and collaboration, the site's infrastructure also directs women's participation in limiting ways. As Katherine Gantz acknowledges in her study of women's discursive strategies and collaboration on Pinterest, "the site often functions as a repressive mechanism, recycling hegemonic notions of feminine politeness and capitalist-constructed heteronormativity" (28). These limitations are crucial to keep in mind as this essay moves forward. With our focus on collaborative uses of Pinterest in the service of our research and pedagogy, we intentionally resist hegemonic constructions of gender while pursuing explicitly feminist ends. Because the platform was not designed (or monetized) for these purposes, our feminist scholarly uses of Pinterest amount to a repurposing of the site.

Working with the example of Pinterest, we argue that digital curation may function as a collaborative archival method for scholars of feminist rhetorics who are interested in bringing together our field's established strengths in historiographic scholarship with emergent digital communication technologies.⁵ This argument is grounded in our collaboration within a pedagogical context and is developed here through three sections.⁶ In the first, Pamela introduces our collaboration as it began in a graduate seminar she taught, *Women's and Feminist Rhetorics*. For this course, Pamela designed a digital curation assignment that she initially intended to involve collaborative curation of existing archives. Over the course of the semester, however, other unanticipated curatorial practices unfolded through our collaboration. In the next sections, Cassandra, a participant in the graduate seminar, discusses two of these practices: constructing "lower-case-a archives" and building community through

5 Finnegan argues that curation—whether as process, practice, or platform—ideally plays a central role in the work of rhetorical criticism writ large (407).

6 For other pedagogical approaches to engaging digital archives in undergraduate courses, see Bessette, "Audio"; Enoch and VanHaitsma; Greer; Greer and Grobman; Hayden; Hayden and Graban; Mutnick; Purdy; Rice and Rice; VanHaitsma; Vetter.

history-in-the-making.⁷ We conclude by pointing to the implications of such collaborative digital curation for “new horizons” in feminist rhetorics.

Curating Existing Archives

Our understanding of digital curation as a collaborative archival method evolved through working together in the Women’s and Feminist Rhetorics seminar that I, Pamela, taught during the fall of 2016. Informed by the piloting of a small-scale curation assignment in two prior courses, I developed a semester-long collaborative project to “curate...collections of archives...related to women’s and feminist rhetorics from across historical periods and cultural contexts.”⁸ On Pinterest, this curation takes the form of “pinning” the websites of digital archives to what the platform calls “boards” (see Figure 1). Along these lines, for example, I created an “Archives of Women’s & Feminist Rhetorics” board where we began curating archives of potential relevance to both our shared course inquiries and individual students’ final research projects (see Figure 2). To set the stage for Cassandra’s discussion of the inventive ways students used the platform, this section draws on scholarship from rhetoric, communication, and composition as well as library and information sciences in order to detail the thinking behind the initial design of this digital curation assignment.

7 Our work is informed by collaboration with other seminar participants. We cite their unpublished and digital work only where given written permission to do so. Our essay expands on an earlier piece, “Teaching and Researching Feminist Rhetorics: Digital Curation as Collaborative Archival Method,” which we wrote with Meagan Clark, Christopher Giofreda, Kimberly Goode, and Meredith Privott for the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition blog: <http://cwshrc.org/blog/2017/02/24/teaching-researching-feminist-rhetorics/>.

8 Here we reference the assignment, which is available along with other materials at the course website: <https://feministrhetoricsblog.wordpress.com>.

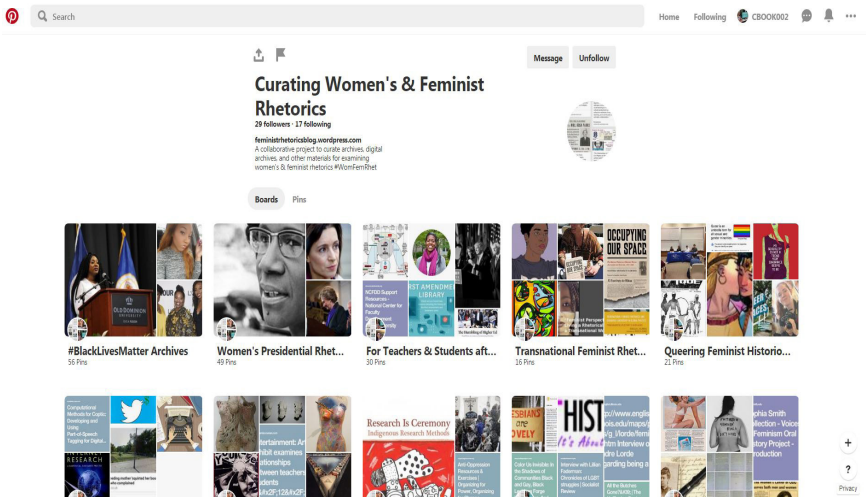


Figure 1: Pinterest page for course.

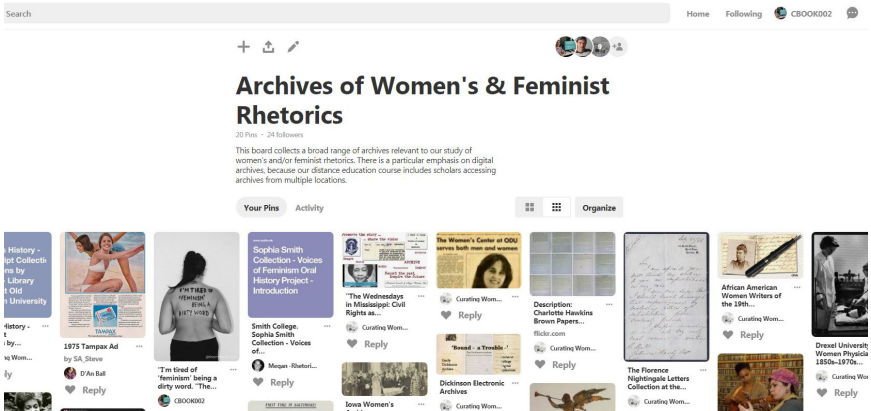


Figure 2: "Archives of Women's and Feminist Rhetorics" board.

My goal when designing this project was to make archival research more accessible to seminar participants. While archival research is central to feminist historiography, involvement in such research is productive even for research agendas that are not primarily historical. In the words of Jonathan Buehl, Tamar Chute, and Anne Fields, archival training encourages graduate students to not only "conduct creative and provocative historical research," but also "think critically about methods, methodology, and scholarly argumentation"

(279). In Cassandra's case, as a doctoral candidate in English and a writing center administrator, her scholarship consists mainly of qualitative research in writing centers. However, her engagement with archives during the course facilitated new ways of thinking about the intersections of writing center studies with feminist rhetorical studies. Yet, material obstacles prohibit many scholars from traveling to brick-and-mortar repositories.⁹ A key obstacle that we faced, working together in a synchronous distance education course, was that we did not have access to the same analog archives. Most seminar participants attended the course via two-way streaming video from dispersed geographic locations. While I taught from Norfolk, VA, for instance, Cassandra participated in the course from Louisville, KY. Although synchronous distance education of this sort remains unique among PhD programs in rhetoric, limited access to brick-and-mortar archives is not. There are many who—whether for reasons of finances, (dis)ability, or family—do not have the ability to travel far and wide to conduct archival research. For these feminist scholars, the curation of existing digital archives holds particular possibilities for facilitating access.¹⁰

While any number of social networking sites may be used to collect and share primary materials, Pinterest is especially suited to the curation of digital archives.¹¹ As Elaine Thornton explains, Pinterest “functions as a place to purposefully collect images from the Internet. By providing functionality that allows users the ability to collect, organize, categorize, and share images, Pinterest fills a gap that other social networking tools do not” (165). Mark Baggett and Rabia Gibbs note that Pinterest’s “specific focus on images” accounts for why institutions such as the United States National Archives, United Kingdom Archives, and New York Public Library “have embraced” it to facilitate

9 Recognizing such obstacles, Purdy points out that accessibility is one the “gifts” of digital archives, which eliminate many of the “temporal and spatial obstacles to archival research” (40). On distinctions between access and accessibility with respect to digital research and primary sources, see Yakel. See also Graban, Ramsey-Tobienne, and Myers (237).

10 That said, increased access to archives through digitization and curation does not resolve the political questions of *which* archives are digitized (Enoch and Bessette; Moravec; Solberg).

11 For readers interested in exploring other options, McGrail and Powell offer a chart that compares different platforms.

“the discovery and access of digital collections” (11, 15).¹² Baggett and Gibbs’s study of the University of Tennessee Library found, for example, that more users accessed those digital collections for which images were uploaded to Pinterest.¹³ Not surprisingly, then, university libraries often elect the Pinterest platform when their goal is not simply to communicate with users, but to share digitized materials from their archival collections (Thornton 171). They use Pinterest, in Thornton’s words, to “meet users where they are” and “draw visitors to collections, resources, and digitized archival materials” (164-65). Because libraries use Pinterest to meet users where they are, feminist scholars may use it to meet archives where *they* are within digital networks. Utilizing the platform’s purpose as well as its visual functionality, feminist teachers and students are able to access and curate collections of existing archives.

The rhetorical dimensions of this curation encompass arrangement and invention. For example, in Nan Johnson’s methodological reflection on collecting archival materials while conducting research for a book project, she writes, “Through incremental recalibrations of what I sought and what I collected the gap closed slowly between the popular rhetoric collection and the gender and rhetoric collection within my ever-expanding archive” (294). “At this point in my story,” Johnson continues, “collecting material had become a heuristic act” (294). Cory Geraths and Michele Kennerly turn to practices for digital collection. Focusing on the rhetorical tradition of commonplace books, they “propose to revive the commonplace book and revise it for the digital age” (“Pinvention” 166).¹⁴ Specifically, they revive commonplace books through Pinterest, urging that this revision is necessary for navigating the seemingly overwhelming amount of information available online: “Our digital update of the commonplace book leverages both a time-tested form of information organization and the ease and accessibility of a digital platform” (167). This use of Pinterest as a commonplace book for digital curation is pedagogically productive in that “the activities required to start and maintain commonplace books reinforce... invention as a process that requires collection, organization, and reflection” (167). Moreover, the digital platform’s emphasis on visuals allows students “to see, easily move around, and categorize materials” (167). Pinterest is well

12 Hansen, Nowlan, and Winter also discuss the importance of visuals to Pinterest, especially with respect to teaching and student learning styles.

13 See also Baggett, Gibbs, and Shumar.

14 Lui also situates Pinterest in relation to “past or offline traditions of curation,” including commonplace books (130). Almjeld makes the connection to commonplace books as well.

suited to making, refining, and moving around categories as students collect digital archives to enable invention. In Johnson's words, "Collecting was thinking: thinking was collecting" (295). As we might paraphrase, based on our experiences, curation was thinking: thinking was curation.

Invention through digital curation is, again, collaborative. More specifically, as Kennedy emphasizes, the type of collaboration that defines most curatorial work is large-scale, distributed collaboration, with important implications for pedagogy.¹⁵ Students, she writes, "will become writers in an increasingly networked world, and the writing they produce will be (and already is) almost entirely digital...They will also inevitably deal with highly collaborative, distributed environments [which] go beyond individual or even small-group websites" ("Textual" 186). With this exigency in mind, Kennedy ventures that, "In order for a class to take up a project of sufficient size to really grapple with the experience of creating a curated text, the instructor may choose to shape the entire semester's work to the work of building of such a site" (186).¹⁶ This is exactly what we did in the Women's and Feminist Rhetorics seminar, as I designed our digital curation project to foreground whole-class collaboration throughout the entire semester. While reading feminist scholarship about collaboration, we worked together to create Pinterest boards related to our various scholarly interests, collect pins for each board, and develop metadata for the boards and pins.¹⁷ We also held regular in-class meetings to discuss our collaborative process.

In some cases, our collaborative process functioned as I had initially intended, so that we curated links to existing digital archives in the service of the seminar participants' primary research projects. For example, Christopher Giofreda embarked on a feminist rhetorical study of Rosa Sonneschein's

15 See also Castro-Lewandowski; Lui.

16 This building includes, as Kennedy continues, "initial rhetorical analysis, developing the basic site architecture and helping students self-select topics based on interest, conducting careful research, filtering, drafting, and recomposition, inserting and maintaining navigation, usability testing, and iterative review" (186).

17 The scholarship we read for this assignment includes the following: Enoch and Bessette; Enoch, Bessette, and VanHaitsma; Geraths and Kennerly, "Pinvention"; Graban, Ramsey-Tobienne, and Myers; Johnson; Kennedy, "Textual"; Lunsford and Ede; McKee and Porter; Ramsey-Tobienne. A full list of assigned readings is available via the course website: <https://feministrhetoricsblog.wordpress.com>.

American Jewess, digitized by the University of Michigan. Another graduate student, J. Meredith Privott, examined the rhetoric of Indigenous women water protectors as represented in video-recorded interviews from the #NoDAPL Digital Archive. Yet there was flexibility in the initial project design, in that it invited students to curate not only “links to digital archives,” but also “online materials, and other resources.” I built in this flexibility because, while I hoped to make archival work an accessible option for students, I did not want to force it on those students more interested in other sorts of feminist rhetorics projects. Indeed, whereas seminar participants like Christopher and J. Meredith did curate links to already-intact collections, most took another route, using Pinterest to construct their own collections of digitized artifacts and born-digital materials.

Constructing “Lower-case-*a* archives”

The other seminar participants and I, Cassandra, did not simply pin existing archives, but constructed our own collections, developing what Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch characterize as “lower-case-*a* archives” (17). These archives stand in contrast with the “upper-case-*A* Archives” described by Robert Connors. As Glenn and Enoch insist, “Not all archival research...begins—or ends—on a university campus or at a prestigious research library” (17). Instead, researchers in rhetoric, communication, and composition need to also consult lower-case-*a* archives, which consist of artifacts not immediately recognized as central to historiography. These lower-case-*a* archives are especially important to feminist rhetorics because they allow scholars to construct histories that may be overlooked through research only in traditional archives.¹⁸

Employing Pinterest, we combined feminist investments in lower-case-*a* archives with the features of archives 2.0, which “are more than digital collections because they invite participation in the formation and expansion of sites, expecting involvement from both archivists and users/researchers alike” (Ramsey-Tobienne 6). By pinning both born-digital artifacts and links to existing archives, we created Pinterest boards where we curated objects of study related to a variety of existing research interests and areas of new inquiry prompted by the course. Examples include J. Meredith’s board, “Digital Ephemera”

18 Geraths and Kennerly provide another example of using Pinterest in their work on Aspasia and nineteenth-century art (“Painted Lady”). Using a Google Images search, they collected and pinned lesser-known images of Aspasia on a publically available Pinterest board. Although they do not name their board an “archive,” it functions much like a lower-case-*a* archive. See also Marshall (370-77).

(of the Standing Rock Sioux's fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline) (see Figure 3) and Kimberly Goode's board, "#YesAllWomen." J. Meredith noted that she collected "about 45 different memes [and] images circulating around the... movement," and that "this board could end up being a treasure trove for someone interested in visual rhetorics." Kimberly's board archived #YesAllWomen tweets, which she later examined as a form of public memory.

Even as we designate these Pinterest collections "lower-case-*a* archives," we recognize the concerns of some archival researchers—and archival scholars and practicing archivists especially—about the expansive application of the term "archive" to many kinds of collections, especially by scholars in the humanities. As Michelle Caswell argues, such references to the archive tend to ignore what Ann Cvetkovich terms "actually existing archives" (268), particularly with respect to "collections of records, material and immaterial, analog and digital..., the institutions that steward them, the places where they are physically located, and the processes that designated them 'archival'" (Caswell). From a feminist perspective, such disregard for the history of archival scholarship as well as the labor of practicing archivists is particularly troubling in its gendered and classed dimensions. Like us, Kate Eichhorn recognizes that, "professional archivists understandably worry about the increasingly hazy distinction between the terms 'collection,' 'library,' and 'archive'" (15).

Eichhorn reminds, however, that "to label a personal collection an 'archive'...remains a powerful authorizing act and *not* because [the] act is necessarily committed to preservation." Rather, "precisely the recognition of the archive as discursive structure has driven the archival turn in contemporary feminist activism, scholarship, and cultural production. For a generation or two of women born during and following the rise of the second wave feminist movement, inaugurating private and semipublic collections as archives... is central to how they legitimize their voices in the public sphere." In Eichhorn's discussion of how labeling collections "archives" is an important authorizing act, she also centers the act of donating such collections to established institutional archives; our lower-case-*a* archives curated on Pinterest are distinct from her examples in that respect. Still, in labeling our curated collections lower-case-*a* archives, we are intentionally engaging in an authorizing act, legitimizing our rhetorical practices less in relation to institutional archives or an abstract public sphere, but more as part of the broader "archival turn in contemporary feminist activism, scholarship, and cultural production" (15).

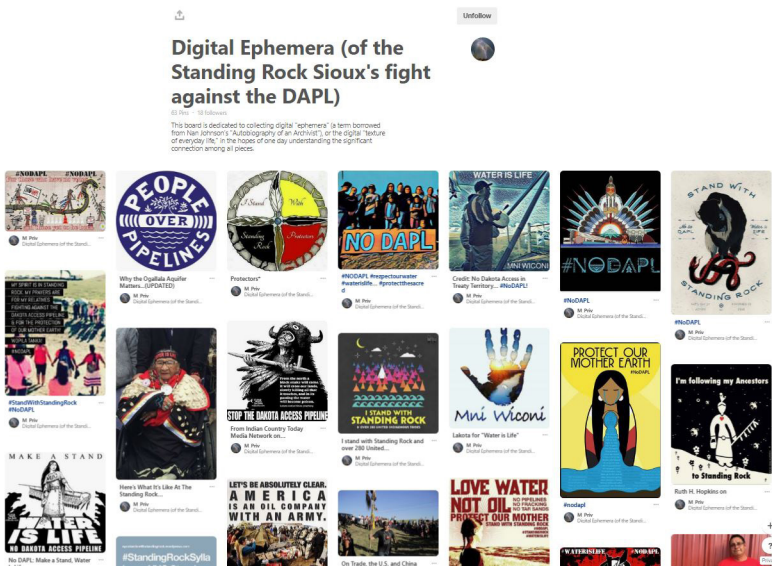


Figure 3: J. Meredith's board, "Digital Ephemera" (of the Standing Rock Sioux's fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline)

One of our first hurdles in curating these lower-case-*a* archives was simply to reorient our understanding of research methods. As graduate students with research experience mainly in textual analysis and qualitative and quantitative methods, archival research was new to many of us. Because of our familiarity with digital research with secondary sources, several of us attempted to pin scholarly journal articles instead of primary artifacts such as memes, blogs, or websites. Heather Herbert described the learning curve and frustration she faced as a scholar working in a new digital platform. After she had worked on creating pins for her board, she realized, "the link I provided would fail to work later when my authentication to the site timed out," because she had pinned links that were behind a paywall.

But once we moved past such initial frustration, using Pinterest shaped our methods in productive ways. D. Knowles Ball describes how the ease of pinning memes revealed a new direction for her research: "A pin I made to my own board [led] me to my course research topic...This pin allowed me to take my investigation of feminist rhetoric and breastfeeding in new directions that I had never anticipated but am quite glad for the results." Her experience exploring Pinterest, beginning with her interest in breastfeeding memes, led her to consider questions of visual rhetoric within breastfeeding communities.

Her work underscores how feminist researchers may use the networked affordances of Pinterest to discover new connections. Although the platform resisted our academic tendency to recognize scholarly journals as the only sources available, it also opened up the possibilities of primary research within lower-case-*a* archives of digital texts that are created and circulated among non-academic audiences.

As a writing center scholar, I seized an opportunity to curate lower-case-*a* archives of the history of women and feminism in writing centers. The field of writing center studies has a history of important conversations in spaces not immediately recognizable as serious academic publications. Notably, in 1976 Muriel Harris founded *The Writing Lab Newsletter* “on a Sears typewriter, cut and pasted—somewhat askew—at [her] kitchen table” (Kinkead 132); the newsletter was one space for writing center administrators “to exchange ideas and information” among “those who are of a helping, nursing bent anyway” (Harris 16). As the description of Harris’s process and purpose illustrates, there is much to uncover about the impact of women, feminization, and feminist thought on writing centers. Yet this is a history that may not be found through research in upper-case-*A* Archives or electronic databases of journals.

For example, I created the “Searching for Feminism and Feminist Perspectives” board (see Figure 4). By including sources outside peer-reviewed journals, I used this board to begin curating a lower-case-*a* archive of women’s conversations and experiences in writing centers. Later, for my final paper, I theorized the role of feminist thought and women themselves across as many writing center-related publications as I could find. I argued that a *feminized versus feminist* narrative tends to dominate conversations about the role of gender in writing center studies. However, I found alternatives to the feminized/feminist binary do exist. I pointed to examples of scholars who use feminist methodologies to create knowledge, disrupt narratives, and educate tutors. Because I did not include peer reviewed journals behind paywalls on the Pinterest board, my lower-case-*a* archive of course did not amount to a “complete” archive of published texts related to feminism in writing centers. Yet, the selections involved in my curatorial process contributed to my understanding of what constitutes an archive of a discipline’s history. In particular, I discovered that including *The Writing Lab Newsletter* and dated edited collections in my final paper helped to historicize the prevalence of describing writing centers using feminized language. I found, for instance, that valid attempts to describe dialogic collaboration conflated “feminist” with “feminization” by drawing on the metaphor of tutor as midwife (DeLappe; Rabuck). Ignoring these sources and instead focusing only on the history of writing centers as represented in the flagship *The Writing Center Journal* might create a privileged version of our field’s history. Through curating my lower-case-*a* archive, I

began to understand how defining the archival boundaries of any disciplinary history limits its representation.

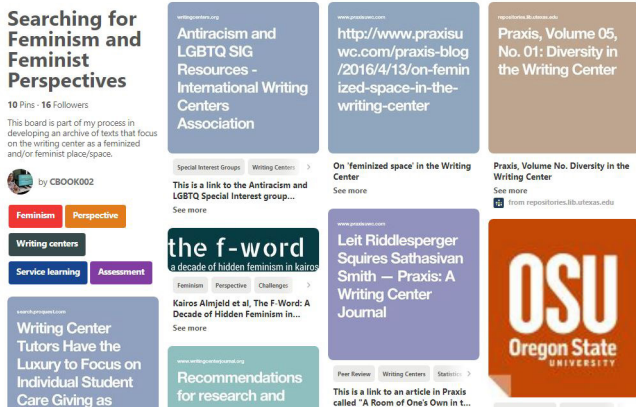


Figure 4: Cassandra’s board, “Searching for Feminism and Feminist Perspectives” (in writing centers).

Importantly, those of us developing lower-case-*a* archives did not undertake this curation in isolation. Pamela set up our course Pinterest account specifically so that we could see the work of our peers and collaborate on boards with them. Our collaboration amounted to what Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede deem dialogic collaboration: “This dialogic mode is loosely structured, and the roles enacted within it are fluid...In this mode the process of articulating and working together to achieve goals is as important as the goals themselves” (235-36). Several of us wrote about our active engagement with one another’s boards in our reflections on the project. For instance, Kimberly describes pins she added to Christopher’s board, “Books on Jewish Women” (see Figure 5): “Since [his] final project is about...Rosa Sonneschein, I thought this was a great reference for him. It examines the various images and stereotypes Jewish women historically had to combat over the past several decades in America.” Kimberly’s example shows how, with some understanding of Christopher’s project, she could contribute meaningfully to his board. Kimberly reflected on the importance of this collaboration: “I felt like it [pinning to Christopher’s board] encapsulated the purpose of our collaborative board. We are to help each other, be each other’s sounding boards, as well as to suggest ideas and sources.” Similarly, Heather reflects on pins added to her board by Casey Reid, acknowledging the scholarly fruitfulness of this type of dialogic collaboration: “Casey saved several pins to my Mansplaining board that gave me new ideas

of how to search for relevant materials.” Several of us engaged with one another’s research in a form of dialogic collaboration, which enhanced both our own projects and our collaboration skills.

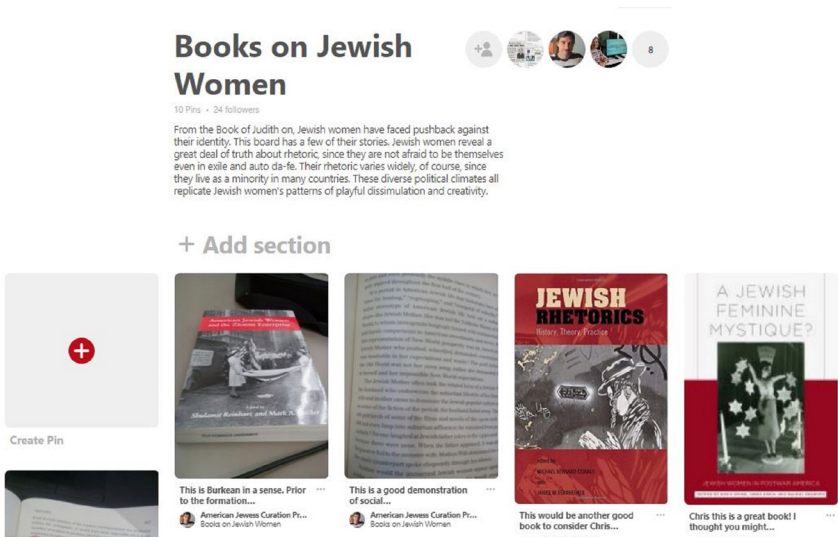


Figure 5: Christopher’s “Books on Jewish Women” board with contributions from both Christopher and Kimberly.

While we engaged with one another’s research through dialogic collaboration, there were several boards on which no one other than the board’s creator contributed. This lack of full participation suggests the importance of communicating clearly about our lower-case-*a* archives to potentially engaged audiences. Indeed, Ramsey-Tobienne recognizes that the “need for participation” is also “one downside of archives 2.0” (8). In my case, although I attempted to reach a peer through “tagging” her in pins, I did not receive a response from her, and there were no comments added to my board. One approach to addressing this lack of participation involves communicating about one’s archival project beyond a course context. Such communication could include sharing on listservs and professional social media accounts. Our class had some success communicating with one another and even engaging outside audiences on Twitter (using the hashtag #WomFemRhet), as Kimberly points out in her reflection. But we could have done more to explicitly invite engagement with our lower-case-*a* archives.

Another approach to encouraging participation involves communication through metadata. On Pinterest metadata includes the captions, or descriptions of boards and individual pins, in order to explain to potential collaborators the goals for the lower-case-*a* archives. Kennedy describes the rhetorical dimensions of metadata: “These strategic links, recomposed texts, metadata elements, and information architectures are suasive elements that contribute heavily to the ethos of digital arguments, and they help both writers and readers realize the *full potential* of digital environments” (“Textual Curation” 175, our emphasis). The digital metadata that Kennedy describes is related to what archivists and archival scholars call the “representation” of a record. Caswell notes that, “how archivists represent records determines how researchers may access them, and subsequently, which records they use to write histories, make legal decisions, and shape society’s views of the past.” As humanities scholars attempting to reach potential audiences in digital spaces, then, we may learn from archivists and archival scholars about their composing processes as they represent records. Again, our class was excited to curate lower-case-*a* archives, but our experience shows that “realiz[ing] the full potential” of participatory archives 2.0 requires a wider range of communication strategies for engaging potential collaborators.

Along with the challenge of eliciting desired forms of participation, we received unwanted participation, as feminists often do in digital spaces. Levine, quoting Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, describes the vulnerability of public pinning: “The very act of selecting, sharing, and thus stabilizing a pin—of trying to make it ‘stand out from the larger flow’— opens the curator and the curated up to the contingencies of consumption and reception, as well as to the contingencies of ordinary affects” (241). In our case, we observed participation by Pinterest users from outside our class who did not share or respect our feminist approaches to curating lower-case-*a* archives. The unexpected trolling that we experienced pushed us to examine our rhetorical power as curators. For instance, I received a negative comment from a user who disagreed with the argument of an article I pinned, although my pin was selected not as an endorsement, but a historical artifact. I deleted the comment because its presence seemed to distract from the purpose of the archive; however, reflecting back on this decision, perhaps I had too much power to delete such comments from the archive. Another form of unwanted attention occurred when some of our pins were re-pinned to boards outside of the class. While reading about feminist involvement in Black Lives Matter (BLM), we curated a “#BlackLivesMatter Archives” board. Christopher notes that his “pin from the BLM board was re-pinned to an anti-BLM board.” Once Christopher’s pin was re-pinned, he lost power over its new curatorial life. In appointing ourselves as curators of lower-case-*a* archives, feminist researchers thus need to recognize

both the responsibilities and the limits of our power to circulate born-digital artifacts on Pinterest, a space not entirely welcoming of feminist rhetorical practices.

Building Community through History-in-the-Making

One of our most important curatorial insights emerged from utilizing Pinterest within our immediate historical context—a crucial moment of history-in-the-making for women’s rhetorics—as we met for class on the eve of the 2016 presidential election in the United States. The week prior to the election, our reading and discussion focused on the history of women’s presidential rhetorics. We considered democratic nominee Hillary Clinton’s complex relationship with gender, feminism, and power in the 1990s (Anderson and Sheeler; Campbell; Dozier; Kenty). To situate Clinton’s political career within a longer historical context, one attentive to black women’s contributions, we also studied the career of Dorothy Chisholm, the first African American woman from a major political party to run for president (Vaidyanathan). In particular, we read about Chisholm’s efficacious rhetorical strategies during the 1970s and 80s after becoming “the first black woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives” in 1968 (Williamson-Ige 95).

Alongside this historical study, Pamela asked us to curate our first “weekly board,” where we collected present-day artifacts related to the week’s assigned readings. On this “Women’s Presidential Rhetorics” board, we each pinned a minimum of two new sources and read two pins made by others (see Figure 6). The weekly board was a shared reading experience, but more social and collaboratively curated than traditional course reading lists. Though not everyone read every artifact posted, we shared responsibility for developing the board over the course of the week. As D. Knowles Ball describes the experience, “it was like making discoveries...going into the collaborative board and perusing my classmates’ pinned contributions.” We could visually see the collaborative effort as a whole due to the centrality of images to Pinterest boards. As of this writing, for example, there are 49 pins on the “Women’s Presidential Rhetorics” board, though our initial plan required only 22 (two per person). Many of us continued to pin on the board throughout the semester. As we worked to make sense of the historical moment, the affordances of digital curation aided us in processing the endless flow of pre- and post-election media while also building community as scholars of feminist rhetorics.

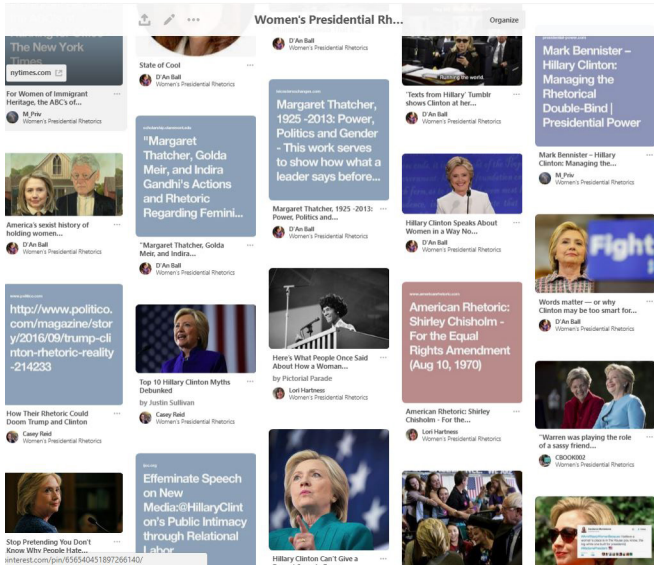


Figure 6: A section of the "Women's Presidential Rhetoric" board.

Through curating this first weekly board, we found that our process had become more fully collaborative, and we were excited as well by the outcome: a robustly curated lower-case-*a* archive reflecting a spectrum of perspectives related to women's presidential rhetorics, Clinton, and Chisholm. We were eager to continue this curation of history-in-the-making. So D. Knowles Ball approached Pamela during our next class meeting to request that we move forward with developing weekly boards throughout the rest of the semester. For the remaining weeks of the course, then, we collaborated to curate digital archives of current events for each of the remaining course topics. These weekly boards included "Transnational Feminist Rhetorics," "Cultural Rhetorics," "#BlackLivesMatter Archives," "Lesbian Feminist Rhetorics," and "Queering Feminist Historiography." Pamela also created another board, "For Teachers and Students After the Election," which amassed 30 pins even though participation was fully optional.

Our energetic pinning during the latter portion of the semester may be attributed partly to post-election bewilderment. Several of us felt both a personal and professional need to process the loss of "our" potential history, as in feminist and women's history. But we were also energized by the community building that our collaborative curation afforded. These collaborative

curatorial activities at times transcended the boundaries of personal and professional. Jennifer Douglas argues that even brick-and-mortar archives are often created through collaborative means because each archive has multiple stakeholders with various purposes (including personal ones) and audiences. Yet, Pinterest makes this collaboration, often hidden in brick-and-mortar archives, more visible to those working outside the archival professions. Debora Lui also discusses how Pinterest has the potential to “blur the line between personal and public,” because it combines elements of private commonplace books with social media (130). Collecting and sharing pins that connected history-in-the-making to our weekly course topics not only helped us process the current news, but shifted our daily media consumption from private and oftentimes passive to public and more active. Referencing election news, Casey reflected,

The articles I was posting on Facebook about the role of gender in the presidential election felt like they had relevance beyond how I was using them privately: I used many of them for our class boards, and as I began to see my pins and my classmates’ pins accumulating, it felt as though we truly were creating something of potential interest to other feminist scholars, as well as individuals who are interested on a personal level with feminism and feminist commentary.

Casey underscores how our personal investments often carried over into the class’s archival space, ideally enhancing this space we coded as “professional” for the purposes of our course.

As we collaborated to create new archives on Pinterest related to current events, we developed into a feminist rhetorical community whose goal was to help potential audiences make sense of history-in-the-making. As we described in the previous section, we learned the importance of cultivating a committed community of archivists who share feminist rhetorical goals. Although the degree of collaboration varied on the individual boards, the shared exigence of the weekly boards helped us define our rhetorical purpose and ethos as a class. Ramsey-Tobienne reminds us that “ethos-building is important for so-called archives 2.0 because questions of trust and community are central to concerns about this developing archival space” (5). As we experienced sporadically on our individually-initiated boards, we needed dialogic collaboration in order for them to become fully realized archives 2.0. J. Meredith’s reflection on the “For Teachers and Students After the Election” board describes her understanding of our ethos and how it helped to build community through curation: “these were all pins that I thought might help my classmates or any visitor get through that particularly tough week. It’s clear that my classmates had the same idea in mind—everyone added pins that represented resources,

inspiration, or new directions to turn to...[the board] may have been one of our most truly dialogic boards this semester." J. Meredith shows that our class-community's primary audiences were academic and non-academic.

Finally, our curation of history-in-the-making through the weekly boards exemplifies Kennedy's emphasis on the role of distributed labor in developing large-scale curatorial projects. She explains, "Textual curators must always contend with distributed collaborative environments and, consequently, distributed agency because they are always and ever working to arrange prior texts into innovative, flexible textual ecologies" ("Textual" 179). Distributed collaboration allows more archival work to be accomplished because multiple curators are working with a shared sense of purpose in a workflow that is more horizontal than vertical. In the case of curating lower-case-*a* archives, this curatorial labor includes identifying and addressing absences in the archives. In a blog post collaboratively authored by seminar participants, for example, we discuss Kimberly's contributions to the "#BlackLivesMatter Archives" board: "Kimberly pinned to this board an article that juxtaposed the generational pain of such violence alongside pins of protest footage. As a critical viewer of this archive constructed by the class, Kimberly recognized an omission in the board, and she used her position as a collaborative archivist to fill the gap" (VanHaitsma, Book, Clark, Giofreda, Goode, and Privott). Here and elsewhere on Pinterest, our feminist collaboration enabled not only community building through curation, but "distributed agency" as seminar participants created and revised lower-case-*a* archives that flexibly adapted to history-in-the-making, addressing archival absences along the way.

Conclusion: "New Horizons" for Feminist Rhetorics

Our experiences using Pinterest for collaborative curation involved both intended practices—curating existing archives of women's and feminist rhetorics—and emergent ones—constructing new lower-case-*a* archives as well as building community through history-in the making. In each case, these curatorial practices enabled our research projects, enlivened our scholarly conversations about methodologies and methods, and supported our collaborative efforts to bring the study of feminist rhetorics to bear on present exigencies. Of course, these curatorial practices also presented challenging opportunities: to be pedagogically responsive to unexpected turns in our collaboration; facilitate meaningful participation when collaboratively composing comments and metadata; and negotiate relations between academic and non-academic audiences, including undesirable responses from audiences unsupportive of feminist rhetorics. In navigating these possibilities and challenges, we have also reflected on the broader implications of our collaborative digital curation for teachers and scholars of feminist rhetorics.

First and foremost, this experience bolsters our conviction about the need for feminist rhetorical pedagogies that incorporate historical as well as digital approaches. We see that most graduate seminars focused on feminist rhetorics, in keeping with the longstanding emphasis on recovery and historiography, still tend to emphasize a historical approach. We believe this approach remains significant, in terms of both learning the history of our field and having opportunities to practice primary, archival methods. Still, as scholarship in recent years makes clear, there is much more to the study of feminist rhetorics than historiography and archival methods. We urge, then, that graduate faculty revise pedagogical approaches in light of ongoing scholarly developments. We have suggested one way to do so, through digital curation as a method for bringing together our field's established strengths in historiographic scholarship with the "new horizons emerging" through digital communication technologies (Royster and Kirsch 149).

For graduate students as well as established scholars across rhetoric, communication, and composition, knowledge of digital rhetorics and experience with collaborative methods are increasingly essential. Returning to Kennedy's call, we are reminded and want to underscore that scholarly conversations exist "in an increasingly networked world, and the writing [we] produce will be (and already is) almost entirely digital" ("Textual" 186). Anyone attentive to the actual, present-day job market that graduate students find themselves entering—both in and beyond the academy—must realize that excluding the study of digital rhetorics from our graduate pedagogies, particularly in courses that draw large numbers of women students, does them an incredible disservice with intellectual, professional, and material consequences. Of course, in order to teach digital rhetorics, more established scholars must be willing to engage with them in their own scholarship.

Geraths and Kennerly offer model projects produced through digital curation and collaboration. As feminist scholars curate and theorize digital lower-case-*a* archives, we need to follow their example by making our methods public. As in the case of archival research (Ramsey, Sharer, L'Eplattenier, and Mastrangelo), such transparency about digital curation will offer exemplars for scholars who wish to replicate curatorial practices. Moreover, sharing a link to a public lower-case-*a* archive may open up that collection for others to conduct additional studies as well as invite participation from new academic and non-academic audiences. Such increased collaboration is a new reality for scholarship in the humanities. While institutionalized hierarchies of value in the humanities continue to valorize the performance (and illusion) of sole authorship, our own ethics and methods in feminist rhetorics have long underscored the value of collaborative scholarship, even for those of us who remain highly strategic about the kinds of collaboration in which we invest our

time and energies. Moreover, if the study of feminist rhetorics is to genuinely engage scholars from across the many subfields of composition and communication—including scholars in technical communication, compositionists who do empirical research, scholars involved in the digital humanities, and communication scientists—we would do well to attend to and make visible methods for collaboration, as collaboration often drives research in these areas.

As we conclude with these reflections on new horizons for feminist rhetorics through increased attention to distributed collaboration and digital rhetorics, we offer the use of digital curation as one method for accomplishing these ends. Yet we also want to continue to ask: How might we teach feminist rhetorics in ways that position ourselves and our students to conduct and contribute to the range of archival, digital, and social scientific research that characterizes our rich and methodologically diverse fields of rhetoric, communication, and composition? We invite our colleagues in feminist rhetorics to join us in imagining, articulating, and sharing still other ways to engage in and teach a range of digital and collaborative methods.

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Review of Bessette, Jean. *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archives: Composing Past and Futures*. Southern Illinois UP, 2017. 202 pages.

Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne

Arguing for the rhetoricity of the archives and culling from a variety of primary sources, particularly those crafted and curated by and for lesbians, Jean Bessette's *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archive: Composing Past and Futures*, traces the process of historicizing lesbian identity. She calls such a process retroactivism, defined as the displacement of singular, often exclusionary, histories with newer versions in an attempt to effect change in the present. Retroactivism enables the writing of new, more inclusive, more queered histories, which in turn foster in the present a collective identity of and for lesbians. In effect, we broaden history in order to re-articulate the present. Further, she argues that histories of lesbianism have been composed "not merely to collect and record the figures, acts, and accomplishments of women with same-sex desire, but also to *forge* a sense of shared identity across time and difference....these historiographic acts actually helped mobilize lesbian identity" (7, emphasis in original). The archives are built both to preserve the past, but also to help understand and delineate a sense of what it meant and what it means to be lesbian. Throughout the book, in emphasizing the constructed nature of the archives, she reminds her readers that archives are not infallible and that the process of retroactivism can and perhaps should be applied toward other mis- or underrepresented groups.

As Bessette lays out in the introduction, her project of recovery and re-reading of lesbian archives brings together feminist, queer, and rhetorical historiographical methodologies. Taken together, these three methodologies productively challenge more traditional histories that excluded and silenced women, as well as pathologized lesbianism, to show how lesbian archives worked against these gaps and mis-identifications. She looks at non-traditional archival materials and archival spaces, as well as documentary films of lesbian history. Her argument that these types of materials are important to consider when dealing with non-mainstream groups, organizations, or peoples, is a valuable reminder for researchers to look beyond standard archival documents and ways of organizing materials to find other forms of historical

evidence and other classificatory systems that these groups used to historicize and legitimize themselves. Each of her chapters focuses on a different medium of production to explore the “technological contexts” of the queered lesbian archive. In overlaying different methodologies and different archives, Bessette is, in many ways, reflecting the very expansive associations she notes in the archives. Her book is therefore not just a history of lesbian collective identity, not just a treatise on archival research, not just a rhetorical reading, but all three woven together.

Chapter one traces the development and reception of the text *Lesbian/Woman*, a collection of self-reported, written anecdotes from lesbian women. Bessette examines how *Lesbian/Woman* itself is an archive, one that helped to create both identification and disidentification among lesbians in the 1970s. This text-based archive began in the 1950s with the Daughters of Billitis (DOB), a lesbian group formed by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in response to the “pathologization and criminalization of same-sex desire” (28). Such villainizing marked women who liked other women as “variants” who were bar-hopping, over-sexed, drug-using deviants. In response, DOB started publishing a monthly magazine, *The Ladder*. As the DOB started dissolving in 1970, Martin and Lyon began composing *Lesbian/Woman* based on the earlier published anecdotes from *The Ladder*. The selected anecdotes were chosen to convey a lesbian identity that conformed to “mainstream expectations” (29) of womanhood (monogamy, respectability, moderation). In positioning *Lesbian/Woman* as an archive, Bessette argues for the inclusion of anecdotes as a form of historical evidence: “anecdotes are ephemeral because they are experiences articulated secondhand and retold in absentia of the subject whose experience is divulged, with no material record to authenticate it” (39). Taken together, the anecdotes grouped within *Lesbian/Woman* are rhetorical in that they showcase a strategically curated collection of lesbian experiences that “had specific, *interventionist* effects on its readers’ understanding of themselves as lesbians” (41, emphasis in original) because they directly undermined the pathologizing, yet “official,” narratives. Bessette also examines the limits of this archive. The anecdotes created a “homonormative” archive that not every lesbian could identify with. For instance, Bessette discusses Virginia, whose experience as a lesbian was markedly different than those showcased in *Lesbian/Woman*. Further, the text ignored the roles of bars in the forging of lesbian identity. Thus, *Lesbian/Woman* showcases the rhetoricity of archives in what it includes and excludes, and in which experiences are validated and which remain marginalized. In talking about the omissions, Bessette reinforces the idea that even archives “with expansive and ephemeral notions of evidence risk exclusivity” (57). This idea of exclusion/inclusion is further explored in chapter two.

The Lesbian Herstory Archive (LHA) in New York City and the June L. Mazer Archives (JLMA) in Los Angeles are the focus of chapter two, "Classifying Collections." Relying on Carolyn Miller's definition of *topoi* as "conceptual shapes or realms," Bessette argues that classification as used in these archives is a rhetorical *topos* that encourages identification, not division. The flexible classification systems used by LHA and JLMA created radically inclusive spaces that responded to the needs of their imagined audiences—women who are looking for artifacts that reaffirm their own stories and experiences. Yet, both places deliberately maintain their identities as archives because of the power and authority given to archives to make "official" histories, even as they create spaces for non-academic researchers. While both LHA and JLMA are archives, they do not seem to follow basic archival tenets. For instance, once the LHA acquired materials they did not always archive them in the traditional sense (e.g. relying on original order, provenance). Instead, as researcher Kate Davy recounts: "[i]nto these boxes had been tossed, in no particular order, press releases, programs, scripts..." and so forth" (73). Or, sometimes disparate items were deliberately placed next to each other, such as a pair of boots worn by the ten-time marshal of the Dyke March next to a collection of 1940 and 50s pulp fiction paperbacks. Bessette argues that while quite distinct in their queer identities, their placement encourages an "associative analogy" wherein the different, but nonetheless valid, histories help create a fuller lesbian herstory.

The next *topos* she looks at is synecdoche and repetition, using the so-called "Gutter Letter," written by Eleanor Coit, and held at LHA. This love-letter was thrown in the trash by Coit's family after her death and then literally retrieved from the gutter by a friend of the archive (hence the name). The letter synecdochically represents lesbian identity—the expelling of lesbian experience from society and then the finding of home at the LHA. The original letter is housed in the Coit special collection, but it was reprinted in the newsletter and appears in the archive's travelling slide show. The letter exists in different categories and in doing so, breaks down strict classification systems. The letter is about Coit, about lesbian herstories, and about the archive's mission simultaneously. Finally, Bessette looks at the function of photographs in each of the archives. One notable photo exhibit at the JLMA is a photo collage screen (think room divider) on which are plastered hundreds of photographs. The screen, titled "Celebrating the Women in my Life, 1915-200?" was created by Ester Bentley. Most of the images are not clearly labeled, but researchers are starting to identify some of the women when they appear in other connections. The ability for collections to share a "connective tissue" across time and place demonstrates another moment of retroactivism. They depict lesbians having long, fulfilling, multi-dimensional lives full of diverse relationships. In seeing the rhetoricity of the archives in their *topos*, we also see what is missing

or elided in histories (in the case of the LHA, it is the histories of women of color), and we see places where new histories might be found to add to lesbian histories.

Perhaps the most non-traditional archives are examined in chapter three wherein Bessette looks at documentary films of lesbian history. She identifies six films and pairs each film with the multimodal rhetorical strategy it uses in pursuit of retroactivism. The five strategies and films are: 1. Unstable identity categories using Hammer's *The Female Closet*; 2. Achronological memory using Hammer's *Tender Fictions*; 3. Unapologetic imaging of taboos using Hammer's *Nitrate Kisses*; 4. Fictitious archives using both Hammer's *History Lessons* and Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman*; and 5. Camp historiography using Carlomusto et al.'s *Not Just Passing Through*. These films are more than recovery projects: they are challenges to such action. They use the archives, sometimes even creating archives—as is the case with *The Watermelon Woman* where director Dunye actually makes an archive to historicize her fictional main character—to help write lesbian histories. At the same time, the films recognize that such histories are necessarily incomplete, biased, and not always pretty. Indeed, the films do not shy away from “taboo” subjects and from making the audience uncomfortable. For instance, Hammer's *Tender Fictions* tells a series of non-linear stories, none of which are figured as the Truth. In playing with the reliability of the past, Hammer's film allows each story, each past, to be equally plausible and possible. Another of her films, *Nitrate Kisses*, depicts an older lesbian couple engaged in explicit sexual acts, overlaid with narration from other lesbians sharing memories of growing up gay. Taken together, the images and voiceover “expose the fractures within lesbian communities” (117) and force viewers to consider exclusions in their own depictions of lesbian identity and in the process of historical recovery. Bessette argues that these films demonstrate “*historiographic retroactivism*,” a queer approach to the often oversimplified process of recovery.

Finally, Bessette asks “what happens when retroactivism goes digital” (130)? In chapter four, “A History of Discontinuities,” she finds both “reverence and remediation in the ways subsequent generations frame the archives of prior retroactivists, demonstrating the endurance *and* malleability of the fruits of their historiographic labor” (135, emphasis in original). For example, the LHA sought to create a DOB documentary video in 1987. While the video was not made, the oral histories done for the film were preserved by the LHA and are now available online. As Bessette points out, the oral histories were conducted through the lens of the LHA (whose approach to lesbian identity was quite different than that of the DOB). Thus, her reminder that archives shape the evidence they hold is one that should be well-heeded by archival researchers. We must “attend critically to the circumstances of the production and

preservation of historical evidence” (135) as much as we heed our own expectations and constructions of (lesbian) identity and of archival documentation.

Bessette ends the book examining queer digital archives, noting that because archives are kairotic, and because we are in a different moment—one where identities like lesbian, gay, queer, transsexual are more readily understood and discussed—than when the earlier archives were constructed, the circumstances of archiving have likewise changed. She looks at samples from three distinct categories of online videos: selections from the “It Gets Better” Archive, a huge, participatory archive of the recent past (stories are told by the video submitters); coming-out videos on YouTube; and ongoing, long-distance relationship videos also on YouTube. She finds that all three sets of videos continue the project of retroactivism started by previous LGBTQ+ archives. She writes: “these [videos] are historiographical compositional acts; through them, experience is recorded and archived, there to be *used* to shape a sense of collectivity—as long as the sites are live and the webmasters allow it” (146, emphasis in original). They help document what it is to grow up and to build and foster relationships as a homosexual in the twenty-first century. A key difference, however, is the organic, networked, non-hierarchical nature of these archives. There are no organizers acting as gatekeepers. That said, earlier videos do influence the types of videos that are submitted (so the archive seems to encourage of its users the same kinds of videos it already includes). The rules of YouTube also limit the kinds of images that can be shared. Ultimately, this final chapter is a call for more attention to “amateur historiography in digital media” (147) and to think specifically about how race, gender, and class are included (or not) in these digital collections. We must ask ourselves: what is the past that is created online? Who speaks? When? Who is silenced? How is the past informing the present and vice versa? And once again, we must think about looking for answers in non-traditional archives and with non-traditional archival evidence.

Though primarily focused on the relationships between archives and the shaping of lesbian identities, Bessette’s *Retroactivism in the Lesbian Archive* is an important reminder for scholars to expand our definitions of archives and to remain attuned to the ways that the past and present mingle and interact to challenge definitions, communities, and identities.

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Review of Booher, Amanda K. & Jung, Julie. *Feminist Rhetorical Science Studies: Human Bodies, Posthumanist Worlds.* Southern Illinois UP, 2018. 260 pages.

Erin A. Frost

Feminist Rhetorical Science Studies: Human Bodies, Posthumanist Worlds takes on the laudable project of building alliances across feminist rhetorics, rhetorics of science, and feminist science studies in order to re-orient posthumanist and object-oriented studies in ways that more responsibly engage cultural factors. The editors situate their book in the contested space between recent work in object-oriented rhetorics—which seek to consider human and nonhuman agents as equal actors in order to challenge human exceptionalism—and feminist materialist responses, some of which argue that object-oriented approaches flatten human hierarchies in violent ways, failing to account for the problems of moving toward thinking of objects as actors when so many humans have only just (or not even) been recognized as actors (and have too long been treated as objects). Amanda Booher and Julie Jung are direct in their critiques: “It seems to us that some scholars of the posthuman/object-oriented are quick to throw off the bodily compartments that orient them in the material world. . . . reinscribing a privileged position that allows one to minimize the body” (3). They thus focus on feminist approaches as a main point of entry with gender/sex, sexuality, race, culture, disability and other aspects of embodiment as related concerns (5). In so doing, Booher and Jung tell one version of an “origin story” for feminist rhetorical science studies, arguing “that *feminist* new materialism offers an especially productive framework for scholars undertaking feminist posthumanist projects in the Rhetoric of Science, Technology, and Medicine (RSTM)” (23).

The editors begin by identifying their own omissions (animal studies, challenges to Western-centrism) and owning their engagement in José Medina’s “epistemic neglect,” a sort of systemic unknowing (7). They invite readers to note further absences, offering a framework for doing so in an effort to help future work to fill those gaps. Booher and Jung suggest that scholars might engage with their own omissions by turning to works that later fill in gaps as a way of rectifying epistemic neglect. Drawing on the work of Karen Barad, the

editors note that any scholarship makes particular choices and that scholars must be accountable for those choices.

This collection includes a prologue, an introduction, and eight chapters, one of which is a conclusion by the editors. The chapters are, as the editors themselves note, "diverse and at times conflicting" (32), putting into practice the editors' commitment to expand perspectives. The introduction, "Of Complexity and Caution: Feminism, Object-Oriented Ontology, and the Practices of Scholarly Work," put several bodies of theory into conversation. The introduction uses the "conceptual hinges" of posthumanism, feminist new materialism, posthumanist rhetorics, and feminist posthumanist rhetorics to articulate relationships between and among those fields as well as feminist science studies and rhetorics of science. Booher and Jung engage in an important reconceptualization of the edited collection by framing their collection through one of its constituent chapters, suggesting in their prologue that Kyle P. Vealey and Alex Layne's methodology of rhetorical reverberations, as articulated in chapter one, can help us to think about ways to read scholarship more ethically. Specifically, this methodology helps us to note which citations are present and absent and to move forward in ways that pay attention to those absences. (For my own part in the context of a book review, I strive to engage in responsible citation practices here by adapting MLA style to list all authors' full names in the references.)

Vealey and Layne argue for a feminist rhetorical methodology that deals carefully with the practical implications of ontology: "we see a need for a way to attend carefully and cautiously to the ontological impact and consequences of our scholarly practices, including how we cite the work of others" (69). They denote this methodology with the name *reverberations* because this term "conveys a sense of lasting and continuing effects that seem to emanate from a designated origin" (69). Vealey and Layne offer a history of object-oriented ontology and its intra-actions (or lack thereof) with feminisms and with women; they explicitly take on the politics of the field, acknowledging (and supporting) scholars who have pointed out that women scholars have been purposefully excluded and that some of the people who have been doing this work the longest (Hayles, Haraway) have not been consistently cited in the field's literature. Vealey and Layne are "charitable" (72) in their critique, pointing out that it is not always malicious intent that underlies this politics of citation, but also making clear that authors are nevertheless responsible for the reverberations they sponsor.

In chapter two, Jen Talbot offers a specific set of circumstances under which it is important to address "tensions that arise when posthumanist conceptualizations of the social become entangled with feminist politics" (86). Talbot uses a North Carolina law requiring pregnant people to undergo fetal

ultrasound before they can access abortion services to demonstrate conceptual differences between Latour's Actor-Network Theory and Barad's agential realism, arguing that the latter "has greater potential to reconcile asymmetries among human persons ethically and compassionately while still working toward extending personhood beyond the human" (86). Specifically, Talbot argues that agential realism can recognize that fetuses initiate biochemical changes in pregnant bodies and recognize that these actions constitute fetal agency without slipping into the assumption that fetal agency necessitates fetal subjectivity. In contrast, for Latour, a body becomes an actant when it is perceived as doing something—so the sooner action can be attributed to an embryo or fetus, the sooner other actants can argue for fetal personhood (96). Display laws, like the NC law described in the chapter, utilize such logics to bolster pro-life/anti-choice arguments. Thus, Talbot says, "posthumanist frameworks that minimize the phenomenological, such as Latour's ANT, are problematic for feminist rhetorics, since human bodies' experiences of the social . . . drive human action" (88-89). Talbot's application of agential realism further suggests that agents are responsible for their own articulations; thus, those who articulate fetal personhood—and not pregnant women—are accountable for the consequences of that articulation.

Catherine Gouge, in chapter three, also takes on issues of patienthood when she recasts the logics of noncompliance, arguing that we should shift from assigning blame for non-compliance to seeing divergent behaviors as opportunities to make care more contextual. Gouge draws on disability studies (especially the work of Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson) as well as new materialist feminisms, medical anthropology, and feminist rhetorical scholarship to introduce a kairology of care which values experience and context. This approach considers care as situated, embodied, rhetorical, and intra-active. Gouge discusses "Compliance 1.0," a model wherein compliance rhetorics assume a standard body and standardized understandings of normalcy and deviance (118). "Compliance 2.0," in Gouge's framework, represents a shift to a "remission society," which builds on Compliance 1.0 but with an additional focus on risk wherein noncompliant patients (those who don't "appropriately" seek to mitigate risk) are accused of being negligent, passive, and weak-willed (119). Gouge's kairology of care, however, points out that noncompliance/divergent behaviors might more logically be seen as evidence of coping and that the causes of non-compliance are not limited to issues of persuasion or trust but also to patients' material lives. Assumptions of compliance can result in biomedicine failing to account for varying treatment options. Logics of compliance treat "health" as a clear goal and assume a linear path to get to that goal, following a logic of progress; Gouge argues that notions of compliance are ableist and to recast them we must challenge existing notions of

disability. Rather than seeing our bodies as “victims of our moral and psychological shortcomings” (124), we might utilize the work of posthuman scholars (especially Barad) to “challenge humanist assumptions about agentic subjects” (127). For example, healthcare professionals routinely ignore that many patients continue to smoke after being diagnosed with lung cancer; however, these patients might benefit from different therapeutic approaches.

Jennifer Bay focuses chapter four on what we teach technical communication students, drawing on the work of posthumanist theories and taking readers to the classroom, smartly pointing out that “we must still attend to practice” (142). She takes on the important problem of how to better prepare and mentor female technical communication students; further, she enacts that work by including research conducted with an undergraduate student, Trinity Overmyer. Bay and Overmyer first followed Thompson’s (1999) work by doing a keyword search in field journals and then juxtaposing those results with data from the U.S. Census Bureau, ultimately finding that female technical writers are disproportionately engaged in part-time work and in work that does not make full use of their expertise and abilities. Unfortunately, the keyword search portion of the study misses a fair amount of important scholarship (Koerber, 2000; Lippincott, 2003; Rohrer-Vanzo, Stern, Ponocny-Seliger, & Schwarzbauer, 2015; Wolfe & Alexander, 2005), even discounting book reviews (Davis, 2007; Salinas, 2000) and comments (Sauer, 1999), and this missed scholarship includes Thompson’s follow-up to the article the study is based on (Overman Smith & Thompson, 2002). However, these omissions do underscore Bay’s point that different approaches focus our attention in different ways. Bay uses her experience in this research study to imagine new and richer approaches that consider “how the databases we used and their material-technological frameworks worked to construct the bodies of technical communicators” (157). Bay discusses how this research project would have been made more productive by using a feminist new materialist approach and she offers specific suggestions for operationalizing a feminist materialist approach to the lived experiences of women who work as technical communicators, including examining the ways workplace technologies manage time, paying critical attention to gendered identity formation, and re-thinking what constitutes professionalism.

In “How Good Brain Science Gets That Way,” the fifth chapter in the collection, Jordynn Jack argues that some recent neuroscience research aligns with feminist and humanist concerns about perceived objectivity in scientific research. Jack first reviews two psychological studies to demonstrate that neuroscience experiments can challenge beliefs about sex and gender by accounting for how expectations may lead participants to offer responses drawn from their own pre-existing beliefs and how the experimental materials themselves

are never free of bias (172). Next, Jack discusses the process whereby she and a research assistant coded 49 neuroscience studies dealing with sex or gender wherein 31 articles demonstrated sex/gender differences, 14 studied phenomena specific to men's or women's brains, and 4 questioned sex/gender differences (173). Studies in this last category, Jack finds, "seek to understand how stereotypes work in the first place" (175) and suggest "that researchers who seek to understand how it is that we ascribe gender differences to others can help depolarize male and female brains by refusing the antithetical reasoning foundational to so many other studies" (178). These articles represent opportunities for coalition and collaboration for feminist rhetorical science scholars. Jack seeks to move us—feminist humanities researchers—from the position of critics to the position of collaborators, to "open up possibilities for entanglement" (166).

In chapter six, Daniel J. Card, Molly M. Kessler, and S. Scott Graham engage the question of how postmodernism, in "positioning language as that which constructs reality without admitting or engaging the agency of material forces" (184), has failed to challenge modernism's basic premise. Meanwhile, some feminist researchers have been suspicious of the material and its potential to lend legitimacy to biologically essentialist arguments. Arguing that political and epistemic representation are inextricable, the authors provide a model for feminist new materialist scholars to engage/compare both a politics of *who* and a politics of *what*. Utilizing the FDA's Patient Representative Program (a program in which the FDA looks to patients and caregivers as knowledge sources) as a site of inquiry, they evaluated 167 meetings between 2009 and 2012. A politics-of-who approach, which focuses on people, showed that patient representatives were present but not significantly involved in driving conversations; a more in-depth politics-of-what approach, focusing on concepts, demonstrated a set of concurrent ontologies and that patient representatives, surprisingly, most often enacted the lab ontology (as compared to home, clinic, or market and accounting for ontologies that were enacted simultaneously). Card, Kessler, and Graham ultimately conclude that their own discomfort with a politics-of-what leads them to suggest that "feminist science studies scholars might find a synthesis between who and what a politically productive tool" and that "the two cannot and should not be uncritically disentangled" (200).

Liz Barr uses chapter seven to analyze the FDA's 2012 Antiviral Drugs Advisory Committee meeting on approving Truvada as a PreP therapy through the lens of embodied vernacularity. (PreP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is a prevention strategy aimed at protecting HIV-negative patients who may be at risk for contracting HIV.) This lens "accounts for the speaking body in addition to the spoken word" (206). Barr argues that community members at the hearing, lacking access to the scientific ethos used by medical participants,

developed an “embodied vernacular authority” as an implicitly rhetorical and feminist response/resistance to dominant discourses at the meeting. In other words, community members leveraged their embodied, material experiences as a source of expertise. Barr further argues that even when embodied vernacularity fails to persuade—as it did in this case—it still counters the erasure of bodies, elicits affective responses, and can offer strategies for negotiating asymmetrical power relationships. Barr’s analysis not only offers specific strategies for future rhetorical action that recovers material entanglements, but it also extends the rhetorical power of the community representatives who are quoted in the chapter, functioning itself as a means of “listening to bodies” so as to result in better future practice (222).

In their concluding chapter, Booher and Jung directly address critiques of feminist new materialism that allege it fails to produce social justice action. They respond to this critique by articulating *habits* as a guiding concept for change: feminist rhetorical practices might disagree with sexist, racist, ableist and other exclusionary habits by interrupting normalized, sedimented patterns of discourse/action. Booher and Jung suggest we might think about persuading habits rather than people: “When we help to enact changes in ways of relating among elements in a system, other ways of doing things become possible” (231). The editors then offer a recounting of the chapters in the collection and specific ways in which they lend themselves to changing habits of domination. In the final pages of chapter eight, Booher and Jung articulate the #BlackLivesMatter movement, Wells’s *Our Bodies, Ourselves and the Work of Writing*, and Pezzullo’s *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* as examples that demonstrate that feminist new materialist rhetorical practices are, indeed, concrete political actions. Each of these examples helps audiences to mark patterns that have been assumed as normal or correct. For example, #BlackLivesMatter calls attention to unchecked habits of racism; it has sparked conversation aimed at reframing patterns of violence against people of color enacted by police as not normal, not correct. Ultimately, Booher and Jung’s theory of feminist new materialist rhetorical practice suggests the following tactics: “identify habits of exclusion and domination; make a material thing that renounces those habits; share that thing with others; and then pay attention to how the thing as a phenomenon becomes rhetorical” (237). This set of tactics, and other theories of the posthuman, “retains the possibility of and the need for feminist intervention in the work of social justice” (242).

This collection has significant potential, especially for use in graduate courses. The contributors grapple productively with big ideas, putting bodies of theory into conversation with each other (and with material bodies that may have been missing from some theories) in ways that help readers to make

connections and theorize dissonances they may have felt but were unable to articulate; for example, Booher and Jung point out that object-oriented ontologies and feminist new materialisms “are frequently lumped together under various headings (for example, posthumanist studies, speculative realism, new materialisms, object-oriented philosophy, and the material turn) which elides significant differences between them” (33). The collection’s editors and authors have clearly been responsive to the kairotic moment into which the book intervenes, as so much of this book focuses on the problems that object-oriented ontologies encounter with feminist and social justice scholars and scholarship. Positioning this text in a graduate course alongside, for example, Black Lives Matters’s *Healing in Action: A Toolkit for Black Lives Matter Healing Justice and Direct Action* might yield important rearticulations of some of the objects of inquiry while also practicing a purposeful politics of citation.

Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of this collection is the earnestness with which it engages its central questions. While much of the text does grapple with object-oriented approaches, it does so with great caution and an obvious willingness to reach whatever conclusions the analyses authentically lead to, as Booher and Jung make clear in their introductory chapter: “[W]e believe FRSS scholars need to engage with these frameworks [posthumanist frameworks such as ANT and object-oriented ontology] cautiously, if at all” (33). Ultimately, this collection does “challenge depoliticized uptakes of posthumanism in rhetoric studies” (1). As a whole, *Feminist Rhetorical Science Studies* is an important collection that practices what it advocates—the text itself is a “concrete political action,” a “thing” that the authors have made that renounces particular exclusionary habits and offers models for other habits. Readers can expect that the authors will, as promised, observe the uptake and circulation of this text so as to see what phenomena it sponsors and the myriad ways in which it becomes rhetorical through both its own contributions and omissions.

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Review of Lorimer Leonard, Rebecca. *Writing on the Move: Migrant Women and the Value of Literacy*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2017. 182 pages.

Kaia Simon

Moving literacy is incredibly complicated. When people move across borders, they carry their literate repertoires with them, and multilingual migrant writers must learn, re-learn, revise, and abandon their literate practices for life in new contexts. Scholars of transnational literacy studies have documented the ways that moving literacy is a fraught process that results in a variety of uneven losses and gains (e.g., Alvarez; Lagman; Prendergast; Rounsaville; Vieira), and Rebecca Lorimer Leonard's *Writing on the Move: Migrant Women and the Value of Literacy* is an important contribution for the analytic nuance and feminist perspective it adds to this conversation. The book draws from an ethnographic study of twenty-six multilingual migrant women in the United States to paint a complex portrait of "the ways in which literacies move, the agents of that movement, and the fluctuating values that mediate it" (5). Lorimer Leonard notes that while she did not set out to focus this study on migrant women, she made the decision to do just that after she began collecting data because the women she interviewed tended to refer her to other women, for example, and because she noticed that wives' voices were often silenced when she interviewed married couples. Most importantly, though, she noticed that the women she met through this study did not fit the narratives of migrant women "experiencing inevitable downward mobility," as work in migration studies and educational policy tended to present (19). Lorimer Leonard found that the accounts of women she spoke to complicated this narrative, demonstrating that mobility and literacy are intertwined and that movement in any direction is not inevitable but instead the product of literate repertoires meeting social values.

Lorimer Leonard seeks to remind scholars and teachers, as well as public policy makers, that moving literacy is not a neutral or seamless process but that "literate lives are...lived at a nexus of prestige, prejudice, and power that creates multiple mobilities, simultaneous struggle and success" (5). In foregrounding the valuation of literacy, Lorimer Leonard reveals the potential contributions multilingual migrant writers can make to themselves and their

identity formation, to institutions, and to communities (local and global) when values align. Her work also identifies the wasted potential that occurs when literate movement is stalled or interrupted because values are mismatched. In my own work with multilingual Hmong refugee women, I have noticed that moving literacy across generations as well as across borders has worked better for some participants than for others and that there are clear affective and economic consequences of those workings in their lives. What Lorimer Leonard's book offers is theoretical framing that reveals how and why literate movement is inconsistent, and affected by social and economic values, over a lifetime of transnational migration.

The first body chapter, "Studying Writing on the Move," makes transparent the rigorous data gathering and analytic processes that undergird Lorimer Leonard's arguments about moving literacy. Her project is framed by three questions: 1) How do multilingual immigrant writers use literacy practices learned in one geographical location to write in another?; 2) How do multilingual immigrant writers use literacy practices learned in one language to write in another or many others?; and 3) How does movement itself—among languages and locations—affect, change, or produce certain literacy practices?

These questions lead her to conduct semi-structured literacy history interviews, which offer rich potential to reveal insights about how literacy matters in individuals' lives and also allow her to foreground the voices of her participants in the findings chapters. Lorimer Leonard also describes her grounded theory-based analytic practices in detail, in this chapter and in the appendices of the book. While many scholars with similar methodologies share interview protocols in appendices (especially since Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives*), Lorimer Leonard's narrative of her detailed coding procedures offers readers insight into this too-often opaque process that moves from coding-as-description to the sorts of higher-order codes that lead to the profound insights of this book. In this commitment to methodological transparency and rigor, she also reveals the emic nature and feminist commitment to reflexivity and responsivity that run throughout her analysis. In keeping with best practices in feminist research methods, Lorimer Leonard is committed to ethical and accurate representations of participants, with ultimate respect for the women who agreed to share their stories with her and the words they used while sharing them.

Following the methodology chapter, the body chapters are organized according to the three types of literate movement that Lorimer Leonard identifies from participants' accounts of their experiences with their multilingual literate repertoires in the United States: fluidity, fixity, and friction. These three types of literate movement reveal how the revaluation process affects individuals' ability to draw from their literate repertoires in the United States. Each

findings chapter defines the type of literate movement by weaving together examples from several participants and then elaborates on each through more extended narratives from focal participants. Through her depictions and analysis of “the everyday experiences of multilingual migrant writers,” Lorimer Leonard reveals “with sharp specificity the complicated reality of multilingual literacy” (17).

The first type of literate movement described in body chapter two. “Fluidity: When Writing Moves” is marked by an ease of motion—when “writing is a courier, moving feelings, messages, and information among readers, listeners, spaces, and heads” (32). Fluid literate motion happens when the values of writers align with the values of institutions and leads to productivity and innovation by multilingual writers. Lorimer Leonard separates fluid literate motion into two types: “messy” literacy and literacy relays. Participants called it “messy” when they described “uncontrolled literate movement” (35) between languages and language varieties, and while some readers might associate such “mess” with struggle, Lorimer Leonard makes clear that “messy output is the result of multilingual ease” (35). Alicia, an ESL teacher, describes such ease as she moves between languages and writing styles as she explains concepts while teaching her students. She automatically adjusts to meet students’ needs in the moment. Literacy relays, a concept that plays off the image of passing a baton, show how “literacy practices and ideologies are handed off and passed around” (44). Relays occur in families between generations, in schools between teachers and students, and globally between NGOs or other organizations who share literate knowledge. As just one example, literacy relays in families might involve mothers ensuring their children learn and maintain a heritage language at home in addition to learning English at school. Those who experience fluid literate motion tend to possess metalinguistic awareness and a bifocal perspective that enables ease of movement; they are able to innovate with language, to benefit economically, and to benefit from “increased access to people, jobs, knowledge, and cultural understandings” (62). This chapter makes clear that fluidity is the type of literate motion that supports positive identity formation as multilingual writers and also provides the most economic and social benefits.

The third body chapter, “Fixity: When Writing Stalls,” considers what happens to literate movement when values are mismatched. In these cases, participants’ “fully developed literate repertoires are mediated by values that slowly shut down their multilingual practices in the United States” (67). Participants who experience fixed literate motion find that while they value their own literate repertoires, their literate practices are not valued in the United States. In situations of fixed literate motion, they also do not have the time or energy to learn to play the literate game in this context. Participants describe feelings

of loss of their heritage languages as they learn English. They also describe compartmentalizing language learning and literacy in terms of space (the contrast between home literacies and school literacies, for example) and in the difference between speech and writing (writing makes things too permanent, and so these participants are reluctant to write until they feel more confident about their skills). This being “stuck” among languages is a learning difficulty as well as an emotional and identity-based struggle. Defne, a focal participant in this chapter who is originally from Turkey, describes the emotional cost of fixed literacy when she tells Lorimer Leonard that she can’t write poetry in languages other than Turkish because “It’s not really connected to my soul anymore, let’s say that way” (81). At the time of the interview, Defne had left a PhD program because she could not maintain the rigorous, and voluminous, writing required by her program. Despite all her work to write well in English as a graduate student in the US, she saw that there was no guarantee that her labor would be rewarded and made the strategic decision to stop expending so much energy on writing. Her story powerfully shows that fixed literate motion results in “much wasted human and intellectual potential” of multilingual migrant writers (89). It is in this chapter that the social values surrounding gender and literacy emerge most clearly. As the women speak about their literacy being stuck, or about losing language and writing, they mention the factors that also seem to influence this fixity: as single moms, for example, or because they must work to support their husbands’ educational pursuits, they cannot spend the necessary time to work on writing in English. The intersections among gender, identity, language, and literacy—and the volatility in their associated values—are most obvious when they are in conflict.

In the context of the third type of literate movement, which Lorimer Leonard describes in chapter four, “Friction: When Writing Stalls in Motion,” “friction” means “not simply how values do or don’t match but how their mismatching is a joint venture between writers and powerful institutions” (92). In other words, friction occurs for the writers who “know how to play the literate game, but the game keeps changing” (93). And it is in the constantly-changing game that contradictions about literacy rise to the fore. For example, a participant named Sabohi was hired to be a principal at an Islamic school because her multilingualism was viewed as an asset—yet as principal, she is expected to oversee the primarily monolingual English curriculum (95). She is not able to fluidly draw from her multilingualism. Throughout the chapter, Lorimer Leonard highlights examples of literate friction in work, in the community, and at home—demonstrating that the changing revaluation of literacy happens among all realms of participants’ lives.

Lorimer Leonard concludes her book by extending her discussion of literate friction with a call for awareness that these deep contradictions in

moving literacy exist because of the ever-present revaluing of literate practices. She identifies four prominent deep contradictions: multilingualism, agency, English, and writing. Multilingualism is experienced as a contradiction because it is simultaneously an asset and a cultural deficit. Participants experience contradictions in agency because they both are and are not in control of their writing. English's deep contradiction emerges in its colonialist remnants and its necessary opportunity for participants to acquire it and benefit from it. Participants find writing to be at the same time both tedious and fulfilling. As she reminds us that these four contradictions make the lives of multilingual writers difficult, she asserts that scholars, teachers, and policy makers can take action to relieve these difficulties. While the contradictions might always be a product of moving literacy, the struggles that result from them can be lessened by changes in awareness, in pedagogies and in educational policies, and in public policies more broadly. The specific suggestions she offers for each contradiction are practical and speak to actions individuals can take, as well as more broad social actions that could lead to structural changes and make the United States generally more open to multilingualism. For example, Lorimer Leonard suggests that the contradiction of English as both possibility and constraint might be alleviated by methods of assessing English language proficiency that reflect multilingual values—such as directed self-placement. This would result in less misplacement or mistracking of multilingual writers in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses that often don't recognize or value the English proficiency that students placed in them bring.

All of Lorimer Leonard's suggestions for future actions speak to the troubling implication that without social, political, and policy changes, literate fixity and friction are inevitable and that multilingual migrant writers' literate potentials will continue to go to waste. Everyone, multi- or monolingual, misses opportunities to experience and learn from multilingual migrant writers' innovations, their creativity, their diverse literate repertoires. This is the lasting and important contribution of this book: through frames of movement and valuation, this book extends our field's already-robust critiques of monolingualist ideologies in the US by articulating the lived challenges and frustrations of the manifestations of the ideologies in migrant women's lives. All scholars, all who teach and learn, all who make and implement policies, and all who live in communities with multilingual migrant writers (and who among readers of *Peitho* doesn't do at least one of these?) can and should use the insights that Lorimer Leonard's book brings us to resist monolingualism as an ideology and to work for a more multilingual United States.

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Review of Vinson, Jenna. *Embodying the Problem: The Persuasive Power of the Teen Mother*. Rutgers UP, 2018. 236 pages.

Kim Hensley Owens

The idea that teenage pregnancy is always already a deterrent to future success for mother and child—as well as a detriment to society and a drain on government resources—is deeply embedded in the modern US psyche; the words “dominant narrative” don’t even quite do justice to the strength of that belief: it seems like fact. And that is why Jenna Vinson’s *Embodying the Problem* is so important. Vinson explores the connections young parenthood often has to poverty and systemic oppression, arguing that “the dominant narrative supports the worldview that positions women, and poor people in general, as responsible for the structural oppressions they face and encourages hostility toward women, particularly women’s bodies” (5). The book battles that dominant narrative by showing how it has been shaped by shaky data and fallacious arguments. The book is intellectually challenging because its wealth of data and well-supported claims force readers to tilt their heads and re-examine the things they think they know about young parenthood.

The preface establishes various linguistic and rhetorical choices Vinson makes. Although she may prefer terms like “young parenthood,” she chooses to both confront and use problematic terminology like “teenage mother.” While Vinson “recognize[s] that the discursive constructions of ‘teenage mother’ and ‘young mother’ function to divide mothering women on the basis of age” and are “loaded terms” with pathologizing potential, ultimately she uses that terminology so she can “speak to those terms, challenge them, and perhaps shift what they mean” (xiv). She invokes Teresa de Laurentis, who argues that “the only way to position oneself outside of that discourse is to displace oneself within it” (qtd. in Vinson, xiv). Further, in most of the book, Vinson inverts the usual adjectival order (see: “Adjectives: Order”) of listing age before color when she refers, for example, to a “white young woman” (xii) rather than to a young white woman, or a “black little boy” (2) rather than to a little black boy. This subtle disruption to expectations makes the reader pause slightly to notice both age and race markers, ultimately enhancing attention to both—an appropriate and smart rhetorical choice in a book on teen motherhood, a

topic for which age is paramount and for which, as Vinson shows, race is often either assumed or elided.

By sharing with the reader her own experiences as a “‘teenage’ mother” (xv), Vinson “make[s] transparent (and valued) the embodied ways of knowing that led to this project” and “demonstrate[s] that [she is] both an insider and outsider to the subjects in this book” (xiii). Her personal stories in the preface and woven circumspectly throughout provide positionality and illustrate her deep investment in “discovering the strategies women use to join the disembodied expert discourses that seek to define who they are and to resist the hegemonic ideologies that silence young mothers’ perspectives” (xv). Vinson explains that “[t]he argument to prevent teen pregnancy functions on the stigmatization and surveillance of young women” (xiv), and shows why those prevention methods are ineffective and how they shame people (especially women) who became parents as teenagers.

Chapter one provides a brief history of the concept of teen pregnancy, tracing back to the 1970s when the term “‘adolescent pregnancy’ was narrated as the beginning of unique social and health problems for young women” (11). Such arguments resulted in legal provision of and federal funding for youth to receive contraceptive services (11). The chapter describes how the public is trained by various images and texts to see “adolescent pregnancy as a problem with women’s bodies” (13) and carefully illustrates how some voices became experts in teen pregnancy while the voices of those teens as experts on their own experiences were not included. Borrowing a line from Monica J. Casper and Lisa Jean Moore, Vinson illustrates that “‘women are highly visible containers of blame’” (qtd in Vinson 15). Although the dominant narrative suggests teen pregnancy is reflective of and responsible for a variety of societal ills, more research supports claims that the age at which a woman has a child has no negative impact on “the economy, their own health/future, their children’s health/future, or the sexual behaviors/outcomes of other women” (17). The pattern Vinson identifies within ad campaigns aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy relies on a combination of judgments, inflated and conflated statistics, and enthymematic statements. The “judgmental-phrase-to-misleading-statistic formula encourages viewers to quickly accept the unstated and often contests premises of the claim such as marriage is the marker of good child rearing, all women need/want state-sanctioned male companionship, and teenage motherhood is always the result of consensual sex between teenagers” (3). After establishing this context, Vinson moves to chapters that analyze specific eras, campaigns, and groups of people.

Chapter two examines how images representing teenage pregnancy helped to establish that concept in the 1970s and 80s. She demonstrates that “there is a historical precedent of using white female bodies in cover stories

to portray teenage pregnancy as a universal problem," which she argues "obscures the United States' problematic history of condemning the reproductive decisions of poor women and women of color" (39). The chapter employs visual rhetorical analysis to read a series of images of pregnant teens and young mothers to understand how they "communicate culturally specific meanings to viewers in a particular social context" (46). Vinson explains that one legacy of Title IX in 1972 is that it grants women the right to stay in school while pregnant, although she also reminds readers that being pushed out of school when pregnant is far from unusual even today. Continued access to education is not always evidence of enlightened views, however, as Vinson illustrates when she finds that some pictures "prompt viewers to support education for (black, low-income) *teen* mothers based on the visual premise that the schools instruct groups of black young women how to behave" (53). Further, she shows that in the 80s, the language surrounding teen pregnancy stood in for race or socioeconomic status, metonymic language choices that veiled various forms of prejudice. The chapter's readings of images are poignant and valuable both for Vinson's argument and for teaching visual rhetorical analysis.

Chapter three focuses on stories that counter the dominant narrative of teen pregnancy, written by women who became mothers in their teens. Vinson analyzes stories from an online social network called *Girl-Mom* and from two edited collections that bring together the stories of young parents. These stories talk back, in Vinson's parlance, to experts who are determined to find negatives stories and frame teen parents who are successful by any standard as exceptions, as anomalous "success stories." The stories by these young mothers resist framing their successes as anomalous. They disrupt the dominant commonplaces that circulate about teenage pregnancy as ruinous to a young woman's life and that of her progeny. Vinson writes from a feminist poststructuralist perspective—rather than showing an interest in why young women became pregnant, she emphasizes how young women tell their stories and what effects those story-making strategies can have on readers, particularly when the stories reveal the structural issues underlying individual "choices" women make. Vinson argues that "personal narratives that explicitly illustrate problems with social structures are crucial to intervening in dominant discourses that obscure the material conditions and social relations that shape young women's experiences of pregnancy and motherhood" (96) The chapter successfully complicates any single or simple narrative for teenage parenthood and obliterates the dominant decline narrative.

Chapter four explores circumstances of the creation of the #NoTeenShame movement, which formed as a response to the #NoTeenPreg ad campaign run

by the Candie's¹ Foundation. The campaign actively shamed teen parents in its attempts to prevent teen pregnancy. The chapter tracks several things, including Candie's #NoTeenPreg advertising; the resulting creation of the group of mothers who formed #NoTeenShame to counter the messages of shame within that campaign; the rhetorical strategies the #NoTeenShame coalition used; and the ways various social media made #NoTeenShame's response possible. Vinson provides statistics that counter those shared in the original Candie's ad blitz, analyzes the #NoTeenShame response, and illustrates the disingenuity of the Foundation as its representatives refused to meet with #NoTeenShame activists about ways to adjust their message that might prevent teen pregnancy without shaming those who had become young parents themselves. Again of significance in this chapter is the notion of expertise; Vinson notes that "the continued use of the #NoTeenShame hashtag suggests that the movement has encouraged other young pregnant and mothering women to similarly recognize that their position as a 'too-young' mother may be a place of authority from which to speak" (133). This chapter provides a window into how social movements can be created, the particularities of social media, and the ways various rhetorics seize opportunities to "shape, and if needed, interrupt [problematic] discourses" (134).

Chapter five spins out Vinson's concept of "embodied exigence," moments when young mothers or young pregnant women can confront the titular "stranger in the street" who hails, questions, and (typically) judges them. Vinson identifies four strategies that women she interviewed have developed when the comments of others about their embodied experiences create an exigence. These four are (1) "walking away," which risks the mother being identified as a rude teen, but is the safest of the four options; (2) "talking back to invasions of privacy," or using societal norms about not intruding to the teen mother's advantage; "(3) "employing humor"; and (4) "educating the stranger with counter-points [*sic*]" (138). This chapter was my favorite because the quotes from the interviewees leap off the page and the situations described are at once so easy to imagine and so hard/sad to fathom. Reading about a young woman transforming her style to counter assumptions or another lying about multiple unrelated children being hers to shock a critical stranger was fascinating, and Vinson's analysis here is equally fascinating. Not everyone will

1 The Candie's Foundation seeks to prevent teenage pregnancy through abstinence-only education; the Foundation grew out of the Candie's brand, which makes shoes and clothing, mostly sold at Kohl's. I searched for but could not find an origin story for the name "Candie's," which looks for all the world like a plural with a misplaced possessive apostrophe, but apparently is not.

agree that bald-faced lies fit seamlessly into the “employing humor” category, but seeing how such lies are actually employed by those cited allows the reader to understand that choice. Vinson’s concept of “embodied exigence” as “the socialized recognition of [a young, parenting or pregnant] body as a problem demanding a response” (147) is compelling and generative. Using samples drawn from each of the four tactics she identifies in this chapter, Vinson created a handout of possible responses to common comments and hostile questions for workshops she conducted with teen parents and parents-to-be at the Boston Summit for Teen Empowerment and Parenting Success (STEPS). This chapter in particular accomplishes the goals of making theoretical and rhetorical sense of seemingly random acts, demonstrates one way to take scholarship public, and will work well in a variety of scholarly and pedagogical contexts.

The conclusion reveals that while teenage pregnancy rates have been steadily declining since they peaked in the 1950s, “there is a real fear that increasing public awareness” of that ongoing decline will reduce or end “funding for existing programs that provided low- or no-cost contraceptives, foster youth development, support young parents, or educate youth about sexual health” (177). That we must keep the public ignorant of such information in order not to keep another segment of the public ignorant of other information is the ultimate irony, and an important element of what Vinson’s book offers: not only a thoughtful rhetorical analysis of myriad rhetorics surrounding the embodied exigence of a pregnant or mothering teen, but also a spotlight on the antics and absence of logic in how the US handles sex education and reproduction in general. Vinson’s goal is to use rhetorical analysis to “join the chorus of young mothers, activists, and feminist scholars in calling for an end to the ongoing stigmatization of young parenthood” (171). While the societal pressure to stigmatize and judge cannot be fully remedied by one scholarly text, this book will change and challenge perspectives, open minds, and help make the broad conversation about young parenthood more accurate and respectful.

Overall, the book, with a wide range of methodologies, interviewees, and text types under consideration, is a strong contribution to feminist work in the field. Vinson’s perspective is clear throughout, and when looking at public texts, she invites readers to examine the same material to see if their analyses match hers or what other perspectives they might offer. My quibbles with this text are few and minor: I see in some places a tendency to over-rely on extant work to anchor the analysis when the analysis itself is actually stronger than the framework, and occasionally at the paragraph and sentence level I found myself craving less pattern repetition and more elegant phrasing, but

these small issues amount to personal preference and do not detract from the scholarly and pedagogical value of the work.

Embodying the Problem engages with theory in an accessible way, carefully guiding readers toward an understanding of the theoretical context in both how she sets up and concludes her analyses. This book will be a valuable text in a graduate or upper-level undergraduate class on reproduction, women's studies, health rhetorics, rhetorics of age, and/or rhetorical or qualitative methodology.

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Review of Walden, Sarah W. *Tasteful Domesticity: Women's Rhetoric & the American Cookbook 1790-1940*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2018. 220 pages.

Elizabeth J. Fleitz

In *Tasteful Domesticity: Women's Rhetoric & the American Cookbook 1790-1940*, author Sarah W. Walden crafts a detailed historical account of the rhetorical work of cookbook writers in the U.S. Walden analyzes the concept of taste via the 19th century American cookbook, examining the genre to explore how women used rhetoric to gain a voice in the public forum while still upholding the status quo by remaining in their domestic space. Similarly, the rhetoric of taste at the time (from taste preferences in food or fashion to moral and ethical beliefs) blended public and private concerns. Drawing from Hugh Blair, Walden describes taste as serving a dual role: "Taste simultaneously indicates an individual preference and a cultural standard, as well as physical and intellectual labor" (1). She does not provide a finite definition of taste, implying that its complexity and flexibility would make any single definition useless. In this text, taste is shown to be a barometer of culture, its definition changing focus as culture develops over the centuries. Taste was a discourse that women, despite their limited gender role, could participate in through cookbook authorship. Inspired by Cheryl Glenn's call to re-map the rhetorical tradition to include work by women, *Tasteful Domesticity* is a thorough examination of the contributions of women cookbook writers to the history of rhetoric.

This 2018 publication is, as Walden observes in her introduction, the first book-length study of cookbooks and rhetoric. As such, it represents a significant step in the study of women's rhetorical practices. Walden provides a detailed introductory overview of past research on cookbooks, from historical, sociological, and rhetorical viewpoints. While it is the first long-form study of cookbooks and rhetoric, it is (as Walden notes) far from the first scholarship on cookbooks in the field, as contributors to and readers of this journal can certainly attest. It seems an extreme statement to call cookbooks a "widely overlooked" area of study in rhetoric (168), though it would have been true several years ago when this text was in its early drafting stages. Today, conferences such as RSA and Feminisms and Rhetorics frequently have multiple

food- and cookbook-related panels, demonstrating the increasing interest in this area of study. Walden's study is distinct in her focus on the rhetoric of taste and the ways in which cookbook writers engaged with that discourse at several points throughout American history. Walden uses the cookbook as a starting point to explore assumptions and arguments regarding taste through the progress of the long nineteenth century in America. While cookbooks are certainly a central feature of the text, this isn't a study of the cookbook genre. In each chapter, Walden uses cookbooks as a jumping-off point to study societal beliefs about taste, considering how cookbook writers engage in debates around these beliefs. Thus, while cookbooks are a central feature of analysis in the book, Walden spends a great deal of time mapping the connections between cookbooks and culture, showing the varied points of influence that food writing reaches. As Walden explains in her introduction, "Women participate in the formation of knowledge and community through their adaptations and revisions of discourses of taste" (17). Cookbook writing is productive; it allows women to have a voice regarding taste and to use that voice to persuade readers of their beliefs. Women were able to define their own community and identity through their writing, claiming a space for themselves in print while staying within their domestic sphere.

Walden's text is divided into seven parts: an introduction, five chapters, and a very brief conclusion. Each of the five chapters focuses on one aspect of taste (taste and science, taste and race, etc.) during a particular time period in American history, beginning in the 1790s with the first American-published cookbook to antebellum nostalgia and its pushback in the 1940s. Each chapter chooses three or more cookbook authors to discuss as representative of taste discourse during its respective time period. Walden admits in the conclusion that the study is not comprehensive, and indeed it doesn't need to be; her text selections in each chapter are highly representative of the period and are useful for her argument without need of more examples.

The first chapter, "Taste and Virtue," focuses on the end of the 18th century, when the first American women cookbook authors began to publish. Prior to the 1796 publication of Amelia Simmons' *American Cookery*, available cookbooks were written by British authors and re-published in the new world. Thus, these first American cookbooks were able to engage in taste discourse in order to unify the new nation. As Walden argues, these women rhetors were able to use taste as a rhetorical device in their cookbooks, linking taste with virtue. Selecting cookbooks by Amelia Simmons, Lydia Maria Child, and Mary Randolph, Walden explores the ways in which taste discourse was intertwined with virtue in the 1790-1830 period in America. A person's individual taste was rhetorically connected to their community; "good taste" had the potential to unify and support a community and a nation. Exploring the concept of

republican motherhood—the ideology claiming that teaching morality had a positive effect on the raising of children, the young boys of which would grow up and become future leaders—Walden shows how these women authors' statements about taste influenced the rise of the republican motherhood ideology. Capitalism is also discussed, as these authors focused on the economic roles of women in the home and argued that domestic facility can lead to strong finances and national success. To Simmons, taste meant to develop an American character or virtue. To Child and Randolph, who wrote more generally on all sorts of domestic matters beyond cooking, having good taste meant to be frugal and to run a well-organized home. These good habits, the authors suggested, would lead to the advancement of the nation as a whole.

Chapter two, "Taste and Morality," takes on the mid-19th century and the cult of domesticity that so rigidly defined gender roles. Identifying key texts from Catharine Beecher and Sarah Josepha Hale, Walden observes the use of taste discourse to imply a connection to Christian morality. In the 1840s, the good taste of a woman would mean her connection to God. Instead of a focus on a woman's economic value, this time period was concerned with her moral value. The Victorian cult of domesticity linked women's roles to morality and the Christian church; the domestic advice text popular at this time claimed an almost sacred position in society, as it taught women how to run a more efficient, moral home, thus making her closer to God. This belief was even stronger regarding motherhood—the increase of clubs and publications catering to mothers and linking them to the church demonstrates the social value of women as the moral center of the home. For instance, the texts Walden uses in this chapter link the practice of good manners to taste. Being the moral center of the home, women were tasked with policing both virtuous thought (morality) as well as virtuous behavior (manners). While the previous chapter aligned taste and virtue, this time period narrows the concept to focus on taste and moral virtue, specifically.

"Taste and Region," Walden's third chapter, is the centerpiece of the text. While not that much longer than the other chapters (31, compared to a chapter average of 25 pages), this chapter is the most polished and information-rich of the book, indicating that the author's own personal interest lies here. References to this chapter are included in nearly every other chapter, making this chapter's topic more thoroughly discussed than topics of other chapters. Indeed, this chapter could be the focus of its own book. Instead of concentrating on a time period as previous chapters did, the third chapter explores a particular cultural region, looking at cookbooks of the Southern United States in the periods just before, during, and just after the Civil War. Walden argues that Southern cookbook writers—white Southern women—wrote to preserve Southern identity and culture during a time of turmoil. Going into great depth

on the South's use of the community cookbook subgenre, Walden argues that "taste constitutes southern identity," (86) examining what she names as the constitutive function of these texts during the Civil War era. Also considering single-author cookbooks, Walden investigates how Randolph, Lettice Bryan, and Sarah Rutledge were the first authors to take antebellum Southern domestic culture and compose those foodways traditions in print.

Chapter four, "Taste and Science," brings the study to the turn of the 20th century with the domestic science cooking reform movement. Beginning with Henrietta Goodrich's call for a "democracy in taste," the cooking reform movement of the Victorian era provided taste education for women who otherwise viewed domestic work as drudgery. As Walden argues, women cookbook authors of this era manipulated taste discourse in order to push for public reform goals to improve efficiency and economy in cooking. Taste is regulated and regimented so as to fit a narrow scientific standard, and science is put forward as the one clear solution to improving women's lives in the domestic space. This narrow construction of taste, not surprisingly, is limited to the white middle class of the era. Domestic scientists attempted to rebrand housework as vital to a woman's maternal duty and her identity, as the text references chapter two's discussion of the cult of domesticity and the woman as moral center of the home. Walden discusses writer Catherine Owen's novelized cookbooks, in which recipes were given throughout a fictionalized account of a woman learning to value the cooking reform movement. Texts like these were created to persuade women to adopt the scientifically proven methods of the movement. Walden ends the chapter with a particularly disturbing discussion of the ways in which taste discourse was racialized. One major argument of domestic scientists was in support of "euthenics," similar to eugenics, as they believed that taste education improved nutrition, economy, and quality of life, thus stabilizing the future of the (white, middle-class) race. While eugenics focused on genetics and hereditary traits, euthenics supporters believed that an improvement in one's environment could have a better, quicker impact on quality of life, thus bettering the (white) race immediately rather than through future generations. Walden quotes euthenics author Ellen Richards, who argued that "Euthenics precedes eugenics, developing better men now, and thus inevitably creating a better race of men in the future" (137). Instructions for the betterment of women's domestic lives was specifically meant for white women, in order to ensure racial superiority. This section in chapter four is one of the most memorable in the book. Laura Shapiro, in her comprehensive history of the domestic science reform movement, *Perfection Salad*, did not even mention this dark aspect of our past.

Picking up logically where the previous chapter left off, chapter five, "Taste and Race," begins with a discussion of euthenics and belief in white

superiority. Again with a nod to Southern regional culture, Walden compares the rhetorical moves in two types of racialized cookbooks of the early 20th century: “Mammy” cookbooks with their antebellum nostalgia and cookbooks written by black women who were professional cooks. She analyzes African-American women’s reclaiming of taste discourse for themselves, through their own domestic writing. Previous to this point, cookbooks had generally established taste and domesticity as the domain of whiteness. As for the “Mammy” cookbook written by white Southern women to wax nostalgic about having servants during the slavery era in the South, Walden argues that they were “a form of representational eugenics,” as these white women used the space of the cookbook to whitewash history and disrespect black women’s lived experience (158). Walden also observes the racialized debate regarding how black and white women viewed cooking. White women authors, with the help of the cooking reform movement, viewed cooking as intellectual labor, as a standardized, rule-governed practice. In contrast, black women authors portrayed cooking as instinctual and organic, as something that provides joy. This fifth chapter attempts to make up for the lack that is evident throughout—a discussion of race. Even in the extensive, detailed third chapter on Southern regional cookbooks, there is only a passing reference to race, a disappointing lack in an otherwise excellent chapter. Saving this discussion for the final chapter of the text seems unnecessary, as the reader finds race to be missing in the analysis of the other chapters. The fifth chapter, while excellent in its comparative analysis, seems like an afterthought in terms of its fit with the other chapters.

Another issue with the study is that it reads like a dissertation. While it is masterful in its use of historical details and a wide range of sources, chapters often get heavy on literature review, a practice embraced in dissertation writing but not necessary for publication. Additionally, while Walden makes excellent connections between cookbooks and other aspects of American culture, several of these points would be better as footnotes that would not interrupt an otherwise solid argument. The reader might wonder what audience is intended for this text, as the introduction goes so far into details about cookbooks and women’s writing that, at least for those who are within this area of study, is already known. Again, it is essential for dissertation writing, but seems out of place in a published work.

In all, Walden’s *Tasteful Domesticity* is an important first long-form publication in the area of cookbooks and rhetoric, scholarship that is (surprisingly) a long time coming. Her facility with historical details and connections made between cookbooks and culture is fascinating, and her argument regarding the rhetoric of taste is solid. Walden’s text raises the profile of cookbooks as objects of rhetorical study for future scholars.

Work Cited

Shapiro, Laura. *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986.

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