

Review of *Ethics and Representation in Feminist Rhetorical Inquiry*

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Abstract: Which rhetorics are collective? What documents count as evidence worthy of an archival collection? How do we speak for women rhetors without violating their narratives? These questions are considered in *Ethics and Representation in Feminist Rhetorical Inquiry*. This collection considers feminist archival research and its representation of (selective) histories and rhetorics by drawing on previous scholarship, studying ignored rhetors, and questioning issues of access across geography, time, and space. To do so, the authors advised researchers “rescue, recover, and reinscribe” women’s rhetorical work, especially rhetorical work done by women who have been historically and repeatedly dismissed by archivists and researchers.

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Keywords: feminist rhetorics, archival research, methodologies, archival access, archival listening, memory work Which rhetorics – if any – are collective? What documents count as evidence *worthy* of an archival collection? How do feminist archivists or rhetors speak for women rhetors without violating their narratives? These questions are considered in *Ethics and Representation in Feminist Rhetorical Inquiry*, edited by Amy E. Dayton and Jennie L. Vaughn.

This collection considers feminist archival research and its representation of (selective) histories and rhetorics by drawing on previous scholarship, studying ignored rhetors, and questioning access issues. While examining previous scholarship, authors consider ways to ethically and compassionately advance methodologies in current research. This collection thus encourages future research on forgotten or unknown women rhetors by utilizing established feminist rhetorical methodologies, offering personal research experiences for analysis and reflexivity, and demonstrating practical approaches to address or answer questions of ethics and (re)presentation.

As feminist and archival researchers, many of the authors draw on Jacqueline Jones Royster’s and Gesa E. Kirsch’s theoretical frameworks and make their impact specific to their research. Authors share theoretical frameworks and common methodologies, such as Royster and Kirsch’s four key terms (critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, globalization) and Krista Ratcliffe’s rhetorical listening. Because these frameworks are shared, each author answers specific questions via the ethics, representation, and interpretation that arise when researching historical subjects.

Since Kirsch and Royster challenged scholars to ask new and different questions of multi-dimensional voices situated across geography, time, and space, they advised researchers “rescue, recover, and reinscribe” women’s rhetorical work. This collection extensively used the three “R’s” to reveal micro and macro histories: those of Native American women, Black women, activists, psychiatric patients, translators, and garment workers.

The collection’s twelve chapters include historical subjects unable to speak for themselves or historical subjects who disrupt neat categorization. Chapters in the collection are grouped by prevalent chapter themes (such as emotion, issues of access, and silenced archives). Most chapters invoke foundational terms in feminist and archival research, such as the idea of “archival listening” and memory work. This collection also introduces new terms such as rhetorical violence, or the harm done to narratives by a researcher’s scrutiny, interpretation, or translation.

Dayton and Vaughn assemble chapters with similar themes, though many have multiple themes and could be grouped differently by readers. Because of this, Chapters 1 and 2 are grouped together as they question the relationships between writers and subjects. In Chapter 1, Reva E. Sias studies Black schoolgirls who were denied a voice. Sias views her research through an Afrafeminist ideological perspective. As she explains, “[Afrafeminism] offers a more nuanced and shared space for African American women as the subjects of study” (24). Afrafeminist theorists can then remember the diverse lives of unknown African American schoolchildren and ethically re-story their lives and voices. In Chapter 2, Sara Hillin details her challenges representing African American aviators. Hillin “eavesdrops” on narratives by female aviators. Although Hillin studied aviatrixes like Bessie Coleman and Willa Beatrice Brown, she had to carefully consider whether to similarly study Amelia Earhart, since Earhart is the focal point of women’s achievements in early aviation. Hillin suggests researchers “overhear” their personal research and representation biases.

In chapter 3, Elizabeth Lowry focuses on displays of emotion, particularly anger, in women rhetors’ writing. Since women have traditionally been expected to downplay anger, Lowry suggests scholars implement an openness to explore and validate this emotion. This chapter assesses narratives by Indigenous women such as Lucy Thompson and Zitkala-Sa and how their narratives channeled “appropriate” anger. She writes, “Recognizing and respecting a writer’s anger means joining in her indignation, agreeing that she has been wronged, and acknowledging that she is exhibiting an entirely rational response to her situation” (68). For these women rhetors, anger is a way to build bridges. Lowry proposes that their anger is instructive *as well as* inviting.

Hillin and Lowry both connect their projects to “archival listening,” a term created by Jessica Enoch and Elizabeth Ellis Miller in chapter 4 to reflect rhetorical listening as it relates to archives. Enoch and Miller build their framing around Krista Ratcliffe’s *Rhetorical Listening*;

therefore, archival listening is a way to listen to details within an archive, especially when those details are complex or negative. They write, “Archival listening means reflecting critically on the disappointment we may feel in the archive, opening ourselves up to what we see as a rhetor’s flaws and failures, and thinking carefully about our historiographic responsibilities and our subject’s rhetorical performances” (72). Enoch and Miller ask how to best ethically represent historical subjects that (might) disappoint more contemporary or progressive researchers due to the subject’s complicated or discriminatory politics. Enoch and Miller’s research revealed their historical subjects’ troubling characteristics. For example, Miller’s research on Sarah Patton Boyle revealed that Boyle, while a white liberal advocating for Black rights, occasionally displayed racist and sexist attitudes. The authors note: “Ultimately, archival listening positions us to take into account our subjects’ flawed humanity, to explore the systems of power that invited and cultivated their rhetorics, [and] to acknowledge the complexity of a rhetor’s life” (86).

Chapters 5 and 6 explore access and ownership by exploring texts of incarcerated girls and hospital patients, respectively. In these chapters, Laura Rogers, Tobi Jacobi, and Caitlin Burns consider who can or should tell a subject’s story and how to tell that story with justice and compassion. Jacobi and Rogers map the personal documents of a troubled fourteen-year-old girl named Lila. Within this chapter, the two reference Patrick Berry’s concept of the contextual now: or, how researchers layer present ideologies and concepts over historical events. In Chapter 6, Burns explains that since archivists and owners of the Bryce Hospital collection have limited outside access to records, they may have inadvertently erased the histories of patients at the psychiatric facility. Burns agrees many of these marginalized, vulnerable populations should be protected, but also demonstrates how this protection *is* an act of silencing. As she writes, “the impact of these actions in this specific situation results in the silencing of the voices that are being protected” (113). In the case of mental institutions, narratives written by hospital superintendents or doctors *are* the accessible materials, and limiting access erases patients’ narratives completely. Both chapters consider who gets to decide when or how to tell a story and which voices may be subconsciously (or consciously) erased in the process.

Chapters 7 and 8 suggest ethnographic approaches to archival research. Some historical subjects have living descendants that may form relationships with archivists or researchers. In Chapter 7, Vaughn explores the relationships she formed with living relatives of her research subject. She echoes Royster’s *Traces of a Stream*: “[we] have an ethical responsibility to the descendants of our subjects to represent their ancestors with respect and dignity” (qtd. in Vaughn 128). These relationships created a living archive that revitalized her research experience. Chapter 8 considers narratives that were hidden to protect women in workers’ unions. Jane Greer looks at writings by working-class women detailing their experiences at the Donnelly Garment Company and notes that she had to resist comfortable narratives and her own conflicted appreciation of such rhetoric. She thus advises researchers to let the records of the past speak for themselves.

In Chapter 9, Gracemarie Mike Fillenwarth describes critical imagination as a way of seeing what is in an archive and what is not. Royster and Kirsch created this term in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*; following in their steps, Fillenwarth suggests looking at women's rhetorical work, collectively. Within her research, she seeks to explore how women's writings "came into being as a result of collective, collaborative interactions and rhetorical practice" (167). As a researcher new to the field of feminist rhetorics, I admired how many chapters, and especially Chapter 9, applied existing concepts in feminist rhetorical inquiry to the exploration of collective feminist narratives.

In juxtaposition to chapter 9, Kathleen T. Leuschen and Risa Applegarth draw on the method of memory work and explain how it "highlights the politicized potential of memory as a mechanism for intervening into contemporary scenes of inequality" (177). Leuschen and Applegarth study personal memories of activism and activists' published or unpublished narratives in chapter 10. But because some of these narratives are unpublished or missing in archives, research into these narratives – and the probing questions and requests that come with them – may be a form of rhetorical violence. This worry is also considered in the next chapter.

In Chapter 11, Cristina D. Ramirez suggests that translation – the translators themselves, the translated language, and what is lost in translation – reveal "the multiplicity of power struggles that accompany translation" (202). In one example of lost meaning, Ramirez recounts Wright de Kleinhan's speech "La lectura," wherein the informal *vosotros* form is used. In this speech, the feminine form of *vosotros*, or *vosotras*, is used to address a female audience. Yet, in translating the work into English, *vosotras* was replaced by the neutral "you." Therefore, this feminine-oriented speech is assigned a different meaning and may have been studied or placed within a vastly different (or exclusive) context.

Wendy Sharer suggests in Chapter 12 that more diverse voices should enter rhetorical discussions and produce theoretically rich projects. Sharer presents an opportunity for this in *Peitho's* "Recoveries and Reconsiderations" section. In this section, contributors can join rhetorical conversations without time-extensive research: the goal is instead to "introduce readers to resources for ongoing consideration and further discussion" ("New Peitho Feature"). Because of this, many feminist and archival researchers who may not have the time or institutional backing to complete extensive research can still join academic conversations and hopefully, bring their varied voices to feminist rhetorical projects.

As a graduate student interested in Indigenous and Mexican American identity, I found Chapter 3 especially engaging due to Lowry's writing choices and feminist historiographic perspective. Lowry's writing was energetic and ethical. Not only did Lowry recognize her subject's anger, she affirmed it. After reading these narratives, I hoped I would encounter more angry, righteous narratives by previously disempowered women in my own scholarly research.

Each chapter encourages additional research and a closer look at existing (and hidden) archives and materials. Many of this collection's scholars recommend others change the (re)construction of archives to include those who have been historically and repeatedly dismissed, such as the psychiatric patients in Chapter 6 or the female garment workers in Chapter 8. As evidenced in most chapters in this collection, many archives are bereft of marginalized women due to their narratives' displacement, archival restrictions, or simply neglect. Furthermore, the authors recommend discussing the collection's research outcomes and processes. By doing so, the authors open their feminist rhetorical research to (more) ethical and methodological questions as well as more diverse researchers.

It is up to readers and researchers to listen to and carefully consider these narratives through archival listening, memory work, and refraining from rhetorical violence in an attempt to recognize a rhetor's reclamation of agency. This collection sparks more discussion and encourages further sharing of research built on significant feminist rhetorical methodologies, like that of Kirsch, Royster, and Ratcliffe. Additionally, it adds to these methodologies by suggesting ways to examine feminist rhetorical research ethically and compassionately. Though other readers such as myself may not know when or how to join a feminist rhetorical conversation, this collection and *Peitho* advise that the first step is to ask, "Who is missing from this (rhetorical and narrative) conversation?"

Works Cited

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