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Cover Art: a light orange-pink color background with line drawings of leafy plants on the bottom left and top right corners. Inset in the left side of the image is a drawing based on a close-up photograph of bell hooks. She is wearing a yellow long-sleeved blouse with embroidery around the neckline and around the cuff. She is resting her chin on her left hand and has a thoughtful facial expression. In the lower right corner are the words "Peitho Volume 24.2 Winter 2022." The drawing of hooks is by Angélica Becerra, an artist and postdoctoral teaching fellow at Washington State University, and is used with permission. Her art is available for purchase here: <https://angelicabecerra.store/>

In Memoriam: Bell Hooks

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Editors' Introduction

Author: Rebecca Dingo

Dr. Rebecca Dingo is Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Rebecca's research has addressed transnational rhetorical and composition studies and in doing so she forwards a transnational feminist lens attuned to global political economy. She is the author of *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing*, which received the W. Ross Winterowd Award in 2012. She has published widely in both the field of Women's Studies and Rhetorical Studies. Rebecca has also offered workshops and trainings across the globe on her research, writing pedagogies, and writing development. Her pedagogy seeks to connect theory with practice and all of her classes tend to offer on-the-ground case studies paired with theoretical lenses. Rebecca earned her Ph.D. in English with an emphasis on Rhetoric and Composition from The Ohio State University.

Keywords: bell hooks, colonialism, introduction

This Winter issue of *Peitho* arrives on the heels of the death of the beloved and deeply influential Black feminist writer/scholar/teacher/activist bell hooks, for whom we offer a memorial. It also comes out as the US (at least) begins to enter what is hopefully the endemic stage of COVID and some light at the end of the tunnel after two very dark years for many of us. But this issue also comes at the beginning of what looks like a possible reinvigoration of the Cold War as the world watches Russia invade Ukraine.

As I think about the legacy of hooks I am inspired to make connections between the rhetorics of racial capitalism, gender, and conflict and I encourage *Peitho* readers and writers to do the same. As I scroll through social media and listen to the news, I am reminded of how raced and gendered rhetorics of the Cold War persist into the present and how they have produced particular sorts of sentimentalities about the tensions between capitalism and communism, as well as who is worthy of protection and who is discounted. I was moved by postcolonial rhetoric and composition scholar, Priya Sirohi's recent post on her Facebook page when she described the uneasiness, I was feeling but couldn't put into words. She states "It's easy to love Ukraine because as far as the international imagination knows, they are a peaceful country bullied by a bigger and meaner one, with a former comedian as the President. It's very easy to hate Russia because we have long hated Russia for its bullying and killing of spies and terrible dictator. These stories are part of the Western imaginary." Importantly, Sirohi's post goes on to recognize that, while the world has and should rally around Ukraine, there has been little notice of a similar conflict between India and Kashmir. She sees the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and India and Kashmir as connected:

the populist nationalism and long-standing Cold War era tensions make the two invasions the same. Russia wants a buffer with its enemies in Europe. India wanted to wrest control of Kashmir from Pakistan. The arguments about cultural hegemony are the same in both. The difference is that India and Kashmir are not predominantly white nations, and therefore their problems aren't considered close to the hearts of people in the West. It's not easy for Western media and politics to love nations with brown or black people in them because their problems are presented through thinly veiled racism as problems of the 'third world'; Ukraine is European in the global imagination, and therefore its invasion feels shocking – it's not the behavior of 'civilized' nations in the West.

Sirohi's observations and connections between nation-state powers, race, colonial histories, and global politics resonate strongly with the political and feminist project that hooks forwarded and lived. hooks' legacy *is* demonstrating how structures of racism, capitalism, and gender work in tandem to reproduce and perpetuate dominant class structures, not only in the US but also globally.

I first read hooks as an undergraduate student where I quickly learned through her work that Black people in the US were subjected to colonialism and that those historical wounds still persist today. Her book *Teaching to Transgress* served as the only textbook of the required Feminist Pedagogy class I took while earning my MA in Women's and Gender Studies. From hooks, I learned how to curate creative spaces for all learners in my classes while working to attend to the persistent wounds of racism, capitalism, and patriarchy present on the students in my class and in their worldview.

We, the Editorial Team of *Peitho*, open this issue with a set of reflections on hooks' legacy from scholars and activists situated not only around the world, but who also live/d and learn/ed in the very region of the US that hooks lived and grew up in. We are struck by how many contributors to her memorial were moved and influenced by hooks' owning her background as a poor Black Appalachian woman and seeing it as a source of strength, activism, and inspiration. As our collection of reflections show, hooks' observations and feminist commitments transcend the globe and writers demonstrate important connections between legacies of oppressions, for example, present in Hyderabad, India and rural northern Georgia, US, not to mention within our own field of rhetorical studies.

hooks' legacy and commitment to understanding how different forms of oppression are interconnected, frames the potpourri of feminist rhetorical scholarship this issue of *Peitho* offers. In addition to several reflections on the legacy of bell hooks, Jessica McCaughey presents data on how the pandemic impacted graduate student writing, Sarah Dwyer considers the how university diversity statements serve as "straightening devices" for queer bodies, and C.C. Hendricks demonstrates how beat poet and activist Diane di Prima demonstrates feminist rhetorical practices that until now have been ignored. Taken together, these essays demonstrate how feminist rhetorical theory can offer a vision of change, whether it is in how our institutions can write more inclusive diversity statements, how they might better support vulnerable graduate students, or even how understanding past writer-activist figures can help us imagine new and more just worlds. *Peitho* encourages more contributions that follow political and activist commitments as they live on in hooks' and other feminists of colors' thinking and continued legacies in particular, by

expanding our notions of identity and locality in order to fully contextualize them in transnational patterns of injustice as the Ukraine example, Sirohi's statement, and hooks attunement to locality within oppressive systems show.

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In Memoriam: Bell Hooks

embracing the erotic

Author: Sherri Craig

Dr. Sherri Craig, an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Writing at Virginia Tech University, researches how universities and English departments implement diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives, particularly for the recruitment and retention of Black women. She also considers the ways in which diversity programming can be located in writing across the curriculum. Her published work can be found at sparkactivism [dot] com and in the WPA: Writing Program Administration journal.

keywords: bell hooks, Black feminism, erotic, in memoriam

I first engaged with bell hooks at the end of my Master's program when I was given *Teaching to Transgress* and *Teaching Community* from my longtime mentor. It would take me three additional years to crack open the pages but it was an experience nearly ten years later that would challenge and change me.

Being a Black woman in the academy has yet to be easy. The daily challenges of microaggressions and hidden Ivory Tower blockages force me to accept that the university will never love me, despite the great ardor I have for it. I liken it to an abusive relationship – I give and it takes, until I hurt, until I bleed with the desire to be worshiped and embraced. To be handled with tenderness and care. Without these intense feelings being acknowledged, I have learned to turn towards my students. I give them the love I so desperately seek from higher ed, from writing studies. To do so, I use hooks' pedagogical practice of eros and the erotic in an attempt to teach the whole bodies of my students.

Reading "Eros, eroticism, and the pedagogical process" and "Ecstasy: Teaching and learning without limits" changed my association to the academy and provided me with the tools I needed to build powerful relationships with my Black students, who were also not well loved by the university. hooks tells us, "To call attention to the body is to betray the legacy of repression and denial that has been handed down to us by our professional elders, who have been usually white and male" (1993, p.58). I work hard to acknowledge the Black bodies, to tell them that I love having them in my classrooms and that I love the energy that they bring each day. To tell them that their smiles and melanin give me strength and hope, that I am impassioned when teaching them and being in the space with them. That I love them. Over the course of the semester, we shake hands, laugh, and sometimes hug. Educating them in this way is an act of love. My love is critical pedagogy. My love is Black feminist critical pedagogy.

When I taught a graduate seminar on critical pedagogy in 2020, I knew *Teaching to Transgress* was a must. In the virtual classroom of white faces and black boxes, hooks' exploration of the erotic and

ecstasy was met with anger and confusion. I distinctly recall two comments, "She loves her students? That is disgusting and illegal!" and "She is in love with a student. Everything until this essay was so inspirational and now I don't care for hooks at all." Shook to my core, I found myself in the unexpected position of defending hooks' words and fighting to articulate why and how love is the answer to radically challenging the institution as change agents. Couldn't they see that love is so much more than affection? It is personal. It is expansive. It is collective. Love, eros, the erotic, the ecstasy of teaching is how we all get the pleasure of overcoming oppression. hooks knew.

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A Story of bell hooks

Author: Hephzibah Roskelly

Hephzibah Roskelly taught for nearly 30 years in the English Department at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. She moved back to Kentucky when she retired and now teaches classes for UNCG's continual learning program and works with area high school teachers. Her latest book is a group of essays on teaching in high school and the university. Following bell hooks' advice about risk, she occasionally gives a sermon at her Episcopal church.

keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam, vulnerability

The first thing you had to know about her was that she spelled her name in all lower case letters. bell hooks. Writing a syllabus, or an article, you had to correct the auto-correct when you typed. Of course, it made you hyper-conscious of her name. But it was neither a rhetorical trick nor a mannerism, I think. Instead, it was an argument, one she maintained throughout her life. It was a way of saying we were all—speaker and listener, teacher and student—one, alike in our smallness, alike in our uniqueness. If we can see ourselves as lower case listeners, helpers, lovers, and friends, she implies, we move beyond what separates us. We might move beyond Class, Gender, Race and the ugly negatives those big words call up—injustice, inequality, intolerance. We could take up instead the truly big ideas of mutual respect and connection.

Like many in our field, I first encountered bell hooks in *Teaching to Transgress*. The book changed my teaching life. She was frank, so refreshing, as she spoke about racism and the walls of custom and distance teachers must break down. "I celebrate teaching that enables transgression," she proclaimed, echoing Freire. "It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom." Reading her, I felt her honesty. I felt I knew her.

I got the chance several years later. She came to my university for three days as part of a two-year program on race and gender, which had brought together twenty or so professors across disciplines. My colleague Ben and I met her at the airport, and we took her to lunch. She had a merry face and spoke with energy and humor about her work. But I truly realized how engaged she was when, at the end of our meal she looked across the table with a little smirk. "Why haven't you asked me about Kentucky?" she said. "You're a Kentucky girl too." She laughed, and I, surprised that she knew about me, stammered something and laughed too. Driving back to the building on campus where she was to stay, she asked about shopping in town. "I see a TJ Maxx over there," she smiled. So we shopped. Ben stood in the front of the store while bell and I looked for candle-holders and soap and undergarments. We bought bras. By the time I took her to the little pink and frilly room in the Faculty Center, it seemed we were friends.

The next day at the workshop, she began with a question for all of us seated in our large circle. "Tell me one thing that's great about you," she began. We went around the circle. I was the second one to

speak. "I'm a loyal friend," I said. She looked hard at me. "That's not enough," she told me. Or something very like. I was a little stunned, a bit hurt. We completed the opening discussion, everyone offering something, no one challenged but me.

The workshop was invigorating, thrilling even. Her talk the next night electrified her audience, many of them students. I thanked her enthusiastically; someone else took her to the airport. bell was all I had thought her to be from my reading. But it took me awhile to understand her message—and it was that—to me. She knew, I finally came to see, that I hadn't been honest. I had given a suitable answer and a "true" one, but not a vulnerable one. You can't be a friend unless you show your self.

bell's point—consistently her point—was that dismantling racism, ending patriarchy, finding justice—required mutuality. We have to become vulnerable to the people around us if we would build trust and make change. She was authentic and vulnerable, and she demanded that we—I—be. *Teaching to Transgress* is an extended example of how this mutuality can happen. She asked teachers to let the guard down, to use real lived experience in order to show students how to use theirs. I knew that; I hadn't trusted it.

The list of her books shows her topics to be far-ranging, as they move from education to art and toward spirituality. I believe she uses a wide lens and a variety of locations to explore an essential, single point. People must transgress—break down barriers, both external and internal—in order to see. In *All About Love* religious leaders and philosophers like Thich Nhat Hanh fuel her discussion of the varieties of and the paths to love. Once we see and let ourselves be seen, she tells us, we can love. She knew well Freire's comment that education is "an act of love and therefore an act of courage." Teachers, leaders, artists, learners and lovers all have to risk ourselves. Whether in a classroom or a board room, a prison or a chapel, for bell hooks, it's all about love. Always lower case.

Jones

bell hooks Memorial

Author: Mikala Jones

Mikala Jones is an Instructor of English at Young Harris College. Her work focuses on prison literacy programs, writing studies, and Appalachian studies.

keywords: Appalachia, bell hooks, in memoriam, material memory



Figure 1: The Image shows brown barn set against a clear blue sky. To the left of the barn is a silo. In front of the barn is a white gate and a driveway running through a trimmed lawn.

“the glory in old barns / surpassing time / wood gray shadowed black / faded colors / places where painted signs / tell of products / no longer in use / standing or falling down / these structures / carry the weight of history / work done and undone / memories of toil and torment / there was bounty here / tears for sowing / lamentations for the dead / all fragments that remain / remind us / give thanks / gather praise”

—(bell hooks, “20.” From Appalachian Elegy)

Like many others, I learned about Appalachia *as Appalachia* while seated in a college classroom. The place I grew up, where my family has called home for generations, was always just *home* to me, but on day one of an Appalachian Literature course at Young Harris College, I was assigned *Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place* by bell hooks. That assigned reading marked my first steps toward nuancing home: a place not just Southern, but also Appalachian. hooks’ collection is one I teach my own students today. Though her words respond to Kentucky’s history and give voice to Kentucky’s forgotten rural people of color, north Georgia students—once me, now my undergraduates—find many applicable images and lessons from the Appalachia hooks highlights because her comments on race, class, and other demographic differences push against dominant narratives across the region and nation-at-large. Her emphasis on the intersections between history and identity of the land, the people, and the power dynamics throughout bear important weight beyond Kentucky’s borders; hope for a better future, as balanced with awareness of the past, is an evergreen lesson for us all.

In poem “20.” from *Appalachian Elegy*, hooks’ speaker gives readers the image of an old barn wherein labor, loss, and triumph are all preserved by the slowly rotting wood: material memory. A single structure, replicated across Appalachia, embodies the very real labor of those who erected it and simultaneously the very real *hope* of those same individuals. All active farm work assumes a future touched at least partially by hope, as working the land requires comfort with time. A barn in its prime is a symbol of active labor, active hope, and obvious utility; however, those old barns peppered across the region today are stunted in regard to all three of the aforementioned qualities. Instead of pushing those ideas, their strongest claim is one of *belonging*. The old structures lay claim to the now and reiterate hooks’ points about knowing a land and people’s pasts because, even in their unkept states, they remind us of past generations who lived where we live, walked where we walk.

For me, the old barns I see daily in Union County, Georgia make me think about my dad, granddaddy, and many others who depended and still depend on returns from the land. The structures make me think about the toll manual labor takes on the body over time: human bodies and the clay. Our relationship, simply as people, with the land is complicated by widespread kairotic influences including but not limited to changing weather, occupation and income opportunities, important intersectional concerns, and blight; hooks’ poetry gives us ways to begin discerning this web of influence for the silenced voices of Black and Indigenous Kentuckians. Though it all begins with awareness, hooks’ words resonate with me in trying to find intergenerational balance, a way to mesh the past with our communal future, and hope for uncovering a sense of belonging. My

Jones

students and I wrestle with these lessons in hooks' abstract poems every semester—explicating “all fragments that remain” (hooks, line 16)—as we search for respectful ways to be. She helps us place ourselves and nuance existing structures, and that placing teaches us to think beyond the *now* and beyond the individual.

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An Open Letter to bell hooks

Author: Abhiruchi Chatterjee

Abhiruchi Chatterjee is a Graduate student of Gender Studies at the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad, India. She has a Master's degree in International Relations and an undergraduate degree in Political Science. She is a Gender & Development consultant, having worked with International Development Agencies like the UN as well as grassroots civil society in India, on various tenets of gender and social justice. The views expressed here are of her own and were first shared during a memorial webinar on Remembering bell hooks, organized by the Centre for Women's Studies, University of Hyderabad on December 20, 2021.

Keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam

Dear bell hooks,

I pray that you rest now. Finally. For rest is a difficult feat- as a feminist activist, as a woman, a woman of color.

As students of Gender Studies, although we were introduced to your writings only now, reading them gave us the air of conversing with a pen pal on the other side of the world – physically distant, but emotionally intimate.

For you write from the heart, you write from experience. You forefront your experience, your location in theorising, instead of abstracting it – the term “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” gave so many of us the vocabulary to locate our oppressions and to leverage our lived experiences as valuable forms of knowledge.

Before I moved to Gender Studies, my disciplinary training lay in International Relations and Political Science. As an early-career scholar and student of color located in the developing world, in studying these disciplines, a lingering feeling remained – of being small and insignificant in front of all the grand eurocentric theories and theorists that felt beyond my control and agency, so far removed that how could I make a difference. You taught me that the answers laid in unravelling my location, right where I was. Your approach of “*theory as a liberatory practice*” made theory accessible. Not just that, it provided me the language to articulate and name my oppressions, and locate how I engage with them. It provided a bridge for lived realities, for those eroded to the background – nuts and bolts in the grand machinery, invaluable, but invisibilized, to find space in knowledge formation and production. In theorizing and visibilizing the experiences of your self, your community and location, you gave others courage to do the same, and for that we are grateful.

Chatterjee

Your journey, from growing up in a racially segregated US South, to finding writing as an emancipatory tool, to the accomplished author and activist you left the world as, illuminates the possibility and joy in healing from pain. Encouraging looking within, granting ourselves power, celebrating our accomplishments, while being aware of the ways “interlocking systems of domination” are designed to make us feel inferior, aspiring to be something that we are not – the internalized patriarchy, racism, casteism. My journey, as a young woman, hurting, feeling encaged, in neo-colonial, neo-liberal patriarchies that operate even in overtly democratic egalitarian spaces towards one that recognized the intersections of various structures that made me feel not good enough, no matter my achievement, and the awareness that this brought in the way I could self-determine my worth and heal in the way I now engage with these structures in my lived reality.

One of the outcomes of that journey in understanding the intersecting systems at play, was the need to do so within a framework and not let it be a solitary exercise. And that emancipatory, liberating space was found for me, as for you, in the classroom. Entering the Gender Studies classroom created a safe space for the diversity of our experiences and connected our individual realities and locations to broader frameworks.

Thank you for centering democracy, participation and presence in pedagogy, rather than hierarchy in teaching. The other day we were analyzing your seminal work on “Oppositional Gaze” in class and each of us brought our layers, beyond the original text – from queer, disability, caste, religion, neurodivergent and so many other perspectives that propounded the meaning of the term. It was possible because each of us was able to put our lens to the term, which would not have been possible in a linear pedagogy that negated our presence.

One of my friends, a PhD research scholar, who is now discovering the joy of teaching, found the classroom a space for subversion and transgression, in an increasingly stifling discourse in familial and community spaces she has to live in, and finds power, in her capacity as the teacher, to transform the hierarchical and gendered way family conversations and community discussions take place.

You may not be with us physically, but your words have immortalized you. Rest now, for you have been heard. Rest peacefully, for the flame that your works have sparked in our minds, in the ways that we engage with the everyday, in seeing experience as a critical category, each in our own realities and locations, will keep your legacy alive.

Thank you, for making us feel less alone about our oppressions, agencies and locations, for feeling seen and validated in the face of multiple oppressions that serve to deny your existence to erasure is one of the key leverages in negotiating power.

Sincerely,

Abhiruchi

Remembering bell

Author: Libby Falk Jones

Libby Falk Jones is Professor of English and Chester D. Tripp Chair in Humanities, Emerita, at Berea College, Berea, KY. Co-editor of *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative* (U of Tennessee P, 1990), she has published and presented on feminist and contemplative pedagogies, faculty development, writing and writing centers, and women's professional lives. Her poems and creative nonfiction have appeared in more than 25 journals and anthologies as well as in three poetry collections. She is currently at work on a collection of poems about growing up female in the deep South of the 1940s-60s and is co-directing a project supporting writing and art by Kentucky women over 60.

Keywords: bell hook, in memoriam

My friendship with bell hooks began in 2005, after bell moved to Berea, when we worked together to organize the 2006 summer conference for NCTE's Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning. Some 80 educators ended up participating in "Writing for Reconciliation," and my time with bell planning and enacting the successful three-day conference forged a strong friendship.

Through the next years, bell visited my classes in writing, autobiography, literacy, and sustainability. And we regularly spent time together, talking. Our friendship was fed by our shared sense of the importance of spirit in education, our interestingly-related Southern girlhoods, and especially our love of reading and writing.

bell was a consummate writer. Writing was the way she knew the world. She wrote every day, early mornings, in hand, on a pad or in a notebook. Her fingers, long and slim, seemed made to hold a pen. "Writing is my passion," she writes in *Remembered Rapture: The Writer at Work*, which she said was her favorite among her nearly 40 books. "Writing has been for me one of the ways to encounter the divine," she writes. "Seduced by the magic of written and spoken words in childhood, I am still transported, carried away by writing and reading."

bell was also a voracious reader, regularly reading—really reading—several books a day. She owned neither television nor computer; books overflowed her shelves, sitting in stacks on the floor near her reading sofa. I often lent her books I was eager to read, knowing she'd have finished with them well before I could get to them. bell loved having favorite words of other writers in her heart and voice. She memorized and recited poems, making the words her own. I remember especially the pleasure she took in saying Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," the way her voice caressed Hughes' words. To celebrate her birthday each year, she invited friends to read to her their favorite poems.

bell was in the world by means of words, comfortable on a stage in front of thousands. She was at home in the world, walking a path of connection, noticing and speaking to everyone, bringing a sense of home to others. Though she thrived on exchanges with others, she was a person of great

Falk Jones

interiority, creating around herself an aura of repose. She was able to be; she did not have always to do.

For bell, writing was a place of sanctuary, a place where healing comes because the writer is bearing witness, as she wrote in reflecting on the 2006 conference in a piece published in *JAEPL*, the Assembly's journal. At the conference's closing session, bell invited us to write to explore a reconciliation we all must make—a reconciliation with our own deaths. Sharing our writings created a powerful connection, she wrote. "Late into the night I could hear the mutual give and take of our words—the sound of deep listening. They entered my dreams like a kind of music—luring, inviting me to sleep with the certainty that death will one day surely come. And that when it does I can call out, greeting death tenderly—with complete reconciliation" ("Writing for Reconciliation" 1).

I believe that bell achieved that reconciliation in her death, surrounded by family and friends, knowing she had loved and was loved. I miss her dearly, her words, voice, presence, spirit, her aging beauty. "Hello, friend," she often greeted me.

Hello, "Ms. bell," my friend. Hail and fare thee well.

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A Haunted Dwelling Place: Honoring bell hooks

Author: Ashley Canter

Ashley Canter is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric and Composition and Teaching Associate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her work focuses on transnational feminist rhetoric, affect studies, and Appalachian literacies.

Keywords: [Appalachia](#), [bell hooks](#), [in memoriam](#)

What makes a stretch of land more than just a dwelling place?

What does it mean to be home?

Who belongs in that place?

What does it mean to be Appalachian?

What does it mean to be an Appalachian working-class academic?

These are questions that reading hooks' *Belonging: A Culture of Place* allows me to ponder.

I grew up in a predominately white, rural, working-class community in mountainous Western North Carolina as a cisgender, queer, mixed race girl. I later moved to coastal South Carolina to obtain my undergraduate degrees. During my undergraduate education, I read bell hooks for the first time. The first time I heard the word “feminism” in an academic context, not as a derogatory term or in an ad, was when I was assigned to read *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* for a WGSS course. Reading this, I started to change my mind about what home could mean.

When I began to imagine education as a place from which to be emboldened, not to pretend, that is when I started to feel at home in a place that felt so frightening and unfitting to me: college. hooks writes:

Future feminist movements must necessarily think of feminist education as significant in the lives of everyone. Despite the economic gains of individual feminist women, many women who have amassed wealth or accepted the contribution of wealthy males, who are our allies in struggle, we have created no schools founded on feminist principles for girls and boys, for women and men (*Feminism is for Everybody* 23).

It is because of hooks' activism that me and so many of us historically excluded from spaces of higher education can find a kind of home here.

Now, I am working on achieving my PhD in Rhetoric and Composition in New England. Throughout my graduate program, I have felt moved by the conversations taking place in transnational feminist communities, in particular. That said, something about this always felt starkly separate from my first home in the mountains of North Carolina.

It wasn't until I read *Belonging* that I realized why that is. I had succumbed to the many ways we are taught to view the violence and injustice that occurs in rural places as isolated, individualized. But, as hooks said, being away from home, and away from Appalachia, has a way of making you think differently and more passionately about what it may mean to come from that land and those people. "Living away from my native place, I become more consciously Kentuckian than I was when I lived at home. This is what the experience of exile can do, change your mind, utterly change one's perception of the world of home" (*Belonging* 13). hooks helps me to see the ways that my experiences—learning to garden, to care in community-centered ways, to work with my hands and whole body, to not have enough and have an abundance simultaneously, to be home—are the very reasons why I can consider the structures of power and love that exist within and across places in such pressing ways now in my work as a feminist rhetorical scholar, teacher, learner, sister, daughter, friend, mentor, mentee. hooks leaves me and us as a field with a reminder that, as others have echoed, places continue to shift us long after we've left them. What we may be haunted by, are the ways we, too, shift places for so long after we've left them.

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Leading with Love, or a Pedagogy of Getting the Hell Over Myself

Author: Chelsea Bock

Chelsea Bock is an editor and an adjunct communications professor at Anne Arundel Community College. She holds an M.A. in English from the University of Maryland, College Park, and an M.A. in Humanities from Hood College. Her research interests include political rhetoric, public memory, and remediation in media.

Keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam

At the ripe age of 24, I stood in front of my bedroom mirror, wiped my sweaty palms down the front of my dress, and prepared to teach my first community college class. I was buzzing with six years of coursework in everything from Faulkner to feature writing but had never learned how to stand up in front of a room for fifteen weeks as Professor Bock. What if I quaked at the sound of my own voice? What if I was met with stares and snickers? So I operated under the recurring piece of advice I was given: "Remember that you're in charge. You command the room."

By the time I had graduated and taken on a full-time teaching load between two schools, I felt like I had found my groove. I was still young but more confident and at ease around my students, especially the working adults who took night classes. And then one evening, I froze as one of them shuffled in with a crying baby in tow. She took a seat at the back of the class and bounced the child on her knee, whispering as she tentatively met my eyes. My face hardened into a scowl. When the class ended, she approached me to apologize. "I'm so sorry. At the last minute, I didn't have anyone to watch her," she said. "I saw your face. I know you weren't pleased, and it won't happen again." This time, I felt myself grow hot with shame. I had commanded the room. But it didn't feel good.

I've carried that lesson with me for nearly a decade now: not the one I was teaching but the one my student gave me. Remembering bell hooks, I decided to replace my shame with opportunity. hooks writes in *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* that "when everyone in the classroom...recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community together, learning is at its most meaningful and useful." No matter what my agenda for the day holds or what assignments are due the next week, my students can't succeed if I'm not rooting for them.

Envisioning the classroom as a space for community, collaboration, and transformation means decentering myself just as hooks did in both her theory and practice. "To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination," she writes in *Teaching Community*, and I believe this starts with rejecting the "old school" of teaching as policing. On some days, it looks like throwing an encouraging smile to the commuter who struggles to make his train on time for class; on others, it looks like setting out crayons and paper in the writing center for children so that their mother can restructure her resume.

Bock

Thank you, bell hooks, for your pedagogy of empathy and respect. You brightly lit my path to becoming an asset to my students and never an obstacle.

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bell hooks Memorial

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Meredith McKinnie is the Assistant Director of First-Year Composition at the University of Louisiana Monroe, where she teaches composition, feminist literature, and American literature. She is a 3rd-year PhD student at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and her research focuses on student agency, feminist pedagogy, and writing assessment practices. She created the Feminists in Action chapter at ULM and has facilitated lecture series on topics such as feminism, political correctness, privilege, and consent. McKinnie works as a freelance writer for *Bayoulife Magazine*, contributing book reviews and a monthly column entitled "Meredith's Musings."

Keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam

A beating heart might dare encapsulate Dr. bell hooks' indelible imprint on feminism, pedagogy, and activism, for hooks led with love. She reiterated the complexity of human existence, valuing compassion alongside conflict. In her copious writings on the intersectional nature of oppression, hooks stressed personal connection, of reaching beyond academic spaces to uplift marginalized communities – for in the effort lies the promise of progress. The usefulness of knowledge demands supplemental action on its behalf. The academy stands to sophisticate the next generation of difference makers. bell hooks believed in the purpose of the academy, while criticizing it relentlessly to improve its function. Constructive criticism is foremost an act of love, she argued.

hooks' feminist philosophies captured my attention during graduate school. While acquiring feminist theory familiarity, I stumbled across hooks' blistering critique of Spike Lee's representation of black women in "Male Heroes and Female Sex Objects: Sexism in Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*." While the article asserted Lee's sacrifice of whole black female characters to appease a predominantly white, potentially blockbuster, audience, hooks' objection to the art arose from respect for the artist. In acknowledging the work, hooks extended love to Spike Lee. In sharing her truth, she potentially broadened his space for truth telling.

As a composition instructor, I frequently lean into hooks' feminist pedagogies. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks binds feminist philosophy to classroom practice. Eschewing the archaic concept of authoritative educators, she espouses classrooms as freedom frontiers. The quest for knowledge involves the input of everyone, students and teachers alike. hooks advocates diversified ways of knowing, insists that acumen is enriched by multiple sources of seemingly contradictory information. Opposing ideologies stand in opposition because we resist complexity. The sticky tension of conflict often rewards one with enlightenment, broadening the scope of understanding. The classroom exists as an invitational space, one in which we admit to unknowing and collectively move toward mutual awareness of one another's lived experiences and vantage points.

Feminism's spotlight on the collective depends upon cooperation. hooks understood the necessity of conflict for potential resolution. As human beings, we most desire to be heard. The

McKinnie

loudest voices require the most love. hooks believed in love without caveat, without boundaries, without conditions for transfer. As educators, we must lean into the principle of love and knowledge coexisting. We must use our liberating spaces for their intended purpose, to build connections and give back to humanity future generations unafraid to interact, to conflict, to challenge one another for society's betterment. To exist in such spaces and not continually grow alongside our students, to not challenge our own beliefs, would be to waste a sacred space and responsibility. From Dr. bell hooks, I learned that authority absent love and compassion emulates colonizing impulses. Only intentional acts of love breed the human connections that fortify education and cultivate progress.

Embracing a Pedagogy of Love and Grief

Author: Sophia Greco

Sophia Greco is a Chilean Californian writer, unschooler, language nerd, and fruit forager. Sophia's most recently completed project was their senior capstone for Soka University of America, "Care, Community, and Political Writing: Mapping a Pedagogical Blueprint for Liberatory Education." Sophia is currently exploring theories and practices of liberatory pedagogy through the fields of rhetoric and composition, archival studies, decolonial studies, Black and indigenous feminist theory, and experimental writing. They enjoy life most when collaborating with writers, abolitionists, radical educators, artists, and learners of all ages.

Keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam

I turn to her when I find myself lost in the process. I turn to her as a fourth-year college student, disillusioned with how rarely I encounter engaged pedagogy at my liberal arts college.

She writes in grounded ways. These grounded ways of writing are vulnerable. She writes and cracks open the mysteries that occlude exactly what it is that makes engaged pedagogy painful, joyful, contradictory. This openness makes space for all that I bring when my heartache leads me back to her: my frustration, optimism, and grief.

bell hooks writes: "In these [classroom] settings, I learned a lot about the kind of teacher I did not want to become" (*Teaching to Transgress* 13). To me, this sentiment resonates painfully across generations, decades, and racial identities, both as a current student and as an aspiring teacher. Although she writes from a positionality that is significant and different from my own, I find myself feeling the same stress, apathy, and boredom she describes having felt in the classroom over thirty years ago. When she says, "I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination," it aches because when I inevitably return to her, it is with the wounded hope that I might catch in her writing a mirror glimpse of my own exposed nerve (*Teaching to Transgress* 18). What does it mean when such a cavernous emptiness in one's own educational experience drives us to become educators ourselves? What lies within the absence(s) in our lives that moves us to action? What does it mean to be a teacher within spaces that reproduce existing relationships of power and oppression?

I am at odds with myself trying to find direction within institutions that perpetuate violence both figurative and literal. I wonder if this sentiment is part of what we call grief; a grief for the liberatory education we seldom (if ever) have; a grief that expands tenfold with the news of her passing. When I am hit with this loss I wonder: do we even know *how* to process absence and loss? We live our entire lives in various stages and forms of grief, yet we treat it like a one-time event. Grief is expected to remain within a finite sphere of our lives, incompatible with the sudden way that a loss can hit you after weeks, months, years. Despite these unspoken rules, grief is uncontained, uncontainable. In spite of these unspoken rules, grief is incomprehensible, incomprehensible.

Greco

What part does grief play in all this pedagogical business, and why is care for life and death cycles important to radical practices of teaching? This grief might be transformative if we honor it. This grief might be central to what she describes as a “pedagogy which emphasizes wholeness,” a pedagogy with space for all that we think, feel, and experience (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 14). Her teachings describe a pedagogy where we can embrace grief, embrace ourselves, and embrace each other wholly.

hooks describes teaching as an act of love; she also says, “To be loving is to be open to grief” (*All About Love*, 200). I turn to her when I am lost in the process—especially now, in the process of grieving her loss.

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bell hooks Memorial

Author: Elizabeth J. Fleitz

Elizabeth J. Fleitz is an associate professor of English at Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. She graduated from Bowling Green State University in 2009 with a PhD in Rhetoric and Writing. She teaches writing pedagogy, digital humanities, technical writing, grammar, and first-year writing. Her research specializes in the rhetorical practices of cookbooks. She recently published an article about cookbooks and remix literacy in *Community Literacy Journal*, and about the cookbook author Amelia Simmons in *Peitho*. She has also published in *Harlot*, *Present Tense*, the Sweetland Digital Rhetoric Collaborative's Blog Carnival, and the edited collection *Type Matters*, among others. She is also part of the editorial collective for the Praxis and Topoi sections of *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy*.

Keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam

As I paused in shock, reading the news online of bell hooks' passing on December 15, 2021, my mind returned to my fondest memory of hooks' impact: discussing her writing with a group of (white, privileged) first-year college students several years ago. The course was Great Ideas in Feminism (my attempt to turn the largely white, cis-het male-dominated "Great Ideas" curriculum on its head). For our first class meeting that cold, gray January day, I asked students to read an excerpt from hooks' 2000 text *Feminism is for Everybody*. I chose the text for its accessibility, knowing this was likely the first in-depth discussion of feminism any of these new college students had experienced. I knew I had misconceptions to clear up before we could truly begin the course. I wanted my students to know, to begin with, that feminism really was for everybody, not just for women. hooks' message is one of inclusiveness, which is useful to any political argument: to unify rather than to divide.

My students' reception to the text was more successful than I even expected: students easily accepted hooks' definition of feminism as being a problem of sexist beliefs and actions, not a problem of sex. Patriarchal culture is the problem, not men themselves (hooks 1). For an author to so plainly and clearly state this fact about feminism was a revelation to my students—and I was so proud to see it happen. Even the students who would regularly play devil's advocate for other discussion texts during the term—such as questioning the validity of rape statistics in the introduction to Enslers' *The Vagina Monologues*—accepted her statements about feminism with no trouble.

hooks' impact on feminism through this text goes much further than the inclusivity of the title, of course: hooks' writing style in not only this work but all of her writings live out her philosophy of inclusiveness, of bringing people together. First, her use of plain language, of short, straightforward sentences, of personal pronouns, all help her speak directly to the reader, inviting them in to learn more about feminism. Rather than using the cold, formal language of academia, hooks intends to reach everyone and anyone, not just people like her. It makes sense, then, that hooks adopts

Sojourner Truth's famous words "Ain't I a Woman?" in the title of her 1981 book about Black women and feminism. Just as Truth used the informal diction of that rhetorical question to be relatable and understandable, hooks adopts not just those words but also that philosophy of plain speech to draw in readers.

In *Feminism is for Everybody*, as well as all of her works, hooks believes there is strength in unity, not in division. Her writing is an invitation to the reader to learn more, not a dismissal of what they've done wrong. It is this inclusivity—this love—that allows her to educate all of us on a truly progressive notion of feminism, one that includes instead of excludes. Gloria Steinem, in her memorial to hooks in the LA Review of Books, notes the importance of this rhetorical move: "Especially in this global era when unity is being imposed by danger, bell's unifying message of love has come just in time" (Yancy, G. et al). In a time of great division, hooks' words are needed now more than ever.

Feminism was lucky to have hooks as its advocate. My students were fortunate to have learned from her. All of us were blessed to have known her and her work, because truly, feminism really is for everybody.

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Finding Home: Cultivating a Culture of Belonging

Author: Kristy Liles Crawley

Dr. Kristy Liles Crawley is a Professor in the English Department at Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Her research on pedagogy and rhetorical studies appears in *Prose Studies*, *Peitho: Journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition*, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, *Routledge Companion to Literature and Class*, *PARS in Practice: More Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*, and *Teachers, Teaching, and Media: Original Essays about Educators and Popular Culture*.

Tags: bell hooks, belonging, in memoriam

bell hooks's enduring contributions to feminist spatial studies highlight the connections between space and identity. In "Kentucky is My Fate," the second chapter of *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, bell hooks maps the territories of her life as she recounts her experiences of living in Kentucky, California, and New York. Through telling the story of her life in various places, hooks' recognizes her deep connection to her home state of Kentucky and realizes that moving away from home has allowed her to understand her identity as a Kentuckian. For hooks, homeplace is not just a physical place; it is a place where one belongs. She cites Carol Lee Flinders definition of the culture of belonging to clarify her feelings of home: A culture of belonging is "one in which there is 'intimate connection with the land to which one belongs, empathic relationship to animals, self-restraint, custodial conservation, deliberateness, balance, expressiveness, generosity, egalitarianism, mutuality, affinity for alternative modes of knowing, playfulness, inclusiveness, nonviolent resolution, and openness to spirit'" (Flinders¹³). hooks applies Flinders' definition of a culture of belonging when she describes the freedom she experiences when she roams the hills of the "racially integrated" Kentucky of her childhood (8). Kentucky serves as the birthplace of her values, a place where she learned to be self-reliant and honest. Her identity as a Kentuckian and her feelings of belonging intensify as she moves to other states and reaffirms her decision to return.

As hooks acknowledges, when we return home, we find only remnants of home:

My decision to make my home in Kentucky did not emerge from any sentimental assumption that I would find an uncorrupted world in my native place. Rather I knew I would find there living remnants of all that was wonderful in the world of my growing up. During my time away I would return to Kentucky and feel again a sense of belonging that I never felt elsewhere, experiencing unbroken ties to the land, to homefolk, to our vernacular speech. (24)

Home provides a sense of identity and comfort. hooks's work sheds light on the connection between homeplace and identity. As a child in Kentucky, hooks establishes a sense of self through the language, values, land, and beliefs that surround her in the place she calls home. The sense of self

as well as sense of home follows her throughout her life. Moving beyond the boundaries of home allowed hooks to recognize the “serious dysfunctional aspect of the southern world” while providing her with “strategies for resistance” (hooks 19). In finding home, hooks’ lays the groundwork for her writings exploring the marginalization and resistance that will be studied by future generations.

hooks’s landmark writing maintains its relevance in today’s classrooms as home and classroom become closely intertwined. As an online educator, each week I am invited into students’ homes. hooks’ emphasis on home and identity reverberates as I capture glimpses of students’ identities as I observe scurrying children, barking dogs, colorful artworks, kaki military uniforms, and musical instruments. Their material objects rhetorically communicate their resistance to containerization as their multifaceted identities become clearer with each class period.

Students’ identities entwined in home provide fuel for meaningful writing. Like hooks’s “unbroken ties to the land, to homefolk,” and “vernacular speech,” students’ literacies communicated through multimodal projects convey their ties to their home (24). hooks’s words often echo in my mind as I reflect on a student demonstrating how to make cuy, a famous Peruvian dish, or another student showcasing an Appalachian quilt pattern as part of a technical writing presentation. Through sharing foods, preparation, quilting materials, techniques, and language, students created meaningful connections between their education, homeplace, and identity. hooks’s writings remain timeless as they continue to prompt educators to create a culture of belonging by linking the classroom with students’ homes.

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Afterword: "When We Are Loving"

Author: Clancy Ratliff

Clancy Ratliff is Professor in the English department at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her research and teaching interests are in feminist rhetorics, writing program administration, and copyright and authorship. She has published research in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Kairos*, *Pedagogy*, and other journals and edited collections. She is involved with several community advocacy organizations, including Sierra Club Delta Chapter, Move the Mindset, Citizens Climate Lobby, Acadiana Regional Coalition on Homelessness and Housing, and Louisiana Association of Sports, Outdoor Adventure, and Recreation (LASOAR).

Keywords: bell hooks, in memoriam

I first read *Teaching to Transgress* in my M.A. program at University of Tennessee in 2000. It was my first introduction to bell hooks, and I was enthralled. I wanted to be a good teacher, and I was reading what my professors suggested, but it was a lot of brain-on-a-stick theory and research about rhetoric, the rhetorical situation. I was absorbed in hooks's directness and focus on teaching. I remarked to my mentor, Mike Keene, about how much I appreciated hooks's writing style, and he said, "well, it's not academic writing." This might sound like a dismissal, but it was in fact high praise; Mike admired hooks's work and could even have been the person who recommended *Teaching to Transgress* to me.

Reading the beautiful memorials in this issue once again showed me how important hooks's clear writing style was. I am someone whose first language is Standard American (Written, Edited, Academic) English. I'm third-generation college. My mother had a graduate degree. In college and graduate school, I did the assigned reading and other reading I needed to do for my projects, which meant I stuck with it for as long as necessary. I spent an entire Sunday reading Donna Haraway's 36-page "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s." I had to engage in an active, ongoing process of thinking of real-world examples of every thought expressed in every mystifying sentence so that I had a solid understanding of the ideas. I was privileged: I had the luxury of time enabled by family financial support, and I was single with no family responsibilities. Although the reading I did in graduate school was difficult, I never found it alienating, and I never felt like I didn't belong in graduate school. Reading hooks was more enjoyable and less of a chore, and I learned as much or more from hooks than other theorists. Over twenty years have passed since then, and I have become far more aware of many people's experiences of aloneness in academia. Now, as I have read tributes to hooks, both here and on social media, I understand her writing style as more than just instructive and beautiful prose, but as inclusive and creating belonging where it is desperately needed.

Since hooks passed away, I have been revisiting her work on love. At the time it was published, I didn't understand why she was so interested in love; it seemed like a nebulous and

touchy-feely topic to write about, and I was unable to see practical implications. After her death, I have been re-experiencing her work under very different material conditions from those 22 years ago. Now I have a spouse and three children, so my encounter with hooks was not an immersive, quiet Saturday afternoon alone. Instead, I've been playing her lectures on YouTube while folding laundry, loading and unloading the dishwasher, sweeping floors, and dealing with frequent interruptions from my family members. I'm in a book club through my local public library called "Beyond Black History Month," in which we read a book every month. We're reading *All About Love: New Visions* for the month of May, so I'm getting an early start. In this book, hooks writes: "When we are loving we openly and honestly express care, affection, responsibility, respect, commitment, and trust" (14). In one of her video lectures, she remarks that love is not compatible with domination, greed, envy, or destruction. It has implications for public policy: she asked, why do we think welfare is bad? She explains "genuine love" as "a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, and respect," as well as "the will to nurture our own and another's spiritual growth" (6-8). She says, again in one of the recorded lectures, that the American left hasn't responded to the needs of the spirit. The right, however, knows and understands emotional needs, and they have used this knowledge to significant advantage. The left, hooks argued, has to talk about love. hooks knew this in the late 1990s, and maybe we are finally starting to realize that she's right.

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Articles

A Question of Affect: A Queer Reading of Institutional Nondiscrimination Statements at Texas Public Universities

Author: Sarah Dwyer

Sarah Dwyer (they/them) is a Lecturer in the English program at Texas A&M University – San Antonio and a PhD candidate in the Technical Communication and Rhetoric program at Texas Tech University. Their teaching, scholarship, and service is focused on engaging the structures that maintain and bolster the exclusionary practices of heteronormativity, racism, and classism within the academy, particularly for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff. Their work on using game-based pedagogy to disrupt traditional classroom structures and encourage engagement and critical thinking has appeared in *Double Helix*.

Abstract: Grounded in my embodied experiences as an openly-queer faculty member at a Texas public university and drawing from Sara Ahmed’s work on affect and institutional diversity, I argue that nondiscrimination statements at Texas public universities are affective objects which serve as straightening devices on the queer bodies that they affect, even as they purport to and often do protect them. The goals of my critique are twofold: 1) to support the work of those tasked with writing revisions to these policies by offering a few practical suggestions to allow for greater enforcement of the nondiscrimination practices that these policies espouse; and, 2) to encourage further reflection on the creation, implementation, and maintenance of these policies in light of their status as living documents which have real, material consequences for the LGBTQ+ individuals who live, learn, and work in our institutions.

Tags: [affect](#), [embodiment](#), [institutional critique](#), [LGBTQ+](#), [queer studies](#)

Introduction: Queer Moments in Texas

Being queer in Texas is a curious experience. LGBTQ+ people make up approximately 4.1% of the population—around 770,000 adults and 158,500 youth in 2017 (Mallory et al.). However, until the June 15th, 2020 ruling by the Supreme Court that Title VII protections included LGBTQ+ workers, no state or federal nondiscrimination protections existed for LGBTQ+ individuals in Texas¹. While some cities had LGBTQ+ nondiscrimination policies in place prior to 2020, these were and remain

¹ As of this writing (February 14, 2022) there are still no statewide nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ individuals in Texas.

quite limited. At legislative and institutional levels, Texas has historically been unsympathetic to LGBTQ+ interests, with the state government being particularly hostile to the transgender community in recent years. Additionally, in 2017, Texas ranked thirty-ninth in the nation on public support for LGBTQ+ acceptance and rights, while in 2021, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) State Equality Index, an “annual comprehensive state-by-state report that provides a review of statewide laws and policies that affect LGBTQ+ people and their families,” scored Texas in the lowest-rated category, “High Priority to Achieve Basic Equality” (Mallory et al.; HRC Foundation).

In Texas, as in the twenty-six other states currently lacking statewide nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ individuals, what few nondiscrimination protections exist have been tied to where we live and, until recently, where we work. The physical locations of our bodies have been intrinsic to how we experience and navigate the world. Because of this, I had some reservations in 2016, when I received an offer from my current employer, part of a large university system that was simultaneously undergoing a major downward expansion and pursuing Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) designation. While I was considering the offer, I perused the institution’s website, only to discover that I couldn’t find the campus nondiscrimination policy anywhere: an immediate red flag for someone who openly identifies as queer. When I asked about it, I was sent a link to the system policy, which suggested to me that the campus nondiscrimination policy was something of an afterthought, despite the large number of minority students that the institution served. In 2016, eighty percent of the inaugural freshman class and seventy percent of the overall student body identified as Hispanic, and seventy-three percent of enrolled students were the first in their families to attend college (University Communications; Office of Institutional Research). As Porter et al. have noted, what is present on (or absent from) an institution’s webpage, reflects that institution’s identity and priorities (620). These websites are part of institutional discourses, which establish institutional identities and practices, and are a means by which institutions legitimize and justify their existence (Mayr 2). If diversity were as important to the institution’s identity as indicated by the designation it sought and by the population it served, why wasn’t the nondiscrimination statement already present on the university’s website, especially as it was undergoing a massive recruitment process for new faculty and its first class of freshmen?²

There is an additional peculiarity to being a queer faculty member at a public institution in Texas, especially one that does queer work: we are often outed by state policy. House Bill No. 2504, originally passed in 2009, requires that public institutions of higher education post the curriculum vitae of each instructor on their websites. CVs must be “accessible from the institution’s...home page by use of not more than three links; searchable by keywords and phrases; and accessible to the public without requiring registration or use of a user name, a password, or another user identification” and list the instructor’s “postsecondary education, teaching experience, and significant professional publications” (“H.B. No. 2504”). For faculty whose work concerns LGBTQ+

² Shortly after my exchange with the department chair, a link to the institutional nondiscrimination statement appeared on the university’s homepage. It seems as though by asking about the lack of nondiscrimination statement I may have successfully (albeit unintentionally) engaged with Porter et al.’s activist methodology of institutional critique (610-642), a practice which I continue in limited form in this article.

themes and issues, this can act as a form of public outing—one that I was not warned about when I was hired.

These experiences during my hiring, along with being the first openly transgender faculty member on my campus and then co-chair of Rainbow P.A.W.S. (Pride at Work and School), the faculty and staff LGBTQ+ group, led me to further question how institutional policies affect LGBTQ+ individuals at Texas public institutions. These policies are the means through which institutional perceptions of diversity are constructed (Iverson 152), yet perceptions and actual experiences of diversity on campus are very different things. In 2018 alone, Texas public institutions educated approximately 658,219 students, an unknown number of whom may identify as LGBTQ+, as there are approximately 928,500 LGBTQ+ individuals in Texas by current estimates (“Texas Higher Ed Enrollments”; Mallory et al.). For LGBTQ+ students, the campus environment, including institutional policies and programming, “has a direct effect on students’ outcomes and can mediate the effects of [negative] inputs [from the wider culture]” (Woodford, Joslin, and Renn 69). My experience working with LGBTQ+ students bears this out: I’ve often been told that they feel more comfortable being out on campus than anywhere else in their lives, even as they sometimes struggle with system policies and technologies regarding LGBTQ+ identities, such as preferred names and pronouns. Because our students feel safe on campus, it is our obligation to do all that we can to be worthy of that trust: to support them both in and out of the classroom and to revise our institutional policies and practices in ways that reflect our embodied experiences as queer individuals studying, working, and living in the strange and often hostile environment that is the state of Texas.

The Project

To answer my questions regarding institutional policies and LGBTQ+ populations, in late 2017 to early 2018, I assembled a corpus of thirty-five nondiscrimination statements from the websites of Texas public universities to analyze them from an LGBTQ+ perspective. I tracked the location of the nondiscrimination statements on each institution’s website, the number of clicks it took from the homepage to access them, whether or not the statements contained any references to gender identity or expression, and related information such as the presence of an LGBTQ+ student group and diversity offices on campus.

The nondiscrimination statements were often difficult to find—it took me three or more clicks from the homepage to locate the nondiscrimination statements for 13 out of the 35 institutions, and in some cases, I had to run a search in order to find them. They were often inconsistently presented, with different versions of the statements appearing on different pages of the website. This left me wondering what the correct version of the policy was, especially because the differences between these statements generally concerned gender identity and expression—that is, some versions of the statements included them as protected categories, while others did not. The statements themselves proved problematic in a number of ways, which I elaborate upon in my analysis below, and the presence of LGBTQ+ student groups and diversity offices on campus also proved somewhat difficult to confirm. While most institutions had a clearly-named student group, in three instances I couldn’t actually find one, and I could only confirm the presence of twenty diversity offices within the thirty-five institutions I analyzed.

Based on these findings, grounded in Sara Ahmed's work on affect and institutional diversity, and drawing on my experiences as an openly-queer person working at a public university in Texas, I argue that nondiscrimination statements at Texas public universities are affective objects which serve as straightening devices on the queer bodies that they affect, even as they purport to and often do protect them.

I begin my discussion with a brief review of affect, how I conceptualize its relationship to queer bodies and institutions, and how institutional nondiscrimination statements act as straightening devices for queer bodies. Next, I provide a brief overview of Texas public universities before analyzing three different models of nondiscrimination statements that I discovered in my research, which I have dubbed the Equal Opportunity Model, the Discrimination Prohibition Model, and the Additional Model. I also analyze the presence and absence of gender identity and gender expression statements as part of these nondiscrimination statements and conclude with a few suggestions for how these statements might be improved.

These statements can only be *improved*; they cannot truly be *fixed*, especially not by those tasked with writing revisions to these policies. The goals of my critique are twofold: to support the work of those tasked with writing revisions to these policies by offering a few practical suggestions to allow for greater enforcement of the nondiscrimination practices that these policies espouse and to encourage further reflection on the creation, implementation, and maintenance of these policies in light of their status as living documents which have real, material consequences for the LGBTQ+ individuals who live, learn, and work in our institutions.

Affect, Ahmed, and Objects

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth describe affect as "aris[ing] in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon...found in those intensities that pass body to body...in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves" (1, emphasis in orig.). Affect occurs between bodies, between moments, between words. Sara Ahmed describes "Affect [as] contact: we are affected by "what" we come in contact with" (*Queer Phenomenology* 2). Affect is fluid, changeable, sticky, embodied: there is something inherently *queer* in its unsettledness, in its action, its permanently fleeting state. Affect exists "in the regularly hidden-in-plain sight politically engaged work...that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of everyday and every-night life, and of 'experience'" (Gregg and Seigworth 7). That is the work of this project—to consider the implications and absences of documents that are generally considered mundane matters of legal and political necessity and the bodies that they affect.

The nondiscrimination documents and diversity discourses of our institutions circle about, between, and stick to bodies like mine, which need nondiscrimination protections due to the historical failure of state and national governments to create or enforce such protections. For example, the 2020 Supreme Court Title VII ruling *only* applies to employment discrimination, after all. In Texas, we dwell in a "legal landscape and social climate... [that] likely contributes to an environment in which LGBT people experience stigma and discrimination [which] can take many

forms, including discrimination and harassment in employment and other settings; bullying and family rejection of LGBT youth; overrepresentation in the criminal justice system; and violence" (Mallory et al.). All of this *affects* us in physical, material ways. The first real moment of affect between myself and my institution occurred because of the simultaneous presence/absence of the nondiscrimination statement on the university homepage, which was materially tied to both my queer body and the institution's body, as the administration was attempting to recruit me to it. This affective relationship continues to this day, as I am visibly out on campus in a number of ways, including through my publicly-posted CV, my work with Rainbow P.A.W.S., the pronouns and title that I use, and my office (a visible representation of my place at the university, a place where my queer body can regularly be found), awash in varying shades of rainbow. This visibility is both involuntary and voluntary, and carefully negotiated: my way of navigating through the "working closet,"³ heavily impacted by the federal, state, and institutional policies and discourses that *affect* how I experience the world.

These institutional policies, discourses, and nondiscrimination statements are *affective objects*. "Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between *ideas, values, and objects*" (Ahmed, "Happy Objects" 29, emphasis mine). Institutional nondiscrimination statements address the *idea* of legal protections for marginalized people based on the institution's espoused *values*, and the *object(s)* of these ideas and values are the bodies of those affected by them. As affective objects, nondiscrimination statements are "imbued with positive affect" (Ahmed, "Happy Objects" 34). They are "sticky because they are already attributed as being good or bad, as being the cause of happiness or unhappiness" (Ahmed, "Happy Objects" 35). While institutional artefacts such as nondiscrimination statements' diversity policies are ostensibly "good" objects, they do not always serve the needs of the populations they purport to protect, as scholars in disability studies such as Stephanie Kerschbaum and Robert McRuer have discussed.⁴

Through embodied experiences with these policies, we may "become alienated—out of line with an affective community—when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good," a process which Ahmed describes in 2012's *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (37). The diversity workers she interviewed reported feelings of alienation and isolation in doing their work: continually running into the "brick wall" of the belief that doing diversity work meant *professing* diversity, rather than taking material action to create more equitable institutions (174-175). Nondiscrimination statements and diversity policies are objects through which institutions can *profess* diversity, and these objects are *good* because they are *doing diversity work*. Through my critique of these "good" affective objects, I become one of Ahmed's affect aliens, because critiquing these documents means critiquing the institution itself and its good intentions.⁵

³ Working closet: "complicated, layered, and unorthodox space comprising a set of networked relations and interactions (including rhetorical practices and strategies) between the LGBT individual and all life contacts," focused particularly on "workplace and professional contacts and interactions" (Cox 3-4).

⁴ See *Toward a New Rhetoric of Difference*, the edited collection *Negotiating Disability: Disclosure and Higher Education*, and *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*.

⁵ For another experience of affect alienation, this time with Safe Space stickers, see Fox, 496-511.

I am affected by these objects, surrounded by them, and in a position to analyze and evaluate them because of my queer body—they are *stuck* to me. Yet it is not on me to solve the problems with these objects—I am solely here to “queer the discourse of diversity,” to borrow Liz Morrish and Kathleen O’Mara’s phrasing. It is, after all, “not up to queers to disorientate straights... disorientation [can be] an effect of how we do politics, which in turn is shaped by the prior matter of simply how we live” – through embodiment and experience (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* 177). My job is not to fix the problem; instead, it is to explain how and why it *is* a problem. As the former co-chair and current secretary of Rainbow P.A.W.S., formerly the LGBTQ+ Task Force at our campus, my duty entails problematizing things for my institution to encourage changes that will positively *affect* myself and the other queer folk on campus.⁶

Institutional Nondiscrimination Statements as *Straightening* Devices

Diversity, as defined by institutional discourses, is something that is brought to the institution by individual students, staff, and faculty, which contributes to the greater good (Urcioli 165). Institutional policies frame diversity as “a goal to work toward or a commodity to accumulate” (Kerschbaum 25-26) such that diversity becomes “a marketable signifier—its invocation masquerades as the cultural capital of the university, to be bestowed on all who tread within its walls and resonating with the promise of corporate success” (Morrish and O’Mara 978). Minority bodies, including queer ones, are the means by which the institution “becomes diverse.” Institutional diversity documents such as nondiscrimination statements, diversity policies, and Safe Space stickers frequently become the instruments of this commodification, framing diverse bodies as objects for institutions to acquire and display.⁷

These documents have historically acted as straightening devices and they continue to do so. They serve to enfold an ill-fitting body (one that is non-normative according to the cultures of the institution, one that is *queer*) into the institution. As Roderick Ferguson explains, “From the social movements of the fifties and sixties until the present day, networks of power have attempted to work through and with minority difference and culture, trying to redirect originally insurgent formations and deliver them to the normative ideals and protocols of state, capital, and academy” (8). Title VII and Title IX, the legal documents that created the precedent for present-day nondiscrimination statements, are the direct result of the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s and underwent the same process of normativity. Just as the revolutionary student movements of the 1960s and 1970s led to the creation of ethnic, women’s, and queer studies departments within the academy, folding them into the institution’s power and body, institutional nondiscrimination statements both provide support for and act to *straighten* minority students, staff, and faculty, aligning them with the whole. Or, as Ahmed puts it, “One fits, and in the act of fitting, the surfaces of bodies disappear from view” (*Queer Phenomenology* 134). Individuals like myself—nonbinary, asexual,

⁶ Folx: an alternative spelling of “folks” used most commonly on social media platforms by members of the LGBTQ+ community, but referring to all people, particularly members of marginalized communities.

⁷ See Fox, 496-511.

and aromantic—frequently disappear even from *queer* conversations; by becoming part of the institution's body, we may as well not exist at all.

This history of straightening is present in the structure of the nondiscrimination statements I analyzed, which frequently echo the wording of both Title VII and Title IX. Title VII reads "It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual...because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" ("Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964"). Title IX, passed in 1972, reads "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" ("Title IX and Sex Discrimination"). Although these laws were originally intended to address only issues of sex and racial discrimination in education and employment, they have since been interpreted more broadly, most recently in favor of protections for LGBTQ+ workers, as of June 15th, 2020.

Derived from these laws, universities have developed individual nondiscrimination statements that both comply with the law and establish institutional attitudes towards diversity. However, as Ahmed explains, "Universities often describe their missions by drawing on the languages of diversity as well as equality. But using the language does not translate into creating diverse or equal environments. This 'not translation' is something we experience: it is a gap between a symbolic commitment and a lived reality," a gap which those of us who are LGBTQ+ on campus frequently experience (*Living a Feminist Life* 90). Once, I was dropping off flyers advertising one of our Safe Space sessions to the secretary of a department not my own and explained that this was training to help support our LGBTQ+ students. The person to whom I was speaking replied, "what's that?" This moment of *affect* impacted my body on a physical level—for a moment, I literally couldn't process what I was hearing; I was so dumbfounded by the idea that someone didn't know what the LGBTQ+ acronym meant. This was not-translation in a literal sense: at that moment of exchange, we were speaking two different languages.

Although generally in a less literal form than this example, nondiscrimination statements can become the means through which this "not translation" occurs, particularly because they serve as a one-size-fits-all solution to the inherently personal problem of discrimination on campus. The issues I face on campus as a white, DFAB⁸, mostly-abled, agender individual, are quite different than those of my cisgender, heterosexual, Black best friend, a Jamaican immigrant who is also a lecturer in our program, yet the same nondiscrimination statement is ostensibly meant to protect us both, even though our needs and experiences are very different.

Symbolic commitments to diversity are not enough for people who are *affected* by these statements, whose responses to these documents and discourses are inherently personal and embodied. Creating these documents is not enough: we must critique, revise, and continually adapt them to better serve the needs of both our students and ourselves.

⁸ DFAB: Designated Female At Birth. A term commonly used in the trans* community to refer to the gender identification granted to infants on legal documents such as birth certificates. The corresponding term is DMAB, Designated Male At Birth.

An Overview of Texas Public Institutions

Texas has six public university systems: the A&M system (eleven institutions), the University of Texas system (eight institutions, six medical centers), the University of Houston system (four institutions), the University of North Texas system (two institutions, two medical centers), the loosely-affiliated Texas State system (four institutions), and the Texas Tech system (two institutions, two medical centers). There are four independent public universities: Midwestern State University, Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas Southern University, and Texas Woman's University.

As I reviewed each institution's website, I encountered three general models of nondiscrimination statements: one focused on equal opportunity, one focused on prohibiting discrimination, and a third model, which was a variation on the other two. In all cases, Title VII and Title IX defined the list of protected classes included in these statements, and institutions frequently included additional protected classes that were at the time not yet defined by law: sexual orientation, gender identity, and occasionally gender expression. While some of these nondiscrimination statements have been updated since the time of data collection, many remain the same.

Diversity Statement Model 1: Equal Opportunity Model

Statements in this model were worded as follows: "[Institution] provides/will provide equal opportunity without regard to/regardless of [list of protected classes]."

Table 1: Institutions using the Equal Opportunity Model

| System | Total Institutions | Institutions lacking gender expression statement |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| TEXAS A&M | 11 | 8 |
| University of Houston | 4 | 4 |
| University of Texas | 8 institutions, 6 medical centers | 2 |
| Midwestern State University (Independent) | 1 | 1 |

This form of nondiscrimination statement is framed in a positive manner, based on providing equal opportunity to all, rather than on forbidding unlawful employment practices. This model is perhaps the simplest and most positively phrased, and thus the most politically neutral; rather than defining any sort of prohibition, it only promises that “equal opportunity” will be afforded to traditionally marginalized groups. This phrasing obfuscates the actual legal obligations of the institution in terms of protecting marginalized bodies and does not offer explicit protections for those that it affects. It also fails to define any prohibitions against discrimination, though these may be described elsewhere in other policy documents.

The phrasing of this form of nondiscrimination statement raises a number of questions. How is “equal opportunity” defined at the institution? How does one provide evidence that they have not been offered an equal opportunity as someone else? In such cases one must out oneself to administrators, much as disabled individuals must when requesting legally-required accommodations, an institutional practice which disability studies scholars have described as “a bureaucratic act further perpetuating different manifestations of institutionalized discrimination” (Carrol-Miranda 281).

Further questions arise when we consider the issue of embodiment: what does equal opportunity *without regard to or regardless of* identity mean? I am a queer faculty member, doing queer work at my institution. My ability to do this work is intrinsically tied to my identity; it *affects* my experiences, my teaching and service and scholarship—so what does it mean if my experiences and knowledge go *without regard*? For scholars focused on identity—scholars of color, queer scholars, feminist scholars, disabled scholars—our work is intrinsically tied to our embodied experiences of the world. If a position arises that is connected to issues of identity, should it truly be an opportunity that is offered equally to *all*? Several years ago, our then-named LGBTQ+ Task Force collectively decided that at least one queer individual needed to serve as co-chair of the committee at all times. Was this an equal opportunity? *Should* it have been one?

These questions are theoretical until the moment that these policies *affect* someone, affect their embodied experience of the world, and connect (or disconnect) them from the body of their institution.

Institutional nondiscrimination statements affect bodies: they serve as a form of straightening device by enfolding disparate groups together and putting them together under the shared umbrella of diversity, eliding the differences between them. The marginalized members of

diverse groups, with different needs and experiences, are offered “equal opportunity,” a vague term which is assumed to address all these disparate needs. And what of intersectionality? Many institutions will happily tout their diversity credentials while their campuses remain inaccessible for anyone with a physical disability: I once spent a semester on crutches, unable to access my department, located on the third floor of a building with no elevator. Although my classes were relocated to buildings with elevator access, I *was* once asked if I could hobble up the stairs to the third floor to make it to a class that had been rescheduled.⁹ Another time, a fire drill occurred while I was on the fourth floor of the library. The elevators had been shut down, and while I stood there, presumably burning to death, I had some pointed questions for the building staff about evacuation plans for the disabled. Their answer was a politely baffled silence.

These issues had nothing to do with my queerness, but everything to do with my body: non-normative, *affected* once again by institutional policies that didn’t account for me. What is “equal” about that?

In the wording of this model, even the potential for wrongdoing is obfuscated: the institution offers “equal opportunity,” which implies that no discrimination could ever occur, since opportunity is offered equally to all. While this suggests that the institution considers ensuring equal opportunity to be a moral obligation, the fact of the matter is more prosaic: every institution must have policies in place to deal with such situations because they can, do, and will occur, regardless of the good intentions of the creators of such policies.

Diversity Statement Model 2: Discrimination Prohibition Model

Statements in this model were worded as follows: “[Institution] does not discriminate/discrimination is prohibited on the basis of [list of protected classes].”

Table 2 : Institutions using the Discrimination Prohibition Model

| System | Total Institutions | Institutions lacking gender expression statement |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| TEXAS A&M | 11 | 3 |
| University of Texas | 8 institutions, 6 medical centers | 1 |
| University of North Texas | 2 institutions, 2 medical centers | 4 |
| Texas State | 4 | 4 |
| Texas Woman’s University (Independent) | 1 | 1 |

This form of nondiscrimination statement, rather than offering vague promises of equal opportunity, is more explicit about the institution’s legal obligation to prohibit discriminatory practices and bears a stronger resemblance to the phrasing of both Title IX and Title VII than the previous model does. Because of their emphasis on prohibiting discriminatory acts, these nondiscrimination statements seem to have a bit more weight to them. It may be easier to define

⁹ I declined to do so.

what counts as a discriminatory act than what counts as “equal opportunity,” given that most institutions have established working definitions for what constitutes discriminatory behavior, usually found on the policy statements page, Title IX, EEO, or HR pages. Likewise, potential consequences of discriminatory behavior are generally explicitly stated within these policies. Because these policies define clearer boundaries, institutional agents may more easily enforce them.

This model of nondiscrimination statement implies a different sort of protection than the previous one, yet still acts as a form of straightening device for the bodies that it affects. Like the previous model, it provides protection for the institution, keeping it in line with federal requirements, and this increased legal emphasis serves to distance it from the very people that it affects. Likewise, the list of marginalized categories still groups disparate individuals together under the same ill-fitting umbrella. One major difference between this and the previous model, however, is that the increased legalese of the phrasing implies that protections for marginalized populations are a *legal* obligation for institutions, rather than a *moral* one.

However, these legal protections have their limits. While an institution may prohibit discrimination, the people who are part of the institution are often the ones who commit discriminatory acts, whose words and actions have physical and material consequences for the LGBTQ+ population on campus. Legal protections can do very little when the perpetrators of such actions cannot be found. When I was initially collecting the data for this project, the Coalition, the student LGBTQ+ group, hosted Drag Show Loteria as part of Coming Out Week and posted flyers around campus advertising the event. Several of these posters were defaced by persons unknown—an act of clear anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination, but one which went unpunished because there was no mechanism for tracking down the vandals and applying the appropriate sanctions, as A&M system policy states that discrimination is “a materially adverse action or actions that intentionally or unintentionally excludes one from full participation in, denies the benefits of, or affects the terms and conditions of employment or access to educational or institutional programs” (“System Regulation 08.01.01, Civil Rights Compliance”). An act of vandalism such as this, while clearly a discriminatory action—one that had a significant negative *affect* on the Coalition members who had to deal with the situation, one which was intended to make them feel unwelcome and potentially concerned about their physical safety while on campus—may not be considered as such per system policy.

This is precisely the problem with documents that focus on the legal issue of discrimination: they may not be enforceable given institutional policies and structures, and they provide little to no guidance on how to protect our bodies and work from discrimination coming from nebulous agents within our institutions, to say nothing of those from the outside. In 2020, two virtual public events hosted by our campus were Zoom-bombed by racist groups which played pornographic videos and filled the chat with discriminatory slurs—acts which caused significant distress for participants, acts which, although virtual, *affected* their feelings of safety and security at our institution. In the wake of these incidents, security guidelines for public online events were clarified and strengthened, yet once again, the perpetrators were never caught.

Diversity Statement Model 3: Additional Model

Statements in this model were worded as follows: “[Institution] provides equal opportunity/does not discriminate based on [list of federally protected classes]. Additionally, [Institution] does not discriminate on the basis of [list of additional classes].”

Table 3: Institutions using the Additional Model

| System | Total Institutions | Institutions lacking gender expression statement |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| University of Texas | 8 institutions, 6 medical centers | 5 |
| Texas Tech | 2 institutions, 2 medical centers | 2 |
| Texas Southern University (Independent) | 1 | 1 |
| Stephen F. Austin State University (Independent) | 1 | 1 |

The third model of nondiscrimination statement lists additional protected categories in a separate sentence, rather than adding them to the end of the existing list. The Texas Tech system had a slightly altered take on this phrasing:

Texas Tech University does not tolerate discrimination or harassment of students based on or related to sex, race, national origin, religion, age, disability, protected veteran status, or other protected categories, classes, or characteristics. While sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected categories under state or federal law, it is Texas Tech University policy not to discriminate on this basis. (“Title IX”)

Since the Supreme Court ruling of June 15, 2020, sexual orientation and gender identity are now considered federally protected categories, at least in regards to Title VII.

This model echoes the other two models, including both the vagaries of “equal opportunity” and the legalese of “does not discriminate.” This phrasing highlights both the changing nature of the politics of nondiscrimination and the institution’s professed dedication to diversity and emphasizes that LGBTQ+ individuals *were* protected by their institutions, even when unprotected by state or federal law. Though this phrasing acknowledges the unique status of LGBTQ+ individuals and serves as an institutional critique of broader American culture and politics, it may also be an indication of the tokenism that occurs when diverse bodies are used as props to illustrate how inclusive an institution is, or at least how the marketing department would like it to appear.

This form of diversity statement showcases the bodies that these policies affect most explicitly and *additionally*. While these statements imply a critique of the larger social problems facing LGBTQ+ individuals, this phrasing also suggests that these extra bodies—these *queer* bodies—are ancillary, an afterthought. The double-edged sword faces us once again: as LGBTQ+ individuals, we are in a unique situation regarding current nondiscrimination laws, which until recently have been dependent on whatever local and institutional policies applied to our physical locations. Local nondiscrimination laws frequently only apply to individuals employed by or

contracted with the city, and as employees of Texas public universities, we work for the state. Thus, no such laws applied to us until the Supreme Court's Title VII ruling, and even then, one of the first studies of LGBT employees since this ruling found that "nine percent of LGBT employees...were fired or not hired because of their sexual orientation or gender identity in the past year" (Sears et al.). The policies that our institutions have created have often been our only form of nondiscrimination protection and are only effective when enforced. They both acknowledge and obfuscate the complexities of our positions: a queerness inherent to our very existence.

The phrasing of this form of nondiscrimination statement both explicitly acknowledges the unique circumstances of the queer body within the institution and larger society and most explicitly renders our bodies as a form of diversity currency, which the institution can call upon to illustrate its (supposed) commitment to diversity. Our presence on campus is often used as a recruitment and marketing tool: at my institution, small banners, which feature images that illustrate the diversity of our campus, adorn the lampposts. One such image features the Coalition, our LGBTQ+ student group. While this image helps to advertise an important student organization, I also consider it somewhat exploitative of an already-marginalized population, especially because the composition of some of the images used for this purpose have a whiff of what disability rights activists call "inspiration porn."¹⁰ Likewise, while we celebrated the addition of a rainbow crosswalk to our campus in the spring, we were less appreciative of its location—a walkway between two different parking lots, far from any campus buildings.

Unlike the other forms of nondiscrimination statements, this version does not "straighten" queer bodies by lumping them in with other marginalized bodies. However, the overall purposes of the nondiscrimination statement remain the same: to provide a normative structure through which to manage an abnormal body and to formalize and ritualize extremely personal experiences of discrimination through a bureaucratic process that serves the needs of the institution. This very action is a form of homonormativity,¹¹ of straightening, and can also be found within many additional diversity policies. How many institutions will offer health insurance and other benefits to the same-sex partner of a queer employee, but only if they are legally married? Such policies assume that the goal of any partnership is marriage and children, despite the fact that this is not the case even for many heterosexual couples. What of those who are queer enough that they do not fit even within those boundaries? My household is entirely queer—my queerplatonic partner and I are both agender, aromantic, and asexual—but because we refuse to engage with an amatonormative, allonormative institution such as marriage,¹² my benefits cannot extend to them, despite our nearly seven-year partnership.

¹⁰ Inspiration porn: a term coined by Stella Young to describe the portrayal of disabled people as inspirational solely on the basis of their disability.

¹¹ Homonormativity: a term popularized by Lisa Duggan to describe a politics that upholds assimilationist and heteronormative ideals within the LGBTQ+ community, including a focus on marriage, monogamy, and childrearing.

¹² Amatonormativity: a term coined by Elizabeth Brake to describe social ideals and pressures about romance, including a focus on monogamy and marriage. Allonormativity: a term coined within the asexual community to describe social ideals and pressures about sexual attraction, mainly that all people experience it.

Policies such as these may consider me “additional,” but when even other members of the queer community sometimes fail to recognize my identity and partnership, am I even that?

Diversity Statements and the Issue of Gender Identity

Another issue with nondiscrimination statements concerns statements of gender identity and expression. Of the thirty-five nondiscrimination statements I analyzed, thirty-two included a gender identity statement¹³. The three that did not (Tarleton State University, part of the A&M System; UT Arlington; and UT Tyler) failed to do so even when the system policy *did* include one.

All thirty-five nondiscrimination statements utilized the phrases “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” to demarcate these particular protected categories. However, as Morrish and O’Mara point out, such phrasing is deliberately vague: “the specifics of sexual identities are erased in favor of sexual orientation...gender has an identity, a binary identity, although the transgender identity rarely appears” (984). This phrasing acts as a straightening device: it names the protected categories without specifying what they might look like or drawing undue attention to non-normative forms of being. This creates a relatively streamlined nondiscrimination statement that allows for broad categories that may be applied to a number of different contexts but also folds non-normative sexualities and gender identities into categories that also include heterosexual and cisgender identities.

The presence and absence of such gender identity statements are a reflection of the nebulous ways in which transgender individuals are treated in our society. As a matter of legal precedent, the Supreme Court only recently declared that gender identity is a protected category under Title VII, as it falls within the larger protections guaranteed to individuals regarding discrimination on the basis of physical sex. The bodies that are or fail to be acknowledged by gender identity statements are those that deviate from the gender binary: those who are transgender or those who are intersex in any of the many ways there are to be.¹⁴ For individuals like myself, who are not “traditionally” trans,*¹⁵ “gender identity” means many different things: I don’t have a gender identity, so am I actually protected at all by these policies? What does that protection look like when instances of misgendering are so prevalent on our campus?

Even if gender identity *is* considered a protected category in an institution’s nondiscrimination statement, that does not mean the individuals who make up the institution are well-educated enough on the matter to refrain from discriminatory actions. The nondiscrimination statement for our campus, which does currently include gender identity and expression, allows me

¹³ For a relevant overview of the process through which a gender identity and expression statement was added to the University of Houston-Clear Lake’s nondiscrimination statement, see Case et al.

¹⁴ Intersex: An umbrella term used for the “estimated one in 2,000 babies...born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that doesn’t seem to fit typical binary definitions of male or female. These traits...include androgen insensitivity syndrome, some forms of congenital adrenal hyperplasia, Klinefelter’s syndrome, Turner’s syndrome, hypospadias, Swyers’ syndrome, and many others” (InterACT).

¹⁵ Trans*: a term used as a form of shorthand within the LGBTQ+ community to refer to a diverse array of non-cisgender identities, including non-binary and culturally-specific identities.

to openly identify as agender on campus and to freely use they/them pronouns and the title Mx. without fear of reprisal, but I'm still misgendered on a daily basis, even by people who should know better. Two years ago, I asked our then-department chair to contact HR on my behalf to correct the title on all of my paperwork from "Ms." to "Mx." All of the official paperwork I have received from HR since then has used the appropriate title, but another colleague had to contact the manager of our departmental webpage three separate times to get the correct title listed there. While this is an example of gender identity protections actively being enforced, communication breakdowns still occur: in 2020 I received a formal letter from our dean which addressed me as "Ms.," and two months ago I received one from the Provost's office which did the same: more moments of unsettling *affect*, when my physical body was once again mislabeled by my institution. While the Provost's office now has the correct title on file, the burden was on myself and my department chair to request the correction—and this was simply an instance of misgendering in a formal letter, a form of private communication, albeit one which I had to disclose to my superiors to ensure it would not happen again. It could have been much worse: other transgender individuals have been addressed with the wrong title in campus media, and experienced significant dysphoria—an *affective* moment of mental and physical stress—as a result of being misgendered in front of what was effectively the whole campus.

Such failures of recognition are often the result of ignorance and the inherent complexities and problematics of trying to create an enforceable policy which protects everyone, or at least attempts to. However, these honest mistakes and oversights still have a real, immediate, and physical *affect* on those who experience them. While I was the first openly transgender faculty member on campus, I am not the only openly transgender employee, and my colleagues' experiences of misgendering and transphobia on campus have been very different from mine. This is likely because of our different positions: students are generally more willing to be confrontational with staff than faculty, and no nondiscrimination policy, no matter how thorough, can account for the simple differences in power dynamics that we experience because of what we do for our institution.

While statements regarding gender identity are necessary to protect LGBTQ+ individuals on campus, significant problems occur if these statements are lacking, misplaced, or otherwise difficult to find. If system policies say protections exist for gender identity, why do some individual institutional statements fail to include them? In the case of a discrimination complaint, which policy applies? Why are the statements different in the first place?

Some of this is simple human error—keeping institutional webpages and records up-to-date is incredibly difficult. Yet the lack of gender identity in some of these statements alarms me, even though, in every case, it is a protected category within the system policy. It is the "additionally" concern once again: the aspect of my queerness that is most likely to receive pushback is an afterthought, a secondary concern, when even now, in 2022, it is what puts me in the most danger. The Williams Institute's 2021 study of LGBT employees found that "nearly half (48.8%) of transgender employees reported experiencing discrimination based on their LGBT status compared to 27.8% of cisgender LGB employees. More specifically, over twice as many transgender employees reported not being hired (43.9%) because of their LGBT status compared to LGB employees (21.5%)" (Sears et al.).

Diversity Statements and the Issue of Gender Expression

The most concerning issue I encountered in my analysis regarded statements of gender expression. Of the thirty-five nondiscrimination statements I collected, twenty-one did not include any explicit statements about gender expression, though many of the current versions of these statements do.

Table 4: Institutions lacking a Gender Expression Statement

| System | Total Institutions | Institutions lacking gender expression statement |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Texas A&M | 11 | 11 |
| University of Texas | 8 institutions, 6 medical centers | 4 |
| Texas State | 4 | 3 |
| Texas Tech | 2 institutions, 2 medical centers | 4 |
| Midwestern State University (Independent) | 1 | 1 |

Outside the LGBTQ+ community, there is little recognition that gender identity and gender expression are not the same thing. But for any transgender individual, the difference is very real: a closeted transgender individual is still trans* and should have that identity respected regardless of how they present themselves to the world. A transgender individual who does not “pass” as cisgender should still have their identity respected. And what of the nonbinary folx like myself? Is our gender expression still respected, especially for those who may present as male one day, female the next, and androgynous the third? At institutions where gender expression is not a protected category, even if gender identity is, we must all proceed with caution.

Even when gender identity and expression *are* mentioned in policy statements, they sometimes conflict with each other. At the time of data collection, A&M San Antonio’s nondiscrimination policy read as follows: “Texas A&M University-San Antonio does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity in its programs and activities” (“Non-Discrimination/Sexual Harassment”). In contrast, the wording on the nondiscrimination posters on campus (see fig. 1) read as follows: “Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, requires education institutions that receive federal funds or financial assistance to prohibit sex discrimination in ALL programs and activities. Discrimination based on gender identity and expression is impermissible.”

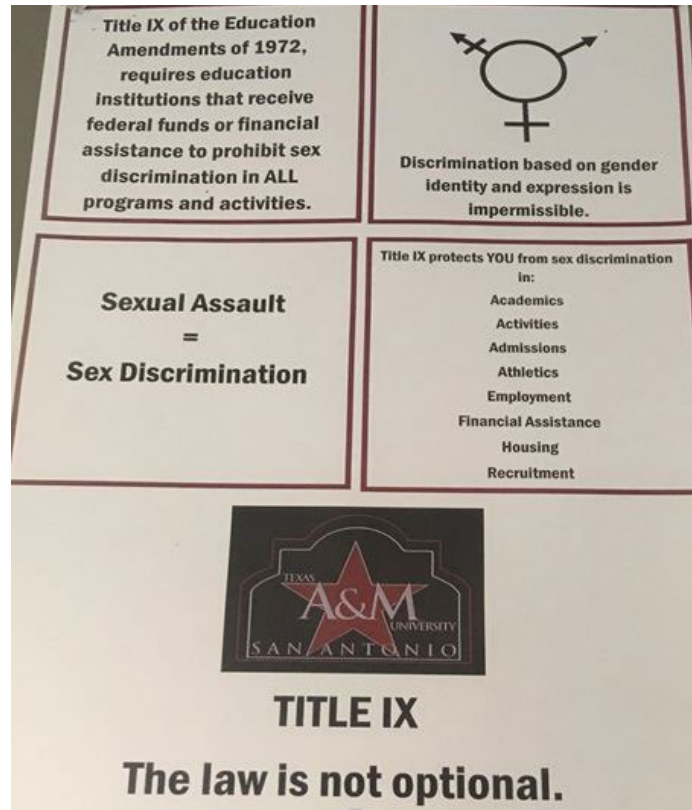


Figure 2: A nondiscrimination poster prominently displayed on campus. The poster states: "Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, requires education institutions that receive federal fumination in AL

These posters implied that gender identity and gender expression were both protected categories at A&M-SA under the precepts of Title IX at the time, per the statement "Discrimination based on gender identity and expression is impermissible." Impermissible or not, the A&M system did *not* recognize gender expression as a protected category at the time. The phrasing of the nondiscrimination statement has since been updated, and now reads: "Texas A&M University-San Antonio does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression in its programs and activities" ("Non-Discrimination/Sexual Harassment"). These are recent changes, reflecting a more coherent approach to diversity on campus, albeit one that is moving sluggishly and unevenly across departments. While the current administration is visibly supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, transgender individuals still have mixed experiences on campus: many instances of misgendering that I've experienced have come from faculty and staff rather than students. And, of course, Rainbow P.A.W.S. still doesn't have a budget of its own.

To protect gender identity but not gender expression implies a contradiction: an institution might respect someone's gender identity but might not grant them the right to express that identity safely on campus. For transgender individuals, gender expression is a complex issue: although legally changing your identity in the state of Texas is a surprisingly simple process, it also requires a good understanding of the court system and how to apply for financial waivers, and there is, as of

yet, no option to legally identify as non-binary.¹⁶ Because of this, the documents that we use to prove our identities are often inaccurate. Mismatches between gender expression and genders listed on official identity documents, including institutional items such as student and staff IDs, can be a matter of outright danger for transgender individuals. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that, of Texas respondents, “32% of respondents who have shown an ID with a name or gender that did not match their gender presentation were verbally harassed, denied benefits or service, asked to leave, or assaulted” (3). When our institutions cannot even grant us the option to list our identities properly on our paperwork, we have to wonder how protected we actually are.

Being transgender on campus, being *openly* transgender on campus, is risky. The same 2015 report found that, of Texas respondents, “73% of those who were out or perceived as transgender at some point between K-12 experienced some form of mistreatment,” and “19% of respondents who were out or perceived as transgender in college or vocational school were verbally, physically, or sexually harassed because of being transgender” (1-2). More recently, in September 2021, the Trevor Project reported a 150% increase in crisis contacts from LGBTQ+ young people in Texas when compared to the same time period in 2020, with transgender and nonbinary youth in Texas “directly stat[ing] that they are feeling stressed, using self-harm, and considering suicide due to anti-LGBTQ laws being debated in their state” (Trevor News). Over seventy anti-LGBTQ+ bills were proposed by lawmakers in the 2021 Texas legislative session, more than forty of which specifically targeted transgender and nonbinary youth (Trevor News).

I only started using they/them pronouns publicly within the last few years, and while I’m comfortable introducing myself to my students that way now, the first time was nerve-wracking. They often misgender me anyway, largely because my gender expression is near-universally perceived as female, but many of them remember and do try. The same is true of my colleagues. But I am extremely fortunate: being misgendered, a type of microaggression, does not trigger gender dysphoria in me, the way it does for so many others. Gender dysphoria—that moment of awful *affect*—is often triggered because of issues with gender expression: moments when someone misgenders you, moments when for legal reasons you must take up an old identity that was never actually *you*, moments when you don’t feel safe enough to express your true identity, when the administrative systems of your institution do not allow for name changes, and when the paperwork for your institution does not allow you to identify as anything other than male or female.

The paperwork that binds me to my own institution, where my queer body does queer work, where it works to support other queer bodies—that paperwork is *wrong*. Matters are equally problematic for students: in spring 2021 I assisted in updating Banner and Blackboard to add a feature which would allow for preferred first names to be displayed,¹⁷ but Banner only imports

¹⁶ Very few of our students are aware of how to navigate the process of changing their legal name and gender identity in the state of Texas, assuming that they are in a position to safely do so. Many are not.

¹⁷ This was the term used by the group, though the use of the term “preferred” is contentious, and is generally no longer considered acceptable when it precedes pronouns. The group nonetheless used the term “preferred” for names, as the policy and technology change applied not only to trans* individuals, but also those who wished to change the names they had on file with the university for

name changes to Blackboard when students register for classes. Students who update their names after registering for classes are confronted with their deadname every time that they log on to Blackboard, triggering dysphoria and often causing their fellow students to misname and misgender them in collective spaces such as discussion boards. Meanwhile, this system does not exist for faculty, so while I would prefer to alter my name and state my pronouns in Banner and Blackboard, I simply cannot. Since I only teach online nowadays, I am regularly misgendered by my students simply because they see the name “Sarah” every time I post anything to Blackboard and assume that I use feminine pronouns despite having they/them listed as my pronouns in both the syllabus and my email signature—more moments of uncomfortable *affect*, this time enabled by the mechanical processes of institutional policy.¹⁸

I feel safe at my institution, and I trust the gender identity and gender expression statements will protect me on my campus because I know the individuals that are tasked with enforcing those protections, and I trust them to act appropriately. I trust them to protect me, to protect my colleagues, and to protect my students. But not everyone is so lucky.¹⁹

These concerns are especially important given that on February 22, 2017, the Departments of Justice and Education withdrew landmark 2016 guidance explaining how schools must protect transgender students against discrimination under Title IX. Protections for transgender individuals were only reinstated three years later thanks to the Title VII Supreme Court decision, a ruling which itself makes no explicit statements regarding gender expression. It is especially concerning here in Texas, where the state legislature has been relentless in its attacks on the LGBTQ+ community, with more anti-LGBTQ+ bills filed in 2021 than in any other state, and where the most successful of these bills, where discriminatory legislation that bans transgender youth from participating in sports in alignment with their gender identity, was signed into law on October 25, 2021 by Governor Greg Abbot.

So how protected *are we*?

Conclusion: Words Are Not Enough

My experiences are not universal: they are intrinsic to my queer body and how it moves through space, through institutions, through the state in which I live and for which I work, affected by them and affecting them. My critique is affective in return—these statements might act as straightening devices, but I, in my queerness, can push back against them, affecting them just as they affect me: after all, the campus nondiscrimination statement appeared on our institutional website shortly after I noted its absence. My institution may have enfolded me into its body in an act of *straightening*, but, by doing so, it is also *queered* because of my presence within it. My queer body

reasons unrelated to gender. Students can also indicate their pronouns in this system, although that information is kept confidential and can only be accessed by instructors through Banner.

¹⁸ While Blackboard does allow users to edit their personal (first) name, this function is enabled by the institution rather than the user, and TAMUSA does not currently allow such edits.

¹⁹ To the surprise of exactly no one, concerns with the enforcement of trans-inclusive nondiscrimination policies in higher education have been a consistent concern for trans* folk over the years—see Seelman and Goldberg et al.

and my queer work have in turn served to *queer* my campus: Rainbow P.A.W.S. has hosted LGBTQ+ educational events, outreach programs, and resource fairs; the Preferred Name working group specifically recruited my assistance to help implement the preferred name system in Banner and Blackboard; and most recently, I have received an inquiry about joining another committee tasked with developing training materials for a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion certificate program.

I offer this critique while acknowledging that these documents are *aspirational*: used to determine the focus, purpose, goals, and commitments of an institution, the promises it makes to those who make up its body, and meaning very little in the absence of effective enforcement, of effective *commitment* on the part of our institutions. After my presentation on this topic at the 2018 Conference on College Composition and Communication, I spoke with someone who expressed intense frustration with his institution, where he was tasked with enforcing the campus nondiscrimination policy. Like so many others, he felt boxed in, surrounded on all sides by a “brick wall” of uninterested and unsupportive colleagues—the seemingly-universal experience of a diversity worker in higher education. I could offer him little more than sympathy and the hope that he might find like-minded others who would be willing to do the actual *work* of diversity with him. Perhaps now that the Supreme Court has ruled in our favor on Title VII, he will have better luck.

Institutions can also revise, review, and expand their nondiscrimination policies. While these statements *do* act as straightening devices, and likely always will simply due to their nature as legal documents, the expansion of such policies to include working definitions for commonly-used terminology, as well as more detailed definitions of discrimination—as one frequently sees in Title IX trainings—can help mitigate these effects and enable more effective enforcement of nondiscrimination policies. Thus, institutions should work to develop precise definitions for the following terms:

1. Gender identity and discrimination: Institutions could borrow from their already-existing Title IX terminology and the examples used in institutional nondiscrimination training to identify and address instances of discrimination based on an individual’s gender identity.
2. Gender expression: In addition to developing a clear definition for what gender expression is and how it differs from gender identity, institutions could provide specific examples of what discrimination based on gender expression might look like by developing further examples to be added to their already-existing Title IX training.
3. Sexual orientation and discrimination: While most institutional trainings do cover sexual orientation in their Title IX training, albeit generally briefly, the development of further examples of discrimination based on sexual orientation could provide more specific guidance for the enforcement of such policies.

The working definitions and examples for these terms should be linked directly from the policy statement on the institution’s website. They should also be available internally, and the definitions and examples added to each institution’s Title IX training program. Policy and subject matter experts should be called upon to further develop these statements, working definitions, and examples. In larger systems, such developments should take place at the system level, rather than at individual institutions, to ensure consistency across all campuses.

Revising these statements, developing working definitions, and providing further examples and training is a starting point, but we cannot let that become the *only* point, nor can diversity documents be our only concern. They *affect* us, but attending to such documents is not enough. They are important because of their ability to determine how, when, and why our institutions protect or fail to protect us, but their power lies in engagement and enforcement, in being regularly updated to reflect the ever-changing legal and political climate in Texas and the country. As employees of these institutions, it is our duty to raise questions about them, to critique them, and revise them, but also to recognize the limitations of this work. It is not and will never be enough to speak about diversity: we must take action, beyond the bare minimum that the law requires, to create safer spaces on campus for everyone.

This last point is both the most nebulous and most important one: cultivating an inclusive campus environment, one that provides visible and meaningful support for the LGBTQ+ community, is the most effective way to create change. Creating institutional policies and documents that can better protect our students and ourselves begins with education, outreach, and understanding. A committee tasked with policy revisions is better equipped to make changes that support the LGBTQ+ community when they are trained in LGBTQ+ issues and understand the challenges that may be faced by their students, particularly given the specific cultural and geographic contexts of individual institutions. An awareness of state and local challenges to LGBTQ+ rights is essential for shaping policies that can better protect our students, staff, and faculty. Visible and concrete dedication to supporting the LGBTQ+ community is essential here in Texas, where the transgender youth sports ban has gone into effect as of January 18, 2022, and school boards across the state are facing an unprecedented number of requests from politicians and parents to remove books dealing with race, sexuality, and gender from school libraries after a parent complaint about Maia Kobabe's memoir *Gender Queer* went viral (Hixenbaugh).

On campus, it is easy to forget that the policy documents that we create, cloistered away in committees and tucked away on some forgotten webpage, are *affective objects*—they shape how we work and how our institutions work. They are living documents that people turn to when they are trying to make decisions about where to go and what to do. Creating them once is not enough: they must be attended to, revised, and updated to reflect the changing circumstances of our students, our politics, and the world.

We are never “done” with diversity. We are never “done” with providing what protections we can for those who are marginalized within our institutions and within the academy as a whole. But we can and should do better: our students' safety—*our* safety—depends on it.

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“Whose Eyes Shall Bless Now the Truth of My Pain?”: Recovering Diane di Prima’s Feminist Rhetoric

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Abstract: In this article, the author argues for Beat poet and activist Diane di Prima’s recovery as a feminist rhetor. Drawing from feminist historiography, the author analyzes di Prima’s published memoirs, poems, personal correspondence, and unpublished manuscripts. From this analysis, the author identifies di Prima’s feminist rhetorical strategies, most predominantly her use of critical subjectivity to resist patriarchal and heteronormative gender conventions of the 1950s and 1960s. The author also briefly explores di Prima’s circulation of feminist rhetoric. The article concludes by articulating the contributions of di Prima’s recovery to feminist rhetorical studies and Beat history.

Keywords: Recovery; feminist rhetoric; feminist historiography; archival research; critical subjectivity; memoir

I slipped out of my daze in time to hear, “We’re closing in fifteen minutes.” Staring at the now-black screen, I tried to recall what induced this trance, but it wasn’t until I had made my way back on the highway that I remembered. Over the previous eight hours in the archive, I developed a robotic rhythm, flipping through documents, taking pictures, and making notes. Suddenly, I was painfully aware of how intrusive it felt to thumb through someone’s personal effects for my scholarly purposes. I pulled into my driveway with the same feeling of lost time, as the three-hour drive seemed a blur. This feeling lingered, as the research I collected from the archive sat untouched for years, until now.

I was first drawn to the Beat writers in my early twenties. As I read Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs, I recurrently asked myself: *where are the women?* Years later, in a master's course in feminist rhetorics, I began to pursue this question in earnest.

Italian American poet, painter, and activist Diane di Prima was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1934 and was the granddaughter of Italian immigrants and well-known anarchist, Domenico Mallozzi ("Diane di Prima"). di Prima dropped out of Swarthmore College to pursue writing. Shortly after, she began performing her poetry within a bohemian community of writers, artists, and activists in Greenwich Village, which included well-known Beat authors. The mother of five children, she wrote two memoirs and over thirty poetry collections. Some of her most renowned works include *This Kind of Bird Flies Backwards* (1958), *Dinners and Nightmares* (1961), *Revolutionary Letters* (1971), *Loba* (1978), and *Pieces of a Song* (1990). Before relocating to San Francisco in 1968, di Prima co-founded the New York Poets Theatre, a newsletter called *The Floating Bear*, and the Poets Press, which published Audre Lorde's premier volume, *The First Cities* (1968). di Prima taught creative writing at the New College of California, California College of Arts and Crafts, San Francisco Art Institute, California Institute of Integral Studies, and co-founded the Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Politics. di Prima worked as a mixed-media artist since the 1960s and had several solo art shows in California ("Diane di Prima"). She also studied Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, which exert a palpable influence over her work in the 1970s and 80s. di Prima died on October 25th, 2020, after a long battle with Parkinson's Disease and Sjogren's Syndrome (Genzlinger).

Poet and novelist Daniella Gioseffi best captures the singular and multifaceted nature of di Prima's work, describing her as:

a learned humorous bohemian, classically educated, and twentieth-century radical, [whose] writing, informed by Buddhist equanimity, is exemplary in imagist, political, and mystical modes. A great woman poet in [the] second half of American century, she broke barriers of race-class identity, delivered a major body of verse brilliant in its particularity. (308)

Working across genres, di Prima offers readers critical narratives of her and other women's experiences that model alternative ways of being for the marginalized.

As a reader, I was taken with di Prima's mobilization of memory and reflection towards an unapologetic critique of gender and sexual norms. Yet, as I began pursuing a doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition, I was once again frustrated by her absence from feminist rhetorical canons. Galvanized by this frustration, I set out to recover her work.

The narrative that begins this article recalls my first experience with archival research in the Diane Di Prima²⁰ Papers collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2014. This first trip left me victim to *archive fever* (Ramsey et al. 3). Overwhelmed by the materials and my feelings, I found it "difficult to envision a project out of 'the lot'" (Ramsey et al. 3). Since then, I have visited di Prima's papers in the Syracuse University special collections and completed several graduate

²⁰ di Prima's last name is often capitalized and without spaces, DiPrima, as that is her family's legal name. She adopted the lower case "di" and added a space to honor her Italian ancestry (Genzlinger).

seminar papers and conference presentations on her work. Yet, I remained reluctant to publish, as my *archive fever* lingered. I continued to work on this article sporadically over my doctoral studies but still never felt right about submitting it for publication. With di Prima's recent passing, the feelings I experienced years ago in the archives resurfaced. The sense of responsibility that once gave me pause now fueled my resolve to share how her work had sparked my love for feminist rhetoric.

In this article, I recover di Prima as a feminist rhetor and argue for her recognition in the field. When recognized in historical accounts of the Beat literary movement, women are often relegated to flat characterizations of the wife, girlfriend, or lover of their male counterparts. However, many of the male Beat authors' spouses were prolific and published writers, including Hettie Jones, Carolyn Cassady, Joanne Kyger, and Joyce Johnson. The recovery of women Beat authors is a rich, decades-long literary project (e.g., Carden, *Women Writers*; Knight; Grace and Johnson). However, these women, and di Prima, have yet to be recognized as feminist rhetors.

To begin this work, I analyze di Prima's feminist rhetorical strategies: her critical subjectivity, critique of patriarchal gender roles, subversion of sexual norms, and circulation of feminist rhetoric.²¹ I analyze these strategies as evidence of di Prima's feminist rhetoric to support my argument for her recognition in the field. I do not subscribe to a static definition of feminist rhetoric. Instead, common characteristics and themes of feminist rhetoric, as recognized by scholars in the field, inform my identification and analysis of these particular strategies. I use the term, *critical subjectivity*, for instance, to capture di Prima's use of her own narrative to critique patriarchal and heteronormative structures. This strategy resonates with Kate Ronald and Joy Ritchie's characterization of feminist rhetoric as "challeng[ing] dominant epistemologies" and "assert[ing] new topoi/contexts from which to argue" (11). In addition, the field has long recognized the power of autobiography and storytelling as modes of critique, and more broadly, the subjective as a vehicle for feminist rhetors to enact agency.²¹ For instance, Jacqueline Jones Royster cites how African American women rhetors of the nineteenth century employed the subjective form of essay writing (31). Through storytelling and reflection, di Prima amplifies previously neglected voices, expressions, and representations. In this way, her narrative serves as a catalyst to shock, intrigue, and seduce readers into considering an alternative history of the Beats.

I draw from feminist rhetorical methodologies of recovery and regendering (Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold*; Ratcliffe; Lunsford) to analyze her published memoirs and poems, personal correspondence, and unpublished manuscripts. Informed by the greater move within feminist historiography to broaden the notion of the archive (i.e., Gaillett; Glenn and Enoch; Kirsch and Rohan; Morris and Rawson), I analyze artifacts that traverse traditional categorizations of genre, audience, and

²¹ For instance, see Dworkin, Hemmings' *Why Stories Matter*, and Segal. Also see feminist rhetorical studies that position memoir and autobiography as methodologies for expanding patriarchal, Eurocentric models of ethos (Foss and Foss, Reynolds, Ryan, Myers, and Jones' *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, and Richtie and Ronald's *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*). Queer rhetorical studies have also recognized memoir, autobiography, and narrative as vehicles of rhetorical agency (i.e., Bechdel, Cvetkovich, Muñoz, and Sedgwick).

authorship. In a 2013 letter included in the SU archive, di Prima articulates the value of engaging with archival material that defies neat categorization:

These journals are each an “art work” in and of themselves.... at the time that I began them, I conceived of them as an entirely different form of journal: one where I would experiment a lot more with images, and where I would abandon the recording of the daily event ... I would want to guarantee access to this archive to myself, my children and grandchildren (so much of their history is in it), and of course to scholars. (di Prima, Letter)

She positions her work, even the most personal of her writing, as worthy of scholarly study and circulation. In doing so, di Prima directly recognizes the rhetorical significance and power of her subjectivity.

I intersperse reflections on my archival experiences throughout this analysis to evoke the many interruptions of my nebulous, years-long writing process. In doing so, I aim to reciprocate di Prima’s vulnerability and honesty in sharing her thoughts, feelings, desires, and failures. My reflections help me to center my *interpretive power* (Royster 281) and reflect the complicated affective processes of this project.

In recovering di Prima’s feminist rhetoric, I contribute to an ongoing “transform[ation of] the discipline of rhetoric through gender analysis, critique, and reformulation” (Buchanan and Ryan xiii). This recovery broadens the history and resonance of Beat literature, while also offering a methodology for recovering the often-neglected rhetorical contributions of women to other literary and social movements. Most importantly, this project contributes to the longstanding tradition of feminist historiography in the field, as it works to expand and complicate what we identify as feminist rhetoric. Recovering di Prima’s feminist rhetoric also builds upon previous scholars’ calls to expand, complicate, and disrupt how we study and canonize feminist rhetors (i.e., Hallenbeck; Ratcliffe; Rawson). As such, this work helps us to reflect on how we can reflexively avoid canonization and citational practices that reify the very exclusion the field was founded on resisting.

Critical Subjectivity

I return to the archival materials I collected years ago and old feelings of paralysis flood back. With frustration, I ask myself why I should pursue this project and who I am serving with this work. Around this time, I find an unpublished, undated poem in one of di Prima’s journals, titled “Bohemia,” in which she writes: “Whose eyes shall bless now the truth of my pain? They are fled who could bear witness to my tale, their blundering time to another.” I continue searching and reading with lots of questions and a renewed energy.

di Prima rejected the patriarchal norms of both the 1950s milieu and a male-dominated literary community. She shares her narrative and critically reflects on her experiences to engage in feminist critique. As opposed to the male-authored representations of women common in popular Beat literature, di Prima offers readers a transparent representation of a woman writer's struggle to love, live, and work within oppressive structures. Her feminist resistance is most evident in her enactment of a critical subjectivity, in which her (and her characters') experiences act as parodies, reflections, and criticisms of oppressive norms. In identifying her critical subjectivity as a feminist rhetorical strategy, I draw from Laura Micciche's definition of *feminist critique* as "question[ing] what passes as ordinary, often as a cover for maintaining the assumed value of intellectual inheritance, in order to unsettle the ground upon which norms hold sway" (176). di Prima shares the material realities of her own marginalization and reflects on her internalization of patriarchal systems to indict their repression of women's lived experiences. di Prima's feminist critique originates from her experiences and is enacted through sharing them unabashedly, even (and especially when) they exist outside of decorum, norms, and, in some cases, legality. di Prima offers readers alternatives to these norms, modeling pathways to agency, expression, and self-determination not afforded to women in the same frequency or breadth as their male peers.

In her memoir, *Recollections of My Life As a Woman (2001)*, di Prima shares stories, memories, and journal entries from throughout her life to chronicle her journey of self-discovery. Throughout these stories, she reflects on her successes and failures in finding her voice. After characterizing the adult relationships she grew up around with a series of vignettes, she articulates the broader agency and social critique that her reflection affords:

It is power I am talking about now, no right and wrong. No cloudy issues of "neglect" or passion. Simply, who held the power in our lives? How did we speak with them, how did they treat us? A pluralism. There are bonds and groupings of power, within each group a kind of hierarchy, never spoken but fully acknowledged. And then there were different groupings, separate and more or less equal. Ward politics. The Church. City Hall. The cops. International relations I learned in the kitchen. (*Recollections* 57)

di Prima identifies the implications of the messages women receive about love, power, and relationships in the home. She draws attention to the processes by which women internalize family power dynamics. For instance, when questioning why she relented to pressures to have an abortion, she asks: "What could I expect? Had I ever seen a woman treated well? Treated as she should be? Not in my home, certainly, not among my parents, or their relatives, or their friends. Not among my own friends, in their various modes of coupling. No room to speak truth. For the woman to speak her truth and be heard. And be safe" (*Recollections* 237). di Prima centers her own narrative within a broader indictment of systemic inequality. Her feminist rhetoric encourages us to reflect on the power dynamics in which we were raised as a strategy for recognizing and fighting against the oppressive power structures of social and cultural institutions.

di Prima enacts a critical subjectivity that "places material experience...at the center of knowledge formation" (Ronald and Ritchie 11). For instance, di Prima reflects on her own experiences with marriage and polyamorous relationships to criticize the patriarchal institution of marriage. She

describes her marriage as a “contractual marriage” she was forced to agree to out of necessity (*Recollections* 336). She reflects on the sacrifices she made to conform to the wife role:

I had figured into that equation some acknowledgement of the freedoms I’d given up. Some respect for the woman/artist I was, and some gratitude for coming to meet this man halfway. None of these things was forthcoming, and I knew better than to feel sorry for myself. I had hardly been married two months before I knew I had made a mistake—shouldn’t have gotten into this at all. (di Prima, *Recollections* 336)

In these realizations, di Prima claims an agency not afforded to her in the moments she reflects on. She offers readers of the day a rare glimpse into the processes by which patriarchy becomes ingrained in women’s lives, hearts, and minds.

Her memories serve as conduits for her feminist resistance. This is a common characteristic of feminist rhetoric, in that “knowledge based in the personal, in lived experience, [is] valued and accepted as important and significant” (Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford 59). di Prima’s narrative is in itself a feminist rhetorical strategy, in that she uses it to intervene within normative narratives of womanhood and the nuclear family. In an analysis of di Prima’s memoirs, Roseanne Quinn identifies her most important feminist act as “dar[ing] to write about herself in the first place” (176). Upon reading the book, critic Grace Paley described *Recollections* as “about a woman who really retained her own powers, a woman determined to live the way she wanted to live—and that was it” (qtd. in di Prima, *Recollections*, “Praise for *Recollections of My Life as a Woman*”). As feminist rhetorical scholars have long acknowledged, for women rhetors, the act of self-expression is an act of resistance. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell describes feminist rhetoric as a “process of persuading listeners that they can act effectively in the world” (86). di Prima employs her subjective experience to claim a self-authored identity and way of being free from the patriarchal and heteronormative gender constructs of the 1950s and ’60s.

For example, di Prima ruminates on her decision to defy dominant beauty standards and expectations of femininity. She cites her sexual and creative exploration as enabling her to identify and resist society’s attempts to regulate her voice and body. She writes:

It was about this time I made what I thought of as my decision not to be beautiful.... I had watched the burden that beauty was for the women and girls around me.... Watched how they *were* watched, both by friends and lovers, so that they were not *seen*, not truly presences, but the painting, movie, statue of someone’s dreams. A piece of the furnishings.... no matter how truly they were loved, there were truly never loved. (*Recollections* 114-15)

In writing through her experiences and observations, di Prima offers a broader critique of the male gaze and how it impacts every aspect of women’s lives. She draws attention to this issue while also modeling strategies for enacting self-authored beauty standards. This critical subjectivity is also evident in her reflections on becoming a mother. di Prima builds upon her own struggles with balancing the demands of motherhood and work to indict the lack of support available to working and single mothers: “The woman who is charged with manslaughter when she leaves her child alone to go to work, to go to the store or the doctor and the house burns down, is doing what she has

done a thousand times before, what she has had to do, in a world, a society that leaves her no options. I saw this now. It was the beginning, for me, of a new kind of radicalization” (*Recollections* 178). In both examples, di Prima uses her experiences as a platform for feminist critique of the social and political structures that stifle women’s agency. This theme of the impossible choice with which women are presented—to conform and surrender autonomy or to resist and be alienated from the power structures that often determine women’s well-being and success—recurs throughout di Prima’s work and illustrates her engagement with critical subjectivity as a feminist rhetorical strategy.

Within the first few scenes of *Recollections*, she articulates the feminist motivations of her work: “I write this book to try to understand what messages I got about being a woman. What that is. How to do it. Or get through it. Or bear it. Or sparkle like ice underfoot” (26-7). di Prima recognizes her personal experience as a vehicle for feminist critique and rhetorical agency. She dwells in her subjectivity as space for critical thought, and potentially social action. In their foundational essay, Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford identify the mobilization of memory towards critique as a characteristic of feminist rhetoric:

From a feminist vantage point, however, it is impossible to take the subjectivity of the rhetor for granted, impossible not to locate that subjectivity within the larger context of personal, social, economic, cultural, and ideological forces, impossible not to notice not only the context itself, but also who is absent from this context as well as what exclusionary forces are at work there. (59)

Similarly, di Prima’s work centers her subjectivity as her primary rhetorical strategy for engaging in feminist critique. By sharing her experiences trying to reconcile what it means to be a woman, what is expected of her, and how she can thwart such expectations, di Prima locates a pathway to agency.

Rewriting Patriarchal Gender Roles

If di Prima has taught me anything, it’s that things are always more complex than they seem. Every time I think I have a certain claim, I read something that contradicts it. My impulse is frustration, but I realize how pompous that is. This impulse becomes something I must remember to store in the locker with my other belongings before entering the archives.

di Prima’s feminist rhetoric constellates around her reflections on her development as a woman and the obstacles she faced in shedding the expectations of femininity and submissiveness ingrained in her as a child. In *Recollections*, she writes:

Part of the bind was/is that it is “wrong” for women to control. To try to control, though the instinct is biological. To get a little peace. “Don’t be teacheretical” my parents would say. “You want everything your way.” When I got older, what I heard from lovers, was that I was a controlling or castrating bitch. But—the assault was universal and ceaseless. You would have had to be dead not to try to stop it for a minute. (di Prima 41)

Hendricks

di Prima describes her experiences fighting against the common stereotypes often ascribed to strong, outspoken women. She offers a glimpse into the complicated and impossible choices women are faced with when fighting to write their own narratives. A key element of di Prima's expose of the material realities of women's inescapable "bind" is her subversion of the dutiful wife role women were largely expected to fill in the 1950s and '60s.

As established, di Prima rejected the patriarchal institution of marriage, positing the wife role as stifling and inauthentic to true agency (Mortenson 36). She channels the Beat individualism and her own narrative to depict women as more than merely an extension of their male counterparts. Characterizing marriage as a mechanism of the patriarchy, di Prima narrativizes the material and affective experiences of women subjected to oppressive gender roles in her poem, "City Winter" (1975). She describes marriage as a jail cell:

I know I am trapped here
in my high, little room
behind the shadow of my husband
and his lovers
taking their ease in the front room
playing the phonograph
I am held here by the shouts of the children
the baby. (192)

As the narrator, di Prima assumes the wife role, describing her prison to the reader in first person. She breaks the illusions of domestic bliss with which marriage is often colored in the 1950s and '60s. She pushes readers to experience the narrator's feelings, mobilizing affect into feminist critique.

In "Learn to Drive Blues" (1975), di Prima criticizes normative expectations of the wife's role in a more upbeat and playful tone. As the narrator, she embodies a female character who refuses to be subservient to her husband; a character that encourages other women to also avoid the oppressive nature of unequal marriages. She talks directly to the reader, "Well, if you ever get an old man who won't let you sing & shout / Baby then you'll find out, just what the blues is all about / Well, I love you babe, but I ain't gonna sell my soul" (303). In addition to highlighting the consequences of domesticity, she showcases women characters who refuse to relent and live within the constraints of gender norms. In both poems, and across her work, di Prima crafts an alternative to conventional marriage, one in which the woman can both love and be loved, can be both a loving partner and a self-determined woman.

A central characteristic of di Prima's feminist rhetoric is the complexity with which she frames this alternative. In addition to imagining women characters that both do and do not resist patriarchal subjugation, di Prima shares memories of real women living and loving alternatively. After reflecting on the problematic messages she received about women's power growing up, she points to women she met once leaving home as models for the autonomous lifestyle she longed for

and later actualized. In the introductory scenes of *Recollections*, she reflects on what those women meant to her:

I thought of deep gratitude of some of the women I met when I first left home at the age of eighteen: those beautiful, soft, and strong women of middle age with their young daughters who made me welcome in their various homes.... These women, by now mostly dead I suppose, were great pioneers. They are nameless to me, nameless and brief friends I encountered along the way who showed me something else was possible besides what I had seen at home. (di Prima 5)

Later in the memoir, she refers to these women as those who “didn’t dream of marriage, or a dinette set, [who] gave their love where they wished, with no hidden agenda” (*Recollections* 265). Throughout her critique of marriage, and more broadly of restrictive gender roles, di Prima does not prescribe to one representation of what agency or empowerment looks like. In this, she continues to enact the feminist rhetorical agenda to revise normative narratives of women’s lived experiences.

Authentic/Alternative Sexual Representations

One of the most recognized aspects of di Prima’s feminist critique is her celebration of alternative sexualities. In writing about sex with the same abandon as the male Beats, di Prima rebels against the post-WWII generation’s grief and preoccupation with the nuclear family. Her sexual experiences afford her an outlet for self-authored agency. di Prima’s disruptive style is palpable in her poem, “To the Patriarchs” (1971), in which she personifies female sexuality as a wrathful, goddess-like entity who threatens the reader:

My hips
haven & fort
place where I stand
& from which I fight
My cunt a bomb exploding
yr Christian conscience
The shock waves of my pleasure
annihilate
all future shock forever. (317)

di Prima uses her sexuality to shock readers. She repurposes the mysterious and sometimes dangerous representations of women’s sexuality as a source of revision and empowerment. In the world she creates, a woman’s sexuality is generative and galvanizing, rather than dangerous or submissive.

Similarly, in *Recollections*, di Prima shares her homosexual and polyamorous experiences as a social commentary on the oppressive systems that prevented her and her peers from expressing

their authentic sexual identities. She blends her memories with social critique that reminds the reader of the inherent risks she and her peers endured to live and love freely. In fact, she explicitly recognizes her alternative lifestyle as a broader act of resistance to the status quo, writing:

...there was no reason, per se, to obey the laws of the land. We simply assumed we were being lied to again. The laws of the land were a hodgepodge of prejudice, fear, and bigotry. That much was clear. Homosexuality was illegal. It was illegal in many states to experiment in your own bed with your own 'legal' partner.... The dance we had all performed to keep parents and the law from ganging up on us when we were teenagers had not been lost on us. Nor had we forgotten the many friends who had disappeared: madhouses, deportation. (*Recollections* 203)

She acknowledges her writing as a critical rhetorical act that exposes the material realities of sexist and heteronormative logics. In contextualizing her rebellion, di Prima employs her feminist critique to "(re)write the past and the present...[and] to draw attention to gendered actions, biases and assumptions as well as the accompanying inequities of power" (Ratcliffe 7). Her seemingly personal narratives, in this way, become outlets for a political consciousness that gives way to feminist critique.

di Prima's resistance to dominant characterizations of a woman's sexuality as dangerous or perverse is most evident in her erotic memoir, *Memoirs of a Beatnik*. She begins *Memoirs* by reflecting on her first time having intercourse as a sort of awakening, as she "enter[ed] the world of the living" (22). In the remainder of the book, she describes her sexual experiences with men and women over the course of a year while living in the "pad," a commune living-style apartment in New York City. An intertextual mix of memory and fiction, *Memoirs* defies genre conventions (Carden, "'What You'"). di Prima plays with fact and fiction to deconstruct and circumvent readers' expectations of how a woman should write about sex. In other words, she mobilizes the stereotype of promiscuity often associated with women like her to enact her rhetorical agency. di Prima's explicit language and style "violate oppressive conventions of the feminine," which dictated that "conventional women, good girls, are not supposed to hear or speak these words" (Johnson 103). In both the content and form of *Memoirs*, she blurs normative boundaries between the public and private, enacting a feminist rhetoric that reflects "the material embodiment of the relationships among self, text, and world" (Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford 64). Considering the common stigmatization of women's sexuality at the time, narrating sex from a woman's perspective was—and still is—a feminist rhetorical act. Roseanne Quinn recognizes this, identifying *Memoirs* as "an early example from the women's movement of...a sex-positive narrative" (189). di Prima goes beyond just talking about sex from a woman's perspective to use her critical subjectivity to reveal and indict the patriarchal systems that repress women's nonheteronormative sexual expressions.

In reflecting on her time at the "pad," she lists the benefits of her polyamorous approach to sex and love: "light and freedom, air and laughter, the outside world—outside of the stuffy incestuous atmosphere of her 'family life'.... laughter, the silliness and glee unscrutinized, one's blood running strong and red in ones' own veins, not drawn to feed the uneradicable grief of the preceding generation" (di Prima, *Memoirs* 72). di Prima posits sexual freedom as a conduit for her agency, much like many women's liberation rhetorics at the time. Feminist critic Estelle Freedman

notes that during this time, “explorations of female passion proliferated as feminists attempted to redefine sexual empowerment” (xvii-iii). She claims her autonomy as a woman in control of her alternative sexuality. Furthermore, di Prima presents sexual liberation as an exercise in collective resistance, a unity in difference, in a refusal to love according to social prescriptions. Her representation of a woman’s self-determined sexuality is a cornerstone of her feminist rhetoric. In fact, she has often been identified as one of the “heroic precursors” of the women’s liberation movement (Libby 46). Sharing realistic representations of a woman’s sexuality enabled di Prima to both critique sexual norms and carve a place for feminist rhetorical elements within male centric Beat literature. By bringing her own sexuality and sexual experiences to the forefront, di Prima espouses a feminist rhetoric that is meant to disrupt social conventions that portray female sexuality as bad, dirty, or wrong. She positions herself as a woman who possesses “an actual body, with body parts, and bodily functions and pleasures” (Quinn 178-179). In claiming her own “sexual power,” di Prima exposes readers to depictions of women as sexual beings (*Memoirs* 33). She flips the tropes common in male-authored sex scenes to center a woman’s affective experience and control.

In claiming a space for her own sexual expression, di Prima also draws attention to the biased nature with which women’s sexually explicit work is received. *Memoirs* was poorly received and branded as vulgar upon its initial release because of its explicit content and style. Unlike the sexually explicit, male-authored Beat novels, di Prima received much criticism for *Memoirs*. Some criticized the book as “pornographic” and as having “too many sex scenes” (McNamara qtd. in Dumaine). One reviewer cited the openness of di Prima’s sexual expression to invalidate feminist movements of the time. For instance, literary critic Steve Haines wrote, “If you read it, you’ll probably wonder if most of the members of the Women’s Liberation Movement would really like to be as uninhibited as Diane di Prima” (qtd. in Dumaine). One of the most common responses to *Memoirs* was criticism of di Prima’s fictionalization of sexual scenes and partners (Carden, “What You”), something she makes explicit in the book with section titles like, “A Night by the Fire: What You Would Like to Hear” (148) followed by “A Night by the Fire: What Actually Happened” (150). While male Beat authors, like Kerouac, were praised for their blending of memory and fiction, di Prima’s credibility and perspective were questioned for employing the same artistic freedoms. Her male lovers are objects of her desire and in her dominance over them, she counters male-authored representations of women’s sexuality. Literary critic, Michael Davidson describes di Prima’s confrontational style as “appropriating the coercive rhetoric of the masculine tradition and using it against itself” (qtd. in Charters 359). di Prima uses her disruptive style as a feminist rhetorical strategy (Campbell; Ede, Glenn, Lunsford) to chronicle her affective journey to sexual liberation. By sharing this journey, her narrative communicates the potential for fulfillment through alternative and self-determined sexualities that fall outside of accepted norms. The Beat movement is often associated with sexual freedom and the defiance of gender norms. Yet, di Prima’s work—and its reception—highlights the one-dimensional, and often misogynistic, representation of sexual expression within its canon.

Embracing the multiplicity of experience that feminist rhetoric affords, di Prima depicts her path to self-awareness through sex as a complicated process punctuated with moments of uncertainty. She shares experiences in which she succumbed to unwanted sexual advances and relented to the sexual roles to which her male lovers expected her to conform. di Prima describes

her sexuality as simultaneously empowering and objectifying. For example, interwoven within free sex vignettes, she describes being sexually assaulted:

But he was too quick, and caught me around the waist at the same time jerking my pants, which he had unzipped while I was sleeping, down around my legs. I struggled silently to free myself, all the time thinking unbelievably that this was rape, that I was about to be raped... And my fear and horror seemed ridiculous. This was Serge...who never got to screw his wife, and if he wanted to throw a fuck into me, why I might as well let him.... Anyway, it didn't seem that I had much choice.
(*Memoirs* 68)

In sharing this experience, di Prima resists creating her own tropes of sexual freedom removed from gendered power dynamics. She reminds the reader that, even within this alternative and open atmosphere she and her peers build together at the "pad," sexual violence and women's subjugation is ever present. Later in *Memoirs*, she reflects on how the patriarchy bled into even the most alternative of her relationships. While in a polyamorous relationship with two men, di Prima finds herself relegated to normative gender roles: "I lost myself in my new-found woman's role, the position defined and revealed by my sex: the baking and mending, the mothering and fucking, the girls' parts in the plays—and I was content. But slowly, imperceptibly, the days began to shorten, the grass turned brown" (*Memoirs* 110). Unsure at the time what caused her malaise, di Prima reclaims an agency in this reflection, as she narrates the constant struggle to resist gender norms. She reminds us that resistance to patriarchy and heteronormativity is a recursive and complex process.

Throughout *Memoirs*, di Prima interweaves asides and social critiques between erotic scenes. She breaks narration with the section titled, "Fuck the Pill: A Digression," in which she criticizes the common perception of the birth control pill as granting women sexual freedom. Contradicting many feminists at the time, she describes the pill as another impossible choice with which sexually active women are faced. Sharing her and her women friends' experiences with the hormonal effects of the pill, including a reduced libido, di Prima identifies it as another tool of control over women's sexuality. As she puts, the pill made "women who finally achieved the full freedom to fuck, much less likely to want to fuck" (di Prima, *Memoirs* 105). di Prima recenters the narrative of the pill through women's lived experiences. In "Goodbye, 'Post-pill Paradise:' Texturing Feminist Public Memories of Women's Reproductive and Rhetorical Agency," Heather Adams analyzes "non-nuanced...retrospectives on the emergence of the pill," calling for more complex histories of the pill authored by women (391). Adams identifies narratives like di Prima's as "feminist interventions" that "trouble and texture remembrance to enrich feminism's stories of agency and liberation" (411). di Prima counters dominant representations of the pill, therein contributing to a more multi-faceted representation of women's sexuality. The complexity with which di Prima represents women's sexual freedom is often overlooked in critical and scholarly receptions of *Memoirs*. The explicitness with which di Prima describes the erotic scenes is an important means by which she resists sexual norms and enacts rhetorical agency. However, her feminist rhetoric is most palpable in her representation of women's sexual freedom as a perpetual negotiation between personal desire and societal expectations.

Feminist Circulations

Through both her writing and participation in activist networks, di Prima engages circulation as a feminist rhetorical strategy to raise consciousness of women's rhetorics and disseminate rhetorics of social change. A common theme across her work is the woman artist's affective struggle for rhetorical agency. For example, in *Recollections*, she recalls an epiphany she experienced after taking part in a women's writing retreat:

For the first time, I saw the chaos in the actual process manifesting, and I questioned whether indeed [the creative process] was "crazy" or only a particular part of our dilemma as women artists. If one persisted, what to do with the work? How to carve a niche for it, if one doesn't have access to galleries, to publishing houses? How to make a place if one doesn't speak the language of the critic? (di Prima 198)

Through kinship with fellow women writers, she achieves a critical subjectivity that she then mobilizes towards criticism of women's exclusion from public platforms. She models a rhetorical agency and feminist resistance possible through subjective expression. She offers *affective solidarity* to fellow women and feminist rhetors (Hemmings, "Affective"), contributing to the *social circulation* of their work and writing processes (Royster and Kirsch).

Some of the most notable of this work includes her time with the Diggers, a group of activist artists that supported homeless youth in San Francisco (Fitzpatrick); her co-founding of the Poets Press, which published writers like Audre Lorde; and her engagement in Vietnam War protests ("In Memoriam"). From 1961-1971, di Prima served as co-editor of *The Floating Bear* with LeRoi Jones (now Amiri Baraka). *The Bear* was a newsletter that published editorials, socially critical poems, short stories, and more, and was shared with authors and activists selected by the editors. di Prima was arrested in 1961 on a "trafficking in obscene matter" charge after publishing Issue #9 of *The Floating Bear*, which contained homoerotic material. Issue #20 of *The Floating Bear* (1962) includes an editorial, in which di Prima and Jones reaffirm their decision to protect the homosexual identities of mailing list members when pressed by the FBI during trial (di Prima and Jones). Included in the SU archives is a 1961 press release authored by di Prima and Jones just after their arrest, in which they state:

It has long been the contention of artists and intellectuals that neither the government nor any of its agencies are qualified to judge what is literature or art and what is pornography.... [our case is] a defense of the artist's sovereignty.... If *The Bear* loses this case, it is not fantastic to say that there will be repercussions throughout the literary world. It would be an ugly precedent that would affect not only an entire generation of writers just breaking into print, but a great many other writers whose works a rust now being published in this country because of older censorship laws. This must not happen. (Jones and di Prima)

di Prima commits to freedom of expression in both her writing and actions. She models rhetorical agency in her work while fighting for marginalized artists' access to public platforms, furthering the circulation of feminist and social justice rhetorics. Her critique of censorship is also seen in a 1990 memo she wrote to the Interface Holistic Education Center, in which di Prima defends her women

students' writing and criticizes the institution's harassment policy, which "forbode sexual language." She writes: "Having myself grown up in a period where the refusal to sign a loyalty oath was an inflammatory matter, I find myself perhaps super-sensitive to this kind of thing.... But I find the list of verbally forbidden material to be somewhat inhibitory, and am certain I do not want to subject any students of mine to such considerations" (di Prima, Memo). In these examples, di Prima both engages in and defends feminist critique. As established, writing about alternative sexualities during this time was an act of feminist critique. In addition, di Prima calls out the structures that perpetuate—and the consequences of—the censorship of feminist rhetoric. These artifacts only begin to demonstrate di Prima's participation in activist networks, as they do not capture her work in coalition building for a myriad of civil and equal rights issues throughout her lifetime. Yet, they serve as evidence of her engagement in feminist circulation, and her ethos as a feminist rhetor deserving of recovery and recognition.

"Tacking Out"²²

With di Prima's passing, the original frustration that fueled my recovery of her work burns hotter. Even with all she accomplished, she remains in the shadow of male authors. The first line of her New York Times obituary reads: "She traveled in the circles of Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti" (Genzlinger). This infuriates me.

In concluding this article, old feelings of paralysis and doubt return, as I recall the many artifacts and claims I have not included. I overcome this feeling by thinking of the countless images from my time at the archives that wait patiently in a desktop folder for my return and the archives I have yet to visit. It goes without saying that a recovery project like this warrants much more than an article-length inquiry. di Prima's reflection on her Italian American heritage, for instance, is a key element of her feminist critique that I do not adequately address in this article and that I hope to investigate further. For example, Quinn identifies the *intersectional* nature of di Prima's work (Crenshaw): "The strength of di Prima's voice is the way in which she persists in offering an ongoing feminist analysis of her sense of Italian American femaleness which began amid reaction to family, and was reinforced by both anti-Italian social sentiment and enduring patriarchal intrusion" (187). In this way, her work draws attention to the fact that a struggle against the patriarchy is also one against racism and white supremacy. In centering her Italian American heritage, di Prima complicates one-dimensional narratives of women's lived experiences. More broadly, this project raises questions about other perspectives excluded from the Beat canon and the value in recovering

²² In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Royster and Kirsch describe the process of "tacking in and out" as imperative when conducting ethical rhetorical studies. "Tacking out" encourages the researcher to take a step back from the work to "broaden...viewpoints in anticipation of what might become more visible from a longer or broader view" (72). I model this approach in the conclusion by identifying the areas I have not sufficiently covered in this article, how my research might evolve moving forward, and the contributions of my project to the field of feminist rhetorical studies and other disciplines.

their contributions to a widely celebrated and studied literary movement predicated on the appropriation of Black culture.

di Prima's recovery as a feminist rhetor is important work. Yet, the contributions of this project go beyond recovery alone. For instance, di Prima's unique blending of memory, fiction, and social commentary offer innovative lenses for studying genre-meshing social movement rhetorics. Her recovery also provides opportunities to reflect on who is and is not recognized in our rhetorical canons, contributing to what Charlotte Hogg describes as a "reflexivity and clarification as to what and whom we represent" (182). In *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope*, Cheryl Glenn identifies the field of feminist rhetoric as in "a constate state of response, reassessment, and self-correction" (4). I contribute to this recursive enterprise by *extrapolating* di Prima's feminist rhetorical strategies (Ratcliffe), which, in turn, expands the field's definition of what feminist rhetoric is and the positionalities, histories, and epistemologies to which we subscribe.

My anger feels generative now; there is much work to be done.

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“This Seismic Life Change”: Graduate Students Parenting and Writing During a Pandemic

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Abstract: This article documents and explores the feminist concern of graduate student and other parent-scholars during a particular time (the pandemic) and place (almost universally, their homes). Part narrative and part mixed-methods study, this piece investigates data from graduate student parents about their writing and home-life experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrates the differing priorities and experiences of these scholars from their non-parent peers, including experiences of physical and mental health, productivity, and access to campus services and campus-community opportunities. Finally, I offer implications for future thinking and increased attention to graduate student parents, post-pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, graduate students, parent-scholars, productivity, writing

As a parent and a doctoral candidate, I often tell people that I never imagined going back to school for a Ph.D., but if I had, I could not have dreamed that it would be my fourth or fifth priority (in the best of times), behind tending to my full-time faculty job, my daughter, my husband, my aging parents, and other obligations. And while I feel my life and teaching experiences have benefited me tremendously as an older returning student, I find myself wishing fairly often that I were younger, less encumbered, and that more of my life and my time were focused on my studies, as I see in some of my classmates. Instead, frankly, my doctoral work is something I have to fit in around other things and people that demand my attention. For instance, if I plan to study one evening and my daughter is sick,²³ I abandon studying. If a work crisis pops up, I attend to that instead of writing a paper for class. This has been even more the case since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interruptions and competing priorities are literally in my line of vision at all times now. Although I

²³ Or overly tired. Or missing me. Or hungry for something different than her dad knows how to make. Or interested in taking a walk. Or sitting in the backyard eating popsicles.

hesitate to admit it here, my writing—both for my job and graduate work—has fallen even further down the list of priorities as I worry about my daughter’s isolation, the possibility of my husband being furloughed or laid off, our elderly parents’ immune systems, and my own sanity. Due to these limitations, my approach to such work has changed drastically and my standards for it have dropped, hovering now somewhere between “don’t embarrass yourself” and “just get it done.” I suspect this is the case for many graduate students—particularly those with children at home. Our ability to focus, broadly, is simply not what it was ten months ago for so many reasons.

Just a few months into the pandemic, I read an article in *The Washington Post*, in which two parents—both academics—tracked their child-related interruptions. They wrote of a 3-hour period of tracking:

Looked at one way, the situation appeared manageable: Over the course of three hours, the parent on duty was interrupted for a little over half an hour in total, meaning they got almost 2 1 / 2 hours of work time...But that time didn’t come in two clean chunks: The parent was interrupted 45 times, an average of 15 times per hour. The average length of an uninterrupted stretch of work time was three minutes, 24 seconds. The longest uninterrupted period was 19 minutes, 35 seconds. The shortest was mere seconds. (Edwards and Snyder)

The same article referenced a study that found it can take 20 minutes for a person who has been distracted from their work to come back to focus (Brumby et al.). Again, the longest uninterrupted work time for this particular writer was 19 minutes and 35 seconds.²⁴ Theoretically, my partner and I split our day around childcare, each taking either a morning or afternoon (pre-nap or post-nap²⁵) working session while the other partner watches our daughter. Because she is two years old,²⁶ there is little to no independent time for her—unless we count watching TV on the couch while we sit next to her, trying to work or attend Zoom meetings. In reality, there has not been a single block of time without interruption in ten months.²⁷

And it’s this experience that has led me to my research here. I ask: In what ways, if at all, are the experiences of graduate students who are parents different from the experiences of non-parent graduate students, particularly regarding home life and writing since the start of COVID-19?²⁸

²⁴ It’s probably worth noting that it took me four days to simply get through this brief article.

²⁵ Since initially writing this, she’s stopped napping. STOPPED NAPPING ALL TOGETHER no matter how long we stroke her hair and talk in quiet voices and get her up early and schedule pre-nap quiet time.

²⁶ Now three, likely four at the time of publication. Look, it’s a pandemic and a I have a toddler, so yeah, fully researching, writing, and revising this thing has been a long process.

²⁷ Make that 19 now!

²⁸ Other than, you know, nonparents probably sleep and occasionally watch Netflix and likely have clean-ish hair and don’t find a slice of bell pepper at the bottom of their cold, cold coffee mug at noon when they finally finish it.

The “Incompatibility” of Parenting and Graduate Writing

The pandemic has, of course, changed every aspect of life for most people, from social gatherings and travel to parenting and public health overall. In higher education, the changes are just as drastic, and of course, for graduate students, in particular, educational challenges are heightened by all aspects of life outside of the classroom—even the virtual classroom.²⁹ Most graduate students work in addition to their studies—many full time. In “normal times” graduate student stress is well documented (see “Grappling with” and Puri). And during the pandemic that stress is increasing rapidly, ultimately developing for many into more substantial mental health issues. A study out of University of California at Berkeley reports that “32% of graduate and professional students screened positive for major depressive disorder” during the early months of the pandemic (Chirikov et al. 1). The study also notes, of course, that certain populations are much more likely to feel these effects—and they include caregivers in this set of specific populations. Caregivers in another study noted that they were most in need of “general coping” mechanisms (Fitzpatrick et al. 1088).³⁰

B. S. Russell et. al conducted a study early in the pandemic about caregiver burden during COVID, finding that the impact of long-term and/or undefined periods of quarantining for families has the potential to “lead to unprecedented impacts on individuals’ mental health” (672). They write, “parents must actively plan new caregiving, work, and education routines, potentially compromising time to tend to their own emotional experience and self-care” (672).³¹ Graduate students, then, must “actively plan” these new tasks into their days while *also* attending to their own educational routines.

We can assume that graduate students who are also parents make up a significant percentage of the overall graduate student population, although no recent data is available on this number. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, twenty-two percent of undergraduates are parents, and I think it stands to reason that this number is likely higher among graduate students, who are on average older (ASCEND); the average graduate student age is thirty-three (*Who Graduate Students Are | Graduate Mentoring Guidebook | Nebraska*).

Parenting during graduate studies or in a full-time academic job has always been fraught. While mothers in academia have done important work in making these complexities visible and noted, these have mostly been through narratives, and straight, white-middle class mother narratives at that (Rose). Few data-driven studies have examined the nuances and challenges of parenting while working as an academic, but it’s clear that finding time, energy, and focus

²⁹ And obviously high schools. And middle schools. And elementary schools. And don’t even get me started on the unexpected shame of having the only toddler who won’t sit still for Zoom story time in April 2020, despite me literally bribing her with snacks. And it’s a screen! Why isn’t it captivating like all the screen-based garbage that she can’t look away from?

³⁰ But what would that even look like right now? We don’t have the hour for therapy, even those of us lucky enough to have insurance. And if we did, every therapist I know is booked up because everyone is falling apart. What other strategies might I be attempting to employ? Last week my daughter tried a Sesame Street deep breathing exercise at a particularly rough moment. But I wouldn’t call that a long-term solution...

³¹ And by “self-care” we’re rounding down now to teeth brushing.

particularly to write at all is extremely challenging in most cases, to put it mildly. Graduate student parents have always reported completing much of their studying and writing for school at night and on the weekends (Sallee 406). They also report spending less time on coursework than they would like or feel obligated to due to competing childcare demands (Sallee 406), particularly as quality childcare has always been out of reach for on graduate students' salaries/stipends (Springer et al. 447; Theisen et al. 53). Candice Harris et al. write "Family is perceived by some to be invisible in academia,³² although women often perceive motherhood to have a considerable impact on their academic career, as the amount of work required to be a successful academic can only be done when one is without children or other responsibilities" (709).

What we do know is that there is an underrepresentation of graduate student mothers in Ph.D. programs and some have referred to this as a social justice issue (Kulp 408). Alessandra Minello, Sara Martucci, and Lidia Manzo point out that "the beginning of an academic career is marked by a prolonged period of precariousness, one which typically coincides with a woman's reproductive period" (2). Mothers who have a doctoral degree are also not as likely to come from top-ranked programs or to publish scholarly work (Kulp 410). One study of parents in academia, centered around identity and performance, quotes a mother remarking on her colleagues and academia at large: "There is still an assumption that a parent can separate themselves from their children and come to work...especially a very young child...they just have to turn the switch off and I don't think you can" (Harris et al. 712).³³ Amanda Kulp writes that "Graduate school is a critical period for Ph.D. earners to collect the kinds of resources they need to compete for tenure-track jobs, and parenting a child during graduate school can put stress on graduate students in their efforts collect these resources" (410).

For mothers working in STEM particularly, concerns around gender inequality that have always existed have now risen too. A "new motherhood penalty" places further distance between mothers and their non-mother and male colleagues in STEM, particularly, although certainly also those in other fields (Staniscuaski et al. 724). Kristen Springer, Brenda Parker, and Catherine Leviten-Reid found that

there are few formal institutional supports tailored to the needs of graduate student parents; there is limited knowledge on the part of faculty regarding supports that may exist for graduate students with children; and departments accommodate graduate student parents on a flexible,³⁴ case-by-case basis. All three serve to create a message that children are not a standard feature in the lives of doctoral candidates. (441)

³² To put it truly as mildly as possible.

³³ And the thing is, I really try. I apologized to my professor so hard and so many times the night I had to leave a Ph.D. seminar because my husband called to tell me the baby had spiked a 104-degree fever and had thrown up in every room of the house in the hour since I'd left. The shame of it, leaving class to go to the Emergency Room.

³⁴ Flexible? Says who?

Motherhood in academia³⁵—whether as graduate students or faculty members—has always had to be *strategic choice* (Harris et al. 709). Springer, Parker, and Leviten-Reid write, “being both an academic and parent is quite incompatible in practice” (436)—and they were writing pre-pandemic. It’s no wonder, of course, that Minello, Martucci, and Manzo in their very recent, very powerful study on the pandemic and academic mothers report that academic work is (still) “incompatible” with full-time parenting (2). I think most parents would admit that when they are parenting young children, it can be very difficult to be fully focused on work, even when their child is not physically in their presence. And now, they are fully in our physical presence at all times. For all parents, of course, both household work and childcare commitments are overwhelmingly up.³⁶ Although much has been rightly made of women disproportionately taking on caregiver loads, one recent study found that there was a much bigger gap in researcher productivity between those who have children and those who don’t than between genders (Breuning et al.). It’s worth noting that they also concede that, just the same, “women will be worse off when the dust settles from the pandemic” (Breuning et al. 2). It’s parenting more than gender, even, that makes keeping one’s head above water as an academic during the pandemic nearly impossible.

When it comes to expectations for research and publishing, some institutions are beginning to make concessions for faculty, but graduate students seem to be on their own (Guatimosim). Early studies suggest that “the global pandemic is quite likely to influence scholarly productivity during this period and in the months, and possibly years, to come” (Breuning et al. 2).³⁷ Reporting on a study of Canadian graduate students, Christine Ro notes that “Just over three-quarters of the 1,431 respondents report that the pandemic has ‘notably’ impeded their ability to conduct research.” 44 percent of those graduate students worry that the pandemic will impact their chances at completing their degree (TSPN). I have to believe that this sentiment is common beyond the bounds of this study.

Further, some argue that “writing needs concentration and inspiration that cannot be constrained into a limited time of the day” (Minello, Martucci, and Manzo 7). Very few studies have looked at the experiences of graduate student writers (Henderson and Cook 49), but even pre-pandemic, graduate student writing is a challenge. Brian Henderson and Paul Cook report that “a significant gap exists between what graduate students know and what they are expected to know” (49). And of course, different fields are going to hold and manage expectations very differently. For instance, in engineering, graduate students, “often struggle to learn to write under high-pressure conditions” (Berdanier and Zerbe 138). Such conditions are typical in many programs. Catherine Berdanier and Ellen Zerbe write:

...it is interesting that most students do understand that writing is a knowledge-transforming process, while still struggling with the trifacta of perfectionism,

³⁵ Or, you know, ANYWHERE.

³⁶ It was a few months into the shutdown when I calculated the number of meals and snacks I made, plated, and cleaned up after weekly for my toddler during the pandemic, and I no longer have that number because I can’t find anything in this mess of a house, but it was a lot.

³⁷ And after this, will we ever look at how just parenting in normal times impacts “productivity” when compared to non-caregiver colleagues?

procrastination, and writer's block. Leveraging writing strategies to overcome some of these issues, such as accountability structures, timed writing sprints, and time management techniques can be housed within a broader discussion of learning-to-write and writing-to-learn as a graduate student in the process of becoming a member of a discipline, calling to mind academic literacies theory. (133)

One might reasonably assume that writing expectations, especially towards professionalization, are more explicitly understood by graduate students in writing studies, but even in this discipline, Henderson and Cook's work shows us that writing studies graduate students still feel they need clearer expectations (63). As we think about parenting, graduate students, writing, and the pandemic, we see a number of connections and crossovers, and yet, we don't yet see any scholarship about parents who are graduate students writing during the pandemic.

Population and Data Collection

The research that follows draws from a larger data set collected by graduate students in a research methods class³⁸ at George Mason University. This IRB-approved (IRB 1557945-1), mixed-methods project included a survey and a limited number of interviews, conducted via video conferences due to the pandemic. All survey participant and interviewee identifying information has been made anonymous, per our IRB approval. The survey contained 27 questions, and a call for responses was distributed nationally, primarily via professional and academic listservs and social media. Due to the listservs we had access to, a high percentage of the respondents were in programs related to English or writing studies (68% of nonparent and 55% of parent respondents were in a writing and rhetoric or related program). However, a variety of other disciplines were represented, including, for instance, information systems, art history, Russian studies, law, consumer behavior and family economics, and genetics, just to name a few. Degrees being pursued included M.A., M.F.A, J.D., and Ph.D. Of 397 survey responses, six were single parents and fifty-three noted that they lived with a partner or spouse and their children, making a total of fifty-nine parents who answered the survey and 275 nonparents. An additional sixty respondents chose not to answer the question of who they live with, and so the answers from these participants were disregarded for the purposes of this inquiry. The total number of survey respondents I looked at, then, was 336. Of those, fifty-three percent of nonparents were still in coursework, and sixty-one percent of parents were still in coursework. Of both nonparents and parents, the vast majority of respondents were in Ph.D. programs and M.A. programs.

The interview contained sixteen open-ended questions. The interviewees were drawn from survey respondents who indicated that they were willing to be interviewed. In the interviews, only four of the twenty-five interviewees mentioned having children, a smaller percentage than replied to the survey, presumably because parents have less time to spare to volunteer to be interviewed.

³⁸ I mean, obviously I couldn't have planned this, gotten IRB approval, recruited, and developed the study materials alone. My role in collecting the data wasn't huge. Even analyzing the data felt like an insurmountable task most nights as I looked with bleary eyes at my Excel sheets after bathing this kid and reading six books and sitting with her until she fell asleep in the dark without actually falling asleep myself.

Mental and Physical Health

Physical and mental health has been a major concern during the pandemic, for reasons that span the stress and isolation and the closing of gyms and the complexities of exercising with social distancing in place to issues of lost wages, the illness and death of family, civil unrest, and so many other factors. Approximately half of each group reported major or moderate impacts to physical health during the pandemic.³⁹ Of the survey respondents, fifty-four percent of parents stated that they have accessed health and/or wellness resources during the pandemic, compared to thirty-nine percent of nonparents. Interestingly, more nonparents reported major or moderate impacts to mental health, seventy-two percent compared to parents at sixty-two percent. Parents reported a slightly higher impact than nonparents on work-life balance (eighty-three percent to seventy-four percent), but both groups reported major impacts here in high numbers. Only fourteen percent of nonparents expressed high impacts from caretaker expectations, compared to fifty percent of parents, although this fourteen percent reminds us that “caretaking” takes many forms. Several survey respondents and interviewees mentioned drastic life changes and particularly strict quarantining due to elderly or immune-compromised relatives that they cared for.⁴⁰ Parents in interviews also talked quite a bit about the lack of “alone” time they experienced⁴¹ due to balancing graduate work, childcare, and, usually, also a job, all within the confines of their home:

My biggest thing is just childcare, and I mean that has really been the big shift for me [...] while both kids are understandably in the middle of the meltdown because we're in a pandemic and they haven't seen their friends, and I'm just sitting there thinking, like, [this would] be so much easier if they were in school every day. You know, like I could get a little time to myself. So that's really the biggest the biggest one for me.
(Anonymous Interview Participant 28)

Ironically, they also, sometimes in the same breath, discussed the challenges of isolation⁴²:

The isolation was definitely like a struggle, especially without the childcare that—I already—I am an introvert, and I do kind of recharge by having alone time. But even I was kind of starting to hit my limit on the amount of hours a day and days a week that I could spend with only an eight month old to talk to (Anonymous Interview Participant 3)

³⁹ I actually would have guessed parents would be in better shape at this point because we're always chasing the kids to save them from death in the street and chasing them to wear them out so they'll sleep and chasing them because the neighbors would for sure think she's too small to be five houses down alone on the sidewalk.

⁴⁰ Can you even imagine caring for a toddler AND an elderly parent in your home right now? (Surely some of you can and are!) For that matter, I only have ONE kid! How am I even complaining?

⁴¹ That's not necessarily true for me. I did a lot of crying alone in the bathroom while my daughter watched Bluey.

⁴² Never alone and also isolated feels right on target.

They⁴³ are with their⁴⁴ children every second, but never with colleagues. Such issues of space and home, of lack of access to offices, classmates, and colleagues, while central to these conversations about sanity, don't even touch on the limits these situations place on gaining access to feedback or even casual what-are-you-working on conversations, which most scholars I think would agree are often incredibly valuable to our work.

Productivity

Productivity is, of course, a major concern for any graduate student, but for parents during the pandemic, such concerns are certainly heightened. Interestingly, Figure 1 below, which charts perceptions of productivity since the start of COVID-19, shows us that parents and non-parents alike are struggling to similar degrees; exactly forty-four percent of each group perceived that they are less productive since the start of the pandemic. We don't, of course, have data on whether these perceptions are accurate and/or the degrees to which productivity might have suffered.

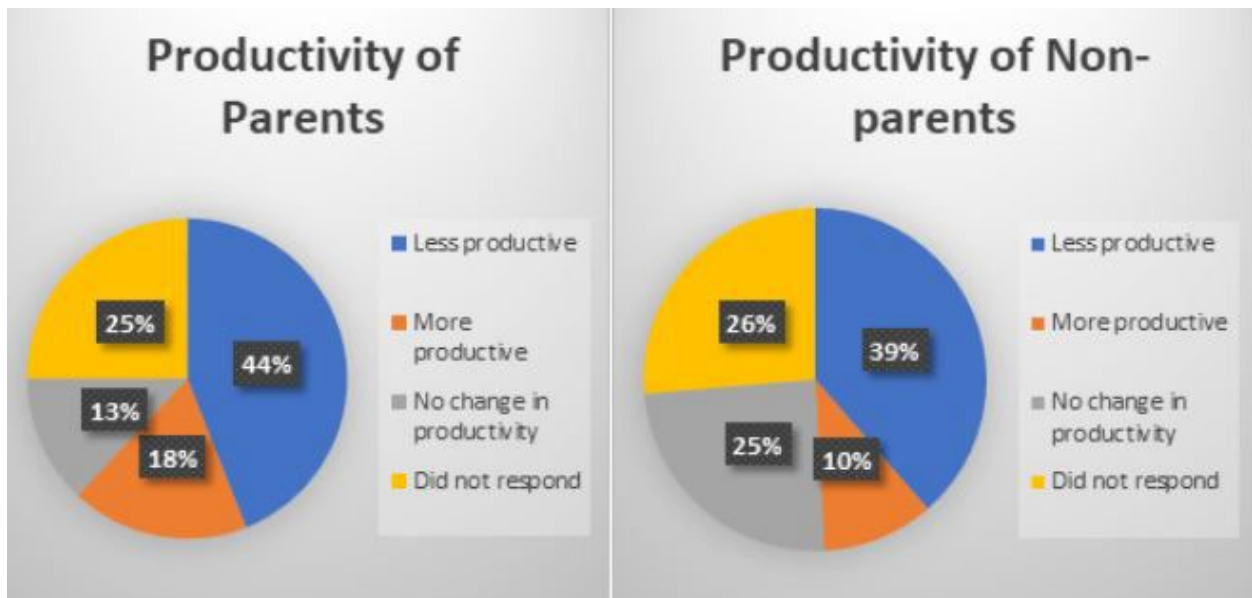


Figure 3: The first pie graph, titled "Productivity of Parents," shows that almost half note that they have been "Less Productive" during the pandemic. In the second pie graph, titled "Productivity of Non-parents," that pie slice is slightly smaller.

Related to this question of productivity, in answer to the question, "Is there anything else about your graduate writing life during the COVID-19 pandemic that you think is important for us to know?" perhaps unsurprisingly, most parents who responded to the survey wrote about having their kids home with them, and the toll twenty-four-hour care and home-school supervision took on them and their work. Representative responses include:

⁴³ We

⁴⁴ our

The hardest, most difficult aspect for me is that public schools are closed, so both of my kids are at home full time and it's impacting my time to get both work and school done. I teach a 5/5 load at the university where I'm a full-time lecturer, plus am taking graduate coursework, and the original plan is that my kids would be in school. This really threw a wrench in things! (Survey Participant 244)

My situation feels a little unique in that I was a full-time caregiver of two children from March-September. My boyfriend's children moved in with us and I had to manage them for the duration of the spring semester and all of summer during a research fellowship. My writing process and workflow changed dramatically due to being a full-time parent. (Survey Participant 7)

Keeping up with the demands of family and work mean my graduate writing is significantly diminished. (Survey Participant 19)

...not a whole lot got done, because my days were devoted to just trying to keep track of a crawling infant and keep him happy and kind of keep on top of stuff. (Anonymous Participant 3)

We see that for these caregiving graduate students, writing "changed dramatically" as the hours of each day being allocated previously to writing were now necessarily devoted to the work of caring for kids. And no wonder; if a parent works an eight-hour day and commutes, the average toddler likely spends around nine hours in daycare each weekday, and school children are often gone somewhere in the range of seven hours. Those seven to nine hours are now time that parents need to feed and supervise their children. Even high school students, who require less "supervision," require time and attention during the day from their caregivers. As one respondent put it, "[my writing] is more impacted by the fact that my daughter is at home all of the time since high school is not meeting face to face; her mental state and her ability to work at home colors my ability to work at home" (Survey Participant 289). To keep up productivity, these parents have to find writing time elsewhere.⁴⁵

In the limited number of interviews from parents, we found that external childcare was a topic of concern that related to many questions. The narratives from these interviews reinforce how much graduate student parents rely upon safe, consistent childcare and schooling for their children in order to write and work. Some representative comments included:

So actually, the biggest [challenge] is childcare. I have a 10-year-old, and I have a four-year-old. And so when I originally signed up for my Ph.D. program, I was like, oh, now is the perfect time, right? Like my four-year—in Fall 2020...my four-year-old will be going into preschool, so will be in school for like four hours a day, five days a week. My 10-year-old is going into fourth grade. He's in school for eight hours a day. My eighty-year-old grandparents come up twice a week and they spend the night with us, and they take care of the kids [...] I can take two classes no problem. And then COVID happens. (Anonymous Participant 12)

⁴⁵ And in my home and many others, "elsewhere" means after bedtime.

For the first six months of the pandemic, we had my partner's kids here with us full time, and I needed that flexibility to get through the summer, and my summer work, because I had to take care of them during the day, like watch what they were doing, like make sure they're alive and fed, and have things to do [...] I went through this seismic life change of becoming a full-time guardian, and going online, like the same week. (Survey Participant 7)

Childcare was probably the single biggest issue. I think if my son had still been able to go to daycare through everything, even if I couldn't go to the library, even if I couldn't go pick up materials, I could have still gotten a decent amount done. Maybe had a little bit of a lapse in productivity. But that was the—the single biggest one is just you can't—with one that little—you can just sit, you know, you can't even say like, well, go play in your room for a little while. It's like, you're eight months old, you're into everything. And it's just a constant, kind of keeping track of him (Anonymous Interview Participant 3)

Managing home school is a particular concern⁴⁶ for many of the interviewees as well:

I went from like, oh, I have this three-hour block of time where I can just write and write and write and write to like now I'm like, alright I get a 20 minute burst, and then my older son gets locked out of Zoom and I have to run in there and help him and then I come back and do another fifteen minute burst and then [...] there's no boundary right now, and it's just a very different space to be in to try to get work done. (Anonymous Interview Participant 11)

Nonparents, on the other hand, wrote about a variety of other issues that affected their writing productivity: including isolation, anxiety, a lack of focus, increased screen time, challenges of remote collaboration and remote teaching, the less-than-ideal physical spaces they have to write in, and uncertainty about the job market. We might assume that these were concerns shared by the parents, but that childcare and parenting concerns simply took precedence.

[Access to Campus Services and Campus-community Opportunities](#)

⁴⁶ Sweet Jesus, I can't honestly even imagine.

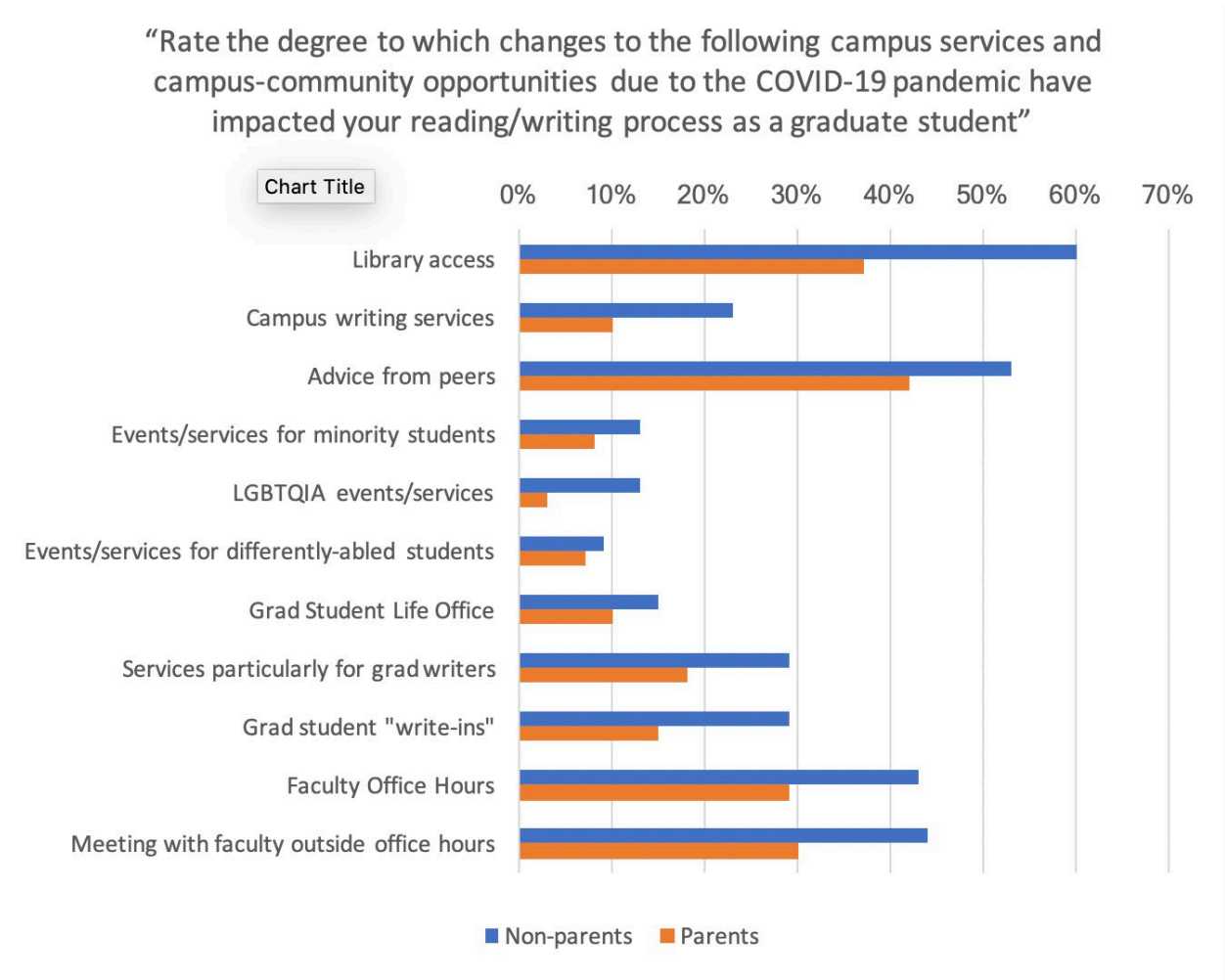


Figure 4: Horizontal bar chart demonstrating that for all categories non-parents reported a higher impact on their reading and writing processes by a lack of access to services.

One of the most illuminating sets of data in this survey regarding parents relates to access to campus services and other on-campus opportunities for graduate students. Figure 2 below illustrates parent and non-parent responses when asked to rate the degree to which COVID-19-related changes in such services and opportunities have impacted their reading and writing work.

We can see that parents were less effected in every single category above. This chart shows us that parents were then, presumably, taking less from such campus services to begin with. And yet, interestingly, of nonparents, thirty-seven percent explicitly said they felt supported as a graduate writer by their “institution, department, program, and/or campus community,” compared to fifty-five percent of parents—perhaps because they have the time to access such support.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ “Perhaps,” but, you know, definitely because of this. After working all day and being away from my kid, and knowing I have to be in a classroom again at 7:20 p.m. for a graduate seminar, I’m not going to skuttle over to campus early to check out the resources at the Random Campus Opportunity.

Insights for the Future

In May of 2021, a photo of an MIT professor went viral after he purchased a crib for his office to support his graduate students with babies or small children (“Mass. Professor Goes Viral After Putting Crib in Office to Help Grad Student with Infant Daughter”). He was praised, but then, quickly, commenters shifted to lament the lack of large-scale, systemic help for parents in general, and graduate students in particular.⁴⁸ As we see in the literature above, mothers who are graduate students suffer in uncountable ways. They’re disadvantaged as students and if we measure success by what kind of job they’re able to land post-graduation, such disadvantages and lack of support will continue to impact them throughout the rest of their career.⁴⁹

This data and these insights from this study aren’t likely to change much about our current situation or the larger one; there’s no vaccine buried in them, and there’s no rhetoric to make millions of COVID-deniers start wearing masks.⁵⁰ But if nothing else, it’s my hope that part of what comes out of this study and others like it is that both parents and non-parents alike can recognize both these systemic issues and the enormous toll COVID-19 is taking on our work. And I hope that advisors and the faculty overseeing these students and programs can too. Well over half of the participants in both data groups reported major or moderate impacts to their mental health since the start of the pandemic,⁵¹ and as we’ve all experienced in some way or another, the other challenges and tragedies of life don’t stop just because we’re stuck at home. Elderly family members still have heart attacks. Work is still busy. The car still breaks down.⁵² The stresses of life are already high for most of us, in particular graduate student parents.

And while I hate to generalize, I believe that most of us would assume such dilemmas affect mothers more than fathers. Right now, more broadly, women’s unemployment is far outweighing the unemployment of men (Ruppanner et al.)—almost certainly as this relates to motherhood—and I imagine only time will tell, too, how many graduate programs, also disproportionately of women, are interrupted or fully stopped due to childcare, as we might assume from a recent census piece (Heggeness and Fields). It’s crucial that we change expectations, educating on what life is like

⁴⁸ We see versions of this all the time; the professor with a student’s baby strapped to his or her back is another recurring example.

⁴⁹ It’s not within the scope of the research here to consider the cost and quality of childcare in the U.S. during “normal” times, and yet, of course, it’s relevant. In most areas of the country quality childcare is nearly outside of the range of possible for homes with two working parents. What happens when one of those parents is bringing in only a pittance of a graduate student stipend?

⁵⁰ Or, now, as I revise this in late Fall 2021, convince these people to get the vaccine because COME ON, SERIOUSLY I STILL GOTTA BE WORRIED ABOUT THIS KID GETTING COVID. YOU’VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME.

⁵¹ More migraines. More panic attacks. More insomnia. More decision fatigue, driven by “*Are we being too cautious or not cautious enough? Which is worse—that she’s getting super weird from lack of socialization or that her friends who went back to school might be exposed?*”

⁵² You still forget the milk. Your in-laws still need you to be sure to call Aunt so-and-so because she’s ill. A peach milkshake still spills all over the car.

for parents right now so that we lose fewer of them through the “leaky pipeline” but also so that our writing can measure up to our peers.

In one of my favorite interviews, a graduate student told me that her kids were grown, but that the two who were college-aged were at home with her due to the pandemic, rather than away in a dorm, as they’d all expected. She told me that they’ve been keeping her in line, and even reading her work and offering her feedback on her papers. Unfortunately, of course, this is a rare case. As the data shows, most graduate students—parents or not—are struggling in any number of ways.⁵³ But they were also struggling before the pandemic, as so much of the scholarship I explore above shows.

To that end, finally, I’m most interested in this data as I believe that it tells us something larger about graduate students who are also parents during “normal” times. As I look back to Figure 2 above, I’m struck by how graduate students who are also parents operate, write, and work differently than non-parent graduate students. As we see, parents reported being less affected by the loss of every single type of in-person campus and program-related resources that had disappeared during the pandemic, from faculty office hours to services for grad writers from other offices or departments. Again, this suggests to me that these parents have been less reliant on such services and support even pre-pandemic. I am a parent in a Ph.D. program, but during my M.A. and M.F.A., I was not a parent. I can say with certainty that I spent more time on campus with faculty and peers and that I took advantage of my university’s additional graduate student support much, much more during my time enrolled in these earlier programs. Without children and working as a teaching assistant, I had the time to; my graduate work was my priority. In my Ph.D. program, however, even pre-pandemic, nine times out of ten I deleted emails advertising workshops, talks, and other opportunities for graduate students. I felt I had little time to spare—even for often seemingly very worthwhile activities—and even if I *did* feel like I had the time, I often couldn’t bear the thought of asking my partner to do dinner/bath time/bedtime alone yet another night of the week beyond the evenings I attended class.⁵⁴ It feels crucial to me that institutions find ways to better accommodate other graduate students in similar positions.

⁵³ As a person who’s been lucky to only really rarely struggle with focus and “buckling down and getting to work” in my pre-pandemic endeavors, *and* as a student and employee who takes quite a bit of pride and identity stake in my ability to be productive, my life during the pandemic, here at home, a virus raging outside and a two year old/ three year old raging inside, my struggle to focus isn’t just a frustration; it’s becoming a spark to a larger depression brought on by feeling as though, well, what is the point? My rational brain is quick to remind me that, *of course*, work and productivity don’t equal value and there’s a pandemic and also my child is alive and fed, so that’s a win, and yet, I struggle, like so many of my peers. I hope that this data and analysis allows me to lower the bar lower for myself. I want to demonstrate, at least inwardly, that I can’t possibly meet those same standards I was meeting pre-pandemic. And of course, it’s worth noting, realistically, no one can, with or without kids; this data shows that everyone is struggling.

⁵⁴ During the pandemic, I don’t even open these emails; I just hit delete. And I have to believe I’m not the only one.

I think that seeing all of this should allow me to simply give myself a bit of a break.⁵⁵ Truthfully, the tension between wanting to go easier on myself as a parent, student, and employee, and the still very real deadlines and responsibilities are in many ways irreconcilable—and to me this data suggests that this was the case even pre-COVID. But it's my hope that even if graduate students are largely "failing" at writing, we can better accept our limits and the limits imposed by the pandemic—but also the system as a whole.⁵⁶ Because it seems clearer than ever that the system(s) aren't going to change for us.

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⁵⁵ But not, you know, really. Many months after initially drafting this, the guilt I feel is stronger than ever about the ways I'm failing my daughter.

⁵⁶ *And the system is fucked*. I mean, not just the academic system, although, yeah, for sure that is. But the *SYSTEM-system is fucked*, and that's clearer than ever to anyone who wants to see it. Whether you clean houses or run a museum or grow flowers or wait tables or analyze stocks, if you are a mother, your life and time were never your own, but they are even less so now. As I write work on this revision, I am sitting on the toilet next to the tub where my daughter is soaking off a 102.5-degree fever. On a work day. And a school day. On day six back to daycare after 18-months home. There is no system in place that works for me, a working mother and graduate student, so earlier today I taught my class virtually, and the two quiet hours I had marked off to work on my dissertation evaporate into the steam of the humidifier while I soothed her. *It will be all right*, I tell her, but long-term, I'm skeptical. I imagine this little creature as an adult woman with her own child, with goals, even with a partner who does their fair share—and still, run ragged and exhausted by the tension between this drive and the lack of support.

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Book Reviews

Review of *Lynching* (Ore 2019)

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Keywords: African American rhetoric, autoethnography, Black rhetorical agency, book review, Counterstory, discourse, embodiment, Intersectionality

***Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, and American Identity.* By Ersula J. Ore. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019. Pp. ix-xx + 175, acknowledgments, author's note, preface, notes, index. \$30, paper)**

As I wrote this, Bloomington, IN was in the midst of cultural unrest surrounding what even the news media recognized as “an attempted lynching” in an incident perpetrated against a Black man on July 4, 2020. Having read Ersula Ore’s text, I could viscerally witness the civic justifications of the white, male perpetrators against a body representing a cultural other in the filmed discourse on social media. Even as reports have been made public, the language of the legal documents lays bare the performance of denying agency to a Black, male victim while simultaneously alleging charges against him as an *aggressor* for attempting to engage in mediation. In July 2021, charges were filed against Booker for being the assailant, and the case continues to remain unresolved. This represents what Black Feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw has identified as an intersectional collapse of race and gender as a motive for integrating injustice into regular practice, potentially obscuring one or both. As she says, “Black men and women live in a society that creates sex-based norms and expectations which racism operates simultaneously to deny; Black men are not viewed as powerful, nor are Black women seen as passive” (156). Thus discourse and acts of lynching is not just a threat of bodily violence against a race but can also serve as the regularization of legislative justification, strengthening an us/them supremacy against the archetype of threat to White, patriarchal order.

From cover to close, Dr. Ersula Ore’s *Lynching* provides a harrowing revelation of racialized violence, one enacted through language that functions through an us/them dialectic, reducing some peoples—some bodies—to the status of lesser humans. Situating foundational concepts from Kenneth Burke’s scholarship to frame the historical trajectory of anti-blackness in America, Ore constructs a rhetorical frame with which to interrogate critical race relations as discursively

entangled in the American demos. Given this historic political trajectory but also our current moment of reinvigorating social justice movements, this text is not just theoretical, but imminently informative in terms of everyday racism and discursive anti-Black violence. Beginning in an embodied tell-all, Ore's Preface and Postscript emplace her within a compelling anecdotal account of the effects of her own racial targeting, based in hierarchical justification for dehumanizing racial bodies as sub-human. Detailing a prolonged account of warrantless detention and the juridical ramifications that followed, Ore's personal narrative creates a context for the exploration she engages. In text and in body, then, Ore performatively demonstrates how Kenneth Burke's concept of identification can inform our understanding of language as an everyday structure of oppression. This recuperation of well-known rhetorical scholarship answers Lisa Flores' 2018 call for more racial rhetorical criticism can be deployed through firsthand accounts, cultural history, and current political contexts.

To build her anecdotal experience into American society, Ore's approach employs discourse analysis to show how language doesn't just *say* things: it *does* things. One of her first examples makes this point clear in the way that—in legal proceedings—a sentence that affirms the *killing* of a person has lighter social connotations than convicting someone of *murder*. Ore uses the contrast to focus on how racially motivated dehumanization is discursively performed by calling a lynching a “killing” rather than a “murder,” metonymically resisting a diverse citizenry as lynching “became rhetorically constitutive occasions in which American civic identity was affirmed through antiblack violence” (19-20). By limiting both the social and legal definitions of what constitutes lynching, Ore argues that a black *victim* can be denied agency of victimhood through legislation while simultaneously being inscribed with the agency of *aggressor* through social mediation. And yet, deploying the term *lynching* in the present can serve as a linguistic memorial that metonymically links current black violence to historical acts and justification.

Chapter one calls upon the dialectic made possible in the Burkean concept of *identification* as merger/division, demonstrating that the basis of American identity ensured a violent rebuke of British rule that was recast onto a black citizenry. As a “call to communion,” lynching further functioned historically as a way to distinguish “those who belonged from those who did not [belong],” uniting both perpetrators of the acts and its spectators through epideictic rhetoric that “instructed citizens... while simultaneously maintaining and reproducing white supremacy as the democratic norm.” Ore explains how a national narrative of a “citizen race” was constituted through this codification and enactment of lynching as a form of communion: a “doing of citizenship.”

Chapter two advances the civic education of lynching as an image of epideictic rhetoric—a symbolic gesture of how “separate but equal” is enacted to separate “them” citizens who were out of place from both polity and vitality. Ore shows viscerally how lynching provides “political iconography that inculcates citizens to the practice of white democracy by way of modeling antiblack violence as a customary, natural, and revered practice of white civic identity” (56). As a resistance, such imagery was also reclaimed and reframed by anti-lynching activists to inscribe alternative lessons of racial terror and black death, as in the case of the anti-lynching efforts of *Crisis*, the *Chicago Defender*—particularly in the historic fervor surrounding Emmett Till.

Chapter three shifts the epideictic discourse into a modern context of museum curation, offering spaces to see and experience division and resistance by strategic tactics of alternative messages. Ore uses instances of historical and present dehumanization of black persons as ritualized transformation of black bodies into Burkean “equipment for living” in the progress narrative of the American polity. As a performative answer to the invective of, Crenshaw “...If we can’t see a problem, we can’t fix a problem. Together, we’ve come together to bear witness... to move from mourning and grief to action and transformation.” (Crenshaw 2019). Crenshaw’s original article about intersectionality emphasized the elision of Black women in the default collapse of Blackness as a masculine threat—which as Ore’s analysis rehashes is a primary driver of lynching.

However, though I contextualize the story of Vauhxx as intersectionally justified by his assailants and public discourse, I want to avoid re-covering an elision of feminine attributes—particularly since the allegations against him resulted from his attempt at civil discourse which has been characterized as “entrapment” and “provocation” since Black males are not allowed in hegemonic narratives to be “soft spoken.” Just as Ore explores how anti-lynching activists transformed visuals into an antiracist civic lesson, her rhetorical analysis of the discourse of lynching allows us to label and acknowledge the intersectional violence of our present cultural narratives against Black bodies.

In similar Burkean fashion of language as symbolic action, Ore rounds out her analysis with “Lynching in the Age of Obama,” This fourth chapter situates the historic trajectory of embodied and symbolic lynching in the presidency of Barrack Obama as further rhetorical divisions of “one of them” who had to constantly account for his blackness. Analyzing discourse around the Obama presidency and the symbolic acts of lynching performed during his presidency, her culminating analysis demonstrates the symbolic interactions of the polis with discursive and symbolic antiblackness reified the nation’s present expulsion of blackness as “out of place” in the American imaginary. More than just dynamic political debates, the everyday nature of such discourse shows that lynching discourse is not just reserved for instantiations but rather it is ingrained in the national narrative that mobilizes the us/them dialectic.

Ore concludes her analysis aptly by depicting how white supremacy operates through suppression of anti-black sentiments. Shifting back to her own anecdotal experience of systematic oppression, she explains how her own perpetrator was entwined in legislative forms of signifying black bodies as a scourge in contrast to white bodies as effectively in need of correction. Juxtaposing herself and another black victim with a non-black suspect stopped by the officer who arrested her, she exemplifies how discursive and legislative lynching is systematically ingrained in the present enactment of American citizenship through anti-Black policing.

Ultimately, *Lynching* provides a topical frame in which to deconstruct how historical oppression of black bodies is presently legitimated to sustain a national sense of an “us” citizenship through discursive and legislative violence against “them.” In the spaces between her words, one can hear the echoes of Achille Mbembe’s *necropower* in the way discourse repeats the sentiment of letting live while threatening to make die. Also, the embodied aspect of discourse rings of George Lakoff’s *Political Mind* in how describing racial *bodies* as lower can neurolinguistically program the delineation of white bodies *over* non-white subjects. And returning to the bookend of an uncertain

outcome, Ore's own account evidences the ongoing subjugation of *them* humans from *us* humans with no hope of unification.

As a discursive analysis, Ore's account is compelling, vivid, and multimodal in showing the ways that lynching has continually transformed *through* American culture, recursively transforming the culture itself. It's no wonder why this was the winner of the 2020 Rhetoric Society of America Book Award since it performs the intertextual linkings of indisciplinarity. Complicating notions of who counts and is counted in "we the people," *Lynching* is not a pessimistic reading of historical progression, but a consciousness raising effort that troubles the progress narrative of what is past/passed.

After reading the text myself and sitting with my own understanding of the stories and analysis it contains, I had the gracious opportunity with my program cohort to join a Zoom call and talk to the author herself. As Dr. O expounded upon the contextual decisions and constraints around the publishing decisions, I realized exactly how much ontological persistence is involved in speaking truth to power. I was reminded of Robert Reid-Pharr's description of the constraints of Black American autonomy: "...Within even the most rigid social hierarchies there nonetheless exist those many folds, tears, points of peculiarity and funniness that might be put to the service of both master and servant, man and woman, white and black." (Reid-Pharr 2007) It helped me realize that this is not just a message to be understood, but also a *telling* to be circulated widely.

As a restitution of rhetorical framing, Ore's project opens up engagements with interdisciplinary critical race scholarship—particularly afropessimist thinkers like Sadiya Hartman and Frantz Fanon. Additionally, the historiographical work of Ibram X. Kendi would contextualize the broader historical movements of black identity in America to the present. With Ore's thorough contextualization of the rhetorical foundations of lynching, it provides a solid foundation for extension in these directions, so I would urge more exploration of where it can be taken up next.

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Review of Digital Black Feminism (Knight Steele 2021)

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Why I get these tweets off?

"Digital Black feminists also wrestle with shades of gray. Like hip-hop feminists before them, digital Black feminists work to reconcile economic and sexual freedom for themselves with community interests that may conflict with their individual needs. However, instead of hip-hop as a driving force, the "gray" for digital Black feminist praxis is deconstructing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy within digital culture." (Steele 10)

In 2009 I created my first Twitter account from my Nokia brick phone. I had to go to the web browser to make an account and this was before apps were even a thing. As I started college, I began to use Twitter for web (this is tweeting from the Twitter website in your web browser) and the text to tweet feature to stay connected with my friends back home and those I was meeting on my college campus. When I got my first iPhone I downloaded the Twitter app and it was history from there. The Black Twitter counter public allowed me to stay up to date with arguments on \$200 dates, be aware of police brutality happening in Ferguson, and information on natural hair products to keep my curls poppin'. As an avid user of the internet from Myspace to Twitter, I found community in these digital spaces. Now that I am a doctoral student who is unpacking what feminism looks like for me, I needed a feminism that allowed me to embrace my digital lifestyle. Catherine Knight Steele's book *Digital Black Feminism* gave me the language and foundation for a feminism that allowed me to combine Black feminist values with my love for digital spaces. Steele's work has influenced my scholarship since I was a master's student in Maryland. I found that her work talked about digital spaces in a way that felt familiar to me. *Digital Black Feminism* does the same thing. It allows me to be in that "gray" area she speaks about in the text that allows me, as a Black woman, to call out and clap back at "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy within digital culture" (Steele 10) and to create, embrace, and honor my Blackness in online spaces.

What is Digital Black Feminism?

“Digital Black feminism insists we centralize Black women in our definition of and history of digital technology. Digital Black feminism is a mechanism to understand how Black feminist thought is altered by and alters technology. Digital Black feminism suggests we attune our gaze to Black women because they potentially provide the most robust site of inquiry as digital scholars interested in digital communication’s capacities and constraints” (Steele 15).

Digital Black feminism centers the voices of Black women and how they use technologies. Steele’s text talks about the technologies that Black women have used dating back to slavery. She opens the first chapter by explaining how these technologies impacted how Black women lived their lives as enslaved women. By opening the first chapter this way, she is solidifying the Black woman’s contribution to technology and confirming that we do indeed know how to be technologically advanced and that it didn’t just start with the worldwide web. Her examples of the many technologies that Black women have used, as a reader, made me feel powerful. It affirmed, for me, that Black women belong in these conversations about technology and how our years of using and creating technologies influence how we use spaces like Twitter or blogs now to mobilize, organize, educate, and build community. As an extension of black feminist theory, Steele uses digital black feminism to debunk the idea that Black women are not included in technology as an “intentional practice” (Steele 15). She asserts that by not aligning Black women with the intentional practices of technological innovation it continues to center white men as the ones who are the creators and responsible for the foundations of technology.

Steele’s creativity shines through this text as she uses the beauty shop as a metaphor for “an analytical tool to understand the relationship between Black women and technology”. Through this metaphor, she explains in detail the ways Black discourse, in this instance, opens folks up to the technologies of Black hair care. She believes that Black women’s hair maintenance can be seen as a “road map” for centering Black women’s financial independence. It also serves as a space to create communities of color that have desires to understand the technologies of hair. I found this interesting because it made me think of how there was a natural hair boom on sites like Youtube and blog spaces. Steele also brings in blogs to solidify this metaphor. Her explanation of these technologies offline and how they transfer skills to online spaces made it easy, as a reader, to see the impact Black women have on technology.

In addition, she also talks about how online spaces and communities create a safe place for Black women and nonbinary folk. Black women are using online spaces to not only talk about their entrepreneurial ventures but also to push back against racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. The clap backs are strong, backed by many Black women, and will quickly remind you that you’ve crossed the wrong one. Black women are using these spaces, according to Steele, as places for liberatory practices as well.

A Feminism that INCLUDES Me

“I intend to send up a flare to those who study and report on digital culture about the glaring absence of Black women in their work. For those studying online

harassment and trolling, algorithmic bias, and digital activism, Black women must be included in your work.” (Steele 156)

Digital Black Feminism influences my current work and future work in a few different ways. Firstly, Steele’s many definitions and examples of digital black feminism allow me to situate not only my work but myself in this type of feminism. It is inclusive of all of my intersecting identities as a Black, queer, and disabled woman who uses social media regularly as a space to create community, learn about new things, and clap back when people try to disrespect Black women. “The importance of digital communication and technology in the lives of Black feminists today cannot be overstated. As a site of thought generation, community formation, and economic advancement, digital tools and culture have changed how Black women (and all people) interact with the world ” (Steele 60). Secondly, Steele’s work is a foundational text for digital humanities scholars. She is setting the groundwork for scholars to build upon her assertion that digital black feminism is personal AND public. Meaning that it requires “intention and care around methods and ethics” (Steele 155). She challenges scholars to think and be mindful about who they cite and how they cite when it comes to talking about these digital spaces. By her starting the conversation on ethics, I believe, that it will implore other scholars in this discipline to consider their ethical and moral compass when it comes to this type of work. “I take caution in whom I cite, which tweets or stories I share, and how much personal information shared in other digital forums I repeat in this text. Countless people participated in the dialogue in the blogosphere and on social media that shaped digital Black feminism. In this text, I choose to cite and publicize the work of those who through their public writing, signal a willingness to enter the public discourse on issues of race and gender.” (Steele 156) Throughout the text, she cites many writers, scholars, and contributors to digital spaces which helps the reader understand more of the genealogy of digital black feminism.

The goal of *Digital Black Feminism* is to continue to empower Black women to use these many technologies and to feel like true contributors to the advancement of these technologies. Steele states that “Understanding the joys and labors of Black women, their fight for liberation, and their complicity in systems of capitalism is very complicated. Digital Black feminism is complicated, but perhaps this sheds light on why this inquiry is necessary” (Steele 157). Black women are necessary to the mobilization of these many technologies and we, all of us, use these digital spaces. Steele does not believe in re-traumatizing Black women for the sake of research and I believe that her text makes that clear. I am excited to think of these ethical implications as I embark on expanding my own research and adding to the foundational work of digital black feminism. Steele’s *Digital Black Feminism* has made me, as a novice Digital Black Feminist, feel seen, heard, and excited to use this framework to create new and innovative work. Although I tend to look at violence online, Steele’s work has encouraged me to consider what Black joy is in this digital space and how I can incorporate the beauty of Black digital discourse into future work.