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Cover Art: image description: a photo of the CCCC Feminist Caucus wall quilt, sewn by Holly Hassel from fabric squares made by attendees of CCCC 2019. Overlaid in the lower right corner is a yellow square with Peitho Volume 25.3 Spring 2023 typed in a handwriting font.

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Editors' Introduction

Rebecca Dingo and Clancy Ratliff

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.

Clancy Ratliff is Friends of the Humanities/Regents Professor in the English department and Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Her research and teaching interests are in feminist rhetorics, environmental 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, and the Acadiana Regional Coalition on Homelessness and Housing (ARCH).

Transnational Solidarities

Rebecca Dingo

Fall 2023 has been fraught. Across US college and university campuses, students have been threatened and arrested due to speaking out about the violence that, although happening in Gaza for decades, came to a peak with Hamas' kidnapping and murdering Israeli civilians. This violence carries on in the extreme as Israel continues to viciously target Palestinian citizens and military forces—murdering over 18,000 Palestinians at the time of writing this. During the fall, three Palestinian college students, visiting family and friends, were shot while walking down the street in Burlington, VT over their Thanksgiving break. A “doxxing truck” drove through Columbia University's campus showing faces of student protesters. Just as Palestinian students have been targeted, since Oct 7th, Jewish students have also been threatened on and off campuses across the US as part of a rising wave on antisemitism, including ideologies that conflate Judaism with zionism. Faculty have felt silenced as administrations have asked them not to write statements in response to the growing violence globally and the unrest on their campuses, while administrators at some of the US's most elite colleges have been scrutinized for their responses to the conflict.

Locally, many of my university's graduate students, particularly international graduate students, report feeling unsafe. As emotions run high and the conflict continues, campuses are becoming more deeply divisive places and conversation, debate, and listening—some of the tenets of rhetorical study—have seemingly become impossible. While universities have historically been fraught places for many students and faculty, humanistic inquiry at its best is supposed to create an environment where students are encouraged to listen to others, hear different and conflicting perspectives, read deeply, think and act critically, and take rhetorical risks. This seems difficult, almost impossible, in the current moment. Yet, for me as feminist rhetorical scholar, this moment has made me turn back to transnational feminist theory and its focus on solidarity. For transnational feminist scholars, the starting point for solidarity begins with not only hearing different and conflicting perspectives but also attending to how conflict and war are critically embedded in sociohistorical contexts. Solidarity does not always mean agreement or consensus.

As I have taken in the growing divisiveness on my own campus and in my own community (even among my friends), I have been reflecting on my own role as a feminist scholar and editor. As a transnational feminist rhetorical scholar, this divisiveness to me is not only unsettling but it is also not productive because at the heart of transnational feminist thinking is the understanding that “differences and commonalities... exist in relation and tension with each other in all contexts” (Mohanty 521). Foundational transnational feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty calls for transnational feminist approaches that attend to the legacies of imperialism and colonization that work through sexist and racist policies and representations, as well as the resulting unevenness of political economic structures across the globe. She also calls for framing feminist projects through the knowledge that this unevenness creates different on-the-ground feminist intentions and politics that, at times, may be in conflict with other feminist projects and experiences. In short, transnational feminists seek to forge connections and solidarities across scales based not on common experiences of gender oppression, identity, and patriarchal oppressions alone but on the various ways that legacies and contemporary structures of violence frame women's lives in different ways. Transnational feminism is a useful framework to approach this current moment where we need new strategies for understanding and communicating about violence.

Divisive thinking pits women against each other and makes it difficult to recognize the systems and scales (the local home or community and the global spaces) through which communities suffer violence. While I am in no way a scholar who studies or fully understands conflict and violence in the Middle East, as a feminist scholar, I am all too aware that violence is gendered and that in war, occupation, and conflict, women's bodies become literal battle zones—sometimes as an act of public war meant to publicly dehumanize the enemy and others in private settings meant demoralize, silence, and take control (“Women and Newborns Bearing the Brunt of the Conflict in Gaza”). Reports from Gaza suggest that women on both sides of the conflict have been raped, murdered, and humiliated. War, occupation, and conflict make transnational feminist solidarity politics paramount for feminist rhetorical practices and analyses.

An article in the online publication *The Intercept* described how just days before the events of Oct 7th, the Palestinian feminist group *Women of the Sun* and the Israeli feminist group *Women Wage Peace* met in various symbolic places throughout Israel and Palestine with the goal of recognizing how violence is gendered and calling out the violence of occupation on all women—Palestinian and Israeli alike but at different scales and effects. On a beach-side table, both sides sat down to write a formal declaration for ending the decades-long conflicts among Israeli and Palestinians. The declaration begins “We, Palestinian and Israeli mothers, are determined to stop the vicious cycle of bloodshed and to change the reality of the difficult conflict between both nations, for the benefit of our children” (WWP). The meeting between both these feminist groups is a great example of a transnational feminist solidarity practices. This group of women see the necessity of solidarity for peace in the region, but they recognize that solidarity does not mean erasing difference or only attending to sameness. Rather, the two groups see the necessity of making connections between how both sides of the conflict, who have different aims and projects, ultimately carry out their violent policies and practices on the backs of women and often without seeing the unintended consequences of violent policies and practices.

While the article shows how deeply violence is gendered in its recognition that “In conflict settings, rape and sexual violence are used as strategic, systematic, and calculated tools of war, ethnic cleansing, and genocide,” both sides see the history of violence in the region to be gendered in insidious and often quieter ways. *The Intercept* reports how “The situations [of each feminist groups] are not exactly parallel, but feminists in both Israel and the Palestinian territories are under attack by the most tribalist elements of their societies, each of which envisions its own version of a ‘pure’ society, whose achievement requires the modesty, piety, and subservience of women” (Levine). The article points out how Prime Minister Netanyahu has created a coalition between extreme-right Religious Zionists who are anti-women’s and LGBTQ+ rights and who seek to remove women from public life. Moreover, the military’s violent colonial practices further reinforce other sorts of gendered violence that impact not just Palestinian women but also Israeli women, such as how in the military, in which all women must serve, over one third of women report sexual harassment. As another example, a feminist human rights organization in Ramallah has noted “how Israeli policies such as home demolition, movement restrictions, night raids, and child arrests increase the burdens of family and household, reinforcing women’s ‘traditional roles within the Palestinian patriarchal society’” (Levine). The organization goes on to say, “Coupled with discriminatory laws pertaining to family reunification and marriage and cultural policing by radical Islamists, these policies exaggerate male domination and female dependency and trap women in abusive relationships” (Levine). In other words, as this feminist organization notes, even when the state of Israel supports liberal feminist equality projects, policies are enacted in the name of saving women from patriarchal violence, including that which Hamas is reported to support, while simultaneously reinforcing it. This is pattern seen widely throughout the history of colonization—using women as arguments for political intervention (Spivak).

Understanding conflict and violence across different scales and contexts demonstrates a transnational feminist analytic. The activism and connections made by Women of the Sun and Women Wage Peace, and the article in *The Intercept*, reflects what Mohanty has explained as a transnational feminist practice: “A transnational feminist practice depends on building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on” (530). Even though Mohanty is writing in the early 2000s, I believe it is apt today to be reminded by her words: “In these very fragmented times it is...very difficult to build...alliances and also never more important to do so.” (530). She argues against divisiveness and instead asks feminists to engage in solidarity projects that are “anti-imperialist, anticapitalist, and contextualized” and that “expose and make visible the various, overlapping forms of subjugation of women’s lives” (515). Mohanty’s approach is also a rhetorical project that requires listening to and understanding different scales and experiences in order to ask questions about, understand, and rhetorically transform location situations. Transnational feminist scholars Ashwini Tembe and Millie Thayer, drawing from Mohanty’s work, further explain that solidarity practices must create the conditions in which “differently situated communities can come together for ‘active struggle’” and then forge “alliances based on common analytic goals rather than similarity of identities” (7; 1). In the example above, similarity of identity would not create solidarity by women who are exploited differently and unevenly within one location. Rather, to create solidarity requires understanding not only how gendered exploitation works and looks different within different locations or different political or ethnic orientations but also how the systems themselves are grounded in gender. The transnational feminist solidarity practices above help me to critique the divisiveness I see on my own campus and community by reminding me to think about the broader contexts and history of this war and the rhetorical projects that surround them. Understanding the various ways that structures organize legacies of gendered exploitation and oppression across borders requires a particular kind of attunement to how they are rhetorically constructed and how they are understood and interpreted on the ground. To me, this is a project of feminist rhetorical scholars, one that I hope to see reflected in future pages of *Peitho*.

While the essays for this issue do not address the conflicts in the Middle East, what they do offer us is reminders of the wide scope of feminist rhetorical theories and the importance of feminist rhetorical practices for reshaping our knowledge and understanding of history and the present; indeed, they offer feminist approaches that we may apply to other contexts. For example, Kristy Crawley’s essay “The Quest for Meaningful Work: Enacting New True Woman Values via Epideictic Rhetoric” focuses on how women have the power to reframe their roles even when there are pressures to act within the confines of gendered expectations. Crawley shows how women business and literary writers redefined the virtues of the new true women in the 19th century to include the values of resourcefulness, critical thinking, and self-fulfillment “as a basis for educating or guiding readers’ conduct through praising and blaming.” Similarly, Lisa Mastrangelo, drawing from Royster and Kirsch’s feminist rhetorical theories of strategic contemplation and social circulation alongside her employment of Barret-Fox’s cold *kairos*, reconsidered the value and

project of Evelyn Cameron, a photographer whose eye captured what life was like as non-natives moved into the western part of what is now the US in the early part of the 1900s. Mastrangelo asks, “How do viewers ‘read’ the work of a person such as Cameron, particularly if their gaze, like mine was initially, is focused on her as exceptional?” The essay explores how “Cameron’s work as a photographer as well as the images she produced contribute to the more inclusive notions of gender” and women’s roles in defining the American West for non-native people; in doing so, Mastrangelo argues that works from women like Cameron importantly interrupt the idea that the American West was merely a masculine space. Also drawing from Royster and Kirsch’s concept of strategic contemplation, Zoe McDonald reads Hilary Rodham Clinton’s 2015 memoir *What Happened* as an important turning point toward Clinton espousing pluralist feminist practices. As McDonald argues, Clinton’s memoir offers readers many opportunities to strategically contemplate their own orientation to the election and in doing so, readers are directed by the memoir toward anti-violence and anti-racist coalition. Taken together, the essays in this issue offer readers feminist rhetorical lenses—specifically the role of feminist reframing, re-seeing, and contemplation—that we can employ to better understand our own rhetorical projects.

Coalescing and Remembering in Cluster Conversations

Clancy Ratliff

This issue has two Cluster Conversations, whose editors have done an outstanding job bringing these authors’ work together and presenting it here. With input from the *Peitho* Editorial Team, Rebecca writes above in response to the violence in Gaza, and she speaks for all of us about this horror, which continues to unfold as we follow events in the news and on social media. We will not look away, tune out, or be desensitized to this human suffering. Amid the devastation in Gaza and elsewhere in the world, we are also seeing turmoil domestically, as the Supreme Court is hearing a case to prohibit access to mifepristone in an added threat to abortion rights, and as state legislatures and governors in some states keep pressing their racist, transphobic, queerphobic agendas. The first Cluster, “Addressing the Barriers Between Us and That Future: (Feminist) Activist Coalition Building in Writing Studies,” is a powerful collection of writing about the frictions, frustrations, failures, and frontières associated with forming coalitions in this context of book banning, suppression of Critical Race Theory, and derailment of work in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity. The contributors to the Cluster reflect on their experiences and directly name and describe the demoralizing and infuriating treatment they have experienced and witnessed, especially in academia. They offer models for creating community in unwelcoming spaces and advocating for change in institutions. Getting to *that future* requires listening to these stories, and the authors in this Cluster are courageous to be the ones to tell them.

The second is a hybrid Cluster Conversation/In Memoriam devoted to Wendy Bishop’s legacy of writing, teaching writing, and mentoring, on the twentieth anniversary of her tragic passing

at age 50 of cancer. I didn't have the honor of meeting Bishop, but I worked closely in the early 2000s with one of her graduate students, Charlie Lowe, who treasured being one of her mentees. He had been working on his dissertation for at least a year, a project I thought was fascinating: an analysis of voice-recognition technology and its potential for composition, particularly with regard to the then-controversial concept of voice in writing. But one day in an email, he added as an aside: "Oh, and I ditched my dissertation," explaining that he was starting over and writing about another topic. I couldn't believe Bishop had gone along with that plan – it was such a good topic (still is), and he'd done a lot of writing on it! -- but she supported him, and he ended up writing a good dissertation about another topic. She was serious about radical revision.

The pieces in the Bishop Cluster share memories of her mentoring, leadership, and teaching, and although it's been two decades since Bishop's death, the issues raised are still very much relevant in academia: burnout, feminized labor of teaching and administration, and the division between rhetoric and composition studies and creative writing: two fields that still need to talk to each other more. Some of the authors remark that Bishop wouldn't like some of the changes that have taken place in the last twenty years. I think she would especially dislike the rise of program assessment and rubrics, which tend not to reward or encourage creativity and experimentation. I think she would also balk at the automation in writing and teaching: automated essay scoring, automated plagiarism detection software, and large language models (generative AI), though she may have approached LLMs with curiosity. Even readers who, like me, did not know Bishop will find this Cluster Conversation engaging to read; these pieces reorient us to what matters the most as we do the work of writing and teaching writing. Much has changed since Bishop taught and mentored students, but, to end this issue on a note of hope – and the dream of peace – we can remind ourselves of the power, generativity, and legacy of kind words, connection, and support: for students, colleagues, and community.

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Articles

The Quest for Meaningful Work: Enacting New True Woman Values via Epideictic Rhetoric

Kristy Crawley

Abstract: To persuade readers to enact New True Woman's values in their quest for an occupation, Martha Rayne employs epideictic rhetoric to educate her readers in *What Can a Woman Do or Her Position in the Business and Literary World*. In this paper, I argue that Rayne blends True Woman and New Woman values to promote the working New True Woman. Through my analysis of Rayne's work, I demonstrate that she utilizes the New True Woman's values of resourcefulness, critical thinking, and self-fulfillment as a basis for educating or guiding readers' conduct through praising and blaming. To showcase the enactment as well as the challenges to New True Woman's values, this article highlights the labor of Mary Ellen Pleasant and Julia Wolfe, two nineteenth-century boardinghouse keepers.

Dr. Kristy Crawley is a professor of English at Forsyth Technical Community College. Her research on pedagogy and rhetorical studies appears in *PARS in Practice: More Resources and Strategies for Online Writing Instructors*; *Writing Program Administration*; *Prose Studies*; *Peitho*; *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*; *Routledge Companion to Literature and Class*; and *Teachers, Teaching, and Media: Original Essays about Educators and Popular Culture*.

Keywords: Martha Louise Rayne, *What Can a Woman Do or Her Position in the Business and Literary World*, nineteenth century, American, epideictic rhetoric, New True Woman, Nancy Myers, domesticated workspaces, separate spheres, labor, Julia Wolfe, Mary Ellen Pleasant

“ . . . her development of strength need not detract from her womanliness or make her one degree less lovable. She will be less dependent but more companionable. Her work itself is becoming more and more adapted to her own tastes and her ability to perform it, and it is a duty imposed on all who have the power to advance her interests to unite by word and deed in clearing away all false ideas of the true woman's position in the world” (Rayne 16).

With the number of occupations for women increasing in the late nineteenth century, Martha Louise Rayne recognized a strong link between self-fulfillment and meaningful labor. In *What Can a Woman Do or Her Position in the Business and Literary World*, Rayne, a nineteenth-century American journalist, invited readers to learn about rewarding occupations that offer more than a paycheck and mindless domestic toil. Rayne's emphasis on independence and personal satisfaction evokes images of the New Woman, a nineteenth-century feminist ideal that contrasted with

the True Woman.

Barbara Welter clearly defines True Womanhood via traditional nineteenth-century ideals: “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. . . Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (Welter 152). Whereas the New Woman starkly contrasts with the True Woman: “Tethered to the professional woman, the educated woman, the club woman, and the political woman, the figure of the New Woman represented virtues at odds with the cult of domesticity: secularism vs. piety, sexual freedom vs. purity, independence vs. domesticity” (Patterson 2). Based on New Woman’s ties to independence and public space, Martha Patterson identifies numerous types of New Women: “suffragist, prohibitionist, clubwoman, college girl, American girl, socialist, capitalist, anarchist, pickpocket, bicyclist, barren spinster, mannish woman, outdoor girl, birth-control advocate, modern girl, eugenicist, flapper, blues woman, lesbian, and vamp” (2). The New Woman examples imply a power to choose, speak, travel, and challenge authority.

Considering the differences between the two ideals, Rayne avoided alienating her audience, specifically those aligned with True Womanhood’s values. She promised women readers the occupations within her work foster “strength” and “independence” while affording women the ability to maintain their “womanliness” and loveliness (16). Wedged between two contrasting ideologies when promoting rewarding occupations for women, Rayne appeals to a broad audience by reconceptualizing the working True Woman. She challenges the either/or dichotomy of the New Woman and True Woman by rhetorically melding the two ideologies forming what Nancy Myers refers to as the New True Woman. The New True Woman “blends and modifies social expectations about women’s respectability with the individual woman’s need and desire to engage in meaningful work” (Myers 43). The New True Woman labors for more than her family. She serves the public as well as strives to perform meaningful work. Laboring within a domesticated workspace, she solidifies her connection to domesticity while engaging in meaningful work to attain “financial independence” and “self-fulfillment” through her “resourcefulness” and “critical thinking” (Myers 43).

To persuade readers to enact New True Woman’s values in their quest for an occupation, Rayne utilizes epideictic rhetoric to educate her readers in *What Can a Woman Do or Her Position in the Business and Literary World*. In this paper, I argue that Rayne blends True Woman and New Woman values to promote the working New True Woman. Through my analysis of Rayne’s work, I demonstrate that she utilizes the New True Woman’s values of resourcefulness, critical thinking, and self-fulfillment as a basis for educating or guiding readers’ conduct through praising and blaming.

My analysis of Rayne's work builds on the definition of epideictic rhetoric's education function. Although many definitions of epideictic hinge on Aristotle's notion of praising or blaming a person or thing, I focus on contemporary epideictic rhetoric centered on the "conduct and values within communities addressed or invoked" (Sheard 771). Grounded in its etymological definition of "showing forth, of display, of demonstration, of making known, of shining," epideictic rhetoric shows forth "shared values of a community. These are the values the epideictic upholds, the foundation from which a rhetor can praise or blame" (Moe 436). In the context of education, Peter Wayne Moe observes that rhetors engage in "seeing what shared values in the community are troubling and then resisting them, rewriting them even, through praise and blame" (Moe 452). Utilizing Moe's description of epideictic rhetoric's education function as a framework for my analysis, I attend to the resistance of True Womanhood values in the first half and focus on Rayne's use of epideictic rhetoric as a way to rewrite True Woman's values in light of New True Woman's values. In the second half, I demonstrate the enactment as well as challenges to New True Woman's values exhibited by the labor of nineteenth-century boardinghouse owners, Mary Ellen Pleasant's and Julia Wolfe in domesticated workspaces.

Resisting True Womanhood's Troubling Values

For Rayne, True Womanhood's values imposed troubling restrictions on women as its emphasis on domesticity intertwined with the separate spheres ideology that refers to "the idea that men and women operated within separate spheres as a result of inherent physical and mental differences" (Amnéus 10). Regarding physical differences, women's ability to give birth automatically linked them to the domestic spaces, meaning private homelike spaces for them to nurture others and perform domestic labor while men's primary role as providers established their position within public spaces, places of commerce and competition. However, in connection to mental differences, Aileen Kraditor notes that the Industrial Revolution "broadened the distinctions between men's and women's occupations and certainly provoked new thinking about the significance and permanence of their respective 'spheres'" (9). With many women lacking the education or skills needed to apply for new technologically advanced jobs and being tied to the domestic spaces due to childcare, men automatically became ideal candidates for jobs within public spaces as many moved from working alongside their wives on the family farm to working in factories. Thus, the divide between men's and women's labor widened, leaving women in the home as men pursued work in public spaces.

While the Industrial Revolution's role in separate spheres ideology makes it appear that all women remained nestled in domestic spaces, numerous lower and lower-middle class women worked in public spaces as unskilled factory workers, maids, cooks, and seamstresses. Lower-class women's presence in public spaces prevented them from completely fulfilling the expectations and ideals associated with the domestic sphere tied to True Womanhood: "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter 152).

Discouraging many women from entering occupations outside of homemaker and limiting them to household drudgery's monotonous work, True Woman's long-standing values prove difficult to resist due to women's social status and reputation tethered to domesticity. Gerda Lerner interpreted True Womanhood "as a *vehicle* by which middle-class women elevated their own status. 'It is no accident,' Lerner wrote in 1969, 'that the slogan 'woman's place is in the home' took on a certain aggressiveness and shrillness precisely at the time when increasing numbers of poorer women *left* their homes to become factory workers'" (qtd. in Kerber 12). True Womanhood's values, entrenched in the separate spheres ideology, function as an ideal for white middle and upper-class women.

In resistance to True Womanhood's troubling values, Rayne recognizes the connection between True Womanhood's values and women's lack of financial independence, especially lower-class women, widows, and unmarried women. Rayne criticizes True Womanhood values' punishing ties to social class as she declares, "The day has gone by when a woman who enters any pursuit of industry loses caste" (12). She precedes to define her audience as well as pinpoint specific groups of women suffering as they cling to domesticity to uphold their social standing:

There are true womanly women, who may not have another opportunity of making themselves a home, for whom providence has furnished no mate—women who are denied marriage, or who prefer a life of single independence to taking up with one lame offer; or, it may be, they are already married, but have no taste or strength for domestic work, and prefer to bear the mutual burden in their own way. There are other women who have time from the duties and obligations of housework to earn a little pin money, and turn an honest penny, for their own profit. (Rayne 14)

Rayne identifies True Womanhood's ties to domesticity and social class as a barrier that prevents married women from earning supplemental income, discourages impoverished single women from working, and forces those with a distaste for domestic labor to continue their household drudgery. In each scenario, women fear that they will lose their social standing and, as a result, they sacrifice their financial stability and contentment derived from engaging in meaningful labor.

Laying blame on True Womanhood's values, Rayne's epideictic rhetoric "invokes shared values as a basis for promoting a vision of what could be" (Sheard 766). From impoverished single women to wealthy married women desiring extra spending money, each group values financial stability and self-fulfillment. Amidst Rayne's disapproval of True Womanhood's domesticity tied to caste, readers imagine what their lives could be like if they discarded the false belief that their social standing rested on whether they labored in a public or domesticated workspace.

Prompting readers to dispel their false beliefs and imagine enriching their lives through meaningful labor, Rayne conveys epideictic rhetoric's efficacy. Sheard infers, "Its [epideictic's] efficacy depends today as it did in antiquity on *kairos* or 'exigency' in the broadest sense (not just 'occasion' of discourse, but what makes the occasion what it is—the critical convergence of time, place, and circumstance, including audience's needs, desires, expectations, attitudes, resources, and so on)" (771). The dilemma of choosing between maintaining their social status and working plagued middle and lower-class women as separate spheres ideology and True Womanhood's values flourished during the Industrial Revolution. However, for some, particularly single women, the only choice was to "work or starve" (Rayne 14). Considering the urgency to help women, *What Can a Woman Do or Her Position in the Business and Literary World* informs women of meaningful occupations and serves as a guide for their conduct in the workplace. Rayne's work fulfills their needs and educates them on the values that lead to fulfilling work while avoiding missteps.

However, Rayne's epideictic rhetoric utilizes working women's missteps to guide readers' conduct. Rayne observes,

The number of incompetent women who attempt to conduct a business they know absolutely nothing about, is almost incredible, and they work harder, to make ignominious failures, than the educated woman does to succeed. But in one sense they are themselves educators; they are many of them pioneers in the work they have chosen, and their mistakes serve as warnings to other women who, armed with their energy, added to a practical knowledge of business in its many details, will accomplish all that they failed to do. (15)

Pioneers' successes and failures help advance Rayne's New True Woman's values through praise and blame. Although Rayne never references specific pioneers, their performances in workspaces help reify New True Woman's values. The next section dedicated to resourcefulness and critical thinking showcase pioneers' behavior. Rayne references the working women's behavior to rewrite community values through praise and blame as she promotes New True Woman's values of resourcefulness, critical thinking, and self-fulfillment that potentially lead to financial independence and contentment.

Rewriting True Womanhood's Values to Promote New True Woman's Values

In the sections dedicated to New True Woman's resourcefulness, critical thinking, and self-fulfillment, I demonstrate Rayne's use of epideictic rhetoric to educate readers through praise and blame as well as persuade them to enact New True Woman's values.

Self-Fulfillment in Domesticated Workspaces

With numerous chapters dedicated to discussing domesticated workspaces, Rayne praises domesticity in advising women to pursue occupations such as boardinghouse keeper, beekeeper, engraver, and cook where their business is an extension of their home and labor benefits the public as they pursue their interests. Similarly, the book's illustrations reinforce domesticity amidst advocating for diverse occupations to promote women's financial independence. For instance, a squirrel, tree branches heavy with leaves, and a farmhouse surround the table of contents. Its domestic imagery praises domesticity while the chapter titles showcase numerous occupations that persuade readers to create their own domesticated workspaces.

However, within the chapters, Rayne resists the notion of conflating women's labor for her family with laboring for the public in a professional capacity. In a chapter dedicated to keeping boarders, Rayne praises separating work from family life: "In the best boarding house the landlady is never seen, except when business requires her. She has her own room, which is also her office, and boarders go there to see her, engage board, pay bills, or make complaints" (270). The boardinghouse keeper ideally functions in a professional capacity and interacts with boarders in the professional space of the office instead of the domestic spaces in the home.

Similarly, Rayne praises dressmakers who separate their business from the domesticated parts of the home: "And, above all, let her keep her domestic troubles and the wrangles of her workroom out of sight, and as separate from her business life, as she would the bread and butter of the nursery from her customers' silks and satins" (218). Such advice emphasizes the importance of the physical separation between the home and business through the illustration of keeping a nursery's physical objects away from work-related materials. Separation yields a sense of fulfillment in labor performed in a professional capacity for those outside of the family.

Critical Thinking and Resourcefulness

In the chapter "Dressmakers and Dressmaking," Rayne blames dressmakers for their failure to utilize critical thinking to advise customers.

I presume there are three dressmakers out of every twenty-five who present the appearance and manners of ladies to their customers. The dressmaker we most frequently meet with, even in the highest grades of the profession, is a dilapidated looking woman, dressed haphazardly in a cheap, ill-fitting costume, who has nothing in her own appearance to suggest a single idea of what her work is. Instead of being interested in her customers' wants, she begins a doleful story of how one girl is sick and another has left her in the middle of the season, without giving warning, or relate her own domestic troubles, or the remissness of some of her customers. When she finally gives her attention she brings in an armful of French fashion papers, and asks the customer to select something,

instead of selecting and suggesting the styles herself, and the lady, who wants her new dress stylishly and fashionably made, goes away with no idea of what it is to be, and with no confidence that the dressmaker knows any more about it than she does. (217-218)

Although the poorly attired dressmaker complains about the struggles in her personal and professional life, when she turns her attention to customers, she takes on the role of a servant as she presents the customers with the French fashion papers and waits for their selection. The dressmaker fails to place herself in the position of a fashion expert. Instead, she views the customer, who is more than likely a middle or upper-class woman, as an expert in matters of fashion. They possess the ability to pay for her services, so they have the power to choose a dress according to their personal taste without any interference from a working-class dressmaker. Instead of being a fashion expert, the sewing professional transforms into a present yet invisible servant as she takes measurements, makes alterations or garments to satisfy her clients, and toils endless hours.

Rayne's critiques highlight epideictic's rhetorical potential to initiate change. Sheard extrapolates, "Often enough, negative images of what is or could be provide powerful incentives for change" (770). Such negative images illuminate dressmakers' lack of critical thinking in terms of analyzing their own clothing's messages or failure to think critically by sharing their expertise with customers. The negative images censure the dressmakers' conduct in showing readers what not to do.

To reinforce critical thinking's value and provide an incentive to change, Rayne praises dressmakers' artistic qualities aligned with critical thinking:

She must have the artist's eye to judge the effects of color, the sculptor's faculty for form, that she may soften the outlines, turn the figure to the best advantage, and arrange the drapery in harmonious folds. She must know history in order to take from different epochs particular details suitable to various styles of beauty, and to be sure of making no mistake in the matter of accessories; and she must be a poet, to give grace and expression and character to the costumes. (217)

Drawing on the skills of artists, sculptors, historians, and poets, the dressmaker uses critical thinking, imagination, and skill to create dresses designed to fit the unique curves of each woman while offering her customers dresses that are in tune with current fashion trends. Dressmakers break out of their servant roles as they engage in self-making as well as making others through their fashion advice and garments. Bodies wearing their garments serve as a reflection of the creator, a woman with the power to shape reputations and combat or promote oppressive fashion trends.

Other works, similar to Rayne's *What Can a Woman Do or Her Position in the Business and Literary World* echo the New True Woman's emphasis on critical thinking. Frances Willard, Helen Winslow, and Sallie White's *Occupations for Women: A Book of Practical Suggestion for the Material Advancement, the Mental and Physical Development, and the Moral and Spiritual Uplift of Women* touted critical thinking's important role in women's sewing professions when describing an unnamed milliner's creative process: "When a customer orders a bonnet or a hat I make a mental picture of it; photograph it, as it were, on my brain, dwelling intently upon it until its image is so indelibly stamped on my memory that I cannot forget it, and can exactly reproduce it" (392). The milliner relies on her mind's eye to hold the image as she works to recreate the hat or bonnet. However, her work goes beyond imitation or reproduction. Her original designs stem from a creative process as well. When asked where she obtains her designs, the milliner provided this response: "Literally everywhere. I go to the theatre as much to see the women's headgear as to watch the play. In architecture, in groupings of statuary or single chiseled figures, in pictures, on placards, and posters, in the way fences are built, in everything my eyes fall upon . . ." (393). The mental work required for design and creation overlaps with subjects commonly taught in universities, for she obtains her designs from art, theatre, and architecture. Lines, shapes, colors, and textures of everyday objects serve as fuel for her imagination and creation. Her everyday outings become research for potential projects.

Also, sewing professionals, particularly those who owned and operated their own businesses, employed their mental faculties to make important business decisions. With more women entering sewing businesses and cities growing, business owners "had to remain cognizant of the changing shopping patterns and economic geography. They had to consider the best and most lucrative location for a business given what one could afford to pay in rent" (Yohn 412). Based on past and current experiences, women proprietors predicted areas of future growth and decline. They used their mathematical skills to determine their weekly and yearly budgets in order to see whether it is worthwhile to move to a new location. Also, to ensure their success, they developed communication skills to reach out to those who could help them accomplish their goals: "They also had to maintain personal and social collaborations and relationships with family, friends, and neighbors that resulted in labor and or financial support. And they had to forge the business alliances that ensured them access to products that would continue to attract loyal clientele" (Yohn 412). Proprietors' access to labor and material goods depended on their continued contact with community members. As they came in contact with suppliers, they engaged in negotiations for the best prices. Their livelihood rested on critical thinking that helped them problem solve in an unstable marketplace filled with competition.

Rayne's praise for the New True Woman's critical thinking, backed by readers' exposure to similar texts, persuades readers to challenge the devaluation of the cerebral in women's physical labor. Occupations such as dressmaking permit women to physically labor, a type of labor considered as inferior to jobs requiring mental labor. In *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence*

of the *American Worker*, Mike Rose acknowledges the misconceptions attached to physical labor: “It is as though in our cultural iconography we are given the muscled arm, sleeve rolled tight against biceps, but no thought bright behind the eye, no image that links hand and brain” (xv). Although nineteenth-century women workers do not come to mind in Rose’s picture of muscled arms, women’s confinement to a domesticated space coupled with their confinement to physical tasks illustrates their devalued positions and intelligence. As Rose points out, sadly few connect physical labor to the idea of “competence,” for competence involves a mastery of “special terminology,” “movements of the body,” and “knowledge of tools and devices” (xviii). Women’s confinement to domesticated workspaces and physical labor reinforced social understandings of women’s work as nonessential and inconsequential. Thus, Rayne praises critical thinking in an attempt to reconceptualize labor in domesticated workspaces.

Enacting New True Woman’s Values

To showcase working women enacting New True Woman’s values, I highlight two examples below: Mary Ellen Pleasant (1814-1904) and Julia Wolfe (1860-1945). Although I cannot attest that Rayne’s book published in 1893 influenced Pleasant and Wolfe, their work exhibits New True Woman values as well as highlights financial independence derived from those values.

I selected Pleasant and Wolfe to demonstrate that New True Woman’s values are shared amongst diverse groups. Pleasant and Wolfe’s differing characteristics such as African American/Caucasian and urban/rural highlight New True Woman’s widespread appeal and attest to epideictic rhetoric’s power to rewrite or revise True Womanhood’s values.

Mary Ellen Pleasant

Mary Ellen Pleasant, an African-American boardinghouse owner, uses the home as a site for education and intellectual activity. Pleasant, also known as “Mammy Pleasant,” works as a domestic servant for Milton S. Latham, a senator, prior to owning her first boardinghouse. Acquiring a boardinghouse after leaving her domestic servant position, Pleasant embraces her ties to domesticity as she continues her physical household labor.

However, she transforms her domestic servant identity tied to True Womanhood by developing a professional ethos through a “cerebral representation of herself” (Berthold 112). Pleasant utilizes the boardinghouse as a launching pad for acquiring property and wealth. Being well acquainted with Senator Latham and other government officials through her work in Latham’s household, she soon attracts the wealthy and powerful to her boardinghouse’s central location in San Francisco in 1869: “Her property was strategically placed—near City Hall, the opera, and the largest gambling house—to attract the city’s political and financial elite . . . Pleasant’s forays to the markets, banks, shops, and courts could be easily observed from the city center, as could the

galas and meetings that took place at 920 Washington” (Hudson 56).

When hosting elite clientele, Pleasant’s boardinghouse becomes a site for audience analysis and all physical objects within the boardinghouse become texts open for interpretation. Subversively, Pleasant acquires information about her clientele as well as valuable investment information: “These men frequented her boardinghouses and revealed information—financial and social—that Pleasant used to increase her own wealth and status. Pleasant’s use of seemingly private space to further her enterprise may have played on the assumptions that white men had about African Americans and ‘help’ in general: that domestics would not understand financial affairs” (Hudson 59). However, while attending to her domestic duties in the boardinghouse, Pleasant attentively listens and applies the financial tips to her life, for “she invested in gold, silver, and quicksilver (mercury) mines” (Hudson 59). The profits from investments that Pleasant acquired allow her to purchase other boardinghouses and further transform her San Francisco boardinghouse into an elaborate establishment.

By embracing the role of a domestic and motherlike figure in her interactions with patrons in her boardinghouse, Pleasant soon learns “the needs of the most successful investors of the day: the Bonanza Kings and their compatriots, who demanded elegant establishments in which to conduct their business” (Hudson 59). Through listening to their conversations, she understands the need for “extravagant fare, including not only food, but also linens, laundry service, and china” (Hudson 57-58). Extravagant furnishings and food ensure that her boardinghouse matches the furnishings of an upper-class home, surroundings quite familiar to her wealthy clients.

Through her commitment to domesticity within the boardinghouse and her resourcefulness, she acquires wealth to improve her own social standing as a financially independent woman as well as engage in the self-fulfilling work of improving the social standing of other African Americans. During the Reconstruction Period, racism prevented many Black Americans from obtaining employment, so Pleasant hired an “extensive staff of black workers” (Hudson 58). Likewise, Pleasant invests her money and efforts when she “challenged the streetcar companies” in court who discriminated against African Americans (Hudson 55). Pleasant’s work as a domestic servant, boardinghouse proprietor, and social justice advocate foregrounds her intellectual labor and underscores her identity as a financially independent New True Woman engaging in meaningful work.

Julia Wolfe

Like Pleasant, employing the home as a site for intellectual labor, Julia Wolfe, owner of the Old Kentucky Home boardinghouse in Asheville, North Carolina and Thomas Wolfe’s mother, used her boardinghouse as a means of financial independence and self-fulfillment. Engaging her body and mind, Wolfe utilizes her role as boardinghouse keeper to make time for intellectual pursuits.

Through critical thinking and resourcefulness, Wolfe constructs an “ethical autonomy” through her ties to boardinghouse’s domestic space while employing her boardinghouse as a means of unofficially separating from her husband and reducing her childcare responsibilities to develop as professional (Myers 43). Kraft describes the family’s separate living arrangements: “When Julia moved into the house she named ‘Old Kentucky Home’ the family split, since W.O. was unwilling to leave Woodfin Street. Julia took Tom while her second daughter, Mabel, stayed with her father. The other children ‘were left floating in limbo,’ picking up one meal at the boarding house and another at Woodfin Street, sleeping wherever they happened to be at bedtime” (65). The boardinghouse enables Wolfe to free herself as much as possible from her husband W.O. who was known for “his occasional drunken violence” (Kraft 67). While Wolfe does not shun motherhood, motherhood does not consume her identity. Her identity as a businesswoman emerges as the children roam back and forth between the Old Kentucky Home and their father’s house on Woodfin Street, somewhat freeing Wolfe to focus on her business.

The boardinghouse business provides fuel for her to engage in intellectual labor in terms of land prospecting, a skill she learned from her father. Through her profits as a successful boardinghouse owner, Wolfe continues to invest in land. Wolfe states, “I had foresight about what Miami Beach was going to be, and I bought property after property” (Norwood 188). On another occasion, she discloses her success in increasing her profits: “I picked up a property and paid \$10,000 for it. I sold that in forty-five days for \$16,000. It was gambling, and I turned it in too soon. Everything I touched, someone else wanted it in less than no time” (Norwood 189). When investing in properties, she does not rely on W.O. or her sons for advice nor does she rely on them for property development. Remaining in a domestic setting, Wolfe uses the boardinghouse as a site to educate herself about building as well as negotiating with contractors. With the boardinghouse serving as a site for money management education, she skillfully exhibits her thriftiness in her negotiations with carpenters:

Well, I built a house on that lot. I planned it and ordered every piece of lumber that went into it. The carpenters said, “She is the stingiest girl—she has measured everything to the square inch and doesn’t allow any waste.” I said, “I don’t mean to have any waste.” I was twenty-one or two then. I hired the carpenters by the day. You know how a house used to be built. I wanted a steep roof, and I built it with the idea that I would take the roof off and raise the house another story later on. I made a broad hall down the front. When I ordered the sheathing that’s put on the rafters they said, “Even to the sheathing she’s calculated to the square foot,” and I said, “I don’t expect you to waste any.” They said, “Suppose a piece splits?” “Send it back and get a good one,” I said. When the logs were cut there would be a point, and they squared the lumber and there was a little scrap at the end. That wasn’t counted in your bill. It was measured from where it measured square. They said, “Maybe we’ll have a wheelbarrow full of scraps.” I said, “I’ll throw it over the fence for Mother to burn in the stove.” Nothing was wasted . . . (Nor-

wood 9-10).

She hires workers, oversees the carpenters, calculates the lumber needed, repurposes excess or scrap lumber, and speculates that a steep roof would allow her to add to the house in the future. Wolfe's knowledge, thrift, and negotiating power set her apart from women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to her ability to utilize the domestic space of her boardinghouse as a moneymaking operation to fund other projects. Learning from her previous projects and negotiations, she continues to educate herself about property investment and development.

Challenges to Enacting New True Woman's Values

Although Pleasant and Wolfe enacted New True Woman's values and reaped the benefits of financial independence and self-fulfillment, it is worthwhile to note the challenges Pleasant and Wolfe encountered when presenting New True Woman's values. Despite Pleasant's and Wolfe's resourcefulness and critical thinking that led to their financial independence, they faced what Joanna Russ terms "denial of agency" (20). Russ explains denial of agency by providing an example from her personal experience. She recalls an exchange with a male colleague who comments on her position as a writer and musician: ". . . I was told at a writer's party by a male colleague that I was a wonderful writer who 'did not write like a woman' and that—pianistically speaking—I had a man's 'reach'" (23). Her colleague denies Russ agency as a woman writer. His comments signify only a man could write or play well. According to her colleague, the skill and intellect needed for such endeavors correspond with men's abilities.

Applying Russ's denial of agency to an undercutting of New True Woman's values, I now turn to Pleasant to further illustrate the denial of agency. Some scholars maintain their doubts about categorizing Pleasant as an entrepreneur as they question how Pleasant acquired a boardinghouse soon after leaving her domestic servant position. Assuming her previous employer is behind her success as opposed to her resourcefulness, some scholars pose the following questions: "Could it be that some Latham money financed her or was he just unusually generous with wages?" asks author Lloyd Conrich. Or, he wondered, did Pleasant blackmail Latham? Perhaps Pleasant did blackmail Latham with secrets she learned in his home. It is just as likely, however, that Pleasant saved her earnings and chose to move into her own home" (Hudson 56). Scholars' questions imply Latham is behind Pleasant's success. Additionally, the fact that scholars question how Pleasant obtains the funds to become a boardinghouse owner suggests the underlying expectation that she would continue her ties to domesticity. To ensure her connection to domesticity, her contemporaries call her "Mammy Pleasant."

Similarly, few, including Wolfe's family, approve of her financial independence. Kraft astutely observes, "Feeling a long pent-up need to make money, partly because of her lean childhood in the Reconstruction South, partly because her husband was an alcoholic and, as a provider, more

lavish than reliable, she set her sights on the boardinghouse at 48 Spruce Street” (65). Financial constraints of the time period and her husband’s failure to provide for the family force Wolfe to rely on the real estate skills her land prospecting father taught her. Deviating from women of the time period, Wolfe invests herself into a role that will support the family, even though the role as a businesswoman does not satisfy her family’s and society’s expectations aligned with True Womanhood. In fact, some people paint Wolfe as a masculine figure. As Norwood visits the Old Kentucky Home to learn more about Thomas Wolfe, he describes his conversation with Wolfe: “She drew a step closer and thrust her index finger in the masculine gesture familiar to all who have met Eliza Gant in Thomas Wolfe’s first two novels” (3). A simple description of a masculine gesture hints at Norwood’s as well as Thomas Wolfe’s perception of a woman lacking motherly qualities. Her pointing suggests a certain strength and authority that men see as uncomfortable and foreign. Sadly, this troubling masculine view follows Wolfe to the present as she is known only to the world as Thomas Wolfe’s mother. Her masculinity, penny pinching ways, and lack of a full investment in motherhood leave a troubling legacy.

Wolfe’s family as well as Norwood deny Wolfe agency in ignoring her entrepreneurial acts of managing and investing. Instead, the family aligns Wolfe’s success, like Russ’s mentioned above, with her masculinity. Her entrepreneurial endeavors distance her from her motherly roles tied to home and family. By Wolfe reframing the boardinghouse’s domestic space as a site of intellectual activity involving investments and money management, her family denies Wolfe, a woman entrepreneur, agency and instead claims her agency originated from her masculinity.

Call for Action

Despite challenges in enacting True New Woman’s values, these values’ relevance extends from the nineteenth century to the present as women continue to seek fulfilling work. I challenge *Peitho* readers to study past and current women rhetors’ epideictic rhetorical practices to uncover changing values with each new generation and to identify troubling values worthy of resistance and rewriting.

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Rereading Evelyn Cameron's Photography and the "Exceptional Woman" Myth

Lisa Mastrangelo

Abstract: This piece discusses the work of turn of the century photographer Evelyn Cameron, and the ways that her photos of early Montana ask us to rethink the myths and tropes of the American West using Medio-Materialist Historiography and ideas of critical imagination and social circulation. Cameron's work and the images of the work around her require new readings in order to reimagine the role of women and women's work in the West.

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Keywords: critical imagination, Medio-Materialist Historiography, social circulation, the American West, women in photography

A few years ago, our family trip for the summer involved a trek from New Jersey to Montana, in part to follow the "Montana Dinosaur Trail" from Billings 220 miles east through the towns of Miles City, Terry, and eventually Glendive, about a half hour from the border of North Dakota.¹ The southeastern area of Montana becomes increasingly rural; towns such as Terry and the Glendive have one main street running through the middle and populations hovering around 5,000 each. In each of these towns, we stopped at the local "prairie museum," including the Range Riders Museum in Miles City and the Frontier Museum in Glendive. In addition, we stopped in Terry to visit the Prairie County Museum and the Evelyn Cameron Gallery. I knew nothing about Cameron other than a brief (and rather unexciting) blurb in the travel guide that suggested stopping in Terry: "Evelyn Cameron, a pioneer photographer, took spectacular pictures of Terry and the surrounding area during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of her photos hang in the Evelyn Cameron gallery, next door to the museum" (Walker 315). We stopped for a tour².

The Cameron Gallery was a surprise and a delight to me. First of all, as a devotee of the Progressive Era but knowing little about the settling of Montana during this period (most of my work has revolved around the East Coast, since that is where I live and work), her incredible photos revealed much about what early Montana looked like in the years just after their 1889 statehood. Second, I had never heard of this woman, who was minor British nobility and yet an immi-

1 Many thanks to Katie Ryan for earlier readings and input on this manuscript.

2 Since her rediscovery, scholars have increasingly begun publishing work about Cameron's life and photography, including Donna Lucey's *Photographing Montana*. PBS Montana created "Evelyn Cameron: Pictures from a Worthy Life," in 2005, which won an Emmy.

grant to the Wild West. She sent away for a custom split skirt (and was nearly arrested for wearing it) so that she could more safely and easily ride astride across the plains to explore, hunt, and shoot but also to photograph neighbors, workers on the railroad, and immigrants newly arriving in the area (Cameron 830). In addition to her skirt and copies of her photographs (the original glass plates have been sent to the University of Bozeman for preservation and digitization), many of her journals have also been copied and transcribed and are available for study. Overall, I was carried away by the story of Cameron herself, who was left to do the physical and financial work to maintain their ranch by herself as her husband, a self-proclaimed naturalist who was more interested in the local birds' nests than ranching, became increasingly ill and eventually died. While Cameron initially took up photography with the idea of assisting her husband's work in writing ornithological articles, eventually she used it to supplement the ranch's income.

In addition to the fact that her photos were stunning, I loved the romanticism of it—woman riding by herself across the sweeping plains to take photographs in order to increase her income! Rugged individualist! Story of exceptional woman doing exceptional things with great scenery for a backdrop! I was in. My Easterner's gaze, colored by popular depictions of the settling of the West (and even texts like Henry Nash's *Virgin Land*), would undergo significant revision as I learned more about Cameron and women's early work on the prairie. Indeed, much of what I learned as an outsider, many others, particularly those local to the area, may already know.

The more I learned about Cameron, the more intrigued I became. After marrying naturalist Ewen Cameron in 1889, the Camerons honeymooned in Montana. A half-sister of Lord Battersea, it was most likely a surprise to her family when Evelyn and Ewen permanently decamped to homestead in Montana in 1893 (Lucey 17). Initially, they hoped to tame wild horses to export to England as polo ponies; Evelyn herself did most of the work of capturing and taming them, but 40% of the horses they caught and trained died on the way to England (most from pneumonia), and the trip was a financial disaster (Lucey 41). Instead, they (mostly she) turned to raising a small herd of cattle, as well as farming and more female-gendered work. Ewen spent an increasing amount of time observing wildlife and writing poorly paid articles on his naturalist findings. Rhonda Sedgwick Stearns notes that, much like the polo horse adventure, Evelyn's initial work did not allow her to survive financially either: "She took in boarders, sold her garden vegetables to other ranchers, raised chickens, sold eggs, churned cream, and sold the butter. None of these met her financial needs" (7). While she continued to do all of those things (and many others), it was eventually her photography work that did the greatest dividend, work that both required and allowed her to take on greater agency and more diverse roles in order to meet an increasing financial exigence.

While I may never have heard of her, Evelyn Cameron was not a remote figure during her lifetime within her own community—Cameron's photography became well known, although mostly to the locals in Eastern Montana.³ After her death in 1928, however, she seems to have faded into

³ Google and database searches revealed a few other female photographers in the West at this time, such as Jennie Ross Cobb (Chavez) and Lorna Webb Nichols ("Topics: Women Photographers"). However, Cameron and

oblivion, and the circulation of her work ceased.⁴ In 1978, while researching women settlers in the area, historian Donna Lucey was shown Cameron's collection of nearly 2,000 glass plate photos by beloved Cameron family friend Janet Williams, who had stored them in her basement (where they were miraculously still intact, given that they were highly flammable and stored with Cameron's old guns and live ammunition) (Lucey x). Cameron took shots of railroad workers, day laborers, and new settlers who had just moved to the area and wanted to send photographs of their new life back to home. In addition, she took hundreds of photos of friends and neighbors, who, like Cameron, were often single women. Lucey was able to convince Williams to not only share the story but also to donate these valuable finds to the Montana Historical Society, where they are now housed.

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Lucey's work was part of a larger movement, beginning in the 1970s, to develop a body of work regarding the contributions of women to Western settlement (see Jordan, Jeffrey, Stoeltje, and Myres, for example). Scholars such as Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, as early as 1980, encouraged historians to take a multicultural approach to this work in their essay "The Gentle Tamers Revisited." Despite this move (and much continued work in the decades after), scholars like Susan Lee Johnson noted that an "overdetermined" relationship between "that which is Western and that which is male" continues to persist (497). In part, Johnson explains, while a "small mountain" of research has been produced about women in the West, it has largely remained unincorporated into mainstream history, instead relegated to separate chapters in the Western history books or separate conference panels: "Most mainstream scholars...leave the questions of gender to women's historians, who are usually women historians" (497). Much in the same way that Victorian depictions of women keep the "angel in the house" alive at the expense of large bodies of working and working-class women, more popular depictions of women in the West continue to reinforce the notion, which I initially held as well, that they were rare and mythical creatures. This leaves scholars with the continual project of attempting to shift Western women's history from an essentialist project, where women are layered on top of extant history, to a more radical one, that continues to enforce and reinforce the notion that women are indeed embedded in that history.

her work have received the most scholarly attention thus far.

4 See Gries for more information on the ways in which circulation can be both ideological and physical.

The more I looked at Cameron's images, read her diaries, and read primary and secondary sources about the homesteading movement in Montana, the more my own vision of Cameron in her surroundings began to shift as I grappled with my own sense of the "exceptionality" of women in the West that I had been trained on versus the reality of their lived experience. I realized the multiple ways in which both Cameron's work as a photographer, as well as the images she produced, contribute to the more inclusive notions of gender and the settling of the American West that scholars have long called for. In particular, her photographs of life on the prairie in Montana between 1894 and 1928 do much to interrupt popular embedded concepts of gendered work by showing diverse work and life roles of women in "settling" and homesteading on the prairies.

Framework

How do viewers "read" the work of a person such as Cameron, particularly if their gaze, like mine was initially, is focused on her as exceptional? Particularly, how do we read her photographs within a sense of the American West as a continually defined male space (what Brigit Georgi-Findlay terms the persistent "frontier myth" of "solitary, innocent (male) heroes" (5))? Cameron's work can be read most usefully through a trio of lenses: to start with, Jason Barrett-Fox's idea of cold *kairos*,⁵ followed by his concept of Medio-Materialist Historiography (MMH), and then Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's theories of critical imagination and social circulation.

Cold *kairos* serves as an overall frame (as well as an explanation of her lack of circulation) instead of a direct method for focused reading. Barrett-Fox defines cold *kairos* as "the material ability to mediate feminist critiques, acts of consciousness-raising, or stories of survival that could—or, in many cases, had no choice but to—lay dormant for huge spans of time...resting in the uncertain hope that a future audience might be willing and able to receive them" (Barrett-Fox 41). Cameron's lack of social circulation for many years (a concept that will be explored in greater detail later) meant that there were no "readings" of her materials for nearly half a century. In addition, cold *kairos* now allows for reading of Cameron's work as what Barrett-Fox terms "survival-feminism"—agency that Cameron took on as a result of financial (and perhaps emotional) need (Barrett-Fox 31).

Barrett-Fox's concept of Medio-Materialist Historiography (MMH) and Royster and Kirsch's concepts of critical imagination and social circulation, however, provide a more focused method for the majority of my readings of her work. As part of an MMH reading, Barrett-Fox notes that several qualifications must exist, chief among them the original creator's use of some form of "inscriptional technology" and their "facility with a particular medium," (48) in this case defined through Cameron's photographs. Next, "another facet of a likely candidate would be the quality with which she manipulated her chosen media and how those manipulations coincided with particular messages, critiques, or other, less overt demonstrations of (distributed) rhetorical force" (48).

5 Barrett-Fox italicizes *kairos* throughout his text.

Importantly, in Barrett-Fox's imagining of MMH, the material creator may not be intentionally creating feminist material, but instead is responding to the constructed circumstances (social, historical, economic) of their own lives (31).

MMH and critical imagination/social circulation may seem like an odd mashup; however, they each have features that allow them to converse with one another. Cameron's "demonstrations of (distributed) rhetorical force" are easily put into conversation with feminist rhetorical scholars of the American West as well as Royster and Kirsch's *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*. In this case, Royster and Kirsch's concepts of strategic contemplation and social circulation are essential to reading Cameron's work as both repeating but also reframing the myths and archetypes of the American West. Strategic contemplation asks readers/viewers to think critically and contemplatively about sources. This, as Royster and Kirsch note, works well "when the ecologies of person, time, and space stretch beyond anointed assumptions about the ways and means of rhetorical performance" (21). Cameron can thus be read in terms of her images' rhetorical performance, one which moves beyond "anointed assumptions" about the West long before scholars attempted to record the roles of women from the area (21).

Kirsch and Royster's concept of social circulation, in turn, asks readers to make "connections among past, present, and future in the sense that overlapping social circles in which women travel, live, and work are carried on or modified from one generation to the next and can lead to changed rhetorical practices" (23). Cameron's images lend themselves to both of these. Women's work in the West was known by those women to be difficult, dirty, and non-gendered. It is, however, our reliance on the frameworks that came after these women that leads popular accounts to reflect largely gendered participation ("civilization" vs. "conquest") of women in the settling of the West. This piece will examine the oft repeated gendered mythology of the American West and the role of women in the newly developing field of photography before turning an eye to Cameron's photographs in order to understand the ways in which Cameron used "visual appropriation" (Fleckenstein) and the manipulation of expectations for her images to reinscribe our views of women in the West. Next, I will discuss the ways in which the depression of their social circulation (creating Barrett-Fox's "cold kairos") has contributed to this gendered mythology and the ways in which a rereading and closer contemplation can serve as a corrective.

The American West as Masculine/Masculinized Space

Perhaps nowhere in history is the "exceptional woman" myth more prevalent than in long established histories and popular depictions of the settling of the Pacific Northwest and territories such as Montana. From the adventures of Lewis and Clark (and the token woman on the voyage, Sacagawea) to Custer's Last Stand and the Battle of Little Bighorn, the history of the "settling" of the Pacific Northwest and the ranching of cattle and roping of horses has been one that has involved images of men, conquest, colonial violence, and rugged individualism. Indeed, Cameron's

own role as a settler clearly participates in this colonialism while at the same time challenging its narrative as a masculinized pursuit.

Johnson observes that “the construction of a masculine West was part and parcel of a larger late nineteenth-century ‘crisis of manliness’ in the United States...” rather than a reflection of reality (497). Henry Nash’s 1950 *Virgin Land* continues this masculinized archetype of the West, where men were mythic and heroic and worked to “subdue the continent” (Nash 37). Nash adds to the notion that the conquering of the West involved strong men, conquering their surroundings in order to “civilize” them (both “taming” the land but also enacting colonial violence by destroying the buffalo and the Native American cultures they found). Readings such as Nash’s, taken as lore, have hardened that version of Western settlement for readers and remain difficult to dislodge, even when audiences are continually presented with contrary evidence. For example, despite their significant participation in activities such as hunting and exploration, Karen Jones notes in “Lady Wildcats and Wild Women” that many women involved in this Western history have continued to be written about as “reluctant pioneers and gentle tamers,” who were imagined to leave the hardest and most rugged work to their menfolk while they attempted to bring culture to their newly civilized surroundings (37-38). As a result of these frameworks, which have been repeated in history books and popular culture, stereotypes and embedded histories of the American West remain largely male and masculine. As Jordynn Jack points out in “Redefining Rhetorical Figures through Cognitive Ecologies,” tropes such as “The American West” are “ecological and embedded” ways of helping us to make meaning (2).

How do we then build on a body of extant scholarship but also continue to chip away at these tropes, to recognize settler colonialism, but also to mainstream a more comprehensive and inclusive view of the West? To start, the unique history of British social class behaviors disrupts some embedded ways of thinking about women in the West. In many ways, the Camerons’ background as minor nobility actually prepared them well for parts of living in the American West. Like many of the peerage, they had to be raised to ride and to shoot. While in general the British hunted for sport and not for food, the Camerons both grew up as accomplished horse people and were avid hunters (Lucey 10). In addition, by the time that the Camerons arrived in Montana for their honeymoon in 1889 with an English cook and a hired guide (Lucey 9), many British landed gentry had treated trips to the West as yet another site for safari and exploration, bringing with them varying degrees of servants and supplies (Pagnamenta 18; 97). And Evelyn Cameron’s class and “good breeding,” combined with her ability to ride and shoot, “conferred a sense of superiority on the female adventurer that often made the crossing of gender boundaries less problematic” (Jones 41). In addition, Cameron’s upbringing meant that she spoke French, German, and Italian, all of which later helped her navigate her way professionally as immigrants from those countries arrived in the area (Stearns 7).

Given the persistent paradigms of women in the West, it is still possible, especially for

those of us who grew up with the more popular masculinized version of the West, to fall into the trap of creating a “female frontier” for them, imagining them doing exceptional and difficult but still gendered work, the confines of which they did not breach (Jones 38). In this version, their presence continues to be the exception rather than the rule. This is another embedded ecology that requires intervention. Sarah Carter, in *Montana Women Homesteaders*, notes that women in the West were “everywhere.” For example, in addition to women who arrived with their spouses, her research found that in Yellowstone County, Montana, between 1909 and 1934, 18% of land patents were issued solely to women, “who together claimed more than 150,000 acres” (24)⁶ Many came alone; others came to homestead with relatives or intended spouses, increasing their land holdings by filing singly but with other family members on adjoining plots, or with intended spouses prior to their marriages (Carter 32). They also had social room to behave in ways that violated social norms in other geographical areas. As Casey Ryan Kelly notes in “Women’s Rhetorical Agency in the American West: *The New Penelope*,” women saw moments where “material structures are open to restructuration and reinterpretation” (227) and used those moments to act. However, publications such as Nash’s (which are still taught in graduate programs in History and American Literature) reinforced the idea of women conforming to social norms, except perhaps for a few rugged individualists who did not conform to either gender or social norms and can be relegated as “exceptional” (such as Sacagawea, Annie Oakley, or Calamity Jane). Popular culture has assisted in this limited view. For example, while the Ingalls family never lived as far west as Montana, embedded tropes have led otherwise unfamiliar readers/viewers to imagine early Western women as figures like those depicted by “Ma” Ingalls—solitary, often isolated women, doing “women’s work,” such as milking, making butter, making bread from starter, gardening, raising children, and bringing a moral and civilizing force to the wilderness. Such images create a picture of solitary women on solitary ranches doing solitary (and certainly gendered) work.

This is not to say that women in the West did not perform such gendered work. Indeed, scholarship about women’s presence in the West shows the ways that many women both enacted versions of being a “taming force” while still breaking the confines of traditional behaviors. As Andrea Radke notes in “Redefining Rural Spaces,” while many of these women were living in the harshest of conditions, they still sought to bring culture and refinement to their domestic spaces. Their adaptive behaviors included “access to material goods and literary culture, and the performance of civilizing manners and behavior that represented ‘proper’ Euro-American civilization” (227). Photos taken of women in clean dresses, hair done and jewelry on, or photos of families near a piano or pump organ, were often seen as evidence that the Wild West was not so wild, and that women’s presence there contributed to this domestication (227). While men are described throughout the popular literature as “taming” the West, women are charged with then “domesticating” and “civilizing” it. Many, of course, did both.

This embedded thinking can be and often is exclusionary and creates a “part-whole” think-

⁶ While the Montana census does not break gender down by county, it shows that in 1900, 36% of residents in rural Montana were women. By 1920, that number had increased to 44% (26).

ing that can allow us, in cases like Cameron's, to continue to read her photographs as exceptions rather than commonplace because it better suits our popular cultural frameworks. Applegarth comments on the danger of exceptionalist discourse as having "limited the significance of women's performances of professional competence by treating even widespread performances, across myriad public and professional spaces, as aberrations, exceptions to a norm of absence, invisibility, and unsuitability" (533). This leaves readers still at risk of reading Cameron's images as exceptional, regardless of our training to do otherwise. Indeed, the few tropes typically presented and re-presented of women settling in the West (homesteaders' wives, for example), are present in many of Cameron's photos. But so too, are the multiple other roles that we may think of as exceptional instead of commonplace. Neighbors and dear friends to the Camerons, Janet and Mabel Williams, for example, arrived with their brother and parents in 1907, each staking a land claim in order to create large holdings for the family (Lucey x). The Buckley sisters, Mabel, May, and Myrtle, on the other hand, ran a ranch with their mother since their father was routinely away for "roundups and other ranch business" (Lucey 54). These working women, as Cameron's images will show below, do not fit popular tropes but were common rather than exceptional, and exemplify the gender-inclusive frameworks of Western history presented since the late 1970s.

Women's work in the West can't be imagined as a monolith either. The work of women in Montana did change, even in the years just after the Camerons arrived. While the Camerons settled after the landscape had been forcibly cleared of most native inhabitants, initially they were surrounded by other English-speaking immigrants (including other British) who had moved to the West. Most of them homesteaded and kept large gardens as well as horses or cattle. As time went on, though, the immigrants in the area included more Germans, Italians, Russians, and Irish. The way they made their living changed, and thus, women's work also changed. Cameron herself was aware of the ways in which this change had manifested itself. Writing "The 'Cowgirl' in Montana" for the generally British audience of *Country Life* in 1914, Cameron defined the cowgirl not as a dairy maid, but as the "feminine counterpart of cowboys—riding in similar saddles, on similar horses, for the purpose of similar duties, which they do, in fact, efficiently perform" (829). These women, according to her, were "accomplished in the incidental work of branding cattle, breaking horses, and throwing the lasso" (830). As time went on and the work in the area changed, the immigrants changed to include "Russo-Germans" and they began what Cameron terms "dry-farming" (cultivating crops without irrigation) (831). Her characterization of the women in particular conveys a sense for the difficult work that these women took on as well as her respect for them.

The female members of the Russo-Germans who have swarmed over the prairie like ants take outdoor work even more seriously than the cowgirls whom they replace. Russo-German girls in their teens successfully perform every kind of farm labour, and may be seen ploughing from daylight to dark, sacking and hauling grain, haymaking, or driving up the cows on their great draught colts, ridden bareback. (Cameron 831)⁷

⁷ While Cameron's photographs depict the work of an increasingly diverse geographic group of immigrants, of the approximately 180 photos in the Cameron gallery collection and the larger collection in the Montana Mem-

While the work in Montana changed as more people moved in to settle, the fact that women's work was gender diverse did not.

Women in Photography

If women's typical work in the West has created conflicting moments in depictions of the West (or moments to ignore altogether), I wondered about the place of women in professional photography during this same time period. Since, as Lucaites and Hariman observe, photographs "shape and mediate understanding of specific events and periods," how is this transformed if women are involved (38)? While the women in Cameron's photographs might or might not be doing traditionally gendered female work, photography itself was seen as an acceptable realm for women to either "dabble" in or even to make a living from. While Cameron used dry glass plate photography methods instead of film, Kodak's photography marketing helped to usher in support for the female photographer. Their development in the 1880s of the "Kodak Girl" (similar to the Progressive Era Gibson Girl) also shows the melding of the independent woman and the angel of the house. Kodak's "Kodak Girl" imagined "the modern woman was fun-loving and independent. She now felt free to go out and explore the world—and she was taking her Kodak camera with her!" ("The Kodak Girl"). As the angel of her house, she also became responsible for making sure that as "responsible mothers and wives, they would ensure that all key moments were duly captured" ("The Kodak Girl"). Where women could not afford cameras and their associated costs, those with the means used photographers like Cameron to record such moments. Indeed, many of the photographs that Cameron took were meant to document such family life and were sent home by new immigrants to show family back home their new environs (Lucey 163).

Photography was seen as more than a hobby, though. An 1897 article in *Ladies Home Journal* by Frances Benjamin Johnston details the acceptability of photography as a new profession for women. In "What a Woman Can Do with a Camera," Johnston notes that under carefully planned circumstances such as understanding local supply and demand and advertising carefully, professional photography could be a lucrative profession for women. However, Nicole Hudgins' research, primarily in England and Europe, reveals that while photography was often seen as acceptable for women, it was often in the context of unskilled work—women were more likely to work as "relatively low-paid helpers in the studio (as retouchers, mounters, and receptionists" rather than as camera and/or darkroom operators (163). In reality, Evelyn Cameron was not concerned about whether or not society felt her photography was an acceptable practice. Early on, she discovered that she was a talented photographer and that it was an efficient and effective way to supplement her income. She also developed and refined her business acumen as she continued,

ory project, I could only find one (Cameron Gallery, DEP 616) that depicted a person of color—a black cowboy with a white cowgirl. It's also difficult to interpret her comment relating the Russian workers to "swarming ants," although given her lighthearted tone and vivid descriptions in the rest of the piece, it is my sense that she meant more to describe their number and movement on the fields. However, it does read as potentially derogatory for contemporary readers.

leaving local advertisements for her photography services at the Fallon and Terry post offices, including a poster with sample prints and a price list (Lucey 160; 157). Cameron used the post office as a “nerve center” to collect and leave messages regarding her photography services (Lucey 156). While an initial attempt to set up a photography studio in town folded after six weeks, her communication system using the post office seemed to work well. She then used her kitchen for a darkroom, processing photos at night, which eliminated the need for a studio and darkroom space separate from the house (Lucey 122).

In the end, Johnston’s vision of the female photographer thus remains more conservative than what Cameron enacted. Johnston imagines a woman working in or even owning a studio with an accompanying darkroom. This would be a suitable locale, separate from her home sphere, for portraits taken with customers arranged in front of static backgrounds (Johnston). Carrying her photography supplies for miles while riding astride through the badlands, meeting transient workers at the railroad tracks, climbing out onto rock ledges and into canyons, and developing photos in her kitchen may not have been seen as the womanly work that Johnston imagined. Overall, though, the actual work of photography was deemed acceptable for women at this time. And photograph she did. While in many instances as we read history, we must critically imagine roles in ways that require us to extrapolate substantial information, Cameron’s photos instead provide proof for those moments.

Evelyn Cameron: Photographer

Cameron began her photography in 1894, when a lodger, a Mr. Adams, offered to teach her amateur photography. She did not initially choose the popular Kodak film cameras available at the time. While there is no record of her first camera model, she chose instead to work with dry-plate glass photography (Lucey 122). By 1895, she wrote to her mother-in-law “It is very fascinating work but it requires a lot of practice” (Lucey 122). She was able to quickly get that practice as friends and neighbors requested photos. After experimenting briefly with a Kodak film camera and finding the tone and clarity disappointing, Cameron ordered a No. 5 Kodet that could be used with either plates or film. Lucey describes it as a “moderately priced folding camera, fitted with a Bausch & Lomb shutter” (123). It was also a heavy camera to transport—9 pounds without the tripod or the extra glass plates (Lucey 131). Eventually, she switched to a 5x7 “Graflex with a German-made Goerz lens” (Lucey xi). While initially she sustained some losses as she experimented with her methods, Cameron was eventually able to use her photography money to substantially contribute to her income. An undated sign with sample photos advertised her services at 25c each, \$1.75 per half dozen, and \$3.00 for a dozen. By 1904 she was charging \$5 for albums with two dozen pictures, which were often purchased as family keepsakes or to send back home (Lucey 160). While in 1899 she recorded a loss of \$4.92 in her diaries (Lucey 156), within five years she was successfully photographing locals and local work, including photographing work on the railroad (primarily by Italians). She had also come to the notice of railroad executives who bought

photos in order to advertise the local geography to potential homesteaders (Lucey 163). Lucey points out that as a photographer with facility in four languages, Cameron “was probably one of the few people who could always move freely from one immigrant group to another” (Lucey 164).

Cameron’s Photos and “Women’s Work”

Cameron’s images can be divided into four major types—portraits, photobooks, naturalist photos (often used to illustrate her husband’s work), and depictions of everyday local life. Cameron certainly focused on many of the men in her world—ranchers, miners, and railroad crews. While her photos show many “typical” images of women inside (or outside) of their homes, upon closer examination, however, they do not simply reveal token women. Instead, working against the popular notion of “men taming the west,” Cameron’s photographs repeatedly show local women responding to, as Barrett-Fox notes, the social, historic, and economic needs in their lives through their work on the land (31). Indeed, Cowgirl scholars identify ranch women of the early West as falling into the categories of “trailblazing figureheads [and] resourceful adapters” (Henneman 155). Henneman’s “resourceful adapters” result in Barrett-Fox’s “survival feminists” (6). Cameron’s work to keep the ranch going and to attempt to turn a profit involved an impressive list of tasks: she “chopped wood, dug coal, tended a huge garden, raised chickens, milked the cow, branded, dehorned, and castrated cattle, broke colts, skinned and butchered animals both wild and domestic, cooked, baked, and scrubbed pots, pans, clothes, floors, and walls with no hired help and little to no help from her husband” (Hager 4). To this, of course, she added professional photography. Like Cameron, most settler women did not typically involve themselves in non-traditional ranch work out of a sense that they were blazing the trail for future women. Instead, it was a pragmatic matter of financial survival for many of them.

In addition, in a factor that would likely be a surprise to scholars such as Henry Nash, many of the women, including Cameron, truly enjoyed the work they did. One of the most often quoted passages from Cameron’s diaries in the secondary sources that I read was her description of such work. She wrote “Manual labour is about all I care about, and after all, is what will really make a strong woman. I like to break colts, brand calves, cut down trees, ride and work in a garden” (Lucey xii). And yet, even sources that talk about how much fulfillment she got from doing such work include pushbacks against it. In “Under the Big Sky,” for example, after listing the above daily entry from Evelyn’s diary, the authors comment “Ranch life was not all drudgery” (68). Yet nowhere from Cameron’s descriptions do we think that she viewed it that way. Hard, valuable work, yes. Drudgery, no.

Donna Lucey’s expectations of the difficult work that Cameron did were initially similar. She writes:

The fact that Evelyn was female, British, and well born led me to expect that her diaries

would be a chronicle of exasperation with the drudgery and boredom of the frontier, animated only by lofty contempt for the crude American frontiersman. I found the opposite: a woman who was thrilled by the independence, the rigors, and the dangers of pioneer life. (xii)

In reality, Lucey's initial perception is born from conscribed expectations of turn of the century American women as well as from embedded tropes of the American West.

As previously mentioned, it is worth noting that many of Cameron's photos *do* show women in typical and gendered roles. They wanted to show their families that they were succeeding, not making social waves, in their new environments. Much like any current photographs, they also wanted to show the best side of their new lives rather than the difficult and dirty parts. As a result, many of her subjects dressed well and showed either their belongings or their houses in the photographs that Cameron took of them. The image of Fanny Wright below shows exactly what people outside of the area typically expected to know about women in the West. She is well-dressed, and heavy textiles adorn the floor and the top of the piano. The fact that there is a piano shows that she is a woman of means and culture. She has pillows and curtains, and the walls are adorned with what the Montana library identifies as a painting of "Al Wright on horseback." Lastly, she is reading a book, showing her as both literate and cultured. The image reflects Jones' concept that many people considered women in the West as civilizing influences. The image of Wright conforms to this, and visually reassures viewers that women in the West were civilized and discerning—proper women, doing proper work.



Figure 1: Fanny Wright reading in her living room, 1905.

However, while many of Cameron's images show traditional home and family images with women in traditional roles, an additional group of them show work that viewers like myself, raised on pop culture notions of the West, would typically think of and associate with Montana—the work of roping cattle and working with horses. In Figure 2, Evelyn Cameron is on a horse and has captured a cow; Ewen Cameron is branding it. From my own perspective, this image didn't unsettle my expectations of Western history too much at first glance. Viewers like me might critically imagine that this is a photo of a wife helping a husband with typical ranch work. And yet, a closer look reveals that while Evelyn Cameron appears to be wearing a skirt, she is instead sitting fully astride her horse and her skirt is "split"—it looks like a skirt, but is instead really more of a gaucho. As well, while she is wearing a white top, the sleeves are rolled up and her arms are bare and tanned. Lastly, she is wearing work boots. Mentally, however, viewers with associations like my initial ones might dismiss the gendered nature of this by claiming that Ewen Cameron is clearly doing the "harder" work of branding the cow. While this photo piques our interest and begins the potential process of contemplation, we might be able to dismiss it as a potentially unique situation, and not really "that" different. As the MMH framework helps us to read, the rhetorical implications of this sends a specific message that is not particularly disruptive of many embedded ecologies of women in the West.



Figure 2: Ewen and Evelyn Cameron Branding Cow



Figure 3: Mabel and Janet Williams Branding Cow

Figure 3's image of the Williams sisters, in much the same pose as Evelyn and Ewen Cameron, however, forced my own strategic contemplation of women in the West to expand past stereotype and required me to at least begin to reject popular embedded notions of roles of women in the West. Both women are active in this photo. Both are gendered in the sense that they appear to be wearing skirts, but the rider reveals that this is also a split skirt. The rider's pose astride the horse is also "masculine" (like Cameron, the Williams found sidesaddle both inconvenient and dangerous for this type of ranch work). Both wear hats (to keep off the sun) and work boots. As well, one wears heavy work gloves. But the fact that both participants in this traditionally depicted male activity are female forced me to reimagine the roles of these women in Montana. While Cameron is simply intending to record her neighbors (and friends) at work, this manipulation of my thinking changed the message and its distributed rhetorical force as I tried to imagine this as a space for many women, and not just for a few (Barrett-Fox 48). This can be a jarring experience for the viewer, though, and one that they might reject. As Risa Applegarth comments, "the embodied occupation of spaces where women *haven't* been [or, as I would argue, we haven't imagined them being,] draws startling attention to unspoken prohibitions against women's bodies entering such spaces" (543, emphasis original). Or, if they do enter such spaces, viewers might try to make the reading safer for themselves and imagine that they do so in limited ways, as exceptional cases. Hariman and Lucaites follow this in visual rhetorical terms as the "individuated aggregate" "whereby the population as a whole is represented solely by specific individuals" (38). If viewers aren't used to seeing other individuals representing what popular culture has led us to believe is the "correct" representation, the experience can be jolting. Rhetorically speaking, Janice Rushing draws on Lloyd Bitzer's work as she prompts that this is an exigency to the myth of Western settlement, commenting, "Exigencies can be societal conditions or institutions that threaten one or more aspects of the myth" (17). In this case, the exigency does not change the myth, but

requires viewers to work harder to try to create a rereading, or even a new version of the myth, or to somehow excuse the presence of these women. And yet, photo after photo from Cameron shows women doing this type of work, further contributing to Johnson's "mountain of evidence" regarding women's roles in the West while simultaneously contributing to a framework that locals likely already know.

That does not mean that society at large accepted these women's place within the myth or read against the myth in any sustained way. For instance, word spread of the Buckley sisters, who were also frequent subjects of Cameron's photographs.



Figure 4: Buckley girls with roped cow



Figure 5: Mabel, May, and Myrtle Buckley Roping Horse

The work that the Buckley sisters completed was received as so unusual outside of their Montana community as to make them spectacle: “Carnival managers tried to hire the sisters, and they were invited to perform for Theodore Roosevelt, but they declined” (Lucey 54). While shows regarding the Wild West were popular at the time, the Buckley sisters considered their work part of their professional and personal lives, not a matter of show.

We can contrast the work of the Buckley girls and their sense of themselves in Figures 4 and 5 with the photographic work of Frances Benjamin Johnston, who was mentioned earlier. Johnston wrote extensively about the feminine qualities that women could bring to photography, and in particular, portraiture. Johnston, in seeing certain roles for women in photography, worked within Victorian virtues and argued for a space for herself within them. However, Cameron’s photos read well beyond this. She is not attempting to live within Johnston’s confines, but rather to document what she realistically saw and lived every day. Barrett-Fox’s MMH readings allow us to think about the rhetorical work of Cameron’s photography as a mediation of her world. Cameron strategically uses her chosen medium in order to manipulate her message: the very existence of her photographs shows her willingness to take on agency for herself and reimagine her role while she presented outside viewers reimagined roles of the women who lived and worked around her (Barrett-Fox 48). Her disruptive message of the popular myth of American women in the West is that women could and did do the work of men on the Montana prairies. They expanded their own roles far beyond “civilizing forces,” (or beyond Royster and Kirsch’s “anointed assumptions”) and they not only were good at such work but also enjoyed it. Cold *kairos* allows us to say that these

are feminist messages—women were participating in this world despite repeated attempts of scholars and historians (such as Nash) to write them out of it or of Wild West shows to write them in as spectacle. Viewing these photos through a mediated gaze allows viewers such as myself to move beyond the pop culture or even Nash’s reading of the West to create scholars’ desired multi-layered roles of women’s work in the West.

The Erasure of Evelyn Cameron

Laurie Gries notes that the concept of circulation can be seen “in terms of spatiotemporal flow as well as a cultural-rhetorical process” (3). In part, the notion of actual physical social circulation explains why nobody recognized Cameron’s work, much less her inclusion as part of the women in the Western narrative, for many years. Kristi Hager notes that after Cameron’s death, her photos were really only seen in private family albums (10). In addition, Hager also observes that the circulation that most famous photographers achieve, with gallery showings, publicity, and reprints, was never a part of Cameron’s career (10). And, in 1928, the time of Cameron’s death, Hager points out that “the general public was not yet nostalgic for the ‘good old days’ of dry land farming” and other facets of early Montana life, making her images of less interest at the time (Hager 10). All of these factors contributed to the lack of social circulation and the development of cold *kairos* surrounding Cameron’s work.

In addition, Cameron’s photographs moved from being public and locally available for sale to private upon her death. Janet Williams, who inherited the Cameron’s ranch and all of the Cameron belongings, was particularly reluctant to share them. Donna Lucey, who initially put Cameron back into circulation in the late 1970s, only learned of Cameron by accident when she was researching the history of women pioneers. As Lucey recalls, “a curator at the Montana Historical Society in Helena mentioned that there was an old farm woman in the eastern part of the state who was hoarding a cache of glass-plate negatives made by a woman during the frontier days. ... The owner had deflected all efforts by the historical society to view it” (Lucey ix). Eventually, Williams allowed Lucey to view the collection, and upon her death, it was donated to the Montana Historical Society. But by then, the photos had largely been out of circulation for approximately 50 years, waiting quietly for their kairotic moment.

The social circulation of these photos also explains, in part, their silence after Cameron’s death. Social circulation asks us to think about “where our research originates, where it travels, and how it connects communities, generations, and different locations” (Royster and Kirsch 105). Indeed, during her own life, Cameron’s collection of photographs circulated in conscribed ways. While she initially had photographed homesteaders, most of whom had moved from the East coast of the US, her work changed as immigration patterns changed; she began to photograph newcomers to the area, including Russian and German immigrants and Italian and sometimes Greek railroad workers (Lucey 163). But these photographs, while prized by the families, again

did not circulate where they might have gained Cameron notoriety and fame as a photographer. Instead, many of the photographs stayed local in family photobooks. Some of the photographs circulated away from Montana—but primarily to go back “home,” and home was often Germany, Russia, Italy, etc. They do not seem to have circulated outside of the Western US in ways that would create a large enough ripple, leave a lasting impact, or intervene in larger audiences’ thinking about the settling of the West.

It was only after Lucey’s discovery of the photographs in 1978 that Cameron’s work developed a more national circulation, and even that has taken some years to accomplish. Lucey’s books, as well as both popular and scholarly articles/books about Cameron, have helped to increase her circulation. The online collections of both The Montana Memory Project and the Evelyn Cameron gallery continue to increase this circulation, making access to some of her photos globally available. Lastly, the development of the Evelyn Cameron Gallery, opened to the public in 2005, has given Cameron a professional gallery space for exhibitions and sales of reprints. Digital technology has, of course, increased her circulation in ways that were not available to her in her lifetime. However, during her life, the rhetorical impact of Cameron’s photographs was limited not only by their locale but also the in the more private, family-based ways in which they circulated (either in Montana or overseas).

Conclusion

Ann George, Elizabeth Weiser, and Janet Zepernick, writing about women between the World Wars, argue that “While a successful individual showed what *one* woman could do, multiple examples did not suggest what women in general could do, nor did they dislodge larger cultural beliefs about what women *should* do” (11, emphasis original). But the large groups of photographs indicating women’s work that Cameron provides also do not show what women *must* and *did* do, both in order to survive, and in order to simply do what needed to be done (and, perhaps, to safely do work that they enjoyed). In this sense, Cameron’s visual embodiment of 1900 Montana through her lens (literally), asks us to embrace the distributed rhetorical force of Cameron’s images and continue the work of feminist Western historians to emphasize the place for women’s bodies—as photographers, as ranchers, and as women doing independent work. If, as scholars like Johnson claim, we must continue to reinforce the idea of women in Montana at the turn of the century in order to disrupt popular conceptions that exclude them, we must read and reread them into the landscape. In order to continue the inclusive history of the West that scholars have been emphasizing since the late 1970s we must continue to reimagine our rhetorical interpretations of women’s presence. Particularly for outsiders raised on the popular culture myth of the masculine West, we must, instead of making them exceptional, reinforce that their active participation in the very historically male depiction of life on early homesteads and ranches was commonplace, and that they themselves rejected the notion that it was spectacle. In this case, however, the lack of social circulation of her images after Cameron’s death meant that her work was excluded from this

project—it did not help to “normalize” the space so that other women could participate in the life of ranching, cattle work, and horse work, without continuing to be portrayed in popular depictions of the West as exceptional.

Barrett-Fox’s concept of MMH is connected to ideas of women’s places and women’s work. Workplaces “provide women avenues to address and negotiate the ever-present production and negotiation of gender (among other kinds of power)” (13). Was the work of these women, and Cameron’s work in photographing them, exceptional? To my mind, of course. They did work that I could not imagine doing, in a landscape that was harsh and unforgiving. But to simply celebrate their individual exceptionalism is to ignore their story of community and the sharing of re-envisioned roles that is brought to life by Evelyn Cameron’s amazing photography.

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Hillary Rodham Clinton's Rhetorical Shifts in *What Happened*: Pluralist Feminist Credibility Post-2016

Zoe McDonald

Abstract: Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2016 election campaign memoir, *What Happened*, marks a significant turning point in the politician's credibility due to the ways the text can direct readers to some pluralist feminist rhetorical practices. Through analyzing three brief significant shifts in Clinton's ethos, this writer suggests the politician begins to reflect the shifts in identification necessary to direct readers to an anti-violence and anti-racist coalition more forward looking than a national election cycle.

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Keywords: Rhetoric, Ethos, Feminism, Coalition, Hillary Rodham Clinton

While twentieth century US women's rights advocates have a wealth of knowledge of the ways to establish coalitions across racial differences (Cole and Luna 96), feminist rhetorical scholars urge careful attention to how such strategies should not exclusively establish an individual's virtues but motivate audiences' long-term participation (Howell; Busch). Such knowledge emphasizes descriptions of joint decision making across social locations, the boundaries of allyship, and how leaders may use moments of failure to call in allies to continue resistance efforts. Feminist rhetorical scholars, Gwen Pough and Rebecca Jones open *Peitho's* "On Race, Feminism, and Rhetoric" special issue with the reminder to "hold space for tension and nuance" because "ongoing protests and unrest around police brutality and murders have forced us to come to terms with the meaning of solidarity and coalition" (n.p.). To study the rhetoric of feminist coalitions, scholars are challenged to understand both traditional political movements such as political election campaigns and more "leaderful" grassroots collectives such as the 2018 Women's March ("Women's March on Washington Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles"). Hillary Rodham Clinton is a representative figure for this crucial line of inquiry, as someone Susan Bordo notes "for better or worse has represented a particular generation of feminists for decades," whose rhetoric shows a remarkable shift regarding gender and race following her 2016 Presidential election loss among the Electoral College (187).

It is tempting to interpret Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC)'s rhetoric as representative of white feminism. As a recent example, the sociologist Ashley Noel Mack interprets one of HRC's tweets from her 2016 election campaign as an indication of the pattern of white women referencing inter-

sectionality in ways that fail to acknowledge the term's history connected to Black women. Following the 2016 election, HRC's rhetoric is more complicated. Such shifts are worthwhile to examine because Clinton's image—more so than her positions, policies, or history—has functioned as a rhetorical straw woman with media coverage focused on the pseudo scandal of her email server and far right conspiracies of her connections to QAnon (Bordo). Clinton's sixth memoir *What Happened* is an especially interesting case study due to the ways book reviewers note the politician's open feminist commitments, a remarkable observation given the book's primary focus on correcting misperceptions surrounding Donald Trump's election. In some moments, HRC employs the rhetorical practices coalition-oriented feminists call on for white allies to adopt. What is especially striking is a moment in the middle of the book in which the former Secretary of State describes her shared caregiver identity with Black women who lost children to police violence in ways that acknowledges structural racism. Clinton describes the Mothers of the Movement in ways that emphasize the life and death stakes compelling a group of Black women to trust her, despite significant risks of tokenization, denial, and unaltered conditions.

In this article, I examine brief moments in HRC's memoir *What Happened* where she deviates from the forms of credibility rhetoric scholars have noted throughout her political career. Through decades in national politics, HRC has represented herself as a detail-oriented "policy wonk" or as a Christian "Madonna" (Kaufer and Parry-Giles; Anderson; Campbell) In brief moments in *What Happened*, HRC uses a "rhetorical feminism" experience-based form of authority (Glenn). Through employing rhetorical feminism, HRC makes rhetorical space for the Black women-led advocacy group The Mothers of the Movement by emphasizing the "unruly" force of bodies at risk, and coalitions with those most at risk, as more central to a healthy democracy than partisan politics, and political press coverage (Alexander et al. 13) While HRC has received important critiques for representing white feminism, I attend to brief moments in her memoir that enabled book reviewers to label the book a feminist text due to shifts from expected presidential rhetoric into embodied knowledge, consciousness of sexism, recognition of shared caregiving responsibilities, and an acknowledgement of race and unequally shared risks among Black and white women. Attending to these shifts in HRC's ethos can create the symbolic disruptions necessary to allow for the recognition of the Mothers of the Movement anti-racist, poverty, and gun violence coalition.

A central challenge for feminist rhetorical scholars has been to focus on ways to resist appeals to a shared sisterhood that ignore racial differences or create false equivalencies among sexism and racism. Such post-second wave projects take on increased urgency in the context surrounding the 2016 US presidential election. As readers of this journal are aware, coalitions remain central actionable networks sustaining commitments to end sexist oppression in daily life and scholarly practices. Anti-racist feminists name the responsibilities white allies have to "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" that include reflexive engagement, embodied knowledge, interracial friendship, and scholarly practices that resist tokenization (hooks 1; Lugones). These commitments and corresponding rhetorical practices take on heightened urgency in

the context of the 2016 election, which saw open displays of white supremacist rhetoric, increased racial violence, and massive protests. Within such a context, how can anti-racist feminist credibility strategies extend knowledge of coalition rhetoric and rhetorical scholars' responsibilities?

Feminist rhetorical analyses often focus on liberal and progressive causes. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald note questions of how to include the rhetoric of women who supported conservative causes, such as temperance, present a significant challenge for scholars concerned with inclusive histories of rhetoric: to notice not all women have advocated for women's rights. Examining uncomfortable appearing coalitions may create new knowledge of inclusive rhetoric, which Karma Chávez models through examining the shared pursuit of migrant rights among a Catholic Church and queer rights organization (133). HRC's memoir is one such text that may provide opportunities to "strategically contemplate" our stances (Kirsch and Royster 656-9), as individuals and parts of this collective, in relationship to the rhetoric of those it is easy to dis-identify with, or distrust.

Cheryl Glenn presents a useful differentiation among feminist rhetoric and rhetorical feminism. These conceptual labels provide a way to recognize different definitions of feminism and their corresponding purposes, such as a liberal concern with inclusion into workplaces or public life. In this liberal tradition, HRC's rhetoric has gained recognition especially for her "Remarks to the U.N. 4th World Conference on Women" with the oft-cited "women's rights are human rights" phrase (*American Rhetoric*). The politician's rhetoric has often functioned as an exigency for conversations surrounding shifting gender norms and feminist responsibilities. Younger generations have engaged key critiques of HRC's generation. The author and cultural critic Roxane Gay describes herself as a "bad feminist" to acknowledge a historical emphasis on elite white women's concerns but suggests those with fewer privileges should not disassociate from expansive efforts to "believe in equal opportunities for women and men" that "can be pluralistic so long as we respect the different feminisms we carry with us" (n.p.). It can be noteworthy to attend to Clinton's text for the ways it contains some pluralistic possibilities not exclusively concerned with formal inclusion, smashing glass ceilings, or blindness to the significance of racism within women's lives. Johnathan Alexander, Susan C. Jarratt, and Nancy Welch urge more attention to the "unruly" force of bodies at risk as a crucial element of recent social movement rhetoric. Cheryl Glenn notes in the conclusion of *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope* the feminine counterparts of masculine rhetorical traditions may alleviate persuasion efforts that spread conspiracy theories, violence, and many pressing social inequalities.

Rhetoric scholars identify a crucial shift following feminism's second wave involves attempts to form connections among women's rights and other social movements. Krista Ratcliffe in *Rhetorical Listening* observes speakers often do not want their various and overlapping social differences to prevent them from addressing issues that do not focus on their social differences (2; see also 25-6). Ritchie and Ronald highlight in their introduction to *Available Means* that due to the millennia of practices denying women access to education and public spaces, a throughline

in women's rhetoric is that women advocate for their presence as a prerequisite to address other issues (xvii). This requirement to justify one's presence, can, at times, become an invitation to use one's status and embodied presence as an asset. In the late twentieth century, Shari J. Stenberg and Charlotte Hogg emphasize the exclusion of women from powerful domains is perhaps more insidious because in many nations it is no longer formally written into laws (4) but prevalent in practices such as interpersonal violence, workplace sexual harassment, online doxxing, and economic inequalities.

Some women may be able to act as if their gender is irrelevant to their lives or perhaps only prevalent once they attempt to ascend to leadership positions. Such a post-feminist position is often individually focused and ignorant, or in denial, of the pervasive inequalities shaping the practices of organizations and governments. It is tempting to place HRC and her rhetoric into such a position. Interdisciplinary scholars spend significant time developing a useful definition of coalitions as embodied human entities and ethical commitments among different groups. As embodied entities, scholars in political science note paying attention to coalitions is a useful way to read American politics, such as understanding the impact of the Democrats and the New Deal Coalition in the early twentieth century (Genovese and Han). Scholars in sociology often examine coalitions as alliances among multiple stakeholders often within government entities and nonprofit networks, as seen in Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna's qualitative research into the insights of US women in different grassroots activist organizations or Karama Chávez's ethnographic description of shifting rhetoric among the queer-rights oriented Wingspan and the migrant-focused *Coalición de Derechos Humanos* nonprofit groups. Within these conversations, scholars offer definitions of coalitions as functional alliances among two or more groups working together on a common goal, often in pursuit of political, or otherwise institutional, change. However, these scholars often note such entities are often short term, more theoretical than functional, and often fail to alter the conditions that brought the group together.

Feminists of color are key voices who point to the ways mid-twentieth century feminist and anti-racist movements had a tendency to overlook the specific needs of women of color. Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Mapping the Margins" points out the limited resources of domestic violence shelters resulted in turning away women of color (1245). Coalitional political goals can encompass everyday acts, which María Lugones notes can include asking a woman how she's doing as her partner is arrested (2; see also "Hablando Cara a Cara"), and calls to resist racially exclusive practices within progressive organizations (see also Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House"). Collectively, these conversations challenge a single identity-political focus.

HRC's rhetoric following the 2016 election is worthwhile to analyze due to her status as the first US woman to win the popular vote for president and because her image featured predominately in election coverage in ways that represent, at least in part, public perceptions of

feminism. I find it worth attending to how, following the 2016 election, HRC's rhetoric is more complicated than a straightforward read of whitewashing, or white supremacist feminism, due to the moments in which HRC's feminist consciousness includes established pluralist features that acknowledge cultural influences, draw upon embodied knowledge, and listen to Black women. In this article, I focus on three chapters in HRC's *What Happened* that center credibility and gender: "Get Caught Trying," "On Being a Woman in Politics," and "Turning Mourning into a Movement." I conclude through considering textual moments of regrets and credibility earned through failure as potential central features of the rhetoric of coalition leaders. Studying these textual moments may contribute to knowledge of ethos as a central persuasive feature in contemporary memoirs and the study of feminist coalition rhetoric that requires alliances with unevenly shared risks and controversial allies (Mack and Alexander; Kelm).

"This is a Story of What Happened." (Clinton xv)

Although Clinton notes her memoir "isn't a comprehensive account of the 2016 race," readers see many versions of the author throughout the book's 500 pages that devote significant attention to the features that made the election depart from run of the mill partisan politicking (xv). The book fits well within the expectations of a failed presidential candidate's tell-all with chapters devoted to thanking running mates, staffers, and voters; descriptions of policy proposals; a political origin story connected to family and faith; corrections of political press coverage; and a call for readers to engage within the institutions of public and community life. The text is also notable for the "Those Damn Emails" chapter addressing the pseudo scandal that dominated election coverage and the "Trolls, Bots, Fake News, and Real Russians" chapter on electoral interference. Throughout, HRC names regrets that include her endorsement of the 1994 Crime Bill (204), her "put coal miners out of work" quip (263), and the "political piñata" of her email server (322).⁸ Throughout, HRC relies on her established forms of credibility. In policy wonk mode, HRC names multiple advisors and cites from public opinion polls. HRC also makes multiple religious references to her Methodist background, the Bible, and conversations with pastors. The memoir also presents a different type of credibility, which HRC's writes as "now I'm letting down my guard" (xviii) to ponder: "You've read my emails for heaven's sake. What more do you need? What could I do to be 'more real'? Dance on a table? Swear a blue streak? Break down sobbing? That's not me. And if I *had* done any of those things, what would have happened? I'd have been ripped to pieces" (122, emphasis in orig.).

What Happened has several chapters that examine the person who has been a politician to resist the caricature constructed by media coverage, political rivals, and disinformation campaigns. HRC responds to the frequent criticism that she has been a career woman without significant family attachments as she makes frequent references to her husband Bill, daughter and grandchildren, and mother. Clinton provides additional context and regrets for some of her well-circulated

1 Clinton explains, "It was a dumb mistake. But an even dumber scandal" (292).

quotations, such as the 1992 “I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was pursue my profession,” in this case writing, “I hadn’t tamed my tongue” (118). Clinton complicates readings of her life as an establishment partisan career politician focused on identity politics and neoliberal economics out of touch with citizens’ needs to reverse unaffordable health care, preventable gun deaths, and unequally resourced schools. It is likely this combination of well-timed political insider knowledge and nothing left to lose reflexive moments landed the book accolades, such as *Time* magazine’s book of the year and a spot on *The New York Times* bestseller list. Reviewers praised the book’s exploration of gender, such as the reviewer Jennifer Senior who calls it a “feminist manifesto” (n.p) and *National Public Radio*’s Danielle Kurtzleben who calls the book “the embattled cry of the hyper-competent woman who desperately wishes the world were a meritocracy” (n.p).

“Why do you want to be President? Why? But, really—why?” (Clinton 40)

Throughout her text, Clinton is self-effacing about her gender, while subsequently describing consciousness of the challenges women face in politics. Clinton places herself in association with men. In an especially interesting comparison, Clinton names her husband Bill Clinton’s rags to riches story of growing up in poverty and Barack Obama’s immigrant background (111-2), two experiences that work well within an American dream cultural narrative of upward mobility. After naming the backgrounds of the two former Democratic party presidents, Clinton then describes her own rise from the Midwestern middle class to become the first woman presidential candidate for a major political party (see 111-112). As others have pointed out, Clinton has situated her political rise in relationship to Bill Clinton and Obama throughout her career (see Kaufer and Parry-Giles), which connects to the traditional strategy women cultivating authority through associations with men. In this tradition, Clinton’s strategic choice mitigates the risks associated with deviating from the tradition equating political authority exclusively with men.

While Clinton establishes her credibility through connections to former Presidents Clinton and Obama, she dismisses her own lived experiences. HRC writes, “Few people would say that my story was quite so dazzling” and “We yearn for that showstopping tale—that one-sentence pitch that captures something magical about America; that hooks you and won’t let go. Mine wasn’t it” (112). And yet this self-effacing gesture then allows Clinton to include her own political personal narrative. Through writing her memoir outside of the purpose to win an election, HRC establishes an opening to name the contextual reasoning informing her actions.

Early in *What Happened*, Clinton devotes a chapter, “Get Caught Trying,” to explain her decision to enter the 2016 presidential race, a decision connected to critiques the politician received during the campaign, as well as what Ritchie and Ronald consider perhaps the unifying feature of women’s rhetoric (xxiv-v). Clinton adopts a position of reluctance to write “probably the most compelling reason *not* to run—was being a grandmother” (47, emphasis in the original).

However, she continues to describe how after receiving encouragement from other politicians, including her husband Bill Clinton and then-President Barack Obama, she decided:

In short, I thought I'd be a damn good president. Still, I never stopped getting asked, 'Why do you want to be President? Why? But, really—why?' The implication was that there must be something else going on, some dark ambition and craving for power. Nobody psychoanalyzed Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, or Bernie Sanders about why they ran. It was just accepted as normal. But for me, it was regarded as inevitable—people assumed I'd run no matter what—yet somehow abnormal, demanding a profound explanation. (40)

While readers can interpret Clinton's question regarding why she ran as one requiring an answer, in this context it can also function rhetorically, without a genuine and logical answer. Further, media and voter questioning of Clinton's motivations reflects a deep tension between Clinton's role as a family caregiver and politician. This tension extends to the historical requirement that women justify their right to speak or have political ambitions in ways that are not required for men, or the Democratic politicians Clinton names (see Ritchie and Ronald xxii). An impossible set of choices—campaigning but going against established political and gender norms in doing so—is one paradox Clinton continues to expand upon as she describes her decision not to foreground her gender in her campaign rhetoric.

Clinton continues to position her political rise as the result of good timing rather than ambition. But Clinton does so in a way that momentarily breaks from the universal or culture-less assumptions María Lugones notes characterize exclusionary practices of "ethnocentric racist" feminists (43-4). Clinton provides readers with her origins as someone who grew up in a white middle class Park Ridge, IL community during a prominent point in history with changing norms enabling women to participate in a greater range of paid employment (113-114). Clinton writes:

I never figured out how to tell this story right. Partly that's because I'm not great at talking about myself. Also, I didn't want people to see me as the 'woman candidate,' which I find limiting, but rather as the best candidate whose experience as a woman in a male-dominated culture made her sharper, tougher, and more competent. [...] But the biggest reason I shied away from embracing this narrative is that storytelling requires a receptive audience, and I've never felt like the American electorate was receptive to this one. (113-114)

As in other moments in *What Happened*, Clinton desires to claim her experiences as a woman as a valuable rhetorical resource. At the same time, she resists claiming such a perspective due to her perception that her audience was not ready to vote for a presidential candidate who openly addressed her gender as a strength, a feeling conformed by political research (Bauer; The

Pew Research Center). In the context of the 2016 election, naming one's experiences as a woman would likely create a liability. Yet, despite Clinton's rational decision to carefully represent herself in an acceptable way to her audience, during her campaign some voters still dismissed her as untrustworthy, unlikable, and unworthy of a vote.

Clinton adds an additional complication to gendered logic through comparing the criticism she received to criticism of Barack Obama in such a way that begins to illustrate a shift in vision María Lugones notes is necessary for white feminist allies. As Clinton describes her response to criticism of her reserved oratory during her campaign, she observes:

People say I'm guarded, and they have a point. I think before I speak. I don't just blurt out whatever comes to mind. It's a combination of my natural inclination, plus my training as a lawyer, plus decades in the public eye where every word I say is scrutinized. But why is this a bad thing? Don't we want our Senators and Secretaries of State—and especially our Presidents—to speak thoughtfully, to respect the impact of our words? President Obama is just as controlled as I am, maybe even more so. [...] This is generally and correctly taken as evidence of his intellectual heft and rigor. (122)

In this reflection, Clinton considers the ways her speaking style is not a deviation from American presidential norms. She answers her own question pondering why leaders cannot be respected for their planned-out speaking style. Clinton continues to justify her style through describing her professional background as a lawyer and public figure, and she considers this style may even be highly valued among political leaders. In an especially interesting twist, Clinton makes a direct comparison to President Obama to note a reserved style is far from a liability for him, but an asset. In doing so, Clinton accurately acknowledges the many racist attacks he endured, such as false claims of his lack of citizenship (see p. 6-7, 366-7, 414-5). However, Clinton does not explicitly consider Obama's race in the above quotation, although her descriptions may indicate her awareness of the ways gender norms are different than racial norms, where Barack Obama, a Black man, did not receive the same criticism as Clinton, a white woman. It is through this implicit description of the different, yet related, effects of sexism and racism that HRC positions herself as capable of adopting a position as an ally for intersectional feminist efforts.

“Well, what would *you* do?” (Clinton 136, emphasis in the original)

Although for most of the book Clinton separates her personal and political lives, in her “Sisterhood” chapters she describes how Clinton the presidential nominee and Clinton the woman blend. In a pattern fitting the second wave mantra the personal is political, I find Clinton resists a separation among her roles as a politician and citizen through naming her embodied experiences in a male-dominated profession that directs readers to challenges more significant than glass ceilings and salary negotiations.

Clinton describes the significance of her gender within her political life through her embodied experiences. Through doing so, she begins to establish an ethos able to direct reader attention to gender-based violence at the core of many feminist movements. Ritchie and Ronald note women cultivate authority through describing their gendered bodies (xxi; xxvi-ii)—such as Sojourner Truth’s identification with her audience’s awareness of her skin color and the physical impacts of slave labor that made her body challenge Antebellum assumptions of women’s fragility. This is not to suggest Clinton engages a similar repurposing of embodied gender and racial norms from her standpoint as a twenty-first century white woman. However, I find Clinton establishes agency through resisting an easy understanding of language divorced from speaking bodies.

In the “Sisterhood” chapter, Clinton describes brief moments she experienced to show the stakes of pervasive sexual harassment. One key illustration takes place during Clinton’s description of the second national presidential candidate debate. Trump stood behind Clinton as she spoke. In response to this physical form of intimidation, Clinton describes her embodied reaction. She writes, “He was literally breathing down my neck. My skin crawled” (136). This resulted in pondering two choices.

It was one of those moments where you wish you could hit Pause and ask everyone watching, ‘Well? What would *you* do?’ Do you stay calm, keep smiling, and carry on as if he weren’t repeatedly invading your space? Or do you turn, look him in the eye, and say loudly and clearly, ‘Back up, you creep, get away from me, I know you love to intimidate women but you can’t intimidate me, so *back up*.’ (136, emphasis in orig.)

Clinton continues to explain why she chose the first option. “Maybe I have overlearned the lesson of staying calm—biting my tongue, digging my fingernails into a clenched fist, smiling while, determined to present a composed face to the world” (136-7). In these statements, Clinton refutes the critique that she didn’t react to Trump’s physical presence on stage. The rhetorical questions direct readers to consider the ways a calm reaction is not a natural one given the situation, and one Clinton herself considered resisting. In addition, Clinton names her embodied reaction to Trump’s breath. Clinton’s description of overlearning how to stay clam points out the ways her reaction is not natural in response to a physically threatening figure. Instead, Clinton’s statement highlights the intentionality around maintaining a calm exterior. Clinton’s descriptions of biting her tongue and digging her fingernails into her fist continue to show a schism between her calm facial appearance and her more expressive physical reactions. Her body tensed up, but she continued to present a composed face of rationality and politeness, one traditionally expected of politicians.

The politician provides a further justification of her actions during the debate through connecting her embodied experiences to sexist and racist stereotypes. Clinton writes if she directly confronted Trump’s behavior, “he would have surely capitalized on it gleefully. A lot of people recoil from an angry woman, or even just a direct one” (137). Clinton’s decision to resist the public

association of an angry woman to her observations of the public punishments faced by other high profile women including Coretta Scott King, Kamala Harris, and Arianna Huffington (137). Unlike earlier moments in Clinton's text, here she establishes herself through associations with other women, a crucial shift in her identification. Through naming the connections among the negative public reception of women considered angry to white and Black women, Clinton implicitly directs reader attention to the ways Black women face additional barriers to their participation in politics.

“[B]ut are we going to see any change? Are we going to see some action” (McSpadden qtd. in Clinton 180).

While HRC seeks to enhance her public image as someone whose gender could be a political asset, by itself this does not challenge racism among women. I find a third form of HRC's revised ethos illustrates the possibilities of a more complicated understanding of the politician as she writes of her association with the group the Mothers of the Movement, comprised of Sybrina Fulton (mother of Trayvon Martin), Gwen Carr (mother of Eric Garner) Lezley McSpadden (mother of Michael Brown), Lucia McBath (mother of Jordan Davis), and other primarily Black women who lost unarmed children to gun and police violence, many of whom spoke in support of Clinton during the 2016 Democratic National Convention. In this section, I find HRC positions herself within a more “leader-full” system (“Women's March on Washington Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles”), one where Clinton's election loss has a deeper significance than her career. Instead, the memoir can direct readers beyond the Clinton 2016 presidential campaign to the pressing needs to address the epidemic of gun violence as it intersects with violence against communities of color through a movement led by Black women.

Throughout the chapter “Turning Mourning into a Movement,” HRC returns to the experiences of the activist group the Mothers of the Movement to illustrate the pressing needs for legislative reform to curb the United States' high rates of gun violence that especially impact communities of color. Clinton opens the chapter with a description of the meeting she organized at a Chicago diner with some of the women who would later campaign for her at the Democratic National Convention as the Mothers of the Movement. Clinton mediates the experiences of the activists within her own bestselling memoir through quoting their words and using their experiences to illustrate the stakes of her failed gun reform policies. As the chapter continues, Clinton attempts to further situate herself for wide reader appeal through naming the support she won from police chiefs (177), her support for law abiding gun owners (187), and her recognition of the importance of guns within American culture (181). The Mothers activist group sought justice for their children, and in Fulton's words, “We don't want to be community activists, we don't want to be the mothers of senseless gun violence, we don't want to be in this position—we were forced into this position. None of us would have signed up for this” (qtd. Clinton 174). Clinton's stakes were much more political than personal. Clinton describes the political power of the National Rifle Association lobbying campaigns as significant liabilities for Democratic politicians. However, these significantly differ-

ent stakes reflect a key feature of feminist coalitions. As Bernice Johnson Reagon notes, matters of survival, life and death, are the most compelling reasons motivating women to find ways to work together across racial differences (357). In a similar way that a feminist ethos can reveal the rhetor's context (Reynolds; Schmertz), the Mothers of the Movement's engagement with the controversial white politician can direct readers toward the intersecting histories of US gun and racial violence. These textual moments can indicate the rhetorical and political failures directing HRC, and her readers, to coalitional movements, especially the Black women-led Mothers of the Movement.

After Clinton describes the initial Chicago meeting, the politician positions her family within larger political structures. Clinton briefly names her racial subject position. She writes, "My daughter and grandchildren are white. They won't know what it's like to be watched with suspicion when they play in the park or enter a store" (176). This moment relies on a complex identification, one requiring Clinton share an identity as a parent and recognize the crucial racial differences among herself and her guests that significantly inform interactions in public spaces. Yet, perhaps more powerful than modeling her own racial subject position, Clinton directs readers to a more expansive form of accountability through implicating herself in the failure to implement gun and police reform legislation. Clinton notes the Mothers "had come to talk about what had happened to their kids and to see if I would do something about it—or if I was just another politician after their votes" (173). This self-recognition breaks from a white feminine position of assumed innocence or naivety about the reasons the Mothers would be inclined to distrust a white liberal politician. In the context of a political memoir from an unsuccessful presidential candidate, Clinton's reflection takes on additional weight as a form of acknowledgement of the ongoing preventable tragedies she was unable to stop.

This awareness becomes the starting place of a coalitional anti-racist feminist ethos as Clinton attributes a question she does not attempt to answer to Lezley McSpadden, a shift that demonstrates Clinton's knowledge of the interconnections among Washington politics, the lives of the Mothers and other families, and her own failure to prevent future gun deaths. According to Clinton, McSpadden asked her, "Once again we're around a table, we're pouring our hearts out, we're getting emotional, we tell you what we feel—but are we going to see any change? Are we going to see some action?" (180). While in majority of this chapter Clinton describes the recent history of gun policies and lobbies within national politics, Clinton provides no textual explanation to McSpadden's call for accountability. Within the text, McSpadden's question is visually set off by a double paragraph break functioning as an intentional pause for readers. While it may be possible to answer McSpadden with a yes or no, McSpadden's question demands an answer in more than words and implicates Clinton as an unsuccessful presidential candidate. Through Clinton's inclusion of this moment, there is the possibility of authority gained because of self-implicating failure with consequences beyond a single election.

McSpadden's questions emerge from her lived experiences as she forms an appeal directed to the influential white politician. McSpadden's challenge to Clinton to produce meaningful change for parents who lost children to unprovoked violence shows a level of rhetorical complexity Clinton herself rarely employs in her text. In keeping with a coalition's focus on action, McSpadden's rhetorical questions aim for more than awareness of violence but form a call to accountability from lawmakers. By including McSpadden's words, Clinton connects readers to the ways women of color may creatively appeal to potential allies through shared identities as a way to point out significant social differences, a move Clinton demonstrates is possible as her inclusion of McSpadden's words in the best-selling memoir may reach audiences who may not read the activist's work (see McSpadden; McSpadden and LeFlore), or see the Mothers' media coverage.

Clinton's choice to include such a complex call for accountability forms the starting place of an ethos in vulnerability or failure. While earlier in *What Happened*, Clinton establishes her authority in association with former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, here she establishes her authority in association with McSpadden. This brief, yet significant, moment illustrates a central finding from the social scientists Cole and Luna's interviews with activists in the *Global Feminisms Archive* – that a crucial aspect of studying feminist coalitions centers on if or how identities should be forged through the alliance (75–76), which in this case required Clinton write of herself as someone who became committed to gun reform legislation due to devastating human consequences that disproportionately impact Black communities. Through this uncomfortable association with McSpadden's unanswerable question of accountability, I suggest Clinton forms the starting place of a form of credibility calling for readers to cross racial divisions to end gun deaths.

This credibility is perhaps most important to attend to due to what its inclusion suggests of the Mothers' of the Movement. Clinton establishing her authority alongside Lezley McSpadden's call for accountability can be read as appropriation or amplification. In either interpretation, the moment's inclusion shows McSpadden trusted Clinton enough to meet with her, to speak rather than assume her words would not be heard, and that the epidemic of gun violence and need for police reform were significant enough to risk engaging with the politician despite risks of denial, appropriation, or further harm. Clinton's controversial reputation did not lead this group of Black women to disengage with her and may have required she alter her consciousness of state sanctioned harm and mass incarceration following the 1994 Crime Bill. Clinton's inclusion of the Mothers of the Movement's can provide a reminder of the necessity to risk allyship with those who show a willingness to listen to act on a hope that future tragedies can be prevented (see Taylor 189).

Conclusion

Throughout *What Happened*, Clinton seeks to revise her controversial reputation in an attempt to offer readers avenues to influence politics following her 2016 election loss among the Electoral College. Clinton is a complex figure, which she acknowledges in the text through noting her regrets, frustrations, and many privileges due to her wealth and status. In the “Get Caught Trying” chapter, Clinton situates her presidential campaign as emerging after receiving encouragement from the previous two Democratic presidents. The “On Being a Woman in Politics” section may help readers recognize patterns of assumed distrust, and embodied vulnerability for women in US politics. In the “Turning Mourning into a Movement” chapter, Clinton describes the Mothers of the Movement group that endorsed her, and required she recognize shared family caregiving responsibilities with crucial racial differences. These humanizing features are worthwhile to direct readers to of the moment political tensions, and, from a feminist perspective, shifts in Clinton’s rhetoric that include some anti-racist consciousness.

Other rhetoricians who engage *What Happened* may find it beneficial to focus on Clinton’s frequent use of rhetorical questions or calls for readers to participate in formal institutions and grassroots movements to shape civic life. Throughout the text, Clinton uses questions to ponder the causes and aftereffects of the Trump election, with questions such as: “But what more could we do?” (351) and “How can we build the trust that holds a democracy together?” (431). In one trend, Clinton points out the US’ geopolitical divisions to ask, “How many shrinking small towns and aging Rust Belt cities did I visit over the past two years where people felt abandoned, disrespected, invisible? How many young men and women in neglected urban neighborhoods told me they felt like strangers in their own land because of the color of their skin?” (431). Further examining the function of HRC’s rhetorical questions may contribute to knowledge of the books’ “up-take” and circulation (Mack and Alexander). A related project may track the strategic shifts among the ways Clinton writes of her enduring faith in the US federal government in ways that consider the intersection among political deliberative norms and the “unruly” presence of bodies at risk in physical places and online spaces (Alexander et al.). There are also potential projects that consider HRC’s *What Happened* in relationship to potential shifts in the rhetoric of other contemporary high-profile women’s rights advocates.

The members of The Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric recognize the many contested definitions of feminism in theory and practice along with responsibilities to ensure rhetorical knowledge is not applied in situations that justify poverty, violence, or debunked conspiracies. This organization attends to the complexity of the contexts surrounding rhetorical situations that may involve acknowledging important moments of revision because of alliances formed across differences in race, social location, and political power. A careful negotiation among trust and skepticism is crucial to study feminist coalitions and their rhetoric. As we examine deeply uncomfortable rhetoric that initially appears as straightforward appropriation, we may more fully

understand the central issues that have compelled individuals to trust each other, persuade those who appear immune to change, and hold onto trust in the benefits of solidarity.

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Cluster Conversation: Addressing the Barriers be- tween Us and That Future: (Feminist) Activist Coalition Building in Writing Studies

Addressing The Barriers Between Us and that Future: (Feminist) Activist Coalition Building in Writing Studies

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Introduction

This Cluster Conversation emerged from a series of experiences each editor dealt with in 2022 as legislators in red states introduced bills restricting higher education and “banning” concepts like critical race theory and diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. This year the Supreme Court also decided to reverse affirmative action, and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson eloquently pinned in her response to this decision: “With let-them-eat-cake obliviousness, the majority pulls the ripcord and announces ‘colorblindness for all’ by legal fiat. But deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life” (Lithwick Slate.com). The repercussions of this decision—on top of the growing lists of states banning educational initiatives and programs that discuss race, gender, and identity—leave many academics and educators feeling that this will only get worse.

Intersectionality, as Kimberlé Crenshaw describes, is “a prism to bring to light dynamics within discrimination law that weren’t being appreciated by the courts” (Coaston Vox.com) Crenshaw brought to light the double discrimination Black women experienced by being both Black and women and highlighted legal cases wherein women were required to choose between bringing a case of racism or sexism and could not say they were discriminated against based on both being Black and being a woman. Considering the history of the American legal system, that the Supreme Court reversed affirmative action shortly after the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* should come as no surprise. The day after overturning affirmative action, the Supreme Court also ruled that business owners now have the right to discriminate against same-sex couples if it conflicts with their religious identity.

This regressive backlash represents a continual pattern of silencing groups fighting against oppression. While many in our profession, particularly those with activist backgrounds, have entered higher education as a way to liberate ourselves and others through fostering agency,

we must reckon with the history of our institutions, and the history of our writing spaces (our programs, our centers, our classrooms). Audre Lorde reminds us that the feminist activist movement will be successful when, “We are anchored in our own place and time, looking out and beyond to the future we are creating, and we are part of communities that interact. While we fortify ourselves with visions of the future, we must arm ourselves with accurate perceptions of the barriers between us and that future” (57). Antiracist, social justice and feminist pedagogies work to support writing practitioners in developing their response to racist agendas that impact our communities in and outside of academia, and to continue coalition building in spite of divisive laws, with a spirit of hope and clarity of vision.

This Cluster incorporates grounded examples of writing scholars and practitioners contending with regressive backlash, tensions, and obstacles and highlights the subversive and coalition-based tactics they have implemented in their contexts. Contributors reflect on their struggles and how they’re doing the work regardless of the barriers, with a focus on the histories we have inherited, and an eye toward feminist methodologies and practices to move forward, in the hopes of real activist work in academia, of coalition-building, of true solidarity, rather than mutable support, highlighting our differences and celebrating what we learn when we work with difference. This introduction sets the scene for that work by providing each editor’s own narrative account of the contexts that shaped this Cluster, the backlash they represent, and our approaches to resistance.

Turning Fear into Actionable Coalition

“Fear is the umbilical cord of rage”- Natasha Tinsley

Though we do not always wish to acknowledge or accept it, women are afraid; we are afraid. We are afraid for our children, our mothers and sisters, our friends and colleagues, our loved ones and strangers. Women are under attack. Black and Brown people are under attack. Queer and trans* people are under attack. We as academics and women and friends have seen (some have even experienced) how this fear can lead to a silence that stifles intellectual, cultural, and societal growth, preventing us from pushing back against these unjust attacks. Because as Audre Lorde writes in her piece “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” this silence comes from the “fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, or challenge, or annihilation. But most of all...fear [of] the invisibility...where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision...[that]...render[s] [one] invisible through the depersonalization of racism” (42). Because of this fear, it can make sense to allow parts of themselves to be silenced so they do not completely disappear. However, this silencing can lead to a concept Ibram X. Kendi wrote about called “uplift suasion.” After slavery, “[t]he burden of race relations was placed squarely on the shoulders of Black Americans...If Black people behaved admirably...they would be undermining justifications for slavery and proving that notions of their inferiority were

wrong” (124). Natasha is the living example of this kind of silencing.

Since her current university is teaching focused, she thought she could just do that; teach. However, “research shows that African American female faculty...tend to be overburdened with service work... [because they are] looked at as diversity experts...” (Fossett). And research ran her over as not too long after she was hired, members of administration asked her to head up different diversity programs. She did try, creating workshops, compiling reading lists, and gathering reading materials on race, discrimination, and inclusion. But she was not/is not an expert. She did not want to be the Ferryman, leading people across a river of uncertainty. So, she reached out and asked what people felt they needed as it relates to diversity. But around this time there was a change in university administration and the world around us. She sent out a survey to the email gatekeeper (not actual name) to be sent to her colleagues asking for their advice and received the following response, “I am still waiting on a response for approval.” That approval never came and that survey was never sent. The life of an academic took over and she silently moved on. And though she claimed to be relieved to no longer be tasked to do this work, the words sat tasteless on the back of her throat. To be pushed through the diversity door to only have the room suddenly snatched from around her without so much as a whisper felt disrespectful, devaluing, a reminder that Black voices have a specific purpose with an undisclosed expiration date. But just as Lorde and Kendi describe, she allowed herself to be silenced out of fear, for her job, for her position, of non-existence.

Now this collection demonstrates how this fear can fester and grow into an emotion that creates an icy heat that burns underneath the skin until it needs to be released. An emotion paramount to rage that is so strong that only action can cool it down. Understand this is not a chaotic, uncontrolled rage, leaving only destruction in its wake. This rage is intelligent, calculated, and channeled, targeted at those who believe that their way of thinking and living is the only way, the only right way.

This collection consists of experiences that demonstrate how this flame can be used to build collaborations and solidarity, hoping to increase this flame so it soon burns beyond those who already understand the battle being waged. While Natasha does not look to speak for the contributors, for they have definitely demonstrated they are talented enough and capable enough to speak for themselves, her interpretation of fear and rage lives and thrives through all of the pieces included in this collection. But everyone involved did not allow their fear to be a debilitating force that lulled them into submission. Like nutrients from a mother, they let this fear nourish their minds and grow into a necessary anger that will hopefully burn into the minds of those who really need it.

The Political is (Necessarily) Personal

Regressive legislation and political maneuvering, or “shock-and-awe campaigns,” as Dr. Kynard refers to them in this issue, have been difficult for some to see past this year. As our editorial team started receiving proposals, the 2023 Texas Legislative session began. By the time we received drafts, the session was coming to an end, and it was clear that Senate Bill 17 and other “anti-woke” bills would pass. When Texas legislators released the state’s finalized budget for the next two years, they included \$700 million extra in state funding for the state’s public universities. These funds were contingent upon two pieces of legislation becoming law: Senate Bill 17, which bans diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) offices and programs in Texas higher education, and Senate Bill 18, the proposal to ban or overhaul tenure. Those bills passed, and public universities have access to those funds only if they demonstrate that they are complying with those new laws. The strings that those funds came with felt more like shackles, especially in underfunded public institutions that operate from a place of fear.

While reading and writing about coalition-building in the face of regressive, anti-woke politicking, and structures of racial and gender domination, Hillary began to feel the urgency around coalitional work in her own institution skyrocket. As Dr. Kynard’s essay-ish (referencing Ahmed) highlights, “DEI on our campuses has never meant radical access and educational transformation,” but in small, regional, public institutions, the majority of an institution’s support for culturally-relevant programming, inclusive pedagogies, and student leadership development may come from a single DEI office.

While SB 17 was still being deliberated, the primary DEI office at Hillary’s institution was making plans for filling the massive gaps that would be left from their office’s changes. Following the law’s passing, the office conducted surveys and focus groups to help redefine their office’s mission and goals in ways that would comply with the new law. Meanwhile, the institution was scrubbing DEI-related words and phrases from their website and all public-facing texts well in advance of the January 1st deadline. This felt like an abrupt shift from the recently established “Core Values” statements which emphasized diversity, equity, and inclusion, which had also been prioritized in various formal processes including tenure applications, annual report forms, and assessment plans. Also at play in this institutional context are rumors that the university is facing the possibility of declaring financial exigency, not to mention the explicit announcements regarding impending reductions in force. Despite these threats, a small coalition of faculty and staff from across campus continued to devise ways to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion work and to recruit others into the unpaid, misunderstood, apparently risky labor of best practices in higher education without access to basic institutional resources like reserving meeting spaces, using institutional emails and postmasters, and meetings during staff working hours. Without those resources, the work was, by necessity, both interpersonal and deeply personal. Our informal conversations became our most important workspaces, and it was in those un(der)documented, unofficial inter-

actions that we discovered access to underutilized resources and sources of support. The work in this cluster has been immediately relevant, insightful, and instructive to circumstances like Hillary's (and so many others), both in terms of illuminating ways to build subversive coalitions within and across oppressive institutions and in terms of addressing the barriers that have thwarted coalition and solidarity among us. As the institutions and organizations from which we earn our paychecks, our credentials, our status, and many of our resources continue to create barriers (expectedly) between us and the future we envision, we cannot ignore or neglect our greatest strength and resource: each other.

Whiplash from Backlash

At the "Addressing the Barriers Between Us and That Future: Feminist Activist Coalition Building in Writing Studies" panel discussion at the 2023 Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition Deconference many of the authors gathered in person and via Zoom in this Cluster were able to gather in person for the first time and via Zoom, to discuss how we continue to show up and implement feminists methodologies and coalition building despite the regressive laws that have been passed in the states where we live.

One of the moderators, Lisa, began the discussion with words she had been trying to pen for weeks as we finished the editors' introduction. As we approached the final weeks before the deconference, she knew she needed to write, yet, Lisa just didn't want to revisit the feelings she had back in 2022, when all that we had worked for felt like it was being stripped away. Each time Lisa sat down to write her portion of our introduction, she could see in our shared document that her co-editors addressed the reality of the regressive laws and their current impact on our teaching, writing classrooms and spaces, and social organizations. When Lisa sat before the blank white screen, she could still vividly see the shock in one of her co-editors', then writing center director, eyes staring back at her from the Zoom box as she explained she had been instructed to remove the Black Lives Statement from the writing center's website.

To open our deconference session, Lisa was honest with our audience, she was, and still is, digesting her feelings. When Lisa joined the writing center in 2018, there weren't many Black faces, but she was welcomed into a writing community whose commitment to social justice was visible. During her tenure, under the direction of Dr. Anna Sicari and alongside her colleagues Hillary Coenen, Fehintola Folarin, and Natasha Tinsley at Oklahoma State University (OSU) they co-founded the Talking Justice Workshop. It was an interactive workshop that taught antiracist strategies for tutors and faculty.

As assistant directors (graduate students) and directors (pre-tenure professionals), we sought to challenge white supremacy's prevalence and norms in our writing spaces by building

tutor and faculty anti racist training programs that instead of replicating coziness (Camarillo, 2019) exposed antiblackness. Our gears were turning to create writing spaces that intentionally did more than hire more tutors of color (Kynard 2019, Jordan 2021), and while we were aware of the HB 1775 law being passed, this call comes about because we did not fully realize what it would mean for us at our own institutions or institutions across the country who were feeling the impact of similar laws.

Choosing Love Amidst Fear

Anna's experience with the state bill HB1775 (please read Wonderful Faison's article to learn more about this bill) and facing institutional demand to end anti-racist initiatives in the writing center she directed in Oklahoma was illuminating in recognizing the successful strategies and tactics right wing ideologues are using to isolate individuals and create cultures of fear and loneliness. In *all about love*, bell hooks writes, "Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience...Fear is the primary force of upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire to not be known" (125). Reflecting on these lines is painful and poignant to Anna, as she experienced this type of fear hooks (and my fellow co-editors) describe, a wish to not be known or seen or recognized for the type of activist work she was attempting to do. It was not until she spoke about these experiences with her colleagues, recognizing that silence can only exacerbate fear, did she better understand the need to share these stories across state lines. Through talking with her colleagues and working with different communities, she recognized the importance of resiliency and strength; in talking with her co-editors, her colleagues and friends in doing this work, she was encouraged to choose love. "The choice to love is a choice to connect--to find ourselves in the other" (hooks 125).

This Cluster is born from love; love the co-editors have for one another, because of our differences and learning from one another, and love for the authors contributing to this issue, recognizing we're all doing this work together. The pieces this conversation showcases illuminate a wide range of issues we need to address as a field, and emphasize the importance of feminist work--exposing and posing problems to build more sustainable, just futures. We have articles that discuss explicitly ways in which these state laws have impacted what we can do as educators, and we also have pieces that implicitly show the barriers that exist, have always existed, and how coalition-building with intention across state lines is necessary.

Coalition-building is rooted in love; and we write this with love to our readers and we write this with hope that you will love the issue. Lorde quote: "How do we use each other's differences in our common battles for a livable future?" We see these pieces using each other's differences to build livable futures and we recognize this issue is BIG. Big in size and in scope and big in hope. We made the decision to have this issue be big, as that is what it will take to address the barriers

and create new futures--coalition building is difficult, it can be messy, and it forces us to acknowledge and honor differences. We believe this Cluster reflects and represents what coalition building can look like in the field, and allows readers to envision potential futures of resilience and hope. We thank the authors for the work they are doing in their communities and institutions, and we look forward to the resulting dialogue and work that comes from their work.

Organizational & Institutional Analysis & Critique

When done well, coalition work helps contributors realize and understand how the organizations and institutions we engage with create barriers to equity and perpetuate injustice. In the first section titled “Organizational & Institutional Analysis & Critique,” authors take a critical eye to organizations and the practices, programs, and policies that have shaped feminist activism and intersectional coalition-building either through their regressive policies or through their attempts to become more equitable. Don Unger’s reflection on his experience with a women’s rights group in the 1990s grapples with definitions of coalition and how different approaches to and understandings of coalition influence the nature of those relationships, and in doing so, he outlines principles that offer guidance for building coalitions that can help establish coalitional subjectivity. Carmen Kynard’s *essay-ish* asserts that “campaigns of white supremacy are meant to scare and scar us into inaction,” and it illuminates the continued “attacks on Black/queer/feminist thought and praxis,” highlighting how this white supremacist dominance goes well beyond the “shock-and-awe campaigns,” and is embedded in our white-washed, neoliberal institutions in everyday ways that demand “deep sightings” in order to be recognized and uprooted. Authors Holly Hassel and Kate Pantelides chronicle the history of feminist coalition building of the Feminist Caucus from the early 1970s and expose the challenges faced by advocates for feminist issues related to the forming of the women’s committees, the use of sexist language, and access to child-care during conferences. Liz Rohan’s article focuses on her feminist activist efforts as a tenured faculty member where austerity measures specifically harm students from low-income backgrounds, as she details the experience of the writing center budget being cut and her efforts to collaborate with students, contingent faculty, and campus organizations to advocate for more resources. Walker Smith’s discussion on his work in the archives of the Southern Baptist Convention reveals how institutional ethnography can disrupt, unsettle, and delegitimize the meaning-making power of a broad range of organizations, including religious and educational institutions.

Mentorship and Interpersonal Advocacy

When Jacqueline Jones Royster was asked what advice she had for newer faculty in a recent conference session titled “Radical Self-Care as a Rhetoric of Resistance for Women of Color in the Academy,” she urged listeners to “find your people.” Aligning with Royster’s advice and this

Cluster's theme of love and hope, the largest section in this Cluster, "Mentorship and Interpersonal Advocacy," highlights how we demonstrate care and advocacy for ourselves and others. Kendra N. Bryant Aya's brilliant poem draws support from and celebrates her coalition with "family members, mentors, teachers, and literary figures" to illuminate her experiences as a Black lesbian pushing back on "heteronormative capitalist patriarchy" even in her writing spaces at HBCUs, which she illustrates are also influenced by "anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and ageism." Also acknowledging that institution does not love us, Wonderful Faison offers readers poignant examples of how HBCUs, who have oftentimes made due with less, can demonstrate and exemplify the impact of institutional support and solidarity for "subvert[ing] anti-CRT legislation" by having campus leaders willing to assert their intent to "defy, dissent, disavow, and disobey" current or new legislative restrictions on CRT or DEI. Eunjeong Lee, Soyeon Lee, and Minjung Kang describe "their effective labor against colonial and anti-Asian barriers," which builds upon decolonial feminist methodologies and works toward affective connectivity and relationality. Continuing this thread of intentional coalition-building, Jennifer Burke Reifman, Loren Torres, and Mik Penarroyo deploy Black intersectional feminist theory and alternative modes of mentorship and collaboration to argue that concepts of expertise and/or legitimacy exist to keep diverse student voices out of institutional conversations surrounding assessment, curriculum, and retention in order to reify white, patriarchal practices. Natalie Shellenberger and Nataly Dickson explore burnout as the exigence for their focus on creating intentional co-mentoring practices for graduate students, particularly graduate students from marginalized communities, and narrate their relational experiences to provide strategies and tactics for feminist mentoring practices in the future. Drawing upon counterstories, Amanda Hawks and Bethany Meadows highlight the necessity to denounce the ideas that Writing Centers are inclusive "safe spaces" and call them out on the gatekeeping practices, advocating that Black Feminism and transformative justice can bring grievances to light and give further evidence of the white supremacy oppression that still thrives to this day.

Subversive Classroom Practices

Bringing coalition building and feminist activist work into the writing classroom, the section on "Subversive Classroom Practices" highlights how we can address regressive backlash and work toward solidarity through teaching. Romeo García and Gesa Kirsch share pedagogical narratives and assignments to show what a commitment to "being-with" others looks like and showcase two stories-so-far and possibilities of new stories from student authors Valeria Guevara Fernandez and Nicole Salazar. While creating equitable environments sometimes feels impossible, Callie Kostelich and Michelle Cowan demonstrate how they sought to resist institutional harms by collaborating with first-year writing instructors in a labor-based grading contract initiative at their institution. In another dialogue, Shewonda Leger and Chantalle Verna reveal how the pedagogical strategies they deploy in Florida draw upon their lived experiences as Haitian women

and incorporate decolonizing and Black feminist principles. Elitza Kotzeva, Sona Gevorgyan, Lilit Khachatryan, and Nairy Bzdigian conversational piece discusses their unique experiences with gender-based oppression and activism in Armenia. Galen Bunting reminds us of the value of inclusive, intentional, and practical teaching practices like those he describes employing in classrooms in Oklahoma, despite backlash.

Lisa, Natasha, Hillary, and Anna invite you to join in this conversation by reading this BIG and excellent collection of feminist, womanist, and queer scholars in the field of writing studies doing the work. In her remarks at the opening keynote during the 2023 National Women's Studies Association Conference, Kimberlé Crenshaw reminded the audience the "war against diversity, equity and inclusion started as a backlash and now has metastasized to the college board basically taking Black feminism, Black queer studies, intersectionality, structural racism out of Black studies." This collection comes at what Crenshaw labels a "critical moment. It's a question of how much the knowledge that has been produced over the last three-quarters of the century can sustain an organized effort, not only to silence and suppress but to completely rip out of even our own histories the knowledge that our experiences have produced." With that in mind, please share these conversations widely--as they offer both strategies and tactics for coalition-building, as well as telling stories that help us break down and move away from fear and isolation and choose action and love.

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Organizational & Institutional Analysis & Critique

Coalition Building Between Subjectivity and Instrumentality: Reflecting on My Experiences in a Militant, Trotskyist Women's Rights Group in the 1990s

Don Unger

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Abstract: This article contributes to conversations about how coalitions shape relationships among people dedicated to social change by reflecting on some of the author's experiences in the mid-1990s with the National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition (NWROC)—a militant, Trotskyist, women's rights organization. In this article, he notes that feminist and queer/Latinx scholarship and Trotskyist approaches depict coalition building in similar ways. They agree that coalitions bring together groups of people with diverse perspectives in order to take joint action around an issue, and they support building coalitions through temporary alliances and ongoing relationships. However, they raise different questions about when a group ceases to be a coalition and becomes something else, and why that matters. Guided by this discussion, he reflects on his experiences with NWROC, highlighting his concerns about their approach. In the end, he offers some considerations for teacher-scholar-activists engaged in coalition building.

Keywords: Trotskyism, protest, activism, organizing, resistance

Introduction

This article contributes to conversations about how coalitions shape relationships among people dedicated to social change by reflecting on some of my experiences in the mid-1990s with the National Women’s Rights Organizing Coalition (NWROC)—a militant, Trotskyist, women’s rights organization. In this article, I note that feminist and queer/Latinx scholarship and Trotskyist approaches depict coalition building in similar ways. They agree that coalitions bring together groups of people with diverse perspectives in order to take joint action around an issue, and they support building coalitions through temporary alliances and ongoing relationships. However, they raise different questions about when a group ceases to be a coalition and becomes something else, and why that matters. Guided by this discussion, I reflect on my experiences with NWROC, highlighting my concerns about their approach. In the end, I offer some considerations for teacher-scholar-activists engaged in coalition building.

Feminist and Latinx/Queer Approaches to Coalition Building

To contribute to ongoing conversations about the term coalition and attendant strategies for building them, I begin by tracing some of the ways that the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (the Coalition) use it, noting that its use is entangled in the organization’s thirty-year history. Briefly examining this history and the shifting use of the term helps me consider why feminist and queer/Latinx scholarship on coalition building and Trotskyist approaches differ regarding the kinds of relationships that coalitions build.

Since its inception in 1989, the Coalition has long grappled with both its mission and putting this mission into practice by growing the Coalition and expanding the resources that it offers members. At times, these conversations have made it into *Peitho* or been included in blog posts published to the Coalition’s website. For example, special issue editors Jessica Enoch and Jenn Fishman coordinated *Peitho* volume 18.1 in 2015, which offers reflections on the Coalition and its trajectory for its 25th anniversary. Written by long-standing members and leaders, these reflections include “key concept statements.” Cheryl Glenn and Andrea A. Lunsford contributed a statement on the term “coalition,” which begins with a discussion of why the word appears in the group’s name. In the statement, Glenn and Lunsford advance the notion of a coalition as “...a group of distinct individuals who come together to cooperate in joint action toward a mutual goal (or set of goals)—not forever, but for however long it takes” (11). The Coalition serves as a bridge “across differences in academic rank and standing (including students), institutional type, research agendas, teaching interests, and cultural ethnic/backgrounds” (11). Further, they use their definition to argue that expanding the Coalition means “being mindful once again of the importance of difference and of listening long and hard to those with whom we wish to join causes” (12). For the authors, expansion relies on a theory of coalition building and a strategy for building them where relationships among members and potential allies are depicted as paramount.

Other work published by *Peitho* that deals with building the Coalition grapples with the impetus behind the organization and the steps that have sustained it, including establishing governing bodies, task forces, and special committees as well as a structure for membership (Gaillet; Graban, et al.; Hidalgo); crafting internal policy documents like a constitution, by laws, strategic plans, and the like (Graban, et al.); moving *Peitho* from a newsletter to a peer-reviewed journal (L'Eplattenier and Mastrangelo); creating the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference (Gaillet; Graban, et al.; Hidalgo); obtaining 501c3 status (Graban, et al.); reshaping the Coalition's mission and subsequently renaming it (Bizzell and Rawson; Graban, et al.); and documenting CFSHRC's long-standing relationship with the Conference on College Composition and Communication's Feminist Caucus (Graban, et al). Based on these discussions, we see a clear focus on organizational structures as key to shaping relationships within the Coalition.

Returning to Glenn and Lunsford's statement, they discuss the potential for the Coalition to expand internationally while also focusing on "inclusiveness at home" (12). This dual strategy speaks to both public outreach and internal restructuring. Within the Coalition, this move toward public work and the need to devote resources to intersectional initiatives has been discussed for decades. However, concrete steps toward these goals have only emerged in the past few years (Bizzell and Rawson; Graban, et al.). The Coalition has long provided a welcoming space for some feminist teacher-scholars of rhetoric and writing. By its own admission, it has disproportionately served white women (Graban, et al.). As some of the articles discussed previously attest, many of these folks consider it a "home," a term Glenn and Lunsford use, as noted previously. How do these notions of a welcoming space or home inform the relationships that the Coalition has sought to build? Or more broadly, how might this perception of the Coalition as home skew coalition building?

Long-time civil rights and Black feminist activist and historian Bernice Johnson Reagon argues, "Coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work has to be done in the streets...It is very important not to confuse them—home and coalition" (359-360). Home is where you are nurtured, "so you better be sure you got your home—someplace for you to go so that you will not become a martyr to the coalition" (361).

Furthermore, Reagon warns that coalition building is dangerous work: "most of the time you feel threatened to your core and if you don't, you're not really doing no coalescing" (356). Sandra J. Bell and Mary E. Delaney might not call the coalition they write about dangerous, but it failed to coalesce and achieve its goals. In their experience trying to build a coalition of academics, community organizations, and government officials, participants' different perspectives and ways of working meant that no one could agree on what a center grappling with domestic violence across Canada should do. Coalition members trace these disagreements back to differences in political agendas, professional benefits, financial motives, and other "instrumental goals" (65).

Deborah Gould grapples with the lasting impact of another coalition that failed to accomplish the goal that it organized around: preventing the gentrification of Chicago's uptown neighborhood in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, Gould argues that despite the coalition's inability to make a lasting impact on gentrification in the area, it had a lasting, positive effect on participants. She notes that two groups that participated in the coalition, Queer to the Left and Jesus People USA, came to relate to one another in surprising ways. Where once they were foes pitted against each other on picket lines in front of abortion clinics, they became "strange bedfellows." From this experience, Gould determines that "Coalition provides a space to be and do together, and become differently as a result; to sense other possibilities, open toward the unknown, experiment, and learn from mistakes; to develop trust and practices of solidarity; and to build new collectivities and new worlds."

Gould's assessment echoes Karma R. Chávez's research on coalition building (e.g., Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*; Chávez, "Counter-Public Enclaves"; Johnson, "The Time is Always Now"). Chávez argues that a coalition is "a present and existing vision and practice that reflects an orientation to others and a shared commitment to change" (*Queer Migration Politics* 146). Participants come together in what she calls coalitional moments that "might be a brief juncture or an enduring alliance" (Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics* 7, qtd. in Licona and Chávez 97). A "coalitional subjectivity" makes this coming together possible (Carrillo Rowe 10, qtd. in Chávez, "Counter-Public Enclaves" 3). As Chávez notes, adopting a coalitional subjectivity means moving "away from seeing oneself in singular terms or from seeing politics in terms of single issues toward a complicated intersectional political approach that refuses to view politics and identity as anything other than always and already coalitional" ("Counter-Public Enclaves" 3). This coalitional subjectivity doesn't erase difference. Instead, participants come to "see issues, systems of oppression, and possibilities for a livable life as inextricably bound to one another" (Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics* 147). As Pritha Prasad notes, coalition is a continual and committed practice. This practice relies on relational literacies (Licona and Chávez, citing Londel Martin's work, 96 and 104). Relational literacies refer to the labor it takes to make meaning across difference. These literacies "are never produced singly or in isolation but depend on interaction" (Licona and Chávez 96).

Gould, Chávez, Licona, and others point toward relationships as being at least part of the lasting change that comes from coalition building. Reconsidering the question of whether or not a coalition can be a home, I would argue perceiving it as such puts members or would-be allies at risk of being excluded from the coalition. While a coalition can certainly be more welcoming to some people than to others, it can also be rebuilt to make itself open to people and perspectives that have been excluded or ignored. It appears that the Coalition has begun moving away from conceiving of the organization as a home and toward a space where members might develop a coalitional subjectivity, at least in practice if not in parsing terms (Graban, et al.).

Trotskyist Approaches to Coalition Building

While traditions on the “old left,” including Trotskyism, might agree that coalitions exist to bring diverse groups together and carry out joint action and that these coalitions can be temporary or ongoing, they depict coalition building very differently. For starters, building a coalition is often focused on what participants can win against an adversary—the bourgeoisie—rather than on the relationships that would be created by the coalition among participants. While it is beyond the scope of this article to chronicle these differences in detail, I present a limited view into how Trotskyists approach coalition building because the organization that I discuss in the next section, NWROC, was composed largely of Trotskyists. His theories and writings informed their work even as other Trotskyist groups would undoubtedly say that NWROC’s work bore little resemblance to Leon Trotsky’s.

The “old left” says less about “coalitions” as such than contemporary academics do. Instead, they discuss “the united front” as a strategy for forming alliances among workers parties and organizations as well as unaligned workers. In a united front, participants make a joint agreement over a specific list of demands, however small or limited, to achieve a common goal or confront a common adversary (German). Trotsky traced the tactic back to the 1922 *Resolutions on the Tactics of the Comintern*, arguing that the united front was the building block of the Bolshevik-led Russian Revolution in October 1917. According to the document, only by drawing the mass of workers into struggle could the revolutionary party convince them of the accuracy of their political program. Additionally, the united front had a better chance of success because it drew on more social power than if a party or worker acted alone, of course.

After being exiled from Russia in 1927, Trotsky spent much of his life arguing for a united front between the social democratic and communist parties in Germany to quash the Nazis before they rose to power (German). Instead of coming together to fight the Nazis, German social democrats and communists fought one another. The dire circumstances surrounding Trotsky’s approach to coalition building in this context cannot be overstated. (For a brief overview of this context and the failure of the German workers’ parties, see Skinnell.) His instrumental language about the united front was meant to be a wake-up call to German workers’ parties. Building a united front was, or at very least needed to be, a tactical decision. In this context, Trotsky was adamant about a few points:

1. Organizations must maintain their independence. He argued that the united front against fascism should “march separately, but strike together! Agree only on how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike!”
2. This united front had to be organized around specifics so that the dividing lines between organizations remained clear to the average worker. “No common platform...no com-

mon publications, banners, placards!”

3. It should be composed of substantial groups of comparable size because it had to be able to deliver something. You did not enter a united front out of moral principle but as a tactical move to prevent catastrophe (German).

With this approach to coalition building, the immediate goal was not to create a shared subjectivity. The party itself focused on creating “class consciousness”—a shared subjectivity among workers. Creating a united front required little sense of respect for the leaders of the other organizations that you entered into the agreement with, or their politics. As Trotsky implored, “such an agreement can be concluded with the devil himself, with his grandmother.” Instead, the united front was meant to stop losses and build the social power of the oppressed against their oppressors.

In the aftermath of Trump’s presidency and the current onslaught of racist, anti-immigrant, anti-LGBTQ, sexist and anti-choice legislation sweeping the country, I would argue that the question of building coalitional subjectivity must connect with opposition to the “creeping shadow of fascism” and winning gains for oppressed people (Skinnell). With this perspective in mind, I reflect on my experiences in an organization that focused rather exclusively on opposition rather than coalitional subjectivity or winning gains.

Coalition Building in NWROC

When I learned about NWROC, it was during my first semester at the State University of New York at Albany (SUNY Albany) in August 1993. I didn’t know anyone on campus, and in my first weeks at the university, I was trying to connect with others. In 1993, the bulletin boards that proliferated campus were our “social media.” We used them to find out what concerts and events were going on around campus and in the city. While perusing one bulletin board, I stumbled across a poster for a meeting by a group called Youth Against Fascism (YAF). The poster headline read, “Smash the Fascists: All Out to Auburn, NY September 25!” It called on students to protest a group called the USA Nationalist Party who were holding a rally at Freedom Park in Auburn, New York on Saturday, September 25, 1993—Yom Kippur. Freedom Park is one of the city’s tributes to Underground Railroad leader and long-time Auburn resident Harriet Tubman. The YAF poster advertised an organizing meeting the following week, just days before the rally.

I attended the meeting—about 50 people convened in the Student Association Lounge in the university’s student union. During the meeting, I learned that YAF was a coalition of student and community groups from across New York state that formed in order to shut down the fascist rally. NWROC was part of that coalition, but it was unclear at that meeting who from YAF was also

a member of NWROC. A dozen or so people at the meeting put forward YAF's platform and organizing strategy, which began with their analysis of fascism. YAF organizers made various arguments about why people needed to fight fascism through direct action, some of these organizers cribbed their arguments from Leon Trotsky's *Fascism: What It Is, and How to Fight It*, though I didn't know it at the time. Some YAF organizers argued that fascism was endemic to capitalism, and they summarized the fascist platform as using the threat of downward mobility to scare white people into joining their ranks; fascists argued that it was "Jews from above; people of color from below; immigrants from abroad; and workers, feminists, and gay men and lesbians from within the white population who were destroying the country." But as the YAF organizers argued, fascists lied to people because capitalism caused this downward mobility and pitted working class and poor people against one another. From these statements, it was clear to me that YAF was anti-capitalist.

YAF built their platform around the slogan "No free speech for fascists." I questioned them about this stance: "Doesn't that make you as bad as the fascists?" They responded by saying that they did not support the government creating a law to curtail free speech and that "speech is never free." Any law created under the guise of curbing fascist organizing would be used against activists fighting fascism and racism, not against the fascists. Instead, YAF's strategy relied on building a coalition of organizations who would call out their members to protest the KKK and neo-Nazis and shut down their attempts to rally in public.

Some YAF organizers took this argument a step further by saying that protestors should prevent fascist organizing "by any means necessary." The discussion shifted, and I and other attendees questioned these speakers about their definition of militancy: what does "by any means necessary mean"? NWROC members argued that the crux of the discussion should be about self-defense. At the time, it was unclear to me which aspects of the discussion represented YAF's politics and which aspects of the discussion represented NWROC's politics, but I had some sense that there were different perspectives being advanced based on various points that people made.

In the latter part of the meeting, YAF organizers discussed plans for the counter-demonstration. The coalition organized several vans to shuttle people from Albany to Auburn early on the morning of the 25th, and the vans would return that night. Interested folks could attend for free but should bring food or money for food. Student groups across upstate New York who composed the YAF coalition arranged transportation from their universities, including SUNY Binghamton and Buffalo, Syracuse University, Cornell University, and several others.

When the meeting concluded, I introduced myself to some YAF members. They asked if I was going to Auburn. I already had plans to visit my family in Binghamton that weekend. I told them that I would be at the next meeting, and I was. I saw NWROC posters around campus declaring victory in Auburn and calling people out to protest the KKK in Indianapolis, IN, a week after

the Auburn rally. According to NWROC and others, 2000 counter-demonstrators showed up in Auburn and had chased the USA Nationalist Party members and sympathizers out of town (see fig.1) (Williams).

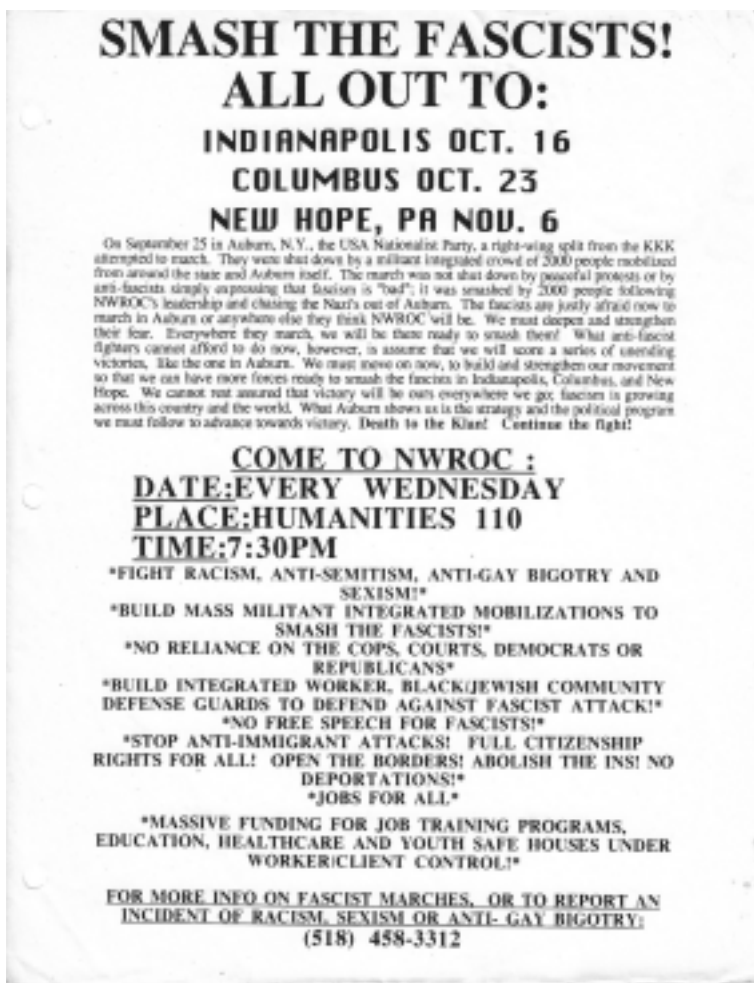


Figure 1. An example of a NWROC poster used to build anti-KKK/anti-Nazi work after the Auburn rally.

After Auburn, the YAF coalition disintegrated. It was temporary, existing only to organize around the Auburn rally. However, NWROC continued their campaign to shut down KKK and neo-Nazi rallies throughout the northeast and Midwest “by any means necessary.” I learned that NWROC had local chapters in Detroit and Ann Arbor, MI as well as Albany, NY. The midwestern chapters played key roles in organizing future anti-Klan/anti-Nazi counterdemonstrations. I joined NWROC for the action in Indianapolis on 16 October 1993. It was an eye-opening experience that drew me into political organizing.

The KKK rally took place on the steps of the Indiana Statehouse. Estimates by a student reporter from Saint Mary’s College in Notre Dame, IN claim that 1000 people were present (Johnson, “Despite Police”). It seemed much larger to me. Officials had created a pen around the Statehouse steps leading into the building. About 100 feet from the steps, they erected a 10-foot-high chain-link fence. On the other side of this area, where you entered the lawn leading to the steps, the city had set up 4-foot-high plastic fencing. Between the fences, the KKK sympathizers and protestors intermingled. There were two or three entrances into this pen that were manned

by cops dressed in riot gear. To enter the fenced-in area, you had to go through a metal detector located at one of these entrances. Next to the metal detectors were signs that said “No weapons. No glass bottles. No sticks.” While going through one of the metal detectors, cops made folks empty their pockets, open their bags, and get patted down. Once inside the pen, you could move wherever you liked. If you walked toward the Statehouse steps, you could see an endless row of police in riot gear lined up behind the fence. There were hundreds upon hundreds of cops, who were armed to the teeth. Helicopters flew overhead, but it wasn’t clear to me if they were with the cops or local news stations.

As the pen filled up, groups of KKK sympathizers and protestors fought. Cops roving through the pen carried plastic zip-tie style handcuffs. Occasionally, they arrested people for fighting and removed them from the pen. More commonly, the cops just let whatever happened happen. After some time, the KKK members took to the steps of the Statehouse. They arranged themselves in a line across the landing at the top of the steps. At the center, their leader stood at a microphone and spewed his BS (Johnson, “Despite Police”). Protestors tried to drown out his speech by chanting “Scum in sheets, get off our streets! Boys in blue you can go too!” or “No Nazi scum. No KKK. No racist, fascist USA.” Despite the chants, you could still hear the speaker because the KKK had a large sound system.

Fed up with the situation, some protestors attempted to rip down the chain-link fence leading to the Statehouse steps. When this happened, I was standing at the fence next to a Black man who had a small child sitting on his shoulders. They glared at the KKK members but did little else. The weight of the protestors clinging to the fence made it bow. Suddenly, the cops on the other side of the fence panicked. They paced down the line of the fence carrying huge jugs of pepper spray. They sprayed everyone on the other side of the fence. Just before I got sprayed in the face, I saw one cop raise his jug of pepper spray over his head to aim it at the child. I am not sure who, but people led me away from the scene at the fence toward the back of the pen. Tears poured from my eyes. Snot gushed from my nose. A reporter seized the moment to ask me about the experience. I launched into a tirade about how Indiana had spent countless dollars to provide a platform for the KKK who were there to recruit people to carry out a platform of racist terror. The night before the rally at the Statehouse the KKK had a cross burning in nearby Starke County (Johnson, “Despite Police”). I also ranted about how the cops were not interested in keeping the peace or they would not be pepper spraying young children and creating a ring for protestors and Klan sympathizers to duke it out. The discussions I had with YAF and NWROC members poured out of me.

By the time I regained my vision, the KKK members were leaving the Statehouse steps. Protestors rushed out the pen onto the streets around the Statehouse and toward one side of the building in an attempt to give the KKK some sort of sendoff as they left. At that point, hundreds of cops in riot gear and armed with large shields and nightsticks formed a phalanx in the street. They

marched toward the protestors shouting orders to disperse and banging their shields. Most protestors did not move. Then, cops began shooting cans of tear gas at people. I saw one person get hit in the chest and a couple people pick up the cans and throw them back toward the police. It was chaos largely manufactured by the cops themselves. During this chaos, I heard windows of nearby buildings being smashed. At that point, I met up with other folks from NWROC, and we made our way back to our vehicles. My face was raw, and I was shaken. The experience galvanized my political work over the next period.

After the trip to Indianapolis, I began organizing with NWROC. It was the first time I had been involved in a political organization and the first time I had been immersed in a queer milieu. At the time, NWROC had a couple hundred members, but maybe half of those members were active. NWROC members were disproportionately queer and female [In writing about the counter-demonstration in Auburn, *The Buffalo Times* referred to the organization alternately as “Marxists lesbians” and a “lesbian rights group” (“Lesbian Rights Group”)]. It was also predominantly white, and most members ranged in age from 18 to 30. My involvement lasted from fall 1993 to spring 1995. This included traveling around the Midwest and northeast to participate in counterdemonstrations against the KKK and neo-Nazis in Columbus, OH, New Hope, PA, Coshocton, OH, and Hamtramck, MI, among others. To build for these demonstrations, I handed out leaflets and talked to students at SUNY Albany. I also participated in NWROC conferences and regional meetings in Albany, Detroit, and Ann Arbor.

On SUNY Albany campus, I helped build campaigns and carry out various actions that NWROC initiated, including a campaign to protest Binyamin Kahane, Meir Kahane’s son, who was slated to speak on campus in November 1993. In advertising the event, the student group that sponsored it, the Revisionist Zionist Alternative, used a quote from Meir Kahane arguing that Jewish people should “fight our enemies with knives, guns, and fists.” This list of enemies included Black Muslims, among others (“SUNY and Jewish Rights”). This campaign was one of many. I offer it only as an example. At times, it seemed like we were tabling or having informational pickets on campus daily. We also held internal meetings and study circles regularly, which meant that I spent very little time on schoolwork.

As my time in NWROC progressed, we put less and less resources into building coalitions on campus or with local organizations in the various places where we carried out work, and we devoted more and more resources to carrying out small actions on several different issues where the same dozen or so people participated. For example, in organizing action around Binyamin Kahane’s speaking engagement on campus, NWROC put out a call to protest the event without building an alliance with other campus organizations and individuals who expressed outrage over the speaker and advertising, such as the Albany State University Black Alliance, Rosa Clemente (Multicultural Affairs Director for the Student Government Association), or the International Socialist Organization—another leftist group on campus that was composed largely of graduate stu-

dents. NWROC's hyperactivism pushed many members and potential allies away and created a high barrier of entry for new ones. It also shifted the discourse within the organization. Discussions of tactics changed from building coalitions over specific issues to more amorphous talk of rebuilding a Civil Rights Movement (see fig. 2). Eventually, this talk of rebuilding a Civil Rights Movement transformed into talk about providing leadership to the people who showed up at the events that we participated in. First, we provided this "leadership" through our superior political analysis, and when few people responded to the political line in our speeches and leaflets, we provided this "leadership" through militant action on the scene, hoping to inspire others through our militancy.



Figure 2. An example of a NWROC leaflet used to build work against KKK/Nazi organizing and against racist provocations on the SUNY Albany campus, including the Kahane event.

Moving Forward

Looking back on these experiences and considering them in light of my previous discussion on how contemporary coalitions need to balance their work building a coalitional subjectivity with the struggles against oppression and the ability to win gains, NWROC's approach to coalition building taught me a lot about what not to do. In parsing these lessons, I outline a few basic principles and a warning that guide my work:

1. Coalition building requires that the basis for action be worked out together with other organizations who are interested in participating in it. It rarely works when one group advances a political line and expects others to sign on to a coalition after the fact.

2. A coalition needs to be built around specific goals or demands and action plans. An approach to coalition building that shifts focus with every incident risks falling into hyper-activism where allies and members quickly burn out.
3. Sustained coalitions often involve multiple goals or demands and action plans that can change over time. Such coalitions require that an infrastructure be developed with involvement from all coalition members or their elected representatives. Even so, there is a risk of losing members who disagree with the changes supported by the majority of the group. A healthy coalition should establish ways for members to express disagreement from the beginning, and these policies need to be respected and maintained throughout the life of the coalition.
4. The coalition also risks losing members if the goals or demands are far beyond the group's reach. For example, a small group that uses an informational picket against a racist speaker on a college campus risks failing miserably if the demands in their leaflets, speeches, and chants focus only on "student/worker/faculty control of the university" and excludes other demands that meet the needs of students, workers, and faculty members.

Over time, a coalition can cease to be a coalition and become a smaller group with a very high level of agreement. As numbers dwindle, this level of agreement increases. Once relationships with other organizations and the ability to attract new members wither, you're left with a small group of people, and your actions amount to little more than a demonstration of your beliefs. Refusing to see this change, from a coalition to a home, of sorts, makes it difficult for the organizers to see that their goals, or the way that they implement them, have become a barrier rather than a bridge for new members and for creating change.

To move forward in this period, the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition might begin by parsing out which organizational goals speak to home building and which goals necessitate coalition building. Next steps might mean prioritizing issues around which to coalesce with others: there are plenty of injustices within our fields, institutions, and regions, which one(s) will the Coalition devote resources to and why? Finally, the Coalition will need to address whether these issues require building a new coalition and drawing other organizations into it or playing an active role in existing coalitions. Based on the scholarship detailing the Coalition's development discussed previously, the Coalition is beginning to move beyond home building and expanding into coalition building (e.g., Graban, et al.). If we take that as a given, then the Coalition needs to be more deliberate about promoting relational literacy and to work toward promoting a sense of coalitional subjectivity by drawing the membership into discussions of next steps.

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Black/Queer/Intersectional/Abolitionist/ Feminist: Essay-ish on the “Deep Sightings” of Black Feminisms during Shock-and-Awe Campaigns of White Supremacy (In Memory of Linda Brodkey)

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Abstract: Part examination, part memoir, and part pissed-off elocution, this essay-ish will honor lessons learned from Toni Cade Bambara’s *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions*. Bambara imbued her fictional Black characters with “deep sight” into the past, present, and future who avoided simplistic, binary thinking under white settler occupation. “Deep sight” was thus a kind of divining and illumination process, as if ordained by the ancestors and the futures to come, about the most serious threats to the survival of Black peoples. In this essay-ish, the author examines contemporary attacks on Black/queer/feminist thought and praxis. She calls on Bambara’s “deep sight,” not as a way out or as a way forward, but as an inward-facing political journey into the “deep sight” of Black feminisms into white settler structures.

Keywords: Linda Brodkey, pedagogy, antiracism, faculty, white supremacy

Part examination, part memoir, and part pissed-off elocution, this *essay-ish* will honor lessons learned from Toni Cade Bambara’s *Deep Sightings and Rescue Missions*. Bambara imbued her fictional Black characters with “deep sight” into the past, present, and future who avoided simplistic, binary thinking under white settler occupation. “Deep sight” was thus a kind of divining and illumination process, as if ordained by the ancestors and the futures to come, about the most serious threats to the survival of Black peoples. In this *essay-ish*, I examine contemporary attacks on Black/queer/feminist thought and praxis. I call on Bambara’s “deep sight,” not as a way out or as a way forward, but as an inward-facing political journey into the “deep sight” of Black feminisms into white settler structures.

The current shock and awe campaigns of white supremacy all around us catapult many folx into fear and despair: book bans of everyone not white, not-str8, not middle class, not-able-

bodied; full-scale blockades on abortion/reproductive rights; legal suppressions of affirmative action/DEI/CRT; state-sanctioned assaults on immigrants; heightened and state-sponsored homophobia and transphobia; hyper policing and prison re-funding; the Global North's genocidal campaigns against Palestine; and so much more to come. These shock and awe campaigns of white supremacy are meant to scare and scar us into inaction, meant to make us feel as if what we had before was so radical in comparison to now, meant to make us demand less the next time around, meant to make us forget our own power, meant to confuse us about the rootedness of these oppressions in and for white supremacy, and meant to especially quiet those still new to calling out injustice in loud ways. These campaigns also compel us, however, towards "deep sightings" of our actual convictions, real understandings of white settler culture, true reckonings with a past that never left us, and cyphers of coalition-building that don't mistake clout-chasing and pick-me-visibility for radical redirections of our world.

This ISH...

I am calling this writing an *essay-ish*. I am deliberately distinguishing my style, flow, and purpose from the individualistic model of literacy, consciousness, and writing that the white, western essay has always represented (Adorno, Lopate). From essays by Montaigne up to Barthes, form and politics have been deeply rooted in a very specific western, patriarchal, masculinist culture, what Sylvia Wynter calls "Man" who over-represents his local self/reality as all of what counts as human while denying humanity to everything else. For me, the essay is the cultural artifact of "Man's" expression. Closely linked to "the essay" is the objective science report, that style of dull writing that we see too much of the social sciences (introduction, literature review, methods, findings, conclusions) where you report on an object as an absolutely knowable thing, which is just more of "Man's" preoccupations and arrogances (Kynard, Lather and St. Pierre). This *essay-ish* ain't none of that and is clear on why.

Black queer feminist *essay-ish* has subverted "Man's" stylings whether we are talking about the word-work of Audre Lorde or Charlene Carruthers. I link myself to this Black queer feminist break and intervention and call it *essay-ish* --- noun, adjective, and adverb. With the western essay now close to extinction, *essay-ish* nods to it, yes, but it ain't tryna replicate, be, and move like it. *Essay-ish* is politically personal, sassy-attitudinal, coalitional, colloquially rooted in its own here and now, unafraid, Shirley-Chisholm-like in its unbossed and unbought reality, and unapologetically Black.

I am also calling up *ish* here in the way Black Language uses it as shorthand for *shit*. As a compositionist, I am laying down on the line that every word, image, and styling that we put on the page, screen, and world are deeply embedded in centuries of power relations. So, yeah, *that ish*.

Coalition with multiply marginalized communities and histories ain't possible if we cannot even unthink and unwrite a way away from Man's expressions (Weheliye). So, yeah, *essay-ish*.

Red Records

From jump, imagining that our current political targeting is different from the worlds in which we had already lived smacks of a certain kind of white settler forgetting and white liberalist denial (Grande). I began my teaching career as a high school teacher in 1993 in the South Bronx. From 1993-2019, I taught a multitude of high school and college students, predominantly Black and Brown, across Harlem, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Newark. From 2019 to today, I teach at a predominantly white college in an English department where my focus is on the histories of Black education, Black literacy, Black feminist teaching, and Black writing lives; I work in the state of Texas that boasts, amongst many other white supremacies, the most banned books in the country and the ancestral home of Juneteenth. For thirty years now, I have taught about and because of a whole range of Black Freedom dreamers (Kelley). And in those thirty years, my students have come to my classrooms having heard very little, if anything, about the Black folx we read and learn about.

I could give countless examples, but I'll lay my soul-memory down here in this *essay-ish* with Ida B. Wells, the activist and journalist most noted for her relentless research and social action against lynching, white feminists' racism, and racist institutions (Royster). Based on her life and impact at the intersections of emancipation, reconstruction, post-reconstruction, world wars, Yellow Fever, the Great Migration, the New Black Press, the New Negro Movement, Black Women's Club Movement, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, and women's suffrage, Wells's life and writing are central to many of the classes that I teach (Berry and Gross). In every class where I bring Ida B. Wells to come sit with us, I always ask the same question: who has heard of Ida B. Wells and what have you learned and read? I've had thirty years of silence. I have been teaching non-stop since 1993, upward of at least five thousand students given the heavy teaching loads and large class sizes I have faced in many of my teaching positions—and that does not even include the community literacy programs I have worked in. Without ever a single semester off, I have never met a student in any semester who has known deeply about Ida B. Wells's life and writing.

In 2020, I did an online workshop for high school teachers about teaching with Ida B. Wells in Texas, because Ida B. Wells is/was part of the Texas content standards. I've been in Texas since 2019 where at least 40% of my undergraduate students have attended Texas schools. Ain't nan one of them heard of Wells and she is IN THE CURRICULUM. I stress this point because you can be IN the curriculum and IN the state standards and still NOT BE IN-CLUDED.

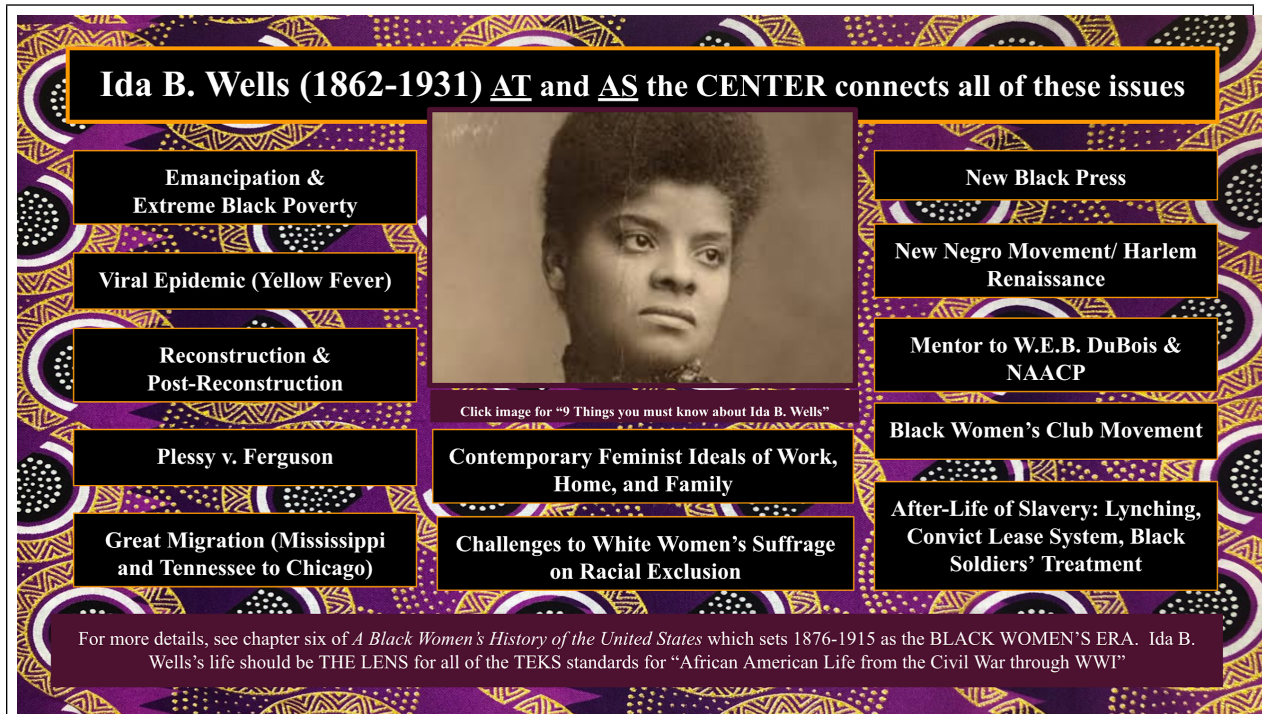


Image 1: Image of a slide and activity from my online workshop for high school teachers on Ida B. Wells. In the background is a patterned design in purple, gold, black, and white, and in the center is a photograph of Wells. Around the photo are black rectangles, each with a topic related to Wells written in white font.

And truth be told, unless I have a graduate student who majored in Black Studies, and sometimes not even then, not even graduate students have read Ida B. Wells's actual words. A book ban or curricular moratorium on texts that center Black feminists like Ida. B. Wells is, at best, redundant as far as I can see.

I ask students about these learning backgrounds not to shame or judge them, their teachers, or their schools. That's not my point. Instead, I ask them to really sit with Wells's impact and ideas and ask themselves why she has been kept hidden from them. I ask students to let her become a new intellectual and political ally to the world they might imagine. This is not about coverage of names and events young people need to know. Though that's important, you don't learn about Ida B. Wells to merely memorize her name and historical contributions; you learn about her to develop the audacity and confidence of Black freedom dreaming. What this means for me as a teacher is that I treat any class about the work of the freedom dreams of Black feminist/Black queer folx as an introductory course. It doesn't matter if it's sophomores or seniors, high school, college, or PhD students. As far as I am concerned, Black freedom, Black women's activisms, Black queer critique, and Black feminist creativity have always been banned from schools because my students arrive to my classrooms having experienced none of that. Thirty years and still no one can tell me who Ida B. Wells is *even when the state was requiring her!* So this next phase of the newest White Supremacist Shock-and-Awe Campaign will look no different than the last 30 years for me.

I want to also add here that support, praise, or acknowledgment of my Black content has also never happened in any institution where I have taught. It feels like every insult and white-passive-aggressive form of sabotage has been hurled my way. The fools I have worked with have never been successful in derailing my teaching convictions and practices, but they are always foolish enough to keep trying. As far as I am concerned, there has never been a moment when my Black content was welcomed by anyone except by my students. And as it ends up, that's all you really need.

While it will be important to argue and fight back on overt white supremacist setbacks in our current moment, we must know we are fighting for much more. As just one example, DEI on our campuses has never meant radical access and educational transformation as Sara Ahmed has continually shown us. Truth be told, no DEI office where I have ever taught has supported my curricular work. The attacks on DEI must be challenged, yes, but, at the same time, we can't act like that is the sum-total of our demands for a just education. Book bans on queer, disabled and/or BIPOC authors represent a kind of ethnic cleansing that we must attack endlessly in many ways. However, even when/if the book bans are lifted, curricular justice and equity will not be in our purview (Dumas).

Because I identify as a Black feminist educator, agitator, and dreamer, I understand that transformative classrooms and coalition work require, above all else, imagination. No one today has experienced a western-made institution that regards Black women/ femmes/ gender-expansive folx as fully human and yet we must live and understand ourselves as such anyway. That is the most imaginative work we can ever do. To think and move beyond white settler structures, we're going to have to think and be creative while the chokehold of our current political climate aims to block radical political imagining by making us fight in small ways and for small things.

The latest removals of Blackness/Black Feminism/Black Queer Critique from our knowledge systems, schools, books, and classrooms are hardly anything new. In fact, our own discipline has actively participated in the day-to-day work of whitewashing, no matter how many position statements are circulated (Prasad and Maraj). Instead of turning towards institutions for redress and repair, I turn to Black feminist ideals of freedom and creative imagination.

The Plagiarism of White Supremacy

I toggle a range of emotions and responses these days. First, there is obvious worry and rage. Behind these performances of moral authority and care for young people is a white supremacist core that is backlashing at our most recent Movements for Black Lives which was more Black feminist and Black queer at its origins than any movement the U.S. has seen (Ransby, Cohen). The current linking of anti-Blackness and anti-queerness in this moment is thus not a coincidence. And it is no coincidence that the states that with the largest influx of a Great Migration BackSouth/

BlackSouth are acting the biggest fools. Just like what Ida B. Wells chronicled in her writings, Black Freedom Movements have always been met with a vicious Post-Reconstruction that re-invents violent methods of Black containment (DuBois, Rodriguez). At the close of the 19th century, that meant lynch law segregation (Marable). At the close of the 20th century, that meant the prison industrial complex (Gilmore). What genocidal processes will white supremacy invent again?

Alongside my worry and rage, I gotta be honest: there is also deep boredom for me. I can't even lie about that. White supremacy is incredibly uncreative and unimaginative. All it seems to do is plagiarize itself and regurgitate its past, failed attempts. If you go back to the banned books of the 1980s in the backlash against Civil Rights Movement gains, you will see the same white supremacist stylings. The names of the authors who were banned in the 1980s, many of whom Judy Blume anthologized, are the same folk banned now. The names on the list of banned books ain't even new--- the list just got rebooted.

I grew up in the Reagan era, first Bush ambush, Tea Party, and so many conservative, super-funded right-wing think tanks that I couldn't keep up with them. It was a political machine deadset on denying any and all life-chance opportunities to Black peoples, that insisted there were no Civil Rights injustices leftover, that worked day and night to convince us racism was Black people's own invention cuz white folk were naturally, meritocratically ahead and just. Folk have just plagiarized this mess from the last time. As Black Diaspora freedom fighters from Sylvia Wynter and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to Walter Rodney always promised though: a colonizing system always *produces* radicals who slip through its cracks and hack back on all of what the empire so falsely inscribes.

Anti-DEI/CRT-typa legislation surely is not new to Texas, my current home either. We jump-started this 21st century knee-deep in white hostility towards anti-racist rhetoric, literacy, and writing instruction. If there was ever a time to really understand race and the discipline of rhetoric-composition studies, this is it. No one could really be surprised by today's deployments if they took the time to remember and honor the legacy of Linda Brodkey! As a reminder that I should not have to offer, the white conservative right came for Brodkey's neck something serious at the University of Texas at Austin in 1990. It is a lesson well worth remembering, because it wasn't the state, the governor, or conservative students and parents who sold her out: it was the white literary faculty of her English department. Yeah, remember that because the R&B group, TLC, posed a good question that applies to many of yall: *what about yo friends?* In 1990, Brodkey and a committee of colleagues set out to redesign the first-year writing curriculum to focus on reading and writing critically about difference in the context of anti-discrimination law and discrimination lawsuits buoyed by what I see as Brodkey's radical feminist consciousness. The language of anti-racism and CRT curriculum wasn't as readily available to them then, but that is surely what they were tryna create. The majority of the then English department supported the new curriculum; however, a small group of literary faculty went to the ultra-right conservative press and think

tanks to complain. Unsurprisingly, it turned into a media storm real fast, what some at the time considered the most visible, public argument that writing studies had encountered. The UT administration tucked its tail between its legs and canceled the curriculum without any regard for the expertise of rhetoric-composition faculty. When I began graduate school in 2000, folx were still very much talking about what “happened in Texas.” Most scholars in the discipline wanted to talk about making sure colleges saw rhet-comp scholars as the ones with expertise in writing instruction and/or debate whether Brodkey and crew handled this moment in rhetorically savvy ways. The fear of Texas was quite palpable. After all, if this is what they did to white feminists, what they gon do to women of color like me? Let’s not kid ourselves here: it took almost thirty years before feminists of color really came back in the numbers that we see today in rhetoric-composition studies in Texas and it’s still entirely too white. And you’d be hard-pressed to find large numbers of white feminists in Texas (or in the discipline) going as hard in the paint as Brodkey did. We would do well not to repeat the mistakes of our discipline’s past by de-racing the history of white-washed rhetoric-composition studies, disremembering actual departmental perpetrators of violence against rhet-comp, pretending as if there is no anti-comp sentiment everywhere we turn, and acting as if there is a rhetorically effective way to persuade white supremacy to be inclusive of the genres of human, as Wynter would call it, that it hates and profiles. We gotta do better than that that in the fire this time.

White supremacy never gives us something new. It is never logical. It revolves around lies, distortions, and misdirection. And it always underestimates our resistance.

Stuck Between a Rock and an Even Harder Place

This moment is also a bit like being caught between the proverbial rock and a hard(er) place. On the one hand, we have a reinvigorated and emboldened conservative right whose goal is to shut down anything and anyone who centers histories and ideas that are not white, not-str8, not middle class, not-able-bodied. On the other hand, we have performativity and appropriations of Black feminist activisms that are equally dangerous, violent, and anti-black.

In a recent context, I witnessed support of a job candidate that signaled exactly the kind of violence that performative allyship represents. The candidate was presented, especially to gullible graduate students, as someone with expertise and experience in carceral studies, prison writing studies, abolition, and community literacies. I knew, however, like an old Keith Sweat song, that *sumthin sumthin just ain’t right*. Here was a white-male-passing PhD graduate in literary studies who had been incarcerated for 4.5 months for felony narcotics distribution, was now a self-proclaimed prison writing educator, and offered no analysis anywhere of racism or their own whiteness. It started with a full pause for me. 4.5 months of jail-time for narcotics distribution and then relatively easy educational access is literally NOT the experience of any Brown or Black person in the U.S., many of whom are still caged away for minor marijuana possessions even in places where cannabis is now legal. At the exact same time that this candidate did a four-month bid,

Kalief Browder was an 18-year-old young Black man from the Bronx, NY who was held at Rikers Island jail for three years for allegedly stealing a backpack that no one has seen or been able to confirm to this day. Unable to afford his \$3,000 bail, Browder remained at Rikers for three years awaiting trial. He spent almost two of those years in solitary confinement where he was brutally abused and attempted suicide multiple times. Two years after his release, Browder hanged himself at his parents' home and is now the ancestral catalyst for activism against the prison industrial complex on the East Coast--- *a hashtag before there were hashtags*. Needless to say, my questions about 4.5 months jail time for a white man's narcotics distribution are not unfounded given the structural racism of the prison system.

And I wasn't wrong. The candidate got busted with distribution-weight cocaine and pills in a police raid of their apartment in the early 2000s in a large southwest metropolis with a prison system as notoriously corrupt and violent as Rikers Island. *Mandatory* sentencing in that state was, at the time, five years *minimum* in *federal prison* for this felony with a maximum of life in prison (states really only began reducing lifetime sentences for drug-related, non-violent offenses in 2021 when they had no choice but concede this level of sentencing was designed to cage Black and Brown men indefinitely). This candidate didn't have to face any of that: they got 4.5 months in the county jail (because they couldn't afford bail) and so faced no sentencing or prison time. That kind of grace and leniency isn't extended to even white people by the prison system. There is only one way to get that kind of non-sentencing: snitching on everything and everyone, which most surely meant Brown and Black peoples. I don't mean this as a mere exaggeration, suspicion, or doubt. This is fact. The use of criminal informants is highly concentrated in drug enforcement which is, in turn, highly concentrated in poor, Black communities who have been overexposed to snitching as a central methodology of incarceration (Natapoff). After all, *U.S. v. Singleton* in 1999, a drug charge case, made it legal to bribe witnesses to secure testimony. The state has a long history of rewarding any eyes and ears for testimony against Black communities. The criminal justice system has used informant/snitches to hyper-criminalize Black urban communities since 1980s Reaganomics and is the residue of COINTELPRO's protracted targeting of the Black freedom movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Mian). Snitches are a central part of structural racism and the prison industrial complex. Either no one in the department had any direct/personal/familial experiences with the actual prison system, has never listened closely to rap or trap, had no real connections to the most vulnerable Black communities, or they were all acting concertedly to protect the innocence and virtue of the white-passing man in front of us, much like the prison system had.

I looked all through this candidate's materials for a serious racial analysis and grounding in carceral studies and found nothing. The candidate even went so far as to share incarcerated students' writing in an online magazine with details describing the contexts of their incarceration. There was no IRB protocol or methodology, even though universities acknowledge incarcerated people as a protected class and do not readily support research about them. The incarcerated

folx who the candidate published about could not have legally given their permission to have their writing and sentencings described with such detail in an open, online magazine. In sum, we were co-signing this candidate's own Tuskegee-esque experiment.

I was further alarmed by this candidate's outright appropriations of Black feminisms since that alone is making this topic possible for graduate study today. "Carcerality" and "abolition" were never grounded in Black feminist activism at any point. At one point, the candidate even chauvinistically called abolition scholarship solely about "abstraction" and "stats." To stand in front of a whole-ass room in 2023, after writing a dissertation about prison literature including your own racially-white-anointed 4.5 months in a county jail, call Ruth Gilmore's work abstract, and reference your own work as effective/narrative/personable is a level of misogynoir that I should never have been subjected to (and this is what I said in my lengthy letter about the candidate, most of which is included here). Even more concerning is that one of the candidate's publications listed on the CV plagiarized a prominent Black feminist scholar's book. The candidate did not quote/attribute this scholar anywhere and yet the candidate's text even mimics the scholar's title, form, and Black cadence-- a text that has wide distribution in prisons, amongst folx who are formerly incarcerated, within work centering Black rhetorics/feminisms/composition studies, and especially for scholar-teachers of community literacies. Hijacking the life-story of a Black woman/professor who has survived sex trafficking and Reagan-era poverty/addiction and doing so for white, personal gain is egregiously violent. The only compositionists who the candidate ever deemed fit to even reference were the lily whitest men of the field. For faculty to think you can just mentor/help all that away is to act as an accomplice to this racism.

When pushed further to discuss abolition, the candidate offered his pedagogy of teaching writing in prison to "them" as the penultimate way to end the entire prison industrial complex and free all these Brown and Black folx from prisons. You can't do anything but feel sorry for the graduate students who believed this was someone with expertise in community literacies, when literally everything this candidate had to say about the politics of teaching and writing has been challenged for decades in our discipline. Even at our worst, rhet-comp folx do not co-sign white-passing men's convictions that they alone can unravel an entire prison industrial complex rooted in plantation logics (McKittrick) with the wonders of their approach to writing instruction. I mean, really. You don't even need fiction when real life is this outrageous: thief Black women's work to commit to ongoing anti-black racial violence.

"It's Got To be Real"

So here we are. State-sanctioned violent actors can target abolitionism and radical feminisms in our classrooms with impunity; and at the exact same time, academics can appropriate Black feminist activisms to sustain their anti-blackness and call themselves the most radical answer to social, educational inequity.

For sure, our schools are under siege. But wasn't nothing deeply transformative happening in those schools before. They have been hell-bent on maintaining institutional whiteness even without a conservative bogey-man to call up.

When it all falls down, I still have faith and energy. There was that brief moment circa 2020 when George Floyd was murdered during the pandemic and a performative version of anti-racism swept up the nation. Thankfully, actually, those empty gestures are now gone. Those same people who adorned anti-racist and anti-colonial pedagogies like a new fashion statement ain't ready for the real risk-taking that kind of work has always entailed. In the words of Cheryl Lynn, *it's got to be real!* The rest of us will withstand the backlash because we were risking our lives all along anyway. In our coalitions, we need to remind ourselves that we belong to longstanding traditions of creating spaces and practices that exist beyond— way way way beyond— the current ordering of things and its utter inability to ever contain us.

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Feminist Resistance, Resilience, and Concession: Historical Moments of Activism by NCTE and CCCC Feminist Groups (or, “Whatever You, Betty, and Nancy Think Ought to Be Done”)

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Abstract: This article traces three specific moments of coalition building throughout the last five decades of feminist work within NCTE and CCCC: establishing a group focused on gender equity in CCCC, drafting and implementing the NCTE Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language, and establishing resources for childcare at the annual CCCC convention. Demonstrated through an array of documents from the NCTE archives, these key moments highlight strategies and barriers to feminist movement. Feminist advocacy in this work ranges from stealth advocacy, to rewriting the sexist rules of the organization, to adhering to the protocol set forth in order to effect change. Analysis of these key moments provides insight for disciplinary reflection and accountability as well as a variety of advocacy strategies for future coalition building.

Keywords: stealth advocacy, kairotic moment, child care, sexist language, committee

Twenty-twenty-three has been a rather momentous year for American feminist histories. We just fell short of the 50th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, although *Ms.* magazine was able to celebrate its 50th birthday, and along with that the many changes to both the material lives of women and evolving perspectives on women’s social roles that the magazine has chronicled. In the field

of Writing Studies, we passed the 50th anniversary of the creation of what became the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) Feminist Caucus, and we're nearing the 50th anniversary of the landmark passage of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) *Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language* (now known as the [Statement on Gender and Language](#)).

Since our recent disciplinary feminist history is middle aged, it is perhaps feeling the same things American women are often invited to feel at middle age: less visible, less cool, less spry than we once were, inviting some familiar questions: Where have we gotten? How did it happen? Who made it happen? Where should we go from here? In parallel, the coauthors, as former co-chairs of the CCCC Feminist Caucus, also seek to make sense of our "affective inheritance" (Ahmed), do the "difficult work" of "acknowledging [our feminist] history" (CFP) and thus, continue coalition building within the field, learning from both our successes and missteps.

We draw from NCTE/CCCC organizational documents spanning from the 1960s to the present several key moments of solidarity and feminist effort within the organization to identify some of the real and manufactured barriers to achieving feminist movement. We focus on three key events and their attendant processes: the creation of the CCCC committee on the Status of Women in the Profession itself, the development of the *Guidelines for the Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications*, and the ongoing effort to offer onsite childcare at the conference. Each action utilizes similar coalition building tools, but ultimately, they demonstrate the continuum of feminist advocacy strategies, ranging from stealth advocacy, to rewriting the sexist rules of the organization, to adhering to the strict rules set forth in order to effect change. We show through these historical events and artifacts how organizational processes and individual resistance created barriers to moving feminist work forward. We identify some of the common strategies (rhetorical and logistical) deployed by those with decision-making authority used to resist inclusive practices and policies. In tracing these barriers and strategies, we aim to offer insight to feminist practitioners in the field doing both disciplinary and outward-focused justice work, insight that provides both an opportunity for disciplinary reflection and accountability as well as a variety of advocacy strategies for future work.

Event 1: Forming a CCCC Committee on Status of Women in the Profession

The first of our three examples of feminist advocacy strategies stems from the creation of the NCTE and CCCC committees focused on women, exemplary disciplinary coalition building. NCTE was inspired perhaps by the Modern Language Association's (MLA) committee on women, charged in their December 1968 meeting. NCTE followed suit in 1970, asking Barbara Friedberg, Kay Hearn, and Virginia Read to develop a Committee on Women, which was constituted officially as the NCTE Committee on the Role and Image of Women in the Council and the Profession (just rolls off the tongue). Their early work included gathering quantitative data about women's involve-

ment in the organization, counting how many women were represented as presidents, members, award winners, and other recognized positions within the organization.

Janet Emig was charged in November 16, 1971 as chair of the NCTE committee (Full charge, Appendix A, 1971 NCTE EC). In his letter of invitation to Emig, NCTE Executive Director Bob Hogan suggested, "You might [...] want to begin thinking of the group's focus. Is it to deal only with the college, where most of the inequity seems to be, or does the public school woman teacher need to have a means of expression and a hope of redress?" (2). The initial language here suggests that though the group's work took place through NCTE, even the initial charge focused heavily if not primarily on college English teachers, underscored by the appointment of Professor Emig as the chair.

College faculty spearheaded much of the work of the early NCTE committee, and it seemed natural that an effort to establish a similar group specifically within CCCC would emerge. However, the establishment of such a group required significant bureaucratic and administrative effort, much of which was stymied by Hogan. The negotiation over the formal charging of the CCCC committee illustrates some principles of what we call "stealth advocacy" deployed, in particular, by two figures in the archives, Betty Renshaw (CCCC secretary at the time of the committee formation and a professor of English at Prince George's Community College), and Nancy Prichard (NCTE staff liaison to the CCCC Executive Committee and Associate Executive Secretary of NCTE). Of course, as is the case with most feminist advocacy, many people were involved in the development of the committee, but Renshaw and Prichard played a particularly satisfying role.

The archival record suggests that specific requests to form a CCCC committee started in earnest in the late 70s, with Lou Kelly, revolutionary University of Iowa Writing Lab Director and early leader and member of the NCTE Women's Committee, directly asking "Jix," 1977 CCCC Chair Richard Lloyd-Jones, to charge the group. She reasoned that there was more work than was possible for one committee, and that the NCTE committee had been doing much of their work for CCCC. It only made sense to have a committee focused on the needs of CCCC constituents within the organization. Yet, there was reluctance by some members to have more than one committee focused on the needs of women. In fact, once the committee was voted into existence, Bob Hogan shared his specific concerns with Lou Kelly. He wrote:

One thing I don't like about myself is that I put off doing the things I feel uncomfortable

doing. But, damn them, they just won't go away. So I'm taking up one of them in this letter...Although the officers of CCCC did authorize in principle the formation of a women's committee under the aegis of CCCC, that's all they did. Had I been alert during that part of the officer's meeting, I would have asked for a delay. But what I thought was merely a report of a request

relayed through Betty Renshaw, turned out, in Betty's and Nancy's notes, as a formal motion, seconded, and carried.

The letter details Hogan's opposition to the formation of a "Woman's Committee" in CCCC, which he characterizes as "a call for volunteers without any battle plan," a "duplication of effort," and lacking both financial and staff support. Despite these concerns, the CCCC committee was formed (June 21, 1977, "Letter to Lou Kelly"). We excerpt the letter at length in part because it's rare that people use falling asleep in a meeting as an excuse to explain their disagreement ("Had I been alert during that part of the officer's meeting, I would have asked for a delay") but also because we are inspired by Renshaw and Prichard's stealth feminist advocacy, which captures the spirit of the moment in the archive, a moment when women's committees in NCTE, MLA, and, finally, CCCC were organizing and pushing for greater representation within English Studies.

In full (see Appendix B) Hogan's letter typifies bureaucratic forms of resistance deployed to stall organizational change work, and his honesty about his desire to stymie Betty's and Nancy's¹ work is instructive for the committee history that follows. In just this brief excerpt Hogan openly admits that he didn't pay much attention to Betty and Nancy, and had he been aware of them, he would have used his power to "delay" and ultimately subvert their efforts. But like many feminist stalwarts across the years, "damn them, they just won't go away." This latter bureaucratic strategy is particularly effective in spaces where progressive advocates are in the minority. We saw this recently in the Tennessee and Montana legislatures, where minority, progressive representatives were expelled and silenced because the rules allowed such action. Why argue with your opponents when you can just ignore them?

What stands out to us in Hogan's appeal to bureaucratic convention is the contradiction that the bureaucracy was apparently in place (the officers did authorize in principle the formation of a women's committee under the aegis of CCCC), yet Hogan simultaneously suggests that the protocols were not followed. From a rhetorical/tactical perspective, Hogan essentially wants to have his cake and eat it too: rules were followed, but he wasn't following. Hogan further appeals to Lou Kelly's sense of wise stewardship, writing that the NCTE is now "disciplined" with its budget and discontinuing a practice of approving expenses incurred without prior approval. He asserts that "at this point there is no money to spend," which is intended to derail the group's request to convene and distribute a newsletter. This appeal to efficiency is further discussed when Hogan suggests that the CCCC-specific group would be a "duplication of effort," connecting again to the idea of resource constraints.

Like many rhetors committed to maintaining the status quo in the face of calls for change, Hogan invokes in his letter an ethos of benevolence and protection for women in his employ and for the women making the appeal themselves. In particular, he cites the problem of staff support,

¹ We affectionately refer throughout the piece at times to "Betty and Nancy" because of how often they are referred to in the archival documents together

noting that “Linda Reed works for the NCTE committee out of her own commitment and good will, and largely on her free time [...] A full-time job, a husband, three children, liaison responsibilities for one NCTE committee, and nurturing her own spirit may be enough of a load” without adding to that support of the CCCC Committee, appealing to the readers’ presumed desire not to impinge on the time and labor of (another) woman staff member. In this way Hogan effectively demonstrates the difference between support and solidarity. By paternalistically framing Linda Reed’s “support role,” and his actions as protective of her time, he is able to prevent her from supporting feminist solidarity work, work that ultimately changed the working lives of women in the discipline rather than only drawing on their support.

Despite Hogan’s numerous concerns, Renshaw and Prichard persisted, using pronoia - “tactical foresight” or long-term strategic thinking to set up future kairos (Mueller et al.) - when they saw their opening to formalize the group. They used their “subordinate” roles as secretaries to create space for feminist advocacy. They took a leap of faith. And because Robert Hogan was snoozing, it worked. Another way to frame Betty and Nancy’s work is in terms of stealth advocacy, enacting change through the tools of bureaucracy: meeting notes, the limited tools at their disposal. In subsequent communication about the creation of the committee, Jix writes to Beverly Henegan of Renshaw’s power: “Betty’s letter makes it clear that I was supposed to appoint you to whatever you, Betty, and Nancy think ought to be done. I’d be more specific, but Betty is the one who says what we decide...If Betty tries to make any evasive actions about what she can’t do by claiming she is just the secretary, you are free to point out that I took even her indirect suggestion as an order.” In such work advocacy might not always appear as such. It might just, as in this key feminist moment, manifest as meeting notes, declaring the existence of a new coalition. Feminist histories are often humble histories. Subsequently, feminist change might not be immediately recognizable, and will likely not be written up in a press release. It may take the form of microactivist strategies, tools for feminist invention in spaces particularly resistant to change.

Event 2: The 1975 Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications

The second example we draw attention to is the development of the 1975 *Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language* in NCTE Publications (referred to throughout as *Guidelines*) for the reason that it illustrates quite different sets of strategies and advocacy used by the NCTE Women’s Committee to write, gain approval for, and implement this set of guidelines. The 1974 NCTE convention included a resolution to create such a document, and the November 1975 Board of Directors meeting at the convention in San Diego included the decision for NCTE to “encourage the use of nonsexist language, particularly through its publications and periodicals” (page 1, *Guidelines*). Just four years after the NCTE Committee on the Role and Image of Women in the Profession was formally charged, they, along with the NCTE Editorial Board, authored the *Guide-*

lines. Although the direct audience for the *Guidelines* was editors such that they could ensure their publications adhered to the discipline's preferred language conventions, the authors note that "eliminating sexist language can be useful to all educators who help shape the language patterns and language usage of students and thus can help promote language that opens rather than closes possibilities to women and men." The *Guidelines* content includes examples of problematic, sexist language and presents different methods for revising them using nonsexist language alternatives.

Though the *Guidelines* themselves were seemingly approved at the NCTE Executive and Board of Directors levels with minimal fuss, operationalizing the *Guidelines* was another matter. This process gave rise to a series of complicated tensions and resistance, with mixed reactions from members and extraordinarily hostile responses from some well-known leaders in the field. What we want to illustrate in this section are some of those tensions that emerged and the strategies that the NCTE Women's committee used to push back in public, assertive ways. From the start, there was a concern with whether and how to identify sexist language, and with what tone sexist language should be addressed. Committee member Marilyn McCaffrey's letter (29 Sept. 1975) congratulating Linda Reed and Susan Drake on the *Guidelines* exemplifies such conflict: "It is clear and thorough and the tone is one of reason rather than militancy. All of this pleases me." At nearly that same time (9-30-1975) Ed Corbett² then the editor of *College Composition and Communication* and, at that time, member of the CCCC officers team, wrote a strongly contrasting letter to the authors detailing extensive objections to the *Guidelines*:

Right from the beginning, I have not been in sympathy with the movement to neuter-gender in our language. The Women's Liberation movement has fought some good fights on important issues--equal job opportunities, equal pay for equal work, etc--and I am wholeheartedly behind them in those fights. But when women's groups charge that terms like chairman are discriminatory, I can only conclude that some of the women in the movement have lost sight of the important issues and are wasting their energies on trivia.[...]

Let me say that one of the most sensible statements on this matter is Murel R. Schulz's "How Serious Is Sex Bias in Language," which I published in the May 1975 issue of CCC.

Like Mr Milquetoast, I'll probably buckle under to these Guidelines if they are officially adopted by NCTE for its publications, but I will be a disgruntled male chauvinist all the while I am kowtowing.

2 At the time of these events, the CCC editor was a member of the CCCC Officers' Committee. That structure has changed such that the representative editors of CCCC-associated publications serve ex officio, non-voting roles on the Executive Committee.

In the Schultz article to which Corbett effectively lays claim in his letter, she writes of the myriad problems of adopting congressperson and chairperson in lieu of congressman and chairman, as the *Guidelines* suggest, “[A] difficulty with -person is that men resist accepting the new label. Why should they accept the neutral term chairperson? Chairman, statesman, congressman, and workman have served long and well. Why should these terms be obliterated by feminine decree?...The problem of pronouns stubbornly resists solution. The use of the generic he reflects the fact that our language is male-oriented” (164). Schulz suggests also that “person” means “woman,” since “man” is the obvious default, and discounts the possibility of “sex-free pronouns” gaining traction, though she does note the use of “they/them” as a useful possibility. Schulz’s prescient words typify the reluctance to adopt nonsexist guidelines for publication. Since men have power, she suggests, and language reflects that power, there is no impetus for men to relinquish any of their power. Schulz makes this observation without recommendations to address the imbalance, instead rightly noting that language reflects society and is difficult to change, particularly for those in the dominant majority. In other words, a resistance strategy on the part of those invested in the status quo, such as Corbett, can include co-opting the voices of members of marginalized groups to support the dominant stance. Given Corbett’s reluctance to “neuterize” language, it is little surprise that he was happy to publish Schulz’s argument and indirectly claim responsibility for her work. Certainly as one of the most influential and powerful members of the field at the time, the objection from Corbett would have been impactful.

The Committee was interested not just in having guidelines but in thinking about how to operationalize them; they used a variety of direct activist strategies to institutionalize the guidelines and ensure that they were, despite Corbett’s objections, “officially adopted by NCTE for its publications.” For example, the Committee issued a call for manuscripts, noting “A CCCC resolution directed a task force to prepare materials to aid college teachers in implementing the NCTE resolution on Sexist Language” (appears in October 1977 issue of *CCC*, p. 256, and was also noted November issue of *College English* that same year). They also offered a “service” to NCTE publications, providing feedback on their relative success implementing the *Guidelines*. You can imagine the popularity of this effort: everyone loves being told that they’re sexist and how to change that.

Even once the guidelines were officially adopted and implemented, there were concerted efforts to subvert the change. In particular, in 1978 at the end of the NCTE Annual Business Meeting in Kansas City, Missouri, Harold Allen presented a sense-of-the-house motion endorsed by the Commission on Language to weaken the *Guidelines*, such “that the policy opposing the use of sexist language in NCTE publications shall not be so construed as to prevent the use of such language by an author if the accompanying editorial comment indicates its presence is the result of an author’s express stipulation.” Although this first motion failed, a subsequent motion the following year passed, though we’re not aware of anyone availing themselves of the opportunity to mark their work as purposely sexist in NCTE publications (we aren’t able to address this fascinat-

ing negotiation in the depth it deserves here, but please stay tuned).

Despite the pointed critiques and reluctance by some powerful members of the discipline, the *Guidelines* were written and shared by 1975, and implemented and adopted with just the one amendment by 1979. In contrast with the development of the Committee on Women itself, which required stealth advocacy and decades of requests before officially being charged within CCCC, the work of the *Guidelines* was completed on a startlingly fast timeline and with direct advocacy. Further, the work of the Committee extended beyond its immediate members and significantly changed the workings of NCTE writ large. The far reach and its lasting impact are characterized by their continued mention in each NCTE and affiliate conference program, and the multiple revisions to the document that have helped it reflect current language practice. Instead of remaining a distinct aspect of NCTE, relegated to “women’s work,” the *Guidelines* were adopted within the organization itself and officially taken up by leadership.

Event 3: The Movement for On-Site Childcare at the CCCC

The implementation of the *Guidelines* was hard won, representative of the discursive “role and image” of women in the profession. Our third key moment, however, addresses another priority of the Women’s Committee, the *presence* of women in the discipline, and, in particular, at the convention. In 1978 during the Women’s Exchange at the CCCC Convention, Ginny Kirsch is credited in a newsletter with asking “Do motherhood and rhetoric mix”? The emphatic response from various iterations of the committee³ has been to try to make parenting and active participation in the discipline more possible. Certainly since the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession (CSWP) was officially constituted in 1983, one of its primary purposes was “to continue to promote the participation of women in the annual convention, on CCCC committees, and in positions of leadership within CCCC,” and while of course not all women are or want to be mothers, it is well documented that being a mother and an academic often conflicts (Gabor, Neeley, Leverenz; Sallee; Ghodsee and Connelly; Mason, Wolfinger, and Goulden; Siegel; Slaughter; Sallee). Targeting childcare support was identified early on as an important strategy to support the aim of increasing women’s representation at the convention. In fact, one of the nine charges put forth for the 1971 NCTE Committee on the Role of Women in the Profession and the Council, a progenitor of the Feminist Caucus, included “responsibility to focus its attention on” “sources \$50-100 - to research the need for and feasibility of offering daycare at future CCCC conventions. They requested polling members in the exhibit hall or including a question about childcare needs on a “ballot going out to members at officer election time.” In 1990, the CSWP submitted a formal memo requesting that the EC “institute childcare facilities at its annual convention on a three-year pilot basis to begin in 1991” (Childcare at the CCCC Conventions memo, April 17, 1990). Yet,

3 The history of the group’s structure and evolving naming is as follows: The NCTE Committee on the Role and Status of Women in the Profession, the NCTE Women’s Committee, the CCCC Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession, the Standing Group on the Status of Women in the Profession, and the Feminist Caucus.

the EC responded that after having polled the membership, they learned that only 5% of conference participants would take advantage of childcare at the convention should it be offered. They “concluded that, given what seemed to be a need among a relatively small percentage of the membership, it would not pursue the issue further at this time” (Response to CSWP from EC). Of course, the CSWP did not agree with the EC’s finding, calling the decision “troubling” and arguing that they “consider providing childcare facilities for the children of parents (both men and women among our membership) who participate in our conference to be an ethical commitment, not a luxury.” The flaw of these data, of course, is survivorship and/or sample bias. That is, it’s quite possible that members with children had simply disengaged from professional activities of this kind in order to balance the demands of parenting with the professional obligations that participation in the CCCC convention created.

Although the EC did not provide a budget for childcare following the formal request, they did allot space for parents at the following convention in 1991, specifying that “CCCC assumes no responsibility for any aspect of the day-care cooperative except to provide the meeting room.” The Child-Care Cooperative invited participants to use the room as needed and meet in the morning to organize care for the day together (See Figure 1).

childcare support was identified early on as an important strategy to support the aim of increasing women’s representation at the convention. In fact, one of the nine charges put forth for the 1971 NCTE Committee on the Role of Women in the Profession and the Council, a progenitor of the Feminist Caucus, included “responsibility to focus its attention on” “sources or lack of sources available for child day care so that women

REGISTRATION, 8:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
University Hall, 3rd Floor

CHILD-CARE COOPERATIVE
8:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m.
Nantucket Room, 4th Floor

Parents with children at the Convention may wish to meet at 8:00 a.m. to organize day care for today. The meeting room for the organizational meeting (above) is available all day long until 8:00 p.m. should parents wish to use it. The Council or CCCC assumes no responsibility for any aspect of the day-care cooperative except to provide the meeting room.

Figure 1: 1

In 2004, the CSWP report cites “concerns related to maternity” as a primary focus of the committee and again requests that the EC prioritize childcare at the conference. In response to these repeated requests, the ad hoc Committee on Child Care Initiatives was formed following the November 2007 meeting of the Executive Committee. They were charged to explore child care options in New Orleans and for *four* subsequent conventions. As the newly appointed chair of the

CSWP, Eileen Schell was a member of the CCCC Committee on Childcare Initiatives, chaired by Susan Miller Cochran. Members of the committee also included Rosalyn Collings Eves, Roger Graves, Sue Hum, Gerald Nelms, and Blake Scott.

The Childcare Committee did extensive research and advocacy toward the goal of offering childcare at CCCC. They had four research priorities: researching childcare in New Orleans, articulating the “the pros/cons of pursuing an informal option in New Orleans,” identifying peer organizations’ practices, and considering liability (Susan Miller Cochran committee communication). They found that many other organizations offer childcare, often through KiddieCorps (who provided onsite childcare at MLA 2007) or Accent on Children’s Arrangements (who ultimately provided onsite childcare at CCCC 2009), commercial service groups that offer childcare for specific events such as conferences. Other iterations that surfaced in their research included babysitting co-ops organized by conference participants, recommendations for local childcare options provided through the convention center/hotel, and vouchers meant to offset the cost of childcare. A 2007 *Chronicle* article entitled, “Bring the Kids,” detailed one such approach by the Association for Jewish Studies that offered childcare for \$40/day for all interested faculty at their annual meeting. Perhaps the strangest option that arose in their research, and one that is indicative of the many hoops participants must often jump through to receive “help,” was from a Linguistics Conference, LSA (January 2008), that provided the following stipulations for parents to receive a Childcare Referral or Stipend:

(1) They are presenters on the LSA program. (2) *The caregiver they secure is a graduate student or unemployed linguist⁴* [This person will also receive a complimentary Annual Meeting registration.] (3) *The caregiver has agreed to provide child care for no more than two children for 8-12 hours.* (4) The parents notify the Secretariat no later than 1 November 2007” (emphasis added).

Although the intention of the requirement that childcare stipends go to “unemployed linguists” is understandable, one has to wonder how many busy parents were able to take advantage of such a narrow requirement or were comfortable approaching graduate students to make such a (inappropriate?) request. Liability was a consistent concern that came up in conversations about childcare, particularly in such informal iterations, but the two large organizations had liability insurance to cover both themselves and the organization, making this the most expensive, but most appealing option.

Given the reality of the convention calendar in which funds and space are allotted so far in the future, it wasn’t possible to get childcare up and running for the convention until 2009 in San Francisco. Ultimately, there seemed to be support on all sides for the work of the committee

4 We can’t help but remark upon the strange unstated assumption that the skill sets of graduate students or unemployed linguists would overlap with the skill set of providing competent childcare.

and the fact of childcare at the convention in the future (See Appendix C for relevant information distributed by the group to stakeholders and report information submitted to the CCCC officers, notably that a professional service was contracted and a childcare collective was created). Thus, childcare options *were* offered for the New Orleans convention, just not the on-site childcare option that the committee identified as necessary for effective inclusion of parents in the convention. We don't have documentation of how many parents participated in the informal options offered in New Orleans, but "Bring the Kids," as well as the extensive research by the Committee on Childcare Initiatives demonstrates that informal babysitting among conference members and individual sitters in guest hotel rooms are not preferred by most parents.

Spurred on by their work toward the 2008 New Orleans convention, in their Report to the CCCC EC, the Committee on Childcare Initiatives resolved that there *would* be formal onsite childcare at the 2009 San Francisco convention calling for further solidarity regarding the CCCC initiatives around childcare (see Appendix D for the full motion), resolving that: "the Conference on College Composition and Communication contract with a professional childcare provider to provide childcare at the 2009 CCCC convention and beyond. Further, we urge that this service be provided at a subsidized rate for graduate students and contingent faculty" (March 18, 2008 Committee Report to the EC). They were committed to getting a jump on the convention calendar and ensuring necessary space and effective communication. A significant part of the committee's work leading up to the 2009 convention itself was making the childcare option visible. There were numerous concerns that the opportunity wasn't made clear to registrants, which would preclude them from taking advantage of the service in San Francisco. The committee was understandably concerned that if the service wasn't made use of, it would be hard to build momentum for the long term on-site childcare solutions they were working toward. They had much to contend with. In addition to identifying a reliable, safe provider and communicating the available service on a tight timeline, they had to work against the perceived "prevailing attitude/assumption [...] that people were not supposed to bring their kids to professional meetings" (Roger Graves, personal communication, 2023). Roger Graves, a member of the Committee on Childcare Initiatives, describes how he and his wife, like other academic partners, alternated caring for children and attending sessions, or taking turns going to the convention each year.

Finally, at the 2009 San Francisco convention, Camp CCCC came to fruition. The Committee Chair, Susan Miller-Cochran, announced the options, which were also included in less detail in the program:

This year we are offering an on-site activity center for childcare, Camp CCCC, during the convention from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Thursday through Saturday right in the Hilton Hotel. Children ages 6 months to 12 years old are welcome. The center, staffed by experienced CPR and Pediatric First Aid certified professionals, will provide age-appropriate entertaining and educational activities, including storytelling, hands-on crafts, games, the "Build

It Zone,” and the “Boogie It Zone.” Infant care stations, rest areas, and “SecurChild®” photo check-in and check-out will ensure a safe, secure environment.

The San Francisco Childcare Pilot was a success, noted in both the yearly reports for the Committee on Childcare Initiatives and the CSWP, whose members and work necessarily overlapped. CCCC allotted \$3000 to offset participant childcare costs. Fourteen families used the services, all of whom unanimously said that the existence of childcare at the conference enabled them to participate. Still, the childcare option wasn't very visible, and, though they didn't track a waiting list, the provider noted that at least ten parents visited the childcare center and noted that they would take advantage of the service at the following convention since they didn't become aware of it until they were at the convention. The Committee on Childcare Initiatives asked that the EC fund childcare at \$4,640, the amount “needed to hire professional providers for on-site care” (2009 email from Eileen Schell regarding childcare), beyond the \$3000 they had agreed to. Cengage sponsored the initiative with a \$1500 donation, and both the Childcare committee, CSWP, and the EC suggested that external sponsors of childcare might be a useful direction for long term support of the service. The 2010 Convention in Louisville again offered onsite childcare through Accent on Children's Arrangements.

Unfortunately, CCCC's commitment to supporting childcare for at least four years at the convention (usage of which very likely may have increased over time as awareness grew) changed. Though the exact set of decisions that led to the evaporation of childcare options is unclear, several motions from relevant EC meeting minutes suggest a few explanations. First, in March 2009, a “crisis” emerged in which dozens of manuscripts were accepted to CCC without sufficient page allotment to publish them, requiring the reallocation of a significant amount of funding, upon a vote by the EC, to cover the cost of publication and expansion into CCC online. Though it appears funds were preserved for the 2010 convention, a review of CCCC EC minutes from November 2009, March 2010, and November 2010, along with the Childcare Committee's two reports that same year, suggest that somewhere during that 2010 time period, no funding was actually preserved for supporting childcare efforts at the convention. A Sense of the House motion in support of subsidized childcare did pass at the convention in 2010. However, there is no formal documentation that the Childcare Committee's request for 2011 funding was ever acted on by the EC.

The perfect storm of relatively low participation in the childcare service given its newness, the journal's fiscal crisis, and somewhat misleading responses to CCC's survey of members about the need for childcare (the survey asked who would take advantage of on-site childcare without asking *if* the member needed childcare at all), resulted in an early end to the pilot. In rejecting the committee's funding request for professional, on-site childcare, Program Chair Marilyn Valentino instead recommended working with the “the local arrangements committee to find suitable, safe, and reliable services close to the convention site, perhaps through a university's childcare service

or similar venue.” Yet, in the June 7, 2010 Committee on Childcare Initiatives Report, they underscored the importance of on-site childcare in lieu of other options, noting that its purpose,

...is to help make childcare more safe and reliable, and less of a burden, to members who require this service in order to attend the convention. While we realize that childcare is not an immediate concern of every member of CCCC, we believe that providing this service sends an undeniable message about who is welcome in our organization, how inclusive we are, and how much we value the diversity of membership that such a service supports. CCCC will need to continue to commit to a long-term childcare solution for future conventions. Our concern for the well-being of contingent faculty, junior faculty, and graduate students, and our desire to be as inclusive as we possibly can, demand that we address this issue consistently.”

Despite this rebuke, the Childcare Committee concluded its three year existence, was not reconstituted, and on-site childcare was not offered again at the convention after 2010. Although rooms continued to be provided for nursing parents, space for a childcare Co-op was not allotted, nor was the babysitting swap continued. It is perhaps telling that the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession was reconstituted from 1983-2015, suggesting that the work of this committee was not finished, yet the Childcare Committee only existed for its three-year term. Subsequently, the requests for childcare once again returned to the CSWP’s report requests, unheeded as they were for the previous two decades.

In 2015, the CSWP again proposed an academic day camp at CCCC, which was not funded; however, the EC provided support for new Childcare Grants, \$300 each/10 grants, the same original budget that had been allowed to lapse four years earlier. Concurrently, the CSWP helped distribute information on the new SIG Academic Mothers, another indicator of the continuing relevance of Ginny Kirsch’s 1978 question, “Do motherhood and rhetoric mix”? Since then, the Childcare Grants have been renamed Care Grants, and they are offered to any dependent caregiver. In keeping with the committee’s original, consistent priorities, graduate students and contingent faculty are given preference if the allotted funds run out. MLA, which also at one time offered on-site childcare, has moved to a similar voucher program in which conference registrants can submit childcare receipts up to \$400. Preference is also given to graduate students and contingent faculty. Like many changes to higher education, childcare vouchers offer individual support rather than systemic change that could improve the community writ large: support rather than solidarity.

However, the goal of onsite childcare, briefly realized more than a decade ago, has not been revived as a request. The Care Grants have become the long-term solution, although peer organizations, from the American Chemical Society to the American Academy of Religion/Society for Biblical Literature have onsite childcare, and, for its part, KiddieCorp has been offering their services for going on 38 years. Yet in 2024, what will conference participation even look like?

What is the continuum of desires for support as the equity gap across institutions widens? What are the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and reduced travel funding for professional engagement, movement of conference-going to virtual spaces, and how will this affect the participation of different member groups with these kinds of historically important professional opportunities? Within the broader considerations of the Feminist Caucus and other feminist groups within rhetoric and writing studies and their intersectional goals of inclusion, what should access look like going forward?

Conclusion

It's worth considering the relative success of these three efforts at feminist activism and disciplinary coalition building in terms of intentions and actions, and ideological versus material commitments. The development of the CCCC Women's Committee and its evolution to the Feminist Caucus demonstrates the success of Betty Renshaw and Nancy Prichard's stealth efforts and the impact of Robert Hogan's kairotic moment of meeting sleepiness. It took 15 years for the committee to be formally charged within CCCC, but its fiftieth birthday suggests that the committee has had staying power, and its archive demonstrates effective advocacy on behalf of its constituents (elsewhere we have also written about the missteps and complex history of the Caucus, see Graban, Hassel, and Pantelides). Further, the work of the *Guidelines* is memorialized in the discipline's annual convention programs, and has been so successful that the addendum allowing the use of sexist language when indicated by an editorial footnote has not - to our knowledge - ever been utilized. The efforts of what became the Feminist Caucus insured implementation of the *Guidelines* with assertive, unwelcome insistence of its adoption.

Yet, the childcare initiatives, called for consistently beginning in 1971, stalled in each of their iterations. For a "feminized" (Schell, 1998), applied field such as ours to continually ask for on-site childcare and only have it offered for two of our fifty years suggests the vast difference between ideological and material feminist responses, between support and solidarity. No feminist change is easy, and both the creation of the Committee and the development and implementation of the *Guidelines* demonstrate how difficult it is to bring about linguistic change and inclusive practice. But on-site childcare required the operationalization of the beliefs undergirding feminist changes in the discipline. They also required budgeting. Thus, it is particularly metaphorically appropriate that on the cusp of institutionalizing childcare at the conference, funds were diverted for scholarship.

Our discipline has long been torn on how to include the "teaching majority": instructors in our field who are not represented in our scholarship, who are teaching the majority of our courses, who we say we value but whose influence is devalued (see Larson, 2018; Hassel, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher-scholars made this visible through a variety of multimodal projects and traditional and nontraditional academic texts (see, Prielipp; Lumumba; Michaud, and oth-

er essays in the *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*' special issue on Carework and Writing during Covid, and Lindquist, Strayer, and Halbritter's 2022 anthology of 'documentarian tales,' collected stories of teacher-scholarship-care work during the early months of the pandemic).

Making visible the strategies that feminist teachers and scholars have used to bring about change is one start, and creating scholarly spaces like the *JOMR* special issue and documentarian tales are how we might make more visible our feminist humble histories and the daily work of members of our field whose labor is marginalized and devalued. As long as the material needs of the teaching majority are viewed as peripheral to their participation in the professional conversations of the field, however, we will have an incomplete picture of who we are. As the CFP for this cluster conversation notes in quoting Audre Lorde, "We are anchored in our own place and time, looking out and beyond to the future we are creating, and we are part of communities that interact. While we fortify ourselves with visions of the future, we must arm ourselves with accurate perceptions of the barriers between us and that future" (57). We take heart in chronicling the feminist coalition building of the Feminist Caucus and its early iterations, yet our primary barrier remains: operationalizing our values, prioritizing access for all members of our coalitions, demonstrating not just support, but solidarity.

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Your Good Deed Could Save the World: Fighting Austerity is a Feminist Must

Liz Rohan

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Abstract: This essay frames some of the author's personal experiences fighting austerity at her institution while relying on the feminist methods of institutional citizenship (Cox and Riedner) and strategic contemplation (Royster and Kirsch). Showing how rhetoric can reflect and enable austerity, the piece outlines how austerity culture at her institution is a microcosm for a larger cultural dynamic for which austerity is culturally constructed, not financially necessary. The author argues that fighting this culture is a feminist must because it punishes low-income students and the institutions serving them. Not everyone experiences austerity the same, while academic culture promotes individual achievement over collaborative social justice activity, which can be barriers for fighting austerity and hence feminist action.

Keywords: austerity, feminist institutional citizenship, strategic contemplation, campus activism

Some might consider a fight against institutionalized austerity to be beyond their pay grade, or work for which they do not have capacity. While recognizing that some people might have barriers for fighting austerity, I argue that fighting austerity is not just care work but also rhetorical and cultural work for which members of our field are of course well-trained to undertake. Through some scenes of my journey as a witness to growing income inequality enabled by my institution, I show how austerity affected my self-efficacy, led me to a new way of seeing and made me consider how feminists can take the lead challenging austerity. Borrowing from Annica Cox and Rachel Riedner, I identify some of my work as a "feminist institutional citizenship," a generative set of practices with its centerpiece--collaboration across silos. Feminist institutional citizenship can be in tension with the dominant demands of academic work that values individualist goal-making. I rely also on reflective methods that Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch call "strategic contemplation" and associate with feminism, "an ethics of hope and care" which can inspire "responsible, rhetorical action" (147).

Strategic contemplation can be a means to *kairos*, reading the room. It requires paying attention to, engaging with and even composing texts that could be considered "ordinary, routine, even mundane" (Royster and Kirsch 147). Significantly, strategic contemplation can be used to interpret and critique pertinent circulating narratives the stories "we are in," that shape and affect

our work. These texts can even include the landscape--place. Strategic contemplation ultimately had me assess austerity culture, supported by its rhetoric, as patronizing, discouraging and, unfortunately, ubiquitous. As Vicki Dabrowski points out, austerity has an emotional component—prohibiting its recipients from “adapting and planning for the future” when their expectations are compromised, their dreams seem impossible (152). Fighting austerity is care work because it challenges a culture that relies on hierarchies between people and fails to acknowledge the self in Other, the I in thou. Austerity advocates promote it as financially necessary, but I show that the rhetoric and budget models at my institution suggests austerity is ideological, a choice. Moreover, the dynamic between the three campuses that make up my institution is a microcosm for a larger higher education budget model and its corresponding culture that seems necessary to critically assess. I emphasize next my efforts to take responsibility for my privilege by confronting austerity showing that I have also been a victim of austerity which in turn shapes my insight. My experience suggests that an “ethics of hope and care” (Royster and Kirsch) cannot flourish in an austerity culture. Fighting austerity therefore is a feminist must.

My transformative confrontation with austerity took began during a research trip to Minneapolis traveling from an Airbnb on a bus to the National Federation of Settlement archives housed at a University of Minnesota library. Most US settlements were closed in the 1950s as low-income people were moved from their neighborhoods to public housing high-rises to make way for highways and neighborhoods built for the middle class. I study the culture in Detroit in particular, the Motor City, at the epicenter of mid-century highway and urban renewal development. I wanted to look closely for evidence of any rhetorical engagement with powerful stakeholders among settlement leaders about the closing of settlements that accompanied the demolition of low-income neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this research was interrupted in more ways than one when I got an inconvenient phone call from my associate dean as I got off the bus at the library, a call that would profoundly change my relationship with the institution where I was educated and educate.

As I stood outside the library leaning on a fence, this dean hinted strongly that the funding for the writing center position I was about to take over from a retiring lecturer would not be funded moving forward. I was shocked and devastated to hear the news. I had gotten my start in Rhet/Comp through writing center work. It had also taken a while for my turn at this job when I meanwhile had waited it out with other small administrative gigs.

My work at the archives in Minneapolis those next three days was doomed. I had trouble concentrating and focusing. Archival material is fuel that can carry me for a year or even years, but this time the work felt black, my note taking mechanical.

A month later I was invited to a meeting where the writing program director and I were told by dean administrators, which included the financial manager, that indeed the positions for the

writing program director and writing center program on our regional University of Michigan campus in Dearborn, were being cut indefinitely because of a budget crisis. At one point in the discussion, I mentioned the expansively funded and staffed writing center at the flagship Ann Arbor campus. The financial director said firmly, “We are not Ann Arbor.” I guess I was supposed to be satisfied with that response. I was not. During my entire adulthood, I have witnessed the rich get richer and the poor get poorer with the University of Michigan as my primary case study.

Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Me

Whether or not by deliberate design, the relationship between Ann Arbor and its regional campuses Dearborn and Flint is a prototype showing how income inequality, and its partner austerity, is enabled through a calculated financial culture that benefits powerful investors. The funding formula works out so that each Ann Arbor student receives four times the funding than Flint and Dearborn students. Dearborn and Flint campus students are considerably more low-income, nearly half of them Pell-grant eligible, about the same percentage of Pell-grant eligible students in Michigan overall (“Facts and Figures”). As Charlie Eaton argues, endowment “spending has primarily benefited students from privileged backgrounds” (1) Endowment-rich schools like the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor can afford to spend more per student as meanwhile lower-income and less privileged students, who more typically attend schools like mine, are supported by tax dollars stingily appropriated. As a result, lower-income students who attend regional universities are disadvantaged by debt upon graduation compared to their wealthy peers. As Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier explain, “This ‘new normal’ of disinvestment, privatization, and regressive imposition of increasing charges on working-working class and poor students further exacerbates...inequalities” (98). The wealthy, whose taxes could be used to better fund schools like mine, are incentivized by tax breaks to invest in endowments that in turn benefit more privileged students who attend schools like the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor (Eaton 119).

As an alumnus of the Ann Arbor campus, I had already been long alarmed about the proliferating opulence on the Ann Arbor campus vis-à-vis the austerity culture on my campus, and comparable austerity also on its other regional comprehensive universities in Flint. Ann Arbor’s central administration’s reliance on its endowment and out of state tuition favors itself over its comprehensive campuses. These comprehensive campuses statistically better serve the 51% of Pell-eligible Michiganders. Dearborn’s campus is even especially credited for enabling economic mobility (“Top Performers”). Having received my BA in 1990, I was among the last in-state college students to pay relatively affordable tuition as the current culture of austerity in US higher education was established. Beginning in the mid-80s, states began disinvesting in higher education as policies eliminating taxes on endowments benefitted investors. Schools like the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor grew their endowments, enabled via cozy alumni networks of the well-heeled. Ann Arbor’s endowment has grown precipitously since 1985 from one billion to ten billion by 2015 and

nearly doubled itself again to 17.2 in the past eight years (Castilla 3, Jordan). All the while, opportunistic financiers established a student loan culture as low-income students have bridged the gap of rising tuition through self-financing (Eaton).

Rhetoric Buoy Austerity

Ann Arbor's rhetoric affirms and parallels its culture of inequality and hierarchy, which enables austerity. I have more status on the Ann Arbor campus as an alumnus--a potential or actual donor, who might also peddle the university's brand by wearing its clothing and attending its sporting events--than as a faculty member on one of its regional campuses. As a micro example, when I sought online help from an Ann Arbor library a couple of years ago, I was asked in the menu to identify my "status." My choices, in order, were: UM Undergraduate, UM Graduate Student, UM Faculty, UM Alumni and, last, Other* (example, includes visitors, people not associated with U-M as well as Flint and Dearborn members)." It seemed not cool to be identified as "Other." I complained to the library's communication's director about this language and some of it since has been reworded (Rohan). I would consider communication with library higher-ups about its list that Othered its regional campus members as an anti-austerity move and a feminist must if considering "ethics of care" and "responsible rhetorical action" as a component of feminist work. As Royster and Kirsch also point out, an ethics of care requires engaging with communities respectfully "as we join the world in theirs and work with them to set in motion a different, more fully rendered sense of rhetoric as an enterprise with a future" (147). Rhetoric can reflect and enable austerity culture. Confronting it can improve the institution, and thus the lives of most vulnerably affected by its policies when considering that austerity can inhibit hope in the future.

Whomever came up with this list unself conscious of the term "Other" to describe its Dearborn and Flint campus colleagues likely didn't know or consider that so many of our students are low-income, first generation or people of color disproportionately ("Facts and Figures"). Rhetoric by central administration also unproblematically emphasizes hierarchies between faculty on the Ann Arbor campus and its regional campuses. As typical, the former president of the University of Michigan, Mark Schlissel, has argued that the budget model is fair because "[w]e [the university] have one global research university and two regional campuses that are much more local in their focus" (Saikh). But Dearborn students reportedly hail from 78 countries ("Facts and Figures"). This hierarchical language parallels claims on central administration's current public affairs website that UM-Ann Arbor has "high research activity" and "competes for faculty and students with other national and international institutions that do similar levels of research" but that "UM-Flint and UM-Dearborn are regional schools whose faculty and academic programs are held to different standards than UM-Ann Arbor" ("Our Three Campuses"). Indeed, faculty on the Dearborn and Flint campuses teach more classes than those on the Ann Arbor campus relying on a teacher/scholar model, and some if not most faculty do less research quantitatively than Ann Arbor faculty. However, in what field, is it not unfair or even corrupt to judge a scholar by their institution or even rank?

Our Dearborn campus has in fact been named as a top producer of Fulbright scholars (“Top Producers”). The term “different standards” sounds patronizing, Othering even.

The emphasis on hierarchical differences between Ann Arbor and its regional campuses in central administration’s rhetoric has been a necessary defense because it rationalizes the status quo budget model. We hear the argument that the Ann Arbor endowment is not for Dearborn and Flint students because this endowment has been earmarked for specific purposes by donors. The donors are entitled to their goals with the money, so any resources from it going to the regional campuses would be unethical. As Fabricant and Brier put it, “The ever greater reliance on new sources of private revenue for public goods [i.e. higher education] has led to an especially deleterious effect on those least able to pay” (23). The institution in this way has strayed from its original mission. The University of Michigan was established to serve the state through a land grant from the US government with money officially appropriated for its growth in the mid 1800s. Even though the university has a long history of gaining private donors, it has been and is still a state-supported public institution (Castilla and Hodgeson 6).

Collaborating to Fight Austerity, a Formula for Feminist Institutional Citizenship

I was able to run the writing center for one year as a lame duck director. I enjoyed the work immensely, particularly the training of the writing center consultants with faculty guest speakers across the campus. The loss of not being able to run the center did not entirely hit me until the following year when I was no longer running it, which contributed to feeling like my career had dead-ended.

Overall, I just felt alienated. The future seemed bleak. As when October 2018 I dragged myself to Ann Arbor for an event showcasing research projects that incentivized collaboration across the three campuses, called the “Cube” research initiative. Maybe I could reignite some excitement about my research working with others? As it would turn out, the research I found most interesting featuring place-based learning was being conducted by faculty on my campus who were presenting a poster at the event, research I already knew about and was peripherally involved in. The psychic effort it took to attend an event like that which earlier in my career I had thrived on, this time brought me to tears and felt like a bust. I was preoccupied, could not “unsee” Ann Arbor’s lavish resources that made me think of inequality vis-à-vis the growing austerity on our campus, as strategic contemplation helped me put my experience into a greater context I was only beginning to fathom. The Cube event’s accoutrements were a sucker punch: a barely touched spread of expensive food and rows of plastic nametags for attendees not picked up, mine ironically not there even though I signed up for the event. Attendees also got a “goodie bag,” flashing LED-lit ice cubes for. . . I don’t know, to remind attendees like me about austerity on the Dearborn campus in contrast to extravagance on the Ann Arbor campus?

I put the LED-lit cubes in my freezer for a while, which affirmed my alienation when I opened it. Eventually the lights in the cubes died so the cubes migrated--still in their dolled-up purple mesh bag--to a drawer in our house where batteries and LED-lit items await a second life in vain. Of course, financing the three campuses equitably is very complicated I might be told. The LED-lit cubes, their purple mesh outfit, and the unclaimed plastic name tags, come from an entirely different funding source than the writing center director position in Dearborn. At least the take home goodie bag did not include cake. "Let them eat LED-battery-powered purple-meshed dressed up not real ice cubes!" was trickier.

As my energy to complete traditional academic research felt sapped, I became energized otherwise in fighting the austerity that led to my alienation and lost productivity. I began to speak out when encouraged by others as I transitioned from a more individualistic to collaborative mindset. In 2018 the Ann Arbor campus had just initiated a scholarship program called the Go Blue Guarantee for all students whose family income was less than \$60,000, but a program as such had not been developed for Dearborn and Flint. I posted a speech questioning that decision which I had given at a regents' meeting on Facebook. A U of M Ann Arbor librarian Facebook friend commented that Ann Arbor's campus stakeholders claim to value diversity, equity and inclusion, but their passivity regarding their regional campuses' austerity culture suggests its policies lack legitimacy and efficacy. She suggested I make my post public.

Inspired by that, with some help from my friends I went a little guerilla warfare on the University of Michigan Alumni Facebook page after it took down an infograph I put up there with statistics about the unequal funding between Ann Arbor and Flint and Dearborn's campuses. The Webperson, presumably as a response to my torn down infographic, posted an article bragging about the Go Blue Guarantee. In comments, my friends pointed out that the Go Blue Guarantee was not extended to Dearborn and Flint students. We accidentally maybe provoked some online posters, who stumbled upon our online conversation, to admit that Ann Arbor could not give this scholarship to Flint and Dearborn students because too many of them needed it! I guess I was becoming an activist taking on the University of Michigan's PR machine.

In a way the work was too easy, the claims too lame. But since it had the power, it needed not to have integrity, class, or even peddle or ponder the truth. Elitism was a cloak like a sweat-shirt worn to a football game or a cap worn jogging. As several alumni punctuated in comments on this development of the Go Blue Guarantee in Ann Arbor that was not extended to students on the Flint and Dearborn campuses: "Go Blue." Go Blue is in reference to the schools' colors, maize (yellow) and blue. Doesn't really matter if the matter is complicated: just say Go Blue and feel good? As my colleague who witnessed this online debate posed, "Have the words Go Blue replaced, 'keep calm and carry on' as a way to steamroll over the [regional] campuses, which some alumni seem to read as business liabilities." An ethics of hope and care in this case when fighting austerity with responsible rhetorical action was engaging with the average person on the street, or

on the Facebook page in this case. This exercise also reveals how austerity can be identified and perpetuated by ordinary texts produced by ordinary people carrying water to norm larger scripts of inequality they are not fully aware of. It seemed ethical, care work, to point out to these alumni that their comments, had they understood the greater context, were cruel.

Thereafter I began collaborating and engaging more fully with the developing movement called One University or IU, that included part-time faculty, full-time faculty and students across the three campuses all working to confront those in power enabling austerity. The work has been fundamentally rhetorical as we brainstorm strategies which included meeting with regents, meeting with legislators, and writing op-eds.

Showing Up and Speaking Out: Feminist Institutional Citizenship in Action

Our most successful activity fighting austerity in the past three years has been promoting and providing data for a rally in spring 2021 that was organized by the three student governments from Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint, called “Fund our Future.” Students demanded that the university’s central administration commit \$10 million per year to Flint and Dearborn campuses for at least five years (Kosnoski and Held, Benevidas-Colon). Considering that austerity can rob people of their ability to plan and imagine the future, the agenda had kairos. Dearborn and Flint students spoke on their campuses and then took buses to Ann Arbor for the main event, a set of speeches on the steps of Rackham Hall in Ann Arbor.

Funding our Future could be regarded as a “big bang coalition” (Eaton) when groups otherwise siloed bond and organize through collective effort for a shared cause. Efficacy might be especially achieved if a coalition ‘bargains with bankers’ to hold powerful actors accountable for the financing enabling austerity. In California for instance, 2,000 students marched to the “flagship branch of Bank of America” and “put a face on those who don’t pay their fair share” (Eaton 178). While those confronting a big bank might not consider themselves feminists, nor did all members of our Funding the Future crowd, these efforts show how activist work can be defined as feminist work when it implements ethics of hope and care through responsible rhetorical action.

Our “big bang” rally ended with a march past then President Mark Schlissel’s house. Some students told me they were uncomfortable with that idea and thought the planned chants about Schlissel were going too far. Some Dearborn students in fact went back on the bus instead of marching. A student walking next to me also happened to tell me she was uncomfortable about the idea but was marching anyway, too. I told the student that in this case, Schlissel had kind of asked for it. He created division with his rhetoric and made loads of money. So, she should feel empowered by speaking up if she was upset about inequality and interested in social justice. I understood why the student was unsure about following the crowd, but the crescendo of the rally

in front of Schlissel's house felt authentic. As wealthy capitalist Nick Hanauer warns, "If we do not do something to fix the glaring inequalities in our society, the pitchforks will come," I was at home with my anger and frustration about austerity and the rhetoric justifying it—poorly so. When it comes down to it, the bad rhetoric crafted and encouraged by those with power that misrepresents our students bothers me the most. Hence, confronting it as care work.

After this grande finale walking to my car, I passed by a church with a marquee that said, "Your good deed can save the world." Ann Arbor was talking to me. A good sign, literally. This was the old Ann Arbor, before she became so corporate thanks to the university's growing endowment the past thirty years and before the bankers took over. When higher education was more substantially funded, hippies had been in charge of the place. Poetry littered Ann Arbor on building walls and bathroom stalls. Aware of strategic contemplation as a method with my work with IU thus far, I pondered whether my participation in the rally was a good deed and thinking about my conversation with the student reluctant to march. The effort was collective. I didn't spearhead it. I just drove 50 miles from my house and showed up. However, returning to my "alma mater" to fight like a mama bear for many students who have not had some of my privileges, but for whom I feel a connection, who I love, felt destined and uncorrupted.

I have suggested how identifying, confronting and speaking out against austerity-enabling rhetoric is care work and I think my experience mentoring students at this rally is the best example of how fighting austerity can have a feminist dimension and is a form of "feminist institutional citizenship." This is a phenomenon when, as Cox and Riedner assert, the "expertise of a broad range of stakeholders com[e] into coalition" (22). Faculty and students across three campuses had rallied for our future together—maybe like a family. Relatedly, while I shared some hesitation in physical activism that day, marching, the mentoring with student activists I engaged with that day comfortably fit with my ongoing work as a teacher. This mentoring could be regarded not only as teaching but, again, as care work which Cod and Riedner also identify as a component of feminist institutional citizenship (21). That day, I reflected foremost on the sense of responsibility I felt not only to confront inequities sponsored by my alma mater but to fight for the future of my students. Our action was collective. Our future was collective, too. Hope and care for students had become more fully integrated with my healing, my own lost hope from the austerity measures that stymied what I thought would be my career trajectory.

I wished more faculty were there though. I understood that my colleagues first might be too busy responding to austerity to fight austerity or were just exhausted--particularly the women considering that Covid-19 pandemic mitigation disproportionately burdened women with childcare and academic care labor responsibilities (Altan-Olcay and Bergeron). Furthermore, not everyone experiences austerity the same way (Dabrowski 68). Even if austerity can dampen a faculty member's optimism about the future as resources are cut or compromised, feminist institutional citizenship might seem like a distraction from the more pressing requirements for succeeding in

academe. Faculty are taught to “keep going, and otherwise ignore gendered organizational practices [austerity in this case]” as a survival tool in a publish or perish culture (O’Meara 353). As Suzanne Bergeron and Özlem Altan-Oclay point out, “Definitions of academic work and success continued to be based, for the most part, on the idea of the autonomous entrepreneurial academic subject working to meet existing performance expectations” (5). We are rewarded institutionally for thinking individualistically. Some might rightly feel like activism would hurt their chances at future opportunities inside institutions if alienating higher-up leadership. Untenured faculty might not take the risk of working for a committee not regarded as official by the institution like IU. However, feminist institutional citizenship should be a frontload essential for improving institutions, or even saving them, so we can continue with the work we have been trained to do, are rewarded for and value such as teaching and research.

This activism can even move the institutional needle, benefitting students, situating this activism as care work. Shortly after our rally university regents announced that the Go Blue Guarantee, earlier just for Ann Arbor students, would be extended to Flint and Dearborn students (Jesse “U-M Extends Go Blue Guarantee”). Although this new program would turn out to be not so guaranteed, the decision by regents suggested to those of us on the IU committee what could happen if we all worked together with students and across campuses as a collective “agentive practice” (Cox and Reidner), working across silos, hierarchies and rank.

Feminist Institutional Citizenship and Strategic Contemplation: Speechmaking Across Silos

As another example of an agentive practice that could be regarded as feminist institutional citizenship that at the same time shows the mental challenge of activism, IU organized a bigger stunt to further our agency born by coalition for the December 2021 regents meeting that was in Ann Arbor: coordinating 3-minute speeches by faculty, staff and students from three campuses. Collectively our speeches emphasized how austerity measures were compromising the learning of students on our campuses who were already stressed economically and not to mention by the Covid-19 pandemic and its mitigation policies.

Reflection, that would turn out to be strategic, was built into that day’s events for me. I arrived early to Ann Arbor for this meeting and took a walk across campus. To get to the building where the regents meeting would start, I cut through the large parking lot near the football stadium. If Ann Arbor was talking to me again, she was either proud or pointing out ridiculousness by showing who was important. Every coach, and assistant coach, and related staff member, had their own parking space. Of course, this is big money Big Ten sports, but what a super strange culture for someone arriving to earth from a spaceship. I wondered where the noble laureates and nobel prize winners parked. I knew the answer: in their driveways or the parking garages like everyone else.

I was having my doubts. Was making a speech to the regents as a collaborative project to fight austerity another good deed—that is care work—or distraction from my work back on my campus finishing up finals, an inevitably not collaborative and quite pressing chore? Coming to Ann Arbor to big bang coalition and inventing agentive practices in so many meetings prior, took a lot of energy. Feminist institutional citizenship can be an intimidating calling.

Strategic contemplation, reading and interpreting the story I was in, had helped me be long sensitive to big picture messaging on the part of our institution, messaging that laid bare its austerity culture and celebrated unapologetically our main campus's flush resources and lavish plans. One presentation at the meeting showed the blueprints for yet another building for students, Ann Arbor's, of course, not ours. A \$25 million dollar donation from a wealthy donor, Larry Leinweber of the Leinweber Foundation, made possible the planning of a sprawling new science building for which the state of Michigan was also kicking in matching funds ("UM receives \$25M gift," "University of Michigan Regents Meeting"). In between speeches we held up paper tombstones naming programs that had been cut on Dearborn and Flint's campus such as the Africana Studies program on Flint's campus and, also, of course, the writing center on our campus.

I fell in love with everyone who spoke for IU. One speech stole the show, difficult to do. A Flint undergraduate student laid out poignantly the major problem at hand: he felt like "a second-class citizen, a sideshow, an afterthought." Precisely. That was the message we were supposed to internalize with the policies, the culture, the rhetoric. I would tie myself to the railroad tracks if I could, were not giving a 3-minute speech at a regents' meeting the watered-down equivalent, to get any upper-administration mucky-muck to respond substantially to critique of regressive policies that might lead any hardworking, low-income, self-made and minority person to feel like second-class citizens at the University of Michigan.

At the very end of the meeting, a statuesque, elderly African-American gentleman stood up and asked to talk to President Schlissel. As the man began talking for what would turn out to be about ten long minutes, his booming voice was quivering, his pain palpable. He introduced himself as Chuck Christian, said that he was dying of cancer and that he drove to Ann Arbor from Boston. He spoke about his lifelong trauma having been sexually abused by a University of Michigan doctor, Robert Anderson, whose actions were under investigation (Jesse, "Ex-football player"). He had put off his treatable cancer treatment because he feared doctors.

Christian's words were disturbing. They stayed with me the whole next day in competition with the afterglow of our group's collaborative mash up "big bang" speech happening. Austerity: death by a thousand cuts. I struggled to process how the entire experience added up along with my maybe not so charitable knee-jerked thought: Christian's expressing pain over his abuse by Anderson, and by proxy the University of Michigan, had stolen IU's thunder that afternoon. I remembered later, after finals were over, my thoughts walking through the athletic compound

parking lot on the way to the meeting, the parking spaces just for coaches. On second thought, Christian didn't steal our thunder. He was our thunder. Christian's pain, although in a whole other category than the collective pain of austerity our group had laid out, punctuated the effects of an institution that was not in the habit of listening, that rewarded some actors over others and in some cases, to a destructive effect, destroyed bodies and lives. While the people with power in that room could be moved to have empathy, their institution had allowed corruption to continue for years, in the case of a doctor who was a sexual predator. Ignoring profound problems had been trending for a long time and was baked into the culture of the place, the built environment even, its material space. The athletic compound parking lot showed a culture: who was important and had priority at an institution that was resource-rich but also enabled resource starvation, that is, austerity.

The silence after Christian spoke, no doubt in part because of shock, symbolized perhaps that this administration really didn't need to respond substantively to individuals without institutional power, even if these individuals were making good points, their facts and logic hard to argue with. But as a collective voice, IU and Christian's standing up was a powerful collective blueprint. As Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier suggest, austerity needs to be fought along with "other progressive campaigns for social justice" (5). Thinking inclusively about our speeches and Christian's, suggests a formula for action that might be activated writ large, when those suffering from a culture of corruption and disinvestment find common ground and fight power with truth together. Feminist institutional citizenship can include those outside of the academe who might not even share the same experiences with academics but who have the similar goals in seeking justice, equity, and the transformation of institutions.

As it would turn out the Go Blue Guarantee designed for Dearborn and Flint has not been as substantial as the Ann Arbor scholarship program, which suggests the strong hold austerity culture can maintain even when confronted. Unlike the Ann Arbor's program, the Dearborn and Flint program has a grade point average requirement, which eliminates a portion of our students from the scholarship. Ann Arbor, which has a higher-grade point requirement for acceptance than its regional campuses, does not have the grade point requirement for its Go Blue Guarantee (Kosnoski and Held). In this sense an Ann Arbor student, after acceptance to the university, could maintain their scholarship, even if getting a 2.0 throughout their college career. Dearborn and Flint students could lose their scholarship with its 3.5 grade point requirement on the other hand and would not be able to get this scholarship in the first place with say at 3.3 or 3.4 grade point that otherwise could get them accepted to the university. That students on Dearborn and Flint campuses would need to be exceptional students rather than just accepted students, fits with the larger cultural picture that has enabled inequality between the campuses in the first place. As Fabricant and Brier put it, "Students not defined as 'elite' or 'gifted' are expected to bear the costs of diminished investment in education" (136). The caveat that those students on our campus receiving the Go Blue Guarantee must be extra special, not just accepted students who are also low-income, parallels

also claims made by the writers responding to my friends and colleagues remarks on the University of Michigan's alumni Facebook page. Funding low-income Dearborn and Flint students would be too much to ask because there are too many low-income students.

Maintaining elitism on the one hand while touting inclusion on the other—shape up and you can get your money—University of Michigan's central administration, with Schlissel at the helm, had been doing its job. The job perpetuating inequality through policy that leads low-income students to borrow money to finance their education inside a larger system that disinvests in regional campuses like mine (Fabricant and Brier 138). A poor rhetorician, Schlissel was a pretty good messenger for the system that rewards elitism. He did fall on his own sword shortly after the roll out of the Go Blue Guarantee 2.0, that kind of includes Dearborn and Flint students now. He was caught violating a university code of conduct when sexually harassing an employee and was fired (Jesse "University President").

Austerity and Greater Contexts

It would turn out that feminist institutional citizenship fighting austerity was not just care work but scholarly work as well. If at first it seemed that feminist institutional citizenship work, that relied on collaboration and also producing and circulating non-scholarly yet persuasive and potentially efficacious texts, was taking me away from producing the work I was trained for, one-authored, peer-reviewed research. Yet, it was eventually emotionally resonating and serendipitously scholarly that I found out about the cuts to my position as the writing center director when on the way to the archives that June day in 2016 in Minneapolis to pursue the completing a scholarly case study. I had gone to the archives to get a better sense for why those running settlements in 1950s did not fight back very hard when their work was downsized or destroyed. I eventually put together some parallels between higher education's austerity culture and the austerity culture that pushed poor people out of their neighborhoods, and also pushed out the settlement leaders who were mostly women running settlement boards in 1950s Detroit. I hadn't at first considered neighborhoods being raised, and settlements also being raised and closed, as an austerity project. In the historical case, powerful and layered policy--enabled also by a new brand of social worker that normed the removal of the poor from their existing neighborhoods to public housing that was considered better. Social service agencies that had begun as grassroots place-specific funding organizations merged with the United Way mid-century and became more bureaucratic when cooperating with government agencies. Although money was available for building public housing, settlement homes were regarded as too expensive, white elephants (Trolander 29). Again, austerity is an ideological choice not a financial necessity. There was plenty of money circulating for urban renewal and the construction of public housing compounds, but not for maintaining already established low-income neighborhoods.

The policies hamstringing the settlements struggling to survive in the 1950s remind me of

the policies shaping the austerity culture on campuses like mine. The US government has created policies that rate college campuses using a set of metrics, such as time-to-graduate reporting and efficiency plans, that puts disproportionate stress on colleges that serve low-income students and students of color. Colleges with wealthier students and large endowments have fewer students taking out loans and struggling to graduate in the socially-constructed-as-ideal four-year time frame (Fabricant and Brier). In each case, mid-century urban renewal culture and higher education austerity culture, the lives of the most disadvantaged have been and are hyper-measured without their consent or collaboration. Social disinvestment coupled with austerity disposes people (Fabricant and Brier 32). Likewise by extension, I felt disposable as a writing center director within this culture that values accountability to spreadsheets not people or big picture goals of student success and faculty development that might even improve the bottom line down the road. But as Vicki Dabrowski points out, “If you have no value for capital, the state makes it harder for you to live” (150). Non-elite colleges don’t typically produce profits for investors. As a result, these institutions as engines of mobility are undervalued, even devalued, and at the very least not important enough to have curiosity about—as with Schlissel using the term “local” to describe our diverse regional campuses. Rhetoric shapes and reflects passivity about inequality and austerity at my institution, and by extension higher education as a whole. Coalition building with the formula of feminist institutional citizenship can bring together people to hold institutions accountable for the policies that are not just financially damaging but psychologically damaging as well—such as extreme austerity leading its victims to lose hope. Fighting austerity is care work.

It was ironic therefore that I got news about the writing center position being cut as I was walking into the archives with questions about the policies that led to the downsizing of female-run settlement culture. I had gotten a good taste of how someone in a leadership position in a neighborhood vulnerable to elimination by an austerity move might have felt. I also understood on two levels—personal and scholarly—why fighting back would be complicated even for those with privilege. Austerity can be so embedded in a culture aided by policy that it appears impenetrable, un-fightable, even the natural order of things, for which passivity about it might seem the only course.

Fighting Austerity as Emotional Repair Work

The day after the meeting July 2016 when I learned that my dream to run a writing center was dashed, my family went to hang out with our friends who were finishing a Great Lakes regatta that ended on Michigan’s Mackinac Island. Sailors on shore having been on a boat for three days are genuinely happy people and are fun to be around. I can’t say the drunken sailor is a stereotype. Reeling still from the meeting, I had a respite from my broken heart when I got sucked into a crowded dance floor of sailor friends and acquaintances at the island’s Horn Bar. The place was packed, the space between people was comically zero. While I am normally claustrophobic and crowd phobic, to participate in that happy crowd was a comfort, a strong contrast to how I had felt

in the meeting the day before. My emotions had me consider how austerity divides us unnaturally and destructively. It forbids compassion and denies our dependence on one another. It forces us to perform as isolated individuals, passive actors taking marching orders from a bureaucracy designed by elites valuing profit over other values such as the mobility of first-generation, working-class college students needing support for example. Austerity to me is the opposite of love, not hate but indifference. Austerity disposes of people by making dreams harder if not impossible not only to imagine but to achieve. It does not nurture. Feminists must fight it. As Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers argue: “We have identified ourselves as separate and have tried to protect ourselves from one another. We have used rules and regulations as weapons and fought to make ourselves safe. But there is no safety in separation” (64). There was no separation between bodies and selves at the Horn bar. Dancing was a metaphor: love and joy between friends and strangers as a default human behavior. Austerity is fundamentally unnatural. As physicist and feminist Karen Barad’s theorizes, “‘others’ are never very far from ‘us’” (178-79).

We might be at the tipping point as institutions can no longer rely on austerity to function. As I wrote this essay, the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor graduate students were on strike demanding a living wage drawing attention to the university’s reliance on cheap labor to run itself. By starving its regional campuses, the main campuses may also have gone too far enabling austerity. As schools like mine cut programs and lack money for tenure-track hiring, Research-1 schools like Ann Arbor are training graduate students for jobs that no longer exist, another microcosm of a larger system which more and more relies on efficiency, not care.

Large scale protests and the mobilizing of graduate students who can’t make a living while training for full-time employment that might not exist also hints to a problem with austerity that Jewish civilization scholar, Jacques Berlinerblau calls “faculty fratricide.” University leaders complicit in severe budget cutting compromise academic freedom, faculty governance and the tenure system. One of my colleagues calls this phenomenon “eating our own.”

Those who embrace ethics of hope and care should challenge a culture that disposes of those who aren’t interesting to the powerful. Again, not everyone will experience austerity the same or have the same power to fight it, and these differences can be legitimate barriers for collaboration. Yet, as Lee Nickoson and Kris Blair point out, listening can help mend division: “listen[ing] to voices of students, our community, to those who experience the world differently” (14). My fellow alumni writing “Go Blue” on a social media post that, if read closely, celebrates some low-income people but not others getting their college funded goes to show the ease with which otherwise good people can passively accept the status quo, too trusting of institutions or too tribal in their affiliations. Complicity was also the norm with those in power who went along with public policy that destroyed neighborhoods and moved the poor without their consent in the 1950s urban renewal cultural era.

My experience with austerity culture, my activist work in response to it and some loneliness with it, might inspire more transparency about the material constraints on our work across rank and region, particularly recently. In this essay I promote feminist institutional citizenship which challenges an “individualistic mindset” (Cox and Riedert). On the other hand, there need not be formulas for fighting austerity but rather missions for which practices emerge from shared values. In my case, these practices have included collaborating, coalition building, mentoring, reflection, and identifying injustice through rhetoric: writing, speaking and editing. I associate these practices with feminist work when holding my institution, that happens to be my alma mater, accountable to better care for its most vulnerable students. As philosopher and Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs put it, “I want to ask people to ask themselves and each other what time is it on the clock of the world.” Put it another way, Barad, the feminist theoretical physicist, encourages us to “meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role we have in the world’s differential becoming” (396), I have shown how I confronted austerity when ‘taking responsibility for the world’s differential becoming,’ when reading the landscape around me, paying attention to institutional rhetoric and holding those with power accountable for it--practices of strategic contemplation that are tied to feminist ideologies and goals.

I think it’s time we all stop accepting austerity as the norm in our respective higher education cultures.

Your good deed could save the world.

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Archival Research as Institutional Critique

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Abstract: Through a critical reading of early 20th century records from the archives of the Southern Baptist Church, this essay interrogates church leaders' claims that the evangelical institution of marriage is a permanent policy, universally applicable to all, and stable across centuries of church teachings. The author argues that institutional rhetorics (IR) as a subfield must resist such universalizing claims made by organizational leaders and instead push for definitions of institutions that expose their unstable shifts across contexts. In doing so, archival research is thus articulated as a performance of institutional critique that has the potential to disrupt, unsettle, and delegitimize the meaning-making power of organizations and the identificatory connections they offer to audiences. In this case study inspired by the volunteer work of Church Clarity, archival research toward institutional critique holds church leaders accountable for their violent rhetorics of gender and sexuality.

Keywords: institutional critique, rhetorics of gender and sexuality, archival research, evangelical marriage

Introduction

Ever-increasing threats against the local LGBTQIA2 community in the city where I taught at the time of conducting this research (Louisville, KY.) have wrought even more undue violence: already in 2023, the Kentucky State Senate passed a bill that endangers the lives and wellbeing of queer and trans students; community programming has been continually canceled in response to DHS domestic terrorism alerts; and the removal of a transgender woman from a school-sponsored fraternity event through verbal and physical harassment has resulted in the "Silent Wars" standoff between students and administration at the University of Louisville, where I conduct this research project. In my last five years serving as a volunteer archivist for Church Clarity, an organization that scores the accessibility of Protestant Christian churches' policies on gender and sexuality, I have deeply engaged with the evangelical messaging that has long fueled the ongoing national debates over how queer and trans people are permitted to exist and participate in American society, and that continues to implement violence in cities like Louisville.

In my position at Church Clarity, I have read, analyzed, and repurposed thousands of church policies on marriage, which we volunteers often use as evidence of a church's affirming or non-affirming status (i.e., listing the levels of spiritual participation that are extended to

or rescinded from queer and trans members). In this process, I was struck by how often church leaders appealed to their own *institutionality*, or the illusion of their permanence, stability, or universality across millennia, and this argument is regularly used by evangelical leaders as a violent rhetoric that attempts to justify homophobia and transphobia in our communities. The Southern Baptist Church (or SBC), for example, has long served as a key resource for churches who seek to recirculate this argument by providing pre-written policy language. Sometimes, they argue that marriage is universal because it was divinely created—God’s “first institution” and his “basic unit of society,” later by “reaffirmed” by Christ—“rather than simply a human social construct” (“On Covenant Marriage”; “Resolution on Homosexual Marriage”; “On ‘same sex Marriage’”). In other policies, they claim it’s the church who has remained unwavering on the definition of marriage to maintain “a healthy society” (“Resolution on Protecting...”). These policies are remarkably influential, as I have personally witnessed how their phrasing is recycled and spread across marriage policies of at least hundreds of different evangelical denominations.

Rooted in 18th and 19th century revival events that “refocused” Protestantism around “personal conversion and piety, and mobilized adherents to social action and proselytizing” (Cope & Ringer 107), evangelicalism is not a specific denomination but a marker of a Christianity that is strictly adherent to the Bible as “the ultimate authority on all matters” (Camper 410)—and enforces a rigid genre set of possible interpretations that is almost always inflected by conservative politics. On gender and sexuality, evangelicals frequently prescribe a fundamentalist “bad rhetoric,” in Sharon Crowley’s terms, imposing “unities that transcend temporal and local contexts” and limiting any “available alternatives” outside of the marriage of one cisgender man and one cisgender woman (130). Such appeals to stasis, or the devolution of rhetorical capacities, are intended to “[constrict . . .] the role of the rhetor” who “is given less agency” to respond to pastoral teachings or attempt to make sense of scripture on their own (Amorose 137), which is traditionally afforded to evangelicals through “a conversion experience that brings the believer into a relationship with God” but severely restricted in how members are permitted to express their gender and sexual identities (Mannon 143). The only path typically provided to queer and trans Christians who seek membership in an evangelical setting is to violently conform to the cisgender, heterosexual, monogamous marriage institution as it is written, or secondarily to permanent celibacy and/or detransition, through whatever means necessary.

Personal narratives collected by Church Clarity volunteers have demonstrated that church leaders hide under the veil of universalizing claims provided by marriage policies (e.g., “marriage has always been defined as...”) that enable them to skirt the responsibility of mounting a defense to counterarguments and even to modify (those supposedly universal) definitions as exigencies, contexts, and organizational needs shift over time. Using Church Clarity’s archival training and resources, I unearth multiple versions of marriage policies from one influential evangelical denomination (the SBC) in an effort to expose the definitional shifts that occur when appeals to institutionality govern what can be said: In other words, I ask, how are institutions like evangelical

marriage changed over time by organizational leaders, and how are these changes deployed as a rhetoric that exploits their own supposed institutionality? In the CFP for this special issue, the co-editors remind us that “it’s important to understand how these systems developed in order to properly understand the backlash that has been created to keep these systems in place.” I echo their reminder and emphasize here that tracing the SBC’s historical development not only aids us in understanding their organizational processes but also provides tactical practitioners with the evidence they need to challenge abuses of power and hold them publicly accountable. Thus, archival research is posited as a performance of institutional critique that disrupts and unsettles the meaning-making power of organizational fields like the evangelical church.

Although “hard to change,” institutions are “changeable,” Porter, et al. write, because they are “rhetorically constructed human designs” that are structured by “rhetorical systems,” or “processes of decision making” (610-611, 625). As the rules, norms, and beliefs that describe reality and determine legitimate actions, institutions are malleable genres, sedimented over time, that have been continually adapted and reused to respond to recurring situations in an organization. The origins of evangelical institutions can sometimes be traced to and through lineages of archival records and multimodal ephemera. Buried in digital traces, Church Clarity volunteers enable institutional critique by unearthing, exposing, distributing, and revising marriage policies and their various roots, ending the violent cycle of “affective inheritances” that are reintroduced by each invocation of the policy against a queer or trans member (Ahmed). As Stoler reminds us, “to understand an archive one needs to understand the institutions it served” because it can expose “taxonomies in the making” (Stoler 88, 91). In this case, archival research performs institutional critique by revealing the definitional labor of maintaining marriage as it is currently understood.

Church documents demonstrate SBC leaders’ efforts to transform one public (Southern Baptists) into the public (America and its territories, and ever-expanding beyond it). In this essay, I follow Church Clarity’s example of transforming archival research into institutional critique by reading a variety of church documents (convention proceedings, committee reports, public resolutions, sermons, presidential addresses, and pastor’s conference press packets) that span over a century. I identify just one (of many possible periods) in 20th century SBC history in which leaders rhetorically refit the marriage institution to serve different policy needs and organizational goals. This essay is not a complete history of the SBC’s teachings on gender and sexuality, but an interrogation of how institutions continually change so that an organization may retain its legitimacy to make meaning in certain arenas of our lives. I draw from artifacts in the Southern Baptist Historical Library & Archives (SBHLA), which is a settler archive, meaning that the marriage institution (and the many other institutions it serves) are rhetorically imbricated with both the history and the presence of colonialism. Marriage was and is a key mechanism for Baptist missionaries to impose Western frameworks of being (gendered and sexed) and sold to and enforced upon new members as a Christian practice that would elevate one’s status to a legitimate American citizen. In doing so, they manipulate audiences by presenting genres like marriage policies as a priori realities, so

that they appear unchangeable and universally applicable—in other words, they were here before us, and they will be here after us. Rather than renaturalizing the marriage institution as a pre-existing given (e.g., “the SBC has always defined marriage as between one man and one woman”), I challenge how institutionality itself is deployed as a rhetoric, and I invite other rhetoric and writing studies scholars to reconsider their archival research as both rhetorical recovery and an intervention in present-day argumentation.

Marriage in the City: The Home Missions Board up to 1912

Marriage is the SBC’s weapon of domestic imperialism and evangelism. Because the American home represents the “achievements and imperatives of civilization,” other homes and living spaces were often targeted as a space in which missionaries could assimilate non-believers (Simonsen 12). Marriage was the path to religious conversion from other faiths to a Baptist practice of Christianity, and the reconstruction of the home shaped gender and sexual identities and expressions, thus facilitating an association with the ideal of nationhood. This violent work was not only facilitated by material force, but also required “the public work of writers, artists, anthropologists, bureaucrats, and reformers” in “literary, legal, and aesthetic” arenas (Simonsen 3). Long before the turn of the twentieth century, “bad housekeeping” had become a symbol of racial and thus religious “inferiority” (Simonsen 3). In this section, I demonstrate how SBC marriage policies are but one tool of many that disseminated, legitimized, and maintained oppressive hierarchical understandings of normative gender and sexuality, garnering their institutional status, before the next section where I trace the cycle of change that the genre underwent.

Dating back to 1845, the SBC’s annual convention, which still meets today, is a gathering of the denomination’s highest-ranking leaders to discuss the organization’s missions, agendas, policies, budgets, and public-facing and political concerns—all of which undergo continual revision. While the meeting itself is insular, it often has ripple effects in its own community of Nashville, TN., even today. For example, its Nashville Statement on gender and sexuality in 2017 was rebuked by the mayor of Nashville (Schmidt), and it once caused the city’s first COVID cluster after gathering restrictions were lifted (Kelman & Meyer). Throughout the busy two days of the convention, certain pastors are selected to give sermons on the hot topics of the time or elected to serve on governing committees, and delegates known as “messengers” travel from SBC churches from every region of the country and around the world to report on their activities and observations over the last year, which are then used to inform the next round of agenda setting and topic invention for sermons and educational materials.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, SBC leaders installed and perfected a cycle through which committees, reports, resolutions, and motions all reflected the shifting values and exigencies that they agreed to prioritize for the remainder of each year until they met again at the next convention. Policy changes appear most often in the form of the report-resolution-motion

genre cycle, which is not unique to the SBC and long predates the SBC’s founding in various legal and corporate contexts. In reading the archival records of conventions, I found that leaders use these gatherings to elect subcommittees to research particular concerns, such as alcohol or gambling, and those subcommittees spend the next year traveling to churches and discussing issues with pastors and collecting data related to that concern. At the next year’s convention, their findings will influence the writing and publication of a resolution clarifying the SBC’s stance related to that concern. If the resolution is not considered enough of an action, leaders will pass a motion to take a specific action, and often, that action may be to fund more research from that committee, which restarts the cycle.

For nearly every majorly debated (and often minor or non-existent) political issue in American history post-1845, the SBC published a resolution detailing their stance on the matter. As I read through documents across three centuries, I kept my own personal list anytime I noticed an SBC writer invoking a moral panic, which I define as an anxiety presented for the purpose of persuading the reader through fear or threat. They are affective arguments that help rhetors to frame some broad entity (society, Christianity, civilization, etc.) as always under severe risk. Sometimes, these anxieties are real events that should concern everyone living at the time, some are social trends that are exaggerated for persuasive effect, and others are entirely fictive and born of bigotry. I share the list below in alphabetical order, with the warning that its contents range from humorous to grim, to demonstrate that no issue is considered outside of the purview of SBC’s authority:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Automobiles ● Child labor ● Child marriages ● Dancing ● Divorce laws ● Divorce ranches ● Immigration ● Industrialization ● Kinsey’s studies on sexuality ● Marriage market towns ● Motion pictures ● Nudist colonies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Popular fiction ● Population increases ● Racetrack gambling, especially the Kentucky Derby ● Rum-running ships ● Syphilis ● Urban centers ● Wage labor ● Watergate ● Whiskey traffic ● White slavery ● Working on the Sabbath

Clearly, the SBC envisions itself as America’s protector from what it considers to be moral decay, and this is most evident in the committee now generally recognized as its public policy arm: what is today called the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. Prior to 1913, though, it was primarily its missionary wing, known at the time by its first name, the Home Missions Board. With Arizona’s inclusion as a U.S. state in 1912 as the last territory before Alaska and Hawaii, the evangelical mission was determined to Christianize the peoples of the land that had been

acquired through colonial expanse, as well as the newly arriving immigrants in increasingly urban American cities. This colonial project was not necessarily focused on new land acquisition and state expansion but with the erasure and transformation of other cultures on lands that were already owned, or “the Homeland” (1912 proceedings 34).

At the 1912 Southern Baptist Convention, the Home Missions Board reported on its findings from the last year and unsurprisingly targeted parenting as its great concern. Having previously created a subcommittee on “Cities,” which “increase rapidly in size,” and “Foreigners,” who “multiply rapidly on our streets,” the report’s concerns ranged from industry and urbanization to the “virgin territory” of the Southwest, “her dazzling mineral wealth,” and the Native tribes that resided there (1912 proceedings 29, 35). What the two spaces have in common for the Home Missions Board is that both are in “the kingdom of Christ” and thus need “winning the lost, and training them to win other lost” (1912 proceedings 31). In response, they clarify that the primary task of the Board is “to Christianize the sons and daughters of the Homeland and develop and conserve their sacred energies for the conquest of the world” (1912 proceedings 34). Additionally, they redefine Home Missions as “Christian patriotism organized for action, and engaged in the sacred business of enthroning Christ in the homes of the Homeland” (1912 proceedings 34). This move unites religion and nation as embedded projects and prioritizes the family “home” as the mechanism through which the two become one.

In each space of the “city” and the “territory,” marriage panics are invoked, yet in different ways. Southern cities are depicted as once-ideal spaces for humble farmers to trade goods who now face a “teeming and crowded population in the poorer districts,” in large part due to “foreigners who have never known a pure Christianity, and have not lived according to the holy ideals of our American Christian civilization” (1912 proceedings 30). Because immigrants were believed to “[carry] the taint of its low standards of life and morals,” cities are thus understood to pose multiple threats to evangelical marriage (1912 proceedings 30):

It shows itself in the amazing multiplication of cheap forms of amusement, which solicit the young to spend their evenings outside the family circle and amidst glare, glitter and excitement; provide along with the things that amuse, and which in themselves might be harmless, suggestions by means of words, attitudes and pictured scenes, that stimulate frivolous, violent and lustful emotions; and tend to produce an impulsive and excitable populace, that will reason little and put emotion in the place of conscience...

(1912 proceedings 29-30)

The Home Missions Board presents the entertainment provided by increasingly diverse cities as a slippery slope from “amusement” to “perverted thoughts” (1912 proceedings 29-30). They question how “strong and godly families” can maintain themselves in such environments, while

also charging them to resist the allure of “fragrant suburbs” where many Christians had escaped (1912 proceedings 30). Instead, they charge Baptist families to take up the evangelical mission: to remain amidst the “temptations, perils and tragedies of the weakened and deteriorated communities” and convert them to Christianity by providing a strong moral example through marriage (1912 proceedings 30). In the city, marriage is seen as both under threat by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration—all of which the SBC opposed at the time of the policy’s recomposition—but marriage is also presented as the firm foundation of the religion and the most powerful tool for fighting these supposed social problems.

In contrast to the city, younger states further West are imagined to be suddenly overflowing with Native American and Mexican communities, who are framed as “multiplied thousands of alien folks now offer themselves to the molding of true religion” (1912 proceedings 35). Evangelical missionaries to Oklahoma, Arizona, and New Mexico are encouraged to fight liquor traffic and federal laws that restrict their behavior, such as attempts to ban teachers from wearing “religious garb” in “Indian mission” schools (1912 proceedings 74, 85). While the Home Missions Board doubted their ability to counteract the entertainment of the city, it’s the lack of attractions in the Southwest that make its current residents seem more amenable to religious conversion, so long as they can keep the focus on education and putting more prohibition laws in place.

Their edict, “We must evangelize our schools and educationalize our churches” that their mission out West is/was settler colonial, which I use to imply that colonialism cannot be reduced to the *event* of land theft, such as the Oklahoman “Sooners” who illegally jump-started the Land Run of 1889, but to refer to colonialism as an ongoing structural campaign that has the permanent cultural erasure and transformation of Native communities as its long-term end goal (1912 proceedings 33). Wolfe defines settler colonialism not as “an isolated event” but as a “structuring principle [...] across time” (399). He uses the “logic of elimination” to explicate the transition from Native removal to Native assimilation, which works within “the colonial rule of law” to eliminate non-dominant ways of knowing and being (Wolfe 399). Christian missions are one core faction of the larger program to establish material and ideological control, and this is seen in how the Home Mission Board prioritizes the institution of marriage as the foundation of settler society, or the “holy ideals of our American Christian civilization” (1912 proceedings 30).

What we see in the 1912 Home Missions Board report is the annual (re)setting of an agenda that has long been in place. As “stabilized-for-now” actions, genres are consistently adapted over time to serve social and institutional needs (Schryer 200). The report genre, which influences future actions/genres like missions, sermons, motions, and resolutions, is crucial to sustain the evangelical institution of marriage. The report accomplishes this sustenance by reanimating the definition of marriage’s primary exigencies according to whichever social “ills” the SBC is targeting that year. At the same time, marriage’s institutional qualities are exploited to further promote the Home Mission Board’s activities, as seen in how marriage is the basis for arguing that missions

are necessary in the first place. In this case, the Board invokes colonial hierarchies predicated on onto-epistemic racism to keep the appearance that the institution of marriage is under threat, while also invoking its strength as a “cure” for a rapidly expanding colony. Through this cycle, marriage plays one part in legitimizing and funding a vision of coloniality that “has been imported, expanded, and disputed for 500 years and counting” (Cushman, et al. 10).

Marriage Under the Influence: Reinventing Home Missions as Social Service (1913-1920)

At the 1913 SBC annual meeting, the Home Missions Board was reborn as the Social Service Commission. The change was only made possible by *the complete rehauling of the evangelical institution of marriage*. Though this move was not overt, it regardless helped to install and perfect a generic “report-motion-resolution” cycle in which marriage’s appearance of institutionality not only sells the idea that marriage is an institution but also provides leaders a moral platform to take action against any supposed threat that may weaken the marriage “institution.” Up to 1912, marriage had been defined as the SBC’s cornerstone of a “civil” settler society and deployed as a violent tool to enforce Christianity and its restrictions onto all genders and sexualities of all peoples everywhere. Marriage was a mechanism through which the idea of a Christian nation was sold to communities where missionaries traveled.

However, after the Home Missions Board’s anxieties about the liquor traffic increased, marriage was entirely redefined and resold to SBC stakeholders as under threat in a new and different way: drunken and under the influence of liquor. In response to the popularity of whiskey, the Board’s campaign shifted from crafting marriage as a strong moral example that would spread and populate (more marriage = good), to actually preventing marriages from happening and increasing the amount of restrictions placed on legal marriages (more marriage = bad). Marriage was recrafted as a tool to wage a legal war against the federal government and influence liquor laws without blatantly violating their supposed values for separation of church and state.

To argue for the transformation of Home Missions into Social Service, the 1913 report began to pin other social ills to “whiskey traffic,” from “white slavery” to “child labor,” specifically blaming industry titans like John D. Rockefeller (1913 proceedings 75). Defending the “Homeland” now encompassed more than just converting Native and immigrant souls by enrolling them in marriage preparation, the motion broadened the purview of the committee: “Whereas” liquor and other social problems threaten the marriage institution, “be it resolved that” Social Service will address “such wrongs which curse society today, and call loudly for our help” (1913 proceedings 75). By the following year, the committee was able to articulate the primary concern that brought together all of their concerns under the umbrella of Social Service (even though it uses the term “institution”—a rule, norm, or belief—in the way that I would define the term “organization”—the group of people who enforce that rule):

As a social institution embodying the divine ideal and responsible for its fulfillment in all the sections and activities of human life, the Church imposes its standards upon all other social institutions: (1) The family it protects by insisting upon the single standard of purity and health, and by maintaining everywhere Christ's limitation of divorce.

(1914 proceedings 37)

New to this rebranded definition of marriage is a focus on "purity and health." In the Home Missions Board era, marriage was an inherently strong moral example to nonbelievers, and the only threats to strong marriages were entertaining temptations that would distract from participation in the family unit. In the Social Service era, we see new categories for marriages introduced: marriages that start with hasty, drunk decisions; marriages that involve "impure" participants (meaning those who have contracted an STD); or marriages that end in divorce.

In the years leading up to the federal enactment of prohibition in 1920, the Social Service Commission used temperance as a moral panic that drastically amplified their missions efforts in all other areas that they were already actively evangelizing, and the urgent shift in tone is clear in the new reports from 1914-1919. "Unrestricted immigration" remains a "DANGER to American institutions" (1914 proceedings 307). Commending themselves for the success of converting the "Five Civilized Tribes" to Baptist doctrine, they charge missionaries with converting who they believed to be the remaining half of the "330,000 Indians in the United States," specifically focusing on "wild" but "wealthy" tribes like the Pawnee (1914 proceedings 307). Missionaries were given the singular goal of abolishing the space of the "saloon" before it could replace the church as the "social center" for the "Indian," who "is still our ward" (1915 proceedings 82-83; 1919 proceedings 78).

Interestingly, though, marriage was rapidly returned to its previous form as soon as the 18th amendment banned the sale of liquor in 1920 and the committee celebrated the abolition of the saloon. The celebration comes with a grim reminder of the importance of marriage, without which "the very foundations of our social order crumble," and how it is continually threatened by the entertainment forms found in urban areas, matching the organizational rhetoric of marriage prior to the rising popularity of whiskey (1920 proceedings 124). Replacing alcohol as the primary threat is the film industry:

The motion picture, as now conducted, is undoubtedly another cause that contributes to this sad condition [...] Nearly every film put upon the screen contains somewhere evil suggestion, calculated at first to bring the blush of modesty and virtue to the cheek and then to remove it and bring in its stead the flush of passion and the blanching purpose

to do wrong. Many of the films are based on the “eternal triangle” and the suggestions of disregard if not open breach of the marital relation.

(1920 proceedings 126)

Even though they are mocked by local newspapers for their disdain of cinema, the committee remained committed to enacting stronger censorship laws, as well as divorce laws and stricter legal requirements for pre-marital STD testing, as evident in the next few years of reports.

Many reports, which inform the “Whereas” statement, result in the publication of resolutions, which inform the “Resolved” statement, and that clarify and promote the stance of the SBC. The cycle of presenting reports and passing resolutions repeats itself throughout the 1920s and 1930s, regenerating and fixating on a new moral panic each time a new social trend emerges. Dance halls replace movie theaters, and so on. In each iteration, marriage serves as the seemingly unending and unchanging institution, always the foundation of a civil society, and always under threat of moral decay. Its rhetorical leverage here is its appearance of institutionality: the SBC can target and attack whatever it desires because it is protected under the guise of that ever-permanent marriage institution. The generic cycle enables the SBC to sustain a rotating agenda while spreading their missions efforts into increasingly broad public arenas: from churches to schools, Eastern to Western states, state to federal legislation, and global missions efforts.

Conclusion

In rhetoric and writing studies, the archive has served as a site of institutional critique by assisting projects that deconstruct identities and rebuild communities. For example, the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn are a site for retroactivist efforts to “compose and appropriate versions of the past toward present identification and politics” (Bessette 3). Violent representations of the past are denaturalized and remixed to “co-opt, challenge, modify, and replace these versions of the past with complex, experiential, and queer compositions” (Bessette 11). However, where Bessette and the LHA productively deploy archival records to foster connections across the past and present, recreating old and new possibilities for (dis)identification, this essay follows the lead of our volunteer work at Church Clarity to use archives to challenge claims and hold church leaders accountable for what they say—deconstructing any possibility of (dis)identificatory connections. Through a rhetorical analysis of SBC archival records, potential religious trauma of queer and trans members is reduced and in some cases prevented altogether by intervening in arguments that church leaders are actively making today, forcing policymakers to answer for recycled fallacies of institutionality.

Instituting a particular vision of reality and projecting it onto non-believers was not and is not easy work for SBC leaders, who seek to establish and maintain onto-epistemic hierarchies that

typify and sort members into categories of existence with an ascribed set of acceptable behaviors or styles of inhabiting the world. García defines settler archives like the SBHLA as those that were “invented and placed strategically to help attune the world to both ideal representations of knowledge, understanding, and humanity and to the promises of salvation, progress, and development” (125). Specifically, they make possible one’s “humanization only by their conversion to Christianity, civilization, and/or modernization” (García 125). He argues that it is the rhetorician’s task to unravel how church-settlers have “used language to disseminate and sell ideas rhetorically,” how such ideas have traveled through the crafting of various institutions, “economic, authorial, political, and knowledge,” and how such institutions have established “structural logics of management” and “control” that persist today (García 124). Envisioning our own archival research as institutional critique affords feminist and queer coalitions like Church Clarity the opportunity to disrupt the “affective inheritances” of contemporary arguments. In this case, the “histories of thought and activism that precede us” are actually violent institutionalized genres that are continuing to enact religious trauma by repeatedly “[moving] through moments of reinvention” (Ahmed 47-8; Cram 15). Archival research is one method of performing institutional critique and is a vital option for coalitions who have access and/or means to trace the archival records of organizations. If it is the archival rhetor’s task to investigate how ideas have been disseminated and sold through language and action, then it is the institutional rhetor’s task to shine a light on what/who is excluded when organizations circulate rhetorical appeals to their own permanence, stability, or universality—to expose, delegitimize, and unmake the visions of reality installed through their institutions.

Institutional rhetorics (IR), then, is not just a subfield that studies how groups of people persuade each other to act, but is also a study of the generic processes of institutionalization that help certain rhetorics stick around and others dissipate. Skinnell recently argued that too many rhetorical studies of institutions define them solely based on the context of the academic study and apply no other substantial definition. Here, I adopt a definition of institutions as the rules, norms, and beliefs that describe reality and determine legitimate actions in an organization, which is largely influenced by organizational theorists (Alvesson; Barley and Tolbert; Brown, et al.). This definition can be adopted by other studies of genres that travel in organizations and that are continually reused often enough that they become institutionalized in that organization’s stock of acceptable knowledge. This move opens IR scholars to new questions that we should be asking, such as: How are claims to institutionality also rhetorical? What happens to its members when an organization calls a genre an “institution?” What are the material and ideological conditions of working with and living in an organization that universalizes its genres as “institutions?” There are real consequences often felt by an organization’s most vulnerable members. How leaders sell this idea, not just once but many times throughout one’s life, as a necessary requirement for successful participation in a particular organization is of great importance. I seek to push IR scholarship to be able to account for the social context at the moment in which a particular genre is institutionalized, as well as account for the genre’s ability to remain institutionalized in an organizational field over long periods of time, reappearing in many new and recurring contexts.

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Mentorship and Interpersonal Advocacy

“BLACKstudies”: a Contemplatively Poetic Response to Alexis Pauline Gumbs (& Audre Lorde)

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“The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that we form those ideas by which we pursue our magic and make it realized. This is poetry as illumination.”

--Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” 1977

Prologue (or an artist’s statement)

I.

Although written six years ago, I recently read Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ (2017) “17th Floor” oracle essay wherein she contextualizes Audre Lorde’s teaching experiences as Lorde expresses them in her 1974 “Blackstudies” poem. According to Gumbs, Lorde’s “Blackstudies” should be “activated as a resource for current Black and Brown lesbian educators . . . who bring complexity

and nuance to their teaching setting” (375). Let me explain: When Lorde wrote her introspective “Blackstudies” poem, she was teaching composition in CUNY’s¹ CAPS² program wherein she navigated racism, sexism, and homophobia, while contending with such outside of her white cis-male dominated classroom. “High up on the seventeenth floor, Audre Lorde struggled to feel grounded,” says Gumbs, who then asks: “How could the work she was addressing in this classroom interact with the real world (literally) below?” (379).

Although Lorde was situated in a classroom with her “enemies”—armed white police officers and officers in training—when she composed “Blackstudies,” confessing: “I do not know whose words protected me / whose tales or tears prepared me / for this trial on the 17th floor” (155; part. 2, stanza II, lines 1-3), Lorde’s poem was inspired by the relationship she cultivated with the Black creative writing students she taught at Mississippi’s Tougaloo College in 1968. In an interview with Adrienne Rich, Lorde explains it thusly:

The ways in which I was on the line in Tougaloo . . . I began to learn about courage, I began to learn to talk. This was a small group and we became very close. I learned so much from listening to people. The only thing I had was honesty and openness. And it was absolutely necessary for me to declare, as terrified as I was, as we were opening to each other, ‘The father of my children is white.’ And what that meant in Tougaloo to those young Black people then, to talk about myself openly and deal with their hostility, their sense of disillusionment, to come past that, was very hard. (“Interview,” *Sister Outsider* 90)

I quote Lorde at length here because the relationships that Black lesbian women foster with their students—if they are open and honest—most likely will be rife with hostility and disillusionment. These associations, built between Black (and/or white) students and their queer Black teachers, cultivated inside and juxtaposed against a white cis-male heteronormative America hell-bent on annihilating Black and brown folks, ain’t easy. “I am afraid / that the mouths I feed will turn against me,” writes Lorde (“Blackstudies” 154; pt 1. stz 5, ll., 1-2). Thus, Lorde’s poem is a study in being a queer Black teacher. As such, says Gumbs, today’s queer, Black teachers reading Lorde’s works (or psalms) should *turn on, energize, animate—put into praxis*—Lorde’s theories so they might find a balm in their own Gileadean environments.

Gumbs models such engagement by “activating” Lorde’s poem via an abecedarian oracle through which she (and Lorde, the holy ghost) instructs readers to think of a challenge they encounter in their teaching, such as *homophobia*, then to reflectively read the “H” section of her oracle (375). There, teacher-readers find inspirational thought—a prophecy, a foreshadowing—directing them on ways to counter that challenge and/or suggestions regarding how to protect their

1 City University of New York

2 College of Police Science

spirit as they confront such in and out of class oppressions. Gumbs employs each letter of the alphabet, excepting letters “X” and “Z,” and composes a divine message intended to support queer teachers drudging through the trenches as Lorde did.

My poem, therefore, titled after Lorde’s “Blackstudies,” is an honest, open, declaration of the barriers between me and my Black students that threaten to thwart my teacherly self and practice; it answers Gumbs’ call to exercise theory—to trust in the Lorde. However, instead of galvanizing Lorde’s work as Gumbs instructs, I activate Gumbs’ “17th Floor” essay. I employ her abecedarian approach, including letters “X” and “Z,” to stimulate and transcribe my own teacherly self-reflection, thereby composing a poem addressing the classroom challenges I have faced.

II.

I am a Black lesbian woman. I have been teaching composition to Black and brown students for over 20 years. I currently teach writing courses at a public HBCU where anti-Black racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and ageism are as present as they are in historically white institutions. However, the anti-Black, sexist, and homophobic attitudes and behaviors I encounter amongst my Black and brown students (and colleagues) dispirit me more than white folks’ oppressions—as evidenced in my poem’s first line. It answers Gumb’s question: *“How can the fact that you are not the first educator to face contradictions and transformations sustain you?”* (376) to which I respond, “it doesn’t,” and explicate my answer via a poem penned as fluidly as Kanye writes his *curses in cursive*³

I am a witness that poetry, says Audre Lorde, comes out of “an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling” (“Poetry,” *Sister Outsider* 37). It is only through poetry, therefore, I could best “respect [my] feelings and transpose them into a language so they can be shared” (37), and I certainly want, I need, to share my feelings about teaching Black and brown students—born and/or coming to age in a 21st century where colorblind racism, pinkwashing politics, and pseudo-decolonization so visually impairs them—they see me an impediment to their knowing selves.

How do I engage Black and brown students in a liberatory praxis when they recognize me as their enemy? How do I help them to write themselves into a liberatory existence when my writing curriculum doesn’t sit right with them? How do I talk about these barriers—many of which have been manufactured to fragment our togetherness—with Black and brown students who only hear white noise coming from my mouth?

My poem records these emotions and feelings, thus “address[ing] the barriers between us (me) and *that* future” [emphasis mine]—that future generation of Black and brown students drunk

3 phrase borrowed from verse four, line four of Kanye West’s “Otis,” a song he produced on his 2011 *Watch the Throne* album with rapper Jay-Z.

on a cis-male heteronormative capitalist patriarchy that renders me useless. And though I know I am not useless, I often feel worlds apart from my students—a distance exceeding the expected generational gaps and classroom hierarchies naturally separating us from one another. Our disconnections can seem so wide I feel depressed—as I imagine Lorde occasionally felt. But! as quiet as it's kept in (traditional) Blacks studies, *still we rise*⁴; thus, my poem acknowledges, too, the coalition of folks on whose shoulders I stand, whose spirited faith propels me to keep on keep-in on even when the fact that I am not the first educator to face contradictions and transformations doesn't (immediately) *feel* sustaining.

III.

But it is, isn't it? I would not be able to enter the classroom day after day, semester after semester if I were not entering with a coalition of folks allied toward a united action. Thus, my poem, directly in “part three: M” and indirectly throughout, names family members, mentors, teachers, and literary figures—some of whom are ancestors—who have (and are) *my burst of light*.⁵ I carry their wisdom and their prayers with me; wherever I am, so, too, are they. I name my coalition via citation practices forwarded by Katherine McKittrick who invites Black writers to use citation practices as spaces wherein they (we) narrate “what we do with books and ideas . . . how we arrange and effectuate the ideas that make ideas” (15). According to McKittrick, whose (2021) *Dear Science: and Other Stories* also centers Black studies, traditional citation practices “acknowledge the shared and collaborative intellectual praxis that makes our research what it is” (15-16). However, as marginalized text, she explains, while citations showcase and centralize the knowledge Black scholars have mastered, they fail to reveal “how we came to know imperfect and sometimes intelligible but always hopeful and practical ways to live this world as black” (17).

“What if citations offer advice?” asks McKittrick (19). “What if citations are suggestions for living differently? What if some citations counsel how to refuse what they think we are?” (19). The copious notes⁶ ending my poem, therefore, answer McKittrick's call to reveal the lessons that cannot be contained within my poem, to share the *other* stories, the “how I got ovuh” stories, the *whose* I am stories. They also detail my relationship with and/or admiration for particular people and their practices—some of them academic, others secular and spiritual. Traditionally, my endnotes also provide context for my poem and include the questions Gumbs poses in her “17th

4 *And Still I Rise* is the title of Maya Angelou's third collection of poems, which includes a poem of the same name, published in 1978—a year before I was born. “Still I Rise” as well as “Phenomenal Woman,” also included in that collection, is two of Angelou's most popular poems.

5 *A Burst of Light* is the title of Audre Lorde's 1988 collection of essays, which includes the most inspired “I Am Your Sister: Black Women Organizing across Sexualities.” Considering these current times, wherein cis-gendered Black women are fighting against transgendered Black women, Lorde's essay ought to be required reading—a national book read (if the conservatives would stop banning books and closing libraries)—that might unite Black women under one coalition fighting against the other who oppresses them (us) as one.

6 My poem submission originally included footnotes, which I believe would be more accessible to readers like me who prefer to read notes on the same page as the main text accompanying them. However, because the footnotes distracted from the poem's structure, I conceded to rearranging them as endnotes.

Floor” oracle essay my poem answers.

Moreover, while McKittrick’s work proposes alternative knowledge by way of citation narratives as “alternative stories” through which Black writers write against the empire (18), my poem acknowledges alternative epistemologies via counterhegemonic composing styles I borrow from Black feminist, Black Arts Movement writers like Ntozake Shange⁷, Nikki Giovanni, and Sonia Sanchez who have written against English language standards. As a matter of fact, I borrow Sanchez’s Blackening, if you will, of the Japanese tanka and haiku; instead of these 7th and 17th century poetic forms being about seasons and nature, their subjects are of the Black experience and are composed in a Black English inclusive of the grammatical structures that make it a language.

With all that said, I neither can write nor teach, neither address nor dismantle the barriers between us (me) and *that* future without a coalition of folks who inspire my activism, which is why I position the Latin “et al.” (and others) after my name as author, for my poem “BLACKstudies” is *our* poem; it is a collaborative project I am empowered to compose (and ultimately publish) because of the genius and courage of our ancestor/grandparent writers, teachers, thinkers, and activists. I am because they are. It really does take a village—a united state, despite america’s splintering spirit.

part one: A-E⁸

the fact I am not the first educator to face contradictions & transformations does not sustain me⁹;

for the fact of my **Blackness**¹⁰ challenges me to show up for & be present to

7 Shange’s respelling of words like “enuf” instead of “enough” in works like her 1976 choreopoem, *for colored girls who considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, have so influenced my writerly self—inviting me to rewrite myself via alternative spellings, abbreviations, and punctuation marks that allow me to boldly Blacken white pages. Her works, predating text messaging shorthand, is a study in Black English, in Black Arts, in Black being; it is a study in Black voice significant to Black narrative.

8 This section of my poem responds to Gumbs’ questions: “How is your classroom more and less fraught than the classrooms Audre faced? How can the fact that you are not the first educator to face contradictions and transformations sustain you?” (376); “What is the Blackness of your challenge as an educator? What cannot be known? What must be transformed? Can you inhabit the Blackness of your teaching?” (377); “What are the experiences that you had as a child, or as a student, that show up as challenges in your teaching?” (378); “How do you create safe space in your classroom?”; and “How does your classroom interact with the rest of the world that your students must navigate during and after your time with them?” (379).

9 Gumbs’ question: “How can the fact that you are not the first educator to face contradictions and transformations sustain you?” (376) garnered an “It doesn’t” response from me. At that very moment, I knew I had written the first line of this poem, for I have been barely managing my feelings re: the current corporate classroom situation and its 21st century consumerist learner in whom I continue to deposit, but from whom I rarely receive a return beyond loose regurgitations of course material and lecture. (And when I use the term “deposit,” I don’t mean like Paulo Freire’s (1970) banking concept of education but deposit as in “pouring my energy into”—until my well is dry.) While being able to see myself in others and knowing upon whose shoulders I stand have often comforted me as a Black American lesbian woman, I don’t find sustenance in Lorde’s classroom experiences—at least not in her “Blackstudies” poem. I feel, instead, fatigued.

10 Here, I am referencing Frantz Fanon’s (1952) “The Fact of Blackness.” Like Fanon, who contemplates his Black personhood against a world of white dehumanization, I think about my Blackness in relationship to my Black students, many of whom have drunk the Kool-Aid and prescribe to a whiteness politick that mummies and mules me.

Black¹¹ students who don't see the Lorde in me
but find their savior in the white man department chair
who'd rather manufacture peace
than hold students accountable to their higher power;¹²
& tho I try to have mercy on my traitorous students—
to give them grace
to pardon their sins
to forgive them for not knowing what they do—
cause I know their childhood aint been my childhood:
supported by middle class luxuries¹³

-
- 11 I initially hesitated to boldface the term “Black,” which I also capitalize throughout the poem, because I didn’t want the boldface type to distract readers. However, after many conversations w/a graduate student re: the term “Black” and the language debates re: capitalizing it and using the term at all, I opted to boldface “Black” because I want readers to hear “**Black**” as though a Xhosa-speaking south African woman clicked the term out her throat.
- 12 At the historically Black university where I teach, the department chair is a well-meaning enuf white man. However, in his desire to help Black students, his efforts often undermine the Black women teachers who hold students accountable for following the course syllabus, class procedures, and departmental mandates. Often, Black students, both graduate and undergraduate, have complained to the chair re: my academic standards—which they read and agreed upon as evidenced on the syllabus forms I require they sign and return to me at the semester’s start. Instead of encouraging students “to rise to the occasion,” as I often tell them, our white man department chair has gone as far as to supporting student withdrawal from a course and offering that course again during an off semester under him as a directed study. What happens to Black studies when white folks direct and manage HBCU programs and departments? What leg do I have to stand on when my Black and brown students see in me a roadblock and see a savior in the white department chair—and in other white teachers who pass our students through systems because they either pity them or are afraid of them? I struggle w/this: w/holding Black and brown students to a particular standard while they participate in and navigate through an academy whose curriculum duplicates racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, ableist ways of being. How do I support my Black and brown students w/out giving them handouts? Or should I give them handouts? *Here! You get an A! You get an A! It’s freedom time; this is reparation.*
- 13 My first post doctorate teaching gig was at Florida A&M University [FAMU], where I graduated w/my bachelor’s and master’s degrees. It was 2012, and four years prior, iPhone had just recently become smart; everyone had it (or the Android), including students. Such material possession, at least to me, was a symbol of financial ability—like Air Jordans in the mid-80s. Unfortunately, I had not yet been introduced to bell hooks (outside of her scholarly contributions to composition theory) nor had I read any Karl Marx or Antonio Gramsci. And although Kanye West’s 2004 “All falls down” had put it in my face: “It seem we livin’ the American Dream / But the people highest up got the lowest self-esteem / The prettiest people do the ugliest things / For the road to riches and diamond rings / We shine because they hate us, / floss ‘cause they degrade us / We tryna buy back our 40 acres / And for that paper, look how low we’ll stoop / Even if you in a Benz, you still a nigga in a coupe” (verse 4, lines 9-16), I still didn’t comprehend nor had compassion for my Black students who entered the classroom ill-prepared: no textbook, no paper, no sense (or very little) re: college readiness. It wasn’t until a student brought to my attention her need for a book voucher that would enable her to buy her textbooks that I realized from what my middle-class privileges shielded me: Although Black students were attending this four-year university, most of them did not have parents who were footing the bill. As a matter of fact, during one of my personal narrative writing activities, one student revealed her houselessness at the semester’s start. I had no idea. As a college student my students’ age, I had no concept re: student loans, textbook vouchers, or Federal Pell Grants. As a result, I did not initially understand nor have compassion for my Black students. That was my first lesson re: class differences in the Black college classroom; we are not a monolithic people.

privileging home libraries,
club affiliations,
paid college tuition, & summer vacations
inside a two-parent household showing me
Black is beautiful
practicing **Black** love
relying on **Black** ways of knowing
because they believed in **Black** genius,
Black family tradition, & kinship
to raise children to be young, gifted, & **Black**
w/souls intact¹⁴

to turn the other cheek
to think before we speak
to be mindful of our planting
cause what we sow is what we reap—
the devil has been busy stealing our children
their consciousness, their **Blackness**,

out of my hands¹⁵

- 14 The original line of Weldon Irvine's (1969): "When you're young, gifted, and Black, your soul's intact" was sang by Nina Simone. It was inspired by Black playwright, Lorraine Hansberry whose 1969 autobiographical play is titled *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. A college girlfriend of mine introduced me to Nina Simone via a homemade mixed CD of what she considered Simone's greatest works. "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" was included, and although I knew very little of Simone's biography and civil rights activism then, in her voice, I felt the struggle—both her own and of the Black children of the 1960s for whom she sang. In another verse, Simone sang, "There's a world waiting for you," which is the world for which I endeavor to prepare my students who cannot (yet) envision the world as I see it and have seen it. When I taught English Language Arts at a predominantly Haitian high school in Miami, Florida, prior to being a university professor, I played Nina Simone on a loop, so much so, my students would enter the classroom asking to hear "Mississippi Goddam" (1964). As a college professor, although I don't have the classroom space nor extended time to play Nina Simone as I had, I do integrate Simone's music into my instruction by way of my Martin Luther King unit, during which time students listen to and analyze her (1968) "Why? The King of Love is Dead." If I don't share Nina in my composition classroom, I don't know if my students will ever know her, and Black students should know Nina Simone.
- 15 According to Gumbs, Audre Lorde was challenged to create safe classroom spaces for her students while preparing them for an unsafe world of intersecting oppressions (378). "She engaged in this battle even in her own nightmares about how demons of White supremacy wanted to steal her children, and the blackness of her hands," says Gumbs (378). I feel this so regularly—but my Black students claim a wokeness that resembles sleep deprivation more than it does critical consciousness. White supremacy is so covert it's slicker than oil, outwitting Black students whose elders and ancestors are noted tricksters.

convincing them they exist in a post racial America¹⁶

where my layered **Blackness** meeting **Black** across **Black**

isn't a rainbow¹⁷

but a stain upon their white-washed dream.

I've grown too tired of trying to uplift them

they squander the gifts their ancestors gifted them

the systems between us keeps me from reaching them

& creating safe spaces aint gone protect them¹⁸ —a brave composition is needed.

-
- 16 As a first-year composition professor at FAMU during the semester when Trayvon Martin was murdered and the #blacklivesmatter hashtag was evolving into a national movement, I situated my first-year writing curriculum with in Martin Luther King's rhetorical genius, inviting students to read and think beyond King's popular 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. Alas, because Barack Obama was serving as the U.S. President, more of my Black students than not attached themselves to the notion that we were living in a post racial America. As a result, my students were not interested in studying the civil rights movement—and told me so. These born-in-1994-18-year-old students' concept of relative American history dated as far back as 2001, when Al-Qaeda terrorists supposedly attacked the United States. I was at my wits end, but more than that, and perhaps hyperbolically so, I felt heart broken. *How could these Black students who were witnessing a modern Emmett Till lynching be so blasé about civil rights?* While I understood their apparent apathy re: a Martin Luther King they felt was overstudied, students told me they were uninterested in civil rights all together because those movements happened so long ago. My students' expressed disdain for studying King's rhetoric in relationship to current happenings felt like a personal affront. Admittedly, after teaching that class of students, I posted Matthew 7:6 on my office door.
- 17 In Gumbs' (2020) *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*, she wrote about the Melon-headed whale she describes as being layered in Blackness. Her exact words: "layered Blackness where Black meets Black across itself as Black" (133) are inspired by Toni Morrison, whose Pilate character from *Song of Solomon* (1977) describes such Blackness as a rainbow (133). I want my Black students to see in themselves a Blackness so beautiful, they "may as well be a rainbow" (Morrison as cited in Gumbs, 133).
- 18 I bought into traditional safe spaces until having read Zeus Leonardo and Ronald K. Porter's (2010) "Pedagogy of Fear: Toward a Fanonian Theory of 'Safety' in Race Dialogue." In their article, Leonardo and Porter claim creating safety around public race dialogue protects only white students while harming Black and brown ones. They advocate, therefore, for brave spaces where "risk discourse about race" acknowledges the "already here" presence of violence, thus moving students toward a more actively progressive discussion re: race (139). After having read Leonardo and Porter's essay, I moved beyond traditional safe spaces and informed my Black students of my intent to create brave spaces. Although Leonardo and Porter's essay is grounded in race dialogue, as a composition classroom in an HBCU, most of my class discussions about writing are race centered. Thus, I aim to cultivate a radical classroom environment where Black students feel a "safety" that enables a brave thinking and being that disrupts white male heteronormativity. Unfortunately, it seems many of my Black students, have a narrow concept of safe spaces believing them to be environs wherein I, the teacher, must manage their feelings re: teacher feedback, assessment, and instruction. Students' expectations for such "safety," align closely w/ coddling and/or entitlement that doesn't serve them—and sometimes, results in a classroom experience that isn't safe for me. Despite my efforts at constructivist teaching, supported by the buffering model of effective teacher feedback, some students lack the vulnerability and valor required to learn. As a result, I have experienced students' clap-back-callout-cancel behavior, which is a violence students often don't realize they've committed against me. If Black-on-Black crime were a real phenomenon, then I've experienced it most in the classroom, especially in the online classroom.

part two: F-L¹⁹

I have no practice
 grounding my teacherly work
 in the sound of here—
 in a sonic consciousness
 enabling my presence²⁰

for the god in me
 is an angry god of floods
 promising rainbows
 layered in **Black**, meeting **Black**
 across **Black**²¹ toward **Black** love

but like sea lions
 claiming their territories

I must claim tenure²²

- 19 This section of my poem, made up of five tankas, a five-line, 31-syllable Japanese poem—which I learned to write *Black* after reading Sonia Sanchez’s poetry—addresses the following questions (and one statement) Gumbs poses: “Does your fear before class feel like a fear of falling or a fear of not being able to climb the mountain of work ahead of you?” (380); “What are the gods of your classroom?”; “How often does what we feel in our hearts make sense in our heads?”; “Do you find yourself taking the journey of each student personally?” (381); “How can your classroom become a place where justice is possible and judgment is suspended long enough for transformation (justice) to occur?”; “In the face of transformation, so much must be unlearned” (382); and “What do students learn about how communication works when they are with you?” (383). While this section addresses these questions, the first three tankas are inspired by Gumbs’ *Undrowned*.
- 20 In her “be present” chapter (*Undrowned* 67-72), Gumbs discusses the presence of the Indus River dolphin who she says “live[s] in sound . . . echolocating day and night . . . ask[ing] where, again where, again where” (68). She then beautifully writes: “The poem of the Indus [R]iver dolphin is the ongoing sound of here, a sonic consciousness of what surrounds them, a form of reflective presence. Here” (68). However, in a previous chapter titled, “practice,” Gumbs asks: “What are your dorsal practices? What evolutionary repetitions have you cultivated to move through oceans? What are the ones you need to cultivate for the waves moving you now?” (45). Those chapters considered together brought me back to my 2012 dissertation about a contemplative high school English curriculum grounded in mindfulness practice that I’ve since neglected, and I questioned myself: Kendra, at what point will you, the teacher become the grasshopping student again? What happened to your practice? And how has neglecting your mindfulness practice contributed to the weariness you feel navigating the oppressive school environment?
- 21 See endnote xvi
- 22 In her “learn from conflict” chapter (*Undrowned* 83-86), Gumbs describes how sea lions fight each other for territory, repeatedly threatening each other by way of “ritualized postures” also called “tenure” (84). I have thrice been on a tenure track, spanning over a 10-year period and have recently, July 2023, earned it; needless to say, I cringed when I read Gumbs’ overt criticism of the academy and its players. Admittedly, and most likely because

& my hands aint strong enuf

to hold my students & me

my hands are tired

from juggling judgment & love

& presumed justice

wearing my whole body down

threatening transformation

if only they'd learn

to unknow what they've been taught

to believe my **Black**

will lead them back to their **Black**

into **Black** togetherness²³ —

might I be able to communicate a communion that frees them.

I had been holding that posture for so long, I have been a sea lion. However, I am not fighting other professors. I am fighting the system, which requires *both* my hands. As a result, sometimes my students become collateral damage because I don't have hands enuf to hold them *and* the things they carry.

- 23 Here, I am calling in the great poet Mari Evans, who asks, in her 1970 "Who Can Be Born Black" poem: "Who / can be born Black / and not / sing / the wonder of it / the joy / the / challenge / And /to come together / in a coming togetherness" (93). It is one of my favorite poems, one I occasionally recite to my Black students—who I believe should memorize poems; they should have at least one poem they carry w/them reminding them of their Black genius, and Evans' poem is one of the ones. "Who Can Be Born Black" brings tears to my eyes as I read it and recall all the Black genius, Black spirit, Black audacity that enabled my existence. I want my Black students to feel all of that when I recite Evans' poem to them. I learned of Evans when I was an 8th grader attending my first Maya Angelou lecture. According to Angelou, Mari Evans was one of her favorite poets; she became one of my favorites, too.

part three: M²⁴

Roll Call:

Choling Bryant²⁵Donald Bryant²⁶Rose McKenney Jones²⁷Mary Bryant²⁸Tywana Greene²⁹

-
- 24 This verse of my poem responds to Gumbs' section, "M is for mother (my my my)" wherein she asks: "*How does mothering show up as a place of mythmaking, measurement, muting, and messages in your own teaching situation?*" (384). According to Gumbs, Lorde is metaphorical mother to the students she teaches as evidenced "all over the poem 'Blackstudies'" (383). I, too, often feel like Mother to my Black students—a result of the mothering I received from kin/folks who nurtured me w/what theologian civil rights activist Howard Thurman (1958) terms "mother love." And so, this verse is a libation, if you will, to the kin/folk—grand/parents, aunts, teachers, and mentors who inspirited my humanity. This roll call verse also acknowledges "those who hold me accountable, who expect me to be who I need to become. . . . [who] ignore[e] the lies I tell myself about myself" (Gumbs, *Undrowned* 23). In her expressed gratitude for her teachers, which is also what "part three: M" is, Gumbs writes: "Even in my resistance I am grateful for you all. For the love you are teaching me, deep, Black, and full. For the nurturance, push, and example. What you learned by facing your own death. What you learned in your drowning is my breath" (23-24). *What you learned in your drowning is my breath*. Yes! I am because of these folks listed here—some elders, others ancestors. àçè and praise God!
- 25 Mommy. My mother is my first master teacher whose mother love continues to support me way into my adulthood. In 1969, she integrated a predominantly white elementary school in Miami, Florida and retired from there after having taught majority 3rd grade classes. When I was in elementary school, Mommy gave me my first rhyming dictionary and thesaurus, and when I was in 7th grade, she took me to hear Maya Angelou lecture after I found in her my muse. My mother has been my biggest advocate and cheerleader, reminding me, still, to keep my eyes on the prize.
- 26 Daddy. My daddy was a social worker who predicted I'd be a career student and told me I was a revolutionary with no cause. I am living to prove the latter wrong. Nonetheless, his mother love regularly cooked dinner, nursed me in Mommy's absence, and insisted neither of us—my sisters nor I—be satisfied with C grades, for anyone can be satisfactory, he said. When I was in high school, Daddy attended a parent-teacher conference with Mommy and me wherein he defended (and demanded) my right to privacy after the white man school counselor attempted to suspend me for writing and passing a letter in class he read without my consent. By the time Daddy was through w/him, I knew that white man school counselor would think twice before threatening school suspension upon another Black girl. Daddy passed when I was 22 years old; he was 55. I've written an essay about his Black feminist spirit on my blog site: *drknbryant.com*.
- 27 Grandma Rose. My maternal grandmother absolutely belonged to herself as Alice Walker (2010) encourages readers to do in her poem "Lost." Grandma Rose was born Pilate, but changed her name post high school. She was a single mother to four children, and, before becoming an x-ray technician, was a day's worker, paid \$7.50 + carfare per day. Grandma Rose collected elephants and tea pots, slept in a round bed, and decorated her house in Asian aesthetics. And at 60+ years old, she eloped while on a senior group bus trip to Las Vegas. Grandma Rose belonged to herself, indeed. I've written an essay about her, too, on my blog site: *drknbryant.com*.
- 28 Grandma Mary. My paternal grandma was the first entrepreneur I knew. She was, what we called then, a beautician, in Liberty City, Florida. Grandma seemed money rich: she owned several properties, drove a Lincoln, and traveled regularly; she and Granddaddy even went to Hawaii for one of their anniversaries when I was an elementary school student. Grandma's 12 siblings, who were from Tunis, TX, insisted on yearly family reunions where mother love flowed through great aunts and uncles and a host of nick-named cousins. Of the many things I remember about Grandma Mary, my clearest memory is of her pulling a pan out of the oven with her bare hands—a pan of dressing, I think (or maybe a poundcake). I swear Bill Withers (1971) wrote "Grandma's Hands" for her.
- 29 aka Cookie, my auntie, my mother's baby sister, who has also regularly cheered my success, just as much as Mommy has

Yasmin Greene³⁰

Anita Bryant³¹

Persephone Taylor³²

Barbara Mesa³³

Karen Bullard³⁴

Maria Krane³⁵

Patricia Moore³⁶

Vernetta Clenace³⁷

Eddy Rodgers³⁸

Vickie Frazier-Williams³⁹

Doris Hart⁴⁰

30 aka Auntie Pump, my auntie, my mother's middle sister; she passed in 2015 at 59 years old.

31 aka Darlene, my auntie, my daddy's only sister. She took my twin sister and me to church, bible study, and vacation bible school, and regularly voluntold me for delivering the church welcome, reading the church announcements, and writing and reciting poems for various gatherings. She passed in 2022 at 68 years old.

32 Girl Scout Troop leader who treated (and still treats me) like her own.

33 fourth grade elementary school teacher who exposed me to poetry writing and assigned the first poem I wrote write, titled "Ants"; it won a blue ribbon at the Miami-Dade County Youth Fair & Exhibition.

34 my mother's colleague, who taught gifted students and was one of the first blue-Black women I can recall seeing who wore her hair natural and her lips fiery red. Whenever Ms. Bullard saw me sitting in my 5th grade class, she, an active member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., always told me how creative and smart I was. She's been rooting for me since I was in elementary school writing poems about ants.

35 my 7th grade journalism teacher—a Cuban woman who'd pass notes with me in class when I was too afraid to speak up. During Bill Clinton's Presidential Inauguration, which Mrs. Krane required my classmates and me to watch, I discovered Maya Angelou. Her reading of "On the Pulse of Morning" (1993) was mind-growing, so much so, Mrs. Krane gifted me Angelou's (1969) *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. I've been Angelou's student ever since as well as Alice Walker's whose (1982) *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* Mrs. Krane gifted me for my 8th grade "graduation." Mrs. Krane and I still exchange letters, but now I gift her books.

36 a mother-friend w/whom I became acquainted while on a middle school Black history trip to Atlanta, GA. I watched Mrs. Moore practice a loving-kindness to her two children (who were also on the trip) that seemed to be reserved for Rudy and Claire Huxtable. As a very involved school parent, Mrs. Moore selflessly extended her kindness and mother love to me whenever she saw me in school. She has been my mother-friend since.

37 a towering Black queer woman high school counselor who wore her natural afro shaped like a crown. Although I was not a student assigned to Ms. Clenace's roster, she tended to me every time I showed up at her office door. Ms. Clenace, who I called "Sister Clenace," introduced me to J. California Cooper, gifting me her (1984) *A Piece of Mine*. Sister Clenace knew I was lesbian before I did, gifting me April Sinclair's (1994) *Coffee Will Make You Black*, whose main character Stevie is so much like I am.

38 Grandma Rose's friend who also worked as an instructor at the high school I attended; she looked out for my sister and me, and I regularly stowed away in Mrs. Rodgers office in between classes and after school fretting about this and that teacher and/or assignment. When I graduated high school, Mrs. Rodgers told me I was a diamond in the rough, which first offended me; however, I have since come to understand the process required in refining diamonds.

39 a mentor-friend who attended the same church as I. Vickie used to sponsor church talent shows I participated in, and she graciously read my rudimentary poems—which was like a famous person reading them since she was a news reporter for South Florida's Channel 10 WPLG local news station. Vickie, too, has been rooting for me ever since.

40 a "talent scout" who managed the Miami-Dade ACT-SO [Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics] Competition in which I participated as a 11th and 12th grader. During ACT-SO rehearsals, Mrs. Hart

Patricia Daniels⁴¹

Tananarive Due⁴²

Genyne Boston⁴³

Margie Rauls⁴⁴

Gloria Taylor⁴⁵

Deborah Plant⁴⁶

Gurleen Grewal⁴⁷

required me and other competing students to perform in front of her and our peer audience, and she'd unapologetically tell us when, why, and how awful we might've performed. Mrs. Hart's brutal honesty about students' talents (or the lack thereof) was akin to Simon Cowell's; however, receiving such criticism as a high schooler inspired my ACT-SO peers and me to put in the kind of work that insisted on Mrs. Hart's rounds of applause. My expectations for my classroom students are undoubtedly informed by Mrs. Hart's expectations of my peers and me. Her honesty didn't embarrass; it ignited, and under her guidance, the Miami-Dade NAACP ACT-SO chapter often brought home medals from the national competition, including the third place one I earned in the original poetry category (1994).

- 41 Miami-Dade ACT-SO coach who celebrated my poetry. Mrs. Daniels' house, not too far from my parents', looks like Miami Gardens' Black Museum inside. It is filled with Black cultural artifacts from Black Cabbage Patch Kid dolls to copies of *Negro Digest*, Mammy replicas and hot irons; Black figurines are shelved on every other wall. Walking into Mrs. Daniels house is like walking into the National Museum of African American History and Culture's level three community galleries.
- 42 Black speculative fiction writer who was assigned my high school writing coach during the Miami-Dade NAACP ACT-SO Competition for which I placed first locally in its original poetry category, and, after Tananarive's mentoring, placed third nationally (1994). ACT-SO provided me my first national stage with seasoned writers who judged and advised my original poem, "De Chu' ch," written in a dialect mimicking Paul Laurence Dunbar's writing style. Tananarive Due, who at the time of my mentoring had shelved her then unpublished first novel (1995) *The Between*, talked with me about rejection letters and how many she had received—was receiving. Unconsciously (or maybe hopefully), she was preparing me for a writing career—one at which I am still grasping.
- 43 my undergraduate English teacher at FAMU, who, like Mrs. Hart, told me the truth about my writing. I was not as excellent a writer as my white middle and high school English teachers would have me to believe as I composed college papers riddled with subject verb agreement and verb tense mistakes, comma splices, and fragments. Dr. Boston encouraged me to mindfully think about my writing, which is a lesson I attempt to pass onto my own writing students. Dr. Boston, too, illustrated the significance of Black students attending HBCUs where teachers are surrogate aunts and uncles, for when my father passed while I was a graduate student at FAMU, Dr. Boston mourned w/me—tears and all, she bowed on her knees before me, and she mourned. Dr. Boston and I still exchange handwritten letters, and she often gifts me journals and pens.
- 44 my advanced grammar teacher at FAMU who challenged my intellectual self more than any other teacher I had met before. Dr. Rauls was a straight up, no nonsense teacher who required students to go to the chalk board and diagram sentences. She became disillusioned about Black students and the significance of grammar instruction quite early—before the turn of the 21st century—often debating w/me and other English teachers the irrelevance of it all. Dr. Rauls and I exchanged handwritten letters and she made the occasional phone call until her passing in 2020.
- 45 my neighbor who lives down the street from my mother. Glo became my friend after she brought a pot of chicken souse to my daddy's wake in 2002. During every holiday visit home since then, Glo invites me over for a cocktail. We laugh a lot, reminisce about parties my parents threw, and thank God.
- 46 my graduate school professor who exposed me to Africana spirituality, mindfulness practice, and (more of) Zora Neale Hurston. Dr. Plant is the most intellectual person I know, who encouraged me to go deeper into myself than I knew was possible. She also invited me to write a chapter essay for her (2010) *"The Inside Light": New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*, which became my first published work before earning a doctorate degree. Dr. Plant, who also edited Hurston's (2018) *Barracoön*, is a cerebral giant whose insistence on serious scholarship and mindfulness writing inspire my own.
- 47 my graduate school professor who directed my dissertation and taught me everything I know about contemplative pedagogy and Toni Morrison. Dr. Grewal, an Indian woman, is a Toni Morrison scholar who expresses a

part four: N-T⁴⁸

I am inside a nightmare of corporate education

where Black students aint required to master African-American literature

as long as they can afford tuition;

& does it really matter they can't recall a Black playwright?

have never read *The Color Purple*?

can't list three Toni Morrison novels?

& have no recollection of Sojourner Truth?⁴⁹

& I have ploughed thru public school's hidden curriculum

& planted Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, & June Jordan

& gathered **Black** history from Ptah Hotep⁵⁰ to Patrisse Cullors

loving-kindness and patience I am still growing to embody. I aim to apply her contemplative teaching practices to my own.

- 48 This section of my poem responds to Gumbs' questions: "*Are there aspects of your teaching situation that feel like a waking nightmare?*" (384); "*Are we over, outside, on?*" (384-385); "*Where are you?*" (385). According to Gumbs, where I am informs from *where, about what, and how*, I teach. "[T]he conditions of your teaching are specific in place and in time," writes Gumbs, "and are shaped by the particular places you come from philosophically, geographically, and physically" (385). In other words, teaching is intimate and personal. Gumbs also asks: "*What questions will you craft to protect and honor your spirit?*"; "*What will you be remembered for?*"; "*What do you need to say as an educator?*" (386); "*Is there a 'they' you feel separate from in your work as an educator?*"; and "*Is there something in your teaching setting that seems large enough to destroy you?*" (387).
- 49 In 2020, a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic, I was teaching a class of senior English students in a course called *Senior Seminar*. This course, designed as a survey course intended to assess students' knowledge of the various literary time periods to which they had been exposed throughout their college tenure, was populated by about eight Black cisgendered female students and one cisgendered white male student; about half of the female students identified as queer. Because we are situated in an HBCU, I thought I'd quiz my predominantly Black student class on their Black literary history; after all, each of them had already taken the required African-American Literature course. This quiz, which ended up being my course diagnostic determining how and with what materials I'd instruct the course, included questions like: *Name one Black playwright and her or his title work. Name a novel centered on religious ideas. Name an author from the Harlem Renaissance.* Excepting the obvious Langston Hughes response to the Harlem Renaissance question and the Tyler Perry response to the Black playwright, my Black students could not recall Black for most of the questions I posed. Instead, they called on writers and books like William P. Young's *The Shack* and C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. And when I asked about a children's author, one student named her favorite white-authored vampire series. To make matters worse, the one lone white male student in the class *did* recall Black for each of his responses, which did not make my Black students shamefully shrink; instead, they damn near dapped him up. When I expressed my disappointment with my Black students re: their Black negligence, they claimed to be so inundated with whiteness that even after attending an HBCU for four years and taking courses like *African-American Literature*, their first thoughts are still white-washed. They practically Kanye-shrugged it off and told me not to be mad at them; be mad at the system, they said. I am mad at both.
- 50 an Egyptian vizier—the highest official who serves the pharaoh. Ptah Hotep served in the Fifth Dynasty of Egypt and is credited for composing a literary manual, *The Teachings of Ptah Hotep*, instructing young men on behavior. This text, too, is considered by some scholars to be the oldest book in the world; for rhetoric and composition scholars, it provided the instruction for rhetoric that informed Greco-Roman ideas re: argumentation. I introduce Ptah Hotep and African rhetoric to my graduate students who take the *Practices in Contemporary Grammar & Rhetoric* course I teach. Although the course has been traditionally taught via a Greco-Roman lens, I begin with Africa, reminding my Black students that she is the cradle of civilization—the beginning of all intellectual genius.

& still, I aint the teacher my Black students want.

—

unapologetically **Black**

lesbian

middle-class

& religious

like when Celie met Shug & found God *in everything that is or ever was or ever will be*⁵¹

& if only I can get my **Black** students to get the white man off their eyeball

to see thru their third eye thru which they transcend a myopic wokeness

& dive into a critical consciousness clarifying their **Black** genius

then, will they know I love them?

& don't they know I love them?

that my red pen bleeding on their page is my offering—

a blood covenant securing us in an I-thou relationship promising transparency, truth, & presence?

that my love inspirits them to compose compositions as fluid as hieroglyphs inside pyramid walls?

that my love insists they know words as intimately as they know themselves—in spirit & in flesh?

that my love begs them to read & write themselves into an existence they were never intended to realize?

No. my Socratic inquiries are not a questioning of ur intelligence⁵²

51 direct quote from Alice Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple* (167). Undoubtedly, Shug Avery's conversation with Celie re: spirituality informs my own walk with God. Before reading Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning work, I, too, was Celie, imagining God as a white man I was trying to get off my eyeballs; sometimes I'm still throwing rocks (168). Nonetheless, Shug Avery is my spiritual teacher who I think of every time I see a fallen or severed tree, feeling like I might be bleeding, too (167). But, as I explain in (2016) "Heaven last all ways': Examining Celie's 'suchness' in Walker's *The Color Purple*" (122-132), ultimately, Celie's spirit—*her* Buddhist being—transforms herself and the novel's other characters. Thus, it is Celie's quiet compassion I strive to embody in and outside of the classroom. Each new year I teach, however, mustering compassion gets more difficult, which is probably why I reference Walker and *The Color Purple* throughout my instruction; they remind me to stay the course—to keep my eyes on the prize.

52 In the *Writing, Science and Technology* course I teach to STEM students, I invite them to compose a mid-term self-assessment letter wherein they specifically address their work ethic; they also compose questions to me re: their progress and my instruction. One student wrote to me in her assessment letter that she finds the questions I pose while commenting on her written assignments offensive. According to her, if she knew, for instance, that she should have written a long sentence as two shorter ones, then she would have, and so, my inquiries felt

but an invitation to ur wondering inside the in between

*love is or it aint; thin love aint love at all*⁵³

& I wonder after they graduate & have children themselves to raise

will they know what I have known & truthfully admit I loved them?

part five: U-W⁵⁴

when I resigned one year short of earning tenure⁵⁵

my mother, a former elementary school teacher who suggested I major in education after I told her I wanted a creative writing degree, said:

Daughter,

Remember—80% of ur work goes to the students you teach.

They are ur priority; they're the ones you aim to reach

& Mommy being Mommy, practiced what she preached

& put her students first

like a questioning of her intellect. To this student, and to many others who have referenced my commenting as “throwing shade,” my questions about their writing are not Socratic inquiries inviting them to think more deeply about their writing as they entered the revision stages but were efforts at making them feel inferior; they neither felt safe nor brave in my classroom. As a result, during next class session, and thereafter in every class I have since taught, I explain to students my intentions around posing questions when offering them feedback for their writing. While many of them expressed their “aha” moment re: my Socratic teaching methods, others, unfortunately, admitted to preferring I tell them exactly what to write over prompting their own thinking—to continue the banking system of education that got them thus far.

53 direct quote from Toni Morrison’s (1987) *Beloved* during a conversation Paul D is having with Sethe re: her murdering her daughter Beloved (164). This line is one of my favorites, for, in Toni Morrison fashion, it begs readers to theorize about love, particularly mother love, and to contemplate to what ends one might go to express love. This quote also invites readers—it invites me—to question how I love and to really consider love as love. despite to whom I am rendering it. “Love is or it ain’t,” says Sethe (164), which supports bell hooks’ ideas re: the fallacy in unconditional love she explicates in her (1999) *All about Love*.

54 This section of my poem responds to Gumbs’ questions: “*What is the collective you feel accountable to as an educator? The students? Your fellow educators? Your institution?*” (387); “*What are the visions you want to express and how must they be expressed for the victory?*”; and “*What needs to be changed in your approach to your work as an educator?*” (388) The last question is inspired by Gumbs’ exploration of Lorde’s (1989) essay, “Hugo Letter: On Generators and Survival.” In it, says Gumbs, Lorde discusses the transformative power of wind, having written, “but wind is our teacher” (388).

55 In 2016, after spending four years at FAMU, one year before going up for tenured associate professor, I resigned from its English Department. I had gotten so wrapped up in the university and department’s politicking that I lost sight of my classroom responsibilities and the students for whom I was accountable. When I first began teaching, Mommy told me teaching is innate, and as a teacher, I am responsible to my students first; neither the institution, nor my colleagues—both about whom I care—are my priorities. “Keep your eyes on the prize,” Mommy reminded me. The struggle continues.

she, a 3rd grade teacher integrating an all-white elementary school,
prioritized her predominantly white class, especially her **Black** students—
rarely there, but when present, holy visible
like the little **Black** girl for whom Mommy purchased a JC Penny brand white sweater
so she wouldn't have to keep coming to school in the dirty, disheveled one she wore;
& sometimes, before we can teach Black students to come to voice
thru arranged vocabulary & syntax
we must give them clean sweaters to wear—
warmth as secure as Maya Angelou's navy blue peacoat⁵⁶ absorbing wind on the pulse of morning⁵⁷
wind *is* our teacher
& Mommy's been the wind beneath my wings urging me to fly right
but not right like
right or wrong
nor right like
left or right
but right like
righteously
for the good of those who love the Lorde
will eventually know justice.

part six: X-Z⁵⁸

when my **Black** student shouted

56 Media mogul, Oprah Winfrey, gifted Angelou the navy-blue Chanel peacoat she wore during the 1993 Presidential Inauguration.

57 title of Angelou's 1993 presidential inaugural poem

58 This final section of my poem responds to Gumbs' questions, posed only in her "Y is for young" section. Here, I also include reflections on letters "X" and "Z" for which Gumbs writes no text: "*Who are the ancestors, elders, and mentors that can put whatever you are facing as an educator into perspective? What tools might you need to create to strengthen your connection to them?*" (389). In this final paragraph, Gumbs reminds readers that what might be "triggering" for today's classroom teachers pales in comparison, if you will, to Lorde's classroom experiences wherein her students wore loaded guns on their hips. Although I do not have gun-toting students enrolled in my classes, often, my students' white-washed conditioning, coupled with their consumerist behaviors, riddle me like bullets. All I have these days is hope, and barely that. I don't see how the ancestors, elders, and mentors who've brought me this far can go the rest of the way w/me. Seemingly, I, alone, must "rise to the occasion," and still I rise.

Malcolm X led the Million Man March—
after his classmate claimed it was Martin Luther King—
I asked the Lorde to be a fence around me⁵⁹
to give me the strength to enlighten generations Y & Z
who had no reverence for **Black** history
their flailing about felt like blasphemy
& the more I taught them, the more they denied me
my classroom space had morphed into calvary
& I was the thief begging for mercy
so that I might muster grace enuf for them—
my zillennial⁶⁰ students
who believed in a post racial america
because Barack Obama was the president
& I—a nigger crook purloining their american dream

the academy *is* fulfilling its purpose

ensuring our **Black** students swim only the surface
got em thinkin they'll drown
after deep submergence⁶¹
believin my lessons are a grave disservice
_____ can't even save them w/biblical verses⁶²

59 At my students' loud and wrong declarations, I sang, Fred Hammond's (2000) "Jesus, Be a Fence around Me," a gospel song I often hum to myself during long silent stretches of students' apparent lack of preparedness for class discussion.

60 the generation between Millennial and Gen Z, born between 1993 and 1998

61 Here, I am referencing Gumbs' *Undrowned* wherein she encourages readers, especially Black ones, to be like marine animals who learn to breathe under water despite daily threats to and attempts at their lives. Recalling our ancestors who survived the middle passage journey, Gumbs claims their breathing is not separate from their captured kinfolks' drowning and the ocean's breathing. She says their breathing contextualizes undrowning: "Breathing in unbreathable circumstances is what we do every day in the chokehold of racial gendered ableist capitalism," writes Gumbs, who suggests we take notes from marine mammals who "are amazing at not drown-ing" (2).

62 I don't profess an ability to save my students nor anyone thru Biblical verses (or w/#blackgirlmagic); however, after a class of homophobic Black students attempted to use Bible verses to support their anti-gay rhetoric, I

the deeper I dive,
the wider the gap of convergence
as tho I prohibit their breathing

& I just don't know where to go from here
lately I don't feel the Lorde drawing me near
as I age thru teaching, so does my despair
my students, they take up so much of my air—

part seven: A-Z⁶³

but like a phoenix⁶⁴

rising out of the ashes

still I rise. I rise

into each new semester

a hope-filled Easter morning.

countered their hate speech with specific Biblical verses re: love, all of which fell on deaf ears. I write about this classroom experience in (2016) "Gays are going to hell: A Lesbian Teacher Tries To Teach Compassion" (23-33).

63 I end my poem w/one tanka that marks the entire alphabet. While the alphabet song concludes w/the singer claiming knowledge of her ABCs and inviting listeners to join her in the next round of singing, this final stanza invites readers into my human teaching experience. Although I do not teach composition in a classroom populated by student police officers of whom I am afraid, like Lorde, I do have "layers of fear to face" (Gumbs, "17th Floor" 376). As a Black lesbian teacher instructing within a "particular historical and pedagogical moment" (375)—inside a global pandemic, post Presidents Barack Obama and Trump, during American race riots and Florida fascism, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and the Russo-Ukrainian War, all while teaching at a historically Black university fixated on earning research one status, thus patterning itself after whiteness—I am afraid (and frustrated). I am afraid of two things: 1. many of my Black students are so whitewashed that they, claiming #woke while clad in natural hair and dashikis, are actually black faced minstrels; and 2. despite my instruction, I will not be able to awaken them. I am afraid for my students and frustrated by the systems reproducing a hegemony so normalized, my Black students treat me like a Juda. But still, I rise, calling on (the) Lorde—hoping such abrupt brevity lends itself to sounding as fervent and hopeful as Maya Angelou's "Good morning" at the close of her (1993) "On the Pulse of Morning" poem.

64 For early Christians, the phoenix symbolized Christ's resurrection. However, for Job, who said: "In my own nest I shall grow old; I shall multiply years like the phoenix" (Job 29:18), it also symbolized longevity. Having said that, Angelou's mentioning of dinosaurs in the opening stanza of her (1993) "On the Pulse of Morning" poem brings me to birds, a few of which evolved from dinosaurs, according to some scientists. Although Angelou wrote, "Any broad alarm of their (mastodons and dinosaurs) hastening doom / Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages" [emphasis mine] (stanza 1, lines 7-8), I imagine the phoenix being as established as the crying rock, the singing river, and the speaking tree Angelou said are ours (stanza 9, line 18). Through them, these sentient (non-human) beings, Americans "[c]an give birth again / To the dream," said Angelou (stanza 10, lines 3-4). If I am right/eous, then I, too, will have the longevity of Job to look upon each new day, to approach each new semester, as an opportunity to give birth again to the dream—a dream our Black and brown students can manifest if I remain brave enuf to share it and they woke enuf to receive it. The children are our future, sang Whitney Houston (1985). I'm hoping.

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The Impact of CRT Bans on Southern Public Universities: An Analysis of the Response of PWIs and HBCUs to Anti-CRT Legislation and a Way Forward

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Abstract: This article analyzes the actions parentschoolcs and school boards in Oklahoma and Mississippi took in response to the passage of each Anti-Woke (Anti-DEI/CRT) legislation. Additionally, by analyzing an official response to CRT bans from an HBCU in Mississippi, this article provides four actions faculty senates, and more specifically, instructors can take to counter and thwart current and future legislative restrictions on CRT or DEI practices and pedagogies in college classrooms: defy, dissent, disavow, and disobey. The article ends with an example of how the author uses acts of defiance, dissension, disavowal, and disobeying anti-CRT legislation in the classroom.

Keywords: critical race theory, HBCU, DEI, defy, dissent, disavow, disobey, anti-woke agenda

Introduction

Racial bias is socially learned and legally enforced. Therefore, educators in states across the country, and specifically the South, are rightfully concerned about what could happen to them if they provide students an education that counters the common—racist, imperialist, and colonial—narrative of the U.S. and how it reached its exceptionalism. However, this article will push back against the generalist narrative that teachers in southern red states are constantly attacked for teaching or being presumed to be teaching CRT or DEI in the classroom and show how these differences are linked not only to the racial, geographical, and political makeup of each state but also to the national political ambitions of governors in those states.

By exploring the ways that southern politicians use anti-DEI and anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) rhetoric and legislation to advance their political agendas, I analyze the approach to DEI

and CRT restrictions in states where the politicians are in lockstep with those in red states seeking to become the POTUS. Next, this article analyzes the actions parents and school boards took in response to the passage of each bill. Further, this analysis attempts to show that while both bills lack substance and are what some pundits have called “nothing bills,” these bills can and have been weaponized against teachers and schools if they are presumed to be teaching CRT.

My analysis will then nuance the educational ramifications of teaching Black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) where their states have banned CRT. Additionally, I focus on how HBCUs have responded to these bills intended to ban or severely restrict CRT by analyzing an official response to CRT bans from an HBCU in Mississippi. From the analysis of the official response, I provide four actions that university administrators, faculty senates, and student government associations can take to counter and thwart current or new legislative restrictions on CRT or DEI: *defy*, *dissent*, *disavow*, and *disobey*. I end by showing how I defy, dissent, disavow, and disobey anti-CRT legislation in the classroom.

These States Messy: My Experience Educating in the South with an Anti-Woke Agenda

As someone who taught in Oklahoma and Mississippi—states that banned teaching CRT—I noticed tangible differences between how doggedly both states are actively implementing or punishing those educators it presumes are teaching CRT and the schools that employ them. These tangible differences led me to explore how presidential political aspirations and agendas dictate politicians’ approaches to DEI initiatives in public education.

When I entered the professorship in 2018, my first job was at an HBCU in Oklahoma. At that time in 2018, K-12 teachers were on strike due to low wages and poor working conditions. Additionally, there were growing concerns about transgender children using bathrooms that did not match the sex on their birth certificates. The political climate in Oklahoma in 2018 forecasted what became a deeply concerning educational trend in some of the southernmost U.S. states: the restriction of the rights of historically underserved populations.

What began as bathrooms and who should use them quickly became a push to restrict any reference to (let alone education about) the struggles of historically marginalized and disenfranchised people within the classroom. As more and more restrictions on educators, curriculum, libraries, and bathrooms mounted in Oklahoma and its neighboring state Texas, I quickly grew disconcerted (and afraid) with the educational climate and decided to move to Mississippi in 2022. And just as I was moving to Mississippi in May of 2022, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt signed SB 615, which “requires students at public schools and public charter schools to use restrooms and locker rooms that match the sex listed on their birth certificates” (Rose and Leblanc).

Racial and Political Demographics: Oklahoma and Mississippi

In Oklahoma, 7.8% of people identify as Black/African American, and in Mississippi, 38% of people identify as Black/African American. While these racial demographics are intriguing, they cannot be fully understood until looking into the political leanings and ideologies of each state. Oklahoma is “tied for the fourth-most Republican state in the United States... [and] has voted Republican in every presidential election since 1952 except for 1964” (“Most Republican States 2023”). Furthermore, what also must be considered are the political aspirations of elected officials within these states. Although Gov. Kevin Stitt has not intended or made his intentions to seek the office of the President of the United States known, Oklahoma’s ranking as the fourth most conservative state with the least amount of African American residents allows for more restrictive legislation to blossom.

While Governor Tate Reeves of Mississippi is not running for POTUS, Mississippi’s systemic disenfranchisement of public schools in predominately Black neighborhoods may be a legislative guide for POTUS-seeking politicians. Mississippi is, after all, the last state to desegregate schools¹. Mississippi’s place in the racist history of America cannot be underestimated. In very real ways, “Mississippi places a mirror to America and tells her who she really is” (Brook). Mississippi is not absolved of its racist past or present, but there is neither a presence of public hysteria nor negative political rhetoric about CRT to forcefully enact and enforce anti-CRT and DEI educational legislation. Essentially, Mississippi got other problems, and politicians and parents just ain’t got the time to give anti-CRT legislation anything more than lip service.

Racial Resentment: The Rise of Anti-Woke Rhetoric in American Politics and Education

Attacks on educational institutions, the curriculum that is taught in those institutions, and the educators who teach the curriculum are nothing new. Undoubtedly, the anti-woke educational agenda is just the newest iteration of attacks on the liberal education system, free thought, and one’s pursuit of individual intellectual growth that is rooted in facts and historical accuracy. Moreover, various governors and school board leaders across multiple Southern states are at the forefront of implementing so-called anti-woke initiatives. In 2022 alone, Republicans in at least 10 states were “considering requiring schools to publish lists of all the books, reading materials, and other activities teachers use. Some proposals would allow parents to review materials before they are added to lessons or the school library, or to opt their children out of certain activities” (Ujifusa). These proposals and bills, Andrew Ujifusa argues, occurred:

1 Bolton, Charles C. “[The Last Stand of Massive Resistance: Mississippi Public School Integration, 1970.](#)”

...at the height of political pushback against the teaching of what their sponsors have deemed “divisive concepts” that prompted 14 states to enact bans or restrictions on how schools address topics like racism and sexism. And beyond curriculum, one bill in Arizona would allow the state to punish teachers who withhold students’ confidences—like a disclosure that a student is gay—from their parents.

There is no question that certain southern politicians are determined to rid public education of any content about the experiences of people who are not white, male, and heterosexual. One only needs to do a survey of the banned books list² to discern the “concerns” that many powerful white men and women have about what people of color learn and might say.

Considering this concern extends to all of public education, educators at all levels across mostly southern and midwestern states should be concerned with how their institutions are responding to anti-woke initiatives. However, not all Southern states that banned CRT and other DEI initiatives have elected officials actively seeking to ban books, fire teachers for perceived CRT teaching, or vastly change course content to reflect a whiter historicity of the U.S. that undermines, minimizes, or excludes the experiences of People of Color (POC). How voraciously elected officials pursue the undermining and white washing of American education depends not only on geography, racial makeup, and educational needs of those in the State but also on the political makeup of the State and the aspirations of the politicians therein.

This is a White People Problem: CRT Laws, Parental Response, and HBCU Backlash

The majority of these anti-CRT bills are about white people and their problem acknowledging racism’s existence, its systematicity through legislation, and its connection to their continued racial and economic dominance through its perpetuation. Most of these bills (as they are read) ensure that schools are complying with the U.S. Constitution and Federal laws. The issue with the bill is that it also ensures white people and historically marginalized populations never considers their role, responsibility, or how they benefit from discriminatory practices. For example, Oklahoma’s anti-CRT legislation, HB 1775, has eight concepts that are banned and cannot be taught in schools. Concepts that are concerned with accountability or feelings are bolded:

1. “One race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex.
2. An individual, by virtue of their race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether conscious or not.
3. An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or

2 Orrin Grey. [“The Ten Most Banned and Challenged Books of 2023.”](#)

partly because of their race or sex.

4. Members of one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect [based on] race or sex.
5. An individual's moral character is determined by their race or sex.
6. An individual, **by virtue of their race and sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race.**
7. Any individual should **feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of their race or sex.**
8. Meritocracy or **traits such as hard work ethic are racist or sexist or were created by members of a particular race to oppress members of another race.**" ("Prohibition of Race and Sex Discrimination")

What is alarming about HB 1775 is how quickly it turns from equitable and inclusive educational practices, e.g., no one race or sex is superior to the other and no individual should be discriminated against based on their race and sex, to exclusionary, bowdlerized (white-washed) pedagogical practices, e.g., no individual, by virtue of their race and sex, bears responsibility for past actions committed by people of the same race and sex, and no individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish... psychological distress on account of their race.

Comparatively, Mississippi's SB 2113 is rhetorically savvy in that it aligns with the U.S. Constitution. Michael McClendon, in his analysis, noted that "the concepts outlined in SB 2113—namely, discrimination against individuals based on their sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin—remain largely illegal under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," and because of this alignment with the U.S. Constitution, "the bill would likely only have limited impact on current pedagogical practices in K-12 schools" (McClendon). However, the vague language on prohibiting classifying students based on race may "have implications beyond what is Federal Law" (McClendon). Contrastively, SB 2113 is far shorter than HB 1775 and has only four concepts that are banned and cannot be taught in school:

1. No K-12 public school or public institution of higher learning (IHL) may compel (or teach a course that compels) students to 'affirm, adopt, or adhere to the idea that any sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin' is inherently superior or inferior, or that any of these groups should be treated adversely on the basis of that identity.
2. No K-12 public school or public IHL may classify students by race (with an exception for

the required collection of demographic information).

3. No public funds may be expended for any purpose that would violate these provisions.
4. If any provision of the law is declared invalid, the other provisions remain. (“Senate Bill 2113”)

On its face, this bill (as it is read) is all gas, no go. The average American educator does not and would not compel students to affirm the idea that any human being is inherently superior or inferior based on their race, sex, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. For most educators, the thought of teaching such ideas in a classroom is abhorrent. However, when considering these bills, people “are less worried about reasonable people reading the law and acting reasonably and more worried about the climate of overreaction surrounding the law” (Ballard).

Parental Response: School boards, Libraries, and Book bans

While the laws supposedly banning CRT are both concerning and questionable, it is mostly white heterosexual cisgendered womens’ overreaction to these laws that is noteworthy. In Oklahoma, Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) accreditation was downgraded after a white teacher filed a “... complaint with the state after she claimed training videos she was required to watch ‘...specifically shame white people for past offenses in history, and state that all are implicitly racially biased by nature” (qtd. in Gamble). The school district responded that 1) the training on implicit bias occurred before the HB 1775 became law and 2) that within the training itself “there is no statement or sentiment pronounced that people are racist – due to their race or any other factor. We would never support such a training” (qtd. in Gamble). Considering how much racism has played in important factor in Tulsa, the complaint filed seemed odd because it was in the Greenwood District of Tulsa, known as Black Wall Street, where a violent mob of white people committed one of the worst acts of racial violence on the Black residents of Greenwood District: The Tulsa Race Massacre³.

Today, to demand that this same city and school system that serves mostly minority students not teach a complete education of America that would include and discuss the history of various minority contributions to and struggles in America is incompetent, a dereliction of duty, exclusionary, and downright racist because it panders solely to the feelings and tears of (mostly) white women– be they educators, parents, or school board members. But feelings aren’t facts. And the facts are this: the assault on public education in Oklahoma is an assault not only on black students but also on every single minority student who must be educated there. Furthermore, the assault on CRT extends beyond the public school system and into public libraries (which serve the public and not just students) with calls to ban certain books. Without question, Oklahoma has

3 NY Times Interactive Story. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/24/us/tulsa-race-massacre.html>

made its intentions clear to its citizens: we are here to support and advance solely the educational desires white parents have for their white children and everyone else can get to the back of the bus or get off it entirely.

In contrast, Mississippi is different, not because it does not want to do what Oklahoma is doing, undoubtedly it does, but because Mississippi schools have other, more pressing concerns to address. Many of the schools have crumbling infrastructure which affects student performance and teacher retention. Many of these crumbling schools serve a predominantly Black student body. The lack of funding or equal access to funding is (without question) by design. At one school in Holmes County Mississippi, one teacher noted that “when it rains, the roof of the decades-old facility leaks. During the worst downpours, hallways flood. Attempts to raise taxes and build a state-of-the-art high school in this high poverty district have failed” (Harris). Furthermore, “the girls’ bathrooms still don’t have mirrors, and the plumbing is often broken... classroom sets of literature books... have pages missing” (Harris). In very real ways, Mississippi schools and the school board have neither the time or money to “enforce” a law that (simply put) is republican virtue signaling.

HBCU Responses from Oklahoma and Mississippi: Not Today, Satan

Working at an HBCU in both Oklahoma (at the height of white furor over CRT) and Mississippi (after leaving Oklahoma), the informal and formal responses of these institutions was exactly what I needed. PWIs like Oklahoma Community College were quick to cancel a fully enrolled course on race and ethnicity in the U.S. “pending a review for compliance with HB 1775” (“Class on Race ‘Paused’”) as public records showed “the cancellation was precipitated by a parent’s complaint about ‘critical race’ and a student’s complaint about a video on redlining” (“Class on Race ‘Paused’”). While the course was reinstated on June 4th, 2021, how quickly Oklahoma moved to address the concerns or crying white people concerned me. How would the only HBCU in Oklahoma, Langston University (LU), respond?

While there was no formal response from the administration or the faculty senate, the Dean of Arts and Science at LU told us all to *keep teaching what you teaching and I’ll handle the rest*⁴. As an educator, that is what I needed to hear. Our students came to this specific HBCU for a reason: they desired to know their history and what had systematically been kept from them. They did not desire to have teachers continue to paint incomplete pictures that left them out OR made them seem content with their condition— which they were not. These students wanted us to teach them all the facts and all the truth. As an educator, that stance from students (whatever their race) excites me.

4 This statement is the authors’ recollection of the conversation she had with the Dean of Arts and Sciences. The statement should not be taken as a direct quote.

At Jackson State University (JSU), an HBCU and the fourth largest public institution (in terms of enrollment) in Mississippi, the JSU Faculty Senate issued a formal response to SB 2113, a *Resolution of the Jackson State University Faculty Senate Defending Academic Freedom to Teach About Race, Gender, Justice, and Critical Race Theory*, that read in part:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Jackson State University Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature or the Boards of Trustees... **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Faculty Senate affirms the [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#), authored by the AAUP, PEN America, the American Historical Association, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities, endorsed by over seventy organizations, and issued on June 16, 2021.

Additionally, not only does JSU faculty formally admit it will actively resist and disobey legislation/laws that ban CRT or encroach on academic freedom, but also calls on the JSU administration to be just as, if not moreso, resistant:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Jackson State University Faculty Senate calls upon the Jackson State University administration to affirm that they reject any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum, pedagogy, andragogy on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice, and will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature or the Boards of Trustees.

The JSU faculty fully adopted and passed this resolution on January 27th, 2022. And while the JSU administration did not and has not publicly supported the faculty's position, they have not deterred or obstructed— either consciously or unconsciously— faculty from continuing pedagogical practices in the classroom that align with CRT. In very real ways, these informal and formal responses by HBCU faculty and deans provide some insight into how to subvert anti-CRT legislation. From reading the JSU Faculty Senate approved the resolution, there are four specific acts faculty intend to do in the classroom in response: Defy, Dissent, Disavow, and Disobey.

1. **Defy:** Resist all laws that limit an accurate teaching of history, science, literature, etc. based on beliefs that race and gender are not integral to history, science, literature, etc. must be openly defied.
 - a. "...the Jackson State University Faculty Senate resolutely rejects any attempts by bodies external to the faculty to restrict or dictate university curriculum on any matter, including matters related to racial and social justice"

2. **Dissent:** Actively hold opinions that run counter to laws that ban or encourage efforts to undermine intersectional pedagogical practices.
 - a. “**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Faculty Senate affirms the [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#)”
3. **Disavow:** Deny any support for any legislative or school board measures that seek to ban, whitewash, or water down curriculum rooted in learning from the experiences of People of Color (POC).
 - a. [Joint Statement on Efforts to Restrict Education about Racism](#)
4. **Disobey:** Break any legislation meant to deny POC access to an equitable education that includes their experiences and the experiences of their ancestors from being taught.
 - a. [The JSU Faculty] “will stand firm against encroachment on faculty authority by the legislature or the Boards of Trustees.”

How faculty at HBCUs resist the push to whitewash their curricula or classroom activities and assignments differs depending on both the faculty members and the classes they teach. However, my resistance is tied to the students I teach and the knowledge they want to have. As a teacher of mostly Black and African-American college students, I recognize that many of these students have neither had many African-American teachers nor been introduced to Black/African-American literature, art, and prose as an educational site of study. With such a focus on student-centeredness, relating every college activity or course with their daily life or what they should expect in their careers, I would fail these black students if I had them engage with exclusively white literature, prose, and art.

My students (and many students) bemoan reading and writing about things they do not presently care about. Sometimes, in a first-year writing class, the hardest thing any teacher will do is get students to read and actively engage with what they are reading. To make the task of learning to actively engage with readings less cumbersome for students, I attempt to give them readings centered on their experience, i.e., Zora Neale Hurston’s “How it Feels to be Colored Me” and James Baldwin’s “If Black English isn’t a Language then Tell Me What it Is.” From readings like these, I can discuss the writing moves Hurston uses to make an effective narrative or I can discuss the way Baldwin attempts to persuade his audience in his essay on Black Language.

I do not suggest that instructors of predominately white students at predominately white institutions do not assign these readings or discuss the writing moves Baldwin and Hur-

ston make in these readings. However, I do suggest that assigning these readings in an anti-CRT educational landscape would give any teacher of predominately white students more pause than an instructor who teaches predominately black college students at an HBCU. It is fair to say that the HBCU emboldens me to be brave. The HBCU encourages the educational advancement of Black people over the legislative restraints put in place to stop their educational advancement. It is simply negligent for me to teach this population of students while disregarding to contributions of Black people to the shaping of the United States.

At the same time, my students read many white authors throughout the semester. The purpose of teaching is to give a fuller and more complete picture of the U.S. and the experiences of those people in the U.S., which includes a great many white men and women. My students find value in those readings as well, depending on the content: the white woman who wrote “A Few Words on Breasts⁵” or the white man who wrote about war and soldiers and “The Things They Carried.⁶”

I want students to hear different voices, different people, and different stories so they can gain perspective. Writing and reading are all a matter of perspective(s) and persuasion(s). The more perspectives one has at their disposal, the more persuasive, communicative, and informed citizens, workers, and individuals they will be. Literature, indeed writing, provides perspective on difference. It is this difference that politicians and their base have long sought to extinguish. But engaging in difference is the only way to build a more equitable society.

Conclusion: Building a Coalition and Addressing the Barriers Between Us

The backlash against the idea of teaching students using a CRT lens is fierce and cannot be underestimated. Legislators and school boards in states Oklahoma have moved quickly to investigate educators for potential CRT violations⁷ causing some educators to resign⁸. In states like Florida and Texas, the political aspirations of the governors are driving their anti-CRT and anti-Woke agenda. These political aspirations have caused them to put bans on not only how children are educated, but also the type of children who are educated, e.g., LGBTQIA+ children.

In Mississippi, similar laws have not had the same effect on public education and educators not because Mississippi is less systematically racist than Oklahoma, Texas, or Florida, but because its long time systemic disenfranchisement of public education in predominately Black and brown neighborhoods shifts the focus from what is taught in the classroom to ensuring students and teachers have neither the materials nor the conditions to effectively teach and learn at all.

5 Ephron, Nora. “A Few Words about Breasts.”

6 O’Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*.

7 Camper, Nick. “Norman High teacher received complaint from parent, accused of violating HB1775.”

8 Reiss, Rebecca. “An Oklahoma teacher says she resigned over a state law requiring teachers to censor books in classroom libraries.”

The four acts I mentioned are subversive and activist in nature; they are radical. But if, as MLK posited, the privileged will not willingly give up their privilege so that the human condition can improve for those without the same privileges, then conforming, going along to get along, and saying things are fine when they are not will cannot possibly lead to an equitable human condition for those who are not privileged. It would only show our propensity to participate in acts of deliberate inhibition that stop progress. People must be willing to defy, dissent, disavow, and disobey. What I am calling for is the courage to be an accomplice : the courage to break laws restricting anti-racist and anti-DEI curricula and initiatives, the courage to fight for equitable education for all those educated in U.S. classrooms, and the courage to push for a better education for all students in U.S. classrooms.

Institutions of Higher Education cannot be so quick to change their curriculum for fear of losing public funds. HBCUs, which are historically underfunded and never get their equal share, can lead the way in this fight because whether the threats are to cut government funding due to our curriculum or because we are not meeting arbitrary performance standards/measures, HBCUs stand firm. They been here before. HBCUs always been denied their equal share. What is it to them and to those of us who teach in the spaces of HBCUs to say “no? We have made do educating our students on less than our monetary share, and we will continue to make do educating them whether the U.S. government supports us or not.

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Coalition Building against Anti-Asian Racism: Interweaving Stories of Transnational Asian/American Feminist Survivance

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Abstract: What does the labor of coalition building look like and consist of for transnational Asian/American women scholars' work/life? What imposes, sustains, or stalls this labor? Adopting the notion of "affective connectivity" (Rhee), the authors grapple with these questions in their autoethnography (Chang; Jackson and Grutsch McKinney), "listing . . . certain key events, themes, memes, traumas, and metaphors" (Monberg et al.) to historicize the interweaving of these issues in Asian/American narratives. The authors' stories illuminate their affective labor against colonial and anti-Asian barriers, presenting affective connectivity as shaping transnational Asian/American feminist ways of knowing and doing activism despite institutional policies, temporal-bureaucratic constraints, and racial and linguistic injustice. The authors conclude by discussing the significance of interweaving stories of affective connectivity and coalition building, as well as tensions and limitations in transnational Asian/American feminist survivance.

Keywords: transnational, anti-Asian violence, affective connectivity, survivance, stories

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against injustices as an Asian American rhetoric scholar prior to us. We, as transnational women of color, hope to inherit and continue working with what she has taught us.

Introduction

This article discusses transnational Asian/American¹ women writing scholar-activists' coalition building against anti-Asian violence. The increasing violence against Asian/American communities in the United States and beyond in recent years has spurred coalition building efforts to amplify Asian communities' voices that denounce colonial, white supremacist ideologies. We reflect on our own coalition building and struggles, to theorize our labor of building community, solidarity, and (dis)connectivity against colonial and anti-Asian violence as "a set of historical conditions involving . . . our bodies" (Tang) that we inherited as transnational Asian/American women writing scholar-activists in the United States. As Black feminists have long argued, coalition building is crucial in Black and other oppressed communities' liberation (Browdy et al; the Combahee River Collective; Jones). Calling for community-based collective knowing, working, and acting against oppressions, the Combahee River Collective has demonstrated and emphasized centering love and intersectional struggles for Black women, while remaining in solidarity with other oppressed communities for their liberation. Such work demands acknowledging how people, things, and ideologies are interrelated (Jones), and "center[ing] the voices of feminists of color who are doing the work to ensure our futures" (Pough and Jones). Uptaking Pough and Jones's calls, we share our coalitional work for futures where our multilingual and BIPOC communities can thrive (Cooper; Ore et al.).

Our work that centers our own lived experiences and coalitional work as Asian/American women is not new, as shown by other Asian/American students' and women's intersectional organizing and activism (Dziuba; Hong; Monberg; Tang). Extending this strand of work, we ask: What does our labor of coalition building look like and consist of in our transnational Asian/American women scholars' work/life? What imposes, sustains, or stalls this labor? We answer these questions through autoethnography (Chang; Jackson and Grutsch McKinney) to historicize our work against colonial and anti-Asian violence in community, classroom, and other transnational spaces. As many Indigenous scholars have argued, advancing the world against colonial violence necessitates different relations, imaginations, and stances (King et al.; Riley-Mukavetz; Smith). Examining our "anticolonial stances . . . [of] being in relation with each other but for survivance" (Patel 8), we adopt Rhee Jeong-eun's notion of "affective connectivity" (17). Then, we discuss how we cultivated a space to write and interweave stories of our lived experiences across different contexts to make visible affective connectivity, or what we call (*ullim*, resonance in Korean), within and outside our stories. We conclude by discussing tensions and reflections in building coalitional work.

1 We use "Asian/American" to reflect our fluid and complex sense of identity and tensions surrounding the two dominant identity options, "Asian" and "American," as represented with the slash (Monberg and Young; Palumbo-Liu).

Affective Connectivity for Coalition Building

Our discussion and praxis of coalition building and survivance² is guided by Rhee's notion of affective connectivity. Rhee theorizes affective connectivity as decolonial³ feminist methodology in its emphasis on:

- 1) affective work,
- 2) particularity,
- 3) non-linear knowledge-making, and
- 4) connectivity from her own past mother and other mothers (thereby "m/others") (17-26).

Working through the "haunting" (Gordon) memories of/about her late mother, Rhee forwards a way of knowing from "rememory" (Morrison)—remembering and recollecting what has been forgotten and learned anew. Challenging the Western notion of a bounded "self," disconnected from "others" and their memories, Rhee poses, "Who we are and become is the work of rememory, a different way of being/knowing/doing that recollects our ghostly connections, relations, and connectivity across geographies, culture, time, and language" (20). This way, the notion of affective connectivity views a self always in connection to others and their onto-temporal-epistemologies.

Affective connectivity then requires affective work. As noted earlier, Black feminists have emphasized the interconnectedness and interrelatedness in coalition building. In her discussion of coalitional learning for justice, Natasha Jones notes the importance of being "attuned to issues of power, privilege, and positionality while actively pursuing options for addressing and redressing inequities and oppressions" (519). Rhee similarly encourages us to trace our own haunting memories, connect them to others, and understand our relation to these hauntings: "To be haunted is to notice us linked" (24). This "haunted engagement" (21) also means to "notice what we are trained not to notice" (3) in the Western academy, attending to invisible ghosts that offer ullim yet do not "exist" for others, and therefore, must be proven otherwise, for their veritable reality.

2 Survivance is not a notion we inherited, nor do we use the term survivance, thinking that using the notion makes our coalition building a decolonial project. As will be discussed later, we honor this notion's lineage from Indigenous people and their approaches to their identity and resistance to colonial representation while acknowledging our transnational settler positionalities. We embrace tensions that are entailed and hope to conscientiously engage with this feeling to extend coalition building outwards.

3 Rhee and we came from South Korea, which was under the direct impact of the United States' expansionism and imperialism. Our critical stance against US colonial violence in Korea has impacts on our coalitional work against colonial violence within the US. As explained further later, however, we recognize that this connection does not necessarily entail or contribute to decolonization, as Itchuagiyaq and Breeanne importantly remind us.

As a Korean American woman, migrant, daughter, and scholar, Rhee emphasizes the connectivity of particulars (21). She notes how the Western notion of the individual “self” frames her and her mother’s being, knowing, and doing as “too particular to be in as academic knowledge” (48). Against the wall of knowledge that delegitimizes the particulars, she stays “neither Korean nor American, neither feminist nor not feminist, [but] something in between,” and “transgresses the wall” (47) through writing her mother’s memory of “unresolved regret and mourning for ... intergenerational trauma” (or han, “a collective feeling of grief that Koreans ... have inherited ... as a result of a long history of injustice”) (35).

Affective connectivity requires a relational recursive memory work that defies the linear and disconnected view of time and space. As Rhee draws on Morrison’s work, rememory is an act of remembering and forgetting simultaneously, actively remembering and re-collecting haunting memories. For transnational migrants, this work of cyclical “back and forth” recalls multiple bodies across multiple temporalities and spaces. Rhee asks:

When you start to rememory not just your mother’s story but your m/others’ stories so that they become your mothers, what kind of a different being or connection can you become? Whose rememory have you bumped into in the place where it happened? Why and which rememories do matter? Then, what kind of different transnational and decolonial feminist accounts can we tell: “as an account of oneself with and through others, connecting my experience with the experience of others” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 30). (20-21)

Rememory works to connect feminist bodies to m/others’ bodies, histories, and colonial violence. As discussed later, our coalition building and survivance too was shaped by different people across multiple borders that we have crossed knowingly and unknowingly and that caught us in between. Accordingly, how we understand our own feminist inheritance across separated yet co-existing worlds in our transnational lives orients us to our coalition building and survivance differently. This way, our coalition work looks both inward and outward, to the past and future, as we learn from Black, Indigenous, and other Women of Color scholars.

If affective connectivity works through haunting and rememory, how does this remembering contribute to coalition building or survivance? Rhee argues, “feminist telling other feminist stories is a way to chart both the possibility and evidence of decolonial feminists’ intergenerational and transnational knowledge project” (21). As a scholar working and living on the stolen land, we pose that solidarity building between/as transnational Asian/American scholars must recognize and attend to Indigenous rhetorics and their strategies named survivance. Remembering “other mothers” bodies, we return to the notion of survivance to understand intergenerational histories of other feminists, and work to avoid fetishizing difference.

Tensions and “Headaches” in Transnational Feminist Survivance

The notion of survivance has importantly guided us to inquire and envision our activist coalition building. Coined by Gerald Vizenor, survivance refers to “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories” (Vizenor vii). Viewed as a way of “reimagining the possibilities for existence and ironic identity within Native communities” and “a scholarly relationship to writings by Indian peoples” (Powell 401), survivance illuminates Indigenous communities’ knowledge and rhetorical practice of “survival and resistance together” against the “marginalizing, colonial narratives and policies” (King et al. 7). As transnational settlers, thinking of our coalition building in connection to survivance engendered tensions. While transnationality denotes ways of practicing varied affiliations beyond one nation-state, it can recenter whiteness, flattening different positionalities of those displaced, enslaved, and genocided (Fujiwara and Roshanravan 6; Kimoto 145). As privileged migrants who came to this land by choice, we are complicit in the colonial violence that occupied Indigenous land, enmeshed in the “cacophony” (Byrd xvii) resulting from the United States settler colonialism and imperialism with incommensurable interests and differences (Tuck and Yang).

We use our privileged transnational positionality to take up Patel’s (2016) call for “acts of a collective countering of coloniality” (9). In doing so, we find Rhee’s dwelling in the cacophony between her and her mother as a productive way to attend to the tensions or “headaches” (Rankine 61, qtd. in Rhee 26). Rhee asks:

Yet, what my mother did not know was that the place she wanted her daughter to settle in ... is a wake of slavery, genocide, and its afterlives, which are still unfolding. How did she not hear about herstories of this land? History is full of stories of the American Dream, democracy, equality, progress, freedom, and hope: that quintessential American story—my parents/I sacrificed everything to come to this country to give us/children an opportunity. Yet, how do you notice only an opportunity, not how the (white America’s) opportunity depends on “looting and violence” (Coates, 2015, p. 6), including the destructive condition and structure of your/parents’ sacrifice? (26)

Her questioning shows a possibility of working with “haunting” memories as not only feminist work but also decolonial feminist work (11). While we do not claim affective connectivity always leads to decoloniality, it alerts us to examine how we recognize and connect to the “haunting” in the very site where the “headaches” begin. In other words, transnational feminist survivance for “countering of coloniality” can emerge through affective connectivity practices. As our narratives demonstrate, this inward and outward coalitional work entails “headaches,” instability, and unsettled bodies.

Activism Contexts and Methods

In sharing our survivance stories, we adopt autoethnography (Chang; Jackson and Grutsch McKinney) to resist self/culture, Black/White, and academy/community binaries and “[list] . . . certain key events, themes, memes, traumas, and metaphors” (Monberg et al.). Rather than starting with a particular “theory” or “framework,” our stories started from (jjokgeul)—the kind of short, descriptive, reflective, messy freewriting—to center our lived experiences of transnational survivance. Once we wrote our individual narratives, we took time to read and annotate on each other’s work following our senses of ullim, that is, our resonance or affective reaction to each other’s (trans)languaging and labor practices. We repeated this process twice more, which drove us to develop our jjokgeuls in different ways that we had not expected. This way, our writing was not a static representation of our lived experiences but a dialogic reflection on and (re)connection to our own and each other’s experience. We presented our preliminary stories at the 2023 CCCC, and we continued to reflect on tensions, limitations, and possibilities in our stories for this article.

Stories

In illustrating our labor of survivance for coalition building, we pay attention to how this labor shapes our praxis as a writing scholar-educator-activist, and what sustains or stalls this labor. Our coalition building has recursively affirmed our own survivance strategies, while expanding our ways of being, knowing, doing, feeling, and teaching language and writing.

Eunjeong: Remembering and Centering Racialized Multilingual Communities’ Embodied Translanguaging for Answerability

“[H]ow do I write we’re moving to the next door?” My mom texted me like usual during my doctoral exam. She was immensely proud of moving to a slightly bigger restaurant after being gentrified out of a booming town in Texas a while ago. “Starting [blank], [the restaurant] is moving to a bigger facility to better serve you!!” “You need to put the date in ‘Starting [blank]’ so people know when you move.” I was proud of my White Mainstream English that I learned at a Predominantly White Institution. My fancy English was supposed to make my first-generation immigrant parents sound just a bit more “professional.”

A few days later, I asked her about the sign. I couldn’t help but laugh at the picture with the exact phrase, “starting [blank].” She said, “I was going to change it, but then people actually came in and asked ‘when?’ . . . So I decided to keep. . . It’s much better. If I smile at them, see their faces, and tell them, they would be more likely to come.”

Running the restaurant heavily relies on my family’s affective labor and translanguaging

(García and Li). “People here like it when you keep talking to them and asking how they’re doing at their table.” Later, I learned that this very first lesson my mom taught me here in the US is called small talk. Her small talk doesn’t feel “small” though. Translanguaging across a “broken” English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and Spanish, my mom checks on customers, hugs, or bows, tries to remember the last conversation they had, and trains and jokes with her employees.

My mother’s embodied translanguaging of centering connectivity and emerging meaning, not the “correctness,” became more challenging, in the backdrop of resurging anti-Asian racism for the last few years. Their (noonchi)—rhetorical sensitivity to and embodied reading of the context, including people’s relations—was at peak, even in their own restaurant, especially around police officers with their then-mixed status and ongoing police brutality. Looking at many Asian women who were murdered because of white supremacist anti-Asian racism, my mother and I remembered our border-crossing that we buried deep down—the times when we had to prove our “goodness” because we were seen conniving and unfaithful at the Customs and Immigration for my mother, and at my F-1 visa, green card, and later citizenship interviews. My mother told me to smile more “just in case.” We faked smiles behind our masks, also knowing this was futile in white temporality—the history that we contribute so much but does not care about us.

My family’s translanguaging makes me pause: How does our scholarship honor and account for their embodied translanguaging and affective labor—the way they trust their noonchi to stay away from any “trouble,” all the “failed” attempts at learning “English,” yet still successful conversations and relationship building with their employees, who are often undocumented and multilingual, and other community members? And how do I remember my family’s translanguaging and remain “answerable” (Patel) to my BIPOC students and communities? The dominating English-only, monoglossic ideologies and colonial structure of educational spaces and beyond view racialized multilingual students and communities’ language and literacies, monolithically anything but for “success,” “career,” or “better” future, also conceived monolithically (Baker-Bell)—so much so that my mom’s language, knowledge, or success won’t count. Yet, my students I worked with over the years in Queens and Houston, majority of whom are transnational, racialized, and multilingual, already use their language and literacies to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. While colleges boast a certificate in translation for taking classes on literary criticism and translation theory, my students’ translation in their Parents-Teacher Conferences, doctor’s appointments, or other everyday translation goes unnoticed. And the institutions and society tell us that our language belongs to the past, not future (Flores et al.), and tells us not to be “stuck in the past . . . [and] move on” (Cooper).

So I center their embodied languaging and history, including ones that have been left behind, forgotten, and invisibilized in my class. We discuss unrecognized yet crucial language labor, make the connections between and across our wor(l)ds, and center the relations, as humans responsible for each other’s time and space. We reflect on our language and positionalities and

talk about how our writing is shaped by not only what we know because of our experience but also what we didn't have to experience or know, and the distance between the two. Instead of teaching how to "fill the gap" in their research, my students and I think about from whose perspective it is the gap, who gets served and how, and what kind of future the knowledge serves. And at times, some of us awkwardly step aside and decenter ourselves to see how much Black and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing language are erased and policed in our institutional space that sits in a historically and predominantly Black neighborhood. In my pursuit of affective connectivity with them and their communities, I recognize how claiming "we" and "us" in building coalition and solidarity may "inadvertently participate in . . . epistemic injustice" (Tang), erasing the intersectional difference I should not forget.

And I struggle at times. I hesitate when students view me through gendered Asian/American affect such as how I'm a "truly caring", "motherly," "cheerleader" (Yoon). I disconnect from a white feminist student who calls racialized and gendered women's language and literacies "trivial." My mind conjures up m/others' not-quite-trivial translanguaging again.

Whose haunting memories do I remember? Who do I dis/connect to/from? How do I remember better? I want to remember and connect better not because I want "closure" and move on, but because I want to learn to live *with* their haunting memories engraved onto my body to remain answerable. Being answerable as a transnational feminist means then being conscientious of how I stand, with whom, toward what kind of interconnected future (Hsu), even when the colonial logic wants me to erase myself from any temporality, telling me I don't know or haven't been on this land long enough to know. Against this barrier, I am learning and working to be in coalition, while remembering and de/centering my communities' embodied labor, albeit ephemeral and "trivial."

Soyeon: Linguistic Inheritance: Resisting Language Immunization as a Transnational Mother of Color

I was busy with daily morning routines at home. My 8-year-old second child asked me, "Mom, am I taking the A test today?" "Not really." I was surprised that my child knew the full name of the test. "My friend B takes the test today. He speaks Chinese a lot, and I speak Korean a lot too. But why don't I take the A test today?" he asked. I felt ambivalent, first relief, thinking that I don't have to open my manila folder for my second child. The A test manila folder. I printed all the documents and email communication relevant to the A test of my first child and archived them into this manila folder along with another manila folder that contains all the immunization records of him. At the same time, I felt a surge of rage again. I was thinking of B, who will be in a separate classroom and answer questions in reading, speaking, listening, and writing for several hours as my first child did.

As a transnational mother of color, I remember my labor against literacy education systems operating through bureaucratic apparatuses while trying to be informed of how my then 8-year-old first child could exit his English as a Second Language (ESL) program some years ago. To navigate the ESL curriculum⁴ and its final “exit” process, I had to email my child’s school more than eleven times between September 2019 and May 2021 (approximately for twenty-one months) in addition to multiple in-person visits and one-hour-long phone conversations with teachers and administrators more than three times. I emailed my child’s teacher first, and the teacher transferred my inquiry to an ESL coordinator, and then the ESL coordinator transferred my inquiry to her colleague, and that colleague transferred my inquiry to the school district’s multilingual curriculum office, and finally I was able to reach one of the staff members of the office. Mostly, teachers and administrators said that they needed to ask someone else to know more about policies. I was also told that schools do not use ESL as an administrative term any longer, and instead they started using “multilingual.”

In my email, I asked for information: What is your policy? How do ESL students exit the program? Were they tested for “exit” already? If not, when are they scheduled to be tested? What are the criteria for “exit”? I did not receive answers in writing. Through an accidental personal conversation with a staff member at school, I came to know that to exit the program, ESL students need to surpass the mark of their previous year in each of the listening, speaking, reading, and writing proficiency tests. If they got the grade “high” in the previous academic year, they need to get an “advanced high” grade in each test next year. The year after the next year, they will need to get an “advanced-advanced high” grade in each test. The bureaucratic and neoliberal systems that control literacy do not say the time of the decision, yet constantly burden individuals to exceed oneself. This neoliberal temporality consumes my energy and leads me to the moment of distress or what Tamika L. Carey calls “rhetorical impatience,” which refers to Black women rhetors’ performative temporal strategies of self-care for equity and justice (273) against a “system of *temporal hegemony*” (270).

The staff member of the multilingual curriculum office of the school district to whom my inquiry was transferred seemed to be also Korean-English bilingual. In the middle of the phone conversation, they switched from English to Korean and said that they could explain the A test processes in Korean. I instantly refused. After the call ended, I thought about my refusal. Why did I refuse their suggestion for “language alternation” (Zentella 80) or a translingual moment? It was maybe because I wanted to resist a sense of the potential paternalistic whiteness or the presumed ownership of English I felt from the moment when they started “providing” Korean. After the conversation ended, I was directed to the test-relevant web page operated by one of the state education agencies. Additionally, I came to know that ESL students should be “monitored” for two years after “exit” to ensure whether they reached the “appropriate” level of English proficiency.

4 My focus is not on ESL programs in K-12 contexts and their curricular efforts. Here, I discuss how the sociomaterial infrastructures of ESL programs are entangled with my racialized feeling as an immigrant parent of color.

Literacy and bureaucracy sustain each other (Vieira 150) and impose hygienic ideologies on particular bodies. Registering and enriching my and my children's translingual practices as part of a "translingual historiography" (Kimball 33) or claiming what Kimball calls "translingual inheritance" is my activism against this reality. In the school district's mandatory registration system, I marked down that my family used Korean as a home language when I became a parent of public education⁵. It was my activism to make my translingual practice and inheritance known across contexts and register them in educational systems for both of my children. I study, teach, and do translingual practice. Then, why would I conceal that my family uses Korean at home? I recognized how this question works as a proxy to register what Prendergast called "a distinguishing trait" in which "literacy and race became interchangeable" (6). My family's literacy was registered as seemingly neutral information. But I feel that this registration operates not only as a bureaucratic apparatus but also a racial apparatus that disenfranchises "undesirable" people (Prendergast 2) who need to be tested, monitored, and controlled. As a transnational mother of color, I resist language immunization by registering my and my children's translingual inheritance under the label of "home language" although this system does not afford representations that can capture our daily translingual practices, which cannot be represented simply either as Korean or English. This registration action entailed affective labor but returned me to other mothers who also dwelled on questions similar to the home language question I answered or who did not have a chance to be informed of what this type of question would entail. This registration action also opened up points of affective connectivity where I feel other mothers and children who were more severely and physically punished by their ways of literacy (Pritchard 60) and whose languages and "rhetorical sovereignty" (King 26) were taken away and violated.

Minjung: This Cruel Game is Called "Not Korean Enough" or "Too Korean" in White

Space

In Tom Hong Do's painful and visceral memoria on his passed father, he reminds us how language and body are interconnected, and translanguaging is always "embodied and responsive" to the material conditions like "time, place, race, class, or gender" (451). Sharing how his father's body was marked in medical reports, Do notes:

Despite the fact that his own report identifies the physical and neurological damages ba sustained, the physician hedges his statements and suspects that ba has a "possible language barrier" that makes him unintelligible. ... [T]he physician specifically identifies ba as an "Asian male (possibly Cambodian)." This indexical marker of race is immediately followed by his supposed "language barrier." ... [T]his conclusion is perceptual rather than factual and speaks to how the white listening subject is either unable or unwilling to

5 Both of my children were tested in their "English proficiency" after I enrolled them in public education systems. My first child was identified as an "English Learner" (EL), while my second child was not identified as an EL.

interpret the linguistic production of racialized translingual bodies as intelligible. (457)

Do teaches us that it is not just language but embodied languaging with extralinguistic features that indexes how a racialized body is interpreted, defined, evaluated, and legitimized—especially Asian bodies as sites of “language barrier” and unintelligibility. Of course, I didn’t know any of this when I started to teach college writing in my second year after moving to the United States from Seoul. I thought as long as I master English and sound “American,” I will fit in and survive at school and teaching.

Behind this thinking was my Korean upbringing. Practicing standard English in Korea is a big deal. You need it for getting into a good college and a good job—and generally for looking smart. I remember receiving compliments on how good my pronunciation was, just like Americans that we heard over and over again in audio tapes from English listening tests; just like how I practiced in front of TV arching my tongue to make /r/ sound. There was a sense of pride to represent a “good” English speaker as that meant sophisticated, independent, liberal, and feminist. But when I was applying for master’s programs in the United States, I was no longer a “good” speaker. I remember asking my advisor, a white male professor, for a recommendation letter to get a teaching assistantship. “*You are going to teach American college kids English?*,” he asked. I knew it wasn’t really a question by his tone. Unlike his doubt, I did receive the teaching assistantship with the acceptance letter.

Every new teacher struggles. Learning to teach requires time, training, and experience. But at that time, a bigger problem seemed to be my transnational and translingual background that is “unusual” for a college English professor. To my colleagues and students, I tried my best to pass as one of them. The mask I was wearing got heavier each day. I started to call umma less and less. When I visited my parents in Seoul during breaks, I was afraid of “losing my sense of English” for using Korean. At the end of the semester, my course evaluation read:

Be more assertive. This is not high school.

She’s so awkward.

I can’t understand her when she explains activities.

Even after realizing that “passing” couldn’t excuse me from being racialized as an Asian woman, it didn’t quite give me the peace about my identity. Only recently, my partner and I started to hang out with more Koreans in our neighborhood in Michigan. I always had very few Korean friends in the United States, and I would notice myself avoiding them even if I had a chance to make acquaintances. A few months ago, I was in a local bakery. The savory pastries they had

reminded me of Paris Baguette or other big bakery chains in Korea. The bakery was busy. All the customers lined up were white. The cashier was a white person. When it was just my turn to order, an East Asian man who looked very Korean came out of the kitchen to help with taking orders. Maybe he is the owner? Maybe that's why those pastries looked so familiar? Thoughts were flowing, and it took me a second to finally hear him saying "What would you like?" in English. I froze for a second till I finally said my order. I was so ready to speak in this white space as a white proxy, but then the sudden presence of a familiar but unfamiliar face and body flustered me.

The next day, I told the bakery incident to my Korean friend, and she said she had similar experiences. She was in a yoga class where everyone was white but her and one Asian woman. When the instructor asked the class to find a partner, she noticed that both of them were trying not to make eye contact with each other. We laughed in unison and wondered why. Then she said, "I think I know why" and showed me a screenshot of Gloria Anzaldúa's words on her laptop:

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out. Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. (38-39)

To face another Asian or Korean is like to face yourself. They are mirrors. Looking at them means you are looking into your pains, your doubts, your shame, your family, and yourself. You are a traitor, a poser, a not-Korean. That is some scary thing to do in everyday life. And the stakes are higher when you are in a white space. It's you and another you and a bunch of white folks. Your survival instincts tell you not to look into the mirror, so you avoid each other. Then you go and talk to that bunch of white folks with a smile and your perfectly arched tongue. These experiences haunted me for contradicting what I was reading at graduate school. Anti-racism. Linguistic Justice. Why can't I be brave enough to "be myself" and face the mirror against white supremacy instead of policing myself? Even on the best days surrounded by "well-meaning" people, I am upset because a coworker brought up her newly-found enthusiasm in K-dramas that I have never shown any interest in. Then I am also upset when I feel invisible because no one knows anything about Korea and treats me as another abstract Asian. After carefully listening to me at the breakfast table, my partner asked me, "So which one do you want? Do you want people to engage with you about Korea or not?" Well, can't it be both?

Interweaving Stories, Affective Connectivity, and Activisms

Our stories show that affective connectivity guided our coalition building against anti-Asian racism, yet with different struggles and issues. Practicing affective relational practice was to

de-isolate ourselves as colonial subjects to “let your oppression peek at mine” (West xiii), and vice versa. This way, affective connectivity can push forward coalition building for transnational feminist survivance. Below, we discuss how our *ullim* points converge and diverge, hence “interweaved,” across our stories and offer implications as to how these survivance stories can expand across contexts.

Affective Connectivity as Affective Labor

These stories commonly unravel our affective translingual labor against anti-Asian barriers, entangled with our and other politicized and racialized Asian/American bodies and surrounding sociomaterial and ideological conditions. Eunjeong’s activism is shaped by her then-mixed-status family’s embodied translanguaging and rhetorical sensitivity, conditioned in the colonial and white supremacist ideologies and materialities. As a first-generation immigrant mother scholar, Soyeon’s rhetorical activism is channeled through her embodied literacy labor against the bureaucratic colonial temporality. Minjung labors against a deficit perspective on her teacher subjectivity, illuminating the uneasiness and complexity behind working with the haunting memories; she policed her teacher identity as a Korean migrant “to perform and show people that [she is] just as good as [her] colleagues.” Our stories then reinforce how our activism is underwritten by affective connectivity, mediated by our embodied affective labor against the colonial onto-epistemologies.

Affective Connectivity as Remembering within Particularities

Our agentic labor takes place in particular times and spaces of our languaging. Eunjeong and her mother’s embodied translanguaging in community spaces differs from Soyeon’s affective languaging in the education system. These stories also diverge from Minjung’s languaging and teaching subjectivity. Here, we do not intend to make a representational transnational Asian/American story. Rather, as affective connectivity affords, we see ourselves and our stories remaining particular and incommensurable. Indeed, throughout our reflections on our stories, we have found how our ways of being, knowing, and doing language as Asian/American are sometimes at odds with our knowledge and work as a scholar-educator-activist. While sharing our stories, Minjung noted, “I was you. You were me. I will be you. You will be me.” These reflections affirmed that our embodied ways of being, knowing, feeling, and doing language are the very apparatus to work against anti-Asian violence, showing that our onto-epistemologies are interwoven with each other’s stories in connection to other settler histories and temporalities. As Rhee argues, “In the process of explicitly recognizing our collective and collaborative work/life, we may be able to share knowledge/memory that heals and empowers us” (55). This is the potential of interweaving stories of our survivance labor that we look toward.

Affective Connectivity as Building Connections with “Other Mothers”

While sharing our stories made us notice both particular and collective haunting memories, it also pushed us to recognize what we (do not) know about BIPOC communities’ memories and survivance. Practicing affective connectivity then asks us to humbly see who else has crossed the borders and how we are here the way we are because they were here before us—Eunjeong’s mother, other Asian women who lost their lives to the white supremacist violence, and the Indigenous and Black communities around her campus, Soyeon herself as a mother and other mothers at her child’s school, and our Korean and BIPOC immigrant-generation friends, students, and communities, as Minjung’s story highlights. We sit tight and try to fathom the impalpable pain and particular stories as we look to (im)migrant women who have come before us, and dispossessed and displaced Indigenous, enslaved Black, and other marginalized communities. We recognize that a responsible rhetorical practice for our answerable affective connectivity is then both centering and decentering our voice, story, and herstories, as we connect to and learn from our BIPOC communities’ survivance stories.

Remembering for Feminist Inheritance: Embracing Transnational Feminist Tensions

Our desire of transnational coalition began from our own positionalities, rooted in our desire to dismantle the colonial categories of language and identities and to claim particular yet relational Korean migrant women scholars’ onto-epistemologies. Yet, our affective connectivity enabled us to look to what Mohanty imagined as international coalitions of Third World women with the “everyday, fluid, fundamentally historical and dynamic nature of the lives” (6) away from the Western deficit frames of their ways of being, living, and knowing.

As we look outward, we grapple with the tension around how affective connectivity can be “accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” as a decolonial feminist methodology (Tuck and Yang 35). Affective connectivity offers a heuristic for “other” ways of knowing, yet it does not always directly contribute to the “rematriation of land or knowledges of the traditional Indigenous stewards of this land” (Itchuaqiyag and Matheson 301). In fact, our resettlement “can . . . actually further settler colonialism” through “an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave” (Tuck and Yang 1). Therefore, non-Natives must acknowledge this complicity in uptaking the notion of survivance. Joining this effort, we embrace the tension and humbly recognize the limit of our affective connectivity and relationality, and the necessity to work with the haunting responsibly (Riley-Mukavetz 560).

Despite and perhaps especially because of the tensions, we cannot work against barriers alone as such work necessitates learning and linking different haunting memories remaining hidden and enmeshed in our varied positionalities. Interweaving our stories affirms our activist time/

space-making against anti-Asian linguistic and racial injustice, temporal and bureaucratic strategies that sustain colonial power, and white supremacist language ideologies. We carry our feminist inheritance and continue learning from m/others' different memories, languaging, tensions, and experiences while noticing our relations to them and their survivance.

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Because We Already Are Legitimate: Feminist Coalition Building among Graduate and Undergraduate Students to Counter Patriarchal, White, Heteronormative 'Expertise'

Jennifer Burke Reifman, Mik P. Penarroyo, and Loren Torres

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Abstract: This article details a coalition building practice between undergraduate and graduate student researchers that embraces student hood as a position of liminality. Using Black intersectional feminist theory and alternative models of mentorship and writing collaboration, the authors argue that legitimacy exists as a construct or a barrier of academia that serves to keep diverse student voices on the sidelines and reify the white heteronormative patriarchy. In detailing their coalition building practices, they describe their methodology of iterative member checking to center historically silenced experiences in academia and reimagine the role of students in research.

Keywords: mentorship, expertise, diversity, conditional acceptance, iterative member checking

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Our research team was formed in the Winter of 2022 as a continuing research initiative that was developed to incorporate student voice in assessment research. As our primary task, we worked under university assessment specialists to craft a research agenda where we developed student-centered inquiries around assessment and learning, trained our undergraduate partners in data collection and analysis, and reported our findings across academic spaces. We started as a traditional, top-down hierarchical research team, where expertise and power came with title and

authority. Our team, composed of two Writing Studies graduate students and two interdisciplinary undergraduate student-researchers, worked to meet our primary funding purpose, but soon began to understand our group differently as we explored the complexities of relationship-building and activist work in academia through our unique methodology of participant-centered research and peer-to-peer mentoring in our writing. The call for our research became more personal, the stakes of the group became more important, and our team fortified to support what we felt was our new central mission: fighting the perception of who was deemed appropriate and legitimate in academic research. Here, our coalition formed.

Over the last three years, across two separate research inquiries, we have worked to build a horizontal mentorship model that intentionally challenges the traditional academic default of who is worthy and capable. In other words, we actively decenter heteronormativity, whiteness, and patriarchal practices through our research and writing, emphasizing our diverse perspectives as a group who negotiates a multitude of identities, along with our precarious roles as both undergraduate and graduate students. While each team member exists in a more perilous position in the university than the last, we have rejected the traditional power structures often handed down in research teams, embracing our liminality as both a means of adding much-needed perspective in empirical research and highlighting the obscured power of living on the edges of academia. Individually, we have each felt conditionally accepted to the university and academic world and were unable to see our liminal positions as places of possibility; however, through our coalition building we could act as a dynamic unit of perspective and expertise. Together, we were already legitimate.

In our effort to look past legitimacy as a construct of academia and gatekeeping barrier, we join others (e.g., Morris, Rule, and LaVecchia) in challenging the notion of “conditionally accepted” (Grollman) members of academia through coalition building. As a concept, conditional acceptance captures the experience of being pushed to the margins of higher education largely due to the perceived status associated with personal identity. In practice, our team is determined to disrupt the patriarchal heteronormative domination of research, writing, and legitimacy by drawing on non-hierarchical forms of mentorship (VanHaitsma and Ceraso) to build coalition in hostile academic environments, research from non-traditional viewpoints, and write in ways that value and honor our varying positionalities. Specifically, we draw on coalition building as a necessary feminist and intersectional practice to form a group that demands that we do not need to erase pieces of identity to add valuable, thoughtful work to academia.

In the following, we detail our experiences as liminal players in academia, graduate students and undergraduates, with a vast array of historically othered identities, to describe how we work against academic gatekeeping in both the institutional and national context. We argue that through building coalitions across our distinctive identities, each facet of our personhood is undeniably found in how we frame the contexts of our research and our writing. Our research focuses on how marginalized groups on-campus are impacted by inequitable curricular design; because

of this, our coalition building is essential to carve out space in often-gate kept sectors of academia and ensure that we highlight traditionally silenced voices. In other words, our coalition building allows us to reject the need to “legitimize” ourselves in the eyes of academia, embrace our positionality, and fortify against gatekeeping forces to add new voices to writing practices and research.

Building Coalition, Finding Power in Liminality

In building our coalition, we often ask ourselves: how can we ensure that our personal histories intersect with one another in a way that is mutually responsive as we come together in addressing these inequities, especially while we exist on the edges of legitimacy in our positions? To this end, we forward the work of Black Feminist scholars on intersectionality and horizontal mentoring throughout our conscious effort in developing the foundational model of our coalition building. Building from Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins extends the conversation via her examination of the “matrix of oppression” and how we can transcend barriers of domination that impede coalition-building (18). Therefore, we believe that coalition is centered around building bridges and forming connections, despite differences, in order to act in a way that acknowledges the convergence of race, gender, and class on personhood (Glenn and Lunsford; Crenshaw; Collins); we also extend coalition to include bridge building across positionality, coupling the concept of coalition with the need for horizontal mentoring as forwarded by Pamela VanHaitsma and Steph Ceraso. While VanHaitsma and Ceraso speak from positions of academia as tenure-track faculty, their insistence on including the perspectives and voices of those in the process of “making it” is central to our coalition. Our team, certainly, is in the very midst of that process. Loren enters their senior year as an undergraduate; Mik has graduated and is beginning to apply to graduate school; Mikenna is working on their qualifying exams; Jennifer is finishing their dissertation. In this sense, our team extends beyond our academic responsibilities and gives significant weight to how our individual backgrounds impact our academic identities while we continue to refine our practice of building an intersectional coalition.

We begin with trust in shared ideology. Loren and Mik were chosen by former undergraduate members of the research team due to their mutual desire to amplify underrepresented voices in higher education assessment research. This shared desire was crucial to the initial stages of our relationship-building as our coalition had not yet fully formed. As with other types of budding relationships, it was necessary that our partnership was founded on mutual ideology. VanHaitsma and Ceraso underscore how “talking with someone who shares our experiences may offer crucial space for validation and support” (VanHaitsma and Ceraso 216). We met virtually on a weekly basis as our main source of communication. At first, Loren and Mik were hesitant to take space in meetings and found it difficult to overcome traditional feelings of hierarchical workplace relationships due to their positionality as undergraduates. Over time, our research team’s interpersonal dynamic quickly evolved into an organic structure that favored non-hierarchical membership and operated largely on trust and compassion, largely due to our personal commitments to the topic.

Because we were able to relate to the research impetus through our individual experiences with marginalization and liminality, we were able to carve an open space for our whole selves in the research endeavor.

In these meetings, we made intentional space to reflect on our experiences as first-generation students or people of color in the classroom, speaking to our lived experience and how these moments might influence and impact our research. Kathryn M. Lambrecht describes the necessity of sharing burdens in student hood wherein “the more students know about other students having similar struggles, the more likely they are to feel a sense of solidarity with their peers” (Lambrecht 147). We found this to be fundamental to our cohort’s non-hierarchical development. As our collaborative relationship deepened, we were more open to sharing our uncertainties and fears as marginal members in academia deriving from various experiences in our lives. This cemented our trust as we learned to maneuver through vulnerability during our conversations about ourselves and, later, with our participants. We were able to bring this vulnerability to our interviews and focus groups, providing other undergraduates with an open place to describe what it meant to be non-white or first generation or low income in the walls of a highly selective higher education institution. In each of these conversations, we also make a conscious effort to discuss non-academic happenings in our lives. Our work, although important, is only a fragment of our lives.

We then center our personal and collective missions through our research agenda and methods. As scholars of color, Mik and Loren operate within an academic space that falls within Carmen Kynard’s definition of a “damn-near-all-white institution” (188). It is through the lack of the institution’s proximity to authentic anti-racist BIPOC scholarship that feelings of ‘othering’ manifests. How can we expect BIPOC scholarship to excel in spaces that have shown performative effort to actively enlist their perspectives? As assessment researchers, we follow scholars like Asao Inoue who argue that assessment is inextricably linked to the hegemonic “racial *habitus*” wherein students of color are held to a standardized metric of whiteness throughout their education. Assessment has disproportionately disadvantaged students that do not fit the status quo: students of color, first-generation, low income, queer-identifying, etc.— all of which are overlapping identities of our team members. Rachel Daugherty suggests that telling one’s story can construct the maintenance of intersectional feminist scholarship through the deliberate cultivation of safe spaces for diverse perspectives. Therefore, we elect to prioritize the historically othered students’ perspectives in our research methodology. It is through our conversational-style dialogue with undergraduates with similar backgrounds that we gain significant insight into which assessment practices are widely viewed as disproportionately unjust by eliciting much more nuanced and genuine responses. Notably, we found that participants were usually eager to share negative academic experiences signifying the unspoken camaraderie between their shared positionality as students. This was observed via participant responses that are typical of casual exchanges between friends, using both slang and expletives to emphasize their frustration with the university’s assessment practices. For example, a participant described their interactions with faculty as “shady” to evoke the depth of

untrustworthiness between themselves and the predominantly white faculty. Another participant described a professor's intimidating behavior as "gaslighting the hell out of [them]" when they requested greater support on course content.

To further express solidarity with participants, we offer our coalition's main practice of cultivating space for marginalized students by sharing personal anecdotes with our participants derived from our own academic journeys; a practice we describe as iterative-member checking (Burke Reifman, White, and Kalish), which reflects elements of critical race theory's practice of counterstory (e.g., Martinez; Yosso). Our livelihoods are not monolithic by any means, but we often encounter cultural and racial similarities that contextualize our understanding of their experiences. For instance, Mik would detail their insecurities as a transfer student who had felt out-of-place in comparison to their peers who attended the university directly from high school. Mik's story encouraged one participant to describe their mutual insecurity as an older transfer student who did not "want to seem stupid" as all their peers seemingly understood the material with ease. The two then talked about overcoming their anxieties of asking for academic support, exchanging resources and advice that abated their transition from community college. Thus, iterative member-checking encourages intuitive connections with our participants because we are able to deconstruct their responses with critical nuance that may not be reflected by researchers who do not share the same lived experiences. To a greater extent, we want to ensure that we foster an academic environment that offers marginalized groups the ability to voice their concerns without fear of 'being othered,' largely because we have lived in this fear.

We continue to build coalitions through our temporal positions. While "student" is often code for "inexperienced" or "uninitiated," we also acknowledge the power in the liminal nature of this label. All of us, as we progress in our studies, will inevitably abandon the student label and the institution in which we exist as students. We recognize this temporal status as one that can offer us more promise for coalition building that extends past institutional borders. Namely, we know that pushing against these institutional boundaries may burn local capital; further, we know that this local capital *can* be burnt because it will not travel. In no way do we see our temporality as an excuse for indignance, but rather, we seek to reclaim liminality as a space for experimentation and for pushing against well-established mechanisms of subjugation built and maintained by the institutions we currently reside in. In this vein, we call on scholars like Lambrecht who have advocated for viewing liminality and emerging "expertise not as a deficit but as a potential source of agency" (134). Our research is then an act of resistance that lives outside the walls of a singular institution and the larger power hierarchies prescribed by higher education.

Coalition Enacted through Collaborative Writing

Our trust, shared mission, and devotion to empowering ourselves are reified and manifested in how we approach our writing tasks. Ashanka Kumari, Sweta Baniya, and Kyle Larson

posit that “[t]raditional academic genres alone are insufficient in building praxis necessary for responding to institutionalized inequities.” We agree, and further contend that traditional, top-down co-authoring processes are insufficient in addressing institutional inequities. As writing tasks make up a huge portion of our responsibilities as a research coalition, we have developed a strategic research methodology that works to honor all our voices (Burke Reifman, White, and Kalish) that has resulted in empirical articles that allow student voices to be centered in research (Burke Reifman, Sims, Penarroyo, and Torres). Specifically, our co-authorship model relies on the framework of collaborative, horizontal mentorship. Critical work on mentorship notes how, despite its many benefits, mentorship “too often becomes deprioritized, professionalized, and reinscribes power hierarchies” (Singh and Mathews 1703). In enacting our coalition, we actively work against reproducing such mentoring hierarchies by leaning into one another’s strengths as varying writers positioned across a wide spectrum of abilities. In this sense, we consider ourselves flexible learners offering guidance to one another, while simultaneously receiving it.

When we first came together, our discussion was largely pragmatic. We provided basic introductions to one another during which we discovered a significant overlap between our academic positionalities — Jennifer and Mikenna hailing from the same program, and Mik and Loren pursuing an undergraduate degree within the same discipline. Jennifer, who has led previous cohorts, then provided a brief overview of our team’s ongoing research projects to get Mikenna, Mik, and Loren up to date. New to the practice of research, Mik and Loren were hesitant to participate, offering tidbits of feedback here and there. As undergraduates, Mik and Loren were initially less confident in their capacity to contribute meaningful work because of their perceived “lower status” on the academic ladder. As scholars of color, they must contend with preconceived notions of being seen as illegitimate in comparison to their white peers and the status quo (Pittman; Buchanan and Dotson). The effects of structural racism commonly manifest in impostor syndrome or feelings of incompetence, despite excelling academically otherwise (Peteet et al.).

The meetings were initially quiet and even rote— we moved through the motions. Over shared time and through vulnerable conversations where we developed trust and fortified our shared mission of our research, we began to evolve. To collectively reject the notion of impostor syndrome and recognize it as a product of structural racism and misogyny, we slowly, yet consciously eliminated the prospects of ascribed expertise. Meeting by meeting, the agenda became a group endeavor, the writing projects were broken up equally, and the direction of the team was a group decision. This development became most apparent in our writing, where we were able to clearly abdicate a traditional hierarchical structure, and as a group, we lean into a reflexive manner of reviewing one another’s writing.

Today, Mik and Loren take on a much more active role as researchers, taking the lead on multiple publications and proposals. They will bring calls for conferences and writing projects to the group with plans and purpose in mind, they help to adapt methodologies and research pursuits

using their experience as students, and they use writing as a vehicle for their voices. With substantial experience and guidance, they also feel fully equipped to offer insight to contemporary attitudes, language, and behaviors of undergraduate student participants; critical nuance that we deem necessary to better serve the community we research and represent.

As our coalition's practices solidified and our criticality came to the forefront, our team found that existing in an academic space that seeks to address inequities in higher academia inevitably creates discomfort. Our discomfort exists within the confines of disclosure due to its exploitative nature (see Donegan for a description of how disclosure is compounded by liminality). Rusty Bartels emphasizes the duality of how "the 'unknowable' that disclosure seeks to make 'known' can also be a point of danger, a necessity, and a price to pay" (Bartels). We harbor identities that higher academia often draws on to incorporate marginalized identities into their institution without offering material support to sustain their livelihoods. To circumvent this, our team has found comfort in the inclusive "we" pronoun throughout our writing practice. "We" allows us to exist as a singular, but united entity without disclosing any intimate details about our respective selves that can be used to exploit us. At the same time, we acknowledge how disclosure can be a liberating and meaningful experience. In this collection, we have chosen to disclose the composition of identities that the team represents. It is through our writing practices that our coalition can manifest in a tangible form.

The Barrier: "Diversity"

The use of the inclusive pronoun marks our existence in hostile waters. For those arriving with identities outside the white, cishet, middle class norm, we often find a sense of *conditional acceptance*, a term defined by Eric Anthony Grollman. As Grollman contends, conditional acceptance impacts those with historically ancillary identities and speaks to "the feeling of being accepted in the academy on the condition that one does little to challenge the academic status quo." As a team, we hold a myriad of intersecting identities that compound in marginalization and conditional acceptance. We represent proud first-generation identities, working together to counter the othering feelings of "figuring out" school and the pressure from our families to do something *great* in academia, despite the othering of our low-income, blue-collar upbringings. We represent a multitude of queer identities, from genderqueer to non-hetero sexualities that feel easy to hide and obscure in the academic world. Parts of our group identify as people of color, calling on the inherent power of their families' immigration stories and cultural identities to persist in historically white spaces. Conversely, part of our team exists as white women, who must acknowledge, confront, and challenge this inherent privilege throughout our work. Our abdication of power authority seeks to decenter our whiteness, knowing that we cannot make claims for social, racial justice without the implicit reproduction of social injustice through unchecked centering of whiteness. Our coalition also honors the myriad powers of womanhood in establishing our political solidarity, drawing from bell hooks' framework of feminist activism wherein we are compelled

by the “need to do more research and writing about the barriers that separate us and the ways we can overcome such separation” as we center our research on the experiences of underrepresented groups (56). Finally, we all come from the liminal space of studenthood; while in various stages, graduate, undergraduate, transitioning to graduate school, our diverse social identities are further amplified by our student statuses.

Intersectional feminist scholarship has long recounted the multitude of ways that “socially constructed categories of identity” (Harold, Prock, and Groden, 2) intersect and change depending on the environment you find yourself in. In this sense, we join others in finding that academic identity and status act as an extension of oneself. These statuses then carry certain presumptions due to the way status can become synonymous with an individual’s externally perceived value. In this, our marginalized social identities are further compounded by the precarity of student status (see Banville, Das, Davis, Durazzi, Dsouza, Gresbinnk, Kalodner-Martin, and Stambler for more on this experience). In our experience, the word “student” is meticulously adorned onto our titles to preface “academic researcher” for the sole purpose of differentiating our team from more “legitimate” forms of work created by non-student researchers. Our institution can then satiate its desire to claim innovative diversity and promote itself as a hub for marginal perspectives while offering minimal contributions to the actual labor we undertake on its behalf. As Sara Ahmed reminds us, institutions often allocate resources and therefore the responsibility of diversity initiatives on individuals, despite the drain on the individual and the inherent creation of hierarchy in this approach (253).

As a result of these many liminal identities, our research team’s perceived value radically shifts depending on the academic environment we operate in and the goals of that environment. In this, the institution has held us up as *diversity* incarnate and touts our work as instrumental to equity in one space and then, delegitimizes our work as “student” driven and “special interest” in the next. Like others, we have experienced the celebration of our diversity as a group as ornamental. Sarah Dwyer helps us understand the “for-show” diversity in the utilization of “nondiscrimination statements, diversity policies, and Safe Space stickers” to frame “diverse bodies as objects for institutions to acquire and display” (33). We are the safe space stickers, touted at meetings and in emails as a “diverse group of student researchers.”

In this way, we are everything the academy wants on paper. We represent many of the identities that higher education has traditionally and systematically pushed aside yet seek to highlight in diversity initiatives; we work hard, and sometimes for free; we bring our otherness to the research moment as assets, countering years of educational trauma around these identities; and we show up for the institution, articulate in the ways they demand and ever willing to prove our “worth”. We are the “diversity champions” that the institution has called on (Ahmed 253). Yet, we live on the margins of acceptance for our actual work, fighting for minimum wage pay, begging for audiences with those who decide our funding, and having our work obscured as *just* a “diversity

initiative.” In other words, while we publish, research, present, secure grants, and move through all the appropriate academic gateways for legitimacy, we are almost always reduced to our diverse identities, which are couched in student hood, rather than the products of our efforts. Martinez, in her counterstory, also describes how “diversity” takes on the form of hospitality,” where diverse identities are accommodated, but never truly taken in the fold (224). Thus, we can understand our position as a diverse research team in two different ways: (1) as a corporate signifier of institutional diversity, or (2) as a disruptive coalition that actively creates space for historically underrepresented groups in academia.

As a research team largely concerned with contextualizing undergraduate perspectives on their assessment, we understand the significance of how our personal ideologies inform our work. Our equity-centered research team, as self-described in previous publications (Redacted for Review), must be careful to maintain a particular academic environment in lieu of establishing problematic dichotomies that serve a traditionalist oppressive hierarchy. We understand operating within higher academia as navigating through a historically rigid nexus of settler colonialism (Patel). Through this, we continue to act as both institutional signifiers and disruptors in our work. We hold the qualifying titles they have given us, yet we do the work we want to.

Nonetheless, academia continues to make calls for diversity and facilitate conversations on inclusion and equity without doing the work to remove conditional acceptance. In other words, diversity policies and initiatives act as a thin bandage over deeply rooted structural inequities that value white, heterosexual, cisgendered, middle-class bodies more than others. While we feel the effects of these competing values throughout our work, we band together to build a coalition and privilege our personal mission, to the best we can, over the institution’s desired view of us as “diversity champions.”

The Double-Edged Sword, Free Labor, and Agency

The coalition we have worked to build through our horizontal approach to mentorship remains dedicated to our work of removing the default heteronormative, white, patriarchal lens to research and writing; instead of accepting this norm, we work as a group to incorporate an array of perspectives and academic experiences in empirical research. However, despite our best efforts and many successes, our research coalition will no longer be funded by our institution in the following academic year. We are immensely saddened by their decision to terminate the funding of our program, even more by the unwillingness of well-meaning individuals who could not articulate our value to administrators. In fact, we were referenced as an “independent program,” a phrase that carries the implication that our actions did not align with our organization’s expectations.

Kelsie Walker, Morgan Gross, Paula Weinman, Hayat Bedaiwi, and Alyssa McGrath rightfully remind us that speaking about the conditions of student hood is dangerous and that our

“bodies bear the high cost of complacency” in these systems of unjustness (108). We speak about these conditions here, knowing the possible consequences, and we bear the weariness of the experience in our bodies. Be that as it may, we wholeheartedly stand by our decision to deviate from conventional expectations of operation. Within the short span of a year, our team’s outright rejection of their proposed standardized schema has demonstrated the material and psychological benefits of training undergraduates as researchers and academic writers in their own right. Our collaborative model sanctioned vulnerability as we learned to reconcile our varied positionalities in conscious coalition-building efforts through co-authorship. Through our collective efforts, we found that the active creation of community is crucial to the success and well-being of not only our identities as students, but to our overall personhood as marginalized actors. For this reason, we plan to continue our assessment research regardless of funding with the intention of expanding our purview to larger participant pools and audiences.

Unfortunately, the continuation of this work outside of institutional funding does necessitate the act of free labor, which presents its own challenges. Like others, we contend all academic labor must be paid due to its remarkable contribution to cultural work and its implications for future working conditions within universities (Allmer; Tennant). Unpaid labor also carries greater risk; it does not guarantee us any immediate tangible benefit compounded by the basic fact that we must function under a capitalist system. After all, we must provide for our respective households and must also be wary of the burden of time and energy we shoulder to commit to this research. Alexis Pauline Gumbs thoughtfully reminds us that “The university is not about the preservation of a bright brown body. The university will use me alive and use me dead.” To continue this labor, we must acknowledge the certainty in which the university will take any given opportunity to co-opt our labor as another *shiny* diverse commodity, while offering no material means to support our livelihoods.

However, as each of us transitions outside of our current institution, we feel secure in our capacity to supplement the conceptual framework and methodologies we find valuable. It is an inherent amalgamation of marginalized experiences that deserve to be amplified and given the same respect as White bodies in higher academia. For us, our act of free labor is an act of resilience, creating impact and space for future generations of marginalized researchers. We hope our work will challenge who can speak on research and complicate the purposes of that research. In this sense, we have the power to disrupt performative measures of university-forward diversity initiatives and, instead, facilitate meaningful relationships with underserved communities through our work, leveraging liminality as a productive tool. After all, higher education tells us they want diversity, and they want to hear the voices of historically disenfranchised groups—so we write together to deliver that, and we operate on the understanding and steadfast belief that our words and experiences deserve and need to be shared. Most of all, we assert that we are, in fact, legitimate.

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“Institutions Don’t Define Us, Our Relationships Do”: Navigating Burnout, Relationship Building, and Collaboration as Graduate Students

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Abstract: Using autoethnography as methodology, this article draws on the experiences of two graduate students and their attempts to navigate burnout, relationship building, and collaboration in their graduate program. They illustrate how burnout has led them to be more intentional in their relationship building in order to combat the institution’s predisposition to individualize, isolate, and promote competitiveness among graduate students. Ultimately, the authors hope to encourage graduate students to consider how collaboration can be used to tackle burnout and build relationships in the process.

Keywords: graduate school, relationships, burnout, feminist co-mentoring, collaboration

In the final paragraph of Leigh Patel’s *No Study Without Struggle: Confronting Settler Colonialism in Higher Education*, she states, “institutions don’t define us, our relationships do” (170). This statement, following an examination of the structural inequalities of higher education, is a reminder of the importance of relationship building while in the institution. This, however, is easier said than done. Since the institution operates as a capitalist meritocracy, everyone defaults to looking out for themselves, which doesn’t translate into relationship or coalition building. This is due to settler colonialism which, Patel argues, “has shaped epistemology, what counts as knowledge, and educational policy and practice via the emphasis on individual achievement” (21). Terms such as “achievements” or “achievement gaps” continue to “illustrate the ways that individual achievement is discussed and valued more than collective learning and well-being” (21). Therefore, these considerations and accompanying pressures do not support collaboration that can create work that will not only bolster the CVs of graduate students but also contribute to larger bodies of knowledge and alleviate the burnout experienced from coursework, exams, teaching commitments, and dissertation writing. As a result, graduate students experience exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of inefficacy, all in the name of producing an original contribution to the field and

sacrificing relationships in the process.

It was not until we were both experiencing burnout that we realized how graduate programs pit graduate students against one another. These conditions are not helpful toward relationship building and collaboration which we argue is crucial to combating burnout caused by the institution. As a result, we have been more intentional with our relationship building and collaborating with our graduate student colleagues. To do so, we exercise two feminist co-mentoring practices. The first feminist co-mentoring practice is from Beth Godbee and Julia C. Novotny which “attends to the relationship and people involved in the mentoring” (180). This feminist co-mentoring approach is associated with “partnership, solidarity, empowerment, and agency” which are necessary toward “asserting the right to belong in higher education” (Godbee and Novotny, 180). The second feminist co-mentoring approach is what Sonia C. Arellano and Ana Milena Ribero’s call *comadrisimo*. *Comadrisimo* is a Latinx, feminist co-mentoring practice that works to “create mentoring relationships in Rhetoric and Composition that challenge hegemonic models of feminism while supporting the success and development of Latina academics” (343). We use these two feminist co-mentoring practices in hopes that we can be, as Patel describes, “less individualistic, competitive, and punitive with ourselves and each other” to combat the institution and build relationships with our colleagues (170). In this article, we use autoethnography to illustrate how our burnout has led us to be more intentional in our relationship building by narrating how our relationships came to be and how these relationships have been strengthened through collaboration. Ultimately, we hope to show how we used our burnout as an opportunity to grow and collaborate with one another instead of letting burnout be a barrier toward our successes and the successes of our colleagues.

Our Methodology

Our experiences in academia are shaped by institutional capitalism and settler colonialism in higher education. Therefore, our choice to narrate our experiences through using autoethnography is necessary to combat the belief that it is not a legitimate form of research methodology. As Michelle Fine states in *Just Research in Contentious Times*, “Given the troubling history of social science, one might reasonably conclude . . . that universities are too elitist and soaked in a long history of exclusion, stratification, and White supremacy to be of use for generating counter-stories, gathering counter-evidence, or fueling movements for change” (116-117). Moreover, Sue Doe et al. capture our purpose in their claim that “autoethnography testifies even as it also calls to action” (146). Therefore, this methodological choice is crucial to challenge the dominant voices that govern academic spaces and continue to perpetuate colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal norms that cause burnout and make it difficult to form relationships with one another. Finally, we echo Walker et. al in the belief that centering graduate student voices highlight the “experiences and needs of this special population” so that institutional policies can be created and revised with current and future graduate students in mind (170).

How We Became “The Nataly/ies”

Before we discuss our experiences with burnout, relationship building, and collaboration, we believe it is important to tell the story of how the two of us met and how our relationship has evolved throughout the years. From the very beginning, we embraced the opportunity to build a coalition together, and ultimately, we created a support system that included becoming mentors and supporters for one another. Going forward, we will mark each of our narratives with our names (including the first initial of our last names) to avoid confusion. We also want to note that our different positionalities, Nataly is a Mexican-American woman and Natalie is a white woman, shape how we experience the institution and build relationships.

Nataly D.: I began the PhD program at Texas Christian University (TCU) in fall of 2020. Like many during the pandemic, my courses were online. I was living in Houston, TX (TCU is located in Fort Worth, TX) while I waited for my graduate courses to begin in person. I remember that the department, professors, and classmates made attempts to create community despite the circumstances, but it was difficult for me to make new friends and form relationships via Zoom or other communication channels. When we returned in person for the fall 2021 semester, I was eager to meet my cohort as well as the new cohort who were able to begin their programs in person. The director of graduate studies (DGS) at the time emailed me before the fall 2021 semester began and asked if I would be interested in meeting the new graduate students during their orientation. I happily accepted this opportunity and joined them during their lunchtime.

At this point, I had a year of the PhD program under my belt. I felt a level of confidence heading toward the new graduate student orientation that day, but looking back, I believe that this could have been an opportunity for me to use my seniority as power to separate myself from the incoming graduate students. I, however, agreed to attend the new graduate student orientation because I know how it feels to be in their position: new to TCU, overwhelmed by the information being given at orientation, and nervous about starting a graduate program. Therefore, I wanted to give them information they wouldn't be able to get from the DGS, who has never been a graduate student in this program. I wanted to make myself available to them right from the beginning and offer the incoming graduate students any information I could on professors, coursework, or TCU more broadly. It was here that I met Natalie, gave her my phone number, and thus began our friendship.

Natalie S.: I was so grateful that Nataly decided to attend the orientation luncheon for my incoming cohort. As an older graduate student, I was a little apprehensive about meeting the other students and if I would vibe with anyone, given my age difference. Right away, I felt comfortable with Nataly, and she was very knowledgeable about the program, courses, and professors — and she was willing to share that information with all of us. We realized that we would be in two courses together in my first semester, and I sat with her in both, and we began to grow closer as the

semester progressed. During these courses, we became Natalie with the “ie” and Nataly with the “y” by our professors. One day, a fellow student said, “here come the Nataly/ies” and now, when people see us together, that is how we are addressed. Ever since August of 2021, Nataly has been an integral part of my support system, and I hope she feels the same way about me.

Breaking the Cycle: Our Mental Health Journeys

Results from a 2018 study showed that graduate students are more than six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety. In their article, “Graduate Student Burnout: Substance Use, Mental Health, and the Moderating Role of Advisor Satisfaction,” Allen et al., note that graduate students experience “high levels of stress, moderate or severe anxiety symptoms, and moderate or severe depressive symptoms” as a result of burnout (1130). At every stage of a graduate program, we are faced with different benchmarks that quickly deplete any of our mental replenishment from semester breaks and trigger those burnout symptoms. Whether it is assistantships, comprehensive exams, or dissertation work that is added to our plates, we still have the constant pressure to publish our work, present at conferences, and distinguish ourselves. If burnout takes over, we risk spiraling into a negative mental space filled with imposter syndrome, depression, and hopelessness. Given all these pressures, it is not surprising that “44% of graduate students who reported depression or anxiety during the past year faced academic hardship due to their mental health problems” (Allen et al., 1131).

There is no guaranteed way to avoid burnout, depression, or anxiety, but we were both able to find pathways to combat burnout that yielded useful interventions for us. Now we have our friends, professional mentors, and outside support systems in place to aid us, as Beth Godbee advises, “in building confidence after it’s been lowered -- helping one seeing that one’s not alone and navigating further traumas arising not only in graduate school but also through job searches and academic careers” (“The Trauma of Graduate Education”). However, before we discuss relationship building, mentoring, and collaboration, we will share our experiences with burnout, depression, and anxiety.

Nataly D.: In my second year of the PhD program, I noticed that my energy was running out quicker than normal, and I was losing motivation to do my work despite having interest in the subject matter. This was accompanied by negative, hopeless thoughts that made me think the work I was doing was not going to have an impact or that it was not contributing anything to the field. By the end of my second year, I could feel myself yearning for a break but finding sadness in the fact that summer meant I would have to prepare for my comprehensive exams. I also had to continue working as an academic coach to pay my bills, all while running on empty. My lack of energy caused me to fall behind on my reading. Then, the straw that broke the camel’s back happened during a stressful family visit that caused a panic attack. After this, I started looking for

a counselor. The next thing I knew, I was in my counselor's office where he confirmed that I was experiencing burnout. Things got worse before they got better. My stress, anxiety, and depression were at their peak during the fall 2023 as I was in the process of completing and defending my comprehensive exams. Slowly, however, I am on the road to recovering from burnout thanks to counseling, maintaining my relationships, and evaluating the expectations I have for myself and those that I thought others had of me.

Natalie S.: The first year of my PhD program was anxiety-ridden mostly from learning the system, the professors, and my specific interests. At our institution, the second semester of the first year is four courses, which is tiring and overwhelming, but doable. Knowing that the following summer would be entirely dedicated to studying for my comprehensive exams, I made a conscious effort to take off the entire summer break before my second year. Even though I took every precaution to store up as much energy as possible, similar to Nataly, I also noticed that during the second year of the PhD program, I began to feel unmotivated, lethargic, and in a state of constant stress. At the end of the Fall semester, I began to see a therapist because I was constantly anxious, depressed, and also experiencing guilt for not being able to accomplish everything and juggle my family and friend obligations. This was when I learned that I was experiencing burnout. For me, the final stressor occurred in the spring semester when none of my close friends were in any of my courses. I began to feel isolated and alienated, which added to my lethargy, depression, and burnout. Currently, I am working towards balance in my life, but it is an ongoing battle.

Articulating Your Goals & Protecting Your Voice

As graduate students trying to make names for ourselves, we are susceptible to getting caught up in the machinery of the institution that can make it difficult to build relationships. In Patel's *Decolonizing Educational Research*, she argues that settler colonialism causes knowledge to be seen as property and limited in nature, leading graduate students to be competitive, even when attempting to collaborate with one another (35). We each have had first-hand experience where collaborative attempts were made, whether that be on a minor level with partner or group work or toward the possibility of publication that were unsuccessful and detrimental to our mental health. In reflecting on these moments, we note the need to be aware that not all efforts to build relationships and collaborate will be safe from the "unquenchable thirst for property that is core to settler structures" (Patel 35).

Nataly D.: A few years ago, a graduate student approached me about collaborating on a project. We were still getting to know each other but I thought of them as my friend especially because of their attempts to build a relationship. When they asked me to collaborate, however, I hesitated. I felt that collaborating on a project required a relationship where both parties knew about each other's work ethics and what they valued. They brought up the option to collaborate multiple times which made it difficult for me to say no. Eventually, after they asked multiple times,

I agreed. I didn't want to collaborate, but I thought that collaboration would be a stress reliever. I immediately saw that this would not be the case. Our goals for the project were not the same. I liked the project's topic, and our approaches were unique, but the process was not enjoyable. They would edit my language which inherently changed my writing voice and made me feel like I was losing myself in the process. I also felt that they were forcing this collaborative opportunity to be a publication which was never my intention. I believe that they were operating on the institution's notion that everything needs to be turned into a publication or else it is a waste of time. I felt that the entire process only damaged the possibility of us becoming closer friends. In the end, this experience was harmful to my mental health.

Natalie S.: In one of my courses, we routinely broke out into discussion groups for each class meeting. During one of these breakouts, I had a difficult interaction with another student that really shook my confidence and upset me. Essentially, a fellow colleague dismissed my thoughts on our readings as reductive, which was affirmed by another member of the group, who happened to be a friend of the colleague. The fourth member in my group looked at me and made a disgusted face at the other two's comments and behavior. She then mouthed to me, "Don't worry about them," and smiled at me. Shortly after, we were given a break, and before coming back together for group presentations on our readings, she took me aside and said, "those two were wrong for being so hateful and dismissive of you. They do the same thing to me, so I do not associate with them unless I have to. You made good points, so I would share them with the class when our group speaks." Even though she validated my hurt feelings, bolstered my self-esteem a bit, and attempted to help me brush off the uncomfortable exchange, I told her that I was so anxious from everything that I did not feel comfortable sharing anymore. She told me that she understood but that we could not be bullied and ultimately silenced by colleagues over their pettiness and competitiveness. When we returned to our groups, she mentioned that I had some interesting thoughts and hoped I would share them, which helped me to be assertive and find my voice. Without her taking the time to encourage and support me, I would not have felt safe to contribute and would have allowed other's settler colonialist mindsets to determine how I exist and function in the academy.

It Takes a Village: Meaningful Co-Mentorship

As we have emphasized throughout this article, relationships are vital to our success and growth in academia. Not only do we turn to each other for support when things are stressful, but we also learn from each other in many ways that benefit us personally and professionally. Initially, the first relationships that we build in our graduate programs are the department advisor and/or our mentors. As Allen et al. state in their study, "positive relationships with a faculty advisor are associated with improved mental health, decreased stress, and less emotional exhaustion among graduate students" (1132). There is often, however, a social aspect missing from our faculty-mentor relationships, something that can be found in graduate student peer relationships such as

peer *comadres* (Ribero and Arellano 349). This is due to, as Godbee argues, the power relations between graduate students and faculty members who might serve as dissertation directors, committee chairs, etc. She states that “graduate students can benefit from dispersed and networked mentorship relationships, especially with mentors who don’t hold asymmetrical power over them” (“The Trauma of Graduate Education”). In this section, we reflect on how we have functioned as (co)mentors to our colleagues and how this practice has strengthened our relationships, created a sense of belonging, and fostered personal and academic growth.

Natalie S.: Personally, I have never considered myself as someone who functions as a mentor; however, after reading Godbee and Novotny’s article discussing feminist co-mentoring among graduate students, I began to reconsider how I view my relationships and experiences. As they state:

We see co-mentoring as feminist as it attends to the relationship and people involved in mentoring; carefully considers matters of status and power; and provides an alternative to, if not direct counter for, the traditional master-apprentice model that has contributed to inequities for women. Additionally, Bona et al. argue that co-mentoring is not a method but a relationship, and as a relationship, co-mentoring is associated with partnership, solidarity, empowerment, and agency—all important concepts for feminism and for anyone (men, women, transgender, cisgender) asserting the right to belong in higher education and other high-stakes settings (qtd. in Godbee and Novotny 180).

During the reflection on my co-mentoring experiences, I slowly began to realize that I was dismissing my mentorship practices as just being a good friend or classmate.

As Godbee and Novotny urge us to consider, “individuals might begin by recognizing where they are already involved in feminist co-mentoring, where it could be extended or tried anew, and how current mentoring approaches could be deepened” (191). For example, I generally tend to keep a small group of friends and share knowledge with those colleagues that I have built strong relationships within the program. Within my circle, I share any tips and tricks that I have learned in (and about) the program, about conferences, and for publications. I have also helped colleagues by offering feedback on any writing they share with me or ideas for projects and including them in panels for conferences. I did not recognize these actions as mentorship, only natural friendship components.

When I dissect the presence of co-mentorship with one of my newest colleagues, who joined the program in the cohort following mine, I definitely think of Godbee and Novotny’s discussion of “power with” mentor relationships. I am older, by age, than most of the graduate students in my program, so I was excited when I met this wonderful woman who is around my age and also has children. Once we got to know this about each other, it felt like an immediate bond formed,

and we wanted to help each other get through this program as easily and quickly as possible. So, in that very moment, without even being aware, our co-mentoring relationship began. Similar to a pairing in the case study that Godbee and Novotny share, our relationship reflects, “their collaborative (or co-) relationship shows how solidarity is built through *power with* — that is, not only through the direct or immediate sharing of knowledge, access, resources, and insights, but also significantly through the indirect and slower, sustained relational work that provides individuals with a sense of belonging” (186). By seeing ourselves in each other, we feel a sense of validation that we not only belong in the program but we can provide meaningful contributions to the field. We truly embody what Godbee and Novotny hope: “If we agree that feminist co-mentoring plays an important role in fostering one’s sense of value (i.e., self-empowerment, agency, solidarity), then individuals can recognize it as important to their own and others’ positions in academia” (191).

Another close relationship that I have involves the only other rhetoric and composition student in my cohort. During the second year in the program, we were in two courses together, and we both each had a separate third course. We were both really feeling the pressure of our projects and deadlines, so she suggested that we team up and create something together for a course final to help ourselves out. Given everything on my plate, it should have been a no-brainer to immediately agree. Unfortunately, in the back of my mind, I worried about sharing credit for a project, especially with the only other rhetoric scholar in my cohort, as well as abandoning the opportunity to start working on a publication draft (which was an option for our final project). As the last month of the semester approached, I realized that we were both exhausted and burnt out, and I was being silly to worry about the negative impacts of our possible collaboration. Thankfully, she had not started working on another final project, so we went on to create a wonderful presentation together. Interestingly enough, it was an amazing piece on feminist coalitional rhetoric that our professor asked permission to use in her future courses. Without that burnout, I would not have worked with my colleague and created such a meaningful project. This experience helped me reevaluate how I exist in the academy and ultimately participate in the “working with” aspect of feminist co-mentoring.

One thing that I became painfully aware of during this reflection is that institutional influences still plague my co-mentorship practices, even though I have a strong desire to dismantle the harmful structures that operate within the academy. However, I am working to unlearn those indoctrinated behaviors and realize it will take a concerted effort by all of us involved to exact change.

Nataly D.: Like Natalie, I also have a relationship with my colleagues where I refuse to gatekeep things like calls for papers or opportunities that can help us all grow professionally. I have found that sharing these things, especially with my younger colleagues, has strengthened our relationships because it comes from a place of vulnerability. I have been in many conversations where my younger colleagues have openly shared their fears of not being published by the

time they go on the job market. In these conversations, I have shared that these were once my fears too, so my inclination to mentor them comes from a place of understanding which we believe is important for relationship building. Vulnerability and understanding help unveil the stressors we experience as graduate students and unite us closer together.

However, vulnerability and understanding function differently from graduate student to graduate student. As a graduate student of color, I understand that there are specific approaches that graduate students like me need. One mentorship approach I have embraced is Ana Milena Ribero and Sonia C. Arellano's "senior comadre," which is an application of *comadrisimo* (345). A senior comadre is an older Latina graduate student who uses her experience in the program to mentor younger Latina graduate students. In experiencing burnout, I approach relationships with my Latinx, younger graduate student colleagues with this framework rather than falling into the institutional trap that could tempt me to be competitive with colleagues I share identities with. This framework also brings attention to the flaws of the system and uses them as *fuera*. *Fuerza*, or strength, is "an example of how to turn obstacles into opportunities for critical work," where a senior comadre can teach her younger graduate student colleagues to "push past the pain, to be productive through the tears" which requires vulnerability and understanding (346). Below, I share a narrative of how I became a senior comadre to a younger Latina graduate student, a relationship I still maintain today.

At the same new graduate student orientation lunch where I met Natalie, I met the newest rhetoric and composition Latina student. She spoke Spanish and was the oldest in her family, like me, and was nervous about graduate school. I thought about how I felt my first semester of the master's program almost five years ago, where I was the only Latinx person in the entire department, and what it would have meant to see someone like me. While we were eating lunch, one of the other Latinx students (male), who was from a different part of Texas, asked if we had experienced any racism or discrimination in Fort Worth. I nodded no, she nodded yes. Nonetheless, we knew that it existed, and there was a possibility we would experience it while at TCU. After lunch, me and the younger Latina graduate student walked over to a coffee shop where she would wait for her ride. I decided to wait with her so she would not be alone, and we continued to get to know each other more. We asked about each other's families and what part of Mexico they are from, and she asked about being a Latina at TCU. At one point in the conversation, I said to her, "we have to stick together!" Thankfully, we have. In these past two years, I have tried my best to support her as she navigates graduate school by giving her advice, listening when she is struggling, and being a friend.

Find Your People: Collaboration as Catharsis

As mentioned earlier, the drive to differentiate ourselves in order to be a marketable commodity is conditioned deeply into the minds of graduate students. In our earlier narratives, we

shared our negative collaborative experiences that felt driven by competition. However, if developed in healthier, mutually beneficial ways, collaboration can not only produce work we would not have created in solitude, but it can relieve stress and burnout and help us cultivate our distinct voices. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede affirm these benefits as they reflect on their years of collaboration when they say, “In our experience, the act of writing together and seeking ‘identification’ allows us to better see ourselves as distinct. As a result, we have felt free to experiment in writing together, aiming for a seamless voice in one piece . . . and for clearly demarcated but communicating voices in another” (5). Collaboration is like any relationship; it can provide catharsis if you choose the right partner.

The difference between our collaborative experiences with other colleagues and this specific project is that we already had a close friendship prior to working on this article. We knew that we were both struggling with our mental health, so even though this opportunity meant one more thing on our plates, we both happily accepted the opportunity to collaborate because it would help us combat burnout and the institution, grow in our friendship, and work towards publication. Our work together in this project truly embodies Meeks and Hult’s objectives for collaboration which are, “Working in partnership, co-mentors empower one another, work as pro-active agents, and enter into a more holistic relationship rooted in a common goal. In this way, co-mentoring takes this concept of *power over* found in traditional mentorships and transforms it into *power with*” (qtd. in “Asserting the Right to Belong” 179). Through this article, we were both able to achieve our common goals of publishing an article concerning the mental health of graduate students and sharing our experiences of co-mentorship, collaboration, and relationship building in the hopes that it can help other graduate students.

Conclusion

Although we argue for considering collaboration as a tool to combat burnout and institutional pressures, we are not suggesting that collaboration is a cure for either. We understand that burnout is a mental health condition caused by many stressors, some of which are imposed on us by our institutions. We also recognize that the institution is rooted in colonial and capitalist structures, making it difficult for change. However, as graduate students, we should consider how collaboration can be used towards coalition building in order to navigate our programs, contribute to knowledge-making, and combat the structures of our institutions — all of which can result in a positive effect on our mental health. In our experiences with collaborating for this article, we found collaboration to be an effective method to discuss these topics, grow in our friendship, and help other graduate students recognize why and how graduate programs have such an impact on one’s mental health.

Building coalitions, whether through mentorship, collaborative writing, or in other forms, allows us to reclaim agency over our education and do things on our own terms, not how the insti-

tution wants it. Lunsford and Ede speak to that agency in their collaboration by saying, “our writing together has given us a stronger sense of our own stylistic proclivities, our own ways of thinking, knowing, writing, organizing, and revising” (4-5). We soon learned that we each have our own unique writing styles and ways of thinking which helped us grow as writers together. Collaboration and (co)mentorship allow for graduate students to challenge dominant practices within our institutions, such as knowledge gatekeeping, competition, and burnout. Without these relationships to intervene and work to dismantle the system, graduate school will continue to function as the colonial, capitalistic, and patriarchal machine as it is intended.

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We Don't Need More "Safe" Spaces; We Need Transformative Justice

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Abstract: Higher education and by extension writing centers are oppressive, violent, and harmful (Wilder; Patel; Meyerhoff). While writing centers often tout values of social justice and inclusion, in practice, they perpetuate and enforce oppressive ideologies (Green; Faison & Condon; Faison & Treviño; Greenfield). Through a combination of storying, building upon current scholarship, and radically imagining futures, the authors discuss how a Black feminism and transformative justice frame illuminates the systemic oppression/white supremacist mindset that is ingrained in writing centers. These systemic oppressions overlap with neoliberal myths of "safe spaces" and "homes" that undermine and scapegoats marginalized consultants in the writing center for the systemic oppression they experience. The article concludes by discussing what transformative justice has to offer us for *(re)imagining writing centers outside of these neoliberal stock stories and offer readers reflective questions for transformation.*

Keywords: writing centers, storying, structural racism, Spiritual Bypassing, transformative justice

Higher education and by extension writing centers are oppressive, violent, and harmful (Wilder; Patel; Meyerhoff). While writing centers often tout values of social justice and inclusion, in practice, they perpetuate and enforce oppressive ideologies (Green; Faison & Condon; Faison & Treviño; Greenfield). As Grutsch McKinney posits, writing centers often adhere to a grand narrative that "writing centers are comfortable, iconoclastic places where all students go to get one-to-one tutoring on their writing" (3). This grand narrative perpetuates the racism and discrimination experienced by marginalized people in the writing center—while allowing writing centers practitioners as a whole to function in the same oppressive ways and continuing to claim writing centers are safe spaces for all. However, in reality, this grand narrative functions as a stock story that allows writing centers to "feign neutrality and at all costs avoid any blame or responsibility for societal inequity" (Martinez 70). These stock stories include perpetuating the idea that the writing center is a "safe" and "welcoming" space; using the terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion as neoliberal

catch-alls that promote assimilation; and giving ourselves self-congratulatory praise while avoiding the call to be co-conspirators (Love).

Through a combination of storytelling, building upon current scholarship, and radically imagining futures, we will discuss how a Black feminism and transformative justice frame illuminates the systemic oppression/white supremacist mindset that is ingrained in writing centers. These systemic oppressions overlap with neoliberal myths of “safe spaces” and “homes” that undermine and scapegoat marginalized consultants in the writing center for the systemic oppression they experience. We conclude our article by discussing what transformative justice has to offer us for (re) imagining our writing centers outside of these neoliberal stock stories and offer readers reflective questions for transformation.

The Necessity of Black Feminisms

(Bethany). I was Mentor Program Coordinator for a writing center, which meant that I was responsible for facilitating new graduate students' transition and onboarding into the center. They had to do onboarding and logistics training as well as get acquainted with writing center scholarship. I created a curriculum with readings that focused on 1) intersectionality and Black feminism, 2) active listening and care in centers, and 3) a choose-your-own-adventure pathway of various options (e.g., linguistic justice, queer theory, feminisms, research). Each new graduate consultant—the mentee—was assigned a mentor who was a returning graduate consultant in the center. As the Coordinator, I met with each pair at least once a month to discuss the curriculum.

One semester, I had to meet several times with a mentee one-on-one rather than alongside their mentor due to scheduling conflicts. I had been doing this for two years now and was previously an Assistant Director of another center, so I felt more than prepared to tackle a quick check-in meeting. However, now, I'm regretful of the hubris I had. I turned on my Zoom room a few minutes ahead of the start time and found the mentee already there.

I began my usual check-in questions about how he was doing, what's happening this semester for them, what questions they had, etc. As the mentee replied to my questions, I began to feel a tight feeling in my stomach. I realized that he was interrupting me and using microaggressive, genderist language to talk about his wife. My stomach continued to turn, and as a survivor of violence and trauma, I tend to never ignore my gut, but I pushed away the alarm bell because this was work, and besides, it wasn't anything I hadn't heard from folks before, so why was this different?

I changed gears away from the check-in to try to ease my own discomfort. I moved to the readings, because I thrive in intellectualizing rather than feeling, so I figured this had to be better.

“How did you feel about this month’s readings? What questions did you have from them?”

“Well, the article on emotion and writing centers that used stories was really illogical and filled with fallacies. It wasn’t very empirical.”

“Can you say more about what you mean by “empirical”?” I asked.

*“Using actual data that is quantitative and rigorous. You can’t just tell a story that has logical contradictions and expect it to pass as scholarship. This is why I chose not to go into **your** field.”*

“You were going to go into Rhetoric and Composition?”

“Yes, but I ended up not because the methods were not rigorous or empirical enough.”

We talked more about his journey applying to both RhetComp and his current field, and he asked me what methods courses I even had to do in my MA and PhD. I could feel my stomach tighten more, and I continued to ignore it. I answered with all the methods training I had, taking the bait and feeling the need to justify my field before I said, “Also to circle back, stories are empirical data. We do have methods that are valid, and the idea of rigor is a Western myth of objectivity that has racist origins. When we read about intersectionality and Black feminism last month, did you discuss with your mentor about their importance? Or how it relates to storying?”

“I understand the importance of talking about identity and privilege, but at the end of the day, it isn’t important to research and writing centers.” The rest of that meeting was a blur, but I do remember logging off the Zoom and vomiting, unable to hold back the silent screams of my body, urging me to listen.

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All identities are also social and cultural constructs, and historically, arise out of and work in tandem with racism and white supremacy. For the macro-level, intersectionality and Black feminisms consider the ways that society has interlocking and overlapping systems of oppression. While each system of oppression will be slightly different based on contextual time, place, and moment, generally these systems include (but are not limited to) white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, capitalism, elitism, ableism, et cetera.

These systems, as illuminated by intersectionality and Black feminist lenses, demonstrate how people with systemically disempowered identities are “impacted by multiple forces and then [they are] abandoned [by systems and institutions]” (Crenshaw 10:31). Each of these identities cannot be untangled from one another, as the Combahee River Collective declared, “If Black

women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.” The Combahee River Collective Statement is just one text that highlights the ways that society runs on the power of webs of oppression. These webs and their work call us to acknowledge how identities, systems, and power are co- and multiply- constructed to restrain and oppress. Those with multiple systemically disempowered identities are most impacted by systemic and interpersonal harm, which creates structural oppression.

These systems create our institutions, which include education, banking, criminal justice and law, state welfare, media, housing, et cetera (Kendall). As Kendall declares:

We don't have bigotry by accident; it's built and sustained by the same cultural institutions we're taught to revere. We cannot keep sustaining a system of gatekeeping that privileges a very few at the expense of the majority. (94)

In this, these institutions are reflections and intentional creations by the overlapping oppressing systems. These intentional, institutional systems work to erase, harm, and silence, but intersectional feminisms allow feminists to “step up, reach back, and keep pushing forward” (Kendall 14) toward accountability and liberation.

Then, at the micro-level, each of these systems not only interlock and overlap, but they also create obstacles, harm, and oppression for anyone that does not fit the “mythical norm” (Lorde). In other words, everyone has various positionalities (e.g., race, nationality, language use, gender, sexuality, religion, class) that are contextually place and time specific. These positionalities and identities cannot be separated at that individual level.

Yet, writing centers and their practitioners ignore and flatten the impact of whiteness and white supremacy in writing centers. Even though intersectionality and Black feminisms demonstrate a necessary framework for understanding and disrupting centers, we as a field have not taken up the call. Instead, we fall into the racist legacies of literacy crises, linguistic assimilation, colonial structures, and more.

In one of the most telling critiques, Faison and Condon write that, writing centers participate:

in the institutionalized practice of cannibalizing the cultures and languages of Othered bodies; enforcing the assimilation of student writers and tutors of color into whitely discourses and the epistemological spaces in which those discourses are legitimated and reproduced. Whitely writing centers, we think, participate in the academy's racial project

of defining and containing racial Otherness within acceptable, normative limits, thus preserving white advantage and privilege. (9)

Writing centers, in their design, perpetuate an institutional legacy of colonialism where bodies of colors are forced to conform to acceptable and normative practices. As true in most institutional structures, policies, procedures, practices, et cetera work together to maintain a culture of white supremacy that forces marginalized communities to conform in order to preserve white privilege.

As Inoue (“How Do”) declares, “White people can perpetuate White supremacy by being present. You can perpetuate White language supremacy through the presence of your bodies in places like this.” So, when most writing centers are in PWIs and/or in a racist society, when the majority of writing centers are operated and staffed by white people, when the majority of our scholarship is written by white people and hosted at “and-grab universities, we perpetuate whiteness and white supremacy.

## Disrupting Safe Spaces

*(Amanda) My friend and I sat together in the empty, locked, writing center, using the peaceful afterhours environment of the center to catch up on whatever homework we had left from our honors literature courses.*

*Eventually, the quiet of studying turned into the distracted banter of friends, and then gossip. We were essentially just chatting about our coworkers. My friend had just started hanging out with one of our coworkers, Wyatt, and eventually our conversation drifted over to him.*

*“Yeah, he’s nice,” I said, “But he ‘jokingly’ carries around that info-wars mug all the time.”*

*My friend didn’t try to come to Wyatt’s defense. She readily agreed that he could be a jerk sometimes and started to add to the stories I’d heard about him. I learned that Wyatt had started to have jam sessions with some of the other boys in the writing center, where they would hang out, chat, and play music. Then she told me that at one of those jam sessions, Wyatt and the guys had started ranking every consultant in the writing center based on how cool they were, and another girl, who’d been in the writing center a few years longer than me and was the only other woman of color in the center was at the very bottom of the list.*

*In defense of this ‘least cool person,’ I insisted, “She doesn’t deserve that.”*

*“Yeah, but they think she makes everything about race.”*

*These interactions became one of the first on a long list of grievances I had, not about the writing center, but about being a Black person in academia. It was reinforced to me then, how people saw it when people of color advocated for themselves in harmful environments. For instance, my writing center director told me that the reason she didn't focus more heavily on race and privilege in our writing center class and professional development was because she'd tried it one year, and it had really scared the white consultants who had never thought about privilege before, and she didn't want to do that again.*

*It was evident in this writing center that consultants of color were scapegoated as uncomfortable, and as ruining the safe, fun, vibe of the writing center when they pointed out injustices. But, I didn't fully think that the writing center played a role in that. By the end of my first semester of the writing center, I wrote a paper where I came to the conclusion that, "When it comes to issues of racism, exploitation is not often intentional, but when working within a discriminatory system that does not acknowledge the burdens that minorities experience in the dominant cultural that instances of burnout and isolation occurs." I knew that racism existed in the writing center, but I had landed on blaming the system, and only the system, while failing to think about the ways that we, as consultants, were implicated inside of the system. There was no way that my friends, colleagues, and directors were racist.*



Even with all the personal, racial, and political trauma that I (Amanda) have experienced at the hands of the writing center practitioners, I had still fallen into believing the stock story of the writing center as a comfortable home; a safe space for everyone. A space where racism happened incidentally, rather than as part of the larger structure. A viewpoint that ultimately allowed the writing center practitioners around me and myself to, "avoid any blame or responsibility for societal inequity" (Martinez 70).

As Grutsch McKinney describes, the myth of the writing center as a safe space or home that I had adhered to "can be traced back to the conscious decisions made by writing center directors to make the space look like home. They wanted to create a physical identity for the center that welcomed students and comforted them" (22). However, the trouble with the physical identity and narrative that directors chose is that a narrative of home or safety will always be a narrative of white supremacy.

This is true, for one because in writing centers, home becomes defined by white, middle-class standards of home and comfort, often leaving those whose homes don't fit into that mold to feel othered or outside. For example, Treviño and Faison write:

I want to stress that feelings of familiarity, of knowing, and being used to things are a part of

what makes spaces feel comfortable and homelike, but I did not grow up in a home surrounded by white middle-class comforts.

Treviño & Faison are only two of many multiply marginalized writing center practitioners (e.g., Garcia, Green, Lockett) who have talked about feeling out-of-place, not-at-home, and othered in the writing center as a result of a physical and verbal rhetoric that prioritizes a white, middle-class distortion of comfort and safety.

Safety exists hierarchically. Ultimately, the idea of safe spaces and home is perpetuated and preserved because it comforts white writing center practitioners. Inside of a space that functions on neoliberal myths of safety, those who act “against”— by making moves like pointing out inequity — that environment are deemed as unsafe, but the people who act “against” the environment are the people who were never safe to begin with. Much like how “the least cool” person in the writing center was the least cool because she disrupted white comfort. When that white comfort is disrupted, Black and brown bodies are then scapegoated as causing that discomfort through systems like Spiritual Bypassing. Ceballos et al. write, “Spiritual Bypassing is what happens when white women confronted with racial trauma fall back on unity, peace, kindness and love to force People of Color to recant their claim to trauma at the risk of being painted as mean or divisive” (115). Spiritual Bypassing allows writing center practitioners, especially “well-meaning” white woman practitioners to continue to distance themselves from accusations of racism.

For example, in the narrative that Faison shares about Spiritual Bypassing, she recounts she how did a consultation on a racist dissertation which claimed that “a woman, no matter her racial background, would have inferior children should she become impregnated by and consequently bear the offspring of a Black man” (Ceballos et al. 98). More than just recounting the racism of the consultation, Faison recounts the subsequent racism she experienced by her colleagues who, “dismissed [her] concern as an underappreciation for and a misunderstanding of science” (Ceballos et al. 99). Here, not only is Faison silenced, but she’s also villainized as misunderstanding science for even bringing up the issue of racism in the first place. Spiritual Bypassing relies on this villainization because by using it, white practitioners can both ignore the stories of marginalized communities and punish marginalized communities for discussing them in the first place. So, when speaking out against oppressive and harmful situations in the writing center, marginalized bodies are labeled overemotional, angry, or disruptive – the people who make a writing center “unsafe”— a phenomenon that Ceballos also discusses happening to her at her own writing center in Counterstories where she was labeled as an “angry Latina” in a writing center that exerted the idea of comfort (Ceballos et al).

Additionally, my (Amanda’s) narrative shows how silencing pairs with Spiritual Bypassing. Silencing marginalized communities allows white practitioners in writing centers to not have to hear marginalized voices or be implicated in the racism they claim to resist. Rather than hearing



counterstories, the white-centered publications in writing centers create a grand narrative of inclusivity without ever having to engage in issues of race that implicate them in broader systems of white supremacy, which then excuses practitioners from making any ideological changes. The safe space and home myths function together to create this unity, peace, kindness and love, which means that anyone who disrupts this vision, often marginalized consultants, can be painted as divisive in the space, while directors, other consultants, and people who enter the space can maintain the feelings that they're doing the right thing by maintaining their ideas safety, and coziness, and unity.

## Turning to Transformative Justice and Community Accountability

(Bethany; CW: linguistic harm). It's 2015, and my first full semester as a writing center tutor. *90% of my job is working with students who must come each week to work with me as a requirement for their writing lab class that supplements first-semester composition. I have the same 5 students I meet with for one hour each week. Every week, we are required to work on papers for their Comp I class as well as writing exercises (usually required grammar drills) that are required for the lab.*

*I go and grab the worksheet from the back filing cabinet for this week's writing exercise. This client—a self-identified white, disabled, first-gen woman—sits down and I ask, "What do you want to work on today? We can do the writing exercises or stuff for your class."*

*She shrugs, "I don't care."*

*"Okay, well the writing exercise is due tomorrow, so maybe we should just knock that out." She nods apathetically. I prioritize efficiency rather than listening and responding to why she is responding with apathy. I see but don't truly listen or hear what her actions are telling me.*

*Instead, I pull out the exercise and begin to lecture about different sentence types and when to use conjunctions, commas, and the like, as the exercise asks. We get to the example sentences, and I question her about how she thinks we can make the sentence grammatically correct. She doesn't really engage, and I naively think it's because I didn't explain it well. I try to explain sentence types using different colors of paper to represent different components.*

*She finally says, "I don't understand any of this because I don't know what you mean by noun and verb. I hate grammar and I'm failing English anyway. This doesn't matter."*

*I launch into another lesson about what a noun and verb are, ignoring the core of what she was saying—that there's emotions, trauma, and feelings here with these topics and class. Even though I had begun tutoring after barely being trained (i.e., watching 2 sessions and was thrown*

*into it that year); even though the grammar drills were required; even though I didn't have the knowledge or language yet to unpack why grammar isn't actually that important or the linguistic and racial harm and violence that its enforcement causes, I caused immense harm to this student by my ignorance. And the worst part is, 8 years later, and I can't remember if I ever addressed her feelings or the content of what she was saying, or if I continued because I thought "good" tutoring meant doing our required grammar drills.*

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We all have and will commit harm. Our institutions have and will commit harm. And the worst part is we can't undo harm once it's been committed. All harm and abuse are a subset to the larger systems and webs of oppression and violence. They can't be untangled from one another.

Our institutions, which include the institutions of writing centers, are sites of assimilation, harm, and systemic and localized oppression. These institutions were never going to be the place for transformative or radical change, as their very goal and creation were and are antithetical to that.

As Sara Ahmed discussing in *Living a Feminist Life*, she critiques how diversity, equity, and inclusion work, or DEI, serve as "brick walls." Moreover, she discusses how doing that DEI work, which is always through the labor of the diversity worker, is "not the same thing as an institution willing to be transformed" (94). In that, our institutions have a stake in maintaining the status quo of racism, sexism, transphobia, colonialism, et cetera. They have distorted DEI efforts by continuing to occupy indigenous land, relying on police and carceral logics, and much more. In writing center scholarship, there has been countless harm through oppressive ideologies and practices, including not only those mentioned in the introduction, but also beyond. People experience harm daily in writing centers (e.g., the stories found within scholarship of Lockett, Dixon, etc.).

So, what do we do about the harm? One answer is transformative justice and community accountability. Writing center practitioners must reflect not only on their own identities and world with intellect and criticality, but also, we must also address the harm systems and people committed. Some writing center scholarship has discussed restorative justice (e.g., Banville et al.). While some institutions have tried to turn toward restorative justice, that work is incomplete and stays within the same system of harm. According to the Alberta Restorative Justice Association, restorative justice is "an approach focused on repairing harm when a wrongdoing or injustice occurs in a community. Depending on the process or technique used, restorative justice involves the victim, the offender, their social networks, justice agencies, and the community." In this definition, restorative justice is used to reduce harm while working within the system that caused the harm in the first place to maintain the same status quo Ahmed critiques. It is a retrofit and a harm reduction technique within that system that does nothing to prevent future harm. It is a reactive, incomplete

measure rather than a proactive one.

Arising in response to the restorative justice movement was transformative justice (TJ). TJ works to transform the system as well as mitigate harm. In the book, *Beyond Survival*, one of the contributors declares that transformative justice is “a process where the individual perpetrator, the abusive relationship, and the culture and power dynamics of the community are transformed [...]” (Barnow 50). As Mia Mingus discusses, transformative justice resists relying on the state’s carceral systems and perpetuating oppressive norms. Additionally, transformative justice seeks to be active in cultivating “healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved” (Mingus).

In this definition, there are many similarities to restorative justice, but it differs greatly in its overall goal— TJ seeks to abolish and transform the system rather than working within the same structures that caused oppression in the first place. Relatedly, transformative justice necessitates the praxis of community accountability. Contrary to popular belief, “being accountable is not about earning forgiveness” (Cheng Thom 76). Instead, community accountability (CA) is rooted in Black queer Feminist values and is a process that’s an act of healing—through self- and community-care—that helps people understand that everyone can grow (Barnow). In addition, even though harm cannot be erased, the work turns toward transforming and healing individuals, communities, and society (Barnow). Overall, these frameworks of TJ and CA serve not only as ways to enact radical criticality for imaging better worlds, but also as tangible praxes to enact.

Your Turn to Grapple with the Messiness

(Bethany) Writing centers have come to embody and be a microcosm of everything, everywhere to me. With that, I tend to feel everything, everywhere—not always all at once, but the messiness reigns inside and I’m filled with complex, clashing and crashing emotions. Sadness, when I find writing centers and the world to be too overwhelming and seemingly too big to change. Anger, at whatever in this microcosm is hurting people and reinforcing larger harm. Shame, knowing I, too, commit harm. Reckoning, knowing shame isn’t a productive emotion and builds walls to our progress. Mourning, at the loss of who I could be today if I had started my (un)learning earlier. Joy, in being intentional that I want a future-me to be proud of actions I take now knowing I already lost so much time to past progress. I want to become a person who future-me doesn’t mourn.

(Amanda) Most days in the writing center come with a flood of contradictory emotions. Safety, maybe, when I walk in the doors and see my friends. Tension, as I walk by the receptionist and wonder if I have to explain my presence. Laughter, at the heart of a good conversation. Uneasiness, when I don’t see anyone or anything that helps me feel as if I belong in the space. Elation, when I share my ideas, and they are heard. Frustration, when those ideas are appropriated. Anger, when I have to sit through conferences and professional development sessions rife with racism. Often, guilt, as I think back to the times when my decision making was informed by

antiquated views, or when I was a bystander, and I let something slide that I really shouldn't have let slide, or I made fun of student writing, or helped a student write a "better" racist paper because it was easier than challenging views. Guilt, also, as I think about my role inside of an institution that was designed to be oppressive and white supremacist and whether or not I want to continue to participate in that system. Guilt at all of the harm I have and will continue to cause, but also acceptance when I realize that, as Bethany reminds us, it's impossible not to cause harm. And even hope, sometimes, when I make plans for what I'm going to do and how I'm going to act when I do cause harm.

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A transformative justice worldview is a necessary and lifesaving framework; while some scholars have begun this work in writing centers, it must continue in all facets, particularly tutor education, professional development, and administrative praxis. To implement this in writing centers (and institutions at large), we must create better worlds through radical praxis. However, when there is the inevitable harm, injustice, or inequity committed, community accountability allows individuals to begin healing. This healing of ourselves, writing centers, institutions, and society is an act of transformative justice.

While it would be wonderful if there was one way to embody this transformative justice praxis, the actual work is messy and imperfect, but it still moves toward collective action. For instance, Sara Ahmed and Gloria Anzaldúa talk about the fragmentation and in-betweenness of embodying this transformative worldview. In other words, a tension exists between a better world we can imagine and the practice of being fragmented, messy humans who are also working toward better. Radical often seems like a scary term, as though it's a word that can be substituted for extreme. In reality, though, as Angela Davis writes, radical simply means "grasping things at the root." For this reflective portion of the article, we want to use radical imagination as a framework, which Lamar Johnson defines as a concept that:

compels language and literacy scholars and the field of English education to take action to eradicate a system that blocks the chances of creating the impossible—in this case, a more just and equitable world. [...] [T]he (re)imagining of y(our) selves must occur and y(our) hearts, minds, and souls have to be angered for justice and angered with the prophetic imagination (Dantley & Green, 2015) to create the world that we hope to see but that is not yet. (499)

We want to think radically about ourselves, our identities, and our imaginings for the future. You may be wondering what TJ looks like and exact plans for how to do it. We cannot give you the answer to that question. Instead, this work is collective, messy/complex, community-based work

that embraces small moments of progress in the present moment. This work is going to be tense and contradictory and ask for a lot of learning and unlearning to the oppressive norms many of us were indoctrinated in. It will be messy, and we will cause and continue to cause harm by reinforcing the systems that we were indoctrinated into, but we will have the responsibility to stay accountable to our communities and ourselves as we learn and unlearn, and (re)imagine a better future.

We want readers to take a moment to reflect radically on goals and visions for the writing center and what it can look like. The questions below are meant to help you reflect, and they are inspired and influenced by transformative justice scholars (e.g., those in *Beyond Survival*, brown's *emergent strategy*, and *Creative Interventions*):

- What are you embodying in your daily life? In your work?
- How can you grow? How can you learn? How can you unlearn?
- How can you become a person you don't have to mourn later?
- How do/ can you move beyond shame to more productive action?
- Who do you lean on? Who leans on you?
- Are your needs being met? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What is your first reaction in conflict?
- How do you feel when you experience/witness anger? Joy? Sadness? Grief? Tension? Conflict?
- How do you make room for complexity, non-linearity, and messiness?
- Have you engaged in transformative justice (not restorative or carceral justice)? How can you continue/begin this ideological shift?
- What are the organization's policies, practices, spaces, and places embodying and reinforcing?
- Knowing that "safe" and "welcoming" are neoliberal myths, how will/does the organization and participants define safety with that in mind?

- Do participants within the organization feel comfortable voicing conflicts and harm? How do you know they are comfortable? If they aren't, how can the organization work to establish a community of care?
- What is the organizations' participants' first reaction in conflict?
- How will/does the organization make room for complexity, non-linearity, and messiness?
- Has the organization engaged in transformative justice (not restorative or carceral justice)? How can you continue/begin this ideological shift?

## Toward Different Worlds

*(Both). The rest of the story from here is currently a fiction where we dream for a better world and people—not better writers or writing. In that dream, we would look back at who we are now and probably “being sorry” at what we were doing and working toward more self-accountability. In it, we are not just surviving, but thriving and living. It’s a world without universities and institutions as we know them. It’s a world where we operate on crip time where there’s time for “pauses” (Inoue, “Teaching”) and criticality rather than capitalistic deadlines. We don’t flatten others’ stories into one-dimensional tropes, but instead understand and accept that we are all messy people with an array of identities and experiences just trying to do our best. We work toward accountability of ourselves and others for a world where it’s not about “fixing” others—for their use of language(s), so-called “deficits, “differences in identities, trauma, etc.—but instead experience all the differences and complexity that are brought to our transformative communities. We want us to “be alive, awake, grieving, and full of joy” (Piepzna-Samarasinha).*

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# Subversive Classroom Practices

## Addressing the Barriers between Us and that Future via Deep Rhetoricity

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**Abstract:** So often left unquestioned within academia is how to be-and-think-with others beyond the axes of academic theories-values, unhinged from rhetorics of propriety, and unseated from automatic equations between a position/ality and

disposition. In our 2022 article, “Deep Rhetoricity as Methodological Grounds for Unsettling the Settled,” we introduced deep rhetoricity as an intervention into rhetorical practices of doing and as a praxis of invention within the same context. Our conversation was introductory, as we tentatively outlined and animated the inward epistemic principles of deep rhetoricity meant to unsettle the settled-ness of self, being, and doing: returns, careful reckonings, enduring tasks. In this companion piece centered on addressing the theme of barriers between us and that future, we open a conversation on the relational framework of being, doing, and thinking-with others within deep rhetoricity. Still in the exploratory stage, we tentatively outline and illustrate the outward epistemic principles of deep rhetoricity meant to unsettle the settled-ness of relationality: returns, careful reckonings, and being-with. The goal of this essay is to call for and work towards establishing a foundation to explore a relational framework of being-and-thinking-with others vis-à-vis deep rhetoricity. The essay features the hopes-struggles of rhetorical scholars and educators as well as illustrate the complexities, complicatedness, and missingness of doing human work and carrying out human projects-with others. Such friction amplifies the demand to learn how to be-and-think-with others otherwise.

**Keywords:** deep rhetoricity, classroom, stories, careful reckonings,

In our CCC 2022 article, “Deep Rhetoricity as Methodological Grounds for Unsettling the Settled,” we (Gesa and Romeo) preliminarily sketched out *deep rhetoricity*. We acknowledged in that essay *rhetoricity* can convey a *doing* such as historiographic, archival, feminist rhetorical, and decolonial research, among other forms. At the onset, however, it was deliberated and determined that in the next iteration of conversations on *doing* what needed to be reemphasized was the *unsettling of the settled*. Our hope, as appealed by indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, was for an unsettling of self-being anchored by identity politics or benevolent lexicography; knowledge production organized by axes of academic theories-values inextricably linked to modern/colonial projects of territorial and epistemological expropriation; and politics of critical positioning detached from location and disengaged from the particularities and specificities in which power unfolds. *Deep rhetoricity* was our attempt to intervene in a *doing* undaunted by the hauntings, unscathed by the haunting situations, and unfazed by the *wounded/ing spaces-places* of a modern/colonial world system.<sup>1</sup> The actor-agent of this *doing* recognizes nobody exists outside of such and thus has it figure prominently in *returns* to spaces-places where one *does* and *thinks*.<sup>2</sup>

We advance a *doing* accountable and responsible to self(ves), others (broadly conceived), and communities. In the spirit of Gayatri Spivak, we set out to think of a *doing* not purely academic, situated squarely as a responsibility to what is formalizable (e.g., responding - being answerable to a call to action), what must *endure* (e.g., the ungraspable), and to the trace of the *other* (radical contamination). Such a *doing* underscores an ethos unhinged from an allegiance to a proper name or finality and grounded instead in being present to self(ves), others (nonliving, non-human), and the infinite demand for getting caught up. In the vein of Donna Haraway and Linda

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1 . See Till (6).

2 . See Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity* (xvi).

Alcoff's work on epistemology, situated knowledge, and truth, we also conceived of a *doing* unseated from automatic equations between a position/ality and disposition. Herein lies its formation as praxis insofar that it is a *doing* grounded in becoming ready to be answerable for how one has come to walk and see the world and interact and exchange meaning with *others*. *Deep rhetoricity* was our wager all *doing* demands as a starting point the corporeal exercise of addressing oneself to hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings as obligation-responsibility. The actor-agent of this *doing* would embody an ethos and praxis of *unsettling the settled*.

*Deep rhetoricity* is our attempt to situate ethos and praxis in the elsewhere and *otherwise*. Alcoff argues we need to relearn how to make truth claims and reconstruct epistemology. That is a course-of-action, however im/possible, we accept, and one that demands the language of constellations and coalitions. A truth: our *stories-so-far* are a cosmo of constellated hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings. The racist Arthur de Gobineau understood the world was being staged for a haunting-and-ghostly totality to become a *structure of feeling*: "so long as even their shadows remain [e.g., monuments], the building[s] stands [e.g., economic, authorial, educational, political, and knowledge], the body seems to have a soul, the pale ghost walks" (33). Though not all feel equally the haunt in their bones, we argue in our essay, we are all in this palimpsest narrative—Raymond Williams' *structures of feeling* or Michael Taussig's *public secret*—of settler sites, haunted/ing communities, and wounded/ing spaces-places. It will take a coalition to unstage such a totality. In the spirit of Karen Barad, Walter Dignolo and Catherine Walsh, and others then, *deep rhetoricity* is about the staging of an epistemic *doing* that fractures barriers between us (living, nonliving, nonhuman) to make visible invisible structures of feeling that attune us.<sup>3</sup> The actor-agent of this *doing* is driven by an ethic of being-and-thinking-with others otherwise that underscores critical frameworks of feminist rhetorical practices and coalition-building. This *doing* is animated and facilitated though by the epistemic principles of *returns*, *careful reckonings*, and *enduring tasks* to ensure a responsibility beyond mere representation.

The focus of our previous essay is on the inward process of *deep rhetoricity*. By couching ethos and praxis in hauntings, inheritances, and dwelling as language, rhetoric, and corporeal exercises of address we are afforded the opportunity to deliberate *an-other* set of choices, options, and responsibilities. We concur with scholars such as Jacques Derrida, Avery Gordon, Sylvia Wynters, and others that *an-other epistemological framework for the living* is needed; one predicated on an ontology of truth not instituted by an epistemology that dehumanizes and devalues human beings (*coloniality of knowledge*) but one that strives to liberate, however im/possible, pluriversal truths and constellated truths; one that partakes in responsible and accountable knowledge production instead of idealized reconstructions of knowledge; one that underscores a humanness in the service of *others*, a being human as praxes. What continues to be at stake in our inability to live or have something in-common is the *possibilities of new stories*. The actor-agent of this *doing* foregoes the given-ness and peels back the layers of what is constituted as settled. To

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3 See Brasher et al. (292-294); A. Gordon (184; 190); Maldonado-Torres (262); Rushdy (33; 57; 174).

begin every conversation on *doing with* hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings is to station self-being within that intermediary stage between what is formalizable and what must *endure* as an *ongoing task*. This is the very space-place of *deep rhetoricity*.<sup>4</sup>

We acknowledge that *deep rhetoricity* can be aligned with the Modernity/Coloniality Collective's prospective task and feminist and coalitional work. A *return* to hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings is a *return* to *where one does and thinks*; a *careful reckoning* with the settled-ness of self-being is a *learning* how to *unlearn* cultural and thinking programs to *relearn* how to *be-and-think-with* self(ves), others, and communities *otherwise*; and the *enduring task* of getting caught up is a commitment to hope-struggle. But because the impetus for *deep rhetoricity* was to go beyond mere critique of Western epistemology and advance a *doing* attuned to the messiness of life, agency, and coalitional work, we did not advance it as a decolonial project.<sup>5</sup> For anything with a proper name, and the irony is not lost on us here, prescribes a proper method of seeing, being, and doing.<sup>6</sup> The same goes with feminist-coalition work and the advancement of a certain form of agency. *Deep rhetoricity* emerges in the vein of Saba Mahmood and Kenna Neitch, where agency is not a synonym for resistance, subversion, and/or resignification of hegemonic norms but rather reflective of a capacity for action that haunting(s)-situation(s) enable and create. It neither portends to be a panacea nor a mechanized application of a proper method but rather a commitment to/wards *unsettling the settled*. The actor-agent of this *doing* engages reconstructive work in epistemology to surrender formal representations of proper names, producing a rupture, creating a clearing, and initiating an opening. This must remain most vital within feminist rhetorical practices and coalitional work where the door must remain open to anyone, *wherever they may be* (Fanon) and in the *non-name of all* (Acosta).

The reconstruction of epistemology that we forward in this essay is based on the outward-facing aspects of *deep rhetoricity*. Its epistemic principles-as-heuristics are not a panacea but build on that hope for a future of mutual wor(l)ding animated by a struggle to unsettle "the barriers between us" (Lorde 57). Like our previous essay, our goal is to open up a conversation, this time on *being-and-thinking-with* others *otherwise*. The relational framework we advance in this essay is informed by feminist and coalitional work as well as scholars such as Audre Lorde, Jim Corder, Joy, Ritchie, Frantz Fanon, María Lugones, bell hooks, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Andrea Riley Mukavetz, and Ana Ribero and Sonia Arellano. We tentatively outline three epistemic principles that are introductory and subject to revision. They are not carried out evenly in this essay but figure prominently throughout. The principles are as follows:

4 . See Alcoff (70-71; 76); A. Gordon (190); Derrida (46); Mignolo and Walsh (170).

5 . See acknowledge Cusicanqui (98-104); Fukushima (14-15); Tlostanova and Mignolo (7).

6 . But as Spivak would say, "all complicities are not equivalent" (63; 59).

- *Returns* to our ways of walking and seeing the world.
- *Careful reckonings* with our understandings of *being-and-thinking-with* and exchanging meaning with others.
- Being-*with*, or a commitment of *being-and-thinking-with* others (past-present-future; environment; living, nonliving, nonhuman) *otherwise*.

Though incomplete, we believe the above epistemic principles are points-of-references that can put feminist rhetorical practices and coalition-building on pathways towards the *possibilities of new stories* amid troubling times and pedagogical challenges. In this context, *deep rhetoricity* will remain quite ambitious in what it strives for, intervention through the *unsettling of the settled* and (re/co)-invention for the sake of relearning how to see and walk the world and interact and exchange meaning with others *otherwise*<sup>7</sup>. The modification to rhetoricity here is less about achieving rhetorical effect and more about making visible the work of *doing* before us all. Such *doing* will echo the undertones of love, care, healing, and learning that are so important to and within frameworks of feminist rhetorical practices and coalition-building work.

Feminist coalition-building, as we envision it, is rooted in principles articulated and advocated by feminist scholars and activists over several decades. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss those principles in detail, we list a number of them below to situate our work and to acknowledge the important work and legacies of feminist activist scholars, scholars who have charted multiple paths for us; have insisted on making commitments to community, collaboration, and coalition-building; and have created/ claimed spaces for women (and women-identified people) whose voices and perspectives that have long been missing, ignored, silenced, or erased from public memory (Applegarth, Buchanan & Ryan, Enoch, Glenn, Logan, Ratcliffe, Royster). Among the feminist activist principles that ground our work are the following:

- questioning the status quo of gendered, hetero-normative, social, political, cultural, economic systems that privilege small groups of people while disempowering/alienating a large number of others, whose stories, lived experiences, and communities have been deemed unimportant, marginal, or deliberately omitted from public narratives (Butler; Duplessis and Snitow; Hanish; Rich).
- questioning epistemological/ontological assumptions of research methods and methodologies and the ethos/ethical practices of researchers. While it is now commonplace among rhetoric and writing studies scholars to reflect on their membership in and commitment to the communities they are studying, early feminist scholars and

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<sup>7</sup> See A. Gordon (5); Maldonado-Torres (251); Corder (23; 25; 31); Lorde (409); Fanon; Lugones; hooks (67).

activists were the ones who insisted on and argued for the importance of these principles (Bizzell, Gilligan, Jagger, Harding, hooks, Lorde, Spivak, Royster, Smith, Sandoval).

- reflecting on one's own ethos as scholars, teachers, community members, and activists (Ryan, Myers and Jones) while working toward reciprocity and collaboration among researchers and community members (Alcoff; Chilisa; Cushman; Powell and Takayoshi; Riley-Mukavetz). That means scholars engage in shared knowledge-building, work with community members who set priorities for the research agenda and for best use of (re)sources—in contrast to Western research practices steeped in traditions of gathering/extracting/exploiting information from community members that can—and have—caused great harm (Caswell; Hughes-Watkins; McCracken and Hogan; Cushman). Reciprocity and collaboration involve *listening* to community members and *centering* their needs, values, and perspectives rather than imposing the researchers' agenda, questions, and values on the community. It also involves protecting the dignity, respect, and autonomy of those we study with an emphasis on fair, ethical, dignified portrayals of research participants and building communities of solidarity.
- developing new tools, frameworks, and methodologies for conducting research, such as the analytical frameworks articulated by Royster and Kirsch (critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization/ transnationalism). It entails efforts to disrupt/unsettle supposedly “neutral /objective points of view” which tend to reflect white western male perspectives. Moreover, it comes with efforts to narrate a greater variety of stories and more complex, diverse representation of human experiences (Graban, Gutenson and Robinson, McDuffie and Ames, Logan, Royster, Schell, VanHaitsma).
- working toward a sense of care, well-being, and love towards those we work with (Corder, hooks, Lorde). Feminist scholars have long recognized that relationships of care can and do create unequal power relations, yet rather than avoiding those inequalities, feminist scholars and activists have challenged researchers to acknowledge potential power differentials and apply an ethics of care to support those who might find themselves in vulnerable positions (Gilligan, Noddings, Tronto).

Embracing *deep rhetoricity* as an intervention into the settled can be helpful to feminist activist and coalitional principles. First, because an ethos and praxis of *unsettling the settled* remains oriented to power structures and hierarchies based in Western settler colonialism, coloniality, patriarchy, and capitalism. Second, because the epistemic principles of *deep rhetoricity* as heuristics

underscore deliberative intentions to produce ruptures, create clearings, and initiate openings. Joy Ritchie warned experiences are not universal, strategic essentialism is only a temporary point of departure, and self-analysis and reflexivity are vital to collective work. Uninterested in hand-waving or “virtue signaling,” we advance a *doing* that incessantly grounds a question, **where are the lessons of ethos and praxis being proposed from?** If we are where we *do* and *think* then hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings must figure prominently in *doings*. And third, because embracing *deep rhetoricity* is about standing at the nexus of an-other’s *stories-so-far* and *possibilities of new stories* as an ethic of love, care, healing, and learning.

The goal of this essay is to animate each facet of the outward-facing aspects of *deep rhetoricity* some of which occurs within the classrooms in which we teach. Our essay below is organized into two sections. In the first section, we explore the barriers between us and a future *otherwise*; the hope-struggle that underscore both possibilities as well as the complexities, complicatedness, and messiness of *doing* human work and carrying out human projects. Such reflections are necessary because sometimes theory and theoretically informed praxis do not easily translate or bode well in practice. This section includes case studies drawn from Kirsch and García’s research and teaching at two different institutions. The second section offers a reflection by all four co-authors, guided by two questions: one, what does feminist coalition-building mean? And two, what does feminist coalition building look like? Such a reflection is necessary given an essay that aims to illustrate how feminist coalition-building might work among a group of four co-authors with diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, and academic standing/privilege.

## The Barriers Between Us and that Future

The discussion that follows draws on examples from undergraduate and graduate courses that Kirsch and García teach. We share examples of how we resist palimpsest narratives that aim to normalize haunted/ing *structures of feeling* (Williams; Gordon), smooth frictions (Lueck and Nasr), hide fissures (Mignolo), and keep the dark corners (and secrets) of history out of sight and out of mind (Bunch). The discussion aims to animate our attempts at implementing the outward epistemic principles of *deep rhetoricity* amid troubling times and pedagogical challenges.

Kirsch reflects on one question that animates this essay: How can we learn to practice *being-and-thinking-with* others *otherwise* in and out of the classroom? Drawing on an undergraduate course, “Writing the Archives,” Kirsch offers a discussion of her feminist commitments and coalition-building practices by working with two student authors, Valeria Guevara Fernandez and Nicole Salazar, who reflect on their own experiences of working with primary sources, conducting archival research, and engaging in feminist coalition-building and activism. Rather than speaking *for or about* students, Kirsch decided to invite students to *be-with/in* this essay as coauthors, sharing their insights, reflections, and challenges of *unsettling settled* histories. Kirsch imagines and enacts a pedagogy that invites pathways of *learning to unlearn as being-with*, highlighting the



possibilities of the outward-facing principles of *deep rhetoricity* and the opportunities that can arise when we find a productive tension between intervention, our current sets of *stories-so-far*, and invention, the *possibilities of new stories*.

García reflects on a recent experience in Tokyo and then segues by recalling work he does *with* students at the University of Utah (UoU). He then contends with a *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* (broadly conceived) in Utah. García proceeds by making an argument for the utility of settler archival research as place-based pedagogy that invites students to *return* to and *carefully reckon* with how their *stories-so-far* and everyday adhere to, interact with, and carry out the histories, cultural memories, and literacy-rhetorical practices settler archives represent. He reflects on failures and minimal successes in an undergraduate course, “Intermediate Writing,” that marks the interplay between a hope for wor(l)ding a future *otherwise* and the struggle to unsettle “the barriers between us and that future” (Lorde 57) through the human work-projects of *unsettling the settled*, *being-and-thinking-with*, and mutual deliberation-determination of *an-other* set of choices, options, and responsibilities.

## Standing at the Nexus of Stories-so-far and the Possibilities-of-New-Stories

In this section, I [Gesa] explore the outward-facing epistemic principles of *deep rhetoricity* against the backdrop of pedagogical challenges and opportunities. In many ways, *deep rhetoricity* resonates with the challenge posed by Audre Lorde:

... looking out and beyond to the future we are creating, [recognizing that] we are part of communities that interact, ... and arm[ing] ourselves with accurate perceptions of the barriers between us and that future” (57).

Lorde’s call anchors the three inward epistemic principles of *deep rhetoricity* as an ethos and praxis of *returns* to our local histories of hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings; *careful reckonings* with self as the place of multiple returns and becomings; and *enduring tasks* of this work. What prompts me to continue exploring *deep rhetoricity* is the potential of the outward journey: the epistemic principle of standing at the nexus of another’s set of *stories-so-far* and *possibilities of new stories*.

When we envision “standing at the nexus” of these two spaces, we invoke movement, fluidity, change—all *enduring tasks*. Drawing inspiration from Lorde and from hooks, who reminds us that “solidarity requires sustained, outgoing commitment,” I invite students, in an upper division course on “Writing the Archives” to explore what it means to *unsettle settled* histories, to confront hauntings and inheritances, and to establish an ethos and praxis that address the barriers between us and another future via a praxis of *being-with* others, *otherwise*. In the course, we study—

and contribute to—many different kinds of archives, including personal and family archives, community archives, digital archives, ephemeral archives, and archives-in-the-making. In the syllabus, I describe the course goals as follows:

This seminar explores archives as sites of cultural interpretation, civic engagement, and social change. We will explore a broad range of archives, including family archives, community archives, digital archives, and institutional archives. Drawing on feminist, rhetorical, indigenous, decolonial, and other perspectives, we will focus on what stories, social memories, and public histories can emerge from archival research, and just as important, what remains hidden, missing, silenced, or erased in archival collections. We will also study how archives in your concentration can illuminate the histories, intellectual frameworks, and methodologies of your field of study.

The course readings are interdisciplinary and include work by feminist and feminist rhetorical scholars, Indigenous scholars, and African American scholars, amongst others. We read chapters from *Unsettling Archival Research* (Kirsch, García, Allen and Smith), articles from a special issue of the digital journal *Across the Disciplines* with the theme *Unsettling the Archives*, and articles by critical archival scholars. One of the articles that became a powerful touchstone in class was Michelle Caswell's "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation." Caswell explains that she adapted the term *symbolic annihilation* from "feminist media scholars in the 1970s" who use it to "describe what happens to members of marginalized groups when they are absent, grossly under-represented, maligned, or trivialized..." (27). Caswell deliberately calls out the willful erasure, disremembering, and omission of records that are part and parcel of many institutional "capital-A" archives, archives that represent on a limited version of history: that of the powerful, wealthy, often white-identified men. She cautions:

"If archives are to be true and meaningful reflections of the diversity of society instead of distorted funhouse mirrors that magnify privilege, then they must dispense with antiquated notions of whose history counts and make deliberate efforts to collect voices that have been marginalized by the mainstream" (p. 36).

In class discussion the term "symbolic annihilation" resonated as both a powerful and haunting concept, offering students an entry point, a measure, a criterion for assessing what happens when "stories-so-far" are missing entirely from public discourse/memory and thereby negate the "possibilities of new stories."

The first half of the semester we focused on readings and case studies that illustrate how researchers can engage in reciprocal work, contribute to the communities they are studying, and produce narratives that *unsettle settled* histories. Students undertake three assignments: an "archival adventure," a low-stakes exploratory assignment that invites discovery of personal or family

archives and reflection on what constitutes an archive, how collections are created, and how memory/ meaning are attached to artifacts. The second assignment explores the conventions of a research proposal and asks students to articulate an original research project that draws on primary sources housed in a digital archive and/or one that builds on the archival adventure. The third assignment asks students to conduct the research they proposed in the second assignment. That is, students follow through on the research goals they set, including analyzing and interpreting primary sources from digital archives, and/or creating original sources via conducting interviews/collecting materials, and/or examining artifacts in small-a archives.

In all three assignments I invite students to see themselves as researchers who reflect on *stories-so-far* and, in the process, work toward the *possibilities of new stories* that might evolve, challenge, or amend *stories-so-far*. I ask students to practice reciprocity, a *being-and-thinking-with*, to make a contribution to the community(ies) they study and/or the archives they work with, so that the archival research they are conducting can enable the *possibilities of new stories*. One of the evaluation criteria for the final assignment, the original research project, addresses outcome, impact, and contribution.

The writer clearly explains how conclusions are drawn, what contributions the research makes, and considers the impact of the research, including likely impact on intended audiences. The writer considers potential reciprocity, benefits, harms to participants/ community. Explains how the results will be disseminated and why these means are appropriate to the subject matter and audience.

Finally, I invite students to articulate the contribution(s) they might be able to make to the communities they are studying. In many ways, this assignment sequence aligns with García's portfolio requirements: constituted by *returns home* (archival adventure), *careful reckonings* with *stories-so-far* (research proposal) and a commitment to reciprocity, to *being-and-thinking-with* others, *otherwise* (original research project).

In the hyperlinks below, readers encounter the words and work of **Valeria Guevara Fernandez** and **Nicole Salazar** who describe and reflect on their archival research projects and what that work means to them. Guevara Fernandez's research project touches on the many ways in which archival materials can get flattened, homogenized, erased; her research focused on holdings in the University of Louisville (UofL) Oral History Center. What caught her attention were nine oral histories—testimonios actually (more on this below)—all classified with a single, generic description: "Latin Americans – United States." As she was about to embark on her research, Guevara Fernandez reflects:

"As I was browsing through the long list of subjects, a specific one caught my attention: "Latin Americans - United States". The lack of detail in its title is what drew me in the

most. Was this an archive about immigration? Politics? Xenophobia?"

As Guevara Fernandez quickly discovered, issues of access, selection, power, and privilege are deeply intertwined with archival holdings. She deliberately positioned herself at the nexus of *stories-so-far* and the *possibilities of new stories* by making a critical intervention: engaging in archival labor. She contacted Heather Fox, the director of the UofL Oral History Center and started a fruitful collaboration, taking on the role of "activist archivist" (Wakimoto, Bruce, and Partridge) and serving as a vital contributor to the archives by creating new records, coding interviews in both Spanish and English, analyzing themes, and making visible the lost and hidden histories contained in these testimonios. Quite literally, Guevara Fernandez began creating *presence from absence and sounds from silence* with her research project.

For Nicole Salazar, connections of *stories-so-far* and the *possibilities-of-new-stories* were invoked when she began her archival adventure by sorting through bins of her grandmother's clothing, many of which were sewn by her grandmother, an accomplished seamstress who worked in factories that produced designer fashion.

"My grandma worked many jobs as she was raising my mom and my aunts. All her jobs always had something to do with sewing, whether it be swimsuits when she worked at La Sirena, costumes while she worked at a factory called Clemente, or luxury purses and belts at the Louis Vuitton factory not too far from her house."

As Nicole sorted through the bins, she came upon a pair of well-worn, low-rise jeans, an item of clothing that she learns tells the story of intergenerational, border-crossing connections. Here, we see Nicole "bearing and being a witness to stories-so-far and embracing the possibilities of new stories that she is able to embody, a college student and athlete." Nicole reflects:

"The majority were memories of my mom since the clothes used to be hers with an occasional piece or two of my Nina's but when I showed her a pair of light washed low-rise Levi's, my grandma had lots to share... The low-rise Levi's were hers when she was in her early 20s and later on she passed them down to my mom. To think that this pair of denim was over twice my age and had seen more of the world than I had was mind blowing. I was so excited to think that a pair of jeans that were once my grandma's and then my mom's could be mine, and that I could make my own memories with them. Once we finished running through the other items I selected, I rushed to try on my new pairs of jeans. I put them on and I immediately felt a sense of belonging. Not only because they fit like a glove, but also because I felt like I filled in the missing part of a puzzle. I had the opportunity to carry on the lineage of the Levi's that had been well loved by my family before me; it felt like an honor to wear them."

Nicole's discovery of her grandmother's sewing skills and sense of fashion led Nicole to a research project focused on a community where fashion and style are used as elements of activism: the community of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Through exploring an archive in the making, that of the Los Angeles house of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and conducting interviews with current sisters, Nicole was able to reckon with *stories-so-far*, build solidarity across communities, and learn to *be with/think with* others, *otherwise*.

## An Experience of the Im/Possible

Recently, I (Romeo) was in Japan with the family. We visited TeamLab Planets (Tokyo), an art installation that aims to unsettle barriers between self and boundaries, self and artwork, and self and others. Its theme, "Together with Others, Immerse your Entire Body, Perceive with your Body, and Become One with the World," is aspirational, an invitation to learn how to *be-and-think-with* others *otherwise* —*an archival impression*.. Activities peeled back layers of accessories (quasi bare-life), unsettled the grounds on which we walk (obscuring the senses), and simulated journeys from darkness to light (regeneration of life).<sup>8</sup> Feminist and coalitional principles were unavoidable. And a decolonial ethic, ethos, and praxis of learning-unlearning-relearning was not lost on me.<sup>9</sup> But the full-body immersive experience, for which I will call a decolonizing archival impression, was actually more emblematic of spoke more to the inward and outward facing aspects of *deep rhetoricity*. *Deep rhetoricity*, conceives of our *stories-so-far* as archives, its epistemic principles the vehicle in which to engage in a slow and deep (de) and (re)-compositioning of self. *Returns and careful reckonings* reposition the contents of our archives so that we can reposition ourselves in relation to it *otherwise* while *enduring tasks* invite the ongoing process of initiating archival impressions *otherwise*.

*Returns*. The first installation, "Waterfall of Light Particles at the Top of an Incline," invites participants to enter a space of darkness and water. Both are intended to unsettle the grounds by which one walks and sees; one is but walking into the abyss of darkness amongst other shadows. It was not lost on me either the significance of entering spaces-places as *stories-so-far* and the symbolism of water both in its ability to restore self(ves) and invite a re-connection with [We/arth]—we are all in and part of an archive. The second installation, "Soft Black Hole--Your Body becomes a Space that Influences another Body," invites participants into an ever-changing space. The beanbags succumb to the weight of others and in turn affects the bodies of others; an archive and its archival impressions. It is meant to underscore how we always already stand at the nexus of an-other's *stories-so-far* and the *possibilities of new stories*. How then, I wondered, do we become more intentional with the way we initiate such impressions?

8 . See Mignolo, "Epistemic" (3)

9 . See Tlostanova and Mignolo (7).

*Careful reckonings.* Perhaps the most moving installations was “Floating in the Falling Universe of Flowers.” We laid down amongst other shadows and *playfully world-traveled* (Lugones) into the universe of the seasonal bloom, change, and de-composition (diastema). Individuality ceased to be, shadows coalesced, and in a moment in time the space was but the substance of humanity and air the song of [We/arth-ly] particles *being-and-thinking-with* others —archival impressions constellating an archive. The decentralization of self and other meant we were once again distributed of the same root and that all bodies (living, nonliving, nonhuman) were one heart reflecting its surroundings; [We] were all just Matter. It was in this moment that I came to realize that the story of life before us all was not that of the [I] or the [You] but of the [We/arth]. And in that story, *being-and-thinking-with* others no longer meant finding the proper words or identifying a proper way but rather what [We] hoped would live-on (*sur-vie*) in the wor(l)ding of a future of the [We/arth] after our own de-composition; a Matter-ing otherwise.<sup>10</sup>

*Enduring tasks.* Every installation immersed the senses in a way to illustrate the effects of presence and consequences of that presence. They amplified the ability for non-humans to (re)attune and of non-humans to alter the ambience. “The tragedy” of a human being, Fanon (echoing Nietzsche) would tell us, “is that [we were] once a child” (231). Yet, in the art installation I was like Chihiro in *Spirited Away* who could see, feel, and hear the wind of the [Earth] pull, once again because all the years were inside of me. For a moment, I was a child again--before the interruption that unsettled my childhood--and existed within a cosmo of fleeting glimpses, borderless worlds, and endless possibilities beyond myself. Life, agency, and rhetoric shifted in register to shared values: *where will we choose to stand in order to see, welcome, know, be present to, and be a witness to an-other? what will we have wanted from one another after we tell our stories-so-far?* But then came the interruption that ended the exhibit and the question of whether I or a *generous reciprocity* will ever have arrived somewhere, someday?<sup>11</sup> The *enduring task* for me was (re)learning how to reconnect with a doing that I once knew.

The exhibit was about *stories-so-far* and the *possibilities of new stories*. That is a feminist aspiration. *Deep rhetoricity* can help facilitate its principles in nuanced ways though by ensuring *returns*, *careful reckonings*, and *enduring tasks* remain at the fore. The exhibit was about hope-struggle. That is a coalitional *longing*. *Deep rhetoricity* can advance its principles in nuanced ways though with an ethic of *being-and-thinking-with* which assures in the words of indigenous and native feminist scholars such as Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill that *longing* remains “people-possessed” rather than “individually self-possessed” (25). I thought to myself after the experience, “if an art installation that is a byproduct of human *doings* could create such dispossessions in me there is no reason to believe such im/possibilities are subject to a specific time frame in life.” Sandra Cisneros’ poem, “Eleven,” speaks to this: “all the years inside of me--ten,

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10 . See Derrida, SoM (xx); García, *Making it Out* (Under Contract, Utah State University Press).

11 See Corder, “Argument as Emergence” (17; 23); Lorde, “There are no Honest Poems” (409); Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality” (260).

nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two and one” (n.p.). I am both an archive, “repositories of feeling and emotions” (Cvetkovich (7), and an “archive in the making” (Browne 51). Perhaps, the tragedy of being human is forgetting we are self(ves), stories that are not fixed but always subject to change due in part to the initiating of archival impressions—that which acts on one’s archive rhetorically. My experience with TeamLab is what I strive for at the UofU amongst the undergraduate students I work with, which I have written about elsewhere (García and Hinojosa).

### Coloniality of Instruction-and-Curriculum

Utahans and Utah stand apart. I say this at the risk of homogenizing culture and reducing *rhetorics of place* to a monolith.<sup>12</sup> In Utah, K-12 education, religion, and group circles are a prism by which to see *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum*, inseparable from *coloniality of knowledge*--the invisible constitutive side (and not derivative)--and *being*. Especially if by power we in part mean epistemic and aesthetic campaigns to hoard and produce knowledge in excess that feed a war to dominate information (and mediums of circulation) fought on the battlefields of ideas (Man), images (Human), and ends (Rights-to). It was during my first year at the UofU, and from both students’ strong sense of obligation-responsibility to and my own readings of church-settler discourse on *work*,<sup>13</sup> that I encountered the *work* of reestablishing Zion and *instructing* salvation, reeducation, conversion, and restoration (*work-instruction*). This, in addition to my readings of discourse by Spanish Friars-Jesuits, Kant, and Hegel of whom emphasized *instruction, curriculum, and/or pedagogy*,<sup>14</sup> would lead me to *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum*.<sup>15</sup> In Utah, it unfolds as the *idea* of Mormon/ism<sup>16</sup>, and *land as inheritance*, an *Other-as-Same* relation, and *work-instruction*, all of which produce images of empty landscapes from which the inhabiting bodies of the other vanish or disappear. These are all archival impressions that feed into a much larger modern/colonial and settlerizing archive.

In part, without the classroom of education (broadly conceived) and *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum*, neither *coloniality* as a disputed logic of domination, management, and control nor the *epistemological regime of modernity* could have been consolidated and sustained so successfully across space-place and time.<sup>17</sup> *Coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* is the medium in which knowledge becomes factual and the tool by which epistemic obedience is managed and controlled. It is a settler-centered instruction in which educators, like the “men of letters” of the past, are entangled in informing-giving form to coloniality of knowledge. They become complicit in naturalizing a colonial matrix of power and its the modus operandi of modernity/coloniality--“The control of labor and subjectivity, the practices and policies of genocide and enslavement, the

12 . See Endres and Senda-Cook (260).

13 . See García (2022a); García (2022b).

14 . See Dussel, Quijano, and Mignolo for conversations on instruction, curriculum, and pedagogy.

15 . See García, “Personal and Collective Memory.”

16 See Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (151): “The ‘idea’ of America’ is not only a reference to a place,” but that which “makes it possible to transform an invented idea into ‘reality’” (*The Idea* 151).

17 . See A. Gordon (10).

pillage of life and land, and the denials and destruction of knowledge, humanity, spirituality, and cosmo-existence” (Mignolo and Walsh 16)--cloaked by images of empty landscapes, narratives of land waiting to be discovered, owned, and transformed into fertile “resources,” and rhetorics of peaceful Man-Human possessing the masculinity and intelligence to transform land into fertile “resources.” For me, students’ *stories-so-far* that year were examples of what *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* has done to and made of them. Because stories are imbued with meaning and consequences insofar that they circulate widely, have structural underpinnings, and carry material consequences (Rohrer 189). Students that year were a testament that stories are political because they “mobilize” histories and geographies of power (Alexander and Mohanty 31). But that too is a *story-so-far*.

Neither Utah nor the students I teach are inherent or essential to themselves. *Coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* in Utah thus can be approached as a racial matrix that peddles racist worldviews predicated on the pretext of epistemic and ontological difference; law of a formal representation of identification that underwrites a responsibility to, conditional welcoming of, and path/passage towards inviting an *other*; and subtext for coloniality of power. It affords us a window, in other words, into *discourse-about actions* (Benoit 70; 75). *Coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* plays a role, adjacent to the material forms of public memory and everyday human projects in Utah, in how the past and certain ghosts are kept alive in ways that rewrites Utah in modern/colonial ways. But again, that is but a *story-so-far*. This means that if space-place, language, and identity are made by the same token they can be remade. This experience allowed me to coalesce the interworking’s of *deep rhetoricity*, decolonial work, and feminist coalition-building. And what resulted my first year at the UofU was an archival approach, an effort to create a public record that would afford students the opportunity to view the contents of their archives as *stories-so-far* and initiate decolonizing archival impressions; the unsettling of the settled-ness of Self.

## The Fly in the Elephant’s Nose

My first year at the UofU was marked by racist fliers, not-in-Utahism, determined epistemic ignorance, and Utah niceness-politeness. But to identify students as *problems* is in itself problematic. Corder claims we are all narratives of histories, dogmas, and arguments. Sometimes they crush up against each other (19). So, when students carried out rhetorics of epistemology through church-settler epideictic rhetoric--“they [the *other*] love when we bring them things [the gift]”--during the first week of my “Intermediate Writing” course I choose to see this as an opportunity. If *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* has informed how such students walk and see the world and interact and exchange meaning with *others* by the same token both can be the means to unsettle *barriers between us* and bring forth a *future of being-and-thinking-with* each other *otherwise*. Friction, in the vein of Anna Tsing, became part of my vocabulary and pedagogical praxis. It afforded one way to think about what happens when there is an opportunity for non-humans (people, stories, knowledge) to come together and get to work. Things, however, do not always go



as planned, and sometimes friction is just resistance.

If the *rhetoric of place* and the everyday are outcomes of literacies, rhetorics, and human projects by the same token they can be the means for a new arrangement. That kind of human work, however, requires a public record, cultural (archives) and individual (self as *stories-so-far*). The racist fliers found on campus were part of it. And so, we began there. A public record can afford students opportunities to utilize hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings as categories of analysis that can point towards connections between the past and the present in terms of social activities. In Utah, those activities can be as small as partaking in a service mission and as large as views on race and sexual orientation shared by the Church. A turning point for me in the ways I teach about settler colonialism and coloniality came by way of an email from a student. They were bothered by their peers and appealed for “more accurate accounts” of Utah history. The student offered to “assist” me in “researching and planning” and therein emerged my archival research of church-settlers of Utah. The student introduced me to the *Book of Mormon* and the General Conference corpus which led me down a rabbit hole and to the *Journal of Discourses* and *The Millennial Star* (and *Ensign*).

Now, students were not inclined to accept conversations about settler colonialism or coloniality much less if they were abstract. So, I turned inward to the haunting(s)-situation(s) I know while I acquainted myself with church-settler history in Utah. In my previous work with students at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley I had done archival research on settler-pioneers of the LRGV (see image below). This activity set in motion my endeavor to be vulnerable and *be-and-think-with* others, unsettling the distance and barriers between us. It animated Avery Gordon’s argument about how [We] are all part of and in this story. My hope was that settler archives would illustrate how ideas “dwell across the ages in the concepts and institutions human beings have built” (L. Gordon 13). Concept and institutions are what allow ideas to *appear* and *become* consequential within and beyond immediate settings and contexts (123). This reflected my effort to stand at the nexus of their *stories-so-far* and *possibilities of new stories*.



Figure 1

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Students, to my surprise, were receptive, given the friction I encountered early on in the semester. They demonstrated their intellectual capacities to explore, investigate, analyze, interpret, determine, and translate meaning. For example, one student wrote about how settlers had control over mass media production (left image). This stood out to me given the mass management and control over multiple mediums of media in Utah and the way the war of information has influenced how “people dehumanize/other individuals.” Another student documented what they saw: white women, old white angry settlers, and white mayor. This response stood out as well because Utah is notoriously White and the *rhetoric of place* is “the glorification of settlers/colonialism/manifest destiny” (right image). With this settler archive I was able to underscore the effects and consequences of settler colonialism and coloniality on land, memory, knowledge, understanding, feeling, and being.

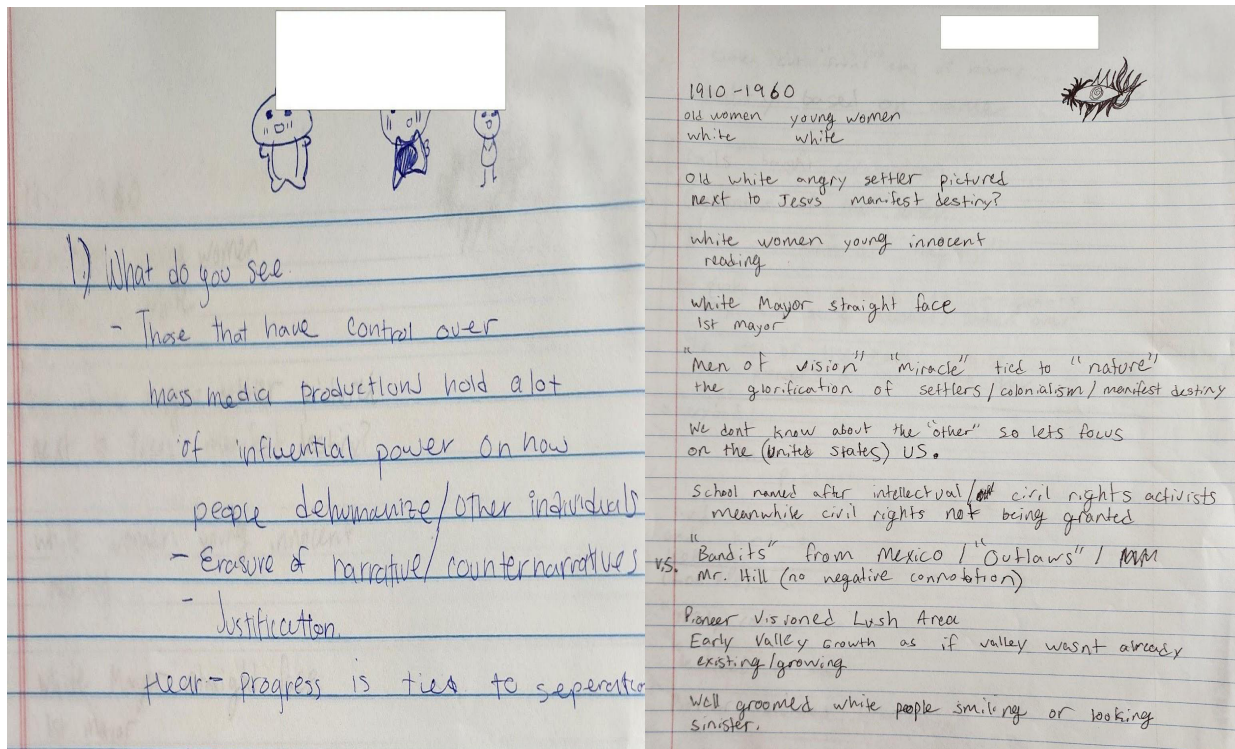


Figure 2 and Figure 3.

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Students were keen on what they encountered in the archives. One took note of key phrases that stood out to them: “rails brought civilization” | “men of integrity” | “destined to lead.” Their observation did not go unnoticed: “Everybody in the picture is white” (left image). I say this because the course was demographically majority white church members with only a couple of exceptions. I wondered, *how did students internalize all this?* Did it even cross their mind? Another student comments on the “dangerous aspect of this writing” because it “allows sentiments” about “Mexicans and Native Americans” to “silently embed themselves in society” (right image). The irony of this statement is not lost on me either particularly as it is read alongside the claim, “by only providing one viewpoint...it leads the reader to assume that the correct narrative is that of the author.” Because Utah is a case study in just how that has happened. I wondered here too, if they found irony in how they dismissed the racist fliers discussed at the onset of the semester.

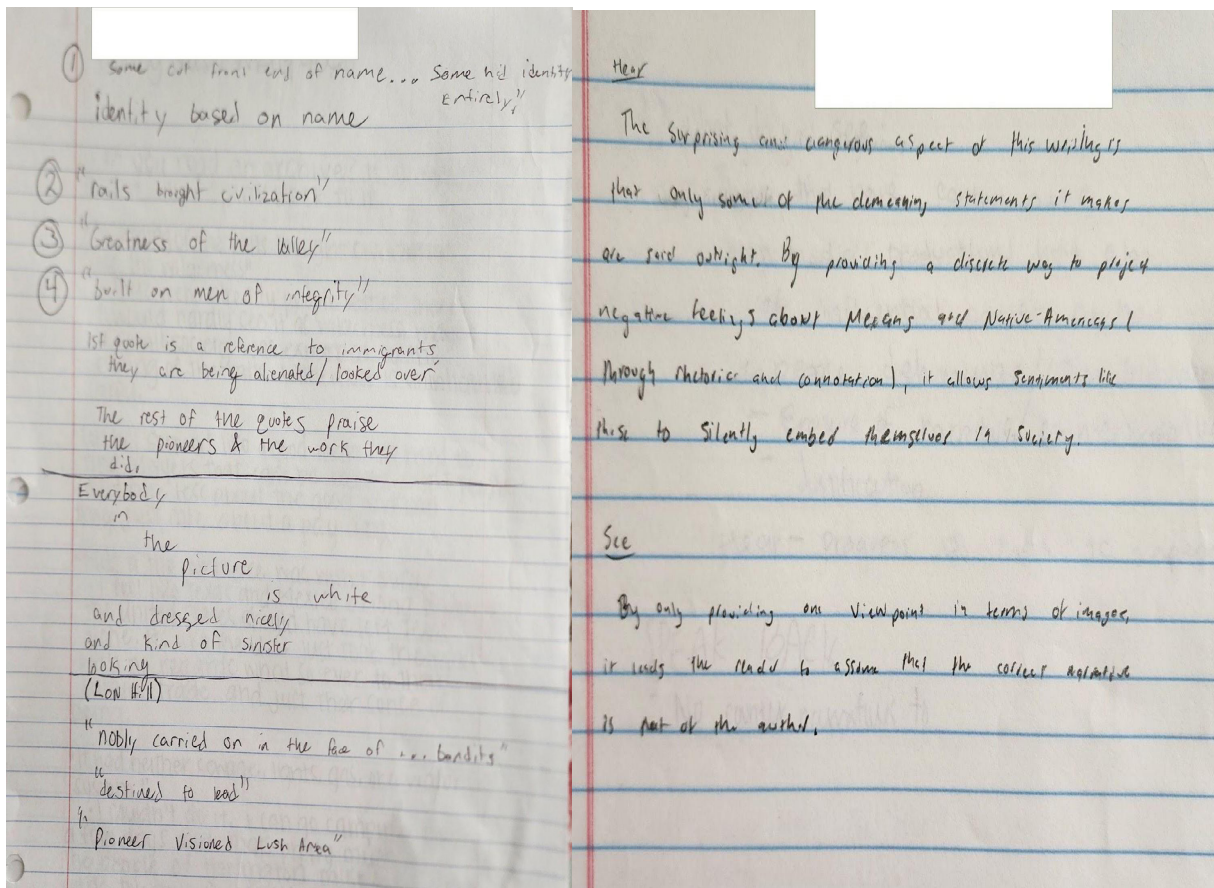


Figure 4 and 5

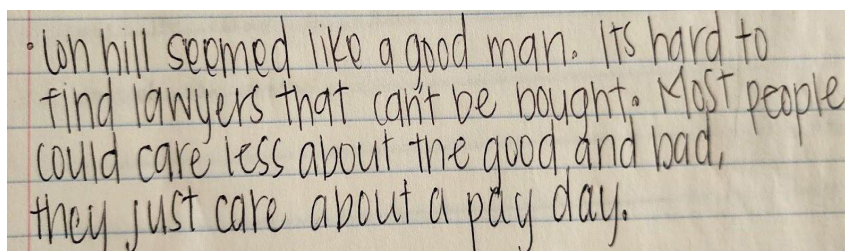
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But this activity reflects the extent of my success that semester. By week three the language of the everyday shifted from Texas/me to Utah/Utahns. The classroom environment changed. We focused on haunting(s)-situation(s) that marked settler arrival, settlement, and expansion in Utah: the various wars between church-settlers and American Indians/Native Americans (Battle at Fort Utah, Battle Creek Massacre, Black Hawk War, Wakara's War, Tintic War); the multiple treaties (Treaty of Abiquiú of 1849, The Spanish Fork Treaty of 1865, Fort Bridger Treaty of 1868); and *coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* (Intermountain Indian School, The Indian Placement Program-Lamanite Placement Program, and Relief Society). Friction was at work. But so were many of the students. Because friction cuts both ways. Such friction laid bare the *public secret* of Utah, the *structure of feeling* haunting Utah, and the function of Utahn niceness-politeness (and not-in-Utahism); a faux listening to the *Other-as-Same*.<sup>18</sup>

Corder anticipated moments in which people can be steadfast in convictions. *Coloniality of instruction-and-curriculum* had only ever underscored the structural underpinnings and material consequences of their *stories-so-far*. *Returns* to and *careful reckonings* with how *stories-so-far* and the everyday adhere to, interact with, and carry out the histories, cultural memories, and literacy-rhetorical practices settler archives represent amplify a threat to foundations of self,

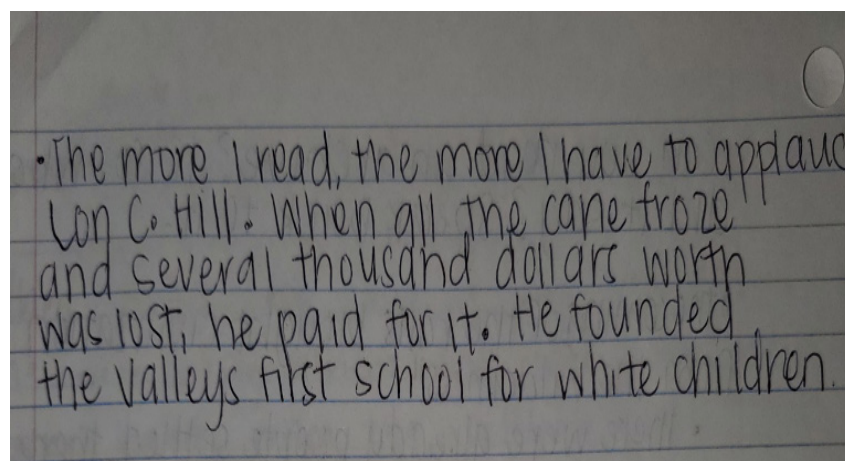
18 . See Dussel on Other-as-Same (12; 32; 34-36; 39; 44-45).

*stories-so-far*, and community. What happens in such cases? The image below comes from students responding to the Texas settler archives. Notice, the students refer to the settler as a “good man” and applaud the settler for taking risks and establishing a white school for children. Now, this comes off the heels, once more, of discussions on settler colonialism and coloniality. Utahn niceness-politeness, in this context, is the act of listening with no intention to have critique bear on the self while epistemic ignorance is the production of knowledge wielded to create distance-separation and maintain relations of power.



• Lon Hill seemed like a good man. Its hard to find lawyers that cant be bought. Most people could care less about the good and bad, they just care about a pay day.

Figure 6.



• The more I read, the more I have to applaud Lon C. Hill. When all the cane froze and several thousand dollars worth was lost, he paid for it. He founded the Valleys first school for white children.

Figure 7.

But I was persistent. We tried the privilege walk and privilege for sale activity. I invited colleagues (Christie Toth and Jon Stone) to attend class. We watched short documentaries. We listened to music. We read the words and ideas of their ancestors. I was still green in the world of teaching. And so, I tried everything. Because I refused to allow church-settler epideictic rhetoric to go unchecked; a wor(l)ding aspiration, which underscores students’ understanding of the ways words and worlding can *take* and *make* space-place. Overall, my goal was to utilize the language of the everyday, attending to the appeal by the student who emailed me, to both illuminate cultural and thinking program/ings and create friction. Hardly anything changed. But I did have four students who were doing *shadow work*; work behind the scenes without any guarantee or certainty for what it might yield (see Arellano et al.). By week 7 of the semester, I decided to scrap the final project and create a new one on the fly. I would call it, “Stories-So-Far and the Possibilities of New Stories.” The title would be inspired by the work of feminists such as Doreen Massey and Judy Rohrer.

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**Stories-So-Far and the Possibilities of New Stories**

Adam Banks claims the DJ is a manifestation of the griot, for which he describes as a storyteller: a *time binder* ("Binding time, linking past, present, and future"), a keeper of history, and a *rhetor extraordinaire* ("able to produce or perform on demand for... whatever the situation demands—celebration, critique, preservation, connection") who is firmly rooted in African tradition (3; 23). Similarly, the *corridista*, firmly rooted in Mexican and Mexican American tradition, is a time binder, a keeper of history, and a rhetor extraordinaire, intervening in normalized stories (e.g., peaceful settlers). Typically, they announce a place, states the problem, reveals a haunting, and call forth a politics (of seeing, being, feeling, and doing) at the nexus of stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories.

Over the course of the semester, we will return to church-settler words, ideas, arguments, and projects of territorial and epistemological expropriation through music (church hymns), readings (General Conference), and settler archives (Journal of Discourse). We will return to the rhetoric of place—the grid system, Temple Square. This is the Place Heritage park—and its effects and consequences on land, memory, knowledge, understanding, and being. For this semester project, you will enact the ethics, ethos, and praxis of the griot and/or *corridista*: announcing a place and space, stating a problem, revealing a haunting, and calling forth a politics at the nexus of stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories.

You will do so by developing a multi-media portfolio that demonstrates:

- A return home. Frantz Fanon refers to home as a place and feeling. Per our readings, it is important to return to the space and place where one does and thinks. Memories "call." Victor Villanueva tells us (19). So, return to your memories and sets of stories. "We are," Judy Rohrer writes, "the set of stories we tell ourselves, the stories that tell us, the stories other tell about us" (189). We take in these sets of stories through community listening (a set of enunciations and material exchanges). They will have informed how we walk and see the world and interact and exchange meaning with others.
  - You will return to and carefully reckon with your sets of stories-so-far. You will locate spaces and places familiar to you, identify specific sets of stories, name the ways you inherit, embody, experience, and practice these stories, and reflect on how these stories both live vibrantly in and around you and settled you.
- A return to a haunted/ing story inherited or passed down about church-settlers. "Stories," M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty tell us, are "simultaneously 'maps' in that they mobilize both histories and geographies of power" (31). Stories, Rohrer remind us, "involve power that has structural

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underpinnings and material consequences" (189). Societies' story, Derrida will argue, is a "collection or series" of hauntings and ghosts" (172). They are, as Avery Gordon claims, part of "our social world" and are a "shared structure of feeling" (27, 201). Society is haunted.

- You will interview a friend, family member, or community member that you have either heard from or share a common haunted/ing story with.
- You will document (images) the ways the haunted/ing story circulates in spaces and places familiar to you.
- You will carefully reckon with this haunted/ing story and the spaces and places it circulates by conducting research on it. In the ethic, ethos, and praxis of the griot and/or *corridista*, you will work to unsettle the settled and haunted back the haunted/ing story.
- A return to the ways hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings afford an-other set of choices, options, and responsibilities. Gordon tells us, "we are [haunted by these stories] ...even if we do not want to be," and it is our responsibility to "recognize just where we are in this story" (22, 51, 188, 190). We are invited to develop an-other fundamental epistemology for living" (151). Derrida will refer to this as a "politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (xviii). A learning how to live otherwise. Stories are not fixed but rather always already subject to change. They are subject to change, because as Doreen Massey claims, they are always in the process of being made (9, 12). In this way, we are "the possibilities of new stories" too (Rohrer 189). But to work towards such ends demands returns, careful reckonings, and enduring task in and around hauntings and ghosts.
  - You will return to your stories-so-far that live vibrantly in and around you and record a careful reckoning with the ways hauntings, inheritances, and dwelling have settled you.
  - You will record a careful reckoning, first, that speaks to the ways hauntings, inheritances, and dwelling have settled you, and second, that speaks to a commitment to unsettle the settled and work towards the possibilities of new stories.

Figure 8 and Figure 9.

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The assignment description is rather long and imperfect but overall the goal for the final project was to create an opportunity for students to gather their ancestral *stories-so-far* and collect evidence to support the verisimilitude of them —demystifying and extending archival research to the *elsewhere* and *otherwise*. The inevitable friction would hopefully aid them in considering *an-other* set of choices, options, and obligations-responsibilities. The assignment builds on the ideas of griots, *corridistas*, and elders as *keepers of history and knowledge, time benders, and canon makers* entrusted with being the affective channels of rhetorical transmission of and for a politics of hauntings, inheritances, and dwellings. They operate under a simple premise that people can listen to know-learn complex issues if the intention is truly for them to understand. It is a portfolio assignment constituted thus by *returns home, careful reckonings with stories-so-far, and the praxis of unsettling the settled*. But again, things do not always go as planned. The assignment went to work, because what was at stake was a grade for students, but so too did students, because friction cuts both ways.

Unlike the scenarios Corder plays out in his essay educators do not have the luxury to walk away, the right to blame students for past atrocities, nor are they entitled to create a culture of adversaries. Still, I find myself agreeing with Corder that argument is not just a noun but a praxis of

being-and-becoming, reminiscent of Sylvia Wynter’s being human as praxes. Friction holds value for me because intervention is rooted in the specificities and particularities in which power unfolds; we must know where we are at and who we are teaching. It holds two truths, first, that there is an opportunity for some-things to *be-with* each other, get to work on un/settling grounds, and mutually co-invent in friction in ways that can *take* and *make* place *otherwise*; power is un/made through friction. And second, friction can be like the *fly in the elephant’s nose*, which is to say, that at the very least we can be the wrench in the assembly line of normative *stories-so-far*.<sup>19</sup>

The goal is not a totalistic rejection of religion nor is it to deliver conversion-type of education but rather it is to create solidarity in and around deep commitments to unsettling the barriers between us and that hoped-for future.

Sometimes neither a theory (a decolonial option) nor concept (*deep rhetoricity*) will go as planned in the classroom. The entirety of the semester was not all marked by failure. I was able to reach four students. The student below was affected by classroom conversations, the behavior of their classmates, and the unwillingness within group circles to have critical dialogue. So, they decided to lead blog posts anonymously which culminated into an end of the year presentation.

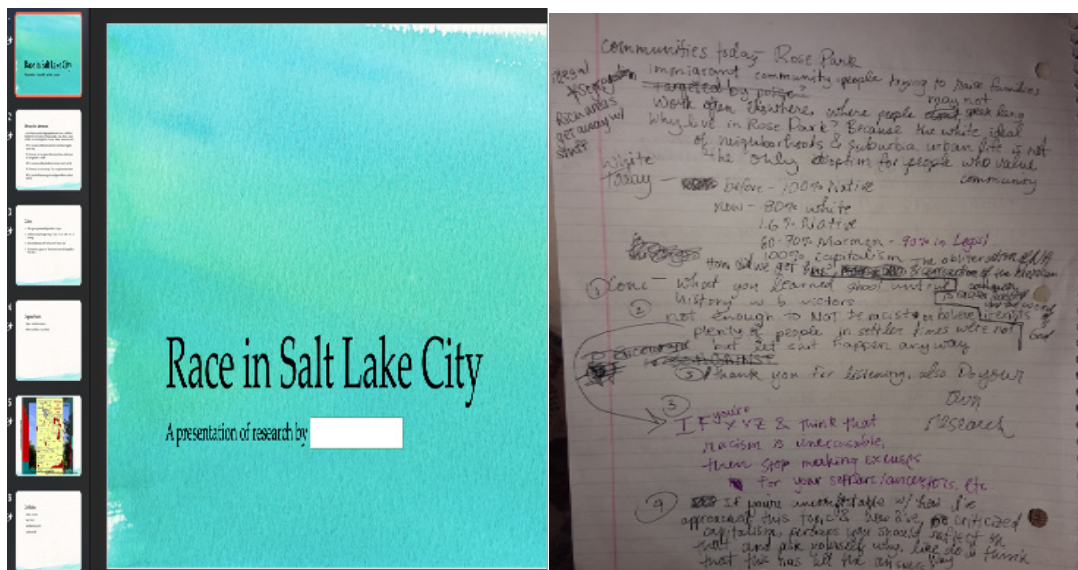


Figure 10. and Figure 11.

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It is our hope, as educators, that when we offer *an-other* set of choices, options, and responsibilities students will pick it up, hold onto it, learn from it, and even pass it along. Sometimes, however, the work of our work will only be felt after the fact. So, perhaps, a reconceptualization of

19 See Tsing, *Friction* (4; 5; 6); Mignolo (“Delinking” 498); Tuck and Yang (21); Tsing, *In the Realm* (31); Tlostanova, “Can the Post-Soviet Think” (40); See Giddens (171); Villanueva, “Blind” (10); Villanueva, *Bootstraps* (121); Blommaert and Huang (271); Endres and Senda-Cook.

failure is in order, because the students I taught that semester will never be able to truly claim they never knew—an archival impression.. And that for me is the power of *being-and-thinking-with*. Stories from faculty of color advancing the projects of unsettling and a decolonial option at PWIs are few and far between in WRS. So, I wanted to share a story of tension, frictions, adjustments, and failures from within the classroom.

Still, I believe feminist activist and coalitional work can benefit from *deep rhetoricity*. Fanon to Mahmood warned about the predicament of contaminating life questions and questions of agency with reductive, dichotomous, and oppositional rhetorical structures. There is almost a sense of simplicity that underscores the aims to unsettle the settled-ness of systems of hierarchy, patriarchy, and other forms of oppression-repression. But at the moment life and agency get reduced to binaries (black/white; good/bad; right/wrong) and options (confront; resist; re-signify hegemonic norms) that human work-project becomes unsuitable for anyone, even if resistance is what is happening. Because it presupposes the proper grounds and name for knowledge, understanding, and being; speaking the proper words and identifying a proper way, reproducing a story of the [I] and the [You] instead of the [We/arth]. Feminist activist and coalitional work still have some *unsettling of the settled* to do, and *deep rhetoricity* can aid in such endeavors.

Feminist coalitional work can benefit from *deep rhetoricity* insofar that it thrives in the complexities, complicatedness, and messiness that comes with friction. In fact, the epistemic principle of *enduring tasks* underscores the anticipation of that. For me, the wor(l)ding of a future of the [We/arth] complements Fanon's vision for a building of the world of the [You]. [We/arth] unsettles the barriers between us and that future by embracing how [W]e all need to give an [E]ar to what lives in our bones [I] and both re-introduce (co/re)-invention as [A]rt and be *receptively generous* to each other and the [Earth]<sup>20</sup> And yet, it nuances the [You]. First of all, wor(l)ding is what we do in WRS, because wording is human work and worlding is a human project. [We/arth], second of all, unsettles the settled-ness of proper words and identifying a proper way. It holds that rhetoric matters because it demands an engagement not just with human beings but with everything that surrounds us—[Earth]. To have [We/arth] in common is to value the possibility for commonality and radically reframe the worth (intentional homonym) of a gift in the *non-name* of all and for the sake of all Matter living-on [sur-vie] and flourishing otherwise.

## Feminist Activist and Coalitional Work

In this section, we, the coauthors of this essay, reflect on what feminist activist and coalitional work means to us and what it can look like. Our reflections do not attempt to settle on [A] definition of feminist coalition-building but rather underscore the importance of *thinking-and-being-with others* (inheritances, dwellings, ghosts, people, non-humans) *otherwise*. Our reflections

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<sup>20</sup> Upon a Google search, and finding the project Wearth, I decided to align my acronym with theirs as it underscores my aim with [We/arth] (<https://www.wearth.eu/>).



below highlight feminist Ribero and Arellano's concept of *comadrisimo* at best and at the very least our aspirations for the wor(l)ding *otherwise*.

**Gesa:** The feminist activist principles we describe in the introductory section of this essay have become integral to all courses I plan, design, teach, revise, or re-envision. For example, in the course discussed here, Writing the Archives, I center the readings, assignments, research methods, and research projects in feminist pedagogical principles. Although the class did not have an explicitly feminist theme, feminist activist principles inform my course design and presentation, including readings selected, questions raised about research methods, emphasis on reciprocity, respect, collaboration, and dignified relations with participants, as well as discussions of differences between stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories. Moreover, my goal is to invite students to make meaningful contributions to new or existing archives; to consult, collaborate, and build coalitions with community members whose stories and lived experiences became the subject of their inquiry; and to contribute to conference panels or scholarly publications (such as this article).

**Valeria:** Coalition-building means and manifests itself through many different ways in my life. I am the start of a new generation in my family, I was the firstborn of the fourth living generation. Every time I go home it is essential to me to come to where my family started. I ask to be taught about the struggle, the sacrifice, and all the work done. I constantly visit the house where my grandmother was born. That's where everything started. To me, it is the house that reminds me of why I need to keep going. Feminist activist and coalition work to me is paving a path for all the women in the world who are underrepresented and come from similar backgrounds as me. We are incredibly hidden in important professional sectors such as the finance field. I emphasize this because the journey I am currently on has not been easy. Coalition-building to me is sitting down and listening to the several two-hour interviews I worked with and making sure every experience was documented correctly on the UofL's Oral History Center website because I know what it is like to have your story be told incorrectly by others. Voices are important, and making sure experiences are transmitted correctly is even more essential to advocacy, inclusion, and trust. Coalition-building is the reason why the organization Pathways to Citizenship, a 501(c)3, is now a priority in my life. Pathways to Citizenship's mission is to help undocumented individuals navigate the complicated legal and cultural pathway to citizenship in the United States. It is essential to give back to my community and contribute to the success of the Latinx community in the United States as well as in Latin America. Every year, I distribute educational resources, food and clothes to my community in Pereira, Colombia. It is important for me to take the time to invest in others who were born into my same struggles. My success is measured through how many lives I impact, not how much profit I can make. Coalition-building to me means I do not win unless the people around me do too.

**Nicole:** What feminist coalition-building means to me is to be able to build not only strong

but also meaningful connections with the people and communities I am working with which in my case were the Sisters. Feminist activist and coalition-building work means you're able to find common ground and help each other in a mutual way, although sometimes you may be working with diverse communities and/or people. This was how it was with me while working with the Sisters that although a community themselves, as individuals they were extremely diverse and complex in the best of ways. I was able to learn from the Sisters while also being able to help them add to their digital archives. It was a mutual exchange and was a building of feminist coalition from both ends. To have successful feminist activist and coalitional work I wanted to represent and advocate for the Sisters. While carrying out my work this meant being able to make sure not to speak for but on behalf of the Sisters, what they shared with me was their truth and stories that I was granted access to share with others; the Sisters held the power in their voices and what I shared. I wanted others to see the more intimate side of the Sisters they don't always get to share, and what made this feminist coalition-building really special for me is that because the Sisters are so diverse, they advocated for many other communities along with the feminist community which meant we were able to do some coalition-building for those communities as well. I always wanted to make sure that everything I did with the Sisters was done with dignity and respect.

Within my project feminist coalition-building looked like working continuously with the Sisters and constantly asking them for their feedback. With everything I did I worked closely alongside Professor Caldwell who gave me honest and very useful feedback. As a Professor and Sister themselves, their feedback meant a lot to me as they saw both perspectives and were the blend within the two parties involved. While interviewing the Sisters I made sure to not only ask my own questions but also give them the opportunity to share what they wanted to say and allow them to have liberty within the project so it wouldn't be just a script. The coalition-building did not only come off from my end but it was a collective effort to do what was best for all involved; most importantly, the Sisters and their individual stories were the center of it all.

**Romeo:** At the heart of feminist rhetorical practices is an ethic, ethos, and praxis of unsettling the settled-ness of societal, cultural, and/or communal mechanisms of oppression, repression, exclusion, and erasure. Several examples in English and Writing and Rhetorical Studies come to mind that speak to coalition-building and efforts to undertake the [R] project (rescue, recover, recognize, reinscribe, and represent) in order to restore women to rhetorical history and rhetorical history to women: *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics* (edited by Buchanan and Ryan), *Rhetorica in Motion* (edited by Schell and Rawson), *Available Means* (edited by Ritchie and Ronadl), and *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* (Kirsch and Royster) among others. I think Ribero and Arellano capture the connecting threads across these projects when they advocate for comadris-mo. If coalition-building is going to mean anything it must include networks of care, mindsets of no te dejes, relations of trust, reciprocal empathy, and most of all love. I think of my Grandma and her comadres in this case, who exhibited for me an awaiting ("ojalá"): a hope without guaranteed

predicate, a hope for that which may or may not arrive.<sup>21</sup>

Grandma and her comadres were more than ready to carry out work for an-other (me) without ever any certainty or guarantee for what it might yield. Not only does this speak to the ethic of paying it forward but also underscores the ethos and praxis of (rhetorical) poder y fuerza. Royster might refer to this as *rhetorical prowess*, but a more appropriate phrase might be a no te dejes mentality. It is best captured by the words of my Grandma, “¡No dejaremos (terconess) que cualquier cosa o persona nos trate comoquiera. Porque si lo dejas, ya valio!” That is the personification of poder y fuerza, which is not predicated on pre-commitments to idioms of resistance, subversion, and re-signification of hegemonic norms but rather reflective of the complexities of reality and to political realities; we *do* despite hauntings and in spite of gaining meaning from haunting situations. In other words, haunting(s)-situation(s) enable and create our capacity for action. I am not sure if the comadres I know would refer to themselves as feminist but that is not the point. Here, the point is the ethic, ethos, and praxis of coalition-building that strives to engage in a wor(l)ding of futures *otherwise*. And that is work worth undertaking. That is the work I hope can live-on [sur-vie] and flourish beyond our immediate settings and contexts.

## Concluding Thoughts, Visions for a Future, Otherwise

Our goal in this essay is to open up a conversation on the outward facing aspect of *deep rhetoricity* and advance a relational framework of *being-and-thinking-with* others *otherwise*. The epistemic principles of a *return* situates us squarely on ways of walking and seeing the world; *careful reckonings* is a coming to terms with understandings of *being-and-thinking-with* others and reciprocity; and *being-and-thinking-with* is a commitment of unsettling the barriers between us and a future of mutual wor(l)ding. Our discussions strive to animate these outwards epistemic principles of *deep rhetoricity* amid troubling times and pedagogical challenges. In all sincerity, we have no remedy, nor do we offer a how-to guide to do this work. Yet, we believe that the concept we lay out and the outward principles we have tentatively sketched out amplify the demand to learn how to *be-and-think-with* each other *otherwise*.

As the examples from García’s and Kirsch courses illustrate, instructors always already stand at the nexus of *stories-so-far* and the *possibilities of new stories*. As García illustrates, this is an *enduring task*, a call for an intervention, when we become too comfortable in the settledness of our assumptions and our communities. We must continually ask, *where are the lessons of ethos and praxis being proposed from?* To *be-and-think-with* another, at least as conceived in this essay, is to engage in friction: an opportunity for non-humans (people, stories, knowledge) to come together and get to work. At times, to channel Corder, it will feel like we as educators are plunging on alone and that we might have to continue to do so as friction becomes resistance. In those instances, the barriers between us and a future of mutual wor(l)ding becomes muddy. But

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21 . See García and José Cortez (105).

unlike the scenarios Corder plays out in his essay, educators do not have the luxury to walk away. In such instances, all we can do then is be the fly in the elephant's nose. That too is a form of unsettling the barriers between us and a future,

As Kirsch's students so eloquently narrate, the *enduring task* is one of making ongoing commitments to relearn to be with ourselves, others, and communities otherwise, a call for invention and co-invention. As Salazar's and Guevara Fernandez's research projects illustrate, taking seriously questions of ethos and praxis—reflecting on our own commitments—and of reciprocity—how we might engage with and contribute to those whose lives we study and document—will lead us to co-create spaces/ places that allow for *possibilities of new stories*, for creating coalitions of solidarity, and for committing ourselves and our work to bold visions of the future. If the research, ethos, and commitments of up-and-coming scholars like Guevara Fernandez and Salazar is any indication, we are well on our way to overcoming the barriers that might stand between Us and that Future.

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## Stories-so-far and Possibilities of New Stories

### Creating Coalitions of Solidarity via Testimonios

Throughout my Advanced Communication Skills writing course, I (Valeria) have discovered my connection and relationship with oral stories from the nostalgia I felt while browsing through different digital archives. Most of my family history, tradition, and experiences have been passed down through words, not writing. I have treasured each statement that has been shared by my great-grandparents, grandparents, and mother more than any history text presented to me in school. During the course, we read and listened to many different types of people who had a story and perspective to share. I related because I know how difficult it is to preserve every sentence, every word, every syllable.

I wanted my project not only to be focused on the voices of a silent community but about the possibilities for intervention and genuine change that extend beyond the boundaries of academia. If we are truly listening to the voices in this archive, we are thinking about how we may plan and strive toward alternative futures that are more equitable and just than the world in which we presently live in (Reyes and Curry Rodríguez). I know the power I hold as an individual with the responsibility of passing them down to those who come after me. Those who must continue to bring these stories to life or else they never existed. I wanted to be able to expand the attainability and understanding of the five testimonios I found so that future archivists won't scroll past them due to the lack of details or language barrier keeping them from exploring the perspectives of others.

Although I do not attend the UofL and am not part of the community, I do plan to continue working with the rest of the testimonios. I will propose to Heather Fox an internship to work closer with the collection and Latinx community leaders for a larger contribution to the oral history project they initiated. An impact I intend to make is for the Oral History Center to have a more conscious understanding of the oral testimonios they are preserving and how important they are to the Latinx community that exists in this country, not just in Louisville. I knew I wanted to base my final project on my community. I wanted to highlight the voices of a community that continues to remain silent in this country. I wanted to do my part with the responsibility of sharing stories that are not as easily preserved as documents.

### The Project of Returns

Throughout my research, I continually emphasize that the sound recordings I worked with are more than oral history—they are testimonios from the Latinx community of Louisville, Kentucky. They are full of struggles and experiences that set side by side the Latinx identity and the American Dream. Testimonios reflect a narrative research approach based on Latin American

history, against the backdrop of socioeconomic injustice that has afflicted the area since 1950 (Reyes and Curry Rodríguez). As Cindy Cruz explains, “testimonio [in the United States] is an expression of the dispossessed, the migrant, and the queer, is a response to larger discourses of nation-building that often erase and make invisible the expandable and often disposable labor and experiences of immigrants, the working class, African Americans, and others” (p. 460). The Latina Feminist Group explains in their book *Telling to Live* that “from our different personal, political, ethnic, and academic trajectories, we arrived at the importance of testimonio as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure” (Torrez 2015). Testimonio allows researchers to bring awareness, offer opportunities to reflect critically, and examine the connection between lived experience and systems of oppression (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona).

Testimonio is a methodological approach for study and a pedagogical resource for teaching in the disciplines of Chicana/Latina and Educational Studies. According to qualitative researchers motivated by testimonies, storytelling—particularly counter storytelling—can assist to shift unfavorable mainstream opinions of racially minoritized groups. This has resulted in academic collective forms, such as the Chicana Feminist group, who see testimonio as shaping “a narrative format as redemption—as takers of the stories, readers of the narratives, and creators of the analysis” (Reyes and Curry Rodríguez). This qualitative technique demonstrates that racially minoritized persons can and do create meaningful forms of knowledge and provide opportunities for students and professors of color to speak and document their own stories, therefore altering the epistemological ways of social science research (Mangual Figueroa and Barrales). This is illustrated, for instance, in Romeo García’s reflection of his sense of /lack of belonging in the academy:

As I think about the academic spaces I now occupy, I ponder what it would mean to re-center listening through storytelling and memory beyond the stories white folks tell in the academy. Community listening invites us to create presence from absence and sound from silence. How then might we embrace this, within a discipline that is overdetermined by a history that is both colonial and hierarchal, in ways that allow us to listen to, provide room for, and speak and haunt back with the heterogeneity of specters? How might we enact community listening, within a field that will re-write itself as colonial, both to be answerable to (to respond and answer to) a call to responsibility, however ungraspable it might be, and a setting-to-work? (Garcia, “Creating Presence from Absence”)

No single definition of testimonio can contain the numerous and multiple uses of the term. However, it is possible to say that one of its central aspects is being a narrative of denunciation that implies an urgency to narrate. In addition, testimonio entails an intertextual narrative, since it always supposes a different version of the same event. Although testimonio is not just a specialty of women, women have offered some of the most powerful voices in testimonio, speaking out forcefully against injustices experienced by their communities. This, maybe more than anything

else, emphasizes how testimonio differs from traditional oral history/life history interviews, as well as genres such as autobiography, which are generally organized through the individual's linear progressive development. Testimonio refuses differences between the individual speaking and the collective from which they speak and is generally motivated by the immediate action-inspiring power of storytelling rather than peaceful or historically-'informative' objectives in and of themselves.

## Careful Reckonings and the Project of Being-with Others Otherwise

Testimonios remain an essential component of the Latinx community's attempts to question prevailing narratives and campaign for social justice today. Testimonios have allowed older generations to transmit their life experiences and social struggles to younger generations for them to learn more about their history and continue the fight. This is difficult to do with the current broad descriptions and lack of attention dedicated to the "Latin American-United States" category in the UofL Oral History Center. Providing greater access to these oral testimonios contributes to research on Latin American diaspora through different time periods and journeys. It also contributes to the possibilities of new stories, new perspectives, and new voices within our communities throughout the country. Latinx individuals can reclaim and share their own stories through testimonios, encouraging a deeper knowledge of their experiences and driving greater social change, specifically in the community of Louisville.

I (Valeria) immigrated to the United States from Colombia at the age of 8. I have been in this country for 11 years now, but I have never abandoned my roots and culture no matter how hard this country tries to erase them. This has not been an easy thing to do. Leaving your country, your people, and your environment results in an emptiness that I know many of us have felt. Coming to the United States to pursue a better life and opportunity has meant digesting a completely different culture and community—one that has not always accepted us. Therefore, I have decided that each event, experience, and emotion in each testimony must be written down. Though this meant I had to work harder and for a longer period, it would be contradictory for me to pick and choose what part of each journey is valid or important. Though I connected with each person through similar concepts and circumstances, each of our stories is unique and significant.

There was Mari Mujica, a research anthropologist at the time of the interview (2017). She left Peru with her husband as newlyweds over 30 years ago. Their first stop in the United States was Iowa, then they were in Massachusetts for 15 years and ended up in Louisville because her husband took a job with the University of Louisville. There was a point in her life where she ended up going to Peru with her son and doing research there, staying with her mother. While she was away, she was apart from her husband for months at a time so she could complete her PhD. But then she decided to not continue her research in Peru because she wanted to do research where she lived; so that instead of just researching people, she was collaborating at some lev-

el. When job opportunities opened in Louisville, it was a great opportunity for her family to move. They lived in Louisville for 9 years and then moved to a farm in Shelbyville. In this interview, Mari discusses how her family came to Louisville, the story of why she came to the United States, how her family felt about just her and her new husband leaving Peru, how they felt about her decision of moving countries for a job, the disconnection and privilege that comes with her journey, her family life and influences, and growing up financially stable in Peru. Her interview cuts off as she's discussing her childhood experiences and mentions a nanny who is referred to as "mama".

Sarah Nuñez was born in Bogota, Colombia in 1978. Her father is Colombian and her mother is from Florida. They met in North Carolina in the late 1960's. Sarah was born in Bogota because in 1977, her parents moved to Colombia to take care of her dad's father while he was sick. She did not grow up with much Colombian culture since she was only there during the very early parts of her life. Spanish was rarely spoken in her house since her dad would only use it to speak to family back home. Sarah grew up searching for a part of herself that was missing and found that piece when she went back to Colombia. At the time of the interview, she was working with the University of Louisville Cultural Center through projects such as the Latino Education Outreach. In this interview, she explains how her father came to the United States, her community as a child, her school environment and peers, her career process and obstacles, opportunities and struggles based on her race/ethnicity/gender, the influence of her past work on what she does today, how Donald Trump was affecting the community at the time of elections, and how she self-identifies with Latino culture as an adult.

Dr. Braulio Mesa was an ESL instructor at the time of the interview (2018) who was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1961. After finishing high school in Cuba in 1979, he was offered a scholarship to study in Russia. He was in Russia from 1980 to 1985 where he got a bachelor's degree in physics and Math and also a degree in Russian language. After completion, he returned to Cuba where he worked as a math and astronomy teacher in a high school. In 1998, he won the Visa Lottery for Cuba which allowed him, his wife, and three kids to move to the United States. He picked Louisville, Kentucky because after doing research on other states, he decided it was the best fit in terms of weather and job opportunities. His family had been living in Louisville for approximately 20 years at the time of the interview (2018). In his time in Louisville, he had worked three jobs—the first two in factories and then as an ESL teacher. In this interview, Professor Mesa discusses his upbringing and educational career, his memories of Cuba, Cuba's political unrest and issues, the people who raised him, his heritage, his journey and how it led him to Louisville, the differences between education in Cuba, Russia, and the United States, the progress and future of ESL programs within education systems, and his experience and growth regarding the English language.

## Reflection on the Project of Being with Others Otherwise.

Every word, emotion and experience matters. My relationship with the Latino immigrant community is personal and intimate to my identity. Throughout my educational career, I've never seen any investment or efforts to make me feel seen through interdisciplinary spaces. Not even when we're the second-largest ethnic group in the country. Not even at a college that preaches global citizenship. Not even in spaces where I'm a minority. My commitment to this project is to ensure that each testimony is acknowledged and appreciated by the UofL Oral History Center and any audience that could potentially use their experiences for research or comfort. These testimonies provide more than a story—they provide insight and unrecognized points of view that should be taken into consideration within a country populated by people from all over the world. As a Colombian immigrant myself, I often feel my Latinx identity disappearing in the country I have been forced to assimilate into because of systematic racism, especially now that I'm in higher education. Accessing this archive has allowed me to feel unity and reflect on my community. I feel less alone and more empowered knowing that more journeys exist. I know that I'm not the only immigrant in this country, but it can get so lonely climbing up the systematic ladder. There's so much emotion and peace that comes with hearing others' emotions and struggles that you can relate to.

Testimonios are sacred coming from any person due to them challenging the narratives that have only been told by the oppressors. I want to thank Mari Mujica for emphasizing the distance from our loved ones and the hard reality that comes with living our lives in this country as our families live theirs in another. I want to thank Sarah Nuñez who was born and then separated from the country I am also from. It was so comforting to hear her experience and identity formation when she visited my beautiful country. [I am so happy you found the part that was missing in our land]. I want to thank Braulio Mesa for dedicating so much of his life to education and working so hard to help the ESL community progress. I was once an ESL student and would've given the world to have a teacher who motivated me and encouraged me as much as he does.

We are all one. Immigration is a concept that usually has a negative connotation, but to me it is so beautiful. I am so thankful and proud to be an immigrant. I've seen and felt so much. The experience of leaving your community for a better life at the expense of not fitting into another is terrifying. I am thankful for the Latinx diaspora that exists today. I am thankful that we are all connected one way or the other. Que poderoso es representar todos los hermosos paises de Latino America de nuestra propia manera.

# Stories-so-far and Possibilities of New Stories

## Creating Coalitions of Solidarity via Fashion Choices

### The Project of Returns

I (Nicole) am a 19-year-old 2nd year student at Soka University. I am of Mexican-American descent raised in La Puente, California by my single mother living only four hours away from her hometown in Baja California, Mexico. Throughout my life I've understood that I have an immense passion for playing soccer, fashion/clothing, and music; all which I have absorbed from my immediate family members including my grandparents and mom. After learning of the connections and roots my family carried through a pair of Levi's, I found not only a new appreciation for jeans, but for clothing entirely. Being away from home for college proved to be difficult as I felt a lack of physical and emotional connection to my family. However, the Levi's allowed me to feel reconnected to my family and reminded me that their presence surrounds me in spirit through my identity and through clothing. I already had an interest in fashion, but it never extended beyond my own fashion choices. Just like the archival adventure allowed me to explore unspoken truths that lived within clothing in my family, I discovered the power of storytelling based on the value of whose history is shared, by whom, and how much is left unsaid.

- My mother shared that she wore the Levi's to her classes at Cal State LA the year before she found out she was expecting me. She mentioned that she loved the jeans because extreme low-rise jeans were very in-trend at that time.
- My grandmother told me that she remembered wearing the Levi's while picking my mom and aunt's from school and when going grocery shopping. My grandma said she saved a lot of money for a while to buy them so she tried to wear them as much as possible.

My archival adventure with clothing in my family sparked my curiosity to discover unspoken truths for other minorities and communities outside of the ones I partake in and furthered my understanding of how clothing can power the voices within these communities. Along with this, I had determined the value of self-expression for clothing in my life but wanted to learn more about what that meant for other individuals and communities who are different from me. This encouraged me to return to the idea of conformity in terms of clothing and what is deemed socially acceptable. I've inherited ideas and concepts through clothing from my family but how do these differ or compare to those of other communities who have been raised/live in completely different environments than my own?



## Careful Reckonings

After wrapping up our archival adventure, Gesa gave us two assignments to further our archival understanding: our Archival Research Proposal and Archival Research Project assignments. These assignments allowed me to pursue my interest in fashion, unspoken truths/history, and archives via the Los Angeles Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who are “an order of 21st Century Nuns dedicated to the promulgation of universal joy and the expiation of stigmatic guilt” (About the Sisterhood). And while the Sisters are no strangers to all sorts of attention—good and bad—the Sisters recently were headlining news articles due to being invited, uninvited, and later reinvited by the Los Angeles Dodgers professional baseball team to receive the Community Hero Award for their efforts in advocating for marginalized groups within the Los Angeles community. The Sister’s were originally uninvited and had their award revoked due to backlash from conservative Catholic groups who claim the Sisters “make fun” of Catholicism and disrespect Nuns by “mocking” their attire (Netburn). The Sisters later received an apology from the Dodgers and were reinvited to accept their award. While many others would have refused or be hesitant to forgive the Dodgers for their behavior, the Sister’s took it in stride, following the goals of their mission of extending compassion, understanding, and kindness to others [the Dodgers Organization and those opposed to their attendance] (Netburn).

I first learned about the Sisters and their mission through a professor at my University who is also a Sister and was a guest lecturer for my class. In the lecture they shared their knowledge about the Sisters, the archives that are a work-in-progress, and the work needed to uncover and explore artifacts within their digital archives. After the presentation, I became interested in learning more about the Sisters and chose to make them the focus of my research proposal and project. The Sisters felt like the perfect community to focus on my because they are a widely spread community who have immensely diverse members who vary in cultural, religious, sexual-orientation, age, gender-identity, gender-expression, and racial backgrounds. Yet, they use clothing collectively to self-express both who they are as unique individuals and how they come together cohesively to promote the same mission. I related to this as my grandmother, mother, and myself hold and shared stories about the Levi’s. Just like those Levi’s, the Sisters’ carefully curated outfits hold and share stories beyond what they verbally share.

The clothing worn by the Sisters and my prior family members touches on unsettling barriers; the Sisters nonverbally challenge gender-norms and stereotypes in clothing along with what society views as acceptable in public appearances in terms of how much attention we bring to ourselves. While talking to my grandma, I learned that she was breaking /unsettling barriers as she shared the challenges and the long amount of time it took her to be able to save up and afford the Levi’s. She had to prioritize paying the bills and taking care of her daughter’s needs before being able to purchase something she strongly desired; I myself wouldn’t need to save for ages to purchase Levi’s nor would I have to put others’ needs before mine to purchase them. I live an entirely

different life than my grandma did at my age as I am not a 19-year-old mother nor do I live in Mexico; her desire to cross the border changed the destiny of my life entirely. The Sisters' clothing, like the Levi's, are a way to bring the past into the present and break barriers of time. Unspoken truths and histories are present in what we decide to wear and sometimes even why we like certain fabrics, colors, prints, designs, and textiles over others.

My research proposal set me up to work with the Sisters, and I had the amazing opportunity to interview two Sisters who are still active within their community today. I walked into these interviews with questions I planned on asking the Sisters along with an image of an outfit they wore that we'd be focusing on (see pictures below).



Figure 12.



Figure 13.

I interviewed both Sisters individually asking them questions on their hats (Hoobie's), makeup, and outfits. The questions dove deep into what impacted their decision for making their appearance along with tying in their personality and life stories into how that has influenced their journey as individuals and Sisters using their clothing and overall appearance to self-express themselves.

After interviewing each of the Sisters I came to an overall conclusion:

“Although I tried to compare the answers given to me... by each Sister, it is unrealistic to do so as they each have their own identities and therefore their own self-expression and messages they are trying to convey. Each interview gave me more insights and highlighted the individuality of each Sister at the same time as they all collectively work as a whole. Although they had some complex and detailed reasons for how they self-expressed through clothing, their clothing choices also had more simple reasons such as adjusting to the weather or wearing a favorite color. The Sisters use the identities that they portray in their clothing to share their self-expression which can fluctuate and vary for different events and times in their lives.”

## Reflecting on the Project of Being-With Others Otherwise

The interviews and reflections I had afterwards allowed me to understand not only the immense diversity in the Sister’s community but also the diversity in the power and reasoning for self-expression in clothing for each person. No two people and their fashion sense are the same so neither will their ability and goal for self-expression be the same. Even when not intentionally trying to self-express through clothing, that alone sends its own message. It was powerful to see how clothing connects us across many differing minorities and communities; although we are still so diverse, we can have one big part of our identities in common. This allowed me to realize:

“I felt a connection to my research project through the talk around clothing as a way to self-express. Although I don’t identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ or queer community, I align with the Sisters in finding significance of self-expression through clothing. My style is very important to me, and everyday I make sure I put on an outfit I feel aligns with my personality. Through my clothing I express a lot about myself. Through all the colors I wear I express that I love color and hate things that are bland. Through my color coordination I demonstrate that I’m very nitpicky and love to organize things when they match. And through the floral prints I wear I tell the world that I love flowers, and it’s why spring is my favorite time of the year. Being able to see from the Sister’s point of view the significance that clothing has for them to express who they are and their identities, meant a lot to me because it allowed me to connect with a community and individuals who are part of something larger than myself.”

Fashion choices and self-expression unites us all and allows us to have an unspoken voice which interacts with strangers with whom we may only share eye contact. Unspoken truths and history is shared through our clothing and connects my archival journey with my grandma’s Levi’s to the Sister’s Nun attire and the interviews with Sisters. Without asking questions and trying to discover unspoken truths, we would not be able to give voice to those who are silenced, allowing us to discover so much more about ourselves and how united we really are. By interviewing and

giving voice to the Sisters' narratives, I discovered so much and was able to communicate with a community I never thought I'd have so much in common with.

Lorde's idea of addressing and unsettling the barriers that exist between us and the future tie into the clothing we wear and the journey's I experienced while working with my grandmother and the Sisters. Our clothing can carry the lineage of past family members and demonstrate how we've grown and sprouted from that as individuals. In many of the Sister's cases, clothing is about taking pride in all that you are and finding your truth while growing from generational and familial backgrounds into your own variation that best expresses you. The Sisters carry on part of their past lives, continue into our present and show our future selves and generations that there are no restrictions on all that you can express and tell about yourself through your clothing. Future generations will be inspired to not conform to gender-stereotypes in clothing and understand that our clothing touches varying communities of individuals in all settings we take part in. I bridge the barriers of the past into the future through clothing by carrying on my grandmother's stories and memories tied to the Levi's; one day I'll hopefully be able to pass these Levi's down to my daughter and not only share my grandmother's stories but also my own.

# Subverting from the Inside: Inclusive Assessment Practices in First-Year Writing

Callie F. Kostelich and Michelle Cowan

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**Abstract:** In this article, the authors respond to Natasha N. Jones' timely question: "How do you work within a system . . . to change and resist the very system that you are working within?" ("The Complicity/Complexity Problem" 5). They extend Jones' question to their situation as WPAs at Texas Tech University, where their FYW program is, to quote the CFP for this collection, "doing the work of antiracist pedagogy . . . during this current wave of backlash." They situate their labor-based grading contract initiative within a politics of locations framework and share the ways in which they navigated conservative scrutiny by building a coalition of first-year writing instructors invested in equitable assessment. The authors hope their experience will contribute to conversations about how WPAs do strategic work, anticipate potential ramifications, and navigate risk in our current political climate.

**Keywords:** pedagogy, assessment, first-year writing, grading contracts, DEI, writing program administration

When Michelle LaFrance and Elizabeth Wardle facilitated the 2019 symposium for developing a feminist ethos for WPAs in the twenty-first century, their driving questions aimed to push the field further towards intersectional, inclusive WPA work as they asked: "How do we build an intersectional feminist ethos into WPA work?" and "What does 'radical inclusion in WPA work' require, look like, inspire, or unfold?" (LaFrance and Wardle 13). These questions—and, importantly, the responses by senior scholars, early career WPAs, and graduate students—built upon decades of feminist WPA scholarship and lived experiences and propelled us towards the future where we have a responsibility to center intersectional, inclusive practices at the heart of our work (Bishop; Cole and Hassel; Glenn; Nicolas and Sicari; Ratcliffe and Rickly). These timely questions were with us before 2020 and these questions remain deeply important as we transition from triaging during a pandemic to reflecting on the future of our work as feminist WPAs.

In many ways, the pandemic was an important catalyst for our programs. We find ourselves in a time and space that is inherently different from our pre-pandemic academic contexts

and constructs. For many folx in writing program administrator positions, we responded to ever-changing situations for the past three years by “leveraging our disciplinary expertise and the tactic of rhetorical feminism to work through issues . . . all while finding ethical ways to reenvision the status quo” (Glenn 190). The pandemic largely disrupted the status quo in many—if not all—of our writing programs, and while each program and university responded in their own ways, this disruption made space for something new to emerge. We are thinking deeply about our programs as important sites for writing, teaching, and administrating *and* as sites of ethical practices for our students, our teachers, and ourselves. We are in a reenvisioning era where we can resist returning to a previous status quo—one that likely privileged certain folx, languages, writing practices, and positionalities—and instead, we can use this transitional period to center equity and inclusion in our writing programs. It is, as Fedukovich and Doe reminds us, “an important and challenging time to explicitly identify as a feminist Writing Program Administrator (WPA) and to envision how feminist principles might be enacted in our programs” (31).

It is in this context of programmatic investigation that we share our experiences as the Writing Program Administrator (Callie) and an Assistant WPA (Michelle) at Texas Tech University, an R1, Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in Texas. We began the 2022-2023 academic year with a commitment to investigating assessment practices in our FYW program, and we launched a labor-based grading contract pilot in our second sequence FYW course, Advanced College Rhetoric, in Spring 2023. Programmatically, we were ready to embark on a labor-based grading contract pilot to reenvision our assessment practices. Students and teachers were back on campus, experiencing a more stable environment post-pandemic, and our administrative team wanted to make the most of that new environment with an effort to align the writing program with our feminist ethos focused on intersectional and inclusive practices. Moreover, we had institutional support from our department to begin the pilot study. At the same time, a backlash against DEI initiatives in Texas dominated the news cycle with the governor directly targeting our institution, among other state universities. In this article, we respond to Natasha N. Jones’ timely question: “How do you work within a system . . . to change and resist the very system that you are working within?” (“The Complicity/Complexity Problem” 5). While Jones offers a critique of DEI programs, we extend her question to our situation at a public university in Texas, and we explore how our FYW program is, to quote the CFP for this collection, “doing the *work* of antiracist pedagogy . . . during this current wave of backlash.” We provide the example of our labor-based grading contract initiative—launched under intense conservative scrutiny—hoping that our experience will contribute to conversations about how WPAs do strategic work, anticipate potential risks and ramifications, and build coalitions to do this work together.

## Institutional Context

We began working together in the First-Year Writing (FYW) program at Texas Tech in Fall 2022. Callie, an assistant professor, was in her first year as the WPA after a year as the acting

WPA of the program. Michelle was a fifth year PhD candidate and was an assistant WPA for her final year in the PhD program. Our institution has an undergraduate population of approximately 33,000 students, with 30% identifying as Hispanic (“About TTU”). The FYW program is housed in the English department, and it benefitted from previous programmatic changes. In 2017, the previous WPA, Michael Faris, wisely introduced an innovative rhetoric-based curriculum with pedagogical development that supported university retention and engagement initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The FYW program now serves approximately 10,000 students a year through a two-course sequence: ENGL 1301: Essentials of College Rhetoric and ENGL 1302: Advanced College Rhetoric.

For the first two years following the major programmatic revision, our FYW program was in a crucial phase of working with the new curriculum, new textbook, new delivery models, and new instructional methods. When the pandemic hit, our program navigated the challenges abundantly well under the direction of our program and department administration. The FYW program traversed complex modalities, institutional mandates that FYW would continue to offer face-to-face classes, and the health considerations of our students and teachers, all while undergraduate enrollment increased, almost in spite of a global pandemic. As we navigated these years, our program administrators and teachers became more comfortable with the new curriculum, something that comes with time, regardless of a pandemic. Importantly, we began to critically reflect on our curriculum and the ways in which we operate to meet course objectives while also thinking deeply about our students, specifically the ways we prioritize—or fail to prioritize—equitable and inclusive practices. Continuous, incremental change was embedded within the fabric of our FYW program well before we launched our grading contract pilot.

When Callie took over as WPA, there was already a key inclusivity-focused curricular change in the works for ENGL 1301, our introductory rhetoric course: a language autoethnography assignment that Michelle Flahive, at the time a PhD student and assistant WPA, and Michael Faris had adapted from Corcoran and Wilkinson’s language autoethnography. The assignment itself values “the rhetorical and linguistic expertise” of students (Corcoran and Wilkinson 19), asking students to analyze their own language practices, and even the creation of the assignment itself recognized the expertise of graduate instructors/students to develop curriculum and spearhead projects that matter to them at a personal level. Since 2022, we have expanded the assignment to all ENGL 1301 classes. Although the language autoethnography assignment and the removal of standard academic English language in FYW prompts are important moves toward radical inclusion in our curriculum, as new administrators, we were interested in embarking on an additional aspect of the program which had yet to be studied in our institutional context: labor-based grading contracts as a more inclusive and equitable assessment method for FYW. Fortunately for us, a cohort of instructors gathered with interest in creating a new and better assessment paradigm for our FYW students.

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1 See Brawley 2023; Das 2022; Faris 2023

## The Grading Contract Pilot and the Attack on DEI in Texas

In Spring 2023, we initiated a labor-based grading contract pilot in twelve ENGL 1302: Advanced College Rhetoric sections. Although the pilot and our study of it exceeds the scope of this article, a few specifics are helpful to situate our initiative and rationale behind it. We recruited five teachers, in addition to Michelle Cowan, who occupied different roles and ranks in the department: one lecturer in FYW, two advanced PhD students, and two second year MA students. Our teachers came from diverse backgrounds and areas of specialization, including technical communication, rhetoric and composition, creative writing, literature, and film. Some of the teachers in the pilot had twenty years of teaching experience; others had two. This breadth of disciplinary and pedagogical diversity enriched our study, as each teacher brought new perspectives and areas of interest to the pilot. Given the size of our program and the make-up of teachers—predominantly graduate students across disciplines—the teachers in the pilot did not artificially skew the pilot by only having teachers with rhetoric and composition areas of emphasis participate. Each instructor held their own motivations for participating in the study and taught their courses differently based on their previous training and interests. Some instructors were looking for fairness—or assessment they could better justify to their students. Some instructors wanted to diversify their teaching experience and felt that learning a new grading approach would be beneficial on the job market. Most wanted to de-emphasize grades so students could be more creative, take risks, and feel less fear and animosity about the course. One instructor was specifically looking for an assessment approach she could adapt for creative writing classes. In this regard, we were thinking about developing a diverse and inclusive group of researcher-teachers from the very beginning, considering what we might learn from their experiences, knowledge, and curiosity<sup>2</sup>.

As we thought through how to construct our assessment pilot, we were aware that incremental changes to curricula and assessment can lead to positive differences in student outcomes, but grading schemas that stick too closely to traditional norms usually continue to reinforce the same patterns of marginalization and normative thinking about writing that our program was looking to avoid (Carillo; Huot et al.; Inoue; Kohn). We were interested in making a bolder move toward labor-based grading contracts, but evidence of the impact of labor-based contracts on a large number of classes had yet to appear in the scholarship (Cowan), a gap we are now working to fill. Our location within an R1 institution meant that we not only had a desire, but also a commitment to pursue high-quality research into alternative assessment approaches. This project had the potential to increase inclusivity and equity in our first-year writing classes, while also providing our graduate instructors with an opportunity to participate in an innovative and timely research project. We framed our project as an effort to train our teachers, encourage engagement from students, promote revision, and give more agency to students. It is in this framework that we proposed our

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2 In a commitment to decentering positions of power and privilege, we will not be sharing more specifics about the pilot in this space, for our findings and experiences from the pilot must be equally shared by those who participated in this labor, not just those of us, like Callie and Michelle, who held administrative positions over the process. We will be writing collaboratively in the coming months about our pilot, our study of it, and the impact of this work on our FYW program and, to a larger extent, on the field.



grading contract as a more equitable and radically inclusive assessment practice for *all* students, not to mention an avenue for us to explore how we teach writing and engage our students in the process of it.

Although the term “grading contract” tends to be bandied about these days as an antiracist practice (which it certainly can be), grading contracts offer numerous benefits. One of the major benefits we hoped for was increased communication and innovation among instructors. We intended to get instructors thinking differently about assessment, and our research team demonstrated that many instructors were hungry for new approaches and ideas. No matter our intention, we understood that using the term “grading contract” would instigate assumptions about our motivations that were correct in part but did not encompass the whole. Certainly, grading contracts can mitigate instructor bias and encourage non-standard forms of writing (Inoue), and we wanted to achieve those goals. However, framing our pilot as a DEI initiative became a point of serious contemplation—with significant implications—for us, especially as the Texas government began issuing negative statements about DEI efforts one month into our Spring 2023 pilot.

On February 6, 2023, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott restricted DEI initiatives at state-funded agencies, stating that: “The innocuous sounding notion of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) has been manipulated to push policies that expressly favor some demographic groups to the detriment of others” (McGee, “Gov. Greg Abbott”). For Texas public institutions, Gov. Abbott’s decree focused on hiring practices, a direct response to a *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece on DEI hiring practices in the biology department at Texas Tech University.<sup>3</sup> Gov. Abbott’s directive follows a trend in Republican politics that claims the demographic groups being disenfranchised are not historically discriminated peoples and that DEI offices are focused on promoting “woke” liberal agendas<sup>4</sup> It was not surprising—though still incredibly disappointing—that, shortly following Gov. Abbott’s public statement, the Texas Legislature introduced Senate Bill 17, which would ban DEI offices and programs at state public institutions, as well as DEI training for public employees (Texas Legislature). In April 2023, the Texas Senate approved the bill (McGee), and on May 22, Senate Bill 17 passed the house (Menchaca), making Texas the second state (preceded by Florida) to ban DEI offices and mandatory DEI training at state institutions. This legislation has upended well-established practices in higher education, placing any activities associated with DEI under intense public scrutiny (McGee, “Texas House”).

We conducted our pilot study during the timeframe when Senate Bill 17 was proposed, debated, and accepted. While we worked to build camaraderie among our study instructors, as project leaders, we could not help but be aware of overarching questions: What does this mean for our home institution, an R1 public university, and its faculty and graduate students who are trained for and tasked with high-quality research activity? We are committed to federal grant funding,

<sup>3</sup> See Sailer, John D. “How ‘Diversity’ Policing Fails Science.” *Wall Street Journal*, 6 Feb. 2023.

<sup>4</sup> The Manhattan Institute and the Goldwater Institute, right-wing think tanks, are largely behind this legislative push across the U.S. (Rufo et al.).

which often entails DEI requirements, and to our own scholarly, pedagogical, and personal convictions around the diversity, equity, and inclusion of all peoples. What does it mean that our Chief Diversity Officer resigned in May 2023 and is leaving not only our institution but the state? What does it mean for us, an untenured assistant professor and a—at the time of this writing—PhD student, to run a labor-based grading contract pilot that we deeply believe in and are committed to and that is, as we stated earlier, a radically inclusive assessment practice for *all* students? And are we putting graduate and NTT instructors at risk by encouraging them to participate in this study with us? We do not know the answers to these questions. We infer that as readers, you may also be contemplating this complexity with us and wondering how all of this will play out in the months and years to come. We are, too, and would be grateful for the solidarity. Importantly, this is a very real context in which we work and live and in which we are piloting an assessment practice that we know to be theoretically sound and pedagogically ripe for investigation in our FYW program. We will not pause an effort that we believe in because of this uncertainty, but we do not ignore it either. In effort to grapple with these tensions, we tap into Ratcliffe and Rickly’s framework of the politics of locations as we navigate and mitigate these complicated politics, and we attempt to theorize an answer—or at least a start to one—for Natasha Jones’ question: “How do you work within a system . . . to change and resist the very system that you are working within?” (5).

## Navigating and Mitigating within the Politics of Locations

Over a decade ago, Ratcliffe and Rickly reminded the field that our work as feminist writing program administrators is always within the context of the politics of locations—administrative, institutional, and cultural—and the intersections between these locations deeply impact the ways in which we perform our labor (viii). We have touched briefly on these locations throughout this piece, particularly our own positions within our university and department contexts. We named ourselves as early-career administrators for a FYW program that is not new but that was recently drastically reinvented, and we identify as administrators with a commitment to an ethic of care (Leverenz) and an intersectional feminist ethos (LaFrance and Wardle). Our professional location—a public university in the state of Texas under intense legislative scrutiny, not to mention the court of public perception—is a complex one. And the gender disparities and labor inequities endemic to that space (the second location in Ratcliffe and Rickly’s framing) are aspects we could address more thoroughly than we have in this article but will resist for the sake of time, space, and focus. For the task at hand, we turn to the third location—cultural location—and the ways in which we navigate and mitigate our labor-based grading contract initiative within this context. We offer an intersectional approach to thinking about these locations as distinct and, also, as overlapping, a poignant point for those of us at public universities in our current political climate. As we pilot this alternate assessment method, we are not just doing one thing, but many things, in complicated contexts and with people whose intersectionality cannot be ignored. Our tactics are largely indicative of our own positionality, our power to make change within the FYW program, and institutionally, our lack of power as a pre-tenure WPA and graduate student assistant WPA.

In their theoretical situating, Ratcliffe and Rickly place Rich's theory of location and Butler's theory of performance in conversation, stating that "agency and restrictions on agency arise not solely from individual will, but rather from whatever acts are allowed (or disallowed) within cultural scripts" (x). We find this language to be particularly helpful as we think about our own language relating to our grading contract initiative and the hidden scripts that are culturally written for us and those that we write—and rewrite—in this process. A quick glance at some of the primary current texts on writing assessment scholarship, particularly related to grading contracts, reveals language that folks may latch onto as buzz words without taking the time to actually learn about this assessment method (Inoue and Poe 2012; Inoue 2015). Within writing studies scholarship, framing labor-based grading contracts as an antiracist initiative is a script that has been written by the leading scholars in the field. It is well established that grading contracts have been used for decades to mitigate instructor and institutional biases that tend to privilege middle-class, white, or so-called "standard" Englishes and counter racism, as well as opportunities to negotiate course requirements, holistically assess work, motivate students, and/or foster social engagement in the classroom, all of which are often framed within a DEI context (Blackstock and Norris Exton; Brubaker; Inoue; Massa; Poe et al.; Taylor). These are important rationales that circulate at our national conferences and in our discipline-specific publications. It is, however, not a script that directly translates outside of these locations, particularly in the context of the attack on DEI in states such as Texas, Florida, and a growing number of others. It is not a script that we can use at our institution to describe our grading contract initiative, not in the era of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, sudden personnel departures, and public statements by the governor that directly name our home institution. Does this mean that we abandon the script and toss it aside, along with the decades of research on this specific value and benefit of the assessment practice? No! Rather, the politics of our locations require us as researchers, teachers, and administrators to be particularly attuned to the multifaceted cultures in which our work is embedded and the complex perspectives through which our work is scrutinized.

As we articulate our grading contract initiative to university stakeholders, we find ourselves drawing heavily on the many benefits of grading contracts. At first, support on the basis of equity was enough. For example, in Fall 2022, Callie wrote an internal grant proposal to Chair and the Executive Committee of the English department. She used the phrase an "inclusive and equitable assessment initiative in 1302" to describe the grading contract initiative, as well as referred to the project as a "study [of] the ways in which we can incorporate anti-racist commenting and grading practices in the FYW program." Interestingly, the Chair's primary concern regarding this initiative had nothing to do with our descriptors of the pilot. Rather, they were concerned with university perception that this alternate assessment method in FYW would resemble a prior failed distributive grading initiative. For context, the FYW program at TTU has long been under intense university scrutiny, primarily related to the extremely high drop/fail/withdraw (DFW) rates the program saw under the pre-2017 model, which included a distributed grading system that was controversial from the very beginning. Since 2017, FYW and English department administrators have worked

diligently to articulate the revisions and to change the narrative of how upper administration, advisors, and students view the FYW program not as a gatekeeping course but as a gateway course where students could be successful in the FYW sequence and develop important skills for further academic success and civic engagement. Once Callie was able to clarify that the grading contract initiative was not a return to distributive grading in any shape, form, or fashion, the Chair wholeheartedly supported our work. This support extended to funding, as the Chair and Executive Committee unanimously approved a grant to fund this project and were—and are—supportive of our clear and transparent objectives for this pilot.

However, as we continued pitching aspects of this ongoing project in Spring 2023, the political climate changed swiftly. We initiated conversations with additional partners across campus, such as the University Writing Centers and Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development Center, two well-respected and valuable resources at TTU. These campus partners were—and are—interested in our pilot and in having conversations about our work. At the same time, we were all increasingly aware of the amount of FOIA requests and public scrutiny at our campus. Therefore, we began to think through best practices for garnering university support during this specific context, and we found it beneficial to articulate the broad array of possibilities alternative grading affords. For example, grading contracts can emphasize student customization and individual goal setting and be instruments that facilitate more interaction and communication between students and teachers (Cowan). Similarly, grading contracts can also increase student buy-in, allow for negotiation to meet specific instructor and student needs, encourage the writing process as a process not as end result, and promote risk taking and the opportunity to do something new and different in our work. Moreover, a process-focused approach to assessment can help us better reach students who feel overlooked or disempowered in the classroom and continue to challenge more confident writers. This assessment method is also an opportunity to introduce graduate writing instructors to evaluation methods that are not dependent on teacher preferences or prior training in which kinds of writing are labeled “good” or “bad.” These principles speak to racial, gender, and class diversity, but they also speak to the ways in which all students can feel left behind, unchallenged, invisible, and at the mercy of systems that have nothing to do with their lived experience. Thus, this project is helpful for initiating conversations about the priorities of our writing program and the ways in which grading contracts are tools to push us all towards a clear focus for our pedagogies, curriculum, and assessment practices.

These are goals and objectives that can be communicated to stakeholders in ways that may make this alternative assessment practice more accessible and approachable—dare we even say, less threatening. In addition to campus partners, we saw this firsthand as we began working with the teachers in our pilot, who helped assess the grading contract in light of differing pedagogies. The instructors played a major role in articulating what mattered to them and the impacts they saw in their classrooms. Through regular bi-weekly team meetings, we were able to align the contract with our overall program objectives while preserving the autonomy of highly

motivated instructors. There were diverse interests in and support for piloting the grading contract. Some instructors used the contract to show students they valued labor or engagement over subjective ideas about “writing quality.” For those instructors, the contract helped them implement more definitive measures of completeness that could be described qualitatively rather than applying numerical assessments that necessitate subjective judgments about “flow” or “style” that tend to be mysterious or opaque to students. Others wanted to see how students responded to a different kind of grading scheme, hoping they might take risks or work in different ways. Others were attracted to the opportunities to customize the contract with individual students. Importantly, there was not one set rationale held by all the teachers in the study. Building a coalition of teachers meant that we did not mandate a one “right” reason for participating in the study. Rather, this was an invitation to collaborate, to learn alongside one another, and to explore the ways in which this alternate assessment practice relates to our objectives—programmatically, personally, and pedagogically.

Although our goals and rationales varied, we did agree to all work with a common contract, which was labor-based—similar to Inoue’s (2019) but with many differentiating factors, largely to account for students’ shifting abilities and motivations in a post-pandemic academic space. When we presented the initial draft of the contract to the teachers at the beginning of the semester, they immediately started making changes through group conversation. We brainstormed, revised, and adapted the contract to accommodate everyone’s input and to value the collective nature of the study. Moreover, to build unity among our group, we listened to and encouraged feedback at meetings every other week throughout the semester as well as through mid-semester and end-of-semester surveys. From the beginning, we sought to balance the need to let all voices be heard and to agree upon a single contract to use. For instance, our contract centered around a B, but some instructors felt strongly that it should not. We wanted to begin with a contract that matched ones already used in composition scholarship, and we had long discussions about the rationale for presenting the B as the center of the contract. Opting for one instructor’s approach over another’s in instances where compromise was only marginally possible was challenging but resulted in important conversations about the contract. It also amplified our goal to build a coalition of teachers in a manner that provided spaces for dialogue, valued diverse input, and recognized our collective knowledge and experience in creating, executing, and studying this pilot.

Another essential discovery was how instructors diverged from the contract or made their own innovations to widely varying degrees throughout the course of the semester. Some instructors were extremely hesitant to make adjustments to the contract for their classes, whereas others immediately made small modifications that fit their classes. Working with instructors to amend the contract individually and as a group was an ongoing process—a process that revealed the grading contracts as instructional technologies that do much more than mitigate bias or encourage diverse expression. They can bring instructors and departments together through discussions they would not have had without the contract. Our meetings about the grading contract exposed institutional

norms about rankings, homework, deliberate practice, and how we value different kinds of student and instructor achievement. Many of the conversations we had as a study team were about what to ask students in our mid-semester and end-of-semester surveys. Most of our questions, which we wondered if we could ask, were concerned about student's obligations outside the classroom and how a grading contract might help them manage competing interests. We were also very concerned with students' mental health. As teachers and administrators, we were constantly thinking about equity, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality, and while these core values deeply impacted our approaches to the grading contract study, we were also increasingly cognizant of the ways in which we could talk about this work *outside* of our coalition and in the politics of locations we occupied in this specific time, space, and context.

## Continuing the Work

As we reflect on where we started and where we go from here with alternate assessment practices in FYW at Texas Tech, we have hope for the future, with awareness for how our coalition of teachers navigated our initial pilot and plan to continue this work in the coming semesters. As we develop a future trajectory for the project, which includes new pedagogical development, invitations for guest speakers, and collaboration opportunities, we have to take the Texas legislature into consideration. We saw the many facets of the classroom impacted by the use of these grading contracts. Our instructors critically evaluated their teaching practices and philosophies, and students reflected on their writing in ways that emphasizes and values process, student agency, and collaborative buy-in. Our efforts to build a coalition with our pilot instructors helped us see how we can position the nature of our study in terms of innovation, student participation, expanded languaging, and the development of an academic self for both students and teachers. While it can seem that initiatives that value DEI principles may be untenable at Texas state institutions in this political climate, we have found ways to continue this important work and to positively communicate that work to stakeholders in our context.

For example, when seeking funding from different programs and departments at our institution, we do not describe our project in terms of privilege—whether to privilege certain voices or decenter others. Rather, we share how grading contracts can help students see themselves as active collaborators in the assessment process versus receivers of it. We describe how students learn to navigate the course with rhetorical awareness and learn about different audience and stakeholder perspectives. We explore the ways in which grading contracts can be a means to decenter grades and re-center revision. We highlight how grading contracts can increase students' attention to course and project goals. We encourage the recognition of a greater variety of writing styles in the classroom and the space to see writing—and the writing process—differently. We invite conversations about grades and assessment in the classroom and programmatically, and we encourage teachers to participate in this process. Much of our initiative centers on not only what is beneficial to undergraduate students, but also what we can do to expand the experience, ex-

pertise, and confidence of graduate students teaching in FYW. The scripts we use to describe our work are not fixed. Just like the grading contract allows space for negotiation, so do our conversations about it. As feminist administrators, we have a unique opportunity to create space for this dialogue, to navigate the intersecting locations in ways that open doors for conversation with folk who are in the discipline and far removed from it. When we do this well—and admittedly, we're still very early in the process!—we can potentially anticipate and mitigate stakeholder resistance that could deter important progress for our programs, our teachers, and our students.

As a field, we must make bold, intentional, coalitional moves to build and support social justice initiatives in our writing programs (Jones, Gonzales, and Hass). At the same time, we must also consider how the language and methods we use to describe our work might allow us to move forward disciplinarily while remaining grounded and secure in our institutional and cultural realities. In response to Jones' question, we choose to navigate and map our locations, critically assessing the audience(s), contexts, and cultural scripts allowed (and disallowed) in those different spaces. By fostering an awareness of locations and the coalitions that locations make possible, we can more effectively articulate the benefits of our assessment methods and the goals we have for our institution's FYW program. We continue to dive into the complexity of what we are doing rather than reducing it into a specific type of initiative, one that often is—purposefully, even—used by those outside of the discipline to harm us and our work. It is in this framing that we further refine our approach to communicating our labor-based grading contract initiative and clarify our goals for implementation as we navigate the politics of our locations and promote the multifaceted benefits of this alternative assessment method.

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# Pedagogies of Social Justice in Miami: Reflections on Healing Wounds of Discrimination and Inequity while Teaching at a State-Funded University

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**Abstract:** This conversational essay focuses on the authors' teaching at Florida International University (FIU). Their exchange begins with reflections on their overlapping journeys to heal intersectional wounds of racism and sexism that they have experienced as academics. They discuss the pedagogies they rely upon to support ethical and healthy classroom experiences for their students and themselves. In her History and International Relations courses, Chantalle implements a horizontal classroom design that includes un-grading as a decolonizing practice to make the classroom authentic and transformative. In her Writing and Rhetoric courses, Shewonda encourages students to value sociocultural writing projects by incorporating Black feminist principles that foster transgressive pedagogy, freedom, inclusivity in the classroom, and empathy for diverse cultural experiences. The authors invite readers onto the journey on which they explore the transformative power of inclusive pedagogies and their crucial role in reshaping academia's landscape toward equity, and its significance for the broader world.

**Keywords:** decolonizing pedagogies, ungrading, zines, horizontal classroom design, heritage stories, silencing

Heritage stories are representations of the lived experience of individuals who carry their home with them or re(create) a home when relocating to a new country. More specifically, looking at Haitian heritage, Haitians continue to find the strength to escape oppression and secure their basic human rights in other locations such as the Greater South Florida (GSF), which includes Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. These stories of their new lives in GSF are blurry: there is no certainty of what the future holds. Yet, their endurance brings about and passes on heritage stories from generation to generation. These stories have shaped us, the authors of

this essay—Haitian women who are socially present and teaching in the GSF area at *Florida International University* (FIU), a state-funded Carnegie Classified Research University (R1) in Miami, Florida. FIU is at once a Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI) whose Spanish-speaking Latin America, the Caribbean, and U.S. students predominately identify as white Latinos; and it is an institution that celebrates having a diverse and international student body. In gratitude, we continue the work of our Haitian ancestors by embracing heritage in our pedagogies.

This heritage work is often challenging, so utilizing decolonizing tools, particularly Black feminist/womanist frameworks, is central to our pedagogies in the diverse yet hyper-segregated and racist context of GSF where most of our students reside. To carry on this work, we gather tremendous wisdom and strength from the writings of Black women authors/scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, alongside other feminist and womanist writers and educators committed to equity who have made space in feminist and academic discourse. Situated in these frameworks, our essay serves practitioners committed to Black feminism/womanism, anti-racist, and decolonial pedagogy.

As Haitian American women and faculty in the English, History, and Politics and International Relations departments at FIU, a growing awareness that the personal is political has strongly influenced our experiences with the power dynamics of racism and sexism and, consequently, led us to shift from traditional pedagogies toward liberatory ways of teaching in our classrooms. We do this by moving away from traditional pedagogies that generally marginalize, alienate, and attempt to silence Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and any other students for that matter.

Shifting away from narrow, alienating systemic traditions allows for ethical and healthy ways of sharing and creating knowledge relevant to contemporary realities. This shift involves asking critical questions, such as what pedagogical approaches help to preserve and share heritage stories in institutional spaces. How do marginalized practitioners, who bear the weight of heritage pain and trauma, persevere and set an example for persisting in challenging and uncomfortable work within colonial and oppressive environments? What does it mean to take risks and refrain from being silenced in the classroom? While there may not be definitive answers or a singular approach to tackle these critical questions, we can intentionally revisit questions like these when teaching, particularly at a time when Florida's educational regulations are contentious and unjust.

In this essay, we (Nou in Haitian Kreyòl) focus on our teaching at FIU. Our discussion begins with a reflective exchange about our respective and overlapping journeys in healing the intersectional wounds of racism and sexism we have experienced as academics. Then, we offer a peek into our classrooms by sharing examples of pedagogies we use to support ethical and healthy classroom experiences for our students and ourselves. In her History and International Relations courses, Chantalle implements a “horizontal classroom design” that includes a practice

commonly referred to as “un-grading” as a decolonizing practice to make the classroom authentic and transformative for her and her students. In her writing studies courses, Shewonda encourages students to value sociocultural writing projects (SWP) by incorporating Black feminist principles that foster transgressive pedagogy, freedom, inclusivity in the classroom, and empathy for diverse cultural experiences by analyzing the writing project *Feminist Zines for Social Action*.

Below, we invite readers to journey with us as we explore the transformative power of inclusive pedagogies and their crucial role in reshaping academia’s landscape toward equity, and its significance for the broader world.

## Sè Ayisyèn: Reflections on Belonging and Pedagogy

*“When everyone in the classroom, teacher and students, recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community together, learning is at its most meaningful and useful.”*

– bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*

*“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”*

– Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light*

**Nou:** *So, let’s begin: How do we, Sè Ayisyèn (Haitian sistas), find belonging in academic spaces that continue to invalidate our experiences and heritage?*

**Shewonda:** So much of it lies in the story of how our life paths have crossed and are intertwined in many ways. Since we first met in February 2020, we’ve learned that we share the same Haitian cultural background, Miami upbringing, and Michigan State University grad school experience. I rarely come across another Haitian woman in academia who understands both the struggles and beauties of being Haitian and rooted in South Florida.

**Chantalle:** The overlap in our identities, academic paths, and the synergy between our intellectual interests is super energizing. When we met, you were presenting your research on digital storytelling about how Haitian women make sense of and name their identities by reflecting on their cooking practices at an FIU Humanities Edge (HE) workshop. It blew my mind that there was now a Sista on the faculty whose research questions, methods, and overall presence spoke straight to my soul.

**Shewonda:** Exactly. Meeting you at that HE event brought a sense of familiarity. It's not often I feel that kind of connection in academic settings. I remember being at FIU's new hire orientation, feeling the lack of diversity, with just two other Black women from other disciplines in attendance. I thought, how could I feel this way at a Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI) with a high population of first and second-generation Black and Brown immigrant students? I realized that my Black faculty community would require building across disciplines. Reflecting on my graduate program and noticing this currently, students are diverse, but there needs to be more diversity in faculty. So, with campus engagement slowly resuming, it feels right to continue where we left off, building community as two Haitian women professors collaborating at HE and LACC workshops.

**Chantalle:** Consciously acknowledging one another and finding ways to connect allowed us to continue the conversation. And, while the pandemic made it difficult for us to follow up immediately, recent opportunities for on-campus faculty development offered us a space to reunite and collaborate.

I am grateful to FIU's HE and Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC). Administrators in these units have used their funding to support our research, the courses we offer, and our commitment to community engagement. Their workshops (especially the grant writing one led by my History colleague Bianca Premo), undergraduate research assistantships, and public symposiums have offered us opportunities to advance our research and teaching in ways that are rewarding and life-giving (a term used frequently by Sherry Watt, my dear friend and colleague at the University of Iowa).

**Nou:** *Unfortunately, this season back on campus also includes the reality that FIU administrators and faculty are negotiating impending educational mandates being legislated by the Board of Governors and State of Florida officials who fund our institution. How has it been adjusting to this period of political assault and uncertainty?*

**Chantalle:** Currently, faculty are spending energy managing so many unknowns about how to lead in their classrooms. My response has been to put my fears aside, work despite them, and practice civil disobedience. In a context where we are already overworked, this is exceptionally exhausting.

We are being terrorized by national, state, and institutional politics. I have deep concerns about how the political current impacts our faculty body (e.g., who we can retain or recruit as new hires, what positions will be funded, and how our daily work becomes even more challenging).

We have to contend with looming and actual threats of censorship: what terms or topics we can or cannot discuss and what draws backfire. There are also union-busting tactics to continuously contend with such as the recent outlawing of public employer payroll deductions for

union members (excluding police, fire, and corrections officers!). For the past 40 years, public workers in Florida have had the benefit of paying their dues through their paychecks. Eliminating this benefit makes it more difficult to maintain the minimum 60% membership roster required for the certification of our union chapter. Decertification means the loss of our Collective Bargaining Agreement and all the rights contained in that contract.

Our students are also impacted directly. They are fearful (at worst) and cautious (at best) about what they can or cannot say or do in the classroom. This is compounded for students who work in our public schools. They are concerned about how this plays out in their K-12 classrooms. Even as their university experiences help them think more critically and boldly, they are unsure of how to hold space for their primary and secondary-level students.

**Shewonda:** What you're saying reminds me of bell hooks' warning that when the process of thinking is no longer enjoyable, we fear the thinking mind. We are silenced. So, knowing that students will walk into my college classroom in a state where they are afraid to ask questions because they are used to being silenced, I approach teaching from a Black feminist pedagogy. I can't teach with the fear of thinking.

I don't leave myself out. With everything I do as a scholar and educator, I value the self.

I deliberately echo Audre Lorde's words, "I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" in my email signature. Being exhausted by the persistent underrepresentation of voices like mine is what keeps me courageous in institutional spaces. I am determined to challenge and disrupt patterns of dominant discourses that ignore and devalue Black women's ways of thinking. As a Black educator, I embrace connecting with my students in ways that help them feel comfortable to begin to unlearn oppressive mindsets. I aim for students to leave my writing classroom with a newfound sense of empowerment, unafraid to engage in Black feminist critical thought.

**Chantalle:** I was not always so courageous in the classroom. I did not recognize it at first but I learned through sessions with my writing coach Cassie Premo Steele (a white woman who shared her expertise in feminist writings, particularly wisdom from Audre Lorde, with me quite generously) that fear was paralyzing me during my early teaching days. I was highly cautious and tentative about bringing politics into the classroom. I understood that the topics I was teaching about race, class, gender, and imperialism in the histories of the United States, Caribbean, and Latin America history could be considered political.

That fear led me to become anxious when teaching. A very pronounced version of this was during and following the elections of Barack Obama in 2008 and Donald Trump in 2016 to the

U.S. presidency. I didn't want to alienate any students. I didn't want to be questioned about whether or not I was offering a fair and quality classroom experience. I guess, in the traditional social science academic way, I was trying to be as objective as possible. I got caught up in this quixotic pursuit despite knowing from my experiences assessing published scholarship that it is impossible to be objective and, therefore, we must be transparent about our subjective stance.

**Shewonda:** I give students a disclaimer on the first day to avoid tensions about the topics and readings I teach in my classroom. I make it transparent that my teaching approaches are informed by my own identities and oppressions—that of being Black, Haitian, and a woman. I make clear my commitment to incorporating the voices and experiences of underrepresented groups in our class materials and discussions to challenge the problems of representation. I make it apparent that we will have dialogues about race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and various social, economic, and political issues, even if these conversations may be difficult or uncomfortable. Acknowledging and addressing these topics within the classroom is crucial for students to recognize and confront injustices that affect them, their peers, and their loved ones.

**Chantalle:** Now more than ever, I recognize that everything we do is subjective because we are all subjects – everyone, including those passionately waging cultural wars as if they are defending objectivity. We all have experiences and knowledge that inform our positions and approaches to whatever we do in life. And so, contrary to my first instinct, I now understand that when I leave my politics out, or anything critiqued for being political, I am not being authentic, and more importantly, I am not being transparent. Being transparent means unapologetically including my personhood (who I am, what I think, what I experience, how I see the world). This allows me to discuss the logic behind my choices and the basis for my understanding (i.e., the meaning I make of things).

**Nou:** *Typically, graduate school does not include training on being transparent and capable of having difficult conversations in the classroom. How do we help our students learn how to have difficult conversations?*

**Shewonda:** I don't remember ever being fearful about my teaching or research practices and topics. For instance, in my dissertation, I made the rhetorical choice to cite only BIPOC scholars. I didn't care how many well-known white scholars talked about the topics within my dissertation; they weren't gonna get a citation from me. How I value and make visible underrepresented voices is crucial to me and my work. The lack of Haitian women's representation in academic spaces keeps my fear away. I don't have the luxury of being fearful when there's a need for Haitian women's voices. I refuse for my Haitian community to continue being underrepresented. I didn't go into academia with the fear of the personal being political because it's the personal that keeps me in academia doing this work. I'm not fearful because I imagine the hope I give underrepresented students when they walk into the classroom and see me, a Haitian woman, standing in



front of the classroom. Hope hits differently when it's visible.

**Chantalle:** Now, I talk with as much transparency as possible about my focus and approach in the classroom. I either explicitly discuss or let students know that I am open to discussing why I might choose a particular text or organize a course in a particular way in terms of the thematics.

And now, in terms of the structure: I have learned that if I leave myself out of the classroom, my ability to connect with and elicit genuine engagement from the students is less effective. I learned this and continue to learn this from a treasured network of pedagogy mentors and colleagues who specialize in teaching and learning. Besides my writing coach Cassie, experts from FIU's Center for the Advancement of Teaching (Erica Caton, and before her Isis Artze-Vega, and Leslie Richardson) and at the University of Iowa's Multicultural Initiatives Research Team, led by Sherry Watt, have been instrumental in helping me strengthen my capacity as an instructor.

These interlocutors have led me to ask the question: How can I invite students to bring themselves into the learning environment if I am hiding behind something else myself?

I used to get evaluation comments where a handful of students criticized my discussion of race and topics that can be easily labeled Black history when in fact, they are simply History (i.e., history that does not exclude Africans and African-descended people from the narrative). Now that I am more open about my stance and approach to teaching, I generally don't get those comments anymore.

**Shewonda:** Sè Ayisyen mwen an (my Haitian sista), we must be aware of our role as Black, Haitian, and underrepresented educators and actively engage in a continuous learning process that forces our students and us to think critically. We have to keep asking questions that shift and decolonize systemic education practices that hinder the learning journey of marginalized students.

“Learning in action means that not all of us can be right all the time, and that the shape of knowledge is constantly changing.”

—hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*

## Chantalle: Horizontal Classrooms as a Decolonizing Practice

As a scholar of Haitian descent and one who studies Haiti, it might seem a given that decolonization would be at the center of all that I am and what I do; but that was not entirely the

case when I first began teaching. It took many semesters and conversations with colleagues and coaches immersed in pedagogy and Black feminist writing before I fully embraced implementing horizontal classroom structures as a way of establishing a more equitable learning environment. While there are many ways to design a class “horizontally,” in essence, the practice calls for a focus on a student’s strengths, emphasis on everyone in the classroom as participants on equal footing (i.e., students and instructors alike), building on existing knowledge and skills, and supporting holistic learning by bridging theory with practice (Gawinek-Dagargulia and Tymoshchuk).

When I teach about Haiti or the experiences of other historically marginalized groups, I am encouraged to align myself and my teaching with decolonial ways of being. The very existence of Haiti is the result of decolonization (a thirteen-year war that culminated in the founding of an anti-slavery and anti-colonialist Black state). The ability of Haitian people (and particularly its women, given the heightened assaults they face) to survive and thrive amidst persistent and new challenges requires recognition of colonial vestiges and new forms of colonialism. When I speak to students about hierarchy as a historical and sociological term, i.e. something from the past and something that persists in present-day society, be it along lines of class, color, gender, sexuality, religion, or any other demarcating factor, it soon becomes apparent that our understanding of hierarchy cannot be bound to a classroom discussion. The values and circumstances that come up in discussion frequently translate to our lived experiences. Whether I invite specific examples or not, students usually introduce examples from their workplaces, civic settings, or the world stage that they are on their minds.

Thus, there is ample room to practice decolonial ways, and for those who are committed, decolonization is an imperative path that shapes our everyday realities through the meaning we make of things, the forms of resistance we take, and the ways of Being we embrace (Watt et al. 2022). An equitable learning environment invites us to care for ourselves not only in the physical sense but also in how we care for our ideas, our right to speak, to write, and to simply be in this world. When students experience this type of care in the classroom, they have an opportunity to better know their rights in this world. I consistently aim to pass on these lessons, which I’ve learned so poignantly from the writing coaches and the teaching and learning experts (listed above) who inspire, instruct, and support me in more ways than I could ever describe.

However, teaching from a liberatory space is not always easy. I have come to realize that while university instructors may be refined in helping students recognize inequity when studying historical figures and moments, we can be less adept at living in alignment with our historical observations. This reality frequently comes to light when I’m listening to deliberations in faculty meetings or trying to make sense of the disconnect between a university administrator’s words and their actions. And, in a more personal context, parenting a child who is now 5 years old has helped me appreciate even more fully the challenge of consistently practicing a decolonial way of Being. As the teachings of Akilah Richards, author of *Raising Free People*, and other members of

a virtual parenting community called My Reflection Matters (founded and facilitated by Chemay Morales-James) remind me regularly: a commitment to decolonization requires patience, continuous self-reflection, assessment, and adjustment. When we lose sight of all that is required in a decolonial practice, we inevitably and at times unintentionally (like a reflex) fall back into practicing fear-based tactics such as minimizing, shaming, and imposing hierarchies in our relationships with one another.

### **Decentering myself to decolonize my classrooms**

Setting up a horizontal classroom is one way that I practice living and modeling in the classroom what I would like to see in the world. By decentering myself (the instructor) and, anyone else working with me to administer the course, in cases when I have teaching or digital assistance, I invite and emphasize an equitable space and place for all members of our learning community to participate in our collective knowledge and skill-building experience, including evaluation measures in the course through a process commonly referred to as un-grading (See Appendix 1).

This means that whether teaching in person or online (synchronously and asynchronously), the parameters of the course are set up in a way where everyone occupies relatively equal power in the classroom. I say relative because I acknowledge my power as the instructor of record who sets the tone (how I show up and invite others to do the same), who sets the overall agenda, as presented in the syllabus, accompanying materials, and assignments, and who submits final grades to the Registrar's office. However, my tone and how we proceed with the agenda, including the un-grading approach to final grade calculations, is always in relationship to, respectful of, and responsive to all who participate in the course.

A horizontal classroom design amplifies the opportunities my students have to be seen, heard, supported, and welcomed to fully express themselves orally and in writing, as they study, and grow. While I offer students this type of support, I also invite them to offer others the same. Thus, when I create a radically open space for my students to learn, I model in the classroom what I would like to see in the world. In these political times, that offering includes the capacity for each of us to engage in civil dialogue, and to co-create spaces of equity, respect, and genuine learning. It is the space where we truly get to heed hooks' caveat in the above quote: that we cannot "be right all the time," and that "the shape of knowledge is constantly changing."

Our students regularly express that participating in a horizontal learning environment does not come naturally, it can be difficult to adjust to, and for some, it can be anxiety-inducing. Students typically expect me to set their learning priorities for them and to tell them how well they are progressing toward a particular final grade. Ceding this power to students means that they take the lead, and I simply make myself available to coach them through a personalized learning plan (PLP) they define for themselves. The self-directed plans are a modified version of the process

in Personalized Learning in a PLC at Work (Stuart, et al.) and are intended to help students take stock of how their personal interests, priorities, and needs align with the goals of the course, as well as how to establish strategies that can help them meet their goals.

The liberatory learning environment I offer students through horizontal classroom design is an opportunity for healing. A horizontal classroom structure supports a socially-emotionally healthy and ethical classroom environment. Evidenced-based findings in pedagogy and general brain development indicate that the absence of fear, anxiety, and other stressors facilitates emotional regulation which in turn allows for higher-level cognitive function (i.e., a greater capacity for critical thinking, verbal expression, and writing) (Matsumoto, Conscious Discipline Brain State Model, Ambrose, Verschelden).

Whether teaching a lower-level course on the History of the United States or Latin America, an upper-division course on the History of Haiti, International Relations of the Caribbean, or a graduate seminar on related topics, I begin with bell hooks to invite students to a joint commitment to critical thinking in our learning process: “Everyone is participating and sharing whatever resource is needed at a given moment in time to ensure that we leave the classroom knowing that critical thinking empowers us.” (hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 11) The setting calls for all to be engaged, for there to be a “radical commitment” to “radical openness” by “[k]eeping an open mind.” (hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 10). These practices usher in the possibility of experiencing radical freedom and for new perspectives and even knowledge to emerge.

In the essay I assign, hooks describes that “children’s passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seeks to educate them for conformity and obedience only. Most children are taught early on that thinking is dangerous. Sadly, these children stop enjoying the process of thinking and start fearing the thinking mind.” (hooks 8). By reading and discussing hooks in my classes, students have an opportunity to learn that critical thinking is an innate and organic skill that children of all backgrounds come into the world doing (e.g., investigating and interrogating with curiosity and without reservation). They soon realize for themselves when relaxing into a different type of learning environment that most of their social experiences and traditional classroom experiences discouraged and challenged them, even at a physiological level (i.e., in the ways that fear and anxiety blocked their mental processes) from the practice of critical thinking.

The process of engaging in the risk-taking required in a horizontal classroom, for instructors and students can feel and can become dangerous, particularly in our current political climate. However, in these moments, I remind myself and encourage my students to heed the words of Audre Lorde, so that we can remember: “...when we speak we are afraid/ our words will not be heard/ nor welcomed/ but when we are silent/ we are still afraid/ So it is better to speak/remembering/ we were never meant to survive” (Lorde).

From my vantage point, those who are engaged in the backlash that has fueled this politically turbulent time are also afraid. Those who aim to censor information fear the awakening that comes when we gain an awareness of more complex realities about the world we live in. At the university level, there are many uncertainties about such censorship efforts, therefore, the ultimate costs associated with the risks that come to those who choose civil disobedience in settings such as a horizontal classroom also remain high at this moment.

It may not seem very consequential to some; but, two stage plays recently produced in South Florida vividly underscore otherwise. The theatrical works *Cry, Old Kingdom*, written by Haitian playwright and Miami native Jeff Augustin, and *Create Dangerously*, based on a book of essays by Haitian author Edwidge Danticat and adapted by Lileana Blain-Cruz remind us that in times of political repression, those being repressed often grapple with whether or not take risks (such as practicing civil disobedience) and that the costs of those risks can be high. The plays emphasize that how we live and what we do is a creative process and that when anyone attempts to create authentically, without reservation, and unapologetically, they are taking risks that leave them vulnerable. Periods of political authoritarianism, such as François Duvalier's authoritarian regime in Haiti (1957-1971), that of his son Jean-Claude (1971-1986), as well as the administrations of and popularity of Donald Trump (at the national level) and Ron DeSantis (at the state level, jockeying for national attention and influence) in the United States, raise the level of these risks to potentially lethal ones.

### **Shewonda: What's Sociocultural Writing Projects Got to Do with Transgressive Pedagogy?**

My Haitian cultural identity and gender shape my pedagogy.

When it comes to applying certain pedagogical principles that center on class, race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and ability, there are significant challenges, risks, or obstacles we face in our role as Black educators. We engage in education as a brave practice, as it involves confronting prejudice, advocating for change, and challenging oppressive educational practices. While Black feminist pedagogies have made progress to improve systemic structures in institutional spaces for marginalized students, these foundations remain threatened and face resistance. Emerging education policies in Florida "attempt" to tear down the transgressive pedagogical work put toward academic freedom. I emphasized "attempt" because by implementing sociocultural writing projects in my writing classroom, I reject political agendas that force educators to ignore issues of social inequality and power relations. Sociocultural writing projects allow students/writers to access knowledge about different facets of history and society. Access to knowledge does not solely depend on or come from teaching materials but also on guiding students to recognize that their experiences contain valuable insights that contribute to history, heritage, and culture.

As a transgressive pedagogy, I implement sociocultural writing projects because students center on the interaction between society and culture, which enables their experiences and insights to be part of the knowledge creation process. Undergoing the research and writing process, students come across historical contexts crucial to understanding how those events influence their current cultural and societal practices. These projects challenge traditional educational norms and promote social justice, allowing students/writers to think independently and find their unique voices. When I plan my writing courses, I employ strategies that enable students to grasp the reasons behind my commitment and desire for them to engage in transformative writing processes and practices that happen through sociocultural writing projects.

I analyze the writing project Feminist Zine for Social Action to discuss the connection between sociocultural writing projects and transgressive pedagogy. Generally defined, zines (/zi:n/ ZEEN; short for magazine or fanzine) are personalized booklets that amplify or voice diverse personal and political narratives and social issues. Further, zines “demonstrate the interpenetration of complicity and resistance; they are spaces to try out mechanisms for doing things differently— while still making use of the ephemera of the mainstream culture” (Piepmeier 191). However, at the same time, “they aren’t the magic solution to social change efforts; instead, they are small, incomplete attempts, micropolitical. They function in a different way than mainstream media and than previous social justice efforts” (Piepmeier 191). Zines are a powerful medium through which marginalized communities record their stories, disseminate underrepresented stories, and organize collective efforts for awareness and change. As a feminist practice, zines offer a unique and accessible platform for individuals whose narratives are often underrepresented or overlooked in mainstream discourses. I emphasize to students that creating a feminist zine does not necessarily label them as feminists but allows them to engage in and make sense of intersectional and feminist principles. What defines their zine as feminist work is the alignment of its content with intersectional and feminist frameworks and practices to improve the quality of life for marginalized voices.

I assign the zine project to my Writing as Social Action (ENC3354) students as their first project (project name: Feminist Zine for Social Action). In Rhetoric and Writing II (ENC1102), wrapping up the semester, students remix their cultural essay into a zine (project name: Cultural Identity Zine). Starting the semester with the zine, the goal is for students to make sense of how their identities intersect. Concluding with the zine, the aim is for students to articulate how they want their culture to be represented—they create narratives of representation. In this discussion, I emphasize transgressive principles when students start with the zine project. Therefore, my analysis focuses on my ENC3354 writing course. Despite zines being an old feminist and political practice, this genre of writing and activism is fading with new generations. Before we start the project, I take a poll asking who has heard of zines. In ENC3354, 3-4 hands go up, and in ENC1102, 0-1 hands go up. We need to assign feminist zines more often in the writing classroom because the content of the zine showcases stories, words, artwork, photography, poetry, and other creative mediums

that show the intersection of marginalized identities because “the social divisions of class, race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and ability are especially evident within higher education” (Collins and Bilge 2), which is noticeable at FIU. So, when writing projects guide students to realize how their intersectionality shapes their interactions within institutional spaces and influences how others treat them, they are empowered to take proactive steps to enhance their college/campus experiences. They navigate the world with a lens that allows them to recognize and consider the different forms of social inequality and power relations their peers encounter and experience. Through this assignment, they adopt a mindset rooted in relational thinking; they embrace a both/and frame instead of an either/or approach (Collins and Sirma 27), recognizing the value in every aspect of their identities.

## Breaking down The Zine Project

### The Project and Objectives

In the *Feminist Zine for Social Action* project, the writing prompt asks students to craft a zine that explores the intersections of their race, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of identity markers and oppressions that collectively impact their experiences and existence in the world. (Refer to Appendix 2 for the project instructions). My objective in assigning the zine project is to prompt students to engage in *critical thinking* and *self-reflection* to explore aspects of their identities to understand the various dimensions of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic background, and more to understand how these aspects influence their thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, and interactions with others. Critical thinking and self-reflection practices actively include students in transgressive teaching by helping them make sense of what they already know and have experienced. bell hooks describes the thinker as someone who sees thinking as an action. The (student) thinker’s thoughts are “where one goes to pose questions and find answers and the place where visions of theory and praxis come together. The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works” (hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking* 7). In this project, students must critically think and reflect on their experiences to bridge concepts of identity with their real-world implementation. By the time students complete this assignment, they discover the who, what, when, where, and how of things, which are the socio-cultural factors that influence and shape their identities. While creating their zine, they recognize critical *social locations* and begin to make sense of both their individual or a group’s social positions within the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, as well as other significant social hierarchies like age, ethnicity, and nationality (Weber 24). Students/writers acknowledge the who, what, when, where, and how of things and name their identities through the writing process, and ownership happens. Recognizing ownership of their identities becomes fundamental to self-expression within a cultural collective.

## Assigned Readings for Foundational Building

My students start the semester by reading two chapters from Lynn Weber's book *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*. They read Chapter 1: "Defining Contested Concepts," to define and understand concepts, including race, class, gender, sexuality, oppression, and social location. To recognize that oppression manifests differently in different social arenas, Chapter 1 helps the students understand how ideologies, politics, and economics further complicate how these concepts intricately shape how individuals experience the world. Next, they read Chapter 10: "Envisioning Social Justice." They analyze the social actions Mamie Mobley, Emmett Till's mother, took to get justice for her son's murder. They see how race, class, gender, and sexuality systems can lead us to act for social justice—which further helps them understand why the personal is political. After being introduced to these contested concepts, they realize that these concepts always intersect when talking about social action, so to make sense of this realization and name it, they read Chapter 1: "What is Intersectionality" and Chapter 5: "Intersectionality and Identity" from *Intersectionality*, by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, and as a class we watched Kimberlé Crenshaw's TED Talk *The Urgency of Intersectionality*. To understand the writing genre of a zine and the complexity of identities, they read Chapter 4, "We Are Not All One": Intersectional Identities" from *Girl Zines: Making Media, Doing Feminism* by Alison Piepmeier. These course readings help them understand intersectionality as "a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experience" (Collins and Bilge 2) and how, as an analytical tool, it drives social action and social justice. They recognize how the intersection of these socially contested constructs leads to inequitable circumstances that shape individual experiences in the broader world. Together, these readings provide a framework for creating their zine.

## Transgressive Principles Practiced by Students/Writers

Students engage in various transgressive pedagogies, such as intersectionality, critical thinking, self-reflection, critical consciousness, storytelling, and ethical considerations, while crafting their zines. Through a deep understanding of intersectionality, students/writers ensure that their zine content acknowledges the complexities of lived experiences and considers how various forms of discrimination and privilege overlap. Students identify and critically analyze the oppressive social and cultural factors perpetuating inequality, discrimination, and injustice during critical consciousness moments. The stories they choose to share in their zines serve as potent tools for sharing lived experiences and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities.

Sociocultural writing projects not only empower my students to prioritize their personal experiences but also equip them with the ability to write effectively across various academic disciplines. Through this approach, I have seen my students gain greater cultural awareness as researchers and writers attentive to multiple human experiences. As my students become more familiar with writing across the curriculum, there is a transformation in how they learn to approach



topics with cultural sensitivity. They become more aware of the potential impact of their words and ideas on individuals from diverse marginalized or cultural backgrounds—a vital aspect of cultural awareness.

### **Why do we need sociocultural writing projects?**

The final deliverables develop through sociocultural writing projects in different modes, including languages and dialects, carrying cultural identity and history. The practice of assigning sociocultural writing projects is critical because the products the students produce in different modes in different languages carry their cultural identities, their histories, and the oppression(s) that their families went through and the current oppression(s) they're going through. Sociocultural writing projects serve as knowledge repositories that document histories, cultural practices, and resistance movements that might be overlooked or erased elsewhere. The deliverables from sociocultural writing projects become dynamic archives, preserving the richness of cultural diversity, and serving as a testimonial space to capture social action. So even if the education system bans books or censors what sorts of topics or issues are discussed in class, the one thing they can't do for certain is take away our lived experience. Implementing writing projects that ask students to write about their culture and lived experiences, as a form of activism, keeps circulating the knowledge/information that the education system is trying to censor.

With sociocultural writing projects, we continue storytelling practices and pass on cultural heritage. Through sharing methods such as peer review or even organizing student conferences that showcase their work, students are exposed to other stories and experiences. Further, with student permission, their final products are shared with students who take the class after them, and those students see their stories and engage with their peers' histories and cultures. Sociocultural writing projects are acts of social justice for South Florida educators and learners. Sociocultural writing projects are powerful pedagogical tools and a movement to keep the dominant culture from silencing marginalized voices and experiences in institutional spaces.

### **As We Transgress**

As our forebears in Haiti, the United States, and worldwide resisted and found ways to thrive amidst conditions intended to extract from them or even eliminate them, so too are we learning to sharpen our capacity for sitting with the discomforts that come with practicing civil disobedience and other risk-taking. This is what supports the possibility for us and our students to survive and thrive amidst the assaults on our right to think, speak, and write freely.

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## Appendix 1

### Boilerplate Language for Syllabi about Ungrading

Some of the recurring comments and questions that many of my faculty peers and I have had for one another are: we love the idea of un-grading in theory, but how does it work? How do we put the concept into practice? Here is some language that I've been using in my syllabus, particularly since at this juncture, we are still operating within a system that requires grades:

Throughout this course, we will be working with an evidence-based approach known-as “Un-grading” (i.e., undoing the traditional grading process).

Instead of the traditional process where the professor assigns grades, **you will assign yourself a final grade based on an evaluation process that tracks your completion of assignments, your engagement in overall course activities, and the personalized learning plans (PLPs) you establish for yourself**. This alternative approach is intended to eliminate the focus on earning points or seeking praise. Instead, this approach emphasizes the importance of investing in your learning experience to develop the capacity to identify meaningful goals, learn how to assess yourself along the way including determining when you have reached your goal, recognize and remain responsive to feedback, be open to employing intervention strategies, and ready to implement an alternative approach when appropriate.

For the work you submit, you will receive different types of feedback, which I will also refer to as **offerings**. These offerings will be general comments to the class at large based on student submissions; at other times, they will be specific comments directly addressed to you from me or a peer in the learning community.

**The only points I will assign to the work you submit is a single point in the grade book for each submission.**

**The submission marks will look as follows:**

- **-I will** assign a point value as a marker that you DID (“1-pt”) or DID NOT (“0-pt”) practice the assigned activity by submitting an assessment

Therefore, **do not distract yourself with the Canvas Letter grade, since *this is NOT* the final grade that I submit to the Registrar’s office** on your behalf at the end of the term for reporting on your transcript.

***Always remember that your course grade will be based on self-evaluation of the work you complete, in consultation with offerings from me and your peers, as well as rubrics provided throughout the course.***

The PLPs, offerings from me and your peers, and related self-assessments will be tools that help you remain clear on some nuts and bolts of the process, allowing you to conclude by the end of the term about whether or not you have reached your goal. You will submit your conclusion in an Assignment called: “Assign Yourself a Final Grade” which I take into consultation, and generally follow, when it is time for me to submit a letter grade into the university system.

Throughout the term, I aim to communicate with you as explicitly as possible about the process to ensure that there are no surprises at the end of the term and that you have confidence in the work you completed and the grade reported on your transcript.

NOTE: Failure to submit a specific letter grade recommendation *and* supporting information as outlined above may result in an Incomplete grade being entered for the final grade. Incomplete grades that are not addressed promptly revert to an F after two semesters (including the summer term). Skip the hassle and complete the steps in this assignment or ask questions if needed along the way

For more info on this approach to grades, see:

“The Case Against Grades” by Alfie Kohn, <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/> “Teaching: Notes on the Thought of Luce Irigaray” by Tomoka Toraiw, <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2015/04/13/teaching-notes-on-the-thought-of-luce-irigaray/> “How to Ungrade” by Jesse Stommel, <https://www.jessestommel.com/how-to-ungrade/>

# Rhetorical Resilience and Righteous Discontent in Eurasia: Female Students Leading the Way

Elitza Kotzeva, Sona Gevorgyan, Nairy Bzdigian, Lilit Khachatryan

**Elitza Kotzeva** is an Assistant Professor of English at the American University of Armenia (AUA) and a literary translator. She was born in Bulgaria, educated in Europe and in the United States. Elitza's scholarship explores the intersections of material rhetorics, feminist ethnography, and performance theory. Her work has appeared in *Intraspection: A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Style*; *Material Culture Review*; *Exchanges: Journal of Literary Translation*; *Apofenie*; and edited volumes focusing on gender and rhetoric in East European and Eurasian cultures. She is also an associate editor at the International Exchanges on the Study of Writing book series at the WAC Clearinghouse.

**Sona Gevorgyan** is an Armenian senior student at the Department of English and Communications at AUA. She was born in Kuwait and moved to Armenia in 2014. Sona is an aspiring writer and journalist who founded AUA's student magazine *The Highlander* to create a platform for student expression. Sona's passion for activism began when she was diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome at the age of 15. Since then, she has become an advocate for raising awareness about the condition and fighting for women's health rights in Armenia. Sona plans to pursue a master's degree in Creative Writing in the United States.

**Nairy Bzdigian** is a Lebanese Armenian who moved from the small town of Anjar in Lebanon to the Armenian capital Yerevan in 2021 to study English and Communications at AUA. She works as a tutor at the Writing Center and is a reporter for the student magazine *The Highlander*. Born in an Armenian town in a Middle Eastern country, Nairy had the opportunity to grow up with and participate in traditions of different cultures. During her studies at AUA, she has been exploring the connections between Lebanese and Armenian liminality rituals to identify similarities between the way gender discrimination and violence against women are enshrined within the respective wedding traditions.

**Lilit Khachatryan** is a local Armenian who graduated from AUA with a bachelor's degree in English and Communications. When growing up, she developed an interest in Soviet Armenian cinema and was specifically curious about how women are portrayed in these films. In her capstone project at AUA, she honed in on the expectations of women's behavior in romantic relationships. To challenge the tradition and the resulting common perception, Lilit composed, directed, and produced a short feminist film in which she defamiliarized a famous Armenian movie from the 1970s by retelling the story from a woman's perspective.

Elitza, Sona, Nairy, and Lilit have worked together in the frame of several courses at the department of English and Communications, at the Writing Center, and within the TEDxAUA student club in the last four years. Elitza is the TEDxAUA club advisor and was the capstone mentor for Lilit and Sona.

**Abstract:** In this article, the authors employ rhetorical autoethnography as a critical method both in and outside the classroom to analyze personal lived experiences of female oppression in Armenia as they embed these local stories within a larger sociocultural framework. In this conversational piece, Armenian female students share their academic projects based on personal experiences and discuss them through the theoretical lens of rhetorical resilience and righteous discontent, bringing the private to the public, the personal to the political. The authors demonstrate that despite the local patriarchal culture with its institutionalized structures of male dominance, women in academia can work together successfully to build coalitions for feminist resistance to systems of oppression.

**Keywords:** rhetorical autoethnography, marriage, family roles, feminist resilience, health care, women's rights

On a sweltering July day in 2022, we had found refuge in the air-conditioned living room of Sona's home in Yerevan. The Armenian apricot season was underway, and the table, elegantly dressed in red cloth with small, embroidered crosses, featured a fruit bowl as its centerpiece. The crystal vessel was overflowing with apricots, peaches, pomegranates, and last-year apples.

We were getting together to talk about our feminist academic work. Four of us, women at different stages of our personal lives and professional development, felt connected because of the work we were doing at the American University of Armenia (AUA) and in the community. Lilit, a recent AUA graduate, had produced a feminist film that revisited ideas from Soviet Armenian cinema. Nairy, a Lebanese Armenian junior, had composed one of her final course projects on how traditional marriage practices in Armenia and Lebanon infringe on women's rights and dignity. Sona, a Kuwait-born Armenian senior student, had developed and delivered a TED talk on women's health and reproductive rights in Armenia. I, a professor at the English and Communications program, have been doing research on the rhetorical practices relative to gender roles of Armenian rural women who are left behind by their husbands for seasonal labor migration.

Lilit, Nairy, Sona, and I felt connected over the work we have done together and the experiences we have shared. In the last years, we read, discussed, and wrote about feminism in the world and in Armenia in classes and outside them. We bonded during Covid-19 isolation using online platforms. We cried together at memorial ceremonies during and after the 2020 Artsakh War—a military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the beautiful mountainous region of Nagorno Karabakh. The war came upon us unexpectedly to steal thousands of young lives, our friends and students among the victims. We survived Covid. We survived war. These experiences made us stronger but also closer and even more connected through our common interest in issues related to women, despite our differences in age, origin, and professional development. We felt we were part of a community where everyone had the right and space to voice their own opinion. We felt empowered together. We read more, we discussed more, we did more for women's rights in the unique context of Armenia and its history.

The four of us had built a relationship over the years that offered a safe space to share stories and learn from each other's experiences while also drawing connections to the scholarship. In our classes, we often combined autoethnography—analyzing our own personal narratives in relation to larger cultural phenomena<sup>1</sup>—with discussions of theory to effectively link the personal experience of students to a wider cultural experience and more abstract ideas. As a teacher, I always found this approach to work well—once students were allowed to share their own stories of oppression, it was easier for them to understand ideas that often remained abstract when presented in foreign social contexts. Lunceford also reminds us that people are unlikely to care about theory without emotional investment in the text, and autoethnography can bridge caring about a person to caring about an issue that is part of their lived experience.<sup>2</sup> As an instructor and moderator of conversations in the classroom, I thus follow the lead of Sara Ahmed who encourages us to start “close to home” in order “to open ourselves out.”<sup>3</sup> I try to create an environment which allows for a safe exchange of local experiences of struggle and resistance that we can then add to the chain of global histories of activism and thought. The conversation that follows, part of my autoethnographic approach to teaching, has the same goal—to add student narratives to the canvas of global feminist resistance and inscribe them into a wider activist movement toward resilience.

Feminist activists in and outside the classroom, my students and I actively practice what social scientists call ethnomethodology—the study of real-life activity, including the study of discourse—to find connections to bigger cultural phenomena. Using a cognitive-process model in combination with a constructivist approach<sup>4</sup> our conversations in the classroom intend to explore real-life situations and challenge, rather than perpetuate, the cultural norms that produce oppression. Deborah Brandt dubs an ethnomethodological approach to composition as sociocognitive, a much-needed empirical method that allows us to understand reading, writing, and (I would add) dialogue as aspects of the social structure of literacy while she views literacy as a cultural activity<sup>5</sup>. A hermeneutically trained scholar of composition, Brandt sees writing as interaction between context and cognition, society and the individual<sup>6</sup>.

Feminist social science scholars have used ethnomethodology to see how women “do class,”<sup>7</sup> or to explore the social organization of race<sup>8</sup>. Black feminists<sup>9</sup> have used autoethnography as a method of resistance to challenge the American mainstream historical narrative. Furthermore, teachers<sup>10</sup> have seen autoethnography's pedagogical possibilities as a critical method

1 See Ellis and Bochner; more recently Poulos.

2 Lunceford 8-9.

3 Ahmed 58.

4 For cultural and textual criticism approach to composition see Cooper and Holzman, or refer to Berlin's and Bizzell's scholarship.

5 See Brandt 317.

6 See also Flower and Hayes.

7 See Scharff

8 See Whitehead

9 See Griffin, Rodriguez

10 See *Queer Communication Pedagogy*, eds. Atay and Pensoneau-Conway

in the classroom allowing to explore race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, religion, ability, class in order to “trouble boundaries,”<sup>11</sup> to challenge the borders of identity,<sup>12</sup> and to give voice to oppressive silences<sup>13</sup>. Using autoethnography in the classroom and beyond helps evoke reciprocal relationship with audiences, inviting participation and a sense of responsibility<sup>14</sup>. Finally, autoethnography can be rhetorical when it draws on experiences that are relative to a rhetorical transaction with the purpose of engaging the audience and seeking response and participation.<sup>15</sup>

In this conversational piece, we employ rhetorical autoethnography as a critical method to embed personal lived experiences of female oppression within a larger sociocultural framework, thus connecting the local to the global, the personal to the political, and the private to the public. We believe that the shared stories will emotionally appeal to the audience in ways to make them partial to an argument relative to feminist resistance. We hope that our conversation will evoke engagement in two rhetorical transactions: one starting “close at home” and working “to open ourselves out” and the other (intended for those coming from other sociocultural contexts) offering a glimpse into a local manifestation of a global feminist project—coalition-building for feminist resistance to systems of oppression.

On that hot July day, Lilit, Nairy, Sona, and I got together again to talk about some new ideas and see how they related to our current work. Sona’s mother had just served lemonade. I took a sip of the refreshing drink:

**Elitza:** We proved we are resilient by making it to Sona’s lovely apartment without fainting with the heat. Our resilience was certainly fueled by a determination to fulfill our feminist mission.

**Sona:** It is interesting you think of it this way. Your comment takes us straight back to our last discussion about feminist resilience.

**Elitza:** Yes, you are right. We defined feminist resilience as a product of conscious and persistent feminist resistance, and we looked at its dimensions: physical, material, and even bodily,<sup>16</sup> as well as linguistic<sup>17</sup>, but also emotional<sup>18</sup>. We often can be resilient in one of these ways but then fail in the others. In all of your feminist projects you have shown how Armenian women can be resilient in material, linguistic, and emotional ways.

**Sona:** Feminist scholars use the term resilience in a sense to describe communities taking

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11 Johnson 84

12 See Alexander

13 See Glenn.

14 Holman-Jones et al.

15 Lunceford 17.

16 See Fleitz or/and Shellenberger.

17 See Glenn.

18 See Ahmed and Canter.



action together toward addressing social injustice, inequality and oppression. With our work here in Armenia, we try to achieve all of the above. As we work with language, our resilience practices are within the scope of rhetorical strategies because we are trying to paint a picture about the ways women are oppressed and experience social injustice in the context of our culture.

**Elitza:** As feminists, we have to be rhetorically resilient. As we were reading the book by Flynn and her collaborators, we decided to think of rhetorical resilience as a practice that is communal, relational, and social. How do you think your work and experience fits within our working definition of feminist rhetorical resilience?

**Lilit:** I believe our projects resonate within our definition of feminist rhetorical resilience. Feminist scholars refer to the Greek term *mêtis*, which they define as a force that combines creativity, opportunism, and even deceit to create situations that allow for seizing chances and utilizing potential.<sup>19</sup>

**Sona:** That's right, Lilit. My personal story illustrates well the idea behind *mêtis*. A couple of years ago, I was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), a hormonal disorder that affects women's reproductive health. At the time, research on this condition was relatively new in the medical world, so, naturally I went to different doctors to understand more about the effects this condition had on my health. PCOS is caused by an imbalance of hormones, and women struggle with infertility. In Armenia, women's reproductive capacity has become the main marker of the Armenian nation's survival and the primary measure of authenticity and traditionalism in maintaining national identity<sup>20</sup>. This is why infertility is seen as a huge struggle for a couple to have. In some families, if the couple struggles with infertility, women are blamed for it. After my diagnosis, what really caught me by surprise was the advice from my female doctor. She advised me to hide this condition from my future husband. As a woman, she was only looking out for me. When I asked why, I was told, "After learning about your condition, your partner will not want to marry you." This followed countless stories I heard of married women secretly taking hormonal pills to conceive, or young women getting divorced, or breaking off their engagements because their partner and their families found out about their infertility struggles.

**Nairy:** Actually, last year, I had to visit a gynecologist because of my irregular menstrual cycle, and the very first thing she asked me was if I was married. I believe this was a "safer" way for her to inquire if I was sexually active or not. Advice like that by your doctor, Sona, can be quite devastating, especially since you heard it from a professional, who is supposed to look at your case on a medical level and not on a cultural one. Hearing such advice from friends and family members is also very unpleasant—they are supposed to accept you no matter what. How were you able to stay resistant and strong after being urged to not disclose your condition to others?

<sup>19</sup> See Flynn et al.

<sup>20</sup> Beukian.

**Sona:** It was very difficult, Nairy. I was stuck with the uncertainty of not knowing what this condition appearing in my life meant for my future. Feminist scholars define that resilience recognizes the need for flexibility and adaptation in situations characterized by change and uncertainty (Youssef and Luthans). For me and my circumstances, it wasn't just about dealing with the condition but facing the stigma around it, which is why I decided to talk about it in public. In Armenia, traditional perspectives hold a strong influence over Western notions of modernity and feminism. It is a society deeply rooted in patriarchal values. Women are regarded as mothers, caretakers, and protectors of their home<sup>21</sup>. Their roles in our society continue to be confined to their reproductive function. I decided to share my experiences with a wider audience. On April 30, 2022, I gave a TEDx talk about my condition and its effect on my life and tied it to being resilient when faced with uncertainty.

**Nairy:** Telling our stories of vulnerability to anyone is challenging, let alone talking about them in a public setting. This is especially true in our culture where we are forced to stay silent about issues related to women's health. Was there anyone who encouraged you to tell your story? Anyone you looked up to?

**Sona:** Yes, of course. Growing up, I always associated resilience with my grandmother. She suffered from a spine injury, and she could barely walk. Despite that, no matter how difficult it was for her, she would get out of bed and help the family when she felt she was needed the most every single day. Feminist rhetorical resilience is seen as communal, relational, and social. It is often perceived as a psychological trait, not a rhetorical action<sup>22</sup>. But it is not simply about individual strength. In my case, it wasn't just my grandmother's strength that motivated me to tell my story, but the stories of so many young women who are ashamed of talking about their PCOS struggles. Popular understanding of resilience envisions heroic individuals performing acts of resilience. But I think it is not like that. Acts of resilience are more communal and relational. Also, it was emotionally very challenging for me to show this part of my life to the public. I didn't know what the response would be. I didn't know if it was the right move.

**Elitza:** Not only that it is the right move, but it is a recommended move for all women who find themselves in precarious situations. This is how we develop rhetorical agency—though rhetorical engagement—and with that, you perform resilience. As Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady explain, resilience as a form of rhetorical agency “begins from a place of struggle and desire.”<sup>23</sup> You wanted to have your story heard and made it available to the community. I remember how difficult it was for you to open up about something so personal when even your family was not ready to hear you speak about your infertility issues in public.

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21 See Beukian.

22 Flynn et al.

23 Flynn et al. 7.

**Sona:** Yes, it was difficult. A couple of days before the TEDx talk, I was telling my mother about my speech. She was worried about my reputation as a woman in Armenian society.

**Lilit:** How did you deal with your mother's concern about your reputation? Armenians live in tight-knit communities. It is very difficult for parents to see their daughter's reputation compromised. This precludes her chances of getting married and threatens the future of the family line.

**Sona:** You are right. It was not surprising that my mother agreed with the doctors because she was worried about my marriage prospects. She didn't understand why it was so important for me to talk about it in public. I knew where her concern was coming from, but I also understood that if I didn't speak about it, it was highly unlikely that anyone was going to do so because of the stigma around the topic. Feminist scholars think of resilience as seizing an opportunity even in the most oppressive situations. They see resilience in the form of a small step toward change, acting in the face of impossibility, and finding strength in vulnerability<sup>24</sup>.

**Elitza:** Your story is a great example of what female rhetors call *righteous discontent*. Shirley Wilson Logan borrows the term from historian Higginbotham—who developed it in her study of Black Baptist women movement at the turn of the 19th c.—and appropriates it to address contemporary women's issues. Logan applies the notion to rhetorical situations in which women speak about social injustices with a moral authority, strongly believing that they are correcting these injustices<sup>25</sup>. She thinks that the rhetorical situation of women today and in the 19th c. are not that different, and therefore they use similar rhetorical strategies<sup>26</sup>. Logan recognizes three manifestations of *righteous discontent*: 1. Telling the stories of people, 2. Invoking the past, and 3. Establishing a common identification. Sona, you have managed to tell your story, invoke your past experience and, with that, the experiences of many other women. I'm curious now about the reaction of the community after your talk. Did any women identify with your story?

**Sona:** After the TEDx talk was published online, many women in their twenties reached out to me. They warmly embraced me and thanked me for speaking about my condition so openly. "Not many women speak about this," I was often told. Some shared that they were on different hormonal pills, while others, like me, were told by their doctors, "When you get married, your condition will disappear." This was an indirect way of the doctors saying that your hormonal imbalance will fix itself if you are sexually active. The women I spoke to were frustrated and found it absurd that they had to wait until marriage to take care of their health. "What if I don't want to get married?" one asked. I empathize with all of them because the stigma and shame around the condition forced them to hide that part of their lives. We have had conversations about different treatments and how we can help one another. I believe we established a form of *identification* in

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Logan 35.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

the same sense as Burke sees identification endemic to rhetoric. These women and I have established common ground and a shared understanding of what needs to be done. As I explain in my talk, resilience is bolstered by the identification with others, especially when we speak about what we, as women, struggle with the most.

Resilience shapes the relationships among ourselves and others, speakers and audiences too. Before getting on stage to deliver my talk, the TEDx event organizer approached me and said, “If you get emotional on stage, pause for a moment, if you need to, and take it all in. Remember that the audience will appreciate your vulnerability.” I always get goosebumps when I think of the moment I had to follow her instructions and pause because all my emotions were welling up inside me. And then I heard the applause—the understanding and appreciation of the audience. That’s when I truly realized that the audience and I had established common ground. My fright disappeared. Instead, resilience became the stepping stone in my relationship with the listeners.

After the talk was published by TEDx, the response completely transformed my life—I realized how many women like me empathized with me and felt empowered as a result of my public speech. Feminist resilience is transformative — it changes the way a life is lived. It can be creative and can come through a suitable rhetorical resource in the form of music, film, family narratives, performance and more. The stories women tell should also address wider audiences, not one’s immediate community. That’s how as feminists, we can develop a bigger rhetorical agency.

**Elitza:** Telling our stories to transnational audiences is crucial. In her famous book *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Cynthia Enloe makes an important statement about international politics in relation to women’s issues across the globe: analyzing international politics must include the visibility of women and, even more importantly, their analytical visibility. That means that women affect politics even when they are not actively involved, but it mostly means that we should be aware of the ways in which governments depend on the control of women as symbols, consumers, workers, voters, etc. Enloe asserts that power is gendered and, therefore, women’s stories matter to the crafting of politics across national borders. I remember that a couple of years ago when I met Nairy, she was telling me about women in her Armenian village in Lebanon and how their stories of oppression were similar to those of women in Armenia.

**Nairy:** Yes, it has been only recently that I realized how the cultural rites in my village of Anjar in Lebanon were similar to those in Armenia in the way they institutionalize female oppression. When I was a child, I was introduced to the Armenian tradition of *Hinoum*. The ritual takes place one night before the wedding as a major celebration and involves all guests. Central to the celebration is a tray containing henna, decorations, alcohol, and a red apple. Every *unmarried* woman is expected to take a bite from the apple. The red apple is a symbol of the bride’s virginity. By taking a bite of it, every girl is marked as a virgin, and later their pinky fingernails are also painted red to announce their purity as virgins to the community and maybe thus attract fellow suitors. As

a child, it was all fun and games until I realized how the ritual was actually indoctrinating women into patriarchal society as it was teaching us children about its ideals—in this case, celebrating girls' virginity as a critical part of the wedding ritual. And we were expected to accept it simply as a tradition in our culture. And we did accept it because we were children and not aware of its deeper meaning. And when I started asking my female friends about it, no one knew why they took a bite from a red apple. Some of my girlfriends were told that by participating in the apple-biting game they were receiving a blessing to get married. The response by itself reflects the patriarchal expectation of young women to be wed as unquestionable.

**Elitza:** It is so interesting how cultures are political even in their rituals, and how girls are taught to behave within the norms of the traditional society from early childhood. From a rhetorical perspective, it is brilliant—the whole community teaches their female children how to be good daughters and good wives by having them participate in a ritual symbolic of ideal womanhood. I wonder what happens when women resist the traditional norms and engage in premarital sexual intercourse. What do their families do?

**Sona:** The act of premarital sexual intercourse is seen as a violation of societal norms, religious beliefs, and traditional family values in Armenia. It leads to disapproval, conflict, and strained relationships within the family which may involve verbal abuse, isolation, or even physical abuse. In such cases, many Armenian women resort to surgical operations to reconstruct their hymen and safe face. This way they can go back to meeting the traditional requirements for the ideal woman and partake in community life with restored dignity.

I remember that in my Gender and Social Change class we read a report on the first sexual intercourse of women and men in Armenia. The 2015-2016 United Nations Health Survey Report shows that Armenian women, if asked whether they had a sexual relationship before marriage, 99.3 % out of 1,830 surveyed women answered negatively. On the other hand, only 46.9 % out of 1,190 surveyed unmarried men claimed that they have never had an intercourse with a woman. It is significant that only 0.7 % of the interviewed women felt comfortable to admit that they have had sex before marriage. While the report does not analyze this data, I think the numbers suggest something about the bias of the female respondents to the question since a positive answer may harm their reputation in the community.

**Nairy:** This data illustrates well the point we are trying to make, Sona. Women in Armenia don't have the right to their own bodies. They seem to be fully aware of it. They know they cannot share in public anything that is not in line with the tradition's rules. And traditions relative to virginity are not only endemic to Armenia. They are present in some other cultures as well. While reading about virginity rites, I came across an article by ethnographer Iklim Goksel on squatter settlements on the outskirts of the Turkish capital Ankara. In these poor neighborhoods, women undergo a procedure to reconstruct their hymen to "be a virgin again" in order to be able to get

married.<sup>27</sup> These women are mostly illiterate—they cannot read or write. They must take different strategies in order to go on with their day-to-day activities which require reading and writing. I found it interesting that in order to get married, they need their index finger dyed black to be able to sign their marriage certificates with it.

I could not help but notice the analogy between the Turkish case and the tradition in our culture of painting the pinky finger's nail red during the wedding ritual. The colored mark becomes a symbol of women as illiterate in the first case and women as virgins in the latter. In both cases, it is about marking women or, rather, labeling them, or even branding them, like animals. Their bodily rights have been violated but—because the mark is already a symbol—they have been also labeled as incapable of communicating on their own using oral and written language. Empathizing with these women for the violations of their human rights, Goksel sees in their actions a different type of literacy. For example, she describes the process of searching for a place and physician to do a hymen reconstruction as a form of resilience as well as a form of literacy. However, like Western anthropologist Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater who was doubtful of Goksel's argument, I also disagree that this can be considered a form of literacy. I'd rather refrain from referencing such practices as a literacy event. I see the actions of these women more as a survival strategy to which they resort in order to continue living respected in the community.

**Elitza:** But isn't that a form of literacy as well—learning how to read the culture so they can survive in it? Goksel lists all kinds of vernacular literacies related to everyday life activities—from going shopping, to organizing gatherings at their houses to gossiping. Women in such poor neighborhoods engage in all of them and, in this sense, are literate in these activities. In the case of hymen reconstructions, women need to find ways to seek a physician who can perform the surgery outside of their community for obvious reasons. With that, they need to invent strategies, discover how to engage in the given tasks, develop relationships, etc.

**Nairy:** I fully understand Goksel's point when she references Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. She suggests that Western scholars, even those who study cultures, are tempted to essentialize and look at other cultures with a Western lens. Goksel accuses Chiseri-Strater of reinforcing an Orientalist paradigm on her ethnographic study, which Goksel explains was contextualized within a specific part of Turkish culture. However, I believe that Chiseri-Strater did not have these intentions because this is about violation of women's rights to their own bodies, no matter where they live, in the East or West. And traditions of virginity should not violate women's rights either.

**Elitza:** Can the practices of hymen reconstruction among these Turkish women be considered an act of resistance to the norms that violate women's rights? When they repeatedly resist the patriarchal rules, don't they, in a sense, show resilience to the violation of their human right to

make a choice regarding their own body?

**Nairy:** I think that their arduous endeavor can definitely be considered an expression of resilience. Flynn and her cowriters assert that “resilience suggests attention to choices made in the face of difficult and even impossible challenges.”<sup>28</sup> These Turkish women choose to get hymen reconstruction in order to be considered pure again as virgins and they meet the demands of a patriarchal society.

**Sona:** What about the case of Lebanon? Have you noticed any form of feminist resilience there?

**Nairy:** Actually, during my recent visit I was lucky enough to be invited to a wedding and took it as a chance to observe and think about the ceremony. During the ritual of *Hinoum*, the guests were offered an apple on a tray. I was shocked to see that everyone, regardless of their gender or marital status, took a bite from the apple! I do not know if it was because they were not aware of the hidden meaning of the tradition and did not see that the apple serves as a symbol of female subordination and oppression. They did not seem to understand that participation in the ritual indoctrinates one into patriarchal norms. I did not take part in *Hinoum* and thought of my resistance as a success story, a step toward resilience against traditions that perpetuate female oppression.

**Sona:** I do believe that resisting participation in such ceremonies could be a way toward gradual dismantling of these traditions either consciously or subconsciously. We have a similar tradition in Armenia. It is really concerning because women here, too, are deprived of the right to make choices regarding their own bodies. They need to follow specific social norms and traditions in order to maintain their reputation in society. When I first heard about the Red Apple, I was horrified. Nairy, can you tell us more about the Armenian version of this tradition?

**Nairy:** In Armenia, people practice the Red Apple tradition as a rite of passage for women who are getting married. When I first walked into your apartment, Sona, I noticed the fruit bowl on the table, specifically the red apples. Before doing my project on marriage traditions in Armenia and Lebanon, the red apple was just a piece of fruit for me. Now it has changed its meaning.

**Elitza:** What does the red apple mean to Armenians?

**Nairy:** The Red Apple tradition is an Armenian tradition that celebrates a bride’s virginity by a basket of red apples. Armenia society, who is quite religious, has strict rules on virginity and pre-marital sex like the Christian doctrine stipulates. In the Bible, the original sin of Adam and Eve is represented through an apple—with one bite of the apple they lose their innocence, that is sexual

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<sup>28</sup> Flynn et al. 1.

innocence. The Armenian Apostolic Church has strict rules on sex before marriage, where they view virginity as a form of purity. In short, being good Christians, Armenians preserve the Biblical symbols in their traditions as they practice them today. On the wedding night, or sometimes on the second night, the newlyweds are expected to have a sexual intercourse for the first time. The following day, the mother-in-law inspects the sheets of the bed where the bride and the groom spent the night. The anticipated scenario is for her to witness blood stains on the white sheet signifying that the hymen of the bride was broken, hence she had been a virgin. The groom's family then sends a celebratory basket of red apples to the parents of the bride to congratulate them on having a pure daughter. If the blood stains are not witnessed, the marriage could end without even properly starting, and the bride's family is shamed. There are cases in which the marriage lasts only for a day because the bedsheets did not feature blood in the morning<sup>29</sup>. When I learned about this, I was so shocked until I saw the similarities between the Armenian red apple tradition and that in my town in Lebanon.

**Elitza:** Your findings prove that women face similar issues across national borders, and to be resilient, they need to be creative in their rhetorical strategies. As Logan reminds us, the rhetorical situations of women are similar regardless of time and geographic differences. The contexts may differ significantly, and within that, the choices we make to develop an argument against patriarchal structures differ too, but the strategies remain the same. This reminds me again of Cynthia Enloe's book on women's importance in politics across borders. Her conclusion carries an important message: The personal is political. And vice versa, the political is personal. Enloe recommends that we pay attention to the fact that, in a globalized world, personal relationships have been politicized. Allegedly private personal relationships have been "infused with power that is unequal and backed up by public authority."<sup>30</sup> In Armenia, women's personal relationships with men have been governed by patriarchal norms but also by state politics, which has, in turn, been influenced both by the Soviets and by the West in recent years. When I was working with Lilit on her capstone project, she thought a lot about these influences. Lilit, can you tell us more about your film *Section of Fairy Tales* as you discuss why you chose to focus on the relationship between men and women in Armenia?

**Lilit:** I've always thought that films have a lot to say about a country's traditions and mindset in general. Movies can tell us about the relationship between men and women in a certain culture. Over the centuries, the role of women in respect to men in Armenia has changed dramatically, but in the last century, Soviet culture influenced it the most. During Soviet times, women were encouraged to partake in paid labor and participate in public life, but at the same time, the Soviets also promoted the image of women as mothers and household carers.<sup>31</sup> In the post-Soviet period since 1989, women were pushed back into their traditional roles. They were expected to be good

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29 See Poghosyan.

30 Enloe 348.

31 Eichler.



wives, homemakers, and mothers—not only in the family but on the national level, too.<sup>32</sup> In her article “Motherhood as Armenianness”—you already referenced it earlier, Sona—political scientist Sevan Beukian observes that women were perceived within an ethno-nationalist discourse as “biological (re)producers of the nation as mothers.”<sup>33</sup> I was really interested in exploring how during the Soviet period in Armenia, traditional patriarchal and Soviet “modern” female ideals were enmeshed to govern women’s behavior in public.

**Nairy:** I am always intrigued by films and specifically their language with regard to ideology. I believe that cinema is a very powerful medium that reinforces ideas for the better or, sometimes, for the worse. Actually, growing up in Lebanon, I didn’t learn much about Soviet Armenia even though I attended an Armenian school. I wonder how women were portrayed in Soviet films. Did their presence and presentation reflect the reality?

**Lilit:** Soviet Armenian cinema offers an array of memorable female characters. However, there are very few films that revolve around female protagonists. Women are often portrayed as secondary characters that complement male protagonists in their role as a mother, daughter, or love interest. For example, one of the most popular roles of the famous Armenian actress Verjaluys Mirijanyan is when she plays the wife and mother in *Bride from the West (Harsnacun Hyusisic 1975)* by Nerses Hovannisyan. The husband in the film feels proud every time Arusyak, his wife, manages to accomplish her household duties. Moreover, in the late Soviet period (1970–1990), women in Soviet-Armenian films were desexualized as a result of the Communist government’s normative ideology with respect to private life in combination with prohibitionist social-sexual mores prevalent in Soviet Armenian society during that time.<sup>34</sup> Scholars like Azatyan and Kaganovsky have pointed to the detrimental nature of desexualized portrayal of women to cinematic love stories. I myself was intrigued by these realizations: women were playing secondary roles in films, and they never actively engaged in a love narrative in Soviet Armenian cinema. And in those few cases that included an intimate loving relationship between male and female protagonists, oftentimes female characters were portrayed in an extremely innocent and pure manner.

**Sona:** I’ve noticed this too, Lilit. While I grew up in Kuwait, my parents, who lived in Armenia during the Soviet era, often watched such films where women characters were always secondary to men. I know about them too—*A Piece of Sky* (1960), *The Tango of Our Childhood* (1984), *Khatabala* (1971), *Bride from the West* (1975), *The Men* (1972), to list a few. Even today, the films are often broadcast on Armenian TV channels, and people continue to watch them. I remember when we talked about Judith Butler and her theory of performativity, we discussed the power of repetition and citationality to our social identities. We talked about how if we make meaning within repetition, then agency comes with the possibility for variations. Lilit, I have seen your film and

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<sup>32</sup> Beukian.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* 252.

<sup>34</sup> Dmytryk, Azatyan.

know that you wanted to develop rhetorical agency for the female protagonist as you challenge the portrayal of women in Soviet Armenian cinema. How did you develop the idea?

**Lilit:** Just like with your TEDx talk, I decided to practice what we discussed as righteous discontent. With my project, I wanted to retell a story that portrayed Armenian women from a well-known film produced during the Soviet years, which you just mentioned, *The Men (Tghamardik 1973)*. The plot of the original film revolves around the main character Aram who tries to win over his love interest with the help of his close friends. I wanted to make my female viewers think about it from a different angle as they identified with the main character, a modern woman. A sexually appealing female protagonist, she acts upon her feelings and is not afraid to be the first one to approach the opposite sex to initiate a love relationship.

**Nairy:** From a rhetorical point of view, this sounds very interesting. Rhetorical resistance in the language of cinema—is this what you did?

**Lilit:** Yes, in my film, the main character—a young girl—tries out all the possible scenarios in her head and never gets the courage to speak directly to the boy she loves. Although the girl acts only in her imagination, it is already a huge step toward feminist resilience. In her book *Traces of a Stream*, Jacqueline Jones Royster describes the phenomenon best. She dubs *critical imagination* the commitment to making connections and seeing possibilities where there are none. It is a tool to see and rethink what is not there and speculate about what could be there. Royster encourages us “to look at what we know and reconstruct with critical imagination the worlds that might have been.”<sup>35</sup> I end my short film with a call-to-action encouraging those who identified themselves with the main character to act, not wait and observe patiently. I invite all Armenian women to “say something.” I tell them simply, “You can’t just live in your head forever.”

**Sona:** That’s a great message, Lilit. I wish they showed your film on Armenian TV channels instead of repeatedly broadcasting Soviet Armenian movies, which many people, like my parents, have watched so many times that they know the script by heart. I wonder what would happen if they showed Lilit’s film. What would our society’s response be? What do you think, Nairy?

**Nairy:** That would be great. The film invites people to rethink their traditional views on gender roles. I believe that initially there would be some criticism, as expected of anything that challenges the norm. Change doesn’t happen overnight, but we should not be afraid of taking the first step. Sitting right here, right now, and talking about these issues together is already a step toward change. Maybe we were scared to voice new ideas a few years ago, but now we have developed more confidence and I believe we can become change-makers. I hope that Lilit’s film will be aired on TV alongside the old Soviet films soon.

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35 Royster 84.

**Elitza:** Lilit's suggestion for change in the relationship between men and women in Armenia is certainly a step toward rhetorical resilience. It is more. It helps build rhetorical agency here and now. Your projects and ideas, Sona and Nairy, too are contributing to the common effort. Like you in your inquiries, we need to follow Enloe's example and worry about the personal first, knowing that it relates to the political. The moment we learn how to better investigate our own personal position to gendered power, how to develop stronger arguments and how to act upon them, we will be able to change the political locally, regionally, and even globally. The personal is political, and we are together working on improving the rights of women in Armenia, and by proxy, across the globe. Building coalitions of solidarity here and now can positively affect the life of women elsewhere. This is what we all are here for.

—

Sona's mother called from the other room, asking if we wanted more lemonade. We did not. "Shnorhakalutyun!" we thanked her. She came into the room and looked at us, puzzled. Her expression revealed that we must have appeared thoughtful or somewhat detached from the reality of her living room. She tried to bring us back:

"Would you like some fruit?"

Her slender figure gracefully glided across the room. Her hand reached toward the fruit bowl.

"Let me treat you to the best fruit before you leave."

She picked a fruit from the bowl and lifted it in offering toward us.

It was a shiny red apple.

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# “Opening A Door”: Resisting Institutional Closeting in the Writing Classroom

Galen Bunting

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**Abstract:** This essay argues that solidarity and coalition building between feminist educators must be the driving force as we design pedagogy which allows LGBT+ students to see themselves in curriculum, even as institutional voices clamor for their closeting, attempting to render them invisible. We must all be what Sara Ahmed calls “feminist killjoys” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). Drawing from experience designing courses in topics from women’s, gender, and sexuality studies in the writing classroom, this essay offers a series of concrete takeaways and reflections on using feminist digital archives and concepts of gender and sexuality in writing classrooms. These methods aim to create “a conversation that can open a door, just a little, just enough, so that someone else can enter, can hear something,” as Sara Ahmed advocates. In drawing upon queer practices of complaint, of drawing on feminist killjoy methods, we can open the door for our students- and for ourselves.

**Keywords:** pedagogy, digital archives, affirmation, community, queer complaint, feminist killjoys, archival literacy

## Introduction

At the beginning of 2023, Oklahoma’s state legislature introduced Senate Bill 129, which would strip access to trans-related care for people under the age of 26. This is just the latest in a wave of bills that strip away access to bodily autonomy for transgender people. Already, Oklahoma bans trans student athletes from sports that correspond with their gender identity in state schools and bans trans people from using the bathroom that aligns with their gender. In the classroom, book bans overwhelmingly target texts which deal frankly with gender and sexuality, presenting a threat to education: when LGBTQ+ perspectives are not present in the curriculum, LGBTQ+ students can be further isolated or othered, made to feel as though they do not belong as writers or as students (Harris, Wilson-Daily, & Fuller; Munro, Travers, & Woodford; Kosciw et al; Snapp et al.). In every sense, legislators paint a target on the backs of LGBTQ+ students, presenting unequal treatment as law.

Oklahoma is also my home.



While I was presenting my work on LGBTQ+ inclusion at a major writing center conference, a member of the audience raised their hand and described the climate towards LGBTQ+ inclusion at their private university. “We’re not even allowed to show LGBTQ+ flags, let alone an allyship sticker,” they told me. “How can we demonstrate our allyship for students who may be struggling alone?”

I return to this question in this short essay to ask: in this anti-trans atmosphere, how can educators and allies partner alongside students? In this contact zone, how can we show up for LGBTQ+ students? When we can’t visually signal allyship, how can we make sure that LGBTQ+ students are not isolated, are not struggling alone?

Drawing from my experience of designing courses in topics from women’s, gender, and sexuality studies in the writing classroom, I offer a series of concrete takeaways and reflections for teaching in this environment, from first-year writing to Writing Across the Disciplines. I reflect on using feminist digital archives, along with my experiences in referencing broader concepts of gender and sexuality in writing classrooms.

## Think Outside the Circle

When I taught for the first time at Oklahoma State University, I knew I would be teaching students who had grown up in rural and conservative areas. I was determined to define the ground rules for my classroom and make sure that all interactions created an atmosphere of shared respect, where students took accountability for their own work and writing. Towards this goal, I allowed all students to introduce themselves. This may seem a small form of resistance, but in providing students with tools to define who they are, we can all be what feminist scholar Sara Ahmed calls “feminist killjoys” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). Ahmed argues that the apparent “feminist killjoy” exposes the “bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). In our current exigence, laws which attempt to erase LGBTQ+ students from the university and from public life negate any avenue for LGBTQ+ students to express bad feelings. In effect, these laws attempt to silence feminist killjoys before they even have the chance to articulate themselves. These same laws dissuade teachers from affirming their LGBTQ+ students in the university. If we are to affirm students, we must, in effect, be willing to kill joy by exposing potential bad feelings, exposing how these laws erase and erode complex human experiences. As feminist killjoys, then, it is our role to partner with our students to make sure that they are offered the tools to express themselves.

At the time, I worked in a front-facing position at the writing center, where I noticed that the forms to schedule a writing center session included a space titled “name you prefer to be called.” This scripted form of prompting allows students to introduce themselves in a manner which may

differ from the name on their official registration, offering a more personal form of communication. I drew on this form to create my introduction strategy.

At the beginning of the first class held on campus, a class on expository writing, I prepared a stack of index cards, which included space for names which students preferred to be called, majors, and current aspiration students hoped to achieve in the class. I explained that these index cards would serve as an aid for our introductions, and then used the board to fill out my own version of an index card for students to follow: I wrote out my name, my pronouns, my prior major, and my current aspiration for the class (which was to introduce students to the tools of expository writing for the college classroom). I then passed out the stack, gave students time to fill out the cards, and suggested they introduce themselves, first to their fellow students on either side, then to the class. In creating this introduction script, I talked with my fellow writing professional Christina Lane, who suggested the idea of the index card as a means of offering a means for students to assert their own identity. As students introduced themselves, if they included pronouns, I made sure to repeat those pronouns, along with their names, to affirm how they referred to themselves.

This first class is instrumental in creating an atmosphere of mutual respect between my students: we go over my code of conduct for the class, which is listed in my syllabus and includes the following clause:

A classroom is a community. Thus, all members of a community should respect the work and dignity of others. A community founded on mutual respect and good faith will be much more conducive to the conversations which we will have throughout the semester. As a community, this space should promote an environment of mutual respect regardless of gender, sexuality, race, disability, etc.

First, I read this code of conduct aloud to my class. Then, we go through it and define each term, from dignity, to mutual respect, to good faith. We discuss what it might look like to treat one another with respect, especially in evaluating one another's writing. I usually write out two statements on the board, one as an example which offers respectful criticism, and one which does not engage in good faith. The first statement usually reads something like this:

"I thought your use of imagery was really effective throughout this essay. However, I had some trouble tracing your argument in your second and third paragraphs, especially your use of evidence." The second statement usually reads something like this: "I didn't like your essay because I don't think you know what you are talking about." Together, we underline portions of the statements which indicate respect or disrespect.

So much of our work as writing professionals is based in showing up for our students through our physical outreach, as Eileen Schell argues, "leading through presence as well as un-

derstanding” (322). In this way, establishing an inclusive atmosphere affirms the right of students to express themselves, without insulting or disrespecting one another, and works through the presence of the writing professional to provide an example. If forbidden to ask students what their pronouns are, allow all students to introduce themselves, and establish a code of conduct for the class. For transgender students, this provides the opportunity to express their identity. As we face growing backlash towards trans lives and identities, educators can still support their LGBTQ+ students. These activities promote an atmosphere of shared respect, setting the standard for the classroom.

## “Our Life On the Page”

I wanted to create opportunities for students to encounter diverse voices on the page, including LGBTQ+ voices. Our first assignment was a literacy essay, which asks students to consider a time in their lives in which literacy placed a significant role. In this assignment, students reflect on their first experiences with literacy, whether on the page or learning a skill. As writers, this assignment provides students with a means of explaining how their understanding of literacy has changed, and how their identity continues to affect their experiences. One student commented when we were first discussing what makes an essay a literacy narrative, “It seems like we’re supposed to put our life (sic) on the page.” This is an astute observation, since in this assignment, students often confront their own identities as writers on the page, and how they negotiate that identity while trying on the notion that they might also be writers.

In introducing this assignment, I was determined to offer students a wide variety of literacy narratives to discuss. I wondered how students would respond to a discussion on the work of Alison Bechdel, whose work as a cartoonist graced the pages of gay and lesbian newspapers in the long-running comic strip *Dykes To Watch Out For*. Today, she is better known for her coming-out story in her graphic memoir *Fun Home*, now a Broadway musical. I had a particular piece by Bechdel in mind, her short comic “Compulsory Reading,” which deals with the act of reading and writing, especially dealing with what we are supposed to read, versus what we do read and enjoy. I knew students would connect with its themes of feeling guilty over not reading.

We even had a copy of the comic in our digital textbook, so access would not be a problem. Our textbook had image descriptions of Bechdel’s comic “Compulsory Reading,” intended to contextualize the visual aspect of comics for sight-impaired readers. I was pleased to see this feature, since digital editions of textbooks have unique opportunities to provide accessibility for all students, and image descriptions are underutilized as a means of providing access. However, there was a glaring issue: in the caption, Bechdel’s comic persona was described as a man with spectacles. I knew this presented a conflict, and I would need to explain why the discrepancy existed. As comics scholar Hillary Chute argues, “Comics is largely a hand-drawn form that registers the subjective bodily mark on the page; its marks are an index of the body... Comics works

are literally manuscripts: they are written by hand” (112). As a form, comics presents embodiment as a form of manuscript, and here, the caption served to override Bechdel’s queer authorial presence on the page.

As I flipped to the introductory panel on the projector, the caption stood out in bold font. A student near the front, who never ceased to have questions, raised an eyebrow as he pointed to the caption. “While that’s the caption,” I said, “Alison Bechdel is a woman cartoonist. This just goes to show that fact-checking can always help everyone, no matter how advanced they might be!”

The students chuckled at this comment. And we moved on. Rather than dwelling on a moment of anxiety or discomfort, the conversation branched into the reasons why the captioner might have assumed that Bechdel was a man, from the short hair of her comic persona to the overwhelming gender discrepancy in comics, a field heavily dominated by men. One student offered the fact when a field is dominated by men, people tend to assume that people within it are all men as well.

I explained to my students that Alison Bechdel also lent her name to the Bechdel test, which allows critics to evaluate how a piece of media can avoid gender stereotyping of women. As depicted in Bechdel’s 1985 comic “The Rule,” a work which passes the Bechdel test must feature two women who talk to each other about something other than a man. In the comic, Bechdel’s character remarks, “Last movie I was able to see was *Alien*...the two women in it talk to each other about the monster.”) In naming this visual form of queer complaint in our class, I offer students a means of reading against the grain, reading against intended meanings of a text, which helped to frame our discussion of reviews as critical texts where queer complaint can thrive.

In this same class, students went on to write literacy narratives on diverse topics. One student described the first time he went duck hunting, while another student described the literacy needed to read a driver’s manual and the experience of learning to drive for the first time. Yet another student described the time she wrote a letter to a traveling member of her family, and described the process of learning how to properly address and send a letter through the mail. In a reflection, one student shared, “I thought writing this [literacy narrative] was going to be difficult, but with the examples and the parts we wrote in class, it wasn’t that hard.”

In the discussion which unfolded from this stray moment in our first-year writing class, we discussed how different identities can be expressed across media and how such depictions make a difference. When we see our own identities represented, we might also feel empowered to express ourselves as we attain further literacy. As I think back, I wonder how discussions like this one might be halted or stopped altogether, if those in favor of silencing LGBTQ+ voices have their way.

## Digital Archives As Diverse Research

As I introduce students to methods for academic research, I draw on digital archives as a method of bringing diverse voices into the writing classroom. This assignment was informed by the work of scholar-teachers Jess Enoch and Pamela VanHaitsma, who have argued “it is crucial to pause before asking students to leverage digital archival materials in their writing projects and prompt them first to read these archives carefully and critically” (217). Students should first achieve a basic level of archival literacy to draw on digital archives in an effective manner. As Charles Morris shows, archives are “dynamic sites of rhetorical power” (115). In understanding archives as a site of critical rhetoric, digital archives can provide potent case studies for students as they understand what research can look like. Moreover, in a mediated encounter with digital archives, students can respond to an ongoing conversation through carefully addressing the rhetorical situation of a chosen archive, understanding its overall rhetorical purpose, and then addressing how a particular archival entry addresses an unfolding conversation. In this way, students situate their own critical voices to express rhetorical purposes and perform research within the exigence of digital archives.

Informed by Enoch and VanHaitsma’s work, I have found that this assignment is readily adapted for writing classes, as well as classes which focus on introducing students to the basic frameworks of gender and sexuality studies. In providing these resources, I draw from feminist frameworks, such as bodily autonomy and intersectionality, to consider who is included in archives and who is left out. In utilizing digital archives, I focus on a series of outcomes:

- Students will be able to define and identify digital archives and their rhetorical purpose.
- Students will be able to navigate a digital archive through either a Boolean search or through a finding aid.
- Students will be able to identify criteria of organization for a given archive.
- Students will critically consider questions of curation: whose voices are involved? Whose voices are missing? How are these sources contextualized through text like metadata, keywords, and captions?
- In class, we will connect feminist frameworks such as intersectionality and bodily autonomy to contextualize archival entries within a larger context of political activism.

Many of these digital archives fall neatly into Kate Theimer’s definition of a digital archive: “online groupings of digital copies of non-digital original materials, often comprised of materials (many of which are publications) located in different physical repositories or collections, pur-

posefully selected and arranged in order to support a scholarly goal.” Others fall into Enoch and VanHaitisma’s inclusive definition of digital archives: “any digital resource that collects and makes accessible materials for the purposes of research, knowledge building, or memory making” (219). The latter provided the guiding definition for my assignment. After identifying a list of digital archives, I pull up several of these archives onto the projector, and ask students to tell me where to go on the archival page. Through most classes, we examine the “About” page, any contextual menus or navigational aids on the homepage, or any disclosed institutional affiliations, and other explanations provided for the archive’s curation and general archival standard.

Students particularly liked the Queer Zine Archive Project digital archive, which catalogs zines from the riot grrrl movement, along with contemporary queer and transgender zines. This archive often limits the metadata provided to explain the context of these zines, which offers students a chance to research for themselves. In keeping with K.J. Rawson’s argument that environment and language can obscure portions of archives, providing creative means of imagining archival inquiries, we discuss how this apparent lack of context offers new entryways into research for future projects. In our class, we reference the article “[Zines, Art Activism, and The Female Body: What We Learn from Riot Grrrls](#)” by Dr. Rebekah Buchanan (author of *Writing a Riot: Riot Grrrl Zines and Feminist Rhetorics*) to offer historical context for this art as a form of activism. Through texts like “Awkward at the Doctor,” a zine which discusses the experiences of queer, trans, and gender-nonconforming patients as they negotiate complex interactions with medical practitioners, students read through a mode of archival queer complaint.

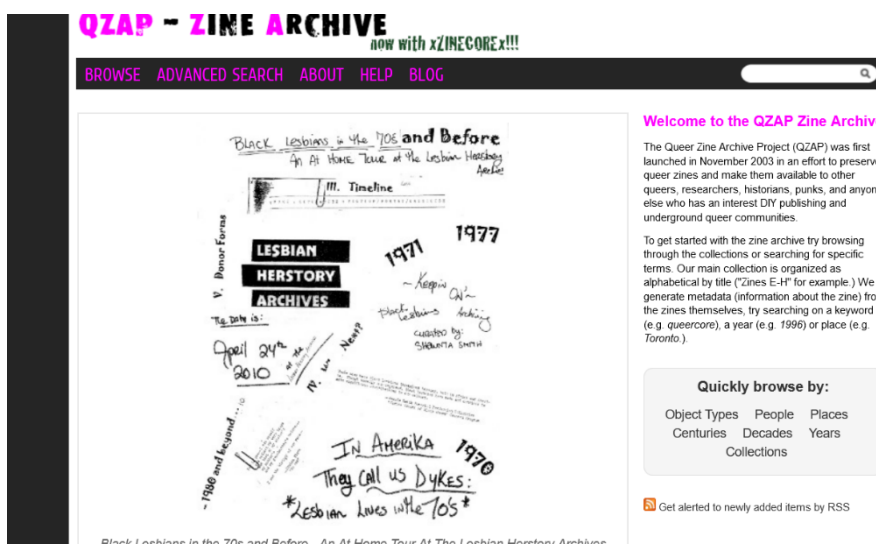


Figure 1.

In the feminist writing classroom, digital archives can form a gateway for students, as educators demonstrate the research process in class, assessing these archives as sources. In our class, we discussed this archive as a source, considering who assembled the archive and where its limits lie. Whose voices are included, and whose voices are missing? What gaps exist in the

archive, and how might research fill in those gaps? In offering diverse voices in the classroom, educators can offer new methods of introducing students to academic research and analysis.

## Conclusion

For teachers of writing, especially in fraught times like ours, questions of how to introduce students to diverse identities in the classroom have only become more difficult. As I sit here writing this essay, I learned that *The Hill We Climb* by poet Amanda Gorman has been banned in Florida, a choice made by a single person (Holpuch). Pictures of shelves stripped of books proliferate, and teachers are constantly facing obstacles that interfere with the jobs we are hired to perform.

As educators consider how to ally with LGBTQ+ students and diverse students in the classroom, we can provide opportunities for students to introduce themselves, and thus support their identities. We can still provide opportunities for students to read and learn from diverse voices. And in drawing from diverse digital archives as opportunities for research as feminist killjoys, offering critical means for students to question and assess sources, educators can also engage students in critical thought enriched by feminist frameworks.

If institutions do not support us as workers, then our work suffers. But dispensing with reliance on institutional support, in the 2019 *Peitho Journal: Special Cluster on Gendered Service in Rhetoric and Writing Studies*, Jennifer Heinert and Cassandra Phillips, Michelle Payne, and Eileen Schell show how feminist writing program administrators contribute to institutional change, despite its challenges. And as Anicca Cox and Rachel Riedner show, coalition building takes place across national, institutional, gendered differences, tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty, graduate student educators and advanced scholars alike, as we look to our growing labor union movement throughout higher education as a model for coalition building, that is, working towards “horizontal, coalitional practices within institutional structures,” dismantling our hierarchical places within institutions in favor of solidarity (18). Beyond the university, library professionals, like Martha Hickson, fight an onslaught of attempts to limit the right to read (Peters). Through reaching out to supportive communities, these library professionals mobilize public support for free exchange of information, despite efforts to ban books.

As a means of organizing, coalition building is deeply relational, bridging institutional divisions based on rank or status to create partnerships. I was only able to offer these assignments and activities for students because writing professionals in my graduate program supported me and offered feedback, sharing their own statements of mutual respect and introductory assignments, which served as a model for my own. Similarly, I have partnered with graduate students and professors alike in designing classes on digital archives, which seek to increase visibility of LGBTQ+ history, the struggle for racial equality in the United States, the history of feminist strug-

gle, and more. Solidarity with one another as educators fosters greater support in the classroom, and in all other aspects of our profession.

Solidarity also looks like working with, not against, the needs of our students. As bell hooks urges in *Teaching To Transgress* (1994), we must view our students as “whole human beings with complex lives and experiences” (15). In her retrospective piece on the legacy of bell hooks and the feminist writing classroom, Patti Duncan reflects, “I was also able to bring my full self to our classes. In the process, we were able to care for one another, learn from each other, and create a sense of community and commitment to our shared space” (2). During a recent community dialogue on public education in Rockingham County, Virginia, high-school students expressed that mental health is one of their greatest stressors, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hagi). Community dialogues, like the one held in Rockingham County, can bridge seemingly insurmountable gaps between educators and the public, and allow us to work with our students to promote further solidarity.

As feminists, we as writing professionals can work together to bridge the barriers of homophobia and transphobia, which stifle our students’ ability to meet each other on equal footing, while realizing, with the Combahee River Collective, that “the major systems of oppression are interlocking”: that we all approach our work through intersecting oppression, which we must seek to dismantle (n.p.). We can work together in refining our methods of fostering inclusivity in the classroom, through mentoring emerging scholars in the field, through sharing methods which worked in our classroom, and by being open about the methods which did not work for us. This might look like creating space at conferences for mentorship, or reaching out to graduate students who express interest in establishing a feminist classroom. Beyond support, solidarity must be the driving force for ensuring that students (LGBTQ+ or otherwise) are able to interact as equals within classrooms and meeting rooms alike. We must all be Ahmed’s “feminist killjoys” (“Killing Joy: Feminism and the History of Happiness” 582). We must work together to design pedagogy which allows LGBTQ+ students to see themselves in curriculum, even as institutional voices clamor for their closeting, attempting to render them invisible.

As Sara Ahmed suggests in her lecture “Complaint as Queer Method,” we must attempt to create “a conversation that can open a door, just a little, just enough, so that someone else can enter, can hear something.” In drawing upon queer practices of complaint in the classroom, we can create critical space for students to engage in rhetorical experimentation as they express critical arguments. These methods may be in our classroom organization, in the texts which we choose, or in our intertextual engagement with archives. By providing students with a critical method of queer complaint as feminist killjoys, we can open the door for our students- and for ourselves.



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# Cluster Conversation: Reclaiming the Work of Wendy Bishop as Rhetorical Feminist Mentoring, edited by Mary Ann Cain and Melissa A. Goldthwaite

## Reclaiming the Work of Wendy Bishop as Rhetorical Feminist Mentoring: A Cluster Conversation

Mary Ann Cain and Melissa A. Goldthwaite

**Mary Ann Cain's** publications have appeared in national and international literary and scholarly journals, diverse in their subject matter and genres, ranging from scholarly work in rhetoric and composition theory to literary works, including fiction, nonfiction essays, and poetry. Her five books include a poetry collection, *How Small the Sky Really Dreams* (Dos Madres Press, 2021), a biography, *South Side Venus: The Legacy of Margaret Burroughs* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), a novel, *Down from Moonshine* (Thirteenth Moon Press, 2009), and two scholarly books, *Composing Public Space: Teaching Writing in the Face of Private Interests* (Heinemann 2010) and *Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing* (SUNY Press 1995). Dozens of her scholarly essays on writing theory and praxis have been published in scholarly journals, along with many national and international publications of her literary work. She is Professor Emerita of English at Purdue University Fort Wayne and lives with her husband, poet George Kalamaras, and their beloved beagle, Blaisie. They spend time living in both Fort Wayne and Livermore, Colorado.

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**Keywords:** mentoring, teaching writing, legacy, collaboration, relationships, rhetorical feminism

"I do have something to add to this conversation because I'm a woman and a creative writer and part of a different generation of compositionists, perhaps because I may experience fewer disharmonies and dichotomies . . . since I don't find my academic and writing lives so disparate although they are often desperate."

—Wendy Bishop, "If Winston Weathers Would Just Write to Me on E-Mail"

Wendy Bishop was one of the most engaged, prolific, and profoundly influential writers-scholars-teachers-researchers that the fields of Rhetoric and Composition, as well as Creative Writing, have ever known. When Bishop died twenty years ago in November of 2003, she was just fifty years old, but she had accomplished more than many people do in much longer careers. She authored or edited more than twenty books, crossed organizational borders (CCCC, AWP, MLA, WPA), often holding leadership positions, and she advocated for this very border crossing and intradisciplinary cross pollination within English Studies and beyond. Bishop transformed the binary of outsider/insider into a more inclusive, multivocal, multidisciplinary approach. As contributors to this Cluster Conversation, we find in this more fluid and flexible understanding of academic work hope for the future of our fields. We need hope, we need examples and mentors, we need to find sustainable ways of working and being that enrich rather than drain us.

As this Cluster Conversation illustrates, Wendy Bishop's influence and legacy—profound, prolific, and persistent—continue long after her passing, and yet much of what she did often falls within the largely undocumented, relatively invisible, and ultimately devalued work of the academy—sometimes seen as "women's" (or these days, "gendered") work. In her essay "Places to Stand," Bishop describes the fear of openly identifying as writers and writing teachers within the profession, a fear that may have "to do with our own concerns about authorizing ourselves as writers-who-teach-a-subject: writing" (12). What Bishop later acknowledges in an endnote is just how profoundly gendered this "pressure to be professional" is: "I also have not entered the larger

discussions of feminism and writing style though I'm aware of it and sympathetic to problems like these" (30).

Her concerns about the marginalization of writing-as-subject, along with the marginalization of writing teachers who must choose between being seen as professional versus writing as a writing teacher, writer, and (what she implies) a woman, echo the broader scholarly conversation about "women's/gendered work"—both within and beyond the academy. Elizabeth Flynn's 1988 groundbreaking essay in *College Composition and Communication* "Composing as a Woman" generated conversations in the field that point to what keeps Wendy Bishop's influence both relatively undocumented and thus invisible but also vitally important—because it is still regarded as "women's work." It's not simply whether or not she is remembered—she most certainly is; it's more a matter of *how*. The *how* is very much in line with what Amy Hodges Hamilton and Micaela Cuelar identify, citing Cheryl Glenn, as the embodied practices of rhetorical feminism. But that *how* is still on the margins of a hierarchical structure at work in the academy.

## Beyond Binaries and Hierarchies

"A polyphony. A bouquet of voices." —Carole Maso, *Break Every Rule*

In reclaiming the work of Wendy Bishop as rhetorical feminist mentoring, we seek—in this cluster conversation—to value the kind of writing that sustains us and our work but doesn't always find a prominent place in academic publications: personal, pedagogical, dialogical, reflective, and collaborative. As this Cluster Conversation amply demonstrates, Wendy's work remains vibrantly alive and embodied by those who worked with her and/or read her texts. Very visible in some ways yet invisible in others, Wendy's legacy has given us a way to understand, argue for, enact, reflect upon, embody, and value work that can too readily be written off as "not professional."

Melissa A. Goldthwaite's "Correspondences," first written in 2004 and revisited for this cluster conversation, reflects upon a deeply personal and also intensely writerly and teacherly relationship that sustained both of them for many years, a sustenance that illustrates the power of what Wendy advocated, finding a clear passage to that safe harbor of connection and relationship, of the community so often written and spoken about but so little understood.

In "Inspiring Collegiality: A Roundtable on Intergenerational Mentoring," Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Sarah Bramblett, Don Gammill Jr., Tiffany Gray, Cantice Greene, Letizia Guglielmo, Mary Lamb, Renee Love, Alice Johnston Myatt, Kristen Ruccio, Matthew Sansbury, Lara Smith-Sitton, and Nathan Wagner continue Wendy's legacy of refiguring mentoring as less hierarchical and more dialogical, more mutually engaging and sustaining, more about shared, "intergenerational" learning and less about what Paulo Freire critiqued as "the banking model of education": "This journey [through academia] is enhanced in life- and career-changing ways through recursive

mentoring and collegiality, collaboration, and accompaniment characterized as fluid, liminal, and asynchronous” (Gaillet).

Meg Scott-Copses, in “Creative Composing,” offers a course plan inspired by and based upon Wendy’s writing and pedagogy, illustrating how relevant Wendy’s work remains. Despite the fact that Wendy’s boundary-busting practices and theories preceded much of the current theoretical language that describes them, Meg highlights how much in line Wendy’s work is with current rhetorical feminism in her current iteration of a course, one assignment, and its outcomes.

Amy Hodges-Hamilton and Micaela Cuellar exemplify Wendy’s embrace of the margins-as-center approach to refiguring roles, genres, and dichotomies of personal/political, individual/collective, creative/critical, exploring and interrogating existing boundaries for new possibilities. Their essay both shows and tells the story of how Wendy’s “rhetorical feminism” shaped their collaborations: Amy with Wendy, Micaela with Amy. Their narratives, both collaborative and individual, break generic boundaries to weave their stories and research into a collaborative whole.

In “Writing With and After Wendy,” Doug Hesse describes how mutual efforts in writing program administration dovetailed with Wendy’s genre-busting impulses to write and teach across generic, but also other, boundaries imposed by the academy as well as the culture at large. He also shares some of Wendy’s prompts, writing in response.

“In Dialoguing with Wendy,” first written in 2003-2004, Mary Ann Cain revisits Wendy Bishop’s legacy 20 years later. She considers how Wendy’s work as “writer-teacher-writer” (Bishop, “Places to Stand”) enacts rhetorical feminism while predating the theoretical language that now helps describe and further illuminate that work. She also, like other contributors to this Cluster Conversation, considers how Wendy’s work has influenced and continues to influence her own, including after her retirement from teaching.

Through the lens of a 20-year retrospective, we discover just how current and relevant Wendy Bishop’s legacy still is, and, in turn, consider just how (often quietly) revolutionary it was in her time. Wendy’s work insisted that we break down binary understandings of identity—in her case teacher-student, master-apprentice, insider-outsider, mentor-mentee, researcher-subject, academic-creative, and so forth—in relation to the academy. While she did not have the theoretical language available to her at the time of her greatest productivity in the 1990s, diversity, equity, and inclusion were, indeed, central to her understandings and commitments. She did not specifically claim to be a feminist, or anti-racist, or an ally to the LBGTQ+ community. She simply was. She understood and enacted what legal scholar and Critical Race Theorist Kimberley Crenshaw first named “intersectionality” before she had a name for it, mapping the complexities of navigating the university as a multiply-identified entity (“writer-who-teaches teacher-who-writes”).

She understood how multiple identification also applied, albeit in different terms, to her students. As Amy and Micaela point out in their contribution to this Cluster Conversation, “One way Bishop pushed against these boundaries was to include the voices of students in her scholarship, particularly those we might not have heard from previously.”

We the editors also note how Wendy’s genre-bending and blurring has prompted some of the contributors to migrate between genres within their individual pieces, and as a result, to break some discursive conventions. In particular, Wendy is named in more personal contexts as “Wendy” while referred to as “Wendy Bishop” or “Bishop” in more conventionally academic contexts. Instead of insisting on consistency within each contributor’s piece, we put the question to ourselves and those authors who were not consistent and decided that strategic “inconsistency” was appropriate, especially when navigating shifting relationships: student/teacher, mentor/mentee, colleague, friend, reader and scholar.

## Toil, Toll, and Joy

“We must work. The earth of writing. To the point of becoming the earth. Humble work. Without reward. Except joy.” –Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*

Wendy fought hard to make way for a margins-as-center approach aimed at valuing teaching and student writers and their work and knowledge. Even when she entered public debates about what writing studies should be, she quoted students, acknowledging that her goal was not just that students would continue writing after her course but that she would “become more aware and respectful of how much and how well they compose themselves before [her class], in what varied media, with what full lives, acknowledging that they are part of the ‘weight’ of the community” as much as she was; “I have power,” she acknowledged, “but when I write with them I tap into their powers” (“If Winston Weathers” 102). To consistently value what and those whom others dismiss, however, can take a toll. Doug Hesse’s poignant reflection captures the toll such work likely took:

Conversation that started in animation dwindled to near silence as we neared the airport, Wendy slumping lower in the corner of backseat and door. She’d just led her last meeting as CCCC chair, and she was exhausted. I was chastened to realize that I’d failed to register the personal costs of her commitments and dedication, seeing instead only the torrent of her talent.

When it came to institutional change, Wendy was not quiet, was not measured, but instead labored, full-throttle, through her own department and college, as well as through a head-spinning roster of professional organizations, including WPA, CCCC, AWP, and MLA within about a decade.



In this regard, her legacy is also sobering; the effort and exhaustion of taking on such professional and academic entities was Sisyphean. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed describes it this way: “The brick wall is what you come against when you are involved in the practical project of opening worlds to bodies that have historically been excluded from those worlds” (Ahmed). Ahmed goes on to describe how “brick wall” as a metaphor is not simply an idea to those who hit it, over and over. Instead “a metaphor (something is like something) of the wall matters precisely to convey how these institutional processes become something *that can be touched*. A wall is what you come up against. It is a physical contact, a visceral encounter” (Ahmed). Wendy hit those institutional walls over and over: the invisible work of the teacher-writer-WPA. In its invisibility, working the margins, hitting those walls, can sometimes be a lonely task. Such work can also make one hungry, even starved, for connection: “The wall: something tangible to some, that can be perceived by touch, by contact, is not even there for others. What one body experiences as solid, for another might simply be air. There; nothing there” (Ahmed).

The bodies Wendy wanted to open to the world of academia were writer-teachers and teacher-writers who wrote, read, and researched in collaboration with their students. And that is where the joy of Wendy’s legacy comes in. Because she refused to think, act, write, teach, *feel* in binary terms, she found connection everywhere:

Diversity work requires world making; finding spaces to withdraw into, places that are less hard to inhabit. Fragments, those pieces that have shattered: we find each other. We find those who have been shattered; who recognise what we are up against. What and even who. This is hard, but who too. (Ahmed)

Those kinds of connections were documented more than a decade ago in *Composing Ourselves as Writer-Teacher Writers: Starting with Wendy Bishop*; they were strengthened in “Wendy Bishop’s Legacy: A Tradition of Mentoring, A Call to Collaboration”; we seek to reinforce and invite new connections in this Cluster Conversation.

In the sometimes invisible, gendered work of making connections, of refusing binaries, of speaking up and hitting one brick wall after another, Wendy Bishop nonetheless inspired others to work and think and write and play and find connection along the way: “We become inventive: to survive what we have come to know. And we have come to know. We know from what we come up against even if we have only scratched the surface” (Ahmed).

It is up to us to continue to remember who she was, what she did, said, and wrote, to keep inscribing her life, work, and legacy, so that this invisibility, i.e. what is simply “air” to some, is seen, felt, and understood as something “solid,” something “tangible” and thus a shared experience that can lead to something else, something new, including places where we truly can “find each other.”

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# Correspondences

Melissa A. Goldthwaite

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**Keywords:** correspondence, email, letter writing, connection, relationships, mentoring

“Our correspondences have wings—paper birds that fly from my house to yours—flocks of ideas crisscrossing the country. . . . [A] connection is made. We are not alone in the world.” —Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge*



One of my clearest memories of Wendy Bishop is her standing on a chair outside her beach house at Alligator Point in Florida one hot July afternoon in 2000. I was standing on the sand below, reaching up to hand her the hummingbird feeder she needed to hang. That day, she was all sun and smiles, welcoming the birds. I remember looking up to her, shading the sun from my eyes, smiling.

Will Baker, in a memorial after Wendy's death, captured her personality when he wrote, "Wendy was half hummingbird. Quick. Sharp. Light. Intense. Charged with sweetness, and a subtle thrum in every move" (5). She became what she loved, a symbol of life and renewal.

Her correspondences certainly had wings. Rarely, they were paper; most often, she sent emails—faster than hummingbirds but just as welcome. A flash on the screen, a connection made.

In one of its meanings, correspondence is to agree, in another, to communicate. In both meanings, correspondence implies connection. Wendy Bishop wrote to connect, often following a pattern of invitation-response-invitation to respond in her process of writing both personal correspondence and the poems, essays, stories, and articles she published.

She modeled a practice of writing, teaching, and working in the context of relationship, relationships based not on status but on mutual care and interest. She established relationships with

her students through writing and revising with them, quoting them in her work, and caring about their professional, personal, and intellectual development. She did the same with colleagues across the country, both longtime friends and those who were newer to the field of composition (many trained, like Wendy, in both creative writing and composition) and saw in her a model for how those who care passionately about writing, teaching, and teaching writing could do what they love.

In creating these mutually beneficial relationships through writing with and for others, Wendy found in both students and colleagues hope for the future of composition studies, a field that didn't always understand or value what she so cared about. Through her invitational ethos, she not only created an opening for other like-minded people to join active—though not always friendly—conversations in the field of rhetoric and composition, but also made the field a friendlier place for the kind of work she loved.

### Seeking and Finding Connection through Collaboration

In July of 2000, hours before we drove from her home in Tallahassee to her beach house and several years before her book *On Writing: A Process Reader* was published, Wendy told me about the initial reviews that claimed she was presenting a solitary writer's view. She was perplexed, explaining, "I don't think of myself as a solitary writer. . . . Internal and private and quiet, but I don't think of it as solitary. I think of myself as always desperate for connection" (Bishop interview). I saw that desire in her eyes and heard it in the quick, low intensity of her voice.

That desire for connection fueled much of Wendy's writing—as well as the relationships she developed and nurtured through writing, especially email. For me, that relationship lasted eight years. For others, I know, it was much longer. For most, the correspondence was connection and the comforting knowledge that we were not alone in the field of composition studies, in our desire to write both creatively and academically, in our teaching practices, in our personal or professional lives, no matter how internal, private, and quiet many of us are or were.

On that same July day, eight months before she was to give her CCCC chair's address, I asked Wendy what she'd like to do for it. Grinning, she told me she wanted to do a version of *Sesame Street's* "Here is Your Life." "Toaster: this is your life," she said with a laugh and then went on to talk about how she wanted her children and all of her friends whose work and teaching had influenced her to join her on stage. I could picture it: blue-suited Guy Smiley with his oval, yellow face and triangle nose leading Wendy's children, Morgan and Tait, and her husband, Dean, to the stage. Numerous students, teachers, editors, friends, co-authors, and collaborators would follow: huddled, herded, and half-embarrassed/half-amused. They would all tell stories, and she would be there to hear those stories. It wouldn't matter that she'd be embarrassed by the attention; she'd know she wasn't alone.

And she would show others that they, too, were not alone, that writing is anything but solitary.

Even a quick glance at Wendy's published work shows how she valued collaboration. Nearly half of her more than twenty books are co-edited or co-authored, and even when she wrote single-authored texts, Wendy was always reaching out, asking for ideas, feedback, contributions. Every now and then, I'd receive a group email with a subject line such as, "friends, if time," asking for reflections on something she wanted to write about. She'd use the quotations from friends as chapter openings, jumping off points, entries into a conversation. Months or even years later, that same group of friends would receive an email file, showing what she did with those initial thoughts, and still later, we'd receive a copy of the book.

Other times, the invitations came through individual emails. When Wendy was working on *Thirteen Ways of Looking for a Poem*, she wrote, asking if I had written a ghazal or pantoum she could include alongside the already published poems. At the time, I had nothing to offer but liked the thought of her including her own and her friends' and students' poems, a risky move that sometimes made reviewers uncomfortable, but a democratizing move from which teachers and students often learned about writing as a process.

Five months into my first (and as of twenty-some years later, only) tenure-track job, Wendy emailed with an invitation to write together. She wrote,

i had been thinking about you these last few weeks, wondering if you'd ever care to try to write something together, now or later down the line—i know your new job is keeping you busy and i know co-authoring takes new learning and doesn't always pay off in depts. in pre-tenure years. i had a request to write a chapter for something i don't know if i even have an idea to say anything about. i'm afraid i may be at a pause, mid-years, mid-passage state myself but i also don't know if it's just this stunning fall 01-spring 02 season which is not like any i recall. i'll forward the call for chapters and see what you think. (Re: [no subject])

The call for papers asked for proposals related to balancing teaching, scholarship, and service in contemporary colleges, specifically English departments. So new to my job, I wasn't sure I had anything to say either, but I welcomed the opportunity to write together.

Both Wendy and I found collaboration generative. Each day for weeks, we'd send long emails back and forth, each reflecting on the ways we sought to integrate teaching, scholarship, and service. Early in the process, Wendy pronounced me "cup half full" and herself "cup half empty," yet despite inevitable frustrations in careers, departments, universities, life, I never saw Wendy as pessimistic. Over the eight years of our friendship, she often asked in differing contexts wheth-

er I was optimistic about the future of composition. Always, I said “yes,” and always that sense of optimism was, in large part, because of Wendy. It was her work, her presence, that made me hopeful.

Writing together seemed to make Wendy more optimistic as well. Early in our work on the essay, she wrote about the process: “and the love of the writing means we don’t care—we write it anyway if it works for the collection or not. which is another difference, point—the liking to co-author for a particular sort of conversation that can only be done with print words and word play but actually has always been what enables the bit of conversation i’m capable of” (Re: Searching for cups). We sent poems, quotations, and stories, cutting and pasting each other’s words into multiple, messy drafts. We left spaces between paragraphs, inviting each other into and to extend the conversation.

Early in the writing process, Wendy ended an email with “m+w squared” (Re: Pulling things together), gesturing to the ways individuals working together add up to more than just two people’s ideas. We change—become more—in the presence of others. In a later stage, she wrote, “i felt a familiar ‘this will work’ pricking of my scalp in rereading the earlier parts and realizing i wasn’t quite sure sometimes who had written which paragraph/section” (Re: here’s the attachment). For me, and probably Wendy, the collaborative process was just as important as any product, any publication, could be. It provided a space for connection, correspondence. As Wendy reflected, “it’s so pleasant to write with someone who understands writing in a similar way: to this project (and others), w” (Re: An Invitation). I knew that pleasure and looked forward to the projects to come.

Beyond writing essays and a poem for her books, one co-authored essay was the only project we completed together, though Wendy was always coming up with ideas for others. She once wrote, “we should edit a whole collection of hummingbird poetry, nonfiction, fiction, and photos. the hummingbird book” (Re: letters to a young writer). She was, just as Will Baker wrote, “Quick. Sharp. Light. Intense” (5), a welcome, energizing presence.

## Seasons, Gifts

Wendy and I corresponded most in the openings between semesters or to celebrate (sometimes mourn) beginnings or endings. In January, she’d write about the Chinese tulip trees and azaleas, while my world was marked by mid-Atlantic snow on spruce branches and dreams of crocuses, early signs of spring. When, in March, Wendy described the scent of crepe myrtle and the sight of high pollen season, chartreuse green coating everything, I told of redbuds and tulips. While she wrote about November dolphins and porpoises at Alligator Point, I talked of the last oak and maple leaves of autumn.

Each December, we'd look forward to time and space to write. In December 2002, as we were finishing our co-authored essay and wrapping up the semester, I told Wendy about the creative nonfiction portfolio a student had delivered to my office, wrapped as a gift in purple ribbon. She responded, "what if we asked them to all wrap these in wrapping paper of choice (would some choose birthday, anniversary, xmas papers?)—or name the person besides ourselves they'd most like to give the portfolio to?" (Re: that is). That she saw student writing as a gift worth giving and worth receiving set Wendy apart from many teachers, especially teachers facing piles that became something to get through rather than something to anticipate or welcome.

Like all teachers, Wendy felt exhaustion and frustration, but those feelings simply prompted more writing. When stuck, angry, or disappointed, she went for a run, wrote a poem, sent an email, or tried to figure something out in an article or essay.

For Christmas that year, I sent Wendy a hummingbird calendar wrapped in handmade paper. In her thank you note, she said she'd use it all year long. That year, 2003, we saw each other only once—shared an hour-long conversation at CCCC and emails about dogs, family, work, and later chemotherapy and radiation. Three months into her treatments, Wendy wrote to say she had six months or so left of chemotherapy. I joked, "You could make a person in that amount of time," and she wrote back, that's "the best line i've heard on this process so far" (Re: updated bio).

A little over a month later, she was gone.

Hundreds, even thousands I imagine, of us stared blankly at computer screens or sat silently with a phone pressed to our ears at the news. Speechless.

For months after her death, I found myself expecting one more email or wishing to write to her. I realized how often we did correspond. More than the long, descriptive emails to mark the end of the semester or beginning of a season, there were hundreds of short notes about an assignment that did or didn't work, best wishes for weekend grading, hope for time to write or rest, a poem, a funny or horrifying family story, good news, bad news, an idea, an invitation. "More soon," I'd close. "l,w," she'd end.

For months, I spent hours upon hours, re-reading old emails, stunned by the thought that another from Wendy would never flash across the screen. Of all the memories, all the messages, one stands out. In March of 1999, Wendy and I were both reeling from the death of close friends. We'd just returned from CCCC, from the comfort of seeing friends, and I'd borrowed a line from Leslie Marmon Silko's exchange with James Wright, "I'm glad and relieved you exist." Wendy reflected on the familiar feeling, writing, "that's how i felt when i looked up and saw you in the audience as a still, comfortable point of focus and often the same when i'd look across the hotel lobby and see friends i couldn't quite catch up to but was glad they were there. in fact, a few times



I slipped into a corner and just watched. . . .” (Re: finally spring, thinking of redbuds).

The CCCC after her death, many of us, too, slipped into a corner and watched, half-expecting Wendy to round the corner. She’d be rushing to a meeting, maybe a session, but she’d smile, wave, offer a quick hug and be off. She was present, even in her absence.

I felt that presence in January of 2004 when I flew to Florida for her memorial service at Florida State. For days, I walked the beach on the Gulf Coast side, thinking of how much she loved that place, even though she sometimes dreamed of moving back west. I watched labs run on the beach, thinking any one of them could have been hers—Lucy—thinking any one of the joggers could have been Wendy. One April, she wrote to say that the birds were using Lucy’s sheddings for their nests.

She always noticed the birds. In her poem “Mid-passage,” from a chapbook by the same title, Wendy writes about mockingbirds and hoot-owls, the energies of the young: “Outside, / under night’s spotlight, / I admire the bird’s young energies” (34). It was Wendy’s energies I admired: she wrote more, did more, created more, felt more, nurtured more in just over 50 years than most can imagine doing in a longer lifetime.

There are a lifetime of things I wish I had written or said. I wish I had the chance to tell Wendy I used *Thirteen Ways of Looking for a Poem* in my poetry writing class the spring after her death. Like she would have, I wrote with the students during every class. Most often, my poems were addressed to her. And I finally wrote the pantoum, my first, she had asked for years earlier.

### **Pantoum for Wendy**

I cannot stop wishing you back,  
playing your words, your laugh,  
over and over. Feet in the sand  
at Alligator Point, I look up.

Playing your words, your laugh  
in my mind, I see the afternoon sun  
at Alligator Point as I look up  
to you, hanging the hummingbird feeder.

In my mind, I see the afternoon sun  
on your hair, cheeks. I smile  
at you, hanging the hummingbird feeder,  
spilled nectar pink on Hawaiian print.

Remembering your hair, cheeks, I smile  
over and over. Feet in the sand,  
spilled nectar pink on Hawaiian print,  
I cannot stop wishing you back.

Beyond the change of seasons, poems, teaching or family stories, there was another occasion for correspondence; I'd often meet people at conferences who would tell me that they wouldn't be teaching today if it were not for Wendy Bishop and her work. I'd write to tell her that. And the hope I find today is the knowledge that a part of Wendy exists in hundreds of teachers and writers who teach and write the way they do in large part because of her.

If I could have wrapped every word I wrote in the year after Wendy's death, I would have wrapped it in handmade paper composed of leaves, flower petals, and recycled office paper—all the drafts that weren't quite finished. And, if I could have, I would have given it to Wendy, for most of it was to, for, in memory, somehow because of her and the way we corresponded.

## **Pause, Mid-Years, Mid-Passage Correspondences**

Wendy died twenty years ago. In these two decades, I've seen other correspondences between Wendy and myself. I am now a year older than Wendy was when she died. I'm not the only one who has done the math. Doug Hesse does the math in his contribution to this Cluster Conversation: "Wendy was 50 when she died. I was 47, which means that as I write, I've now lived 17 years longer." Last year, I heard from one of Wendy's co-authors, David Starkey, who wrote, "Now that I've outlived her by a decade, she's starting to feel more like a genius younger sister than an older (genius) mentor" (Re: Trying to find). At 51, I understand the "pause, mid-years, mid-passage state" that I could not have understood when I was 29 or 30. I find myself asking others, like Wendy asked me, "Do you feel optimistic?" But instead of asking about Composition Studies, I'm asking about English Departments, the Humanities, academia.

I've returned to the book chapter, "Is Your Cup Half Empty or Half Full? On Seeking Fullness in Academic Places," Wendy and I wrote more than twenty years ago:

We have found that ‘remembering’ has been instrumental in allowing us to find a balance in academic life. The process of connecting what we thought (then) with what we think (now) is explained in studies of adult reentry (often women) college students. We believe that what is useful for the adult academic learner is useful for the adult academic—a constant attention to and making of accounts of one’s learning helps to (re)integrate diverse aspects of one’s life. (175)

I have been reintegrating my life, in part, because of another correspondence: like Wendy, I was diagnosed with a blood cancer (leukemia rather than lymphoma), but it did not take my life. It did, however, strip away my ability—for a while—to serve on multiple committees, teach multiple classes, work on multiple books, say yes to multiple requests to conduct manuscript or promotion reviews. As the rogue cells multiplied in me, I had to reevaluate what I could do, what I wanted to do, what gave life (whether there would be minutes or years or decades left) meaning. Years later, I’m still doing that reevaluating.

I go back to that article, to the words Wendy and I wrote:

We worry as that old feeling comes upon us, that we are co-existing in an academic climate that encourages the heroic, the martyr-like, the materially-focused, the multi-tasking career arc. We worry about the possible slips between the cup and the lip. How do we advise others on ways to make a nest—find a horizontal safe house—within the vertical hierarchy of the institution? (Is Your Cup 168)

I think about the nest, the safe house, the ways we offered the advice we needed to take ourselves: “find safe audiences—co-author in order to build nourishing relationships and develop innovative thinking/texts; use e-mail exchanges and tag-team writing to build on and refine each other’s ideas” (180). I still need that advice, still need “self-mentoring as a way of seeing the academy, of learning how to accept what’s there and ask for what’s not in ways that fit one’s own ethos and ethics within an admittedly difficult institutional climate” (177). Do you need that, too?

Here’s what that process of re-integration and of finding correspondences reminds me: writing and teaching writing and writing alongside students still matters to me. It still gives my life purpose and meaning. As I create syllabi for my autumn classes—The Practice of Writing, Creative Nonfiction Workshop, Writing and Reading Animals—I’m building in opportunities to write for and in every class period, scaffolding support for a writing life for myself, for my students. I am returning to the radical revision assignment that Amy Hodges Hamilton and Micaela Cuellar describe in their piece: “a ‘radical revision’ of a previously completed text, where students [are] invited to consider changes in voice/tone, syntax, genre, audience, time, physical layout/typography, or even medium.” The re-seeing through changes in form and genre that they describe feels new and exciting even a more than a quarter of a century after the publication of Bishop’s *Elements of*

Making connections with colleagues across the country who share similar values still matters to me. This past April, I attended Cheryl Glenn's moving and inspiring retirement celebration—a symposium that looked and felt a bit like that Sesame Street spoof *Here Is Your Life* that Wendy had joked about doing for her CCCC Chair's Address. Former high school students Cheryl had taught, former graduate students, teachers, family members, co-authors, friends, colleagues from across the country all gathered and gave talks and ate together and told stories and made further connections. In Cheryl's kitchen, I talked with one of her former graduate students, Heather Brook Adams, about our desire to mentor the way we'd been mentored. My dissertation director, Andrea Lunsford—mentor extraordinaire—was at that gathering, too. In Cheryl's living room, when I was talking with Kris Ratcliffe and brought up something Wendy had said, poet Robin Becker came over and said, "I heard you mention Wendy Bishop," and the circle of conversation opened. All these correspondences created an optimism and sense of hope and connection that I hadn't felt in a while.

Recently, I was consolidating boxes of letters, putting a lifetime of correspondence into larger boxes. I saw a flash of yellow and Wendy's familiar handwriting, a paper bird migrating back. And then another! The next was a letter Wendy had written on September 11, 2001, a day many of us will never forget, a day on which most of my students now were not yet conceived.

This morning, I pulled Wendy's posthumously published poetry collection *My Last Door* from my shelf and found her poem "Where the Hummingbird Sips, There Sip I: An Appreciation," in which she writes of a hummingbird: "She's what I want to be" (72). And I see Wendy in her description of the hummingbird:

Her wings long hands  
in service of her tongue—  
even as she begins,  
she's at top speed,  
rising phoenix-like  
from another flower-flame. (73)

Wendy Bishop rises in the flower-flames of her words, the writing that sustained her and that—even decades later—continues to inspire and mentor others. In our teaching, our writing, our friendships, may we continue to find correspondences.

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# Inspiring Collegiality: A Roundtable on Intergenerational Mentoring

Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Sarah Bramblett, Don Gammill Jr., Tiffany Gray, Cantice Greene, Letizia Guglielmo, Mary Lamb, Renee Love, Alice Johnston Myatt, Kristen Ruccio, Matthew Sansbury, Lara Smith-Sitton, and Nathan Wagner

This group of thirteen colleagues, all with ties to Georgia State University, enjoys a reciprocal mentoring friendship, showing Wendy Bishop's legacy. Bios of each author can be found at the end of this roundtable.

**Keywords:** creative writing, composition, teaching, mentoring, personal writing, autoethnography

## Lynée Lewis Gaillet—Introduction

For the 2008 collection *Stories of Mentoring: Theory and Praxis* (2008), Michelle Eble and I sought narratives, histories, and testimonials that defined acts of mentoring in layered and nuanced ways. At that time, mentoring still smacked of top-down, required apprenticeships. Most workplaces mechanically bought into the idea that mentoring was “good” for business but didn’t materially invest in nor explore possibilities inherent in the act. Mentoring usually followed prescribed procedures and habits that relied upon randomly matching new employees and graduate students with (overtired, overworked) reliable/experienced employees. Of course, tales of rich, organic mentoring nonetheless abound, but access to that kind of life-changing influence has been sporadic and serendipitous depending upon location; sociocultural and economic factors; gender, race and embodiment; and so on. We received scores of submissions that explored, critiqued, and suggested a wide swath of concomitant mentoring issues. Of the seventy-eight included contributors, eight voices penned the encomium “Wendy Bishop’s Legacy: A Tradition of Mentoring, A Call to Collaboration.” Collectively, Anna Leahy, Stephanie Vanderslice, Kelli Custer, Jennifer Wells, Carol Ellis, Meredith Kate Brown, Dorinda Fox, and Amy Hodges Hamilton provided a sketch of Bishop’s influence—most of them knew her as a teacher/mentor; one never met her. Herein, we 1) update Leahy and her coauthors’ claim that “Wendy Bishop is still teaching us, as a field and as individuals, how to become effective teachers and mentors” (81), and 2) reify Bishop’s assertion in *Teaching Lives* that mentoring is important “[b]ecause I relearn my life as my students explore theirs” (320).

The idea of intergenerational mentoring, currently explored in *Composition Studies* (and elsewhere), depends upon an “ethic of hospitality ... to facilitate respectful, productive relations among generational groups, which recognize and enact interdependence but allow for a wide range of stances and strategies of interaction in action and scholarly discourse” (Phelps 106). Likewise, contributors to *Stories of Mentoring* sought to complicate ideas of mentoring, to find

synonyms for the sometimes contentious term. However, as Jenn Fishman and Andrea Lunsford explain, difficulties in understanding and fostering mentorship “concern more than nomenclature” and necessitate viewing this concept as a cooperative act. In describing the “rabbit hole of mentorship,” they contend that “*mentoring* is simply another word for control” (20) and alternately propose “collegiality,” a term that invites the “reciprocal process of learning and teaching ourselves and others how to work most cooperatively and productively together” (31). This give-and-take idea of partnership resonates with Bishop’s nod to benefits for the mentor (relearning) and newer ideas of “accompaniment,” defined by John Brereton and Cinthia Gannett as mentoring that addresses “gaps and tensions ... as a means of respecting critical differences in view, while sharing some portion of our lifelong journeys” (120).

In 1988, Winifred Bryan Horner took me under her wing, initially in the traditional role of apprentice/research assistant but over the next twenty-six years as a colleague, whereby “personal commitment to a large research project” and “areas of shared interest” strengthened our relationship (Fishman and Lunsford 31). Our long-time academic friendship illustrates the value of intergenerational mentoring: our collaborations (and the roles we played) morphed in ways that supported me as an emerging researcher-teacher and much later sustained Dr. Horner’s work. In paying forward her care, I quickly recognized the value of coauthoring with students (who become professors), of working with brilliant new scholar-teachers and how that advances my own research agenda, and, most importantly, of building life-long friendships grounded in intellectual explorations and respect. The smart, caring, and hopeful voices below adopt an intergenerational mentoring lens to honor the magnitude of Wendy Bishop’s work. As Leahy learned from Bishop, “teachers, scholars, and writers, can benefit from working together—and the final product, too, might be more complex as a result” (68). By participating in multidirectional mentoring networks that they enlarge and enact, my coauthors and I recall Vanderslice’s characterization of Bishop’s sphere of influence: “As we each read from our part of the [*Stories of Mentoring*] essay [at 4Cs] it was striking to be in that room and hear the ripple effect Bishop’s mentoring had had ... Hearing those stories confirmed for me ... how powerful mentoring can be and we made a pact that day to mentor others in our field, a pact we have honored” (“There’s an Essay” 2-3).

Wendy Bishop reminds us that “[t]rying to work toward emotional, spiritual, familial, intellectual, professional, political, and the big ETC. of truths is not just part of, but is the process of writing ... It is the golden mean, too, of a version of academic life that many of us might choose” (“Suddenly Sexy” 265). This journey is enhanced in life- and career-changing ways through recursive mentoring and collegiality, collaboration, and accompaniment characterized as fluid, liminal, and asynchronous.

## Letizia Guglielmo—Widening the Gaze: Feminist Rhetorical Mentoring and Students' Scholarly Voices

In “Students’ Stories and the Variable Gaze of Composition Research” (1993), Wendy Bishop claims, “How students are included in composition research is for me a continuing issue” (212). Published thirty years ago, before I was even a first-year writing student, before I had any intention of pursuing graduate work in rhetoric and composition, before I would complete a master’s thesis and doctoral dissertation focused on composition teaching and learning, and long before my university created an office of undergraduate research that supported collaboration with undergraduate student researchers, Bishop challenged us not to privilege our own gaze as teacher-scholars. “When teachers become researchers and students’ stories, interpretations, and contributions count,” she explained, “then knowledge making and professionalization come into better balance” (“Students” 210).

I encountered Bishop’s piece first as a graduate student and later, while working on a co-authored book with my mentor, Lynée. Our goal was to draw a diverse group of teacher-scholars into writing and scholarship, and our work was firmly grounded in envisioning mentorship and coauthorship as part of that process: our own and our readers’. Bishop’s call for attention to research methods within the field and to the absence of authentic student voices in our studies of writing and writing process, including “questions of gender, race, and class ... [and] current structures of institutional power,” created space and provided a feminist intervention for decades of future writing research. In recognizing that “[t]his kind of research will change composition studies” (“Students” 210), Bishop created space for the kind of transformations Cheryl Glenn more recently described as those that “keep the discipline rolling” (173). My feminist teaching and mentoring means actively creating space for students and their authentic voices in our disciplinary work. I do that work most actively through undergraduate research projects that allow us to write, reflect, and theorize collaboratively on the published page, that value personal and lived experience, and that disrupt expectations of who can contribute to knowledge-making in the field.

### Tiffany Gray—Continuous Learning

“ ... I believe learner and learning method should be suited to each other, should be individualized as much as possible. That means I’ll be a continuous learner in a continuously changing learning environment.” —Wendy Bishop, “On Teaching with Technology”

Influential women in my life have always reinforced the idea that we never stop being learners. As an older student returning to the classroom, I find wisdom in their words and an echo of Wendy Bishop’s sentiments that learning never ends. Bishop’s ideas go further, though, to indicate that learning requires not only a tailoring to meet learners’ abilities, but also the application



of individualized learning methods: the more individualized the learning experience, the greater opportunity for developing individuals as continuous learners. For older students like me who find themselves working with younger scholars, Bishop's notions about being a continuous learner apply to both mentees and the younger mentors they work with. Just as an older student brings with them life experience that applies to their relationality as a learner, younger scholars possess an expertise in academic understanding that encourages inquiry. From my own personal experience, a successful older mentee/younger mentor relationship came by way of a younger professor who, during a course I was taking, offered multiple types of project options that allowed older students to apply course material broadly to their lived experience by not limiting the work to academic applications only. However, lived experience does not always coalesce with academia, and as a result, opportunities for increased learning between older students and younger professors can only exist if both are willing to learn from one another. Through collaborative learning, older students and younger scholars can share their knowledge bases with one another and find commonality in the pursuit of learning. In doing so, a symbiotic relationship forms between the older student and the younger teacher, where distinct identifiers no longer exist as each serves in both capacities simultaneously. Thus, in line with Wendy Bishop's assertions, "continuous learners" recognize that learning never stops. All can learn and all can learn from one another.

### Mary Lamb—On Textual and Human Mentors

The process of learning is often subconscious and hidden until we're on the verge of a new stage. I remember shocking my dissertation advisor when I shared a draft, the first of many, but this one was finally good—and she asked how I "broke through." I replied confidently, "I learned to plagiarize." I saw her horror, so I tried again: "I mean I learned to read the genre and I understand how they are writing and I found my voice in the scholarship." This type of mentor stands silently while we imitate, copy, and mimic various styles while grappling for our own. First, our moves are tentative (waiting for our mentor to respond with praise or criticism), but along the way, we engage in our own voice and style because we become invested.

Other times, we actively collaborate with human coauthors on individual works, a process Bishop describes in talking about collaborating with Hans Ostrom: "I'd say in every text I write there's now at least one move that I could point to as a definite 'Hans-influence'—could I edit that out? Sure. Would I? Rarely" (Acts 158). She continues, "I can now assign myself to write like Hans in order to get out of a drafting problem spot, and that's wonderfully freeing. I can import what I imagine to be your to hell with the audience approach and break through some useless propriety that is holding me back from trying out ideas in a draft" (Acts 159).

Bishop's scholarship honed strategies that prompted growth, from hint sheets at the back of *The Subject is Reading* to her "try this" sections in *Acts of Revision*. As I examine my worn copy, I

find handwritten sticky notes: “Sept. 10 Revision,” and another says, “Sept. 10 HW Try pp. 19-24 strategies—bring new draft for Wed.” I don’t remember the year or course, but I do remember my fear and hope for student growth as I shared these activities.

This is the essence of mentoring: offer a glimpse of what is possible. Lynée mentored me by offering space for growth and strategies to try. In turn, this is how I mentor others. Echoing Bishop’s invitational strategies, Lynée would ask, “What if you...?” or say, “Try this,” and then the arrow pointed to an open space where I honed my own strategies and authored my life choices.

### **Cantice Greene—Emotion and Writing: Wendy Bishop and the Mentorship Loop**

When I was studying for specialist exams in feminism and therapeutic writing, Lynée suggested I read Wendy Bishop’s scholarship. I immediately connected with Bishop’s philosophy about the fitness of expressive pedagogy in an academic writing classroom. My dissertation credited Bishop for her keen awareness of the emotional impact of teaching writing. Bishop’s teaching philosophies and scholarship have informed the way I teach and what I teach. When I first started, her voice in scholarship was the reassuring one I needed to teach composition focused on the personal essay.

I felt a kindred spirit with Bishop when she defended an instructor’s choice to teach expressive pedagogy by comparing its emotional weight to social-constructivist pedagogy. Bishop explained their mutual tendency to spark traumatic recall: “[S]ocial constructivist classrooms may ask students to consider political, social, or ethical topics (date rape, discrimination, gender bias in the workplace) which may in turn elicit curative and/or disturbing narratives, discussions, or memories for students...” (*Teaching Lives* 150). She aptly drew attention to the emotional burden I’d felt as a black woman asked (often by white instructors) to write about social and political topics all throughout my college writing experience. I see the connection here to mentoring. Mentoring is relating—it is the relationship that forms when we see ourselves in our students’ place or from their perspective.

Now that I’ve returned to the classroom to study creative writing, I think of Bishop’s extensive scholarship on creative writing pedagogy in English training programs. I’ve often made the closest connections with students when inviting them to join me at a local writing conference, whether academic or creative. A few years ago, three students were delighted to present their work at a local conference when I suggested it. One of those students, a slightly older non-traditional student, remains my closest student connection. We comforted each other through COVID-19, as she graduated in 2020. More recently, I was surprised to see two of my students in attendance at a local writing conference that I advertised in class and on my door. While these shy students hadn’t told me beforehand that they planned to attend, we ate lunch together, and our informal conversations led to our collaboration for an upcoming undergraduate research workshop.

More importantly, we took pictures together and shared mobile numbers. At the conference, we made an important step in breaking down any walls of separation that stifled our communication.

In the *Journal of Creative Writing Studies*, Stephanie Vanderslice recalls the ways Bishop impacted her: “All this mentoring slowly transfers knowledge and encourages innovation from one generation to the next” (3). We crave this innovation—at least I do. I think this may be why we continue to remember Wendy Bishop’s important place in our disciplinary history.

### **Kristen Ruccio—Mentorship Finds Us**

I tried to limit myself to one quote by Wendy Bishop to anchor my contribution, but that quickly became an impossible task because so much of her work influenced me and my mentors. Still, where I find her influence most is in the ways that I always try to work to build my communities while also making a space for my own way, just as Bishop did...although I certainly do not have her legendary energy! Her legacy of mentorship, formal and informal, has impacted my life as both a student and as a professor. I came to my first/current tenure-track job, like many of us, having moved away from my friends and family and feeling adrift, scared, and excited. And I was primed to look for mentorship because I was part of the mentorship program at Georgia State University’s English Ph.D. program. I had two wonderful mentees, both of whom I am still friends with today. I thought I would have to search to find someone to connect with here at A-State. Instead, I literally stumbled into my mentor when I nervously walked into the pre-semester workshop for composition faculty. Helen Duclos, a then-80-year-old woman, was funny, brash, and had an institutional memory like nothing I have ever seen. Sure, I came here knowing how to teach composition, but Helen taught me so much about all the unpublished truths of any large organization. We have a policy of dropping students who do not attend class during the first 10 days, and Helen warned me, “It’s nothing but trouble. Always email them first—don’t just drop them.” She was correct; I dropped a student without emailing, and it was a huge mess for me and for the student. Another time, she told me not to trust turning in my grades via the LMS. I thought maybe she was just a little tech-phobic. Nope, I got a call at 11 a.m. the day grades were due at noon wanting to know where my grades were! She knew all the tips and tricks to survive. And I can never repay her for all that institutional knowledge or how it helped me navigate a surprise promotion to WPA in my third year. Helen retired when the first wave of COVID hit, but I will share the gift of her mentorship as I work with other teachers.

### **Don Gammill, Jr.— Defying Genre and Generational Divides**

In *The Subject is Writing*, Wendy Bishop spotlights how the fluid blending of creative and practical writing practices yields products that don’t always fit intended genres: “[W]e shouldn’t assume that there is only one way to categorize or that those categories should (or could) hold fast for all people, in all cultures, in all historical times” (197). I must admit, this concept was

somewhat foreign to me when I left corporate communications for the academic world at 35. I mainly viewed writing as creating products to fit classifications, but I knew there was more to it. After two years of adjunct teaching, I enrolled in the English Ph.D. program at Georgia State, and my perspective expanded as I encountered Kenneth Burke's contention that words are heuristics that influence our thinking. He asks, "Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us?" (6). I think Bishop practicalizes and builds on this idea, declaring that readers do indeed "depend on the conventions they have learned" to interpret texts, but that a suspension of their judgement is needed "to understand *each* new work they encounter" (*The Subject is Writing* 198).

At GSU, Lynée's mentorship helped me conceptualize how to co-create interpretation like this. She pushed me to be creative and defy systematic barriers in my research, writing, and teaching. It was suddenly okay to blur genre lines if the contribution to discourse was better for it: a commonplaces book could replace a term paper as a final deliverable, a 1940's radio broadcast could work in tandem with an 1880's newspaper article to help tell the same story, and a linguistics paper delivered at a philology conference could still be worked into the emerging foundation of my scholarship in rhetoric and composition. This shifted my paradigm to one that more appropriately valued the negotiated nature of writing and written genres. Today, I similarly urge my students to leverage their individual creativity and view themselves as co-creators and co-definers along with their audiences. Their consistent success credits the ever-strong intergenerational momentum for the disruptive-but-(re)constructive writing pedagogy Dr. Bishop exhorted. I believe she would be quite pleased.

### **Sarah Bramblett—Intergenerational Mentorship Inspires Interconnectivity**

The history of rhetoric and composition is both brief, existing at the collegiate level as a discipline for a relatively short period of time, and long—theories rely on Aristotle and rhetorics that have existed at every level of human communication. Within both histories, composition and creative writing have been pitted against each other but occasionally are championed for the ways in which they interconnect. In binaries such as romanticism vs. enlightenment rhetoric, writing out of inspired imagination vs. formulaic process, and expressivism vs. current-traditional rhetoric, scholars demonstrate value in connecting the extremes. Wendy Bishop, through ethnographic methodology, argued for the overlap between creative writing and composition studies. As Patrick Bizzaro observes, Bishop embodied "the writer-teacher-who-writes (and teaches writing out of that writing)" (258).

Hopeful intergenerational mentorship also inspires intradisciplinary conversations that champion the overlap between binaries in a natural manner. Mentors who are aware of the field's borders invite mentees, who might be fresh in their disciplinary opinions, to write and think in ways that encourage depth and disciplinary excellence. Mentees, excited about ideas they can't yet label, re-inspire a mentor's own studies.

Thanks to excellent mentorship, I was able to find the myths that exist in the swinging of generational pendulums, specifically focusing on romanticism vs. enlightenment rhetoric and the lingering effects this binary created. Because my mentors had been mentored well, the extremes were not the only options when establishing academic relevance. I was able to avoid the traps that so many of the myths can lead to, traps like “expressivism is not a valid form of teaching writing” or “formulaic process has no place in writing studies.”

While the connections fostered by intergenerational mentorship may not manifest as directly as a composition scholar mentoring a creative writer nor as subtly as trends influencing conversations, connections between willing and open mentors and mentees create teachers and thinkers who converse creatively about writing, teaching, research, and historic places—or writer-teachers-who-write and mentor out of their mentorship. As a result, intergenerational mentorship becomes key for a discipline that fits thousands of years of history into such a narrow window of recent academic relevance, as Bishop demonstrated well.

### Alice Johnston Myatt—Paying It Forward

Wendy Bishop was ahead of my scholarly time. Her legacy, however, lives in her many mentor texts for tutoring, teaching, and writing. For example, her 1993 book *The Subject Is Writing* was part of a collection on the shelf I had as a graduate student, and it guided my early teaching as a GTA. In that book, I found the advice to let students pursue their own passions and interests whenever possible. I put that advice into practice the first semester I taught, and that practice has become an integral part of my teaching. All writing projects I assign include an exploration of personal interests and a proposal for the project that describes what the student wants to explore and write about. The ideas and issues they select inspire students to invest in better writing, and in turn, the work they produce is rewarding to read and assess. Later, as I became interested in independent writing programs, Bishop’s 2002 “A Rose by Every Other Name: The Excellent Problem of Independent Writing Programs” had a direct influence on my work in this area. My academic home is a stand-alone department of writing and rhetoric, and Bishop’s candid exploration of the complexities of growing and maintaining such programs helped me understand and traverse the landscape of our department while supporting its development.

Another mentor text connects to my work in writing centers. Bishop’s essay “Is There a Creative Writer in the House?” is especially helpful for my work with writing centers *and* teaching at a university where most of our graduate teaching assistants come from a robust MFA program. Her succinct observation that “[g]reater engagement usually equals greater investment” (44) became a mantra for me in tutoring and in teaching. In his introduction to the second edition of *A Tutor’s Guide*, Ben Rafoth pays homage to Bishop’s enduring and multi-faceted legacy. After describing her notable contributions to the field and her work as a writing center tutor at the University of

Alaska, he writes: “She was a keynote speaker at writing center conferences and was a friend to hundreds of tutors, students, writers, and teachers” (x). In short, she valued the work of writing tutors. First as a tutor and then as a writing center administrator, I encouraged students to embrace and integrate creativity in their writing in ways that made sense to them. For example, I quickly realized that allowing more narrative content in assignments enlivened their writing for them and for me.

Bishop’s work intersects with my own. I love mentoring and find it essential to my work: both being mentored and in turn, paying it forward by mentoring others. I appreciate the lessons learned from Wendy Bishop, scholar extraordinaire.

### Lara Smith-Sitton—Pedagogical Autoethnography and Creativity

The graduate program I teach in requires students to declare two concentrations from three possible areas: rhetoric and composition, creative writing, or applied writing. Most students identify as “creative writers” with aims to produce fiction, memoir, screenplays, or poetry. When I started teaching in a program with such a diversity of writing interests, Wendy Bishop’s questions in *Keywords in Creative Writing* shaped the focus of my approach: “What makes creative writing so different from other writing done in other classes across the curriculum? And what exactly is creativity?” (Bishop and Starkey 71). Given my background in rhetoric and composition, after the pandemic I returned to Bishop’s work in *Something Old, Something New* to consider how I might strengthen and change my pedagogical practices in order to increase student engagement and build richer connections among the community of writers returning to the classroom.

Weaving together research, scholarship, and creative projects, Bishop explores how understanding our private and professional identities can lead to re-envisioning our pedagogies (*Something Old* 134). With this in mind, I augmented Bishop’s ethnographic approach studying college writing instructors with Bochner and Ellis’s autoethnographic methods and methodologies. Autoethnography “allows a person to lean into uncertainty rather than struggle against it. The shape of autoethnography is not the exclamation point (!) but the question mark (?)” (15). As I had more questions than answers, this approach allowed for deeper clarity about the role of a writing instructor in a multi-disciplinary program. Like Bishop, I believe that “all writing—even the one-minute, uncorrected email—involves some kind of creativity, some thinking, some *imagination*” (Bishop and Sharkey 71). I see writing as a tool that “attempts to explain why and how humans do what they do” (72). My courses have assignments rooted in these ideas—students are now seeing the interconnectedness of writing, regardless of the genre, and the significance of each writing concentration: expansion of a three-part final project now includes a research paper; deliverables incorporate research (short story, conference abstract, grant proposal, etc.); and an autoethnographic essay calls students to articulate their writing practices. The assignment modifications emphasize the value of learning from other writers. In small groups, students reflect upon

their individual composing experiences as well as their observations about the practices of other writers. By using an autoethnographic approach, these meaningful conversations help students better understand the writing requirements for reaching their professional goals.

### Renee Love—Intertextuality

Wendy Bishop's work inspires me because she realized the power of intertextuality, one of the hallmarks of postmodernism. She resisted the narrowness of writing and teaching hierarchies and embraced the diversity of "both," advocating for blending multiple voices and styles of writing, the scholarly with the creative, the personal with the ethnographic, the teacher's voice with the student's. Alice Rosman argues that "Wendy Bishop attempts to make sense of the artificial boundaries that exist between creative writing and composition" by "mixing writing genres within her own works" and "bring[ing] the voices and experiences of other teachers and students into her scholarly writing" (3-4). Bishop realized writers and teachers did not have to prioritize one discipline (literature or composition, academic or creative, personal or ethnographic, etc.) at the expense of another. In what I can only describe as a radical insight, she understood that we need not choose the traditional emphasis of literature consumption over writing production or insist on only academic writing when we could also teach students to write creatively.

In departments I have called home, administrators often have a "live and let live" teaching philosophy, where writing instructors have autonomy to select assignments for their classes. Still, a perusal of any writing teacher's reading list reveals a teacher's stance on prioritizing literature and composition or academic writing over creative writing. Bishop was a pioneer in writing instruction because she understood that combining compositional strategies enriches both teachers' and students' writing experiences. She writes "after unbraiding and uncomposing my selves within the academy in order to learn specialized skills and certain discourses ... I decided intentionally to rebraid and recompose my self through teaching creative and compositional strategies together" (*Teaching Lives* 219).

I agree. Bishop's practice of blending composition and creative practices is an essential component of my work as a writing teacher and as a creative writer, and this approach helps me and my students develop a sense of agency regarding our writing projects, too (not to mention a sense of enjoyment).

### Nathan Wagner—The Process of Mentoring Relationships

Bishop identifies "neighborliness" and "becoming" as key components in her feminist mentoring model. These practical concepts, she tells us, foster positive development for most any context: Bishop argues that successful mentors enable graduate students to become successful

academics by instilling neighborly values, such as remaining open to new ideas and new holistic beliefs, exploring critical ideologies, and explicating and reimagining one's own process of becoming a member of a department and university (Learning 349).

Neighbors appear within an established framework; in the instance of an English department, the framework is institutional, and the faculty, staff, and graduate students arrive at this intersectional site and become neighbors. Neighborliness indicates proximity, a nearness that provides the opportunity for contact between a mentor and a mentee; reciprocity, a willingness to give and receive, an openness to alternative practices, styles, and ideas; and neighborliness forms the conditions for cultivating (becoming) community.

In my experience as a graduate student mentee and a faculty mentor, I have found the mentoring relationship *most* fruitful when both mentor and mentee are open to the possibilities of each other's positions and commitments. We arrive in our respective English department "neighborhoods" with unique perspectives and histories; we develop our own narratives as our careers progress. I arrived at my doctoral program committed to studying literature, but after meeting some of my neighbors in rhetoric and composition, I switched concentrations and afterward developed publishing, presentation, and course design projects with these same neighbors. When I help lead collaborative mentoring sessions beyond graduate school, my colleagues and I prioritize conversation and open curiosity about one another's innovative teaching strategies. Subsequently, not only am I given occasion to share my own work with others, but I am also able to develop my own pedagogy within this framework of neighborly reciprocity.

These instances of "becoming" have shaped the trajectories of my career. If we (faculty, graduate students, mentors, mentees) attune our mentoring practices to *inhabit* neighborliness and becoming, we will continue learning and growing through this collaborative process, developing our scholarly, pedagogical, and administrative potential beyond what we could have achieved or even dreamed singularly.

## **Matthew Sansbury—Mentoring is a Wellspring of Hope**

Throughout my academic experiences, mentors have helped in person and across texts, often echoing one another while offering professional hospitality. Wendy Bishop is one of those voices because her work helps me enact sustainable practices for rhetorical feminism. "My students teach me. The ideas they give me help," she says, providing an example of intergenerational mentoring that flips the traditional power dynamic (Starkey et al. 104). Bishop's work has mentored me to find the pleasure in writing and to challenge undemocratic power structures since graduate school, and I continue this tradition today with my own mentees. In my cultural rhetorics courses, for example, we deploy multiculturalism as a lens to share our embodied experiences, ultimately challenging stereotypes and biases through engaged writing.



During these trying times of conflicting crises, Bishop's approach to writing pedagogy and administration is sustenance. In "Take Risks Yourself": An Interview with Wendy Bishop and Gerald Locklin," Bishop argues that "you've got to set up the classroom to be a place where students are encouraged to take risks. Write with your students. Take risks yourself ... That's what I learned from teaching composition: a lot of different ways to think about how to create the pleasure in writing" (Starkey et al. 106). My mentors modeled these notions as well, so I adopted a pedagogy of compassion, working alongside students to take risks and seek joy through writing. This style of intergenerational mentoring extends into this very text—wherein I write with a mentor whose hospitable pedagogy once reified these ideas of writing with and learning from students.

As a feminist writer, teacher-researcher, and administrator, I seek to answer Bishop's call: "Studying power structures made me think that maybe things can be changed ... I believe the system should be more democratic, more supportive" (Starkey et al. 109). Despite an ever-uncertain future, I look to Bishop's work, remembering to cherish writing while working to change the system: I dare to hope.

## Contributor Bios:

**Sarah Bramblett** teaches English at Kennesaw State University, blending historic best-practices into a pedagogy that engages students as they write academic papers cognizant of internal and external audiences. She earned her doctorate in Rhetoric and Composition from Georgia State University, where she received the Provost's Dissertation Fellowship Award to analyze the bridge between reason and imagination as they have been taught and applied to the teaching of rhetoric since the eighteenth century.

**Lynée Lewis Gaillet**, Distinguished University Professor of English at Georgia State University, researches mentoring practices, writing program administration, composition/rhetoric history and pedagogy, feminist praxis, publishing matters, and archival research methods. Her book projects include *Scottish Rhetoric and Its Influence*, *Stories of Mentoring*, *The Present State of Scholarship in the History of Rhetoric*, *Scholarly Publication in a Changing Academic Landscape*, *Publishing in Community*, *Primary Research and Writing*, *On Archival Research*, *Writing Center and Writing Program Collaborations* and *Remembering Differently: Re-figuring Women's Rhetorical Work*. She is a Past President of The Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition.

**Don Gammill, Jr.** is a lecturer in the English department at Kennesaw State University just outside Atlanta. Subsequent to his private-sector career in human resources and the healthcare industry, he taught first-year writing at several local colleges and then earned his Ph.D. (English Rhetoric & Composition) at Georgia State University where he taught writing, rhetoric, and editing courses for seven years while also serving as an editorial assistant, research assistant, writing center tutor, and teaching assistant mentor. He researches rhetorical practices and influences involving public perceptions of morality, especially as related to the intersecting of religion and culture.

**Tiffany Gray** is a graduate student at Georgia State University in the English Department with an emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition. Her research interests include women's rhetoric, the history of rhetoric, archival studies, and 19th-century Mormon women's rhetoric. Gray's most recent publications include "Claremont Graduate University's Mormon Women's Oral History Collection" in *Peitho* (Volume 25, Issue 2, Winter 2023) and a review on T. Kinney's *Legitimization of Mormon Feminist Rhetors*, forthcoming in the *American Journal for the History of Rhetoric*.

**Cantice Greene** is a professor of English at Clayton State University, a predominately Black institution on the southeastern tip of the Atlanta metro area. She often infuses her religious identity in her teaching and writing as she endeavors to build coalition between herself and others in the secular university. Her service to the university includes support of Christian faculty and students through advising and program development. Her teaching ranges in subjects from co-requisite learning support for English composition to graduate courses in professional writing.

**Letizia Guglielmo** is Professor of English and Interdisciplinary Studies at Kennesaw State University. Her writing and research explore feminist rhetorics and pedagogy, gender and pop culture, and student and faculty professional development. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals and edited collections. Book projects include *Immigrant Scholars in Rhetoric, Composition, and Communication: Memoirs of a First Generation*, *Misogyny in American Culture: Causes, Trends, Solutions*, *Scholarly Publication in a Changing Academic Landscape*, *Contingent Faculty Publishing in Community: Case Studies for Successful Collaborations*, and *MTV and Teen Pregnancy: Critical Essays on 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom*.

**Mary R. Lamb** is professor and chair of English at Clayton State University. In 2015, she co-wrote a grant for a Peer Academic Mentoring Program, which won the 2022 Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curricular Innovation for the University System of Georgia. In 2014, she was awarded the Clayton State University Tommy Clonts' University Professorship for teaching, scholarship, and dedication to improving public education. Publications include *Blurred Lines: Digital Reading and Writing in Composition Studies*, ed., 2019 and *Contested(ed) Writing: Re-conceptualizing Literacy Competitions*, ed., 2013. She recently completed the Executive Leadership Institute at the USG.

**Renee Love** is an English Professor and veteran college administrator at Lander University. Her scholarship is diverse and explores themes such as helping students navigate the transition to college, a subject included in her co-edited collection (2017) *Writing Pathways to Student Success* (with Lillie Craton and Sean Barnette) to "Teaching the Post-Pandemic Student." She is also interested in writing projects that combine composition studies with public scholarship and creative non-fiction. Renee is a frequent columnist in South Carolina publications where she writes about life lessons in the human journey and civic engagement.

**Alice Johnston Myatt** is an Associate Professor of Writing and Rhetoric in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Mississippi. In addition to teaching a variety of composition and rhetoric courses for the department, her research focuses on the intersections of writing studies, writing centers, and related fields, with special emphasis on professional writing and collaboration. Her publications include an edited collection, journal articles, and book chapters. She earned her Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from Georgia State University.

**Kristen Ruccio** is the Director of First-Year Writing at Arkansas State University. Her scholarship focuses on disability studies, writing program administration, and first-year composition praxis. She is committed to mentorship as a teacher-scholar-administrator. In her spare time, a very small item, she loves to explore her new home state of Arkansas and to create new vegan recipes.

**Matthew Sansbury** is an Assistant Professor of English and Director of First-Year Writing & The Writers' Studio at Clayton State University. He has published work in *Computers and Composition Online* and *Kairos—PraxisWiki* as well as the collections *Threshold Conscripts: Rhetoric and Composition TAs* and *The Rhetoric of Participation: Interrogating Commonplaces in and Beyond the Classroom*. A former research fellow for the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives, he teaches courses in cultural rhetorics, digital writing, and multimodal composition at Clayton State and serves as Conference Program Editor for the College English Association.

**Lara Smith-Sitton** is Associate Professor of English at Kennesaw State University. She served as the Director of Community Engagement for six years, where much of her work focused on high impact practices and community engagement. Recent publications include *Green Card Voices: Immigration Stories from an Atlanta High School* (2018, 2019) and articles in *Reflections; Community Literacy Journal; The Journal for Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, and Perspective;* and *Double Helix*. Currently, her work largely focuses on returning citizen education initiatives in the State of Georgia with a team of cross-disciplinary scholars and teachers.

**Nathan Wagner** is a Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of North Georgia. He earned his Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from Georgia State University where he worked in collaboration with influential mentors. His work has been published in *Rhetorica, Philosophy & Rhetoric, Rhetoric Review,* and *Composition Forum*, and he is the coauthor of *Composing in Four Acts: Readings for Writers*, published with Fountainhead Press.

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# Creative Composing: A Lesson Plan for Students, Teachers, and Teacher-Writers

**Meg Scott-Copses**

**Meg Scott-Copses** specializes in creative writing, composition, and an embodied pedagogy that fuses the two. She earned her Ph.D. in poetry from Florida State with a dissertation on service learning in at-risk environments such as prisons and youth shelters. At her home institution, the College of Charleston, she specializes in composition and writing studies, and is the Director of the First-Year Writing program. In 2020, she won the University's Distinguished Teaching Award, in part based on her research into experiential and embodied teaching practices. She challenges students to explore the intuitive connection between experiential observation and analysis, and between creative and critical thinking.

**Tags:** feminist pedagogy, creative writing, teaching, student writing, reflection, personal experience

## Introduction

This lesson plan focuses specifically on Wendy Bishop's chapter "When All Writing is-Creative and Student Writing is Literature," from *The Subject is Writing*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Like so much of Bishop's work, her style and structure serve as direct evidence for her primary argument. She "creatively composes" this chapter, demonstrating the natural overlap between creative and academic pursuits and between student writing and the literature we teach. While Bishop's work predates the subject we now call rhetorical feminism, she offers a clear example of its key tenets—inclusivity, community, and equity. She privileges dialogue over monologue, inviting students to draw on their own experiences as they develop an empowered and growth-oriented writing practice.

It was long after my graduate training at Florida State that I found language for the re-orientation that Wendy instilled in me. In reading Carolyn Shrewsbury's "What is Feminist Pedagogy?" and later Cheryl Glenn's "Remapping Rhetorical Territory," I came to recognize that my teaching practice moved in these same directions and that I had been guided by Wendy to radically alter the power dynamics and the communication opportunities in my writing classroom. In Shrewsbury's words, I had created, somewhat unconsciously, a "liberatory environment," which she describes as:

A classroom characterized as persons connected in a net of relationships...in which we, teacher-student and student-teacher, act as subjects, not objects. Feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning—engaged with self in continuing reflective process; engaged

actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community and with movements for social change (166).

Reading any of Wendy's work reveals these same values as she challenges us to re-orient our understanding of what an academic article is and does. Her chapter "When All Writing is Literature and Student Writing is Creative" offers a clear example of what we might call a "flipped article" (again Wendy's pedagogy and scholarship was well before the term flipped classroom came into popularity). Readers are immediately inside the experience of her pedagogy, as she places her students' writing alongside her own. She fuses pedagogical research with lived experience, insisting on a more embodied approach. As for methodology in both creative writing and composition classrooms, she suggests:

Writing always involves the study of exemplary or expert writing in the forms you hope to learn. But you also need the opportunity to write against and experiment with those forms. *You have to try it to do it* (Bishop 197).

The following lesson plan grows out of this "Try-It" spirit, both for students and for teachers. Recently a colleague asked me about building rapport; he lamented that the buzzwords all sound good in theory—"experiential" "embodied" "hands-on," "active." His question: but *how do you actually do it?* My answer: Not unlike writing, teaching is also about trying it. You have to try it to do it.

## Background and Audience

This lesson is appropriate for any of the following courses: Introduction to Academic Writing, First-Year Seminar, Freshman Composition I or II, Introduction to Creative Writing, Introduction to Literary or English Studies, Advanced Composition, Theories of Teaching Writing, Graduate Teaching in English or English Education. Students should come to class having read the article "When All Writing is Creative and Student Writing is Literature," but even if they haven't prepared as thoroughly as we'd like, this assignment is designed to experientially teach the key findings of the article and to generate helpful discussions about thinking and writing.

### Goals

- To understand existing distinctions between disciplinary fields of creative writing, literature, and composition.
- To generate new, experience-based definitions of creative writing, analytical writing,

professional writing, and academic writing

- To consider what separates student writing from literature
- To study our own writing preferences, beliefs, and practices
- To discuss helpful teaching and learning strategies for writing

### **Discussion and Mapping 10-15 minutes**

Create binaries on a whiteboard, smartboard, or overhead using the terms Creative Writing vs. Academic Writing and Student Writing vs. Literature. Ask the class to generate key words and associations that typically fall under each heading, as seen below:

### **Creative Writing /Academic Writing Student Writing / Literature**

|             |             |        |           |
|-------------|-------------|--------|-----------|
| fewer rules | rubrics     | novice | Published |
| voice       | more formal | graded | Studied   |
| feeling     | analysis    | errors | Perfect   |

Discuss areas of overlap between these divisions. For example, both student writing and literature might be published. Both creative writing and academic writing may involve research. Consider what Bishop's article adds to this discussion. For example, both creative and academic writing are process-based. Both student writing and literature involve an understanding of generic conventions. In Bishop's view, risk-taking and engagement apply equally to creative and critical thinking.

### **Two Writing Prompts 20-25 minutes**

Divide the class into two groups, A and B, and assign two different quotations (below), both of which are lines from Bishop's article. Students should begin with this line. Note: students aren't quoting Bishop (or Bishop's students); they are acting as though this is their own opening line.

- Group A opening line: Is creative writing stuff that you do for fun and composition stuff that your teacher makes you do? That's how it felt in elementary school.
- Group B opening line: Creativity involves risk taking. It's likely that in your past, you were not praised for taking risks.

Subdivide these two groups further so that:



- Group A-Academic will use opening line A to write an *academic/analytical piece*.
- Group A-Creative will use opening line A to write a *creative piece*.
- Group B-Academic will use opening line B to write an *academic/analytical piece*.
- Group B-Creative will use opening line B to write a *creative piece*.

Allow 7-10 minutes for this first writing prompt. Make sure students understand that this is an exercise, a first try, and that they may not be finished when time is called. The purpose is to see what we know intuitively about these genres and to notice our own thinking and writing process as we try it out.

After time is called for Prompt 1, explain that students will now use the same opening line, but this time to write in the other genre. For example, students who first worked on a creative piece will now use the same line to write something more academic or analytically driven. Allow 7-10 minutes for the other genre.

### **Partner Work and Class Discussion 20 minutes**

Pair students with a partner to discuss this experiment. Ideally, a student from A-Academic should pair with a student from B-Creative. This will offer students a chance to learn more about the opening line they weren't assigned. It will also control for variables such as which genre they worked on first or second. Students should trade their writing or read what they've written aloud, then discuss their process. Which piece felt more successful? Which one surprised you the most? Students might also identify new ideas or emerging definitions for the thinking processes used in each. It's unlikely that this discussion will need much prompting. In my experience, this portion of class is extremely lively.

Finish class by returning to the charts made at the beginning. What new ideas have developed as a result of this experiential lesson? Assign a reflective follow-up to be completed as homework. Students may post to an online discussion board or bring their reflections to the next class.

### **Teacher Reflection and Follow-Up Instructions:**

As I hinted above, this lesson was a big hit. I knew it would be interactive and hoped it would help students grasp the article, but it far exceeded these expectations. Students were completely engaged in what Bishop describes as the "messy, generative, exciting process

of writing” (194). For whatever reason, this particular line has stayed with me years beyond graduate school. I’ve even used this quote on syllabi and assignments, and it came to me again—almost in a chill-bumps way—while watching my students so completely immersed in the act of discovery. *The messy, generative, exciting process of writing*. Yes!

As good as I felt about the class, I was even more impressed with students’ follow-up posts, which they submitted a few days later. Reflecting on this distilled experience proved to be as important for them as the experience itself. I will insert, here, the prompt I used. In keeping with my earlier theft of Wendy’s lines, please feel free to steal:

In Thursday’s class, we used the same prompt to write two entries—one creative, one analytical. What did you discover about your own writing through this experience? What takeaways did you glean from your partner in follow-up discussion? Describe your relative comfort with one style over (or in tandem with) another and consider Bishop’s claim that “all writing is creative.”

After processing your experience, think about what these ideas mean in the context of teaching writing. What’s the role of “the creative” in composition classes? What’s the benefit of considering “student writing” alongside “literature?”

## Student Writing

It seems only fitting to focus now on student responses as valuable testimonials and direct evidence for Wendy Bishop’s vision. More than anything else I learned from her, it’s that teaching writing really means *writing alongside your students*, reading them, letting them read you, learning from them as equally as they learn from you. When I think about recent discussions I’ve had with colleagues and students about the advent of ChatGPT, I take comfort in writing that feels authentic, metacognitive, collaborative, and instructive.

Below, I’ve excerpted passages from students (used with permission) that have given me plenty to think about. These students will be delighted to learn that their writing—not unlike literature—was published, and that their words are worthy of study.

From the unlikely English major:

Bishop’s article discusses the problem of students believing that they aren’t worthy to be named a “writer,” that what they write is so much less than “literature.” The constraints students often face when interacting with academic writing, such as research papers and essays, disregard writing as a creative process. This resonated personally with me as I would’ve never guessed in a million years I would be an English major. Growing up, I

enjoyed reading and writing, but never excelled in school. I wasn't a great essay writer, and I never did anything that deserved praise. I accepted my place outside of the discipline. But I finally had a teacher who encouraged us to take risks and encouraged us to lean into the discomfort we felt and do some exploring. He treated us as if we were all equally capable of producing publishable work. I started reading more, writing more, and caring more, and here I am. —Eliza

From a self-professed analytical writer:

In Thursday's class, I came to the realization that I really need to get out of my comfort zone when it comes to writing. I naturally gravitate towards writing in a manner that seems academically correct—always. I was assigned to write creatively first, which I really struggled with. Without realizing, I wrote the creative prompt in a more analytical manner. Honestly, I don't think I wrote creatively at all. And then afterward, when writing analytically, I just used more professional verbiage and somehow making things even more structured than before. Am I really this boring?

When discussing with my partner, I noticed that she took a more anecdotal approach, which I think made her text seem less analytical and created a distinction between the two styles. Her writing was fun, personable, and relatable. I noticed that my writing seemed to only answer the prompt. I learned a lot about potential areas for growth. —Chelsea

From an unabashed creative writer:

Reading my creative piece and then moving to my analysis is a bit funny, honestly. It's like I turned around, put a suit and tie on, slicked my hair back, and turned back to face the audience, ready to lay out some facts and cite some quotes. Lewie and I had a blast conversing and focused mostly on how similar we are in our inability to hush our creativity, humor, and emotion under any circumstances. We never actually read our analyses to each other because we were too busy laughing about how we both wrote intensely dramatic, poetic pieces about risk-taking and creative writing itself. Needless to say, we were both fully immersed —Luca

From students who cultivate the merging of these styles, or who use one genre to think strategically about the other:

From Thursday's class I learned that I have become a better analytical writer than a creative writer. It was kind of sad to realize this, since I fell in love with writing through

the creative writing I did in elementary school. In middle and high school, I still loved creating stories and new approaches with the prompts I was given, and I realize now that this made me a better analytical writer because I would look at these boring papers and still try finding a way to be creative! I think that if students at any level were allowed to release some sort of inner creativity, or allowed their own spin, that both their creative and analytical writing would improve.—Elizabeth

This exercise got me thinking that creative writing and academic writing have a systematic relationship, not a hierarchical one. When we colloquially talk of creative versus academic, we are more speaking about the Inspirational Process versus the Mechanical Process of writing, both in the actual crafting of language and in the crafting of ideas: the fundamental systems employed by the writer.

The Inspirational/Mechanical Processes are more akin to energy sources than anything else, and the writer bounces between them whether writing a post, a school essay, a poem, or a novel. The writer uses the Mechanical Process while integrating quotes but may draw on the Inspirational Process when their integration becomes ineffective or repetitive: they dive into the creative energy to find a new, more unexpected way to craft the language and ideas surrounding this quote. When the movement between these two processes is unconscious and fluid, we feel in the zone. When it's not fluid, we become conscious of the discrepancy and may feel writer's block. —Jacob

The exercise we did in Thursday's class was a surprising challenge. I noticed that writing in separate styles forced me to look at the same topic from more than one angle and with different audiences in mind. In talking to Hailey about this experience, we agreed that it was difficult to mentally switch between the analyzing and creative parts of our minds. I can see that this is a skill writers need to practice in order to weave the two aspects together in a singular piece of writing.

This experience showed me that academic writing and creative writing really shouldn't be taught as completely separate entities. It would be a disservice to student writers to not be allowed to start experimenting with the mixture of analysis and creativity before they get to the college level. It would be like parents who don't let their children cook or try out spicing their own food and exploring flavors. They wonder why kids end up only cooking bland dishes once they move out of the house.

Bishop mentions that "creativity involves risk-taking." What better place for student writers to take risks and try new things with their writing than the classroom? What is a teacher really doing for their students if they don't foster a safe environment for that?

How can a student confidently mix ingredients in new ways if their work keeps coming back to them covered in scolding remarks about criteria and convention errors? —Vacarella

From students who plan to teach:

I want to be a teacher who praises/encourages students to take risks! I remember what it felt like once when a teacher told me I clearly didn't get it, and that I should "try something easier." I had an idea, and though it wasn't perfect, all ideas deserve attention in a writing class, even if you end up throwing it out because that is part of the writing process too. —Sarah

Rather than thinking of the two as separate categories, Bishop believes one should come before the other: "If you are creative before you are careful, you will be more likely to gain an understanding of the writing process of professionals." I think this shows the importance of maintaining "the creative" in composition when teaching writing to students. When students are taught to write in a strict, rubric-driven way, they're being shielded from taking the risks that could make them really grow as writers and invest in the process itself, which most of them come to dread. This activity felt empowering, and I was energized by knowing that it was up to me to feel what was working. I want my future students to use their own instincts. —Ariel

So in teaching writing, maybe teachers should stop giving out super in-depth rubrics and prompts. Let the student read the prompt and use their writing to give the prompt some shape and depth. That way, the teacher may get a new insight instead of receiving what they already know, what they expect, the answers teachers are looking for. —Kennedy

From a rule-breaker:

Ummm...through my experience with responding to the same prompt creatively and analytically, I discovered I need to read prompts more closely. But no matter my oversight, I discovered that I will make any writing prompt my own. Even when I realized I was supposed to be writing something analytical and then something creative, both of my responses took the same form. They failed to be either specifically creative or specifically analytical and became instead what I wanted to write. I even struggled to stay on the topic of creativity, instead finding myself connecting the prompt to some recent experiences. Neither struck me as easier, considering I found it impossible to meet the criteria of both!

The other day I saw a TikTok about how at 5 years old 98% of children met the requirements of being a “creative genius.” By age 10, only about 30% did and by adulthood it was less than 5% (or something.) I think the role of creativity in teaching writing should be fostered. There are also many reasons to consider student writing as literature beyond the fact that they are far more similar than they are different. The most compelling to me is building the confidence of students. Regardless of what a teacher may say to their students, their underlying beliefs come through, and if it’s clear that a teacher doesn’t take their students’ writing seriously, students won’t take their own writing seriously either. —Mo

From a student with big questions about academic voice:

It was easier to get into a state of flow when writing creatively. I got nearly three times more words out in the first write-up compared to the second (which I would attribute to the need I felt to incorporate evidence in the academic writing style). It’s interesting that I naturally associate academic writing with evidence-based style and creative writing with a more intuitive style. If I dig further, I realize that the academic voice that I attempted is neither natural or captivating, and it is certainly not a voice that I ever see myself utilizing outside of academia.

Why do I use it? Who has shaped my understanding of this academic style... one that I think is both boring and impractical? If you take another step, one must wonder: why do we teach students to write with this voice? I don’t even think this is done intentionally, but I also think this is a bigger question than it appears to be on the surface.—Ryan

Even if you only browsed a few of these student samples, it’s easy to detect their level of engagement. These writers are asking interesting questions and courageously posing solutions for themselves, as well as for the educational systems they are a part of. It’s worth noting that these Discussion Posts are entirely credit-based; students receive a 100 for completion if they meet a 250-word count. All students easily wrote much more than this, not simply checking a box to receive a grade. They continued to mention the impact of this assignment all semester long, even referencing it in final projects and on course-instructor evaluations.

Thank you, Ryan, Mo, Kennedy, Ariel, Sarah, Vaccarella, Jacob, Sarah, Elizabeth, Chelsea, Eliza, Luca, and Mo for giving us new ideas about Wendy Bishop’s work and the larger practice of engaged teaching and writing.

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# Radically Revising the Writing Classroom: Wendy Bishop as Feminist Mentor

Amy Hodges Hamilton and Micaela Cuellar

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**Micaela Cuellar** (she/her) is a PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition at Florida State University. Her research lies at the intersection of composition and literacy studies and considers the way writing facilitates healing both for individuals and communities at large. Micaela is passionate about teaching writing in and outside of the classroom, as shown through her previous work at Healing Housing, a women's sober living home in Franklin, TN, in which she, alongside Dr. Amy Hodges Hamilton, co-taught a Trauma Writing Workshop with women recovering from drug and alcohol abuse. Micaela recently served as a Teaching Associate for FSU's Program for Instructional Excellence during which she chaired the Pedagogy Committee and hosted the Annual Spring Book Club. She looks forward to joining the College Composition Program as a mentor to incoming TAs later this year.

**Keywords:** feminist mentoring, pedagogy, writing, radical revision

“It takes encouragement and courage to find a clear passage to affirming oneself as a teacher within an institution that valorizes almost every other role first.”

– Wendy Bishop, “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition”

Cheryl Glenn's analysis of rhetorical feminist mentoring is an apt description of how Wendy Bishop mentored until the day she died in 2003. Glenn defines feminist mentoring as “a generative model of ever-expansive teaching” and acknowledges that as such “we academics ‘embody’ the discipline for the next generation of scholars and it passes along...values, theories, habits, and assumptions that, especially when transformed, keep the discipline rolling” (173). This is exactly how Bishop mentored, and as I, her last graduate student, consider the power of her teaching and mentorship on the twentieth anniversary of her death, the reflection I shared at her memorial still rings true:



Wendy Bishop was my mentor, teacher, fellow writer, major professor, and friend, so it was impossible for me to find a way to adequately express my love and respect for her. She always encouraged me to read through things I had written when I was blocked, so I took her advice and began to read things we wrote to each other. I am going to read the last paragraph of the process memo I wrote to Wendy in a research methods course I took with her in Fall 2002, because it is much of what I would like to write to her now:

This process narrative is the last text I will write to finish my course work and begin studying for exams, and I am so grateful for the experience of this course and your teaching. Your knowledge and love for students and writing has been evident in every course I have ever taken with you (and my first class with Wendy was an advanced article and essay workshop in 1996), Wendy, and I will never forget your grace, your guidance, and the knowledge you have shared with me and countless other students. I came alive as a researcher and member of the Composition field this semester, and I have you to thank. It is my goal as a teacher and researcher to share with others all you've shared with me.

I have never forgotten that goal and always strive to emulate Bishop's pedagogical and theoretical approach to teaching, the field of Composition Studies, and, perhaps most importantly, the mentoring of my own student-writers like Micaela Cuellar. Bishop was a pioneer in the ways she challenged scholars, writers, and students alike to explore texts creatively and analytically, to radically rethink the essay form, and to collaborate and to engage in interdisciplinary work with and for students. Bishop shared this commitment in her 2001 chair's address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication: "I have long been one who preferred to be among others *only* if I can choose my own way" (CCCC 326). Bishop chose her own way by moving in and out of the traditional English department coverage model, all while including students, from Literature, Creative Writing, and Composition, in the conversation. As Art Young describes in the foreword to *Composing Ourselves as Writers-Teachers-Scholars*, Bishop was one of the first to "call for boundary-crossing conversations about pedagogy and theory, about students and classrooms, and about individual and social purposes for writing and for teaching writing" in ways that have made space for progressive scholars of today and those in the future to dissolve arbitrary boundaries and promote inclusivity and exploration (vii). Wendy Bishop was a radical feminist mentor, as evidenced through her research, mentorship, and teaching practice.

## Wendy Bishop as Radical Feminist Mentor

To most effectively analyze Bishop's impact on the field of feminist rhetoric, we must first consider how her scholarship paved the way for feminist scholars across English Studies. During Bishop's twenty-five years as a teacher-scholar, she led what colleagues Patrick Bizzaro and Alys

Culhane define as a “a quiet revolution” and served as a leader in both Composition and Rhetoric and Creative Writing, holding executive positions in both the Associated Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Bishop earned an MFA in Creative Writing and a Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric and insisted on merging both creative writing and composition studies into her prolific research, publishing 22 books and hundreds of articles and creative writing pieces. In all of this work, Bishop resisted the limitations of singular labels and declared, “For me, to be only a poet, or a feminist, or a compositionist is not enough” (341). As Bishop further shared in one of our class freewrites during Amy’s PhD program and later published in “Because Teaching Composition is Still (Mostly) Teaching Composition”:

I do not believe I can have a smorgasbord pedagogy, but if I do feel entitled to range widely, as a teaching generalist, as a writing specialist, then I’m obliged to think systematically about my practice, even if I do so in snippets of time—at the market, on the commute, between classes, during the department meeting. I am obliged to define, refine, name and explain my practice and to build new knowledge from which to set out again. It is the building and the appreciating and the setting out strongly that matters to me. Writing teachers who get up each day and do their work are doing their work; they do not have to apologize for having values and beliefs, for coming from one section of a field and for moving—perhaps—to another section—from one understanding of instruction to another understanding of it—as long as they are willing to talk, to share, to travel on in company. (77)

This traveling on in company is how Glenn differentiates rhetorical feminism from feminist rhetoric, which she defines as “a set of long-established practices that advocates a political position of rights and responsibilities that certainly includes the equality of women and Others” (3). Bishop agreed that women and other minoritized voices in the academy are always at risk of further silencing and marginalization and believed an interdisciplinary approach within English studies could provide a “formidable challenge to the status quo” (qtd. in “Learning” 344). One way Bishop pushed against these boundaries was to include the voices of students in her scholarship, particularly those we might not have heard from previously (344). Bishop was more interested in the creation of texts than the theorizing of them, particularly from those historically ignored. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins speaks to the power of feminist mentorship, as it specifically pertains to Black “community othermothers,” and she connects education and mentorship directly to political activism when she writes that “families and community mentors imbued the highly educated Black women in her study with a determination to use their education in a socially responsible way” in reference to historian Stephanie J. Shaw’s *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do* (189). Though Bishop’s positionality did not reflect that of a Black woman, she still sought to use her education to promote inclusivity in the classroom (and academy at large) by centering students’ voices and experiences. Shaw describes the impact and role of these feminist communi-

ty mentors stating, “these women became not simply schoolteachers, nurses, social workers, and librarians; they become political and social leaders” (Shaw as qtd. in Collins 190). Through her radical feminist mentorship, Bishop, too, served not only as a teacher but also as an othermother, collaborator, and social leader within her writing community. “Learning Our Own Ways” illustrates Bishop’s commitment to feminism and to valuing the voices of marginalized student-writers. As Alice Rosman reminds us, “Her contention that storytelling and narrative are powerful ways to build bridges between these marginalized cultures and the dominant ones is one that carried through the entirety of her scholarship” (64). Bishop also acknowledges connections between her creative approach and theories in anthropology and feminism, which we would argue is radical feminist mentorship:

Postmodern anthropology and feminist theory suggest alternative ways of reporting both practice and research—honoring story, testimony, observational anecdote, informal analysis, regularized lore and so on—and these movements may connect some of us back to our humanistic roots as writers and readers of fictional and factional texts. (*Teaching Lives* 319)

As a writer, teacher, and scholar, Wendy Bishop actively worked to deconstruct unnecessary boundaries within the academy, the English Department, and in the classroom. In her 1999 essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition,” Bishop reflects on her career, stating: “All the years, 1-20, I’m teaching. Teaching writing. Teaching writing as a writer. Wondering how it could be any other way” (21). Bishop emphasizes the ways she sees herself as both writer and a teacher with a goal of mentoring and collaborating with her students both in and outside of the classroom. In reflection of Bishop’s mentorship, Stephanie Vanderslice cites collaboration as the way she deconstructed boundaries: “collaboration was second nature to Bishop” and “she not only enjoyed what I think of as the highest kind of discourse—an intellectual give and take rather than rabid attack-and-retreat turf-guarding that can characterize others in academia—but that she also shared the wealth, often inviting others to converse and co-author” (3). Always cognizant of her role as a professor, Bishop is also aware of and considers the limitations of labels in the hierarchical system she sees existing within English departments, including the label of “feminist”, as noted in her essay “Learning Our Own Ways to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department”:

When we label ourselves in this way, we agree to the dominant method of distinguishing areas in English studies, what Gerald Graff calls the field-coverage model, a model that isolates and elevates the literature scholar and critic and isolates but devalues the generalist.... By creating separate women’s studies programs, designating fields like “composition” and “feminist studies,” or allowing only minimal authority for writing program administrators, the establishment is free to conduct department business as usual. Meanwhile,

marginalized cultures within or beside the department's dominant culture, alienated, co-opted or about to be co-opted, sit silently around that meritocratic table, feeling concerned. (339)

In their 2006 book *Keywords in Creative Writing*, Bishop and Starkey deconstruct the master-apprenticeship analogy ever present within academia in a manner that speaks to the institutionalized inequity that the academy has yet to rectify when they write, "while this hierarchical model may have functioned effectively centuries ago... it is problematic in the democratic and multicultural twenty-first century" (122). Their critique of this system calls out the colonial nature of teacher-student relationships within the university that are directly tied to power and the possession of knowledge as power and control, writing, "One obvious inconvenience is that the master-apprentice system tends to reproduce an image of 'genius' held by those in power" (Bishop and Starkey 122). Bishop and Starkey highlight an excellent point in their rejection of the master-apprentice analogy by not only bringing the suppression of minoritized voices to the forefront but by subsequently noting that having students emulate the scholarship and writing of instructors ultimately limits the possibility for new, revolutionary scholarship across the curriculum.

Though Bishop passed before the conversations of decolonizing composition and the academic classroom took place, we are reminded of her devotion to inclusive pedagogies, as evidenced through her reflections on teaching and the experiences of those she mentored. In their article "Decolonizing the Classroom: An Essay in Two Parts," Reanae McNeal and Peter Elbow describe the importance of decolonization within the English classroom:

Decolonial pedagogies require that we honor our web of relations by being deeply aware of each one's valuable contributions and our connections with each other.... The voices and personhood of our marginalized relations become an imperative aid to understanding the complexities of diverse knowledge systems and multiple lived realities. In order to address current atrocities, historical trauma, and colonialism we must create strong braids of awareness that are sturdy bridges to new stories. These stories help us reimagine the world as diverse global citizens: a reimagining grounded in the promotion of justice for all, including the Earth. In this fashion, what we braid and how we braid knowledge systems in our classrooms is so important. (21)

A self-described "social expressivist" (although she preferred no labels), Bishop blends the fields of creative writing and composition in a way that encourages students to be better writers both in service of themselves (expressivist) and in their larger communities (social) (*Teaching Lives* viii). In doing so, Bishop, in her own pedagogy, writing, and classroom, seeks to "create strong braids of awareness that are sturdy bridges to new stories," as McNeal and Elbow describe. Much of Bishop's teaching of writing stemmed from her own learning and experience as a writer. In interrogating the writing processes of herself and her students, whom she often wrote

in communion with, she incorporated the findings into her classroom and her scholarship. When describing what brought her to her unique blending of creative writing and composition studies, Bishop writes:

Writing captured me and composition helped me understand that captivation. After unbraiding and uncomposing my selves within the academy in order to learn specialized skills and certain discourses, in order to participate in elect and select societies, I decided intentionally to rebraid and recompose my self through teaching creative and compositional strategies together. (“Composing Ourselves as (Creative) Writers” 219)

Bishop and her legacy are crucial to the future of composition studies as we continually seek to deconstruct unnecessary demarcations between the personal and the political, the scholarly and the creative. She theorized the braiding of two fields as an act of rebellion—a “quiet revolution”—in which she challenged the dominant perspective of composition as a field and teaching as a profession. Bishop radically revised the role of the composition instructor, and, in doing so, she made the classroom more inclusive and welcoming for all by composing with students, inviting them to collaborate in her publications, and by thinking radically about what it means to compose and revise in the field of English Studies.

## Moving Feminist Rhetoric into Practice: The Radical Revision

In order to move Bishop’s feminist rhetoric into practice, we must remain attentive to how an embodied sense of identity is always linked to rhetorical action as Glenn calls us to do. This principle can act as a guiding force for our field, both professionally and in our activism. Bishop defends her choice to do this in her essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer- Teacher-Writer in Composition”:

I do my mixing, not to elevate genres but to intermingle them, not to venerate the poetic or belletristic but to point out that each brings us to our senses though in different modes and tones. Because styles, genres, and syntax seem both to prompt and predict thought, I need to think in and through them all. (17)

One of the first practical experiences Amy had with radical feminist mentorship came in the way of a revision project Bishop assigned in her 1998 upper-division writing workshop at Florida State University. Bishop assigned a “radical revision” of a previously completed text, where students were invited to consider changes in voice/tone, syntax, genre, audience, time, physical layout/typography, or even medium. Today, this project could be classified as one that promotes multimodality or that asks students to “decolonize the essay” from its traditional form. In addition to the radical revision, students were also asked to write a letter of self-reflection that explained the process and radical revision in detail (Appendix A). This assignment opened up possibilities

for how to revise outside of what is often viewed as acceptable in academic discourse, and Bishop was ahead of her time, once again, with the introduction of multimodal composition and alternative discourses. She invited students to consider what discourse and modality best fit their writing, providing students agency over their stories and writing and encouraging instructors to adjust assessment accordingly. Amy chose to create a poem after writing her literacy essay on a lifelong search for love through words:

### **I Think of My I Love Yous**

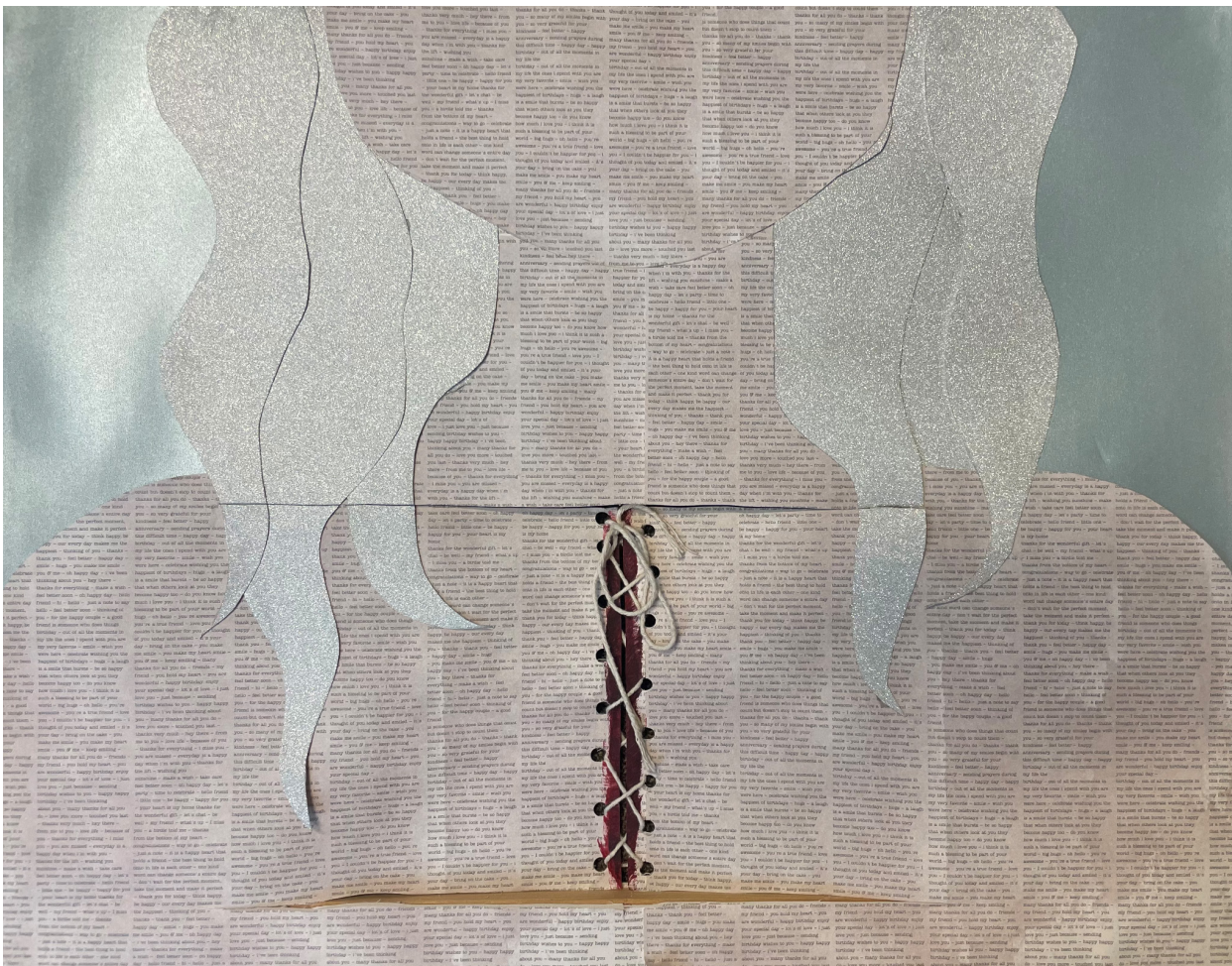
of all my I'll waits and I promises,  
so sad, our sea of failed words,  
like stars that fall too far off,  
faint and alone in the sleeping sky.

But the always and the nevers  
keep speaking somewhere—  
only listen for the echo of our parallel lives,  
the way a subway violinist haunts us,  
a church of sound on our way  
to somewhere else, or that rare rush  
of air in a mall, a smell that stops us,  
chilled, makes us mouth  
someone's name.

It was such an eye-opening experience that Amy, and now Micaela, assign it in every writing course and continue to be amazed at how it shifts students' understanding of discourse, writing, and revision.

Micaela reflects on her experience with the project in Fall 2015: "I found this particular assignment to be my favorite of the class...When approached with the task of taking one of our essays and transforming it from one form of art to another, I was excited." For her radical revision, Micaela chose to visually create a metaphor she used in her personal essay from earlier in the semester. When speaking of her goals for the project, Micaela writes, "My biggest challenge while

creating this was hoping readers would get it and that it would be an accurate representation of how one feels when going through a difficult situation.” In the process letter, Micaela emphasizes how the process of creating the radical revision unknowingly seemed to align with the experience she wrote about, but this time she had agency over it. She created the radical revision, and she was able to choose how to share it.



The radical revision project, first published in Bishop’s *Elements of Alternate Style* (1997), invites students to shift their essay’s style, perspective, or genre. Through this final revision project, student-writers are invited to reflect on their growth throughout the writing process by revising their essay in a radical way and into a different genre or form. Bishop writes that the radical revision moves us to an informal, narrative research writing style that “allow[ed] [her] to investigate ethical, political, and writerly concerns more freely” (216). The radical revision requires students not only to wrestle with the challenges of reconceiving their previously finished work but also encourages them to consider how they define revision and how they chose to learn to deal with its limitations. In “Distorting the Mirror: Radical Revision and Students’ Shifting Perspective,” Kim Haines-Korn presents the radical revision assignment and reminds us that the radical revision “involves seeing and seeing again and how shifts in style and perspective can help us write, think, and learn” (95). Overall, if one of our main goals as teachers of writing is to share the

power of rhetoric with students, then why not take a risk and move differing forms of that rhetoric into our pedagogical designs? In other words, Bishop calls us to break out of our “comfort zones” and get radical in the writing classroom by moving past theory and into practice.

## Carrying Radical Mentoring On: Student-Mentee Reflections

*Amy, Wendy Bishop’s Final Graduate Student, 1998-2003:* Even as an undergraduate student, I was intrigued by the uniqueness and effectiveness of Bishop’s assignments, and I could tell she was much more humble than she should be. Of course, I was right. She was, by the late nineties, one of the strongest voices in the field of composition in terms of her publications and professional engagements, as well as an endowed chair in the Department of English at Florida State University. Yet in class, she wrote with us, shared with us, and always entered into writing exchanges as our equal. In “Learning Our Own Ways to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department,” she supports the need to critically challenge students: “Since graduate students clearly represent great potential for English departments, we should explore public and private channels for teaching these soon-to-be-peers critical consciousness [...]. These students have the potential to make the changes within the house of English studies we have sometimes despaired of making” (133). Bishop and Glenn offer alternatives to traditional, master-apprentice models of mentoring through non-hierarchical, mutual, and networked collaboration. Glenn also points out that such mentoring is the way rhetorical feminists give each other hope and make space for each other in what has traditionally been a privileged and exclusionary white, male space, and that was my experience as a student of Wendy Bishop.

I was distracted by the bright Florida sunlight that bounced off one of the many bookshelves lining Dr. Bishop’s office and almost missed what she asked. Or maybe I didn’t believe she could really be asking me, a first-year Ph.D. student, to co-author a chapter on the power of letter writing as a way to process loss and trauma. I squinted her way and said yes even though I wasn’t exactly sure what I was saying yes to. And she continued to ask me to collaborate—on CCCC panels, in chapters, pedagogical workshops, and in conversations over coffee about her research and the teaching of writing. Because of the power of this mentorship, of being valued, I have looked for opportunities to mentor in my teaching and writing life.

Even though I didn’t think I was adding much to the scholarship when working alongside Wendy, which she insisted I call her rather than Dr. Bishop, I now know that was likely untrue because of the ways my teaching and research have been deepened through mentorship and collaboration with my own students. Micaela, a student who didn’t even know she wanted to go to college, is an example of how carrying mentorship forward is both radical and vital to the future of our field.

*Micaela, Amy Hodges Hamilton’s student, 2015-2018:* Eight years ago, I sat in my first



college class, Amy's first-year writing course, and I finally felt that I belonged somewhere. A high-school drop-out by the age of 16, I was persuaded to attend college two years later as an escape from the small Texas town in which I was raised. To my surprise, I found my home within the four walls of a classroom where the desks were arranged into a circle and the space was made complete with a professor and strangers-turned-friends who comprised a community of writing, researching, and collaboration founded on mutual respect and care for each other and their stories.

As a white Latina student, I always struggled to articulate the complexities and privileges I experienced throughout my life due to my race, ethnicity, and the pronunciation of my name. However, with Amy's guidance and through workshopping with my peers, I sought to interrogate my own identity by telling stories through memoir, essays, art pieces, and research—all of which I was encouraged to explore in Amy's class. Prior to this, I'd never experienced education in such a communal way. I was moved by the rhetorical, pedagogical choices Amy made in the classroom, such as: sitting amongst her students, as opposed to traditionally standing in the front of the classroom, writing and sharing with us during class, especially during freewrites, and prioritizing connection and collaboration through individual conferencing and half-class workshops. Though I couldn't have articulated it at the time, I wholeheartedly believe the sense of belonging I (and many others) felt can be attributed to the radical feminist pedagogy and mentorship Amy has carried on from Wendy.

In my second semester of college and another course of Amy's, I approached her after class one day, letting her know I was considering changing my major to English. In that moment, Amy led me to her office, and we began discussing the English major and possible graduate programs and career choices in and outside of the academy. Quickly, these conversations shifted from undergraduate advising to research possibilities, collaborations on campus-wide social justice initiatives, service-learning opportunities, and, later, the chance to co-teach a writing workshop with marginalized women in the community.

There are days when I lie beneath the Spanish moss, shading myself from the warm Florida sun, that my heart burns with immense gratitude for Wendy Bishop and her legacy that lives on through my forever-mentor and friend, Amy. As a third-year PhD student studying to take my preliminary exams, I carry the teachings of Amy and Wendy with me as I enter what I hope will become a decades-long career of teaching, writing, and dissolving the boundaries between the academy and the community. Whether she knew it or not, Wendy forged her own genealogy within composition studies—one I am lucky to be a part of—and it is privilege to have a hand in carrying on her legacy and expanding upon her creative, empowering, and inclusive scholarship that changed the way I understand writing, the classroom, and the true meaning of teaching. As Bishop reminds us, "...teaching is visionary and spiritual—it is what matters—and I return faithfully to the classroom year after year, needing that growing space, no doubt, as much or more than the classroom inhabitants need me" (*Teaching Lives* 314).

## A Call to Radical Feminist Mentoring

From reading and re-reading Bishop's scholarship, we think she would argue that to most effectively act as rhetorical feminist mentors, we must all, beginning and established scholars alike, write *with* and *about* students. In both her teaching life and scholarship, Bishop believed in the power of connecting these two sometimes dichotomous roles. In "Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition," Bishop urges "...teachers [to] write with and for their students as well as with and for their colleagues" (9). Glenn, too, insists, "teaching is hope embodied. It is a forward-looking endeavor, one that has the power to change lives—our own, our students" (125). Glenn suggests that rhetorical feminist teachers should acknowledge their own positionality, respect students' experiences, and help students investigate patriarchy and other compounding injustices in the world. To be an intersectional feminist capable of effecting positive change in the classroom and academy, it is our responsibility to demonstrate inclusion, equity, and decoloniality in all aspects of our pedagogy. Bishop did this as an early advocate of ethnographic inquiry, a research method designed to give voice to writers and writing practitioners we may not have otherwise heard from. Equipped with these inclusive writing practices, students and teachers are prepared "to develop rhetorical agency" and change the status quo, prompting us to see how our work matters and how our political commitments can guide our professional actions (148).

We can begin by doing what Bishop did throughout her mentorship and scholarship—share stories, write with and about our students, and mentor the next generation of feminist rhetoricians. As she articulates in "Teaching Lives: Thoughts on Reweaving Our Spirits," "...teaching [and mentoring] teaches me, heals me, helps me, centers me in my professional and personal life in a way I've seldom seen talked about" (314).

It's time to talk.

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# Appendix A

## Radical Revision Guidelines

1. Choose Essay I or II (you may not want to choose Essay II, because you just finished writing that essay and you may be too close to it, making you reluctant to jump in and play with your text).
2. You will revise this essay in a way that challenges you to take risks and try something you've never tried before as a writer and analyst in this class.
3. The revision can end up less effective than the original (there's no real risk-taking without the possibility of failure). Remember the revision process is an important part of the overall writing process. You must be willing to re-evaluate and analyze your texts again and again to become a successful writer.
4. The core of the radical revision assignment is your process, which will include:
  - a) A process letter (one page single spaced minimum) where you recount what you chose to do, why—why is this a risk/challenge for you as a writer, how it worked, and what you learned—see questions below.
  - b) All drafts/notes/peer review sheets that encouraged your revision.
  - c) The final radical revision (or a photo).
  - d) Class presentation or reading/explanation of your revision.

## Process Letter Questions--Radical Revision

This letter will inform your reader of your goals for this radical revision and how those goals were accomplished. These may include learning about drafting from changing a text from one style to another, taking risks, pushing boundaries, attempting difficult tasks in order to learn more about yourself and your writing style. Please write this as a personal letter to me, and answer six of the following eight questions. Be sure to add any information that you think will help me evaluate your radical revision. Remember, your process letter should be 1-2 pages single-spaced.

1. Tell me in some detail about the drafting particulars of this project—where did you

start (ideas and drafts) and where did you go (how many drafts, revisions, taking place where, for how long, under what conditions)?

2. What were your goals for this piece? Where are you challenged? What did you risk in revising your essay in this way?
3. Who is the ideal reader/audience? What should she/he bring to the text in order to give it the best reading/interpretation?
4. If you had three more weeks, what would you work on?
5. According to your own goals for this project, estimate your success. Be specific and perhaps quote from sections of the text or point to a particular aspect of the project
6. What did you learn about yourself as a person and writer from this project? How was this process healing?
7. You've given this to your peers and they say, "we like it, but..." How did your responders help or hurt your revision efforts?
8. How would you evaluate yourself? Do you feel like the radical revision was a success for you as a writer? What did it show you about your focus/your life story?

**To radically revise, students are invited to try one or more of the following:**

1. **Voice/Tone Changes? Change from first to third or try second; write** as a character, change tone (serious to comic, etc.), change point of view from conventional expectations, change ethnicity, change perspective, use stream of consciousness, use the point of view of something inanimate, use a voice to question authority of the text OR change from adult to child to alien, try parody or imitation
2. **Genre Changes?** Nonfiction to poem to song to ad campaigns, bumper stickers, letters, sermon, journal, fairy tale, recipe, prayer, cartoon, short story
3. **Time Changes?** Future (flashforwards/flashbacks), present to past, tell backwards, situate in a different era or time, change expected climax/central idea of essay
4. **Multimedia/ "Art" Piece Performance (monologue/dialogue)**, play, audio and or video, art illustration (canvas, collage, watercolor, etc.), write on unexpected objects (shirts, shoes, walls), choral performance, mime

\*\*\*push your text, fracture, bend, break conventions, think about emphasis, importance, and detail as a writer. How will your central idea be clearest for the reader/observer? You are going to break conventions in order to learn about the importance of analysis in EVERY context (art, research, film, music, literature, math). As you write, notice the progression of your ideas and the progression of your text (you will explore this in your process cover sheet)\*\*\*

# Writing With and After Wendy

Doug Hesse

**Doug Hesse** is Professor of Writing at the University of Denver, where he was named University Distinguished Scholar. The writing program he founded at DU won the CCCC Certificate of Excellence. He has been President of the National Council of Teachers of English and of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, as well as Chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, to name some of many leadership roles. His five co-authored books (with Laura Julier, Becky Bradway, and Lynn Troyka) and 90+ articles and chapters have mostly focused, in recent years, on creative nonfiction, pedagogy, and writing programs. His career and life were richer because of treasured time with Wendy Bishop.

**Keywords:** creative nonfiction, composition studies, writing process, administration, poetry

when it comes down to it, i'm an introvert who loves to/needs to write and finds her community where she can--as in these e-mails, the conferences.

Wendy Bishop to me, "re: catching up," 4/4/02 7:34 am

I recently skimmed dozens of emails from Wendy Bishop between 1999 and 2002. Someone had wanted details about the CCCC Public Policy Committee, which she'd asked me to form and chair. I found the information and in the process happily revisited several other conversations: about Wendy's essay that I published in a College English special issue on creative nonfiction, about a book project with Kathi Yancey and Carrie Leverenz that ultimately was overtaken by Wendy's cancer, and, most poignantly, about personal lives that included family worries and career doubts. Each email came entirely lower case and signed "cheers,w" or "I,w" as if her writerly torrent couldn't be hindered by shift keys—or perhaps as if, despite her prolific output, part of her remained careful to leave modest footprints. In August 2001, for example, our main topic was whether I'd lead an upcoming C's Executive Committee retreat, but I was worrying about my wife having cancer, and Wendy was worrying about Hurricane Barry:

we have the place we really want to be living at on the gulf coast and it will take a few days to get there (45 miles away, dean was evacuated yesterday) and see what's left of our cinderblock imaginary retirement. but the place on alligator point has been fine for 50 years so i'm sure it's fine still. hurricanes come with the sea turtles and dolphins and i'd say it's a fair deal.

i'll be in touch and give becky my best thoughts. same for you, I,w

Wendy to me, "re: a double p.s." August 6, 2001, 1:31 pm

I first really got to know Wendy at a picnic in Oxford, Mississippi, July 1994. The occasion was a joint WPA/ADE summer conference, at an evening social beneath oaks on a mansion's lawn, with fried chicken and coleslaw served on long white tables. Libby Rankin invited me to join her, Lad Tobin, and Wendy, people whose work I admired as way out of my own league. I felt lucky. Those three were friends, and I watched their easy banter with envy but was happy to be there as a newcomer warmly welcomed. This was the second time I'd met Wendy, the first being during a small, late afternoon session at the CCCC Seattle, 1989. Wearing a down vest, she sat near the back wall, offering astute comments during the discussion. I went up afterward to share my appreciation, and I mostly remember her wariness.

When I was program chair for the 1999 WPA conference at Purdue, I invited Wendy to speak. She said she'd need a small stipend to offset childcare costs when she left Tallahassee. Of course. She chose as her title "What Interests Me Is What Interests You: The Writing of WPAs," had us write during her talk, and sent us off with some prompts.

1. Write vignettes of all the memorable people you've encountered. In ten years you'll have forgotten many of them—savor—them now.
2. Take off the weight of this world and list the things you have learned: small to large. Practical to theoretical and back again (or aren't these often intricately intertwined?).
3. Write a letter back to this conference; tell it what it did and didn't do for you. Ask it hard questions. Do a short analysis of what you saw as its main text and subtexts. Put your finger on the pulse and pressure points that you brought along with you, that you felt from others.
4. Write a piece praising yourself—your work, your sense of what it means to be in your role(s), the spaces the role(s) create in your life that might not otherwise be there for you to fill.
5. Tally up your losses. Put them down in writing, then take that writing and perform a ceremony for it: let it go, give it up, forgive it (and yourself, and others): put it in a ten-year time capsule, a message in a bottle, bid it (at least temporary) adieu. Now, feel what you feel without these losses. If you could/can forgive yourself, are you more willing to go on?

These invitations exemplify Wendy's pure belief in the personal value of writing, her utter respect for the craft and those who practiced it. Although the Purdue conference was for administrators, and although Wendy surely was one of us, she insisted that we remember and privilege our identities as writers. The prompts were partly therapeutic, a role I sometimes saw writing as



filling for Wendy, though writing for her had the larger purpose of creating, something bigger than repairing or healing.

Those values drove many people to dismiss Wendy as naïvely romantic, even dangerously so. Most infamously, Gary Olson used her as an avatar of ideas threatening “the death of composition as an intellectual discipline.” Olson’s ire focused on Wendy’s 1999 CCC essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition,” which he cast as seeking to deny the place for theorists, especially social constructionists, within composition studies. Gary made reasonable points about keeping composition a large field, and he interestingly complicated the present dispute as not between social scientists and humanists but, rather, between both of those and a philosophical/theoretical tradition interested more broadly in status and power. Still, in framing the issue as one of “creative” writing (his quotation marks) v. intellectual work, I think he missed Wendy’s point. She was trying to hold as central to our field the act and craft of writing as opposed to theories about writing. Certainly, Gary was right to assert that theorists cared about writing, including their own, as much as “creative” writers do. But Wendy called for privileging at least in our field the techne and art of making texts, of whatever genres and subject matters, rather than using writing as a topical field and way into larger social and political structures. However vital those latter matters surely are, and important as I found both of and about, both craft and status, I remain drawn to Wendy’s emphasis on producing writing—on the act, on style and practice more than on idea or analysis. Those traces show in my “Creative Writing and Composition” in CCC a decade later.

Wendy certainly heard and was troubled by those critiques. In January 2002, when I sent her editorial suggestions to fine-tune “Suddenly Sexy,” a piece I’d already accepted, she replied,

out of the frying pan into the fire, doug.

i started in revising this last week and somehow the essay turned to shreds as i tried to make it more organized and erudite. i want to give it another go but can’t until friday which i’ve slotted for nearly all day, me and “suddenly sexy,” mano a mano. if i can’t pull it off (i think i may have a spectre of “first time in CE and tired of Gary Olson calling me the death of theory audience jitters”) then i’ll just go back to the original and do the cosmetic things you suggested. but you had good deeper revision ideas and i want to try to honor them--it’s just i don’t write logical or linear and when i pull out a thread and try to insert a backbone, it seems to come tumbling down. and the conflation of cnf and essay is a troubling and pesky one--this is such a slippery area--but i’m game for the challenge.

Wendy to me, “this is just to say,” Wednesday, 1/23/02, 5:47 am

I was surprised that Wendy, to all appearances productively confident, would have jitters about writing for any readership. As someone who's always written with doubts and difficulties, I was reassured to have lofty company, especially someone whose revising could also tatter a draft. Wendy knew she was cutting diagonally against many (perhaps most) of the prominent scholars in our field, and she carried the extra weight of being a poet (one who even became chair of AWP) in the afterglow of Jim Berlin's sharp but ultimately reductive critique of poetics through the 1990s. In those days, poetry specifically (and creative writing generally) met some contempt within our field, both as a classist avatar of an unexamined belletristic tradition and as cushy idling while there were more urgent (politically, economically) writing matters to sort. If composition studies loathed literature colleagues for their resources, status, and power (at that time) in departments, it dismissed academic poets as indulgent and indulged. Compositionists were doing the hard and necessary work. Setting aside the accuracy and fairness of this attribution, it is historically the case that creative writing had been part of CCCC through the 1960s. Wendy was publishing articles in CCC just as poets Marvin Bell and William Stafford had done three decades earlier, although, as I've noted by the mid sixties, scholars like Ed Corbett and Francis Christensen were winning the organization's hearts and minds.

I dedicated the 2004 CCCC convention program to Wendy, writing a few comments on her life and accomplishments and reprinting her "My Convention Poem." Kathi Yancey and I organized a session, "Her Words and Ours: A Celebration of the Life of Wendy Bishop," which I put in a late Thursday afternoon slot. Lad Tobin, Deborah Coxwell Teague, Libby Rankin, and Marilyn Cooper all shared memories of Wendy. Carrie Leverenz, John Boe, Keith Gilyard, and David Starkey all read some of her work. The center of the session, however, featured everyone present writing in response to one of Wendy's invitations—the five from Purdue I reprinted above, plus seven more Kathi and I had culled from her books. After writing, we shared them, led at tables whose leaders included Pavel Zamelinski, Hans Ostrom, Lisa Albrecht, John Lovas, Joye Neff, Shirley Wilson Logan, Michael Spooner, and Erika Lindeman. I include all the names both to inscribe these people into this remembrance and to suggest the company she kept and people who missed her—at least those able to come to San Antonio that spring.

Going on twenty years, I've kept the writings people gave me from that celebration. It's long past time to reach to their writers—the ones still living—to see if I/we might do something with them, perhaps revisit what we wrote. My own piece (responding to Wendy's prompt #10: "Write about decisions, windows, chances, turns") went back to that day in Oxford, Mississippi, concluding, "I don't know cause and effect here. I do know there's a chain of meetings with Wendy that began with the fairly shy me deciding on a July afternoon to sit down with my betters. Not a big decision at all, more chance than window. I've learned since to try making room at tables."

what's bad is i haven't given you much time to respond to this (if any).

Wendy to me, "here 'tis," 1/28/02, 10:17 am

Today I'm drawn to Wendy's shortest prompt, #9: "Write about time." Not much rhetorical situation in that assignment. I imagine someone chiding its author as being too unfocused, lacking exigency. But I see it as capaciously trusting, letting writers figure audience and purpose based on their interests and needs.

"Write about time."

Wendy was 50 when she died. I was 47, which means that as I write, I've now lived to an age 17 years beyond her. Had she lived to 67, I imagine she'd long ago have retired to that cinder-block beach house on Alligator Point to make poems, memoirs, stories, and essays. I can't help confronting the sober truth that she'd have made better use of those years than I have, at least in terms of writing. In other dimensions of life, I think I've done fine, though who doesn't have regrets? But in mapping my writerly life against the extrapolation of another's, especially when that other is Wendy, I enter a dispiriting competition. Wendy would loathe competitive self-doubt and redirect me to ask what writing I wanted to do tomorrow, cautioning against fussing about writing I didn't do yesterday, suggesting that if we're being really honest, I must have derived some compensatory satisfaction from the multiple service and leadership roles I took in the past couple decades, commitments that rendered my writing practice a stream, not a river: an oxbow, not the main channel. I suspect, further, she'd urge me to make writing a priority—now!—if that's what I thought I wanted. Time is neither plentiful nor promised.

I have a preserving strong impression of Wendy that comes from the Monday before Thanksgiving, 2001. We were both standing outside the Baltimore convention center, and she invited me to share a ride to the airport. We talked about meetings we'd just attended, about my son's journey as a cellist, about the upcoming holiday. Conversation that started in animation dwindled to near silence as we neared the airport, Wendy slumping lower in the corner of back-seat and door. She'd just led her last meeting as CCCC's chair, and she was exhausted. I was chastened to realize that I'd failed to register the personal costs of her commitments and dedication, seeing instead only the torrent of her talent. We'd continue sending emails. We'd continue meeting: drinks in the Palmer House the next spring, a talk I gave at Florida State. We promised to propose a panel for CCCC in 2004, but she was dead by November 2003. It turns out the session we finally did share featured Wendy having us write, showing the way through her own words. The subject was writing. The subject was Wendy.

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# Dialoguing with Wendy

Mary Ann Cain

**Mary Ann Cain's** publications have appeared in national and international literary and scholarly journals, diverse in their subject matter and genres, ranging from scholarly work in rhetoric and composition theory to literary works, including fiction, nonfiction essays, and poetry. Her five books include a poetry collection, *How Small the Sky Really Dreams* (Dos Madres Press, 2021), a biography, *South Side Venus: The Legacy of Margaret Burroughs* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), a novel, *Down from Moonshine* (Thirteenth Moon Press, 2009), and two scholarly books, *Composing Public Space: Teaching Writing in the Face of Private Interests* (Heinemann 2010) and *Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing* (SUNY Press 1995). Dozens of her scholarly essays on writing theory and praxis have been published in scholarly journals, along with many national and international publications of her literary work. She is Professor Emerita of English at Purdue University Fort Wayne and lives with her husband, poet George Kalamaras, and their beloved beagle, Blaisie. They spend time living in both Fort Wayne and Livermore, Colorado.

**Keywords:** dialogue, crots, writer, connection, academia, dogs

I don't remember how I first learned of Wendy Bishop's death in 2003, whether it was "star[ing] blankly at [a] computer [screen] or s[itting] silently with a phone pressed to [my ear] at the news," as Melissa Goldthwaite writes her in essay here. But like Melissa, I, too, was "speechless." When Susan Hunter, the editor of one of Wendy's favorite journals, *Dialogue*, asked me the following year to guest edit what was supposed to be the final issue in tribute to Wendy, I readily agreed. I had known Wendy since 1990, and as I moved through my own academic career, I always felt Wendy as a friendly presence. Even as I grappled with the vicissitudes of the academic landscape, particularly in the borderlands of English Studies, especially as a "writer-teacher-writer," I always felt at home with Wendy and her work. It wasn't that I always agreed with what she said or did, but much of the time, I found her articulating thoughts, ideas, feelings, and stories that affirmed what I was experiencing yet not quite formulating in the precise, penetrating, and personal, yet scholarly ways that she did.

When Melissa invited me to collaborate with her to propose this tribute to Wendy for *Peitho*, I knew I had to agree. I had unfinished business with Wendy; the *Dialogue* issue never appeared, for circumstances beyond my control. But also, twelve years later, I went through my own cancer experience—breast cancer—and kept marking the years I'd survived beyond Wendy. I knew I would never be productive in the same ways as she was. In a way, I didn't want to be if it meant my life might be shortened by what Melissa and Wendy so aptly describe in their collaborative essay:

We worry as that old feeling comes upon us, that we are co-existing in an academic climate

that encourages the heroic, the martyr-like, the materially-focused, the multi-tasking career arc. We worry about the possible slips between the cup and the lip. How do we advise others on ways to make a nest—find a horizontal safe house—within the vertical hierarchy of the institution? (168)

Now, twenty years later, as I reread some of Wendy's essays and poems, we academics, we human beings, are now in a much different moment, different in so many, many ways. Back then, we had the luxury of assuming institutions of higher ed would survive, however imperfectly. We had the shield of ignorance to assume that global warming was far off, nothing that would impact us any time soon. We had the hubris to believe that in teaching students to care about writing, and to write in ways that would open doors to diversity, equity, and inclusion, that change would happen, slowly, yes, gradually, too, but ultimately would succeed through generational shifts in values, practices, and visions of what is possible. Those conversations were not about survival: will our profession, our institutions, our students, ourselves, our planet survive?

I am myself also in a much different moment. I retired from teaching in 2022, or, as I prefer to say, left teaching to write full time. In revisiting Wendy's work on teaching, writing, mentoring, researching, and administering, I wonder if being "just a writer" as opposed to a "writer-teacher-writer" leaves me now more observer than participant with Wendy's work, more connecting to those practices of writing as performed outside the academy, outside of teaching and mentoring, than trying to figure out best practices for navigating within. In the essay below, I am revisiting a dialogue I constructed with and about Wendy Bishop upon her passing in 2003. At the end of that essay, my present-time self returns to dialogue with that dialogue and with myself from 20 years ago about Wendy and her work. I do so in the spirit of bringing this retrospective forward, into the *now* we currently inhabit, making the walls (boundaries) of that moment tangible again and in doing so, helping us find each other through the fragments they engendered.

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### **Dialogue essay 2004-2006**

Friday, December 31, 2004 6:16 p.m.

Dear Wendy,

I'm still thinking about your passing more than a year after the fact. I keep coming back to this: I'm a little mad at you. I wrote that in the notes I took after listening to your radio interview with Peggy O'Neill the other day. You had been a visiting writer at Loyola College in Maryland; I was glad to know you had been invited as a *writer*—a poet and essayist—to do workshops. It made me wish I'd extended that kind of invitation to you.

I know when people die that sometimes my first reaction is to get a little mad at them for dying. I'm sure

that's part of my reaction here. Yet for some reason I think you were starved for poetry. In the interview, you read your poem, "Gardenias," from your book *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Poem* and described the excesses of desire. I remember you were very strict with yourself about such indulgences, poetry being one of them. It had its place, but it never took over your life, not like it did for Dylan Thomas, for instance. I always admired you for not letting yourself get consumed in being The Poet as a singular identity. Poetry traveled with you everywhere, but you took it to so many places where it was so clearly Other that it never became just one thing, just one identity. Instead, it was so much a part of everything you did, all your life. At the same time, I sensed something was missing in your life, although you never spoke nor wrote of it.

Maybe I'm just a little mad because I believe, rightly or wrongly, that a part of you was not nourished somehow, and that had to do with the choices you made, the pace you kept, the insistence on connection, the shyness and solitude never indulged. Maybe I just want to know what nourished you through the struggles. Maybe I want to know that you did indulge. I remember your shyness because I could relate to it; I can picture your solitude even in the midst of a crowded convention ballroom. Maybe I'm really more than a little mad that no one ever published a full-length book of your poems during your lifetime.

Love,

Mary Ann

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Wendy Bishop's professional work in rhetoric and composition, writing pedagogy, creative writing, and writing program administration always seemed to me about possibilities, about ever-expanding horizons of textual encounters, new dimensions of pedagogical contact, new identities being forged. With those possibilities came the underlying story of ease, joy, and wonder, as well as commitment, practice, and focus. But I don't remember ever coming away with a sense of struggle, labor, conflict, or even pain, at least in her writing. That came in conversations, and now, as I read some of her poetry, through her poetic voice. Memory is funny that way; I know she wrote plenty about the struggles in her WPA work; in fact I recall reading such an article in *Composition Studies* back when I was a WPA right out of graduate school. Yet she used dance as a metaphor for the work of administration. I remember when her colleague, Ruth Mirtz, who took over as WPA when Wendy left that position at Florida State, was denied tenure, and how she wrote of the pain of that. But I don't remember feeling the pain in her writing, just in her conversations. She wrote about the struggles, but I remember the dance.

I was lucky to have a few conversations with her: one or two long and leisurely, post-workshop pub talks with a group of us; one in the gloom of the U.S. Grant hotel bar in San Diego during MLA; but more of them in the vein of how she recounted her own conference encounters—fast, fleet, penetrating words exchanged on elevators, in passing in a ballroom pre- or post-session, or a wave from across escalators going in opposite directions. Like the hummingbird Melissa

Goldthwaite recalls in her essay here, or the bird in and out of Bede's meadhall that Wendy herself recalls in her 2001 CCCC chair's address, Wendy moved quickly, lightly, but also, as Melissa says, fiercely and tenderly. I felt better hearing and reading about her struggles (me, too!), but I remembered more the possibilities of the dance.

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*New Year's Eve, 2004. I'm sitting in front of the computer, my beagle, Barney (a female), lying curled on my lap. She is settled in, won't let me get up without some very unhappy looks. I remember today's horoscope in the newspaper about a woman who will be prominent in my life today. I want to go upstairs to retrieve the exact words, but Barney is determined to keep me here. She lays her chin on my arm as I type. I know this arrangement cannot last long—we've been here before—but I try to keep going and not shift around too much. Petting her, waiting for words to come, I conjure Wendy, think of her strong spirit, how much I loved her friendly insistence on making these connections, building these bridges, even when the territories "over there" seemed at times so hostile. I remember Wendy including her whole life in her writing—even the dog with which she ran three miles most every day.*

*When Barney wants food, very little I can say or do will dissuade her. Was connecting Wendy's "food"? Barney is not content until I sit back, away from the keyboard, and stop typing and shifting my legs. So I sit.*

\*

Saturday, May 06, 2006 5:17 PM

Dear Wendy,

Twenty months after I started my introduction to the *Dialogue* issue dedicated to you, I return to it now, worried that it will be more about me than about you. And yet I also know you would challenge such either/or, categorical thinking and perhaps even praise me for writing in "crots," mixing genres, voices, and styles in an attempt to capture the heteroglossic combustion of the writing-teaching-writing experience.

Amy Hodges Hamilton writes about visiting you at home while you underwent chemotherapy. Even three weeks before your death, you continued to direct Amy's dissertation. The images of you as always connected, always available, always the teacher and friend and collaborator, haunt me as much as inspire me. Melissa Goldthwaite quotes you as saying, "I think of myself as always desperate for connection," and I wonder what fueled that desperation and why it scares me to even think about why you, of all people, would ever feel desperate when all you ever did was connect and connect and connect?

Love, Mary Ann



Wendy aimed to make visible the invisible workings of writing to those within and beyond the college classroom; she was interested in bridging audiences to include those on the outside. But as with any such struggle came fatigue and doubts. In her chair's address at the 2001 CCCC, she acknowledged her own and others' "burnout" and questioned her own state of being: "Since I too regularly feel crisp around the edges, I start to consider whether or not I am maturing into a generational cliché myself, less *counter*, *original*, *spare*, and *strange*, more *slow*, *sour*, or *dim*. Myself, but different" (329).

Yet reading her work, it is hard to imagine Wendy ever burning out. If anything, she was a kind of magician or alchemist. And the mixtures were for many of us a heady brew. We could be more than the sum of our parts, as she wrote to Melissa Goldthwaite: "M+W squared." She brought together roles, positions, identities, and disciplines in energizing, even liberating ways. But her work was much bigger, more generous, certainly deeper than mere professional life could contain. She wrote about the pain, yes, even the pain of the cancer that finally took her. But I remember more the largeness of her, the mystery surrounding the light her life provided to those like me who refused to accept writing, writing about writing, and teaching as somehow lesser acts in the academic/cultural hierarchy. It was not difficult to believe that her light would never burn out.

Wendy was a great mentor because of the balance she struck in embracing such diverse and sometimes divergent aspects of herself and her work. And certainly Wendy did pave the way for so many of us to do just that, to aim for balance rather than shutting down or denying the parts of ourselves that did not fit the academic mold. But perhaps even more importantly, she insisted on bringing us to the borderlands of our knowledge. With Wendy, there was no center, only the border at the center of all she cared about and fought for, against difficult and often frustrating odds.

As someone who has followed Wendy's exploratory, radically revising example, I find that the borderlands are perhaps the most challenging location to situate oneself—as teacher, writer, scholar. It is a place of unknowing rather than certainty, exploration rather than proven mastery, untested potential rather than certified accomplishment. Even after 20 years, I feel nervous excitement when I teach, especially when I know I've situated myself, along with the students, in the borderlands of what we know, say, and do.

Still, it is easy to forget that the borderlands are more than a metaphor and that real lives are at stake. Wendy insisted on bringing us to those borderlands, and also those of forest, night, and wild, of the interpenetration and interanimation that language gifts us. She showed us how to find ways to approach those borderlands and those who work within them in order to radically revise our vision of ourselves and of those Others upon whose labor we depend.

Wendy valued the labor of writing and of teaching for what it was—exhausting, exhilarating, necessary, vital, and just plain good work. William Stafford, speaking of his ditch-digging days, lauded the repetition, the over-the-shoulder glance at the sky, the moments of being totally in the moment with his own movements, with the earth, and with everything around him. Like Stafford, Wendy did not romanticize the labors of teaching writing, but neither did she condescend to them. It was simply good work. She argued and at the same time simply offered herself as the example that it was valuable and should be valued for what it was: “It takes encouragement and courage to find a clear passage to the safe harbor of affirming oneself as a teacher within an institution that valorizes almost every other role first” (“Places to Stand” 13). Wendy modeled how to find that clear passage for so many of us, and in doing so created passage for others to follow as well.

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*Yesterday, as I finally sat down again to write this introduction, 20 months to the day since I first began “the Wendy issue,” I watched as my beagle, Barney, took her usual place on the sofa downstairs in my office. This time she did not interrupt me to seek the warmth of my lap, despite the fact that my basement office is colder in May than September. Even though it was dinner time, she did not come to my desk and, with her strong right paw, scratch the filing cabinets in persistent circles. Maybe she was content that earlier that day I had taken her for a walk around Foster Park. Unlike many dogs, she is not a walker; she stops and sniffs every last thing around her. But that morning she stared at me with such intent while I laced my walking shoes that I knew she wanted to join me. It took us almost twice as long as my “normal” pace to circumvent the park, and I had to keep my eyes tight on Barney, not the explosion of lilacs, tulips, and crabapples flowering our path, just to keep her going. At the end of the walk, I lifted her in my arms to smell the three different kinds of lilacs that line the bikeway to the park, because the day was too beautiful not to. For once, I did not resist Barney as she led me to the borderlands of my assumptions about a “productive” day and radically revised my vision to include attending to my dog’s insatiable nose and proud and steady trot in between fits of sniffing. Perhaps like Wendy, I, too, am just as desperate for connection.*

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Sunday, May 07, 2006 3:02 PM

Dear Wendy,

What is it about our profession that makes us so lonely, so “desperate for connection” that we will ignore the imperatives of authorities, the warning signs, the threats of physical, psychological, material, and emotional harm and press on, “against the odds,” to make and sustain our relationships? What if teachers, especially teachers of writing, were really valued in the ways that you hoped for, struggled for, and ended your life still working for? What if we, as a country, valued the ditch digger and the sugar cane field worker, the teachers of writing working in obscu-

rity? What if we brought the shadow populations out into the light of respect and gratitude? Would our desperation disappear, and if so, what would we be left with? What would it be like to feel satisfaction without wearing ourselves down against the frustration and pain of teaching always in the shadows, in the service of certain notions of mastery? What stories and poems and dialogues and essays could we write to help us imagine such a world, and also help us “find a clear passage to [that] safe harbor” of connection and relationship, of the community so often written and spoken about but so little understood, let alone manifested in sustainable ways, within and outside the classroom?”

Your death puts me into another borderland, another location that insists on exploration, uncertainty, and risk. What am I willing to give up, change, take upon myself to radically revise my vision of myself and of Others, but also to change the borders themselves so that all may find their true value?

I don't know the answer to that last question, but I do know that I am not the only one who wants and values the connection and the work, who wants “balance” and connection (“dialogue”) but also, paradoxically, the unbalancing borderland to be at the center of all we do.

Love,

Mary Ann

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At Foster Park, the spring flowers have reached their peak of color and perfume. I've always thought it was no accident that I moved to a neighborhood where I can walk every day in a fostering place, since, like Wendy, so much of my teaching life centers on that concept. I seek a similar kind of fostering as I walk the park's generous green stretch almost every day. In a newly planted semi-circle of crabapples, a stone marker in the ground reads: “Death ends a life, not a relationship.” So the pain is there, as is the sorrow, but the dance into the borderlands, with all who knew and valued Wendy and her words, and all those who will, continues.

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## Reflections 2023

Wednesday, August 23, 2023 5:45 p.m.

Dear Wendy,

It's been over a year since Melissa and I decided to co-edit this cluster conversation for *Peitho*. It's also been over a year since I retired from academia to be the writer, not the teacher, not the writer-teacher-writer. Just writer. When I knew you back then, I wasn't writing poetry. Now I am. In my essay about you for *Dialogue*, I lauded the fact that you did not want to fly only under the title “poet.” While I've often wondered, What if you had?, I also know my life would be so different had you done that. Call me selfish. But also call me still sad that your one full-length volume

of poetry was published posthumously. Call me mad that most people don't know this book exists. Call me curious to know what if you had "made it to the finish line" of academia, as I've jokingly described it to friends. Doug Hesse thinks you would have loved spending time at Alligator Point in your beloved Florida beach house and not looked back. Melissa and I aren't so sure.

When I made the decision in January 2022 to leave teaching, I thought I'd really miss it, at least for a while. That writer-teacher-writer you wrote about struck deep chords in me. I was certain those identities were so intermingled that I would feel some pain and grief in leaving, especially leaving sooner than I'd imagined. Surprise! I didn't. Other than weeping during a walk with my colleague and friend, Janet, around that same Foster Park I wrote about 20 years ago, I haven't much grieved. And I'm glad to claim "writer," just "writer," as my identity now. Had you survived to know academia in its current throes of upheaval, turmoil, and "radical revision," I wonder if you might not have sought an exit sooner than planned, as I did. And, believe me, this is not the kind of "radical revision" you had in mind.

I think I'm going through a radical revision of "writer-teacher-writer." I don't know if I'll ever *not* be a teacher. But the places have changed. The "writer" and "teacher" are not the identities I began with 33 years ago. I know this is so because as I've reread your work and read that of the others in this cluster conversation, I see so much more clearly now how I became more like you as my writing and teaching progressed. One of my last classes in Spring 2022 was a new one, "Writing for Social Change." I don't think I ever taught more like you than that class. I stopped worrying so much if what and how I taught prepared the students for the rest of their academic or professional lives. Instead, I sought to help them find engagement with their lives as they were right then. I encouraged them to write in different genres, styles, and modes of discourse, as well as media, to really mix it up, to better connect with the diverse, heteroglossic reality that they already inhabited. It made me wish I had taught and written about that kind of teaching more throughout my academic life. If I ever go back to academic teaching, that's the place where I will start to radically revise everything.

With gratitude and thanks.

Love,

Mary Ann

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Wendy's concept of "radical revision" (employed in this cluster conversation by Amy Hodges Hamilton, Micaela Cuellar, and Meg Scott-Copses) helps me in this moment of re-visioning myself from 20 years ago, along with my understanding of Wendy's work. In "Places to Stand," Wendy writes,

The goal then is not to toss out the unified text with the academic bath water, but to offer options. To explore for ourselves, and to allow our students to do so also, how a deeper understanding of the connections between thought, words, and life may occur when we re-read our own

writing. To do that, of course, we must write. (17)

In this act of rereading my writing, I find myself radically revising my writer-teacher-writer identity now that I am “outside” the institution where this identity primarily existed. I am writing to discover a “deeper understanding” of that “unified text”—in this case, the text of my academic identity and of academia itself—in this moment of radical change and upheaval for those in the humanities and liberal arts. In this radical revision, I lean into the forms and genres that Wendy led me to 20 years ago—the crots, the genre mixing of personal, academic, and narrative writing—to re-vision the writer-teacher-writer who no longer teaches in the classroom: “Because styles, genres, and syntax seem to both prompt and predict thought, I need to think in and through them all” (17).

What this rereading prompts me to understand is what Wendy was demonstrating and advocating for all along, namely that to create spaces for students *and* ourselves to learn, we need to create spaces of learning that go beyond the prescribed identities we are presented with. We need to understand our work as not simply one identity or another, one genre or another, but (as I wrote 20 years ago, quoting Wendy) as something that helps us “‘find a clear passage to [that] safe harbor’ of connection and relationship, of the community so often written and spoken about but so little understood, let alone manifested in sustainable ways, within and outside the classroom.”

I reread myself as not “outsider” or “insider” but as a learner who still learns through language, thoughts, and writing. Stories are an important container through which those elements necessary to relational work like mentoring are carried forward. I radically revise my “outside” location as one that helps me understand and experience the intimacy that language and writing make possible, an intimacy that teaches me new understandings of how writing enables new ways of knowing and being by creating the relational webs through which all else is made possible. I understand “intimacy” as coming from a practice of deep observation and attention to others in relationships of mutuality, respect, and cooperation. Being released from the urgency to “produce,” to “publish or perish,” and to give more and more of myself to students, colleagues, and the institution, places me in a different mindset, a different sense of time, one that allows me to open up to what I might have overlooked before in my rush to produce. I don’t simply *know* how much words matter; I *feel* words more as an experience. And it’s stories that best carry that experience.

In *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley’s Sack, a Black Family Keepsake*, Tiya Miles painstakingly unravels the story of a simple cloth sack that was passed down from an enslaved woman, Rose, to her daughter, Ashley, after Ashley was sold to another slave owner. The sack contained the few objects that Rose could muster to sustain her: a “tattered dress 3 handfulls of /pecans a braid of Roses hair” (Miles 5). Decades later, Ashley’s granddaughter, Ruth, embroidered the contents of Ashley’s sack in colored threads that told the brief but potent story of her

grandmother's experience.

As Tila Miles demonstrates, the sack is a container that, like stories, carries a transformational power, “mark[ing] a spot in our national story where great wrongs were committed, deep sufferings were felt, love was sustained against all odds, and a vision of survival for future generations persisted” (274). In this “radical vision of Black persistence,” Rose’s fear was turned into love and a commitment to “fight for life”—her own and that of generations to come (274). The sack is a container that carries not only physical sustenance but emotional and spiritual resilience in the face of unfathomable injustice and suffering. In her deep dive into Ashley’s sack, Tila Miles demonstrates what otherwise would go unnoticed and unvalued in this weaving of identity, culture, and legacy across generations of African American women, namely the power of the ordinary object to sustain life across generations in the face of impossible circumstances.

The story of Ashley’s sack returns me to the power and possibilities that stories offer as a container for radically revising our relationships within and beyond the academy, and by doing so, radically revising the academy itself. As I radically revise this “insider/outsider” binary I confront now as “just a writer,” I come to understand how much Wendy and her emphasis on narrative has prepared me for this moment of shifting ground. It’s not about *either* telling stories and fostering the relational threads of intimate understandings of self and other *or* doing the “hard” work of analysis, argument, research, and evidence. Instead, it’s about appreciating what narratives, like everyday objects such as Ashley’s sack, provide in terms of sustenance. In short, stories don’t just support us; we can’t, literally and figuratively, live without them.

And now in this moment, when academia faces its greatest challenges and threats, we need stories more than ever. We need the kinds of relational work—collaboration, teaching, mentoring—that Wendy valued and argued for, work made possible by writing, teaching writing, and studying both. If we carry the sack of our stories forward, “we cannot forget its layered lessons” (274), which we need to sustain us in the face of overwhelming force and potential domination and suppression. The world has always been there; it’s just that academia’s inward-looking demands made that less apparent. And now the world has come blasting into academia’s view. In some ways, it’s been positive in terms of fostering inclusion. But in this moment of radical revision, much of the change being forced from without has been hugely negative. Such negative “revisions” are, at least in part, the consequence of academia’s hubris in positioning itself above the fray, including the relational work of language, writing, and the teaching and research of writing that continues to be devalued as too basic or remedial or just plain ordinary, like a sack. As I radically revise myself as “just a writer” in relation to the academy, I also start to radically revise my vision of the academy itself. And in this, I see how much Wendy’s work has prepared me for this moment.

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*Twenty years is just a number, as the saying goes, until you get up close and consider what*

*all has happened. In my radical revision of self and other, I see twenty years in dog years, i.e. the three beagles I've lived with. Like Ashley's sack, my beagles are the containers that sustain me and carry forward memories of sustenance, love, and a commitment to carry on. First Barney, who entered my narrative 20 years ago. Then Bootsie, who came five years later. And now, as of one year ago, Blaisie, our newest. Just as Barney, in my previous narrative, kept reminding me of the world and all its different movements of time, attention, and stillness, Blaisie continues to complicate my identity as not simply in the world as a human being but also as part of the natural world—a world I experience now as both breathtakingly beautiful and frighteningly under siege with climate change. Each beagle marks a different season of life: Barney saw the beginning of a settled home life and job; Bootsie ushered me through the middle years of health and other personal challenges, including breast cancer and losing a second home to a climate-change-fueled wildfire; and Blaisie arrived just as my husband and I shifted to being writers, “just” writers, after decades in academia.*

*As I write from this house rebuilt in 2013 after the fire, with Blaisie now a year old, I think of Wendy and her black dog running on the beach, her hummingbirds at the feeder, and how she merged identities with them, and the beach house where she, too, considered storms and destruction but also the sea turtles making it all worthwhile. I think of how radical revision requires destruction as well as creation. Living in close relationship to anyone or anything, one must learn to relate to both.*

*Still very much a (sometimes destructive) puppy, Blaisie demands the kind of intimacy that has marked this shift into a new awareness of language and stillness; she carries the storms that make the deeper understandings possible. Such storms are extraordinary teachers, offering lessons of intimacy that are gifted through close attention, stillness, and then language, writing, reading, and reflection. And in this exchange I find, along with Wendy, a measure of hope even as so much else tells me otherwise. When we radically revise our identities to be in dialogue with the Other, new worlds, new possibilities, new understandings appear.*

*As my Other, Blaisie challenges me with her playful insistence that I pay close attention or else destruction may ensue. And it always does. Because I know now, after 28 years of life with beagles, how fleeting their puppyhood is; because I have the privilege to stop what I'm doing to pay attention without feeling the crunch of time slipping away and other, more urgent tasks, going unattended; because I am, perhaps, also a bit wiser about how to address her destructiveness, I radically revise my self as less concerned about maintaining an order and control I assume is necessary and more concerned about engaging the destruction she presents on its own terms. To this end, I silently sprinkle cayenne pepper where she is chewing and biting: her bed, the furniture, the carpets, sometimes even the light sockets (though thankfully, this last one is rare). The pepper lets her environment give her feedback instead of me having to correct her. As a writer, I gain more respect for the destructive aspects of my own composing processes, now untethered from*

*an order I assumed I had to follow to survive within the boundaries of the academy.*

*Twenty years is, through the eyes of puppy Blaise, an unfathomable amount of time. Twenty years since Wendy left this world, and an entirely different world has arrived. In another 20 years, there will be yet another world, unfathomable even as the hopes and fears, the dire warnings and ongoing catastrophes point towards anything but peace, stability, and freedom. In this moment that Wendy didn't know but in a way anticipated, I hitch my wagon to language, learning, writing, and the relationships these foster. We can still become something else, something different, something we never could have otherwise imagined.*

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