

Peitho

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

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

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Editor's Introduction

Jen Wingard

Peitho 20.1, our Fall/Winter 2017 issue, is being released during a fraught political and cultural moment. We are ten months into one of the most divisive presidential administrations we have ever witnessed as a country, one that is demonstrably changing how political rhetoric and even policy-making are performed and circulated. We are in the midst of recovering from some of the largest, nearly simultaneous natural disasters we have seen: uncontrolled fires in the West; super-storms in the Gulf and the Caribbean; and earthquakes across Mexico. And finally, the racial divides in our country are becoming ever more visible, and more visibly dangerous, for people of color. Our earth, our polis, our communities: all are weary, and yet we must continue the struggle.

The work in this issue intends to assist us all in the struggle, by making us re-see how even foundational feminist work needs to be challenged during difficult times. Whether it is through adding the voices of those previously unheard, as we see in Kelly Blewett's and J.P. Hanly's work on Ursula Nordstrom and Ann Eliza Young, respectively; or rethinking the challenges posed when we engage in pro-choice discourse and/or trigger warnings in the classroom, as discussed by Timothy Ballingall and Stephanie Phillips and Mark Leahy; or, as Jennifer Young and Laurie McMillian note, our need to consider how certain seemingly feminist texts can actually do more harm than good; each piece in 20.1 asks us to recalibrate our notion of feminist rhetorical practice, and challenges us to do so at a time when the stakes could not be higher.

Finally, I would like to note some good: As I begin the middle of my second year as editor, the submission rate of the journal has grown. As such, I have brought on an editorial assistant to help with the workload. Rachelle A.C. Joplin, a PhD Student at the University of Houston will be working closely with me. Additionally, I would like to officially recognize Suzanne Bordelon, Professor at San Diego State University, who has taken on the role of the chair of the editorial board since Lindal Buchannan has rotated out. I look forward to working with both Rachelle and Suzanne over the next few years to help *Peitho* continue to grow and thrive.

Here's hoping I see many of you at Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) in Dayton, OH, Oct 4-7, 2017. And I certainly hope you will have a chance to catch up on the latest issue of *Peitho* during your travels.

In solidarity.

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Tributes to Jan Swearingen (1948-2017)



Texas A & M Professor Carolyn Jan Swearingen would have been 69 on August 18, 2017. She died on June 1, 2017, after being diagnosed with a mean and aggressive form of cancer in early December 2016. A powerful classicist, stalwart feminist, loyal colleague, and loving friend, Jan is remembered by many of us who worked closely with her.

The following professional tributes could be ordered in a number of ways, but I've chosen to arrange them from the personal to the pedagogical to the professional. All of these tributes offer harmonious tones of mourning, celebration, and appreciation. The final tribute offers advice on how we might best continue to honor Jan's intellectual legacy.—Cheryl Glenn

Friend and Colleague: Jan Swearingen

Cheryl Glenn, Penn State University

When I think of Jan Swearingen, I think of how good she always smelled. I think of her perfect posture (she was always reminding me that I could stand taller—and she was right!) and that way her little finger fluttered so elegantly.

Like many of you reading this, I, too, loved and admired Jan for all the many ways that we nine outline in this tribute: her brilliance, her capacious intellectual curiosity, and that fierce loyalty of hers that was so beautifully balanced by a generosity and gentleness of spirit. She loved her family and her close friends, and she was proud of all of us, which is probably why—when we gathered at her memorial service at Ghost Ranch in late June—we already felt as though we knew one another: she had bragged about *each* of us to *all* of us.

Over the years, Jan and I shared many things: a love of Santa Fe (to which she introduced me back in 1994), cooking (which we often did together during her frequent visits), children (ours are so smart they make our teeth hurt), and, of course, rhetoric. As rhetoricians, we often appeared on the same professional programs, speaking to the importance of broadening the focus of rhetoric beyond that on the early Greeks and Romans to include practitioners of rhetoric throughout the ages, around the globe, and, especially, women. We were both fascinated by the formidable medieval women who commanded rhetorical power, women such as 11th-century abbess Hildegard von Bingen, whose music, art, plays, and writings (scientific and religious alike) continue to inspire.

Right after her heart-breaking diagnosis, Jan wrote to me: “Dear Cheryl, Thanks eternal and abundant for your friendship and love and support. We have travelled many roads together and now begins another. Sharing Hildegard with you over the years is one of my treasures. Love, Jan.”

Soon the chemo, radiation, and surgeries interfered with her regular notes and letters. Still, we managed to stay in very close contact, talking or texting nearly every day. Eventually, Jan’s suffering would give way to silence. Yet two days before she died, she texted me one last time, “Love to you 2, dear friend.” Thus, Jan took in the bright hour, when, as Emerson tells us, we “cease . . . to be a prisoner of this sickly body to become as large as the World.” To me, the spirit that is Jan Swearingen will always be as large as the World.

Mentor and Angel: Jan Swearingen

Hui Wu, University of Texas at Tyler

Jan Swearingen and I met by fate through what the Chinese call “spiritual interactions” (shen jiao, 神交 epistolary relationship). But neither of us knew we had corresponded to each other across the Pacific when we first met at Texas Christian University. I had applied for a doctoral assistantship in Linguistics and English at the University of Texas at Arlington, where she directed the Graduate Program in the Humanities. A letter notifying me of lack of funding bore her name—C. Jan Swearingen, a strikingly unusual name to me as an ESL professor in China. I had never seen such a long, non-English-looking last name before. Not until we met at TCU as professor and student did we recall our correspondence. She told me she tried hard to obtain an assistantship for me. Though she had not been successful, she did remember my credentials and last name.

Fate brought our relationship naturally to our families and children. Her son, Ben, would stay with us when she was out of town. She made sure that Ben had enough supply of Coke and milk, because he did not drink water to

quench his thirst. She made sure that Ben had his blue over-weight duffle bag in good shape, because that's his backpack for school. Ben would hang out with Donna like her big brother; they would talk and laugh incessantly about things that did not make sense to us at all. They would laugh so hard that they both fell from the couch to the floor, while curling up their bodies like snails, gasping for breath. The fact that both of them are fast talkers might have had something to do with their incessant talk in those old days, I guess.

When Ben was attending the University of Texas, Donna received scholarships from Texas A & M and several other universities. Jan drove us around the Texas A & M campus, sharing information about resources and engineering programs. When it was time for Donna to make the decision about college, I called Jan. She told me to let her make the decision by herself without pushing it. I took Jan's advice and kept my mouth shut. The second year at Texas A & M, Donna said it was the best decision she'd ever made. Although their universities were football foes, Ben and Donna still talked to each other incessantly like brother and sister in their college years.

Fate decided that Jan was my guiding angel. Before the first day of class in fall 1994, I found a book in my mailbox in TCU's English graduate office—Robert Oliver's *Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China*. Her note inside told me to keep it as long as I wanted. This book incited me to research in Chinese rhetoric. After I started my first college teaching job in the U.S., I received another book from Jan—*Seven Chinese Women Writers*, which aroused my desire for theorizing cross-cultural perspectives on feminism. Her note on the cover page reads, "For Hui, in appreciation of your friendship, generosity, and intellect" with "intellect" underlined. I'd say the same, and then some, about her. Her wisdom and intellect put us together on several conference panels and in special journal issues on Chinese rhetoric. Together, we published our book, *Guiguzi: China's First Treatise on Rhetoric*, and a companion essay.

Fate brought us together. And with Jan as my guiding angel, I have been moving upward in career and family life, a career and life that I could not, and dared not, to imagine before I met her. I am thankful to Jan for being my mentor and sister, part of my family, and Donna's aunt. Love and peace to Jan, my angel.

Taking a History of Rhetoric Class with C. Jan Swearingen

Jennifer Bay, Purdue University

Beth Brunk-Chavez, University of Texas at El Paso

Taking a history of rhetoric class with C. Jan Swearingen was, at times, like trying to drink from a firehose. While her style was never to lecture, we left each class with a profound respect of the knowledge she shared with us—from Enheduanna to Sor Juana, from Diotima to Sojourner Truth.

While her breadth and depth of knowledge may have overwhelmed us, taking a history of rhetoric class with Jan was not so. It meant reading deeply and closely. It meant spending three weeks on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. She taught us to slow down, to absorb, and to connect.

Taking a history of rhetoric class with Jan was the scent of patchouli.

Taking a history of rhetoric class with Jan was to receive your writing back knowing it had been carefully read and filled with checks, double checks, check pluses, and the occasional check with exclamation points. It was reading her marginal and summative comments that poetically praised your insight while also pushing you to think beyond that moment.

Taking a history of rhetoric class with Jan was to make connections between Eric Havelock's pre-oral cultures and the Tamarians from Star Trek Next Generation.

Taking a history of rhetoric class was to momentarily be transfixed by the rubbing together of her finger and thumb while she thought deeply.

Taking a history of rhetoric class with Jan was learning through a way of thinking and writing now called feminist historiography. It was to come to the innate understanding that women were a powerful rhetorical force and that the methods we use to uncover their long history needed to be different than standard historiographic methods. In short, Jan taught us to look for what was missing, what we knew must have been there but were not being told. She taught us to understand that women were powerful and possibly dangerous. Like her colleague Hans Kellner, Jan taught us how to "get the story crooked," in order to illuminate the ways those who had been left out could shine forth. She was connecting us to a network of feminist historical scholars who were not just her colleagues but also her dear friends. These were important scholarly—and personal—lessons for developing feminist scholars.

Taking a history of rhetoric class with Jan was ending classes with the phrase "Same bat time, same bat channel." Urban Dictionary reminds us that this phrase was used to tease viewers for the next episode in the Adam West *Batman* TV series. More recently, this phrase is used "to affectionately tell

someone that you will see them soon, particularly at a regular time/place.” We know that there will not be another history of rhetoric class with Jan, but we’d love to hear her make that promise one last time.

A Tribute to Dr. C. Jan Swearingen

Rachelle A.C. Joplin, University of Houston

My relationship with Dr. Swearingen began in the fall of 2012. I was a freshman at Texas A&M University, a newly minted English major with a rhetoric focus who was eager to find a mentor. I took her History of Rhetoric course in the spring of 2013 and found the relationship I had been searching for. She taught her History of Rhetoric subversively, introducing me to the feminist scholarship that I am thrilled to contribute to today. In addition, Dr. Swearingen became a priceless fount of wisdom, shaping my experience in higher education. She directed my undergraduate thesis, and I am humbled to have been one of the final students to ever work directly under her tutelage. Her guidance in applying to graduate school encouraged me to consider, at a fundamental level, what work fulfilled me and contributed to a greater good.

I am now earning my PhD in rhetoric and composition at the University of Houston, and I genuinely would not be here if it were not for Dr. Swearingen. Her mentorship, willingness to push me, and ability to see potential in me resulted in my decision to pursue academia as a career. More importantly, though, her scholarship created the potential for my work to exist in any form whatsoever. Her brilliant intervention into the rhetorical canon and her deft ability to weave her research into her teaching have each allowed space for feminist rhetoric to thrive and grow.

The pithy secondary title to my undergraduate thesis was “Why I Am Allowed to Write This Thesis.” I go on to explain in detail the rhetorical canon and how women injected themselves into it, allowing for the current rhetorical moment to exist, and thus for my scholarship to emerge. However, for the purposes of this tribute, I would like to say simply that, in large part, I was allowed to write this thesis, be this scholar, do this work, because of Dr. Jan Swearingen. And I will never thank her enough for that.

She Was a Model: Jan Swearingen

Cynthia Haynes, Clemson University

There are only a handful of women in the field of Rhetoric whose scholarship, teaching, and mentoring touched the lives and careers of so many women today. C. Jan Swearingen is one of those women. I was fortunate to take 3-4 graduate seminars with her: History of Rhetoric I and II and several

Feminist Theory courses. Because Jan worked in classical rhetoric and feminist studies, she brought a unique perspective to the material. I remember having my wordview split open on a number of occasions. Jan allowed for rich discussions and invited her students to spar with her, all the while gently pushing us to rethink and deconstruct the phallogocentric history of rhetoric. In addition to taking her seminars, I regularly attended informal meetings at her home after she created a reading group on feminism. We explored early women theologians, such as Sor Juana, as well as poets, activists, artists, and countless women who are now considered canonical in women studies. Jan's own scholarship also made a deep impression on me. She taught us well. She was a model for how to be a strong woman in academia. She left us too soon.

East-West Rhetorical Studies

LuMing Mao, Miami University

I have been feeling my loss since the sudden passing of C. Jan Swearingen. I have lost not only a dear friend but also someone whom I can always count on for constructive and engaging dialogues, someone whose ideas and scholarship I have come to respect and admire a great deal. At the same time, I know I must also count my blessings. For well over two decades now, I have had the good fortune to get to know Jan, to get to learn from her, and, better still, to work with her on a number of projects near and dear to our hearts. I want to celebrate this good fortune of mine and what Jan has meant, and will continue to mean, to me and to our field.

As we all know, Jan was a feminist historian of rhetorics and literacy. She was much more, too. Her ability to discover new ideas, to challenge the accepted paradigms, was well known to her colleagues and students. Her impatience with overstatements and with essentializing claims was simply a delight to behold. She was infinitely fascinated by Chinese rhetorics' emphasis on complementarity, harmonic opposites, and parallelism. She would call my attention to oft-suppressed traditions in Western rhetorics, beginning with the pre-Platonic sophists, that shared and fostered the same kind of emphasis, albeit not as importantly present as it was for Chinese traditions. It was her insight, among many others, that current East-West rhetorical studies represent a real live contact zone that had helped lay the foundation for the impressive growth of comparative, global rhetorical work that we are witnessing today. I still vividly remember the most recent time Jan and I met—in October 2016 when she visited Miami University; when we reminisced about the roads we had travelled together; and when we discussed the future trails we planned to map out, to tread, to explore. Little did I know then that this would also be my last time talking to her in person, but how much I know now that these moments will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I miss Jan. I miss her knowledge of Western rhetorical traditions and feminist historiography. I miss her willingness to engage with that which is unfamiliar and unknown. I miss her ability for nuanced reading, for nipping binary thinking in the bud, and for promoting capacious understanding of different rhetorical traditions and different ways of thinking, being, and doing. The other day I sat down and reread Jan's latest tour de force: her expansive but nuanced comparison of Guigucian rhetoric with the Pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. Once again I was being reminded of why I gravitated toward, and indeed fell in love with, her work decades ago.

I know Jan has left me—much too early, much too soon. But I also know Jan will never leave me. Her amazing body of scholarship, as well as our collective fruits of labor, will forever serve as my font of inspiration. Her optimism for the future, her disdain for demagoguery, and her generosity toward others will always serve as my exemplar. Jan's legacy endures.

Memories of a Feminist Rhetorician

Susan C. Jarratt, University of California Irvine

Rhetoric studies and feminism have lost an important voice with the passing of C. Jan Swearingen. I believe my first encounter with Jan came through an engagement with her scholarship. She preceded me in the rhetoric PhD program at the University of Texas at Austin by a few years, so I didn't have the pleasure of knowing her as a student. But finding her scholarship was an important step in my intellectual development. "The Rhetor as *Eiron*: Plato's Defense of Dialogue" (PRE/TEXT 3, 1982) came out as I was exploring dissertation ideas and gave me a sense of how one could approach the venerable texts of ancient Greece from a rhetorical perspective. We must have met first when I interviewed for a position at the University of Texas at Arlington in 1985. I remember her as quiet but self-possessed and supportive. Reading her book, *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies*, published by Oxford in 1991, made me proud to be in our field. Here was a learned, innovative study of ancient materials from a rhetoric scholar marking out new terrain – and by a woman!

A few years later, after I had a job and started to explore feminist approaches to our field, we became better acquainted through the editing process of a special issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* I had proposed on feminist readings of male-authored texts in the history of rhetoric. Jan contributed an essay on the character Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, and I was having trouble getting in the groove with her writing style. As I kept advising a more linear, hypotactic style, Jan patiently persuaded me that her more circular, reiterative

approach was equally valid and more appropriate for her subject. This was a valuable lesson in feminist style and editing practice.

Through the years, as we appeared on panels and in publications together, I came to appreciate Jan's dry wit and precise but always inventive style of scholarship and presentation. I so admired her later move into the world of Chinese and other non-Western rhetorics. She was a strong and distinctive woman and scholar. I was fortunate to come into the field in her wake and learn from her always thoughtful ways of being in our academic worlds. I'm grateful for her choice to take a rhetorical path through a too-brief life.

C. Jan Swearingen: Scholar, Feminist, and Rhetor

Kathleen Ethel Welch, University of Oklahoma

C. Jan Swearingen, late of Texas A & M University and formerly in the ranks of professors at the University of Michigan, the University of Arizona, and the University of Texas at Arlington, was one of the most influential scholars in the humanities. Her influence has and will continue to be very powerful. Her unique and very influential work on Plato, especially in *Rhetoric and Irony: Western Literacy and Western Lies*, influenced her work on religious rhetorics of the east and of the west). This positioning makes her one of the most important scholars of rhetoric of the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Also central to her scholarly legacy is the new research she conducted and published on Diotima and other historical women in classical rhetoric, her field of greatest expertise. This reputation will persist.

As we celebrate her unusually strong scholarship in rhetoric, those who knew her and worked with her can assuage their grief by continuing to study this rhetor whose tenacity and willingness to speak truth to power will make many people across our globe study the West. *Rhetoric and Irony* has been translated into other languages, most notably Mandarin. Other translations are sure to continue.

Her colleagues, far and wide, her students, and many others will continue to benefit from her extraordinary contributions as a scholar, a feminist, and a rhetor.



Inviting Infamy, Reframing Freedom: Nineteenth-Century Anti-Polygamy Lecturer, Ann Eliza Young, and the Dynamics of Incremental Persuasion

J.P. Hanly

Abstract: *This essay reintroduces the nineteenth-century anti-polygamy lecturer, Ann Eliza Young; examines the rhetorical strategies the estranged nineteenth wife of Brigham Young employed to achieve her aims; and argues that she emerges for historians and theorists of rhetoric as an unexpectedly heuristic figure, affording insights into the dynamics of incremental persuasion and the networked nature of rhetorical agency. After familiarizing readers with her career and the criticisms she faced, I analyze how, by drawing on the resources offered by anti-Mormon rhetoric and fiction and by developing embodied and ethical arguments that challenged audiences to form identifications expanding their conceptions of who could be a speaker, Young was able to reframe the Mormon question so that her listeners and readers might engage more productively with what was ultimately at stake in cultural conversations about the problem of polygamy.*

Keywords: *nineteenth-century, women, rhetoric, agency, history*

While American democracy has always produced powerful public speakers, lecturing did not fully come into its own as a profession until the 1870s saw the establishment of lyceum bureaus, booking agencies for speakers capable of attracting paying audiences throughout the country. The most formidable among these was Boston's Redpath Lyceum Bureau, which listed as part of its annual Star Lecture Course many of the country's best-known lecturers on reform topics, including Wendell Phillips, Henry Ward Beecher, Susan B. Anthony, and Mary Livermore. Due to their ability to guarantee box-office receipts, popular lyceum lecturers were referred to as "paying cards" (Scott 27-28). During its early years, Redpath's most in-demand "paying card" was Anna E. Dickinson, whose oratorical abilities reportedly earned her over \$20,000 per year in the early 1870s (Gallman; Ray, *The Lyceum* 40). By mid-decade, however, Dickinson's mantle as Redpath's top-drawing female orator had been assumed by a less likely figure: Ann Eliza Young, the estranged nineteenth wife of the Mormon prophet, Brigham Young (Pond). During a career that lasted nine years and carried her from New York to San Francisco, the controversial

anti-polygamy speaker was a staple on Redpath's Star Lecture Course, drawing crowds in the thousands and, by some accounts, giving "the emerging field of professional lecturing . . . its first sensational box-office star, at last" (Wallace 15-16).

Although historians of rhetoric have recovered a wider and wider range of overlooked nineteenth-century female speakers and writers, few have taken note of Young. To some extent, this may be attributable to the field having lately reoriented toward researching "the rhetorical practices of ordinary women" (Royster and Kirsch 58). Yet, as Kathryn Derounian-Stodola has recently suggested, the lack of attention may also be the result of Young's infamy having "hitherto overshadowed her contributions" (151). This hypothesis seems credible when one looks at how Young is depicted by those few biographers and scholars who have written about her. Among Young's biographers, Helen Woodward, for instance, emphasizes Young's taking advantage of her second husband, Moses Denning, a "rich old logger with one arm" from Manistee, Michigan (330). Autumn Stephens follows Woodward's lead in lampooning Young as a gold digger, and Frances Laurence depicts Young "as someone notorious and something of a freak" (191). Likewise, despite his wanting to present Young as an unlikely feminist hero, Irving Wallace is forced to concede that Young was "driven by the twin demons of duty and money" (278). Scholars have also emphasized Young's infamy. Angela Ray suggests that Young's "moral" talks were only popular because they were "titillating" and that her success was symptomatic of the emergence of the 1870s-era "controversial lecturer" and the commercialization of the formerly idealistic lyceum culture (43). And Ray's assessment of Young aligns with the judgments of other scholars who treat Young as a suspect figure in the course of broader discussions of nineteenth-century nativist literature (Davis 221-22), conversion narratives (Holte 216-21), and women's mission organizations (Pascoe 40).

What if, however, Young's infamy might be regarded as one of the main reasons she merits being looked at more closely? Feminist historical scholarship across the disciplines has been moving away from its traditional focus on unimpeachable figures in direct conflict with hegemonic social structures. Historians of rhetoric such as Carol Mattingly and Malea Powell have helped lead the way in examining how resistance is just as often accomplished by ambivalently situated speakers and writers functioning in discursive contexts that may seem to be at cross purposes with feminist objectives. I aim in this essay to contribute to the conversations initiated by these and other scholars whose work on nineteenth-century women speakers has been so instrumental in transforming our understandings of rhetorical agency, helping us appreciate how rhetoric functions within complex dynamics to bring about social change, and moving the field toward a more productive comprehension of "the history

of nineteenth-century rhetoric as a multilayered text" (Johnson 47). Toward that end, this article draws on archival research to familiarize readers with Ann Eliza Young's accomplishments and rhetorical abilities and to work toward a fuller understanding of how such an infamous figure was able to not only achieve her immediate aims as an anti-polygamy activist but also contribute to the broader women's rights movement.

I begin by looking more closely at Young's career, at the criticisms lodged against her, and at the case that could be made against her meriting careful study. Then, I turn to consider how these same criticisms, when viewed from a different angle, might be seen as pointing us toward elements of a rhetorical practice that is noteworthy for its attentiveness to the challenges presented by her identity as a female speaker, escaped Mormon wife, and divorcee, as well as for its suitability to the sort of incremental persuasion necessitated by the intransigent audiences she typically addressed and by the multiple aims she pursued. Finally, I will consider some of the broader implications of what we might gain from studying Ann Eliza Young, suggesting that in offering such an infamous, complexly situated, and challenging example to consider, Young may be seen to emerge as an unexpectedly heuristic figure for historians and theorists of rhetoric, affording a unique opportunity to continue working toward a "richer understanding" of the "networked" and "dynamic" nature of rhetorical agency (Geisler 15, McIntyre 26-27, Royster and Kirsch 132).

Engaged as a "Sensation"

At first glance, it would seem obvious that Young should be accorded more attention as a significant figure in the history of nineteenth-century rhetoric. According to a January 29, 1875 article in the *Boston Daily Globe*, Young's career "began in an obscure town in the far West, on the sixth of December 1873," and by "the first of January, 1875, she had lectured two hundred and twenty-three times" throughout the United States. As to the source of her popularity, the *Globe* noted that although she generally may have been "engaged for the first time as a 'sensation,'" once she had spoken, she was inevitably "recalled on her own merits as a lecturer" (Circular 21). By 1874, her first full year as a professional speaker, Young was commanding \$1,000 per performance and often drew crowds in the thousands for multiple-night engagements in cities from Boston, where she addressed 2,000 in her first lecture, to San Francisco, where according to the *Chronicle*, there were "3,000 souls anxiously surging before the door struggling to get within" (Laurence 187; Circular 27). In addition to lecturing, Young authored a 604-page autobiography and exposé of Mormonism, *Wife No. 19, or the Story of a Life in Bondage*, which, when published in 1876, sold 30,000 copies in four months. A review in the Northern Kentucky/Cincinnati-area *Christian Standard* predicted that

“the authoress will, in history, hold her place with reference to Mormonism and its overthrow, as Mrs. Stowe and ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ to American slavery” (“Mormon Literature”).

Young was born Ann Eliza Webb to Mormon parents, Chauncey and Eliza Webb, in Nauvoo, Illinois, September 13, 1844. Only three months earlier, their religion’s founder, Joseph Smith, had been assassinated by an angry mob. Two months prior to his death, however, Smith had announced his most controversial revelation, the doctrine of “celestial marriage,” referred to informally by Mormons as “plural marriage” and by “Gentiles,” or non-Mormons, as polygamy. A few months after Smith’s death, Ann Eliza’s mother’s close friend, Brigham Young, was elected President of the Church. Harassment of the Mormons in Nauvoo continued throughout 1845, and in 1846, Brigham Young began overseeing the migration westward to Salt Lake City (Bushman and Bushman 30-36; Young *Wife No. 19*).

In the year before the family crossed the Great Plains, Chauncey Webb married his first plural wife, Elizabeth Taft. He would take three more before Ann Eliza reached adulthood. Young’s picture in *Wife No. 19* of her childhood alternates bucolic recollections of growing up in Deseret, as the newly-arrived Mormons termed Utah, with lamentations of her mother’s misery under polygamy. Her depiction of her teenage years offers a behind-the-scenes look at her baptism and the accompanying secret Endowment House rituals. As she moves on, Young discusses her unhappy first marriage to and divorce from the abusive James Dee, and her ensuing, unexpected courtship by and forced marriage to the septuagenarian, Brigham Young. The autobiography culminates with its narrator’s dawning awareness, due to alleged mistreatment by the Prophet, that the plural marriage system is an evil on the scale of Southern chattel slavery. Perceiving a vocation to combat this “twin relic of barbarism,” as polygamy had been referred to in the 1856 Republican platform and thereafter regularly in the press, Young filed for divorce from Brigham Young and took up residence in the Gentile-owned Walker House hotel (*Circular 21*; Gordon, “The Mormon Question” 22).

News of Ann Eliza’s suit to divorce Brigham soon became a sensation throughout the country, with the proceedings reported faithfully in many papers over the next two years as the court battles dragged on. As the reports continued, their focus began to shift from the Prophet to his rebellious young wife, as attested to by the following chronological list of *New York Times* article titles: “Brigham Young’s Divorce Suit” (28 Aug. 1873); “Brigham Young” (27 Aug. 1874); “Brigham Young” (2 Sept. 1874); “Ann Eliza Young’s Divorce Suit” (27 Feb. 1875); “Ann Eliza’s Suit” (7 Mar. 1875); “Ann Eliza Young’s Divorce Suit” (21 Jul. 1875); “Ann Eliza Young’s Alimony” (1 Aug. 1875); and “A Menial Instead of a Wife: The Divorce Suit of Ann Eliza Young - The Decision in the Case” (28 Aug.

1877). Ann Eliza's emergence as a notorious figure during the legal wrangling is also apparent in the treatment she received from *Saturday Evening Post* humorist, Max Adeler, who joked, "If Ann Eliza Young ever succeeds in obtaining a divorce from Brigham, she [should] immediately mail to us the silver-plated butter knife which we sent her when she married him. . . . If he now marries again, as he probably will when Ann Eliza secedes, another butter knife will be wanted, and we would rather give him an old one than to incur any further expenditure" (Adeler 4). Adeler and others recognized early on that Ann Eliza could be useful for generating laughs. Few, however, likely foresaw her emergence from the gossip columns to become a formidable public speaker. One who did was James Burton Pond, a *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter who volunteered to become Young's agent after seeing her first informal talk in the lobby of the Walker House. Thanks to the financial success and valuable connections he reaped from managing Young, Pond later went on to become owner of the Boston Redpath Lyceum.

In his memoir, *Eccentricities of Genius* (1900), Pond reflects on Young's rapid ascent as a speaker and activist. He claims the 1874 passage of the Poland Act, which amended the jury selection process in the Utah Territory and was a major step toward ending polygamy, was attributable to Young's impromptu lectures to a standing-room-only audience of congressmen in House Speaker, James G. Blaine's, office, as well as to the effects of her sold-out speeches in Washington during the opening months of her activity as a speaker (Pyle 40; Pond xx). Young went on to lecture on average between 160 and 180 nights a year throughout her approximate nine-year career, which also saw major political victories for her cause with the Supreme Court's 1879 decision to uphold the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act and the 1882 passage of the Edmunds Anti-Polygamy Act (Laurence 185, 187; Bushman and Bushman 106). Years after his early protégé had retired, Pond continued to testify to her exceptional skill, comparing her favorably to Stanton, Anthony, and other women lecturers ("Major Pond's" 5) and consistently defending her integrity to any who might be skeptical of her motives: "I will say now that in all my experience I have never found so eloquent, so interesting, so earnest a talker. . . . She had a cause. She was in dead earnest. She could sway audiences with her eloquence" (Pond xi). Nevertheless, it should be noted that most of Young's contemporaries took a somewhat dimmer view of her talents and accomplishments.

That Young was regarded by many more as a freak than as a legitimate reformer is reflected by her having received, immediately after the news of her first informal lecture was transmitted across the country via AP cable, a telegram from P.T. Barnum offering her \$100,000 if she would agree to be exhibited as a curiosity under his management (Pond ix). Demonstrating awareness of her status as a curiosity, Young typically opened her most popular lecture,

"My Life in Bondage," by proclaiming, "The nineteenth wife of a man living in the nineteenth century, in a heathen country, would perhaps be considered a curiosity. But in civilized Christian America, where the abomination of polygamy is permitted by the Government, she is, of course, no curiosity" (Laurence 184). Yet, Young also undermined such efforts to counteract negative preconceptions by making questionable decisions. For instance, before she had even managed to lecture her way to the east coast, an article appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* questioning her credibility. In an ill-conceived public relations move intended to respond to the allegations, Young set up and then abruptly cancelled an interview with notorious columnist and free-love advocate, Victoria Woodhull, who, after being snubbed, approvingly broadcast that Young was carrying on an affair as she flitted unchaperoned across the country (Wallace 298; Laurence 185). While Young and Pond both always strenuously denied the persistent allegations of impropriety, when one reads Pond's reminiscences, it is hard to miss the degree to which his recollections of his first star lecturer's "eccentricities" always remained suspiciously adulatory and apt to emphasize her appreciable physical attributes ("Major").

Questions and insinuations continued to dog Young throughout her career and even after it ended. Some common accusations included claims that Young was the creation of a group of anti-Mormon provocateurs connected with the Walker House hotel and the *Salt Lake Tribune*, that her motives were entirely pecuniary, that elements of her autobiography were plagiarized from Fanny Stenhouse's *Exposé of Polygamy in Utah* (1872), and that her speeches and autobiography were ghostwritten by the anti-Mormon author, John H. Beadle (Nibley 427-569; Wallace 235). The cumulative effect of these criticisms was that newspapers and magazines came to enjoy poking fun at Young, whom they regarded as cutting a ridiculous figure, continually railing about the evils of polygamy. This attitude is apparent in the ironic tone of reporting on Young's later activities, as when the December 26, 1877 edition of the *Louisville Courier Journal* informs readers that "Ann Eliza Young is going through Massachusetts with her 'Horrors of Mormonism,' one of whom she is which" ("*Puck's Exchanges*" 12) or the *Daily Democrat* of Albuquerque writes of her 1883 re-marriage, "It affords us unusual pleasure to announce the recent marriage of Ann Eliza (Brigham Young's 19th flame) to an Ohio man. Not only does it relieve the country of a female lecturer, but at the same time a long suffering nation gets even with the irrepressible Ohio man" (Laurence 191). By the late 1880s, in the wake of a third divorce during which Denning publicly referred to Young as a "bitch" and a "whore," Young's reputation as a speaker had been almost completely effaced, and her image as an minor celebrity and serial divorcee had been cemented, as further evidenced by the indifference

that greeted her attempts in 1908 to solicit subscriptions for an updated version of her autobiography (Wallace 421).

Such is the case that was and might be made against Young. Much of what has been described, such as the tendency to dismiss her as a curiosity, the insinuations about her involvement with Major Pond, and the ridicule in the press, is typical of the treatment received by nineteenth-century female speakers (O'Connor 32-40; Johnson 52-64). Yet, some of the charges are more difficult to dispense with. It is indisputable that Young's career was facilitated by the material support of men like Pond, Judge McKean, and the Reverend C.P. Lyford (Young, *Wife No. 19* 598). Additionally, as Young lacked any means of supporting herself and her children immediately after her divorce from Brigham Young, she undoubtedly commenced her lecturing career partly for the money. These criticisms, however, impose unreasonable expectations for self-sufficiency and disinterestedness on female speakers. Such criticisms would obviously seem ridiculous if applied consistently to males.

All that remain, then, are the accusations that her speeches and autobiography were ghostwritten and that her persona was fabricated based on her 1872 reading of Stenhouse's *Exposé of Polygamy in Utah* (Nibley 489; Stenhouse and DeSimone 182-83). The first of these charges is relatively easy to address, as Young's handwritten 1878 letter to *Chicago Tribune* publisher S.L. Beidler, as well as her 1881 letters to Jenny Froiseth, publisher of the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, offer clear evidence of her command of the voice that one encounters in her speeches and her autobiography. The second charge, however, is not so readily dismissed, as it is impossible to deny that Young's lectures and her autobiography appropriate material from Stenhouse's writings, which Young often told audiences had been among her main encouragements to leave Brigham Young's household (Wallace 235-36; Stenhouse and DeSimone 15-16). One instance of such borrowing is found in the closing chapter of *Wife No. 19*. There, Young makes a final, emotional appeal to women to join her crusade:

And you, happier women . . . can you not help me? The cry of my suffering and sorrowing sisters . . . asks you, as I ask you now, "Can you do nothing for us?" Women's pens, and women's voices pleaded earnestly and pathetically for the abolition of slavery. Thousands of women, some of them your country-women, and your social and intellectual equals, are held in a more revolting slavery today. (603)

This seemingly heartfelt peroration lifts ideas and language directly from the preface Harriet Beecher Stowe had contributed to Stenhouse's 1874 book, *Tell It All*. Stowe's preface features very similar phrasing and diction, describing polygamy as a "cruel slavery whose chains have cut into the very hearts of

thousands of our sisters” and calling for “every happy wife and mother” to help relieve the “sorrows . . . of thousands, who, suffering . . . cannot or dare not speak for themselves” (Stenhouse and DeSimone vi). Meanwhile, other components of Young’s autobiography and her lectures might also be traced to Stenhouse’s publications, including chapters in *Wife No. 19* on the so-called “Handcart Scheme” (200-27) and the “Mountain Meadows’ Massacre” (228-61) that bear a remarkable similarity to the chapters on those same events that Stenhouse had recently included in *Tell It All* (191-220, 324-39).

While Young’s critics have tended to emphasize her borrowings from Stenhouse, it might also be argued that Young appropriated key elements from the speeches of another of her predecessors. Anna Dickinson might be seen as having done much to blaze the trail that Young would travel as an anti-polygamy orator. Already a popular draw on the lyceum circuit, Dickinson had been inspired by an 1869 trip to Salt Lake City to write what would become one of her most famous speeches, “Whited Sepulchres” (Ray, *The Lyceum* 151). Delivered throughout the country during the 1869-70 lecturing season, Dickinson’s speech contrasted the open beauty of Utah with the attenuated lives Mormon women were forced to live and argued that the oppression of women under polygamy was the “logical outcome of patriarchal principles” (Gallman 70; Ray 154). While it is unclear whether Young was familiar with Dickinson, it is striking the extent to which Young’s self-presentation mirrors Dickinson’s positioning of herself and her motives in “Whited Sepulchres.”

One way Young mimics Dickinson is in depicting herself as “an exemplar, an individual capable of . . . giving voice to the unexpressed needs and desires of others” (Ray 155). For example, Dickinson says, “I speak for the hearts of tenderer and sweeter women, when I speak these words and I tell you what is in their souls.” Similarly, toward the end of *Wife No. 19*, Young says, “My life is but the life of one; while thousands are suffering, as I suffered, and are powerless even to plead for themselves, so I plead for them” (601). Additionally, Young echoes Dickinson’s presentation of herself as “transforming despair into a call to heroic action” (Ray 165). In “Whited Sepulchres,” Dickinson portrays herself as almost “longing for death” as she contemplates Salt Lake City, with its injustices, standing in stark contrast to its beautiful surroundings, but as being able to carry on by “realizing that her mission is to ‘live to work.’” Likewise, Young presents herself as despairing due to the intractability of the polygamy issue, but able to persevere due to her sense of vocation: “If one voice, or one pen can exert any influence, the pen will never be laid aside, the voice never be silenced. I have given myself to this work. . . . It is my life mission” (604). While Young’s metonymic positioning of herself as a “pen” and a “voice” for the voiceless may be powerful, it feels somewhat less than authentic given how strongly it recalls the stance that Dickinson had pioneered in “Whited Sepulchres.”

While Young's successes would seem to indicate she merits more attention from historians of rhetoric, she has remained more infamous than famous, in part because of unfair criticisms but also because of legitimate questions about her authenticity. Significant elements of Young's subject matter, style, and persona were appropriated from Stenhouse's writings and Dickinson's speeches. Thus, it would seem that if a case remains to be made for Young's significance, it will have to be made on grounds other than those previously offered by Major Pond: "She had a cause. She was in dead earnest. She could sway audiences with her eloquence." If Young could sway audiences, it was not because she had an unequivocally just cause or because she was authentic. An infamous woman appropriating the themes, words, and postures of her predecessors to advocate for women in a problematically nativist idiom, Young remains an irreducibly ambivalent figure. Yet, if one looks at Young's complex relationship with Stenhouse and Dickinson from a slightly different angle, it is possible to move beyond the traditional and limited conceptions of rhetorical agency implied by arguments like Pond's and work toward a fuller appreciation of how Young's addressed the particular challenges she faced and achieved her multiple aims.

Returned on Her Merits

Understanding Young's complex relationship with her predecessors requires looking more closely at what she borrows. From Stenhouse, Young takes elements of Stowe's "Preface" to *Tell It All*, as well as chapters on the hand-cart scheme and the Mountain Meadows Massacre that Stenhouse had herself repurposed from sensationalistic accounts in such virulently anti-Mormon books as Benjamin Ferris's *Utah and the Mormons* (1854) and John Beadle's *Life in Utah* (1870). And from Dickinson, Young appropriates a stance that might also be seen as having been derived from prior anti-Mormon publications, as becomes apparent when one considers the following excerpt from Metta Victor's *Mormon Wives: A Narrative of Facts Stranger Than Fiction* (1856), in which an escaped wife addresses how she has transformed her despair into a sense of vocation to speak on behalf of voiceless women: "Always, always, my voice shall rise in defense of one love constant through life, and faithful in death – one home – one father and mother for the children – one joy on earth – one hope in heaven" (316). In this and similar passages from other anti-Mormon novels published by female authors in the 1850s, such as Alfreda Eva Bell's *Boadicea, the Mormon Wife* (1855), Orvilla Belisle's *The Prophets, or Mormonism Unveiled* (1855), and Maria Ward's *Female Life Among the Mormons* (1855), we not only see Dickinson's stance foreshadowed, but also Young's very identity as an escaped-wife-turned-speaker prefigured. When Young appears on the lecture circuit, it is, for many in her audience, as if Bell's *Boadicea*—another of

the novels' heroines who escapes across the great plains to tell her story—has suddenly sprung to life.

What is to be made of the fact that so much of what Young tends to borrow from her predecessors is itself derived from previous anti-Mormon publications? Looking at Young's appropriations from one perspective, one might argue they indicate why she should not be viewed as a significant rhetorical figure: because she was not agentive, but was rather epiphenomenal, an individual who just happened into a role imagined for her by hack authors writing in the grip of some of the nation's darkest nativist fantasies. Viewed from another perspective, however, one might argue it is precisely how Young negotiates her rhetorical agency in light of her positioning relative to these anti-Mormon novels, and to other discursive formations, that makes her a figure worth reconsidering. Making this case requires, first of all, an understanding of where these novels came from, what they shared in common, and what cultural work they performed in their particular historical context.

Hundreds of anti-Mormon novels, quasi-historical and pseudo-ethnographic studies, exposés, and alleged autobiographies were published in the U.S. between 1850 and 1890 (Arrington and Haupt; Foster; Nelson). The first recognizably anti-Mormon publication, *The History of the Saints; or, An Expose of Joseph Smith and Mormonism*, by disaffected former Mormon leader John Bennett, appeared in the early 1840s. Yet, the initial wave of anti-Mormon publications by "Gentiles" did not materialize until the mid-1850s. Prominent among this wave of publications, which responded to intense cultural anxiety in the wake of the LDS Church's 1852 public affirmation of the doctrine of plural marriage, were the four novels by Belisle, Bell, Victor, and Ward (Bushman and Bushman). These novels drew on the conventions of a wide range of genres—including the gothic; anti-Catholic, nativist novels and exposés; slave, conversion, and captivity narratives; and temperance and abolitionist writings—to "together mobiliz[e] a sentimental campaign that opposed the practice of Mormon polygamy" (Burgett 76). In addition to articulating connections with other sentimental genres that were commanding wide readerships in the wake of the success of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, these novels also performed important cultural work in helping to formulate what would come to be known as the "Mormon question," an assemblage of public conversations about polygamy, the limits of religious freedom, and related issues that was as much a matter of American Protestant culture defining its own values as it was about the Latter Day Saints (Arrington and Haupt; Burgett; Cannon; Davis; Gordon, "The Mormon Question"; Pierson). Because these novels so effectively repurposed the conventions of reformist sentimental fiction and prompted readers to engage with questions with major implications for U.S. Protestant self-definition, they offered anti-polygamy writers and lecturers considerable

resources for framing appeals in terms that audiences would recognize and credit.

A main way Young takes advantage of these resources is by establishing her *ethos* using strategies that will resonate with audiences whose preconceptions have been shaped by anti-Mormon fiction. The first of these strategies, which had frequently been used by the heroines of anti-Mormon novels to establish credibility, is to stress that she possesses no rhetorical training. In a personal letter dated April 14, 1881, Young thanks Jenny Froiseth, the editor of the *Anti-Polygamy Standard*, for complementing her speaking ability, but tells her, "I have never had any training whatever, in any way, for public speaking." Young similarly says, as she begins her lecture, "My Life in Bondage," "I cannot lay any claim to the grace of rhetoric or the art of elocution. Nevertheless, I have something to say, and . . . [while] I may not move your feelings . . . I do desire your attention, and if possible, to aid in determining your convictions" (Wallace 287). While these assertions, peppered throughout her discourse, are undoubtedly somewhat true, one might note that Young's very disclaimer seems to suggest some awareness of rhetorical theory, as it invokes Hugh Blair's currently influential conception of conviction's being inadequate to effect persuasion without one's also moving the feelings (Bizzell and Herzberg 975; O'Connor 111-16). In any case, as she stresses that she possesses no rhetorical training, Young is following the lead of fictional heroines like Bell's Boadicea, who similarly apologizes for her lack of skill, saying that all she can do is "relate events as they happen" and contribute her "'little all' towards arresting further horrors" (93, 69).

An additional strategy Young uses to develop and maintain her *ethos* is to profess a scrupulous reluctance to reveal all the sordid details of her story that might be mentioned. Toward the end of one of her lectures, for example, Young says, "I have but imperfectly told the story of polygamy; much that might be said, under some circumstances, cannot be told in a promiscuous assembly" (Wallace 291). In referencing her inability to tell her entire story, Young once again appropriates a strategy used by characters like the narrator of Orvilla Belisle's *The Prophets*, who begins her tale by claiming that because of a "reluctance to inflict a deeper grief" upon the surviving family of Joseph Smith, much that might have been included has had to "be withheld" (5-6). Whether used in a lecture or a novel, such affectations of restraint work both to establish credibility, by insinuating there is more evidence than one has time to present, and to titillate, by inviting the audience to fantasize about the salacious details that had to be omitted. Using this strategy, Young is able to simultaneously satisfy and circumvent her audience's expectation that she "speak to the facts."

As can be seen, there is good reason to be skeptical of Young's assertion that she "cannot lay claim to the grace of rhetoric." Her speeches and autobiography demonstrate a strong understanding of how to take advantage of the context established by prior anti-Mormon writers and speakers to craft ethical appeals. One might also go on to examine how she draws on these resources to craft pathetic appeals. Yet, it is possible to make more direct progress toward understanding her significance by moving on to consider how, by developing arguments that might be characterized as embodied and ethical, Young was able to incrementally move her skeptical audiences toward the formation of identifications that would have implications ranging far beyond her hearers' being convinced that polygamy should be outlawed.

An Accidental Feminist in an Intentional Man's World?

One of the most interesting things about Young is that she rarely, if ever, offers what one would most expect from an anti-polygamy speaker—logical arguments in favor of a political solution to the polygamy issue. Rather, Young mainly focuses on sharing her story and her insider's perspective. When she does develop arguments, she addresses what seem, at first, to be tangential questions: Are Mormon women responsible for their own plight? Do they have the agency to escape? In this section, I begin by looking at why Young chooses to focus on these seemingly tangential questions. Then, I turn to how she answers them, analyzing how her rhetorical practice works incrementally by means of embodied ethical arguments to invite identifications and eventually accomplish her multiple aims. Finally, I conclude by considering what insights historians and theorists of rhetoric might gain from looking closely at Young.

Why does Young address these questions rather than argue for a political answer to the problem of polygamy? One reason is because she does not believe Congress is ready to move on the matter. Offering her assessment of the prospects for legislative action, Young says she expects "legislators, in doubt or in dread, [will continue] to give polygamy the benefit of their doubts or their fears . . . for a season" (Wallace 292). Also, she writes that, having witnessed the government's inability to enforce the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, she is convinced "legislation will do no good, unless the laws can be enforced once they are made" (Young, *Wife No. 19* 604). Given these views, it makes sense that Young would not present logical arguments for why new laws should be passed. Another reason Young focuses on what initially appear to be ancillary questions is because she is presenting her arguments primarily via lectures to paying audiences on the national lyceum circuit. As Ray has explained, audiences did not come to lyceum lectures to have their minds changed. Rather,

they came to participate in gatherings that functioned “through repeated performative enactment” to constitute “group identity” (“What Hath She Wrought” 185). According to Ray, in this context, persuasion could only be effected indirectly via the “slow alteration of cultural definitions and expectations within a framework of assumed cohesion.” Adapting to these constraints, some speakers, such as Frederick Douglass and Anna Dickinson, developed what might be considered an ethical modality of argument that “presented the speakers themselves as texts available for public reading” (197). Via the ambivalent “bodily enactment” of identities that both “validated aspects of dominant cultural mores” and “move[d] beyond accepted conventions,” such speakers, Ray argues, contributed to the gradual realization of social change by “demonstrat[ing] that the category of public lecturer was more fluid than previously thought” (*The Lyceum* 175, 178). Additionally, speakers sought, with these embodied, ethical arguments, to “persuade incrementally,” shaping their listeners’ opinions on broader controversies “via careful, subtle movements away from what the lecturer imagined was the viewpoint of many audience members” (“What Hath She Wrought” 202). Given the constraints operative in lyceum lectures, it makes sense that Young would not opt to develop logical arguments aimed at securing immediate political change but might instead argue in the more oblique, embodied, and ethical mode that Ray ascribes to Dickinson and Douglass.

While this might account for why Young does not argue in the way one might expect, why does she focus on whether Mormon women are culpable for their own oppression and whether they possess sufficient agency to break free? She focuses on these seemingly peripheral issues because doing so allows her develop the sort of arguments that Ray has suggested were necessary if a lyceum lecturer aimed to do more than just entertain. Additionally, this focus allows Young to pursue both the more immediate and the broader aims that Ray mentions, not only enlarging existing conceptions of who can be a public speaker but also moving her audiences incrementally toward agreeing with her on underlying issues bearing on how the Mormon question should be framed and, eventually, answered.

Let’s look first at how Young uses this indirect, embodied, and ethical mode of argument to broaden her audience’s sense of who can be a public lecturer. Young begins by arguing that the answer to both of the questions she raises is “no.” Her Mormon sisters should not be blamed for their predicament because “they are just as pure and true as any woman in the world” (Wallace 289). Further, she insists that her listeners must not imagine “the women are free to accept this relation or reject it—to live in it or leave it,” when, in fact, “They are not free. Their souls are fettered” (292). Young’s apparent purpose in defending her Mormon sisters’ virtue and sincerity and in stressing their lack

of agency is to preemptively rebut some of the most common excuses for not taking action against polygamy. Yet, as she makes these particular arguments, Young might also be seen as presenting herself as an ambivalent text available for public reading. Her very presence before the audience as an intelligent and articulate escaped polygamous wife would raise questions about such wives' lack of agency, while her willingness to take up the still-scandalous profession of female orator would cast doubt on their virtuousness. The discrepancy between Young's assertions about Mormon women and her "bodily enactment" presents her audience with a choice: Should they dismiss her as unreliable, recognizing that doing so would present a victory to the defenders of polygamy? Or, should they overlook the cognitive dissonance they are experiencing and identify with Young, whose message otherwise so powerfully aligns with "conventions" and "dominant cultural mores" familiar from anti-Mormon and other reformist discourses, although doing so means implicitly affirming that such an infamous individual should be allowed to occupy the category of lecturer?

To ensure everyone in her audience is on the hook, Young is careful to point out that, while her sufferings under polygamy were sufficient to facilitate some initial awareness of her being oppressed, her presence before them as a speaker was dependent on the intervention of individuals who provided her with "encouragement" (289, 292). Emphasizing the necessity of others' encouragement, Young invites audience members to consider whether, in listening to her at present, they might number themselves among those providing such support. And Young sets the hook even more firmly soon thereafter by relating how, after taking the initial steps toward her new vocation, she was beset by questions: "How would I be received into society? Would ladies, especially, recognize one who had been a polygamous wife?" Inviting her audience to imagine themselves overhearing her internal struggle with such questions, Young even more dramatically turns her speech into an occasion in which the audience must decide whether, in order to fight the Mormon menace, it might be necessary to accept the legitimacy of an ambivalent speaker like her. Young's apparently digressive arguments, as it turns out, function, like the ethical arguments of Douglass and Dickinson, as an important component of a strategy aimed at engendering the formation of identifications that would move her audience to shift their thinking about who can be a speaker.

Yet, as previously indicated, Young's embodied and ethical arguments might be seen as purposing and accomplishing additional goals beyond just expanding her audience's sense of who should be afforded access to the platform. Her strategy of presenting herself as a text available for evaluation and inviting identifications also works toward achieving the sort of broader, more incremental persuasive aims that Ray mentions. For Young, these broader

aims involve reframing her audience's understanding of the Mormon question so that, when the country is finally ready to address the matter, it may do so in a manner attentive to what is really at issue—namely, questions about women's roles and opportunities and about the nature of freedom. As we will see, Young accomplishes this reframing by articulating identifications of her anti-polygamy rhetoric with two key reformist discursive formations beyond the realm of anti-Mormon discourse: the rhetoric and fiction of temperance reform and of anti-Catholic nativism.

According to Krista Ratcliffe, an identification functions as “a place of perpetual reframing that affects who, how, and what can be thought, written, spoken, and imagined” (qtd. in Balliff 1). By speaking and writing in ways that subtly identify her anti-polygamy rhetoric with temperance and anti-Catholic discourses, Young expands what might be thought about the Mormon question, opening up possibilities for imagining how it, like these issues, might be fundamentally connected with the woman question. That Young was highly attuned to the possibilities offered by articulating connections between anti-polygamy and temperance discourses is illustrated by an incident that occurred in 1877. Thanks to the efforts of some prominent suffrage activists who supported the Mormons, due to Utah having granted women the vote, two polygamous wives, Emmaline Wells and Zina Williams, had been granted an audience with First Lady, Lucy Webb Hayes, to advocate for plural marriage. Upon learning of this, Young sprung into action and wrote to Mrs. Hayes. Taking advantage of the first lady's well-known interest in temperance, Young wrote, “You did not hesitate to be known as the uncompromising foe of those drinking habits which so widely desolate the homes of this country. But Polygamy desolates every home which it enters. Surely it will be neither improper or unwise for you to exert your influence against that vast and increasing crime” (Wallace 388). Here, Young not only identifies her cause with temperance reform, but also emphasizes the analogous negative impacts that polygamy and drink have on the domestic sphere, taking advantage of “the easy cultural conjunction between intemperance and injustices to women” to articulate productive connections between the Mormon question and “other issues of concern to women” (Mattingly 123-24).

Young does not explicitly connect polygamy with drink in her lectures or books, but the connection is nonetheless strongly implied by how readily the plot lines of Young's autobiography recall storylines familiar to readers of temperance fiction. As Mattingly points out, temperance novels from the 1850s and 1860s typically began with a wedding, but then would descend into chaos. The heroines would respond either by stoically facing their lots as wives of alcoholics or by striving to change their husbands until, failing, they would bury their husbands or die themselves (127). This is the shape of the story Young

tells of her mother's life, upended not by drink, but by the equally destructive force of polygamy. Likewise, the plot of Young's own story, with its not one but two divorces, finds its analogue in temperance fiction. A new generation of temperance novels published in the 1870s featured plots where strong-willed heroines would either assume complete control of the household or "make the radical choice to leave" (131-133). Such stories, which provided a space for discussing the potentially negative consequences of marriage and highlighted women's need for some means of recourse, control, or escape, helped make a figure like Young imaginable. At the same time, however, the existence of someone like Young presumably had ambivalent effects on the cultural work being accomplished by temperance fiction, as she embodied an extreme and troublesome instantiation of the sort of agency that the more recent novels had envisioned.

Young's identifications with conventions familiar from temperance and anti-Catholic rhetoric and fiction were effective in that they provided her a means of reframing the Mormon question so that it overlapped more productively with other ongoing cultural conversations about the limits of religious liberty and about the nature of freedom, consent, and license. Yet, these subtly articulated connections and echoes could be, at the same time, problematic, not only for the reason just noted, but also because of the extent to which temperance and anti-Catholic discourses, much like anti-Mormon rhetoric and fiction, remained invested in reinforcing conservative gender ideologies and propagating nativist paranoia (Hofstadter 20-35). The simultaneously powerful and problematic nature of these identifications, and the important role they played in helping Young effect the sort of incremental persuasion needed to achieve her broader aims, becomes most apparent, however, when we consider the striking ways in which Young cannily deployed what Susan Griffin has called the "narrative language" of anti-Catholic fiction and rhetoric (2).

Young's speeches and writings strongly recall the narrative language of anti-Catholic fiction when she makes use of the previously-discussed tropes that anti-Mormon novelists used to establish *ethos*, such as emphasis on the speaker's lack of training and the "strategic omission[s] of information" (Griffin 45-46). Young's also recalls the narrative language of anti-Catholic fiction when she offers "thick description" of strange cultural practices and rituals. And her autobiography, with its plates providing aerial views of Salt Lake City, likenesses of Mormon leaders, and artists' depictions of the Temple, evokes the use of similar graphical features in anti-Catholic novels, which incorporated exhibits, illustrations, and floor plans to testify to both the empirical reality of the evidence presented and the considerable money spent to finance the book's development and printing (45). By using these sorts of features, Young encourages her audience to intuit associations between her project and this

parallel nativist discursive domain in which authors and readers were likewise engaging with “cultural ideas and problems, including the roles of women, shifting definitions of masculinity, the status of marriage, education and citizenship” (2).

Young’s use of these evidentiary strategies may have additionally called to mind, for her audiences, the anti-Catholic genre of escaped nun’s tales, as well as the career of Maria Monk, whose autobiography, *Awful Disclosures* (1836), had employed many of the aforementioned strategies to describe her life in and escape from the Hotel Dieu Nunnery in Montreal. Monk, like Young, had undertaken a speaking tour, during which she was continually confronted by attempted debunkings and accusations that her autobiography had been ghostwritten. By 1838, Monk had been discredited, and she quickly thereafter disappeared from view, dying in prison in 1849. *Awful Disclosures*, however, went on to sell an estimated 300,000 copies prior to the Civil War, and it remained in print and widely read in Young’s day (Billington 295-96). Young’s speeches and autobiographies most clearly echo Monk, and the genre of escaped nun’s tales, in blurring the line between autobiography and fiction. According to Griffin, anti-Catholic fiction was able to emerge as an “integral and shaping part of cultural controversy” largely thanks to how Monk and her heirs were able to create “‘true’ accounts” that not only “marshaled and confirmed recognized patterns of information for a Protestant audience” (26, 34, 38) but also created an interactive rhetorical dynamic wherein “the renegade must be subjected to examination and interrogation” (30).

We are now able to draw some conclusions about how Young’s incremental, ethical and embodied persuasion works, what she accomplishes with her reframing of the Mormon question, and why she might be regarded as an especially heuristic figure for historians and theorists of rhetoric. As has been shown, much of the power of Young’s rhetorical practice is due to her framing her appeals based on “patterns of information” from not only anti-Mormon discourse but from temperance rhetoric and fiction and anti-Catholic fiction as well. This strategy renders her recognizable and makes her seem authentic. At the same time, however, some of the most crucial aspects of Young’s rhetorical effectiveness are attributable to her remaining an irredeemably suspect figure in the tradition of Monk. As Young speaks, she poses a problem for her listeners, who want to identify with her but must grapple with her infamy, the inconsistencies between her arguments and her bodily enactment of the identity she is defending, and all of her blatant appropriations from various discourses. Like the escaped nun, she paradoxically represents both “authenticity and unreliability” (Griffin 30). Also, as Griffin argues was the case with escaped nun’s tales, Young’s lectures and autobiography accomplish their cultural work in large part by offering up Young herself as an ambivalent text available for

public reading. She counts on this dynamic, which invites her listeners and readers to actively engage in assessing her status as evidence, to help accomplish her reframing of the Mormon question. This reframing works because, as they are invited to assess Young's status as evidence, members of her audience are also challenged to engage with crucial questions about the nature of freedom, consent, and license underlying the debates over polygamy and woman's rights.

Why was it so important that Young's speeches and writings engage her audience with these more fundamental questions underlying the polygamy controversy and work to subtly and incrementally shape their views on such matters? Grasping why these sorts of strategies were needed requires understanding a bit more both about what was being contested in the polygamy debate and how it had been contested to that point. Prior to and during the 1870s and 1880s, anti-polygamy activists' arguments had generally boiled down to a single assertion: "Mormons had fundamentally misunderstood the nature and import of freedom" (Gordon, "The Liberty" 822). Meanwhile, defenders of polygamy had contended that the constitution's protections of religious liberties guaranteed a woman's right to consent to enter a polygamous marriage. According to this understanding of the limits of religious liberty and the nature of freedom, advocates of polygamy were actually the ones protecting women's rights. Anti-polygamy activists, on the other hand, had rejoindered that a right to consent to polygamy was merely "the liberty of self degradation," that all polygamous marriages were therefore non-consensual, and that women were justified in gaining their freedom via divorce or escape (817). The anti-polygamy activists' ability to make this argument had been complicated, however, by their audiences' prejudices against divorce. These prejudices led most to hold the view that, while one might consent to marry, consent crossed the line and became license when one wanted to do something conventionally regarded as unethical, like divorce (840). Additionally, Young's audience's thinking about freedom, consent, and license had been shaped by the abolition debate and the Civil War. Slave owners and the seceding states were both understood as having crossed the line between consent and license in insisting on their rights to own others and to leave the union. Obviously, the analogy with the slave owner was highly useful to anti-polygamy speakers, but the analogy with the seceding states was problematic, as their audiences were likely to conceptualize wives attempting to leave a marriage as breaking a union all had entered consensually. Most speakers attempted to cut this Gordian knot by arguing that the Mormons needed to be compelled, by law or by force, to abandon their erroneous conception of freedom. Young, however, differs in that she attempts to loosen the knot by reorienting the debate's underlying terms,

influencing how her audience thinks about freedom, and particularly how they understand the dynamic of consent and license as it relates to divorce.

One can see how she manages this by looking at another of Young's several dedications at the outset of *Wife No. 19*, this one "To the Mormon Wives of Utah." In this passage, Young attempts to convince reluctant Mormon women to overcome their fear and join the Protestant Christian community:

Hence, you shrink from those whom God will soon lead to your deliverance, from those to whom I daily present your claims to a hearing and liberation, and who listen with responsive and sympathetic hearts. But He will not long permit you to be so wickedly deceived; nor will the People permit you to be so cruelly enslaved. Hope and pray! Come out of the house of bondage! Kind hearts beat for you! Open hands will welcome you!

Here, Young speaks directly to Mormon wives, encouraging them to escape or divorce and to trust they will not be ostracized but welcomed. Yet, she also implicitly hails her readers, who are again asked to consider whether they will identify as among those who will provide encouragement to such women and to make this decision based on their knowledge of the only escapee and divorcee most of them have encountered, the author herself. As she engages her audience in this by-now-familiar identificatory dynamic, Young's wording subtly nudges her readers to reframe their thinking about the nature of freedom. It does so by encouraging them to consider whether a decision to escape or divorce might be re-conceptualized as a matter not of license, but of consent—of a woman's choosing to supplant a former union initiated by deception with a new union with "the People." With the series of imperatives closing the passage, Young suggests, in case her readers have yet to pick up on their envisioned role in this new alliance, that the proper response to the woman who has made such a choice is not only to "listen with responsive and sympathetic hearts" but to "welcome" with "open hands." While all these appeals remain implicit, they gain resonance and power when interpreted in light of the connections that Young's speeches and autobiography had articulated with anti-Mormon, temperance, and anti-Catholic discursive formations, all of which might be seen as having provided crucial space for addressing fundamental, but not often openly discussed, issues at the heart of the woman's rights and polygamy debates.

Ultimately, Young is able to speak and write powerfully, in spite of, or perhaps because of, her infamy, by drawing on the resources offered by anti-Mormon rhetoric and fiction, by developing embodied and ethical arguments that challenge her audiences to form identifications that will expand their conceptions of who can be a speaker, and by articulating connections

with a broader range of reformist discursive formations so that her listeners and readers might engage more productively with what is genuinely at stake in cultural conversations about the problem of polygamy. Her multidimensional rhetorical practice works by indirect, complex, and ambivalent means to incrementally move a resistant audience not toward support for a political solution to the issue per se, but toward changing the underlying attitudes that are ultimately keeping the issue from being resolved. With her reframing of the Mormon question, Young calls attention to the fact that the Mormon question is inseparable from the woman question, which is in turn inseparable from conversations about the limits of religious liberty. All of these are inseparable from prior questions about the nature and import of freedom. Further, it is not just Mormon polygamists who hold problematic ideas and attitudes. The reform-minded Protestant members of her audience will also need to change how they think about freedom, consent, and license; about divorced and escaped women; and, indeed, about women in general if the true roots of the polygamy issue are ever to be addressed. Young's rhetorical practice is attentive and responsive to all these broader issues, which makes her career as a speaker and writer an especially valuable resource for insights into what might be more generally thought of as the dynamics of incremental persuasion.

Young moreover emerges as an unexpectedly heuristic figure for historians and theorists of rhetoric because she challenges us to further extend and complicate our thinking about rhetorical agency. Hopelessly infamous and troublingly inauthentic, but, at the same time, highly effective and enormously successful, Young stands as of yet a bit beyond our explanatory reach. Yet, this "promiscuous and protean" (Campbell 14) quality is precisely what makes her such a productive figure to consider for a field presently seeking ways to "move beyond notions of rescue, recovery, and (re)inscription" and to work toward "understanding rhetorical agency itself in new, more dynamic terms . . . as an embodied social praxis" (Royster and Kirsch 43, 132). Trying to describe exactly this compelling and yet elusive quality that makes Young so worth revisiting, Irving Wallace, Young's best-known biographer, once referred to her as an "accidental feminist in an intentional man's world" (332). Wallace's thought-provoking description, it should be noted, perceptively recognizes the way in which Young's career functions to "challenge . . . the centrality of the actor-hero-rhetor"; however, it doesn't quite speak to the actual, surprising ways in which her rhetorical practice succeeds "by opening itself to networks of causes and to nonrational ways of knowing," or to how it reflects an awareness of the extent to which "political and cultural changes are the results of a myriad of extended, messy, sometimes inexplicable interventions" (MacIntyre 25-26). Wallace fails to fully grasp how Young manages to effect meaningful change by means more indirect, subtle, and ambivalent than we have tended

to recognize. Young's speaking, writing, and activism deploy powerful embodied and ethical arguments that persuade gradually by inviting identifications, articulating effective connections with diverse discursive formations, and reframing seemingly intractable public questions so as to make them more amenable to rhetorical action. She challenges us to "stand back from the simplicity and forthrightness of the basic account of eloquence to see more than we might perceive at first" (Royster 33) and offers a strong reminder of why historians of rhetoric should continue to seek out, listen to, and learn from new individual woman rhetors. When we take such a step back, attending carefully to what we might learn from Ann Eliza Young, we are able to discover considerably more than we might initially perceive, not only about a groundbreaking and unfortunately overlooked woman lecturer, but also about ourselves—about whom we can listen to with responsive and sympathetic hearts and whom we are willing to welcome as a significant figure in our histories of rhetoric.

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Reading Children’s Book Editor Ursula Nordstrom: Archives of Literacy Sponsorship, Workplace Persuasion, and Queer Networks

Kelly Blewett

Abstract: *This essay examines the rhetorical strategies of Ursula Nordstrom, a lesbian editor at Harper and Row from 1931-1980 who had a progressive vision for children’s literature. Nordstrom’s charismatic ethos enabled her to achieve professional success, as did a vital network of women. The essay asserts that Adrienne Rich’s concept of the lesbian continuum is relevant for understanding the role Nordstrom’s network played in her career. While positioning children’s publishing as a worthy site to study workplace communication, the essay also explores how the inaccessibility of women’s corporate archive, as well as the shifting intersubjective space between the researcher and the subject over time, impacts feminist historiography.*

Keywords: *workplace writing, corporate archives, lesbian, queer, historiography, literacy sponsorship, strategic contemplation*

“This apartment full of books could crack open,
... Once open the books, you have to face
the underside of everything you’ve loved—”

—Adrienne Rich, “Twenty One Love Poems”

In 2005, the summer after my senior year of college, I interned at a children’s book publisher in New York City. I began a delicious routine: working by day in Penguin’s bustling, colorful offices just south of the Village, and returning each night to read in a cramped bedroom in the meat packing district, near Times Square. I would lie across the low, full-sized bed in the tiny apartment and read books about children’s literature. I was twenty-two years old, alone in the city, and very, very happy. This nightly reading was my first encounter with Ursula Nordstrom, whom I first encountered by way of *Dear Genius*, Leonard Marcus’s brilliantly edited collection of Nordstrom’s letters.

Dear Lavinia:

It was such fun seeing you at luncheon; you make such sense and also look so pretty. Grand combination. You did not talk too much about problems. I enjoyed everything. [. . .]

What I want to say to you today is that I love you all the more for your confession about not loving *The Hobbit*. It is one of the several books I have tried my best to read but I simply could never get into it and I have had to hide my shame, but now I can admit it in view of the fact that I will have your distinguished company. Bless you, Mrs. Russ, and long may you rave.

Ever Affectionately,

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Twelve years later I have, in Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch's term, strategically contemplated Ursula Nordstrom, and I see someone engaged in very tricky rhetorical work, someone whom Suzanne Bordelon might refer to as a muted rhetor, a person whose powerful persuasion worked behind the scenes of institutions to encourage social change, often through command of mundane documents. She preferred, in the words of Leonard Marcus, to "make her mark . . . with invisible ink" ("Introduction" xvii). Feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition should read about Nordstrom because she fought ideological battles on an unusual battleground. She was a very successful sponsor of literacy for young children, as well as artists and writers. Not only did she offer challenges to her contemporaries in children's publishing, but she offers us challenges today, too—about how to study writers in corporations, about the complexity of literacy sponsorship, and about the intangibility of queer feminist networks. And, finally, about the slipperiness of the relationship between the historian and the rhetor she studies.

I want to introduce Nordstrom to a new audience—to explain her accomplishments, to look at her rhetorical strategies—and, amidst this familiar work of recovery, to explore what Adrienne Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum may offer us as we seek to understand Nordstrom's female networks in children's book publishing. Such a move follows K.J. Rawson's call to upset the familiar assumptions of heteronormativity that characterize feminist rhetorical history. As I open up children's publishing as a worthy site to study workplace communication, I will also raise points about the accessibility of women's corporate archives—an accessibility question that continues to have implications in the study of workplace writing today. Most importantly, though, I want to theorize how Royster and Kirsch's concepts of *strategic contemplation* and *critical imagination* have played out in my own understanding of Nordstrom. As

Adrienne Rich's poem quoted in the epigraph above suggests, there is danger in reopening cherished rhetorics. We may have to encounter the underside of our intellectual icons.

Ursula Nordstrom's Context and Significance in Children's Book Publishing 1930-1980

"What does an editor of books for young people do? Well, that all depends. It depends on the type of house with which the editor is associated, his or her relationship to the management, the type of management, and the type of economy." -Ursula Nordstrom, "Editing Books"

Ursula Nordstrom worked at Harper & Brothers from 1931 through 1980. Mary Stoltz, one of her authors, described her presence years after her death: "She was a bit plump and she had a wonderful intelligent face that was kind but not in the least bit sweet. She had spectacles and these marvelous blue eyes looking out at you. She had great legs. She had a very low, precise, musical voice" (Marcus, "Tapes," 137). She was hired to work in the college books department. In the cafeteria, she befriended the head of the children's department, Louise Raymond. She became Raymond's assistant, and, after Raymond left the company, Nordstrom took over her job. (It wasn't hard to get; one historian says, "the publishing house casually passed the directorship to Nordstrom" [Stevenson, "Nordstrom," np]). She ran the department for thirty-three years, nurtured new talent, and oversaw new editions of classics. She steadily accrued successes within the company, becoming the first female Vice President and a publisher. Leonard Marcus, in his collection of her letters, the only published volume devoted to Nordstrom, calls her "the single most creative force for innovation in children's publishing in the United States during the twentieth century" (xvii). He explains her significance in this way:

It was she who published many or all of the children's books of Margaret Wise Brown, E.B. White, Garth Williams, Ruth Krauss, Crockett Johnson, Charlotte Zolotow, Maurice Sendak, Mary Stoltz, Louise Fitzhugh, Else Holmelund Minarik, Mary Rogers, Karla Kuskin, Russell Hoban, John Steptoe, and Shel Silverstein. Put another way, it was Nordstrom who edited a major portion of the children's classics of our time, including *The Runaway Bunny*, *The Carrot Seed*, *Stuart Little*, *Goodnight Moon*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Harriet the Spy*, *Little Bear*, *Bedtime for Frances*, and *The Giving Tree*.

Nordstrom, propelled by a progressive view of childhood and an affinity for creative types, effectively broadened the range of issues that could be

explored in children's and young adult literature. In 1972, *Publishers Weekly* summarized her contributions to the field: "she has pioneered and turned increasingly toward books that deal honestly with contemporary problems" (Freilicher, 32). Young adult books that dealt honestly in contemporary problems may have been more popular due to larger cultural shifts wherein realism came into fashion and sentimentalism declined. But it was Nordstrom's ability to move within this trend, and perhaps even to direct it, that distinguishes her career.

A recent collection devoted to the intersections between queer theory and children's literature locates one of the books Nordstrom edited, John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* as the first book for young adults to explore homosexual desire (Abate and Kidd). Another of her titles, Louise Fitzhugh's *The Long Secret*, was the first book to mention menstruation, famously prompting Nordstrom to write in the draft's margin, "Thank you, Louise Fitzhugh!" (*Letters* 239). As Nordstrom recalled in a speech, she was one of the first to accept and publish a book written in Black English vernacular ("Assorted Thoughts" 25). Yet, as the epigraph to this section suggests, Nordstrom's job was characterized by her relationship to the "upper management" of a patriarchal publishing company—her role was the female children's book editor in what was otherwise a boys' club. Along with her tremendous output, her successful management of this dynamic makes her, and the field of children's publishing more broadly, especially worthy of analysis for feminist historiographers today. "Work-related rhetorics" write Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith, "might offer feminist rhetoricians a robust, sustained area of inquiry, spanning both historical and contemporary research. [. . .] workplaces and professions are often key axes in the maintenance or disruption of gendered, raced, classed, and ability-based differences" (200).

Like teaching writing in the academy, children's publishing could be considered an underclass in the book world.¹ This was one reason Nordstrom was so free to experiment in the department, and why she was able to rise to a place of authority as a non-college-educated woman (though her lack of degree troubled her). Like teaching writing, where it was held that women

1 In *Bookwomen: Creating an Empire in Children's Book Publishing* (2006), Jacalyn Eddy describes the important role that women played in professionalizing children's literature. She profiles six women—two booksellers, two editors, and two librarians. Working across their respective sites, often in tandem, these women increased the volume of children's books being published, established review magazines to evaluate and promote the books, created awards that celebrated top books, and established spaces within libraries and bookshops devoted to children's literature.

were especially suited to work closely with student writers and nurture their prose, it was believed that women publishers were especially suited to work on books for young children. And it was mostly middle and upperclass white women who held these editorial roles. "Subscribing to the culture of middle-class status also involved performing the role of 'women,'" cultural historian Jacalyn Eddy writes of women in the publishing industry during the early-to-mid twentieth century, "thus 'niceness,' 'mannerliness,' and 'civility' set the boundaries of their language and social behavior" (9). Or, as scholars in rhetoric and writing might put it, "workplaces, work tasks, and work arrangements are also sites where gender and work themselves are rhetorically contested and construed" (Hallenbeck and Smith 201). Nordstrom had to work within the gendered expectations of her company and the larger publishing industry. Her stylish self-presentation, combined with a vital network of female allies, helped her achieve tremendous success within those parameters.

Residue of old arrangements—wherein publishing was a literary club made of up white, privileged males—lingers. A 2015 survey indicates that the workforce in publishing is predominantly comprised of white women, which grants credence to the often-heard claim that publishing (like teaching) is a feminized profession. At the executive level, however, the survey results indicate, the industry is still led by white men (McGee). Traditions of publishing have other implications, too, for studying editors like Nordstrom; the Harper archive, like many corporate archives, is not open to the public. Archival inaccessibility has a bearing on how feminist historiographers like myself approach figures like Nordstrom and on the role that critical imagination and strategic contemplation must play as we try to, in the words of Cheryl Glenn, identify "a pocket of rhetorical activity" (11).

Archival Limits and Methodological Approach

"Historiography, reading it crookedly and telling it slant, could help me shape—re-member—a female rhetorical presence." —Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold*

Because Nordstrom worked for Harper and because the papers related to each book project on which she worked must be approved by the author's estate manager before they can be quoted, relatively few of Nordstrom's words can be easily accessed today, though it is obvious that Nordstrom spent hours each day writing. Many papers are stored by Harper in an off-site facility, unavailable to researchers. Leonard Marcus was one exception. He describes his process of spending two years reading tens of thousands of letters before selecting 350 of them for inclusion in *Dear Genius*. The letters, wonderful as they are to read and rich as they are in examples of Nordstrom in action, are

also maddeningly incomplete. Deborah Stevenson, reviewing the book in a children's literature journal, notes:

One can't help but wonder about what's not included. The lengthy correspondence with Sendak addresses moral questions, creative dilemmas, and family matters, but there's no elaboration on the artistic evolution of *Wild Things* or *In the Night Kitchen*. Selected letters to Louise Fitzhugh explore details about *The Long Secret*, but there's no hashing through of *Harriet the Spy*. Did these landmarks emerge without epistolary coaching, or were those letters less memorable, or less effective, than those Marcus included? [. . .] Are there things missing that we don't even know to miss? ("Letters" 260)

I wanted to see Nordstrom's thousands of letters for myself, of course. I first reached out to children's literature scholars whom I knew had seen papers from the Harper archive. One kindly offered to forward my request to the corporate archivist but was not enthusiastic about the prospects. He explained that the archival material is located off-site and must be requested and relocated for review, and that the office did not have enough staff and resources to respond to research requests. He concluded: "I suspect that [the archivist] may not be able to help at this time."

He was right. While I eventually communicated with the archivist directly, sending a letter emphasizing my commitment to studying Nordstrom and offering to cover the costs associated with moving papers from the storage facility, the archivist politely demurred, explaining that while my request was interesting and valid, the company policy was not to allow any outside access into the in-house archival materials. This decision, I learned, is not unusual. Peter Carini, an archivist at Dartmouth College, explained, "Because the mission of many corporate archives is to support the administrative work of the company, they can be difficult to contact and do not have public-facing presences" (Carini).

In lieu of access, then, researchers must focus on documents already available to the public. In Nordstrom's case, these documents are, in fact, quite varied: letters, interviews, speeches, newspaper and magazine articles, book

chapters, and even her own novel for young people.² As a feminist historiographer curious about how Nordstrom articulated a rhetoric that enabled her to move purposefully through her work situation, I was especially interested in finding themes that appear across these documents. By looking across these disparate pieces, I hoped to see Nordstrom "slant," as Cheryl Glenn would say. For Glenn, looking at a subject slant will enable a project to take shape, sight-lines begin to converge, and a portrait emerge (173).

I also wanted to be reflexive and attentive to my own readerly approach to Nordstrom's public archive. Jacqueline Jones Royster has eloquently described the importance of historiographers acknowledging their passionate attachments (*Traces* 280), yet the development of an attachment to particular rhetorics and rhetors progresses in stages. As the relationship between the researcher and the subject shifts, the way the pieces of the archive fit together will also move, and the portrait they suggest to the historian will alter. By offering a very specific example of this phenomenon, it is my hope that we might be able to consider the role that the intersubjectivity between the researcher and the subject plays in feminist historiography more broadly. Such work has already been undertaken in anthropology, in scholarship such as Margery Wolf's *A Thrice-Told Tale*, which depicts the same event as described by the researcher in three different genres and at three different times in her life. Taking up Wolf's framework, scholars in rhetoric and composition have studied the "lost subjects" in narratives about service learning. They conclude: "conflicts of representation and responsibility. . . haunt ethnographic encounters" (Carrick, Hamler, Himley, and Jacobi 59). Perhaps many feminist historiographers are also haunted.

Nordstrom's Ethos and Enthymemes

When I was 22 and encountering Nordstrom for the first time, it was the star power of Nordstrom's prose that kept me turning pages. One reviewer, after reading Marcus's collection of letters, commented, "[Nordstrom's]

2 We have the letters from Marcus's volume, supplemented by a critical introduction which contains passages from additional letters not included in the book; a book chapter Nordstrom wrote later in her career about her work; four short articles she wrote for public audiences (two of which were published in the *New York Times*); two profiles which appeared in *Publishers Weekly* (one from the forties, one from the seventies); several accounts of working with Nordstrom in the public record; and, finally, Nordstrom's own novel *The Secret Language*, which was published in the early sixties. All of this is in addition to, of course, to the sizable archive of children's books Nordstrom had a hand in publishing.

epistolary persona is witty, engaged, and dramatic, with a stylish New Yorkeresque breeziness" (Stevenson "Letters" 257). Marcus also described the letters in performative terms: "Letter writing was a form of theatrical improvisation for Nordstrom. Her letters were her stage" ("Introduction" xxxiv). Barbara Dicks, who worked as Nordstrom's secretary, recalled her boss's writing process: "She typed her own letters, mistakes and all, at the speed of light. That was how she expressed herself" (Marcus "Tapes" 145). Like other women rhetors, Nordstrom relied on humor to persuade.³ Recounting in an interview how she acquired and edited one of her most famous books, *A Hole is to Dig* by Ruth Krauss, she said:

Nobody expected *A Hole is to Dig* to do what it did. Ruth brought it in to me all on three-by-five cards, and I went into hysterics over some of the definitions, they were so marvelous and there had never been a book like it. She said she had a certain man in mind to illustrate it, and I thought he was the worst man in the world, but I always tried to make the authors happy . . . (Natov and Deluca, 121)

She described the atmosphere around Harper following a successful awards night in a personal letter:

What do you think about good old Harper having published books the authors and artists of which won both the Newbery and the Caldecott medals? We are so happy—unaccustomed as we are . . . We've been living in this sort of cold-water flat for a long time, trying to keep things scrubbed and neat, and the rats under control, and doing the best we can, don't you know, and everyone's braids neat, and fresh pinnys on, and not getting discouraged or bitter—not gambling or swilling cheap wine. And finally we got moved out into a better neighborhood. . . . It's been a long wait, but finally we're respectable, and all. Forgive effusion. We're all slightly light-headed. (*Letters* 175)

If descriptive hyperbole was one half of Nordstrom's ethos, the other half may have been self-assured directness. While she often experienced feelings of inadequacy, perhaps, as she put it, because she was a child of the depression or because she lacked a college degree, and she was confident enough to express these feelings in speeches, articles, letters and interviews. In one interview she explained: "I was always nervous I went by hunches. A librarian once said to me, 'How dare you think you can be a children's book editor—you haven't been a teacher, you haven't been a librarian.' And I said, 'Well,

3 For a discussion of the role of humor in women's rhetoric, see Zwagerman.

I'm an ex-child and I haven't forgotten a thing" (Natov and Deluca 122). That Nordstrom located her authority in once having been a child stands in contrast to many of her peers who were determining what children should read, who often located authority as *mothers* or *parents* or *psychologists* rather than former children (see Eddy on the importance of authority in children's book publishing). Nordstrom's boldness informed her style and success.

One of Nordstrom's often repeated goals was to "publish good books for bad children." In this phrase, Nordstrom simultaneously offered a critique of the field, which she saw as offering bad books for good children, and a direction for future work: she wanted good books that met children where they were, that were not didactic, that were close to children. Once, writing in 1954 to a sales representative who was not enthusiastic about the newest book by Ruth Krauss, Nordstrom defended the author and drew the salesman's attention to the very end of the book. "Just look at the last line of the *How to Entertain Telephone Callers*" she wrote. Krauss's line, which was "whatever your talent," was evidence to Nordstrom of how Krauss spoke to children:

Believe me, that [line] is so close to children, so exactly right, so damn warm and perfect that any little child can't help but feel happier at the moment when it is read to him. Happier isn't the right word. I guess I mean that 'whatever your talent' can't help but make any child feel warmed and attended to and considered. And, believe me, not many children's books make children feel considered. No child would define it that way but you'll know what I mean. (*Letters* 72)

While I will return to this idea of what it means for a child to be "attended to" in a book, I want to draw attention to Nordstrom's rhetorical flexibility, made possible through her stylish ethos. She concluded the letter: "Oh hell, it all boils down to: you just can't explain this sort of basic, wonderful stuff to some adults, Jim." To read over her correspondence, Marcus writes, "is to witness the creation of an artfully drawn, unfailingly vivid character named Ursula Nordstrom, a literary persona by turns leonine and Chaplinesque, cocksure, and beguilingly off-balance" ("Introduction" xviii). While she did occasionally engage in outright conflict, she more typically charmed her audiences, often through humorous stories that gently revealed an underlying point.

When Nordstrom talked about her male-dominated workplace, for example, she repeated key vignettes to establish a larger narrative about Harper and her role within it. Consider this letter, written in 1950 to author Meindert DeJong:

Did I ever tell you that several years ago, after the Harper management saw that I could publish children's books successfully, I was

taken out to luncheon and offered, with great ceremony, the opportunity to be an editor in the adult department? The implication, of course, was that since I learned to publish books for children with considerable success perhaps I was now ready to move along (or up) to the adult field. I almost pushed the luncheon table into the lap of the pompous gentleman opposite me and then explained kindly that publishing children's books was what I did, that I couldn't possibly be interested in books for dead dull finished adults, and thank you very much but I had to get back to my desk to publish some more good books for bad children. (*Letters* 64)

Nineteen years later, Nordstrom brought this story up again in another letter, calling the offer "patronizing" and asserting "I almost killed the man" (*Letters* 286). She also told versions of this vignette in a *New York Times* article and a *Top of the News* article, in a speech, and in an interview with *Publishers Weekly* ("Stuart, Wilbur, Charlotte" [345]; "Joyful Challenge" [38]; "Assorted Thoughts"; Freilicher [33]). This vignette—and its central character, the Harper man—was evidently very important to Nordstrom. It helped her explain her career to a variety of audiences and to pointedly distance herself from the company for which she worked. It was a central narrative of her public life.

To listen to the telling of the story like this is to see a treasured psychological object, one that is useful and comes easily to hand. Adrienne Rich writes, "the workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of their psychic and physical boundaries" ("Compulsory" 1598). Nordstrom used this story to publicly reject male violation and to position her involvement in children's publishing on her own terms. "The most creative people today are working in children's books," she told the interviewer at *Publishers Weekly* after finishing this vignette. "Children's books is the most rewarding field there is in publishing" (Freilicher 33).

In 1981, writing from a house in Connecticut so remote that "it can't easily be found, even with a map" (Marcus xxxvii), Nordstrom would again refer to the men of Harper, but this time in such a way that one can see more of her workplace philosophy. She wrote:

One has heard (not often, but one has heard) of the heads of adult trade departments who have suddenly thought to themselves, and repeated this thought to the top management, "Hey, why don't we put the junior books and the adult trade into one department? Really that would make more sense. They're all trade books, actually. The same salesmen sell them, and I just think the junior books and their profit should now become part of the regular adult trade department." (Note: Throughout the above, the publishing head of the adult trade

department probably referred to junior books as “juvies,” which is salt in an easily opened wound.) Well, when this happens, it is time for the editor to fight for the department’s turf. It is important for those departmental figures to be kept separately, and to show that the department is making money. (If they don’t show a profit, of course, the conversation between the adult trade editor and top management will never take place.) If the department shows a healthy profit, top management must admit that “they must be doing something right” and keep hands off. (“Editing Books” 152)

While the tone of this piece is light, as when Nordstrom suggests the use of the word “juvies” to be “salt in an easily opened wound,” the threatening nature of the encroachment is clear: the reason for conflating the departments would be to use the profit from the children’s department to mask a deficit in profit in the adult trade sector. Though Nordstrom employs no pronouns in this brief vignette, it is clear the “heads of adult trade departments” are men in social connection with each other, or what Heidi Hartmann would later call a “kinship network” (101). The relationship between adult trade and upper management must be subverted in order for (female) independence to be maintained. But the relationship cannot be undermined through Nordstrom’s own social capital. Instead, Nordstrom must demonstrate by way of financial data that the children’s department is earning a healthy profit to maintain her autonomy. Capitalism is thus positioned as a woman’s weapon against patriarchy—a subtle positioning that underlies many stories about the office that Nordstrom enjoyed retelling.

Nordstrom’s focus on the bottom-line may be a “double-voicing” strategy, described by Suzanne Bordelon as when “muted or subordinate groups must use the language of controlling power in order to be heard” (339). Talking numbers forced men to back down, which may explain why Nordstrom frequently discussed of book sales, even when she wasn’t asked about them. In 1979, she offered many sales figures to interviewers at the *Lion and the Unicorn* and went out of her way on another occasion to say that thanks to her leadership the children’s division was the most profitable sector at Harper. In a collection of interviews about Nordstrom, one author remembered Nordstrom consistently bringing up money to demonstrate the viability of her taste and her success (Marcus “Tapes” 151).

While Nordstrom’s books were financially successful, her rhetoric is troubled because the kinds of texts that most animated Nordstrom—including her own book, *The Secret Language* (1960)—were not typically among the most profitable. Further, Nordstrom’s capability at earning money did not transfer neatly into power within the company. As author Margaret Warner reported:

As for her own career—it ended unhappily in her view. I'm a bit fuzzy on the details, but in her final years at Harper, she was denied a seat on the board. Here she was, running this incredibly successful seven-million-dollar department, which was a big deal in those days. She was a giant in her field, a recognized trailblazer. But inside the company, she wasn't admitted to the "club." [. . .] I know she felt she'd been patronized—and in the very end, she felt she was expendable. I think she was quite bitter—and that's not too strong a word—that she hadn't been recognized. She warned me to take a lesson from her experience. The message was: as a woman you're going to have to work twice as hard and be twice as good as a man, and even then do not assume you are going to get the same recognition or rewards. (Marcus, "Tapes," 151)

Overall by reading across these documents, we see a beloved line of argument—that capitalism can protect female turf—and the limits of that argument. Reading between the lines, we may infer that Nordstrom's vision was for certain profitable children's books to allow for other less popular, more controversial titles to be published.

What Nordstrom focused on in her public and private self-presentations was creating a powerful persona—a funny, witty, breezy self who could persuade writers to work with her, communicate her triumph over sexism at work, cast a vision for the field of children's publishing, and defend her taste in children's books. Her rhetorical strategies of establishing core narratives about her industry and using humor and exaggeration to persuade readers were not unique. For me, even more than these rhetorical maneuvers, Nordstrom's ideas about children and reading were fascinating.

Imagining Nordstrom's Vision of the Child Reader

I saw something in Nordstrom's vision for children's literature that deeply appealed, particularly what I perceived as her desire for children to feel recognized by the books they read. Louise Rosenblatt, as paraphrased by Annika Hallin, offers a view of reading that seems to elaborate Nordstrom's view. Rosenblatt, resisting the New Critical approaches, emphasized the viability of students' diverse reading interpretations. Rather than prescribing a particular way to read, Rosenblatt preferred for students to engage the text associatively and saw reading as a process by which "the text will be remade through its combination with the student mind" (286). Ultimately, she thought that "literary education ought to help students integrate their linguistic competence with who they are as persons." Nordstrom also believed that children could make what they wanted to out of the books they read. She often said that a child would respond creatively to the work of a truly creative person (see *Letters*,

168; "Assorted Thoughts" 28; Freilicher 33; "Joyful Challenge" 40). Rosenblatt's idea about the power of reading to develop individual identities is echoed in Nordstrom's statement that children must feel *considered* in the reading, a statement which seems to suggest that an empathic connection between the child reader and creative person will forge a unique and valuable reading experience. Similarly, in "Girls Reading, Narrative Gleaning," Janice Radway suggests a book to be akin to an attic wherein the girl reader can try on clothes she finds appealing and see how they fit. If a reader likes how something fits, Radway writes, she will take it out of the text and use it for her own self-fashioning. When Nordstrom talks about the magic that happens when a child encounters the work of a creative person, these are the associations I bring to her archive to help me interpret what she's saying. As Gary Weissman writes of his reading of the short story "The Man in the Well" by Ira Sher: "intertextual associations made Sher's story seem thematically familiar to me. Whether or not I reference the ideas and terms I know from reading Canetti and Foucault . . . they have affected how I think about [the story]" (106). I see myself similarly finding Nordstrom's vision for reading "thematically familiar," and I locate language to describe it by returning to Rosenblatt and Radway.

The interpretive stance does not seem to overread the archive, which demonstrates repeatedly Nordstrom's alliance with creative writers and artists. For instance, Nordstrom published Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, a controversial book even in its early days in print (see Holmes and Galchen for a sense of why people disagree about this book). To recap, the plot details a female tree's willingness to be completely used—down to the stump—by a young boy. Asked by the *Lion and the Unicorn* what, exactly, she thought the book was about, Nordstrom neatly evaded the question. "What I know is that I love what is in [Shel Silverstein's] head," she said, "and that's what I want to publish" (124). Nordstrom's insistence on supporting creative people is echoed in a 1967 article, in which she wrote: "We simply try (and it is really not so simple to try) to find and recognize creative people and then let them write or draw the way that they want to" (40). She went on to write, "we trust the creative person . . . Children respond to what is fresh and original and honest . . . anything less is not good enough for a child" (40).

Her description of the sacred engagement between the child reader and the creative artist seems to articulate what I see as some of the mystery and power of childhood reading, a process that is both internal and external, as Radway and Rosenblatt elaborate. But as I write this, I'm aware that I'm creating Nordstrom's theory of reading in the space between myself and the archive. Put another way, the view of reading I ascribe to Nordstrom is not fully inflected in Nordstrom's prose, because Nordstrom never wrote out a theory of child reading—or if she did, it lies among her papers in the storage facility. Instead,

I'm critically imagining Nordstrom's theory. This is not unusual. We bring our intellectual passions to the rhetors we admire and see their words as connected to our deeply held beliefs. Perhaps this is the nature of having intellectual icons at all and the rhetors themselves are uncomfortable companions to our mental projections. In her essay about Adrienne Rich, titled "The Intellectual Icon Across the Street," Harriet Malinowitz writes that meditation on certain pieces of Adrienne Rich's writing so deeply shaped her critical consciousness that she hardly knew how to interact with the person Adrienne Rich when they became neighbors. The actual Adrienne was a secondary, charming, fascinating, intimidating decoy who was ultimately irrelevant to what the Malinowitz made of Rich's prose. As feminist historiographers, we must balance fidelity to the archive with our interpretive stances. This balancing act is complicated because of our own investments in these rhetors. We take up studies of feminist rhetorical history in part because they offer insights for our contemporary moment.

Studying Historical Queer Networks

"No one has imagined us. We want to live like trees, sycamores blazing through the sulfuric air, dappled with scars, still exuberantly budding . . ." —Adrienne Rich, "Twenty-One Love Poems"

That Ursula Nordstrom was gay is not a secret to someone who comes to know Nordstrom well after her death, someone who comes to know Nordstrom, that is, retrospectively and on the page (see a variety of secondary sources about Nordstrom, including Stevenson "Ursula Nordstrom" and Marcus "Introduction"). Yet how open Nordstrom was about her sexuality in her life is not well documented. Certainly, though, there are connections between the editor's life story and her creative vision for children's literature, connections she almost makes explicit in a 1981 interview with children's literature journal *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "I had also said for years that I hoped someone would do a book . . . on the different varieties of love" (Natov and Deluca 125).

As I wondered how Nordstrom's sexuality shaped the work she did at Harper as well as her own writing for children, a topic which I approached in a public profile of Nordstrom ("Ursula"), I began to notice how relationships with women were just at the edges of her public archive. She traveled to Europe with a friend and fellow bookwoman, Frances Chrystie, who was instrumental to her professional life, most famously because Chrystie introduced Nordstrom to Maurice Sendak (see Lanes). She dedicated her novel, *The Secret Language*, to her colleague Charlotte Zolotow, who was also involved in the book's editorial process (*Letters*). Nordstrom returned the favor by editing

a number of books by Zolotow, who was also an author. She met her life partner, Mary Griffith, at Harper (see Stevenson, "Nordstrom," np) and went out of her way to publicly locate her own career in a longer trajectory of women working in the book world (Natov and Deluca 119). Long before Eddy wrote about the first generation of bookwomen, Nordstrom traced her own genealogical line back to Virginia Kirkus, who founded *Kirkus Reviews* and was the first editor of children's books at Harper & Row.

Adrienne Rich wrote in the eighties that women who form unlikely alliances in the face of male domination should be considered members of "the lesbian continuum," a phrase that seems to speak to the powerful life-giving relationships Nordstrom fostered at work and described in her fiction. (Her novel *The Secret Language* details what I suggest elsewhere is a queer friendship between two little girls and their housemother ["Ursula"].) Of the lesbian continuum, Rich wrote, "I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experiences . . . to embrace the many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support . . ." ("Compulsory" 219). My sense is that Nordstrom—in her work life, in her home life, in her fiction, and at the edges of many of her public presentations of self—evidenced the "primary intensity" of the network of women in her life. However, she was rarely forthcoming about these relationships.

In her interview with *The Lion and the Unicorn*, for example, she referred to her decades-long partner as "the friend I live with" (131). As this euphemism demonstrates, Nordstrom often seemed to speak in code when talking about sexuality, to, as Jaqueline Bacon put it "encode her particular concerns . . . in an acceptable form" (qtd Bordelon 335), and so I found myself having to fill in many gaps, to supply what seemed likely to be true given what I knew was true. Feminist historiography provides a justification to engage our subjects in this way. Patricia Bizzell writes that critical imagination "invites hypothesizing beyond what traditional scholarship might regard as rigorously demonstrable, a technique made necessary by the fragmentary and faint character of much evidence on women's rhetorical activities" (x). Such an approach can be justified because subjects don't write about everything, and, in the case of Nordstrom, certain representations seem purposefully left out of view. After my profile of Nordstrom was published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, children's poet Lee Bennett Hopkins commented, "An interesting article. I knew Ursula, Maurice and John ... all of whom were 'out' with those who where [sic] in." As controversial representations-of-self get lost, we risk losing marginalized histories altogether. These histories are, however, tremendously

important for feminist historiographers interested in the rhetorical activities of queer women operating in heteronormative spaces.

Adrienne Rich's piece explicitly sought to destabilize heterocentric assumptions, as she explained in a later foreword to the essay:

I wanted the essay to suggest new kinds of criticism, to incite new questions in classrooms and academic journals, and to sketch, at least, some bridge over the gap between *lesbian* and *feminist*. I wanted, at the very least, for feminists to find it less possible to read, write, or teach from a perspective of unexamined heterocentricity. ("Foreword," 203)

Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum provides one theoretical framework through which I can view these faint traces of primary intensity with other women that are at the edges of Nordstrom's archive. It seems an appropriate frame, too, given that Rich wrote the piece while living in New York around the same time Nordstrom was there. Taking up Rich's term to make Nordstrom's female network more visible helps me see the role that women *likely* played for Nordstrom more clearly.

Rich's desire to bridge the gap between lesbianism and feminism has been critiqued by others, including Cheshire Calhoun, who argues that Rich's lesbian continuum was already passé in the late nineties: "Contemporary lesbian theorists are less inclined to read lesbianism as a feminist resistance to male dominance" (200). My aim here is not to argue that the lesbian continuum is a relevant theoretical concept for studying all queer feminist networks, but rather to point out its salience in making sense of Nordstrom's references to women in her work, life, and fiction. If there is something to be drawn to other studies of queer feminist networks from this example, it may be to follow Lisa Ede's advice and "always historicize" (183), to resist heterocentricity in historiography by reviewing and contemplating work from the subject's contemporaries who were writing more openly about queerness. While such an approach runs the risk of essentializing the queer experience, it offers a useful way to place the primary rhetor in a richer context that could contribute to a more kaleidoscopic view of the rhetor's self-disclosures. The aim is to avoid absorbing and neutralizing the queerness of rhetors like Nordstrom, and to see, at the highest resolution possible, the role Nordstrom's sexuality may have played in her professional life. It is noteworthy that a number of Nordstrom's most famous authors were also queer, though not publicly out, including Maurice Sendak, Margaret Wise Brown, M.E. Kerr, and Louise Fitzhugh. As I've suggested elsewhere, Nordstrom's sexuality may have contributed to her stance as an unconventional and supportive reader of texts by these authors, thereby shaping how Nordstrom sponsored their literate activity.

Nordstrom as Literacy Sponsor

"This is pure surmise, but I think that Ursula connected immediately with people who felt themselves to be outsiders and who had some basic feeling about speaking a different language from that of the average kid. I never met Louise Fitzhugh, but I suspect it was true of her and that it was true of M.E. Kerr, and that with writers like that Ursula would extend herself greatly to get at the central, crucial story." —Doris Orgel (Marcus "Tapes" 142)

Nordstrom's career is a brilliant example of literacy sponsorship, a term coined and defined by Deborah Brandt as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" ("Sponsors" 166). As Nordstrom's career demonstrates, sponsorship in book publishing is uniquely enmeshed between the aesthetics of individual editors and the powerful institutions they represent. Recalling that Brandt developed the concept of sponsorship from the history of artistic patronage, it is interesting to regard Nordstrom as a patron to her writers. Her letters include many anecdotes of times she floated writers money, trusting that a manuscript would be turned in eventually; or even published books she considered weak because she believed eventually the writer would produce something more valuable ("Assorted Thoughts" 28). While Nordstrom was not the same kind of patron to all her writers and artists, recollections from some of them make it clear how important her endorsement and encouragement was (see "The UN Tapes" for many examples). In an interview during the 1980s, Maurice Sendak spoke glowingly of the impact that Nordstrom had on him early in his career:

I loved [Nordstrom] on first meeting. My happiest memories, in fact, are of my earliest career, when Ursula was my confidante and best friend. She really became my home and the person I trusted most. These beginning years revolved around my trips to the old Harper offices on Thirty-third Street and being fed books by Ursula, as well as encouraged with every drawing I did. We had our disagreements, but she treated me like a hot-house flower, watered me for ten years, and hand-picked the works that were to become my permanent backlist and bread-and-butter support. (Lanes 38)

In part, Nordstrom could be this kind of sponsor because she had complete control over the Harper list, which is not typically the case today in publishing. Most new acquisitions must be approved by an editorial board which, as an industry website explains, is "typically comprised of an acquisitions editor, as well as representatives from the sales, marketing, and finance departments"

("Commonly Used Terms"). Nordstrom's battle for the turf was waged, I suspect, to keep such a committee from upending the rhythms she had at Harper, including an occasionally unconventional cash-flow.

While scholars have examined how institutions shape sponsorship (see Duffy et al.), Nordstrom offers a compelling example of sponsorship shaping an institution. In other words, her efforts changed the institution she represented as well as the discourse within and around children's book publishing. Absent the details from Nordstrom's archive, her role within the Harper operation as a sponsor would be rendered invisible. The identical symbol of the Harper logo, printed across the spines of books, suggests a uniformity in sponsorship. But behind this uniformity is a hive of activity. Looking at particular editors within publishing houses offers a richer picture of literacy sponsorship in action and raises questions for future studies.⁴ How do internal institutional policies impact editor's ability to sponsor writers they admire? How do material facts of the business—such as the average size of a book run—impact the emergence of new talent? How does the work of a particular editor shape the broader flow of discourse? What turns in book culture can be traced back to particular editors who served as influential literacy sponsors? All of this exposes what Brandt has called the "deeply textured history that lies within the literacy practices of institutions and within any individual's literacy experience" (*American Lives* 56).

Not only the literacy of writers and artists, but also the literacy of children was sponsored by Nordstrom, though she rarely faced this audience directly. Her letters and interviews are peppered with anecdotes about particular responses children had to books, some of them lovely, and others—to Nordstrom's mind, anyway—entirely off point. (She recalls one letter she received in response to her own book, *The Secret Language*, to which she wanted to reply "That's not what I meant" [Natov and Deluca 132].) Thinking about direct and indirect recipients of literacy sponsorship, as well as the role particular sponsors play in directing the power of an institution, could usefully broaden our understanding of the causes, workings, effects, consequences, and significance of literacy sponsorship—and its impact on book culture writ large. Three years into my doctoral program, I began to think about writing my dissertation on just this topic. The realization that Nordstrom's papers would

4 Work from the history of the book field seems poised to engage this kind of frame, such as Janice Radway's *A Feeling for Books*, which examines the Book of the Month Club's process for choosing feature titles; Joan Shelley Rubin's *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, which studies the role of certain review periodicals in shaping reader's tastes; and Cecilia Konchar Farr's *Reading Oprah*, which studies the television mogul's book club.

be difficult to access coincided with a development in my personal life: I began to read some of my favorite Harper classics to my son, who was six. My relationship with Nordstrom was about to shift again.

The Perils of Strategic Contemplation

One of the first books we shared was *Harriet the Spy* (for an explanation of why this book was controversial, see Seo). Reading my childhood paperback aloud to my child, I found myself interfering with the text, omitting words such as “kill” and “fat.” I also felt uncomfortable about what I suddenly perceived as Harriet’s uncharitable point of view. Later, writing a parenting column for a local magazine, I described my son as a reader before turning the gaze to myself as a mother reading:

[J]ust as I cannot anticipate the things he takes from the stories, so I am also sharing thoughts about them that never occurred to me before reading them as a mother. “It was a bad idea for Harriet to write mean things in her notebook. We need to be kind to friends.” This kind of casual moralizing, so quick to my tongue, is likely irritating to my son (it certainly would have annoyed me as a kid), but I can’t help myself. Suddenly the stories seem useful in a new way, in what they can tell us about how to be good in the world. (“Old Books”15)

When I wrote about casual moralizing as “likely irritating” to my son, there was actually another audience I had in mind—the great editor herself. Like Harriet Malinowitz, who reported having a version of Adrienne Rich talking in her head after spending years reading her prose, I was now hearing my own version of Ursula Nordstrom, and she did not like what I was doing.

“Oh, parents!” Nordstrom lamented in a book chapter, one of her final pieces of public writing (“Editing” 153). Parents—like editors, reviewers, and librarians—were in the cadre of adults Nordstrom had to work around to deliver her books to children. Suggesting her to be a “seasoned campaigner” at such work, Marcus observed Nordstrom’s skill in securing “endorsements when necessary from psychologists, educators, and others for a book deemed too risky—or risqué” (“Introduction” xxv). She also firmly adhered to her policy of loyalty to her creative writers and artists, regardless of a book’s content. Once, when a sales rep asked Nordstrom to omit a scene from a children’s book that made fun of someone with a disability, Nordstrom replied in a letter, “there always have been and there always will be children who will imitate physical disabilities and they will do it whether or not Ruth Krauss writes a book” (*Letters* 70). She proceeded to defend all the questionable bits in the book. In a copy of the letter that was circulated around to the staff, though, she wrote “I begged her to take it out” in the margin (71). This dual response

demonstrates Nordstrom's most deeply held belief: if you want to work with a creative person, let them write what they want to write. But what I realized, reading *Harriet* with my son, is that I was now inclined in a different direction, to be loyal to him by negotiating and interpreting the text alongside him (and yes, by pulling lessons from it). As my responsibility to my particular child came into the foreground, the pleasure I took in reading these books as a child shifted to the background. In addition to seeing books like *Harriet the Spy* differently, my response to some of Nordstrom's most famous escapades changed.

Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* became controversial because Mickey, the young protagonist, is pictured without any clothes on ("STAKE NARKID from the front. Like, wow!" as Nordstrom put it in a private letter [282]). A librarian painted underwear on the boy, which Nordstrom responded to in an open letter, referring to the action as "censorship by mutilation rather than obvious suppression" (*Letters* 334). A rather elaborate controversy unfolded. Librarians banned the book. Booksellers returned the book. Bruno Bettelheim, reviewing the book for *Ladies Home Journal*, indicated that children should not be allowed to read it. (It was later revealed Bettelheim himself had not read the book [Sonheim 11]). In the midst of the fray, Nordstrom deemed librarians censoring the book "neurotic" and wrote to children's book reviewer Zena Sutherland that working on books like *In the Night Kitchen* was "[t]hrilling, absolutely thrilling" and that it "makes up for some of the second rate Shakespeares I'm trying to love to day" (*Letters* 290).

When I read this story early on, of course I didn't perceive myself as wanting to participate in what Sendak called "all the fuss over [Mickey's] penis" (Rehm). But now, the mother of a boy, I better understand why a librarian would draw on underwear. While Sendak suggested that if the unaltered illustration was presented to children without comment they would "not even notice" the nudity (Rehm), my experience suggests otherwise. And thus, as my identifications have shifted, I find myself mentally extending sympathy to Nordstrom's historical opposition.

Fluctuating sympathies and readerly complications renew my fascination with the role of books in childhood. Perhaps books are an important supplement to the guidance and care of a parent. "Most adults seem to have very poor memories of their childhood," Sendak told Diane Rehm in a 1993 interview. "Maybe it has to be that way." Many prominent children's book creators were not parents. I wonder if parenthood blocks the memory of being a child, a blockage that can, in contrast, be channeled more freely by creative people like Sendak and Nordstrom who ably remember. "The creative writer of children's books has his or her younger self more easily available to him or her than it is to most of us," Nordstrom commented once ("Assorted Thoughts"

26). Or perhaps actual children are less important to the work of publishing great children's literature than the satisfaction of what Marcus called "the Wonderland rush of venturing headlong into territory that was marked off-limits" ("Introduction" xxvii). With such a thought, certain pieces of Nordstrom's archive gleam more prominently, such as her epistolary comment, "I don't expect creative artists who do books for children to think about children all the time. They rarely do—the really great ones—because they do what they do for themselves . . ." (*Letters* 156).

While these archival reconsiderations may seem idiosyncratic to my own life and interests, I'd argue they are really the mundane result of strategic contemplation, of lingering in the research space, of considering the internal aspects of the research process (Royster and Kirsch 85). The intersubjective space between the researcher and subject shapes the interpretation of the archive. While I cannot predict the future, I do expect that my perspective on Nordstrom will continue to evolve.

Concluding Thoughts

"feminist practices involve connections among past, present, and future" —Jaqueline Jones Royster, "Ain't I A Woman"

As feminist historiographers, we don't work with our actual subjects in their context, but inevitably bring them into our own. Strategic contemplation, then, is fundamentally unstable. When we apply these concepts to our approximations of our subjects, what results are partial, idiosyncratic, deeply felt, and even personal portrayals of the rhetors we admire.

In the end, we need a way to acknowledge our own subjective response to our subjects, even as we try to move closer to them. Adrienne Rich has written—and composition scholars like Lisa Ede (*Locating Composition*), Krista Ratcliffe (*Anglo-American Challenges to the Rhetorical Tradition*), and Jessica Restaino (*First Semester*) have echoed—that theory is only good if it smells of the earth ("Notes" 213). In the context of feminist historiography, the material landscape Rich references may be our actual research subjects and the theory the way we use them to further our conversations. To attend to the rhetor requires closely examining their papers. Yet Nordstrom's documents, like those of many workaday writers, are mostly unavailable to us, raising again the complicated question of who owns writing. As Deborah Brandt points out in *The Rise of Writing*, "When people write for pay, they write at the will and under the control of the employer, and their skills and experiences as writers belong among the assets of their organizations" (163). While Brandt draws attention to contemporary corporate settings, Nordstrom's workplace writings can be used to demonstrate that this state of affairs also has a history. As feminist historiographers continue to explore women's rhetorical strategies

in professional settings, Nordstrom's story calls for action: to find corporate archives and to persuade gatekeepers to make documents available. This is something I hope yet to do with Nordstrom. "To even hold something in Ursula Nordstrom's penmanship would be a thrill," I wrote to the Harper archivist, seeking entry to her papers. Years later, I still feel that way.

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Scapegoats and Aliens: Institutionalized Shame in Divorce Court and Mandatory Parenting Classes

Jennifer Young

Abstract: *The article is a rhetorical analysis of a state-mandated parenting class for divorcing partners. The analysis is deployed through a gender and affect studies lens and preceded by a narrative account of a class in Ohio. The thesis of the article is that mandatory parenting classes are justified through rhetorical means rather than pragmatic ones; I suggest that the primary effect of the classes is to shame parents rather than to benefit children.*

Keywords: *Rhetoric, Parenting, Divorce, Shame, Public Policy, Discourse Analysis, Demagoguery, Scapegoating*

The typical response to news that a couple is divorcing is invariably one of sadness: “I’m so sorry.” And divorce is inarguably sad. There is one emotion that divorcing people experience more intensely than grief, however, and that is shame (Jenkins). In some ways, and in some communities more than others, divorced and divorcing people remain marginalized—a socially- and politically-accepted target for judgment and discrimination. Part of the reason for this is that many social/political attacks are leveraged “in the best interest of the children,” a specious claim because it tends to proffer impunity to those leveraging the attacks without accounting for whether there is any actual or demonstrable benefit to those whom it purports to protect. This dynamic is especially instantiated in legally mandated parenting classes, which courts in 41 states now have the option to require of divorcing parents. In this article, I discuss these classes and analyze the rhetoric employed to justify their existence. I suggest that the shaming effects of legally mandated parenting classes are not merely unfortunate collateral to some higher or more noble goal; rather, the shaming is intentional and part of a larger institutionalized system of shame that works (intentionally or not) to repeat and reinforce certain conservative ideals. The resulting discourse inflicts harm upon certain bodies as it claims to ameliorate it in others.

This article addresses issues germane to “collaborative divorce”—a cooperative and uncontested set of legal processes in which parents (sometimes but not necessarily with the assistance of attorneys or mediators) make all

decisions about children, finances, etc. prior to sitting before a judge. I use the term “marital dissolution” synonymously. I restrict my discussion to this type of divorce in order to consider various aspects relevant to the divorce itself (the physical and legal separation) without the obviously complicating elements of bitter conflict and/or violence, which are in themselves inherently destructive and therefore always skew the answers to questions about the effects of divorce.

I recently attended one of these mandated parenting classes as part of my own divorce, which took place in a county court in Ohio that governs surrounding rural and suburban communities. As a rhetorician, I found the experience both fascinating and troubling. It would be dishonest, of course, to claim academic impartiality; to be certain, I was as emotionally engaged in the process as it is possible to be. I knew, therefore, that in order to reflect upon my experiences in an academically valid way, I needed some method to mediate between my role as a rhetorician and discourse analyst and my personal experience as an emotional parent. Julie Nelson’s work in situating the relatively recent discipline of affect theory within the classical study of rhetoric is helpful. She explains that affect theory’s emergence in the early 2000’s offered hope of articulating a legitimate method of theorizing how feelings and emotions tie into discursive networks and relationship formation (Nelson). Unfortunately, Nelson contends, “despite great hopes for affect theory’s contributions to rhetoric . . . it was never fully absorbed.” She blames this on scholars’ tendency to define affect as “precognitive, impersonal, and unstructured,” a characterization attributed to Brian Massumi’s early affect theory scholarship and one that renders it almost useless in discussions of intentional rhetoric. Nelson claims, though, and I agree, that such a definition is incomplete and unnecessarily limiting; rather we should “consider additional renderings of affect that make its rhetorical work more visible, including its cyclical relationship with emotion” (Nelson). I have tried to do that in researching and writing this article—to use affect theory as a vehicle for bringing the lived emotional experiences of divorce to bear upon intellectual inquiry into the rhetorical and discursive structures that frame those experiences.

In my home state of Ohio, one of the initial experiences required of divorcing parents is attending a legally mandated parenting seminar. There are several options for session times, most of which are weeknight evenings or Saturday mornings. The seminar is a single two-hour session. A brochure sent through the mail notifies parents that no legal divorce or dissolution will be granted unless parents are able to provide proof of having attended the seminar. The actual wording of the law (Ohio Revised Code 3109.053) states that “in any divorce, legal separation, or annulment proceeding and in any proceeding pertaining to the allocation of parental rights and responsibilities

for the care of a child, the court *may* require, by rule or otherwise, that parents attend classes on parenting” (ORC 3109.053; italics mine). I was surprised to find this language when I began formal research (which was a few weeks *after* I attended the class). The information presented to parents does not indicate that there is any flexibility or space between the actual state law and the way that my county implements it. The text on the brochure I received reads as follows:

Divorce is a very stressful experience for parents and children. Although you may decide to end your marriage, you will continue to be mother and father.

This two-hour seminar will focus on what children need from both of you during and after your divorce. The group will provide practical information that you can apply to your divorce situation. It will teach skills for helping your children manage divorce successfully. This will include handling “tough situations and tough questions.”

During my initial paperwork-submission meeting with the magistrate (my partner and I handled all the legal transactions of our divorce ourselves, without attorneys), I questioned whether it was absolutely necessary for me to attend the parenting seminar. By that point in the process, I had consumed a virtual library of texts on children and divorce, including not only mass-market books, but academic scholarship that addresses large scale, peer-reviewed studies on children of divorce. I had done this research because I wanted to be certain that I was doing everything possible to help my son navigate this major change in his life. The magistrate, though polite, did not budge: “It’s not optional,” she said. “No parenting class, no divorce.”

Narrative Synopsis of Parenting Seminar

The “Still Parents” class was held in the facility the county uses for supervised visitation and safe exchange—this is the location in which non-custodial parents who have demonstrated the capacity for domestic violence or child abuse must take their visitation with their children, under the protective watch of Children’s Services professionals. It is also used as a neutral exchange location for parents who have shared custody and do not require supervised visitation services for the well being of their children, but who are believed prone to behaving in volatile or potentially violent ways when they are confronted with each other. This location is sort of the demilitarized zone of divorce, complete with alphabet decorations covering the drywall partitions of the squat, pole-barn style building.

A social worker named Barbara, who stood at the front of the room and addressed 32 of us sitting in folding chairs facing her, was in charge of the night's session. She opened her discussion by telling us that "It's not a punishment that you're taking this class." I will admit it felt like a punishment, but no one had suggested aloud that it was. Barbara also informed us that there would be a "no-texting" rule for the class.

Next, we watched a PBS video titled "Kids and Divorce, For Better or Worse." The program began with a video collage of children making statements while speaking to therapists. The clips are presented without context, so there is no way to know the exact circumstances that led to the children's words. For example, one little boy tells his therapist, "I cried every night for two and a half years," and the therapist replies, "It's like a nightmare, isn't it?" The film transitions to a slide show presentation of drawings done by children in therapy. One is a heart bisected with a zig-zagged line and the title "Mom" on one side, "Dad" on the other, and the word "Love" written in the center and sliced in two by the zig-zag. Another portrays a violent scene with a child's voice bubble that says, "Chelsea go and call the cops. Hurry Chelsea!" Barbara later referred to this drawing and remarked, "I would venture to say that at least one of you has been in a situation where the police have been called." I found this confusing, because this particular parenting class was for people in the midst of collaborative divorces, which necessitate cooperation and resolution between parents. Someone else wondered (aloud) why there weren't different requirements for parents going through cooperative dissolution versus those going through contested divorce, since they are legally two separate processes. Further discussion among the participants revealed that, contrary to Barbara's statement, none of us had been in a situation related to our separations in which the police had been called.

After the video, we were directed to split up into groups and pick a group recorder. Barbara directed us to reveal the problems we were having as a result of our impending divorces and the problems our children were having as a result of our impending divorces. The group recorder was told to make lists of these problems, which would then be reported to the whole class after roughly 15 minutes.

One group, for reasons they didn't explain, added up the number of children they had *collectively* and reported this to the class. They also took a variety of "issue tallies" related to divorce: "Three members of our group are struggling with separation anxiety; Six members are addressing children acting out," etc. My own group's interaction was less organized; we remained mostly silent and avoided looking at one another until the last few minutes of the allotted time, at which point a few people made generic remarks about feeling tired, worried, and stressed. The group adjacent to mine cracked jokes

about being broke and depressed and laughed loudly throughout their discussion. All of this seemed to evidence not so much individual inability to judge appropriateness, but rather the fact that we didn't really understand what we were *doing* there. There was no response to nor discussion of potential solutions that followed the reporting of the problems that we and our children were encountering; the totality of the activity was the recording and revelation of the problems themselves. I felt as though I were caught in some weird amalgamation of a group therapy session and a corporate retreat. After each group had reported their "adult problems" and "child problems," the two hours were up and Barbara explained that she would respect our individual schedules by releasing the class on time, and we went our separate ways.

I felt somewhat insulted walking out of the class. It seemed patronizing and condescending—the teacher-student relationship established between Barbara and us, the no-texting rule, the seemingly obvious lessons about excessive conflict and violence being harmful to children. I couldn't pinpoint any practical knowledge offered by the class. Barbara did at one point remark that most children whose parents are careful to protect them from the tension, conflict, and bitterness of divorce tend to do pretty well. This, presumably, was the point of the class—to prepare us to be these kind of parents so that our children would fare well in the aftermath. But the vast majority of the class was taken up with nightmare stories, reports and recollections that would horrify any passably reasonable human being, followed by the forced group interactions and "reports." I didn't really *learn* anything, other than that what I was about to do was potentially harmful to my child, as though I hadn't considered that. I left wondering, if the class didn't provide substantial constructive advice for divorcing parents, then why exactly were we taking it?

Tali Schaefer, in an article on legally mandated parenting classes published in *The Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, restates my question and offers an answer: "What should family law do about divorcing parents? 'Teach them a lesson,' a legislative wave sweeping through the United States has answered" (Schaefer 491). I had felt this intuitively, but recognized that my impressions were unsubstantiated and potentially tainted by my emotional entrenchment. Schaefer's article analyzes the enactment discussions that resulted in legislation that mandated parenting classes for divorcing partners in the state of Colorado; she focuses specifically on the rhetoric employed by judges in promoting the mandate. Schaefer concludes that "despite its child-oriented goals, the legislation is preoccupied with casting a negative judgment on parents' decision to separate and with blaming parents for the negative effects of divorce" (Schaefer 492). My experience in the class I attended instantiates this focus on shaming parents rather than helping children. The majority of time and discussion in the class was dedicated to demonstrating how harmful

divorce is to children (a point that, even if true, was essentially moot at the time of the class; there was relatively little time and discussion dedicated to teaching parents how to help their children navigate separation and divorce).

History of Mandatory Parenting Class in Ohio

In 1999, the State of Ohio convened a Task Force of 24 individuals that included judges, attorneys, state senators and representatives, academics, and social workers; the Task Force sought input from experts in various disciplines as well as from parents' groups and from a panel of teens who had experienced their parents' divorces. The goal of the Task Force was to make recommendations that would "minimize conflict between parents and protect children from the effects of their parents' conflicts, while providing opportunities and support to parents as they continue to be parents to their children, regardless of family structure" (Ohio Task Force 3).

One of the recommendations was to implement mandatory parent education programs for divorcing parents. The report also contains curriculum standards and presenter training guidelines for the programs. The Task Force's recommendation became state law on October 5, 2000 (Ohio Revised Code 3109.053, "Parenting classes or counseling"). Having attended a mandatory parenting seminar prior to reading the Task Force's guidelines for their development, I was struck by how markedly different in tone my seminar was from the language that supposedly supported its institution. The juxtaposition paralleled the disconnect I'd felt during the class—the class whose brochure promised to "teach skills for helping your children manage divorce successfully" but whose reality seemed to deliver one clear message: divorce is harmful to children. A similar disconnect is evident between the language of the guidelines for the seminar curriculum—which is primarily productive and nonjudgmental—and much of the language contained elsewhere in the Task Force's report—which is emotional, discriminatory, and assumptive.

Rebecca Dingo's work on public policy development and "networking arguments" is helpful in understanding these juxtapositions and disconnections. Dingo claims that public policies are always "intrinsically rhetorical" (22) and that considering only the written policy "tells us little about the policy's rhetoricity" (23). Rather, we must understand that "policy is not written in one place—a final policy is merely a tangible outcome of a set of distributed logics that are boundless" (Dingo 25). This recognition helps to account for the split-personality effect of the rhetoric employed in the Ohio Task Force report; it is likely that some passages read as shaming and oppressive while others read as helpful and supportive—an effect Dingo calls "the shifting meanings and unevenness of rhetorics" (110)—because *all* of those intentions actually are reflected in the language of the final document. A close reading

of documents associated with public policy development and enactment can help us to “effectively disentangle the commonplaces of public policy from their taken-for-granted meanings and show how they are not a single totalizing discourse but many interwoven strands of arguments” (Dingo 26). In this case, those arguments originate not only with 24 members of the task force but with an unknowable number of voices beyond them. For example, the Task Force consulted with “a panel of teens” (Ohio Task Force ii) during their research, but there’s no indication of how many teens comprised the panel or what their experiences had been; clearly these factors would significantly affect the testimony the teens provided.

The lack of identification for specific voices facilitates a scenario in which arguments “appear monolithic,” when in reality they are “composed of elements derived from other things” (110) and “vulnerable to co-optation or appropriation” (22). Could this explain the discrepancies between the proactive messages contained in the Task Force’s stated mission (as well as in the brochure I received) and Barbara’s somewhat condescending and almost completely purposeless interpretation of the suggested curriculum? I know now, although I didn’t at the time of the class, that the qualifications to teach these seminars are fairly loose and vaguely defined. The Task Force report suggests (but does not require) that presenters have an advanced degree, and the total time commitment to become licensed to teach is one day (presenters must attend a one-day workshop) (Ohio Task Force D-4). The *only* defined requirement is “training or experience in family life education, family dynamics, domestic relations, marriage and family therapy, counseling, mediation, psychology, social services, child welfare, or a closely related field” (Ohio Task Force D-4). Clearly, this is subject to interpretation. The fact that it calls for training OR experience is even more problematic; moreover, it offers zero assurance that the presenters are actually qualified to be addressing the very important topics they are charged with teaching.

Did Barbara co-opt or appropriate the intended message of the parenting seminar to impose her own opinions of divorce? Perhaps, but if so, the potential for that appropriation was essentially “built in” to the policy from its inception, the resulting discourse of multiple “networked arguments” (Dingo). Dingo notes that in the case of U.S. legislation, “the text itself has been touched by testimonies” (23) and by a multiplicity of voices, some of which act as “vectors of power” (Dingo 25).

This is clearly instantiated in the report of the Ohio Task Force, and it helps to explain the “shifting and uneven” rhetoric contained in the text and reflected in the implementation of the parenting seminars. Of particular interest is a letter added to the report shortly after its approval. The appendix is labeled “Individual Statement of John Guidubaldi, D.Ed., L.P., L.P.C.C” (Ohio Task

Force, Appendix H). Dr. Guidubaldi is a Harvard-educated university professor, child psychologist, and distinguished researcher. He has also been the Director of the Father Involvement Research Project in Akron and Cleveland. Dr. Guidubaldi was appointed to the Task Force by Republican judge Thomas J. Moyer, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of Ohio.

Despite Dr. Guidubaldi's impressive credentials, his language reveals a strong conservative bent and contains many passages that suggest a bias against people who have decided to divorce. For example, he writes, "Some revisionists promote the notion that our current crisis of family instability is not cause for alarm, [but] no prior period in our history has experienced the level of deterioration of family life we are witnessing today" (H-1). Clearly, this writer equates "divorce" with "deterioration." In some cases that may be true; however, it is also true that families can implode (or deteriorate) in all kinds of ways while parents remain legally joined and locked in conflict. He goes on to recognize that "the term 'family values' has come to be identified with a conservative agenda, seen by some as an obstruction to freer forms of interpersonal intimacy" (H-1). This seemingly reduces the decision to divorce to a quest for "freer forms of interpersonal intimacy." While that may be true in some cases, it certainly does not account for the totality of reasons for which couples decide to divorce. For most couples, the decision is an extremely painful one that is intended to dissolve a toxic union that is actively causing harm; this is not the same as the superficial "grass is greener" scenario the writer seems to suggest. Dr. Guidubaldi offers this explanation for why people may see the conservative agenda as "an obstruction to freer forms of interpersonal intimacy":

Those who hold this view typically support alternative lifestyles, including sequential monogamy, unwed parenting, and homosexual marriage, forsaking the "until death do us part" bonds of matrimony when either party is dissatisfied. As with any viable social movement, this one needed a noble banner to wave, particularly since freer adult lifestyles frequently meant onerous consequences for children. Convenient justifications were found in such politically timely rubrics as the accusation of oppression, the quest for individual rights, and the celebration of diversity. Today, the overly zealous application of these marital escape valves exonerates divorcing parties who have no real history of physical abuse or even the more amorphous and opportunistic claims of "psychological" abuse. (H-1)

There is quite a bit to unpack here. First, the linking of liberal views to support of alternative lifestyles, which Dr. Guidubaldi seems to suggest are selfish, is not directly relevant to the issue the letter addresses and instead becomes a

red herring that serves to link divorce to irresponsibility and a lack of concern for one's children. The characterization of those with liberal views as people likely to easily forsake their marital vows when either is simply "dissatisfied" is both simplistic and unsubstantiated. He then seems to suggest that most divorcing people are willing to sacrifice their children's well being so that they can live a "freer lifestyle"; moreover, they are callous and manipulative enough to take advantage of "convenient justifications" while waving a "noble banner" that grants them access to participate in a new "social movement." Dr. Guidubaldi caricatures divorcing people as wanna-be-hippie teenagers skipping school to attend a protest under the guise of civil activism when they really just want to have some fun. He then calls into question whether psychological abuse is even real (or rather, as he terms it, "an opportunistic claim"). Making all divorcing people into strawmen who want to shirk responsibility and engage in sexual experimentation at the expense of their children certainly makes it easier to legislate corrective action against them, but it does so with a faulty and incomplete understanding of the actual complexity involved with making the decision to divorce.

He concludes this section of his letter by claiming, "Under no-fault laws, families can be disassembled by unilateral action without guilt, simply because a partner 'feels' oppressed or unfulfilled" (H1). I suppose this is technically true: there is no way to legislate "guilt," and therefore it is *possible* that people could divorce without it; he also discounts the role of feelings in a marriage. Personally, I cannot imagine a parent going through the divorce process without astronomical amounts of guilt; I feel confident in saying that any parent who *could* most likely has psychological problems that are far more severe than any the divorce itself will cause.

The latter paragraphs of Dr. Guidubaldi's letter seem to markedly depart from the assigned missions of the Task Force, but it appears that these are points he felt compelled to share nonetheless. In these paragraphs, he claims, "Issues of exorbitant or extended spousal support and unreasonably high child support payments are predicated on the assumption that a spouse (almost always the wife) or a child is entitled to be kept in the style to which they have become accustomed" (H-3), and follows with the conclusion that "this deep pockets orientation provides a windfall for the recipient with no obligation to provide anything in return" (H-3), seemingly suggesting that many people (but mostly women) choose to divorce because of its profitability. He refers, in fact, to child and spousal support as "inflated entitlements that often provides incentive to divorce" (H-2). He moves from that argument to one that suggests "when the right to choose parenting is unilaterally given to women with assurances of support, a great many unwed births may be expected to continue" (H-4), thus claiming that women get pregnant and have babies to

make money in the same way that we get divorced to make money. As troubling and offensive as some of Dr. Guidubaldi's statements are, it is important to remember that these are statements we can actually see and interrogate, because he put them in writing and that writing was made a part of the official government document.¹ The voices we cannot apprehend, let alone analyze, are certainly far more extensive—Dingo's "distributed logics that are boundless"—and the effects of their interlinking cannot even be hypothesized.

“In the Best Interest of the Child”

This phrase is invoked repeatedly throughout the Task Force's report, even as the report itself recognizes that it is a "term of art" and an "elusive concept when it is used by the courts" (Ohio Task Force 9). This phenomenon—of referencing something with which no one can disagree (who *doesn't* want what's in the best interest of the children?)—serves the purpose of shutting down any

1 Prior to his involvement discussed in this article, Dr. Guidubaldi served on The U. S. Commission on Child & Family Welfare, which issued a 1996 report to Congress and the President; Guidubaldi subsequently authored a minority report to the 1996 report. The minority report is similar in tone to the addendum discussed above, revealing a strong anti-feminist bias as well as the fact that Guidubaldi felt professionally slighted and under-respected by the majority membership of the Commission. In the 1996 minority report, he blames "the decline in socially responsible behavior of our nation's youth" on "the movement toward a matriarchal society" (Guidubaldi "Minority Report"). He also claims that receiving financial support from their ex-husbands could "promote attitudes of learned helplessness" in women, and that "the new 'liberated' woman's role" is "undermining paternal authority" (Guidubaldi "Minority Report"). As in his 2001 individual statement discussed above, the 1996 report features a critique of female control of reproductive rights, linking such autonomy to women's increased willingness to divorce and suggesting that the decision is at least partly financially motivated (Guidubaldi "Minority Report"). Dr. Guidubaldi's closing statement in the 1996 report is that, "The greatest of my personal adult challenges was my own divorce. When my long-term wife decided that she wanted her 'freedom,' I learned first-hand what so many of my male clients had grieved about in my private psychologist office — the absolute loss of power to control the two most important things in one's life: parenting privilege and the fruits of one's own labor" (Guidubaldi "Minority Report").

critical inquiry of the rhetoric, because to do so is perceived as automatically getting in the way of what is “in the best interest of the children.” The language addressing mandatory parenting classes explicitly instantiates this phenomenon, stating that “in addition to all of the factors in the best interest statute, the court should take into consideration the failure of either parent to attend a parent education seminar” (Ohio Task Force 9). So, the parenting seminars must be accepted without question as serving “the best interest of the child,” and resisting them automatically brands a parent as “*not* acting in the best interest” of their child. The logic is both circular and unprovable. Dingo addresses tactics such as “the best interest of the child” in a discussion of neoliberal public policy development in which terms of “empowerment” that “appear benign” (or actively beneficial, in this case) are employed to advance arguments that appear above reproach (Dingo 111). Patricia Roberts-Miller’s writing on demagoguery, an ordered and identifiable form of discourse/propaganda that often employs shaming tactics, sheds further light on this manipulation of rhetoric:

If people will hold their positions regardless of whether their evidence and reasoning turn out to be false, then it is not a topic for argumentation. It is, instead, a logically closed system. This, too, is important for considering demagoguery, as demagogues almost always present exactly such a system, and it’s likely that that is one of the attractions: they promise their followers certainty. This certainty is not the same as accuracy, however; it results from their offering an ideology that is impervious to argumentation (not because it is true, but because it is formulated in such a way that it cannot be disproven). (Roberts-Miller, “Democracy, Demagoguery” 471)

Despite the attitude of certainty with which the Task Force made its recommendations and with which many courts now enforce attendance, no study to date has been able to demonstrate that short-term mandatory parenting classes have any positive impact upon the well being of children (Schaefer 501-2). Offering compelling but unsubstantiated claims is typical of demagogic argument, in that it “often reasons from what ‘must’ be true, even in cases when there is adequate empirical evidence. . . . Premises are thereby protected from falsification—the very things that might throw them into question (conditions in which they are shown to be falsified) is rejected precisely on the grounds that it would falsify the premises” (Roberts-Miller, “Characteristics of Demagoguery”).

Assumptions and Emotional Language

The cover page of the Task Force's report contains this quote, which is centered on a mostly blank page (save for the name of the task force and the title of the report) and printed in bold text:

People who are willing to create a life should be willing to take care of it and support it. It's like when I was in ceramics class, there were steps to getting a piece of pottery complete. First, you have to make sure that there are no bubbles in the clay or else it's gonna blow up in the kiln and then you have to make sure that there are no bubbles in the glaze, wait for the glaze to dry and set it in the kiln just right. I think that parents should be willing to put it in for the long run and take time with their pottery and they should be willing to go through every step to assist that pottery so that it comes out as the best possible piece of art. — Joseph, age 17

First, we could question the appropriateness of opening a report that should have been unbiased and research-based with an emotionally charged quote from a 17-year-old about whom the reader has no information. However, we must recognize that introducing pathos into the legislative process has historically been productive and not just manipulative (in the case of, for example, conversations that led to enacting Amber Alert legislation and the like). Even if we let that go, though, this passage certainly contains confusing messages.² The Task Force's report was intended to address the complexities of families who were *already* divided or in the process of dividing. To include language that suggests the family should not divide (or even language that is ambiguous enough that it could be interpreted that way: "I think that parents should be willing to put it in for the long run"), then, would seem futile. So if the language cannot actually affect the reality of the situation, then what purpose does it serve other than to cast judgment upon parents?

Roberts-Miller offers an explanation: "Demagogues polarize a complicated (and often frightening) situation by presenting only two options: their policy, and some obviously stupid, impractical, or shameful one. They almost always insist that 'those who are not with us are against us' so that the polarized policy situation also becomes a polarized identity situation" (Roberts-Miller, "Democracy, Demagoguery" 462). In this case, "their policy" is the enforcement of parenting classes and other requirements for divorcing people,

2 This is not a critique of the 17-year-old's statement, nor does it question the validity of his words; my critique is of the statement's inclusion in the official report, especially given that it's presented without context.

and the parents who care so little about their children that they are willing to let their “pottery blow up in the kiln” are the “obviously stupid, impractical, or shameful one[s].” Furthermore, establishing this dichotomy (early, in this case) “enables members of the ingroup to take the moral high ground . . . Our views of people like us (the ingroup) are nuanced and complicated, whereas we define the outgroup by one or two salient and generally negative features that we insist epitomize the entire group” (Roberts-Miller, “Democracy, Demagoguery” 463).

Clearly, divorce is the salient feature here, but it is opportunistic and simplistic to use it this way. The reduction of divorcing parents to one aspect of their lives—the divorce—is a theme in the Task Force’s report. It is used as a context-less, metaphorical tattoo that is emblematic of “bad behavior on the part of outgroup members [that] signifies their true identity” and then juxtaposed against “good behavior on the part of ingroup members [that] signifies their true identity” (Roberts-Miller, “Characteristics of Demagoguery”); divorced or divorcing parents are “bad” and those who clean up their messes (the Task Force, in this case) are “good.” The mission statement written specifically to justify the implementation of the parenting seminars claims that, “in order to prevent divorcing and never-married parents from doing unnecessary harm to their children, all never-married, divorcing and post-decree parents need specific education about helping their children through this change in their families” (Ohio Task Force D2). The assumption here, presumably, is that married parents are not in danger of “doing unnecessary harm to their children”—or at least not enough danger that the government needs to intervene. This dichotomy seems difficult to support universally; certainly children experience all kinds “unnecessary harm” at the hands of their still-married parents. Creating a structure in which married parents do not require intervention but unmarried parents do—as a result of their marital status and nothing else—implies that, at least as far as children are concerned, “marriage is preferable to divorce.” This belief facilitates a dangerously enthymematic sort of reasoning, in which potentially faulty conclusions are taken to be self-evident, and which justifies all sorts of actions that may not be appropriate. Traced backward, an analytical syllogism to explain the reasoning behind mandating parenting classes might sound something like this:

The government mandates remediation when poor parental judgment has been evidenced (abuse, neglect, addiction).

The government mandates remediation for divorcing parents, even those who have handled the process with cooperation and without need of legal intervention.

The government sees divorce as evidence of poor judgment.

The assumption, then, is that parents who divorce are parents who have poor judgment, and are therefore deserving of mandated remediation. The assumption also implies that it can never be good judgment for parents to divorce, despite psychological evidence that parental conflict is actually more damaging to children than divorce (Goldstein et. al). It is crucial to note here that it is the divorce itself which provides the justification for the mandated class, not the conflict that children experience; if they experience conflict within an intact family and the *conflict* doesn't rise to the level of physical abuse, then the court system stays out of it entirely. The discrepancy is an example of what Chaim Perelman calls "symbolic liaisons." He explains that it is "only when a symbolic liaison has become institutionalized that . . . argumentation can play a role" (102). In this case, the "symbol" is the divorce itself—the "thing" to which we can attach the mandate. But the conflict is the actual problem (as far as children are affected). If our true intent in mandating parenting classes is to guide parents toward helping their children through a difficult time, then we certainly do not apply the guidance universally. The death or chronic illness of a parent or the loss of a parent's job can also thrust a family into economic turmoil and interpersonal conflict, but we do not mandate parenting classes for parents faced with these hardships. Because cause (parents deciding to get divorced) rather than circumstances (families in crisis due to reasons that are "not their fault") is used as the justification for legally requiring parenting classes, it becomes difficult to ignore the judgment factor driving the enactment of such legislation.

Roberts-Miller explains that this, too, is typical of demagoguery, in that it "imagines public deliberation as a place in which people with accurate perception point out the Real Truth to others who, if they are also capable of unmediated perception, will instantly see it" (Roberts-Miller, "Characteristics of Demagoguery"); she describes demagoguery in public discourse as the mechanism through which the ingroup "demonstrates the clarity of one's vision, one's ingroup membership, one's loyalty to that group, and one's willingness to engage in punitive action on behalf of the ingroup/against the outgroup(s)" (Roberts-Miller, "Characteristics of Demagoguery").

The punitive action is partly justified through a discourse of shame that is inserted into a speciously-ethical pragmatic endeavor (to care for the children of divorced parents). For example, one lines advises that "Children of divorce are begging parents to walk a mile in their shoes and to consider their child's needs to be at least as important as their own" (3). The assumption is that parents don't consider this, that parents think only of themselves. In tone, the passage is emotional and sandwiched between two sentences that straightforwardly address the practicalities of children transferring between homes.

This creates a rhetorical clash in which one line is reasoned and pragmatic and the next resembles a tongue-lashing. The overall effect is a somewhat schizophrenic text—Dingo’s “networked arguments” made manifest—an outcome that is perhaps unavoidable in some ways; however, it is also revealing of the confusion and competing perspectives that are still a part of conversations surrounding divorce in contemporary America.

Shame and Identity

Shaming rhetoric in the Task Force’s report and even more so in Dr. Guidubaldi’s letter (which became part of the final report) beg an interrogation of how shame operates beneath and beyond the level of text in the discourses surrounding divorce. A transactional relationship between shame and normativity plays out in affective ways; the price of bucking the norm is suffering the shame. Sara Ahmed states it explicitly: “Shame can also be experienced *as the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence*” (*Cultural Politics* 107). “Affective cost,” painful as it may be, doesn’t end at the feeling level; it has life-altering consequences that do violence to the individual and compromise the collective health of society. The parenting class I attended (which definitely had a transactional feature: “Go to the parenting class, and you may get the divorce; don’t go to the parenting class, and you may not get the divorce”) was certainly emotionally taxing—perhaps intentionally so. But there are other—less overt yet perhaps more insidious—structures in place for the processes surrounding divorce. The penal system procedures and carceral environments in which divorces are carried out exact a particular sort of affective toll. The excessive waiting to talk to an actual human being in the domestic relations court compounds the frustration of an already-frustrating and confusing experience. The fact that divorcing parties have no say in terms of when or where their mediation appointments or hearings are scheduled prevents emotional or practical planning ahead and results in lost wages at work, challenges related to child care, and a general loss of control over the entire process. The extremely complicated process for filing paperwork often drives people to hire attorneys even when attorneys are not necessary or appropriate, which in turn creates additional economic hardship for families already financially overburdened. All of this is followed by the horror-story mandatory parenting classes and, ultimately, another lengthy wait for the actual divorce hearing, in which dozens of divorcing couples sit in the waiting area of the county courthouse, watching couples walk into the judge’s office as legally joined partners and walk out crying and untethered for the first time in years or decades. I couldn’t have been the only one wondering why it was taking so long; after all, wasn’t it the court who scheduled these appointments? Did they not realize they scheduled all of us at the same time? Surely if there

were a better way to handle the whole thing, a more dignified way, they'd do it. Right? In my experience, at least, the entire process felt cloaked in shame.

Eve Sedgwick claims that "asking good questions about shame and shame/performativity could get us somewhere with a lot of the recalcitrant knots that tie themselves into the guts of identity politics" (64). I suggest that we apply similar "good questions about shame" to the issue of divorce in contemporary America. It appears needless to argue that we have elevated the traditional, American nuclear family to the level of "sacred." Pramod Nayar, in his discussion of "moral panics," notes that "[r]isk culture . . . appeals to the *cultural rhetorics of the family*, where the family is projected as something of unimaginable value" (101). Risk culture, he claims, persuades people to behave irrationally by over-blowing the potential for danger inherent in the common actions and experiences of everyday life. He describes the ways in which our anxieties can be capitalized upon, especially where we sense a risk or threat to traditional structures, such as the nuclear family. These risks or threats are portrayed as moral crises that require a response from "so-called guardians of morality" (Nayar 114). The Task Force members assumed this role, and they were effective in it. Nayar suggests that risk itself is an "affective phenomenon. Risk's discourse's effectiveness depends upon how much *affect* it can generate" (12). The discourses surrounding divorce, and especially those employed to legislate mandatory parenting classes, have been especially successful in generating affect.

In the case of enacting and requiring parenting classes for divorcing people, shame is used as the impetus for the punishment and becomes the scar left upon the punished. Ahmed articulates this effect: "To be witnessed in one's failure is to be ashamed: to have one's shame witnessed is even more shaming. The bind of shame is that it is intensified by being seen by others as shame" (*Cultural Politics* 103). This is an instantiation of Baruch Spinoza's concept of the *affectus* (the shaming force, in this case) and the *affectio* (the inscription left on the shamed). Ahmed describes how "shame secures the form of the family by assigning to those who have failed its form the origin of bad feeling" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 107). She also discusses the ways in which anything within the arena of love is particularly vulnerable to becoming an object of shame: "Through love, an ideal self is produced as a self that belongs to a community; the ideal is a proximate 'we' . . . If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate 'an ideal' that has been given to us through the practices of love. What is exposed in shame is the failure of love" (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 106).

Ahmed also examines the ways in which the nuclear family is defined as a "happy object" in part by identifying those who disrupt or do not conform to its traditional structure as the cause of unhappiness ("Happy Objects" 30). She

refers to these Others as “affect aliens,” whose ranks include “feminist kill-joys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants” (“Happy Objects” 30). I would suggest that divorced people could also be labeled “affect aliens,” in that we have disrupted the structure of the traditional nuclear family. The creation of these dichotomies—those who successfully maintain the family unit as opposed to “those who have failed its form” (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 107); “happy objects” versus “affect aliens”—serves the rhetorical purpose of justifying “fixes” for those located on the “bad” side of the dichotomy. Anyone who does land on that side is “seen as trouble, as causing discomfort for others” (Ahmed, *Cultural Politics* 39). I certainly left my mandatory parenting class with a clear message of how much discomfort I was causing for others. Regardless of whether the message was delivered with rhetorical intent, it doesn’t do anything to help children; the danger of it is that it risks encouraging parents to reverse course in a way that could potentially do *more* harm to children and land the children in a worse (and even more unstable) position than they were in before their parents attended the class.

Sedgwick discusses the relationship between shame and identity, describing it as “at once deconstituting and foundational, because shame is both peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating . . . That’s the double movement shame makes: toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality” (36-7). This seems particularly germane to issues related to divorce. The double movement toward private and public experience—and especially the ways in which the doubling touches and re-shapes identity—is instantiated in the processes and procedures of taking apart a marriage: there are personal elements (the untethering of a sexual union, the state of the couple’s children, the reactions of their families and friends); and there are elements quite public (dealings with the municipal justice system and domestic relations courts, choices about children’s schooling, alterations to property holdings, finances, etc.). At the intersection lie points of tension in which we can observe a rhetorical clash that often manifests in shame.

And when we talk about the intersection of identity and shame, we ought to be very concerned about what emerges from that union. If it’s true that shame is the most powerful affect that shapes one’s sense of self (Sedgwick 37), then wouldn’t responsible adults ask what exactly our manner of dealing with divorce is doing to those most actively developing their identities? We still use the phrase “child of divorce.” My child is now “one of them,” and I find myself wondering, *If I died, would he be called a “child of death”?* Barbara Ehrenreich expresses concern about “the effect all this antidivorce rhetoric is bound to have on the children of people already divorced—and we’re not talking about some offbeat minority . . . [T]hese children already face enough tricky interpersonal situations without having to cope with the

public perception that they're damaged goods" (Ehrenreich). The notion of self-fulfilling prophecies is relevant here, and we would be wise to interrogate the ways in which shame-inducing cultural responses to divorce impact the children affected.

And if the current discourse constructs children as hopelessly crippled by divorce, it casts their parents as the criminals who inflict the injuries. These constructions of identity are revealed in subtle and minute ways, but statements such as Guidubaldi's that charges parents with finding "marital escape valves" (H-1) to "exonerate" (H-1) them of their actions don't require much rhetorical expertise to apprehend the criminalistic language employed.

Many of the discourses and processes surrounding divorce, in fact, are infused with shaming and punitive elements that seem more germane to criminal justice than to civil proceedings. The first step in the divorce process is to file the required legal documents that initiate the separation and eventual decree of divorce. In most cases, this must be done in a county courthouse. When I went to file mine, I was stopped at the door and my purse was taken and put through an x-ray machine while I was scanned with a metal detector by a police officer. There were more police officers in the rooms of domestic relations court. I was instructed to give my name to one of them upon entering. I had some questions about the paperwork (46 original pages, which after being completed must be copied and collated in various combinations into multiple "packets" for filing), and I assumed there would be someone there with whom I could speak. It turns out there are people to whom questions may be asked (magistrates), but you can't just walk in and do that. I asked a clerk how I could arrange to speak with someone. She told me that there was a form I could fill out and that I would receive something in the mail giving me an appointment to come back to ask questions sometime in the next two weeks. I explained that I have a full time job and would need to plan around my teaching schedule and inquired as to what times were available. She told me that there would be no choices; there would be a time selected by the court on the document I received in the mail and that would be my time to ask questions.

It is understandable, certainly, that there need to be policemen in courts; and it is understandable that magistrates don't have unlimited free time during the day to answer questions about paperwork. I don't dispute either of these realities. What I question is whether peaceful marital dissolution procedures must even be carried out in courthouses that feature metal detector scanning and heavy police presence. Was I doing something criminal? I hadn't thought so, but it sure felt that way. I have completed other legal processes before: I get a driver's license every time mine expires; I renew my plates; I've changed my name at the Social Security office; I've applied for a marriage license and

gotten married. All of these activities took place in spaces without police officers or metal detectors, and all had reasonable selections of hours posted.

Scapegoats and Free Radicals

After my divorce hearing, I received in the mail an itemized breakdown of the costs associated with my divorce. The total cost of filing for a divorce in my county is \$282.21. Approximately half of that is allocated for “Clerk’s Fees” (\$137.71). The remaining half is allocated to a number of different funds. These are the funds: Child Abuse Fund, Shelter Victims Fund, Family Violence Prevention Fund, and the Mandatory Parenting Program. With the exception of the parenting class, the programs that were funded by my divorce exist as responses to various crimes. I realize that these programs should be funded, and that those funding dollars must come from somewhere. I find it curious that when the decisions were being made about who should pay for crimes like child abuse and family violence, someone apparently decided that the obvious answer was divorcing individuals. This is representative of what Kenneth Burke calls the “scapegoat mechanism,” in which people tend to “ritualistically cleanse themselves by loading the burden of their own iniquities upon [the scapegoat]” (Burke 406). The fact that we even have the Child Abuse Fund, Shelter Victims Fund, and Family Violence Prevention Fund reveals societal iniquities for whose existence we tend to seek scapegoats. Our scapegoat hunts are too simplistic, though—too opportunistic. The Ohio Task Force’s report constructs “people getting divorced” as its scapegoat, but in doing so it fails to account for the less tangible factors that contribute to divorce: lack of education, economic hardship, gender inequality, conservative agendas that limit access to birth control, and the list goes on. The Task Force report neither addresses nor even acknowledges any of these factors, but instead sets up divorcing peoples as “Criminals [who] serve as scapegoats in a society that ‘purifies itself’ by ‘moral indignation’ in condemning them” (Burke 407). The Criminal is a troubling metaphor of divorced and divorcing people, but it is not the only one.

Sedgwick describes shame as “a kind of free radical that . . . attaches to and permanently intensifies or alters the meaning of—of almost anything: a zone of the body, a sensory system, a prohibited or indeed a permitted behavior [and becomes] a script for interpreting other people’s behavior toward oneself” (62). The problem with permitting (or encouraging) shame-inducing rhetorics in divorce processes is that they actually do function similarly to free radicals: although the span of time that either rhetorics or free radicals can actively wreak havoc is brief, the damage is quickly done; by the time the parenting class is over or the free radical has de-stabilized itself, degeneration and combustion have already been set into motion.

Conclusion

Ahmed writes, “If anything, the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere. Affect aliens can do things, for sure, by refusing to put bad feelings to one side in the hope that we can ‘just get along.’ A concern with histories that hurt is not then a backward orientation: to move on, you must make this return” (50). As a newly divorced person, and therefore perhaps something of an affect alien (and perhaps a scapegoat), I’ve tried to attune myself to the ways in which the “bad feelings”—which I argue are at least partially rhetorically constructed by the legal process rather than wholly caused by the division of the marriage—become permanently inscribed upon the separating bodies. We need to recognize that such inscriptions, especially when their instrument of application is shame, negatively affect both the separating bodies and their children. One could argue that they affect everyone, since the percentage of the population touched by divorce is so significant. It is tempting to grit one’s teeth and charge through the divorce process until it’s over and then try to forget the whole experience. But I’ve tried, as Ahmed suggests, to “make the return,” to travel back through the journey in order to examine and question its affective elements.

It’s become a refrain to say *Divorce is too easy these days*. But people who have gone through it know that there’s nothing easy about divorce, and there never will be. And my argument is not that we should make it any easier. It is that we must “develop a critical rhetoric that articulates standards for good public discourse” (Roberts-Miller, “Democracy, Demagoguery” 460). “Good public discourse,” in the example of the Ohio Task Force’s report and the current processes surrounding divorce, might nudge those engaged in dialogue toward more nuanced and realistic conceptions of the totality of divorcing people rather than default to vilification and the creation of one-dimensional caricatures of those people as careless and neglectful troublemakers. It might move beyond personal bone-picking and stone-throwing like the rhetoric of Dr. Guidubaldi’s statement to instead focus on what sort of programs could truly help parents and children. Identifying and calling out the futility and affective cost of shaming rhetoric could make space for discourse generative of familial and societal growth.

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Mixed Messages: Slut Shaming in *Mean Girls* and *Easy A*

Laurie McMillan

Abstract: *Problems with slut shaming have received increased attention since the late 1990s, but actually changing rhetorics associated with the word “slut” is tricky. Two teen comedies that address slut shaming, Mean Girls (2004) and Easy A (2010), show how feminist conversations can become warped when translated into a mass market genre. The movies explicitly condemn slut shaming, but changing rhetoric involves addressing not simply the term “slut” but also underlying cultural narratives. The movies successfully challenge heteronormative competition and sexual double standards; however, they undo their positive messages as they rely on good girl/bad girl dichotomies that perpetuate slut shaming. These movies thus illustrate the difficulty in adopting feminist messages for commercial venues that are invested in wide public appeal.*

Keywords: *slut, slut shaming, teen movie, genre, Mean Girls, Easy A*

High school slut shaming as a specifically gendered form of bullying has received increased attention in the new millennium, both in academic research and in public conversations. Although many feminists argue that the solution to slut shaming is simply to stop using the term “slut,” more sophisticated analyses go beyond the rhetoric of individual words and call for the transformation of underlying cultural narratives that link a woman’s morality with her sexual behavior (Brontsema; Godrej 6; Mills 36). However, transforming cultural narratives is a slow process, and feminist thinking is often distorted as it enters the mainstream (McRobbie 539). While popular media can potentially challenge problematic social norms and offer progressive narratives that reach a large audience, popular media can also face constraints that limit and undercut an ostensibly feminist message.

Such a dynamic is visible in two commercially successful teen comedies aimed at a female audience: *Mean Girls* (dir. Mark Waters, 2004) and *Easy A* (dir. Will Gluck, 2010). These films explicitly condemn slut shaming, yet each movie struggles with its potentially transformative message because commercial success depends on some adherence to the status quo. As a genre, teen movies navigate contradictory expectations; youth audiences tend to appreciate fun entertainment and a rebellious message, but parents and public watchdogs often call for movies to provide a moral compass (Driscoll; Shary, *Generation*).

In response to public conversations and genre constraints that frame their productions, *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* offer direct criticisms of slut shaming and associated cultural narratives yet simultaneously reify problematic good girl/bad girl dichotomies. Tracing the connections between social conversations, genre constraints, and the movies' mixed messages is instructive for feminist activists committed to changing sexist rhetorics, especially those associated with the word "slut."

Increased attention to slut shaming

The releases of *Mean Girls* in 2004 and *Easy A* in 2010 coincide with the increased attention paid to bullying and slut shaming since the late 1990s in both scholarly and popular venues. School shootings—especially at Columbine in 1999—led more educators, researchers, and legislators to investigate bullying (Birkland and Lawrence 1419) and peer-to-peer sexual harassment (Stein). More recently, incidents involving cyber bullying and teen suicide have drawn attention to slut shaming as a specific form of bullying (Bazelon 9). During the same time period, commercial presses published books that analyzed slut shaming (Tanenbaum [2000]; White [2002]), and feminist writers who addressed slut shaming were becoming more well-known in online venues and via books such as Jessica Valenti's *Full Frontal Feminism* (2007) and *He's a Stud, She's a Slut, and 49 Other Double Standards Every Woman Should Know* (2009). In the context of this rise in research and public attention focused on slut shaming, *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* can be understood as participating in cultural conversations identifying slut shaming as a widespread social problem.

Each movie also responds to a specific publication condemning slut shaming. Most important for the creation of *Mean Girls* is Rosalind Wiseman's commercial book *Queen Bees and Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and Other Realities of Adolescence* (2002), which highlights a number of roles and behaviors common to high school girls as they try to find acceptance and popularity within a teen culture Wiseman labels "Girl World." Wiseman's anecdotal research is based on her experience working with teen girls in an educational program she developed to challenge relational aggression. In particular, one of the unhealthy relational aggressions she addresses is slut shaming. Tina Fey bought the rights to Wiseman's book and used it as fodder for the *Mean Girls* screenplay.

While *Easy A* is similar to *Mean Girls* in its engagement with public conversations about slut shaming in the 2000s, it adapts a text published long before Wiseman's *Queen Bees*: Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). Just as *Mean Girls* depicts teen girls' relational aggression as depicted by Wiseman, *Easy A* dramatizes a teen girl who is treated like Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, publicly shamed and ostracized for her (purported) sexual behavior. This

reworking of a nineteenth-century story points to an ongoing problem of slut shaming in American culture and implicitly suggests that such behavior should be relegated to the past. While the plotlines of both *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* were inspired by particular texts, I'm suggesting that they are better understood as also responding to wider conversations about slut shaming. In short, the movies redirect a public conversation *about* teen girls to an audience *of* teen girls.

Central to critiques of slut shaming is the question: How can slut shaming be stopped? Repeatedly, both scholarly works and popular books argue that simply excising the word "slut" from vocabulary is not enough (Brontsema; Godrej; Mills; Payne; Tanenbaum; Tirrell; Valenti, *Purity*; White). After all, another word such as "whore," "ho," or "skank" could replace "slut." Reclaiming the term "slut" as a self-determined and positive label is sometimes posited as an alternate solution, but this option tends to be most readily available for white affluent heterosexual women (Armstrong et al.). Reclamation efforts fall short to the degree that non-heterosexual girls continue to be either invisible or demonized, while girls of color or of a lower economic class are assumed to be sexually available and thus cannot safely embrace the slut label (Egan 136; Armstrong et al.). Therefore, avoiding or reclaiming the term might help somewhat, but the key to transforming the rhetoric of "slut" is to change narratives of sexuality.

Typical ways of "framing" girls' sexualization "grants some girls the hallow of innocence, normalcy, and health while others come to be viewed as promiscuous, deficient, and ripe for social sanctions" (Egan 17). The "good girl" is most often associated with an innocent and sexually pure white middle-class or affluent girlhood (Egan 136; Armstrong et al.). These cultural narratives are not benign fictions; they are implicated in everyday judgments and behaviors, many of which are extremely harmful in terms of individual psyches, individual physical health and safety, and widespread social issues associated with privilege (or lack thereof). Slut shaming is just one way the good girl/bad girl dichotomy is expressed and perpetuated, and it cannot be changed in isolation but instead is part of a larger attitudinal shift. To some degree, both *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* deconstruct narratives that perpetuate slut shaming, but as successful Hollywood teen movies that rely on easily digestible cultural scripts, both movies ultimately fall short.

Teen films and evolving portrayals of sex

At the same time that *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* respond to a time period in which slut shaming was increasingly recognized, analyzed, and critiqued, they also reach a mass audience by offering characters that are immediately identifiable and storylines that meet viewers' expectations. While less popular films may go further in challenging slut shaming, considering these two mainstream

movies is helpful in exposing typical cultural narratives and the difficulty of social change.

To be clear, sex is one of the hallmarks of teen films. After all, figuring out sexual identity and sexual choices weighs heavily on most teens, so such conflicts are regularly dramatized on the screen (Considine 204-05; Driscoll 71-74). Abstinence marked both the conservatism of the 1950s and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s (Considine 216; Doherty 201). Most other decades showed boys enjoying sex while girls either resisted sex or suffered negative consequences (Shary, *Generation* 210; Shary, *Teen* 51). By the new millennium, “teenage girls in American cinema [...] emerged as more aware of their past mistreatment and misrepresentation and more in control of their destiny, both politically and sexually” (Shary, *Teen* 93). Still, parents and rating systems limit the portrayals of teen sex, so the overall trend in teen movies since the early 1980s has been to emphasize love and to characterize lust negatively, whether through romance-focused plots associated with John Hughes or via movies like the *American Pie* series, which revolve around sex but ultimately reward the characters who are invested in committed relationships (Kaveney 9; Shary, *Generation* 210).

In light of this general trend, it may be surprising that *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* are not the only teen films aimed at girls to challenge slut-shaming narratives, though they are the only two to achieve strong commercial success. *Saved!* (2004) explicitly addresses slut shaming, while *Coming Soon* (1999), *Virtual Sexuality* (1999), and *The To Do List* (2013) use comedic storylines to challenge the idea that girls interested in sex are “slutty.” Each movie suggests that sex and emotional attachment should often go together, but they avoid dogmatism by depicting diverse hetero- and homosexual desires or disrupting the romance narrative that privileges emotional attachment over desire. All four of these movies—as well as *Mean Girls* and *Easy A*—feature white female protagonists from affluent or middle-class families, mirroring research conducted with college students that suggests “the ability to define acceptable sexuality” is a privilege denied to all but “high-status women” (Armstrong et al. 104). Even these movies that redefine teen sexuality thus reflect social constraints, though they still deserve credit for challenging “good girl” narratives to some degree.

Unfortunately, as movies that thematize healthy female sexual desire, *Saved!*, *Coming Soon*, *Virtual Sexuality*, and *The To Do List* did not benefit from wide release and box office success. Reasons for variations in box office success are complex, yet it seems instructive that *Mean Girls* and, to a lesser degree, *Easy A* stand apart from these other movies. *Mean Girls* ranks sixth and *Easy A* ranks eleventh for top-grossing high school comedies (“Comedy—High School”), and both movies won categories in the MTV Movie Awards and the

Teen Choice Awards. The success of *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* is partly because they are fun, with strong protagonists and catchy dialogue. But part of the success is because both movies negotiate the contradictory expectations associated with teen movies.

As mass market movies with wide appeal and PG-13 ratings, *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* offer entertainment first and social lessons second. Still, movies and other media provide narratives that help viewers make sense of the world, so identifying what these movies suggest about slut shaming can be useful. To a great degree, popular teen films are caught in the same dilemma popular high school girls face, “determined by a fine combination of conformity and rebellion” as they try to be “acceptable to a wide range of people while also staking out an individual identity that makes them special and desirable” (Shary, *Generation* 61). Specifically, as *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* respond to both social conversations and genre expectations, they criticize slut-shaming behaviors while paradoxically supporting good girl/bad girl narratives that keep the word “slut” in play.

Mean Girls: Deconstructing heteronormative competition, demonizing female desire

To some extent, *Mean Girls* offers a feminist message against slut shaming. In the scenes leading up to an explicit call for an end to slut shaming, *Mean Girls* depicts a high school “Girl World” of heteronormative competition and sneaky aggression. The word “slut” is one weapon the girls use against each other in a contest for male attention. Thus “queen bee” Regina George (played by Rachel McAdams) pretends she has been labeled a “fugly slut” so that she can innocently accuse others of bullying. Meanwhile, friends Trang Pak and Sun Jin Dinh accuse one another of slut-hood and have a violent confrontation upon discovering they have both been sexually involved with Coach Carr. In these situations, the word “slut” is clearly part of unhealthy dynamics, used by girls who seek status and male attention by condemning other girls.

The message against slut shaming becomes explicit in *Mean Girls* when an outbreak of chaotic physical violence among the girls leads to the principal calling an assembly. In this pivotal scene that transitions from the violent climax to the gradual resolution of the storylines, math teacher Ms. Norbury (played by Tina Fey) tells the female students, “You all have got to stop calling each other sluts and whores. It just makes it okay for guys to call you sluts and whores.” Ms. Norbury is one of the few adults in the movie portrayed as credible and supportive to students, so her advice has the ring of conviction in the midst of comic elements. Ms. Norbury’s stance suggests that females should stand together to fight misogyny rather than compete for male attention.

Thus, *Mean Girls* does not simply challenge the use of the word “slut” and its synonyms. Instead, it pairs a critique of the slut label with challenges to a culture of heteronormative competition, in which girls vie for status and male approval—a dynamic that has been observed and commented on in several research studies that analyze slut shaming (Armstrong et al.; Duncan; Duncan and Owens). This culture of female competition plays out in the Girl World of *Mean Girls*, especially among a clique called the “Plastics” who forge their circle of friendship through rules and judgments that mark who is included and who is excluded. The dynamics are strongly critiqued even before Ms. Norbury’s speech, both through comedic elements and because the story is told through voiceover from the perspective of Cady Heron (played by Lindsay Lohan). Because she had been homeschooled in Africa by her zoologist parents and is entering a high school for the first time, Cady’s “anthropology of high school tribes is given added reflexivity” (Driscoll 60) that helps viewers recognize the oddness of the dynamics. Occasional cross cuts juxtaposing Girl World with savage animal behavior from Cady’s time in Africa emphasize the inhumane elements of the teens’ interpersonal behavior.

Throughout the movie, girls compete for boys and strive to improve their status by following “rules” about weight, attractiveness, intelligence, and expression of anger. From the start, the rules are portrayed as ridiculous and arbitrary, as in the oft-quoted line, “On Wednesdays, we wear pink.” In the final third of the movie, queen bee Regina George points out that these rules “aren’t real.” This phrase suggests that rules regarding appearance are social constructions, while it also uses irony to highlight the very real effects the fake rules have. In this case, Regina George cannot sit with her friends because she is wearing sweatpants on a Monday. Such moments of social exclusion are intertwined with Cady’s plan to depose Regina George and win the affection of her love interest (Aaron). Through these scenes, the movie challenges heteronormative competition and the overly prescriptive parameters of appearance and behavior to which teen girls are expected to conform—both of which are social dynamics that contribute to slut shaming.

Unfortunately, *Mean Girls* also relies on familiar tropes that are less helpful. In its focus on Cady’s storyline, the movie suggests that individuals are responsible for changing problematic dynamics of teen culture. While individuals may have *some* power, studies show that the best routes to changing slut-shaming environments rely on systemic change and people working together (Goldman; Tanenbaum 247-53). Cady’s problems, however, are exacerbated by her own poor choices, and, as the protagonist, she has the power to solve her own problems. Furthermore, Cady wins Aaron’s affection at the end of the movie, with this fulfillment of the romance narrative undoing the movie’s stance against heteronormative competition to some degree.

The movie also hints at but does not fully acknowledge the way Cady experiences privilege due to her status as a white, middle class, heterosexual, cis gendered, and able-bodied young woman who fits traditional beauty norms. Research shows that factors such as race, class, and sexual orientation affect social positioning and influence slut shaming behaviors (Armstrong et al.; Egan; Tanenbaum). Cady's ability to change unhealthy relational dynamics is more believable because she fits stereotypes for female movie protagonists, but ignoring the complexities of social positioning limits the thoughtfulness of the story.

In addition to the overly simplistic focus on individual rather than systemic change, *Mean Girls* fails to adequately address slut shaming because it relies on a strong divide between "good girl" and "bad girl" behavior. In short, girls are encouraged to be sexy but not to express sexual desire themselves. As noted, Cady Heron is considered a "hottie" in *Mean Girls*, and she expresses attraction for Aaron. In one key scene, viewers can see that Cady has integrated more fully into the Plastics as the four walk confidently down the high school hallway together with similar outfits and hairstyles. This scene is disrupted, however, when Cady eyes Aaron as he walks just behind Regina: Cady walks into a garbage pail, falling into it headfirst so that her legs and feet kick up in the air as the other three Plastics and Aaron walk on. While this moment suggests that heteronormative competition is destructive, the behavior that is punished is *not* aggressive behavior toward another girl; rather, Cady is punished when she looks at a male with desire.

Cady's other moments of expressing her attraction for Aaron are similarly associated with poor choices: Cady pretends to be bad at math, kisses Aaron while he's dating Regina George, and drinks too much before bringing Aaron to her bedroom. Cady ends up offending Aaron and vomiting on him in this latter scene. Aaron's attraction for Cady only returns near the end of the movie when she stops chasing after him and instead focuses on behaving ethically. In other words, Cady's "good girl" behavior aligns the ethics of honesty with the suppression of sexual desire.

Cady's portrayal would be slightly problematic in isolation. However, all the other portrayals of sexual behavior in *Mean Girls* are associated with unethical behavior or stupidity, so the ultimate message against slut shaming is further undone as good girl/bad girl categories are reinforced. Regina George, Karen Smith, Coach Carr, Trang Pak, and Sun Jin Dinh are the only characters presented as sexual, and they are all negative role models. Regina George is the villain of the movie, and she has sex with Shane on the sly while she is dating Aaron. In this situation, having sex is linked with dishonesty and betrayal. Karen Smith is portrayed as not only sexual but also dumb, as in a scene that leads to an incestuous encounter with her cousin. Coach Carr is similarly

unsympathetic as he has unethical affairs with underage girls—acts of rape that the movie treats as a lighthearted plot point. Coach Carr also displays stupidity while teaching sex education. Finally, Trang Pak and Sun Jin Dinh are minor characters who have sex with Coach Carr and fight each other (as mentioned above). They fit the stereotype of the submissive yet exotic Asian temptress as they avoid confronting Coach Carr and seem committed to holding onto their sexual relationships with him despite his lack of fidelity (Sue et al. 76); this racist treatment renders the characters unsympathetic sources of humor for viewers. All of these sexually active characters act as foils, highlighting the way Cady is only admirable once she learns to resist the dishonesty, sneaky aggression, and stupidity that are associated with her sexual desire for Aaron. In other words, *Mean Girls* reinforces associations of a girl's virtue with her lack of sexual desire, so Ms. Norbury's advice about not calling each other "sluts" rings hollow.

Easy A: Challenging double standards, prescribing appropriate female desire

Like *Mean Girls*, *Easy A* explicitly calls out slut shaming yet implicitly reifies problematic cultural narratives. While Ms. Norbury's speech is the clearest resistance to slut shaming in *Mean Girls*, a critique of slut shaming shapes the entire plot of *Easy A*. Olive Penderghast (played by Emma Stone) narrates her story through a webcast that traces her change in high school from a student who goes unnoticed to a notorious "whore"—the target of a hyperbolic rumor mill and an anti-slut campaign led by a student religious group. While the attention she receives upon gaining a reputation for being sexual at first feels positive to Olive, it gradually progresses in negative intensity until Olive knows "how shitty it feels to be an outcast, warranted or not."

Just as Ms. Norbury's statement in *Mean Girls* is taken seriously because of the way her character is portrayed, Olive's narrative is received sympathetically because her story displays her intelligence, her good humor, and her generous spirit. Furthermore, because she is the one telling the story, Olive provides viewers with a sense of "authenticity" and helps the audience identify with her (Fleishman 17) as she discredits the sexual rumors. Thus, even though Olive never says, "Stop calling girls sluts," that message is clearly communicated.

Easy A also goes beyond condemning the word "slut" by addressing underlying cultural narratives, focusing on a gendered double standard rather than the heteronormative competition that is critiqued in *Mean Girls*. To some degree, *Easy A* relies on the obvious as it highlights this double standard and the ways lying, gossip, competition, and social exclusion feed slut shaming. At the start of the movie, Olive is not sexually active and feels "invisible to

the opposite sex,” but once she is overheard lying to her friend about having sex, the rumor quickly spreads, with fast-motion editing dramatizing Olive’s change in status. Soon after, Olive pretends to have wild sex with her gay friend Brandon during a party to change his reputation and protect him from bullying. While Brandon is greeted as a hero, however, Olive is labeled as a “dirty skank.” Other unpopular boys come to Olive, asking her to have pretend sexual relations with them so their reputations can improve while her reputation worsens. The religious Cross Your Heart Club leads a campaign of shaming Olive, eventually picketing with signs such as “Expel Olive” and “Olive is a slut,” though the males who claim to have sex with Olive improve in social status. The movie thus shows that girls who are not sexually active are ignored while sexually active girls—or those with a reputation for being sexually active—are susceptible to quick and painful condemnation. Boys, in the meantime, tend to escape slut shaming, but they face unfair evaluations based on standards of masculinity that include sexual prowess with females.

The movie is slightly more nuanced as it uses a narrative of economics to expose the way women may be valued and ultimately devalued based on their sexual reputation. Brandon pays Olive to pretend to have sex with him, and the other males who ask her to lie about having sex with them afterward similarly offer her money. Eventually, the offers are insulting, such as a coupon for 10% off an oil change. Although played for humor, the movie suggests that Olive’s worth has decreased because of her slut reputation in ways that make her vulnerable to sexual violence. Early in the movie, a boy offers to pay Olive to pretend to have sex with him, and when she at first declines, he says, “I don’t need your permission, you know.” This line foreshadows a later episode in which Olive believes she is on a traditional date, but the male gives her a Home Depot gift card and insists that she owes him sexual favors. Olive’s reputation for promiscuity has devalued her to the point that this classmate believes she is not allowed to say “no.” While this serious point is not belabored within the comedic constraints of the movie, this scene becomes a turning point for Olive; she feels compelled to tell her story publicly and thus regain her reputation and her voice. The movie’s connections between sex, money, and violence help expose how deeply troubling slut shaming can be.

Still, while *Easy A* condemns sexual double standards, the movie is problematic in ways that are similar to *Mean Girls* in that it relies on individual problem-solving rather than systemic change, and it also reinforces good girl/bad girl dichotomies. To be fair, *Easy A* shows the gendered double standard is part of the high school culture and reinforced by religion, so systemic issues are recognized. However, the solution for addressing this situation is one that Olive manages as an individual. As explained above, Olive’s webcast creates the narrative arc of the film, and the end reactions from supporting characters

imply both that Olive is widely heard and that she is able to fix the situation simply by telling her story. Olive, like Cady in *Mean Girls*, experiences certain privileges as a white, middle class, heterosexual, cis gendered, and able-bodied young woman who fits traditional beauty norms. The ability to change one's own reputation may be less believable for characters whose social positioning does not fit these categories. Regardless, understanding slut shaming as a systemic problem means that the solutions must also be systemic, and both *Easy A* and *Mean Girls* fail on this count.

Easy A is also similar to *Mean Girls* as it avoids depicting healthy sexual behavior for women. Olive herself is completely chaste despite her reputation. She tells Rhiannon at the start of the movie that she is "not that kind of girl" when Rhiannon believes Olive has had sex, and Olive refuses to kiss her love interest until the moment is right at the end of the movie. The characters in the movie who know Olive best—and who are themselves presented in positive ways—never doubt that the rumors about Olive are false. Mr. Griffith (Olive's English teacher), Olive's parents, and Lobster Todd (Olive's love interest) verbally confirm that they know Olive is not engaged in several casual sexual encounters. In other words, Olive's choices about sex are essential to her identity, even when the movie seems to claim that people should *not* be judged according to their sexual behavior.

The DVD cover reinforces Olive's characterization as a chaste and therefore "good" girl. It features Olive holding a sign that reads, "A comedy about / a good girl / a small favor / and a / big rumor." This image explicitly labels Olive a "good girl" while the chalkboard behind Olive depicts the "big rumor": It has words such as "easy," "floozy," "tart," "cheat," "slut" and "tempres" with arrows pointing toward Olive, clearly labeling her in a way that she doesn't deserve. Olive's appearance positions her as a middle-class white teenager with no hint of sexual expression. She is wearing a yellow dress with a high neckline, her bustline is blocked by the sign describing the movie, and the shot is cut off at the waist. The only hint of anything sexual in the DVD cover is the scarlet red "A" of the title that is mimicked with red capital A's in the names of the actors (such as "EmmA Stone"). This reference to *The Scarlet Letter* does more to align Olive with canonical literary history than with sexual behavior. The ultimate message is not that slut shaming is bad but that slut shaming an innocent girl is bad. Unfortunately, a teen movie may be limited in its ability to criticize slut shaming while simultaneously depicting healthy expressions of female sexual desire.

Easy A thus associates most of the sexual activity of secondary characters with negative behaviors, though to a lesser extent than *Mean Girls*. Three women in the movie are depicted as sexual. One is Olive's friend Rhiannon, who focuses on being sexually desirable in ways that suggest insecurities. The

second is Olive's mom, who says she had a reputation as a slut when she was a teen that was due to her habit of sleeping around. Although Olive's mother is a sympathetic character so her sexual history could be a moment for individual sexual choices to be respected, she attributes her behavior to low self-esteem. Immediately, then, "sleeping around" is portrayed as the behavior of a girl who is emotionally unhealthy. Finally, the school guidance counselor is the female character whose sexual behavior is most prominent. Mrs. Griffith is not at all sympathetic as she cheats on her husband with a male student, gives the student chlamydia, and blames Olive. Here, the clearest expression of sexual desire is aligned with dishonesty and an abuse of power. The student is of age, so it is not considered statutory rape within the movie, though the teacher/student dynamic would lead to the guidance counselor losing her job. Mrs. Griffith is thus a female version of Coach Carr from *Mean Girls*, though she is depicted as more reprehensible.

Still, some instances of sexual relations are portrayed in positive ways in *Easy A*, unlike the sexual activity portrayed in *Mean Girls*. Sex within marriage is seen as a healthy ideal, portrayed both by Olive's parents and (somewhat) by Mr. Griffith as he flirts with his adulterous wife. Olive's friend Brandon leaves town with his boyfriend, so a committed gay relationship is depicted as a viable option as well. This relationship is also interracial, so *Easy A* goes beyond typical movie depictions of monogamy. Olive herself explains near the end of the movie that she may or may not have sex with Lobster Todd, and that is no one's business but her own. *Easy A* thus depicts more flexible sexual choices than does *Mean Girls*, but it ultimately upholds monogamous committed relationships as the appropriate place for sexual desire. Such a cultural script may be less likely to lead to slut shaming than the strong alignment of virtue and virginity in *Mean Girls*, but *Easy A* does not ultimately offer strong positive models of teen female sexual desire.

Final complications

Unfortunately, both *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* tend to associate girls' sexuality with immorality, even though both movies initially appear to stand firmly against slut shaming. It may be somewhat comforting to remember that teens encounter so many messages from so many sources that no single movie or genre is likely to have undue influence. Furthermore, teen movie viewers are savvy. Overstating the movies' potential negative effects ignores "the complex ways in which girls negotiate popular culture and, equally importantly, actually behave" (Egan 134). Rather than consider the movies solely in terms of the influence they exert on teen audiences, moreover, my approach has been to simultaneously position the movies themselves as the recipients of social influences. While many helpful conversations about slut shaming have taken place

in both academic and popular venues, conforming to expectations associated with particular genres can warp the message. This may be especially true for genres such as movies that operate within a limited time frame (as opposed to a series that might offer complicated and revised messages over time). Furthermore, challenges are particularly acute when feminist stances are adapted for mainstream commercial endeavors that rely on some adherence to dominant narratives to achieve widespread popularity (McRobbie 539). In the case of slut shaming, looking closely at *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* reveals how difficult addressing such an issue can be. The movies gesture toward a positive change, but they gesture from the vantage point of mainstream commercial endeavors that often limit how radical the messages can be.

In order to effectively address slut shaming through the transformation of problematic cultural narratives, feminists need to recognize such constraints. This approach allows for complex readings of movies such as *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* while also exposing the degree to which feminist principles are widely accepted or resisted. To explore narratives of teen slut shaming further, moving from movies to other genres—television series, zines, and sex-education YouTube channels, for example—would provide a fuller context and reveal more nuances in the ways slut shaming is addressed. Most importantly, considering a number of media forms may help feminists recognize not only the limits of particular genres but also where and how transformational narratives are most likely to occur. Rather than simply dismiss texts like *Mean Girls* and *Easy A* that straddle conflicting belief systems about slut shaming—or about other feminist issues, for that matter—we can use them as markers for where we have been, where we are now, and where we are headed next.

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Motherhood, Time, and Wendy Davis's Ethos

Timothy Ballingall

Abstract: *Maternal abortion narratives, in which mothers describe the experience of choosing to abort (and grieving the loss of) a wanted pregnancy, enable rhetors to construct maternal pro-choice ethē. This “between” ethos is achieved most saliently through the ways mother rhetors shape time in these narratives. In particular, this essay looks at the temporal dimension of the ethos-building in former Texas State Senator Wendy Davis’s memoir Forgetting to Be Afraid. Davis deftly provides insight into the ways that women’s rhetoric can resist and potentially change the lived temporalities of women in the future, thereby enabling broader possibilities for ethē construction.*

Keywords: *motherhood, time, ethos, Wendy Davis, reproductive rights, abortion*

As women’s reproductive rights appear more and more precarious given electoral and legislative trends in recent years, the need for credible, compelling, and inclusive models of pro-choice ethē is all the more urgent. An obstacle to meeting this need is the fact that the reproductive-rights movement has been slow to acknowledge what Lindal Buchanan calls the “public fetus,” the invocation of the idea of a fetus in public discourse, or to adopt a “two-person paradigm” wherein pregnancy involves two distinct *persons*, a woman/mother and a potential child. Dichotomizing the “woman” (a person) and the “fetus” (a non-person), Jeannie Ludlow argues, “has played a role in the gradual diminishment of support for and access to abortion in the United States” (28). The challenge for pro-choice rhetors, as Lindal Buchanan sees it, is to “devise new rhetorical strategies capable of protecting women’s fragile reproductive freedoms” while also “[s]oftening the movement’s stance on pregnancy and fetal value” in order to “repair damaged movement ethos and attract new (or alienated) audiences to the cause” (112, 114). A promising strategy for pro-choice rhetors, then, Buchanan argues, might be appropriating the cultural code of motherhood, which has been primarily a resource for the pro-life movement. Harnessing the topoi of motherhood may afford women rhetors the moral and cultural authority traditionally granted to mothers even as they make progressive arguments.

Former Texas State Senator Wendy Davis’s 2014 memoir, *Forgetting to Be Afraid*, is a concrete example of how pro-choice rhetors might harness motherhood not only to create ethos as an individual but also to frame abortion positively as a compassionate decision. Davis is, of course, most famous for

her advocacy of reproductive rights in a thirteen-hour filibuster in 2013, of a bill which when passed into law resulted in a fifty percent decrease in abortion-providing clinics in Texas (Feibel); however, in June 2016 the Texas law was found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in a five-three decision (Liptak). Harnessing her notoriety from the filibuster, Davis campaigned for governor in 2014 against the Republican Attorney General Greg Abbott. Hitting bookstores just two months before Election Day that year, *Forgetting* is in many ways a political memoir, but it also transcends its immediate context by addressing issues such as what it means to be a mother. The memoir recounts Davis's childhood and early adulthood, her financial and personal struggles as a single mother, and her rise to fame as a champion of public education and women's reproductive rights. The excerpt of the memoir that cable news and social media fixated on, however, was a chapter in which Davis publically discloses that she had had an abortion in the 1990s.

I argue that this chapter strategically presents Davis as embodying a pro-choice *and* maternal ethos, which may help the pro-choice movement begin recuperating its image and attracting new audiences. Davis powerfully shows that reserving the right to have an abortion and acting as a loving mother are not mutually exclusive actions. Identifying as both a mother and pro-choice, two entities traditionally antithetical in American public discourse, engenders a "between" ethos. Nedra Reynolds has argued that subject positions on the margins and between discourse communities can serve as *topoi* for ethos construction (33), and Carolyn Skinner has demonstrated the utility of a "between" ethos in her study of nineteenth-century women physicians. Davis's "between ethos" is, in large part, constructed via the ways in which she discursively represents time—relationships to the past, present, and future; routines and duration; the physical and emotional toll of enduring lengths of time; and so on. In this way, Davis deserves scholarly attention not only because she constructs an ethos that can serve as a model for recuperating the broader ethos of the reproductive-rights movement, but also because the nature of her ethos-building speaks to a gap in the feminist ecological interpretation of ethos.

I begin by explaining what it means to think of ethos as temporal and how gendered rhetorics of time, particularly *maternal* temporal rhetorics, influence women's ethos construction. Next, I recap some of the events in Davis's life leading up to the memoir's publication and provide an overview of the memoir itself and its significance. Finally, I will explain how Davis shapes time in one of the central chapters of the memoir to construct a maternal pro-choice ethos, presenting the reproductive rights movements with a contemporary model for how to effectively reframe abortion as potentially congruous with motherhood.

Ethos, Time, and Motherhood

For twenty-plus years, scholars in feminist rhetorical studies have been recovering and analyzing women's ethotic practices in order to interrogate—and regender—the field's definition of ethos (Jarratt and Reynolds; Reynolds; Christoph; Pittman; Applegarth, "Genre"; Skinner; Ryan, Myers, and Jones). This scholarship has made the "ethical appeal" accountable for extra-textual and non-deliberate factors, especially the ways in which social location (gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, etc.) and accompanying power relations shape and are shaped by women's ethē construction. Location, however, is more than a metaphor for sociocultural identity: Women's ethē are shaped also by literal locations, cultivated in relation to spaces and places. Julie Nelson Christoph has observed "strategies of placement," such as using regional terms, in the autobiographical writings of pioneer women (677). Risa Applegarth argues that rhetors can employ "place-based ethos strategies" to create audience-based credibility and trustworthiness based on the rhetor's affiliation with a certain place and the meaning a place has for an audience or discourse community ("Genre"; see also "Working With" 217). Combining this place-based approach to ethos with the social approach above, Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones ask feminist rhetoricians, in analyzing women's ethē construction, "to acknowledge the multiple, nonlinear relations operating among rhetors, audiences, things, and contexts" (3)—in short, to grant that ethē are cultivated in relation to an ecology of social constructs, power relations, embodied practices, technologies, and the physical world.

In order to fully appreciate the feminist ecological ethē of women rhetors such as Davis, I would like to pivot from Applegarth's use of place-based ethos strategies to draw attention to *time-based ethos strategies*, which have garnered less scholarly attention. A turn to the temporal is merited because a rhetor's relationship to/experience of time can function as a location from which she speaks, a place in which she dwells, a material resource that may or may not be available, and a material field that, like space, accrues meaning through its discursive invocation. Whereas time is normally affiliated with *kairos* (timing or qualitative time) in rhetorical theory, my goal here is to explore the possibilities of *chronos* (quantitative time) for shaping ethos. *Chronos* is not "an abstract, neutral backdrop for our activities," writes Jordynn Jack, because "it too is shaped by rhetorical injunctions about its organization and use" (288). Injunctions about the organization and use of women's time can, of course, have a direct bearing on women's ability to craft effective ethē. At the very least, a spatial interpretation of ethos necessitates a temporal corollary, for conceptions of space are also often conceptions of time (Jack 301n). For example, Mary Austin's place-based ethos strategy of *attestation*, explains Applegarth, involved attesting to not only her firsthand observations in the

desert but also “the length of time she has spent in making them”: “Combining specificity ... with long sweeps of time, Austin affirms that her desert experience ... [was] distilled from years of habitation and experience, rather than from brief forays as a tourist or adventurer” (“Genre” 55-6). Furthermore, a “dwelling place,” the original meaning of ethos (Chamberlain; Halloran; Miller; Hyde), may indeed be that, a place, but dwelling occurs over certain lengths of time, at a certain pace, orienting a subject to the past, present, and future. Michael J. Hyde writes that “one can understand the phrase ‘the *ethos* of rhetoric’ to refer to the way discourse is used to transform space *and time* into ‘dwelling places’” (xiii, emphasis added). Time is a component of the ecology in which *ethē* are constructed. A “feminist ecological *ethē*,” write Ryan, Myers, and Jones, “... describes women’s public ethos construction relative to *time*, contexts, and different relationships” (2, emphasis added).

How, then, does temporal location shape women’s *ethē* construction? How are women’s *ethē* shaped by gendered experiences and conceptions of time? While women’s experiences of time are shaped by diverse factors (e.g., structural racial inequalities, workplace dynamics in a globalized economy), women’s time is perhaps most gendered by the cultural code of motherhood: shared beliefs, values, and unstated assumptions in American culture which establish normative expectations for how women and mothers should spend their time, where it should be spent, with whom, for how long, and why. It naturalizes a certain orientation to the past, present, and future, and creates a “right” order and pace of events centered on childbearing and childrearing. The experience of motherhood itself necessitates a number of timely considerations: would-be mothers must negotiate the “biological clock” and the “best time” to get pregnant, issues of work-life balance and family leave, time with children but also restorative time away from children, arrangements for day-care, and so on. In short, motherhood generates certain “rhetorics of time [which] dictate when [a] space,” such as the body,¹ home, classroom, or workplace, “should be used, who uses it when, and how activities are scheduled and sequenced within that space” (Jack 288).

Not surprisingly, the temporal dimension of ethos—as is the case with the sociocultural and spatial dimension—is not “harmonious or conflict-free,” and competing maternal beliefs and values are often at the root of such conflict for women (Reynolds 333). Indeed, in *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, Sarah Sharma argues that time is highly relational, hierarchical, and

1 Feminist geographer Linda McDowell calls the body “the most immediate place ... The body is the place, the location or site, if you like, of the individual, with more or less impermeable boundaries between one body and another” (34).

consequential—in a word, ecological. Sharma argues that time functions in a manner similar to how power functions in the work of Foucault. Time is not a universally experienced orientation to or sense of the past, present, or future, or something one can somehow step out of. Rather, Sharma posits “a conception of time as lived experience, always political, produced at the intersection of a range of social differences and institutions, and of which the clock is only one chronometer” (15). It makes less sense to speak of Time than of temporalities—contingent experiences or senses of time. Temporalities, much like power relations for Foucault, are entangled in other temporalities, our time always potentially affecting, supporting, or exploiting the time of others. For “temporal interdependence [pervades] ... the entire social fabric” (20).

Sharma’s theory of temporalities provides insight into the ways in which temporal location, much like spatial and sociocultural location, can function as a constraint and/or resource for women’s *ethē* construction. Specifically, Sharma follows Bourdieu in enumerating the ways in which power or agency may be exercised temporally: “taking one’s time[,] ... making people wait[,] ... adjourning, deferring, delaying, raising false hopes, or conversely, rushing, taking by surprise” (qtd. in Sharma 74). Power is often experienced temporally, then, as “anxious, powerless waiting” (qtd. in Sharma 74). For many women, this kind of power is felt in experiences of motherhood. For example, in the classic text *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich characterizes women’s temporality generally as one of waiting:

a woman pregnant is ... a woman waiting. Women have always been seen as waiting: waiting to be asked, waiting for our menses, in fear lest they do or do not come, waiting for men to come home from wars, or from work, waiting for children to grow up, or for the birth of a new child, or for menopause. (39)

According to the institution of motherhood, which holds that mothering ought to be intensive and continuous, women’s temporalities are “naturally” entangled with those of male suitors and husbands as well as children; a mother is told to “find her chief gratification in being *all day* with small children, living at *a pace tuned to theirs*” (Rich 22, emphasis added).

Maternal waiting is reinforced by pro-life beliefs and legislation, which hold that childbearing is always-already the outcome of pregnancy. For example, Buchanan points to the word choice of the pro-life legislators in the debate over the 2004 Unborn Victims of Violence Act. For these legislators,

fetus = baby and pregnant woman = mother (Buchanan 100).² In the pro-life view, "a woman pregnant ... is a woman waiting" for the one and only possible outcome of pregnancy (Rich 39). Pregnancy automatically produces—or rather, should produce, barring miscarriage or abortion—the birth of a child. And this temporality is often universalized to all pregnancies, wanted and unwanted, normal and abnormal, healthy and life-threatening. In contrast, pro-choice rhetors' figuration of pregnancy includes what I call a *pregnant pause*, an exigent moment of indeterminacy, a need for decision-making in which an agentive pregnant woman decides whether or not to let the pregnancy continue developing—opting to make no decision, in this case, still being a decision. When the outcome of a pregnancy is not predetermined in isolation from the woman's reproductive agency, the sense of time is non-teleological. Childbirth may or may not be the outcome depending, in part, on what the pregnant woman decides.

Abortion narratives that presuppose the existence of a pregnant pause but situate it in the context of a wanted pregnancy constitute a pro-choice genre that, if foregrounded more in pro-choice rhetoric, can soften the movement's stance on giving presence to the "public fetus." In the 1970s and 80s, pro-choice rhetors failed to match the visual forcefulness and directness of pro-life rhetors, who would often bring pickled fetuses in jars into courtrooms (Condit 82). In response to powerful tactics like this, pro-choice rhetors would ineffectively advocate abstractions such as personal liberty.³ "Until the pro-choice movement reconsiders its one-person paradigm of pregnancy and comes to terms with the public fetus," writes Buchanan,

it will continue to produce ineffective discourse and to hemorrhage its base of support. As the intensifying War on Women indicates, it is imperative to devise new rhetorical strategies capable of protecting women's fragile reproductive freedoms. ... A willingness to wrestle with the complexities and moral ambiguities of pregnancy and abortion may be essential to (re)winning the backing of a broad

2 The same pro-life word choice is observable in the transcript of Wendy Davis's 2013 filibuster. A senator questioning Davis catches himself doing it: "You've mentioned about the health of the mother and you've mentioned that the mother would have—pregnant woman would have to be brought to the point of compromise of immediate injury or death" (qtd. in Mardoll 79). But a moment later, he switches back to *mother*: "[I]f there's a condition that threatens the life of the mother, you don't have to wait until that's about to happen" (80). Earlier in the day, another senator had used the term "pre-born child" (2).

3 For a similar critique from a women's studies perspective, see Ludlow 35-41.

constituency of Americans, many of whom have been alienated by the movement's intractability. (112-13)

One of the most promising discursive sites for producing effective, moving pro-choice arguments that wrestle with moral and emotional gray areas is the maternal abortion narrative. These abortion narratives recount the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of mothers who have had an abortion for reasons consistent with the beliefs and values traditionally associated with the Mother figure, such as, for example, protecting a child from unnecessary pain. Furthermore, time and temporal location are salient themes in these narratives, in that, women are differentially positioned relative to a birth event in the past, present, and future; they endure spans of time with varying degrees of agency (i.e., the pregnant pause) and in different material and sociopolitical contexts. Examining representations of time in maternal abortion narratives provides understanding for feminist rhetoricians into the nuances of maternal pro-choice ethos, a vital rhetorical construct in the movement's current moment. In her own narrative, Davis describes the pregnant pause but, rather than insisting on abstractions like choice and personal liberty, Davis situates the pregnant pause in the context of great emotional pain, the loss of a wanted pregnancy, a mother's loss of a child. Davis thereby combines the pro-choice and pro-life orientation to the future during pregnancy: indeterminacy and the exigence for a decision as well as maternal longing and the expectation of childbirth.

Wendy Davis and *Forgetting to Be Afraid*

Wendy Davis's memoir likely would not have been written or published when it was without Davis's national profile thanks to her strong identification with reproductive rights. On 25 June 2013 Davis stood on the senate floor of the Texas state capital and filibustered Senate Bill 5 (which later became House Bill 2), all while being prohibited from eating, drinking, sitting, leaning on any furniture, using the restroom, or speaking about any topic besides SB 5. Davis received help from her Democratic colleagues, who stalled proceedings with procedural questions, as well as from the protestors in the gallery, who cheered and chanted in the final moments before the midnight deadline—an event that has become known as the “people's filibuster.” But the people's filibuster would not have been possible without the physical, mental,

and emotional perseverance and rhetorical savvy of the senator from Fort Worth, Texas.⁴

The filibuster succeeded in preventing the passage of SB 5 until Gov. Rick Perry called a second 30-day special session to start on 1 July 2013. Because an identical bill would reach the senate floor weeks—rather than hours—ahead of the deadline, as was the case on July 13, filibustering likely would have been impossible. The law (now called House Bill 2) went into effect in Oct. 2014, forcing the closure of about half the 40-plus abortion clinics in Texas. A lengthy legal battle ensued, culminating two years later in the SCOTUS decision in favor of the law's opponents. In the meantime, Davis had, because of the filibuster, become a national political celebrity, a "feminist superhero" (Walsh). The filibuster generated a level of enthusiasm Texas Democrats hadn't experienced since Gov. Ann Richards was in office in the 1990s.⁵ The filibuster had made Davis a viable candidate for governor against the Republican Attorney General Greg Abbott. In Oct. 2013, Davis officially announced her candidacy for governor. Interestingly, *The New York Times* noted, in "her 15-minute speech ... she mentioned neither abortion nor her filibuster—and [the omission] seemed an

4 Beth Daniell and Letizia Guglielmo note that Davis's ethos during the filibuster was "borrowed and shared in collective action," for thousands of women and men contributed their personal stories regarding abortion to Davis's office for her to read (104). Davis has even on multiple occasions acknowledged that "It was your voices—lent to me—that made it possible for me to stand those 13 hours" (qtd. in Daniell and Guglielmo 105). While Daniell and Guglielmo draw our attention to the collectiveness of Davis's ethos as an example of cyberfeminist activism, Davis is important to understand more fully as a feminist rhetor because her rhetoric, especially *Forgetting*, highlights temporal location, an understudied component of the ecology in which women construct ethē.

5 Almost immediately following the filibuster, journalists began comparing Davis to Ann Richards. Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood and daughter of Ann Richards, described "Wendy [a]s the kind of woman that my mother was always nurturing, and nothing would have made her more proud than to see Wendy lead Texas" (Mitchell). Most rhetorical scholars are probably familiar with Ann Richards for her use of "feminine style" in both its formal qualities and as an ethic of care (Dow and Tonn). Similarities in Davis' and Richards' feminist political philosophy aside, a significant difference between the two is that Davis was clearly identified with the feminist movement from the outset of the filibuster, whereas Richards may have "identified herself as a feminist, [but] her primary public role [was] not as a feminist advocate" (Dow and Tonn 300).

attempt to ensure she does not become a single-issue candidate” (Fernandez). The Davis campaign’s main strategy was apparently to give as much presence as possible to her personal success story, her overcoming poverty and adversity through hard work and opportunities for higher education.

Before the filibuster and the accompanying national prominence, Wendy Russell Davis had been married and separated by the age of 19, left to care for her infant daughter, Amber, in the mobile home she had shared with her first husband. While waiting tables at her father’s restaurant, she met her second husband, who worked in local government and would encourage her to pursue her education. Davis worked her way up through the paralegal program at Tarrant County College, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in English at Texas Christian University before attending Harvard Law School. She served on the Fort Worth city council for nine years prior to becoming a state senator in 2008. And Davis’s first filibuster was of a 2011 bill that would decrease funding for public education by \$4 billion.

Many journalists and voters, however, had already decided Davis was in fact a single-issue candidate regardless of her biography or commitment to public education. The pro-life majority of Texan voters saw Davis as, to quote a conservative blogger, “Abortion Barbie,” a moniker intended to degrade both Davis’s appearance, as a blonde white woman, and her position on reproductive rights (Erickson). After months of Davis discussing her inspiring life story in speeches on the campaign trail, conservative reporters took aim at her biography. Wayne Slater in a Jan. 2014 *Dallas Morning News* article argued that Davis had been “blurring the facts” about when she was divorced from her first husband. Slater further intimates that she had used her second husband to pay her Harvard Law School tuition and had neglected her children while she was there.⁶ A number of journalists were quick to point out the sexist tropes thinly veiled in Slater’s article, painting Davis as a “gold digger” and a “bad mother” (Luther; Marcotte; Mundy). Many conservative news outlets treated Slater’s criticisms unproblematically as breaking news (e.g., Darby). The “bad

6 Slater writes: “Davis was 21, not 19, when she was divorced. She lived only a few months in the family mobile home while separated from her husband before moving into an apartment with her daughter. A single mother working two jobs, she met Jeff Davis, a lawyer 13 years older than her, married him and had a second daughter. He paid for her last two years at Texas Christian University and her time at Harvard Law School, and kept their two daughters while she was in Boston. When they divorced in 2005, he was granted parental custody, and the girls stayed with him. Wendy Davis was directed to pay child support.” Later, he speculates: “Some will question how much of her success was her own doing, and how bad her circumstances were to start.”

mother" label in particular would remain hard to shake. In response to the article, the Davis campaign gave selective interviews, issued news releases with a detailed timeline of Davis's life, and released a two-page open letter from each of Davis's daughters with the expressed purpose being to combat the "bad mother" criticism (Root).

Less than two months before the election, Blue Rider Press published Davis's memoir, *Forgetting to Be Afraid*, the inside cover touting it as "the exhilarating and deeply moving story behind one of the nation's brightest young political stars." In the memoir, Davis recalls personal struggles, such as her mother's suicide attempt, her parents' divorce, her own divorces, an ectopic pregnancy which had to be terminated, and a late-term abortion of her would-be daughter Tate Elise which was prompted by a severe fetal abnormality. Conservative pundits criticized her for having had an abortion as well as the book's release two months before the election, calling it an attempt to merely pull at the heartstrings of voters. Some critics even questioned the truth of Davis's disclosures (Siggins). What these pundits and critics failed to see was that *Forgetting* transcended the immediate situation of a tough election. The book was not an extended stump speech. *Forgetting* is the most sustained effort by Davis to tell her personal story and to present herself to voters as a complex human being whose upbringing and adulthood, complicated as they were, have informed who she is today. On *The Rachel Maddow Show*, Davis explained that she wrote with the intention of helping readers understand

how I became who I am and why it is that I fight for the things that I fight for. I wanted to put it all out there and to be real. ... I hope that women and the men who love them who may be facing very difficult decisions like the one that my former husband and I faced with our daughter, Tate Elise, I hope that they'll find some comfort in knowing what we went through and how we handled it. These stories are important, I think, for people who are looking for comfort, looking for inspiration, and that's what I hope to achieve through this book. ("Wendy Davis")

Davis did not use her memoir to counter the conservative criticism of her being a "bad mother," but rather transcended the situation to construct a more useful, ecological ethos for pro-choice women. Dan Solomon of *Texas Monthly* explicitly links the memoir to the 2013 filibuster, writing that, during the filibuster, Davis was an "abstract, ... figurative representative" of Texans who have experienced difficult choices with abortion, whereas her "abortion reveal" made her "a literal representative of some of the circumstances under which people have abortions ... Her decision to tell her own story," Solomon continues, "will strike many supporters as a powerful follow-up to the stories

that she told from the floor of the Senate during her now-famous filibuster” (Solomon).

The memoir’s connection to the filibuster is unsurprising because in the opening pages Davis explains that the exigence for the book was in part the “awakening” she experienced while reading a particular personal testimony during the filibuster (*Forgetting* 4). Davis recalls the testimony of Carole M., who learned at four months that her baby had a terminal condition where “abnormal amounts of fluid build up in the body” and so she and her husband faced the difficult choice of birthing a stillborn baby or aborting (qtd. in *Forgetting* 272). Davis began to cry while reading this testimony, especially because, as she later reflects, “[i]t could have been my story. ... And it felt as though I was reading words I could have written” (272). For a moment, Davis writes, she considered sharing her own story about Tate Elise, but ultimately she decided a personal disclosure like that would have made the filibuster about her, not the millions of Texas women she was representing (275). The testimony is especially devastating because Carole’s language is maternal: This was “a much-wanted pregnancy,” her “beloved child,” her “baby, who we named Amber Grace” (qtd. in Mardoll 46-7). *Forgetting’s* disclosure of Davis’s abortion, then, is not only generally connected for reproductive-rights activists to the meaning of the filibuster, as Solomon observes, but also specifically connected for Davis to the difficult experience of a mother aborting a wanted pregnancy.

Abortion narratives written about wanted pregnancies are (and should only be) one type of abortion narrative. We need more and a diversity of abortion narratives circulating in print and online in order to reduce the myths and stigma around abortion. We need books like Caitlin Moran’s *How to Be a Woman* and films like *Obvious Child*⁷ wherein women undergo abortion procedures and do not feel guilty. As Emily Shire of *The Daily Beast* points out in a review of *Forgetting to Be Afraid*, Davis fits the narrative of “a tortured, loving mother acting out of almost pure medical necessity” whereas, on the other hand, “[f]or a woman to reveal she has had an abortion because she wanted one ... and, further, to declare she has only felt happiness towards her decision is truly groundbreaking. Davis’ abortion narrative,” Shire continues, “has helped diminish the social stigma surrounding abortion. But until the ‘bad’ abortion stories are just as acceptable, pro-choice advocates have a long way to go”—“bad” stories being the “truly groundbreaking” ones (Shire). Despite Davis’s narrative fitting the type “easiest for people to digest,” for many people in Texas, especially voters, even the “good” abortion stories are still unacceptable (Shire): Davis lost her bid for the governorship by over twenty percentage

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2GN3wdfqbA>

points to the pro-life Abbott. Nevertheless, the wanted-pregnancy abortion narrative—the maternal abortion narrative—is especially rhetorically significant because it collapses the dichotomy of moral mother vs. selfish, oversexed, abortion-seeking woman. Narratives like Carole's and Davis's appropriate the topoi of motherhood while advancing a pro-choice message, creating perhaps the best chance for reproductive-rights rhetors to move and persuade pro-life audiences and to decrease the stigma around other abortion narratives as well—including the “bad” ones. “Good” abortion narratives, ones of mothers who only reluctantly undergo an abortion out of medical necessity and concern for their child's quality of life, represent one way reproductive-rights rhetors might appropriate the code of motherhood.

Davis's narrative, in particular, deserves our attention because she remains one of the central, most influential figures of the reproductive-rights movement today. While the filibuster propelled her into the national spotlight, she has remained active working to advance women's and reproductive rights as well as civic participation, giving college-campus talks about her inspiring life story, the importance of and strategies for civic engagement and gender equality, and the general economic benefits of workplace gender equality. She contributed an amicus brief in support of Whole Woman's Health (13-16) which was largely based on the abortion chapter in *Forgetting*, and she campaigned in several states for Secretary Hilary Clinton this past year. She also founded Deeds Not Words, an Austin-based non-profit organization that targets millennials and advocates for greater civic participation. Deeds Not Words maintains a website that aggregates news about gender equality and links to organizations and resources for advancing women's rights; it also publishes a weekly newsletter, *Deeds Digest*.

Temporality and Davis's Maternal Pro-Choice Ethos

Chapter 14 of *Forgetting* begins with an account of Davis's third pregnancy. When her daughters had reached ages six and twelve, Davis wanted to have another child, but halfway through the first trimester Davis and her then-husband Jeff discovered “[o]ur Lucas had implanted in a fallopian tube, rather than in my uterus,” which is also known as an ectopic pregnancy, making the pregnancy “unsustainable and not viable” (172). Davis had the surgery to remove the tube and terminate the pregnancy. “I was heartbroken. ... We all grieved the loss, but I grieved most deeply,” she writes (172). Soon after, Davis and her husband stopped taking measures to prevent pregnancy, knowing the chances of Davis getting pregnant with one fallopian tube were greatly diminished, but “I secretly prayed that were it God's plan for us we would find ourselves expecting again” (172). Two years later in 1996, they found themselves expecting again. Happy but cautious, Davis dutifully prepared for her

third baby, whom she named Tate Elise, by being “completely dedicated to having the healthiest pregnancy possible, reading every book on the subject that I could get my hands on” (173). Because Davis was thirty-three at the time, her husband in his late forties, she took a Tri-Screen to test for possible risk of chromosomal or neural defects. When the results came in, the doctor recommended she follow up with a high-risk pregnancy specialist. The specialist told them Tate had a slightly enlarged head but it was nothing really to worry about. A few weeks later, Davis went in for a second ultrasound and the doctor was very quiet. “[W]hen he finished,” writes Davis, “he repositioned my chair to its upright position and reached for a box of Kleenex, his hand actually shaking. ... I could see in his eyes the news even before he opened his mouth to speak” (175). Tate had developed Dandy-Walker syndrome, a fetal brain abnormality where the left and right hemispheres of the brain develop in complete separation. On top of that, “[h]er condition, extremely rare, fell on the most severe end of the syndrome’s spectrum” (175). Davis describes her reaction: “I couldn’t breathe. I literally couldn’t catch my breath. My baby. My precious baby Tate. I don’t remember much else about that day other than calling Jeff, trying to contain my hysterical crying. The rest of it is a shocked, haze-filled blur” (175).

It is in Davis’s description of her grieving and the series of actions before finally deciding to abort the baby that I see Davis discursively incorporating the pregnant pause: Her right to choose abortion is taken as granted. Davis exercises her reproductive agency through waiting, to recall Sharma and Bourdieu. Davis describes waiting as long as possible, gathering “as much research as I could” and consulting multiple specialists, before making the decision (176). Because the pregnancy is, of course, a wanted pregnancy, Davis’s reason for waiting is maternal love:

When I was alone, with time ticking away and the urgency of making a decision pressing down upon me, I would talk to her. I spoke in the most reassuring way I could. I promised I would not let her suffer. But I needed more information. To make such an impossibly awful decision, I needed to feel surer. (176)

The choice to have an abortion is presented as a last resort and an extremely painful one in her situation. Davis gets a second opinion from “a doctor in Austin who specialized in obstetric neurological diagnoses” and a third opinion from a specialist at “a teaching hospital in Dallas” (176). After seeking out a fourth opinion, Davis had “[found] her own way of getting there,” that is, resigning to the last resort.

In contrast, agentive waiting was ultimately only partially available for Carole, who wrote the testimony that inspired Davis. Carole’s testimony

similarly takes as granted the pregnant pause but describes the prolonged pain a mother can feel when a faith-based insurance policy forces a mother to wait after she has already decided on abortion. After being informed that her baby had Hydrops Fetalis, Carole and her husband had three options: "We could wait until she passed, induce my labor, or have a dilation and extraction" (qtd. in Mardoll 46). Similar to Davis's narrative, Carole recognizes the need for decision-making: "[W]e had a decision to make. Even if we decided not to do anything, we were still making a decision, and we had a limited amount of time to decide" (46). Carole's initial agentive waiting soon turns, however, into powerless waiting: After Carole and her husband decided to have her labor induced, they were informed by her husband's employer Seton, a Catholic medical organization, that the Seton insurance "would not allow us to have our labor induced while our daughter still had a heartbeat. That meant that we were either forced to wait until she passed or agree to have her heart stopped" (47). After weeks of waiting, they decided to have their daughter's heart stopped. In Carole's case, she had made her decision but had to endure a protracted waiting period and limited options for which Carole could be waiting. The temporal politics of Carole's and Davis's abortion narratives, then, include the conditions under which a mother waits—if waiting is chosen or imposed—and the available medical options for which a mother is waiting.

The available medical options in these particular abortion narratives are severely limited not only by institutional forces but also, in the first place, by terminal prenatal illness, which, in the context of a wanted pregnancy, engenders heartbreaking incongruities: "Instead of planning a nursery," writes Carole,

I was picking out a headstone for my baby. Instead of choosing an outfit for her to wear home, I was picking out her burial gown. ... Every time that I left the house, someone would comment on my pregnancy. They asked perfectly normal questions about my due date, the gender, the name. I answered their questions as nicely as I could, and then I would turn around and burst into tears. So eventually I stopped leaving my house. (qtd. in Mardoll 47)

Death in this instance replaces childbirth as the eventual conclusion of a wanted pregnancy. Davis and Carole respond to this devastating temporal reorientation, this revision of what the future holds, by assessing their child's likely quality of life and ultimately choosing abortion as a maternal, loving option, framing abortion as an end-of-life issue. "I could feel her little body tremble violently," writes Davis, "as if someone were applying an electric shock to her, and I knew then what we needed to do. She was suffering. ... It was time to accept the grim prognosis shared by those four physicians" (*Forgetting* 176).

Ultimately, it is “[w]ith the heaviest of hearts” that Davis and her husband decide to terminate the pregnancy, knowing “it was the most humane and compassionate thing we could do to spare Tate ... further pain and suffering” (177). Carole’s testimony more explicitly frames abortion as a humane measure:

Being told that you don’t really have any control over how your baby is going to die is devastating and self-defeating. I chose to have a baby, and to bring her into this world. I should be allowed to make the very personal, very private, and very painful decision as to how she leaves it, guided by the best interest of my child and my family. (qtd. in Mardoll 48)

Framing abortion in this context as an act of compassion is not unique to Davis’s and Carole’s narrative. For Phoebe Day Danziger’s 2014 *Slate* article, “A Peaceful Death” even more explicitly and deftly explores the issue with moral and emotional nuance. I briefly put Danziger’s narrative, too, in conversation with Davis’s to illustrate the range of maternal appeals in abortion narratives. Danziger, who is herself training to be a neonatologist, describes and reflects on the events after she and her husband learned “[o]ur baby had what is called a bladder outlet obstruction, meaning that the urine that was being stored in his bladder was unable to exit” (Danziger). They decided to have an abortion. Danziger’s moral justification for the decision is couched in maternal concern for the quality of her baby’s life:

Because of the choice we made to end his life, our son never got the chance to gaze up at his parents, to see who it was that had been talking and singing to him all along. He never got the chance to fall asleep in our arms, bundled and cozy, pink lips and fuzzy hair like a duckling, smelling of milk and baby, the very best smell in the world. Neither, however, did he have to suffocate to death at birth, his small body gasping to fill his woefully hypoplastic lungs. He did not have to feel pain shooting throughout his abdomen, grossly distended with urinary ascites. He did not have to experience one minute away from the warmth and love of my body. We chose, instead, for him to be born straight into peace. (Danziger)

Danziger, like Davis and Carole, clearly shows childbirth as the expected and desired outcome of a wanted pregnancy while also showing that the love for her son extends to curtailing his suffering at the end of his life.

Each of these three narratives assumes the rightful existence of the pregnant pause but situates this pro-choice temporal orientation within the context of a wanted pregnancy and further attends to the reality of a terminal condition. Situating the pregnant pause in this way enables these narratives

to tap into the expectation of childbirth and the grief of this expectation going tragically unrealized—both of which resonate with the pro-life view of pregnancy. After Davis's abortion, she mourned the loss of her child:

An indescribable blackness followed. It was a deep, dark despair and grief, a heavy wave that crushed me, that made me wonder if I would ever surface. It would take me the better part of a year to ultimately make my way up and out of it. And when I finally did come through it, I emerged a different person. Changed. Forever changed. (*Forgetting* 178)

Enduring that heavy wave of grief required counseling in the early days, stories of couples going through a similar experience, the time and comfort of family and friends, and group counseling in the weeks after. In her grief Davis further describes a specific re-orientation to the past. For memorializing Tate enabled and continues to enable Davis and her family to cope with her death. Davis keeps "a wooden memory box ... [with] the photographs [of Tate after she was delivered], the program from a private memorial service ... cards sent by people who reached out to us to provide comfort, and that little crocheted bunny [a nurse made for Tate after she was delivered]" (178). The following year Davis and her family participated in a Walk to Remember in Tate's honor: "It was important to all of us to memorialize her, to recognize that she *was*. That she was loved, and is still loved, and always will be loved by us" (179). For Davis, Tate was a real person, a real part of her family, a part of her past that lives on in her.

Readers might observe the surprising similarities between this account in *Forgetting* and the story of how, also in 1996, Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum—a staunch pro-life advocate—and his wife, Karen, brought home their son, Gabriel's, body after he had lived only two hours, having been born after 20 weeks of gestation, so their two other children could meet and say goodbye to him. Karen Santorum later published letters she had written Gabriel while pregnant with him in *Letters to Gabriel: The True Story of Gabriel Michael Santorum*. While Karen and Rick Santorum's view of pregnancy and their descriptions of this tragic experience do not presuppose the pregnant pause, they grieved the loss of their son similarly to how the Davis family grieved the loss of their daughter and baby sister. The Santorums did everything they could to ensure their son lived, if even for two hours, whereas the Davises prioritized their daughter's quality of life, her living without unnecessary pain. These narratives share a teleological view of these particular pregnancies, the painful temporal re-orientation caused by a terminal illness (where the expectation of childbirth is replaced by the certainty of death), and a desire to keep the memory of their child alive in the present. That the temporalities of these

two stories are more similar than different suggests the potential power of maternal abortion narratives as a starting point for more genuine dialogue, getting away from the entrenchment of the “abortion debate,” and as discursive sites to cultivate compelling, credible, and maternal pro-choice ethē.

Conclusion

This essay has examined how maternal abortion narratives negotiate the code of motherhood, as a gendered rhetoric of time specifically in relation to childbearing. I would like to conclude by briefly returning to the idea that maternal temporal rhetorics encapsulate more than traditional pro-life ideology. A future line of inquiry complementary to my own might include analysis of how maternal temporal rhetorics pertaining to *childrearing* are negotiated by women rhetors who cultivate the “between” ethos of working motherhood. As the sexist *Dallas Morning News* criticism of Davis demonstrates, working motherhood is still a difficult ethos for women to inhabit—in Texas politics at least. For mothers who perform paid labor, whether by choice or economic necessity, the code of motherhood encourages feelings of guilt and ambivalence about their “double shift” as working mothers, their less-than-total entanglement with the temporality of children (Hays 142), their inability to live “at a pace tuned to theirs” (Rich 22). In a number of passages in *Forgetting*, for example, Davis describes exhaustive daily routines during which she vacillates between being a mother and being a commuter, a receptionist at a pediatrician’s office, a paralegal student at a community college, a waitress, a nontraditional college student, a law student, and finally a lawyer. Whereas economic necessity motivated Davis’s earlier grueling schedules, the logistics of attending Harvard were motivated by Davis’s self-actualization and professional goals. And yet the Harvard chapter constantly returns to Davis’s considerations of her daughters, reflecting her priorities as both a mother and a law student. The early decision of where Davis would live in Cambridge was determined by proximity to “an exceptional public elementary school for Amber and a quality day-care center for Dru” despite meaning a longer commute to campus (*Forgetting* 137). While Davis’s childfree classmates “would essentially stroll across campus, ... by the time I sat down at my desk, my day would already have included getting two girls up, fed, dressed, and off to school and then a commute into Harvard Square” (140). These dizzying daily routines and logistical decisions suggest a negotiation of values and responsibilities, in particular the dual-responsibilities of working motherhood, the competing ideas about what it means to be a “good” mother, and how a “good” mother ought to spend her time. Davis illustrates Skinner’s observation that “*ethos often is ... composed in a dynamic context that includes multiple competing ideas about the ‘best’ virtues; consequently, ethos formation frequently involves value negotiations*

as well as reciprocity between rhetor and audience identity constructs" (175). How one represents how she spends her time, then, is shaped by a negotiation of the values one holds and the values imposed on her via the "popular beliefs about those of her social position" (173).

This essay has sought to respond to Buchanan's speculation about how the contemporary reproductive-rights movement might appropriate motherhood by arguing that maternal abortion narratives, specifically narratives by mothers who describe the experience of choosing to abort (and grieving the loss of) a wanted pregnancy, enable rhetors to construct maternal pro-choice *ethē*. While maternal abortion narratives like Davis's, Carole's, and Danziger's currently "occupy an uneasy place in the mainstream dialogue about abortion" because they blur the seemingly opposing positions in the abortion debate (Danziger) and because they are only one kind of abortion narrative (Shire), they are one of the most promising discursive sites for broadening support for the movement. This is because they make available to pro-choice rhetoric the *topoi* of motherhood and more inclusive "dwelling places" from which pro-choice rhetors may speak and write. Maternal pro-choice *ethē* are achieved most saliently through the ways in which mother rhetors shape time in these narratives, that is, how they are oriented to the past, present, and future and what choices they make to affect their experience of time. Hitherto time, in general, is an understudied component of ethos for feminist rhetoricians. Much scholarship in feminist rhetoric has revised ethos to account for the constraints and alternative resources—including associations with certain spaces and places—of women as they construct persuasive *ethē* in written, oral, and multimodal arguments. Appreciating the full range of rhetorical, historical, cultural, and material contexts in which *ethē* are cultivated means we should also consider time as a material resource (un)available to rhetors. Moreover, incorporating time into a feminist ecological mode of inquiry requires that we politicize time, asking questions about how power and agency are exercised temporally, how time can be gendered, and how time is represented rhetorically.

A time-inclusive model would further consider the ways in which speakers and writers aim to change women's experiences of (gendered) time with their rhetoric. Indeed the broader purpose of maternal abortion narratives like Davis's, for example, is to make the pregnant pause an available temporality for all pregnant women. Considering time from a feminist ecological approach asks that we examine rhetorical acts not only for their constructions of temporality, but also as potential interventions into women's temporalities, as

prompts for the adjustment of women's future experiences of time, thereby broadening the possibilities for women's *ethē* construction.⁸

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Anticipating the Unknown: Postpedagogy and Accessibility

Stephanie Phillips and Dr. Mark Leahy

Abstract: *This article articulates postpedagogy through a feminist disabilities studies (FDS) lens. FDS asks us to interrogate, reshape, and “reimagine” (Garland-Thomas 2005) how bodies interact with one another and their environment and emphasizes how language shapes this environment. It is important to incorporate FDS in postpedagogical classrooms because a pedagogy that seeks to “disequilibrate” (Santos & McIntyre 2016), “risk” (Rickert 2007), and create “uncertainty” (Lynch 2013) has the potential to create barriers for students with mental illnesses and trauma and further reinforce the systems of power that lead many of these students to leave school before finishing their degrees.*

Keywords: *postpedagogy, pedagogy, feminist disability studies, safe spaces, trigger warnings, accessibility*

A postpedagogy, insofar as it declines to participate in the dialectics of control, is an exhortation to dare, to invent, to create, to risk. It is less a body of rules, a set of codifiable classroom strategies than a willingness to give recognition and value to unorthodox, unexpected, or troublesome work. (Thomas Rickert 196)

A college classroom, or campus, that adequately accounts for the material realities of diverse bodyminds is almost inconceivable within an institution built on awarding individual merit over acknowledging structural privilege and inequalities. (Angela Carter, “Teaching With Trauma”)

Introduction

The program of 21st-century composition studies has largely been one of clearing out old ideas, old processes, old ideological commitments, and old expectations. Much of this work has been done under the umbrella of postpedagogy, which, if it can be defined simply, is a way of reflecting on the idea that writing cannot be taught as a set of transferable rules or skills, but it can be learned. Postpedagogues approach this dilemma in a variety of ways, but common themes are a focus on new-media composition, student-generated assessment criteria, and by asking students to articulate their experiences and investments in unexpected ways. Neither instructors nor students in a postpedagogical classroom know precisely what to expect at the beginning

of a semester, assignment, or project, and this lack of rigidly defined expectations (in a sense, a lack of “pedagogy”) creates opportunities for individualized teaching and learning (Santos and Leahy 87). Recent book-length works by Thomas Rickert (2007), Sidney Dobrin (2011), Paul Lynch (2013), and Sarah Arroyo (2013) speak to the degree to which postpedagogical thought has increasingly come to shape innovation in writing classrooms. As the body of practicable postpedagogical insights grows, two central concerns remain unaddressed:

- 1) If postpedagogy seeks to create unpredictable spaces within the writing classroom, how can we ensure that those spaces are accessible, safe, and create equitable opportunities for all students?
- 2) How do we avoid making unfair or potentially exploitative demands of our students when we make their experiences, investments, interests, and struggles the central focus of the class?

In this article, we view postpedagogy through a feminist disability studies (FDS) lens and articulate ways in which postpedagogical attitudes can better meet the needs of diverse students. According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, FDS “seeks to challenge our dominant assumptions about living with a disability. It situates the disability experience in the context of rights and exclusions. It aspires to retrieve dismissed voices and misrepresented experiences. It helps us understand the intricate relation between bodies and selves” (1557). FDS asks us to interrogate, reshape, and reimagine how bodies interact with one another and their environment.

As postpedagogy is opening spaces where instructors are asking students to risk, push boundaries, and thus construct more meaningful compositions, it is necessary that instructors consider how to create spaces that will best allow students to complete these kinds of assignments. Ultimately, the language used to describe postpedagogical classrooms and student-teacher interactions shapes the classroom space and the experience that students have within this space. Through the creation of safe spaces—places where students have equitable opportunity to speak and be heard without the possibility of judgment, harassment, or worse—students can better engage in challenging discussion and the types of assignments proposed by postpedagogy. Despite declarations that safe spaces coddle college-aged students, we argue that these spaces challenge hegemonic notions of power, gender, race, and disability. By evaluating the language we use to shape our classroom spaces and conceptions of our students, we can better ensure that we can all risk and create within a safe space.

Who are our students?

Before we can construct spaces, we need to consider who will inhabit those spaces. There is a surprising ambivalence toward students present in much of the literature on postpedagogy, along with an understandable reticence toward putting its own insights into practice. As a response to process-based, postprocess, and cultural studies pedagogies that dominated composition programs at the end of the twentieth century, themselves responses to antiquated composition pedagogies that focused on imitating exemplary writing models, postpedagogical thinkers often saw the history of writing pedagogies as wave after wave of reinscribed, ineffective pronouncements about how to “write well.” Any new insight risked being yoked to this historical, totalizing pedagogical imperative to control student writing rather than ensure that individual students had opportunities to understand the role that writing played in their own lives and in the achievement of their own goals.

Notably, Vitanza calls for a moratorium on turning theory into praxis (160), and Dobrin calls for composition studies as a whole to move beyond its focus on first-year writing students and consider writers and writing beyond the university (161). This tension between theory and practice is one of the main instigations for Lynch’s 2013 work, which attempts to answer the twin questions, “How do I teach postpedagogically?” and “Having taught postpedagogically, how do I do so again without inadvertently creating a pedagogy?” His answer is to rely on the “practical wisdom” gleaned from the postpedagogical classroom, but to resist the urge to reduce uncertainty or the contingent nature of postpedagogy (137). Thus praxis never leads to theory, and vice versa. But, for a body of work so adamantly devoted to understanding individual, unpredictable acts of writing and individual, unpredictable writers, postpedagogy has spent very little time thinking about actual students. Instead the literature is peppered with exclusionary generalizations that cast students as self-centered, inexperienced, lazy, and unmotivated.

Rickert (2007) describes a specific set of symptoms exhibited by writing students that necessitate the postpedagogical classroom: “cynicism, apathy, disregard for others, and violence” (163). The failure of pedagogies in the traditional sense is its expectation of certain kinds of sincere participation or self-reflective cultural critique, expectations that only drive students further into postmodern malaise. Rickert seeks to “shift control of the dominant loci of contention from the teacher to the student” to create a space where the texts produced by such students can be valued even if they cannot be predicted or incorporated into any stable model of assessment (163).

Rickert cites two powerful examples of student writing that have troubled writing teachers and presented difficulties in assessment that were not easily dismissed. The first, a student simply identified as “Matthew” in Blitz and

Hurlbert's *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age* (1991), is an emergency medical technician injured to the violence and misery of his occupation who confronts the instructor with the cynicism and perfunctory performance Rickert classifies as indicative of contemporary writing students. When called upon to write, Matthew recounts the horrific things he has seen, and the instructor is at a loss for how to evaluate work that is at once below the writing standards established in the class, but beyond his expectations in terms of emotional resonance and depth. Blitz's pedagogy itself creates a disjunction between what the student has written and what he can assess, and it is this gap that postpedagogical approaches attempt to bridge.

Rickert's second example is the widely-cited Quentin Pierce essay reproduced in David Bartholomae's "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum" (1993). Pierce, a student in Bartholomae's writing class, turns in an essay that "negates himself, his writing, his composition course, and his world in general" (Rickert 191). Though "poor" by the standards of the composition classroom, the paper haunts Bartholomae and, after many years, he finds himself returning to it as an example of writing he felt at a loss to evaluate by traditional standards, but that deserved attention and appreciation nonetheless.

These are the kinds of students (coincidentally both male) and situations that Rickert's postpedagogy is designed to create space for. A student challenging the boundaries established by a particular writing assignment, producing a text that is, say, shorter than the page requirements stipulate, or demonstrating significant grammatical peculiarities, but who produced work that was otherwise arresting or successful, would find room within the postpedagogical classroom to explore their ideas. And, perhaps more importantly, the student would be assessed not simply by how well they fulfilled prescribed expectations, but by how well they fulfilled the new expectations they had a hand in creating—criteria the instructor could not have anticipated.

Building on Rickert's conceptualization of apathetic students, Santos and McIntyre (2016) note that the educational system itself has become apathetic: "we would position postpedagogy as a response to the broader socio-political and institutional changes in America's primary and secondary education systems" ("Toward a Technical Communication"). Such systems, Santos and McIntyre claim, push students through an educational process like they are products on a conveyor belt. Further, these systems kill creativity in favor of homogeneity and a "skill and drill mentality" ("Toward a Technical Communication"). While Santos and McIntyre also admit that each student may need different things from their classroom experience, the assumptions that a postpedagogical classroom is necessary to disrupt the conveyor belt-like approach to education does not account for experiences outside of

the university. This approach also imagines the postpedagogical classroom to be the sole creative outlet in the lives of increasingly apathetic student populations.

Rickert and Santos and McIntyre essentialize student experience in a very particular way, ascribing specific traits (apathy, cynicism) while ignoring other possibilities and experiences. We might assume that a student who was not bored or disengaged would be even better served in a postpedagogical classroom, just as free to explore the possibilities inherent in the act of writing. But Rickert's articulation of postpedagogy makes other demands of students, demands which imagine very specific experiences and resources at a student's disposal: "to dare, to invent, to create, to risk" (Rickert 196) in order to overcome their incipient boredom and make use of their resistance to the writing classroom. But what about students who are no stranger to risk, students who have not found their lives outside the writing classroom to be exercises in tedium, or whose experiences of violence have not been second hand? If, as Lynch (2013) says of Rickert's examples, "the entire postpedagogical project hinges on being sensitive to these situations" (113), how might that project be challenged by a more diverse understanding of the students we encounter?

When we consider, for example, that one in five women and one in sixteen men have been the victim of sexual assault on college campuses ("Statistics About Sexual Violence"), we must stop making assumptions about our students and the mundanity of their experiences and better prepare our classroom spaces to accommodate those who have suffered from trauma. While much research has already been conducted about access for those considered physically disabled, both pedagogically (Dunn & Dunn De Mers 2002; Price 2007; Brewer et. al. 2014; Browning 2014) and theoretically (Dolmage 2013; Boyle & Rivers 2016), we will examine trauma as a disability and how the language of postpedagogy specifically shapes the experience of students with post-traumatic stress disorders in the classroom. Like Angela M. Carter (2016), we "conceptualize trauma as a disabling affective structure" ("Teaching With Trauma"). An FDS lens troubles the rhetoric used to articulate postpedagogy and our relationship with our students. If trauma is a part of our students' lived experiences, approaches that describe themselves as "painful," "risky," "disequilibrating," and "distressful" without accounting for the attendant dangers seem particularly careless. In light of Carter's "Teaching with Trauma: Trigger Warnings, Feminism, and Disability Pedagogy" (2016), in which she asserts that we must adopt an FDS pedagogy, we feel that existing articulations of postpedagogy have not adequately considered students.

Shaping Classroom Spaces Through Language

FDS emphasizes that space and experience are often shaped through language. Garland-Thomson (2005) notes that, while the language used by FDS scholars can often seem convoluted, the terminology is employed specifically to challenge assumptions about power relations: Garland-Thomson “use[s] phrases such as ‘the traits we think of as disability,’ for example, rather than words like ‘deformities’ or ‘abnormalities’” (1558). Such attention paid to word choice and context is meant to “clarify by insisting that readers [also students and teachers] do not fall back on essentialist definitions of disability as inferior embodiment” (1558). Garland-Thomson (2011) also makes a distinction between the terms *impairment* and *disability*. Like the distinction between sex and gender proposed by early feminists such as Gayle Rubin (1975), Garland-Thomson’s distinction between impairment and disability is between “bodily states or conditions taken to be impaired, and the social process of disablement that gives meaning and consequences to those impairments in the world” (591). Offering the concept of “misfitting” to FDS, Garland-Thomson identifies a *misfit* as “the discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is” (593). With much early FDS work shifting the focus of disability from a perceived problem within the body to a problem of social justice, Garland-Thomson’s misfit helps scholars discuss the embodiment of disability without giving up the way disability is constructed as a social phenomenon through language and space.

While language has the ability to reinforce ableist perspective and power dynamics, we would like to consider that language can also help create equitable access for students (as, for example, in our usage of the term “student with a disability” instead of “disabled student” to counter the potential dehumanizing effects of the latter). In this way, FDS demonstrates both the “cultural work and the limits of language” (Garland-Thomson 2005, 1558). Kristina Knoll (2009) proposes that we consider how to best inform the “physical and social environments of our classrooms” (124) in order to make them more accessible to students with all forms of disabilities. “Language,” says Knoll (2009), “can play a big role in social privileging. It can liberate or oppress students and instructors. It plays an enormous role in reinforcing and internalizing ableism in our classroom dynamics, from our syllabus to our readings and verbal exchanges” (125). Knoll’s argument raises questions about how we construct environments through language. Pedagogies that seek to “disequilibrate” (Santos & McIntyre 2016) students, ask students to “risk” (Rickert 2007), or foster “uncertainty” in the classroom (Lynch 2013) have the potential to create barriers for students with psychiatric disabilities, such as post-traumatic stress disorders, and further reinforce the systems of power that lead to many of these students leaving school before finishing their degrees.

Part of the issue arises from a stark distinction between mental and physical processes in the body. FDS scholars, such as Margaret Price (2015), complicate a static understanding of binaries between psychiatric disabilities and physical impairments by offering the concept of “bodymind” (Price 269): “According to this approach, because mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other - that is, because they tend to act as one, even though they are conventionally understood as two - it makes more sense to refer to them together, in a single term” (Price 269). Calling for the inclusion of *bodymind* into FDS, Price indicates that the use of a single term to cover both mental and physical processes can create a new understanding of these processes as one, instead of treated as separate, distinct processes.

The current structural distinction between body and mind creates barriers for students with issues regarded as merely psychiatric in nature. In a study of psychiatric disability on college campuses, Collins and Mowbray (2008) found that students reported a number of structural barriers within institutions that complicated their role as a student: “interpersonal discrimination (lack of awareness or understanding of mental illness by faculty and peers), gaps in service provision (lack of campus-based mental health services or information about disability services), and difficult social relationships due to fears of stigma following disclosure of illness” (Collins and Mowbray, 92) all contributed to students’ inability to participate successfully in a classroom space or, even worse, complete their degrees. And, while the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) places the dropout rate of students with mental disabilities at 56.1%, Collins and Mowbray report this rate as 86% (qtd. In Carter). One reason for the discrepancy in dropout rates is that students do not always disclose their mental disability. As we have already noted, disclosure is, as Carter (2016) points out, “a political privilege” (“Teaching With Trauma”). Further, Carter notes that “the vast majority of potentially traumatizing experiences are rooted in systems of power and oppression. The forces of racism/white supremacy, colonization, and global capitalism continuously instigate enumerable violences worldwide” (“Teaching With Trauma”).

At the large research university where we work, for example, Students with Disabilities Services (SDS) offers accommodations for students in the form of extra time on a test, access to presentation slides, alternative text, braille, copies of class notes, deaf and hard of hearing services, excused attendance for medical appointments, physical movement during class, permission to record class, preferential seating, and the use of a laptop or other electronic device to take notes (“Classroom Accommodations”). In terms of acknowledging psychiatric disabilities, SDS provides accommodations for veterans suffering from PTSD in the form of time away from class for medical appointments. All of these accommodations are presented to the instructor in the form of a

memo that is issued to the instructor by SDS. With the exception of veterans with PTSD, the accommodations for students with physical disabilities do not fully consider students who have experienced trauma or their needs within the classroom. This is not to criticize SDS and the difficult work that they do at our institution. However, when the NCES “reports that students with mental disabilities are more likely to drop out of college than any of their peers, with dropout rates at 56.1% for those with ‘mental illnesses’ and 23.6% for those with ‘serious emotional disturbances’” (qtd. In Carter), we must consider how we can better accommodate the needs of these students. And when we take into account that an instructor might easily read a withdrawn, traumatized student as a bored, apathetic student who needs to be pushed out of her comfort zone, we can see how troubling it might be when the theoretical framework we operate within only has a vocabulary for describing student malaise.

Postpedagogical Language

Santos and McIntyre (2016) label their teaching style as a “disequilibrating pedagogy” and an “intentionally distressful approach” that has the potential to create “debilitating anxiety” for students (“Toward a Technical Communication”). The insinuation of this pedagogical style is that if the classroom does not project this “radical perspective” (“Toward a Technical Communication”) and students are not made to feel “disequilibrated,” true learning cannot and will not occur. This false binary between safety, boredom, and homogeneity on the one hand, and chaos, invention, and creativity on the other overlooks the possibility that students can learn from places of safety. After surveying their students, Santos and McIntyre note that “while many of the students reported initially feeling some measure of disequilibrium or discomfort, most concluded that the course made a significant impact on their creative capacity and what Shipka would refer to as their “rhetorical and material awareness” (“Toward a Technical Communication”).

Indeed, doubts and uncertainties can give rise to creative inspiration and opportunities for learning in nontraditional mediums. However, this view of creative acts as inherently chaotic, painful, and mysterious at times comes dangerously close to mirroring the language of romantic poets in the 19th century. In 1817, poet John Keats referred to the capability of “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” as negative capability (Keats 277). Santos and McIntyre dub the result of this negative capability “painful creative work” (“Toward a Technical Communication”). Our students, particularly first-year writing and technical communication students, are not necessarily served by the lessons of Keats, Byron, and other Romantic, emotionally tortured poets. The imposition of such “painful” and “chaotic” rhetoric in writing classrooms creates an environment of risky,

personal, and confessional writing that, arguably, creates spaces that are not safe for all students.

Lynch also identifies uncertainty as a necessary condition for teaching and learning (9). Uncertainty, for Lynch, goes beyond mere risk, which is the weighing of known outcomes: "Uncertainty is far more unsettling than risk. In uncertainty we cannot perceive or imagine the possible worlds that may result from our decisions" (10). Our attention here is not simply drawn to the word "uncertainty," but also the word "unsettling" used to characterize it. Again, we see assumptions about what students have experienced and what they need as writing students exhibited by the language used to outline postpedagogical approaches. We cannot know what any given student's experience is, and to what extent being "unsettled" or producing "unsettling" work will be a productive experience. The prevailing assumption that our students are untroubled, spoiled, "the most elite, the most privileged" (Dobrin 16), caught in the throes of "the paralytic effects of large-scale, deep-seated cynicism" (Rickert 162), simply cannot account for the diversity of lived experiences of an actual student population.

Ironically, postpedagogy arose in part as a critique against liberatory and cultural studies approaches to writing classrooms that sought to guide students toward particular ideological insights and critical positions. Rickert's critique of liberatory pedagogies is that, in an effort to free student minds from the shackles of conformity, instructors expect or even demand certain ideological insights and specific forms of critique, "and thereby perpetrate a particular kind of authoritarian violence against the student" (182). But what postpedagogy retains from its precursors is an articulation of the student that assumes that they come into the classroom with specific cultural attitudes. Rickert advises that we recognize and appreciate student resistance (like the Quentin Pierce paper) in the writing classroom, rather than "trying to produce its possibility—which in any event harkens back to the strategies of control, of orchestrating flows and powers to produce a certain specific result" (196). Rickert's articulation of postpedagogy, then, explicitly avoids such expectations, but at the same time assumes that the kind of "inventive resistance to control" exhibited by the Pierce paper is "always happening" (197). Lynch agrees that "[t]he job of pedagogy is not so much to elicit this kind of work, but rather to make prudential judgements about how to respond to it" (116), but is again more interested in what happens when the prized Quentin Pierce-style essay inevitably shows up, and less interested in whether or not Quentin Pierce is an accurate representative model for all students. This conceptualization of the teaching of writing as a kind of receptiveness to the unexpected is then, paradoxically, limited by its assumptions about where (and who) unexpected writing comes from.

Along with the distressful and “disequilibrating” language used to create the classroom space, the language used to discuss the relationship between students and teachers is often fraught with metaphors that reinforce the instructor’s control over classroom information, withholding what the instructor thinks, feels, and knows in an effort to create self-reliant students. However metaphoric this language may be, “metaphors often reflect and construct accepted ways of knowing” (Reynolds 5). If we accept such metaphors as a means of representing student-teacher relations, we overlook the potentially damaging effect such language has on students attempting to inhabit the classroom space with trauma.

Rickert notes that power flow in the classroom is difficult to conceptualize, especially as instructors such as Gregory S. Jay call for a decentered classroom experience where students are “producers rather than receivers of knowledge” (Rickert 114). Rickert identifies the problems inherent with the power dynamics of a decentered classroom when he notes,

Although we may try to curtail our power in the classroom by deflecting it through strategies of decentering, those forces still reemerge through the will to critique[.] . . . There exists a fundamental antagonism between teacher and student that cannot be avoided or dissipated. (118)

Rickert further argues that “institutional authority cannot be easily side-stepped” (120). As much as decentered classroom experiences seek to empower students, the power differential between the student and the instructor, who must ultimately assign a grade or pass critique, cannot be forgotten.

What we find in the assignments proposed by postpedagogues, such as Santos and McIntyre then, is, instead of deflecting authority to the students, a willingness to allow both the teacher and the student to remain in spaces of doubt and uncertainty. For example, Santos and McIntyre reference a common conversation that takes place in their classrooms between students and the teacher:

Student: So, what does Ulmer mean by Memorial?

Teacher: I don’t know, what do you think he means?

Student: Well, something something.

Teacher: Yeah, that sounds about right. So what does that mean/tell us/encourage us to do? (“Toward a Technical Communication”)

Such a conversation demonstrates that postpedagogues are comfortable not having all of the answers. This strategy ultimately asks the students to think through their own questions, fostering a critical thinking skill that is not

achieved when they are simply handed the answer. What such an approach does not consider, however, is that such withholding of instructor input may lead many students, particularly those whose relationship to authority may be more complicated than apathy or resistance, to become even more dependent on their instructor.

To better explain this, looking at an assignment referenced by Santos and McIntyre, Marc Santos' online New Media for Tech Comm syllabus from 2015 includes a project called "Make Me a Map That Is Not a Map" (Santos). The project description says simply, "In short, this project will call upon you to construct a map out of mixed-media materials. I imagine the maps will be quite idiosyncratic. We will hold a gallery in which everyone displays their maps" (Santos). The project intentionally withholds what the instructor considers a map that is not a map is. This asks students to interpret the project but, while the instructor may not have an idealized "map that is not a map," students looking to achieve a good grade may assume, given previous experiences with expertise and authority in the classroom, that the instructor knows exactly what he or she expects. Thus, a student may work even harder to please and meet the supposed desires of her instructors. When such projects, as noted by Santos and McIntyre, often ask students to elicit personal information, the line between risk and safety may become blurred as many students are asked to "risk" and strive to meet the assumed desires of their instructor.

Such "intentionally ambiguous" (Santos & McIntyre) assignments offer a great opportunity for unexpected and interesting student work. But without a more nuanced understanding of who our students are and how they might respond to "intentionally ambiguous" assignments, it has just as much potential to cause anxiety that many students might be ill-equipped to handle. While Santos and McIntyre cite anonymous responses provided by their students about this pedagogical approach, as well as successful assignments completed by two male students, each in their respective classrooms, we challenge the validity of a methodology that asks students attempting to work while in a state of "disequilibrium" to respond to how successful such anxiety and disequilibrium has been. Though the surveys were conducted anonymously, there are many students who may have felt intimidated by the survey and simply responded in a way they *assumed* would please the instructor. Indeed, if many students with trauma are not reporting their needs to a University-governed body, as we established in a previous section, what is to say that students are in fact reporting their honest reaction to such classroom assignments via a Google Doc survey that they know the instructor, an authority figure, will read?

This is not to say that assignments that foster doubt and disequilibrium to help students create are necessarily bad things. However, since postpedagogy

calls on us to consider how we can more ethically inhabit the power we embody in the classroom, we need to consider the power dynamic that withholding information and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and anxiety may have on a diverse range of students with experiences that we cannot expect to know or understand. And, if we cannot (and should not) expect our students to disclose personal information regarding such experiences, we should remember what Nedra Reynolds tells us in *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*: “it’s a geographical instinct to try to orient yourself when in an unfamiliar place, behavior learned from home and other dwellings, streets, and cities; it’s a habitual response to being faced with newness or unfamiliarity” (168). Students struggling with the power dynamic or who feel alienated due to the risks and anxiety they are asked to experience, may never voice their concerns because, given that the classroom is made to be a jarring and unfamiliar experience, they do not feel comfortable challenging the obvious but unspoken (withheld) desires of their instructor. The overwhelming “instinct” to “orient” oneself in this classroom space ensures that they simply accept their discomfort or leave.

The Trouble with Triggers

Like other FDS scholars (Carter 2016; Knoll 2009), we believe that working to create classrooms that are safe spaces for our students will help to better promote accessibility for students with disabilities. Calls for safe spaces, however, have been met with large-scale oppositions, specifically from within academic institutions. In 2015, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt published an article in *The Atlantic* called “The Coddling of the American Mind.” At the beginning of the article appears an image of a toddler sitting at a desk with a sweater that reads “college.” Both the title and the image imply a common narrative among college faculty that tiptoeing around sensitive material in the classroom (what they believe defines a safe space) stifles debate and inhibits the intellectual growth of students. Lukianoff and Haidt rail against “trigger warnings”—alerts issued by a professor to warn of material that might elicit negative emotional responses from students—and safe spaces, claiming that they damage free speech and “coddle” our students. Lukianoff and Haidt define a safe space as spaces “where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable” (par. 2). This article and the many others that are opposed to safe spaces and trigger warnings (Bass and Clark 2015; Lukianoff and Haidt 2015; Schlosser 2015; Essig 2014) indicate that there is a misunderstanding about these terms and how they can help instructors to create more accessible classrooms.

The assumption that safe spaces are homogenous thought bubbles where students always agree and debate never occurs 1) overlooks the divergent

worldviews of diverse and unique student populations and experiences and 2) privileges ableist, white, male positions within the classroom by stifling discussions that challenge that normative worldview. The idea that safe spaces do not allow for debate is, in fact, entirely incorrect. For example, in Knoll's classroom she encourages positive discussions about disability that challenge the view that able-bodied students are the norm. Knoll does not wait for individuals to need specific accommodations. Instead, Knoll anticipates the necessary accommodations, such as handing out her syllabus in multiple different formats, in order to send the signal that the classroom is a "disability-positive space" (127).

By talking about issues of disability within the classroom, as Knoll (2009) proposes, we can do a far better job of creating a space through our actions and language that promotes acceptance and understanding of students with disabilities. Another method for creating positive, safe spaces is to no longer rely solely on academic institutions' disability services to inform professor behavior through individuated accommodation letters. Carter (2016) recommends that we get rid of accommodation letters altogether as these require "reliance on the medical model of disability" ("Teaching With Trauma"). Building on Carter's argument, however, we do not believe that writing instructors should be solely responsible for creating accessible classrooms in the absence of an accommodation letter. Instead, we believe that disability should be considered in all classrooms whether it has been precipitated by an individual student or not. Likewise, Kerschbaum argues for "the importance of imagining disability—of understanding disability as always present in any given classroom even if the specific ways that disability takes shape may not be immediately evident" ("Anecdotal Relations"). Waiting for an individual accommodation letter, then, only reinforces an environment where disability is differentiated from the other, "normal" students, or where only medically documented disabilities are provided with accommodations.

Postpedagogues, in attempting to resist creating preconceptions about their students, discuss student diversity only abstractly and fail to anticipate the everyday needs of diverse students. Lynch (2013) proposes that we "[n]ever make claims about student experience without evidence that they themselves have produced" (133). While Lynch is not talking explicitly about accommodations, but about student experience in general, the trouble with assuming that anyone with a "disability" can or will produce evidence is that not all students have access to the necessary accommodation letters: "people of color, poor people, and queer people are less likely to have the financial resources necessary to obtain the required diagnosis and documentation" (Carter). Our own university's SDS website, for example, states that "It is your responsibility as a student to identify yourself to SDS and present proper documentation of your

disability if you would like to receive academic accommodations" ("Overview"). All responsibility for effective accommodation rests with students who may or may not be able to bear that responsibility.

As Knoll has demonstrated through her anticipation and acceptance of disabilities that may or may not be present in her classroom, providing accessibility without coercion from disability services works to combat the othering of students with disabilities against able-bodied students. In author 2's classroom, for example, he has developed an assignment for his technical writing students that asks them to collaboratively write instructions for creating randomly generated folded paper shapes, and then trade those instructions with each other. After a partially blind student had trouble writing instructions by hand (which was a requirement of the assignment), author 2 has changed the assignment for all of his classes to ask students to use computers to write their instructions. Use of the computer allows for text sizes to be greatly enlarged, and for any number of additional accessibility technologies to be employed. In this way, a more diverse range of students can participate, including, for example, students with motor-function disabilities or hearing impairment. The assignment has neither become easier (collaborative writing never is) nor less conducive to moments of unexpected insight, but fewer students now struggle with the nature of the assignment itself, with the classroom logistics of writing, moving around the space, and discussing their writing with others.

This experience has also reshaped both of our classrooms in order to ask students to ensure that their work is accessible. As we prepare writing students for a variety of fields, we ask them to consider different audiences for the assignments they complete. For example, we ask students to provide captioning for videos and written descriptions for any images that they provide on technical documentation. These activities foster discussion about accessibility and normalize acts of accommodation by our students.

Like Knoll and Carter, we build "trigger warnings" into our classroom experience in order to ensure that students who have experienced trauma are not triggered or re-traumatized by the content of a class. Psychoanalyst Avgi Saketopoulou describes being triggered as "a paralyzing, overwhelming cascade of emotional and physiological responses commensurate *not with the anticipation of danger but with the experience of the danger itself*" (qtd. In Carter). The use of trigger warnings, then, seek to inform students about potentially troubling content and avoid triggering these negative psychological and physiological reactions from students. Trigger warnings as a way of building safe spaces have come under scrutiny as instructors are claiming that the need to alert their audience to potentially psychologically triggering material stifles and "threatens" academic freedom. In 2014, the Academic Freedom

and Tenure committee, as a part of the American Association of University Professors, stated,

The presumption that students need to be protected rather than challenged in a classroom is at once infantilizing and anti-intellectual. It makes comfort a higher priority than intellectual engagement and . . . it singles out politically controversial topics like sex, race, class, capitalism, and colonialism for attention. ("On Trigger Warnings")

Similarly, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2014) published an article by Laurie Essig called "Trigger Warnings Trigger Me." In Essig's article she states,

The world is a painful and anxiety-inducing place, and human representations of the world are often painful to consume. But rather than retreating into a world where our courses are reduced to viewings of *My Little Pony*, let's all put on our big-girl panties (or big-boy tighty whities, as in the case of the Wellesley statue) and face that world together. ("Trigger Warnings Trigger Me")

Essig's argument assumes that making classrooms accessible infantilizes all students. These same arguments cannot be made for physical, medically documented disabilities but are routinely made about mental disabilities, in spite of the fact that both impact classroom experiences and limit access. Carter identifies this exclusionary tendency, saying that "[t]he false connotations of access with 'safety' allow accommodations to be dismissed, and only serve to further marginalize mentally disabled students by telling them they are in fact not welcome because their needs disrupt the process of learning *their* peers deserve" ("Teaching With Trauma").

"On Trigger Warnings" (2014) further warns that including trigger warnings about suicide in a syllabus, for example, is akin to giving students a "spoiler alert" that will deprive them of experiencing great literature, such as *Anna Karenina* and *The House of Mirth*, as first-time readers. The anti-trigger warning sentiment largely argues that if students want and need trigger warnings, they are childish, immature, and juvenile. Interestingly, these arguments also seem to assert that, since life is tough, it is the job of the college professor to initiate their students into the "school of hard knocks." The language of trigger warning critics so closely echoes that of postpedagogues because both discourses retain the same impoverished conceptualization of students as bored, lazy, and self-centered, having no experience of suicide or other forms of trauma prior to reaching our classroom.

One of the problems with this line of reasoning is the assumption that our students are "coddled" and have never experienced racism or misogyny prior to entering our classrooms. This assumption elides the experiences of

the students sitting in the classroom and, largely, privileges the position of the able-bodied, white, male students. Asking these students to “risk” their experiences means asking them to potentially rehash painful life experiences that they (understandably) may not want to share with the class or their professor. In a blogpost on *EdStateswoman*, the author argues the necessity of creating a safe space for students and writes:

I learned very quickly that a woman who has been raped might not want to debate whether the length of her skirt determined her fate. I learned that the trans student who was assaulted on his way home didn't want to debate whether he was really a man or a woman. I understood that the black student who put up with people touching her hair “just to see what it feels like” didn't want to listen to the validity of the term ‘micro- aggression’. I know that the Muslim student spat at on the bus might not want to listen to a speaker from Britain First in the interests of healthy debate.

It is all too easy for people who have never faced any of these things to paint safe spaces as mollicoddling bubbles in which students are not allowed to debate difficult things because it might hurt their feelings, or worse, offend them. *If you feel the need to mock the concept of or complain about safe spaces, I don't want to generalise, but chances are, you've never felt the need for one.* (*EdStateswoman*, emphasis mine)

In 2014, author 1 taught a first-year composition course that integrated graphic novels and web-writing. As the class started reading *Watchmen*, a 1986 graphic novel written by Alan Moore that dramatizes contemporary fears and anxieties through a deconstruction of superhero narratives, a student tentatively approached author 1 regarding his hesitation to talk about the rape scene during class. With many pertinent themes and challenging material to discuss in a classroom, the treatment of the female characters in the graphic novel was often discussed during the class. This particular student identified a scene in which the main female superhero is raped by a fellow crime fighter. The story of this rape is brought up multiple times in the novel and addressed by different characters with different points of view. The student was having trouble discussing the scene because, as he disclosed, he had suffered from sexual trauma while serving in the military. He apologized for being unable to present an accommodation letter that would excuse him from such discussions, because SDS did not have an accommodation specific to leaving class discussions that became too difficult or “triggering.” The student was offered the opportunity to leave the class any time that he felt uncomfortable and the

remainder of classroom assignments were given a warning about any potentially triggering material.

Despite our defense of safe spaces, we acknowledge that there are issues surrounding access to safe spaces and, as bell hooks claims, the very notion of “safety” itself. In a 2014 public dialogue between bell hooks and Laverne Cox, hooks interrupts Cox’s discussion of safe spaces to note that she is largely critical of the notion of safety. “I’m very interested in what it means for us to cultivate together a community that allows for risk,” states hooks,

The risk of knowing someone outside your own boundaries, the risk that is love – there is no love that does not involve risk. I’m a little wary because white people love to evoke the ‘safe spaces’ and I have a tendency to be critical of that but I do believe that learning takes place in the harmonious space . . . (49:00-50:05 A Public Dialogue Between).

For hooks, this form of risk ultimately means the ability to confront people and ideas outside of one’s comfort zone. In lieu of the term “safe spaces,” hooks opts for “brave spaces” because it is an act of bravery to work to communicate across differences. It is much easier to hate, argue, belittle, or even ignore such differences, but hooks sees it as an act of bravery to create possibilities for exchange and communication.

Despite hooks’ use of the term “risk,” however, she clearly indicates that these spaces are intended for communication and not violence. The discussion of safety and safe spaces between Cox and hooks follows a story of hooks meeting Janet Mock, a well-known trans-rights activist, writer, and TV host. A friend called hooks and said she did not want to meet Mock because she “is an abomination.” hooks made the decision to turn away her friend because she was not going to explain to Mock that there is someone who feels violently towards her identity: hooks states, “I don’t allow that kind of violence” (47:02).

“Brave spaces” is not the first term seeking to reimagine safe spaces. Campus activists have also worked to recognize “safer spaces” as a more inclusive means of creating community spaces. The Coalition for Safer Spaces states, “We say ‘safer’ realizing that not everyone experiences spaces in the same way as others, so any one set of guidelines established to create safety may not meet the requirements of everyone and there may be complications or lapses in fulfilling those guidelines in practice” (par. 2). Both brave spaces and safer spaces work to be intersectional and to acknowledge lapses in our understanding of safety as well as access. In both cases, however, safer spaces and brave spaces seek to allow for diverse voices to speak without the threat of being seen as an abomination or experiencing other forms of violence.

Claiming that our classrooms should not be safe spaces, brave spaces, or safer spaces closes the door on student experiences and those students’

potential need to discuss or not discuss those experiences free of judgment and penalty. The critics of safe spaces and trigger warnings seem to conflate discomfort and trauma. Safe spaces are not opposed to challenging students and asking them to complete difficult assignments. On the contrary, discussing and drawing attention to the normative view of gender and disabilities within the classroom is extremely challenging for many students. It is difficult to act within spaces that ask us to consider perspectives and experiences that are not our own (the kind of risk hooks proposes when discussing brave spaces). When talking about her own classroom, the author of "Safe Spaces: Still Needed, Still Important," writes, "everyone is allowed to be there, but micro-aggressions, assumptions and triggers are discussed, defined, questioned. Do I shut down some discussions? Yes, because if they go on to cause someone distress, my classroom is not the place for that" ("Safe Spaces: Still Needed").

These spaces - safe, safer, brave - indicate an ever-evolving understanding of how communities, such as classrooms, can best help communication happen between members of that community. Accessibility, safety, understanding, and communication are all an ongoing process. Adopting changes in the classroom in order to better meet the needs of students is a great start towards fostering accessibility in the classroom, but this is a part of the *process* of accessibility and not an end point.

Conclusion

In attempting to create a space for the unexpected in writing classrooms, postpedagogy challenges the writing teacher to shrug off old assumptions about how students write, what makes good writing, and even what "writing" is. Free of these expectations, new and meaningful work that would have proven troubling to pedagogies of the past can be explored and even valued. None of the literature on postpedagogy describes this position as easy to inhabit. Lynch (2013) describes what is asked of instructors as "[c]ultivated naïveté, beginner's mind, undisciplined expertise, all leading to a kind of pedagogical *sprezzatura*" (138). It is in part due to this desire to remain open to possibility that postpedagogy resists entering into discussions of privilege and disability. Pedagogies that ask students or instructors to adopt specific ideological positions or perform specific forms of cultural critique often wind up re-inscribing the kind of prescriptivist or territorializing writing practices they were designed to combat. These are the very pedagogies that postpedagogy attempts to avoid.

But this resistance to assumptions and expectations intentionally creates a lacuna around student experience. With the exception of a few exemplary cases of resistant students or surprising student work to serve as benchmarks, students are largely absent from the discussion. Student experience

is flattened and homogenized into an unknowable morass, waiting to come into focus in our classrooms. However, the radical uncertainty that we adopt toward student writing should not extend to our understanding of our students themselves, and the “discomfort” and “anxiety” that we ask of ourselves as instructors entering these uncertain spaces cannot be what we ask of our students. The stakes are too high and the risks are too great when we are talking about students with physical or mental disabilities. If these students are unable to participate in the classroom at all because the instructor has not adequately considered issues of access *prior* to their arrival, none of the surprise that distinguishes postpedagogical classrooms from any other classroom can be created.

By challenging the language used by postpedagogues we do not mean to insinuate that students be “coddled” or allowed to ignore worldviews that diverge from their own. Instead, we seek to create spaces where postpedagogical assignments that foster creativity and push our expectations of student work can be performed without fear of exclusion or retraumatization. Creating safe spaces through FDS helps these students to risk because they know that the impact of risking is not as drastic as retraumatization. The world outside of the ivory tower is extremely difficult and many of our students have already learned that lesson. Why can’t these students count on their classroom to be a safe space for discussion and asking difficult questions without fear of exclusion, harassment, or trauma?

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Diab, Rasha. *Shades of Sulh: The Rhetorics of Arab-Islamic Reconciliation*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2016. 264 pages.

Chanon Adsanatham

As I compose this review, thirty-nine lives from fourteen countries have just been lost from a gun massacre in an Istanbul nightclub on New Year's Day. Their families are starting 2017 with misery and grief, a recurrence that may now be all too familiar across the globe. Earlier in 2016, terrorist bus drivers crashed into crowded streets in Germany and France, killing twelve people in Berlin and eighty-six in Nice. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had claimed responsibilities for all these onslaughts; it justified its attacks as retribution against counter-ISIS operations. ISIS's growing insurgencies have sparked aggressive crackdowns on terrorism across the globe but only seem to fuel more retaliations from insurgents. What rhetorical resources and practices, then, might be available to counter growing violence and aggression and move fragmented communities toward peace and reconciliation? Given that recent terrorist incidents have been erroneously tied to Islam, what within that religion might be invoked to help us create healing rhetorics of reconciliation? These pressing questions are the foci of Rasha Diab's *Shades of Sulh: The Rhetorics of Arab-Islamic Reconciliation*. The book examines sulh—reconciliation, peace, or peacemaking—as a longstanding tradition and praxis in Arab-Islamic culture. Comprised of four chapters, along with an introduction and a conclusion, Diab's monograph makes three specific contributions: It offers the first book-length study of Arab-Islamic rhetoric of peace grounded in rhetorical studies; expands scholarship of Middle Eastern rhetoric beyond exploring style, poetics, and translations of Greco-Roman rhetorical treatises in Arabic; and extends rhetorical examination of peacemaking discourse beyond the Judeo-Christian and Western context. Revisionary historiography, comparative and cultural rhetoric, and peace studies inform the book's inquiry. As a whole, *Shades of Sulh* presents a contextualized examination of sulh as a rhetorically rich and generative resource, past and present, to foster and sustain peace.

Organized topically rather than chronologically, Diab's book analyzes the usage of sulh to reconcile conflicts and yield peace in communal, constitutional, diplomatic, and intrapersonal contexts. Using rhetorical and critical

discourse analysis as the primary method, each chapter of the book zooms in to examine specific functions of sulh and to demonstrate its malleability and usefulness across time and space.

Diab begins by explicating the aims, features, and processes of sulh to set up a vocabulary and framework for studying peacemaking cases in the rest of her book. In chapter one, "Peacemaking *Topoi*: Cultural Iterations of Relational and Moral Needs," Diab posits sulh as a cultural principle in the Arab world to promote reconciliation, forgiveness, and cooperation among individuals and communities; sulh is an investment and call for cooperation and relational good to yield a "proactive, forward-looking [stance and] system that [aims] to subvert violation, violence and oppression at institutional and individual levels" (Diab 45). Reflecting Islamic beliefs about the significance of human dignity and lives, sulh works to create and maintain social harmony and interconnectedness among all human beings, regardless of their differences. Sulh is built upon three components or what Diab calls the "topoi of peacemaking": memory, justice, and prudence (52). Memory involves the heeding of grievances and concerns from stakeholders in order to yield acknowledgement and accountability, an important step toward healing and cooperation. Justice entails working to honor and recognize social, psychological, and ethical needs of *all* stakeholders to transform them into peace pursuers, so justice in this sense is not retributive but rather, restorative. Prudence frames the pursuit of justice. It helps curb hostility, retaliation, and retribution, establishing the possibilities for productive civil dialogues. Collectively, memory, justice, and prudence interconnect to yield dialogic interactions toward reconciliation.

The next three chapters of the book analyze rhetorical processes and practices of sulh in communal, international, and intrapersonal contexts. Chapter two, "The Sweet Power of Persuasion: Cultural Inflections of Interpersonal Sulh Rhetorics," lays out sulh procedures for resolving conflict in a community. First, a stakeholder (the wrongdoer, third party, or the victim) initiates reconciliation to restore peace and order by soliciting a respected elder or noble individual in the community to mediate a concern. Upon accepting the request, the mediator plays the role of an objective peacemaker and approaches all stakeholders to request truce and invite them to come together to rhetorically listen to each other's issues with an aim toward eliminating an "us versus them" mentality. Drawing upon Krista Ratcliffe, Diab defines rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretive invention that enables a rhetor to assume a stance of openness in cross-cultural communication. To encourage open, honest exchange toward reconciliation, the various interlocutors separately reflect on their needs, thoroughly clarifying their desire. Afterward, they reconvene in the presence of the mediator and community members to openly acknowledge one another's issues; and within this process, stakeholders work to lower their ego by heeding

everyone's rights and dignity. If relevant, the wrongdoer makes a sincere apology to show accountability and move toward amends. In the end, they eat together as a sign of reconciliation. The mediator plays the most important role throughout these time consuming, challenging steps. S/he must carefully balance stakeholders' needs and diligently nudge them to collaboratively construct a peaceful resolution that is acceptable to all parties. His/her mediation must reflect magnanimity, prudence, deep listening, and care. Altogether, sulh processes motivate interlocutors to value, dignify, and remain accountable to one another. Unlike traditional judicial process, sulh leads people away from punitive retribution toward social reintegration and peaceful co-existence.

Sulh, however, is not merely a mediation practice; it also constitutes a fundamental principle behind the founding of the first Islamic community in the seventh century. Chapter three, "*We the Reconciled: The Convergence of Sulh and Human Rights*," explicates features of sulh in the Charter or Constitution of Medina (CM) from 622. During this time, various tribes had fought and persecuted one another for dominance over religion, territory, and economic gains, creating massive turmoil. To restore peace, the prophet Muhammad formed a new peaceful city-state—Medina—and instituted CM to decree equal protection of all citizens regardless of difference. Specifically, CM affirms the importance of respecting and preserving people's lives and everyone's right to peaceful livelihood. Muhammad's constitutional decree reconstitutes fragmented citizens into a political community, creating a "unified citizenry" (Diab 102). Thus, in addition to being a mediation practice, sulh is a political vision and more broadly, a way of governing and living in an Islamic nation. As CM accentuates "immanent value of human beings and life," "equality of all people," and "the right to be a responsible member of a community," it represents an early human rights document in the Arab tradition—one that precedes the Geneva Convention by nearly thirteen centuries (Diab 101).

The next chapter, "*From the Egyptian People's Assembly to the Israeli Knesset*," turns to investigating a contemporary uptake of sulh to restore strained relations between Egypt and Israel in 1977. Diab analyzes a diplomatic speech that President Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt delivered to Israel—the Knesset Address (KA)—to end a longstanding warfare that led to economic and emotional devastation in both nations. Reading his speech through the lens of sulh, Diab demonstrates how al-Sadat's rhetoric praises peace and censures war by depicting the former as a moral order and the latter as unethical destruction, thereby presenting peace as a more viable and desirable pursuit. Specifically in his address, al-Sadat uses commissives, or speech acts of promise, to invite trust, cooperation, and openness to change by declaring his determination to "go to the end of the world" to end the war and save lives (Diab 133). Al-Sadat's declaration creates a voluntary self-binding

commitment to sulh and shifts his subject position from an enemy to a caring, tenacious peacemaker. Second, al-Sadat employs narratives to invoke goodwill and credibility by telling stories about the losses he experienced from war, his previous records of peace pursuits and ceasefire agreements, and the benefits of ceasing combat. His narratives further “increased the rhetorical force of his commitment and make it recognizable to Israeli publics and political elites” (Diab 135). Finally, al-Sadat employs rhetorical listening by acknowledging Israeli grievances and his country’s complicity in the conflict in order to create accountability and truce. Collectively, all of these moves minimize an “us versus them” positionality and reconstitute the two warring nations as collaborative peace seekers. KA reflects the tradition and practice of sulh in international diplomacy context.

Chapter five “To Gather at Court: Sulh as Rhetorical Method” analyzes a literary dialogue *The Great Court of Sulh* (GCS) by Muhammad Madi Abu al-’Aza’im (1869-1937), a theologian and professor of Islamic law. GCS presents an allegorical debate among virtuous and wicked voices within the self, as they attempt to achieve reconciliation in an imaginary court: Temperance, Generosity, Folly, Cowardice, and so forth. The dialogue shows internal challenges and debates that one must confront to achieve sulh. Comprised of two major sections, the first part of GCS details vices’ grievance and protest against reconciliation; they present their complaints and demands for punitive justice. The second part transitions to examine potentials for *wasatiyah* (the middle path or goodness between two extremes), *tazkiyah* (purification through abstaining from bad deeds and striving for good), and *kamal* (perfection based on the character of Allah, the Islamic God). Thus, GCS moves from conflict-ridden relations based on a self-centered perspective to a reconciliatory mindset built upon restorative justice, empathy, and prudence. As a whole, GCS illustrates the intrapersonal struggle and debate that one must undergo to achieve sulh. It posits internal deliberation as a significant component of sulh praxis; sulh rhetorical process involves both internal deliberation and external articulation.

Altogether, *Shades of Sulh* tells “a story of the gift of realizing an alternative option” toward conflict management—one that moves interlocutors beyond an either/or, conquest/submission, or win/loss paradigm toward the pursuit of peace within communal, constitutional, international, and intrapersonal contexts (Diab 192). Though sulh is a difficult rhetorical practice, its generative reconciliation potentials warrant additional exploration. Diab identifies three promising areas for future research in the closing chapter of her book: examining processes and performances of reconciliation in greater details, recovering the invisible contribution of women to sulh, and capturing and investigating discourses of intrapersonal deliberation or internal rhetoric in the pursuit

of peace. Taking up these issues, Diab contends, will not only further advance rhetorical studies beyond the dominance of the Western tradition but, more broadly, will allow us to continue the important rhetorical work of fostering and sustaining peacemaking in conflict-ridden twenty-first century.

All in all, *Shades of Sulh* provides a compelling model for how to conduct contextualized, focused, and accessible cross-cultural research. Most importantly, the book encourages us to theorize, employ, and instruct rhetoric as an art of peacemaking. As sulh aims to make peace rather than to conquer or prove guilt and innocence, it challenges us to teach and practice rhetoric beyond the conquest-conversion model in traditional rhetorical theory. Diab's book asks us to contemplate: How might we adapt and teach argumentation as peacemaking and use sulh processes to complicate rhetoric (Booth), listening rhetoric (Glenn and Ratcliffe), invitational rhetoric (Foss and Griffin), arguing as an art of peace (Kroll), and Rogerian praxis? Additionally, given that sulh promotes relationality, deep listening, and accountability, its practices can perhaps be reappropriated as a research methodology for engaging cultural differences and studying marginalized rhetorical traditions and figures. How might we use sulh as a framework to yield ethical, responsible rhetorical studies? In particular, given that sulh praxis aligns with feminist principles of reflexivity, non-harm, non-violence, and non-domination, a sulh methodology might be particularly productive for feminist and comparative scholars. In sum, sulh represents a "gift of possibility" for enriching the theory, method, and praxis of rhetoric, making Diab's book innovative and refreshing (Diab 192). It is a worthwhile read.

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About the Author

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Hallenbeck, Sarah. *Claiming the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Nineteenth-Century America*. Southern Illinois UP, 2016. 205 pages.

April Cobos

Sarah Hallenbeck's *Claiming the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Nineteenth-Century America* is a fascinating rhetorical analysis of the work of women bicycle-enthusiasts in the late nineteenth century. The project considers how women exercised rhetorical agency to construct "new identities and arguments for and about themselves" through embodied practices of cycling, writing about cycling, and creating related technological inventions (xiii). While Hallenbeck examines the collective impact of women's rhetorical activities, she notes that these material and textual practices were often fragmented and that women were not always deliberately seeking to "transform the gender order"; however, the repetition and visibility of their activities did have "rhetorical effects" (xv). The powerful intersections of her theoretical framework provide valuable insights to the fields of rhetoric, feminist historiography, and technical communication. That framework also offers a lens through which other scholars can analyze rhetorical agency within networks to shift or influence the social and cultural landscape.

Claiming the Bicycle reflects a recent push in feminist rhetorical scholarship to expand the boundaries of what counts as women's rhetorical activity. Hallenbeck references Jessica Enoch's call for work that considers how gender distinctions are created and disrupted. She builds on Royster and Kirsch's concept of social circulation, a means by which scholars can better understand "the social networks in which women connect and interact with others and use language with intention" (xv), in order to further discussions of how gender differences shift and transform the material networks that women inhabit, rather than focusing on how gender differences are sustained. Throughout the text, Hallenbeck connects these concepts to actor-network and cultural-historical activity theories to better situate the rhetorical actions of women bicyclists "within the networks of diverse, constantly shifting human and material elements" (xxi). She argues that these theories help in highlighting how rhetorical agency is shaped by, or dependent on, larger institutional and ideological structures and ways agents work within those structures.

Hallenbeck makes engaging contributions to cultural studies in technical communication by examining various artifacts in order to understand how "technology becomes integrated into the fabric of a particular cultural moment," as well as looking in the gaps to expand the definition of what counts as technical communication (xix). The preface touches on Judy Wajcman's *Technofeminism* to argue for the importance of analyzing the construction of technologies and the constant changes in these technologies. Hallenbeck returns to Wajcman's work in suggesting future considerations in her conclusion.

The nuanced, detailed examples provided in each chapter strengthen the readers' connections between the archival materials and her theoretical analysis. She draws from a wide range of rich cultural artifacts from the late nineteenth century, including traditional print sources like newspapers, magazines, and instructional manuals, but also more unique materials like photographs, actual apparel, and invention patents. Her diverse cultural artifacts exemplify to readers options for expanded their own definitions of archival materials.

The book is organized to make the examples more readily accessible to readers, with Hallenbeck breaking the text into chapters by different cultural artifacts. In the introductory chapter, "Regendering of the Bicycle in the 1880s" she argues that women's embodied performances as bicyclists during the decade destabilized the physical network of spaces male riders had established for themselves. While the tricycle and the Ordinary, two common late-nineteenth-century bicycles, positioned men and women users differently, a third option, the Safety, "defied gender categorization" because of less pronounced differences in the technology (3). This allowed for new riding purposes and contexts for both men and women. Of course, Hallenbeck recognizes that women bicyclists still had to manage the gender conventions of being seen as more frail than male riders, being considered only riding companions to men, and hearing ridicule or insults outside of major cities (31); however, women's collective efforts over the decade began to transform these gendered ideals. As more women rode, the material conditions changed and the network expanded, offering women more opportunities to exercise agency.

Hallenbeck examines the inventions women began to create in order to overcome user-design problems, arguing that inventive activities can be thought of as performances of user agency or demonstrations of the extent to which technology systems continue to develop. In chapter one, "Women Riders and the Invention of the Bicycle," Hallenbeck focuses on three particular calls to innovation: women's cycling clothing; the comfort, safety, and morality of bike saddles for women, and the need to protect the rider's face from outside elements. She marvels at the accomplishments of women bicycle inventors during this time period, particularly in relation to bicycling accessories,

and points out that only 1 percent of patents were filed by women throughout the U.S. during the 1890s, yet there were sixty patents by women in relation to cycling. Women's struggles to be taken seriously are highlighted, as men's individual inventions were often marked as brilliant while women's collective inventions were ignored or underscored. She uses the term "rhetoric of urgency" to show how saddles unsuitable for women bicyclists prompted the need for invention. Hallenbeck also uses the term "rhetoric of choice" in this chapter, as women inventors began to stress individual decisions, which incited opposition. Despite this opposition, women cyclists' innovations began to "fill holes in existing technology," addressing design problems and allowing women to create and exercise agency (66).

Chapter two moves away from the embodied experiences and into women's written practices, highlighting the rise of the "Bicycle Girl," depicted in popular magazines through advertisements, short fiction, commentaries and travel writing. She discusses how women rhetors, mostly amateur writers, used the popular magazine to create a "culturally viable ethos" that carried the potential for social change without threatening the social order while simultaneously taking advantage of a new social order established in middle- to upper-class neighborhoods (72; 77). The idealized figure of the bicycle girl was a complex image, working both to provide visibility of women's cycling activities while also maintaining certain stereotypes of women bicyclists as young and fun-loving. Hallenbeck notes the gendered conventions still in place, as many of the story characters lacked depth while others focused on courtship narratives in which women characters still conformed to gendered images of the bicycle girl, appearing, for example, in need of rescue by a male cyclist. She does note that some women broke from this script and depicted women as heroines. The chapter examines collective ethos, and Hallenbeck argues that while women were not always aware of the impact of their rhetorical efforts, there was "strength in repetition" with the written accounts in popular magazines helping to create arguments in favor of women as bicyclists (88).

Continuing on with the agency of women writers, chapter three, "Women's Written Instructions for Change," looks at technical communication, such as instruction manuals, suggesting they provided a counternarrative to the idealist bicycle girl from popular magazines. Hallenbeck considers how these technical communication sources allowed for a more diverse representation of women bicyclists and invited a wider range of women to become users of the new technology. First, she provides examples of male-authored bicycle manuals and then compares these with those authored by women cycling enthusiasts. She argues that the male-authored texts viewed men as experts, often presenting negative images of women as cyclists, and reinforced gendered notions that women were not natural fits for riding. In comparison, women

enthusiasts began writing their own instruction manuals that intervened in the dominant narrative of women's bicycling abilities, using the texts to question and transform the negative narratives. In particular, the chapter focuses on an author named Maria E. Ward. Instead of defending women's lack of ability, Ward continually argues that the problem is women's lack of knowledge regarding bicycling technology. In essence, Ward "breaks down gender binaries in relation to tool use, asserting that tools can be used by both sexes and the skills required are not gendered" (123). Enthusiast-authored manuals such as Ward's played an important role in encouraging women's confidence and changing men's beliefs about women and bicycling technology.

Chapter four, "Women Bicyclists' Embodied Medical Authority," focuses on the cultural artifacts that address how women enthusiast writers and women cyclists challenged the popular scientific medical authority of the time in order to construct agency regarding their own bodies as bicyclists. This chapter has important implications for various other scholars working on gendered ideologies of women's physical bodies and the way women have spoken back to these conventions. Hallenbeck's examination of the writing of medical authorities still plays into twentieth-first-century debates about the "natural" differences between men's and women's physical abilities. First, she highlights many of the cautionary tales put out by doctors and other medical authorities regarding bicycling and women's bodies, such as the impacts they would have on reproduction or parental nurturing (132). She also notes that women doctors in the 1890s used the same ideologies and approaches because these women were seeking approval by their male peers. Thus, the majority of doctors, male and female, saw women's use of the bicycle as only a treatment for specific ailments, to be used with careful doctor's supervision and restraint. However, women commentators published articles in popular magazines and newspapers to "indirectly" challenge these dominant narratives (149). Toward the end of the chapter, Hallenbeck moves back into women's embodied performances, where racers and endurance riders challenged dominant narratives about women's biological and psychological characteristics, especially near the end of the century. Many of these women riders even purposely overturned doctors' orders. For example, Hallenbeck provides the case of Margaret Gast, a woman who rode 200 miles a day, hoping to set the distance record of 4500 miles in 30 days, only to be stopped by a sheriff because such a display would start competitiveness in other women who would overdue it (162).

Hallenbeck argues that her book is intended not just to highlight what the bicycle did for women but also what women did for the technology of the bicycle. Women began to see themselves as agents of change, encouraging other women to take up cycling while they also invented new ways within the

network in which to do so. She notes that these types of collective activities have not yet received much notice from feminist rhetoricians and encourages further investigation of this type of accumulated activity in order to expand our understanding of social and cultural changes within a network. She also notes that the work of collective rhetoric goes on whether we acknowledge it or not, but that drawing attention to the way individual technology users create agency can be especially effective. In returning to Wajman's *TechnoFeminism*, she ends with three concluding generalizations she believes feminist scholars and technology users can use to understand agential orientation in the future. A Technofeminist rhetorical agent: 1) rejects the notion that technologies come to her in finished form; 2) understands her interactions with technology may maintain, complicate, or contest dominant social norms, and sees potential for social change; and 3) strives to be a tinkerer in the broadest sense, understanding that through use inventions emerge.

About the Author

April Cobos is a PhD candidate at Old Dominion University, where she is completing her dissertation on the professional ethos building practices of women in explosive ordnance disposal military communities. She was the 2015 Feminisms and Rhetoric conference recipient of the Nan Johnson Outstanding Graduate Student award. Other current research projects include the visual rhetoric of disabled veterans and the writings of the Woodhull and Claflin sisters.

Wood, Henrietta Rix. *Praising Girls: The Rhetoric of Young Women, 1895-1930*. Southern Illinois UP, 2016. 192 pages.

Sara Austin

A recent addition to the Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms series from Southern Illinois University Press, *Praising Girls* examines the epideictic discourse of several different groups of young women. Similarly to other writers in the series, Wood draws on archival sources, rhetorical and historical theories, and feminist rhetorical methodology to revise our understanding of epideictic rhetoric as a tool used by a diverse group of young women in the Kansas City, Missouri area during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Through an examination of archival sources, Wood calls for a broadened understanding of epideictic rhetoric, one that includes not only speeches given by elite male orators, but also those delivered in print by ordinary rhetors. Specifically, “ordinary girls who engaged in extraordinary rhetorical activities” (xi). These include affluent white girls, Native American girls, African American girls, and working- and middle-class white girls. Accordingly, “*Praising Girls* analyzes the published writing of diverse young women in a representative Midwestern city as epideictic discourse” (xi). Wood analyzes newspapers, literary magazines, and yearbooks to understand how these girls defined themselves and how they viewed and fit into the larger community of Kansas City in an era filled with social unrest and change.

Wood explains the significance of *Praising Girls* to feminist rhetorical studies with two reasons. First, while other scholars have examined the history of women and rhetoric, little attention has been given to young women and girls, and although chapters and articles address the rhetorical acts of young women, no book yet addresses this topic. Second, in order to understand the “rhetorical aims and achievements of women in the twentieth century, we need to understand their training and experiences as girls” (xi).

Wood uses the preface to explain the background of the project and its connections to interdisciplinary archival research, rhetorical theory, and feminist rhetorical methodology. Historians, archivists, and scholars will appreciate her explanation of the methods and methodology she has applied as well as the limitations she encountered. From an archival research perspective, Wood brings to light the messiness involved and is transparent about

the process and recursive nature of such research. She also clearly outlines a corresponding methodology, identifying parallels with Kirsch and Royster's feminist rhetorical practices and aligning key terms such as social circulation, strategic contemplation, critical imagination, and globalization with her study.

Organized into five chapters plus a preface and conclusion, the book addresses the epideictic nature of publications written by groups of girls in different school settings. The first chapter, "Girls and Rhetoric: Contexts," provides a framework for analyzing texts as epideictic rhetoric, specifically by considering how rhetoric supports group identity. Drawing on both historical definitions from Aristotle and Isocrates and contemporary interpretations of epideictic rhetoric from Kennedy, Miecznikowski Sheard, Poulakis, and Sullivan, Wood presents epideictic rhetoric as a force that defines collective identities, influences public perceptions of roles and rights, and alters a social order that excludes or dismisses (5). Further, she asserts that girls' writings can be epideictic. In examining these writings, Wood uses archival sources to answer the question, "Can epideictic rhetoric broach cultural and social boundaries?" (6). Wood also uses her first chapter to explain the importance of Kansas City as a rhetorical site for her study: this location serves her research particularly well because it contains archival sources for "affluent white girls, Native American girls, African American girls, and working- and middle-class white girls in a forty-mile radius" (xiv). While all of the girls in Wood's study "confronted constraints of gender and age," many of them also faced issues of race and class (6). Equally as important, the girls in the study witnessed and were affected by historical forces such as "industrialization, commercialization, imperialism, Jim Crow codes, and immigration," consequently, the epideictic rhetoric of these girls was informed by national, local, and international issues (17). In the face of these various issues, the girls' texts serve as examples of collaborative identity formation through which the writers helped to define their own collective identity and responded to normalized ideas about girls during the time period.

In the second chapter, "Amplifying Identity: Barstow 'New Girls,'" Wood describes how girls at Miss Barstow's School in Kansas City proclaimed their collective identity in *The Weather-cock* (the Barstow yearbook) via a demonstration of the five tactics of epideictic amplification (magnification, confirmation, emphasis, restatement, enlargement). Through publications in *The Weather-cock*, these white upper-class girls worked to distinguish themselves from earlier generations and identify themselves as "new girls" or middle-class girls that played sports, attended high school, liked to have fun, and "found venues for expression in school-sponsored publications" (23). For example, Barstow girls used emphasis, showing how "art can function as visual rhetoric that amplifies an epideictic argument," by including images that depicted their commitment to athletics and demonstrated that they took "learning to swim as seriously

as learning Latin" (42, 44). Such amplification techniques served to persuade readers of *The Weather-cock* of the girls' identity as new girls, different from earlier generations of upper-class women, including their mothers.

Chapter three, "Persuading Diverse Audiences: Haskell Girls," focuses on epideictic discourse published in two student newspapers at The Haskell Institute, "the second largest off-reservation government boarding school for Native Americans in the United States" (56). Publications in both the *Indian Leader* and *Indian Legends* newspapers addressed multiple audiences, both white and Native American, and worked to promote pride in indigenous identity. Even though their publications were ultimately solicited by white authority figures, the girls of Haskell appealed to diverse audiences in order to "reconcile skeptics, reassure sympathizers, and rouse support for Indian education rights" (58). Girls at Haskell also created identity through epideictic discourse by praising themselves and their peers and educating readers about Native Americans in the early twentieth century. Wood also considers similarities and differences between the rhetorical tactics used by girls at Haskell and those at Barstow. Both groups used similar epideictic strategies, but there were variations in how those strategies were applied. While Haskell girls privilege race over gender, girls at Barstow tended to take race for granted: "Haskell girls had to counter the notion that they are the Other, and Barstow girls define themselves by conjuring the Other" (87). These distinctions importantly allow for a broadened understanding of epideictic rhetoric.

The fourth chapter, "Glossing (over) Historical Realities: Lincoln Girls," examines the epideictic rhetorical activities of students at Lincoln High School, the only public secondary school for African Americans in Kansas City. Using their yearbook and newspaper, girls of Lincoln High wrote poetry and prose for the purpose of constructing community and combatting the racism that they experienced in a predominately white city. Although girls at Barstow and Haskell both faced challenges that shaped their epideictic rhetoric, girls at Lincoln faced particularly challenging circumstances, including addressing a primarily black audience that disagreed on how the race should progress. These challenges resulted in Lincoln girls using two epideictic strategies: one was to obscure the facts and the other was to emphasize them facts. One student, Hazel Hickum, illustrates the former strategy in a poetic tribute to Lincoln High School that "avoids addressing the historical consequences of separate and unequal education for African Americans" while instead imagining a community of young successful scholars (96). Such epideictic rhetoric at Lincoln High School allowed young women to challenge societal conventions while praising their peers.

In the fifth chapter, "Creating Consubstantiality: Central Girls," Wood discusses the students of Central High School, the largest coeducational high

school in the United States at the time. Through an examination of three school-sponsored publications, Wood examines the factions of the student body and their consubstantiality, an essential component to epideictic rhetoric. The girls of Central built consubstantiality to promote community and counter the factions within the school. Wood notes that while the boys at the school were more interested in creating school spirit by supporting the male athletic teams, the girls at Central composed epideictic rhetoric “that encouraged students to act together” (128). Even though the Haskell Institute and Lincoln High School were also coeducational, this chapter focuses on some of the distinct gendered differences between the girls and boys at Central High School. As with the other schools, the girls at Central used the school’s yearbook, literary magazine, and newspaper to promote inclusivity and wisdom. One student, Beatrice Hill, for example, composed a poem that personified the school and encouraged students to view the institution in a way that “bestows power, light, and knowledge of noble deeds upon its disciples” (130).

Using examples from each of the five chapters, Wood examines the similarities between each group’s epideictic rhetoric in the conclusion. She notes that the girls revised ideas about young women of the period and by defining themselves, helped define careers, goals, and objectives for women of the twentieth century. An example Wood provides is Lucile Bluford, who graduated first in her class of Lincoln High School, earned a bachelor’s degree at the University of Kansas, and joined and eventually became editor of the *Kansas City Call*. Wood suggests that, moving forward, scholars might use a framework of epideictic rhetoric to examine other textual and material artifacts from other cultures such as the first wave of the women’s movement, the labor movement, and the Civil Rights Movement. As a framework, epideictic rhetoric might provide ways to examine group identities “of other collectives past and present” (147). Wood also suggests that epideictic rhetoric might provide a way to understand recent political polarization and the failure of rhetors to “unite rather than divide the factions that constitute the United States.” This exploration, Wood proposes, “might yield rhetorical remedies to this serious problem” (148). In addition to addressing interdisciplinary archival work for historians and archivists in rhetoric, Wood’s inclusion of girls in the rhetorical conversation serves as an important reminder for a wide range of scholars of the importance of building on and moving beyond ancient rhetorical definitions to create a more inclusive, diverse field.

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