

# Peitho

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FEMINISM

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



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# Peitho

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

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Volume 19

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**Editor's Introduction and Welcome**

Jen Wingard

2

**ARTICLES**

**Women and Corporate Communication in the Early American Republic** 5

Heather Blain Vorhies

**Women, Work, and Success: *Fin de Siècle* Rhetoric at Sophie Newcomb College** 28

Christine Jeansonne and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

**Feminist Fissures: Navigating Conflict in Mentoring Relationships** 54

Kathryn Gindlesparger and Holly Ryan

**Race, Women, Methods, and Access: a Journey through Cyberspace and Back** 71

Leah DiNatale Gutenson and Michelle Bachelor Robinson

**From the Margins of Healthcare: De-mythicizing Cancer Online** 93

Cristy Beemer

**Linking Rural Women Transnationally: Iowa's "First Lady of the Farm" and Post WWII Ethos** 128

Abby M. Dubisar

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**Applegarth, Risa. *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2014. Print. 267 pages.** 150

Colleen Derkatch

**Buchanan, Lindal. *Rhetorics of Motherhood*. Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2013. Print. 200 pages.** 156

Dalyn Luedkte

**Stenberg, Shari J. *Composition Studies Through a Feminist Lens*. Anderson: Parlor Press, 2013. Print. 120 pages.** 161

Kelly Whitney

**REVIEW ESSAY**

**Rethinking Recovery Work: New Directions in Feminist Histories of Rhetoric** 166

Sarah Singer

# Editor's Introduction and Welcome

Jen Wingard

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I want to welcome everyone to *Peitho* 19.1, the Fall/Winter 2016 issue. I am very excited to build from the excellent work of the previous editors, Pat Sullivan and Jenny Bay. This issue in particular represents a collaboration among us. Most of the pieces in the issue were finalized during my transition, but were ushered through the review process by Pat and Jenny. So please do enjoy this issue. It represents a true collaboration between editorial teams.

As I transition into my position as editor, I will guide *Peitho* with a vision similar to that of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition. The Coalition celebrated twenty-five years last year, and as any good twenty-something does, it began to take stock of its own commitments, as well as feminist scholarship in our field. I am pleased to be joining the conversations over the next several years to make *Peitho* and the Coalition more representative of the many types of feminism and varied histories in the field of rhetoric and composition.

Through building alliances, showcasing a variety of feminist work, and committing to rigorous and inventive scholarship, the Coalition and *Peitho* are poised to become a site for feminist dialogue and inquiry during a cultural moment when such voices are desperately needed. It is my goal as the editor of *Peitho* to explore not only the intersections of history and current feminist concerns, but to create a scholarly journal where history is understood as fundamental to understanding and interpreting current political and cultural trends. As we all move forward through the next years, it is essential that we build coalitions across difference, and that we look to our multi-faceted feminist histories to do so.

Part of assuming the editorship was naming a new Editorial Board. The board I have selected will be instrumental in helping me develop a lasting and diverse vision for *Peitho*, and I am looking forward to working with them over the next few years. Additionally, there are several people whose help has made my transition to editor much smoother than it could have been. Thank you to Pat Sullivan, Jenny Bay, and all the editorial team at Purdue University; Lisa Mastrangelo, Lindal Buchanan, Cheri Lemieux Speigal, Jenn Fishman, and Patricia Fancher. And I would like to give special thanks to Wendy Sharer, *Peitho's* Associate Editor. She has been an excellent partner to work with, and I appreciate all of her time and support.

Finally, I would like to end my welcome with a statement written and endorsed by the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and

Composition's Advisory Board. This statement represents the values and commitments of the Coalition and *Peitho*. And it is in the spirit of this statement that *Peitho* will continue to develop its scholarly identity.

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## Coalition of Feminist Scholars Statement of Solidarity

"In 2016, the Coalition changed its name to reinforce the organization's longstanding commitment to critical feminist work and to better reflect the diversity of its membership, where "diversity" is not always marked by stark or traditional distinctions. After the 2016 general U.S. election, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to the values of inclusion and gender justice on which our organization was founded; to recognize and bring attention to the unique challenges involved in feminist writing, teaching, scholarship, and leadership in the current political climate; and to reiterate our support for our members.

Historically, work in rhetoric and composition and feminist methodologies has always been political. Drawing on the past for fortitude in the present and inspiration for the future, the leadership of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition adds its collective voice to those calling for solidarity. In doing so, we join colleagues in two of our closely affiliated professional organizations that have also recently made statements:

The Council of Writing Program Administrators, which issued "The CWPAs Statement on Supporting a Diverse and Inclusive Environment," (found here: <http://wpacouncil.org/node/7535>);

The Council of Writing Program Administrators People of Color Caucus, which issued the "CWPA POCC Statement of Solidarity" (found here: <https://cwpapocc2014.tumblr.com/post/154427635590/cwpa-pocc-statement-of-solidarity>);

and

The Conference on College Composition and Communication, which issued "The CCCC Statement on Language, Power and Action" (found here: <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/language-power-action>)

In addition to supporting these initiatives from our fellow organizations, we will continue working toward inclusion and solidarity in multiple ways, starting with conversations about balancing work and life at the 2017 CCCC. In addition, the theme for the 2017 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference is

"Rhetorics, Rights, Revolutions," and promises to create spaces and opportunities for both dialogue and action at the upcoming conference.

We welcome you to participate. Join us at both of these events and subsequent events for both sustained and sustaining conversation. We welcome your ideas and would like to hear your needs. The Coalition is poised to collaborate with others to create just spaces in which feminist research, teaching, and learning are possible for all."

\* \* \*

I am excited to be the editor of one of the few feminist-focused peer reviewed rhetoric and composition journals at this time. I can think of no other time where smart and thorough feminist research and scholarship needs to be circulated as a means of building community and preparing for action. We are in a historical moment where many feminist voices need to come together so that we can begin to build coalitions across our differences, rather than in spite of them, and it is my goal that *Peitho* can serve as a place where that thinking can happen. In the next few years, I will strive to bring together historical, cultural, and activist feminist voices in each issue. And through the collection of articles, it is my hope that history, identities, and current events can begin to speak with one another.

Jen Wingard

# Women and Corporate Communication in the Early American Republic

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Heather Blain Vorhies

**Abstract:** *This article examines the work of women in corporations and corporate-ly structured organizations during the early American republic. The technology of the corporation enabled both for-profit and non-profit groups to efficiently gather and disperse funds, manage employees, and communicate with staff and shareholders. As managers and members of organizations such as the New York Female Missionary Society, women played a key role in the development of corporate communication and in the development of the corporation itself.*

**Keywords:** *Early American republic; corporate communication; Methodist; women*

Amid the fervor of nation-building in early nineteenth-century America, corporations played a crucial role in shaping the country's infrastructure. Corporations invested in and built banks, canals, toll roads, and steamboats. Likewise, schools, hospitals, missionary societies, Sunday School unions, and religious publishing houses turned to the technology of the corporation to raise money and manage employees. These business developments were not solely the result of for-profit business; indeed, many developments cross-pollinated from non-profit organizations to for-profit organizations and back again. In addition, the early American republic is "a key transitional period" particularly pertinent to understanding the current American economic system (Gilje 2). Gilje notes, "it was in this period that many of the later elements of capitalism—a flexible currency, banking, corporations, transportation systems, industrialization, and pervasive consumerism—began to take recognizable shape" (2). For these reasons, this foundational period, before the "giant corporation" and "specialized white-collar function" of the late nineteenth century (Douglas 126), is a ripe one to turn to for a better understanding of corporate structure and corporate communication.

All the more important, such cross-pollination between for-profit and non-profit entities sheds light on dark corners of our economic system and history: in considering the corporation for public good, the many corporate women of the early American republic can be recognized for their contributions

to business. As American evangelical movements such as Methodism were driven by women (Wigger 151), it is hardly surprising that women were active participants in religious corporations and corporately structured organizations. Yet, with a few exceptions, Writing Studies scholarship has not identified the early American republic as a period that has much to tell about the development of corporate communication nor about women as businesswomen. This formative moment for corporate communication offers a unique view in which women ran and financed business operations, in which non-profit business lead the way in innovation, and in which new and adapted forms of writing were necessary to manage regional, national, and even international organizations. This article examines the role of women in the origins of corporate structure and corporate communication in the early American republic. It does so by providing an overview of women and business; by establishing the development of the corporation as a technology; and finally by moving into a direct textual analysis through the annual reports of three organizations: the Union Canal Company, the Methodist Missionary Society, and the New York Female Missionary Society (NY-FMS). For my purposes, I use the term *corporation* to signify legally incorporated entities and the term *corporately structured organization* to refer to organizations that have the hallmarks of corporations (shareholders, officers and managers, and by-laws) without the act of legislature. Likewise, I use *business* to denote non-profit and for-profit economic activity, as well as the organizational management of employees, funds, goods, and even shareholders by corporate boards.

## Women and Business

In comparison to the early American republic, the eighteenth century arguably offered more economic independence and participation for women, as Hartigan-O'Connor's study of women in Charleston in the latter half the eighteenth century demonstrates. Eighteenth-century women were openly involved in the economy, appearing in newspapers as advertisers and in court dockets as business disputants (Hartigan-O'Connor 56). A Baltimore woman, Mary Katherine Goddard (1738-1816), published America's best-known copy of the Declaration of Independence, while Eliza Lucas Pickney (1722-1793) transformed southern agriculture with the indigo crop in the 1740s (Drachmas 9). Despite a shift to "public" masculine and "private" feminine spheres in the nineteenth century (Hartigan O'Connor 3), women business owners such as Rebecca Lukens (1794-1854) of Lukens Steel existed. Like Rebecca Lukens, women members and officers of corporations and corporately structured organizations were often the wives of for-profit businessmen (Ginzberg 48).



To be sure, voluntary associations and benevolent societies did not strive to make a profit, and frequently gave goods and services away for free. Nevertheless, they did act as businesses, hiring employees and managing them, overseeing funds, purchasing goods and services, and attempting to make a return on investment for their shareholders. Granted, this return on investment was meant as someone else's salvation, rather than monetary gain for the shareholder.

The job of feminist scholarship in the history of business writing is to find other, less visible women who are missing from the record, to return women to the narrative from which they are absent, and to re-imagine that narrative. By having only a small body of research that acknowledges such work, history at large and Writing Studies in particular have reinforced the ideology of a nineteenth-century "male" workplace (Boydston 39-40) and have "concealed and diminished the significance of these initial steps that women took beyond their prescribed domestic boundaries" (Shaver 16). I see the first step of such research to recognize women's work as business, rather than as simply charity.

The deep involvement of evangelical women in corporations and corporately structured organizations across the nineteenth century offers unique insight into women's work. For this particular case study, while the rhetorical activity of Methodist women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well-documented (Tolar Burton; Shaver; Hill), the business writing of Methodist women in these same two centuries is only sparsely documented. Shaver opens the door to exploring the business activity of women in *Beyond the Pulpit*, noting that antebellum American Methodist women cobbled together religious careers from church activities, such as teaching Sunday school and running missionary societies (14). Likewise, Hill's *The World Their Household* and Ginzberg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence* establish the post-Civil War turn by evangelical women (and by society at large) toward professionalism. Using the lessons from their mothers' and grandmothers' work in non-profit corporations, women in the latter half of the nineteenth century strove for professionalism and efficiency in their own national and international organizations.

Shaver, Ginzberg, Robert, Renda, Cayton Kupiec, and others note the seriousness with which early nineteenth-century women approached benevolent societies—in reality, non-profit businesses. As Shaver has noted, benevolent societies offered an alternative for women who wanted a career but perhaps did not have the inclination to be an itinerant preacher's wife or to become one of the few female missionaries or preachers (16). Shaver describes it thus: "Because the church and church-supported activities were located in the indeterminate realm—between domestic activities and market enterprise—church work ultimately provided white, middle-class women with a sanctioned

retorical borderland from which they could step beyond the domestic sphere while still maintaining the social mores of the era" (14).

Although I agree with Shaver that women in voluntary and benevolent associations did operate in liminal spaces, I call attention to these women as businesswomen and caution that categorizing women's work as liminal has the side effect of devaluing it. Ginzberg notes both that gender boundaries contained greater flexibility in the early American republic than in the latter half of the nineteenth century (40) and that gender boundaries in some ways did not practically exist, though such boundaries existed ideologically (41). In much the same way, while women's corporations and organizations were often created in tandem to parent organizations (as is the case with the New York Female Missionary Society), these organizations functioned independently and could spend their money as they pleased. Men even recognized the superior non-profit business skills of women. This happened, for example, in 1839 with the Boston Penitent Females' Refuge, when "the male managers of the Penitent Females' Refuge in Boston gave up fund raising completely because 'it has been suggested to the Directors, that a more suitable and successful course would be to leave the collection of funds entirely to the Board of Directors of the Ladies' Auxiliary Society'" (Ginzberg 43). This all suggests that women's involvement and agency in business was accepted.

However, I do not wish to imply that the picture was rosy. Kerber's *Women of the Republic* documents well the many challenges women of this era faced: increasing limitations on their financial independence, for just one example, even as nineteenth-century women slowly gained the right to divorce. Rather, as Ginzberg, Shaver, Hall, and others have documented, women went about their work in spite of such obstacles. The challenge for us as researchers is to recognize how we may have unconsciously accepted the "public/private" ideology of the nineteenth century (with work being public and male) as a practical reality and what impact this ideology has on our narrative of women's work.

Likewise, viewing religious non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations as outside of the economic system cloaks these businesses as something other than business, albeit businesses that always operated in tension with profit. Nord sees these organizations simultaneously rejecting commerce and accepting it with open arms. The market, for non-profits such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, was a "wily and dangerous foe" (Nord 7) that, to put it plainly, had to be beaten at its own game. In supplying books and tracts free or at low-cost, these organizations worked against commerce. But in doing so, "The managers of the noncommercial Bible and tract societies made themselves practical businessmen, savvy marketers, large-scale manufacturers, and capitalists in order to save the country from the market revolution" (Nord 7). Again, corporations as a technology allowed

non-profit organizations to manage money efficiently and make decisions, setting up officers and a board of directors that would report top-down decisions to members spread across vast geographical spaces.

Both Ginzberg and Hall note the development of women's professions during this time, with the early nineteenth century setting the stage for the professionalism of the women's temperance movement, the relief movement of the Civil War, and the women's foreign missionary movement. Just as in the early American republic, in the late nineteenth century married women's fund-raising and organizing created the means for single women's careers (Hempton 159). Organizations such as the Methodist Church had become massive, with the Methodist Church becoming the largest institution outside of the Federal government (Shaver 4). Likewise, women of benevolent societies saw themselves as fully professionalized; Hill rather wryly notes, "In fact, the 'business of missions' might have been a more apt characterization [rather than "the science of missions"]" (109). The size and scope of non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations had vastly intensified; unsurprisingly, with this came the need for professionalism, efficiency, and good business management.

The early American republic represents key developments for this later professionalism. Using state legislatures, women gained legal corporate status for their organizations and unusual legal power for themselves (Ginzberg 50). Using charters, by-laws, and policies, they began to organize themselves in ways that would later be referred to as "scientific." Using accounting and annual reports, they communicated with their shareholders and were held culpable for their results and for operating "efficiently."

## **Corporate Structure and Communication in the Early American Republic (1800-1840)**

Corporations were not a new development, but the immense popularity of corporations was. Colonial New Englanders had often used corporations to fund and organize public works projects, such as banks or roads; however, it was not until after the American Revolution that the number of corporations rose sharply, or, as Nord, puts it, "flourished abundantly" (18). As Wright notes, "A comprehensive roster of the profit-making and non-profit institutions established in New England between the 1780s and the 1820s would include thousands of entries" (73). These organizations ran the gamut from medical societies to turnpike corporations, insurance companies, and singing societies (Wright 73). Much of this corporate growth centered initially in New England, with 200 New England out of 332 total American non-profit corporations being chartered by 1800. Almost three times as many chartered corporations

per 100,000 inhabitants existed in the New England states when compared to the mid-Atlantic states, and four times as many when compared to southern states (Hall 101). At the same time as the number of corporations boomed, the definition of corporations refined. This new definition offered businesses a technology largely free from outside influence that efficiently stored (and hopefully increased) shareholders' investments and managed people and goods within a top-down structure.

What defined corporations then would be familiar to business today: a charter directing the corporate mission, a board of trustees, the corporation as an artificial person, and the sanctity of the corporation from outside interference, whether public or private. With a charter, corporations could concentrate money and organize efficiently for a specific purpose. With a board of trustees, corporations were able to hold officers to strict protocol and to provide ramifications if trustees strayed outside the corporate mission. With "artificial person" status, corporations had "the right to name; to sue and be sued; to acquire, hold, and dispose of personal and real property; to establish by-laws; and to transact business endorsed by an official seal" (Wright 140). And, with court cases such as the *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819), corporations were supposedly protected from state involvement (McGarvie 99).

Yet, there is one stark difference between the early American republic's corporations and today's corporations. Until the 1830s and 1840s, corporations—whether for-profit or non-profit—were expected to operate for the public good (Gilje 4-5). Many of these corporations would fall today into the classification of non-profit.<sup>1</sup> Ginzberg outlines this difference in her study of nineteenth-century benevolent societies, explaining, "Today, incorporation involves filing papers with a state official and paying a fee . . . In the early nineteenth century, the process was more complicated, for corporations were themselves viewed with suspicion; corporate status was limited, by and large, to charities, churches, and cities, 'harmless, and not profit-making entities' " (48-49). Rather than paperwork and a fee, incorporation came through an act of the state legislature (Ginzberg 49). Perhaps ironically, as the popularity of corporations in for-profit and non-profit business continued to spread (and as the number of petitions rapidly grew in the 1830s and 1840s) states dropped the qualification of public good from the requirement for a corporate charter (Gilje 4).

Non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations, in their missions to place a Bible in every home or to provide schooling for children

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1 This type of corporation is more officially referred to as eleemosynary, but is referred to as non-profit here for simplicity's sake.

or to build hospitals for the ill, operated solidly within the realm of business. Nineteenth-century non-profit corporations could possess significant wealth and resources, and in managing large budgets, staffs, product dispersal, and marketing, corporate boards had to be “practical businessmen” even as they sought “to save the country from the market revolution” (Nord 7). Hall notes that by 1846, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had an annual revenue of \$250,000 (five times that of Harvard University), with a staff of 300 missionaries and assistant missionaries across ninety-three missions (102). Likewise, the American Tract Society (ATS), making an annual revenue of \$154,000 that same year, “had a salaried staff of 12 corresponding secretaries and clerks who supervised the activities of 175 field agents” (102).

Perhaps most significantly, non-profit corporations learned how to be corporations and businesses alongside, if not in advance of, for-profit corporations. For just one example, non-profit evangelical corporations pioneered large-scale fund-raising and management. Subscription fund-raising through regional auxiliary organizations moved money back to a larger parent society. National parent societies could thus gather huge amounts of money. Wright records, “By 1817, the ABCFM, the most wide-reaching of the regional and national organizations in early nineteenth-century New England, drew support from 287 local affiliates” (58). For this reason, Hall calls the “scope and scale” of American religious organizations during this time “a striking contrast” to the for-profit sector (102). As Hall argues, the corporate structure is a technology in and of itself, and during the nineteenth century business had to learn how to use it effectively (107). Indeed, “America would lead the world in adapting the corporation to private business enterprise” in the nineteenth century (Nord 32).

Following Nord, I argue that non-profit religious corporations developed business practices before for-profit corporations, such as the railway industry, saw the need. But missing from these accounts is how influential non-profit corporations were in paving the way for corporate practices that followed. Strict accounting, a practice greatly encouraged by Methodism’s founder John Wesley (Hempton 110), was essential to organizations such as the ATS before it was essential to railroads or iron companies. In much the same way, the management of hundreds of employees at sites hundreds, if not thousands, of miles apart was broadly needed earlier than it was in the for-profit sector. For this reason, Nord posits that religious organizations did not just use business practices that were already in place, but were innovators of business practice, if not progenitors (111). I suggest that both Nord and Hall would agree that non-profit and for-profit business acted in parallel streams which frequently intersected; indeed, there was no way they could not have

influenced one another. Members and officers of non-profit business were often also for-profit businessmen, as the example of Arthur Tappan and Co. attests. Arthur Tappan and his brother Lewis supplied not only money to the ATS, but also business organization (Nord 89).

What follows is an examination of annual reports of three organizations: the Union Canal Company of Pennsylvania, the Methodist Missionary Society, and the New York Female Missionary Society (NY-FMS). Behind the seemingly mundane nature of these annual reports is business innovation: the struggle of corporate officers to constantly adapt their communication and management practices in a rapidly changing economy. My goal in supplying male-authored comparison annual reports for NY-FMS is two-fold. Whereas scholars such as Donawerth have made a strong case for a women's tradition of writing, particularly pre-1800, I propose that these texts support what Skinner finds in her research of late nineteenth-century women physicians: female physicians' writing had more in common with male physicians' than with non-physician females. As Skinner notes, "the boundary between 'masculine' and 'feminine' rhetorical practices, always fuzzy and permeable, becomes even less clear when women engage in what we might be tempted to call 'masculine' communicative acts" (183).

Also, non-profit and for-profit business writing shared corporate genres. In these early stages of free-market enterprise, both non-profit and for-profit business writing exhibited elements of sociability and a longer, less to-the-point sentence structure than in the late nineteenth century. Many types of corporate communication developed over the nineteenth century, from broadsheet regulations (Yates) to incident reports (Brockman) to account books (Johnson), in response to managerial need. As Johnson argues in *The Language of Work*, many of these forms developed because pre-discursive (i.e., watch-and-learn) communication simply was not enough for business to function anymore. Brockman extrapolates on this, writing, "prior to 1850, organizations had little need for administrative structure because their small size allowed owners to manage personally" (9). In the early American republic, for example, E.I. Dupont could write his correspondence himself (six thousand letters annually) (Douglas 126) and Rebecca Lukens could invoice accounts in individual letters (Johnson 59). But at the same time, railroad and steamboat accident investigators found that they could not rely on the coroner's report and had to invent the incident report as a genre (Brockman).

## THE UNION CANAL COMPANY

The Union Canal Company's annual reports are prime examples of corporate communication in transition, moving from pre-discursive communication and an epistolary tradition to nineteenth-century scientific corporate

management. In addition, its annual reports also emphasize the cross-pollination between non-profit and for-profit sections. In a time when corporations by definition were “for the public good,” the Union Canal Company was equally about business as it was about nation-building.

Following Douglas’s assertion that business and business writing in the early American republic were more personal, it is unsurprising that the Union Canal Company’s annual report of 1818 starts by addressing the shareholders and acknowledging their concerns. Union Canal President Joseph Watson and the Union Canal Board encourage shareholders to quiet their anxiety—or, rather, quiet their complaining.

Those persons, to whom trusts of an important kind have been confided, naturally feel some anxiety, to explain the course of their proceedings, and more particularly, when required to do so by the charter from which they receive their appointments. To feelings of this kind, the Managers of the Union Canal Company, are not insensible, and their determination has received a new impulse, from the wish at this time so universally expressed, in favour of internal improvement. In the chasm<sup>2</sup> produced by the subsidence of party passions, it is gratifying to observe the space filled with rational schemes, for moral reform and physical advancement. (Union Canal 3)

Watson continues, arguing that the scope and timeline of the Union Canal Company (originally devised as the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Canal Company) was unrealistic.

In seeking to divert blame from the Board of Managers, Watson quickly turns from a discussion of the project timeline to the public purpose of a for-profit corporation. In doing so, he uses grandiose language that references a Christian republic as he gently chides the shareholders.

The views which gave rise to the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Canal Company, originated with men of enlarged and comprehensive minds, whose patriotic wishes for the improvement of the state, was seconded by their personal interest for its success. They saw that no single scheme, could develop and bring into action, at once, so many sources of wealth, as the connection of the waters of the two great rivers, the Delaware and the Susquehanna. That they were correct in this opinion, experience has shown, as it is believed, not an individual can be found, who has geographically examined those rivers, but will

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2        Someone has crossed out the typo “charm” on the Library Company of Philadelphia’s copy and hand-written in “chasm.”

admit the truth. But to them, like sojourner in the wilderness, it was denied to see the promised land. (Union Canal 3)

Largely, Watson and the Board use the 1818 annual report to move blame from the Union Canal Company and its managers to public opinion. Public opinion had shifted away from the canal project to join the Susquehanna and Schuylkill rivers to the Atlantic, delaying the project. This lack of public opinion, Watson claims, is paired with a lack of monetary support. Amusingly, this public works project of the early American republic suffered the same fate as many current American public works projects—the initial plans and funds for the project were raised in 1795, which means that twenty-three years later the project was still in development. According to the Lebanon County Historical Society, physical work (aside from surveying) on the canal started three years after this report, in 1821, with the full canal opening ten years later, in 1828 (“History of the Union Canal Company”). Today, you can ride through one of the canal tunnels by boat at Union Canal Park in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

The 1818 Union Canal Company annual report includes tables and data, denoting a shift in the genre towards greater inclusion of table bvgs, charts, and figures. At this time, however, the inclusion of such data was by no means expected or required. (A later report, from 1820, includes no tables or charts.) Watson recounts the entirety of the work done on the Delaware and Schuylkill Canal, estimating the entire cost to dig the canal at \$1,221,000 for seventy miles. Watson also includes a report from the engineers about the availability of water for the canal, all with the goal to convince shareholders that the proposed site of the canal is the best site. He seems to have been continually frustrated by concerns over the site and points of connection to the Atlantic, mentioning it several times. Two pages after the engineer’s report, Watson concludes that the public has been largely misinformed. He writes, “It has been the misfortune of the Union Canal Company, for particular circumstances, to lay under suspicions of supineness and indifference, by those not informed of their real situation. The charge is not merited, and with a candid public, it can be readily removed” (13). A page later, Watson signs off the annual report, using formatting that is repeated by both the Methodist Missionary Society and NY-FMS. He writes, “By order of the Board, Joseph Watson, President. G. Ehrenzeller, Secretary. Office of the Union Canal Company of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, November 17, 1818.” Thirty years later the Union Canal Company’s reports used cleaner, direct language, easier-to-read type, and more and more tables and figures.

#### THE METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

Whereas the 1818 Union Canal Company report uses data to argue the appropriateness of its plan to shareholders, the First Annual Report of the



Methodist Missionary Society uses tables to verify to its shareholders that funds have been used appropriately. That this report would focus so greatly on accounting is unsurprising. As Hempton notes, Methodism's founder John Wesley set a precedent for exact accounting; following this, "The records of the Methodist Church in all parts of the world are full of neat rows of figures constructed by circuit stewards, chapel committees, and mission secretaries" (110). Hempton refers to the accounts of New England Methodist itinerant preachers during this time as "impeccably presented" (123); accounts needed to be, not only to track the many expenses of traveling preachers and the books sales these preachers used to support themselves, but also to protect the rapidly growing denomination from corruption. Indeed, without trust in accurate accounting, voluntary donations would disappear and the funding system that supported Methodist itinerant preachers, as well as non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations such as the Methodist Missionary Society, would dissolve.

The First Annual Report is about ten pages long, with the last two and a half pages consisting of accounts from the treasurer, Joshua Soule, the rest of the report signed by Nathan Bangs, the Methodist Missionary Society's third vice president. Again, what is emphasized to shareholders is accurate accounting. These last pages are certified by William A. Mercein and William B. Skidmore, auditors, as "a correct transcript of the books of the Treasurer of the Missionary and Bible Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America" (Bangs 194). I include the first, short section of this transcript as an example:

September 13, 1819. To cash paid for postage of a letter, - \$00 27  
December 10, - To do. paid Abraham Paul's bill for printing, 53 31  
January 14, 1820. To do. paid J.C. Totten, for blank books, 27 18 2/4  
April 17,- Balance in the treasury , - - 737 27 1/4. ("First Annual Report"  
193)

It is also interesting to note that of the final \$823.04 in the account, \$137.29 has been provided by NY-FMS, nearly 17% of the parent society's total funds. Other women also appear in these accounts—a Miss Fanny Ashcroft, who paid \$20 for a lifetime subscription, the members of a female bible class who paid \$20 to make Nathan Bangs a lifetime member, a Miss Ann Van Houten, who paid \$1, and an unnamed woman who paid \$.50. There are perhaps other unnamed women included in this list, under the many anonymous annual subscriptions and one-time donations listed.

While the annual report ends in accounting, the rest of the report outlines the society's mission, presents the funding method for the society (auxiliary societies), excerpts short updates from eight auxiliaries, and includes part of a letter from Bishop McKendree praising the mission and the business model.

Unlike either of the two NY-FMS reports, the parent society's First Annual Report is largely self-congratulatory; as the report notes, "it appears all of the annual conferences have warmly approved of the plan and objects of the Society" (Bangs 189). Several pages later, Bangs writes in response to Bishop McKendree's letter, "From these interesting communications, the managers have reason to congratulate the Society on the success of its efforts" (191). However, these praises and Bangs's assertion on the second page of the report that "These circumstances afford no small evidence of the utility of the plan, and of its ultimate success" (186) were premature. Apart from the Wyandot mission, missions in the early American republic were largely failures.

### THE NEW YORK FEMALE MISSIONARY SOCIETY

While the two previous cases represent male-authored corporate communication, the New York Female Missionary Society (NY-FMS) is a representative case study of a larger set of women's business activity and women's corporate communication. As Hill states, "Local auxiliaries, like temperance groups and women's clubs, offered conservative women a forum for developing skills in public speaking, fund-raising and organizational management that could be easily transferred from these semiprivate spheres to the public arena" (4). These local auxiliaries should not be underestimated in their economic importance. Both Hill and Shaver document the outstanding number of these organizations, with Shaver noting that the American Board of Foreign Missions boasted 592 women's auxiliaries in 1828 (4). The popularity of non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations would continue throughout the nineteenth century even as fund-raising models and their corporate structure refined.

When read alongside spiritual journals and correspondence of American Methodist women, NY-FMS may seem to be operating under an epistolary tradition and the Methodist tradition of spiritual literacy, to borrow Tolar Burton's term; there are certainly elements of these two traditions within the NY-FMS documents. However, the officers' and members' writing expands beyond one-on-one communication and personal spiritual development. Rather, these women are participating in and inventing business communication—within annual shareholder reports, there are the origins of the contemporary genres of the company mission statement, the business plan, meeting notes, or motions to shareholders to make a structural change. NY-FMS, just like the Union Canal Company and Methodist Missionary Society, had to solve the problem of how to communicate and manage operations across the region, and, in the case of NY-FMS and the Methodist Missionary Society, communicate and manage operations across the nation and nations.

NY-FMS's membership included the who's who of New York City, and its business documents—annual reports and assorted correspondence—were periodically published in the *Methodist Magazine* (*MM*), a precursor to the *Christian Advocate*. Thus, in publishing NY-FMS's corporate communication, *MM* made visible women as corporate managers. This makes for a somewhat rare research site of women's corporate communication, for as Shaver has explained, "Even when women kept diaries, wrote letters, or prepared meeting minutes and reports of their activities, these works were seldom considered valuable, thus, most have been lost to later generations" (4). Perhaps even more intriguing is that during this period women appeared in *MM* mostly through their deathbed confessions (Shaver 54); yet, when women did appear in another capacity, it was as businesswomen.

NY-FMS, formed on July 5, 1819 in New York City (Daggett 77), was to have a lifespan of over forty years (141). Its first meeting set a corporate structure of four officers (First Directress, Mary Mason; Second Directress, Mrs. John Vanderpool; Treasurer, Mrs. Doctor Seaman; and Secretary Mrs. Caroline M. Thayer) and twenty-four other members of the Board of Managers (Daggett 7). NY-FMS's corporate model was based on subscription investment, often referred to as the widow's mite or cent societies. The use of subscription investment for national and regional fund-raising was a widespread and hugely successful method; in this model, women saved meticulously what pennies they could and made small donations that added up to great numbers. Membership subscriptions were priced low to attract many investors, and sometimes women grouped together to raise the funds for just one subscription, as is the case with the female bible class mentioned in the First Annual Report of the Methodist Missionary Society. Whereas NY-FMS members were meant to invest in the organization through subscriptions, the NY-FMS board was tasked with ensuring the organization fulfilled its chartered mission, organizing fund-raising, selecting appropriate missionary workers as well as recruiting speakers from missions to visit New York, financing women's missionary work, and accounting for this missionary work and the expenditure of organization funds.

By the Civil War, NY-FMS's outdated subscription-model of fund-raising, an older business model, and the loss of the previous generation of supporters meant the end of the society (Robert 127). While certainly not the oldest such organization, as Wright puts the establishment of the first female cent and subscription societies at around 1800 (56), this was the first women's auxiliary to the Methodist Missionary Society. Arguably, NY-FMS's legacy would be the work of two of its missionaries, Ann Wilkins and Sophronia Farrington, in Liberia, as well as NY-FMS's support of the Wyandot mission in Ohio.

Non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations, particularly religious ones, frequently needed to exercise the “visible hand of management” before their counterparts in the for-profit sector did. While pre-discursive communication might work at an iron factory where the boss lived and worked on-site, it simply was not an option for missionary and tract societies. Communication needed to happen regionally, nationally, and internationally; a missionary could not walk down the hall and ask a question or get approval from his or her missionary society. Nor could missionary societies verbally discuss business decisions with every member. Some verbal discussion could take place at annual meetings, but such organizations had to ensure that they had disclosed accounting and policy changes even to members not in attendance. Thus, communication, and through it, geographically-dispersed corporate management, had to happen in writing.

Ironically, (a) the accounting that Wesley had encouraged in his followers, (b) the corporate structure of missionary societies, and (c) the pressure for success led to the inflation of numbers and an avoidance of describing the full troubles missionaries faced. Shareholders needed to be kept investing, and to that end, corporate writers padded their accounts and put a positive spin on negative results. As McGloughin notes, “Missionary journals and the annual reports of mission boards were obliged to provide statistical tables as corporate reports to their stockholders; but statistics were not the measure of successful missions” (339). These would be the missions of Sophronia Farrington and later Ann Wilkins, both funded by NY-FMS, in which “Behind the mapping, organizing, reporting, and strategizing of Methodist missions, and behind the printed ranks of annual reports, balance sheets, and missionary stations, the private correspondence of Methodist missionaries shows the human cost of the great missionary adventure” (Hempton 176). Many such missions would end in disaster and death for both the indigenous peoples Protestant evangelical Americans sought to convert and for the missionaries themselves.

With a strong epistolary feel and seemingly personal touch, NY-FMS’s writing follows corporate communication of the time. The first appearance of NY-FMS is in the May 1820 issue of *MM*. The secretary, Caroline Matilda Thayer, includes a greeting from the Board of Managers, accounts for the society’s current finances (less than stellar, according to the tone of the report), reports on the official status of the society (as of September 1819), provides a sort of a mission statement for the society, and finally makes a call for even more participation on the part of members. This call is characteristic of the tone of the NY-FMS’s writing. “Let us then redouble our exertions,” Thayer enjoinders members, “let us cheerfully submit to any privation which duty demands, and make every exertion which prudence justifies, and we cannot fail of success” (“First Annual Report” 197). It is hard to imagine a contemporary business text

encouraging shareholders to “cheerfully” submit to a profit loss, but again, as Douglas notes, nineteenth-century business writing was still in part that of the gentleman who saw business not as “an impersonal and silent working of offices and bureaucracies” but frequently as direct human interaction (126).

As a corporately structured organization, NY-FMS needed its subscription members (shareholders) to be informed of its mission statement and to approve it. Thus, the next part of the First Annual Report exhibits the origins of company mission statements. Whereas the beginning of the report gives a predictable call to women to support men in missionary work, the mission statement portion of the First Annual Report is audacious in its scope, but perhaps not unreasonable given the wealth of other missionary societies at the time. In any case, the concerns of these women were truly global and they do not seem bothered by a lack of funds; rather “a boundless field for Missionary exertions presents itself to our view,” with missionary concerns stretching from “our frontiers” to Asia and Africa (Thayer, “First Annual Report” 196). Although it is clear that for these women, there is and can be no other option than Christianity, Methodism, and “civilized” life, their writing reflects a certain respect for indigenous Americans and an acknowledgement that not all interaction with “civilized men” has been for the better. In any case, the business goal of the Board of Managers is clear: they have concluded that the purview of NY-FMS should be mainly limited to indigenous Americans, French Louisiana, and Spanish South America (Thayer, “First Annual Report” 196).

Any business with shareholders needs to accurately inform its investors of the business’s current financial state, including the strength of investment and company profits (or lack thereof). Once again, within its Second Annual Report, NY-FMS is adapting and inventing what were at the time new forms of corporate communication. The Second Annual Report of NY-FMS appears in the July 1821 issue of *MM* and is signed C. M. Thayer, Secretary (Caroline Matilde Thayer), and is likely the same C.M. Thayer that appears on other reports in the *MM*. There are two things of note in regards to the Second Annual Report. First, although more effusive in style than our twenty-first century business documents, this report follows a familiar structure, making sure that each shareholder knows the health of the membership, how funds are being used, and gets a chance to approve (or not approve) policy changes. The report presents the current membership numbers, accounts for the use of membership dues, makes allowances for why the numbers are not as high as they should be, and asks for approval (after the fact) of a policy change. Like any business report, whether for-profit or non-profit, it ends on the familiar note of what needs to be improved. Second, I want to highlight the innovative business practices that NY-FMS used with subscription-style fund-raising. This was an efficient way to get many people to contribute small amounts that

added up to large amounts and to move capital to the auxiliary's projects as well as back to the parent society. In using subscription fund-raising to raise investments, in using corporate communication, and in using corporate structure, the women of NY-FMS actively developed the corporation as an economic technology.

For a non-profit business dependent on subscription fund-raising, the number of members and their health wasn't just an issue of Christian concern. It was a monetary one as well. Death or failure to renew membership would mean a loss of shareholders and therefore funds for the organization. Thus, the Second Annual Report format Thayer uses is familiar to us in the twenty-first century, with membership numbers and the financial state of the organization included. Thayer begins by noting the present membership and current finances:

None of our numbers have been taken from us by death; and though the causes to which we alluded in our last Annual Report, viz., the depression of business, and consequent pecuniary embarrassments, have still operated to lessen our resources, we have been enabled to collect the sum of \$122 which we present to the parent Institution, with our warm hopes and fervent prayers that the design for which it is given may be answered in the conversion of the many immortal soul. ("Second Annual Report" 278)

Subscription investment would prove particularly popular with women throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but would not be the only form of investment. As Cayton notes, "Women's contributions included not only direct contributions but also bequests, sales of jewelry and cloth, the proceeds of mite boxes, and money saved by forgoing the use of sugar for a year" (85-86). NY-FMS followed this trend, accepting goods as well as money when they created a circulating library for the Wyandot Mission in 1826 (Lamplin 108-109).

As a corporately structured organization, NY-FMS needed its shareholders to support changes to operating procedures. This ensures consensus on the part of the shareholders and provides a check to the Board of Managers, but nonetheless having to gather approval from geographically-dispersed members could be frustrating for those in managerial positions. The next part of the report asks for a name change approval, with the Board of Managers wanting to change from a Bible Society to a Missionary Society; in regards to the latter, the Board of Managers asks that members support this decision on the part of the Board. Here, the Board of Managers explains, "The general conference have thought proper to limit the operations of the parent Society exclusively, leaving the distribution of the Holy Scriptures to those effective

Institutions which are organized expressly for that purpose" (Thayer, "Second Annual Report" 278-279). Not only has the parent institution streamlined its purpose, but NY-FMS itself has had trouble with members holding both missionary and bible society membership, something for which "we experienced no little embarrassment" (278-279). The Board is hoping that there will be minimal objection on the part of members: "This objection to our Constitution being now removed, we are encouraged to look for the cooperation of our sisters who have hitherto withheld their support from motives which we cordially respect" (278-279).

Fund-raising and the corporate purpose of public good (and pride in "this commercial city") mingle in the next part of the report. The report then turns outward, commenting on the activities of the new and sundry auxiliaries that have been established throughout New England: a Female Association at Albany, whose Second Annual Report appears in *MM* in 1825, a Boston auxiliary, and even an auxiliary society in rural Maine. This "remote" society the Board intends as motivation to its members. The women of this society scraped together twenty dollars for their pastor's lifetime membership to the parent missionary society, one-sixth of NY-FMS's total contribution. This may not seem like much, but these New York women were the well-to-do and elite of the Methodist church, and presumably would have had far greater means than women in rural Maine. With this example, the Board gently chastises its members:

When we compared our means, in this commercial city, with those scattered inhabitants of a country circuit, we at once recognize the principle upon which our Savior predicated his approbation of the widow who cast her two mites in the treasury. We have given of our abundance, but they have contributed of their poverty. May such examples stimulate us to increased exertions, and may we enter upon the duties of another year with a realizing sense of our responsibility! (Thayer, "Second Annual Report" 278-279)

This call to the wealthy Methodist women of New York was no new call. From the start, the Society's leaders had intoned the responsibility of well-to-do Methodist women to support the activities of others. Even at the organizational meeting of NY-FMS in 1819, Thayer, Mary Mason, and a Miss S. Brewer called for all females of the Methodist Episcopal church to apply themselves to fund-raising and society membership (Daggett 78).

NY-FMS operated at the forefront of American mission work, abroad and at home. After the inclusion of its second annual report, NY-FMS continues to appear sporadically in *MM*. However, in 1826, NY-FMS supplies copies of two letters to *MM*—one from Susan Lamplin, NY-FMS's secretary, to

Reverend James B. Finely, superintendent of the Wyandot mission, and the other a reply from the Wyandot mission itself, signed Between the Logs, John Hicks, Monocue, Matthew Peacock, and the School committee and chiefs of the nation, including Esq. Gray Eyes, James Big Tree, James Harryhoot, Joseph Willams and classleader Geo. Punch (chief). The Wyandot mission at the time was the major mission for the Methodists and arguably the only successful mission in America to this point. The success at the Wyandot mission, with nearly 4,000 Native American Methodist members, spurred an explosion among Methodist missions for the next twenty years, with “missions among some thirty-five tribes” and over two hundred Methodist preachers (Hempton 155). It is incredibly fitting that businesswomen were part of Wyandot.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the development of corporate communication is that it did not grow out of earlier rhetorical models (Yates 65). Rather, the early American republic represents a period in which businesses struggled to create new forms of communication for which they had few, or, in the case of Brockman’s steamboat incident reports, no earlier models. Businesses had to adapt, add, and invent forms—from factory floor regulation broadsheets to technical instruction manuals to annual stockholder reports. Methods of keeping track of people and things (goods, expenditures, profits, and times, for example) also needed to be developed. Formal accounting blossomed over the course of the nineteenth century, with Bentley and Leonard listing nearly five times as many accounting textbooks and guides from 1851-1900 than from 1791-1850 (6). In a time where corporations by definition were for the public good, NY-FMS demonstrates the use of the technologies of the corporation and of corporate communication by women to manage people, funds, goods, and even the reactions of shareholders across great distances. Women in business needed to use the visible hand of management for such organizations to function efficiently; as women used such technologies, they developed them, playing a crucial role in the development of corporate communication.

Again, in contrast to Yates, who sees corporate communication and organization as having been primarily developed by the railroads and manufacturing (100), I see the innovations of non-profit business (much of which was religiously-affiliated) pre-dating those of the railroads. As Wigger reminds us, religious movements such as Methodism were fundamentally women’s movements—spurred by and supported by women. Thus, I believe that thorough studies into business communication in the early American republic must consider not only non-profit corporations but also women’s participation in



these corporations. In light of these records, however, “participation” seems too light a word, perpetuating the omission of women from the narrative of work, and ascribing twenty-first century values (in which non-profit work is frequently defined in opposition to work and business) to the nineteenth century. For example, Shaver calls such omissions “especially unfortunate considering the seriousness with which women pursued these occupations and the emphasis that antebellum churches placed on these evangelical pursuits” (96). Shaver also warns readers against categorizing women’s benevolent work as small or insignificant (104). Although I agree with Shaver that a contribution of women in the early American republic was to lay foundation for the women who would follow, such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union or the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society, it was not their only contribution or their greatest. Women, such as those of NY-FMS, were not only benevolent organizers but also businesswomen.

Finally, examining women’s corporate communication expands the narrative of work. As Boydston and Shaver argue, history at large and Writing Studies in particular have failed to recognize women’s work *as work*. This happens even though women “often acquired and exercised many of the same skills that men used in the marketplace” (Shaver 83). Yet such a point of view still separates women from the marketplace and divorces their work from the economy. Arguably women’s work did sometimes operate in less visible places of the economy, as is the case with Hartigan-O’Connor’s example of women’s domestic economy—selling eggs and other small items. At the same time, women’s work did operate more centrally and visibly, as when in 1833 Baltimore seamstresses went on strike and published their resolutions in the *American* (Rockman 133). In much the same way, the reality of women’s work had to be recognized, as “Self-supporting women composed a large enough segment of the laboring population to warrant official concern whenever the city’s economy slowed” (Rockman 136). Rockman then notes that in 1805, when the city was finding it difficult to support out-of-work women, a benevolent society was proposed (137). The proposed society never came to fruition, but such an example shows the breadth of women’s work. Women at lower economic levels worked as seamstresses, hucksters, and domestic servants, while women at higher economic levels worked as corporate managers for the public services meant to serve other women. Only by continuing to map women’s work and the work of other under-represented groups, such as laborers and the enslaved, can scholars re-write the narrative of work and of business beyond “white,” “male,” and “public.”

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# Women, Work, and Success: *Fin de Siècle* Rhetoric at Sophie Newcomb College

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Christine Jeansonne and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles

**Abstract:** *"Women, Work, and Success: Fin de Siècle Rhetoric at Sophie Newcomb College," identifies a kairotic moment in the current conversation about gender in all-women's colleges. We look to a now-closed (a year after Hurricane Katrina in 2006) women's college in New Orleans to understand how faculty, students, and alumnae used rhetoric at the fin de siècle and early part of the twentieth century to construct a successful vision for women's education. In calling their public rhetorics "epideictic," we note that they were strategic rhetoricians who praised the institution of women's education in documents like the student and alumnae-run magazine, The Newcomb Arcade, and in promises made by faculty in their speeches about education, and even in alumnae's oral histories that were supposedly more candid. Together, we've written this article because it affords the field of Feminist Rhetoric with historical data and documents from female students and alumnae who were making a case for women's education when it was in its incipience. The research we have done will help modern-day rhetoricians see and reflect upon the rhetorical foundations of women's education in the South and in general, to then go forth to interpret the broader future of women's education and an expanded sense of women's gender.*

**Keywords:** *women, work, success, rhetoric, New Orleans, New South, reality, gender, art, pottery, education, students, teachers, alumnae*

The title for a *New York Times* feature story asks, "Who Are Women's Colleges For?" As many women's colleges are closing (their numbers dropped from two hundred in the U.S. in 1960 to forty-six today, according to Feldman),<sup>1</sup>

1 Since June 2015, six women's colleges (Barnard College, Bryn Mawr College, Mills College, Mount Holyoke College, Simmons College, and Smith College) have broadened their admissions policies to include the enrollment of transgender applicants who identify as female. Some women's colleges have closed down altogether due to a major drop in enrollment, while other schools have merged with their brother institutions or have chosen to keep their names but become coeducational.

the colleges that remain continue to tout advantages for a particular environment for women's education. Not uncommonly today, applicants to women's colleges define their identities as "female" or "woman" in new terms, and the *Times* author, Kiera Feldman, reviews the complex terrain of gender definition, particularly transgender identification. Leaders of women's colleges continue to consider how such discussions of gender will influence their missions and enrollments.

In addition to the question of "who" should enroll in women's colleges, other crucial debates will affect the kinds of environments we provide in the 21st century in order to insure that women are educated to become leaders. In particular, the rhetoric surrounding leadership at women's colleges provides a particular lens through which to analyze gender and other crucial questions: What are these colleges' goals vis-a-vis women? Should women's education prepare them for a culture that continues to place constraints on them? What transformations are necessary to move from a rhetoric that merely promotes women's education to a rhetoric that offers a critical account of what happens after students become alumnae? Should women's education prepare them as agents of change in the culture?

Through an examination of rhetorical arguments for the existence of a women's college at the fin de siècle and in the early years of the 20th century, we suggest that these questions were not successfully answered then, nor have they been now. And yet, as in so many cases in the past, a visionary rhetoric often precedes real social reform. Although rhetorical arguments for the founding of women's colleges in the late 19th century contained few explicit discussions of gender identity, they frequently enforced culturally normative behaviors for women. At the same time, however, they advanced idealistic proposals for what a woman *might* do in society. Founders and first generation women students used what we call a "rhetoric of success" to promote a positive rationale for women's education, even though the colleges frequently failed to deliver on all of their promises.

We examine the trope of success for women at one such college, H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, founded in 1886. Newcomb provided education for women for over one hundred years in the Deep South, but often did not (or could not) fully deliver on the promise of new opportunities for women, evident in the stories of early graduates' lived experiences. We also explore its innovative experiment in women's work at the Newcomb Pottery, which opened in 1895. Even though the women's pottery is not the primary focus of this study, the works of art produced by these women led us to this study because we have long admired it and wondered about its meteoric rise in popularity. If we read art (in this case pottery) as text, what does it "say" about women's work and women's artistic achievement? Kenneth Burke offers one



Figure 1 *Newcomb pottery decorators depicted at work in a 1902 woodcut, Special Collections, Howard Tilton Library*

these Newcomb rhetors were self-consciously trying to make the case both for the college and for women's opportunities. They show an acute rhetorical awareness of the need to establish the case for Newcomb in New Orleans and to carve out room for a female presence in the workforce. Hardly a bastion of suffragist resistance to patriarchy, the Deep South did, in fact, need educated women workers in roles that clashed with the dominant trope of what an educated, middle or upper-middle class "lady" could do in the world. We discuss the economic influences below in the section on cultural conditions in New Orleans.

We investigate arguments in the school magazine, *The Newcomb Arcade*; in speeches by administrators and faculty members on the efficacy of a woman's education at Newcomb; and in later interviews by three alumnae about their

2 We are indebted to M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer for this use of Burke. They use Burke's "symbolic intensity" to explain the impact of Rachel Carson's rhetoric *Silent Spring* on the environmental movement during the time of the Cold War.

explanation with his idea of "symbolic intensity... 'charged' by the reader's experience outside the work of art" (63) itself.<sup>2</sup> The themes and motifs in the pottery capture the flora and fauna of the Deep South, but they also reveal much to contemporary audiences about women and work at a time when opportunities were severely restricted.

Some of this symbolic intensity derives from a tension between the visionary rhetoric of the founders and the students and the powerful gendered barriers that the earliest graduates faced when they sought to become independent artists. In their arguments for the founding of the college, for its purpose, and for the Pottery,



experiences at Newcomb. Dagmar LeBreton, Olga Peters, and Sadie Irvine, all early graduates of Newcomb College who studied and worked in the arts in varying capacities, each provides a different perspective on women's artistic work. In their stories, they grapple with the rhetoric of success that urged them on, while at the same time their college was imposing conventional ideas about professional success, limiting their constructions of female gender, underestimating their artistic capacities, and restricting their personal freedom.

As an institution established to educate white women in the Deep South after Reconstruction, Newcomb College is certainly different from women's colleges in other regions;<sup>3</sup> nevertheless, we assert that rhetorical practices at Newcomb resemble those at other institutions in the United States during this time, particularly the arguments aimed to convince skeptical audiences of the need for women's colleges to train women for leadership.<sup>4</sup>

## **Kairos: Setting the Stage for Women's Education in New Orleans**

Josephine Louise Le Monnier Newcomb endowed Newcomb College in honor of her young daughter who died at age fifteen. Newcomb College was unique because of its practice of educating young women for professional futures alongside men at Tulane University. Unlike other women's colleges established in the 19th century as independent schools, Newcomb was the first to grant degrees to women at a coordinate college in the U.S.; others, e.g., Radcliffe and Harvard, would later adopt the model of separate colleges sharing resources.

Audiences for feminist arguments of any kind in New Orleans were virtually non-existent before the Cotton Exposition of 1884 when Julia Ward Howe,

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3 In contrast to Newcomb, which was founded for white women, Spelman College (<http://www.spelman.edu/about-us/history-in-brief>) was founded in 1881 as an educational opportunity for African American women and named in honor of Mrs. Laura Spelman Rockefeller and her parents Harvey Buel and Lucy Henry Spelman, longtime activists in the antislavery movement. As the seven sister schools emerged in the Northeastern United States, so, too, were seven white, all-women's colleges opening in the South: Agnes Scott College, Hollins University, Mary Washington College, Queens University of Charlotte, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Sophie Newcomb College, and Sweet Briar College.

4 See a contemporary example of collaborative rhetoric in the resuscitation of Sweet Briar College: <https://savingsweetbriar.com/> and <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/06/22/deal-will-save-sweet-briar-college>.

the famous suffragist and abolitionist, visited New Orleans. She spearheaded the first “Women’s Department,” a special showcase for women’s work at the 1884-85 World’s Industrial and Cotton Exposition. Miki Pfeffer describes the prospects following Howe’s visit: “If Southern ladies allowed themselves, they could exchange pedestals for fresh pathways” (207). It was this arts exposition that led Tulane President William Preston Johnston to advocate for a women’s college and to hire the Woodward brothers, Ellsworth and William, to teach arts classes. They had been influential teachers of the women in the Exposition, and they became the first teachers in the highly successful arts curriculum at the fledgling Newcomb College, established with Mrs. Newcomb’s gift a scant two years after the Exposition. In *The Arts of Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*, Sally J. Kenney points to Josephine Newcomb’s desire to “advance women in the practical side of life” (9). An advertisement in *The Newcomb Arcade*, the students’ quarterly magazine (to the right), touts it as “The Art School for AMBITIOUS YOUNG WOMEN” (qtd. in Poesch 48). Typical of the era, Newcomb limited the scope of “ambitious young women” to “the higher education of white girls”<sup>5</sup> (Crawford 10).

Even for those unmoved by feminist arguments, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the First World War, massive fires, and disease made it clear that New Orleans’ women had to assume new roles. Ellsworth Woodward,

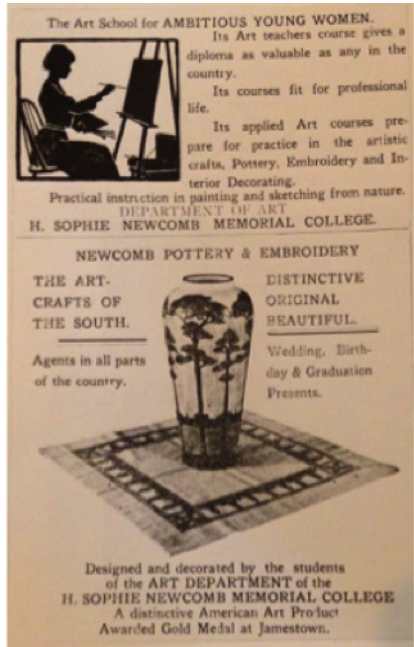


Figure 2 Advertisement printed in *The Newcomb Arcade* Volume 1, Number 1. January 1909

5 Women of color were admitted at Newcomb College in the years after desegregation in the South, but there were none during the period we are examining. Male African-American students were first admitted to Tulane in the 1960s, and the archivists we consulted believe that the same policy applied to women, but there is no documentation of a dual policy. We do know that African women were routinely accepted after the 60’s and until Newcomb’s closing.

the head of the Arts College and eventual founder of the Newcomb Pottery, knew that roles such as “the madonna of the hearth,” a common Victorian image familiar to him and to others, would not be sufficient to build a new economy for the region. In a 1909 issue of *The Newcomb Arcade*, Woodward argues, “Schools have come to realize that where one may be prepared to add to the sum of beauty and achieve personal success through the pictorial arts, a hundred may be trained to useful enterprise in the field of artistic craftsmanship—a limitless field in which the world of industry ministers to the needs of a refined civilization” (emphasis ours, 27). Young women outnumbered young men in New Orleans, and, as Kenney puts it, “New Orleans families were aware that their daughters needed employment” (10), and jobs for women producing decorative arts offered seemingly limitless opportunity.

Despite the relative privilege that the majority of Newcomb students enjoyed as white “Southern ladies,” the individual lives of these women in the South after the Civil War reveal struggles with gender and class identities; they were required to maintain feminine decorum, to give back to their communities in the spirit of “noblesse oblige,” and even to debate whether they could aspire to professional lives as artists. A few Newcomb students came from modest middle class backgrounds and needed jobs to contribute to their families and support themselves financially.

The Newcomb Art School is our specific focus for several reasons. First, arts education has been historically and continues to remain feminized. Producing decorative arts was considered a particularly acceptable pursuit for women. The Arts School and the Newcomb Pottery<sup>6</sup> offered jobs to young women decorators and teachers, many of whom were Newcomb alumnae. Secondly, we assert that the arts and especially the Pottery—where men threw the pots and women decorated them—were not simply spaces where traditional gender roles were reinforced, but also places where gender could be explored and reconfigured. Sadie Irvine, for example, excelled in her role as a decorator, the “exceptional woman” so common in women’s histories. In order to succeed, she chose to focus on her art rather than to marry and assume a more conventional role in New Orleans’ society. Others—a majority, in fact—struggled to balance their pursuit of careers in the arts with the pressure to be “proper ladies,” as we shall discuss in more detail. Thirdly, women’s

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6 Newcomb College itself was founded in 1886, but the Newcomb Pottery was not established until 1895; the founding of the Pottery marks the beginning of our interest in specific women’s lives; the Pottery was conceived as “part artist collective, part social experiment, and part business enterprise initiative under the auspices of an educational institution” (Conradsen et al. 9).

artistic achievements have been historically undervalued, and the history of Newcomb pottery provides an excellent example.

The young women artists at Newcomb College decorated some of the most famous American artifacts in the Arts and Crafts Movement at the Pottery and sold them for modest prices. Newcomb women continued to produce pots after 1929, but the Pottery closed in 1940 as sales declined during and after the Great Depression. In the late 20th century, however, long after the Pottery closed, Newcomb pots became prized artifacts for collectors. Unless one is a wealthy collector of fine (and very expensive) ceramic art, an art historian, or an alumna of Newcomb, the names of even the most successful artists from Newcomb College are unrecognizable and unmentioned in women's histories. Today, however, the pottery and Newcomb women's pioneering efforts are currently being recognized and rediscovered, and are on display in a traveling exhibition entitled, "Women, Art, and Social Change: The Newcomb Pottery Enterprise" sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution, the Henry Luce Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Writing about an earlier exhibition of women's pottery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, curator Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen underscores the importance of including women's contributions in the canon of American Art: "The role of women in producing American art and studio pottery has always been understated. Everyone knew that women figured prominently in both movements. But actually they were more important than that—they dominated these movements from the 1870s to around 1915" (Reif).

The Pottery was heavily influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement, the trans-Atlantic rejection of the Industrial Revolution. John Ruskin, the leading English art critic in the Victorian period, articulated many of its major tenets as he decried the damaging effects of industrialization on artists and workers. The remedy that he and artists such as William Morris and J.W.M. Turner promoted was a return to nature for subject matter and to handcrafted products, designed and produced by individual artists. The famous "Mad Potter of Biloxi," George Ohr, who taught for a brief time at Newcomb, promoted handcrafted, anti-industrial arts with his slogan "No Two Alike." Ellsworth Woodward's art also included Arts and Crafts motifs, and he and the early teachers at Newcomb, including Ohr, found the fauna and flora of Louisiana extremely suitable subjects for a women's arts curriculum. Thus, a distinctive "Newcomb style" for the pottery, as well as other arts and crafts (e.g., stichery, jewelry, book binding), emerged from the Arts and Crafts movement and from the emphasis on local motifs.



Figure 3 Students decorating pots in the pottery decorating room, ca. 1902-1905, Poesch 36.



Figure 4 Joseph Meyer at the pottery wheel, Poesch 72

According to an 1881 article from New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* entitled "Women's Work—Which Our True Men Should Consider,"<sup>7</sup> women of the time excelled in the decorative arts: "In decorating pottery and china painting, female artists have displayed more aptitude and taste than men, and no doubt this branch of work will afford

employment to many women in the future" (4).

Despite their alleged aptitude, they were not allowed to actually create the pots. They were not instructed in the skill, though a few taught themselves and some rare examples of their pots survive. In general they were restricted to traditional classrooms where they studied drawing and decorated the pots in their regular clothing covered by aprons. We include here a

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7 For additional detail and background on the Pottery, its teachers, and the women's roles there, see Sally Main's "Conscious Freedom: The Newcomb Pottery Enterprise," in *The Arts and Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*.

photograph of Joseph Meyer, the potter who shaped most of the pots decorated the Newcomb artists, to illustrate the distance women were forced to keep from dirty work (Poesch 72). No doubt it was also perceived as unseemly for a woman to straddle a pottery wheel.

According to Jessie Poesch (1922-2011), Professor Emerita of the History of Art at Newcomb, these gender roles were universally “understood”:

It was assumed that a professional male potter would be needed to work the clay, throw the pots, fire the kiln and handle the glazing [all tasks done by both men and women today]. The women might do the designing and decorating, but a man would perform the other tasks, which were half-mechanical, half-artistic. The Newcomb Pottery was an enterprise designed to employ Southern women, but in this late Victorian period it was assumed that only the lighter work could be handled by the women.

Even with these restrictions and safeguards, many parents had to be assured that their daughters were not exposed to experiences they deemed inappropriate. A newspaper account entitled “Free Drawing Classes at Tulane,” cited in Sally Main’s history, reports that “many of the new members of the art classes were attended by their male protectors who brought them to the door and went off only when well-satisfied with the busy look of things” (8). Because of assumptions about gender roles at Newcomb, administrators and parents required that these students be monitored and restricted to pristine studios.

## **Newcomb Epideictic Rhetoric of Success**

The founders, administrators, faculty, students, and alumnae at Newcomb invoked what we call a rhetoric of success: an epideictic mode of rhetoric that declared success for women, celebrating women’s potential and often embellishing these young professionals’ accomplishments in the workforce well beyond the reality. This rhetoric of success warrants contemporary scrutiny because we can now see clearly the gendered constraints, constraints that did not apply to male artists. Its promises of professional achievement during the period were unrealistic. By propagating a rhetorical narrative that did not consider the failures and disappointments in finding work in a “man’s world,” Newcomb faculty and students unwittingly misled one another and some of the female students who followed. The statistics and firsthand accounts of their professional successes reveal a disconnect between the rhetoric and the realities of lived experiences, as we will illustrate later in this essay.

The faculty, administrators, and Mrs. Newcomb initiated this epideictic rhetoric of success in order to galvanize support and enthusiasm for women's education. Woodward expresses it this way in a 1901 report: "I am hopeful that we can here provide a livelihood for that large number of women who have artistic tastes, and who do not find the schoolroom or the stenographer's desk or the counter altogether congenial" (qtd. in Conradsen et al. 181). Over time, the rhetorical trope of women's success, particularly in this women's college, was instantiated in nearly all public documents produced at Newcomb. Heavy-handed epideictic praise of Newcomb's promise began as early as the college's first graduation when President Preston Johnston presented the diplomas, saying,

Young Ladies: You are presented to me by your honored President as duly, truly and fully prepared to receive the Baccalaureate Degree of this University. You constitute the first graduating class of the H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College. You are the firstlings of our flock, as the rare primroses in the springtime of its college existence, the first flowers of its morning...you will look back with a tender regret and a modest joy on this school where you early found a standard and incentive for aspiration (qtd. in Crawford 55).

These women, newly minted as professionals, would require new rhetorical skills in order to promote their ethos as female professionals in a male-dominated society. While college leaders and alumnae constructed a visionary ideal for women's education, the female students also had to use a new kind of rhetoric as they moved into new arenas. Newcomb women proved to be sophisticated rhetors, deploying a rhetoric of praise and echoing their teachers in order to establish a strong reputation for the college.

In particular, the students' quarterly magazine, *The Newcomb Arcade*, promulgated an idealistic vision to a public audience. Throughout the Arcade's twenty-five year existence from 1909 to 1934, students and alumnae collectively exhibited a deep self-awareness of their shared rhetorical spin on the value of the college and its promise of success. In the March 1916 issue, Jane L. Gibbs, a graduate in 1905, describes the value of her alma mater and the strides made by her fellow alumnae. In a section entitled, "An Alumnae Appreciation of the Art School," Gibbs contends that the Art School provided the economy with working, self-sufficient artists: "While many graduates go out each year as teachers of art, others prefer an occupation which is both remunerative and congenial, so we find some following the designing of pottery, others are filling orders in the jewelry-craft, while those who are skillful with the needle are kept busy with the art needlework..." (45). She echoes Mrs. Newcomb's vision of the self-supporting Newcomb woman when she



asserts that “the aim has been to provide opportunity for *self support* through congenial occupations which otherwise would not be offered in the community” (emphasis ours 46). In the February 1924 issue of *The Newcomb Arcade*, Elizabeth Harris describes another skill necessary in order to become self-sufficient: “Newcomb trains us to be financial geni as well, perhaps financiers of a lower order than bankers, but financiers just the same. We become auctioneers par excellence” (111). Harris provides an account of their working habits and skill sets throughout her article, echoing Mrs. Newcomb’s well-known financial prowess and business sense.

## Appeals for Financial Support

Student and alumnae writers in the *Arcade* illustrate their financial acumen by asking their readers to contribute to their school. While fundraising is an ongoing enterprise for all educational institutions, not unique to women’s colleges, writers in the *Arcade* solicited donations using appeals specifically for women’s education. Pleas for donations appear in a section of the November 1915 issue written by the alumnae community. Members ask for donations to the loan fund for the upcoming Vaudeville show: “...even if this *Arcade* comes to you when it is too late to inform you of this particular event, won’t you, you Alumnae who weren’t there, won’t you remember that although the show only takes place once a year, the Loan Fund, for which the show is given, is with us always? And won’t you as individuals help that worthy cause?” (27). This type of appeal continues in a section entitled, “Of Alumni Interest” in the March, 1916 issue, in which the author contends, “You have just spent four years finding out how tremendously deep are the wells of knowledge and what a scanty drop thereof you have tasted. That is a most wholesome gift from one’s Alma Mater, and indeed, if you have not received it, you have practically wasted your years trying to increase coils of gray matter, where no gray matter really grows” (45). Like many others, Erma Stitch connects the general theme of success with the financial responsibility for their alma mater in the February 1924 issue: “Girls who have already achieved a name, and those who are ‘doing things’ in other parts of the country or abroad are a credit to Newcomb. If you are one of these, you will be giving back to Newcomb something of what she has given you by letting others know something of what she is...” (125).

Dagmar LeBreton promotes financial responsibility in a 1969 letter to her fellow 1912 alumnae in a letter, saying,

And the great thing is that you, individually, can be a part of the intellectual evolution we are engaged in at the University, even though it has been fifty seven years since you flipped the tassel on your mortar



board from right to left, or was it left to right? You can really be a part of that continuing progress if you make sure that your name is included in the list of contributors to the annual Alumni Fund.

In *The Arts and Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*, Main emphasizes the rhetorical significance of Newcomb women's efforts to communicate a collective and public vision of their school. She explains that Newcomb's "students, particularly its art students, gave voice to the possibilities and aspirations that an education can provide" (39). Beth Ann Willinger and Susan Tucker report, "the students created ways of imprinting their own social and intellectual engagement onto the landscape of the College" in *The Newcomb Arcade* (266).<sup>8</sup> The appeal of preservation was successful in persuading fellow alumnae to donate money so that Newcomb College could be sustained. It was only in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, with its drastic impact on the whole economy of New Orleans, that Newcomb was dissolved as an entity separate from Tulane in 2006.

## Resistance to Success Trope

Not surprisingly, beneath the narrative of success there were some quiet, privately expressed caveats and resistance to gendered constraints. While Mrs. Newcomb and the faculty insisted that the college was not a finishing school but rather a college with rigorous courses, expectations, and boundless opportunities for women, there was an underlying sense within the campus community that women could only go so far; they could succeed and *strive* to be self-reliant, but only within acceptable limits. Chloe Raub, the Newcomb Archives and Vorhoff Library Special Collections Librarian, asserts in a recent interview that many of the women artists at Newcomb realistically planned to marry and/or become teachers after graduation. Students might have majored in art thinking they would become professional artists, but upon graduation, they more often sought careers in teaching because this job was viewed as more suitable for women. Raub also suggests that the college wanted women to excel only in particular kinds of disciplines. While languages and the arts were considered suitable areas for women, the sciences were not encouraged as often, despite Newcomb's notable record of preparing some of the region's first women physicians. Newcomb women were expected to amass educational expertise, with training that equaled the rigor of male students, but they were nonetheless expected to be "adequately feminine" (Raub). Teachers and administrators alike told them to maintain proper feminine behavior and

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8 The name of *The Newcomb Arcade* comes from the Arcade Building, a popular meeting place for Newcomb students.

make the appropriate personal and professional choices befitting a proper young woman. A Newcomb education was not to alter, attenuate, or dismantle a woman's femininity, but it was expected to be demanding in its professional preparation, especially after 1919 when President Pierce Butler phased out programs in "domestic science" and education in favor of the liberal arts and sciences.

## **Self-Reliance as Artists vs. Service to the Community**

Newcomb women who wanted to embody this narrative of success—a job in the arts, self-reliance, money—often found themselves unable to find careers as artists. The broad strokes of the rhetoric elide critical differences specific to various individuals, groups, and classes. The success trope was effective in fundraising and strengthening an argument for the college and women's education, but it did not accurately describe the majority of the art students' lived experiences. Neither did it fully represent the actual, on-the-ground policies at Newcomb or the barriers newly trained female students encountered in the workplace. No doubt their strategies were necessary, if not sufficient. It would take more than rhetoric at women's colleges to change the social and cultural conditions for Southern women during this period.

Despite notable exceptions such as Sadie Irvine, the famous pottery decorator who successfully sold her work after her graduation from Newcomb, the majority of graduates struggled to find and maintain careers in the arts, even though arts and artistic careers had been emphasized from the founding of the College. In her thesis entitled "The Founding of H. Sophie Newcomb College: An Experiment in Southern Higher Education for Women," Katy Coyle reports data on the occupations of the first ten graduating classes of Newcomb College. According to these records, there were over 130 students in the first ten classes. Their degrees ranged from the arts to the sciences, and of these graduates, only thirty-seven women are listed as having occupations. Of these individuals, twenty-two had jobs as teachers, and the others had careers in the school board, government, law, music, business, writing, and secretarial work. Only two graduates, one of whom was Annette McConnell Anderson, the mother of the famous Mississippi artist Walter Anderson, reported careers as artists.

As we learned in the interview with Raub, a sizeable number of graduates were content, despite Woodward's views previously mentioned, with finding careers in traditionally "female" jobs or with being active members in society clubs and organizing events for the community. They could do so because they were supported financially by their families or spouses if they married. Many of those who married had children and ceased to pursue work outside

the home. So to say that all Newcomb graduates were aiming to gain impressive jobs as professional women would be an inaccurate claim. While some graduates found themselves disappointed in the lack of professional opportunities, others were not interested in professional careers.

To showcase the disconnect between the rhetoric about women's education and the reality of lived experiences, we look in more detail to the on-campus Pottery. From the Pottery's beginning, the Art Department hired Newcomb art graduates and decorators from outside the school to teach art students and to decorate pottery thrown by men. After graduation, art graduates were given the opportunity to work as designers at the Pottery. The work they decorated could be sold to the public for an income in the school's salesroom. Too often, however, the decorators were unable to earn sufficient incomes to support themselves. In *The Arts and Crafts of Newcomb Pottery*, Spinozzi contends, "In spite of these idealistic goals, of the dozens of decorators who contributed to the pottery's output over its fifty-year existence, very few were actually gainfully employed or able to support themselves on their earnings" (181). She continues, saying that at the turn of the century: "...the once-attractive prospect of working as decorators no longer enticed the art students at Newcomb College" (192-193).

A combination of problems beset the young decorators who tried to work at the Pottery. First, decorators had to buy their own materials and were only given half of the profits. When the Pottery first opened, they were guaranteed an income regardless of the outcome of the sales. But quickly, their pay became contingent on the sales of their wares. After the decorators expressed dissatisfaction with this system, the school returned to their original plan and placed all of their wares in the salesroom for the public to buy. However, the decorators were still grossly underpaid because Woodward would lowball the price of their pots. Even the most exemplary works were underpriced. This happened, as Elizabeth Kemper Adams explains in her 1921 book, *Women Professional Workers: A Study Made for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union*, because "Salaries in applied art work [such as pottery] are so unstandardized, and are changing so rapidly, that it is unsafe to give any figures" (324). Because there were not thresholds for artistic salaries, and because women's labor was substantially undervalued, it was easy to pay them less than male artists required.

Woodward made promises to potential employees that they would make \$150 per month, but even the most successful artists did not make the promised \$150. The cost of living in New Orleans also created a strain on the artists (Conradson et al. 182). For example, Sabina Elliot Wells expresses her frustration as a decorator in a letter to her mother: "...I am almost in a state of open rebellion. I am supposed to be one of their clever designers and I will make

this month \$40.00 and last month \$30.00—and that at a pottery where the theoretic pay is \$100.00 per month!” (qtd. in Conradsen et al. 182). Despite her talent, Wells could not support herself with the inconsistent salary and resented the promises made when she was hired.

In *Newcomb Pottery & Crafts: An Educational Enterprise for Women, 1895-1940*, Jessie J. Poesch, Sally Main, and Walter Bob stress, “...the pay they received was probably woefully inadequate unless it was supplemented by aid from their families or they cut expenses by living at home. The women who worked at the Newcomb Pottery were possibly paid as well as some of the women of their generation who went into the working world, yet it was hardly enough to genuinely provide a livelihood...” (108). The Pottery underpaid them, and they were often over-worked (Poesch et al. 111). Poesch, Main, and Bob also report that only one full-time employee received a regular salary:

By 1913, the alumnae saleroom was sufficiently profitable to support one regular employee, who was paid \$15.00 a month to take care of the showroom. The income of the pottery was cited as being about \$6000.00 a year at this time...A writer explained the purpose of this saleroom and these ‘industries’ as ‘not to make money for the association, but to help the girls become self-supporting in their chosen work’ (86).

In their 1976 book, *Newcomb Pottery and Craftworks: Louisiana's Art Nouveau*, Suzanne Ormond and Mary E. Irvine explain that wealthy women were more likely to reap the benefits of their Newcomb education by work in the Pottery than women who depended on their education for a livelihood: “If a woman did not marry and raise children, there was little for her to do at home except read, tea party, or play a musical instrument. The Woodward brothers felt that these women could make an artistic contribution to the community” (71). Those who were not New Orleans’ gentry, however, typically relied on the traditional, gendered occupations listed above by Katy Coyle if they continued to make artistic contributions to the Pottery.

The rhetorical strategies of the founders, administrators, and selected Newcomb women reveal much about what success *could* mean for women in their era, how a career as an independent artist could be possible, and the pioneering role that women’s colleges *did* play in higher education. As we looked for the opposing or counterbalancing rhetorics of failure in alumnae interviews conducted many years after graduation, we did not find many public expressions of disappointment. There are individual hints of dissatisfaction with gender roles in the personal accounts below, but their public rhetoric in the *Newcomb Arcade* emphasizes their common desire to promote the benefits of their college. The women who contributed to the archives or were solicited for



Figure 5 Dagmar LeBreton's graduation photograph, 1912, Newcomb Archives Oral History Project

interviews by Newcomb historians, were, of course, leaders on campus and promoters of success. Many of the women valued the experiences they had whether or not they actually became self-sufficient artists, and they had vested interests in making Newcomb look progressive.

### **Dagmar LeBreton: Professional Success and Women's “Special Mission”**

While most extant accounts of the early Newcomb experience are positive, the College's digital archives contain oral histories of a few former art students who resisted the rhetoric and the gendered limitations at the College. In her interview on March 18, 1985, Dagmar LeBreton, a 1912 graduate of Newcomb, reveals that she had internalized the unspoken assumptions about success for women. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree of Design from the Art School in 1912, she attended Columbia University to obtain a Master's degree. Once she returned to New Orleans, she began teaching foreign languages at Newcomb College and later established the Department of Italian there.

In the interview, LeBreton contends that Newcomb College was not a finishing school but an institution with rigorous expectations. She recalls, “You were on your own, and you had to make good. It was a challenge of trying out yourself against the group.” LeBreton has fond memories of the Art School, saying that they “had a great many potentialities right here in the South and that we needn't copy snow scenes anywhere...all of the effort in the art school was to awaken us to the artistic potentialities...to awaken people to open their

eyes to see what's around them." LeBreton explains that the Dean kept in touch with private schools in the Northeast and selectively modeled Newcomb's curricula on the progressive and rigorous examples he found there.

When asked about the purpose of an education for women, LeBreton responds that a college education "helps you to grow up... and to extend your point of view...and that you owe a certain bit or a lot of your talent to be developed for the good of others," aligning with a more classical view of the purpose of education as training for citizenship. According to LeBreton, "All of the leaders in community work are Newcomb graduates," echoing contemporary claims for women's colleges as training grounds for leadership roles.

The interviewer then asks her how education has benefited her personally, and she responds that she would not have pursued her career in teaching Latin at Newcomb and the romance languages at Tulane if it were not for her husband's death in his twenties. She was widowed a year after she graduated and was soon thereafter offered a position at the Art School. However, she had to go back to school to earn an advanced degree because the Art School at that time only granted the bachelor of design degree. The art degree was not sufficient to allow her to teach languages, even in that era. The interviewer asks her: "Why did you go to college?" She responds, "I thought we had to be educated." At the end of this interview, she expresses her views on women's work: "I don't want Newcomb to become too ERA because I think women have a special mission in life, and I think that women who are trying to be like men are making a mistake...I think that women who don't have to work...are perhaps losing a lot....and of course, there are some women who have to work." She asserts that women "cannot combine—that is a full mission—the mission of motherhood and wifehood...I think that's what a woman is made for—combine that with interest—a woman has to work so hard to equal a man—" When the interviewer remarks that she worked and was married and raised a child, LeBreton insists that she "had" to work. Because her husband died so young, she had no choice but to raise her child and have a career. Nevertheless, she says that she does not regret her career.

## **Olga Peters: Critic of Gender Roles**

Olga Peters graduated from Newcomb College in 1920, after World War I. To support her education, Peters worked as a dancer for the troops during World War I. Like so many other Newcomb students, she aimed first for a career as a teacher, completing a B.S. in education from Tulane University; she went on to complete a master's degree in ballet from Newcomb. She tried decorating pottery for a while during her time at Newcomb but never found that work adequate to support herself. After graduation, she taught

in various public schools in the city, teaching dance and art classes. She also designed costumes for Mardi Gras carnivals for over thirty-eight years.

LeBreton, in the interview discussed above, subscribes to a traditionally gendered understanding of a woman's role in society, while Olga Peters subtly conveys skepticism about the conservatism at Newcomb and in New Orleans. She does not outwardly criticize the sexism of the time and the unre-



*Figure 6 Olga Peters decorating, Newcomb Archives Oral History Project*

alistic promises of success, but neither does she accept them. When she discusses both women's clothing and artistic freedom, Peters reveals a strong awareness of the conservative expectations for Newcomb students.

Mid-way through a recorded interview in January 5, 1983, Peters is asked, "What about attitudes toward women?" She responds with dismay, "We had to wear black stockings to the gym class" with tennis shoes, adding that they weren't allowed to wear their gym suits on campus. She says, "[you had] to know how to take care of your hair and your skin and your nails," and they were regularly given physicals to check on their hygiene. The interviewer asks her to think about the political implications behind gender and attitudes toward women, and Peters avoids the question and instead remarks upon the social politics within the school and her community. She says that there was "an uprising in the sororities" and draws attention to a social hierarchy that was in place at Newcomb, claiming that the sororities at the top were often given advantages.

Art classes were very small, so everyone knew one another and fostered relationships. Despite the sheltered environment in the studios, Peters remarks that the artists had to have a letter from home saying they could draw nudes. Many of the female models were also modest. On the subject of Sadie Irvine, one of the few artists from the era who is recognizable today, Peters minces no words: "I just could not stand Sadie Irvine...she was engrossed in her own situation. She was superior." Peters' attitude suggests a common attitude toward women who are deemed "exceptional."



## Sadie Irvine (Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine), Consummate Artist: The Rhetoric of Success Made Reality



Figure 7 Sadie Irvine posing “in a way to evoke the fluidity and the formality of art nouveau,” ca. 1912, “Sadie Agnes Estelle Irvine.”

The most enigmatic of the women we investigated is Sadie Irvine, arguably the most famous Newcomb decorator, educated at Newcomb College and employed as a decorator and instructor there for decades after her graduation. Surprisingly little of her direct testimony about the Newcomb experience survives, given her significance today; her larger pots sell for tens of thousands of dollars at prestigious art auctions around the world.<sup>9</sup>

Irvine was born into a Catholic family in uptown New Orleans, and her mother died at a very young age. When Irvine was a child, her stepmother noticed an artistic propensity in her and encouraged her to pursue artistic education seriously, over-

seeing her enrollment at Newcomb College in 1902. She lived with her parents for most of her life and was buried with them when she died in 1970. In addition to her career as a teacher of pottery decoration at Newcomb, Irvine maintained strong friendships with many of the Newcomb students, employees, and with her teacher Ellsworth Woodward, long after she and Woodward

9 Sales records from 2008 at the Rago Auction House in New Jersey show the sale for \$80,000 of an early pot from 1909. The pre-auction estimate was between \$45,000 and \$65,000 with an opening bid of \$22,000. Even smaller pieces command significant prices at auction. A pair of candlesticks decorated by Irvine in 1925 sold at Neal’s Auction in New Orleans for \$10,900 in 2007. A single tile from 1933 with the Newcomb Fountain and Louisiana irises sold for \$4,830 in 2001.



retired. Irvine continued to work collaboratively with local artists, pursuing and exchanging other art forms such as cards, tiles, and painting. She also mentored art students and taught at The Academy of Sacred Heart in New Orleans. Throughout her life, Irvine had a strong presence in the artistic community and in women's education. At that time, and even now without evidence, it is impossible to describe the connection between her personal life and her success as an artist; however, she does illustrate the kind of intense, singular dedication to a profession that might have been a requirement for success in her era, and even today.

What little we do know of Irvine's personal life is that she took her work seriously, and that art "formed the focus of all of Irvine's life" ("Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine"). Letters from the archives illustrate that she was well connected. She wrote often to her brother and her sister-in-law, Mary Irvine, her collaborator as an author. Excerpts from "Notes on People at Newcomb" ("Notes") show that she knew the community at Newcomb very well and had opinions about almost everyone.

Writing about Bemis Sharp, a Newcomb graduate who returned to teach in the Art School with her, Irvine says, "she bummed around Europe" and started painting again in Paris when "Matisse was just getting started...followers were dirty, bearfooted (sic) and more mother hubbardly...never signed pottery or paintings" ("Notes"). Irvine's depiction of Matisse's followers contrasts sharply with images of the women artists at Newcomb, photographed in long skirts and white, high-necked Victorian blouses, protected by starched black aprons. Newcomb women were certainly never dirty or "bear-footed" in their classrooms because men, notably Joseph Meyer, threw all of the pots (See Figures 3 and 4). Given the precise rules for signing art works at Newcomb, the foreign practice of unsigned work was also unthinkable to her.

Irvine is well known for creating the pots decorated with a moon shining through moss hanging from a live oak tree, a motif that has become synonymous with Newcomb arts. In later years, she rued creating this most famous design: "I have surely lived to regret it. Our beautiful moss draped oak trees appealed to the buying public but nothing is less suited to the tall graceful vases—no way to convey the true character of the tree. And oh, how boring it was to use the same motif over and over though



Figure 8 Vase with Sadie Irvine's Popular Moon Motif

each one was a fresh drawing" ("Sarah Agnes Estelle Irvine"). The images of Deep South flora and fauna were immensely popular at the time, but they were also "appropriate" subjects for Southern women artists in this period, unlike the partially nude figures so often depicted by Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939), for example. Like other artists, Irvine also found herself constrained by the demand to be a "production potter" individually reproducing the limited range of motifs. Only long after her death did her work command prices that might have afforded her more creative freedom.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps because she was engaged in a collaborative women's art enterprise, she was not well-rewarded financially in her day, and yet the Newcomb Pottery was the only lucrative venue available to her.

Irvine did, however, experience one moment in the spotlight when one of her pots was chosen as a gift to the actress Sarah Bernhardt, who claims to have "found her artist soul in a congenial atmosphere" when she visited the campus on March 31, 1911. Irvine's pot was an early one, described as "one of the new matte glaze pieces, with a design of white narcissus on a blue-green ground, made by one of the most talented of the decorators, Miss S.A.E. Irvine" (*Picayune*, as qtd. in Poesch 61). Miss Bernhardt, wearing "a heavily embroidered net tunic of peacock blue, a boa of silver sable, and a dark velvet hat which 'was almost buried in smoky gray plumes,'rose' and held the vase aloft, and clasped it to her heart with characteristic enthusiasm" (*Picayune*, as qtd. in Poesch 61).

Despite her contributions to Newcomb, there are no oral interviews with her as there are with other alumnae, perhaps because of her ongoing employment as a decorator and teacher long after her graduation. She was successful in her profession, arguably the most successful, and therefore the embodiment of the self-reliant artist dreamed of in the early days of Newcomb. We don't know how she felt about her own success, other than what we can infer from the comments about taking herself "seriously." We can speculate that because she did not conform to the roles of matriarch, society clubwoman, or community leader that, to some, she did not fully perform the role of the "Newcomb lady"; nevertheless she succeeded as a "Newcomb woman." She

10 In the Spring 2014 catalogue for Neal Auction Company, auctioneers and appraisers of antiques and fine arts in New Orleans, only two very small pots of Irvine's were available, one made in 1925 and estimated in value at between \$1,500 and \$2,500 and another made in 1926, with some restoration, valued at \$1,000 to \$1,500. When Irvine's larger pots are put up for auction they appraise in the tens of thousands of dollars, but very few of them ever appear; museums now own most of the finest ones.

is the most interesting of our cameos, the clearest exemplar of the success narrative, and in the future we hope to find more letters or documents that reveal her own assessment of her success.

## Conclusion

In her 2009 article on rhetorical imagery of women workers in WWII, a study that is reminiscent of our own work, Jordynn Jack offers a “rhetoric versus reality explanation.” As she argues, “wartime propaganda (rhetoric) suggested that women’s opportunities were unlimited but actual industrial practices related to women’s work (reality) failed to change” (286). Despite the fin de siècle rhetoric of success that masked the complexities behind lived experiences and gendered limitations in the workforce, we nevertheless regard Newcomb College as a noble experiment that succeeded in providing a progressive vision of women’s education. Not only at Newcomb, but at other early women’s colleges, the rhetoric of success was necessary, if not sufficient to prevent the inevitable disappointment many graduates felt when they failed to find jobs in the arts professions. As with many other social movements, the visionary rhetoric about women’s independence served as a precursor for substantive social change.

As we compare the late-19th century, fin de siècle rhetorics of women’s work and women’s success to those in the early 21st century, we are again struck by similarities. Women’s colleges continue to argue that their *raison d’être* is to provide success and leadership roles for women. At least the question is now what it means to be a “woman,” as opposed to what it means to be a “lady.” One only has to look at 21st century popular films such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), *The Proposal* (2009), and *I Don’t Know How She Does It* (2011) to see that models for women’s success are highly conflicted. For some, success means trying to “do it all”; some opt to preserve a certain kind of “femininity,” something Newcomb women were required to do. These films depict an ongoing anxiety about women’s roles in professional and leadership positions. *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Proposal* depict powerful women as cold and alone. The premise of the third film, as the title suggests, is that it is impossible to have a rich private life, a family, and a demanding career unless you are a Superwoman (and miserable).

The tension between the rhetoric of progress for women and lived realities remains unabated. We have much to resolve regarding success, both in education for women and in lived experience. As was the case for Newcomb women over a hundred years ago, the gap between equal opportunities for women and men cannot be closed merely by asserting rhetorical tropes of success. We will never argue that visionary rhetorics of success for women are empty,

in the popular sense of “empty rhetoric,” for women have long used creative arguments to pave the way for change. As far back as the Classical period, we have had exemplary women who, like Sadie Irvine, forged a place for themselves in history, and their stories remain important as arguments. However, as we ponder the social transformation still needed, we seek new variations on success for more women, both in rhetoric and in lived experience.

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# Feminist Fissures: Navigating Conflict in Mentoring Relationships

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Kathryn Gindlesparger and Holly Ryan

**Abstract:** *Scholarship in rhetoric and composition has richly addressed the role of feminist mentoring and how a feminist perspective of mentoring might work across various mentoring configurations. However, there is little feminist rhetorical scholarship that discusses the transition from a graduate mentoring group to a faculty mentoring group. This case study examines how one group navigated the change from graduate mentors to faculty mentors, revealing how unarticulated conflict lead to the end of the relationships. In unpacking this narrative, this article argues that feminist mentoring scholarship has not done enough to openly discuss the role of conflict in mentoring. Lacking scholarship to guide the transition of the group, the members instead relied on assumptions about the role of feminist mentoring and what it means to be a feminist mentor. This piece offers ways of embracing conflict in feminist practices.*

**Keywords:** *mentoring, faculty, graduate student, feminist mentoring, conflict*

Mentoring has been a core value in the field of rhetoric and composition for decades, and practitioner-scholars take seriously the role mentors play in training graduate students and new faculty for academic, professorial, and administrative work. As women trained in that tradition, mentoring is key to our academic identity, a vital part of our professional development and an important way we give back to the field. Given this deep-rooted commitment, it might come as no surprise that in 2013, when our long-standing mentoring group dissolved, we felt a significant emotional loss. For some, this dissolution might seem par for the course: as people grow and their needs change, they move on from the structures they once leaned on. However, for us, we felt a deep concern that we had failed one another and the field by not finding ways to make our group work, despite the clear indicators that the group no longer served its purpose. This article is a reflective analysis and meditation on the fissures that emerged in our group and how they contributed to our



eventual break-up. A key focus is analyzing our negative reaction to this dissolution, reactions which were rooted in a problematic set of assumptions about feminist mentoring. While changes in personal and professional relationships are a natural byproduct of the transition to faculty life, we want to speak out against the feelings of guilt and shame that might manifest when these transitions do not go as planned. We hope this article offers other feminist mentoring groups productive ways of evolving through mentoring relationships that are not rooted in shame, guilt, or false narratives.

This article also serves as a sequel to the advice about graduate mentoring groups given in *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*. In their foundational book, Michelle Ballif, D. Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford outline a process for mentoring graduate students at the dissertation stage. Students under a single advisor work as a group to give and get feedback on their projects. Mountford organized her graduate students into this mentoring configuration once they reached the dissertation-writing phase. Ballif, Davis, and Mountford write:

Every student member reads each other's work and responds in written form, and they then meet either at someone's home, a quiet cafe, or someplace on campus to discuss possible revisions. Chapters must be workshopped and revised before they are submitted for Mountford's review. [...] [T]he biggest benefit, Mountford claims, is that she no longer serves as the sole emotional support system for each student. They call each other between meetings, she notes, to offer encouragement. They are also harder on the drafts than she is much of the time, Mountford claims, which means she spends her time solving problems rather than convincing students they have them. (141)

In this kind of mentoring, students support, guide, and challenge each other through an unfamiliar process: dissertation writing and, potentially, the academic job market. While the mentees are free to work together on issues with which they can confidently help one another, it is under the gaze of an experienced faculty member who can offer help with scholarship and model professional behavior based on her own experiences and expertise.

Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's discussion of the group is largely under the guise of how to structure advising since the context of the discussion in *Women's Ways* is how to sustainably advise multiple PhD students at one time. However, we experienced this mentoring configuration as support for students' professional advancement. Professional advancement refers to the process of shifting from student to expert in the field by disseminating research, most often through publication. By publishing, a person advances in

the field by becoming more well-known and a more accomplished scholar. Dissertation work is the starting point for professional advancement.

We were members of Mountford's dissertation writing group at the University of Arizona and benefitted enormously from the group. We benefitted so much, in fact, that after graduation, we decided to continue the mentoring group ourselves. After graduating and securing academic appointments, we had become such a part of one another's lives that we could not imagine not meeting on a regular basis (something we will discuss later in the article). We decided to keep the same format, attempting to mentor one another on our scholarship. As we settled in to our tenure-track positions at our new institutions, we quickly leaned on each other to help us make the transition to faculty member. Since we were all WPAs at small colleges, we found that we sought advice on how to negotiate the local and complex demands of our new positions. Our group shifted from a writing group, working to advance ourselves as experts in our field, toward a focus on developing our professional identities; this shift was key in our dissolution and is part of what we want to analyze. Professional identity development refers to the process of becoming versed in the literacy practices surrounding the political and professional navigation of faculty life, specifically the non-publishing aspects of our work. While this worked for a while, soon our group started meeting sporadically, dividing our attention to changing life circumstances (namely children), and each member started to produce fewer pages of scholarship. The group was no longer supporting professional advancement *or* identity. Eventually, it was time to end the group.

Looking back, the case of our dissolution is ripe for analysis because it demonstrates how we told ourselves narratives that weren't tenable in our new positions. First, we believed that our model for graduate mentoring could be imported into our new positions, and second, we believed that feminist mentoring meant that we had to support one another's choices no matter the consequences. Our dissolution shows how our group changed but our story about who and what we were had not. This article provides a case study of a mentoring group that attempted and yet failed to successfully shift from a graduate cohort to a faculty cohort. We argue that the rhetorical purposes of each group are different and without fully acknowledging the transition between those purposes, conflict can manifest and the group can dissolve. The transition from graduate student mentoring group to junior faculty mentoring group has not received much attention in our literature about mentoring, and the differences between those contexts of mentoring are what make the transition untenable in some cases. This article draws attention to the necessity of conflict and change (even including dissolution) in our models of feminist mentoring across graduate and faculty mentoring groups.

## **Our Story: Graduate Mentors to Faculty Mentors**

As Mountford's advisees, we were required to participate in monthly peer review sessions in which each dissertating student submitted chapter drafts to the group and received feedback at our regular meetings. However, when she took a new position at another university, she no longer required her final advisees to meet on a regular basis. Mountford encouraged us to meet on our own, but did not make it a prerequisite for submitting chapters to our committees. Most of the members of the group decided not to continue with the writing group any longer (job market and other obligations got in the way), but a few of us decided to continue meeting regularly. In fact, we met much more often, almost weekly and sometimes daily, to discuss chapters, research problems and other deadlines.

For us the group was invaluable because the feedback on our writing helped make us better scholar-writers. Each member of the group took their role as reader seriously, helping to examine how well we were applying certain concepts and ideas to our larger argument. For example, when Katie decided to apply a Buddha-esque theory to her work on sustainability, the group was able to steer her in another direction that made more sense for the claim she was making. Also, when Holly applied Foucault to her work on pharmaceutical advertising, the group was able to ask smart, thoughtful questions that helped her clarify and define her analysis more effectively. Part of the reason the feedback was effective was because we were all driven by a singular purpose; the dissertation was the only scholarly project that each of us had.

An added bonus of meeting was that we also just enjoyed each other's company. The dissertation-writing stage can be isolating for many graduate students, and our situations were no exception. Near the beginning of the dissertation writing stage, for example, Holly married and moved from Tucson to North Carolina. In this new place, she had no intellectual community and no friends: it was just her, her husband, the cats, and the dissertation. The weekly, sometimes daily, meetings by phone with the women in the mentoring group were not only the sole connection Holly still had to the graduate program; they were also a social outlet. Katie had a similar experience: she had started working at a local nonprofit, and the normalcy of day-in-day-out graduate classes had dissipated. The combination of taking on that new full-time work and having finished coursework all but severed her ties to the campus community. The mentoring group time on the phone was a positive reward for writing. As graduation drew near and our work intensified, the personal started to bleed into the professional. During one meeting, a fellow member broke down in the Del Taco drive-through. She had just ended a relationship, was stressed about the dissertation, and cried, "I just need a Coke!" We totally understood.

Listening to her order the Coke through the crackly drive-thru intercom over the phone was a moment of clarity: we were here for each other no matter what. We were friends and we were grateful for each other.

Once we finished our dissertations, our group experienced a transformative shift. We started mentoring one another about issues related to the job market. The University of Arizona offered a course for students who were on the job market, but while Katie was able to attend (even though she had already completed her dissertation), the rest of us were no longer living in Tucson. Each of us had jobs, but no one yet had a tenure-track position—what we all agreed was the next transition. The job market was brutal for two reasons: first, none of us had ever navigated it before, making each and every advertisement or correspondence from a prospective employer something to be studied and analyzed for hours. Second, we were inexperienced and using our best guesses to construct CVs and letters. Mountford patiently and generously reviewed our application letters, but the day-to-day toll of checking the Rhetoric and Composition Jobs Wiki and stressing about how to contort ourselves to fit into various jobs was shared among the women in the group.

Our group had developed a rapport with one another that made the job market less opaque. For example, we provided a safe space to try on the new identity of “faculty member,” which was an awkward performance to practice. While the job market class could provide feedback, the most specific and difficult feedback often came from the writing group. In one instance, after a difficult practice interview with the job market class, Katie rehearsed her answer on the phone to the often-asked “tell-us-about-your-dissertation” question on the phone with the writing group. The feedback from the job market class had been: can you highlight your main points more clearly? Their feedback, while true, was also wrapped in a collegial politeness that she just didn’t have the emotional energy to unwrap. It took good friends to explain the problem in shorthand: “You’re talking too much. Stop sooner.” With so much unclear and unsaid in the job market process, having friends who could “tell it like it is” felt like a rare gift.

The writing group also normalized the foreign, stressful experience of the job market. By living through one another’s experiences sending out materials, interviewing, and watching the wiki, we began to see how little control we actually had over the outcome: we could put on our best faces and submit our best materials and still not get the job. Because we had come through a stressful process (the dissertations) together in a noncompetitive way, we kept that kind, generous spirit as we moved into the job market.

The purpose of our group shifted in those months we were on the job market: professional advancement seemed to take a backseat to defining our professional identities. Since we had so recently finished our dissertations, we

used that document as evidence of our potential for academic growth and a budding research agenda. Our writing samples often came from a chapter of our dissertations. The professional advancement of having multiple publications did not seem to matter so much because we were newly graduated and relying on our dissertations; absent that immediate push for articles, we were able to focus on crafting documents that defined our professional identities as faculty.

We did not explicitly discuss this change in group purpose. Instead, we implicitly agreed that once we were off the market, we could return our attention to our professional advancement—the scholarship. Publishing could be the sole focus of the group; after all, we named ourselves “Pubwrite,” a riff on our original listserv nickname, “Disswrite,” and an explicit reference to our intention to publish. This change was necessary and exciting for us, but we did not explicitly discuss this change. Instead of choosing one goal or another to focus on for the next few months, our group ultimately tried to be both a support system for professional advancement and identity.

While assumptions regarding feminist mentoring are the main focus of this article, we begin by contextualizing our experiences through a narrative on what we saw as the benefits of the group. In those early days, our group functioned well for multiple reasons. First, we developed strong friendships. We had known each other for over ten years; we had a shared history that led to a shorthand that was comfortable and useful in terms of talking through our writing and work issues (for example, we still all understood indulging a theoretical tangent as “going Buddha,” after Katie’s ill-advised dissertation jaunt into Buddhist philosophy). We looked forward to meeting each week and our time together was just simply fun and rewarding, as friendships are. We enjoyed each other’s company and didn’t want to lose our personal relationships by butting heads over how we should address our work.

Also, we were able to stay in touch with the rhetoric and composition community. Small colleges, where we were all employed, do not often employ more than one rhetoric and composition faculty member, and, if that college is outside of the United States, there may not be another rhetoric and composition person for miles around. The group became a tether to the larger community: people with whom to talk about ideas and have a common language and disciplinary lens. While there are other ways to be involved in the field (conferences and publications), the mentoring group was a free, frequent, low-stakes opportunity in which to engage.

Additionally, the group offered us intellectual freedom. As we moved into our first academic positions, most of us felt a sense of loss at the intellectual freedom implicit in graduate school to explore a range of new research interests. Our time together on the phone each week was a tie to this old identity.

In our new positions, we did not have the same free reign. We were tied to our new institutional missions and taught whatever the curricula demanded, usually generalist rhetoric and composition courses, and contributed to service and the campus culture as was appropriate. At our institutions there were no discussion groups around topics other than teaching. The mentoring group allowed us to continue to discuss other specialty areas of interest with a group of invested listeners.

Finally, each of us was hired into WPA positions, putting us in highly visible roles on each of our campuses. The mentoring group eased us into our new WPA identities, which necessitated a carefully constructed veneer of professionalism. Our graduate student identities were markedly different from these new professional identities; as newly minted administrators, we were put in the position of being experts. To vacillate or show too much weakness would be to compromise our authority. The mentoring group was a place where we could mentor one another through difficult administrative situations and plan for what our public persona would be. Even though publications were the goal of our group, the majority of our meeting time was spent getting advice about specific WPA challenges we each had in our new jobs. For example, when Holly was first hired, she was immediately asked to create a strategic plan and budget for her fledgling writing center. Having never created these kinds of documents during her graduate work, she turned to the group for support. During Katie's first days as the WPA at her new job, she discovered that the basic writing curriculum badly needed to be updated; she used the group to test her arguments for the university education committee so that she could position herself as an expert for faculty unfamiliar with the discipline. At work, we had to perform as expert in order to be taken seriously by our colleagues. In the group, we sought mentoring that helped us to effectively create that performance.

For several years, these benefits were enough to maintain our group, but as the years went on and our lives changed, these benefits were not enough to keep the mentoring group together. We didn't realize it at the time, but the shift that was taking place, from a focus on professional advancement to professional identity development, was setting the stage for the mentoring group to dissolve. While we focused on our new WPA-oriented jobs—perhaps because the demands on a WPA are so immediate—we did not focus on our scholarly advancement and thus disengaged with the writing process. We thought the mere existence of our group provided the “support and affirmation” so thoroughly explicated throughout Ballif, Davis, and Mountford's project (143). As we discussed the breaking points in preparation for writing this article, we found that our actions weren't conscious decisions, but performative and constructed acts that maintained the powerful status quo of

support and friendship. The unverbilized shift from scholarship to identity formation caused fissures in our working relationships. Without a singular goal like the dissertation or larger project, we often prioritized our own needs ahead of needs of the group, making the meetings at times unproductive and not fulfilling. Our personal lives became more complicated too, as we had extended our families—we now had spouses and children. We double-booked the mentoring time for breastfeeding or office hours; the lack of focus during the meetings meant that we weren't supporting advancement as well as we thought we were. Once we returned to our scholarship, we needed to seek expertise outside of the group because we could not support each other's professional advancement: no one in the group had the same sub-discipline, making substantive feedback challenging. These fissures, like in cracks in a rock, did not cause an immediate break, but rather weaknesses.

## **Assumptions about Feminist Mentors**

After a series of missed meetings, backchannel online chats and finally a quick confrontation during a writing group phone call, the group decided to stop meeting in order to spend time getting feedback from other, newer mentors. After not meeting for several weeks, before a writing meeting on the phone one day Holly admitted to Katie that she was seeking advice on an article from another faculty member at her institution; she mentioned feeling guilty for not telling the other members of the group that she was seeking outside help. Katie also confessed to seeking mentoring advice from a new group that could help her prioritize her projects.

Eventually both Holly and Katie explained to the other group members that they had sought advice and support from outside sources. No one in the group was particularly troubled by what we thought was an admission, and, in fact, the group supported our decisions to have additional mentors. However, in that moment of confession, both Katie and Holly felt such relief because we had felt such guilt and shame about not being good feminist mentors. The guilt was really connected to our (mis)understanding about the narrative of feminist mentoring. Because we assumed that feminist mentoring relationships should be unchanging (unwavering), guilt and shame began to well up. The fissures and the realization of the benefits/drawbacks were usually experienced in private moments of reflection, not shared among the group members. We proceeded in shame, keeping the mentoring positive and relatively superficial. Our indebtedness to each other—and our commitment to mentoring—kept us from finding the mentoring we actually needed. We avoided conflict.

When we decided to write this article, we needed to figure out why we felt so guilty and shameful at the dissolution of our group. While there are

multiple personal reasons (“I should have tried harder to make it work!”), we agreed that the problem wasn’t simply individualistic. We believe that there were two reasons why our feelings manifested as guilt and shame: first, the narratives around mentoring that currently exist do not account for our experiences; and second, the stakes we had in the group were so powerful that we thought our dissolution would jeopardize our professional advancement and identity profoundly.

The stories we told ourselves about what it means to be a mentor informed why we felt so guilty. Our assumptions about feminist mentoring were two-fold. First, feminist mentors are unwavering, and second, there must be support for both the personal and the professional. These assumptions were mostly solidified in our undergraduate experiences. Katie’s formal exposure to feminism came from interdisciplinary undergraduate women’s studies classes where students were encouraged to contextualize feminist theory with their own lived experience. These classes emphasized solidarity, with a hint of essentialism thrown in. The subtext of all of the coursework was political: women should stick together. Holly’s exposure to academic feminism was similar, cobbled together through a variety of undergraduate classes and experiences in education and then graduate classes in rhetoric and composition. Holly’s undergraduate work as a Resident Assistant exposed her to rape crisis training, SafeZone training, and gender equity initiatives. Both of us ardently supported women’s causes on our undergraduate campuses, attending protests and participating in awareness events like Take Back the Night.

In graduate school, we both saw the underlying theme of “women sticking together” reflected back to us through a variety of experiences. For example, our own graduate school mentor, Roxanne Mountford, often worked with feminist (and female) collaborators, writing articles and books with her graduate school friends Diane Davis and Michelle Ballif. Her feminist colleagues called in to contribute to our graduate seminars by phone. At conferences, we watched cohorts of feminist mentors network. A favorite memory of Katie’s from graduate school is attending the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition meeting on Wednesday night at the New York CCCC and watching the reunion of what looked like several graduate school friends. These women seemed to have it all together: they were dressed to the nines in shawls and arty-looking jewelry, carried neat-looking briefcases (as opposed to my backpack stuffed full of student papers), and kissed and hugged in what registered to be the chicest performance of collegial love ever witnessed. It was clear that they had a personal relationship as well as a professional one. Their performance was also conventionally female—the jewelry, the kisses—which further enforced the idea that “women stick together.” This idea that feminist mentors blend the personal and the professional is echoed in “Wednesday



Night," a clip from the 25th anniversary version of a documentary about the history of the coalition, in which Krista Ratcliffe and Lynèe Lewis Gaillet agree that the "first order of business" when they see each other is to hug.

Unsurprisingly, our assumptions that feminist mentors should stick together and that feminist mentors integrate the personal and professional are also reflected in the wider feminist literature. During our undergraduate experiences, Holly and I were both influenced by feminist writers like bell hooks, who emphasized the solidarity between women ("Feminism") and also the importance of diversity among women. In her retrospective of the professionalization of the women's movement, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth notes that indeed, second wave feminism has been marked by the sometimes divergent commitments to solidarity and professional advancement, saying

Since the nineteen-sixties the women's movement in the United States has sponsored two potentially divergent agendas: solidarity and professional success. These agendas do not necessarily conflict, although they do seem to work best in a particular sequence. When women emphasized solidarity first, they improved their economic and professional situation; when women emphasized professional ambition first, solidarity tended to go out the window at substantial cost to the women's movement. (Ermarth 39)

What Ermarth says about the women's movement is also true for our group, as a microcosm of the larger cause. As a bloc, women do better together (achieve higher pay, etc), but when we are focused on ourselves and not focused on the cause, the cause suffers. When our group started paying attention to our own individual needs, it started to feel individualistic and self-serving. This idea that professional advancement must come at the expense of solidarity is one that resonates with us because this trope is precisely where our guilt comes from. Perhaps rightly so, we were afraid that when our support for one another's research waned around the time of the job market, that our solidarity was also at risk.

## **Mentoring Scholarship**

The tropes of solidarity and professionalism are present in the wider mentoring scholarship, as well. These narratives are positive and productive. Jenn Fishman and Andrea Lunsford's work in "Educating Jane" provides a useful definition for the power of mentoring. They argue that mentoring supports "the desire to create access to and new avenues for academic and personal development," and it "promote[s] strong pedagogy, [...] foster[s] professionalism, and [...] enable[s] individuals to set and accomplish new goals" (30).

Others have echoed Fishman and Lunsford's attitude toward mentoring, especially in the "publish or perish" culture of higher education. In "Get Together to Write," Jennifer Friend and Juan Carlos González describe a writing group of first-year tenure-track faculty at the same institution who met monthly to critique approximately five pages of writing, although the group would meet for up to six hours to work on entire manuscripts (33). Friend and Gonzalez share that their group "fostered greater collegiality and helped [...] establish friendships based on the advancement of critical scholarship" (33). Initially, our group bought into this story in our own practice even though our group functioned remotely, unlike the writers at Friend and Gonzalez's institution: our friendships grew deeper, our connections felt stronger, and our trust and dependence on one another became more deeply rooted.

The narrative of a feminist mentoring group is also ingrained in mentoring rhetoric. Feminist mentors actively eschew the dominant hierarchical paradigm of mentoring, creating a more egalitarian working relationship. Gail McGuire and Jo Reger argue that "co-mentoring" is an inherently feminist concept because it flattens the hierarchies that traditional mentoring relationships require. Co-mentoring relies on feminist principles that underpinned our writing group's values: we were mindful that each of us had her own academic career path and that no one's experiences were more valued than the others'; we were careful not to become competitive; and we tried our best to integrate the personal and the professional by considering our emotions and checking in on our lives outside of academe. These values were demonstrated when we supported each other on the job market for different jobs, when we supported each other for the same jobs (non-competitive), and when we let ourselves have moments of humaneness within the writing group meeting (driving through Del Taco for a post-breakup Coke). But more than our varieties of strengths and specialties, it was our participation in the dialogue and collaboration during our meetings that made the feminist mentoring possible. Gail Okawa suggests that reciprocity among mentors and mentees is a crucial part of the mentoring process, and that the process should be "shared, reflective, and democratic" (528). We expected that the group was a shared, reciprocal space, and that expectation was feminist in itself.

When the group failed, we assumed we were not sharing enough, being reflective enough, or democratic enough. We thought our friendships were falling apart, like we weren't supporting each other fully enough. When our group failed, we were left to feel that there was something wrong with us because we were starting to tell a story that wasn't reflected in the literature.

## Conflict Management or Lack Thereof

Rhetoric and composition studies offers some insight about how to understand interpersonal conflict. In their article “Collaboration and Conflict in Faculty Mentoring Situations,” Mara Holt and Albert Rouzie offer a dialogue about their mentoring relationship that highlights the various conflicts they experienced as a senior and junior faculty mentor pair. In one particularly relevant paragraph, Rouzie’s voice says:

I saw myself as more conflict-phobic. I thought of conflict as unpleasant and unproductive, something to be avoided. I still think it’s unpleasant, but before our conflict could yield any benefits, I had to unlearn my attitude that it was counter-productive [sic]. I had to realize that not only was conflict inevitable, it was necessary and productive, provided you can work through it to some resolution. All collaborations require conflict whether expressed or repressed. No conflict, no collaboration. (84)

It is important to note that Holt and Rouzie discuss conflict in a hierarchical mentoring relationship; the “master and apprentice” model. Much of their conflict came from the intentional separation of the personal and the professional. Many mentoring relationships that address identity development (like our group did) and/or are organized around personal and professional friendships can experience similar conflict because collaboration requires a transformation from the individual to the collective identity.

Transformation of any kind can be uncomfortable; looking back on the path of our group, we tended to not address the transformation. This is perhaps not unusual, as negotiating conflict can take several different approaches. The Thomas-Kilmann model of conflict management presents a taxonomy of five styles of conflict management: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating. A collaborative style involves a high level of concern for goals. It is an “invitational rhetoric that invites the other’s perspective so that [a resolution can be reached] that honors” both parties (Wilmot and Hocker 168). Compromise is a style that results in gains and losses on each side. It differs from collaboration because it “requires trade-offs and exchanges” (163). Avoidance is “characterized by the denial of conflict, changing and avoiding topics, being non-committal, and joking rather than dealing with the conflict at hand” (151). We see these categories as fluid and dynamic, as individuals employ these concepts as rhetorical strategies rather than static identities.

We find these definitions useful for thinking about the behaviors in our group. For example, we tended to avoid conflict instead of collaborating or compromising. Susan Jarratt's article, "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict" warns why avoidance can be damaging: avoidance allows oppressive discourses to proliferate. She encourages feminist teachers to embrace conflict not as "grounds for despair but the starting point for creating a consciousness [...] through which the inequalities generating those conflicts can be acknowledged and transformed" (275). If our group could have better understood what the benefits were (i.e. why we were invested), we may have been able to understand better what each member of the group needed. While this conversation may not have stopped our group from ultimately ending, it may have alleviated our feelings of guilt and shame over being responsible for the breakup.

By breaking up, we felt like we weren't being good feminists, which implicitly entailed being vocal about our support of one another's professional advancement *and* professional identity formation. In short, being there for each other in all capacities, all the time. Our academic preparation, as discussed earlier, had shown us that "the personal is political," and that our relationships with one another are the bedrock of our careers. We believed that staying together was a demonstration of our feminist commitment, not only to one another but also to our advisor; we felt indebted to the long line of feminist thinkers and teachers who had paved the way for us. So when the group dissolved, we felt like we were betraying our friendships, as well as our feminist teachers.

As a way of thinking through what our group might have done differently to have a more productive dissolution, we offer the following thoughts as rough next steps for how to encourage conflict and change. We find Krista Ratcliffe's work on rhetorical listening helpful in determining how to be more transparent about conflict. Ratcliffe argues that interlocutors must listen "for intent and with intent" to understand the rhetorical negotiations at play in any situation, including acknowledging privileges (29). We could have manifested the rhetorical listener stance by considering the following suggestions:

***Set goals and review them regularly.*** The key word here is "regularly." When we started meeting, our goals were broad but workable in the short-term. Our goal was to publish, but after a few months of meeting, we should have discussed whether that was still our primary goal or if it was only a small part of the mentoring we were doing. Having clearer boundaries about what we were trying to accomplish might have helped us to "blame" the change in our careers for the dissolution, rather than question our self-worth as feminists.

**Transparently address differences in working styles.** Difference is often silenced because privileged discourses about academia are rewarded. Given how racially and socioeconomically homogeneous our group was, our differences boiled down to smaller discrepancies: working styles, parenting choices, invention strategies, work boundaries. Our preferences were things that we knew about each other, but we didn't discuss how they impacted the group. If we could have created a climate that addressed these differences, we would have been better set-up to collaborate through rather than avoid conflict.

**Recognize silence as part of the discourse.** Glenn's definition of rhetoric as an analysis of who speaks, when, would have been advantageous for us to consider (42). Each member should have been mindful of who was dominating and driving conversations and establish ways of finding what has not been said. By allowing ourselves to sink into the same roles of speaker and listener, week after week, we minimized our ability to share and produce ideas.

## Conclusion

Conflict in mentoring groups reminds us of the concept of *metanoia*, which "involves a transformation that can range from a minor change of mind to a dramatic spiritual conversion. Such changes often lead to new belief, which then leads to new action" (Myers 2). We had an old belief, which was that "being loyal" and "being feminist" entailed sticking to one another through thick and thin, and "sticking to one another through thick and thin" entailed providing support for the development of who we were going to be as scholars and how we were going to get there. When we couldn't be all things to all people, we felt like we had failed. We now think that 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.

We propose dialogues about conflict and tension in feminist mentoring relationships that are productive sites of transformation rather than ones of shame or guilt. From this initial investigation of conflict, we advise that more research be done to consider the varied configurations that mentoring relationships take on and how conflict can be more transparently addressed in those relationships. We also think there should be more public discussion about the kinds of conflicts women in lateral mentoring relationships encounter, so that the feminist community in rhetoric and composition can more acutely address how to handle those fissures, as a way of keeping more mentoring relationships intact or minimizing the sense of guilt when those

mentoring relationships need to change. Feminist mentoring relationships in rhetoric and composition can and should reflect the larger feminist values of collaboration, listening, and embracing conflict and change.

Finally, we want to underscore the importance of recognizing the roles power, race, and privilege play in the lifespan of any mentoring relationship. Scholars such as Okawa and Carmen Kynard & Robert Eddy (2009) have opened the door for conversations about hierarchical mentoring amongst scholars of color, but a critical approach to power and privilege should be integrated into any scholarship or practice of feminist mentoring groups, as well. This attention to privilege is one of the limitations of our work: we are white, middle-class women in full-time positions. Because the navigation of conflict is culturally-bound, we need more discussions of what kinds of conflict management are appropriate for different discourse communities.

For us, switching to a collaborative conflict management style would have been a paradigm shift from the friendship-oriented accommodation styles (like avoidance) we were used to. As Holt and Rouzie have noted, conflict will always exist in mentoring relationships, and our group would have likely benefited from a collaborative conflict management style. We recognize that because collaboration is a search for a “new way,” these new ways may not be found overnight or over the course of a single meeting. They may evolve over long periods of time, many months, before the innovation is identified.

To aid in this innovation work, the literature on feminist mentoring needs to be fleshed out to explore all the ways mentors can support each other and how mentoring relationships can transition to accommodate career and life changes. We imagine more public discussion about the kinds of conflicts women in mentoring relationships encounter, and more discussion about how feminist mentors repair, revise, rejuvenate, and recreate these relationships. Conflict and change are cornerstones of feminism; we cannot shy away from them in our mentoring practices.

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# Race, Women, Methods, and Access: a Journey through Cyberspace and Back

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Leah DiNatale Gutenson and Michelle Bachelor  
Robinson

**Abstract:** *Feminist historians of rhetoric and composition have begun to consider how digital technologies may enhance and occlude their scholarship, and this growing body of scholarship is impossible to ignore. This article traces the authors' failed attempt to locate two historically important educators, Susie and Lottie Adams, in both physical and digital archives. While frustrating, the search for the Adams women led to some important conclusions about silence and invisibility and the underlying reasons why the researchers were ultimately unsuccessful in locating them. These explanations invite further discussion of a disciplinary conversation that is already well underway.*

**Keywords:** *Access, Digital Humanities, Race, Women, Historiography, Recovery*

Almost a decade ago, I walked into the archive located in the main branch of the public library in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, for the first time. I was enrolled in a graduate seminar on the History of Rhetoric with Professor Carol Mattingly at the University of Louisville and needed to visit an archive and report on the experience. Having been a classroom teacher for many years before returning to pursue a PhD, and having grown up in Louisville and been educated in the public school system there, I chose to research the first school in the city of Louisville. The librarian handed me an accordion file with a hodgepodge of documents, but mostly photocopies of newspaper articles on the opening of schools exclusively for African American students in the Louisville area from the early 20th century. The contents included detailed accounts of the building of a variety of schools in prime Louisville areas and budgets in the tens of thousands of dollars (quite generous given the time period). My report, "white citizens of Louisville were willing to spend an exorbitant amount of money to prevent their children from attending school with my ancestors," stimulated lively discussion in class, but the discussion ended with Prof. Mattingly asking me how I knew that it was the white citizens spending money to build schools and ultimately suggesting that I follow the money to

be sure. I followed the money directly to a dissertation project that looked at public discourse surrounding the opening of schools for African Americans in the Louisville area.

This research uncovered legislation lobbied for and by African American citizens and passed in 1865 that assessed an additional tax of \$2.00 against all “negro and mulatto” citizens of the state of Kentucky for the purpose of opening schools for “negro” children.<sup>1</sup> I also discovered the first schools opened in 1871, housed in Fifth Street Baptist and Center Street churches, and that the appointed principals of both schools were women, Susie Adams and Lottie Adams, respectively. Though women commonly served as teachers, it seemed extraordinary for them to be appointed administrators, and I wanted to know more. Because of their last names, I suspected that the Adams women may have been sisters and possibly related to the Rev. Henry Adams. Rev. Adams was a high profile African American minister and pastor in Louisville from 1829-1872, and prominent in the annals of Louisville history. Critical imagination suggested that the Adams women were his relatives, and their ages suggested they could be his daughters, but the women seemed to disappear after their initial appointments by the Jefferson County School Board. I extended my search for evidence of Susie’s and Lottie’s professional and/or personal lives at the onset of the project, but was ultimately unsuccessful in my pursuits. Because of the time sensitive nature of dissertation writing, I moved on from the Adams women, but the absence of documentation for their lives never left me.

## A Reason to Revisit

Fast forward the clock a number of years later to when I am serving in my first faculty position. I was teaching a graduate seminar in Feminist Rhetorics and had been paired with one of my students in a university-wide mentoring program. The mentoring arrangement was structured with periodic formal meetings. Through these meetings, we made the decision that the culminating experience from this year-long journey would be a collaborative article submitted for publication, and I encouraged Leah to take the lead in the scholarly exploration. Leah had recently read articles in the special issue of *College English* in November 2013, focused on Digital Humanities and Historiography and edited by Jessica Enoch and David Gold, and found interest in building on the work of that issue. She used her final paper for the Feminist Rhetorics

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1 Robinson, Michelle Bachelor. *“Still I Rise!”: Public Discourse Surrounding the Development of Public Schools for African Americans in Louisville, Kentucky, 1862-1872*. Dissertation. University of Louisville. 2010.

course to explore a comprehensive review of literature, and after some conversation, we decided to resurrect the Susie and Lottie Adams project.

Because of technological advancement and the availability of digital tools that were not available when the project was originally conceived, because of Leah's interest in the intersections of feminist historiography and the digital humanities, and because of the campus mentoring program that brought us together as a collaborative team, we began the search anew. We were inspired by the growing AND expanding field of digital technologies and humanities, as well as the widening critical conversation surrounding the connection between feminist historiography and the digital humanities. Leah felt particularly inspired by the recent publication of the *College English* special collection, and so we were hopeful of a more fruitful outcome on a second look. Maybe this project could find, or even place, two important African American women's narratives in a digital space. Whatever the result, we had decided to embark on a digital journey to see where it might lead.

## And so the Journey Begins

Through the use of an experiential research project, this article invites readers on a journey. In some ways, the journey is pedagogical in the sense that it begins with a faculty member and her graduate student collaborating on a project. In other ways, the journey is methodological in the sense that it provides a model for research practice in digital spaces, as well as in brick and mortar archives. Ultimately, this journey is about discovery—the discovery that “open” in digital spaces is not synonymous with inclusion, and in some ways it can actually be “closed” to many underrepresented groups, particularly African American women. In the following sections, we enter the critical conversation surrounding feminist historiography and the digital humanities by examining the need for transformative access in using and creating digital archives for African American women. This discovery relies heavily on the epistemology of Adam J. Banks' taxonomy of access outlined in his groundbreaking work, *Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground*, in which he articulates the particular forms of technological access necessary for African Americans to fully participate in American society on their own terms:

material, functional, experimental, and critical<sup>2</sup> (41-43). Feminist historiographers of color must gain all of these specific types of access to technology before the digital archives can achieve their radically democratizing political ends. In our final section, we offer suggestions for how we begin to move forward as feminist scholars, archivists, digital humanists, and the field at large.

## The Journey through Scholarship

Feminist historians of Rhetoric and Composition have begun to consider how digital technologies may affect their scholarship. Traditionally, historical research in Rhetoric and Composition Studies has taken place between the physical walls of archival spaces, rather than within the virtual databases of cyberspace. Such methodology stems from the need for historians to study material artifacts that were produced long before the development of the Internet in the early 1990s (Enoch and Bessette 635-636). However, the growing body of literature regarding the merger of the digital humanities and feminist historiography in Rhetoric and Composition research is impossible to ignore. This scholarship suggests that the existence of digital archives creates the possibility for a significant democratization of historical texts in the 21st century.

The digital humanities/feminist historiography conversation begins with James Purdy's landmark essay "Three Gifts of Digital Archives," in which he builds on Susan Wells' discussion of the gifts of physical archives. Purdy argues Rhetoric and Composition scholars must understand the effects of integration, customization, and accessibility in order to both successfully use the digital archives as well as teach students how to navigate them. In her essay "Googling the Archive: Digital Tools and the Practice of History," Janine Solberg offers a discussion of the way digital search tools and digital environments support feminist rhetorical practices and uses her own experience digitally researching early-twentieth-century advice writer Frances Maule in order to

2 Banks calls for transformative access to technology for African Americans that eschews colorblindness and embraces race cognizance. In doing such, Banks outlines a taxonomy of access that he hopes will provide "a more effective matrix for understanding technology access... and what this changed understanding might mean for writing instruction – the work of composition, computers and writing, technical communication, and African American rhetoric" (41). Although Banks does not directly reference the subfield of feminist historiography, the implications of his theory do much to explain the scarcity of African American women from the digital archives.

explore how digital technology has “shifted conditions of findability” in the 21st century (53).

In their article, “Meaningful Engagements: Feminist Historiography and the Digital Humanities,” Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette continue the conversation Solberg begins. Enoch and Bessette’s nuanced discussion of feminist rhetorical practices and the digital humanities explores the ways digital technologies both promote and impede the tectonic shifts in Rhetoric and Composition scholarship Royster and Kirsch initially advocate for in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*. They include a long list of digital archiving projects that provide opportunities for feminist research: HEARTH: The Home Economics Archive, the Victorian Women’s Writers Project, and the Poetess Archive, to name just a few projects that are perhaps less well known than other, larger databases such as the Perseus project or Google Books (638). Interestingly enough, of the digital archives mentioned by Enoch and Bessette, only one, Digital Schomburg: African American Women Writers of the 19th Century, focuses solely on the work of African American women. Such foundational texts were the beginning of a conversation that gained a tremendous amount of traction with the November 2013 Special Issue of *College English*, “The Digital Humanities and Historiography in Rhetoric and Composition,” edited by Jessica Enoch and David Gold.

Enoch and Gold highlight the ways in which scholars such as Shannon Carter and Kelly Dent, Ellen Cushman, Jim Ridolfo, and Tarez Samra Graban are now working to build digital historiographic projects. The collective work included in the special issue addresses the ethical imperative of contemporary Rhetoric and Composition Studies and argues that by creating digital historiographic projects that give voice to marginalized populations, scholars counter dominant historical narratives and begin to move beyond Royster and Kirsch’s acts of rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription. Though the special edition of *College English* extensively explores diverse communities, there was not an article engaging African American women in digital spaces. Knowing that the collection does explore a number of communities, acknowledging that editors Enoch and Gold are committed to engaging scholarship focused on underrepresented issues, and considering the foundational work of scholars such as Jacqueline Jones Royster<sup>3</sup> and Shirley Wilson Logan<sup>4</sup> in the

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3 Jacqueline Jones Royster is the author of *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* and has theorized extensively about methodology and historiography.

4 Shirley Wilson Logan is the editor of *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth Century African-American Women*. Her work focuses on the written and oral performances of African-American women.

historiography of Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies, we wondered why African American women have a limited presence in this growing body of scholarship and also why many of the digital spaces hosting work about and by black women are often not recognized by digital humanists as work within the Digital Humanities discipline.

In 2001, African American Studies scholar Abdul Alkalimat called for “a move from ideology to information” in Black Studies. He argues this shift to the “virtualization of the Black experience” is not only the logical next step in critical conversations engaging “Afrocentricity, Afrology, Afro-American and African American Studies, Africana and African Studies, as well as all forms of ethnic or minority studies,” but a crucial one in “the evolution of survival” for African Americans. (“eBlack: A 21st Century Challenge”). He notes that such an information revolution has the potential to lead to “a renaissance of community development, cultural creativity, and liberation politics” both inside and outside of the academy. This movement provides an alternative to the vertical structure of established institutions and hierarchies (“eBlack: A 21st Century Challenge”). It resists any sort of authoritative ideology and, in theory at least, has the potential to defy the gatekeeping of academic knowledge production.

Although Alkalimat stressed the importance and necessity of African Americans in the production of all things digital nearly fifteen years ago, scholars working outside of the identity categories of white and male often have difficulty navigating the disciplinary terrain of the digital humanities. As Moya Z. Bailey notes, “The ways in which identities inform both theory and practice in digital humanities have been largely overlooked” (“All the Digital Humanists are White”). Because the marginalized and underrepresented often occupy “the liminal spaces” of the digital humanities, Bailey calls for a shift in the types of critical conversations we are having in the digital humanities. She argues that we might “[center] the lives of women, people of color, and disabled folks” in order “to engage new sets of theoretical questions that expose implicit assumptions about what and who counts in digital humanities as well as expose structural limitations that are the inevitable result of an unexamined identity politics of whiteness, masculinity, and ablebodiedness” (“All the Digital Humanists are White”). Due to the present ubiquity of digital culture, now more than ever, African Americans must create and be represented in digital spaces in order to ensure that technology supports revisionist historical interventions.

Despite the immediate challenges of doing work in the digital humanities as a person outside of a dominant identity politic, a growing body of intersectional digital humanities projects exist. For example, the Crunk Feminist Collective began using blogging/microblogging platforms to explore feminist theory and thought outside of the academy in 2010. Recently, the #BlackLivesMatter Movement has gained traction across social media platforms and has found

its way into composition classrooms across the country. Grassroots initiatives such as Black Girls Code provide opportunities for Black women to learn and engage with the skills necessary to work in STEM fields. In terms of digital archives themselves, an increasing number of virtual projects explore the lives of women, including African American women. The New York Public Library Digital Library Collections in connection with the Digital Schomburg houses *African American Women Writers of the 19th Century*, a virtual, key-word-searchable collection of 52 published works by black women writing in the 19th century. On a more localized level, *A Gathering of Women*, a digital repository sponsored by the Arkansas Women's History Institute, provides a collection of the unwritten history of Arkansas women.

And yet, while these projects are substantial, they do not explore the structural limitations that scholars working in rhetoric and composition studies may encounter while trying to trace the history of the discipline. We hope that our search for the history of Susie and Lottie Adams highlights some of the ways in which digital technologies are "raced" in their infrastructure and are used in a way that "race" our thinking about literacy, rhetorical practices, and composing in general. In exposing some of these structural limitations, we hope to answer Bailey's interdisciplinary call to examine the identity politics at play in the digital humanities.

## Taking a Second Look: Recovering a Historiographic Search

Having explored the growing scholarship at the intersection of historiography and the digital humanities and having identified an experiential project to engage, we decided the best approach would be to begin the project with each of us searching for one of the women in cyberspace. We searched the following databases: the Subject Guides within our university library system (both Education and African American Studies); HathiTrust; Google Books; Dissertations and Thesis Abstracts; American Memory; African American Newspapers: the Nineteenth Century; and many more. In most cases we came up with little; however, we experienced a breakthrough with [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com). One search for Susie Adams in Kentucky placed her in the household of the Rev. Henry Adams in the 1870 US Census. Another placed Lottie in the household of one Margaret Adams in the 1880 census. We were curious if Margaret had appeared in the 1870 census with both Susie and Henry and discovered there was a Margaret listed under Henry. Henry was 67, Margaret was 45, and Susie was 22, followed by a host of other adult age people in the Adams' household. In the 1880 census, Margaret was listed at age 50 (which would indicate that in 10 years, she only aged 5, and if indeed these two were the same

woman, someone was not honest with the census collector). Neither Henry, nor Susie is listed in the 1880 census, but Lottie appears. Records indicate that the Rev. Henry Adams died in 1872, and therefore, if this entry were indeed his family's household, he would not have been alive for the 1880 census. The search had not put Susie and Lottie in a household together and was not conclusive on whether or not the two Margarets were the same person, but we remained optimistic and hopeful.

Endnotes and footnotes in pivotal historical texts referenced both women in some capacity. For example, L. A. Williams' *History of the Ohio Falls Counties* was in our university's special collections and also appeared in digital form. However, when we attempted to access volume 2, which contained the Adams women's reference, we discovered that only volume 1 had been digitized. This partial digitization suggests that the resources in archives are limited and certainly not apolitical. Either the digital humanist who made volume 1 available could not commit time and resources to digitizing volume 2, or s/he simply had no vested interest in making it more widely available. Although this scholar likely did not intend to erase anyone's history, nevertheless, our link in cyberspace to the Adams women was lost once we attempted to access this text online.

Marion Lucas's text *A History of Blacks in Kentucky from Slavery to Segregation 1760-1891*, one of few texts on this subject, referenced both Susie and Lottie and cited a number of 19th century newspapers as sources, all of which we were able to secure on microfilm through interlibrary loan, but we were not able to find any direct or conclusive references to either Susie or Lottie in those original periodicals. Following Lucas' sources led us to *Weeden's History of the Colored People of Louisville* compiled by H. C. Weeden and published in 1897. The full text was available on microfilm through interlibrary loan and was able to provide as much information about the schools and the women as any text we had encountered thus far.

Weeden had transcribed into his text, the minutes from several watershed moments during the opening of schools for "colored" people in Louisville. We contacted the Jefferson County School Board Archive, who sent a list of researchers for hire. We solicited via email the services of one and requested scanned copies of the original minutes from the various moments Weeden had included in his narrative. On April 4, 1870, he recorded (and we confirmed) that a committee on colored schools had been appointed (Weeden 22).<sup>5</sup> We were able to confirm the appointments to the office of principal for both Susie

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5 Louisville Board of Education Minutes April 4, 1870, Jefferson County Public Schools Archives and Records Center.



Adams and Lottie Adams (Weeden 23).<sup>6</sup> We also discovered that in 1872, Lottie was later appointed as an assistant to Professor Joseph M. Ferguson, the principal of the newly constructed colored high school. Lottie was paid a salary of \$400, which made her the highest paid assistant, even exceeding by \$50 the salary of Florence Murrow, an assistant identified as “white” (Weeden 33). A bonus discovery from Weeden’s text was that he identified schools for colored people that had been opened and actively functioning since the “early forties” (22). Following that statement, Weeden provides a comprehensive list of teachers, schools, and locations. First on the list of teachers for some eight to ten pre-emancipation colored schools was Rev. Henry Adams, and again in this intimate African American community, we believe it more than coincidence that he shares a name with Susie and Lottie (Weeden 22). Although the women were listed in the Jefferson County School Board minutes housed at the University of Louisville Archive, and the women were listed as the appointed principals, along with their salaries and the names of those who had been hired as teachers, they seemed to disappear from both physical and digital spaces after their initial appointments.

Despite our best efforts, we were limited in what we could find. We were hopeful that there would be some personal or professional documents that chronicled the Adams women’s lives. Personal correspondences, professional materials, lesson plans, curriculum—any of these kinds of documents would have given us a better understanding of the women who were the first principals for Louisville’s African American public schools. However, historical documentation practices are vastly different than they once were, and oftentimes important source details have not been included in these older texts. These limitations beg the question of whether or not there are some histories that are privileged over others, and whether those privileged histories have been preserved at greater lengths and with greater detail. Some have been displaced, unexplored, and possibly forgotten or at best moderately preserved. Most of what we are able to confirm about Susie and Lottie is based on inference. Were they the daughters of the great Rev. Henry Adams? The answer is untenable, and so we offer an interpretation of 1860 and 1870 Census Records. However, we were not able to substantiate the validity of this reading (Royster and Kirsch 106-107). We highlight two historical texts that cite Susie and Lottie Adams in the history of education in the city of Louisville and the state of Kentucky, but when we ordered the original cited documents from interlibrary loan, we were not able to validate the citations from those texts.

6            Louisville Board of Education Minutes October 3, 1870, Jefferson County Public Schools Archives and Records Center.

With doubts prevailing, we took our double checking carefully. With Williams' *History of the Ohio Falls Counties*, we found that only half the text had been digitized, and interestingly, it was the half that did not contain information about Susie and Lottie. We discovered that a hardcopy of the Williams text was housed in our university's special collections, which afforded us the opportunity to read the undigitized portion of the book; however, there was not any information included to which we did not already have access. Additionally, the Williams text was published in 1882, and source documentation has evolved significantly over time. His methodology for reporting history was largely undocumented, therefore impossible to validate, and did not really provide a trail of breadcrumbs for us to follow.

On the other hand, *Weeden's History of the Colored People of Louisville*, did make a valiant effort at accuracy. Though his methodology varies significantly from contemporary research practices and standards, he did leave a trail of breadcrumbs for our journey. We were able to substantiate, through engagement with his text as well as acquiring copies of the primary sources he references, much of the limited history that he records. The most compelling discovery in Weeden was the fact that Lottie Adam's salary in 1872, as an assistant to Professor Joseph M. Ferguson, exceeded that of her white colleague Florence Murrow, who also was appointed an assistant to Professor Ferguson. This historical fact contributes a layer to a conversation about who Lottie Adams must have been as an educator and a professional. Clearly, she was viewed in the highest regards by the administration at the schools housed in the Fifth Street Baptist and Center Street churches.

## Getting Back to the Basics

Since we realized such a limited amount of success with research in digital spaces, we decided to follow the breadcrumbs left from traditional research spaces and give brick and mortar methodologies another try. Traveling to Louisville, KY, we met with Carol Mattingly for a nostalgic discussion of revisiting the project, intellectual exchange, and maybe a little advice. We shared with Carol what we had found in digital spaces. She offered an alternative interpretation for Lottie's 1880 census appearance, that she might have been a younger sister who joined the family household between 1870 and 1880. She explained that unwed women in their twenties would not have lived alone, and so her appearance in 1880 might be accounted for in her moving from her

parents' home to the home of an older brother. This interpretation is one that of course made perfect sense<sup>7</sup>.

Early the following morning, we arrived at the Filson Historical Society, a community-based library and archive in the Louisville area, which focuses on preserving primarily local, but also state history. Our search began in the special collections. The Filson Historical Society is a very stately archival space in the sense that it exudes an ambiance of wealth and privilege. It is housed in a beautiful Victorian style home in Old Louisville, an area just south of downtown that boasts of being one of the largest collections of Victorian homes in the south.<sup>8</sup> The interior of the building donned dark and heavy wood trim and crown molding. Adding to its stately atmosphere, there were many portraits on the walls of various people who had been citizens of Louisville and whose families had preserved their legacies by donating family artifacts. The portraits were almost exclusively of white people and primarily of men; there were several portraits of women, oftentimes painted alongside their children. Though portraits cover the walls in the three-story facility (four stories if the basement is included), there was only one portrait of an African American woman labeled "Hattie." When we inquired about other portraits of African Americans (just in case we had maybe missed some), the librarian informed us that there were possibly more in storage, but there were no others on display.

Navigating this onsite archival visit reminded us of Jessica Enoch's reflection of the Webb County Heritage Foundation (WCHF), a local archive in Laredo, Texas. She describes the space in this way:

The WCHF is an archive alive with contributions that community members compose, and it is a place where public memory in Laredo is constantly created and re-created. Moreover, the WCHF is not simply a library where scholars can research and compose histories of rhetoric and writing instruction. The WCHF is itself an extracurricular educational space: one of its objectives is to teach the community about its history while also connecting its past to Laredo's present and future. Therefore, as researchers continue to visit local and community archives like the WCHF, it is important that we avoid seeing ourselves as detectives or hunters. We might instead recognize that we are often outsiders to these communities whose members have

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7 Dr. Carol Mattingly (professor emerita) in discussion with the authors, February 2015.

8 "Old Louisville: Preservation District." [louisvilleky.gov](http://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/planning_design/landmarks_and_historic_pres/oldlouisng.pdf), [http://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/planning\\_design/landmarks\\_and\\_historic\\_pres/oldlouisng.pdf](http://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/planning_design/landmarks_and_historic_pres/oldlouisng.pdf).

leveraged very different arguments from these archives and about the figures we study. (“Changing Research Methods” 60)

Our response to this local archive was quite different. We concurred with feeling outside the culture, though one of us is a native Louisvillian. At first glance (and at concluding reflection), this local archive appeared in direct contrast to that of Laredo, as it was reinforcing and maintaining historic power structures, definitely not “recreating” but rather reinscribing public memory. We both felt this sentiment upon entering the facility, but we kept an open mind. Though I am sure the founders and benefactors of the Filson Center would make the argument that the facility was developed and curated for the mainstream, with a majoritarian focus, the facility exists in this current, 21st century, diverse environment, and yet there has been little effort at revisionist curation.

With our open minds, we were hopeful and yet not surprised that we were unable to find anything about Susie and Lottie, especially in this space. The archivist was wonderful in helping us to conceive of the various places where there might have been potential breadcrumbs, again, relying on our “critical imagination” and already having ascertained that there were no documented trails to Susie and Lottie, we made Rev. Henry Adams our focus for the day. We thought if we can find “personal” information about Henry in some place, the Adams women might make an appearance. We began with church histories. According to Marion Lucas in *A History of Blacks in Kentucky*, Rev. Henry Adams had been the pastor of the First African Baptist Church, which was originally part of the First Baptist Church congregation before they became independent in 1842 (Lucas 124). The First Baptist Church merged with the Second Baptist Church and became the Walnut Street Baptist Church in 1845, which is still an active congregation to this day. We used all three institutions—their church histories, their church programs, and any other files that could potentially provide a crumb—and there existed no documented sign of Rev. Henry Adams in any of those spaces. At the urging of the archivist, we left the Filson Society and traveled to the Western Branch of the Public Library, which has one of the largest collections of African American artifacts in the city. The librarian was again supportive and helpful, but most of the materials were from the early 20th century and were part of the Joseph Cotter collection, many years later than the period in which we were working.

The librarian at the Western Branch helped us to identify a book that was housed at the public library’s main branch, The book did not provide any additional information, but here we were standing in the exact space where this brick and mortar search began more than nine years ago, with a tattered folder stuffed full of xerox-copied articles. Though we had hit a literal wall in the physical space, a librarian, intrigued by our journey, introduced us to a

database of periodicals that could only be accessed with a local library card. Because neither of us had one, we once again called on Carol Mattingly, who offered hers and was excited to help. After chatting with her about the day's methods and dead ends, she assisted us with searching the periodical database. She felt sure that Rev. Henry Adams obituary would have been published and surely his daughters' names included. We were able to locate Rev. Henry Adams obituary from November 8, 1872. The obituary identifies that he was survived by five children, but it did not list the names of his children and therefore could not provide confirmation of Susie's and Lottie's relation ("HONORING MERIT" 4).

The obituary listed a number of accolades and gave an account of the number of white citizens who attended Rev. Adams' funeral, yet his family members did not receive acknowledgement in the publication. Given the historical racial climate of this nation, we can deduce that providing an account of the number of white citizens in attendance at one's funeral was far more newsworthy and validating for a life well lived than a list of his family. There was also a memorial from his fellow ministers printed a few days prior on November 6, and many years later we located an article, printed on July 4, 1886, and listed under the "Our Colored Citizens" column, that reported on Rev. Adams son, John Quincy Adams, who was leaving Louisville for Saint Paul because he felt that better opportunities could be found there (4). Imagine the frustration when we located an article on the son, but none on the women we imagined were his daughters, or possibly his daughter and sister. We had come full circle. Our search for the Adams women ended where it started, in digital spaces. We knew little more than we did when we began, and so it begged the question: What next?

Without a doubt, digital research and the creation of the digital archives is yet another of the "tectonic shifts" in the history of Rhetoric and Composition Studies that Royster and Kirsch theorized (Enoch and Bessette 636). As such, we soon realized that our project presented us with specific challenges, particularly in terms of critical imagination. Although we desired to discover how the Adams women navigated their public and private lives as African American educators, we recovered few of their primary artifacts. As a result of this gap in the historical record, we realized that, as David Gold suggests, we might apply critical imagination not only to the lives of the Adams women, but to the digital archives themselves (25). We used this concept to engage in a microhistorical search for the Adams women in cyberspace. By thinking "between, above, around, and beyond," we discovered that our journey did not merely describe the limits Susie and Lottie faced while living in Louisville, Kentucky during the 19th century (72). Instead, our use of digital archives illuminated larger technological questions that relate to race and gender in the 21st century.

## Why can't we Find Susie and Lottie?: The Material Conditions

The limited success of our exploration not only presented some interesting complications due to the lack of preservation, but it also illuminated the complicated intersections between race, gender, and technology that Banks articulates. For Banks, the problem is not just about our team being unable to locate digital primary texts which provide a window into the lives and work of the Adams women, but rather that raced people in general are unable to achieve the kind of “transformative access” that will prevent the issue of limited preservation and access from perpetuating itself. According to Banks, “transformative access” is the “genuine inclusion in technologies and the networks of power that help determine what they become, but never merely for the sake of inclusion” (45). “Material access” is the foundation of such transformative access, as it affords researchers the opportunity to “own, or be near places that will allow [them] to use computers, software, and other communication technologies when needed” (Banks 41). Though the researchers here, as well as other academics committed to inclusive digital work, may have some material access, that access must be “meaningful” (Banks 41). Scholars and digital humanists need to continue their pursuit of the kind of access that transforms digital spaces. We need more women and people of color engaging in digital humanist projects utilizing methodologies that do not privilege some parts of materials over others and that digitally preserve all texts making them more widely available.

Considering this argument in the context of lack of access may seem surprising because both researchers own computers, have high speed internet connections, and are adept at using other communication technologies (digital cameras, sound recording equipment, etc.) when conducting research. However, according to Banks, one of the major difficulties in defining real access to technology “lies in the stubbornness of common understandings of technologies as merely the instruments people use to extend their power and comfort” (40). While material access to technology certainly requires availability to physical devices such as computers, Banks argues that meaningful access “begins with equality in the material conditions that drive technology use or nonuse” (41). Carried to its logical end, true material access would thus require a complete restructuring of the economic relations of the United States (41), and even such a radical economic revolution would not ensure the full participation and representation of African American women in our rhetorical history.

The issue of material access is exacerbated for African Americans, such as the historical Adams women. Even if we achieve the transformative access to

digital spaces and begin to create and cultivate a meaningful presence, there remain issues of preservation in physical archival spaces that will impact, and likely hinder, access. Abdul Alkalimat notes that Black women have been “all but ignored by major [physical] archives,” on account of not only their gender, but their race (“eBlack: A 21st Century Challenge”). Therefore, if there is not preservation and representation in brick and mortar, there is no large collection of materials to digitize. Further, in “Meaningful Engagements,” Enoch and Bessette argue that feminist projects like ours, which explore small, local archives, often stand in stark contrast to large and often well-funded digital projects that focus on the work of canonical, mostly white male, rhetors such as Jeremy Bentham, William Blake, Abraham Lincoln, and William Shakespeare<sup>9</sup> (638). In this sense, the values perpetuated by digital archivization projects may seem to be at odds with the ethics of care and hope at the very heart of feminist recovery work.<sup>10</sup> The lack of preservation of black women’s material artifacts in traditional brick and mortar archives translates into a lack of material artifacts in digital archives. Because Susie and Lottie’s rhetorical contributions were not available for us to find in a large, well-funded physical archive, it was far more difficult (if not impossible) for us to trace their histories in cyberspace.

Consequently, a double marginalization of the Adams women left us to piece together their history from artifacts we located in a Special Collections Library at our home institution, through systems of interlibrary loan, the Filson Historical Society, and public libraries located in Louisville, Kentucky. Having to piece together fragments of the Adams women’s lives leaves us with an incomplete narrative and a limited history. While frustrating, our search for the Adams women led us to some important conclusions about the underlying reasons why we were ultimately unsuccessful in locating them, especially when considering Banks’ concept of material conditions. Throughout our journey of tracing the fragments of the lives of Susie Adams and Lottie Adams,

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9 According to Enoch and Bessette, there are “2,421 manuscript transcriptions collected in the Bentham project; over 6,000 digital images in the Blake Archive; and 30 million searchable words in the Lincoln Historical Digitization Project” (638).

10 Royster and Kirsch define an ethics of hope and care as a “commitment to [being] open, flexible, welcoming, patient, introspective, and reflective. It requires looking and looking again, reading and returning to texts, learning about the contexts of those who use rhetorical strategies under conditions that may be very different from our own” in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* (145-46).

we identified four likely reasons for our inability to find any primary texts that would significantly locate them in Louisville's educational history:

1. It is possible there was no preservation of Susie and Lottie's history, as their accomplishments may have been overshadowed by their famous possible relative, the Rev. Henry Adams. Therefore, we cannot recover a history that has not been recorded.
2. It is possible documents may exist in a brick and mortar facility, yet there is no political or academic investment in making them more widely available in a digital archive, or even in digital or onsite index, for that matter.
3. Other feminist historiographers, like ourselves, may have a vested interest in digitizing the historical artifacts of Susie and Lottie, yet lack the technical expertise to create or contribute to a digital archive.
4. Digital humanists are not invested in searching for the narrative history of women like Susie and Lottie Adams because their histories are often some of the most difficult to recover.

These conclusions point to the obvious archival circumstance. We could not access material about Susie and Lottie because equality does not exist in the material conditions that drive the use or nonuse of digital archives. Primary documents, such as records of salary distribution, lesson plans, letters, journals or any other written texts of the Adams women, were most likely not preserved during the 19th century. Consequently, we were unable to access these important artifacts online, even if another scholar had a political investment in digitizing them. The fact that we had access to powerful communication tools through our university was inconsequential. We found very little documentation to substantiate our theory that the Adams women were important 19th century rhetors.

## Lower Order Concerns/Higher Order Concerns

On a local level, our inability to locate, substantiate, and validate the Adams women is demonstrative of the limited historic value that community members, historians, and preservationists have assigned to women's work in general, and African American women's work in particular. However we argue, and research supports, that these limitations are still very prevalent in current scholarly conversations, which continue to uphold a significant gap in the literature. In *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*, Cynthia Selfe suggests that when we do not pay attention to the way we use technology, it serves the status quo rather than questions it. Our ability to provide revisionist



histories in the 21st century depends largely on our abilities as feminist historiographers to “pay attention to the ways” in which the use of technology “races” our thinking about the past and requires that we take an active role in joining and expanding future conversations (XIV).

In order to assure that the newly emerging field of the Digital Humanities and Historiography of Rhetoric and Composition attracts the work and perspectives of people of color, we must become race-cognizant multimodal scholars. We begin this critical process by asking ourselves several important questions before we use technology or engage in the creation of a digital humanities project: What is it we are designing and why? Who is designing these projects? Who will use them? How will we know if we have been successful? These questions, initially posed by Michelle Kendrick in “Invisibility, Race, and the Interface,” force us to pay attention to both the digital and social aspects of our projects (and the way we access them) in ways that ask us to recognize the racialized aspects of digital technologies (399). We would like to add the following question: Have we considered a multitude of intersections when developing that design? The ways in which we engage these technologies to create our projects matter. We would argue that if we ignore the ways we utilize technology to construct the digital archives, these virtual spaces may continue to serve the majority culture and status quo rather than provide opportunities for revisionist inclusions.

On a more global level, the Adams women phenomenon has forced us to reconsider the four critical terms of engagement (critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization) that Royster and Kirsch propose as a critical framework for evaluating the major shifts in rhetorical inquiry (638). What is the theoretical relationship between the terms, race, women, methods, and access? What intersections occur when considering both feminist historiography and the digital humanities? What epistemologies will emerge from the collision? And ultimately, how does that collision look differently with African American women as both researchers and subjects? Enoch and Gold’s special edition began this conversation, and we hope this work builds on that beginning.

Of the research included in the special edition, we believe the work of Shannon Carter and Kelly L. Dent most closely illuminates methodologies that are relevant to constructing a more complete history of underrepresented groups. In examining the Carter and Dent article “East Texas Activism (1966–68): Locating the Literacy Scene through the Digital Humanities,” we appreciated this work as a strong methodological model and wondered how a remix method applied to Susie and Lottie Adams might look. Though Carter and Dent offer a detailed methodological description of the historical recovery work they have accomplished at East Texas A&M, that work includes the

narratives of African American male athletes and leaves room for a project of African American women's narratives. In their description, we realize all the ways one might democratize and employ texts that could be useful in building Susie's and Lottie's narratives.

In all our searching, the only primary document including the Adams women's names are the minutes from the Jefferson County School Board meetings in which they were appointed principals. Every secondary source referencing them cites the same primary document—the minutes. Though we have been unable to find other primary texts that speak to the lives and legacies of the Adams women, we might employ other documents to contextualize their lives and work. What were the national, state, and local conversations about African American schools in 1871? How might employing those documents help sculpt an appropriate understanding of Susie Adams and Lottie Adams? Who are the audiences for an artifact of this nature? Where would one house such an artifact upon creation? To what resources might scholars have access to accomplish digitizing localized histories?

Clearly, there are more questions raised here than solutions offered, and in order for the digital humanities to truly provide a means to revisionist histories, African Americans, feminist historiographers, and underrepresented groups in general, must gain proficiency at all levels of Banks's taxonomy of access. It is necessary, as Banks emphasizes, for them to “know how to be intelligent users and producers of technology if access is to mean more than mere ownership of or proximity to random bits of plastic and metal” (42). Given the current limits of critical conversation concerning race and access as they relate to the digital humanities and feminist historiography, more could be done either practically or theoretically to ensure that the digital archives are inclusive spaces that challenge the status quo rather than reinforce it.

## **Toward a More Inclusive Digital Humanities**

We realize the picture we have painted of the current state of African American women and the Digital Humanities in Rhetoric and Composition may seem rather bleak, perhaps even futile. However, looking toward the future, the creation of digital archives certainly offers the possibility for the radical democratization of historical texts. One way that we might begin to reconsider critical engagement involves the role graduate students might play in creating the digital archives of the future. In his 2006 article, “The Foreign Language Requirement in English Doctoral Programs” Doug Steward noted that most English departments rarely take very seriously the foreign language reading proficiency exams that graduate students must pass in order to complete

their degrees because little research is actually conducted in a language other than English.

Unfortunately, very little has changed in 2016. Rather than viewing this institutional requirement as an archaic hoop that graduate students must jump through, Rhetoric and Composition scholars might view these tests as exciting opportunities for students to become proficient in computer programming and/or coding. Department chairs and program heads might consider allowing coursework in computer science to be considered a part of the core curriculum for Rhetoric and Composition graduate students interested in pursuing digital scholarship as an area of expertise. Although many graduate programs in Rhetoric and Composition Studies may offer seminars on computers and writing or rhetorical history, in which students learn to question technology and accepted historical narratives, these courses rarely (if ever) teach the computer coding skills necessary for students to create their own digital archives. Transformative digital literacy, as Stuart Selber defines it in *Multiliteracies for a Digital Age*, requires students to not only critique technology, but also to use and produce it effectively (24-25). Thus, the pursuit of transformative digital literacy is necessarily an interdisciplinary one—one that might require students' pursuits to take them outside of English Studies.

Jessica Enoch suggests in her article "Changing Research Methods, Changing History: A Reflection on Language, Location, and Archive" that individual institutions may consider offering grants to graduate students and Rhetoric and Composition scholars interested in creating a digital repository. We acknowledge that there are some entities like the University of Alabama Digital Humanities Center and the Ohio State University Digital Media and Composition Conference (DMAC) that are doing so, but our national institutions like NCTE and CCCC could develop a more robust support system for the Digital Humanities and Historiography in Rhetoric and Composition. The computer sciences and related disciplines might also consider cross-listing courses with required Rhetoric and Composition coursework. Such an emphasis on collaboration between more experienced Digital Humanities scholars and graduate students or other less experienced Rhetoric and Composition faculty members provides new and exciting ways to broaden our understanding of critical engagement. Fortunately, this tectonic shift in methodology has just begun to occur. Because the intersection of these two fields is still in its infancy, there is still time to ensure that African American women gain the forms of access necessary for them to become equal stakeholders in the Digital Humanities. However, we should act quickly to do so. To begin this process, we must continue the difficult conversation Banks began when he theorized his taxonomy of access in 2006.

## The End of the Journey

Though we were unable to locate the substantial primary evidence we would have liked, we acknowledge the scholarly value of this journey. The journey resonated for us both pedagogically and methodologically. First, we took this journey together, learning about the ways in which knowledge is preserved and constructed, and secondly, we tried every archival trick, digital and brick and mortar, leading us to know nothing more about Susie Adams and Lottie Adams than Michelle discovered almost a decade ago. Not one letter, journal, curriculum, or tangible material was discovered in this exploration. However, we learned that in 1871, during the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), two African American women served as principals of the first two African American public schools in Louisville, Kentucky. This fact in itself is significant, but we know gaps remain. Our journey raises important questions about how the many fragments and gaps in history, especially in the narratives of African American women, cannot be addressed by digital technologies alone. Most importantly, our journey generated far more questions than answers, and yet when readers complete this article, they will have read both the Adams women's names more than thirty times. At the very least, this work places them in a scholarly context. Our search for the Adams women emphasized the importance of Banks's concept of transformative access and the reality that in the 21st century, if African American history is not made digital, then it is not accessible in fundamental ways for important audiences in the academy and beyond.

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# From the Margins of Healthcare: De-mythicizing Cancer Online

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Cristy Beemer

**Abstract:** *“From the Margins of Healthcare: The Online Community-Written Diagnosis Narrative” is a deeply personal study in which a breast cancer survivor and participant-observer in the large, online peer-to-peer healthcare community emerges from the silenced margins of medical paternalism to give voice to patients often silenced in traditional healthcare settings. This study examines one online thread, an immediate archive, women’s rhetorical history in the making, as a site of feminist praxis through a collaboratively written response to standard medical practice that interrogated top-down policies allowing the silenced to find power and agency.*

**Keywords:** *healthcare, cancer, survivor, patient advocacy, feminist community building, online support communities*

As long as a particular disease is treated as an evil, invincible predator, not just a disease, most people with cancer will indeed be demoralized by learning what disease they have. The solution is hardly to stop telling cancer patients the truth, but to rectify the conception of the disease, to de-mythicize it. - Susan Sontag *Illness as Metaphor* 7

After my breast cancer diagnosis, I stumbled out of the exam room and headed toward the scheduling desk armed with scribbled notes, a tape recording of my rock-star oncologist describing my diagnosis, and the elaborate treatment plan for the clinical trial on which I was about to embark. Walking down the hall, I said to my husband, “Is there a pamphlet? Shouldn’t someone give me a pamphlet? Folder? No? A binder, maybe? Not even a pamphlet?” My husband said, “What kind of pamphlet?” I responded, “I don’t know. I don’t make the pamphlets. Like a ‘So, You’ve Got Breast Cancer,’ pamphlet or a ‘What You Need To Know When Coming in for Chemo’ pamphlet.” Nope. There are no pamphlets. I told the woman who scheduled me for nearly thirty

appointments, “Oh, they didn’t give me a binder.” “They were supposed to give you a binder?” “Weren’t they?” “What sort of binder?” “I don’t know. Isn’t there a binder?” Obviously, I wasn’t communicating well. It turns out, there are no binders. So, I went to the bookstore. There were some books, several in fact, but I wasn’t ready to hear anyone else’s cancer story. I wanted the book to talk to *me*. I wanted it to know what I needed. I wanted to interact with people who knew what I was experiencing, and I didn’t find that in a book. I found it online—not in one story, but in the exchanges among the thousands that gather in the online breast cancer support community.<sup>1</sup>

Cancer is complicated, mysterious, and frightening. In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag refutes Karl Menninger’s suggestion in his 1963 book *The Vital Balance* that we should abandon names and labels for illnesses because the very term “cancer” can strike fear enough to kill one. It would be better, Menninger had argued, to leave a patient in ignorance than for a patient to be saddled with the confirmed diagnosis of certain death. Unsatisfied with ignorance, Sontag instead urges us to confront illness because the silencing of terms “would mean, in effect, increasing secretiveness and medical paternalism” (7). Gerald Dworkin defines paternalism as “the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm” (1). Even when intentions are noble, and doctors believe “that the person affected would be better off, or would be less harmed as a result of [a] rule, policy, etc., and the person in question would prefer not to

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1 I am truly grateful for the support and encouragement of the *Peitho* editorial staff—especially Jenny Bay and Jen Wingard. I’d also like to thank my anonymous reviewers for their detailed feedback that pushed me in directions that will continue to serve me in this work. Thank you to Nan Johnson, Jenn Fishman, Lori Hopkins, Rachel Trubowitz, and the UNH Writing Academy supported by Dr. Robert A Chase ’45 and his late wife Ann Parker Chase ’46. My deepest gratitude goes to Jessica Restaino who was entirely generous with her time and assisted me in the revision process. Finally, I am eternally grateful to my community members online—especially my 40somethingish sisters. My illness was made easier and my life made better by experiencing our journeys together.



be treated this way, we have an instance of paternalism" (Dworkin 7).<sup>2</sup> Sontag counters paternalism with a call for us to understand illness. "The solution is hardly to stop telling cancer patients the truth, but to rectify the conception of the disease, to de-mythicize it" (7).<sup>3</sup> In order to de-mythicize we must gather many voices and experiences together to share, inform, and support patients so that they can come to an understanding of illness, and be empowered in the patient-doctor relationship. As this study proves, collaborative diagnosis narratives written in the online breast cancer support community are feminist responses to standard medical practice, and together, they work to de-mythicize cancer by sharing the real experiences of life with cancer from many patients' standpoints. The online breast cancer support community subverts medical paternalism by providing a patient-centered, peer-to-peer forum for empowering patients by de-mythicizing cancer. By informing cancer patients of the realities of many lived, felt experiences of cancer and its treatment, the assumptions and myths of cancer are debunked, and patients are empowered and liberated by information.

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2 In *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine*, Judy Segal tackles the issue of paternalism in her chapter, "The Problem of Patient 'Noncompliance': Paternalism, Expertise, and the *Ethos* of the Physician." Segal concludes that, "In general, we should trust physicians themselves to act on their best knowledge, and we should act on our best knowledge, too, which includes knowledge of what a good idea it often is to take the advice of experts. We all do well to know as much as we can; we cannot all know what doctors know" (152). We should, as Segal argues, respect the expertise of doctors when it comes to medical knowledge, but the online community offers a place to gather knowledge that is born from the lived experience of a variety of patients. I do not mean to suggest that doctors have unkind intentions or simply operate as dictators without taking into account the input of patients. I do claim, however, that patients often feel as though they can't question doctors, and I believe that the online space offers patients a forum outside the real and/or perceived hierarchies of the doctor-patient relationship where discussion can lead to empowerment and liberation.

3 The myths of cancer are too extensive to list, and the size of the online community hints at the individual complexities of the issues covered by a community that far exceeds the confines of simply the medical concerns of patients. Driven by fear, a newly diagnosed patient faces the unknown, and the experiential truth shared by fellow patients addresses the many unknowns of the uninitiated. In the online community, for example, patients learn that you often gain weight from cancer treatment, that reconstruction is far from a "boob job," and many other facets of the experience of cancer that doctors, friends, and family members cannot know unless they too have experienced it.

In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, Sandra Harding states that: “The remedy for the inadequate philosophies of science, epistemologies, and methodologies justifying and guiding mainstream research, and the social theories that informed them, according to [feminist standpoint] theorists, was to start off thought and research from women’s experiences, lives, and activities (or labor) and from the emerging collective feminist discourses” (Harding 6). A collective discourse of women’s experience with breast cancer already thrives online. It offers a challenge to the patriarchal structures within rhetorics of health and medicine, and it is also a site of knowledge construction. In this online space, there is the potential “of developing distinctive insights about systems of social relations in general in which their oppression is a feature” (Harding 9). Not merely a handholding support group, the online community is uniquely equipped to gather distinctive insights from several patients to represent the standpoint of many women. Knowledge is created in this space from the ethos of several thousand first-hand reports. As with other feminist endeavors, in this space, experience is valued:

Standpoint theory is an explicitly political as well as social epistemology. Its central and motivating insight is an inversion thesis: those who are subject to structures of domination that systematically marginalize and oppress them may, in fact, be epistemically privileged in some crucial respects. They may know different things, or know some things better than those who are comparatively privileged (socially, politically), by virtue of what they typically experience and how they understand their experience. (Wylie 339)

Feminist standpoint theory legitimizes the experience of patients. The large online community allows for a varied response, not one single standpoint, but several, that can answer critiques of standpoint theory that suggest it creates a false universalism. While more standpoints are not necessarily superior to an individual experience, the gathering of multiple experiences shares the knowledge of multiple experiences without a forceful consensus. Further, in this online community, the collaborative, conversant structure and the ethos granted to experience contributes to socially constructed knowledge formation and grants agency to the subjects. The cancer patients who make up this community are, in every other aspect of their care, subjects rather than knowledge-makers, and it is in the online community that they can claim authority. Within this feminist community, women challenge the patriarchal, epistemically privileged medical community to value and share the experience of patients.

For the purpose of this study, I will focus on one thread where a new community member, WorriedMama, prompted community members to tell the story of how they received their diagnosis. The response of the community exemplified the power of the online feminist challenge to medical paternalism and displayed the unique rhetorical possibilities of this collaborative space. This thread was a feminist response in several ways: community members were able to respond to medical paternalism enacted in the top-down policies of medical establishments; members pointed to the material conditions of their lives and how policy affected them, prompting a consideration of their feminist standpoint; the responses were poly-vocal, varied, and even contradictory without any pressure to come to consensus; all responses spoke with authority built from life experience; and the individual responses were gathered in one collaborative thread. Further, this site is feminist in that it offers a counter-discourse to the dominant narratives in mainstream mass-market publications and fundraising campaigns, i.e., the pinkification of breast cancer. This counter-discourse is protected in an anonymous forum that minimizes personal risk and allows patients to discuss sensitive issues. Certainly, the online site is not an ideal sisterhood of feminist empowerment. There are disagreements, personality clashes, and typical “flaming” episodes as in any online community; however, the online support community does seek to be a space that upholds feminist ideals of equity, representation, and collaboration, while enacting a patient-centered response to the patriarchal medical care system.

Online forums are affecting the doctor-patient relationship and should be explored further for their impact on the rhetorics of health and medicine. In “Writing Patient’s Wrongs: The Rhetoric and Reality of Information Age Medicine,” Karen Kopelson asserts, “The changing medical landscape of e-health remains underexplored by scholars in rhetoric and writing studies (including by those working in medical rhetoric), while the discursive reconfiguration of patienthood in the context of e-health has received less attention still” (356). Kopelson observes “the e-patient evolve from misinformed nuisance all the way to the patient who is a true medical ‘expert,’ fully empowered not only to ‘partner’ with doctors, but to manage many aspects of health care on her own” (356). While Kopelson considers the patient as a user of online information gathering, she complicates the bothersome image of the empowered patient armed with online research, and acknowledges, “the self-managing, expert e-patient is fast becoming a normative identity construct, which, like all normative identity-constructs, marginalizes alternative subjectivities and serves dominant interests—in this case, those of the medical power structure” (356-67). Kopelson notes, “What is at issue is that e-patients, by virtue of being e-patients, are being scripted as difficult, demanding, newly challenging; that

e-patients are being written into a position of (threatening) dominance, and that the ‘activating’ seed of their power is their internet-generated bundle or sheaf, which, we might note, is then consistently figured as a weapon” as they saunter into doctor’s offices armed with printed-out online research (366). We must, however, take this inquiry further than merely considering the effect of collecting Internet research. Yes, patients are empowered by information that they have gathered, but they have also found a space where their experience is valued and their standpoint is considered. When patients gather online, there is an inherent challenge to the dominant structure of medical paternalism.<sup>4</sup>

Despite mythical Hollywood dramatizations of patients wasting away, cancer is more accurately an expansion, an uncontrolled multiplication of abnormal cells. To even talk about cancer as one, singular thing is troublesome because as we learn more about cancer, we learn that it is a collection of idiosyncratic and individual diseases brought about by an unquantifiable number of hereditary and environmental factors that have some characteristics in common. Breast cancer alone is a topic much too expansive to be addressed by a single narrative. The multiplying numbers of breast cancer survivors coupled with the complexities of breast cancer contribute to the exigency of a community response. According to the American Cancer Society, one in eight women (12%) will develop invasive breast cancer in her lifetime (Key Statistics). In 2016 alone, there will be 246,660 new cases of invasive breast cancer, about 61,00 new cases of non-invasive breast cancer (carcinoma in situ), and 40,450 women will die from breast cancer (Key Statistics). If we add this year’s numbers to our existing survivors, “at this time there are more than 2.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States” (Key Statistics). Further complicating these massive numbers are the many different types of breast cancer that alter everything from diagnosis and prognosis to treatment

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4 I do not mean to establish a binary of patient/doctor, us/them. Many doctors work tirelessly to challenge the paternalistic traditions of medicine, but the motivations of doctors is outside the purview of this article. Here I am discussing the perceptions of patients and the consequences of being socialized to defer to the authority of the doctor. In my own experience, I had a wonderful oncologist, Dr. Nancy U. Lin, who answered my emails directly, and always had time for my questions.

plans.<sup>5</sup> One narrative simply cannot de-mythicize or address all the concerns of these many, individual patients with diverse illnesses. One narrative simply doesn't represent the varied experiences of breast cancer patients. Just as I abandoned the bookstore in search of a community, thousands of women turn to the online breast cancer support community daily to find answers to their specific questions; to find others experiencing the same disease, treatment, or life conditions; and to tackle the mysteries and myths of cancer together. Consequently, what emerges when studying this space is not a pattern of response. In fact, the community is feminist in resisting predictable patterns of response as it allows for an appropriately poly-vocal and varied response to a complicated, mysterious, and deadly disease. One frequent indictment of online information is the simple notion that there is *too much* online. While patients can easily become overwhelmed by information, here the online community functions to organize and direct posts to people seeking the same sort of information. I believe that this poly-vocality, the allowance of differing, dissenting, voices and experiences to be gathered and searched to provide a community member with options for response is integral to making this community a feminist response to cancer. Rather than pushing toward consensus, the poly-vocal response inclusively represents many experiences and allows the patient the freedom to choose where to participate.

The online breast cancer support community is as complicated as the disease itself—an exponentially increasing number of community members creating posts that grow in number daily, providing not one response, but a plethora of responses to a multiplying number of inquiries. Together, the online community can function to de-mythicize cancer by sharing the first-hand, experiential knowledge of a large array of patients, and by answering the needs of many different patients. While this may seem overwhelming to an outsider, posing a specific question or finding a group in which you belong within the community is made navigable by the organizational structure provided. To use a feminist metaphor, the responses here are *gathered* for patients. This communication is entirely dissimilar to a one-sided web search that only returns an astronomical number of singular narratives. The gathering together of the poly-vocal response provides opportunity for understanding the complexities of breast cancer and its treatment. Sharing the experience of breast

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5 Types of breast cancer include: Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS), Invasive Ductal Carcinoma, Triple Negative, Her 2 Positive, Estrogen Receptor Positive/Negative, Progesterone Receptor Positive/Negative, Inflammatory, Recurring, Metastatic, Medullary, Tubular, and Mucinous—and combinations of these types listed.

cancer is especially imperative because patients often feel that the topic is salacious, taboo, or potentially dangerous to their lives and careers.

Sontag cautions, "Since getting cancer can be a scandal that jeopardizes one's love life, one's chance of promotion, even one's job, patients who know what they have tend to be extremely prudish, if not outright secretive about their disease" (Sontag 8). When cancer is located in the breast, a sexualized area of the female body, communication can be risky in additional ways. Breast cancer patients often feel the inability to honestly discuss their illness even in professional medical settings. The online support community is a forum for joining together in secret to have open exchanges and minimize personal risk through anonymous screen names and thumbnail avatars.

Because secrecy is important to this community, I will not name it, but for the purposes of this article I will refer to the site I study as "Breast Cancer World" or "BCW." While there are many online support communities, I have limited my study to this one, large, international (although the vast majority of members are in the U.S.), and well-respected online breast cancer support site. BCW is divided into two large sections. One part of the site contains up-to-date, reliable information that is overseen by an advisory board of medical professionals. The community portion of the site contains a discussion board where the primary research of this study takes place. This discussion board currently has 80 forums where 174,717 members discuss 134,866 topics, but this number increases daily.<sup>6</sup> Topics range from "tests and treatments" to "news and announcements." Moderators will often chime in on community posts in order to direct a member over to the information side of the site to clarify information or impede the spread of any confusing or erroneous advice. The administrators of the site establish the forums that create the structure of the discussion boards; however, within each forum, members start threads—discussions where the original post remains at the top of the page, and where responses can go on for hundreds of pages. Some threads become very popular. Some are typical reiterations of common issues (nearly every day someone posts that they are nervous about the outcome of tests), and some are routine (there are prayer threads where people post each day). Sometimes these threads are prompted by a development in the news, for example, a celebrity's handling of her/his cancer treatment, or a new advertising campaign that stirs controversy. There are "friend threads" where people have been posting so long that they know one another well, and new topics pop up every day as people come together to share the experience of cancer. Finally, there are transformative threads that challenge our notions of health-care and embody a feminist response to the treatment of breast cancer. The

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6 These numbers reflect data gathered July 31, 2016.

thread I will discuss here was particularly transformative in that the patient struggled to understand the limited information she was given while awaiting her diagnosis, and was affirmed, joined, and informed by the responses of many. Her post was essentially a plea to help her de-mythicize the process of diagnosis.

For the purposes of this article, all posts are from the same thread begun in January 2012.<sup>7</sup> In the “original post,” or “OP” of the thread, WorriedMama wanted to know if people were told of their malignant diagnosis by phone or in person at the doctor’s office.

*I had a needle biopsy on Tuesday and the radiologist said that I will hear from my dr. Friday. This sounds great to me. I mean, if it's b9 [benign] they'd just tell me over the phone, right?*

*When my best friend was diagnosed with BC [breast cancer], the dr. called her once he had the results to make an appointment, then she had to wait for like a day or two. We were only 29 at the time and we thought that they probably always call you in for an appt., even if it's b9, so we were hopeful. Unfortunately, she had cancer. Since then, I thought that they probably only call you in if it's bad news and they can just give good news over the phone.*

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7 The University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board deemed my study exempt. In addition to protecting the real life identities of my subjects, I have extended privacy protection in my study to include the privacy of the online identity, protecting and valuing that screen name as a holder of ethos and an extension of the community member. To do so, I have changed screen names and slightly altered verbiage in posts. I have been very careful not to change the intent, effect, or character of the posts. The changes are very slight, but I believe that in a community such as the one I am studying, where users can search archived posts and users have identities that mean a great deal to them, in which they have invested many hours to establish themselves as members of the community, this is an important step to take to ensure the privacy of my subjects—both real and virtual. In “Remix Cultures, Remix Methods” Reframing Qualitative Inquiry for Social Media Contexts,” Markham suggests that we should take a cue from Kincheloe’s “bricolage approach” to qualitative research by taking up the metaphor of the remix. Markham’s call to innovate methods of research makes room for this sort of “Adaptation and creative innovation [that] is sorely needed to study the complexity of digital life” (65).

*Should I ask the office what their procedure is for giving results? I don't want to be a pest—especially since it's not a long wait.*

*So, I guess I'm just curious. How were you told the results?*

*-WorriedMama*

WorriedMama's implicit question was "Is it a bad sign if the nurse calls me in for an appointment instead of giving the test results over the phone?" Or, more honestly reflecting the exigency of her post, her question was really "They called me in for an appointment. So, do I have cancer?" WorriedMama is acting on a myth. She questions if this myth is true: good news is delivered on the phone, but if they make the patient come in to the office it's bad news. At her invitation to share "How [you were] told your results," a narrative emerged comprised of many responses that basically addressed the question: "Where were you when you heard the news that would change your life?" There were 209 responses within two and a half months starting in January of 2012. The thread was briefly revived in October of that year. It has since been quiet, although similar threads asking about diagnosis procedures surface from time to time. Usually, questions from a "newbie," or a person new to the community, are factual—questions about side effects or managing life with cancer; however, this newbie asked community members to remember, recount, and reflect on their experiences as they first heard their cancer diagnosis. What emerged from the thread was a feminist response, based on the experiences of patients, in the form of the online, collaborative diagnosis narrative.<sup>8</sup>

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8 The diagnosis of a life-threatening illness was added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1994 (American Psychiatric Association). Certainly, all breast cancer patients don't consider their date of diagnosis traumatic. In fact, in "Cancer as a Psychological Trauma," James Coyne argues, "the casual assumption that cancer is traumatic has been used to turn patients' normal reactions to a diagnosis into a mental health issue, frighten persons who suffer from cancer, and promote bogus therapies" (1). Whether we categorize the moment of diagnosis as traumatic or not, the online community-written diagnosis narrative may function in the same way as retelling trauma therapies work toward lessening the isolating experiences of trauma.



## Diagnosis Narrative as Genre

There have been many helpful and deeply meaningful breast cancer narratives<sup>9</sup> and even graphic novels<sup>10</sup> written for the public. In “Breast Cancer Narratives as Public Rhetoric: Genre Itself and the Maintenance of Ignorance,” Judy Segal suggests that “breast cancer narratives have now become part of a dominant discourse, requiring a counterdiscourse,” and she cites the ways that they have “been coopted” by big business, industry, and pharmaceutical companies (6).<sup>11</sup> The counterdiscourse to these traditional, mass-market cancer narratives that Segal calls for already exists online. The genre of the online, collaborative patient diagnosis narrative challenges the dominant story by gathering together many voices within a community of peers to evaluate the traditionally dominant culture, the medical paternalism, of the healthcare industry.<sup>12</sup> While several breast cancer narratives briefly discuss the moment of diagnosis, the larger emphasis of these narratives and graphic novels is usually placed on treatment and the journey toward recovery, remission, or death. The online community-written diagnosis narrative focuses on one crucial and shared moment in the process of the cancer journey—the early, terrifying moments of diagnosis that all patients share.

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9 *Breast Cancer Narratives: Betty Rollin’s First, You Cry; Joyce Wadler’s My Breast; Audre Lorde’s The Cancer Journals; Barbara Ehrenreich’s Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America; Tania Katan’s My One-night Stand With Cancer*

10 *Breast Cancer Graphic Novels: Marisa Acocella Marchetto’s Cancer Vixen; Miriam Engelberg’s Cancer Made me a Shallower Person: A Memoir in Comics*

11 See also Segal’s “Cancer Experience and its Narration an Accidental Study.”

12 In *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*, John M. Swales states that “genres are communicative vehicles for the achievement of goals” (Swales 46). In “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller explains “a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (151). Although there are shared features of the individual responses within this genre, I resist pointing to the similarities of posts because it is the diversity of responses that makes this a unique genre where the shared actions of working through the difficult, perhaps traumatic experience of diagnosis defines this genre. The online setting makes possible the collaboration of poly-vocal responses that need not lead toward consensus to create a new diagnosis narrative—the online collaboratively written diagnosis narrative.

In “Genres in the Internet: Innovation, Evolution, and Genre Theory,” Janet Giltrow and Dieter Stein push scholars to consider the effect of the online space on genres that may already exist in print forms. “The Internet enables a new communication setting which reconfigures the conditions to which pragmatic features of language respond,” essentially changing the genre (Giltrow 9). Giltrow and Stein go on to name a few of the features of this online communication:

The main components of this new communication setting are the vast and variable range, new pull and push mechanisms, new distance-synchronic forms of communication, new combinations of N-to-N—the number of people speaking and the number of people receiving the communication—and the high speed as well as the archiving of interaction. (9)

It is precisely these features, only enabled in an online community, that make the online, collaborative diagnosis narrative possible.

The patient diagnosis narrative is the first-person account of hearing the news of one’s diagnosis for the first time.<sup>13</sup> Key features of this genre in the online breast cancer community include a thick description of the location where one heard her diagnosis, a recounting of the conversation, an exploration of one’s emotions at the time, and finally, perhaps most significantly, an assessment of the appropriateness of the exchange between patient and

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13 Rita Charon, Professor of Clinical Medicine and Director of the Program in Narrative Medicine at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, coined the phrase “narrative medicine” as “a unifying designation to signify a clinical practice informed by the theory and practice of reading, writing, telling, and receiving of stories” (Charon viii). She describes Narrative Medicine as “A clinical cousin of literature-and-medicine and a literary cousin of relationship-centered care,” and describes the outcome as an opportunity for health care professionals to understand the patient’s perspective more thoroughly, and to explore their own perspective as doctors (Charon vii). Charon claims that: “what medicine lacks today—in singularity, humility, accountability, empathy—can, in part, be provided through intensive narrative training. Literary studies and narrative theory, on the other hand, seek practical ways to transduce their conceptual knowledge into palpable influence in the world, and a connection with health care can do that” (Charon viii). Although Narrative Medicine provides a “practical” application of literary studies and narrative theory to the world, the online breast cancer support community is already a site of narrative theory in practice, where this theory of allowing for “singularity, humility, accountability, and empathy” is already in action at BCW.

doctor according to the needs of the patient within a dynamic, collaborative thread. The telling of one's narrative helps to solidify the memories of readers who then become authors and reflexive participants in the narrative construction. In an asynchronous space, where members do not have to be online at the same time to interact, the reflection back to one moment, the moment of initial diagnosis, while different for each member, is a unifying construct.

In the OP that began the thread of diagnosis narratives, WorriedMama is new to the site, but she already uses the language of the community in the shortcut "b9" for benign, meaning not malignant. The exigence for her post is that she doesn't know how to interact with her doctor, and she is not empowered to ask her doctor for an answer to her simple questions due to medical paternalism that has left her scared, confused, and unsure of proper protocol. She worries that simply asking the office about their policy for sharing diagnoses will cause them to label her "a pest," and that concern leads her to the feminist online community where her post is safe in its anonymity, heard, and validated in its responses. WorriedMama is silenced by medical paternalism and top-down policy, and so she turns to this feminist community for guidance. As WorriedMama waits for her testing results, she is unaware of the parameters of her appropriate behavior as a patient, despite the shared experience of her friend's diagnosis. And though this issue was important enough to send her to the online community, she still qualifies her question with a dismissive "So, I guess, I'm just curious." Like many female breast cancer patients before her, she is silenced by her role as patient in the hierarchical doctor-patient relationship. The fact that she feels that she can't even ask her doctor's office about their policy for fear that she will be labeled a "pest," and that could be harmful to her care, should be of great concern and is what led her to this collaborative community. WorriedMama perceives that she can't ask her doctor a question, and in her fear and anxiety as she waits for her diagnosis she goes online. In turning to the community of women online who have shared the experience of diagnosis, her voice will be heard and her concerns will be validated and shared by others.

## **Ambience and Back Stage Patient Discourse**

*I heard on the phone. I will never forget how I felt like I had been kicked in the stomach. I just KNEW something was wrong and had told the doctors of my chest pain for nearly two years, but neither the oncologist nor the plastic surgeon believed me because my cancer was sooo small and node negative. Finally, I convinced them to do a bone scan because it would "make me happy," and a few days later, as I talked to a friend on the phone the operator broke in to say I had an emergency call. It*

*was the doctor calling to say that she was sorry, but the breast cancer is back and it's metastasized to the bone.*

*Then I went in for a CT scan and it was also in my lung and liver. I called her to get the results of that test and when she got on the phone she asked me if I was sure that I wanted her to tell me this news while I was at work. Well, since you put it that way, I think you should. I got a new oncologist after that.*

*-GraceCee*

One key feature of the online diagnosis narrative is the evaluation of the diagnosis interaction from the standpoint of the patient. Contributors to this discussion thread always spend some time reflecting on what would be the best way, for them in their particular situation and in light of their material needs, to be given the disturbing news of diagnosis. The gathering together of these poly-vocal responses allows for several standpoints to be considered. Preferences varied greatly despite the fact that the policies regarding the dissemination of diagnostic information were determined almost exclusively according to the doctor's preference without the input of patients. The medical paternalism of these top-down policies is challenged by this poly-vocal response that resists consensus. By considering several standpoints of patients receiving their breast cancer diagnoses, we de-mythicize the unknown possibilities of this interaction.

A definitive diagnosis can only happen after a biopsy, and so doctors must be cautious in their word choice leading up to that diagnosis. While experience and all signs may lead a doctor to believe that the patient has cancer, a doctor will take care not say the words "you have cancer," until test results are received and the diagnosis is confirmed by the pathology. But patients listen very carefully to the clues doctors give. Obviously, by asking GraceCee if she was sure she wanted to hear her results while she was at work the doctor already told the patient that the news was not good. GraceCee felt repeatedly unheard and dismissed by the medical community. Her post doesn't complain about the doctor, but her negative assessment is very clear in the mocking tone she uses when she adds extra o's to "sooo small," the snarky "Well, since you put it that way," and her ending comment that she "got a new oncologist after that." Many patients on the thread felt the need to look for a new doctor based on the manner in which they were told of their diagnosis. In the doctor-patient relationship that hasn't fostered democratic exchange, the patient uses their only recourse—to simply not return to that doctor and establish the next doctor-patient relationship with more input from the patient; however, one cannot choose a new doctor until one is diagnosed and knows what sort of doctor she needs. Sharing this path to empowerment with other

community members can, in turn, empower them to choose a health care practitioner who does not dismiss their concerns. The moment of diagnosis is, necessarily, early on in one's journey as a patient, and so the learning curve is steep for patients. Some feel empowered to get a new doctor after those first interactions about diagnosis, but they would not have known to ask for that care before this experience.

Just as GraceCee was "told" by clues in the doctor's call before she was explicitly told her diagnosis, many women expressed that they were sure of their diagnosis before anyone said the words out loud. Perhaps the overwhelming number of breast cancer diagnoses today causes doctors to be less cautious as they interact with patients; perhaps a litigious society has led to an understandable fear of doctors saying anything that could be misinterpreted; perhaps patients are much more savvy about interpreting the motivations of doctors as they have more information from peer-to-peer healthcare sites, or perhaps patients are simply well attuned to read the signs, or as one woman called it "a number of small 'tells,'" that a cancer diagnosis was imminent in order for the patient to have time to prepare to hear the news. In *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*, Thomas Rickert suggests that "We are entering an age of ambience, one in which boundaries between subject and object, human and nonhuman, and information and matter dissolve" (1). As we navigate this age, "wakefulness to ambience is not a subjective achievement but rather an ambient occurrence: an attunement" (Rickert 8). The desire for information, and the simultaneous fear of that information, awakens that attunement to one's environment as patients await a cancer diagnosis. Rickert explains that we must "expand the concept of attention beyond that which is limited to the subjective, intentional, or merely cognitive; attention would thereby come to include the materiality of our ambient environs, our affective compartments, the impact of that which escapes conscious notice, and the stumbling block presented by the finitude of knowledge when facing the plenitude of the world and its objects" (xi). One patient's heightened attunement caused her to be "told" her diagnosis by the sound of a bag on her door:

*As I sat in the exam room with my hubby I heard the MD whisper something, and then I heard someone putting a bag of stuff on the other side of the door. I knew then they were going to give me a bag of information that I would only need if I had cancer. The wait between hearing that bag put on the door and the MD finally coming in was excruciatingly painful. I just wanted to back up and not open the door.*

-CityChica

This doctor's office generously gathered some information and some sort of free cancer "swag" as a kindness to the newly diagnosed cancer patient. Perhaps the bag included a binder or a pamphlet like the one I searched for the day of my diagnosis. In these initial moments of diagnosis a patient is attuned and desperate for any information, so CityChica read all the "available means of persuasion" as Aristotle defined rhetoric. The sound of the bag on the door was, essentially, the way she heard her diagnosis, and as we can see by her very strong word choice, she found it "excruciatingly painful." In the attempt to do something kind for the patient, the medical establishment let CityChica down. CityChica puts the reader in her shoes and lets us experience her standpoint. We are with her as she hears the bag, and we share her thoughts when she rightly guesses why there would be a bag on the door, and her very strong word choice of "excruciatingly painful" is so heartbreakingly honest that we sympathize with her as we share that suspended moment before the door opens and the bad news is delivered. Where she was once silenced, she found a space in the online community to put her experience into words. The danger of medical paternalism is that the medical establishment doesn't consider the standpoint of the patient when establishing office policy. CityChica's doctor's office provided the "swag bag" as a kindness, but no one in the office considered the standpoint of the patient trapped behind the door. Both GraceCee and CityChica realized that the doctors were trying to be kind, but both patients described the experience as painful.

In "Discourse Methods and Critical Practice in Professional Communication: The Front-Stage and Back Stage Discourse of Prognosis and Medicine," Ellen Barton uses Erving Goffman's theatrical terminology to analyze the "front-stage" and "back-stage discourse" of physicians' prognosis discussions with patients. Barton follows oncology physicians through their presentations of prognoses to patients with cancer, their "front-stage discourse," and then engages with the physicians in their "back-stage discourse," or when "on the back stage in the hallway or clinical work area, these same professionals talk as co-workers, coconstructing an insider discourse of medicine that covers a variety of medical and nonmedical topics" (Barton 71). In other words, the back-stage discourse is the uncensored quip, the truth-telling, bluntly-stated assessments not appropriate for patients, but perhaps most sincerely expressed. Ultimately, Barton concludes that despite the difficulty of physicians who are genuinely torn between truthfully informing a patient about his or her illness and destroying any hope that could make a difference in a patient's quality of life and potentially even impact their prognosis, the back-stage discourse may have important implications for front-stage practice. "If back-stage discourse expresses experience in the absence of false hope," Barton writes, "such realism could (and perhaps should) recursively enter the front-stage discourse of

prognosis" (106). Barton suggests here that we rethink medical paternalism. In both GraceCee and CityChica, we see patients who, through their attunement to ambient rhetoric, overhear that "back stage discourse" of physicians. While doctors' back-stage discourse occurs in the hallways, the back-stage discourse of patients is the online support community. Just as Barton uncovered a space where physicians were able to speak with greater honesty, the online community provides the un surveilled space where patients can engage in the same sort of uncensored truth-telling, and more strikingly, the patient standpoint can be given voice.

## **Dissensus and Material Conditions**

Consensus is not a goal of the online discussion board. And so, the online community is feminist in that it allows for varied and even opposing points of view to be considered without any pressure to come to consensus. The feminist, poly-vocal response challenges the top-down response of medical paternalism. The online community allows for several voices to be heard and considered.

*I told them up front that I did not want to be told the results on the phone. I live by myself. I brought my two sisters with me for the results. I needed their support.*

*-EveinTX*

EveinTX claimed the power to direct her care. While many members in the discussion reflect on the experience of their diagnosis only in retrospect, EveinTX reports that she anticipated her needs as a patient, and advocated for what she needed. Even at this early stage in her breast cancer treatment, she told the office how she wanted to hear the results. Perhaps her desires were easy to fulfill because they happened to align with the office policy (i.e., being told results in person), but regardless, EveinTX's impression was that she got what she asked for in her treatment. It is less common in the thread, but there are some patients who, right from the outset, feel empowered to dictate the terms of their treatment. And we can see that EveinTX shares her experience without prescribing action for others. Like posts before her, she recounts how she was told the news, but she also shares the motivation for that decision. Her statement, "I needed their support," served not only to explain her actions, but to clue in readers that maybe they might also need the support of others and may want to plan before the diagnosis meeting to ensure that kind of support. EveinTX certainly has a strong point of view, but she simply shares

her course of action and motivation. As a feminist response, she gives this cue not as a directive statement, but rather as an explanation that the reader can then consider and choose to follow or not.

While it seemed that the overwhelming preference of doctors was to call patients in to give them bad news in person—perhaps as a perceived display of kindness or a requisite performance of compassion—many women simply did not have the time for the luxury of a private appointment with a doctor. Unlike a traditional single-authored narrative, the online community allows for response, and often that response can be in direct contrast to the previous post. Many women worked to balance their own needs for emotional support with the material conditions of their lives. This community allows patients to voice their individual preferences that challenge blanket policies made by doctors. SurvivorinPink responded to EvieinTx's post, offering a new patient standpoint:

*Why should I take more time off work for an appointment, pay another copay, and sit in an exam room just to hear yes or no?*

*-SurvivorinPink*

It is real life, material concerns such as these that are often ignored when doctors have a blanket policy for delivering results and diagnoses. Once again, the patient gives voice to the conditions of life that may go unconsidered by top-down policies. The cost of cancer care can be astronomical. Even those lucky enough to have good health care will see a large increase in their health-related costs while undergoing treatment. For a doctor to assume that it is economically feasible for women to come in for another appointment just to discuss a diagnosis, even if that doctor's motive is to provide emotional support, is not enacting a feminist model of care, one that considers the material conditions of one's life. Despite the best intentions of her doctor, SurvivorinPink has more basic needs to consider—the very real economic cost of taking off work and paying for a visit. Her post inspired others to contribute to the thread in agreement.

*As a single, working mom, I'm thankful for anything I can do over the phone so I don't have to miss work unless it's absolutely necessary. Plus, I'm a very private person and prefer to deal with things on my own at first, so having a day to process my diagnosis before meeting the surgeon was perfect for me.*

*-GeorgiaPeach*

GeorgiaPeach expresses both economic concerns and an emotional concern. Her post agrees with SurvivorinPink. GeorgiaPeach also has work to consider



when making appointments, but she also responds to EvieinTx by offering an alternative emotional need. Where EvieinTx needed the support of her sisters, GeorgiaPeach needs time to process. No post disagrees with another here or negates the previous contribution; they simply offer alternatives based on each patient's needs—consideration lacking when policy is written in a top-down fashion. In gathering the voices of many patients, the online, collaborative diagnosis narrative represents an inclusive and diverse portrait of patient needs.

The resulting collaborative narrative in the online setting is a shared narrative, a communally composed story where one post influences another, a woven fabric of experience where one post relies on the next, not merely a collection. A detail in one post inspires someone to remember her own details. One's impression of the doctor's motivations for proceeding the way she/he does prompts another community member to defend or join in on a criticism. The online space, the context of this communicative writing act, influences the construction of the narratives in collaborative ways that writing alone cannot. While the details may change, all the participants and nearly all of the audience members share the community and the experience of diagnosis, and so a new narrative genre emerges, and a unique form of collaborative narrative construction is evident. Rather than a unified narrative, the knowledge in this space is created by the whole community in an inquiry-based approach, one that reflects feminist values of questioning, complicating, and sharing viewpoints rather than a paternalistic narrative of questions and answers and top-down authority.

In addition to the material conditions of women, one post brought to light the added challenge of engaging with the medical community with a disability. SilverLining, a hearing-impaired community member, clearly illustrated the importance of considering the individual standpoints of patients:

*My bad-delivery-of-news story is after the magnified views mammogram, I waited almost a month to hear results. I had asked them to send results to my family physician because I am deaf and they couldn't call with results or to make appointment. Finally, I got aggravated with waiting and had my husband call the hospital (he can hear a bit, but prefers to make rather than receive calls). It turns out that the hospital, having found that I had no phone number on file, had taken it upon themselves to ignore the annotation on the chart to call the family doctor, deaf, etc. and decided to search through 15-20 year old directories and found the telephone number of my parents' house where I had lived for part of grad school, and were trying to call them to recall me for an appointment. Now, they are both elderly and my father is unwell since his younger brother died of cancer. I had been going out of my way to keep them out of the picture and the hospital clumsily almost outs*

*me. Fortunately I think they thought it was just a fundraising call from the hospital foundation and never mentioned it. Worse, having been unable to reach anyone that way, the hospital was just sitting on the results. Idiots.*

*-SilverLining*

SilverLining shared her “bad-delivery-of-the-news story” in a way that indicated that it was just one of the many challenges she faced in her journey as a deaf cancer patient. Once again, the benefit gathering many patient responses in one community can help us all reach a feminist inclusivity of representation that resists consensus and considers a wide range of patient needs.

## **Weaving the Threads of a Kairotic Response**

*Do you think I'm nuts for taking so much time talking about things here but no time at all researching breast cancer? It seems a lot of you think I should prepare for the worst, but keep hoping for the best, and that's how I usually do things. But I love to research generally, and I can't handle even looking up terms. I'm not sure if I'm trying not to tempt fate or if I just don't want to waste my time when I may be alright.*

*-WorriedMama*

*There will be time to ask your doc all the questions you come up with after you have a diagnosis. I was too nervous to research. So, you don't have to! I didn't. Your own particular diagnosis will bring up a million questions to drive you crazy, so don't take on all the unknown possibilities that won't have anything to do with you. I think you're doing great. Good luck!*

*-SandyTeacher*

*Thanks, SandyTeacher. I am feeling better. Talking with all the people on these threads has been so helpful.*

*-WorriedMama*

*The facts can be frustrating, but I felt better after I researched. I just tried to only research where I was in my treatment and not get too far ahead. So, I just finished radiation, and I'm about to have my yearly gynecology appt. So, right now I'm looking up preventative ovary removal. It came up before, but now that I'm going to see my doctor, I'm taking the time to research it.*

*Take care!*

*-TruthTeller*

*That is great advice. Of course you'll want to research a lot after you find out your diagnosis, so for now just research where you are.*

-SandyTeacher

*Thanks, Sandy – it has been helpful for me so far. I was really happy that I found a step-by-step description of a sentinel node biopsy online. I watched it right before my procedure and it was so helpful to know what they were going to do instead of imagining the worst.*

-TruthTeller

WorriedMama admits that she is using the community rather than conducting “research” in anticipation of her diagnosis, and even acknowledges that she is perhaps seeking advice from an inappropriate source. She even asks if she is “nuts” for seeking out community knowledge rather than conducting research. Left on her own to de-mythicize cancer, she wants a response—or several—rather than a static article. She asks for peers to respond to her concern, not her medical condition. This space answers her call for information based in experience. The response is terrific advice from two other community members that have shared the experience of the start of a cancer journey—advice that suggests strategies for managing the overwhelming amount of information available from people who have had this experience themselves. Once again, even though the responses seem contradictory (SandyTeacher says to wait to research and TruthTeller suggests researching in appropriate stages), the community members collaborate and agree to revise the advice showing the benefit of this poly-vocal response. And although SandyTeacher’s response can sound directive in her response that WorriedMama should not “take on all the unknown possibilities that won’t have anything to do with [her],” SandyTeacher offers not researching as an option, not a prescription. Further, SandyTeacher offers the option not to research because that was what worked for her in her experience as a cancer patient. In *Kaironomia: On the Will-to-Invent*, Eric Charles White expands on the implications of the term *kairos*, beyond its common definition of “the opportune moment,” by tracing the origin of the word *kairos*. One possible origin of the term *kairos* comes from weaving, traditionally a woman’s art, when the weaver pulls the yarn through a gap in the cloth’s warp. In *Weaving the Word*, Kruger traces the anthropological history of weaving in which it was largely the women’s role to produce cloth, and connects that practice to literate practice where “women took part in the first textual practices, recording their society’s stories, myths, and sacred beliefs in the symbols woven or embroidered on their textiles. The scene they conveyed constituted society’s first texts” (Kruger *Weaving the Word* 22). Thus, the weaving process has its roots in the very first literate acts by women. The online environment has, in large ways,

become a new community, and the literate practices of women have moved to this space and have been transformed by it.

The language of weaving is already present online in the discussion board where discussions are called “threads.”<sup>14</sup> This metaphor also works so well here because the gap that opens in the cloth is literally nothing without the perpendicular threads of warp and weft coming together. In this predominantly female-populated space online, opposing voices counter the dominant cancer narratives and even counter one another as they collaborate not toward consensus, but toward a woven cloth of opposing, yet complementary threads of narrative. The online discussion thread does not stand alone, but rather it is woven into a collaborative narrative. The diagnosis narrative is kairotic in that it is a genre that is rooted in time, the first moments of diagnosis, but in addition to responding to a moment in time, the diagnosis narrative also creates a kairotic moment in the actual moment of the community response online. As women come together to share these memories, they create a kairotic response to the original post. Just as the posts are gathered, the patients themselves gather in sharing this experience. Further, Berkenkotter and Huckin connect the concept of genre to a “highly developed sense of timing” where the writer must consider “At this moment, what are the compelling issues, questions and problems with which knowledgeable peers are concerned?” (3). Although Berkenkotter and Huckin discuss the academic writer, the genre of the online diagnosis narrative answers this kairotic moment where online communication, immediate access to information, and complicated disease come together.

## Sharing the Opportune Moment

The message boards online are asynchronous, so community members do not have to be online at the same time to engage one another in a conversation or thread. These threads are all saved, and so from time to time someone searching the site might “revive” an older thread. There are even some threads that remain active long after the member who started the thread has left the community. In essence, what remains online is an archive of these conversations—a living archive that can be added to as time goes on, and so time in this space is a complicated notion. Medical advancements and changes in treatments can make older messages irrelevant and even incorrect, necessitating that time become an important marker in the online community

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14 Lora Arduser also uses this metaphor in her *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* article “Warp and Weft: Weaving the Discussion Threads of an Online Community” that studies the online Tu Diabetes site.

when advice is shared and accuracy is valued. Members who have posted on the boards about the miraculous successes of their treatment protocols have gone on to recur. Women who came to the site trembling with fear and posting about their likely upcoming cancer diagnosis have heard benign results and left the community. Treatments once considered groundbreaking can become outdated, and innovations can render what had seemed unerringly bleak statistics untrue and unnecessarily frightening, but all of those posts remain in the archive. Like any archive, the online space is a stored record of these communications, but at the same time it is a 24-hour, awake, active, global community.

Community members often comment on the late hour as they post on the discussion board. While I do not have data to support the thesis that activity increases during the night when people can't make phone calls or visit "IRL" (In Real Life) friends, a simple search of one site yielded over 60,000 posts containing the word "alone." The stress of a cancer diagnosis can undoubtedly keep one up at night, and chemotherapy can also cause insomnia in patients. But even in the quiet hours of darkness, the "Active Topics" board is awake and refreshes with every new post on the site. Unlike in-person support communities, someone is always awake and available online. In an online city that never sleeps, but that holds and records every moment shared, time is created by the community and becomes crucial to determining the validity of information and experience.

Many "friends," or more significant relationships in the online community, are made when members share an experience in time. Threads are often created for people starting chemo in a particular month, or having mastectomies in a certain month, and these threads remain active for a long time as the participants can compare and share their experiences as they go through them together in the same time frame. The moment of diagnosis is perhaps the most consequential and *kairotic* moment of exigency in the rhetoric of this space. It is also a mutable time. While the moment of reflection may not be consistent—some stories were told about the present week, and some stories went back decades—the moment of the subject of the stories is consistent. The *kairos* of a written text is necessarily different from the passing moment of oral discourse:

No writer can account in advance for every such need [as in oral discourse where an evaluation of what the moment requires can be assessed], so 'occasion' for written texts must refer to the situation initially eliciting the writing, whereas *kairos* itself will pertain more to the harmonious and appropriate fashioning of a suitable text. (Sloane 530)

The sharing of that passing instance of life-change is the “occasion” for the woven, kairotic response. When a patient is diagnosed, it is an isolating experience. What is shared, at the moment of diagnosis, is the single most profound aspect of the self. Suddenly, other identities like “wife,” “mother,” “professor,” “writer,” are all pushed to the side as one discovers that the most profound thing about them is no longer shared with family and friends, but with every other woman participating in the virtual breast cancer community. In *Doctors’ Stories: The Narrative Structure of Medical Knowledge*, Kathryn Montgomery Hunter describes this loss of the self: “The act of becoming a ‘patient’ is itself a first step in assuming a nonpersonal, medicalized identity. The translation of the patient’s story into the medical discourse involves the substitution of the case for the person: the patient is impersonalized, represented in the medical arena by an objectifying narrative” (Hunter 134). BCW provides a space to de-mythicize cancer within a community of peers, mitigating the isolating experience of disease.

Further, the time created in the sharing of these contributions to the thread, the individual threads that weave together to make *this* narrative, create a kairotic moment that allows for the empowerment of the patient and the breast cancer community as a whole. This reconception of time as something fluid yet shared can only happen in this online community. Whether a patient’s diagnosis was heard the day before they posted or ten years prior, they were able to share that moment in this online community. And it remains to be shared with others as they encounter the same experience.

## Peer-to-Peer Feminist Response

*KatieM - Congrats on your wedding. I just wanted to clarify what was posted above. Chemo can cause menopause, but Tamoxifen doesn't. Tamoxifen can give some of the same symptoms—hot flashes, infrequent periods—but it doesn't make you infertile. Tamoxifen does cause birth defects though, so you can't safely get pregnant on it. Lots of women take it for a couple of years, have a child, and go back on it. I was not menopausal after chemo. Some chemo drugs make it more likely than others, but there are other factors too like the dosage and your age. I did IVF and froze 16 embryos before I started chemo just in case. I'm so glad that I did, even though I was still fertile after.*

*Most importantly, remember that the overwhelming majority of biopsies come back negative! Younger women, especially, have dense breasts and lots of hormonal changes. They are very cautious if you have a family history. Good luck and remember that the odds are you are completely fine!*

-Dreamer864

Dreamer864, is quite knowledgeable about breast cancer. She was a seasoned contributor to the site, and her response inches toward medical advice in some sense as she clarifies the side effects of the popular drug, Tamoxifen; however, her advice is firmly rooted in her own experience going through chemotherapy as a young woman whose fertility is a major concern. Much like other activities that are viewed as extracurricular and unimportant, the online breast cancer support community has been dismissed as an amateur response to the search for medical advice and a possibly dangerous space where unreliable information can easily be spread.

Just as Kruger, in his study of weaving, argues for the legitimacy of and respect for the tasks of female experience, I argue that the online breast cancer support community is a space that we must reclaim as a legitimate contribution to rhetorics of health and medicine:<sup>15</sup>

I suspect, however, that no matter how determined scholars may be to engraft feminist studies onto the root of historical and cultural studies, no real change in the view of women in history will occur until modern society changes its perception of those tasks that make up this female experience, tasks like weaving and sewing, cooking and childbearing—and begins to esteem them. Without respect for this work, the history of female experience will always be considered less valuable than its historical male counterpart in male experience. (Kruger 22-23)

The online community is a legitimate part of women's literate practice and a genuine feminist contribution to rhetorics of health and medicine.

Work in rhetorics of health and medicine has contributed to our understanding of common genres of writing seen in medical settings or the professional discourses of health and medicine.<sup>16</sup> It is my hope that this analysis adds to this work by moving to the margins of healthcare—in studying people outside the medical community yet completely immersed in it. As Ellen Barton states in her 2005 introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* on the discourses of medicine, “Attending to the organization of the language of medicine into genres—with their powerful effects on the formative and normative discourses of the profession—is an

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15 Blake, Segal and Keranen ask scholars to adopt the term “rhetorics of health and medicine” in order to “signal a broad array of health publics, their *nomoi*, and their discursive practices, some of which only partially intersect with medical institutions” (1-2).

16 See Wald, et al. “Untangling the Web—The Impact of Internet Use on Health Care and the Physician-Patient Relationship.”

important interdisciplinary contribution our field can make" (248). In "From the Frontiers of IMRAD: Nontraditional Medical Research in Two Cancer Journals," Michael Zerbe seeks out "nontraditional science articles," that he defines as "those that focus on issues other than the cancer and that often consider human beings as a whole, rather than solely a disease that happens to be carried by a human being, as their primary object of study" (207). In his endnote to that statement, he acknowledges, "The vast majority of these physicians, of course, care deeply about their patients. The existence of this relationship, however, does not change the fact that the voices of patients are typically not heard in traditional science research" (Zerbe 219). Zerbe attributes this silence to the need for the quantification of scientific research methods: "Because a single patient is almost always just one of many patients being treated (statistical significance is much easier to achieve with large sample sizes), she or he is characterized primarily as a carrier of cancer and little more" (207). The patient voice is also seldom heard in research in rhetorics of health and medicine because attention is mainly paid to genres of writing within the professional disciplines that exclude patient voices. By contrast, the online site serves to gather together individual voices to create a statistically significant corpus of patient responses. By considering the voice of patients and honoring the ethos of patients' experience, we can enact feminist values of representation. In essence, the online breast cancer support community is a place of feminist standpoint praxis.

Further, although my research casts a spotlight on the rhetorical acts of a previously under-valued online women's community, this project participates in a legacy of extending the feminist lens by using a feminist methodology to research and interrogate this site of rhetorical practice, participating in "feminist rhetorical scholarship [that is] now moving far beyond the rescue, recovery, and (re) inscription of a diversity of women participants" (Kirsch and Royster 642). As a widespread, overwhelmingly female disease, and one that is centered on a sexualized portion of the female anatomy, breast cancer has been a context for previous challenges to the patriarchal medical community. For example, in *The Breast Cancer Wars: Hope, Fear, and the Pursuit of a Cure in the Twentieth-Century*, Barron H. Lerner highlights the activist history of breast cancer when the default treatment for breast cancer was the radical mastectomy, taking far more tissue than was necessary without regard for a female patient's psychological well-being. The "Radical mastectomy, performed mostly by male surgeons on female patients, had become a touchstone for dissatisfaction with a patriarchal and authoritarian medical system," leading to



changes in surgical protocols (Lerner 4)<sup>17</sup>. The nearly ubiquitous pink ribbon campaigns, while seen by some as a falsely feminine and precious way to describe a deadly disease and a narrative put forth by the breast cancer industry to politicize breast cancer in the U.S., began as survivor-created responses to a system in which the patient had no voice. These movements have transformed the experience of patients from solitary suffering to the opportunity for community, survivorship, and celebration, but they have become the language of the breast cancer industry rather than the patient. Many of today's breast cancer patients resist the pinkification of this deadly disease. To avoid being coopted by the "business" of breast cancer, patients are voicing their experiences of illness online.

Lest we think that all the posts were indictments of the medical community, a great number of contributors to the thread noted an appreciation for the difficult position of doctors. Although it's true that most doctors mentioned in the thread dictated the terms of the doctor-patient relationship, many posts expressed empathy for the doctors who had to deliver devastating news to patients. SurvivorinPink posted: "My oncologist called me on a Friday, and was very compassionate and professional about it, but got right to the point." Prayers 2011 had nothing but praise for her doctor:

*When she did call, she was awesome. She wanted to know how I was doing after the biopsies, and then said, I'm so sorry. It's cancer.*

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17 See *The Breast Cancer Wars: Hope, Fear, and the Pursuit of a Cure in Twentieth-Century America* by Barron H. Lerner, M.D. for "a history of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment in twentieth-century America," with a focus "on the years from 1945 to 1980" (4). See also Maureen Hogan Casamayou's *The Politics of Breast Cancer* for an account of the National Breast Cancer Coalition's activist successes gaining "extensive media coverage as well as both attention and action from Congress and the White House in the period between 1990 and 1993" (ix). These histories cast a spotlight on the tradition of women's healthcare initiatives in the treatment of breast cancer as successful challenges to the patriarchal system of medicine. For more on the public narratives of breast cancer, see also Samantha King's *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*, Ulrike Boehmer's *The Personal and the Political: Women's Activism in Response to the Breast Cancer and AIDS Epidemics*, Gayle A. Sulik's *Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women's Health*, Lisa Keränen's *Scientific Characters: Rhetoric, Politics, and Trust in Breast Cancer Research*, and Mary K. DeShazer's *Mammographies: The Cultural Discourses of Breast Cancer Narratives*.

*She then gave me the good information (that it was small, slow-growing, caught early), and she paused every few minutes to ask how I was doing, how I was processing all of this information, and if I needed her to repeat anything.*

*We really did have a wonderful conversation—about much more than just my diagnosis. I was shocked, and I cried when I hung up the phone, but I was glad this doctor was the one to tell me.*

-Prayers2011

These complimentary posts display the feminist impulses of the community. In a truly generous rhetorical move, even while challenging the power dynamic, they consider the feelings of the empowered.

## **Implications and Conclusions**

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.

-bell hooks "Marginality as Site of Resistance" 343

In *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks said "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (xvi). In "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" she expanded on this concept to show the transformative power of the margin: "that it is also the site of radical possibility a space of resistance. It was this marginality that [she] was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" (206). Medical patients are the often-powerless subjects of the study of their own bodies, and given that the overwhelming majority of breast cancer patients are women, I believe that viewing this space as a marginal site where the silenced

find agency and power is productive.<sup>18</sup> In cancer vernacular specifically, the term “margin” resonates deeply. In order to give a patient the best prognosis, the surgeon who removes a tumor or area of malignancy must achieve “clear margins.” To hear that phrase in a post-surgical report means that the surgeon has removed enough of the surrounding tissue to improve the patient’s prognosis and reduce the likelihood of recurrence and progression. But patients also often remain on the margins of their own care throughout cancer treatment. Right from the start of an illness, the doctor decides the process by which the patient hears the diagnosis without considering the standpoint of the patient. Even with recent attention paid to collaboration in medical care, patients are often simply told doctors’ policies without the opportunity to participate in and direct their own care. But the gathered posts of the online community move patients from the margins of their care to the center of the community response. The structure provided gathers together many different responses, allowing for many standpoints to be considered by the group.

First and foremost, studying the rhetoric of the nearly exclusively female, online community of breast cancer patients contributes to our examination of feminist rhetorical theory in practice. Women come together on this site to share the ethos of their experience, and in doing so create knowledge, support one another, and challenge the widely accepted power dynamics that place the patient in the silenced, subordinate position in a power dynamic. Medical paternalism is acknowledged and challenged on many fronts, from new narrative approaches to medical training to new laws granting patients power over their own test results. In these ways, the move toward collaboration with doctors is being fostered as a response to earlier top-down medical care; however in *Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine*, Judy Z. Segal cautions that “What seems to be a challenge to paternalism [in the form of “shared-responsibility medicine”] may be a cagey new version of it” (35). Although the

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18 The anonymity of the online space prevents me from knowing the demographic details of site participants, and certainly the community members that I am talking about have access to Internet resources; therefore, I don’t want to appropriate the language bell hooks uses to a site that likely contains members of the privileged classes—especially given their access to health care. However, I believe that it is particularly useful to claim this site as a site of feminist practice that empowers and liberates women, and the term “margin” accurately describes the ways that patients are present for their care but are also silenced, left in the dark of cancer myths, not included in decision making, or not considered as whole people with material conditions that may influence treatment decisions—even when they enjoy good relationships with their doctors.

patient is given an opportunity for input in discussions with doctors, the power dynamic in these relationships remains unchallenged: “in shared-responsibility medicine, patients have a voice because they are *granted* a voice; patients are decision makers because they are recruited to decision making by experts who tell them what decisions are to be made and what the terms are in which to make them” (Segal 35). The peer community online gives voice, power, and authority to patients in a space outside the doctor-patient relationship. Despite moves toward sharing responsibility for decision making in health-care, “There are ways in which the new physician is still the god-like practitioner but one whose job description includes caring what the patient thinks” (Segal 35). However, caring what the patient thinks still falls short of a true collaboration. We have been socialized to accept the “god-like practitioner,” so when patients seek out a voice, they often turn to online communities where they can share their experiences without the oversight of doctors. While there are dangers lurking in the anonymous, virtual, amateur advice-giving sites dedicated to health and wellness, there are treasure troves of archived online writing from collaborative threads that can provide an evaluative critique of medicine in practice. These spaces are real challenges to top-down, paternalistic medical care. Here, as in other areas of women’s rhetoric, experience is valued and silenced voices are heard. The collaborative online narrative does not lead to consensus; rather, it provides a fuller picture of the experience of patients. There is room online for asking questions, for seeking clarity, for varied efforts to control and understand. And what also becomes very clear is that patients come to this space because in the traditional medical community patients do not control healthcare.<sup>19</sup> The desire to make sense of one’s illness, even in this community space, is different from an attempt to come to a consensus about illness.

In the end, to use the language of the online community, the OP (original post) got B9 (benign) results and left our community, but the resulting thread left a lasting impact on the women who shared their stories. I participated in this thread when I was about a year out from my diagnosis. This is how I responded in the thread:

*I went in for a mammogram because I felt a lump. The technician said that I had dense breasts and so I needed an ultrasound. They stopped being really friendly and were suddenly very professional and distant. The radiologist came in and said directly, “I’m really worried.” Yeah. Me too. That was a Friday. They got me an*

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19 Of course, it can be argued that doctors do not “control” healthcare either. I do not claim they do; however, this online space can be an empowering location for patients who often feel powerless in their illness and treatment.

*appointment with a surgeon the next business day. I knew. On Monday, the doctor looked at me and said, "You probably have cancer." He tried to book a lumpectomy right then and there. (I went alone...might as well...I knew already.) I made him do a needle biopsy because I needed to KNOW 100% before I went ahead with any other procedures. He asked me if I would like to come in for the results and I said, "Doc, we both know I have cancer. So, you're just going to tell me how bad it is. That we can do over the phone." He called a few days later with my diagnosis.*

*After that, we went down to Boston to Dana Farber for a second opinion, and I got on a clinical trial. I was anxious to move ahead, but in the end it was so much better for my prognosis that we waited and got a second opinion.*

This discussion thread provided a space for us to slow down and share. I went on to craft a longer diagnosis narrative after the post above, and that narrative led me to turn a critical lens toward this extracurricular space leading to this project. The thread fizzled out with many women expressing their thanks specifically to the OP—some even reported that they cried upon hearing her good news. The OP's final post was:

*Wow! I'm so glad that I started this thread! Reading all of your experiences has helped me understand what I'm experiencing. You are also answering a question I hadn't even thought of: Do they say comforting things even if they can see that things aren't looking good?*

*-WorriedMama*

The gratitude expressed by the community for the opportunity to share the stories of their diagnoses was striking. The OP was aware that some members of the community looked back on the time of diagnosis as a traumatic experience: "Everyone, thanks so much for sharing so openly about a tough moment in your lives. I hope reliving it hasn't been too traumatic. Maybe it's given an opportunity to look back and see how far you've come?" WorriedMama's acknowledgement of the "openness" of the community is an indication of the success of de-mythicizing the experience of the breast cancer diagnosis. That open exchange is why she came to this community, and that was the feminist response she received. Another community member posted, "This is a great thread by the way. Interesting to hear how others heard. Praying that the person who started this thread hears good news." And although the OP is gone from the community, the thread remains part of the archive. It can be searched for and revived. It can be read and learned from. It can continue to share the kairotic moments of diagnosis and the collaborative voice of patients and their experiences. And more than any individual response,

it can reflect the complicated and diverse nature of cancer and work toward de-mythicizing breast cancer.

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## About the Author

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# Linking Rural Women Transnationally: Iowa's "First Lady of the Farm" and Post WWII Ethos

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Abby M. Dubisar

**Abstract:** *This essay expands understanding of situated and invented ethos by analyzing the archival writings of Ruth Buxton Sayre (1896-1980), known as "First Lady of the Farm." Rhetorical analysis of post-WWII writings by Sayre, as well as archival photographs and publications about Sayre, position Sayre as a model for constructing negotiated ethos and accessing authority through multiple roles. Ultimately, this essay argues that Sayre had to redefine the accepted characterization of women on farms not only to propel her own pursuits as a rhetor, but also to convince farm women of their responsibilities for postwar reconstruction, positioning them as global citizens.*

**Keywords:** *archival research, Ruth Buxton Sayre, peace, rural women, rural rhetoric, post-world war II, farm, Iowa, midwest, women's history, Farm Bureau, Associated Country Women of the World*

"The tremendous task that lies before us as organized farm women is to help to create an understanding of world citizenship among farm people."—Ruth Buxton Sayre, "The Farm Woman—a World Citizen" 1935 address to the Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau<sup>1</sup>

Ruth Buxton Sayre lived from 1896-1980 and was known during her lifetime as "First Lady of the Farm" because she served as a dedicated advocate for farm women, both in Iowa and across the world. An avid speaker and

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well-published writer, she was appointed to President Eisenhower's Agricultural Advisory Committee in 1953 and served in other civic roles. Also, as part of her lifelong mission to link rural women and connect farming people with international affairs, she led the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) as its president from 1947-1953.

While Sayre's archive has much to contribute to rhetorical study, in this article I specifically address two ways that Sayre invented herself as a rhetor: by constructing a negotiated ethos and by establishing multiple types of authority as a model for others. After providing the background of this research and its method, I connect Sayre's work to studies of ethos and transnationality. I then describe the possibilities for women's farm-based peace rhetorics that Sayre's work illuminates, closely analyzing both Sayre's work and publications about her and their representations of negotiated ethos and multiple roles that model authority.

## **Background and Method**

Even though my analysis focuses on Sayre's postwar writing and speaking, her thinking about international citizenship began earlier. Sayre attended Simpson College in her home town of Indianola and graduated with a German degree during World War I. As Hoehnle writes, "she found German teaching jobs hard to come by in the fierce nativist climate of the time," indicating the constraints against which she developed her ideas ("Sayre, Ruth Buxton").

Upon marrying Raymond Sayre in 1918 she moved from Indianola to the Sayre farm, transitioning from a home equipped with modern conveniences to one without plumbing and electricity. This transition helped mobilize her evolving international perspective since she experienced the challenges of farm life that could unite rural women regardless of nationality. By harnessing her education and the connections she built through farm organizations, she wanted to show farm women that their roles linked them to an international network of rural women and could be expansive, not limiting. For example, in "A Country Woman Looks at the World," Sayre states that, "organized groups of women are tackling many of the social and economic problems of world recovery" (2). She goes on to describe the 1941 ACWW memo on reconstruction, which "recommends an immediate postwar program of feeding the starving countries of the world, a long-term program of freer trade in the world-wide distribution of food," ("A Country Woman" 2) and more ideas crafted by rural women advocating for postwar progress.

Sayre's papers are held at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City and represent the lifework of a rhetor who used all available means of persuasion to make the farm a locus for progressive activity and to shift farm

women's perspectives, challenging them to see themselves as influential beyond their rural, home locations. Occupying eight and a half linear feet, the 32 boxes that make up the Sayre collection include materials dating from 1920 to 1980. As a researcher of women peace activists' rhetorical strategies, I first discovered Sayre due to her interest in peace and international relations. For this article I selected dated, postwar artifacts showing Sayre's ability to strategically and habitually craft an ethos that balanced her acceptable role of farm wife with her evolving role as an international figure, as well as publications from the same time period that feature others' descriptions of her expertise.

Arranged thematically, this article analyzes several 1948 documents from Sayre's substantial archive: Sayre's address at the Tenth National Farm Institute, "The World Situation from a Woman's Point of View"; her *Farm Journal* article, "Peace is Possible"; Martens and Shank's *Farm Journal* article about Sayre, "This Busy Woman Keeps a Gracious Home"; and Hegerfeld's profile of Sayre in *Successful Farming*, "Successful Homemaking." Hegerfeld's profile includes photos of Sayre cooking in her kitchen and is paired with Sayre's article "Farm Women Must Be Good World Neighbors."

In the work covered here especially, she met audiences' expectations for what a farm woman would know and understand in order to gain acceptance and secure authority while she further built her credentials and philosophies to craft herself as an expert on international affairs. Individuals writing about her, on the other hand, emphasized her domestic roles as primary. Ultimately, Sayre strategically balanced multiple roles, those assigned to her and those she promoted for herself and others. At the same time, she worked to help farming communities come to terms with their own international connectedness after World War II, linking together women's evolving roles and the postwar landscape. Thus, Sayre used rhetorical strategies to try to renegotiate women's roles, leveraging the postwar era to do so.

## **Ethos and Transnationality**

My study is informed by understandings of ethos that help reveal how women rhetors invent themselves as authorities (Campbell, Reynolds) as well as feminist rhetoric's recent interest in transnationality (Dingo, Hesford, Richards). In their introduction to the special issue of *College English* on transnational feminist rhetorics, Wendy S. Hesford and Eileen E. Schell define transnationality as "movements of people, goods, and ideas across national borders," a term that points out "forms of cultural hybridity and intertextuality" (463). This concept would have resonated with Sayre because she strove to persuade rural women to see their lives as linked to other rural women around the world, destabilizing the significance of national borders and

networking women who were engaged in farming worldwide. Likewise, Sayre would have appreciated the transnational rhetorical perspective Hesford and Schell promote, one that focuses on “cultural interconnectivity...addressing how cultures transact and interact with one another in a variety of mediums... and through international policymaking and transnational organizing” (465). Sayre knew that the future of agriculture, and women’s leadership roles within agriculture, would be increasingly influenced by international trade policies and other outcomes of globalization. She worked to connect rural women to one another in order to expand their knowledge and influence, convincing them to build an international network of rural women.

The framework of situated ethos (i.e., one’s accepted reputation) and invented ethos (i.e., one’s constructed or performed authority) helpfully shows how Sayre crafts her authority. While situated ethos is one’s established authority and trusted persona, which Sayre relied on and maintained in her civic roles, invented ethos is the character rhetors invent for an occasion, which Sayre had to craft when facing audiences unfamiliar with her background and expertise (Crowley and Hawhee 149). Overall Sayre builds on her community’s assumptions and audience’s expectations for her (situated ethos) and pushes boundaries by inventing new possibilities for farm women’s authority (invented ethos) that are both relevant to her own expertise as a speaker and writer and essential for the influence of all farm women. These two types of ethos must work together, as Sayre understood. In Burke’s words, “the more effective your invented ethos is, the stronger your situated ethos might become in the long run, and vice versa” (22). One builds on the other, and Sayre understood that she could not mobilize audiences’ thinking in new ways without establishing herself as a familiar authority.

Scholars of feminist historiography show how rhetors meet the dual elements of both situated and invented ethos. Writing about Margaret Prior, the first female missionary of the American Female Moral Reform Society, Shaver shows how an understanding of both invented and situated ethos is essential to women advocates and leaders: “In the neighborhoods that she frequented, Prior relied on a *situated ethos* that drew from her reputation and actions... [But] for individuals reading her unsigned missionary reports, Prior used an *invented ethos*, in which she intentionally constructed her character within the discourse” (70). Shaver’s analysis thus shows how Prior met audience’s expectations for what a female missionary should know and how women behave as advocates that promote change in nonthreatening ways.

Writing about the autobiographies of pioneer women who lived a generation before Sayre did, Christoph features the writers’ strategic use of ethos construction to introduce themselves to readers and gain authority. Christoph demonstrates how strategic ethos deployment was essential for

nineteenth-century pioneer women writers, who “did not have access to the political and economic evidence that middle-class men used to participate in debates about westward expansion” (662). She predicts that the “strategies of placement” enacted by these autobiographers can be found in other types of texts as well and this prediction is confirmed in Sayre’s writing and speaking by her portrayal of importance of the farm as a place. Through Sayre’s efforts to craft a negotiated ethos as well as establish and maintain multiple roles that modeled the authority she hoped other farm women would assert, her archived work reveals her skill as a rhetor who understood the need to build one’s authority and invent a place from which to speak and write.

The study of women rhetors is inextricably linked to the study of ethos because such rhetors wrest the authority that is not automatically handed to them by audiences. Feminist rhetoric scholars, too, work to change the very definition of ethos in order to make authority more inclusive. Writing about methodology, Micciche positions feminist constructs of ethos against traditional definitions that “privilege the individual speaking or writing well” (175). Instead, a focus on “collective identity and collaboration as significant to knowledge building and the development of credibility” shapes the intellectual endeavor of feminist rhetoric. Positioning Sayre as part of that effort to redefine ethos illuminates Sayre’s attempts to show all farm women the roles they could play in a global context, redefining in turn the definition of a farm woman.

Likewise, amplifying this redefinition offered through Sayre’s work heeds Dingo’s call to meet the need “to trace the circulation of arguments about women and to look not only at these arguments themselves but how those arguments network to wider contexts such as historical discourses, geopolitics, global economics, and cultural expectations” (145). My analysis of Sayre’s archive can help feminist rhetoric scholars better understand the significance of the current power infrastructures in which women farmers are enmeshed and how definitions of farming women invoke or deny autonomy for rural women in a transnational frame.

## **Cultivating Women’s Peace Rhetorics from the Farm: Negotiated Ethos and Multiple Roles**

Sayre’s path diverges from pioneer and urban women who have been analyzed by rhetorical scholars studying ethos (Christoph; Shaver) as well as from the peace activist women in interwar scholarship (Roskelly; Sharer) because Sayre occupied a liminal space that was continually in flux. She moved between an accepted farm-woman identity, her situated ethos from her private life on the farm, and that of a leader promoting new roles for women and

connecting their identities to international relations and peace, her invented public ethos that she crafted throughout her writing and speaking career.

## **Negotiated Ethos**

While Sayre's archive contains writings and speeches that span her adulthood, her postwar publications most prominently address gender roles, peace, food, and agriculture, and thus articulate how her gendered ethos contends with both situated and invented elements. She consistently addresses audiences with a negotiated authority that draws on her various types of expertise and works across the boundaries of public/private and domestic/professional.

Sayre built her negotiated ethos while using gender norms in order to destabilize them. Using her otheredness as a woman speaking on a topic that was not considered to be within the realm of feminine authority in her 1948 speech ("The World Situation") to the Tenth National Farm Institute, themed "Agriculture and World Reconstruction," Sayre addresses her assigned topic head-on. She employs her platform to focus on gender as a subject of its own, and relying on secondary sources to establish her expertise. This speech was also published in the proceedings, thereby extending its influence beyond the live audience. Sayre knows she must address her situated ethos as a woman before she can invent her ethos as an expert on postwar reconstruction.

The way that Sayre is introduced at the Farm Institute initially keys audiences in to how they should interpret her ethos and outlines her qualifications for speaking. Thus, it opens the discourse by securing her situated ethos as a familiar person, not a threat or provocative expert. She is introduced as "a woman we all know and highly respect. She has been very active for a number of years in community, state and national affairs, and now is president of the Associated Country Women of the World. I am sure this group is going to enjoy this presentation to be brought us this morning by Mrs. Raymond Sayre" ("The World Situation" 58). While Sayre is described as a wife and leader, the framing of "enjoyment" minimizes the purpose of her address over other more serious purposes that a person in her position might have intended. Based on this introduction, the audience could expect to be entertained by this speaker. Likewise, the audience might interpret the description "very active" to mean that Sayre was busy doing volunteer, social activities rather than serving the elected roles that she garnered from being an established expert or a college-educated professional.

In her own terms, Sayre opens in an invitational way. Yet she offers a different type of situated ethos, one embedded in the farm, as she starts her speech by stating, "I don't know just exactly how a woman got on the program today because certainly I do not qualify as an expert...I come right off the farm...What

I have to contribute will be from a woman's standpoint—not as an expert—but as a farm woman" ("The World Situation" 58). From the outset, Sayre destabilizes the notion of expert qualifications. She asks to be interpreted both as an outsider on the Farm Institute's roster of speakers—a woman in a room full of men—and an insider who is engaged in farming.

Sayre initially crafts her negotiated ethos from the farm, a place endowed with consistent meaning, yet her strategies later shift to change the meanings of the farm as an ideological construct. Christoph's "strategies of placement" apply to Sayre's opening since it reveals the contingency of subjectivity that demands ongoing tactics, what some would call the invented part of ethos construction, and the place-based significance of material constraints that define a writer's geography and physical location, as well as ideological position (669). Unlike Christoph's autobiographers, however, Sayre's live audiences require the additional work of securing their interest and sustaining their attention in rural women's experiences and viewpoints.

The photograph in Figure 1 helps illustrate the gender imbalance of the



Figure 1: MS 19 Sayre Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Iowa City, IA. 20 February 2015. Used with permission of SHSI.

contexts Sayre worked in and the audiences she faced throughout her career as a speaker, which justified her need to be interpreted as reassuring at a time when gender roles did not invite women into places of leadership and power in agriculture or world reconstruction. That is, speaking opportunities about world reconstruction did not fall

into women's assumed positions.

Included in an album of photos of groups and committees, the photo in Figure 1 and other photos like it reaffirm how male-dominated the contexts were within which Sayre worked and served. While Figure 1 is not labeled, it illustrates the groups in which Sayre worked as the solo woman, over and



over again, showing Sayre's relevance to writers who address audiences from marginalized positions as well as the fact that she modeled the kinds of roles that women were ready and able to enact.

Enloe addresses the importance of circulating such images, even now:

Most of the time we scarcely notice that many governments still look like men's clubs....We see a photo of members of Russia's cabinet, Wall Street's inner circle, the Chinese Politboro, or Europe's central bankers, and it is easy to miss the fact that all the people in these photographs are men. (28)

As Enloe asserts, "One woman in a photo makes it harder for us to ignore that men are *men*" (28). Likewise, photos of Sayre surrounded by men show the gender norms she was destabilizing with her public presence and leadership. She made a space for herself and other women who followed her path.

Sayre's language choices help create such a welcoming path. Her pronoun use throughout the speech, for example, reflects her understanding of a carefully crafted, negotiated ethos. In the first three paragraphs, as she introduces herself and her approach to her topic, she begins many sentences with I, a reflection of her focus on engaging her audience in the topics of importance to her. She begins the fourth paragraph of her speech with this line: "Everyone knows that our basic social unit, the family, cannot prosper without the full partnership of husband and wife" ("The World Situation" 58). Here she begins to use first person, plural pronouns, and throughout the rest of the speech she starts sentences with we and uses us repeatedly. Thus, she positions herself as being like her audience even though at the start of the speech, she positions herself as different, othered.

This transition between first-person, singular pronouns to communal language shows Sayre's crafting of her audience's ethos, transitioning her listeners from being Farm Institute attendees to themselves being members of families and global citizens. Here she is invoking what Black calls the "second persona" (119), soliciting them with her discourse and linking her style with the audience's outlook on farm values and cooperation. Sayre ends the fourth paragraph with the statement "It is our ability to work together that will determine whether or not we will move forward in our plans for reconstruction" (58), implicating all audience members as being like Sayre, sharing the "woman's point of view" that she outlines. Here she relies on commonly held notions of what it means to be a member of the Midwestern farming community, invoking values of cooperation and growth.

With this speech, Sayre also reinforced her ethos as a trusted authority prepared to comment on gender, an authority that is not necessarily expected of most farm women. Earlier in the speech, she indicated that her audience

would be mostly made up of men, suspecting they would not be interested in a woman's viewpoint. She knows that the homogeneity of the audience, as Figure 1 shows, demands both a carefully crafted ethos and well-supported arguments for her choice to introduce her talk by addressing the topic of women as a central focus. For example, she states, "I am going to talk about women a little bit, and I want you to know my philosophy—that I think we must consider women in the world today not as women but as human beings and as citizens" ("The World Situation" 58). By introducing the key term "citizens" to replace "women," Sayre directs her listeners to expect her to shift the narrative from a gendered perspective to a commentary on human action, opening the possibilities for how women contribute to global communities.

Several months later in the *Farm Journal* article "Peace is Possible," Sayre again emphasizes place and role by positioning her authority between situated and invented ethos in order to mobilize her position while meeting audience expectations. Imagining Sayre writing such articles while sitting at the table in her dining room "office" with a large globe of the world beside her (see Figure 1) helps readers gain a sense of her international perspective as she addresses individuals who might be reading the magazine in their farm homes. Sayre begins the article by drawing on her postwar travel experience, visiting Rotterdam in September 1947 and witnessing the "the ruin that Nazi bombs had wrought" (87). By drawing upon her eyewitness account of postwar Europe, Sayre positions herself as a correspondent, translating postwar conditions for her audience back home. She assumes readers have not traveled to Europe recently or ever and imagines that their curiosity about its conditions can be satisfied by her descriptions.

Sayre crafts her ethos through drawing on her travel experience and then adding the qualifier that not everyone can travel. She writes humbly without expectation that readers want to be like her. She knows that they might not want to travel, yet she feels her message is important for them. Sayre acknowledges her own privilege of mobility and encourages readers to see literacy practices as modes for experiencing the world: "We can't all go to other countries, but we can read and learn about them. We can exchange letters with women in other countries. We go in spirit with the gifts that we send those still standing on the battle line for freedom" ("Peace Is Possible" 88). Here Sayre anticipates arguments that audiences may make against her ideas; they are not able to travel and experience the world, as she has been able to do. Yet suggesting people read, as they are already readers of *Farm Journal*, is a palatable recommendation to individuals who may be feeling isolated after World War II.

In "Peace Is Possible," Sayre constructs her ethos as a negotiator and anticipates that her readers might feel overwhelmed or not know where to begin. She assuages their concern and boosts their confidence:

You are only one person, it is true. But you are one. You make decisions every day. You vote (sometimes). You influence your husband (who does vote or who does make public policy). You affect the opinion of your neighbors. Your opinion is so important that it is popular business to figure out what you think through public opinion polls. (87)

Sayre tried to convey to her readers that their opinions have value. Combining her call to action with reminders about women's influence, including repeatedly noting that women make up more than half of the voting population, she asked women to unite and take on the mission of leading progressive change.

Sayre offered readers an opportunity to enact their authority to engage in peace efforts. Included with her brief author biography at the end of the article is an invitation for readers to contribute to Sayre's theorizing. The biography indicates that Sayre is currently in Geneva, Switzerland, "to be the voice of farm women at a meeting of the Department of Public Information at the United Nations." It continues, "She will welcome your suggestions on what you think about world affairs, and what you think women can do. So will Farm Journal. Write Peace Plans, Farm Journal, Philadelphia 5, Pa. and we will forward to Mrs. Sayre in Switzerland letters that might prove helpful to her" ("Peace Is Possible" 88). Although the archive of Sayre's work does not include these reader letters, so the volume and content of such responses remains unknown, the move shows again Sayre's desire to negotiate authority and to communicate to readers that their perspectives are as important as hers, the author and traveler. While she strives to be seen as an expert, she also welcomes other farm women to be like her and theorize peace roles. Her goal is to inspire others to take on such identities and extend their farm roles, to become globally minded.

Although "Peace Is Possible" reinforces some of the ideas that Sayre developed in other speeches and writings, it features new possibilities that reflect the timeliness of women's opportunities:

Not long ago I sat in a meeting with women representatives from countries who make up the Commission on the Status of Women. This commission makes recommendations for policy and action to the Social and Economic Council of the United Nations. They were

asking us what the women's groups thought and what they wanted done. (87-88)

Sayre urges her readers, then, to understand that the time is right for women to educate themselves, inform their opinions, and bring their ideas to those in authority who are ready to listen and act, making the most of available communication channels.

Sayre's negotiated ethos is also constructed by publications about her. One example of others fashioning her ethos is a profile of her home and her roles within it that was featured in *Farm Journal* several months after it published Sayre's "Peace Is Possible." Authors Martens and Shank mention in the first sentence that despite Sayre's packed schedule, "with no extra help, she manages to keep this gracious home an inspiration to her family—and to other women with their hands full" (156). Such descriptions construct Sayre's ethos by securing her domestic authority and assuaging the ongoing fear that advancing leadership roles for women will negatively affect their performance of traditional feminine roles. The profile reassures readers, then, that the status quo and the nuclear family will remain secure, not at risk, if women become international figures like Sayre. Of course this fear has a long historical lineage. 100 years earlier, women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton had to address this same anxiety about compromised femininity (Buchanan 119).

The comment about independently keeping a home also suggests that readers would be more likely to criticize Sayre's gender performance as a homemaker, perhaps harshly, if she had the choice to hire domestic workers (even though, as Hoehnle notes, a hired girl helped Sayre's mother with daily tasks) than to criticize her theories of world citizenship ("Iowa Clubwomen Rise"). The threat to traditional femininity and women's housekeeping roles may be more frightening for readers than another war. Such anticipation of judgment shows the powerful impact of gender norms to shape audience reactions. That said, by pointing out Sayre's independent caring of her home, Martens and Shank attend to the labor conditions of farm women's lives, acknowledging that in addition to becoming the engaged world citizens that Sayre envisions, readers must also perform the domestic labor essential to keeping the farm home running, the primary responsibilities of many *Farm Journal* readers. Ultimately, this profile probably hoped to attain solidarity between *Farm Journal* readers and writers such as Sayre, convincing readers that writers were just like them and that the magazine reflected authentic farm life.

For the article, Martens and Shank visited Sayre's home, took photos of the interior, and chronicled the decoration choices and kitchen renovations that Sayre made with her family. The focus on Sayre's decisions as a domestic expert (e.g., adjusting kitchen counters to specific heights for various tasks and systematizing other chores related to cooking) highlights her interest

in efficiency and accommodation and secures her situated ethos as a middle-class farm woman. As Sayre describes her renovations, she insists that the entire family was involved, yet the authors position her as the authority and main benefactor of the changes, referring to “her kitchen,” which she re-designed to be a time saver (159). Such publications serve as a reminder that Sayre’s ethos was always in flux and her invented ethos as an international authority was always secondary to her situated ethos as a homemaking farm woman. Sayre likely knew that such framing enhanced her position as a contributor to *Farm Journal* and helped her readers relate to her, which in turn enhanced her future writing opportunities for the magazine.

Others’ crafting of her authority as an everyday farm woman added yet another layer of ethos. As a result, Sayre had to maintain a tricky balance of modeling what she hoped for rural women while maintaining traditions expected of them. Additionally, the smart adjustments she made to her kitchen’s design parallel her (perhaps threatening) insistence that people must revise their rural perspectives in order to become more engaged world citizens, just as any farm kitchen can be renovated in order to become more effective and efficient. As the next section shows, Sayre was invested in maintaining in her work as a rhetor the multiple roles that Martens and Shank featured.

## **Establishing and Maintaining Multiple Roles to Model Authority**

In her own writing and speaking, Sayre strived to be interpreted as a supportive leader of farm women by advocating acceptable change that would not threaten farm women or the farm family structure but instead mobilize readers and listeners. Yet she also had to contend with the multiple roles she embodied and address the gender norms she subverted to accomplish her goals.

Significantly, the emphasis on gender threaded throughout Sayre’s Farm Institute speech ran the risk of turning away some audience members, a possibility that Sayre tempered by striving to unify her audience. Despite its indication of an important topic, her talk’s title, “The World Situation from a Woman’s Point of View,” which, as she notes early in her talk was assigned and not chosen, also marginalizes Sayre’s perspective—the speeches that come before and after hers are not qualified as a certain type of person’s point of view, but are instead positioned as authoritative, not needing justification or special characterization. But she quickly problematizes the habit of breaking issues down in a gendered binary in order to justify her place on the podium and make space for other women to occupy its authorial position:

I'm not exactly happy about the wording of the topic given me. It implies that the problems of reconstruction can be separated along the lines of gender. I have said over and over again that problems do not have gender; they are neither masculine nor feminine. The question of war and peace is not a "man's problem" or a "woman's problem." It is not a question of women for peace and men for war. (58)

Here Sayre takes on essentialism. She qualifies the importance of gender dynamics, and she directly addresses the notion of gendered authority, collapsing the experiences of women and men instead of fulfilling expectations to speak as a woman about women's issues. Instead of meeting assumptions, she mobilizes the conversation and asks to be interpreted as an educated person with a point of view, an expert.

Sayre works to subvert her ethos as a farm woman or even a leader of an international organization of women and instead invents a more nuanced authority on the ways women are misunderstood and underestimated. Women must be assumed to embody multiple roles at once. After describing her philosophy, a justification of addressing the topic of women that included stating that women should be considered as human beings and not marginalized as women, Sayre draws on Mary Ritter Beard's 1946 book *Woman as Force in History*. By featuring such secondary sources, Sayre further moved beyond occupying the podium as a woman to exposing her audience members to sources that may have been new to them.

Sayre wanted to be understood as a public scholar, a person drawing from academic work on how women have contributed to culture, the significant roles they have had. In her speech, "The World Situation," she refers to Beard's work regarding women as discovering the "peaceful art of agriculture" (59), but then she complicates this understanding of women as peacemakers by stating that Beards "points out that women as well as men have promoted wars in order to gain their own selfish purposes and have fought in wars side by side with men" (59). After addressing more ways that women are positioned to contribute to world affairs, Sayre issues a call that all people must act as world citizens and participate in world reconstruction, quoting Mahatma Gandhi on the duty of world citizenship (61) and extending these ideas to the notion of interdependence across the world. Here again Sayre urges her audience to build their own authority and become experts, to transition their roles and knowledge from private farm life to public places beyond the farm.

Sayre positions her audience members as also being occupants of multiple roles. She crafts them as decision makers who need to become informed, just as she has worked to educate herself and position herself as an expert on world reconstruction:

The decisions we have to make in these days are not easy. They are terrible and compelling. But the heart and the core of our choice does not lie in the compulsion of the atom bomb. It lies in the soul of men and women—in their moral and spiritual courage. (“The World Situation” 65)

Thus, Sayre again reiterates that world affairs belong to world citizens who are responsible for future global development.

Sayre’s authority and its multiplicity was also shifted and defined for her by the publications featuring her work. When this speech was condensed and published in *Farm Policy Forum* a few months later, its title was simplified to “The World from a Woman’s Point of View.” When the title appears at the start of the article, the font size for “the world” is much smaller than the font size for “From a Woman’s Point of View,” making obvious the publication’s perspective that Sayre’s gender is more important than her topic. Sayre’s femininity and relationships were again emphasized in the biography offered with the article, which describes her as “an Iowa farm mother.” Again she is positioned in a reassuring, nurturing manner on the farm before her credentials as a leader are described. Trust is secured through established norms before new, *multiple paths to authority* can be engaged.

Another article written about Sayre enhances her construction of multiple roles and adept ability to perform her authority. A description introducing her to readers of the “Successful Homemaking” section of *Successful Farming* represents this prominent feature of multiple roles. As in Martens and Shank’s profile article of Sayre, editor Hegerfeld uses the first sentence of her introduction of Sayre to assuage anxiety over Sayre’s comprehensive control of her domestic context: “Charming, grey-haired Mrs. Raymond Sayre of near Ackworth, Iowa, is energetic proof that a woman these days can be a neighbor to the world—and not neglect her home job, either.” Beyond highlighting Sayre’s appearance and agreeableness, Hegerfeld describes Sayre’s family obligations and notes that “Sunday night waffle-suppers are her delight” (90). On the following page, Sayre’s own article, “Farm Women Must Be Good World Neighbors,” opens with her oft-told anecdote about being in Brussels in the morning and New York in the evening and then turns quickly to her argument that world citizens “all suffer from the same economic and political ills. No longer can any quarantine keep our part of the world immune” (91). This juxtaposition of multiple types of authority reinforces the significance of situated and invented ethos relying on one another to push the boundaries of identity construction and enable a rhetor to perform multiple identities simultaneously. On the one hand, Sayre loves waffles, just like the average *Successful Farming* reader. But on the other hand, she has flown transatlantically and studied economics and politics, setting her apart from her audience.



Sayre's ethos emphasizes the between spaces of farm women's lives, liminally and simultaneously both public and private. Because the postwar era is a time of transition, Sayre helps to model how gender roles can transition too. Using a term like "good world neighbors" in the title again builds on the reassuring, Midwestern, rural values of helpfulness and kindness, giving those upheld characteristics global implications.

Sayre's presence in *Successful Farming* is thus both subversive, since she is pushing on gender norms with her invented ethos of globalized perspectives, and expected, since her situated ethos as a farm woman who cooks for her family must also be pictured to maintain readers' comfort with her. Clearly Hegerfeld believed Sayre needed to be made agreeable to readers of *Successful Farming* or at least to justify why she was a featured authority as a writer for the magazine. If readers were to accept Sayre's authority on world citizenship, it had to be legitimized by her domestic acumen. A photo pub-



Figure 2: Titled "Homebody," the caption to this clipping reads as follows: Mrs. Raymond Sayre of Ackworth, Iowa, is the voice of the American farm woman. Dissatisfied, as a young wife, with farm living conditions, she decided to make the country home the best place in which to live. Now travels thousands of miles, addresses half a million women annually on farm home modernization. Between trips, Mrs. Sayre keeps house and cares for four children. MS 19 Sayre Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Iowa City, IA. 20 February 2015. Used with permission of SHSI.



lished with the article features Sayre positioned at her dining room desk as in Figure 3, this time pointing to a spot on her globe with a fountain pen. Another image shows her peeling potatoes in her kitchen while adjusting the knob on her kitchen radio. Both images are captioned with the sentence, "Mrs. Sayre keeps in touch with world news even during busy days of housekeeping" ("Farm Women" 91). Notably, the cover of this particular issue of *Successful Farming* features a young girl having a tea party with her doll, reinforcing the magazine's commitment to securing feminine roles for women.

Sayre, too, however, maintained her commitment to such roles and knew their essential importance to keep the farm running. Sayre's scrapbooks, evidence of her self-curated ethos, feature side-by-side publicity about her international activities as well as published write-ups and photographs of her domestic work. Figure 2 displays clipping Sayre included in her scrapbook that shows that she valued her family roles as well as her civic roles and wanted to remember all the ways her life was featured in publications. The image shows Sayre as a typical farm woman, resting outside after gathering flowers from her garden. Contrasting this image with the conference room photo in Figure 1 reveals Sayre's investment in maintaining her farm persona as well as her professional identity, both within the private pages of her scrapbook and in public perceptions of her work.

Readers of Sayre's work know that the topics she addressed were much more diverse than domestic matters of the home, and this brief biography buries in the middle the mention of her international work, placing this work within a domestic frame of Sayre's roles as wife and mother. This photo is pasted into the scrapbook without any publication information, yet its presence in Sayre's album shows her desire to include all versions and representations of herself and her lifework. Without the other photos and written artifacts of Sayre's lifework, however, this depiction of Sayre does not fully illustrate the attitudes Sayre hoped to encourage or the expansive nature of her work.

In "Farm Women in the Midwest since 1945," Devine writes that in the years after 1945, "rural Midwestern women encountered both continuity and change in their work lives, families, and communities" (160). Sayre can be understood as someone not only who represented this mix of tradition and evolution, but also as someone who crafted identities that fit within established expectations in order to ultimately push boundaries and create new possibilities for women.

## Conclusion



Figure 3: MS 19 Sayre Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Iowa City, IA. 20 February 2015. Used with permission of SHSI.

Studying negotiated ethos and the multiplicity of roles through the work of Sayre models for rhetoric scholars how marginalized writers and speakers work to create new, authoritative positions for themselves. Inventing oneself as a rhetor requires ongoing efforts to maintain multiple types of authority. Understanding ethos historically also requires the effort to save artifacts and make them publicly available, an argument Sayre's archive also makes. One final image of Sayre secures her strategic construction of ethos and embodiment of multiple roles. Figure 3, published with her 1948 *Farmer's Magazine* article "World Situation

from a Woman's Point of View," demonstrates how she constructed herself for audiences and how she wanted to be interpreted as an authority. Pasted in her scrapbook, it serves as an icon of Sayre's negotiated ethos and modeling of multiple roles.

Accompanying a November 1948 article Sayre wrote for *Farmer's Magazine*, Figure 3 features Sayre at the desk she set up in her dining room, a place she refers to as her modified work space. Having arranged this scene for the photographer, she positions herself as a writer with an international perspective, within a home space traditionally set aside for meals served by women to their family and guests. The corner cabinet of dishes provided the backdrop,

making deliberate Sayre's persona of being a public figure who also gains authority from her private, domestic circumstances. She again occupies the space of a housewife, and as a politically engaged writer inviting her readers to see themselves as able to occupy multiple roles, possibly even convert their own dining rooms into spaces where they can think about, and perhaps write about, global issues and their relationship to agriculture.

The iconic globe and plume pen serve as prominent symbols that secure her identity as a globally minded writer and traveler. Sayre's smile, too, invites readers to understand her as a friendly person and not be threatened by her so-called "woman's point of view," the title of her article. She appears proud of her writing space and the work she accomplishes there. Several versions of photos like this one surface in the archive, showing Sayre's need to continually establish herself as a woman who occupies multiple roles.

A 2007 *Des Moines Register* article about Sayre, as well as Hoehnle's profile, speaks to the lasting effects of Sayre's rhetorical strategies. It characterizes Sayre as "Iowa's premier farm spokeswoman, [who] wielded clout throughout the world." Comments on her skill as an orator are also included:

Her goal—always—was to enable rural women to recognize their potential for contributing to society. She inspired women to broaden their views. She was called a dynamic speaker capable of raising goose bumps in her listeners. She was known for her friendly demeanor, bright attitude and common sense. (Longden)

Such an account matches the ambitions and rhetorical strategies exemplified in Sayre's archived materials. Hoehnle reports that in her final years, "Sayre was praised as a woman who never forgot her roots, a 'real farm woman' who remained a 'homey kind of person' despite world travels and acquaintance with presidents and royalty. It was her 'common touch' and 'plain speaking' that had both endeared Sayre to other farm women and fueled her advancement in their ranks" ("*Iowa Clubwomen Rise*" 44). Clearly her negotiated ethos and ability to take on multiple roles in order to model authority left an impression with those who read her writing and heard her speak.

Sayre's artifacts make a significant contribution to rhetoric scholars' understanding of how women crafted rhetorical roles for themselves, especially in light of recent interest in transnational feminist rhetorics and rural rhetorics. For example, Schell's recent work on Wangari Muta Maathai and Vandana Shiva, both children of farmers who draw on their agricultural knowledge and history, links contexts of transnationality, women's rhetoric, agriculture, and peace. Schell argues that Maathai, a Kenyan Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the Greenbelt movement, "modeled a form of transnational ecological literacy, feminist rhetoric, and global citizenship that demonstrates her

commitment to her homeland, to empowering rural women to undertake sustainable development, and to cross-border ecological activism" (588). Schell further argues that Shiva, an Indian environmental activist and feminist, makes use of "symbolic action—words, signs, images—and direct action to persuade citizens across the globe to pay attention to the issue of biodiversity" (32). A generation earlier, Sayre worked within the constraints of postwar Midwestern farm life to reach rural women across the globe and prompt them to harness their capabilities for political engagement.

I conduct this archival research on Sayre in order to connect feminist historiography, and its emphasis on amplifying the work of marginalized rhetors, with current research on ethos and feminist transnational rhetoric, hoping to cultivate a historical understanding of women's transnational rhetorical work from the farm and other rural locations. To do so is to reject assumptions that rural citizens were not engaged in the larger world around them and to argue that they in fact saw themselves as global citizens. As Donehower, Hogg, and Schell maintain, "this is an important time to be working on rural literacies, rhetorics, and pedagogies as we confront environmental and economic challenges of unprecedented scope and impact: global climate change, the end of peak oil, rising food prices, and a worldwide economic recession." They note that scholars in rhetoric and composition have already begun to study how rural communities will contribute to global citizenship and sustainable economic development (xv). Analyzing Sayre's archival materials contributes to this effort.

As Ritchie and Ronald put it, "women must first invent a way to speak in the context of being silenced and rendered invisible" (xvii). Likewise, a generation earlier, Sayre strove to prevent farm women from seeing themselves as invisible, silent citizens. Like Ritchie and Ronald, I hope that studying Sayre and animating her archive for rhetorical studies will document "the means women used to claim their rights as rhetors [and ensure] that those means will, indeed, remain available and visible for women" (xvii). Sayre offers a vibrant model to those of us who study rhetoric as a way that people use writing and speaking to change their own lives and the lives of others—a vibrant model that shows how authority can be invented and mobilized, cultivated from the farm and broadcast globally.

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## Figures

Figure 1: MS 19 Sayre Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Iowa City, IA. 20 February 2015. Used with permission of SHSI.

Figure 2: MS 19 Sayre Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Iowa City, IA. 20 February 2015. Used with permission of SHSI.

Figure 3: MS 19 Sayre Collection. State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI), Iowa City, IA. 20 February 2015. Used with permission of SHSI.

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## About the Author

**Abby M. Dubisar** researches the intersections of gender, power, and peace. Some of her most recent presentations and publications analyze cookbooks published by women peace activists, the persuasive strategies of women farmers, and food politics' reliance on regressive gender norms. Dr. Dubisar is an Assistant Professor of English and affiliate faculty member in women's and gender studies at Iowa State University, where she teaches classes on women's/feminist rhetoric, activist rhetorics, gender and communication, and popular culture analysis.

**Applegarth, Risa. *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2014. Print. 267 pages.**

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Colleen Derkatch

In *Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science*, Risa Applegarth tracks the discursive transformation of early American anthropology into a rigorous science of human culture. Winner of the 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Outstanding Book Award, this book centers specifically on genre change and resistance in the field's "burgeoning culture of professionalism" (2) between the 1885 founding of the Women's Anthropological Society and the end of World War II. At its highest level of abstraction, Applegarth's book makes two key moves: first, it shows how American anthropology, once open even to amateurs and hobbyists, coalesced into an expert-driven scientific practice; and, second, it examines how the women and people of color marginalized by the narrowing of the discipline resisted and remade its dominant genres to carve space for themselves to speak. *Rhetoric in American Anthropology* weaves a textured rhetorical history of a nascent academic discipline that will appeal to a wide range of readers, including rhetoricians, genre theorists, historians, feminist scholars, anthropologists, and those interested in the dynamic interplay of discourse, knowledge, science, gender, race, and power.

Applegarth works within the long tradition in rhetorical and genre studies of viewing genres not merely as text types linked by shared rhetorical features but as discursive productions that perform social, ideological, and epistemological actions. Within this tradition, genres are themselves imprinted with the situations and interests they serve, and so they preserve something of their contexts of use. For that reason, Applegarth argues, examining competing and complementary genres produced at the same time for similar purposes can help us learn more about the situations they served. Applegarth focuses on four genres from early American anthropology, each comprising an individual chapter: the ethnographic monograph, which she identifies as the period's dominant genre, and three countergenres that emerged in response to it, the field autobiography, the folklore collection, and the ethnographic novel. Applegarth uses these genres and the historical contexts they preserve to tell



a larger story about “broader tensions between gender, race, and access to rhetorical resources of scientific discourse” (11).

Applegarth characterizes her approach as a “rhetorical archaeology,” which she aligns with digging through sedimentary layers to construct a narrative about not only the discursive forms that have survived but also those that have failed or faded over time. To explain the value of her approach, Applegarth extends Carol Berkenkotter’s earlier invocation of genres as historical artifacts akin to “pottery shards, bones, and rock strata” (3):

This research practice understands genres as material instantiations of a community’s norms, values, and priorities and investigates genre change to unearth and envision the prior life of a community. Like pottery shards, genres are only partial fragments of the rhetorical life they enable. Like bones, however, genres are also foundational fragments, structures upon which a host of more fleeting, less easily preserved rhetorical practices are built. And like rock strata, genres and individual texts can be read sequentially, revealing in their spatial and temporal relations the operation of incremental or abrupt processes of change. (175)

Whereas a conventional account of anthropology’s progress as a discipline might focus on the triumph of its dominant genre, the ethnographic monograph, Applegarth shows that early and nearly forgotten genres have equally important stories to tell—if only we have the patience and good sense to listen for them.

Listening to the stories of these alternative genres pays off in multiple ways. Most significantly, Applegarth’s rhetorical-archaeological approach is a feminist act of historical recovery. Although typical narratives of scientific progress naturalize science’s objective stance—its apparent “view from nowhere” (Nagel)—*Rhetoric in American Anthropology* instead reminds us that the discipline’s apparent neutrality is premised on the subjectivity of a particular (white, male) sort of observer. By shining a light on the subject positions that are erased within the discipline’s dominant genre, Applegarth creates space for us to hear the voices that were crowded out by that genre.

Although the chapters of the book build on and respond to those previous, each works individually as a case study of a different genre so it makes sense to discuss them in turn. The introduction, “Gender, Genre, and Knowledge in the Welcoming Science,” establishes the book’s context and core arguments, setting into place key threads that are picked up and woven together across the book: the effects of professionalization both as a point of access to the discipline and, somewhat paradoxically, as a means of masking inequality; the rhetorical construction of anthropology as a contribution to scientific

knowledge; and strategies of resistance employed by women and people of color to produce valid anthropological knowledge. Importantly, Applegarth's focus both in the introduction and in the rest of the book is bidirectional, examining how marginalized scholars gained access to professional anthropology and how they used that access to push back against the discipline's problematic norms. One thing I found unusual about the introduction is that it focuses more on the book's contributions to various fields of scholarship than on gathering together its core rhetorical principles or forecasting the chapters to come. More explicit signposting both in the introduction and over the rest of the book would have helped me stay oriented as a reader and keep its core arguments at top-of-mind. Applegarth's rich and generous analysis is sometimes more implicit than it could be.

The first chapter, "Ethnographic Monographs: Genre Change and Rhetorical Scarcity," explains in further detail the professionalization of early American anthropology vis-à-vis the rise of the ethnographic monograph as its dominant genre. Applegarth notes that, prior to the 1920s, anthropology was accessible to anyone capable of observing and faithfully recording observations. Women were particularly crucial to the enterprise because they were able to access and observe domestic customs that would have been out of reach of their male colleagues. Following the first world war, however, anthropology's boundaries shrank with its increasing alignment with science as the product of acquired expertise. Applegarth cites Bronislaw Malinowski's 1922 ethnographic monograph *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* as emblematic of this new professional science of anthropology, although she explains that it is not the text itself that was significant for this shift but the genre it "inhabits and alters" (29) because that genre "draws a tighter circle around a smaller community of legitimate practitioners" (27). Applegarth introduces the concept of *rhetorical scarcity*—"a manufactured situation of intense and increasing constraint within a genre that significantly restricts rhetors' access to key rhetorical resources" (29)—to explain how genres do not change only through natural evolution but can also be manipulated to restrict access to a genre and the contexts it serves. For the ethnographic monograph, such restriction is built into the genre itself through, for example, invocation of scientific methods and language, thereby marginalizing women and people of color in the production of anthropological knowledge.

Toward the end of the first chapter, Applegarth establishes her warrant for the remaining chapters: "Historical genre study can remind us that the textual practices that won out in a community existed in relation to other rhetorical possibilities" (55). One of those "other rhetorical possibilities" is the subject of the second chapter, "Field Autobiographies: Rhetorical Recruitment and Embodied Ethnography." Whereas the ethnographic monograph assumes a

scientific prose style that deemphasizes the researcher's own subjective experience in the field, the field autobiography places that experience at the center. Blending technical elements of scholarly research with personal, narrative elements of autobiography, researchers working within this genre speak from an identifiable position grounded in a body and a set of experiences that cannot be divorced from the researcher's observations. Key to her analysis of Ann Axtell Morris's *Digging in Yucatan* and *Digging in the Southwest* and Gladys Reichard's *Spider Woman*, Applegarth argues that the field autobiography performs what Wendy Sharer calls "genre work," wherein the invocation of a specific generic form allows a writer both "to meet and to contest community-based discursive norms simultaneously" (63). I will note that I was surprised to learn, nearly 10 pages into the chapter, that there are only 3 examples of the field autobiography genre, two of which are by the same author. Because of the small corpus size, Applegarth's summative statements about the field autobiography as a *genre* sometimes felt under-resourced.

In chapters three and four, Applegarth showcases her rich historical research and careful, close analysis of her primary materials. In "Folklore Collections: Professional Positions and Situated Representations," she examines how two women of color, Yankton Nakota writer Ella Cara Deloria, and African-American novelist, playwright, and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, countered or subverted the colonial impulses of the academic genre of the folklore collection. From the perspective of rhetoric, I found this chapter particularly compelling because Applegarth enumerates and describes a set of four rhetorical strategies that enact colonial values in typical folklore collections (101) and then offers a detailed discussion of how Deloria's *Dakota Texts* and Hurston's *Mules and Men* subvert those strategies. Applegarth demonstrates how both writers employ the genre to simultaneously establish their professional identity as producers of legitimate anthropological knowledge and stretch the boundaries of that identity to encompass their own (nonwhite, nonmale) subject positions: "by taking up the folklore collection genre *differently*—by writing from an overtly racialized and gendered position, as well as enacting other kinds of disruptions—these authors remake the knowledge that genre enacts" (98).

The final chapter, "Ethnographic Novels: Educational Critiques and Rhetorical Trajectories," continues Applegarth's detailed analysis, this time focusing on ethnographic novels such as Gladys Reichard's *Dezba, Woman of the Desert*. According to Applegarth, ethnographic fiction combines the generic affordances of narrative fiction with the specificity of ethnographic observations by presenting close-up detail about an individual or group within a fictional story arc. This chapter's key insight is that, through discursive strategies within the ethnographic novel genre such as realism and holism, "anthropologists

position themselves as experts, assert the accuracy of their claims, and reinforce their authority to speak publicly about a specific culture or community" (144). These strategies "transfer epistemic authority to the portrayals and critiques located within even these fictional texts," thereby enfranchising marginalized authors by "position[ing] their fictional portrayals as *knowledge*" (144).

I came to *Rhetoric in American Anthropology* from several half-steps outside its subject area (I am a rhetorician of health and medicine and a health humanities scholar), and so my main criticism of the book is also kind of a half-compliment: I would have liked to have heard more throughout—more about the historical-professional contexts about which Applegarth writes; more about the texts themselves (their antecedents, their circulation and impact, their rhetorical construction); more about the extent to which other scientific disciplines viewed anthropology as a science; more about Applegarth's own research methods; and more about the specific rhetorical concepts that she discusses throughout. Applegarth weaves a compelling and lucid history of how marginalized researchers gained voices in early American anthropology but the story itself is somewhat elliptical and it often took me a while to connect the dots. Bringing the book's structure closer to the surface might make Applegarth's stunning rhetorical archaeology somewhat more accessible. This criticism should not, however, diminish the importance of Applegarth's contribution to rhetorical genre studies, feminist scholarship, and the history of anthropology. In the final pages of her book, Applegarth argues that

feminist scholars should create historical accounts that can help us resist viewing historical erasures as markers of merit, or as evidence confirming the limited roles women have played in rhetorical and scientific traditions. Instead, we might actively investigate such gaps and erasures, perhaps finding evidence instead of discriminatory memory practices that have systematically eclipsed the rhetorical, scientific, and public innovations of people of color, women, and others positioned disadvantageously relative to official memories. (181)

*Rhetoric in American Anthropology: Gender, Genre, and Science* makes a crucial and stunning first step toward this larger project of feminist recuperation.

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## About the Author

**Colleen Derkatch** is associate professor of rhetoric in the Department of English at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada. She is author of *Bounding Biomedicine: Evidence and Rhetoric in the New Science of Alternative Medicine* (University of Chicago Press, 2016) and numerous articles and chapters on rhetoric of health and medicine.

**Buchanan, Lindal. *Rhetorics of Motherhood*.  
Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms.  
Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2013. Print.  
200 pages.**

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Dalyn Luedkte

In July 2015, Hillary Clinton made the first of many speeches in the long run up to the 2016 elections and, though she was very familiar to the voting public, something significant had changed since her previous White House bid. Namely, Chelsea Clinton gave birth to a daughter named Charlotte and Hillary Clinton became a grandmother. This change in maternal status was on full display in that speech as Clinton discussed being at the hospital for Charlotte's birth and the responsibility she feels to enact long-term change so that all children, not just her own granddaughter, are given opportunities to succeed. It was clear, as Anna North noted in *The New York Times*, "Not only will Mrs. Clinton not be bowing out of the presidential race to care for her grandchild, she's made her grandmother status central to her message." Indeed, Charlotte continued to show up during stump speeches and Chelsea Clinton herself hit the campaign trail for her mother, giving speeches and sending out emails to potential supporters. Amber Kinser argues in the foreword to *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, "We do seem to have a bit of an infatuation with motherhood and, for the most part, we don't like to think of it as a strategy, of employing it adroitly to achieve particular social or personal ends or, more accurately but perhaps less palatably, deploying it to achieve them" (Buchanan xiii). Clinton, like both Sarah Palin and Michelle Obama who are discussed in chapter one of *Rhetorics of Motherhood*, embodies the discomfort people feel about the obvious deployment of motherhood as a rhetorical strategy.

Lindal Buchanan explores this slippery, vexing terrain of motherhood as it has been deployed by both women and men through three case studies that span the twentieth century. The book is divided into four chapters: a theoretical framework for analyzing motherhood in public discourse and one chapter for each of three case studies of motherhood in public discourse. Buchanan begins chapter one, "Theorizing Motherhood in Public Discourse," with an epigraph by John McCain that lays the groundwork for the theory to come. In it, McCain announces Sarah Palin as his running mate, framing her history as beginning in the PTA and defining her as "devoted wife and mother of five."

Drawing on Lyotard's use of denotation and connotation, Buchanan clearly illustrates how the image of Palin with her son is both a simple image of a mother holding her son and a savvy rhetorical move that aims capitalize on motherhood's positive cultural associations; motherhood helps her connect strongly with her conservative audience but also subtly challenges them, and undermines her, because her appearance as a mother on the national stage moves the Mother, which Buchanan capitalizes when discussing the ideological construction or cultural code, from the private to the public sphere. Because of its gendered nature, the Mother advances and obstructs, benefits and detracts, frees and detains—much like its counterpart, the Woman: “The devil term Woman and the god term Mother are rhetorical expressions of the code of motherhood and overarching system of gender; they provide speakers with immediately recognizable benefits (and culturally resonant) stereotypes, each comprised of well known qualities and associations” (8). In addition to explicating the complicated relationship between gender and motherhood, Buchanan also notes that there are significant gaps between ideas about motherhood and mothers' lived practices, specifically in the ways that motherhood is coded to privilege white, heterosexual mothers, which results in serious consequences for mothers who fail to fall within these normative practices.

This coding of motherhood as white and heterosexual is particularly significant—and problematic—in the rhetoric of Margaret Sanger, the twentieth-century birth control advocate. In chapter two, Buchanan focuses on Sanger's efforts to harness the rhetorical power of the Mother to change her image from a militant, activist “woman writer” to a mother of two—and, specifically, a mother with a righteous cause. Buchanan argues, “Motherhood provided Sanger with a set of shared precepts that enabled her to promote feminist objectives in an accessible, attractive, and nonthreatening manner and persuade women to embrace novel ideas about reproductive self-determination” (27). As suggested in chapter one, however, the coding of motherhood leaves out many mothers, and Sanger's deployment of motherhood is no different in that she depicted the stereotypical user of birth control to be a white, married homemaker. While acknowledging these legitimate criticisms, Buchanan argues for greater attention to the rhetorical context within which Sanger was operating. Sanger crafted her ethos using maternalism, which emphasized both the familial importance of a woman's role as wife and mother but also the Mother's social role in maintaining a just and moral public. This change in Sanger's rhetoric, from the radical class warrior fighting alongside her brothers to morally righteous mother defending those less fortunate, allowed her to successfully expand her audience but also worked to recast “female proletarians from class warriors to victims in need of rescue” (32), an unfortunate move that opened the door for the eugenic rhetorics that Sanger

has become known for. In addition to the ways Sanger negotiated multiple audiences and spaces as a rhetor, Buchanan also analyzes how she crafted her ethos within and across multiple genres, particularly photography and film. Newspapers and periodicals covered her *Woman Rebel* trial using a family portrait constructed by Sanger, which shows her with her two sons. As Buchanan points out, she is the epitome of the white, conservative homemaker with her loose hair and dainty lace collar. The fact that the photograph was distributed widely: a sampling in the Library of Congress includes 49 papers that feature the photograph, indicates how well this visual depiction of motherhood resonated with audiences of the time. The consequences of Sanger's rhetoric have been long lasting: "Sanger compromised her politics and sacrificed the reproductive interests of far too many women for far too long. Her accomplishments, however, were also substantial, contributing to the creation of a legal and social environment that recognized women's right to control their own bodies. Sadly, such environments are fragile, susceptible to backlash and deterioration" (62).

In contrast to Sanger, who used motherhood to her benefit in public discourse, Diane Nash, leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), illustrates the dangers of motherhood. In 1962, Nash decided to uphold the SNCC's jail-no-bail policy by agreeing to begin a two-year prison term while she was pregnant with her first child. The jail-no-bail strategy was designed to avoid the economic burden such fines places on nonviolent activist organizations and, more importantly, put pressure on the justice system by refusing to support its immoral practices. Therefore, instead of appealing her confinement, Nash accepted her prison term, explaining her decision in two documents: a press release and a letter to civil rights workers. Chapter three begins with a paragraph from Nash's press release within which she employs a variety of maternal appeals. Although Nash's willingness to enter jail while pregnant was at odds with typical notions of motherhood, Buchanan argues that Nash's particular framing of her decision—to "hasten that day when my child and all children will be free, not only on the day of their birth but for all their lives" (qtd. in Buchanan 70)—drew upon common assumptions about mothers in that Nash, as a soon-to-be mother, was giving up her own selfish comforts to suffer for all children. That said, Buchanan also argues that Nash herself did not rely on motherhood to advance her cause. Through an analysis of Nash's eighteen-paragraph letter to civil rights workers, Buchanan effectively shows that Nash's preferred rhetoric focused on logical, well-reasoned arguments. Others, however, have focused on Nash's pregnancy and impending motherhood, "[...] overlooking her strategies and organizational contributions to civil rights initiatives. Such depictions ultimately pushed Nash into the background of movement history" (64). Buchanan focuses on three subsequent



historical accounts of Nash's appeal revocation (her stated reasons for not appealing her confinement), which deploy common narratives about race and gender, thereby, Buchanan argues, making Nash's contributions to the civil rights movement invisible. First, Buchanan shows how Manning Marable, author of *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, acknowledges that Nash is a committed activist, like her SNCC counterpart Bob Moses, but unlike Moses Manning frames his discussion of Nash by highlighting her marriage and pregnancy. The other two antiracist historical accounts, Buchanan argues, similarly deploy the Mother to erase Nash's contributions to the civil rights movement. In *In Struggle*, Clayborn Carlson suggests that Nash's pregnancy is a publicity stunt, and Taylor Branch, author of *Pillar of Fire*, describes how Nash's husband acted as his wife's lawyer and argued with the judge on his wife's behalf—an event that never happened since Nash was represented by a lawyer. These popular accounts illustrate that “Nash's marginalization transpired through a double movement: first, antiracist historians' perspective reinforces inequitable gender relations, and second, their allusions to the Mother flattened the accomplished and multifaceted organizer and projected a simple, authoritative stereotype in her place” (73).

In the final case study, Buchanan details a new development in the social and cultural history of the rhetorics of motherhood—specifically within the political realm—and the consequences it has for women. As she explains, “Traditionally, pregnancy has been framed as a holistic process that unfolds within a woman's body over the course of nine months and culminates in the birth of a living person and legal subject” (88), but this changed dramatically when President George W. Bush signed Laci and Conner's Law: The Unborn Victims of Violence Act (UVVA) into law. While many states had passed feticide laws, Laci and Conner's Law was introduced to ensure federally that when a pregnant woman and her fetus are murdered the perpetrator is held accountable for two victims or, more importantly, two lives. Opponents of this bill introduced an alternative in the Motherhood Protection Act (MPA), which recognized only the mother as a victim but imposed greater penalties for the termination of pregnancy. Buchanan argues that MPA advocates focused on the primacy of women's rights, “confining pro-choice rhetors chiefly to logos, minimizing opportunities for pathos, and damaging ethos” (94). UVVA proponents, on the other hand, rhetorically used the full power of the motherhood code by focusing on both the mother, Laci Petersen, as the wholesome, protective Mother betrayed by her husband, and the *preborn child*, Laci's son, Conner. By pointing out the complexities of these rhetorical choices, Buchanan effectively brings the reader back to the early framing of the Mother as a god term and Woman as the devil term. Buchanan explores the complexity of motherhood's rhetorical force and the difficulty of countering it, ending with the argument

that “[i]nvolving powerful cultural codes, creating connections with others, and stimulating trust and feelings are the missing elements in current pro-choice discourse” (114). This focus on current pro-choice discourse moves the analysis of motherhood into the current political realm, establishing how rhetorics of motherhood continue to affect women both socially and politically.

The good news, however, is that Buchanan makes it abundantly clear that the women in her book demonstrate not only individual resourcefulness and rhetorical savvy but also that motherhood is not an unchanging monolith—that people, events, and issues move across and within its construct, changing it as they go. Buchanan also gives us a framework from which to view current political events. When Hillary Clinton accepted the Democratic Party’s nomination for President, she invoked motherhood in ways both personal and rhetorical: “Standing here as my mother’s daughter, and my daughter’s mother, I am so happy this day has come. I’m happy for grandmothers and little girls and everyone in between.” Buchanan’s research gives us the tools to understand how Clinton and others might use the Mother in specific contexts and “exposes the construct’s seams and structuration and creates opportunities for transforming motherhood and gender” (124).

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## About the Author

**Dalyn Luedtke** is Assistant Professor of English and Communications at Norwich University, the oldest private military college in the United States. At Norwich, she has had the opportunity to teach courses as varied as first-year writing, *Introduction to Mass Media*, *Advanced Composition*, *Rhetoric of Popular Culture*, and *Professional and Technical Writing*. Her research focuses on television, digital writing, and pedagogy, and she is currently working on a project that argues for the pedagogical use of reality television in the writing classroom.

**Stenberg, Shari J. *Composition Studies Through a Feminist Lens*. Anderson: Parlor Press, 2013. Print. 120 pages.**

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Kelly Whitney

I admit when I first picked up Shari Stenberg's *Composition Studies Through a Feminist Lens*, I was skeptical of how thoroughly a book a mere half-inch thick could capture the rich scholarship in composition as read through a feminist perspective. Yet Stenberg impressively packs into 100 pages a coherent and comprehensive introduction to topics that emerge at the intersection of composition, rhetoric, and feminist theory. The third installment of the *Lenses on Composition Studies*, a series intended to introduce graduate students and upper-level undergraduates in composition to the field's major topics, this book "aims to spotlight how feminist contributions have made Composition Studies a more inclusive, innovative, and exciting field" (4). Stenberg's approach to structuring the book allows her not only to present concepts, tensions, and histories in rhetoric and composition but also to expose readers to various feminist research methodologies. In each chapter, Stenberg identifies a specific topic in composition studies and synthesizes feminist scholars' re-readings, responses to, and critiques of the topic. This structure demonstrates to her readers both the landscape of composition and examples of feminist theory in action.

Stenberg begins the book with the chapter "Composition's Origin Stories Through a Feminist Lens" in which she reviews and retells three of composition's origin stories, stories with which many readers of *Peitho* are likely familiar. She first discusses Harvard's entrance exam as the origin of first-year composition, whose purpose was to "fix" student writing. Next, she describes composition's move to legitimize itself as an intellectual field by adopting classical rhetoric as its ancestor. In the third origin story, Stenberg aligns the process movement's commitment to scientific methods and inquiry with its efforts to validate composition as a field of knowledge production. Though the origin stories themselves aren't told through a feminist perspective, Stenberg reminds her readers that a story always "depends on the lens of the storyteller" (3) and follows each origin story with purposeful summaries of how others have recast each story through a "feminist lens," or historiography, a research method endorsed by many feminist scholars. These feminist historiography

projects bring together topoi from feminist theory and composition studies to reveal the origin stories' effects on the field today. For example, composition's origin of "fixing" students' writing marks it as a service field to the university, a status that has led to sexual divisions of labor, exploitative labor practices, and the institution dismissing the intellectual rigor of the field.

Though the Harvard entrance exam and process movement origin stories are occasionally referenced throughout the rest of the book, the two subsequent chapters address the implications of the classical rhetoric origin story on composition studies. "Whether or not classical rhetoric is composition's ancestor," she argues, "the *values* of masculine classical rhetoric have forcefully shaped what we in contemporary western culture consider good argument and writing: linear, persuasive, objective-sounding, and clear" (20, original emphasis). While classical rhetoric may have legitimized composition as an intellectual field, the rhetorical tradition represents and privileges a small group of people and determines what the field values as good writing, tensions she addresses in the following two chapters.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Stenberg reviews feminist recovery work and scholarship on identity intersections to denaturalize master narratives of the universal thinker and the universal woman. In Chapter 2, "The Rhetorical Tradition Through a Feminist Lens: Locating Women," she challenges these master narratives by reviewing feminist scholars' recovery work on marginalized and silenced women. Embracing "overlooked" women's rhetoric rejects the concept of a universal rational thinker and, in turn, expands the rhetorical tradition beyond masculinist standards. To perform this recovery work, she says, "[W]e can hear women's voices in the tradition(s) if we listen hard enough, or, in some cases, if we listen for different *kinds* of rhetoric" (20). For example, women such as Aspasia, Diotima, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Margaret Fuller "borrow[ed] and appropriate[ed] rhetorical strategies to participate in the public sphere," (20) and recovery projects of these women's work "ask us to think in new ways about what counts as legitimate knowledge, argument, and speech acts" (22). Similarly, in Chapter 3, "Difference, Form, and Topoi Through a Feminist Lens," Stenberg references intersectional identity scholarship by Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Hélène Cixous, and Trinh T. Minh-ha and their efforts to denaturalize the universal woman. Accounting for identity intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and language avoids collapsing differences among women and claims legitimacy to the personal "as a way to enhance and further knowledge" (47). In both chapters, we see a move away from "the seemingly 'universal' rhetorical standards of clear, linear, logical prose" and toward new ways of thinking about what counts as knowledge, argument, and inquiry (44).

While the first half of the book addresses a few ways scholars have challenged and expanded the rhetorical tradition, the second half discusses the rhetorical tradition's influence on the composition classroom. In Chapter 4: "Teacher and Student Identity Through a Feminist Lens," Stenberg rereads through a feminist perspective three metaphors of the composition instructor. Two of the metaphors emerge from two of the origin stories: the "teacher as disciplinarian/mother/maid" metaphor in response to composition's purpose of "fixing" students and the "teacher as nurturer" metaphor in response to the process movement. Read through a feminist lens that interrogates traditional gender roles and expectations, yet another feminist research methodology she highlights, we see how these metaphors circulate gendered expectations of the instructor and lead to questionable labor practices. She ends the chapter with a discussion of the current pedagogical moment metaphor: "composition teacher as rhetor." In this metaphor, the instructor takes a rhetorical approach to pedagogy, meaning the instructor attends to the moment and context instead of enacting a prescriptive approach or identity. By stressing the importance of *kairos* and diverse identities, she reminds her readers there are many ways to espouse a feminist pedagogy, which is a particularly helpful message for her intended readers who are developing their identities and commitments as teachers.

In the final two chapters, Stenberg highlights the ways ideological analyses lead to different forms of feminist revision, particularly regarding what counts as research, argument, and writing in composition studies. In Chapter 5, "Research and Writing Through a Feminist Lens: A Focus on Experience," she discusses revisionist work motivated by reflexive practices. In an example of her own reflexive practice, Stenberg describes a classroom discussion wherein students list the rules they've been taught as to what constitutes academic writing, a discussion familiar to many composition instructors. Her students' responses are those many compositionists come to expect, such as no contractions, no first person, and good transitions, a reminder that classical rhetoric has forwarded a limiting and limited narrative of what counts as good writing and that many students have learned this narrative as academic writing dogma. Stenberg then leads students to "consider the assumptions and values that shape" the rules of good writing "instead of approaching [them] as neutral and universal" (70). An ideological analysis of these rules reveals "masculinist structures and practices" that feminist scholars seek to challenge and revise, and one way of doing this is through reflexive practices (75). Through reflexive practices, writers and researchers adopt new responsibilities and account for their language practices, power relations, politics of location, and personal experiences, and attending to these relationships shapes new ways of thinking about what counts as—and what it means to—research and write.

In another effort to promote the value of reflexive practices, Stenberg provides, throughout the book, questions for writing and discussion that offer her readers an opportunity to reflect on the ideas presented in each chapter, to conduct further research, and to respond to brief case studies. Including these questions throughout each chapter is an effective method to encourage her readers to engage with the book's concepts as students, teachers, and citizens in more critical and reflexive ways.

In Chapter 6, "Argument Through a Feminist Lens," Stenberg continues to discuss ideological analyses that lead to feminist revisionist approaches to argumentation. These approaches include negotiation, mediation, conversation, and rhetorical listening, all of which respond to the social nature of composing and avoid hierarchical relations of interaction that result from traditional monologic forms of argument. Highlighting feminist's revisionist work in these final two chapters offers an important lesson for the reader: what counts as academic argument is the product of an instructor's, a discipline's, and/or a community's beliefs about knowledge, evidence, and reason. Therefore, a critical look at argument surfaces its ideological commitments; how we assign, discuss, and evaluate writing shape students' beliefs on what it means to write and to be a writer.

Throughout the book, Stenberg is careful to present the complexities of feminist scholarship by locating convergences and divergences of feminist scholarship on composition. The introductory level of the book limits the depth in which Stenberg can capture competing feminist philosophies, yet she provides sufficient discussions of these philosophies to show her readers that a single feminist theory doesn't exist, and, more importantly, that diverging philosophies have contributed to more robust composition theories. Still, her most pointed commentary on composition and feminism comes in the epilogue and highlights this recursive value: "A feminist lens...does not rest upon final answers or closure; instead, it invites reflection, rethinking, and rewriting, so that feminist knowledge, writing, and classrooms are ever-evolving" (102). As we see, both feminist and composition theories are active and interactive scholarly pursuits that interrogate "what counts as knowledge, how we produce and share it, and who is considered a knower" (98). Her book, then, invites her readers to engage in "reflection, rethinking, and rewriting" of how they position themselves within composition studies.

The book appeals to practicing and aspiring composition instructors because it is readily applicable to classroom use. However, readers who expect to come away from this book with concrete lesson plans and projects to assign in their composition courses will be disappointed. Beyond the few short anecdotes of her own classroom experiences and those of other scholars, Stenberg smartly refrains from offering a compilation of classroom practice

activities. It seems that one of the main purposes of the book is to show that feminist theory is a valuable lens for re-thinking and re-seeing dominant narratives, and presenting a compilation of classroom practice activities would limit the potential for readers to engage in their own acts of re-thinking and re-seeing. Because she does not provide concrete lesson plans, she embraces the potential for her readers to function as feminist agents themselves, re-seeing and re-thinking their own classroom practices and pedagogical and feminist commitments.

Stenberg has produced a text that effectively and efficiently introduces emerging scholars to the composition field. This book would be appropriate as the representative introductory text on composition and feminist theories in an upper-level undergraduate or beginning graduate-level composition theory survey course or even for experienced teachers of composition to reflect on their own teaching practices and philosophies. Ultimately, this book serves as an excellent model for those practicing and aspiring composition instructors seeking to espouse feminist methodologies in their own pedagogy or scholarship.

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## About the Author

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## REVIEW ESSAY

# Rethinking Recovery Work: New Directions in Feminist Histories of Rhetoric

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Sarah Singer

Jack, Jordynn. *Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks*. Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: U of Illinois P, 2014. Print. 320 pages.

Jensen, Robin E. *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870-1924*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2010. Print. 264 pages.

Koerber, Amy. *Breast or Bottle?: Contemporary Controversies in Infant-Feeding Policy and Practice*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2013. Print. 192 pages.

As we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Coalition of Women/Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, historians of feminist rhetoric are shifting away from some of the formative traditions of feminist recovery work. K.J. Rawson has prompted us to consider how scholars have recovered women's rhetorics hetero and gender-normatively, without interrogating the very definition of "woman." Heather Brandstetter has urged us to question our beliefs about what and who should be recovered in her ongoing project about the history of selling sex in Wallace, Idaho. Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette have clarified how historians of feminist rhetoric might use methods and tools from the digital humanities to extend archival research practices ("Meaningful"). Even some scholars who pioneered these formative traditions have called for historiographers to extend their investigations to include contemporary women, since "they too may be forgotten" and may gain broader interdisciplinary appeal (Enoch, "Feminist"). Such a shift—especially the move to situate feminist histories of rhetoric in the present—engages with new questions about access, materiality, and the purpose of historiography that have emerged from more than thirty years of experimentation.

Three recent book-length studies both reclaim and rethink these concerns about the politics and practice of feminist rhetorical historiography. Jordynn Jack's *Autism and Gender: From Refrigerator Mothers to Computer Geeks* (2014); Robin E. Jensen's *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870-1924*



(2010); and Amy Koerber's *Breast or Bottle?: Contemporary Controversies in Infant-Feeding Policy and Practice* (2013) use feminist approaches to trace the rhetorical histories of three contemporary issues: the diagnosis, treatment, and production of knowledge about autism; the ambiguous discourses used to teach and discuss sex education; and the evolving (and highly rhetorical) public policy discourses that have shifted beliefs about the health benefits of breastfeeding. These texts present three main themes. The first theme, the continued practice of not speaking for others, reflects the strength and value of established feminist historiographic research traditions. To ensure that they do not gloss over or misrepresent the nuances of others' language and ideas, even when the narratives are racist or classist, Jack, Jensen, and Koerber carefully enmesh quotations from Autistic<sup>1</sup> individuals, nineteenth- and twentieth-century health reformers, and women who breastfeed.

The other two themes, recovering gendered everyday rhetorical practices in light of the present and applying multi-genre and mixed methods approaches, represent the next generation of feminist historiographic study. Sarah Hallenbeck (2012) argues for a "feminist-materialist" approach to rhetoric that prioritizes networked relations among rhetors instead of discretely recovering women. She asserts that this shift in perspective allows feminist rhetorical historiographers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of "how gender differences and norms become naturalized, enhanced, or diminished" in everyday practices (25). Since health issues affect large populations, it becomes all the more critical to study patterns in aggregate, without focusing on any one individual or any one specific approach. These authors likely take up multi-genre and mixed methods for the same reasons. Their analyses of scientific journal articles, health policies, posters from WWI, memoirs, self-help guides, YouTube videos, and more are put in conversation with interviews, focus group data, and dialogue from online forums to produce a more comprehensive understanding of these historical and contemporary controversies. Together, looking at the language of others, studying gendered everyday practices, and employing multi-genre and mixed methods moves the field forward by helping us better understand how power is gained, lost, and redistributed, and through what available means of persuasion.

Health, science, and medicine is one cluster in which everyday discourses about gender are produced and reified, making it a particularly salient area of focus for feminist rhetorical historiographers. Jack, Jensen, and Koerber are neither the first nor the only scholars to use feminist rhetorical methods to

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1 Following the rhetorical choices of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, I choose to capitalize the word Autistic when it is used to describe individual and group identities.

investigate questions about these topics. Since at least the 1980s, feminist theorists have publicly critiqued science and objectivity. Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body* (1987; 1992; 2001), Londa Schiebinger's *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (1993; 2004), and Susan Merrill Squier's *Babies in Bottles: Twentieth Century Visions of Reproductive Technologies* (1994) are three early examples of this work. So much has followed. Mary M. Lay (2000) and Susan Wells (2001) were among the first scholars to employ feminist rhetorical methods to examine health, science, and medicine-related texts, films, speeches, posters, and other material objects. The range of related publications since then (including Marika Seigel's *The Rhetoric of Pregnancy* and Wendy Hayden's *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism*, both of which were reviewed in earlier issues of *Peitho*) suggests that this is an established direction for future research. These feminist rhetorical studies of health, science, and medicine challenge us to consider how arguments about power, sex, gender, and other categories of identity are produced in everyday discourses, in effect disrupting the authority of more "legitimate," ostensibly more powerful, rhetorics that are portrayed as stable and ahistorical.

## The Continued Practice of Not Speaking for Others

Jack, Jensen, and Koerber continue the feminist rhetorical tradition of not speaking for others by intentionally making space for language used by research participants, health seekers, clinicians, and healthcare advocates. In an effort to shift the hierarchies implicit in most research endeavors, feminist scholars have long worked to examine research subjects in ways that reflect their extraordinary yet imperfect identities and experiences. While feminist scientists have recruited women and underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities to participate in clinical trials, feminist rhetoricians have recovered speeches, diaries, letters, instructional manuals, and other rhetorics written by and for women, people of color, people with disabilities, and people whose sex and gender identities disrupt hetero and gender-normative binaries. Crucially, although feminist rhetoricians use rhetorical and other modes of analysis to interpret these materials—and thus have opportunities to refigure rhetors' original language—they resist. Preserving language can be a deeply painful reminder of past and present cultural wrongdoing. It can also be a technique for honoring the carefully crafted rhetorical choices made by particular communities. Since Jack, Jensen, and Koerber work to recover gendered everyday practices in the past and present, their research calls for special attention to both of these possibilities. Their determination to speak respectfully about but not *for* the groups they study elevates expectations for ethical research in future interdisciplinary rhetorical scholarship.

Jack is explicit about her intention to prioritize the voices of individuals from the Autistic community, noting that “whenever possible I have sought to incorporate perspectives of [A]utistic people throughout the text, while also striving not to give the impression that there is a single, agreed-upon stance of the ‘[A]utistic community’ on any one issue” (30). Despite her attention to a diverse group of autism stakeholders (ranging from Autistic individuals to the doctors who diagnosed them), she consistently maintains this framework throughout the monograph. In Chapter 5, Jack studies blogs, internet forums, and memoirs to “better understand how [A]utistic individuals use and adapt gender discourses as tools for self-understanding” (184). For example, Jack reports that one person describes themselves as a “monogamous genderqueer bisexual happily living in a straight marriage who generally feels like a gay man in a woman’s body” (197). By bringing in the language of Autistic individuals, Jack both supports her claim that Autistic individuals invent nontraditional sex and gender discourses that disrupt traditional binaries and pays them respect by not paraphrasing their explanations of their identities.

In a similar fashion, Jensen supports her argument about racist, classist, and ableist sex education discourse through her readings of U.S. government campaigns such as “Fit to Win” (Chapter 3) as well as “Keeping Fit: An Exhibit for Young Men and Boys”; “Youth and Life: An Exhibit for Girls and Young Women”; and “Keeping Fit: For Negro Boys and Young Men” (Chapter 5). Jensen captures language and overarching concepts from films, poster series, and other ephemera to argue that, even though these “separate but equal” campaigns aimed to close the health disparities gap, they reaffirmed “common assumptions about traditional gender roles and racial hierarchies” (117). For example, Jensen analyzes a pamphlet that refers to individuals suffering from syphilis as “loony,” “poor half-wits” who were forced “behind the gates of one of these nut-farms” (75); this language was used to scare white soldiers into remaining abstinent during deployment. In another instance, Jensen includes the phrase “colored clandestine prostitutes,” which was one of the ways that the Committee on Training Camp Activities referred to African American women who, based on racist and gendered stereotypes, were thought to have exceptionally high rates of venereal disease (80). Jensen argues that the committee’s main concern was that these women could spread diseases to (supposedly) blameless white male soldiers, not helping the women get treatment or health education. These language choices reinforce the notion that sex education in the Progressive Era focused on the health and wellbeing of white men, thereby limiting access to key healthcare information for women and men of color.

Although Koerber includes language directly drawn from infant feeding policies and recommendations, she prioritizes language from interviews in her monograph. In Chapter 3, Koerber quotes from both a phone interview

with Dr. Lawrence Gartner, the chair of the committee that wrote the 1997 *American Academy of Pediatrics* policy statement on infant feeding (60), and Jackie, a La Leche leader and one of Koerber's qualitative research participants (70). The inclusion of these diverse perspectives allows readers to better understand how infant feeding policies have been shaped rhetorically and how they challenged traditional medical authorities in public contexts. Koerber does not risk mischaracterizing the ideas of her interviewees by paraphrasing them, even when they reveal information that complicates her claims. For instance, Koerber quotes four women's discussions of "breastfeeding failure" in Chapter 5 even though two women's stories do not fully support her argument that rhetorical and material circumstances prevent women from breastfeeding. Koerber also weaves in her personal perspective as a pro-breastfeeding advocate. This choice necessarily complicates the boundaries of "objectivity," a standard that is still prized in some mixed methods research studies, but it allows Koerber to engage more openly with the language and ideas of her participants.

More broadly, the continued practice of not speaking for others in recovery work suggests that the field of feminist rhetorical historiography is maintaining some key founding principles despite other methodological and theoretical shifts.

## **Recovering Gendered Everyday Rhetorical Practices in Light of the Present**

Jack, Jensen, and Koerber locate their projects historically, but they justify their relevance by centering them within current social debates. Positioning their work as a response to contemporary controversies allows these authors to draw upon both contemporary and historical resources, thereby extending the reach of their arguments beyond feminist rhetoric scholars to historians of medicine, public policy experts, and health educators. Moreover, Jack, Jensen, and Koerber recover individuals from the past in their studies, but they only highlight them in the process of recovering gendered practices. This is a transition from the well-established feminist historiographic tradition of recovering women rhetors.

Jack takes a historical and rhetorical approach to examining "scientific and popular rhetorics about autism" (16). She opens her monograph by identifying autism as a contemporary controversy and historicizes it as part of her analysis: "Given the gaps in scientific knowledge about autism, this controversy entails more than just arguments about scientific facts, but stories as well: stories about children affected, about parents struggling to come to terms with a diagnosis, about [A]utistic individuals and their lives" (1-2). In Chapters

1 and 2, Jack traces the history of the topoi—rhetorical commonplaces—that helped authenticate two opposing female characters that have played significant roles in autism discourse. Jack argues that the “Refrigerator Mother” character, whose stoic, distant personality and lack of affection supposedly caused her child’s autism (33), and later, the “Mother Warrior,” the tirelessly aggressive parent who will do anything to save her child from autism (65), were both culturally created in their particular historical moments. To support a case for these characters, Jack recovers evidence from Margarethe Ribble’s 1920s books and articles about “bad mothering” (38), as well as other 1950s childrearing books (43), early “autism memoirs” such as *The Seige* (50), sixteenth-century midwifery texts (68), *Mothering* magazine (70), [Parenting.com](#) advice boards, testimonies to U.S. government committees (73), [Amazon.com](#) reviews (85), and more. Jack also examines the history of autism itself: its discovery, name, and diagnostic characteristics (16-24). She pays close attention to how practitioners needed to distinguish autism from “feeblemindedness” in order to keep at-risk children from being sterilized or euthanized. This often meant qualifying descriptions of Autistic individuals with middle and upper class modifiers, such as dress, demeanor, cleanliness, and explanations of the parents’ white-collar professions. Jack’s history situates autism as a classed, raced, and gendered condition, helping readers understand why such stereotypes remain prominent today.

Koerber relies on rhetorical history as an underlying analytical tool in her monograph because it “requires us to view current controversies as they are unfolding in a situation that still contains important elements from the past” (8). In Chapter 1, she connects the scientific and social histories of infant feeding practices through an analysis of three topoi: “breastfeeding as foundation in the mid-twentieth century,” “breastfeeding as the norm in the late twentieth century,” and “formula as risky in the early twenty-first century” (13). In Chapter 2, Koerber grounds her work historically in a study of fifty-nine scientific and medical journal articles about infant feeding practices published between 1940 and 2005, some of which she discovered through archival research at the Pediatric Historical Archive of the American Academy of Pediatrics (33). This chronological literature review critiques the shifting metaphors about the science of the immunoprotective qualities of human milk, which began as a “hierarchical-machine” metaphor and became a “complex-systems” metaphor (35). Similarly, in Chapter 3, Koerber dissects three American Academy of Pediatrics policy statements about infant feeding that were released in 1982, 1997, and 2005, and she considers how these policies might have impacted women’s embodied experiences with infant feeding in Chapter 5. Like Jack and Jensen, Koerber contends that her analysis “tells a story of scientific ‘progress’ that is

not about rhetoric, science, or medicine, but about the complex intersections among these domains" (48).

Jensen's guiding research questions situate her study in the present. She states her aim to investigate the history of sex education debates, the individuals and organizations that took part in these debates, how these debates circulated in public discourse and experience, and, most significantly, the reasons why "the United States made so little progress in keeping residents free of disease and informed about sex" (xii). Jensen's recovery of pamphlets, films, posters, and notes from public speeches housed at the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota and special collections libraries at University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Illinois Archives in Urbana-Champaign suggests that our twenty-first century public sex education practices have not developed extensively beyond their earlier counterparts, since most are still driven by ambiguous language practices (160). Although Jensen features three main women rhetors in her monograph—Margaret Sanger (Chapter 1), Dr. Ella Flagg Young (Chapter 2), and Dr. Rachele Slobodinsky Yarros (Chapter 4)—she primarily recovers how they took up gendered rhetorical practices that enabled them to speak publicly about sex education. For example, although only "representations" of Yarros's speeches still exist, Jensen uses existing archives to develop a compelling argument about how Young and Yarros leveraged their identities as women and their professional training (as an educator and physician) to discuss sex without vague metaphors in public speeches, newspaper articles, and health education curricula. Some of their practices, such as sharing stories about fraternities, sex, and sexually transmitted diseases with male and female audiences (106) and separating boys and girls during sex education lessons so that they could ask questions more freely (46-47), are still used today. Jensen's work illuminates how the rhetorical strategies of less politically powerful rhetors enabled them to change health, science, and medical discourse, as well as reform gendered expectations.

## The Use of Mixed and Multi-Genre Methods

Jack, Jensen, and Koerber's monographs uniquely engage feminist rhetorical practice by using multiple, multi-genre, and interdisciplinary methods for conducting research.<sup>2</sup> Social scientists and digital scholars have historically combined diverse research methods, but Jack, Jensen, and Koerber chart

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2 Social science researchers often incorporate "mixed methods," an approach that involves "multi-level perspectives," "exploring the meaning and level of constructs," and "cultural influences" (National Institutes of Health 4).

new territory by applying these methods to feminist rhetorical historiography. Their novel insights suggest that, in order to write about the histories of health, science, and medicine, scholars must engage with professional literature in those fields, which seems to necessitate a different approach to historical research. Also, since Jack, Jensen, and Koerber aim to recover gendered everyday practices instead of particular historical figures, they are prompted to use new combinations of research methods, such as exploring and participating in online forums, blogs, interviews, focus groups, and cultural critique. In these cases, using varied research methods reveals how gender functions as a form of social power and authority in health, science, and medical discourses.

Jack employs rhetorical analysis to reveal how, using stock character personas derived from cultural topoi, different individuals engage and shift scientific and public rhetorics of autism. She draws on research from feminist science studies and disability studies as well as cultural and rhetorical studies of medicine to illuminate the many facets of autism as it is typically understood: a medical condition, disability, and way of being, thinking, and seeing the world (24). Importantly, Jack balances medicalized discourses about autism with accounts by Autistic individuals and community authorities (i.e. Jenny McCarthy and similar advocates). In turn, when she defines autism in the introduction, Jack includes scientific, psychiatric, neurodiverse, biomedical, and historical and cultural definitions (7-12). Since most studies of autism prioritize one of these perspectives, Jack's interdisciplinary and multi-genre work provides thoughtful synthesis that merits additional study by autism researchers across disciplines.

The benefits of Jack's multi-genre method are particularly clear in Chapter 4. To explain the topos of the "autism dad," Jack uses a range of resources, including autobiographical writing by autism dads, blog posts from *The Thinking Mom's Revolution*, [About.com](http://About.com) articles, scientific studies, findings from Gloria Moss's *Gender, Design, and Marketing*, a dissertation by an autism researcher, and twenty brochures from autism agencies that she coded for visual features (175). These seemingly disparate genres stemming from seemingly unrelated discourse communities reveal how many authorities shape knowledge about autism simultaneously. Multi-genre research allows Jack to achieve her goal: to illuminate "public debates about theories concerning autism: what it is, what causes it, and how it affects people's lives" (26).

Along with multiple genres, Koerber uses multiple methods to study the evolution of the rhetoric of infant feeding practices. In her introduction, Koerber calls her monograph a "kairology," a concept coined by Judy Segal to describe a rhetorical history that connects significant moments of rhetorical opportunity, particularly in medicine (3). Taking a "recursive approach" to her kairology, Koerber works to "combine what is best from the textual analysis

studies and the ethnographic studies, from the humanities and the social sciences, providing a picture of current U.S. breastfeeding practices that is unique in its interdisciplinary orientation and its multifaceted methodological approach" (147). Koerber contends that this method ensures that she achieves effective sampling in her study, which combines rhetorical analysis and interviews (9). Although Koerber primarily isolates these methods (focusing on rhetorical history in Chapter 2, rhetorical and textual analysis in Chapter 3, interviews in Chapter 5, etc.), she risks a less seamless argumentative flow in pursuit of a diversity of angles and voices only made possible through mixed methods research. Koerber is explicit about her work with an interdisciplinary research team, through which she interviewed mothers "without any specialized expertise in infant feeding" (9, 107). She pairs this data with interviews with a range of breastfeeding advocates, including health professionals and La Leche League volunteers, for a more comprehensive analysis. Koerber is guided by the social science research methods of "purposeful sampling" and "theoretical sampling," which enrich her human and material archives, and through which she identifies patterns and trends.

Jensen's research method, which she calls an "organic approach to criticism," enables her to combine close reading and "broader critical-cultural interpretation" to study the rhetoric of sex education contextually, accounting for the "historical, political and sociological variables from which it emerges" (xviii). For Jensen, this means that she considers how "text" and "context" come together to illuminate language choices ("applied aspects of rhetoric") and to impact speeches, school board decisions, public health campaigns, and guidelines for health education as well as the visual rhetoric of sex education campaign materials. She also layers on an intersectional approach. Jensen does not provide a specific definition of intersectionality or an intersectional approach to frame this method, but she footnotes Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>3</sup> and Kathy Davis,<sup>4</sup> two well-known intersectionality theorists who argue that identity is situated, historical, simultaneous, and individually and group-oriented. She contends that such an intersectional approach allows her to study the everyday rhetorics of women rhetors fully in the context of their lived experiences, in which they were sexed, gendered, classed, raced, and identified by other

3 See Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color." *Stanford law review* (1991): 1241-1299.

4 See Davis, Kathy. "Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful." *Feminist theory* 9.1 (2008): 67-85.



elements of difference (xix). Jensen theorizes intersectionality in the context of singular people, for instance: “[Yarro’s] intersectionality also helped her to understand, speak on behalf of, and better serve others with intersectional identities who were in need of access to health information” (xix). Future studies might expand on Jensen’s work to call greater attention to “resulting intersections of subordination” as they affect larger social groups (xix). Ultimately, Jensen’s study suggests “different discourses, communication formations, and research questions demand that critics use diverse lenses for analysis” (xviii).

## **Conclusion: Recovering the Present**

Jack, Jensen, and Koerber’s monographs demonstrate that feminist rhetoricians can use historiography to better understand health, science, and medical issues in the present. I believe, however, that these texts entreat budding scholars to take up two remaining challenges in future research projects: 1) extending feminist rhetoric beyond English and Communication Studies scholars, and 2) bridging disciplinary gaps between rhetoric, health, science, and medicine. Although Koerber, Jack, and Jensen’s careful analyses of health, science, and medical discourse would probably provide useful texture for recent quantitative studies about infant feeding, autism, and sex education, it is not clear how far their work will span. Jensen’s book won the 2015 National Communication Association Distinguished Book award, which “recognizes research that has made, or offers the promise of making, a significant contribution to scholarship in Health Communication theory, research, and/or practice” (“Distinguished Book in Health Communication”). Health communication is a cornerstone of many scholarly communities, so it is conceivable that exceptional scholarly work in this area might be of interest to clinicians, medical journalists, health writers, communication scholars, and others. Also, since the publication of her monograph, Jensen has published about the rhetoric of sex education in a range of social science, health education, and qualitative research journals,<sup>5</sup> greatly widening the audience of her research. Likewise, Jack’s monograph won the 2014 Rhetoric Society of America book award, which evaluated the book’s “engaging style or readability,” “potential to promote rhetoric among scholars from other fields,” and “potential to promote the general public’s understanding of rhetoric” (“Awards”); the book’s selection is indicative of its expected interdisciplinary appeal. Such movement seems promising, though we need to wait a number of years before we can make a comprehensive assessment.

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5 Some examples include *AIDS Patient Care & STDs* (2007), *Qualitative Research* (2010 and forthcoming), and *Sex Roles* (2010).

On a similar note, feminist rhetorical histories of health, science, and medicine may gain a broader appeal with the rise of interdisciplinary research groups. Koerber's focus group data, which she gathered collaboratively with scholars from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center Anita Thigpen Perry School of Nursing, serves as an exciting example of how rhetoricians can work with scholars from other fields to enhance research in rhetoric as well as health, science, and medicine. Jack recently became the co-director of an interdisciplinary lab called the HHIVE: Health and Humanities: An Interdisciplinary Venue for Exploration, which aims to "[link] the humanities and health sciences through student-center research projects, innovative curricula, and public engagement" ("About"). Mixed methods and multi-genre studies, such as the three discussed in this review, that focus on gendered everyday rhetorics challenge feminist historians of rhetoric to broaden and complicate their research aims and engage in complex but necessary interdisciplinary collaborations.

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