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Editorial Leadership

Editorial Board

About the Journal: Peitho seeks to encourage, advance, and publish original feminist research in the history of rhetoric and composition and thereby support scholars and students within our profession. For submission guidelines and requirements, please see http://peitho.cwshrc.org/submit/.Peitho (ISSN 2169-0774) is published twice a year, in the Spring and Fall. Access to back issues of Peitho are part of the Coalition membership package. Coalition membership is $10 for graduate students and $25 for faculty; more information is available at cwshrc.org.

Cover Art: mage 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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Rebecca Dingo & 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, Acadiana Regional Coalition on Homelessness and Housing, and Louisiana Association of Sports, Outdoor Adventure, and Recreation (LASOAR).

Keywords: In Memoriam, Feminisms and Rhetorics De-Conference, literacy sponsorship, reproductive justice, infertility, rhetoricity of work, labor

This issue of *Peitho* was crafted just after the biannual Feminisms and Rhetorics De-Conference taking place at Spelman College in Fall 2023. There, the editorial team were all inspired by the rich and diverse panels that demonstrated how the political and scholarly work of feminism is pushing to make and reimagine a just future. After the editorial team presented "Making Publishing in *Peitho* Transparent" to a well-attended panel, they eagerly awaited the submissions from participants that would showcase the scholarly possibilities that come out of a de-conference. At the same time, they all heard and indeed felt the power of Tamika Carey's keynote address, "The Uses of Fatigue: Invitations, Impatience, and Investments," which acknowledged that the work of feminism is uneven and exhausting and that at the center is rage. During continued fraught times not only in the US but also across the globe, as feminists we rage but we are also challenged to question our own affinities and practices and to recognize our own political affordances and limitations. Because Carey's keynote focuses on rage and fatigue and their presence and legacies within the feminist community, especially feminists of color, we thought it was imperative to publish

it here in *Peitho.* In particular, her questions, "What are feminists' *ways of making it* (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford) in *times like these?* And [...] how can we collectively imagine feminist futures when so many of us are tired?" are generative because they push us to imagine ways of doing feminist work in sustainable ways. Though our term as editors will have ended by the next Feminisms and Rhetorics conference in 2025, we hope that publishing the keynote addresses may become a tradition.

Carey's focus on feminist futures and fatigue resonates with our two other articles in this issue. Holland Prior in her essay "Reimagining Sponsorship: Recovery Work, Institutional Sponsorship, and the Nearly Forgotten Rev. Mary A. Will" puts Deborah Brandt's theories of literacy sponsorship in conversation with feminist rhetorical studies in order to forward a new feminist rhetorical recovery project based not on a figure's words but on the figure's relationship with an institution. Carving out a new feminist future through this unique method, Prior cogently demonstrates the affordances of this method for tracing the rhetorical practices of women whose words and work may have been erased, squelched, or would not otherwise be known. Prior implicitly recognizes how the politics surrounding a speaker may limit how their rhetorical actions were archived and circulated. As a result, her method importantly draws attention to the relationship between figures and institutions. Further drawing our attention to how institutions shape rhetorics, Amy Vidali, draws attention to how choice feminism has inadvertently promoted damaging rhetorics around infertility. Drawing from her personal experiences with infertility, Vidali's essay resonates with Carey's keynote essay in that both demonstrate the utility of rage even as may face exhaustion. Vidali uses her experiences to draw attention to the need to understand and communicate about infertility through the lenses of feminist disability and reproductive justice because they reframe the issue temporally, outside of a normative progression controlled by personal choice and responsibility. Ultimately, Vidali offers us new feminist rhetorical practices that treats infertility not as a person failure but as a human condition that changes across a lifetime.

Jennifer Sano-Franchini and Nina Ha's Recoveries and Reconsiderations essay in this issue describe the important recovery work involved in building an archive. Their project recovers the history of Asian and Asian American students at their institution, Virginia Tech, and in the surrounding Appalachian community. Sano-Franchini and Ha engage in collaboration among undergraduate students, faculty, and staff to construct this archive in community about the range of Asian and Asian American experience at Virginia Tech. The Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CFSHRC) has a collection of resources, "Fighting Anti-Asian Racism and Rhetoric," and we will be recommending that this archive be added to the collection for its powerful demonstration of antiracism and belonging that universities can and should support and learn from.

Included in this issue is also an In Memoriam tribute to activist, teacher, poet, and scholar Minnie Bruce Pratt who, in solidarity with others of her generation, paved the way for many to not only embrace sexuality but also to connect oppressions within a heteronormative and heterosexist system. Rebecca encountered Pratt's work as an undergraduate student with a minor in Women's Studies. For Rebecca, Pratt's book *S/He* showed the workings of heteronormativity and sexism relied on each other.

The first time Clancy read Pratt's work was just over twenty years ago, for a feminist studies seminar when she was a student at the University of Minnesota. She was assigned Pratt's 1984 essay "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," published in *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism.* Pratt reflected on her life experiences, including her childhood in Centreville, Alabama. Having spent most of her life until that point 170 miles north in Florence, Alabama, Clancy felt a shared understanding with Pratt and appreciated the deft way she described the cognitive dissonance that white evangelical Christians in the southern United States often showed, and still show, about US foreign policy, especially in the Middle East:

> in evangelical theology, the establishment of the state of Israel, the growth of an "Arab-Moslem confederacy," the rise of "red" Russia and China, are seen as important only as preparation for the second coming of Christ; the Christian messiah will come again only when Arabs and Jews in the Middle East "fight a battle into which all the world's nations will be drawn"—Armageddon. All non-Christians will suffer horribly in these "end-days," which are described as specifically a time of "purification" for Jews. Christian believers will escape this holocaust, which some of them think might be a "limited" nuclear war, because they will be caught up into heaven in "the Rapture," and return to earth only after Christ's coming has prevented the destruction of the planet. *Such "Christian" believers, in their Arab-hating and their Jew-hating (disguised as Jew-loving, the right-wing Friends of Israel) have no motivation to work for peace in the Middle East, no interest in the needs of both Palestinians and Jews for safe homes, but only an interest in continuing the long history of imperialist nations in pitting the two peoples against each other.* (46-7, my emphasis)

Pratt, writing in the early 1980s, summarizes the arguments Clancy was hearing later in that decade in her Southern Baptist church's youth group (this same church brought Lt. Col. Oliver North in to give a talk, with much fanfare, shortly after the Iran-Contra hearings). "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" was published forty years ago, and it's still as timely now. Rebecca and Clancy didn't have the opportunity to work closely with Pratt as the contributors here did, but Benjamin Zender, Eileen E. Schell, and C.C. Hendricks share their memories of her as a teacher, mentor, and colleague, and we can see the reach of Pratt's legacy in their thoughtful tributes.

Cluster Conversation: Gender and the Rhetoricity of Work

We are pleased to publish in this issue a Cluster Conversation edited by Michelle Smith and Sarah Hallenbeck. The Cluster started as a weekend workshop at the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Summer Institute in 2023 at Penn State. From Thursday, May 25 through Saturday, May 27, participants engaged in the intensive reading, discussion, and workshopping of ideas that is emblematic of RSA workshops, and we're happy to showcase writing that comes out of that rich, deeply collaborative intellectual environment. In this Cluster, authors examine a variety of different kinds of work and norms and policies about work. Lillian Campbell shares findings from her interviews with tele-observers who work in hospitals and are overlooked members of care teams. Ashley Beardsley reveals the obscuring of labor in Rachael Ray's show *30-Minute Meals*, which demonstrate home-cooked meals that can be prepared in half an hour. Ray makes simple recipes seem more complicated and elevated than they in fact are, while also omitting some of the work that must be done to prepare the meals, including grocery shopping and clean-up. Kristina Bowers analyzes policies of US workfare programs and how they effectively prevent most people with Long COVID from being able to access benefits. Ashley Hay introduces readers to Repairman67, a content creator who posts primarily on TikTok and OnlyFans and is a sex worker, sex educator, and influencer whose work involves creating intimacy with viewers in a digital attention economy. Kelsey Taylor Alexander's piece looks closely at the the r/antiwork forum on Reddit, a space where users are doing serious critique of cultural norms about work, especially during the pandemic. Alexander historicizes this conversation, situating it in the Protestant work ethic, and she uses David Graeber's critique of capitalist logics to intervene in received notions of work-as-identity.

Our cover art for this issue is by Pilar Emitxin, an illustrator and graphic designer in Córdoba, Argentina. The image, "El Feminismo Va a Vencer" ("Feminism Is Going to Win"), is posted on *Justseeds*, a wonderful place to buy art: posters, postcards, calendars, stickers, and more. *Justseeds* also has a repository of digital graphics that are Creative Commons licensed. We are grateful for Emitxin's generosity in providing this art in the repository, and we are proud to feature it on the Winter 2024 cover.

Nicole O'Connell's review of *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives* completes the Winter 2024 issue. This issue may be the last one that will be featured on the CFSHRC's website: *Peitho* will be moving to the WAC Clearinghouse platform soon. It is still the journal of the CFSHRC, and all issues that are currently on the CFSHRC's website will continue to be archived here, but future issues will appear on the WAC Clearinghouse's website. This partnership will provide more resources for the journal, including funding and production support, and ease in assigning Digital Object Identifier (DOI) numbers for each contribution to *Peitho*. We're excited to be working with the WAC Clearinghouse, and we hope you enjoy this Winter 2024 issue.

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In Memoriam: Minnie Bruce Pratt

Burning Questions

Benjamin Zender

Benjamin Zender has degrees from Syracuse University (BA), University of Massachusetts Amherst (MA), and Northwestern University (PhD). Zender is a multidisciplinary teacher, researcher, and performer who explores why we collect, care for, and publicly exhibit objects. Zender currently serves as the Public Humanities Fellow at Sarah Lawrence College in partnership with the Yonkers Public Library. At Sarah Lawrence, they teach classes in public humanities, gender and sexuality studies, and performance. At the Yonkers Public Library, Zender leads an initiative to reimagine the library's special collections in the "Local History Room" as a vibrant community space. Through a series of workshops, day-long public events, and expanded research resources, the library hopes to build community trust, ensuring broader access, and reexamine library archival collections practices to include broader documentation of life and culture in Yonkers and the greater Westchester area. Zender's interest in this project stems from their work grassroots archivists queer, trans, and women of color archivists who curate grassroots archives. This work centers small independent libraries, museums, and archives as key sites for understanding how marginalized communities build knowledge, history, and community in a world that is ambivalent about their survival.

Keywords: Minnie Bruce Pratt; mentorship; pedagogy; process-based writing; grief

Minnie Bruce began to teach me thirteen years ago in a cramped circle of tiny desks in a windowless room next to a stack of her notes and an electric kettle. Before our first meeting, she asked the class to email each other our "burning questions," the "myster[ies] or dilemma[s]" that would frame our work together. And then, for two frequently harried summer weeks, we wrote and revised in response to fifty prompts as we followed these questions. Minnie Bruce provided the space to reckon with something pragmatic, something profound: we faced the reality that a single piece of writing could never actually deliver the urgent desires that demanded it.

More menacing still, it seemed we couldn't actually begin to grapple with these demands without first producing drafts. Many of them. Each one with the knowledge that no amount of revision or feedback would ever ensure the writing's sufficiency to ourselves.

Earlier this year, preparing to teach in my first faculty position following my PhD, I tried to use my syllabus to share Minnie Bruce's lessons on the promises of writing and revising in community. My draft claimed that she described our burning questions as the "visceral, urgent,

but often underexamined questions that motivate our intellectual work." But my description of the burning question is absent from my final syllabus. Then, like now, I knew something was missing. I had made a mental note to email Minnie Bruce. I didn't.

There were—are—so many of us who depended on Minnie Bruce for pithy and crisp language when we brought her a morass. Minnie Bruce taught us to use a single, located, sensuous moment as a key to the world. It seems so silly to think about the lilt of her voice over the dusty linoleum of a humanities building, as If a mundane moment in an unremarkable classroom could say anything about her you don't already know.

This writing is not sufficient. I've had *Peitho's* short call for memorial writing about Minnie Bruce open on my screen for weeks, but I could only write when the option was to something insufficient or nothing at all. Our sole job as writers, according to Minnie Bruce, is to produce something that is honest and accountable *enough*, and then to let it go. I want to believe I have the wherewithal to contribute to an archives of our love for her, using the tools she helped me develop. Yet, I'm wallowing in the worst kind of irony in trying to write about the mentor who helped me find my voice. It seems my voice just won't stay found.

Tribute to Minnie Bruce Pratt

Eileen E. Schell

Eileen E. Schell is Professor of Writing and Rhetoric and L. Douglas and Laura J. Meredith Professor of Teaching Excellence and Faculty Affiliate in Women's and Gender Studies. Schell is the author of seven books and co-edited collections and many articles, which have examined the intersections of food rhetorics and agricultural literacies, feminist rhetorics, and academic labor, among other subjects.

Keywords: Anti-Racist, Creative Nonfiction, Feminist, In Memoriam, Leslie Feinberg, LGBTQ+ activist, Revolutionary Communist

Figure 1: a group of eight people smiling and standing in front of a white wall. Minnie Bruce Pratt is on the far left, and Eileen Schell is the fifth person from the left.

Brilliance. Generosity. Warmth. Revolutionary Communist, Anti-Racist, Feminist Consciousness. All of these qualities were on full display any time Dr. Minnie Bruce Pratt was in the room. Many of us know Minnie Bruce as a renowned feminist, poet, essayist and activist; I had the good fortune of being her colleague at Syracuse University 2005-2014; I also was fortunate to serve as her Department Chair from 2007-2012.

I first met Minnie Bruce when she came to Syracuse, NY to give a poetry reading at the YMCA Downtown Writers' Center. Star-struck, I listened to her read her poetry and approached the podium with a book for her to sign. I found her to be warm and approachable. After the reading, my colleague Margaret Himley strategized with me about bringing Minnie Bruce to Syracuse

as a colleague, and she worked tirelessly to make that happen. Upon arrival at Syracuse University, Minnie Bruce was jointly appointed in the Departments of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition and Women's and Gender Studies at SU. She was centrally involved in the 2006 launch of the LGBTQ Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences. She taught courses across all three areas and immediately drew a following of students.

Minnie Bruce's courses changed lives and changed consciousness. Her cross-listed WRT 422/QSX 400 course "Stranger than Fiction: LGBT Creative Nonfiction" asked students to respond to the question: "The hidden facts and unspoken truths of life can sometimes be 'stranger than fiction'—and when that is so, how do we write believably and convincingly about those complex realities?" ("Syllabus" 2014). Students read LGBTQ creative nonfiction and wrote creative nonfiction on themes of bodies, genders, and sexualities. She also taught a remarkable interdisciplinary advanced Creative Nonfiction course at the graduate/undergraduate level labeled WRT 438/ CCR 638/WGS 600 Advanced Creative Nonfiction: "Writing In-Between" that took place over a two-week intensive Maymester session. The course was set up around "tracking the answer to a burning question" through creative nonfiction ("Syllabus" 2015). Populated by a mix of undergraduate students, graduate students across disciplines, faculty, staff and community members, the course enabled so many to work on figuring out their writing projects through creative nonfiction. I took her class the last summer it was taught and saw first-hand the incredible camaraderie and investment that people had in each other's work. These courses were more than writing courses; they were communities of writers and activists who wrote, supported each other (see Navickas). Writers often ended up publicly sharing their work in the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric and Composition Nonfiction Reading series. Minnie Bruce was instrumental in helping me start this series in 2008 when she headlined the Department's Spring Conference "What is Nonfiction?" along with Judith Kitchen.

In addition to her pivotal teaching, Minnie Bruce was on the frontlines of almost every major campus and community protest in Syracuse. She and her partner Leslie Feinberg were active in labor struggles, anti-racist, and queer liberation movements across the country and world. Minnie Bruce served as a journalist and managing editor of *Workers World/Mundo Obrero* newspaper. When I was Chair, I remember her sitting in my office with a stack of *Workers World,* sharing her latest pieces. Her work as a journalist was on top of all the organizing, teaching, writing, and workshops she was doing at Syracuse and elsewhere. As she shared on her website: "The struggle—for social justice and for workers and oppressed people, against racism and imperialism and for liberation for women and all gender and sexually-oppressed people—is my life" ("La Lucha"). She lived those words daily.

Figure 2: a group of thirteen people standing together and smiling in front of a dark red wall. They are in two rows: six in the front and seven in the back. Eileen Schell is the third person from the left in the front row. Minnie Bruce Pratt is the second person from the right in the back row.

None of us in Syracuse were ready for the news of Minnie Bruce's illness and death. We had watched her care for Leslie through the advanced stages of Lyme disease until hir death in 2014. We had attended Minnie Bruce's remarkable retirement party in 2015, which featured readings by some of her creative nonfiction students. It was inconceivable that less than ten years after Leslie passed away that Minnie Bruce would pass away from glioblastoma.

At her "Celebration of Life" service on September 30, 2023 at the May Memorial Society in Syracuse, I met her two sons, grandchildren, chosen Syracuse family, former students, and comrades. Infused in that event was the community that Minnie Bruce and Leslie had built together. All of us were given the opportunity to carry away a memento in the form of a pair of clip-on earrings. Minnie Bruce did not have pierced ears, but she loved wearing clip-on earrings, and she had a huge collection for all occasions. As I stood with colleagues and friends looking at the trays of her earrings, we reminisced about Minnie Bruce: her colorful scarves, stylish hats, smile, laugh, wise advice, revolutionary writing, and activism. We talked about the electric energy in the air in her classes, readings, writing, activism, and her stories about growing up in Alabama. I carried away a pair of Minnie Bruce's simple silver spiral earrings, which symbolize to me her beautiful, revolutionary spirit and life that touched and fortified so many of us for the struggles ahead.

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The Power of Narrative: A Memorial for Dr. Minnie Bruce Pratt

C.C. Hendricks

C.C. Hendricks is an Assistant Professor and Director of First-Year Writing in the Communication Arts & Sciences department and core faculty member of the Women's and Gender Studies department at the University of New Hampshire. She is a mom and feminist rhetorician. She has held Writing Program Administrative positions and teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Rhetoric and Composition and English Education. C.C. has also served as a consultant in writing centers and a Writing Across the Curriculum program. Her work has appeared in Peitho, The WAC Journal, Across the Disciplines, Composition Studies, Peitho, and edited collections. She is currently working on a book-length recovery project of Diane di Prima's feminist rhetoric.

Keywords: Pratt; memorial; feminist; narrative; creative non-fiction; voice

I met Dr. Pratt in the summer of 2016 during the first year of my doctoral coursework in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program at Syracuse University. That summer, Dr. Pratt was teaching an Advanced Creative Nonfiction (CNF) course. Reluctant to take any course that required me to write personally, I was not going to pass up the opportunity to take a class with the Minnie Bruce Pratt. I was already an admirer of her work and activism and countless graduate students in my program had described her course as "transformative." In fact, many discovered their dissertation project in her course. I entered the first class meeting a bit skeptical of CNF but eager to learn from a legend. Dr. Pratt slowly ate away at my skepticism with daily writing exercises that amounted to hundreds of pages over the eight-week course. Scared to be vulnerable or to share something that would out me as the impostor I felt like, my writing remained performative over the first few weeks. I began the course trying to write in a way that I thought would impress Dr. Pratt.

As a working class, first-generation woman in the South, I was raised to not share my dirty laundry or negative feelings with people I didn't know very well. Everything is always "fine" in front of "company." With direct but generous guidance, Dr. Pratt helped me see the power in my own voice, the value in my own story, and how to confront my own limitations and biases as a writer and reader. By the end of the course, I had used the daily writing exercises and larger assignments to begin to process the crushing grief I felt after my father's death the year before. In addition to the personal impact of taking her course, Dr. Pratt helped me unlearn the fabricated boundaries between research and narrative, theory and reflection, and academic and personal writing that I had been taught. The reading, writing, and collaborating I did in her course irrevocably changed the scholar and teacher I am today. Once staunchly resistant to personal narrative, reflection and feminist storytelling are central in all my scholarship today. Looking back at my final

reflection from the course now, I feel overwhelmingly grateful to have been able to study with her: “Writing in this way seems more powerful than I ever imagined. My own identity as a ‘strong woman’ is being tested by my surveys into the past, into my memories. Writing like this becomes a way for me to parse through the outside voices to truly find and exercise my own.”

It’s impossible to capture what we’ve lost with Dr. Pratt’s passing, just as it’s impossible to capture her lasting impact on so, so many. Rest in power, Dr. Pratt, and thank you, truly thank you, for everything.

Articles

The Uses of Fatigue: Invitations, Impatience, and Investments

Tamika L. Carey, Ph.D

Tamika L. Carey is an Associate Professor of English and an NEH Daniels Family Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Virginia. She is the author of *Rhetorical Healing: The Reeducation of Contemporary Black Womanhood* (SUNY 2016) and other essays on risk, self-help culture and media, and activism.

Keywords: Fatigue narratives, homecoming, feminist futures, listening, labor

This is a modified version of the 2023 Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference keynote address.

Permit me to open with a few quotes. The first two are definitions of which you may be familiar. They are:

> Fatigue, a noun referring to extreme tiredness resulting from mental or physical exertion or illness.
>
> Weariness, a noun describing a reluctance to see or experience any more of something. (Dictionary.com)

The next quote is the opening of a recent advice essay in The Guardian. The letter writer states:

> Ever since I made the conscious decision to live my life fully as a feminist, it has been fraught with conflict and stress. I'm determined to make a mental note of any discrimination against my gender, to open my eyes and stop editing out instances — on the television, internet, radio, and day-to-day life — of women being treated differently to men… My conflict and stress don't originate in interactions or arguments with others, but from the mental effort of attempting not to live in a dreamlike state, ignoring evidence everywhere, all the time. ("I Live as a Feminist")

This passage is the opening to an advice essay entitled “I Live as a Feminist, but I’m Tired of Being Furious All the Time.” In response to this dilemma, the columnist advises the letter writer to: “stop raging,” because

> Solutions are not found when we are incensed… We all want a new world that’s far more female-shaped. That dream will only be realized using predominantly feminine qualities, such as reason, patience, endurance, and emotional sensitivity. For that we need to be calm, rational, and ready to listen, not in a state of rage. (“I Live as a Feminist.”)

A confession: in one draft of this address, I dragged this columnist and what I considered to be her antiquated advice. If there is an emotion that has characterized feminism and – more specifically – the feminisms enacted among people of color and marginalized communities, it has been rage. June Jordan once confessed that the police officers who beat and disfigured a childhood friend “hardened her” and pushed her into a “place of rage” (Parmar). bell hooks observed that “sharing rage” fosters cross-generational alliances among those groups “seeking ways to be…self-determined” and participate in…. [political] struggle” (hooks 19-20). Susan Stryker maintained that in “rebirthing [their] rage… rage rebirthed [them]” in her work on trans-life (237). Brittany Cooper has helped us understand when this emotion requires what she refers to as “homegirl interventions” (5). More recently, Hil Malatino extracted an “Infrapolitical Ethics of Care,” or a “reliance on a community of friends to protect and defend you from violence, to witness and mirror one another’s rage, in empathy, and to support one another during and after the breaking that accompanies rage” through their analysis of CeCe McDonald’s letters (130). Rage has been integral to the political self-actualization of most feminists. Indeed, for some of us, rage is our brand.

Eventually, I realized that I had encountered a version of *feminist fatigue* last spring during a conversation with the undergraduates in my Black Women’s Rhetoric class. When they fell silent during our session on Ida B. Wells’ rhetoric in “Lynch Law” and I tried to coax them back into the conversation, a brave young woman spoke up and said, “we’re tired of this.”

“Tired of what?” I asked.

“It’s overwhelming,” the student said. “It’s depressing.” Others nodded in agreement. “Why do we always have to look at the past? It’s hard enough being a Black woman here *right now*.”

I don’t want to call this a failure on my part, but I had already stumbled with this class. On the first day of the semester during my customary reading of Pearl Cleage’s “Why I Write” essay, one young woman teared up and another became visibly tense when we got to the passage where Cleage describes a mass shooting. In my efforts to begin the class as I always had, I did not consider the residual trauma many of them were experiencing in the wake of the November 2022 shooting on our campus. My choice to prioritize business as usual had set the stage for

them to shut down.

The contrast between public discussions of *feminist fatigue* and the one I witnessed in my classroom is an inspiration for this address. While I imagine we're all feeling the brunt of pandemic-related issues, inflation, anti-immigration legislation, attacks on queer and trans communities, political corruption and insurgency, gun violence, and anti-woke curricular initiatives alongside our standard diet of harassment, misogyny, misogynoir, patriarchy, the "isms'' and the "phobias," I consider my undergrads' confession a cause for concern. If we can agree that feminism is a project undergirded by hope (Glenn 2018) and an insistence on justice, what are we to make when a group of prospective feminists and young rhetoricians are already exhibiting apathy and overwhelm? What are feminists' *ways of making it* (Balliff, Davis, and Mountford) in *times like these?* And, finally, how can we collectively imagine feminist futures when so many of us are tired?

My answer is that conversations about fatigue invite us to refine our approaches to listening, to deepen our understanding of relationships, and to invest in reparative practices. Black women and femmes hold no monopoly on exhaustion, but we have been talking about fatigue for a while. In the past decade, we've built upon the concept of "Racial Battle Fatigue" to include what Menah Pratt calls "racial and gender battle fatigue." We have seen the emergence of groups like the Nap Ministry, and the publication of critical works such as Chanequa Walker Barnes' *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength,* Marita Golden's *The Strong Black Woman: How a Myth Endangers the Physical and Mental Health of Black Women,* April Baker Bell's "For Loretta: A Black Woman Literacy Scholar's Journey to Prioritizing Self-Preservation," and public-facing works like Tricia Hersey's *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto.* This is but a small sampling of a robust set of discourses on exhaustion happening among and about this group by Black feminist and womanist scholars that too often remain under-tapped for their broader insights about the nature of labor, work, and participation. In that vein, I devote the remainder of this address to identifying how fatigue among members of this group can be made *usable* to us as logics of participation, methods of disruption, and pathways to return.

"Truth is I'm Tired": Fatigue as an Invitation to Listen

The first quotes I cited containing definitions of "fatigue" and "weariness" are attempts to pay homage to the late Audre Lorde, whose essay "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" is the other inspiration for this address. Lorde delivered "The Uses of Anger" as the 1981 National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Conference keynote. By that time in her career, she had already published several poetry collections, helped to create Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, and taught at Tougaloo, Lehman, and John Jay College where she fought for the creation of a Black Studies program. Although Lorde conceded that her position as an employed faculty member and one-half of a two-parent household gave her some economic stability, she

used the occasion to call out NWSA's commitment to equity, noting that the organization's refusal to waive registration fees "for poor women and women of Color who wished to present and conduct workshops" undercut the liberatory potential of the conference's theme of "responding to racism" ("Uses of Anger" 126). Lorde lists various racial and gender microaggressions she experienced as some of the sources of her anger, but she concludes that anger can be transformational because it's "loaded with information and energy," and, when "focused with precision, it can become a power source of energy serving progress and change" (127).

In "The Shape of My Impact," Alexis Pauline Gumbs informs us that when Lorde was diagnosed with cancer a few years later, she was not only denied medical leave, but she had to turn down a prestigious fellowship at Cornell University because Ithaca's climate was too cold for her battle with the illness. Moreover, Hunter College, the school Lorde would join just months after delivering her NWSA keynote, ultimately denied her requests to teach during the summer so she might live in climates more accommodating to her health concerns the rest of the year. Never mind that Hunter College's English Department would later hold a symposium to honor Lorde after her death. At this point, the institution was inflexible about how Lorde was to undertake the labor they expected of her (Gumbs).

I relate to these aspects of Lorde's career because at this point my situation looks different today than it did in October 2007 when I attended my first *Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference* at the University of Arkansas, Little Rock. I am now a tenured associate professor at an institution considered to be elite by some. Back then, however, I was a graduate student eager to present on Septima Clark, excited to meet fellow peers and friends that would push my thinking for years to come, thrilled to sit in a hotel lobby and chat with Dr. Royster, Dr. Logan, and the late Dr. Joyce Middleton, and unaware of how long it would take to pay off the credit card debt necessary to attend these events despite having generous mentors who let me room with them. I left that conference *invigorated and invested*. And so, when I took my first position as an assistant professor teaching a 4/4 load, I attended five conferences in less than two years, served on national committees, prepped five classes in four semesters, and published. And then, two years later, when I moved on to my next institution, a place where I would stay for six years, I dug even deeper into my reserves, attending at least twelve conferences and undertaking six campus visits, sitting on yearly hiring committees too often as the requisite person of color, prepping and piloting at least nine new courses, surviving two different tenure hearings, serving on executive boards, chairing committees, and planning one wedding and one funeral. I don't share these last details to elicit sympathy or to downplay the good outcomes I have experienced. The truth is, though, I'm tired because the road from Little Rock to Atlanta has been an exhausting one.

I am not alone here.

- A queer historian who has spent the first decade of their career assembling a ground-

breaking archive and fighting to secure funding to house it receives an email soliciting their participation on yet another organization's Awards Committee. When they respond explaining they have just finished their third committee appointment in five years, they are told "but we need people like you to do this work."

- The sole woman of color on the editorial board of a scholarly journal receives an urgent request to write a piece for the journal's late summer/early fall 2020 issue. When the scholar tells the editor that she is committed to other projects and has *no new work* she can contribute at that time, the editor immediately writes back requesting the names of other scholars "who can provide the Black perspective." When the scholar sends the names of two other scholars who may be able to contribute, the editor circles back again and states: "I assume you can at least find the time to review these essays."

- An energetic young scholar agrees to become a section editor for an established journal despite teaching a 4/4 and carrying a considerable load of other service obligations. In less than two years, the scholar steps down from the position. When asked about her decision, she confesses "There was *no structure* in place, and I was just tired."

- An award-winning interdisciplinary scholar and researcher arrives two days early to the university where she will co-lead a week-long summer institute seminar. As she is catching up with her co-leader and finalizing their plans for leading the seminar, she begins to cry, saying: "I am tired. So tired."

- An associate professor and journal founder posts an apology on social media to the people to whom she "owes something," explaining that she has been overwhelmed and unable to deal with all of the obligations.

Patricia Hill Collins' (2016) work on *Black Feminist Thought* - and specifically her discussion of oppositional knowledges – arose from her study of the labor exploitation Black women experienced. Krista Ratcliffe's theory of "rhetorical listening" and her work to figure out how to "stand under" discourses developed as a response to the resentment and resistance Lorde's critique and truth-telling inspired among some white readers (Ratcliffe 205). While I am sure many of us benefit from these valuable concepts, feminist rhetoricians still need frameworks to identify the kinds of assumptions, logics, and discourses that position Black women and other typically under-represented populations adversely within these spheres of labor and service. Said differently, in addition to "standing under" the discourses of others, how do we account for the discourses that inform how we "stand among" each other?

Fatigue narratives like these become *usable* when they push us to listen for what I con-

sider as the ***"seat at the table"*** logics that position some of us for burnout and make inordinate labor requests seem reasonable. As Sara Ahmed observed in *On Being Included,* the longstanding challenge to creating diverse and equitable working environments is a compulsory atmosphere of "happiness" where workers, and particularly members of under-represented groups, feel that they are expected to appear agreeable or perform gratitude for the opportunity to labor (2012). Conversely, as Carmen Kynard explains in "All I Need is One Mic," there is a distinction between the "job," or the compensatory tasks or acts of service individuals undertake, and the "work," or the labor that should emerge from a person's convictions and commitments, that is too often confused in these labor conditions. "Seat at the table" logics are the claims and assumptions about work, duty, and membership that Black women, and truly any number of historically underrepresented groups, internalize and navigate that lead to such confusion.

Three of the prevalent logics that circulate in our contemporary moment are: 1) the scarcity/gratitude logic which says "there are limited seats at this table, so you must demonstrate willingness and gratitude to be there"; 2) the "*when and where I /you enter"* logic which says: "I am/you are the only one of your group at this table, so I/you must represent for my/your community;" and, finally, 3) the "change is slow and institutions are firmly built" logic which says you "must put in present work for future gain." The latter is a particularly potent logic that not only makes change and accountability subjective or invisible but can also absolve those who are inhibiting progress of said accountability by amplifying the message that it is hard to undo tradition. Some of these logics have originated as survival mindsets designed to protect groups attempting to enter previously closed spaces from surveillance, disappointment, or exclusion. In these ways, they are not altogether dangerous, and they do not prevent individuals from being vocal or critical during a working or collaborative effort. These logics simply become dangerous when they justify unfair critiques or inordinate expectations placed on others.

Let's consider again the narrative about the scholar of color who was approached to write for the special issue. While it is likely that this woman joined the board to help promote more diversity in the journal, the editor does not acknowledge the lack of representation on their board but expects her to perform multiple forms of labor. In this instance, the scholar ultimately chose not to undertake the labor expected of them, but "seat at the table" logics enable us to hear the lines of thought and largely unspoken messages at work when underrepresented groups feel obligated to take on tasks *time and time again.* These logics also highlight the mechanisms that contribute to the state of the Black Rhetorical Condition, or what Elaine Richardson describes as a state of being "desired and devalued" (33). Imagine if we, a body of feminists and rhetoricians, built these forms of fatigue and these logics into our approaches to mentoring, organization, and engagement. Imagine if we thought about the assumptions that we internalize about the duties we should uphold or the labor expectations we project onto others. Imagine if we thought more about rest as we are thinking about representation.

"Get Somebody Else to Do It": Impatience as Resignation

Fatigue does not always look like lethargy. Sometimes it looks like confrontation or disruption. Such was the case when Civil Rights Attorney and activist Nekima Levy Armstrong interrupted a February 2022 press conference about Minneapolis Police Officer's shooting of Amir Locke, a 22-year-old Black man who was asleep on a sofa when officers entered Locke's cousin's apartment thinking they had located a suspect in a different crime. Locke did not survive the shooting and the protesters and city leaders who spoke out on the murder condemned the police's use of a no-knock warrant. When the city's mayor and Police Department officials took to the podium during a press conference a few days after the subsequent protests, the Police Chief acknowledged how "everyone knows" the kinds of threats officers face and how "quickly" the officers had to make the decisions that culminated in the shooting that transpired ("Anatomy"). Minutes into the Police Chief's remarks, Levy-Armstrong – who was co-chairing a public safety task force at the time – stood up and interrupted the speaker, approaching the podium while opening her coat and facing the cameras to indicate that she did not have a weapon (see Figure 1). In the eight-minute remarks that followed, Levy-Armstrong pivots between directly addressing the mayor and the Police Chief as she calls out what she describes as the "anatomy of a cover-up," or the organizational structures and decision-making practices that enabled the Police Department to absolve themselves of responsibility in Locke's death. Exasperated, she declares that she is:

> expecting strong leadership, I'm expecting integrity, and I'm expecting accountability. You guys aren't going to waste my God damn time… I can be used to come speak the truth about what needs to happen, but when it's time to call out these inconsistencies, these inaccuracies, the lack of information, I gotta sit in the back? Or not even be invited? I'm not here for it. ("Anatomy")

In an interview with Levy-Armstrong shortly after the press conference incident, journalist Roland Martin introduced the activist by saying that she was "sick and tired" of listening to excuses ("Anatomy").

Figure 1 : Attorney and activist Natasha Levy Armstrong turning to cameras to indicate that she does not pose a threat during a February 2022 Minneapolis Police Department press conference following the shooting of Amir Locke.

Obviously, there is a difference between the service-inspired burnout I illustrated with the previous fatigue narratives and the activist burnout Levy-Armstrong articulated during the press conference. In this latter instance, fatigue becomes usable as a way of understanding how Black women rescript the terms of their working engagements and advocacy. Within her eight-minute remarks, Levy-Armstrong moves deftly through several significant rhetorical tasks. In addition to creating an opening to speak in a moment that is assumed to be closed by generic conventions and articulating her commitments and personal convictions as a civil servant and the mother of a Black son, she redirects the ethical responsibility of service back onto the city's leadership with her actual threat of quitting the working group. These moves of employing spectacle, articulating an unapologetic stance, and calling out how the working group was wasting her time are all emblematic of the *rhetorics of impatience,* or discourses and performances of urgency and exasperation used in pursuit of equity and control (Carey 2020), Black women use as forms of resistance and discipline in the interest of self-care and wellness.

As I explain in "Necessary Adjustments," these rhetorics operate as resistance against forms of *temporal hegemony,* or structures and systems that converge and push equity further and further out of reach (270). Although the Police Chief was not attempting to push or delay any particular goal away from Levy-Armstrong, her reference to the "speed" in which her officers were forced to make their decisions suggests that the chief felt licensed to rush past the questions about accountability that would understandably follow. Had Levy-Armstrong subscribed to the "seat at the table" logic that suggests change happens slowly and that it's difficult to undo traditions, she might not have been as possessive over the currency of her time or the way the city leaders seemed fine with exploiting her activism when it served their purposes. To disrupt and discipline the leaders away from these lines of thinking – lines of thinking that could result in the loss of a life – Levy Armstrong brings her "whole self" (Lorde) to this moment, embodying indignation and calling for reciprocity. Fatigue channeled as impatience becomes usable when it shows us how people like Levy Armstrong reject any attempt to make them complicit in their own oppression or the disregard of the communities for whom they labor. At this point, resignation is the only option.

We will not all end up on the frontlines of efforts against state violence, nor will we all take active roles in racial and other social justice campaigns. As feminists, however, the minimal amount of work we should feel compelled to undertake is the task of learning to see, hear, and respond accordingly to the calls for accountability rhetoricians like Karma Chavez (2013), Eric Darnell Pritchard (2017), and Elliot Tetreault (2018) have made to advise us on how to responsibly show up for each other in our coalitional work. Imagine if the pedagogies we developed in our classroom spaces amplified these moments of impatience and fatigue as exemplars of activism rather than leaving them unengaged or misread as forms of incivility. Imagine if we did more to cultivate the kinds of emotional literacies necessary to stand among and stand up for each other in crisis.

"No Ways Tired": Fatigue as a Call to Invest in Homecoming

I began this address by identifying *feminist fatigue* and how I had observed it, but I want to close by returning to the definition of weariness, or the reluctance to see or experience any more of something. The case studies I have discussed are extensions of my current projects on urgency and risk, but it is the project I did on healing that has yet to let me go. That project has taught me that too often we skip the stage of grief that happens between trauma - by way of microaggressions or bigger systems of violence - and healing. The impulse to rush back to "business as usual" is understandable if we have the fear that taking time for ourselves will result in us giving up or falling apart, but it can be shortsighted when some of us are still weary. Well before the pandemic, I began to notice how many dynamic feminist scholars and or women of color have experienced have experienced fights with cancer. Indeed, I have worked alongside some of them and consider them among my dearest friends. Again, I don't share these details lightly. Instead, I am convinced by scholars like Jenifer Nash (2022) who writes of "slow loss" and Black feminist endurance that we must sit with and grieve how heavy the weight of fatigue has been on us, particularly on women and people of color.

Yet, as we've gathered here at Spelman College, an institution with an esteemed history and a beacon within an HBCU culture, I am inspired by the concept of a homecoming and how our opening session between Dr. Bachelor-Robinson and Dr. Royster launched us into this conference. Growing up in the Black Church, I understand homecomings as reunions and gatherings that should replenish us. As someone who studies healing though, I also see the concept of homecoming as a potentially radical reparative project. In her recent book *Homecoming: Overcome Fear and Trauma to Reclaim Your Whole, Authentic Self,* psychologist Thema Bryant explains that fatigue is a sign of disconnection, an indicator that a person is out of touch, burdened down, and cut off from the sources that give them life. Among the solutions that Bryant offers is a project of reparenting. The logic is that we can extend to ourselves the care and support we have not always received. Ideally, these intentional practices will enable us to counteract weariness by being compassionate to ourselves first.

As I close, I want to imagine several *homecoming* practices we might invest in as a coalition. Imagine if we made the restorative circles and other inclusive efforts intentionally built into this conference part of the coalition's legacy. Imagine if the organizers of the next conference *kept that same energy*[i] as the organizers of this year's conference exhibited and built in mechanisms for the rest and repair of their attendees. Also, imagine if we did more by way of recognition and self-actualization to combat the harmful "seat of the table" logics that position so many of us for exhaustion, perhaps through compiling or archiving fatigue narratives such as the ones I shared. Imagine if we as a coalition invested in or partnered with restorative training efforts such as Beth Godbee and Candace Epps-Robertson's recently developed "Pathways Through Burnout" cohort program to stop the trend where we suffer through fatigue in "isolation" by joining

spaces for “discussion, reflection, processing, and guidance” (“Pathways”). Imagine if we remixed the logic that change is slow and we rebuilt ourselves with the affirmation that our work, as a coalition, as scholars and teachers, as feminists, womanists, and as citizens, *is and has always been* necessary and that our presence is valuable. Imagine if we took rest in the fact that even as so many of us are tired, we are still here.

Thank you.

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Reimagining Sponsorship: Recovery Work, Institutional Sponsorship, and the Nearly Forgotten Rev. Mary A. Will

Holland Prior

Abstract: This article forwards a framework of *institutional sponsorship*, a recovery methodology designed for historical figures that have eluded existing recovery efforts. Grounded in Brandt's concept of sponsorship, institutional sponsorship is an analytical framework that is not entirely dependent upon a figure's words but rather locates a historical figure's rhetorical presence through their relationship with an institution. Institutional sponsorship employs a three-pronged approach: embracing ephemeral evidence, exploring power dynamics, and analyzing the reciprocal impact between the figure and institution. This model is illustrated with Rev. Mary Will, a nineteenth-century clergywoman who, despite her unique and tumultuous career, has been nearly forgotten.

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Keywords: ephemera, institutional sponsorship, Mary A. Will, power, preaching, recovery methodologies, social circulation, sponsorship, women's ordination, women preachers

Epigraph

> "We pray the Lord of the harvest, that he may send laborers into his harvest, that are not afraid to unite their labors with that of a woman."
>
> —Rev. Mary A. Will, The American Wesleyan, 20 February 1861
>
> "We are glad to say, that our church never has been so well governed under any pastor, as it has been under sister Will. We think it can no longer be said, that a church cannot be well governed by a woman. There never was a mother who watched over an infant with greater interest, than sister Will has over this church."
>
> —S.A. Stock, The American Wesleyan, 12 June 1861
>
> "Resolved, that the action of … ordaining a female was unscriptural."
>
> —Wesleyan Methodist Connection, "Book of Minutes," June 1864
>
> "Resolved, that the action of … deposing sister M. A. Will was irregular and illegal."
>
> —Wesleyan Methodist Connection, "Book of Minutes," October 1875

Introduction

In 1994 when Cheryl Glenn published "Sex, Lies, and Manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric," she called for feminist historians of rhetoric to "re-map" rhetorical history by writing women into the rhetorical canon (180). Glenn went on to offer a first step in this feminist challenge to the history of rhetoric by arguing for the inclusion of Aspasia of Miletus—a contemporary of Socrates, Plato, Pericles, and other classical figures—in the rhetorical canon. No primary sources from Aspasia have survived, but Glenn nonetheless reconstructs her life and rhetorical impact through secondary and tertiary sources, drawing a parallel between the credibility of recovery work on Aspasia and that of Socrates: "We know about Aspasia much the same way we know about Socrates: from secondary sources, for neither of their work exists in primary sources" (182). Soon after, Susan Jarratt and Rory Ong published "Aspasia: Rhetoric, Gender, and Colonial Ideology," which employs similar recovery methods to consider Aspasia's role as a Sophist and argue that "she marks the intersection of discourses on gender and colonialism, production and reproduction, rhetoric and philosophy"—making Aspasia a figure of "profound importance" for historical scholarship (10). Since then, feminist scholars in the history of rhetoric have continued to advance recovery efforts and made incredible strides in writing women and other traditionally disenfranchised groups into the rhetorical tradition, and more possibilities for recovery work remain.

Yet, there is still more work to be done. Existing recovery efforts have largely focused on historical figures for whom secondary or tertiary accounts exist, meaning some historical figures remain elusive because we have so little or no account of the figure's words. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch would refer to these figures as "*silhouetted*, if not altogether invisible, historical figures" ("Social Circulation" 175, emphasis in original). While silhouetted figures are everywhere to be found, the rhetorical tradition of preaching is rife with such silhouetted figures, particularly women preachers. Those women preachers who have entered the public consciousness and have crept into the rhetorical canon—women like Phoebe Palmer and Frances Willard—do so because of the relative celebrity they enjoyed as advocates for women during their careers. The higher cultural visibility that women preachers like Palmer and Willard attained led to the preservation of their sermons, letters, and other primary source materials that would enable future scholars to study and analyze their rhetorical impact. But what about the other women preachers, those who were less noticeable but no less significant? Women like Rev. Mary A. Will, a nineteenth-century Wesleyan-Methodist clergywoman in Illinois and the first known woman to be ordained, deposed, and then restored to ministry? Attempts to study and analyze Will via existing recovery methodologies have been unsuccessful because so few of her words were preserved, leaving very few primary, secondary, or tertiary accounts behind for analysis. This dearth of evidence surrounding Will reveals the need for expanded recovery efforts. Will and women preachers like her have shaped the communities around them and kept the tradition of women preachers alive for centuries, but most have been largely forgotten and have become silhouetted figures.

Recognizing the need to recover silhouetted figures and other marginalized voices, Nan Johnson issued a challenge to feminist scholars in the history of rhetoric in her introduction to *Peitho*'s 2015 celebratory issue: "how can we widen the view even further?" (15). Johnson's call is a recognition of both the incredible work feminist historiographers have done to recover marginalized voices over the past few decades and the need for even more innovative means to recover and elevate women's voices in the rhetorical tradition.

This article responds to Johnson's call by forwarding a new framework of *institutional sponsorship*, a recovery methodology that is not entirely dependent upon a figure's words. By reimagining Deborah Brandt's notion of sponsorship through a feminist rhetorical lens, institutional sponsorship emerges an analytical framework that locates a silhouetted historical figure's rhetorical presence through their relationship with the institution(s) surrounding their lives and careers. In forwarding the institutional sponsorship framework, I have two primary objectives. First, I hope to invigorate further conversations about the utility of sponsorship for wider application in feminist rhetorical scholarship. Second, I aim to theorize and demonstrate institutional sponsorship as one such application that serves as a method for recovering marginalized voices.

The institutional sponsorship framework employs a three-pronged approach to map and locate a silhouetted figure's presence: embracing the ephemeral evidence pertaining to the figure, exploring the power dynamics between the figure and the institution, and analyzing the reciprocal impact between the figure and the institution. I begin by contextualizing institutional sponsorship in existing literature and then explain and illustrate the three-pronged framework with Rev. Mary A. Will. Even though Will had a unique and tumultuous career as a clergywoman in nineteenth-century America, she has been almost completely overlooked in the tradition of Methodist women preachers. My attempts to study and analyze Will via existing recovery methodologies were unsuccessful and revealed the need for this new institutional sponsorship framework, as Will left very few words behind and only glimpses of her have survived in traditional archives. Despite the scarcity of primary, secondary, and tertiary accounts that have survived Will, I use institutional sponsorship to analyze Will's relationship with her denomination and demonstrate how Will's rhetorical presence shaped the Wesleyan Methodist legacy of women's ordination.

Toward a Feminist Rhetorical View of Sponsorship

In their chapter in Laurie Gries and Collin Gifford Brooke's *Circulation, Writing, and Rhetoric*, Royster and Kirsch call for the deployment of social circulation in our digital age to encourage a new type of analysis. Social circulation, as explained by Royster and Kirsch, is a feminist rhetorical practice that "invokes connections among past, present, and future in the sense that the 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" (*Feminist* 23). Analysis grounded in social circulation, then, looks for impact that ripples across time and may transcend

the boundaries of traditional archives. As Royster and Kirsch explain,

> This type of analysis helps us reach for new interpretive paradigms for *silhouetted*, if not altogether invisible, historical figures and locate a rhetorical presence, rather than absence, for them at the convergence of images, texts, forms, formats, and perspectives. At this convergence we gain a capacity to create a social historiography, a mapping of visibility, and a sense of mobility within social space as we learn to narrate consequence, impact, and achievement in a more fully textured way. ("Social Circulation" 175, emphasis in original)

I suggest that reimagining sponsorship as an interpretive paradigm that stems from social circulation offers new possibilities for mapping the visibility of marginalized and silhouetted voices.

Such a reimagination is already in close alignment with Deborah Brandt's original conception of sponsorship. When Brandt first published "Sponsors of Literacy" in 1998, she was addressing the need to move beyond a narrow focus on individual literacy development and examine how an individual's development was shaped and influenced by larger, systemic forces. Brandt formally defines sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" ("Sponsors" 166). Brandt expands her exploration of sponsorship relationships in her 2001 book *Literacy in American Lives*, and commenting further on the nature of sponsorship, she explains:

> Sponsors are embodied in the materials of reading and writing, the institutional aegises and rationales under which learning is carried out, the histories by which practices arrive at the scenes of learning, the causes to which teachers and learners put their efforts, and the advantages, both direct and indirect, that stand to be won by the sponsors themselves. …Sponsors can be benefactors but also extortionists—and sometimes both in the same form. (*Literacy* 193)

Put another way, sponsorship relationships are complex and nuanced. Sponsors possess power and exert ideological pressure, and a sponsor's impact upon the sponsored may be helpful, harmful, or both. By analyzing sponsorship relationships scholars can locate those connections across time and space that Royster and Kirsch's practice of social circulation calls us to look for and examine.

Brandt further describes sponsorship as a way to expose the "[a]ccumulated layers" of influences that comprise the "deeply textured history" of literacy, making it a framework that not only withstands but embraces complexity and nuance ("Sponsors" 178). Rhetorical ecologies are

rife with complexity and nuance, and when we reimagine sponsorship through the feminist rhetorical lens of social circulation it becomes a means of analyzing that "convergence" of sources that Royster and Kirsch envision to surround silhouetted figures ("Social Circulation" 175).

Since its publication, Brandt's sponsorship framework has been widely applied to study literacy in a variety of contexts, from Bump Halbritter and Julie Lindquist's methodology for operationalizing discovery in scenes of literacy sponsorship to Dale Jacobs' study of Marvel comics as sponsors of multimodal literacy.[1] The complexity of these sponsorship relationships and the variety of research sites and subjects put forth by Brandt and many others in her wake serve as proof of the appeal and utility of sponsorship as an analytical framework, particularly in examining relationships between the sponsor and the sponsored. However, as chronicled by Ann M. Lawrence in her 2015 review of sponsorship literature, subsequent scholars who used Brandt's study as a model for their own research moved away from this expansive notion of sponsorship and focused only on people as sponsors. New possibilities for analysis and potential rhetorical intervention emerge when we re-engage with Brandt's original construct through a feminist rhetorical lens, particularly when we consider the "institutional aegises" that Brandt named as a site of sponsorship.

Brandt's definition of sponsors highlights the importance of looking beyond the individual to the influences that surround them, and this same concern has reverberated throughout feminist rhetorical scholarship. Through her scholarship, Brandt effectively argues that sponsors are "delivery systems" for economies of literacy and that sponsorship is "richly suggestive" as a framework for exploring these economies and their effects ("Sponsors" 167). The feminist reimagination of sponsorship I am calling for not only re-engages with Brandt's expansive conception of sponsorship but also shifts its lens from economies of literacy to rhetorical ecologies. By using sponsorship to examine rhetorical ecologies and grounding the framework in feminist rhetorical practices, scholars of rhetoric can offer new insights into people, situations, events, and interactions by identifying the sponsors—human or nonhuman, overt or subtle—that possess or exert power in a given rhetorical situation and then examining the relationships between the sponsors and the sponsored. For the present purpose, my interest is in developing an ecological view of the sponsorship relationship between an institution and a silhouetted historical figure. This sponsorship relationship offers feminist scholars in the history of rhetoric a new way to recover silhouetted voices that existing recovery methodologies have not yet been able to access.

1 To gain a broader understanding of the breadth of sponsorship research in literacy studies, see Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's study of computer-related literacy in Literate Lives in the Information Age (2004); Morris Young's "Sponsoring Literacy Studies", in which he explores the sponsors influencing the field of literacy studies itself (2013); Lisa Lebduska's more troubling look at the relationship between sponsor and sponsored in "Literacy Sponsorship and the Post-9/11 GI Bill" (2014); Lisa Mastrangelo's "Community Cookbooks: Sponsors of Literacy and Community Identity," which examines how cookbook authors sponsor their local communities (2015); and Kara Poe Alexander's theorization of reciprocal sponsorship through relationships that developed between her students and local businesses during a service-learning project in "Reciprocal Literacy Sponsorship in Service-Learning Settings" (2017).

Institutional Sponsorship

Institutional sponsorship, then, is a specific form of rhetorical sponsorship that I define as an analytical framework that examines the relationship between a person and the institution(s) surrounding that person's life and career. The deployment of this institutional sponsorship framework follows a three-pronged approach: embracing ephemeral evidence, examining power dynamics, and analyzing the reciprocal impact the person and the institution had on one another. This methodological reorientation toward institutional sponsorship holds great potential for recovery work in the history of rhetoric. For the remainder of this article, I will demonstrate how a silhouetted figure's presence can be mapped and analyzed through the three-pronged institutional sponsorship framework by offering some brief biographical background and then exploring the sponsorship relationship between the silhouetted historical figure Rev. Mary A. Will and her denomination.

The Nearly Forgotten Rev. Mary A. Will

Rev. Mary A. Will was ordained in 1861 and assumed leadership of the Nora preaching circuit in northern Illinois around that time. A scant three years later in 1864, Will was stripped of her ordination and ministerial credentials on the grounds that ordaining a female was unscriptural. Her case was later brought before the church's General Conference in 1875, at which time Will's deposition was declared "irregular and illegal" and she was (surprisingly) reinstated into ministry. As both a rhetorical scholar and an ordained woman, I believe Will's story is remarkable in both its novelty and complexity. Will navigated predominately male spaces and found both success and opposition, and her story may also help us better understand the struggles other women and marginalized groups face. Yet, despite her unusual ministerial career, Will has remained a silhouetted figure, a mere whisper in the Wesleyan-Methodist archives, and very little about her personal life is known. Will's rhetorical presence can only be recovered and analyzed through the lens of institutional sponsorship.

Will may be nearly forgotten, but her impact upon her denomination—the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America—has rippled throughout subsequent generations. By analyzing the traces of Will that remain through the three-pronged institutional sponsorship framework—embracing ephemeral evidence, examining power dynamics, and analyzing the reciprocal impact—I examine Will's rhetorical presence and consider how Will shaped the Wesleyan Methodist legacy of women's ordination.

Embracing Ephemeral Evidence: Locating Mary Will in the Ripple Effects

While the excellent strides feminist scholars have made in developing recovery methodologies have enabled many marginalized figures to be written into the rhetorical tradition, some figures do not fit into these methodological frameworks because we have minimal or no accounts

of the figure's words. I argue that when we have little or no primary, secondary, or tertiary accounts of a figure's words—as is the case with Mary Will—we can use the institutional sponsorship framework to study the figure's rhetorical impact through the ripple effects the person left upon a given institution. These ripple effects are what queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz would call the *ephemera* or "invisible evidence" that is located in intangibles like performance, emotion, and story (10). Ephemera includes "those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself" (10). In other words, ephemera is not the silhouetted figure or direct evidence from the figure but is instead the impact the figure has made upon the institution.

Though the institutional sponsorship framework can certainly be used in contemporary application and analysis, institutional sponsorship is ideal for recovery work because it is *not* a means of examining a figure individually (e.g., a focused analysis of a person's journals or private papers). When a person has left few or no papers, letters, or words behind—either through primary sources or the kinds of secondary and tertiary sources that motivated Glenn's recovery of Aspasia—even established recovery methods are quickly stretched. Institutional sponsorship, by contrast, is less concerned with a dearth of surviving words from a historical figure than with the figure's relationship to a particular institution. And the traces of this relationship are located in the ephemera. Ephemeral evidence of this nature, Muñoz argues, "grants entrance and access to those who have been locked out of official histories" (9), and institutional sponsorship offers a way to locate a person's rhetorical presence by analyzing and interpreting the ephemeral evidence to reveal the relationship between the person and the institution. This ephemeral lens is useful for analyzing Mary Will because very little traditional evidence remains to offer insight into Mary Will's life and career. Glimpses of Will remain only in government records, minutes from denominational meetings, and a few brief status updates about her church that were published in her denomination's weekly newspaper, *The American Wesleyan*.

Mary Will was ordained by the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America (now known as the Wesleyan Church), a small Methodist denomination that was formed in 1843. The larger Methodist church in the United States was embroiled in a debate over slavery at that time, and the pro-abolition wing of the church branched off and established itself as the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America. In their early days, the Wesleyans had considered themselves "beacons in a darkened world" (Stephens 164). They identified with the radical reformers of their day, fighting for abolition and the promise of a new social order.

This social reform mentality was seen most clearly in 1848 when the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls, NY became the site of the first Women's Rights Convention in the country, and ephemeral evidence suggests the possibility that a young Mary Will had a connection with the Seneca Falls congregation. Genealogical records indicate that Mary Will was born in the state of New York in 1821, with her maiden name appearing with the spelling variations "Salsbury" and

"Salisbury" across records. Records from the Chapel in Seneca Falls indicate that a Rev. Samuel Salsbury/Salisbury served as the pastor there from 1843 to 1847 and then again from 1870 to 1872 (National Park Service). Samuel Salsbury/Salisbury was also the president at the 1867 Wesleyan-Methodist General Conference. Surviving evidence can neither confirm nor deny a familial connection between Mary and Samuel—perhaps he was her father, uncle, brother, or other relation—but these ephemeral traces suggest that Mary was likely immersed in the social reform-minded Wesleyan-Methodist community as she grew up and would have been aware of the women's rights movement that burst to national visibility at Seneca Falls. In 1853, a few years after the Women's Rights Convention, the founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America, Rev. Luther Lee, presided over the ordination of Antoinette Brown, one of the first women to be ordained in the United States. Less than a decade later, Rev. Mary A. Will was ordained by the Illinois District of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection in 1861, making her the first woman to be ordained within the fledgling denomination.

Will's motivations for entering ministry are unclear, but the ephemera surrounding Will offers some insights. Census records indicate that Will married her husband Henry "H.R." Will, a Canadian citizen, during her teen years, and gave birth to their two daughters—Sophia and Matilda—while the young family was living in Canada. In 1848 the Wills returned to the US, taking up residence on a farm in Hanover, Cook County, Illinois. By the time of the 1860 census, Mary and H.R.—now empty nesters—had moved roughly 100 miles southwest to the Hennepin Township in Putnam County, Illinois, where H.R.'s profession was listed as a "Wes. Meth. Clergyman." Denominational records show that both Mary and H.R. were ordained by the regional Illinois Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, and that the Wills relocated to Nora, Illinois in late 1860. Pieced together, census data and denominational records suggest that the Wills entered into ordained ministry and moved to Nora for Mary to take charge of the Wesleyan-Methodist preaching circuit there following the previous pastor's departure. This move would mean Mary Will was not only the first woman to be ordained but also the first woman to be officially recognized as a pastor and given a pastoral appointment within the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. Put another way, the ephemeral evidence reveals that Will was the first woman to hold a formal leadership position within her institution.

It was a common practice for Wesleyan-Methodist pastors at the time to send periodic updates to the denomination's newspaper, *The American Wesleyan*, and Mary Will published a few such updates in early 1861. Will's updates are brief and written with a positive tone, but her update published on February 20, 1861 offers her only surviving reference to the opposition she encountered as a female minister. After recounting some details about her growing ministry in Nora, she concludes with a prayer: "We pray the Lord of the harvest, that he may send laborers into his harvest, that are not afraid to unite their labors with that of a woman, for the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few" (30). Clearly, Wesleyans had not universally adopted Rev. Luther Lee's view of women's ordination, and Will was confronted by people who were reticent

or unwilling to “unite their labors with that of a woman.” However, the exact nature of the problems she encountered remains unknown. Perhaps the challenge lay with her local congregation, perhaps with the Wesleyan Methodist institutional leadership, or perhaps both. Whatever the case, ephemeral traces indicate that Will’s ordination was revoked three years later.

How and why Will’s ordination was challenged remains unclear, but at the 1864 General Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America, the Illinois Conference’s decision to ordain her was brought under review. The committee that reviewed Will’s ordination declared “that the action of the Illinois Conference in ordaining a female was unscriptural” (209). The General Conference, however, declined to take action following the committee’s resolution and left the matter to the Illinois Conference (Haines and Haines 18). The Illinois Conference soon followed suit and deposed Will from ordained ministry, exerting their institutional power over her. This much is recorded in the official denominational minutes, but details of the conversations and wider debates that surrounded Will’s deposition were not preserved.

Will’s thoughts and actions following her deposition are also unknown. Perhaps she remained at the Nora church, continuing to minister as she had been but with H.R. stepping in as the official pastor. Perhaps she needed some time to recover from the deposition ordeal and left Nora to stay with one of her daughters for some respite. Will disappears from records for a few years following her deposition, and surviving evidence does not indicate if her retreat from visibility was forced or voluntary.

The impact of Will’s ordination and subsequent deposition on her denomination, as seen through these ephemeral traces that remain, is complex. Her deposition came near the end of the American Civil War, a time when many Christian communities—including the Wesleyans—were beginning to experience an identity crisis. As historian Randall J. Stephens observes, “post-war Wesleyans longed for a miraculous, old-time, unadorned faith, free from worldliness and corruption,” and the end of the Civil War to the beginning of the twentieth century marked a period of transition away from their focus on reform to a more conservative outlook that emphasized personal holiness and entire sanctification (169). The result was a loss of the radical hope that had driven the abolitionist reformers, and Wesleyans faded from larger national conversations as they abandoned “the idea that the world could be fundamentally reordered by the cross and through human effort” (Stephens 173). Whereas the Wesleyan-Methodist founder Rev. Luther Lee had advocated for women’s ordination and other reforms with enthusiasm, Mary Will’s generation of Wesleyans had endured a civil war and were struggling to redefine themselves.

By locating Will in and through the ephemera that surrounds her, we see more clearly how her ministerial career was shaped by historical, social, and denominational events both before and during her career. Will is the first of many Wesleyan women who would eventually be ordained in the centuries to come, but her complex relationship with the Wesleyan Methodist Connection is

reflective of the complex history of women's ordination in the United States.

Examining Power Dynamics: Mary Will's Pastoral Ethos

The second pillar of institutional sponsorship is an examination of the power dynamics between a person and an institution. Like Brandt's original sponsorship framework, institutional sponsorship is grounded in power. Under Brandt's definition of sponsorship, power is the key characteristic a sponsor possesses, and the sponsor benefits from exercising their power. However, in the institutional sponsorship framework, the power evinced between a person and an institution *may* be more nuanced than a blanket statement that the sponsor possesses power and benefits when that power is exerted. While this imbalanced power dynamic is often true in institutional sponsorship relationships, it is also possible that the power dynamic is more fluid and can shift over time. Institutions generally possess and exert more power than any one person, yet individual people like Mary Will can and have wielded complex and often fraught forms of influence over a wide range of institutions.

The institutional sponsorship approach investigates who was able to exert power in a given situation and how that power was expressed. Sometimes power is overt and visible, and sometimes power is seen through scars left upon the person, the institution, or the surrounding landscape. To explore such power dynamics, the institutional sponsorship framework asks two main questions. First, *Whose accounts and records were preserved and what is missing?* Or, in contemporary application, *Who is allowed to speak and who is silent?* When analyzing a historical figure, power is revealed in the surviving evidence. Institutional sponsorship considers how power dynamics influence which voices, sources, and forms of evidence were preserved and which were disregarded. Institutional sponsorship also examines how power dynamics inform who was granted and who was denied access to publications, platforms, pulpits, and more across various places in time. Second, *What sources of power do individual figures and institutions draw upon?* Institutional sponsorship looks both for traditional, visible forms of overt power (e.g., power to create policies, form governing structures, hold leadership positions) and for non-traditional, more subtle sources of power (e.g., community support, spiritual ethos) that operate within a given rhetorical situation. By wrestling with these questions and tracing power dynamics across time, institutional sponsorship participates in Royster and Kirsch's call for the deployment of social circulation in new forms of analysis. In so doing, institutional sponsorship helps to map the visibility of silhouetted figures and locate their rhetorical presence through the power they exerted and the power exerted upon them.

To begin interrogating the power dynamics between Mary Will and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, I focus on the power exerted through access to ordination. The Wesleyan Methodist Connection held the power to control and wield access to ordination. The denomination exercised this power over Will by first granting and then revoking her ordination, and they bene-

fitted from their power to control and regulate access to ordination. Later, however, the power of Will's presence would lead the denomination to restore Will's ordination. To examine these power dynamics between Will and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, I turn to the two guiding questions: Whose accounts and records were preserved and what is missing? What sources of power do individual figures and institutions draw upon?

Discussion of the first question—whose accounts and records were preserved and what is missing?—began in the previous section with the recognition that very few of Mary Will's words have been preserved. No surviving records reveal how Will reacted to her ordination and deposition, and the Wesleyan Methodist newspaper, *The American Wesleyan*, is noticeably silent regarding wider reactions to Will's ordination and deposition. Will also seems to have been denied access to the review of her own ordination. Nothing in the records and minutes from the 1864 General Conference that overturned her ordination indicates that Will was present or invited to contribute to the conversation in any way. Whether Will was intentionally written out of "official" histories or was merely overlooked as not worthy of inclusion in these conversations, these gaps and silences reveal the power that the Wesleyan Methodist Connection exerted over Will.

In response to the second question—what sources of power do individual figures and institutions draw upon?—Will seems to have drawn power from three sources: the ethos of the Methodist woman preacher, the tangible success of her ministry, and her congregation. Will was ordained relatively early in the life of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, a time when the new denomination was still negotiating its institutional identity as distinct from the broader Methodist church it had broken away from. Methodist preacher and theologian Phoebe Palmer was already a well-known figure during Will's time, having published her best-selling book *The Way of Holiness* in 1843, and Will would have had Palmer and other Methodist women preachers to point to as she was beginning her ministerial career. It is possible that Will, in her church context, was able to draw power from the ethos of the Methodist woman preacher to reach and connect with her audience in the manner that Patricia Bizzell effectively argues enabled Frances Willard to reach her own audience. This ethos, which Bizzell describes as "a particular type of womanly spiritual ethos," likely helped to advance Will to ordination in 1861, whether because she enacted this spiritual ethos or because her audience would have made positive associations between Will and other Methodist women preachers ("Frances Willard" 378). Yet, as time passed and the Wesleyans drew further away from the larger Methodist church, any power Will might have drawn from enacting the ethos of the Methodist woman preachers seems to have faded quickly. By the time her ordination was brought under review at the 1864 Wesleyan Methodist General Conference, the power of the Methodist woman preacher ethos had dissipated.

From the ephemeral scraps of Will's written words that have survived, another source of power, though of a distinctly rhetorical kind, emerges: the undeniable success of her ministry. A handful of updates Will published in *The American Wesleyan* are all that remain of Will's voice,

and in these updates she offers the wider denomination glimpses of news from her congregation. Will's first update appeared in the newspaper on January 23, 1861, a few months after she had arrived in Nora to take charge of the preaching circuit there. Addressing the newspaper's editor, as was standard practice, Will writes:

> Bro. Prindle:—While writing on business, I will just say to the readers of the *Wesleyan*, that we are enjoying a glorious revival on this Circuit. It is supposed that there have been over one hundred reclaimed or converted, and the work is still going on. We have no house large enough to hold the congregations that assemble from evening to evening. There is another feature of this work which is encouraging; believers are being sanctified. All are pressing forward to perfect holiness. (15)

The factual tone of this update is indicative of Will's other pastoral updates, and through this factual tone Will contrasts herself with her male contemporaries. Most of the updates pastors published in the newspaper were more expansive and included the pastor's ruminations on certain people and events within his congregation (perhaps as a means of smoothing over any challenges or difficulties that had arisen), yet Will's update is succinctly focused "on business." Rather than offering her own extended interpretation or reflection on the status of her church, she draws power and authority from her successes: with more than 100 new members and the need for a larger meeting space, few could deny that Will's ministry was thriving.

The final source of power seen in the evidence surrounding Will is her congregation. Even though Will's name appears in the pastoral rosters that were periodically published in *The American Wesleyan* during the early 1860s, not everyone acknowledged her leadership at her church. In a report on the Nora Quarterly meeting that appeared in the newspaper on May 15, 1861, Will and her husband H.R. were referred to as "Brother and sister Will, the joint pastors of the flock" (Matlack 78). H.R. Will was also an ordained minister, so this confusion is perhaps understandable, but it is more likely that people who encountered Mary Will operated within a terministic screen that equated *pastor*, *preacher*, or *clergy* with *men*. Seeing Will in a pastoral capacity would not fit within that interpretive framework, and categorizing Will with her husband, then, would have been a way to make sense of and explain the lived reality. It is also possible that defining pastor as male led the authors of such reports to intentionally suppress Mary's leadership in her church.

Whatever the case, the confusion over Will's leadership motivated her congregation to come to her defense. A month after the report listing Mary and H.R. Will as "joint pastors" was published, S.A. Stock—a member of Will's congregation—wrote to the editor of *The American Wesleyan* to correct and clarify Will's position as pastor:

> Brother Prindle:—In looking over the Wesleyan, I notice brother Matlack's publication of our quarterly meeting. We think Bro. M. did not understand sister Will's position. We do not censure brother M.; we think he was misguided perhaps by the quarterly conference. *We do not wish it to go out, that sister Will does not have charge of the Nora Circuit. We are glad to say, that our church never has been so well governed under any pastor, as it has been under sister Will. We think it can no longer be said, that a church cannot be well governed by a woman.* There never was a mother who watched over an infant with greater interest, than sister Will has over this church. May God speed the time, when man will no longer trample under foot woman's rights, but, when God calls her to labor in his vineyard, she may not be trammeled. As woman is blamed with the fall of man, we think she should have the privilege of proclaiming his redemption. (Stock 94, emphasis added)

This letter was published on June 12, 1861, and we have no information about this letter's author, S.A. Stock. Yet, Stock's rebuke of those who either confused or intentionally downplayed Mary Will's leadership imbues Will with power by confirming her position and authority as pastor of her church.

It is noteworthy that Will did not offer this correction herself but remained silent and allowed S.A. Stock to speak for her in this venue. In her analysis of women's defenses of women's preaching in nineteenth-century America, Lisa Zimmerelli identified appealing to the power of the call to preach as one of three *topoi* commonly employed. By articulating detailed accounts of the call to preach, women were able to shift agency away from themselves and establish their ethos in a "mandate from God," which also "constituted an exigency that demanded women respond" (Zimmerelli 189). Zimmerelli argues this frequent pivot to narration of the call to preach demonstrates women preachers' rhetorical savviness via their "astute analysis of the constraints and opportunities of their rhetorical situation" (189). While I suspect Will would have employed this rhetorical strategy in her own preaching and pastoral work, she allowed someone else to narrate her calling and capabilities to the readers of *The American Wesleyan*. In so doing, the impact of this letter upon its Wesleyan audience was stronger than if it had come directly from Will, and the power behind Will's pastoral ethos rests in both a divine mandate *and* the support of her congregation.

The power Will drew from the ethos of the Methodist woman preacher, the tangible success of her ministry, and her congregation may not have been enough to keep the denomination from revoking her ordination, but her powerful presence kept her from being fully ignored or completely written out of official histories. In 1878, the county where Will had lived and pastored published *The History of Jo Daviess County, Illinois*, and a significant portion of the book traces the history of Christian denominations in the area. In a section devoted to Will's church in Nora, the book's authors note:

> [W]e are unable to fix the date of organization, but it is remembered that the office of pastor was filled by Revs. Mr. Morgan, W. W. Steward, *H. R. Will and his wife Mary A.* During the charge of the latter minister, in 1861, their church was built on the township line road five and one half miles south of Warren. …The Sunday school was organized in connection with the church at the time of the erection of their building. Its first superintendent was Rev. H. R. Will. (562-563, emphasis added)

Mary Will's name is only briefly dropped into this record, yet her presence is significant. As the only woman to appear in this record, we can assume that Will's role in the church was so powerful that even those who would intentionally or subconsciously suppress women's pastoral activities could not leave her out of the historical record. Echoing the confusion that led to S.A. Stock's letter clarifying Will's role as the pastor of the Nora church, Will is here listed again as pastor alongside her husband, but this record also identifies H.R. as the first superintendent of the Sunday school. This detail offers a hint as to the true dynamic between Mary Will and her husband. Sunday schools were typically operated under the authority of the church, with the superintendent taking responsibility for the administration, budget, and operations of the Sunday school. If Mary Will pastored the church and H.R. ran the Sunday school, it is possible that Mary was effectively H.R.'s boss, which would align with S.A. Stock's letter explaining Mary Will's leadership over the Nora church. In contemporary terms, this would mean Mary was the lead pastor and H.R. was her assistant pastor.

Mary Will's powerful presence also forced the Wesleyan Methodist Connection to contend with her again more than ten years after her deposition. The events that led to Will's appeal are unknown, but at the church's General Conference in 1875, Will's deposition was appealed, and the committee that reviewed her deposition declared that "the action of the Illinois Conference in deposing sister M. A. Will was irregular and illegal" (350-351). Though this was certainly good news for Will, the committee's report was not adopted by the General Conference and support for women's ordination swiftly declined. Will's appeal in 1875 is the last known mention of her in any documented records, and she is noticeably absent from the Wesleyan Methodist archives and the Wesleyan newspaper from this point forward.

Analyzing the Reciprocal Impact: Mary Will's Fractured Legacy

Alongside embracing ephemeral evidence and examining power dynamics, the third element of the institutional sponsorship framework involves analyzing the reciprocal impact of the person and the institution upon one another. Building upon the questions posed in the previous section about power dynamics, analyzing the reciprocal impact between a person and an institution involves asking: *How would the institution and the individual be different if they had not encountered one another?* This is perhaps the most important question posed within the institutional sponsorship framework. From a contemporary vantage point, institutional sponsorship

looks at the changes in policies, leadership positions, and organizational structures that result from an institution's interaction with an individual figure. These changes might be bold and readily apparent, or they might be subtle and visible only in the aftermath of the figure's relationship with the institution. Whatever the case, changes and alterations are indicative of the nuanced power dynamics described above and serve as fruitful sites for analysis. As Kara Poe Alexander's exploration of *reciprocal sponsorship* demonstrates, sponsorship need not be a "one-way" or "fixed" dynamic in which the sponsor influences the sponsored. Rather, Alexander argues, the sponsorship relationship can be fluid and reciprocal—that both parties can serve as sponsors for one another. The same can be true in an institutional sponsorship framework: the person and the institution can shape one another, and both can wield power. For historical figures, the reciprocal impact might be visible during the person's lifetime (e.g., changes that directly affected the person's career), in subsequent generations (e.g., policy changes, shifts in institutional structures), or both. To revisit Royster and Kirsch's social circulation language, the reciprocal sponsorship impact "invokes connections among past, present, and future" (*Feminist* 23).

The complex relationship between Mary Will and her denomination as seen through the ephemera and power dynamics above demonstrate a fluid relational dynamic. Both wielded differing forms of power and influence, and both impacted the other. While the Wesleyan Methodist Connection held the power of ordination and controlled Will's career, Will left lasting imprints upon both her church in Nora, Illinois and the Wesleyan-Methodist denomination. Her calling to ministry and apparent leadership strengths prompted the Illinois Conference to make her the first Wesleyan woman to receive ordination and assign her to a preaching circuit, which both contributed to ongoing debates about women in church leadership and provoked new debate within the denomination. Will's presence created ripple effects felt by the denomination and the women within it for generations to come, and the challenges to Will's ordination reflect the shifting ideology of the Wesleyan Methodists.

Despite the radical reform mentality that birthed the Wesleyan-Methodist denomination and its founder's public support of women's ordination, when Will came into ministry the prevailing attitude seemed to be that women had already advanced far enough. Wesleyan women already enjoyed greater access than in many other societal spheres, as they were able to cast votes in their local churches and to publish in *The American Wesleyan* newspaper, and women were central to the battle for temperance, which was becoming a prominent issue among Wesleyans during Mary Will's time. While some still demonstrated a more activist stance, most Wesleyans seemed content to preserve the status quo surrounding women and were beginning to embrace the 'separate spheres' ideology that confined women to the domestic or private sphere. As Barbara Welter, Nan Johnson, and others have demonstrated, this gender ideology rose in popularity among white, middle-class Americans in the nineteenth century, including Wesleyans.

This shift away from the Wesleyans' radical reform mentality of the 1840s toward the separate spheres ideology is reflected both in Mary Will's career and in *The American Wesleyan*. In 1847—more than a decade before Will's ordination—a woman, Sarah A. Rice, wrote to the editor with a unique request: "Will the Editor be so kind as to recur to the 20th number of May 15th, 1847, and give us the *vice versa* of an article 'To Wives'?" The "To Wives" article referenced was a detailed list of nine things wives should do to please their husbands, and Rice chastises its author, stating that he "assumes the office of dictator" and "issues down his terms as if he were an occupant of the upper world; or belonged to a higher species of some grade of superhuman nature" (1). This "supercilious manner of dictation to women," Rice observes, is "neither new nor uncommon." Rice then challenges the author to examine his own gender bias and to "occasionally reflect upon the deteriorating and degrading tendency of caste of sex, the necessary result of those conventional usages by which the power of the strong exalts itself to such an astonishing supremacy" (1).

Rice follows this rebuke with a series of illuminating questions about the biblical and theological assumptions behind the "To Wives" article and concludes with a further challenge to the newspaper's editor, briefly excerpted here:

> First, Can the mind under compound systems of physical power, civil, religious and domestic, ever attain its proper growth or the mortal and intellectual stature which its benevolent Creator meant it should?
>
> Second, Should not all human beings who possess incontrovertably productive energies sufficient to secure them in the rights of free agency, personal responsibility, and self-control, enjoy them?
>
> Third, Liberty is as necessary to the growth and expansion of the soul as is space to the body. Is that policy of society, of law, and of provincial justice, therefore right and just, which deprives females of all strength by securing their greatest possible dependence?
>
> …Few Editors have moral magnanimity enough to allow females the liberty of the press, if they say anything which does not fall precisely in the wake of public sentiment. Can [this newspaper] publish this? If not, he is requested to send it to some lover of truth, if any such can be found, who will. (Rice 1)

The newspaper editor granted her request, commenting, "We shall henceforth claim to belong to the most magnanimous class of editors, for we allow our lady correspondent the use of our columns, to say what is as far from the wake of public sentiment, as the general pursuits of men are from the duties of the nursery and the kitchen" (1). Printed just below Rice's letter and

the editor's note was "To Husbands," which opens by noting that a man's first thought after marriage should be, "How shall I continue the love I have inspired?" Following this guiding question are the nine points of advice originally proffered to wives with the nouns and pronouns switched to refer to husbands. For example, the eighth point reads:

> Few things please a woman more than seeing her husband noble and clever in the management of his household. A knowledge of cookery, as well as every other branch in housekeeping is indispensable in a male; and a husband should always endeavor to support with applause, the character of the *gentleman* and the *house-keeper*. (Rice 1)

Subsequent issues of the newspaper do not indicate how Rice's request and the "To Husbands" column was received.

By the 1870s, however, any "magnanimous" editorial spirit seems to have abated and such a request from a woman is less likely to have been entertained. On July 12, 1876, after Will's ordination had been revoked and then restored, *The American Wesleyan* published an article written by Mrs. J. P. Spaulding, who was married to the current pastor of the Nora Circuit where Will had pastored. Mrs. Spaulding's article, "Duties of a Pastor's Wife," argued that a woman's primary responsibility was to care for her children. The pastor's wife should also support her husband's ministry through prayer and encouragement, but, Mrs. Spaulding concludes, "the position of mother [is] higher, nobler, holier than any of her sphere in which woman was ever called to act" (2). Mrs. Spaulding's sentiments reflect an ideology that would confine women to the domestic sphere (see Bizzell, "Chastity"; Johnson, "Gender"; Welton), and her exhortation to pastor's wives seems to be a direct response to women like Will who continually sought to work outside of the domestic sphere in the church.

Yet, even as the Wesleyan Methodist Connection seemed to embrace at the institutional level the separate spheres ideology, Will could not be contained within the domestic sphere. The Wesleyans continued to debate about women after Will's deposition, but she remained in Illinois and continued her ministry. Though her husband H.R. was now the 'official' pastor in the family, the 1867 pastoral roster listed "H.R. and M.A. Will" as pastors of the preaching circuit at Ophir, Illinois, and Mary Will's name appeared on a publicized list of speakers for a regional ministry conference held in early 1867. Apparently, Mary Will's pastoral calling and giftedness in ministry were so significant that the institution—her denomination—had no choice but to allow her continued presence in ministry.

Years later, after Will's deposition had been reversed, Mrs. H. E. Hayden, another preacher and contemporary of Will would allude to Will's impact upon the Wesleyan Methodist Connection thus: "The Lord designed that the Illinois Conference should take the lead in giving the sisters a helping hand by ordaining them. I am sorry that after they had taken a step or two, they backslid.

I hope they will soon be reclaimed" (Hayden 1). Mrs. H. E. Hayden was a vocal and visible advocate among the Wesleyans for women's ordination and women's right to preach, but she was never ordained. It seems that Hayden and many other women who sought to preach over the next few decades were casualties of the "backslide" resulting from the controversy over Mary Will.

From 1879-1891, Wesleyans formally ceased ordaining women but did allow them to serve as licensed ministers.[2]Wesleyan women were able to seek ordination again after that period, but the Wesleyans never regained the radical hope that had characterized their earliest years and led Will to ordination. Today, Will's denomination, now known as the Wesleyan Church, is quick to celebrate its history of ordaining women. In 2011, a small brochure appeared at church conferences, "Celebrating 150 Years of Women in Ministry in the Wesleyan Church." The brochure highlights Will's ordination in 1861, but the more complete story of Will's deposition and the denomination's fractured legacy of support for women's ordination is absent from both the brochure and the broader denominational consciousness.

If not for Will, Wesleyans would not be able to (accurately) claim that their denomination has been ordaining women since 1861, and this legacy and history has attracted women seeking ordination to the Wesleyans. If not for Will's appeal and restoration to ministry in 1875, the Wesleyans may have ceased ordaining women entirely during the nineteenth century, and her presence contributed to the continuation of women's ordination in America. Despite this legacy, a study conducted in 2016 concluded that just 7.75% of all senior or solo pastors in the Wesleyan Church are women (Hammond 65). This figure places the Wesleyan Church slightly behind American Protestant churches, where women comprise just 9% of senior pastors (Barna Group).

By using the institutional sponsorship framework to analyze Will's relationship with the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, Will emerges as a passionate, gifted leader whose presence forced her denomination to grapple with its position on women's ordination. Many women who stand in Will's fractured legacy have found that, like Will, their journey to and beyond ordination is a tumultuous one. Perhaps a greater awareness of Will would benefit women today who face challenges in their own ordination processes and ministerial careers.

Conclusion

This article participates in mapping the visibility and mobility of women that Royster and Kirsch call for by mapping Rev. Mary A. Will's sponsorship relationship with her denomination.

2 A minister's license is often an early and required stage in the ordination process. Once licensed, a minister is authorized to conduct local church business (e.g., officiating weddings and funerals, delivering sermons) but is unable to vote or participate in the business of the denomination. By not allowing women to advance beyond the licensed minister stage, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was effectively able to benefit from women's labor without offering them a voice in the denomination's leadership.

Institutional sponsorship offers a means of responding to Nan Johnson's call to "widen the view" of feminist rhetorical scholarship, and it invites new possibilities for further study and analysis. My exploration of Will and the Wesleyan-Methodist Connection of America highlights the complex relationships that can occur between a person and an institution, and it also demonstrates the ability to recover a figure's rhetorical presence by examining the impact a figure has left upon an institution. While the denomination exercised significant power over her, Will—through her continued pursuit of ministry—shaped the Wesleyan legacy of women's ordination. Will's existence and effectiveness in ministry made her impossible to ignore or erase. Even after her deposition, the denomination acknowledged Will's effectiveness in ministry and affirmed her as a "co-laborer in Christ," and Will and her husband remained active in the denomination throughout their lives ("Illinois Conference" 2). Despite looming in the shadows as a nearly forgotten, silhouetted historical figure, Will's presence has rippled across time and impacted generations of women and Wesleyans, and her presence provides additional context for existing rhetorical scholarship on women preachers.

Institutional sponsorship builds upon the work begun by Cheryl Glenn, Nan Johnson, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch, and so many more by forwarding a new means of approaching recovery work and bringing silhouetted figures into sharper focus. Where other methods might see only an absence, institutional sponsorship locates a rhetorical presence at the convergence of ephemeral evidence, power dynamics, and reciprocity. I hope to see more historical figures recovered and analyzed using the institutional sponsorship framework.

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Beyond Choice: Infertility and/as Disability

Amy Vidali

Abstract: This essay reconceives infertility beyond rhetorics of choice and blame by recognizing that infertility is prevalent in those younger than 35, that infertility rhetorics are eugenic, and that infertility is not only a clinical diagnosis. The essay begins by putting feminist scholarship on infertility in conversation with "choice feminism" through a brief reading of the Netflix film *Private Life*. Next, the essay considers the eugenic implications of educating people about biological fertility timelines. Finally, infertility is positioned as a disability justice issue, which values infertility as a feminist-disability intervention into normative decision-making processes about (not) having children.

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My primary physician washed her hands and smiled over her shoulder as she said, "There's no rush, I had my children at 41 and 43." This was an upbeat follow-up to her claim that I probably didn't want to get pregnant "this depressed." Pregnancy during major depression is risky, and my doctor's suggestion that I could choose to have children later seemed reasonable (even feminist). I delayed a year, and at age 34, learned that I was profoundly infertile. I had blithely assumed, along with my doctor, that I would be fertile-enough until at least 35 if not 40, as I'd so often heard. I did not understand how I could be *so* infertile without anybody noticing, given my privilege in having consistent healthcare and regular OBGYN check-ups. A few years later, after four failed intrauterine inseminations (IUIs), a privately-funded infertility specialist would tell me I was reacting to in-vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment like someone who was 43 years old. By which she meant, unlike my primary physician, like someone at the end of their fertility.

Fertility and infertility are simultaneously silenced and subject to constant rhetorical negotiation. While it may seem that one is silenced (infertility) while the other is not (fertility), I am instead suggesting that we are always talking, or not talking, about the two together. The silence speaks to fears of infertility, the intolerable state of the "barren woman," and ignorance about the prevalence of infertility when people are in their twenties and early thirties. These silences operated in my conversation with my doctor, who did not discuss infertility with me, inquire about my pregnancy history, or ask about any biological family members who struggled to get pregnant and/or went into early menopause. At the same time, it is routine to rhetorically engage fertility and infertility by asking friends and strangers if and when they will have any or more children (Bute, "Nobody"). When infertile people respond to probing questions by revealing their struggles to get pregnant, family, friends, and bystanders say "'your time will come,' 'you're meant to be a

mom,' or 'don't try so hard'" (Jarvis, "Invitational" 19; also see Johnson and Quinlan). Very rarely did anyone, except fellow infertile people, respond to my infertility with anything other than chipper advice.

Fertility is treated as the "natural" or "default" status until a certain age, while infertility is an inevitable deficit. Instead of accepting this normative, predictable, and ultimately false continuum, I embrace a fluid notion of infertility that waxes and wanes in specific individuals and populations. My notion of infertility encompasses the broader medical, social, and rhetorical histories and contexts in which fertility and infertility are imbricated, which include rhetorics of abortion and birth control, forced sterilization and population control, adoption, and other assisted reproductive technology (ART). Infertility rhetorics must make room for those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or disabled, for those denied adoptions, and/or for single parents, thereby challenging biological and genetic bases as the sole connections to parenthood (Brakman and Scholz). Those who experience infertility may be clinically infertile or may not; I suggest that infertility is not always a clinical diagnosis and is defined by wanting to have children, or the option to have children, and being unable and/or prevented from doing so. To mark my revisions to typical notions of infertility, I could use a new term - maybe "in/fertility" (Marafiote) or, drawing on disability perspectives, "disfertility." I haven't done so here because my primary goal is to shift the way broader publics think of infertility (rather than create a neologism broader publics won't adopt), and to reclaim the term from its currently limited reference to the clinical/physical inability to have children in cisgender women.

While I've sketched infertility broadly, I cannot consider all types of infertility in this essay. I am limiting my examination of assistive reproductive technology (ART), particularly in-vitro fertilization (IVF).[1] Focusing on IVF means focusing on white, cisgender women of means, because we are the ones who are able and encouraged to seek IVF (Britt; Johnson, B.). I am this over-represented woman: white, cisgender, and middle-class (and at the time of treatment, married to a man). In analyzing infertility rhetorics, this over-represented white, cisgender woman threatens to erase the experiences of those who are not like her. I am simultaneously tackling two problems in this essay: that infertility is misrepresented to everyone, causing much pain and limiting the effectiveness of treatment, and that certain people, particularly those who are not white or straight or able-bodied, are not regarded as worthy of infertility treatment and have been actively harmed through sterilization. I analyze these two issues together not to equate their impacts, but because they are connected at the root. That is, cisgender white women of means don't have access to infertility treatment in significantly higher numbers simply because they have money (though that helps), but because this is how the system is designed to work: cisgender white women are encouraged to procreate while disabled people, queer people, and people of color are not, in a system that blames infertile people for their infertility.

1 1. Note that male infertility (Barnes; Culley et al.) and secondary infertility are common causes of infertility.

Partly because of these complications, and partly because I've worked on this essay on and off for nine years, this essay moves in several directions while swirling around issues of choice. I begin by situating infertility in the context of "choice feminism," noting how infertility is positioned as the result of "bad choices." To do this, I examine the 2018 Netflix film *Private Life* in the context of feminist scholarship that dismantles the idea of people simply "choosing" when to have children. In the second section, I trace the eugenic implications of educating people about biological fertility timelines, which simultaneously push white people toward pregnancy and people of color toward sterilization, as represented in "fertility campaigns." In response, I consider incorporating evaluations of infertility into routine medical care (which would have revealed my infertility to me earlier in my life, for better and worse). Finally, I suggest that locating infertility within the frames of progressive disability studies invites infertile people to resist shame and blame discourses, reconceptualizes infertility outside of deficit models, and values infertility as a feminist-disability intervention into normative decision-making processes about when and why to have, or not have, children.

In Jennell Johnson's introduction to *Graphic Reproduction*, she notes: "So this is the point where I must note that I do not have any children." Conversely, this is the point where I must note that I have one child. After four failed IUIs, I was told I had about a 15% chance of having a child through IVF. I produced four eggs and three embryos, all of which were implanted in my uterus and one of which became my son. My privilege facilitated the birth of my child, as my mother paid for me to go to a top-rated infertility clinic and supported various supplementary treatments (such as acupuncture and months of pre-hormonal treatment). While my treatment is over, I remain impacted by my experience and the continuing consequences of my infertility, particularly navigating the risks of early menopause. And, though it would be wrong for me to claim that I understand the experience of infertility treatment that does not produce a child, I do claim that the identity and experience of infertility is not erased through the birth of a child, nor does it always persist when children do not result from treatment.

Infertility, Choice Feminism, Reproductive Justice

Feminist scholarship engages infertility as a "rhetorical vehicle" for discussions of risk, objectification, capitalism, genetics, and Western culture (Sandelowski and de Lacey 33). Christine St. Peter argues that we should group ART with other technologies, such as contraception and abortion, prenatal technologies, and birth-related technology so we can critique the "coercive medical environment in which women are being conditioned to trust, or forced against our will to accept, high-tech interventions in our reproductive lives" (354). In her analysis of choice in relation to abortion, ultrasound, and sterilization, Jennifer Denbow suggests that rhetorics of choice are attached to "autonomy as proper or rational self-governance," which allows for "the appearance of respecting women's rights and self-determination while justifying increased surveillance

and management of women's bodies and reproductive decisions" (3).[2]

Feminist scholarship on infertility is particularly helpful in challenging the idea that people simply "choose" when to have children. In *Contemplating Maternity in an Era of Choice: Explorations into Discourses of Reproduction,* Hayden and Hallstein argue: "Choice suggests rational deliberation – as if women consider all the options in informed ways, choose the option they prefer, take appropriate action, and achieve their goals." Instead, "women's reproductive desires are often ambivalent, vague, and subject to change" (xvii). Palczewski suggests an emphasis on "reproductive freedom" instead of choice, highlighting "the right to have children as equally important as the right not to have them" (73).[3] Jennifer Bute et al. trace reactions to Sylvia Hewlett's very popular *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*, and they ask: "[H]ow are women to be strategic when their choices are limited by lack of access to paid time off, inadequate child care, or fear of losing their jobs?" (63). Tracy Marafiote echoes this claim, and Elissa Foster places the "choice" of getting pregnant against her non-choice of a miscarriage (150).[4] Feminist scholarship has also considered infertility in a global context, noting that while infertility is not without stigma in richer countries, infertile people in these places usually "live in a society that does not force them out of their own houses, curse at them in the streets, or condemn them to a life of poverty and destitution due to their infertility" (Shah and Baxter 109-110; also see Inhorn and Balen; Inhorn).

Despite this rich scholarship, much of mainstream feminism adopts a fairly simple notion of infertility informed by "choice feminism," which as Shelley Budgeon explains, "coheres around a set of key principles including a privileging of individual women as best positioned to make choices about how to live; a belief that women are able to unproblematically exercise autonomy because of the achievements of feminism; a claim that traditional feminine norms are no longer connected to gender inequality; and that the role of feminism is to withhold judgment of the choices women make" (12; also see Ferguson; Thwaites). Mainstream, choice feminism confirms dangerous myths surrounding infertility: that it is rare; that cisgender women younger than 35 (even 40) are rarely if ever infertile; that infertility is not an issue for people of color, queer people, trans people, gender non-conforming people, and/or disabled people; that infertility isn't related to, or embedded in, eugenic histories of procreation and sterilization; and that medical advice about fertility and infertility can be issued without medical testing, examination of family history, and discussion of pregnancy histories.

2 Similarly, Anne Burns suggests that choice functions "as a tool for discipline, rather than a means for liberation," noting that viewer comments on involuntary porn sites overwhelmingly shame people for "choosing" to take naked/sexualized photos (102).

3 3. On being childfree, see Gillespie, Hintz, Kelly; on the blurring of childfree and involuntary childlessness through the concept of non-motherhood, see Letherby and Williams; on managing stigma and the limitation of choice rhetorics for those who are childfree, see Morison et al.

4 The "choice" to end IVF is also complicated (Haas; Harwood; Jarvis, "Expanding"; Thorsby). For a critique of choice rhetorics in infertility clinic marketing, see Takhar and Pemberton.

The 2018 Netflix film *Private Life* is worth analyzing because it challenges mainstream choice feminism but leaves misconceptions of infertility intact. It's important to understand this common rhetorical move, which suggests that people need better choices to prevent infertility, rather than challenging the idea that "better choices" can consistently avoid infertility. Written and directed by Tamara Jenkins (who had IVF treatments in her 40s), the film examines the infertility journey of Rachel and Richard (who are both white and hyper-educated), a married couple played by Kathryn Hahn and Paul Giamatti. As noted in a *Guardian* interview with the filmmaker and Hahn, the film indicts second-wave feminism for "lulling women into a false sense of fertility" (Shoard). This is evident in a scene where Rachel and Richard are in their New York apartment getting ready to go to the fertility clinic:

RACHEL: It totally misrepresents the book. And then it's like, oh, you know, I don't understand the business side of things, which I don't. But I do know if a guy wrote it it wouldn't be packaged like a cupcake.

[RICHARD laughs]

RACHEL: I'm sick of this shit. Same thing with this whole fertility nightmare. I just feel so betrayed.

RICHARD: By what?

[RACHEL is brushing her teeth and talking]

RACHEL: The bullshit I was fed in college. Feminist ideology. [spits in sink] The lie that I could have a career and then kids. Well obviously that hasn't panned out. I should send them the bills for our IUIs and IVFs.

RICHARD: You can't blame second-wave feminism for our ambivalence about having a kid.

RACHEL: I'm not ambivalent.

RICHARD: No now you're not, because you realize that the boat is leaving the dock. But before you kept changing the deadline, remember? You know, we'll start as soon as I finish the play. Right after I get this story published. Once I finish the book.

RACHEL: Are you blaming me?

RICHARD: No I'm not blaming you. I'm just saying that we need to take some responsibility for the situation.

RACHEL: A lot of women have babies at 41. I thought I could too.

RICHARD: Okay. I just don't think it's Gloria Steinem's fault that we can't get pregnant.

RACHEL: Whose fault is it then? I guess it is mine. Because I was too busy writing my stupid book.

The scene ends with Rachel noting that they need to move on and just "repress it, or suppress it, or whichever one is more appropriate." Like feminist scholarship, the scene suggests that people do not simply "choose" when to get pregnant, though blaming second-wave feminism is a new twist. But rather than blaming "Gloria Steinem," I would argue that it's rhetorics of choice, popularized in second-wave feminism's abortion battles, filtered through choice feminism's emphasis on personal "freedoms" and "choices," that misrepresent the realities of when and how pregnancy occurs. Accurate representations of infertility do not align with choice rhetorics that suggest all who can bear children are fertile until 35 or 40.

A feature of *Private Life* that's received little to no attention is the young woman Rachel and Richard recruit as their egg donor - their young niece Sadie (who is not a blood relative). In a film review, Sadie is referred to as "a fecund 20-something who is exploding with fertility but is completely in no way prepared to have a child" (Almendrala). In actuality, Sadie does not perform as expected as an egg donor - she isn't fertile enough. In the film, she tearfully reports her conversation with the fertility doctor to Rachel and Richard: "He said I didn't have enough follicles, that I'm a low responder. That someone my age should have way more and my eggs aren't growing at the right rate or something. He said he has 41-year-old patients who produce more eggs than me." I cheered when I first saw this scene, but rather than a needed representation of a young infertile woman, Sadie only serves as a foil for understanding mid-life infertility and as a narrative respite from what is, in this film's set of relationships, a bad decision to use a family member as an egg donor.[5] In reality, Sadie's experience is common if uncommonly represented: As reported by the CDC, 12% of women aged 25-29 use infertility services. In another study of 782 couples (involving women aged 18-40), the rates of infertility (determined by failure to conceive in 12 cycles, or about a year), were 8% for those aged 19-26, 13-14% for those aged 27-34, and 18% for those aged 35-39 (Dunson and Baird). Finally, while based on a dated study, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) prominently positions claims that 7% of women aged 20-24 are infertile, 9% of women aged 25-29, and 15% of women aged 30-34 ("Waiting").[6]

While the infertility numbers are expectedly higher in the 35+ category, one in ten women being infertile and/or seeking infertility services prior to 35 is significant. But in *Private Life*, the 20-something's infertility is a brief plot point and the focus stays on Rachel, who is on the older end of normative childbearing age (over 40). Thus, while the film troubles assumptions that people should just "choose" to have children earlier, it keeps intact the idea that Rachel would have been fine if she'd (just) had children earlier. Maintaining this choice, and choice rhetoric, is necessary to hold mainstream feminism together, because if we decide that infertility only happens when we make bad choices, then we just need to make better choices, so let's fight to keep those choices

5 Rounding out the film's representation of maternity is Sadie's mother, Cynthia (played by Molly Shannon), who complains to her kids about how they ruined her life.

6 Correspondingly, people lament the lack of resources for those who are infertile in their twenties (Pearson; Tigar), and there is debate regarding whether infertile women and girls in their teens should be treated (Derouin; Haimov).

in the hands of women. While this echoes common pro-choice slogans ("my body my choice"), it also keeps the systemic factors that prevent and delay (and demand) childbearing, and the reality of pre-35 infertility, obscured.

A reproductive justice (RJ) framework provides an alternative to choice feminism. As described by Kimbala Price, the reproductive justice movement's "three core values are: the right to have an abortion, the right to have children, and the right to parent those children" (341). In "Radical Reproductive Justice," Loretta Ross et al. argue that RJ must "go beyond affirming the right not to have children and pivot to emphasize the right to have children under the conditions we choose" (184). Rhetorically, Shui-yin Sharon Yam argues that reproductive justice must reshape rhetorical work, and Melissa Stone and Zachary Beare offer an infographic on the relationship of RJ, reproductive rights, and reproductive health.[7] Clearly, RJ frameworks are important to reframing infertility, though much of the scholarship does not address infertility (including the sources I just mentioned). Further, as I suggest in the final section of this essay, the connections between reproductive justice and disability justice are also underdeveloped, and a disability perspective on infertility is necessary to truly challenge rhetorics of choice around infertility.

Age Education and Infertility Testing

Perhaps the answer, then, is to educate people about the actual likelihood of infertility so they can make informed decisions. Upon request, I've tried educating people I love about infertility, noting that it regularly happens to people in their twenties. Each time, I've felt like a pesky great aunt who wiggles her finger and says "tick tock,"[8] and each time, I've been rebuffed by these folks, who assure me they are "fine," adhering to what Ruhl calls "the willed pregnancy." Education about fertility and infertility is fraught not only because it can feel "unfeminist," but because these conversations are imbricated in eugenic and racist beliefs about who should (not) have children. To move forward with effective education and discussion of infertility issues, we must understand its eugenic underpinnings, and to this end, I examine three sites of fertility education: an ASRM campaign and two "fertility campaigns" (in Italy and Britain). I then consider the complicated benefits of including fertility evaluations as part of routine reproductive care.

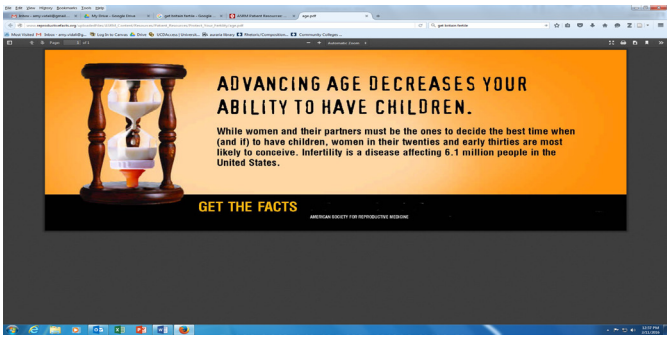
7 Yam also suggested that rhetoricians rethink using "women-centered" language, as while such language "helps articulate and reclaim the specific history of misogyny and cis-sexism, it inadvertently excludes trans and gender nonbinary people" (22). To this end, in this essay, I have worked to use more inclusive terminology, such as "infertile people." However, my use of such inclusive terminology is overshadowed by the consistent use of "women" in the scholarship I reference (in quotations and article/journal titles).

8 On clock metaphors, see Robbins; on biological clocks and tenure clocks, see Ceraso and VanHaitsma.

Eugenics and "Fertility Campaigns"

There is a need for education about age-related *and* non-age-related infertility. In a systematic literature review of 71 studies of fertility awareness, such awareness is described as "low to moderate among people of reproductive age," with subjects assuming that "age-related fertility decline starts later than the actual turning point" and overestimating what fertility treatment can do (Pedro et al. 75; also see Bretherick). More shockingly, in a study of 599 childless men aged 20 to 50, the researchers conclude that their subjects "had no coherent body of knowledge regarding age-related fertility and ART treatment and family building options" (Daniluk and Koert 839; also see Benyamini et al.; Bunting and Bovin; Lee; Maheshwari). Geeta Nargund suggests increased attention to age education, sperm-related infertility, impacts of STIs and abortion, IVF treatment, and implications of "low population growth," though again, pre-age-35 infertility is ignored.

As Lynn Harter et al. claim, existing campaigns to educate about biological timelines "discipline women through rhetoric about time, technology and middle-class values," ultimately blaming women for not acting "in time" (87). These attempts range from urging people to have children earlier (while ignoring why they wait) to campaigns that less subtly draw on racist and ableist eugenic rhetorics about who should and should not be having children. The former is evident in an ASRM campaign, which while over a decade old, is still prominent online. A series of four posters feature repurposed milk bottles, and one of the posters (below) features an hourglass made of a baby bottle with the sand/milk almost out. All caps against an orange background reads: "Advancing age decreases your ability to have children." In smaller print, it says: "While women and their partners must be the ones to decide the best time when (and if) to have children, women in their twenties and early thirties are most likely to conceive. Infertility is a disease affecting 6.1 million people in the United States." (The other three fertility posters focus on STIs, smoking, and weight. All use the phrase "your decisions.")



As Tracy Marafiote describes, the National Organization for Women (NOW) has had "vehement responses against campaigns to educate women about age constraints with the idea that such campaigns would bully and scare women into having children earlier or at all" (188). Such responses are understandable, as education campaigns like ASRM's fail to recognize why people have children later in their lives. ASRM's poster also contradicts its own educational booklet entitled "Age and Fertility," which more accurately notes: "A woman's best reproductive years are

in her 20s. Fertility gradually declines in the 30s, particularly after age 35." That people are often rather fertile in their teenage years is ignored; I assume this is to avoid identifying these as relevant childbearing years.[9]

Judith Daar's *The New Eugenics: Selective Breeding in an Era of Reproductive Technologies* claims that a new eugenics perpetuates "decades of restrictive immigration policies, years of discriminatory marriage laws, and a half-century of forced sterilization" (192; also see K. Price).[10] Naively though, Darr suggests that "few worry that modern-day Americans would respond favorably to scientific assertions about improving the human condition by organizing a web of state-sponsored programs that assess, suppress, deprive, and encourage reproduction according to one's expressed and inherited characteristics" (28). Such programs and attitudes are explored by Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body,* where she claims that "reproductive literacy" centers on the concerns of white, middle-class women and the right to abortion (6), rather than "the devaluation of *Black* reproduction" by new reproductive technologies (246) and the parallel development of state-sponsored sterilization of Black women alongside a "booming" fertility industry to help white, middle-class couples (4; also see Greil).

Another campaign is Italy's government-sponsored "fertility day" in 2016, which released promotional materials but was ultimately canceled.[11] The main poster/image features a white woman in a red sweater holding an hourglass toward the camera, with the caption, "La bellezza non ha eta. La fertilita si" ("Beauty has no age, fertility does"). The woman, who has pale white skin and long brown hair, holds her hand over her belly and gives a knowing look, and negative response was swift given the condescending tone and Italy's childcare inequities (Pianigiani).

9 On the over-focus on preventing teen pregnancy in defining reproductive justice, see Vinson and Daniel.

10 She adds that Robert G. Edwards, the Nobel-Prize winning doctor who co-created IVF, was an ardent eugenicist (see Johnson, M.; Obasogie).

11 For analyses of infertility on social media, see Blakemore, et al.; Johnson & Quilan; Perone et al.; Rome

This campaign, and others like it, are concerned about diminishing numbers of younger workers, not with preventing difficult and expensive infertility procedures for those who want to have children.[12] In her work on infertility's racial and economic disparities, Ann Bell notes that women of color "must grapple with the stigma of being childless while simultaneously rejecting the negative stereotype that they should not be mothers in the first place" (690). Conversely, in my infertility journey, I was told more than once that "people like me" should have children, because I am "smart" (and white and middle class and cisgender, and at the time, married).

Finally, a similar campaign called "Get Britain Fertile," sponsored by First Response, adds an ageist twist. In a widely-reported photo from the campaign, 46-year-old Kate Garraway is costumed with gray hair, liver spots, and wrinkles. She's pregnant and covers her breasts with a shawl (which is fuchsia, the color of First Response boxes), while revealing her pregnant belly.

She's supposed to seem ridiculous and remind us of fertility timelines. Think Progress responded: "First Response has decided the solution to the trend of women waiting longer to have children is to criticize them, prey on their fears of aging, and exploit social disgust for even moderately sexual old women." While these concerns are apt, critiques failed to note the eugenic legacy of encouraging white Brits to procreate (Soloway), while people of color are featured in campaigns to prevent teen pregnancy (DasGupta). As Robin Jensen argues, the rhetorical history of infertility "complicates the idea that the discursive past is made up of a diachronic success of strategies, each superseding the other" (5). Instead, rhetorical themes repeat and recur, including eugenic themes

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Such fertility "education" depoliticizes infertility and reproductive technology, ignoring how the "toxic by-products of industrialized culture" significantly impact infertility (Gaard 108). In their work on mandatory insurance for infertility, Mary Shanley and Adriene Asch argue that such insurance "obscures the fact that a significant share of infertility stems from quite varied (and op-

12 Russia once gave a national "conception" holiday, with rewards for those who had babies nine months later on what was roughly Russia Day (Gietel-Basten). In another example, a Danish travel agency encouraged folks to "Do it for Mom" and "Screw for Denmark" while on vacation, with possible prizes if you could prove you conceived while on holiday (Sims).

pressive) social contexts that affect different populations: delayed childbearing, untreated pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), and workplace and environmental toxins" (852).[13] More encouragingly, infertility awareness campaigns driven by non-profit organizations like RESOLVE (an infertility organization) have featured abstract representations of diverse people with emphasis on being "one in eight," as one in eight people will experience infertility. There is not, however, any emphasis on infertility before age 35, and the impact of such campaigns may be limited (Patel). That only 1% of the articles in major health journals geared toward women have focused on infertility in the last 15 years isn't helping (Place et al.).

Infertility Evaluation

Another approach to education is to include fertility evaluation as part of routine reproductive care (as such care exists in the United States). At present, heteronormative (and mysterious) "guidelines" in the United States specify that infertility should be suspected after one year of unprotected sex with no pregnancy if you are under 35, six months if over 35. There are also simple blood tests that are infrequently offered, and those tests would have very likely revealed my infertility issue (low ovarian reserve) in my twenties. Instead, by the time my AMH and FSH levels - which roughly correlate to the quantity (AMH level) and quality (FSH level) of eggs - were tested in my early thirties, my AMH number was "scant" and I had no ability to get pregnant without intervention. Such blood tests do not indicate all fertility problems, but they do provide important hormonal information for all people, including current and pending infertility, hormonal imbalance, and/or menopausal status.[14]

I wonder what I would have done if a routine fertility evaluation had revealed my quickly diminishing ovarian reserve in my twenties. Bavan et al. explore this issue by reporting the results of a 73-question survey focused on access to testing ovarian reserve, which was administered to 328 women (mean age 22). Most respondents were interested in ovarian reserve testing (79%), and "29% said they agreed or strongly agreed that they would consider stopping their education or work immediately if they became aware that their ovarian reserve was clinically low," which assumes that one cannot pursue education and work while trying to get, or while being, pregnant. Had I been one of the survey respondents, I believe I would have been among the 62% who "agreed or strongly agreed that they would take no action regarding their education or work

13 Another study reveals that expanding insurance coverage for infertility only results in increased usage by middle class, educated, cis-gender white women (Bitler and Schmidt).

14 For example, clinical testing and tracking of hormones in the "menopause transition" has been shown to help prevent bone loss (Karlamangla et al.; Shieh et al.; Podfigurna et al.), and research indicates a need for testosterone screenings for certain populations (Johnson et al.). At present, over-the-counter hormonal testing is limited to ovulation tests and pregnancy tests (for a feminist critique of such tests, see Layne). A newer market is OTC perimenopause/menopause testing, and while the value of such testing is "unsubstantiated" (Rushing and Santoro), as a non-expert, I'm interested in OTC options given inattention to infertility in reproductive care.

despite such news," and perhaps also the 80% who "indicated that if they received unfavorable results revealing abnormally low ovarian reserve, they would consider having children earlier" (1196). There is no option in Bavan et al.'s survey to decide not to have children as a consequence of the testing information; "repro-normativity" (Franke) remains intact.

While the right to fertility information feels unquestionable, implementing such testing without a concomitant shift in attitudes and behaviors may further oppressive pressures and systems: As Robin Jensen notes, medicalization and moralizing/shaming often work together. Ovarian reserve testing may scare people into having children before they are ready. Testing may only be offered to some and identify problems that those without insurance cannot attempt to address. Testing won't change the fact that certain people – people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, disabled people, poor people – are often discouraged from having children in the first place. Testing may further stigmatize those who seek infertility treatment, under the guise that they "should have known" they were infertile. Similarly, such testing may reify a healthcare system that already refuses to cover infertility. Finally, increased stigmatization of IVF might impact people who use infertility treatment with no other option.

Tracing familial lineages of infertility, despite the seeming irony of that phrase, is also needed. Well into my infertility process, an infertility specialist asked when my mother had gone into menopause. No medical history had ever asked me this, and when I asked my mother, she felt bad that she'd never thought to tell me she went into menopause in her early forties. At the same time, relying on familial lineages of infertility privileges certain kinds of infertile people, as gathering family history can be challenging.

While useful in some ways, ovarian reserve testing and tracing family lineages of fertility are ultimately problematic because they still rely on choice rhetorics: they assume that people can make better choices with better information, when this often isn't the case. Instead, to radically reconceive and reclaim infertility, we must more overtly (and finally) disconnect infertility from choice and volition. Disability helps us do this.

Cripping Infertility

Early Disability Studies sought to shift disability away from "problem" bodies and position it as a consequence of inaccessible environments (Linton). This body/environment binary has been rightly criticized (Owens), but a kernel remains that helps articulate infertility in environments (rhetorical, historical, cultural, political), rather than solely in individuals' bodies and "choices." For me, a disability perspective was key to resisting the shame-and-blame discourses of infertility while respecting my sense of loss.[15] Further, a disability approach to infertility honors the pain and grief

15 Part of a disability approach to infertility can include considering infertility as a legal disability. Legal scholars have sought protection of infertility under the Americans with Disabilities Act (Dallman; King and Meyer; Sternke), and David Orentlicher notes that reproduction was con-

of infertility and reframes it using crip time. Cripping infertility "decenter[s] normative relationships between bodies and institutions" (Simpkins) and emphasizes community, not cure.[16] We must shift from occasionally considering disability as a "topic" to adopting disability as a theoretical and activist lens through which we consider infertility.

Existing work on disability and fertility largely focuses on selective abortion. As Michelle Jarman claims, "[W]e must infuse our politics with a more crip lens…that pays careful attention to the dangers of figuring disability as a central defense of either life or abortion " (63). Alison Piepmeier explores how choice rhetorics of reproduction inform prenatal testing and selective abortion, and in her interviews with mothers who have children with Down Syndrome, Piepmeier highlights the "inadequacy of the narrative of 'choice,'" as decisions to mostly knowingly have children with Down syndrome were often community decisions, results of indecision, or conflicted choices (166). At the same time, as Bagentos notes, we must pay attention to how disabled people are "frequently denied their own rights to conceive, bear, and parent children, whether through forced sterilization or abortion, the denial of assisted reproduction, or the denial of parental rights once their children are born" (276).

The connections between disability justice and reproductive justice frameworks are underdeveloped and primarily focus on prenatal testing and screening. Dorothy Roberts and Sujathe Jesudeson note that "reproductive justice, women's rights, and disability rights activists share a common interest in challenging unjust reprogenetics policies and in forging an alternative vision of social welfare" (318). They discuss developing a shared set of values around reproductive autonomy, parenting, and policy advocacy, though they largely settle on "reproductive genetic technologies" (314), particularly prenatal screening, as the main takeaway of their piece. Similarly, in an exploration of rhetorics of reproductive justice, Novotny et al. touch on disability and infertility, but only to question "what lives are worth living" ("Amplifying" 383). While prenatal testing and screening are important, "any consideration of disability and reproductive rights must consider people with disabilities as parents, not just as fetuses" (287; also see Powell, "Disability").

As articulated by Crystal Benedicks' review of two infertility memoirs, a disability perspective on infertility emphasizes that we can't control our bodies and that self-care won't prevent or heal infertility.[17] Benedicks reviews Pamela Mahoney Tsigdinos' *Silent Sorority* and Phoebe Potts' *Good Eggs,* noting that each features a moment of "outraged entitlement," where these women

sidered a major life activity in Bragdon v. Abbott, which considered whether an asymptomatic HIV+ woman seeking dental care was in fact disabled, and she was considered so because AIDS can impact fertility and reproduction. Orentlicher argues that we often identify age-related conditions as disabilities (osteoporosis, hearing loss) and that infertility should be no different. Such legal reframings leave "disability as deficit" intact

16 Cripping infertility overlaps with Maria Novotny's concept of queering rhetorics of infertility, as well as work on queer reproduction (Smietana et al.) and queering reproductive access (Tam).

17 I edited this review while serving as one of two book reviews editors at *DSQ*.

claim they "should be fertile" due to healthy lifestyles (also see McLeod and Ponesse). But as Benedicks claims, as each story develops, so does "the realization that there is no moral basis for health, nor is biological function subject to the will." While neither Tsigdinos nor Potts uses the language of disability, Benedicks notes that "their crises can be read as moments of recognition of one of the ableist myths that undergirds normative understandings of disability: disabled bodies metaphorically signify moral failure; people 'deserve' the bodies they have." Benedicks suggests that disability perspectives can help navigate infertility, and for me, the grief that came with infertility was tempered by my view of it as a disability. While I was sad that I would not be able to have, or easily have, the biological child I wanted, only in my lowest moments did I somehow think it was my fault or that I was "less of a woman," as infertility memoirs relentlessly relate. I have other disabilities and have discarded the idea that I somehow "deserve" the emotional and physical pain my disabilities cause, and my infertility provides perspectives on reproduction that are valuable.

A disability approach to infertility is also needed because disabled people struggle to access infertility services (Francis et al.) and are more likely to be infertile than nondisabled people. As noted by Ha and Martinez, "[C]ompared to those without disability, WWD [women with disabilities] had 78% increased odds of having self-reported infertility," and among those, women with cognitive and sensory disabilities have the highest infertility odds (7). There is also weight discrimination surrounding infertility, as access to infertility services is often tied to BMI requirements (Parker and Grice; Slocum et al.). Finally, infertile people prefer the language of disability. A study of preferred terms for infertility among 1,226 U.S. adults reveals "condition" as the preferred term (78.4%), then "disability" (11.5%), then "disease" (9.7%) (Mancuso et al. 2111). Notably though, "Those choosing 'condition' were less likely to have a personal history of infertility and more likely to have a family or friend with infertility, and those choosing 'disability' were more likely to have a personal infertility diagnosis" (2114). I embrace the language of disability for infertility, in the context of disability and reproductive rights (Kallianes and Rubenfeld) and disabled mothering (Lewiecki-Wilson and Cellio-Miller).

Much as the meaning of disability is slippery in ways that challenge simple binaries, so could "infertility" expand to include all those for whom heterosexual conception is challenging or impossible. In doing this, my goal is not to make the definition of infertility so vast as to be meaningless or include everyone (as happens with "we're all disabled in some way" arguments, see Murray and Carlson). Instead, broadening and complicating infertility decenters the idea of "choosing" your way out and emphasizes contextual barriers. A disability approach also makes space for the pain and suffering that many with infertility experience. Cara Jones argues that feminist disability scholars "must add to their analytical toolkit a model of disability that centralizes pain" (556), and her work centers on menstruation and sexual pain related to endometriosis. The emphasis on pain where "fun" sexual experiences are expected maps to infertility, and both invite attention to disabilities strongly implicated by hormones. Margaret Price also encourages attention to pain, and I was struck by Price's description of how she hopes people will react to her pain: by "wit-

nessing" and expressing a "desire to help alleviate pain (rather than denial and eradication of the pain)" (13). This is what I wanted on my infertility journey but did not receive.

A disability approach also invites a needed re-reading of time and aging in relation to infertility. Robin Jensen asserts that given the over-attention to having children "in time," there is little space left "for the consideration of diverse evidence, historical perspectives, and long-established scientific and cultural refutations" (155). Jensen seeks to center "structural inequalities, lived material experiences, and a variety of relational encounters" (167), and a disability approach extends this work to more squarely question normative fertility/infertility time frames, rather than saying people lack choices within these frames.

In "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," Ellen Samuels notes that she doesn't exactly wish for a cure; she wants "for time to split and allow two paths for [her] life" that she could move between. I live these two paths, alongside other infertile people who grieve what they may have lost while embracing the path they are on. Samuels' articulation of crip time can challenge normative fertility-to-infertility timelines and recognize that infertility happens across the life course, as crip time can "extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings." As Alison Kafer writes in "After Crip, Crip Afters," crip time is not only about slowness or doing things "in time," which again maps to infertility. Instead, she asks: "What are the temporalities that unfold beyond, away from, askance of productivity, capacity, self-sufficiency, independence, achievement?" (421). A disability approach makes space for infertility successes and failures while complicating what those terms mean. A disability approach to infertility makes room for community; infertility is part of disability justice.

Resistance is Infertile

I've been writing this essay for a long time, and my motivations and connections to infertility have shifted over the years. At first, I was motivated by a conversation with my therapist about whether I wanted a second child, and in that session, I realized that I was grieving the loss of the choice I thought I would have, not an actual second child. I believe that if I hadn't felt promised the choice to have a child - if infertility had been typical and expected - I wouldn't have had so much to grieve, either in thinking about another child or in navigating the privileged and painful gauntlet that led to my son. At the same time, my infertility was a VIP invitation to important conversations I would not otherwise have had, as my infertility required me to think long and hard about whether I really wanted children and what it means to want biological children. Infertility requires us to think deeply about what we want and why, to consider the privilege and exclusion that informs why some of us get what we want and some don't, and to imagine diverse futures that embrace multiple forms of parenting. For these reasons, I am grateful for my infertility.

Around the time I finished a first draft of this essay, I marched at the second annual Women's March (in 2018), and I saw a protest sign that said, "Resistance is Fertile" in all caps on a white board, with some hastily-drawn flowers at the bottom. (The rest of the photo features the backs of marchers dressed for cold, some in pink cat ears and some holding protest signs, against a backdrop of traffic lights, buildings, and a lightly-clouded blue sky.)

The sign assumedly draws off the phrase "resistance is futile" from the Borg in Star Trek, which made me chuckle. But the sign bothered me because it equates resistance, feminism, and fertility in a movement and march significantly composed of infertile and/or menopausal people. Resistance grows in barren wombs and adoption denials; feminist rights extend to infertile people and those who are childfree; fertility is neither natural nor neutral.

In the Covid era, I worried about those who had their infertility treatments put off, in some cases for fear of the virus (Muhaidat et al.). Predictive modeling suggests significant Covid impacts on the success of infertility treatment (Bhattacharya), particularly for those with lower income (Morris), as well as notable impacts on mental health related to infertility (Barra et al.; Marom et al.). I had to move quickly when I learned I was infertile, and had I delayed treatments for a year or two, I would not have been successful. But clinics stayed open for some during Covid (de Souza et al.), and my prestigious clinic probably would have done so for me.

As I submitted this essay for publication, Roe fell. As the federal right to abortion was removed, I found myself less comfortable critiquing the idea of choice, while also feeling galvanized to more loudly declare that not everyone had choice - about abortion and other matters of reproductive justice - even with Roe. The Dobbs decision has also changed how IVF works, "making IVF less efficient, more costly and unsafe, and inevitably limiting access to care" (Ulker et al. 306; also see Crockin; Letterie & Fox).

As I finally finish this essay, I know my family is complete with my son. He won't inherit my complicated fertility, though it has characterized, and will characterize, our discussions of what it means to have children. My niece will need to know her infertility lineage in a different way and,

if she wants children, possibly navigate the testing and timelines I've considered in this essay. As I imagine talking to her about it, concerns about her feeling pressured to have children young wash over me anew, despite everything I've written here. Rhetorics of choice aren't only normative and omnipresent - they're simplistically seductive.

But it won't be one hard conversation or painful realization with my son or my niece, as it was when I learned about my infertility. Conversations with these people I love will be the constant, gradual, and recursive dismantling of myths of fertility and reproduction. Telling the story and lessons of my infertile body and bodies like mine is my choice. There's still time.

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Recoveries and Reconsiderations

Asians at Virginia Tech: Recovering an Institutional History of Asians in Appalachia through Intra-Institutional Networks

Jennifer Sano-Franchini and Nina Ha

Abstract: This Recoveries and Reconsiderations essay discusses the Asians@VT project, which documents a history of Asians and Asian Americans at Virginia Tech and the greater Southwest Virginia region. This essay discusses the context, background, outcomes, and implications of the project, which was developed through an independent study with six undergraduate students who engaged in archival research and oral history interviews. In doing so, it describes an example of feminist pedagogical practices for re-visioning rhetorical education. It also makes the case for intra-institutional collaborations that include administrative professional faculty in cultural and community centers.

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Tags: Asian Pacific Islander Desi American, APIDA, Asian American, Asians@VT project, Appalachia, Virginia Tech, Cross-Institutional Networks, Cultural and Community Centers, Archive, Archival, Oral History, Southwest Virginia, Recoveries and Reconsiderations, South Asians living in the diaspora, Feminist historiography, AAPI

What Is the Asians@VT project?

Asians@VT (https://asiansatvt.omeka.net/) is a digital archive of historical materials including recordings of oral history interviews that documents a history of Asians and Asian Americans at Virginia Tech (VT) and the greater Southwest Virginia region. A collaboration among a group of six undergraduate students and the two authors of this essay—a research and teaching faculty member, and an administrative professional faculty member—Asians@VT uses Omeka and Timeline.js alongside the methods of archival research and oral history interviews with alumni and faculty. In doing so, this project recovers and reconsiders the contributions of Asians and Asian Americans who were physically present and engaged within Virginia Tech and its surrounding communities. The university is also located in what the Appalachian Regional Commission has identified as Appalachia. As a result, we understand this project as contributing to ongoing efforts in Appalachian Studies to document a record of people of Asian descent—amongst other minoritized populations—in Appalachia, a place that is commonly imagined as homogeneously white and socio-economically disadvantaged (Allen, Avashia, Cabbell, El-Amin et al., Hayden, Kwong, Thompson, Troutman, Turner and Cabbell).

This project was guided by feminist rhetorical historiographical approaches as it focuses on recovering the history of a minoritized group. It was also methodologically informed by Terese Guinsatao Monberg's "Listening for Legacies, or, How I Began to Hear Dorothy Laigo Cordova, the Pinay Behind the Podium Known as FANHS" as it attempts to engage in feminist rhetorical listening through oral history "To go beyond what is immediately visible and documented … [through] what Jacqueline Jones Royster calls 'a habit of critical questioning, of speculating in order to make visible unnoticed possibilities, to pose and articulate what we see now, what's missing, and what we might see instead'" (87). Like Monberg and other feminist scholars, this work is grounded in a desire to account for diverse knowledges and forms of labor—or community contributions—to our understandings of institutional histories, to rhetorical theory, to understandings of Appalachia, and to knowledge about Asian American communities more broadly. In other words, we intentionally sought to consider how Asian Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDAs)[1]at Virginia Tech not only contributed to the university in direct and apparent ways, but also "behind the podium"—as they have worked to support, make possible, and enable our ongoing presence. This project also involved "strategic contemplation" as theorized by Royster and Kirsch, as we deliberately took

1 We sometimes use Asians, Asian Americans, and APIDAs interchangeably; however, we want to underscore the complexities of these terms, which represent diverse groups of people with highly heterogeneous histories and experiences that must be recognized. For instance, Desis (South Asians living in the diaspora) don't always consider themselves under the rubric of Asians, and at times, Pacific Islanders do not want to be grouped with Asian Americans because of complex colonial histories. Pacific Islanders are also generally recognized as marginalized and differently affected by some common anti-Asian stereotypes. It is challenging to find a term that fully reflects the diverse and heterogeneous experiences of this complex group of people. APIDA underscores the complexity of trying to recognize the diverse histories and experiences of this large and unwieldy group. We are not trying to replicate a white supremacist system and we want to acknowledge this complicated history that cannot be resolved in this paper if it should even be resolved.

"the time, space, and resources to think about, through, and around our work" (21), as we sought to "see and hold contradictions without rushing to immediate closure, to neat resolutions, or to cozy hierarchies and binaries" (21–22), and as we intentionally recognized that the work we were doing relied on the ongoing work of Asian/Asian American and other minoritized people. We were open to learning what we would learn through the research process, as opposed to having specific benchmarks in mind.

In addition, this project was informed by not only feminist research methodologies but also feminist pedagogies—it looked beyond the traditional classroom to at times overlooked learning spaces, it centered the concerns and interests of the students who participated in the project, and it contributes to the growing scholarship of feminist collaborations such as the work by Judy Wu and Gwendolyn Mink about the "trailblazing legislator Patsy Takemoto Mink, best known as the legislative champion of Title IX." Moreover, in the vein of Monberg's pedagogy of "recursive spatial movement" and "writing *as* the community" paradigm, our project positioned the Asian American students we worked with to "move *within* their own borders or communities, so they might listen for the deeper textures present in the place(s) they might call 'home'" (22). We also co-taught this independent study as women whose pedagogy aligns with feminist practices through continued collaboration and communication with each other and encouraging shared spaces and shared visions without competitive or hierarchical power dynamics (Sano-Franchini, Sackey, and Pigg). In other words, we didn't assume the tenured faculty member should take the lead on things or that the person in student affairs should take a back seat in a research project. We understood that everyone had equally important contributions to make to the project, and that every voice mattered. This is recognized in the fact that we had a contributions page especially devoted to the students, whose profiles appeared at the top of the page. Finally, we allowed for considerable flexibility when we all had to pivot online due to COVID, which started at the middle of the semester; we understood the need to recognize work and personal life balance during a time when many of us had other urgent matters as well as challenges to navigate as the pandemic brought on anti-Asian hate incidences. This was a difficult time for many of us in the Asian American community as so many of us—especially East and Southeast Asians—felt anxieties about being randomly targeted for physical attacks and harassment.

This Recoveries and Reconsideration essay outlines the context and background for this project, the process used to engage in this recovery work, and the outcomes and implications of implementing this project, as opposed to focusing on the content included in the digital archive. We hope that by doing so, this essay will encourage readers to consider how this project might serve as an example that can be adapted for their own institutions, in their own efforts to recover much-needed histories that support APIDA visibility and inclusion.

Context and Background

Asians@VT was developed in Spring 2020, while we were both faculty at Virginia Tech, a research intensive predominantly white institution in the mid-Atlantic and Appalachian region. Asian American students made up over 10 percent of the undergraduate student population, making them the largest racialized minority group on campus. At Virginia Tech, like in many institutions of higher education, APIDAs are not considered underrepresented due to the lack of data disaggregation, thereby causing this minoritized population to be underserved and under-resourced, not to mention ignored and at times erased from local histories. Moreover, in some instances, Asians and Asian Americans are not even perceived as minorities, even though they are! As a result, there has been limited attention dedicated to APIDA students' needs and concerns not only in the university curriculum and student support services but also in terms of institutional narratives and histories. In this context, it is not surprising that the history of APIDAs at the institution was not visible to a vast majority of students, faculty, and staff who came into the university. Thus, we were compelled to instigate and encourage the documentation of APIDA contributions.

When we first came together to discuss the idea of working on a history of APIDAs at Virginia Tech, Jennifer Sano-Franchini was an associate professor in the English department, and Nina Ha was the director of the Asian Cultural Engagement Center (now the APIDA + Center). Nina invited Jennifer to serve as a Faculty Fellow for the Asian Cultural Engagement Center (ACE Center), a position that was made possible through the generosity and support of the Office for Inclusion and Diversity. We wanted to collaborate on a project that would bring attention to the history of the APIDA community at Virginia Tech ever since Nina began her role at VT in Fall 2019. Jennifer's interest in recovering Asian and Asian American institutional histories extended from her experience doing archival research on Asian American contributions in NCTE and CCCC (Sano-Franchini, Monberg, and Yoon), and from working with APIDA students on a library exhibit at Virginia Tech. At a previous institution, Nina had experience assigning oral history projects in the classroom, particularly with respect to gathering digital narratives of Japanese Americans who had experienced U.S. mass incarceration during World War II. Therefore, this collaboration that combined archival research with oral histories felt seamless. When we had the chance to co-facilitate an independent study with interested and motivated students, we were excited to do so. Being able to bring attention to primary sources and uncover the stories of the APIDA community is important for encouraging all members of the university community to recognize APIDA contributions to the community, as well as to re-contextualize their own positionality even if they are not APIDAs themselves.

We recruited six undergraduate students from a variety of disciplines—accounting, political science, math, computer science, Asian studies, and journalism—who were active in working with Nina and at the ACE Center. What compelled all of us to implement and complete this project was a shared desire to not only document but also uncover/highlight this history of a heterogenous

APIDA community that is oftentimes overlooked or perceived as invisible. As many of the students note on the Asians@VT website, a large part of their desire to participate in this project was to create and document otherwise forgotten and excluded histories. In this way, we centered students' interests and concerns through a feminist pedagogical framework. For example, Kenny Nguyen conveyed, "The project has taught me the importance of having our organizations continue to keep adequate records and documentation properly archiving them for reference and research purposes for future generations. If the lived experiences and struggles of our community are painted to be illusory, then through documentation and archival processes, we are able to **solidify their place in reality**." Kenny's comment profoundly highlights how processes of documentation affect not only who is viewed as part of "reality" but also how organizations might conduct their work in the present and future. Underscoring Kenny's observations is Algae Ngo who wrote, "I hope that this project will spark a stronger drive towards archiving and documenting the presence of AAPIs at Virginia Tech to further establish ourselves and our experiences as an integral part of this university's history." Throughout this process, the students insisted on creating a space of belonging that was not temporary; rather, the timeline and archival materials that they uncovered and restored, especially in a virtual format, allows for continued documentation and recordkeeping of an APIDA presence that cannot be erased.

Identifying students who wanted to participate in this project underscored the value of having an Asian American studies curriculum since all six of the students had previously taken the Asian American History class and/or the Asian American Experience course that had been offered at VT. Through their engagements in either one or both of these classes, the students understood the value of desiring to know more about APIDA contributions and the local histories of APIDAs living in Southwest Virginia. What was also beneficial about these students' disciplinary backgrounds was that they were also evenly divided into what projects they wanted to cover—three of them chose to work on archival research and three of them participated in the interview process.

Developing the Project through an Independent Study

In this section, we discuss the logistics of developing this project, as well as the challenges we experienced as we navigated institutional structures for making this work possible. Because the existing university curriculum at the time—as well as our teaching and administrative assignments—did not include a course on Asian American feminist recovery work, we developed an independent study cross-listed in English and Sociology, through which the students could receive academic credit for working on this project. First, however, we needed to navigate the institutional process for approving the independent study for students from several different colleges and majors. Having students from across the university meant that there were multiple forms that needed various signatures including not only the students' academic advisors, but also the chairs of their respective departments and the deans from both the students' majors as well as that of the credit-granting college! When students were majors of different colleges from our own College

of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, those signatures needed to be gathered in person and not electronically. Therefore, Nina literally had to walk from department to department and building to building to gather original signatures, which was both time-consuming and cumbersome. Additionally, we needed to develop justifications for how the independent study aligned with their major plan of study. Thus, we developed a syllabus that outlined the following learning objectives:

With successful completion of this undergraduate research, students will:

- Understand basic tenets for engaging in historical research in Asian American rhetoric.
- Discuss concerns relevant to oral history and/or archival research, including textual imperialism, archives as institutionalized knowledge, and the rhetorics of curation.
- Apply feminist historiographical methodologies to a research project documenting a history of Asians at Virginia Tech and in Southwest Virginia more generally.
- Analyze historical artifacts and narratives through a feminist rhetorical framework.
- Explain the connections between local events and larger sociopolitical movements.

Through these goals and given the students' diverse skillsets, we worked together to walk through the process of curating and analyzing interviews or archival and academic materials, including but not limited to Virginia Tech yearbooks, its student newspaper, *Collegiate Times,* and other local news articles, published histories, and other resources. The independent study was assessed on a Pass/Fail basis because the project encompassed a variety of skillsets that didn't necessarily lend itself to traditional methods of assessment. In addition, we believed that this option would encourage students to be driven by their own interests and engagement in the project itself, and not be concerned with the pressures of traditional grades, which can lead to students feeling that they need to do what we, "the teachers," wanted them to do.

With feminist historiographical theories and pedagogies in mind, students were encouraged to consider the rhetorical implications of the telling of history; how histories both enable and limit the possibility of community, as well as how the telling of history is epistemological and imbued with implications for power, privilege, and marginalization. We began the semester by assigning readings from *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South*, including the introduction and a chapter by Brandzel and Desai that centers on the context of Virginia Tech, as we believed these works would provide important context for the project on which we were embarking. In addition, we examined existing histories of minoritized groups at the university that were created through Special Collections at the University Libraries. To better frame this project, we reached out to campus partners such as Katrina Powell, who was leading VT Stories, an effort to collect "stories, memories, tall tales, tragedies, and triumphs of all members of the Hokie community," Jessica Taylor from the History Department who specializes in oral histories,

Anthony Wright de Hernandez whose job was to cultivate and acquire materials for the Newman Library's Special Collections[2] and Corinne Guimont, also part of the Newman Library and whose focus was on creating a digital record using such applications like Omeka. Having supportive and engaged collaborators is necessary when considering the creation and implementation of a student-led research project like the one that we proposed and fulfilled. That people's expertise were varied and coming from different disciplines and backgrounds was vital. This project was transdisciplinary, diverse, and intentionally multimodal. Moreover, it was important to us to draw on existing university resources and expertise to support this project and its goals, and to create networks that would raise awareness about the project and the need to include Asians and Asian Americans in institutional histories and historical work more generally.

Conclusion: Outcomes and Implications

Upon looking back at this project, there were many challenges as well as celebratory moments that all of us shared. Through Asians@VT, we learned that students of Asian descent had been attending Virginia Tech for more than a century. The first documented Asian student that we found in the archive was Mozaffar-ed-din Khan, who enrolled as an international student from Teheran [*sic*], Persia in 1914. We noted how this was not long before women were first allowed to attend classes full time at the university in 1921. It was also almost four decades before the university enrolled its first Black student, Irving L. Peddrew III in 1953. The first Asian student whom we could find evidence of having graduated from the university was Tien Liang Jiu from Hong Kong; he graduated with an electrical engineering degree in 1924. The first South Asian student we found evidence of was a graduate student who attended VT in 1948, Chittaranjan Ishverlal Almaula from Bombay. The first Asian international and woman student to enroll at the university in 1950 was Yvonne Rohran Tung from Hong Kong. Taken together, this history of Asian international student enrollment demonstrates the slow process by which Asian men from different ethnic backgrounds, and then Asian women were admitted to the university over several decades. At the same time, there is much we have yet to learn, including the history of domestic Asian American students at VT.[3] We found ourselves feeling hope, anticipation, interest, and disappointment simultaneously as we came to learn how much was still missing from our history of Asians at VT.

2 Anthony Wright de Hernandez reached out to Nina when she started working at Virginia Tech in 2019 requesting that she donate materials about APIDAs since Special Collections had so little documentation by and/or about APIDAs. Thus, this feminist historiographical project helped with the curation and accumulation of this knowledge

3 We understand that the Virginia Tech shooting may be the only fact some people know about VT given the magnitude and media coverage of this event; however, we believe it's important to highlight the wide range of things that Asians at VT and in Southwest Virginia have been doing for a long time. In other words, we do not want this event to overshadow the important contributions that have been made by APIDAs at VT and in Southwest Virginia more broadly. In addition, the shooting continues to be a point of trauma for the VT community, making critical conversation about the topic difficult. In addition, although the Special Collections included archival materials related to the shooting, those materials often didn't focus on the APIDA experience. Thus, we did not include the archival materials from this event

In addition, while we began this project meeting in-person at the ACE Center, our project was disrupted as the COVID-19 pandemic started midway into the spring semester. These circumstances forced us to reconsider new ways to approach our methodologies as we all had to pivot to working online as we negotiated new ways for students to take classes as well as for instructors to teach courses, all the while trying our best to get work completed despite many obstacles and restrictions. In the case of the students who were researching in the Special Collections of the library, they now had to find source materials virtually. For the students who had conducted oral histories in-person, they now had to do so via Zoom or other online applications. During this time, both students and faculty had to manage all of this alongside health, caregiving, and other concerns; as a result, our focus necessarily shifted away from the project to an extent.

Still, what we noticed while planning and implementing Asians@VT was the importance of intra-institutional partnerships—in this case, tenure-track faculty and student support units. Despite the varied ways in which institutions of higher education can be quite siloed and can even deter unique opportunities for collaborating, we recognized the value of creating these transdisciplinary and intra-institutional networks. For instance, Jennifer's background in rhetoric and the digital humanities nicely complemented Nina's background in Asian American studies and her professional relationship with Asian American students from a wide range of disciplines, not to mention that of our collaborators in history, the libraries, and the digital humanities. Together, we created a project that was informed by several disciplinary perspectives that no one of us could have created on our own. As our unique teaching styles and pedagogies came together, it became clear to us how it is important to think "outside the box" about whom we might partner with, and the value of considering intra-institutional partnerships, especially between traditional research and teaching faculty and those in cultural and community centers. In addition, this intra-institutional setup meant that our "classroom" was not only at the ACE Center, which served as a kind of meeting hub, but also in the Intercultural Engagement Center's conference room, the university archives, and interview meeting spaces. This cross-campus spatial arrangement was not just functional but also pedagogical as it meant that students were able to lay claim to these predominantly white spaces and the institutional resources that are available to them. Several students observed this point; for instance, Jessica Nguyen noted that she hopes "our research inspires more groups to see the value in utilizing resources VT Special Collections has to offer." The students who worked on the project were able to gain firsthand experience in terms of how the university libraries, as an example, is a space that can enable communities to establish our presence and place in the university's history. Moreover, this engagement, we believe, teaches students about the politics of place-based narratives and that they have the agency to intervene in institutional white supremacist narratives through historical research. We encourage others to consider similar kinds of feminist intra-institutional partnerships as a way of establishing the presence of invisibilized and marginalized groups on their own campuses.

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Cluster Conversation: Gender and the Rhetoricity of Work, edited by Michelle Smith and Sarah Hallenbeck

Introduction: Feminist Imperatives and the Rhetoricity of Work

Michelle Smith and Sarah Hallenbeck

Michelle Smith is an Associate Professor of English at Clemson University, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in feminist rhetorics, rhetorical theory, and material and cultural rhetorics. Her publications include her monograph, *Utopian Genderscapes* (2021), as well as articles in *College English, Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, and *Peitho*, among others. Her current research explores archives and feminist memory through an extended study of the WWII-era image popularly known as Rosie the Riveter.

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Tags: rhetoricity of work, workscapes, domestic rhetorics, intersectionality, temporality, work-as-identity

This Cluster Conversation responds to an exigence crystallized by the pandemic: the simultaneously material and rhetorical nature of work, including the settings and material contexts in which it occurs, the values we assign to it, the ways our mind-bodies are conditioned by it, and the possibilities for how it might be otherwise.

In the last four years, COVID has enlivened recent debates over compensation, working conditions, and status accorded to food workers, public school teachers, early childhood educators, and numerous others whose work has been labeled "front line." It has allegedly yielded a

"Great Resignation" as well as countless debates about the efficacy of remote work and a flourishing of entrepreneurial activity. Very quickly, the conditions under which many of us work, as well as the ways we approach and are valued for our work, have been transformed, often within technological frameworks the contours of which we are still learning. This Cluster responds to this tumultuous era of work by revisiting and introducing new methods, approaches, and questions related to the rhetoricity of work. It builds on past scholarship, much of which attended to historical configurations of work's rhetoricity (see Gold and Enoch's *Women at Work*, Enoch's *Domestic Occupations,* and Smith's *Utopian Genderscapes*, among many others), offering inroads into more contemporary investigations of work-related rhetorics. While not all these essays take up the context of work vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic specifically, all of them attend to working contexts that might broadly be considered contemporary.

As scholars and editors, the increased public attention to rhetorics of work during COVID-19 challenged us to consider how our existing frameworks were or were not equal to the task of making sense of the shifting workscapes around us. Our collaboration in this area began with our 2015 article in *Peitho*, which called for more attention to work-related rhetorics in (feminist) rhetorical studies. Planning and leading an RSA Summer Institute workshop in 2023 gave us the opportunity to reflect on the body of work-related research that has grown, and that we ourselves have participated in, since then. As we've seen, there has indeed been increased scholarship in this area—yet we see a particular need for rhetoricians to attend not only to rhetorics at play within specific occupations, but also to the collective mechanisms through which work is valued, devalued, made visible, obscured, celebrated, misremembered, recognized, and/or erased. In this introduction, we first provide background on the workshop as the genesis for this Cluster before describing three promising avenues for future scholarship that coalesced in our collaboration with the contributors to this Cluster.

The Workshop

In planning our workshop, we wanted to revisit our 2015 *Peitho* article, which called for more research in the gendering of work. In that article, we gestured toward the three topoi of duty, education, and technology as frequently implicated in efforts "to naturalize, disturb, or otherwise resituate what constitutes 'women's work'" (203). Eight years later, we wondered: how did these topoi hold up as useful and capacious descriptors for the rhetorical gendering of work? To what extent was "gendering" still central to our inquiry? What other topoi were scholars identifying, both in historical contexts and in our volatile contemporary moment? And what other methods, questions, and approaches were they bringing to their scholarship on work, both within and beyond rhetorical studies?

To support our thinking and discussion, we gathered a range of readings including scholarship on women's work in rhetorical studies (Gold and Enoch, Smith, Buchanan, and Applegarth,

Hallenbeck, and Redeker Milbourne); popular nonfiction on women's work (Goldin, Williams); material theoretical approaches (Cresswell, Sharma, Jeon); and neoliberal feminisms and work cultures (Cech; Federici; Gill, Kelan, and Scharff). Our conversations and the subsequent work of the contributors helped us to reflect both on where our understanding of gendered rhetorics of work has been and where it is going.

With the help of our nine workshop participants, we recognized that our original topoi–and perhaps topoi in general–invite a tacit orientation toward studying specific occupations and workplaces, rather than toward examining broader, more culturally pervasive discourses about work that exceed occupational boundaries, and that have proven particularly relevant in this "post" COVID moment of reflection and transformation. Additionally, we noted a dearth of scholarship exploring working conditions outside colleges and universities, relative to that within. We encouraged workshop participants to contribute scholarship to our cluster conversation that might both address these gaps and reveal additional avenues for future feminist research in work-related rhetorics.

The authors of the five essays included here–all participants in the RSA workshop last spring–provide models for what future scholarship within work-related rhetorics might look like. Here, by way of introducing their excellent work, we describe three themes that emerged from their efforts. Each, we believe, warrants further exploration by researchers interested in work-related rhetorics.

Intersectionality

One theme that emerged from our Cluster is the need for more explicit commitments to the intersectional analysis of work-related rhetorics. Such a commitment is essential not only to decoding the complex negotiations through which different forms of work are valued at particular moments in time, but also to addressing contemporary issues of access, advancement, and even disciplinary or occupational knowledge-making practices that have very real effects on people's lives. The need to consciously seek and craft intersectional approaches was underscored, in our workshop, by observing that even recent popular scholarship on the gender wage gap limits its scope to the wages of college-educated men and women, a group that constitutes less than half of the U.S. population (Goldin 5). Both Lillian Campbell's and Kristina Bowers's essays engage with these concerns, each offering innovative methodologies to demonstrate how processes of exclusion and devaluation operate through work-related rhetorics.

Kristina Bowers brings a much-needed disability studies-informed perspective to discussions of work-related rhetorics, scrutinizing the neoliberal rhetoric of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for its equation of work with citizenship and disability with the inability to work. Indeed, disability and work are intimately linked, as Alison Kafer demonstrates in her qualification of the disability studies mantra that becoming disabled is "only a matter of time": "Of course,

disability is more fundamental, more inevitable, for some than others: the work that one does and the places one lives have a huge impact on whether one becomes disabled sooner or later, as do one's race and class positions" (26). Bowers' contribution examines the policies and procedures through which individuals apply for SSDI from the perspective of individuals suffering from Long COVID, a wide-ranging disease that does not conform to the ableist rehabilitation/cure telos through which the SSDI operates. Drawing from Annemarie Mol's multiple ontologies theory and praxiographic method, Bowers traces the construction of Long COVID–and disability more broadly–through the arduous and ongoing process required to apply for disability in the United States. The resulting analysis "reveal[s] how material, embodied experiences of disability… interact with social discourses and neoliberal institutional practices that label people 'disabled'" (Bowers, this issue). In keeping with our interest in expansive (rather than occupation-specific) work-related rhetorics, Bowers encourages us to consider how disabled people are constructed as inadequate citizens through dominant, neoliberal work-related rhetorics. Future scholarship might examine how other documents and bureaucratic processes reinforce, complicate, or challenge this construction, or how they otherwise shape disabled people's experiences with work.

Meanwhile, Lillian Campbell's essay examines how class and race inflect work-related rhetorics, situating her analysis in the health professions. Campbell draws from interviews with Black and biracial women working as tele-observers in a virtual intensive care unit (VICU) to demonstrate how their expertise is often dismissed and devalued by their more-credentialed hospital colleagues. Campbell demonstrates how these tele-observers rhetorically navigate the "difficult position of having extensive patient knowledge that helped them to recognize subtle problems alongside communication challenges and workplace structures that limited their ability to act on that knowledge." More broadly, Campbell's article interrogates a long-standing scholarly fascination with high-prestige, masculine-identified jobs as objects of analysis within feminist scholarship on work. "Feminist rhetoricians have long been interested in women and health work, but—just as our attention has historically been skewed toward North American white women—we have consistently focused on higher-status professional discourses in health care, especially the experiences of physicians" (Campbell, this issue). As Campbell argues, overlooking the contributions and knowledge-making practices of entry-level workers in woman-dominated professions deprives us of valuable tools for addressing social and systemic inequities, such as the unequal maternal health outcomes for Black women in childbirth.

Work-as-identity

Additionally, rhetoricians are well-poised to draw attention to the consequences of boundary work between personal and professional lives and spheres. As Claudia Goldin explains, "women have increasingly been planning to have long-term, highly remunerative, and fulfilling careers—sustained achievement that becomes embedded as part of an individual's identity" (6). Additionally, more workers have joined the so-called "gig" economy or have pursued influencer or brand

work, which commodifies and monetizes identity in seemingly unprecedented ways. Feminist rhetoricians have long explored the fusing of work and identity in the home, and the rhetorical creep as domestic rhetorics accompany women into the workplace (see, for instance, Gold and Enoch), but contemporary rhetorical constructions of work-as-identity pervade other domains. For example, the idea that it's not work if you love it, long a bastion of rhetorics of women's domestic work, has spread outward into a number of other domains, most notably particular forms of white-collar work.

In her contribution, Ashley Hay explores social media content creation, a form of labor that is only intermittently recognized as work in broader public discourse. Asking how "femininity and postfeminist sensibilities… extend beyond cisgender female bodies," Hay examines how sex working content creator Repairman67 rhetorically positions his content creation as a natural expression of his identity. This pretense of content creation as more expressive than creative is common across social media, but Repairman67's sex work adds an additional angle to this positioning insofar as he must evade restrictions for illicit content while also directing followers off-app to more lucrative revenue streams. As Hay explains: "The changing demands of the attention economy drive creators to create fluid and responsive textual and paratextual content for both their viewers and the platforms upon which they operate." Hay thus theorizes Repairman67's content creation as an "excessive" form of labor entailing "emotional and entrepreneurial" work, clarifying that "it is not sex that Repairman67's viewers are consuming, but his entire technosexual identity." Feminist rhetoricians might do well to investigate the possibility that boundaries between work and identity are increasingly blurry for other professions as well, with particular attention to the fact that the association of the work we do with who we are creates opportunities for exploitation. Indeed, the idea that having passion for one's work offsets lower pay or inflexible working conditions often functions as what Erin Cech terms a form of "choicewashing," where "the cultural framing of processes that are systematically classed, racialized, and/or gendered as the benign result of deliberate individual choices within equitably functioning and opportunity-rich social contexts" (166).

Similarly, Kelsey Alexander's analysis of the recent emergence of the so-called "anti-work" movement and backlash on Reddit engages with neoliberalism, a notion closely tied to work-as-identity. As Foucault explains, neoliberalism involves the extension of economic thinking into "a whole domain previously thought to be non-economic," such that identity takes the form of *homo economicus,* who is, fundamentally, "an entrepreneur of himself" (219, 226). Alexander situates the anti-work movement as a critique of a neoliberal ethos grounded in the U.S. Protestant work ethic, the belief "that hard work pays off both spiritually and literally" (Alexander, this issue). Through an analysis of the subreddit r/antiwork, Alexander shows how this critique became more urgent under the conditions of the pandemic, when, in the face of widespread shortages and lack of support, workers were expected to forge ahead in service to production and commerce under the auspices of "essential" work. Alexander's contribution encourages scholars to attend closely to digital platforms like Reddit, which, though "often dismissed for their magnification of hive-minded,

and at times hateful" communication, "are fast becoming the best locations to track how digital communities (re)act towards the precarious nature of our times." In general, her essay suggests the potential of research avenues that historicize and interrogate pervasive work-related discourses, such as the positioning of work-as-identity, that resonate beyond specific industries, professions, and workplaces.

Temporality

Time and temporality emerged as a theme across our workshop readings. Claudia Goldin's diagnosis of the gender wage gap as a result of "greedy work" in U.S. contexts focused in large part on temporal dynamics. As Goldin explains, greedy work rewards couples for "specializing," such that one partner (often, in heterosexual couples, the man) is on call at work, and the other at home. As a result, "the individual who puts in overtime, weekend time, or evening time will earn a lot more—so much more that, even on an hourly basis, the person is earning more" (Goldin 9). On a larger scale, Sarah Sharma highlights how broader narratives about time–such as narratives depicting the COVID-19 "moment" in terms of urgency and temporariness–support unsustainable and inequitable labor relations. "Too often the belief that we are living in a dangerously sped-up culture makes the demand for the labor of others justifiable as a systemic need 'in these fast-paced times' rather than the structurally excessive privilege that it is" (Sharma 19). Thus, a final promising avenue for future research might involve temporal erasures, distortions, or minimizations related to different forms of work, particularly those that are tied to identity and care for others rooted in love. Although time has been explored in several feminist rhetorical examinations of work (see, for instance, Jack's "Acts of Institution" or Enoch's "There's No Place Like the Childcare Center"), it remains a promising avenue for feminist scholars interested in work-related rhetorics.

Ashley Beardsley's article offers a compelling consideration of work's gendered and temporal resonances, asking: how is the compression of time, like the demarcation of space, implicated in the gendering and devaluation of domestic labor? "Focusing on the role of time in rendering women's work less visible," Beardsley argues that "omitting time spent laboring over a meal conceals labor that most often falls on women." Beardsley's chronotopic analysis of Rachael Ray's TV show, *30-Minute Meals*, and cookbook, *Just In Time!,* reveals how an emphasis on time-saving cooking techniques both naturalizes women's responsibility for providing their families with delicious, nutritious meals and compresses the time required to actually prepare said meals, from meal-planning to clean-up. Using an embodied, materialist methodology grounded in strategic contemplation, Beardsley experiments with Ray's recipes in her own kitchen, tracking her time commitment in doing so. Beardsley's article extends research by scholars such as Smith and Enoch, who have each examined the historical erasure of domestic labor through spatial representations and demarcations. She also provides an illustration of political scientist Valerie Bryson's claim that women's domestic work "cannot be captured by simply mea-

suring the hours that women's caring responsibilities appear to involve" (134). Indeed, as Bryson explains, women not only give their own time, but also "make time" for others: "much of women's work in the home involves generating time for family members by coordinating their activities with the external timetables of schools, dentists, transport and other households" (133). Beardsley demonstrates that the gendering of work remains alive and well, even as the means by which it is accomplished have evolved, and she makes a strong case for continued examination of temporal rhetorics in the study of gender and work.

Conclusion

We hope that these and other themes that run through the five essays included in this Cluster Conversation, are generative for scholars interested in pursuing projects in the burgeoning area of work-related rhetorics. Intersectionality, temporality, and constructions of work-as-identity each build upon existing research while at the same time productively addressing oversights and gaps in our assumptions about gender and the rhetoricity of work.

This volatile moment–in which forces as diverse as gig economies, remote work, and artificial intelligence are all simultaneously transforming workplaces, and in which Americans' understanding of the aims and purposes of higher education is becoming increasingly vocational and profit-driven–invites rhetoricians' critical and imaginative attention to the question of *work*. We would be wise to examine how these rapid changes are playing out both in specific occupational contexts and in broader cultural currents, such as in work's perceived relationship to identity, citizenship, and education or training.

As we undertake this research, we must be vigilant about the mechanisms through which work is erased, distorted, or rendered invisible–which, we note, remains a constant thread in this research area and one of the primary characteristics of work's rhetoricity, as well as its gendering. However, not all of the essays included in this Cluster Conversation engage explicitly with gender. This reflects our commitment to recognizing that work's rhetoricity exceeds its complicity in processes of gendering, and that feminist scholarship is capacious enough, both in its aims and its methods, to attend to the embeddedness of work in a wide range of unequal power relations. For example, our workshop left us convinced that one potent aspect of the rhetoricity of contemporary work is its participation in the "neoliberalization of contemporary culture" (Gill, Kelan, and Scharff 227). We must interrogate the neoliberal structures that pervade contemporary discourses of work such as those that Bowers and Alexander explore, and we would do equally well to investigate (and historicize) emergent counter-discourses such as those of the anti-work movement. Such examinations indeed deepen rather than distract from our feminist commitments, signaling a recognition that, in the words of feminist theorist and activist Silvia Federici, "'women's history' is 'class history'" (14).

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Not Just Doctors: Woman-Dominated Health Work as a Site for Rhetorical Research and Professional Change

Lillian Campbell

Abstract: Feminist rhetoricians have long been interested in women and health work, but we have consistently focused on higher-status professional discourses in health care, especially the experiences of physicians. Drawing on interviews with three women of color working in tele-observation, this article models an approach for rhetorically attending to undervalued health work where women are in the majority. Tele-observers virtually monitor high-need hospital patients via video cameras in the patient's room, typically observing 6-8 patients at a time and communicating with them using a microphone. My findings discuss the tele-observers' training and preparation, their verbal communication on the job, and their physical experience of the virtual intensive care unit. I argue that to position women of color in all echelons of health care as changemakers would require transforming public attitudes towards training, prioritizing interprofessional communication, and decentering recruitment into high prestige professions in health fields. Feminist rhetoricians can lead the way in expanding our thinking about workplace representation from an emphasis on recruiting new women into high-paying health roles towards valuing and seeking professional opportunities for women who are already engaged in a range of health work.

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Tags: Rhetoric of Health and Medicine; Technology; Health Professions; Workplace Communication; Embodiment

The Black maternal health crisis has been in the public eye lately, particularly with high profile cases like the death of Olympic sprinter Torie Bowie and Serena Williams' life-threatening delivery complications (Cash). In the United States, Black women are three times more likely to die after giving birth than non-Hispanic white women (Hoyert), while making up less than three percent of physicians (Bajaj, Tu, and Stanford). These two facts are often articulated together as part of a narrative about the need to recruit Black women into medicine. Yet, as someone who recently gave birth in Milwaukee, I was struck by the number of Black women involved in my pre- and post-natal care—as medical assistants and technicians drawing blood, taking vital signs, and generally providing much of the data for my care. What about those women? As I further considered this experience while developing this article, I wondered: How might attention to women of color in all echelons of health work change how we enact equity both in terms of professional recruitment and patient care?

Feminist rhetoricians have long been interested in women and health work, but—just as our attention has historically been skewed toward North American white women—we have consistently focused on higher-status professional discourses in health care, especially the experiences of physicians (Kondrlik; Skinner; Theriot; Wells). One can see the logic behind such an approach—drawing on research on the pay gap (Fine 57) and the "leaky pipeline" for women moving into leadership roles (De Welde, Laursen, and Thiry 1), researchers focus on understanding rhetorical and social barriers to accessing high-paying roles. Biases towards professional roles that require four-year college degrees or more are also ingrained. Most researchers work in traditional academic spaces and, as a result, carry with them assumptions about what counts as desirable work (Rose xxxix).

In contrast, this article models an approach for rhetorically attending to existing undervalued health work where women are in the majority, such as Certified Nursing Assistants ("National Nursing Assistant Survey"). In doing so, I argue that women of color in all echelons of healthcare could contribute to reducing racial and cultural disparities in care. I draw on my findings from interviews and observations of seven tele-observers in a Virtual Intensive Care Unit in the Midwest. Tele-observers virtually monitor high-need hospital patients via video cameras in the patient's room, typically observing six to eight patients at a time and communicating with them via microphone. Six of the tele-observers in my study were women, three of them were Black or biracial, and together they represented a wide range of ages (20-60) and professional backgrounds. These included stints working as an airline customer service representative, special education teacher, small business owner, nurse, EEG monitor for stroke patients, lab technician, etc.

After reviewing existing feminist rhetorical scholarship on women in health care and introducing my field site, this article analyzes the material rhetorics of tele-observers and the material conditions that best support their ongoing employment. My findings discuss the tele-observers' training and preparation for their role in the VICU (Virtual Intensive Care Unit), their verbal communication on the job, and their physical experience of the tele-observer role. Drawing on these findings, I argue that to position women of color in all echelons of health care as changemakers would require transforming public attitudes towards training, prioritizing interprofessional communication, and decentering recruitment into high prestige professions in the health fields. Feminist rhetoricians can lead the way in expanding our thinking about workplace representation from an emphasis on recruiting new women into high-paying health roles towards valuing and looking for professional opportunities for women who are already engaged in a range of health work. Such opportunities might include but should not be limited to employment as doctors.

The Prestige Problem

While this article calls for a shift in how feminist rhetoricians conceive of and research women's participation in healthcare, I recognize that recent feminist rhetorical scholarship on women and work is already beginning to attend to working-class women. For example, in *Women at Work* (2019), editors Jessica Enoch and David Gold describe a nearly even split between chapters focused on working-class and professional-class women (6). Similarly, Lisa Blankenship's work on rhetorical empathy includes discussion of domestic worker Joyce Fernandes's social media campaign #Euempregadadomestica (I, Housemaid). This expanding view of what constitutes work and what work is worth studying is in line with my call in this article to consider women across the spectrum of health care employment.

Indeed, much of the historical research on women's rhetoric in health care takes female physicians as its primary focus. Carolyn Skinner, Susan Wells, and Nancy Theriot all examine rhetorical practices of women physicians in the mid-to-late 1800's. Meanwhile, Patricia Fancher, Gesa Kirsch, and Alison Williams also describe how the *Woman's Medical Journal* (1893) provided social networking for women in the profession and challenged sexist institutions, but rarely included Black female physicians as authors or readers ("Feminist Practices").

Undoubtedly, this historical rhetorical research is restricted by access to women's writing, as women in high prestige fields were more widely published. Still, the field's bias towards higher status health work carries through to scholarship on contemporary women in rhetoric and professional writing. Examples include Kristin Kondrlik's examination of women doctors' professional ethos in #Likealadydoc and my own research on rhetorical positioning of physician Dr. Carla Pugh ("MacGyver"). Meanwhile, Heather Falconer's case study of a Black woman pre-med student speaks to some of the challenges of recruitment and persistence for women of color in medicine (10). An important exception is Rachel Bloom-Pojar's and Maria Barker's research on *promotores de salud*, lay workers who provide reproductive health education for local Latino/a communities. The authors show how "promotores help connect immigrant communities with social services, and they make health information culturally relevant and linguistically accessible" (85). Their research demonstrates the vital rhetorical knowledge that can be gained by considering women in health care outside of formalized professional tracks.

Field Context

This research took place in a Virtual Intensive Care Unit (VICU) housed within a research hospital's health center in Menomonee Falls, WI. The VICU is a large, open room with approximately six nurse stations spread across the right side and a set of about eight tele-observation stations next to one another on the left side. The VICU nurses monitor high-risk hospital patients' medical charts and provide supervision and advice to floor nurses. They will also cover

for tele-ops [observers] if they need a break and can answer tele-ops' questions about patient context because of their medical chart access and co-location in the VICU.

Each tele-observer has a set of double computer screens and headphones at their adjustable desk; on their screens, they remotely observe six to eight patients at several different hospital sites and with different levels of need. Their job is to make sure that patients are not violating protocol by getting out of bed or otherwise disturbing their IV lines, oxygen tubes, or other interventions. To accomplish this, tele-observers are responsible for issuing a "redirect" when a patient breaks protocol, either by speaking verbally into a microphone connected to the room or pushing a button that issues an automated verbal command. If a patient does not respond to their redirect, the tele-observer may call a nurse or sound an alarm, depending on the situation's severity. Tele-observers also have a set of paper documents where they keep track of how often patients break protocol and their interventions.

During the summer of 2021, I spent twenty hours observing operations in the VICU, staggering my observations so that I could see different staff members at different times of the day and night. Initially, I planned to focus on the virtual nursing care team, specifically their use of a patient deterioration algorithm, a system which alerts providers when patient status is likely to decline based on a set of data points. However, I became increasingly interested in tele-observation, a position that did not require any formal education, though certification as a Nursing Assistant (CNA) or prior experience was recommended. Thus, I followed up with the clinic coordinator in summer 2022 to conduct virtual interviews with seven of the tele-observers in the VICU. This research was approved by my institution's IRB; in line with that approval, I keep the hospital network anonymous and use pseudonyms for my interviewees.

For the purposes of this article, I focus on my interviews with three women who self-identified as Black or biracial, since recruitment efforts often prioritize individuals with similar intersectional identities (Bajaj, Tu, and Stanford). However, when relevant I also draw on insights from my other interview participants, as well as observations gleaned from the twenty hours I spent observing the VICU. Below, I provide some context on the three women who will be the focus of this article.

Ava is a Black woman in her twenties who was pursuing a bachelor's degree in Biology at the time of this study, with the goal of becoming a Genetic Health Counselor. She received her CNA certification during college and had been working as a CNA in a clinic on her campus that served both resident nuns as well as high-need locals. The VICU position was her first virtual job, and she had been working there for one year part-time when we spoke. Ava and I met over Zoom and were able to interact through both video and audio during the interview.

Becca is a biracial (Black and white) woman in her thirties who had a wide range of previous experience in healthcare as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CAN) and a health aide, as well as in childcare and family care. She had been working in the VICU for four and a half years, alternating between full- and part-time work. At the time of the interview, she was working part time in the VICU and as a medical aide while studying for a degree in social work. She had a young child who she carried with her around her house for most of the interview, and we paused occasionally so she could attend to the child.

Finally, Darilyn is a Black woman in her forties who had been working in the VICU for two months when we spoke. She had held a wide range of prior health care positions, including as a phlebotomist, a triage coordinator, and as a CNA. She was working part time at the time of the interview. We spoke over the phone rather than over video, so I had less access to her expressions and movement while speaking.

Interview and Observation Findings

Drawing on my interviews and observations in the VICU, this section analyzes the material rhetorics of tele-observers' work and workplace. I discuss tele-observers' preparation for the job, verbal and written communication practices on the job, and embodied experience of the VICU. These findings provide grounding for the subsequent discussion section, where I attend to how under-valued health workers' material rhetorics can help feminist rhetoricians transform our thinking about enacting equity in professional recruitment and patient care.

Training and Preparation for Tele-Work

In the white-collar roles that are often the focus of gender and health work scholarship, training is long-term and sequentially organized, with workers deciding early in their educational lives their field of work and then investing years into acquiring appropriate credentials. In contrast, training and degree requirements for the tele-observer role were minimal. During their first two weeks of work, participants received training and mentorship during their regularly scheduled hours, focused primarily on learning the technical systems for the job. All three women in this study had CNA certificates, but several interviewees did not. Tele-workers instead relied on years of related and adjacent experience in health care, customer service, education, and more to inform their practices on the job.

When asked about training for the position, most participants described a focus on the technology they would be using, including the video monitoring system and the auditory system that allowed them to use a microphone to speak into the patient's room. Participants also noted that understanding medical terminology and hospital operations were necessary for their day-to-day practices, but that they either came in with that knowledge or learned it on the job. Prior

knowledge that supported the tele-op role, then, came primarily from participants' previous experiences, both learning in formal educational programs and prior employment.

Ava and Becca were currently enrolled in degree programs, and Becca reflected that her social work courses supported her ability to contextualize patient experiences, saying:

> Somewhat understanding why people do the things that [they] do, commit, or try to commit suicide. Or the reasons why. It's just so many different forms of mental health out there [...] So I'm kind of seeing how people act it out in the emergency rooms or in the different hospitals.

Here, Becca draws a connection between what she is learning about different mental health diagnoses in her classes and their enactment by patients on the screen. Seeing her patients "act out" the different diagnoses helps her to contextualize the experiences of her patients. Similarly, Ava's CNA coursework contributed to her empathy for the patients she was observing. She explained: "If you first walk into a room and patient's arguing, they're cranky, you're just like 'oh this person's mean,' but then you don't think about, 'hey they're in a lot of pain, they're under a lot of stress, they might be trying to figure out how they're going to pay for this treatment.'" While Becca described learning to contextualize mental illness, Ava's lessons were more holistic, focused not just on how a patient's diagnosis might influence behavior, but also on their external lives and experiences.

On the other hand, several participants offered specific examples of the ways their physical experiences with patients in healthcare contexts gave them the embodied rhetorical knowledge to intervene with patients on their screens. Becca, who was also working as a medical aid, explained that her direct patient experience gave her interventions urgency: "If the patient's sitting in the poop, you know, kind of understand not what the feeling is but what you should do in a better way pretty much […] I can be quick when I need to." Becca's embodied encounters with patients in a hospital context, then, prompt her to intervene quickly. In a similar way, Darilyn described a situation where the patient had what looked like yellow cream all over their protective mitts. Even though she could not see the color clearly on the screen, she reached out to the nurse, noting that the location of the fluid on the back, shoulders, and mitts cued her into something being wrong. It turned out that the liquid was blood, and Darilyn credited her prior work as a CNA with helping heighten her awareness of the problem, even though the screen distorted the situation.

Overall, participants drew flexibly on their prior education and experience to inform both their physical and emotional rhetoric with patients in the VICU. Prior embodied experiences were far more influential to their practice than formal credentialing or on-the-job training. As I discuss later, this points to a need for feminist rhetoricians to attend to health professionals outside of four-year credentialed positions, since formalized education creates both financial and logistical barri-

ers that limit who we consider to be workers and what we consider to be work.

Communication on the Job

To enact change in a workplace, especially in terms of patient advocacy, individuals need to communicate effectively about a patient's status to an entire healthcare team. One of the biggest challenges in medical contexts is that data-driven evidence and claims are often much more highly valued than claims based on embodied or intuitive knowledge (Campbell & Angeli 356). For tele-observers, knowledge of patient needs was often born of careful observations of patient behavior over a period of many hours. In fact, they were restricted from access to data: the tele-observers were not authorized to view patient charts. Thus, when they sensed something was wrong and needed to communicate that to a nurse, it could be difficult to persuade their team.

The tele-observers were encouraged by both their site manager and one another to "trust their gut," and yet, that did not ease the process of persuading a healthcare team to intervene with a patient. Another interviewee, Ginny, a white woman in her fifties who had worked in the VICU for two years, explained: "I think as human beings we communicate on so many levels that we're not even aware of. So it could just be the facial expression on someone that you've been watching that because you've been watching them for eight hours you notice a change and then you'll click on that room." These small changes often show up before the data-oriented tracking—before the telemetry machines know that a patient is crashing, for example. They are also more difficult to articulate to a nursing team.

In general, the tele-observers had to navigate several communication challenges when interacting with their patients and the floor nursing staff. With patients, tele-observers recognized that they were a disembodied voice in the room issuing directives and that, depending on the patient, they could expect a range of reactions. Some participants described using the patient's name in an initial redirect, modeling language for me like, "John Doe, could you please sit down?" (Ava). Ava explained that using their names helped patients to know that the instruction was directed at them, especially for disoriented patients. Other observers seemed more comfortable relying on automated redirects, however, rather than speaking personally to the patient. Darilyn, for example, said that she primarily used the automated messages and would only use her own voice if there was not an appropriate automated message. She felt that patients responded better to the recording.

Meanwhile, when it came to communicating with nurses on the floor, tele-observers navigated a precarious balance between reaching out to nurses for updates when necessary but also not bothering a harried team who often seemed inconvenienced by the tele-observers. The nurses were on twelve-hour shifts, while tele-ops were on eight-hour shifts, meaning that nurses'

hand-offs to the tele-ops—when they provide an overview of the patient's status and needs—did not align with the hand-offs they give to incoming nurses on the floor. In addition, tele-ops had the authority to remove cameras from a patient's room after a period of inactivity, but nurses often wanted to keep the camera in the room for an added layer of security. Becca explained that tele-ops have a script available to them for when they need to notify nurses that a camera is being removed. This script frames the removal as a directive rather than a request, helping to combat the challenging power differentials of the conversation:

> Your patient has had very little interventions in the last twenty-four hours so we're going to pull the camera. And most times they'll say, 'well we have a doctor's order' or 'we had interventions' but they're not on our sheet, so we just have our [VICU] nurses take a look at that and we'll give them a call back.

In Becca's explanation, we can see how relying on nurses' updates about patient interventions creates gaps in tele-ops' knowledge. Thus, the tele-ops leverage personal relationships with nurses in the VICU to help navigate a difficult conversation with nurses on the floor, gaining legitimacy through this relational support.

In general, the tele-ops were in a difficult position of having extensive patient knowledge that helped them to recognize subtle problems alongside communication challenges and workplace structures that limited their ability to act on that knowledge. In immediate interactions with patients, they could rely only on verbal communication to redirect patient action. Meanwhile, when reaching out to nurses, they were faced with power differentials born of both information differences (data vs. intuitive knowledge) and educational differences.

Embodied Experience of the VICU

While the tele-observers faced several communication challenges, they also frequently reflected on how relaxed and comfortable this job was compared to their previous roles in healthcare. Becca described the atmosphere as "laid-back," while Ava noted, "I wouldn't say it's stressful, it's a very relaxed feel. We can get up; we can stand at our desks too." Several of my participants mentioned the availability of standing desks and workout equipment when I asked about their physical experience of the job. This was interesting, in part, because while the nursing team on the other side of the room was almost always standing at their desks, I never saw a tele-observer standing during my observations.

Meanwhile, in terms of their emotional experience, participants also commented on the reduced emotional load enabled by their virtual presence. Ava, comparing her experience to working as a CNA with the nuns on her campus, noted, "I would say emotionally, my CNA job was very demanding because many of the sisters were lonely, so I was their only source of outside connec-

tion." I asked all participants whether they ever felt like they wanted to "reach through the screen" while working and received split responses. Of this sub-group, Ava and Darilyn said "no," while Becca said "yes." Ava noted that her instinct when a patient needed intervention was to try to get a nurse there quickly. However, she emphasized, "I try not to take this home with me because we're not doing so much for them emotionally." Meanwhile, Darilyn expressed some sadness about her futility, "You just wish that they wouldn't do things, you know certain things, hurt themselves. I just act as urgently as I can to help them." In contrast, in her response, Becca repeated twice that she "want[ed] to help more": "If they're going to fall, I want to kind of catch them, but the stat alarm doesn't really work because most times in two of the hospitals they can't run there fast enough."

In part due to the perceived low physical and emotional load of these jobs, many participants indicated an investment in staying in the positions long term. This was buttressed by the fact that the positions had good benefits that participants could access even if they were working part-time. Darilyn commented that she "hope[s] to stay here," while Becca, who was in school for social work, noted: "I would say I would never leave it because when I'm ready to retire I can pick and choose what I want so, as long as you stick with OPT [optional part time], you'll be good." Other participants made similar observations about their ability to stay on into older age. Knowing that retention can be a huge problem for marginalized workers, the fact that the tele-observer role was one that participants could imagine fitting into their lives for the foreseeable future is significant.

Learning from Woman-Dominated Health Work

Drawing on my conversations with Ava, Becca, and Darilyn, I argue that we can leverage the presence of women of color in all echelons of health work to help address racial and cultural disparities in care. However, this will require transforming how the public thinks about training, interprofessional communication, and recruitment in health fields. Feminist rhetoricians can contribute to these efforts through ongoing attention to and publicization of the experiences of under-valued health workers.

Implications for Training

The barrier to entry for tele-observer work was low, with a recommended CNA certification that could be waived for workers with appropriate experience. This is important because low-cost community college options for certification are often difficult to access ("Spring 2023"). In fact, one of my participants described how her career goals changed due to limited access: "I was actually going to look into becoming like a surgical tech. And then the one main class for that […] was booked up for the next two years, so I was like, 'well I'll just put that aside for now' and then I ended up getting the job with social services" (Evie). Overall, formal educational re-

quirements can create significant financial and logistical constraints for workers. Meanwhile, when public institutions cannot provide access to certification, private institutions step in. In this way, demanding formal certification for health work can both limit access and require participation in predatory for-profit institutions that target first-generation students and people of color (Cottom 186-7).

An alternative would be to find more consistent ways to value and "count" worker experience towards professionalization. As I discussed, tele-observers in my study relied heavily on communication strategies and embodied knowledge from their previous work experience, in addition to formal coursework. Other countries with more robust investment in vocational education training are far ahead in developing systems that recognize and value this workplace experience alongside formal coursework. For example, in 2018, Finland revised its vocational education programs to broaden the contexts in which students can acquire qualifications, including increased opportunities for on-the-job learning (Rintala & Nokelainen 114). Looking to similar models could help health care employers and educators in the U.S. to think expansively about how we define qualifications for different types of health work. Feminist rhetoricians can contribute by drawing attention to the complex rhetorical knowledge that individuals gain outside of formalized education and through a range of workplace experiences.

Implications for Communication

I was stunned to learn that the tele-observers did not have access to patient health records and impressed by their ability to rhetorically navigate complex interprofessional relationships without that access. They relied heavily on their own documentation as well as the knowledge of the nurses in the VICU to argue for removing patient cameras. Their lack of access to the health record also compounded their disadvantages when advocating for patients. Nurses were likely to brush off their concerns in part because of educational differences. Evie captured how the differing levels of access and expertise shaped communication between tele-ops and nurses: "[The nurse] is just seeing that patient for a few minutes at a time […] where I'm monitoring that patient that whole time. So I'm the one who has, I guess not more education, not a better/higher degree, but I'm witnessing and noticing more." Tele-ops struggled with this combination of less educational standing and limited chart access, but more embodied patient knowledge. Therefore, when calling a nurse to alert them to a problematic change in patient behavior, they had to rely on intuitive claims that are often not as persuasive in medical contexts (Campbell & Angeli 356).

If we are to leverage the embodied, intuitive knowledge of a wide range of health providers—letting the perspectives of women of color become part of the conversation—we need to consider how to elevate their voices in interprofessional contexts. In the case of tele-observers, granting access to patient charts and including tele-observers' notes in the patient record—rather than isolating this information on paper documents—would go a long way. Feminist rhetoricians,

meanwhile, can value the important rhetorical work that tele-workers and individuals in similarly undervalued roles perform by attending to it in our scholarship and calling for change. In addition, more effort to incorporate interprofessional communication training for both nurses and tele-observers could help to support trust and open communication between the two groups. Tele-observers who had worked in previous health care settings noted how their knowledge of nurses' experiences helped them to collaborate effectively with this group. However, floor nurses also need to understand the tele-observers' experiences and limitations so that trust can be mutually established. Meanwhile, as I have argued elsewhere, rhetoricians of health and medicine can play an active role in contributing to such interprofessional communication training ("Rhetoric of Health" 7).

Implications for Recruitment and Retention

I want to end with the question that began this article: how might attention to women of color in all echelons of health work change how we enact equity both in terms of professional recruitment and patient care? A simple answer is that perhaps we might look to an existing workforce of Black women already engaged in patient care when we consider *who* to recruit. However, just recruiting marginalized individuals into prestige positions is not enough. A more complex answer is that we must consider how future health care positions can reflect some of the specific advantages of the tele-observer role that made it an appealing long-term option for many of my participants. Feminist rhetoricians can contribute to building an understanding of the material rhetorical experiences that facilitate ongoing professional engagement and success for women of color.

My participants could imagine themselves working in the VICU long-term because their physical and emotional distance from the hospital floor helped them to avoid burn-out. Economic historian Claudia Goldin argues for the need to "make flexible positions more abundant and more productive" (15). While clearly health care is still going to require in-person work alongside virtual roles, we might look to careers like Ava's and Becca's for a vision of the future—working part-time in person in a hospital setting and part-time virtually. Both participants noted how these dual roles helped them to feel both emotionally engaged and present with patients and to avoid exhaustion. And, indeed, their workplace experiences helped them to be better virtual providers as well.

Finally, choice has a positive effect on the workplace experiences of tele-observers. They could stand or sit; work out or not; use the voice recording or speak directly to patients. These options gave them flexibility and the ability to alter their workplace practices in response to their unique rhetorical positioning and needs. Considering what it might look like to integrate similar elements of choice into health care work should be a priority.

The shifts I am calling for here are by no means small. They call for transforming the ways we think about work and education broadly to help us to recognize the gaps in our existing frameworks. A first step might be more feminist rhetorical scholarship attending to the everyday embodied rhetorics of women in less prestigious health roles. What else can we learn from attending to the material rhetorics of under-valued women health workers? Where else are we failing to look? Who else are we forgetting to include when we study the rhetoric of women's health work? And how might listening to these groups help us to transform the ways we think about concerns like recruitment and the Black maternal health crisis in a variety of professional fields and contexts?

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"You Have Time, and You Should Cook, Tonight:" Erasing Feminized Labor on *30-Minute Meals*

Ashley M. Beardsley

Abstract: Home-cook-turned-television-personality Rachael Ray began teaching viewers how to cook in 2001 on the Food Network show *30-Minute Meals*. Across thirty seasons, Ray demonstrates how cooking television promotes time-space compression through fake-outs: shortcuts that make dishes seem more complicated. In this article, I use strategic contemplation to analyze episodes from season nineteen of *30-Minute Meals* and cook from Ray's 2007 cookbook *Just in Time!* to argue that instructional cooking texts (TV shows and cookbooks) erase the labor associated with feeding other people by omitting time spent laboring over a meal. Throughout, I incorporate my mom's relationship with Ray and cooking alongside my kitchen labor to demonstrate how Ray minimizes necessary steps that occur before and after cooking.

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Tags: cookbooks; domestic labor; Rachael Ray; television; time-space compression; strategic contemplation

Duty typically implies a responsibility to or for other people.

-- Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith

For dinner Saturday night, I made "Shrimp Scampi Verde" from home cook-turned-television-chef Rachael Ray's fifteenth cookbook, *Just in Time! All-New 30-Minute Meals, Plus Super-Fast 15-Minute Meals and Slow-It-Down 60-Minute Meals*—with a few modifications (180-1). The recipe calls for fresh linguine, but I didn't bother checking to see if Wal-Mart even had fresh pasta—I had a box in the pantry. Next, I replaced the chicken stock with the Better Than Bouillon Vegetarian No Chicken Base (I'm a pescatarian). I did use basil, parsley, chives, arugula, EVOO (extra-virgin olive oil), garlic, red pepper flakes, and dry white wine, but I opted for frozen shrimp instead of fresh and used Country Crock plant-based butter (I have a dairy allergy). As the shrimp was frozen, I ran the one-and-a-half pounds of seafood under cold water for about seven minutes, a step not accounted for in Rachael's instructions.[1]

1 I refer to Rachael Ray by her last name when analyzing and her first name when sharing cooking stories to signal both my relationship with Ray as a culinary persona and how she

From there, I set up the rest of my ingredients. Although Rachael goes back and forth to her fridge and pantry on her cooking show and explains ingredients while she roots around her spice rack, I like to get out most of what I need in advance. My *mise en place* ready, I salted the pasta water and began chopping. By the time I had pulsed the herbs, arugula, and stock into a paste, the water was ready, so I dropped the noodles and began cooking the shrimp in a skillet, adding the garlic, red pepper flakes, and bright green sauce. It took me forty-one minutes and thirty-seven seconds from defrost to dinner. We will return to the cooking time later in this article after I tell you a bit about how Rachael uses what seems like a small amount of time—thirty minutes—to erase the feminized labor associated with cooking by means of shortcuts, or fake-outs.

In her first TV show, *30-Minute Meals,* which premiered in 2001, home-cook-turned-television-personality Rachael Ray made half an hour seem like ample time to whip up impressive, comforting dishes.[2] In this article, I study Ray's temporal rhetoric by analyzing recipes and episodes from 2006–2007 to examine how instructional cooking texts' hyperfocus on time (e.g., meals that take thirty minutes) erases the feminized labor associated with the daily act of cooking. Such an erasure of work *as work*, especially when it comes to cooking, has yet to be fully explored by feminist rhetoricians. As Sarah Hallenbeck and Michelle Smith explain, "the erasure and invisibility of much women's work is an enduring problem" that rhetorical scholarship can illuminate (201). The labor of cooking—which includes essential pre-cooking steps like making a grocery list and shopping and post-cooking clean up—is rendered invisible, because views of gender and work are based on the notion that acceptable women's work prioritizes "subsistence work" like "cooking, cleaning, [and] sewing" (207). Focusing on the role of time in rendering women's work less visible, I argue that omitting time spent laboring over a meal conceals labor that most often falls on women. In addition, I fold in my personal connection with Ray's work to build on feminist rhetorical scholarship that explicates the ways time and gender are accounted for and discounted in relation to work and examines the kitchen as a rhetorically gendered site often discounted as a workspace. As Jessica Enoch's archival-based spatial rhetorical analysis of diverse materials—including everything from architectural schematics to government bulletins—demonstrates, studying everyday artifacts promotes a fuller understanding of the way women engender and regender space. I add instructional cooking television shows and their hosts' cookbooks to Enoch's list of rhetorical artifacts that co-constitute space and gender (24). Such materials account for and discount the gendered labor associated with cooking, and, through these materials, celebrity chefs participate in constructing gendered spaces that hide women's domestic labor.

To do so, I employ feminist rhetorical practices, specifically strategic contemplation, as I cook from *Just in Time!* and watch *30-Minute Meals* to identify and unpack the impact of Ray's central temporal rhetorical strategy: shortcuts. I begin by explaining how I chose one of Ray's

uses storytelling and humor to craft a connection to viewers.

2 Ray hosted *30-Minute Meals* for thirty seasons and had numerous shows throughout the years. Her talk show, *the Rachael Ray Show,* first aired in 2006. After seventeen seasons of national syndication, she made her last bowl of on-air pasta on May 25, 2023.

cookbooks and specific *30-Minute Meals* episodes. Then, I use episodes from season nineteen as a case study to interrogate Ray's use of time and, as the epigraph from Hallenbeck and Smith notes, explain how Ray minimizes time to present cooking as a duty associated with the *responsibility* of feeding others. Though Ray promotes the idea that people who work outside the home have time to cook, I (re)consider the feasibility of such recipes through my own perspective, as a slightly-above-average home cook. Although I focus on what Ray's cookbooks and shows obscure, I conclude by noting how she incorporates the senses to teach viewers an embodied way of cooking. Ray's teaching style is reminiscent of learning to cook by being in the kitchen with someone and acts to empower home cooks.

What's for Dinner? Selecting and Analyzing Recipes and Episodes

When I was a kid, I would ask my mom a question that makes my adult self bristle as one of the people in my household who plans meals: "what's for dinner?"[3] My mom was prepared to answer (and take me to Taco Bell if she'd planned something like stuffed peppers, a dish I never learned to like). Our dinners usually involved pasta or sandwich-type items featuring chicken or ground beef; indeed, in many ways, they resembled the dishes taught on the instructional cooking show *30-Minute Meals*. Such shows fall into the "cookery-educative" television genre, which seeks to build cooking literacy through a charismatic host who demonstrates how to cook (Matwick and Matwick 11). Rachael Ray was the first on-screen cook my mom and I connected with through the kitchen TV.

In 2001, the first episode of *30-Minute Meals* aired on the Food Network channel and began promoting a temporal rhetoric that uses time convince viewers there's no excuse not to cook. Originally called the Television Food Network (TVFN), the channel's programming focused on "serious chefs" and restaurants (Collins 162). Despite this focus, Ray was not considered a chef, because she didn't learn her cooking skills in culinary school—she is self-taught and gained experience teaching customers how to cook at a specialty food store. Her cooking classes at Cowan & Lobel, a gourmet grocery store in Albany, New York, embraced the thirty-minute meal rule and developed Ray's expert status through her connection with shoppers—she was a home cook feeding family and friends, just like them. The cooking classes were three hours long, and attendees left with enough thirty-minute meal recipes to prep a month of food (Diamond). The TV show, however, wouldn't have worked as a three-hour program, because *30-Minute Meals* needed to focus on one complete meal to help viewers get something on the table in real time and keep them engaged.

Overall, the tightly timed format worked. With thirty seasons of Italian-inspired, time-friendly meals and twenty-six cookbooks to choose from, I needed to select recipes to make and

3 Thanks to my husband Sam who shares the labor of meal planning, shopping, cooking, and cleaning up.

episodes to analyze, so I approached Ray's materials like the high school kid asking my mom, Shelly, what's for dinner. I used strategic contemplation to engage in an imaginary conversation with Shelly about Rachael Ray because my prior experience with Ray centers my mom and her daily cooking. As Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch explain, strategic contemplation is a way to embody research that involves "engaging in a dialogue, in an exchange, with the women who are our rhetorical subjects, even if only imaginatively, to understand their words, their visions, their priorities whether and perhaps especially when they differ from our own" (21). After watching several *30-Minute Meals* episodes from random seasons and imagining Shelly was there, I became fixated on Rachael's cookware line, which launched in 2006, shortly after her daytime talk show, *Rachael Ray*, began airing.

My current obsession with her pots and pans occurred because they marked a milestone for Rachael in my mom's kitchen: Shelly bought them for herself one Christmas. By that point, we already referred to extra virgin olive oil as EVOO, the shorthand we'd learned from Rachael, and, although Shelly watched for entertainment rather than culinary instruction or dinner ideas, Ray was a regular household presence. I can't be sure whether the cookware was a 2006 or 2007 purchase; however, knowing my mom's affinity for acquiring the latest kitchen gadgets, I settled on using materials from 2006 and 2007, which led me to cook from *Just in Time!* and analyze season nineteen to mark a time when Rachael and the orange nonstick cookware entered our home.

There are thirty episodes in the season.[4] Because this article seeks to understand how instructional cooking shows employ time as it relates to women's *daily* cooking, seven episodes were omitted because of their connections to holidays or their emphasis on hosting rather than the day-to-day cooking in a family home.[5] Then, I asked, "What would Shelly make?" My mom did not like cooking and spent the least amount of time possible in front of the stove, so if she were going to make one of Rachael's recipes, she would have gravitated toward simplicity and familiarity. Thus, I searched episode descriptions for mentions of simple and easy. Our dinners often featured chicken or the popular soup and sandwich combo, so those were the next keywords. As I watched, I used strategic contemplation and feminist rhetorical theories of time and gender (Enoch; Hahner; Hallenbeck and Smith; Jack) to see how Ray articulates relationships between cooking, duty, and time, watching for mentions of cooking techniques that expedite cooking. In light of these criteria, my analysis focuses particularly on the episodes "Half Baked," "Simple Three Course Italian," "Reuben It In," and "Dinner in Florence."

4 Different streaming platforms (e.g., Discovery+, Sling, Amazon Prime, etc.) provide conflicting episode numbering; therefore, I refer to episodes by their title, use timestamps, and provide URLs for The Roku Channel, which does not have commercials.

5 The excluded episodes include cooking for Thanksgiving or with Thanksgiving-inspired flavors ("Thank Me Later" and "Gobble It Up"), Halloween ("Friday Night"), having friends over to watch sports ("30 Minutes to Victory"), a general "spread" for entertaining ("Munch and Mingle"), cooking seafood during the holidays ("Holiday at Sea"), and hosting on New Year's Eve ("Casual New Year's Eve").

To engage in an embodied exchange with my mom and Rachael, I needed to cook, but due to my dietary restrictions, I couldn't make the dishes from the selected episodes.[6] Instead, I cooked from *Just in Time!*, published in 2007—the year season nineteen aired. I highlight my cooking experience making the "Shrimp Scampi Verde," because it captures my average cook time and was the dish I enjoyed the most. To inform my analysis, I also modified and made the fifteen-minute "Chicken or Shrimp Fajita-Tortilla Soup" (86), "Sorta-Soba Bowls" (118), and "Fish with Ginger-Orange-Onion Sauce" (202), and the thirty-minute "Green-with-Envy Orecchiette and Red Wine-Braised Sausages" (132), "Can't Beet That! Drunken Spaghetti" (134), "Whole-Wheat Pasta Arrabbiata with Fire-Roasted Tomatoes and Arugula" (145), and "Charred Chili Relleno with Green Rice" (170)—all from *Just in Time!*.

As I cooked and watched episodes, I became increasingly aware of how Ray mentors home cooks by speeding up the work of cooking through shortcuts that distract viewers from the labor and, more specifically, the time associated with cooking. In what follows, I explicate how Ray's multi-course meals use fake-outs to promote a temporal rhetoric that applies gendered stereotypes of duty to obscure cooking as labor.

Three Dishes in Thirty Minutes? No Problem

You have always got time for a great meal.

--Rachael Ray, 30-Minute Meals sign-off

At the end of each episode, Ray encourages viewers that a great meal, which includes several dishes, is something they always have time for. However, Ray notes in an interview that she makes multiple dishes per episode, because "every second on television" must be filled (Sagon). Ray also notes that viewers more often than not "just do the entrée and a side and don't bother with dessert," showing that she recognizes most home cooks will not serve a three-course meal. Nevertheless, the show's emphasis on the simplicity of multi-course meals overshadows Ray's understanding of how viewers interpret the dishes, reinforcing the message that, to be a successful home cook, you should prepare multiple dishes in thirty minutes or less. Such an emphasis on speed connects to Jordynn Jack's descriptive concept of time-space compression—a notion often associated with technologies that "seem to accelerate or elide spatial and temporal distances" in favor of efficiency (57). Time-space compression teaches viewers to "speed up production cycles" or, in this case, cook time, to produce more food, without recognizing the labor associated with cooking (57). Such rhetorics perpetuate the patriarchal expectation that women are responsible for cooking regardless of whether they work outside the home. Here, I use time-space compression, specifically the ways that work connects to time in the present and immediate future, to examine how Ray focuses on the present, ignoring pre-cooking prep like shopping and post-cooking cleanup. I consider the implications of this compression to understand how

6 The dishes in these episodes use an exorbitant amount of cheese and meat, making it difficult to substitute ingredients to accommodate my dietary restrictions.

erasing steps of cooking labor contributes to devaluing cooking as work.

Furthermore, Ray's concept of thirty-minute meals mirrors the time-saving rhetoric dominating twentieth-century cookbooks, particularly those published in the 1950s and 60s. These cookbooks encouraged the use of convenience foods (e.g., frozen dinners and canned vegetables), adopting "the radical notion that cooks should speed up their work as much as possible" (Inness 19). Similarly, Michelle Smith emphasizes that we must consider gendered technologies (like stand mixers and ovens with easily adjustable temperatures) that "succeed or fail in liberating women from domestic drudgery or reproductive determinism" (9). Acceptance of such items allowed women to spend less time in the kitchen, and using pre-made ingredients became commonplace; however, they did not change who was responsible for cooking. Ray's recipes align with the acceptance of pre-made ingredients, especially when it comes to dessert. For example, "Coldie but a Goodie" is the only episode from season nineteen that mentions dessert. Spumoni ice cream sandwiches conclude a pasta-filled meal with a side salad, coming together quickly as Ray calls for pre-made chocolate cookies, a jar of jam or fruit spread, and two pints of ice cream.

Although shortcuts can expedite a meal, using pre-made ingredients reinforces the gendered expectation that women can whip something up at a moment's notice. "In order to understand regimes of time," says communication scholar Leslie A. Hahner, "we must not only interrogate the public circulation of temporal discourse, but also the ways in which time is unevenly distributed and articulated to various subjects" (290). In the case of *30-Minute Meals*, women are given a specific amount of time to complete the task at hand—cooking for others—because it is a form of feminized labor. In Ray's world, the unspoken dictator of time is the mundane act of getting dinner on the table for your family, and occasionally guests, by a specific time. In my childhood home, that time was 5:00 p.m. My mom planned her day around having dinner ready "on time." In the sections that follow, I address how the time-space compression of *30-Minute Meals* promotes cooking for others as a gendered duty and deploys fake-outs to minimize the labor associated with cooking. Throughout, I situate these observations in relation to my personal experience making Ray's recipes.

The Intrinsic Duty to Cook for Family and Friends

Let's return to my Saturday night dinner. My evening plans consisted of cooking, so I wasn't annoyed that it took forty-one minutes to make the garlicky shrimp. The added time might seem on-point when including the time to thaw frozen seafood; however, this wasn't a thirty-minute meal. According to the cookbook, the "Shrimp Scampi Verde" is a fifteen-minute dish (Ray 180). In a 2004 *Washington Post Interview*, Ray admits that making these meals in the amount of time she stipulates is a stretch. "I can do it in 30 minutes," she says, "but not everyone can. I'm used to cooking. I chop fast" (Sagon). Based on my experience with Ray's recipes, her admission that the average home cook may need additional time certainly applies to the fifteen-minute entrées.

I can't chop nearly as fast as her, but I consider myself pretty adept with a knife. I mention the additional cook time here because my experience informs my central argument that cooking texts render work invisible through temporal restrictions that discount necessary steps beyond active cook time.

By focusing on the act of cooking itself (the present), Ray obfuscates the more dispersed work that goes into cooking for others. Despite the added time, the recipe headnote reflects my reaction as I mopped my bowl with a slice of fresh, homemade sourdough bread: "Too easy! Too good!"[7] As food rhetorics scholar Carrie Helms Tippen argues, headnotes "reflect and reform the narratives of the culture they claim to represent" (12). Such mirroring occurs in Ray's cook time, headnotes, and commentary throughout episodes and is similar to the way twentieth-century cooking texts, like *30-Minute Meals*, advertise quick dishes that use convenience items like frozen vegetables and store-bought elements to fulfill the responsibility of feeding others (Elias; Inness). The headnote continues: "I wrote this for [actress] Stephanie March to cook up for her hubby, the spicy Bobby Flay. It is herbaceous and ridiculously delicious. Your mate will kiss you for it again and again" (180). Bobby Flay, a professional chef who still has television shows on Food Network, is more than capable of cooking for himself and others, yet this dish is written explicitly as an easy entrée his wife can make for him.[8] The subtext here is that, even after a busy day on set, March is expected to have the time to cook for her partner. The "fifteen-minute" dish uses efficiency to obscure her career in favor of the patriarchal duty of cooking for her husband, discounting the shopping and prep time that most likely does not fit easily into March's work schedule. These gendered constructions incorporate efficiency as a guiding principle promoted at the end of the nineteenth century as "an ultimate term for organizing labor in the factory, school, and home" (Hahner 293). Indeed, we saw how Ray incorporated pre-made items into dishes like the spumoni ice cream sandwiches mentioned earlier, demonstrating how to structure labor at home (cooking) efficiently. Part of being an efficient home cook is making enough food to feed others. For example, the *Just in Time!* introduction includes the note that the recipes "serve four unless otherwise noted" (Ray 16). One reason the recipes serve multiple people is that cooking a single serving requires more daily cooking time, and I can attest that cooking for four saves me time—I made the full shrimp scampi recipe so I could enjoy it that night, eat leftovers later in the week, and freeze a portion for a future lunch or dinner when microwaving was all I had energy for. While I did spend less time cooking throughout the week, my initial cooking labor and the reason I might choose leftovers or something from the freezer—my job as an assistant professor and writing center director—are ignored.

7 The recipe suggests serving the scampi with "crusty bread"; because I make sourdough most weekends, this item is something I generally have on hand (180). I did not include the time I spent making the bread as part of the dinner's timing.

8 Flay's first Food Network show, *Grillin' & Chillin',* began airing in 1996, and he has been a constant presence at the network ever since.

Despite excluding entertaining from my dataset, I saw how *30-Minute Meals*' recipes also serve four or more people, employing time-space compression to obscure feeding others and the duty associated with cooking. From mentioning that the pasta e fagioli al forno (a casserole-style dish) is easy to bring to a potluck or school function ("Half Baked") to preparing Reuben mac-n-cheese to take to a new mother ("Reuben It In"), Ray implicitly tasks viewers with cooking to sustain people outside their immediate family. One meal, a Florentine-inspired prosciutto-wrapped chicken with spinach fettuccini and a gorgonzola cream sauce, takes the cake for episodes that ignore the labor of cooking and hosting a meal.[9] "Need to impress somebody in a hurry?" asks Ray at the beginning of "Dinner in Florence." "Well, here's your recipe for success. It's a meal for six in thirty with a big wow factor" (00:00:00–00:00:09). Again, Ray emphasizes that the home cook is responsible for feeding other people, and viewers are welcomed with a statement that reinforces time-space compression before they have had a chance to entertain the idea of cooking a multi-dish meal with items they have never cooked—and possibly never eaten—before. The work of preparing food for six is compacted into thirty minutes as Ray describes the Florentine prosciutto-wrapped chicken, spinach fettuccini with gorgonzola cream sauce, and puttanesca tomato salad with fried capers as a "simple and elegant meal that's perfect for making a big impression," all in the name of efficiency (00:00:24–00:00:28. Overall, Ray teaches viewers that they should strive to awe their guests with their food, and, to do this quickly, she promotes making impressive dishes that rely on fake-outs.

Incorporating Cooking Fake-Outs

Across cooking texts, Ray uses fake-outs to accomplish time-space compression. As Ray's opening for "Dinner in Florence" draws on the time-saving rhetoric associated with the show, it obfuscates the labor it takes to entertain a party of six through ingredients that might not be easily accessible. Ray uses time-space compression to present the meal as a fake-out, directing viewers' attention toward the present act of cooking. The dish calls for spinach fettuccini noodles (a pasta made with a bit of spinach in the dough), pine nuts, and Prosciutto di Parma. Ray often explains foods to U.S.-based viewers by breaking down unfamiliar ingredients in a subtle act of feminist historiography, reintroducing flavors removed from nineteenth-century cooking texts that catered to white, middle-class taste to craft a shared identity (Enoch; Neuhaus; Tippen; Walden). For example, in "Simple Three-Course Italian," Ray explains giardiniera as an "Italian hot pickled vegetable salad" that can be found in the salad bar section of a store, with the appetizers in the deli, or in the Italian foods section (00:17:41–00:17:59). Here, Ray teaches viewers about an ingredient and uses food to cultivate identity. Calling for Prosciutto di Parma for the Florentine-inspired chicken underscores the Italian identity Ray draws upon to write recipes; however, Ray relies on the authority she established as an Italian home cook in previous episodes and does not explain the ingredient.

9 "Fettuccini" is more commonly spelled "fettuccine." I use fettuccini in this article because this is the spelling Ray uses.

Furthermore, purchasing ingredients like giardiniera and Prosciutto di Parma can present a challenge and require additional shopping time. While I could not go back in time and grocery shop in 2006, I was curious: can I find all these ingredients at Wal-Mart? What about the employee-owned supermarket HyVee? Shopping list in hand, I went to both stores in search of the ingredients to make guests feel like they were having dinner in Florence. I easily found all the items except one: spinach fettuccini noodles. Neither store had these on the shelf. If I wanted to make the dish, I would buy regular fettuccini; however, Ray does not acknowledge that an ingredient may be challenging to find or require trips to multiple grocery stores. What she does explain is that the dish is a "good fake-out" and that "only you have to know it took half an hour" (00:02:53–00:02:56). Here, Ray promotes fake-outs as a way for women to feel accomplished in the kitchen and supports the notion that they can balance working outside the home and cooking. Yet my Florentine shopping experience demonstrates that while Ray does indeed give viewers recipes that do not take hours to make, she fails to recognize the time required across planning, shopping, cooking, and cleaning up.

Such fake-outs are Ray's primary rhetorical move. Although Ray uses a variety of proteins (e.g., chicken, tuna, and lamb) in her show and corresponding cookbooks, recipes focus on casserole fake-outs—cooking pasta on the stove, mixing it with meat, veggies, and more, pouring it in a casserole dish, and broiling it for a few minutes to "make it look bubbly and like it's been in there all day, like a lasagna dinner" ("Half Baked" 00:01:09–00:01:14). These fake-outs are her way of modifying dishes so they appear like time-consuming entrées, rather than "simple" bowls of pasta with store-bought bread and a side salad. As a home cook, I enjoy this approach because Ray gives me ideas for dishes I can throw together after work, but as a rhetorician, I find that the guise of thirty minutes and cooking trickery contribute to normalizing gendered invisible kitchen labor—a normalization I benefited from when I asked my mom what we were having and expected her to have a plan.

Notably, the trips to the store do not reflect my weekly grocery shopping patterns. I went shopping despite having already purchased groceries for the week, making what my mom would call a "special trip" for ingredients. What my experience does demonstrate is that "time-space compression condenses the range of temporal concerns," such as meal and event planning, grocery shopping, the act of entertaining, and post-event clean-up to serve up a rhetorical situation concerned with the present (making the food) and immediate future (feeding guests or family) (Jack 57). Ultimately, Ray's fake-outs are an example of time-space compression that supports the feasibility of cooking a meal in thirty minutes to adapt gendered ideologies to contemporary circumstances, conveying that, regardless of what women do outside the home, they are (still) responsible for feeding others.

Conclusion: Measuring Ingredients as a Return to an Embodied Way of Cooking

After consuming a comforting bowl of pasta, there was one thing left to do that Ray doesn't account for: clean up. I packed the leftovers, wiped down the stove and counters, swept, and did the dishes. About twenty-five minutes later, the kitchen was back in order. Are you keeping track of the time I spent? The "simple" shrimp and pasta dish consumed a little over an hour of my time, excluding meal selection and grocery shopping. Throughout this article, I have presented my experience cooking from Rachael Ray's cookbook *Just in Time!* and analyzed her instructional cooking show *30-Minute Meals* as twenty-first-century cooking texts that ignore the labor of meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking for others in favor of time-space compression that focuses on the present act of cooking and eating in the immediate future. In doing so, I explained how a rhetoric emphasizing women's responsibility to cook and entertain and the use of fake-outs hides the cooking labor designated as women's duty.

However, alongside her temporal rhetoric, Ray also offers viewers an embodied, multisensory way of cooking. Thus, I will end by acknowledging that her rhetoric contributes to recovering and circulating cooking knowledge that some viewers would not have access to otherwise. For instance, Ray combines precise measurements and embodied cooking instructions in the written "Shrimp Scampi Verde" recipe. She calls for one teaspoon of red pepper flakes and half a cup of dry white wine, but incorporates sensory cues that tell readers they can "eyeball it" (180). Similarly, Ray instructs viewers to "eyeball it" when adding grated cheese to a dish and to "add a little more in there once ya eyeball it" when whisking stock into a cream sauce ("Dinner in Florence" 00:05:52–00:05:53; 00:14:52). Such sensory instructions seem contradictory to Ray's promotion of quantified efficiency in that they embrace cooking's intuitive qualities in favor of using the senses to bring people and food together in a way that informs how we know the world. Even though viewers like my mom might watch Rachael cook on TV for entertainment, she permits cooking to taste in a way that relies on the senses and embodied knowledge. Ultimately, while Ray contributes to societal expectations that women cook dinner, she uses a combination of exact and sensorial cooking instructions to teach her audience.

Overall, rhetorically analyzing two of Ray's cooking texts reveals that using fake-outs—a form of time-space compression—is her primary rhetorical strategy; however, her embodied, multisensory notes provide potential opportunities for future research. Even though I watched episodes for indications of time and efficiency, I began to wonder how Ray and cooking TV shows more broadly keep recipes alive by evoking the senses as a way of knowing. To frame such knowing as a feminist rhetorical inquiry, we might explore if other prescriptive texts regarding women's domestic labor—from community cookbooks to twentieth-century radio shows and videos on social media—simultaneously promote and subvert time-space compression by slowing down cooking through sensory instructions and crafting memories. Already taking up the work of embodiment

and cooking, literatures of food scholar Jennifer Cognard-Black says a recipe is “a synthesis of collective memories from a community of cooks who share and extend these memories with their readership” (32). Although Ray’s show minimizes the labor and duty of cooking, her cooking shows also craft memories with their viewers, like the ones I shared with my mom. I am transported to my mom’s kitchen whenever I hear Rachael’s voice, and it is the collective memories of viewers that I invite feminist rhetoricians to continue exploring.

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Work and the Rhetorical Enactment of Disability in U.S. Social Security Disability Insurance: How Long COVID's Ontologies Disrupt the Logic of U.S. Workfare Systems

Kristina Bowers

Abstract: Long COVID, a disabling chronic illness, continues to affect millions of people, changing work and health on a population level. As more people afflicted by Long COVID attempt to access workfare programs such as Social Security Disability Insurance, their experience exposes the inadequacies of such programs to humanely address the needs of all disabled people. In this essay, I draw on Annemarie Mol's multiple ontology theory and praxiography method to tease out the multiple ontologies of Long COVID and show how these ontologies exceed the bureaucratic logics of SSDI that cast disability as a static, discrete, medical phenomenon. Long COVID, with its sheer number of symptoms and its varying presentations, troubles the rigid measurement of disability length, severity, and impact on embodied capacity that SSDI depends on to disperse financial benefits to those deemed disabled enough to deserve such support. I conclude with a call for feminist rhetoricians of work and labor to both incorporate disability praxiography into their analyses and see what affordances practice-based ontologies offer to thinking about how disability, race, gender, and other identity categories are lived and experienced.

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Tags: COVID, praxiography, disability, feminist new materialism, Social Security, disability insurance/benefits

As we enter the fifth year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the COVID virus continues to disable and kill millions. Despite the consistent, yet sometimes underwhelming, efforts of government organizations and healthcare providers to mitigate the effects of this "mass-disabling" event, the virus persists (Duggal qtd. in Arnold). Along with straining healthcare systems around the world, the pandemic has precipitated "the degradation or collapse of welfare services" caused in part by job loss and financial precarity of those disabled by Long COVID, the chronic illness that the COVID-19 (COVID) virus can trigger after even one infection (Hereth et al.; WHO). As of October

2023, an estimated 14.3% of American have experienced Long COVID, which can cause symptoms and subsequent diseases and disorders including but not limited to: fatigue, organ damage in the "lungs, heart, nervous system, kidneys, and liver," diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cognitive and memory impairment, and cancer (CDC "Long COVID: Household Pulse Survey"; Klein).

Although President Biden ended the U.S. Public Health Emergency on May 11, 2023 (Klein), COVID continues to spread. The already tenuous and blurry boundaries between disabled/abled and healthy/unhealthy are breaking down and shifting as more and more people who are affected by COVID attempt to access "workfare" programs like Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Social policy researcher Maeve Quaid defines workfare as a type of welfare that requires "recipients [to] undertake some labour-market-related activities...in return for government payments" (19). Workfare, as opposed to welfare, programs "emphasize an individual's responsibility to work, but do not include supports and services that help remove wider structural barriers facing people with disabilities" (Harris et al. 823). In other words, SSDI claimants must have previous work history to qualify for benefits and are often required to undergo job training and searching activities while receiving benefits. Not only does SSDI policy emphasize an individual's responsibility to seek out or return to work, it also emphasizes their responsibility to maintain or resolve their disability, as evidenced by the repeated verification of long-term, "total" disability required for SSDI ("Annual Statistical Report" 2-4). By defining and quantifying disability as the inability to work and linking access to financial security to individual responsibility, SSDI policy employs a neoliberal framework of citizenship.

To tease out the relationship between work and disability within the context of SSDI and Long COVID, I analyze excerpts from the latest "Annual Statistical Report on the Social Security Disability Insurance Program" and SSDI guidelines for claimants, physicians, and government employees on the Social Security Administration (SSA) website. I pay particular attention to the embodied labor that is necessary for claimants to access these benefits. Through this analysis, I reveal how material, embodied experiences of disability–here, in the case of Long COVID–interact with social discourses and neoliberal institutional practices that label people "disabled." Instead of debating whether chronic illness can or should be considered a disability2 or theorizing meaning from disabled experience, I follow the work of Annemarie Mol and other scholars who have theorized the multiple ontological enactments of disease and disability through practice(s) rather than perspective (Card et al.; Dijkstra; Friz; Kessler; Sikka). This focus on practice helps me think through how disability exists or is brought into being through the intra-action of human and nonhuman agents specifically in this moment—the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The multiple ontologies of Long COVID exceed the bureaucratic logics of SSDI that cast disability as a static, discrete, medical phenomenon. Long COVID fails to cohere because of its sheer number of varying symptoms and outsized effect on the bodies and working ability of the disabled and temporarily-abled in the U.S.

I start by situating Long COVID in the context of SSDI and the logic of U.S. workfare systems. Understanding SSDI's medical definition of disability as the inability to work assumes that claimants fail to produce labor and capital through normative embodiment and that they, rather than the government, are individually responsible for managing their disabled body-minds. The languages of SSDI policies and application materials are important actants in the assemblages and practices that create and maintain multiple ontologies of disability. I draw on Mol's multiple ontology theory and praxiography method to theorize the role of language and embodied labor in such assemblages. I conclude with a call to feminist rhetoricians of work and labor and disability studies scholars to incorporate praxiography into their study of gender, disability, and work.

SSDI and Long COVID

Disability insurance was added to the US Social Security program in 1954 and has since expanded or restricted eligibility requirements and the application process based on changing ideologies of work, disability, and the purpose of the program. Some of the aspects of SSDI that have changed over time include: the amount of financial assistance available for disabled workers and their dependents, the length of time of coinciding Medicare coverage, eligibility for benefits including work requirements, the process of initial and continued verification of disability, and the appeal process ("Annual Statistical Report" 1-2).3 The number of people newly receiving SSDI has decreased from approximately 648,000 in 2020 to 543,000 in 2022, as compared to the approximately 1.8 million applicants each year ("Social Security Disabled Worker"). SSDI benefit claims involving Long COVID represented approximately 1% of all applications as of 2023 (Rapaport; Konish). The SSDI application process and policy language frames disability as static and unchanging through the assumption that a condition never changes in severity or how much it affects a person's life and that it can be accurately captured at one moment through primarily physician-provided evidence. At the same time, disability is ironically assumed to be a non-permanent or variable condition requiring methodical and consistent re-verification by the SSA even when "medical improvement is not likely" ("Annual Statistical Report" 7).

Although SSDI is meant for long-term, "total" disability the insurance program continues to emphasize a focus on rehabilitation and a telos of re-entry into the workforce for claimants and beneficiaries ("Annual Statistical Report" 2). For example, a web page informing current beneficiaries and potential claimants of what they should "report" while receiving benefits lists changes in work status, income, citizenship/immigration status, and "big improvement[s] in your medical condition" as important information to tell the SSA "right away" to determine continued eligibility ("What You Must Report"). The urgency conveyed by the phrase "right away" implies two goals: returning people to work as quickly as possible and carefully monitoring the enrollment numbers to weed out people who no longer qualify, or in other words, do not deserve the assistance. Separating deserving, legitimate applicants from undeserving, illegitimate ones is one of the moral underpinnings of workfare social policy (Quaid 9). The assumption that medical conditions that

cause disability in the SSDI framework will, or should, improve similarly supports a telos of cure while acknowledging fluidity in the physical experience of disability. This expectation of improvement exemplifies disability scholar Alison Kafer's concept of "curative time" which assumes "the only appropriate disabled mind/body is one cured or moving toward cure" in which cure "signals the elimination of impairment but can also mean normalizing treatments that work to assimilate the disabled mind/body as much as possible" (27; emphasis added). To assimilate disabled people into a normative workforce, SSA operates within Kafer's "curative time," pushing SSDI beneficiaries to return to work even while receiving benefits and conveying skepticism about the existence of long-lasting, variable disability.

SSDI beneficiaries are expected to constantly update SSA about changes in their disability. SSA requires such self-surveillance to determine beneficiaries' continued eligibility for benefits and facilitate a linear move towards re-entering the workforce. The assumption inherent within the SSDI system that some people will be successfully rehabilitated through and past disability, at least enough to perform normative embodied labor within capitalism, applies to all disabilities when improvement is a general underlying expectation of medicalized disability. This ongoing verification process is an example of what Ellen Samuels calls "biocertification," which "describes the many forms of government documents that purport to authenticate a person's social identity through biology, substituting written descriptions for other forms of bodily knowledge and authority" (122). The continuous authentication of disability refuses the permanence of some disabilities (e.g., some forms of blindness) while expecting all disabilities to improve to the point of cure. Through these reporting requirements, the SSA scrutinizes the existence, severity, and impact of claimants' disabilities on their lives, creating an individualized mandate for recipients to manage both their disability and their survival rather than being able to rely on government, community, or even workplace resources.

In our continuing pandemic context, it is crucial for rhetoricians interested in work, labor, and disability to examine institutional discourse and documentation that manage workfare programs. Additionally, scholars studying government policy and healthcare-related technical communication might attend to the SSDI application and accompanying policy documents, especially as Long COVID is challenging not only individuals' embodied capacity to produce labor but also the work-centered identity of American culture. As "a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems...[that] may emerge, persist, resolve, and reemerge over different lengths of time," Long COVID can present challenges to the strict duration and severity requirements of SSDI especially because many of these symptoms are difficult to diagnose and are often misunderstood by healthcare providers (CDC "Long COVID or Post-COVID Conditions"). In an emergency message detailing SSDI policy on evaluating COVID-19 claims, the SSA defines duration as "the period during which a person is continuously unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity because of one or more MDIs [medically determinable impairments]" and goes on to state that projection of the severity and duration of an MDI-caused disability may be necessary "if it is unclear whether or when

the MDI(s) will resolve" ("Evaluating Cases"). The variety in symptoms, severity, and duration of Long COVID presents challenges for this chronic illness/disability to ontologically "hang together" (Mol 5). Mol writes of multiple disease ontologies, "objects come into being—and disappear—with the practices in which they are manipulated. And since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies...far from necessarily falling into fragments, multiple objects tend to hang together somehow" (5). Due to the numerous physical symptoms and wide-ranging effects on the body, the multiple ontologies of Long COVID perhaps cannot hang together as neatly or cohesively within SSDI policy's conception of disability. Long COVID also exceeds or spills over any easy hanging together because of the massive scale at which it is affecting population-level health and working conditions.

The various evolving and fluctuating presentations and experiences of Long COVID have made it especially difficult for people with Long COVID to seek SSDI benefits within an already hostile and arduous application process. Some of these difficulties include: the lack of a positive test to show initial infection with COVID; SSDI or private health insurance companies requiring additional testing or "evidence" to validate a claim of Long COVID; the difficulty in diagnosing and proving that one has "invisible" symptoms like cognitive impairment and fatigue; and frequent reviews of a case even after it is approved (Mizuguchi, Konish). Along with the difficult and often painful symptoms and experiences of Long COVID, I argue that claimants can experience "access fatigue" which Annika Konrad defines as "the everyday pattern of constantly needing to help others participate in access" or, in other words, advocating for and explaining oneself to people and institutions that are inaccessible (180). One criterion in obtaining SSDI benefits for a claimant with Long COVID is to produce proof of an initial, acute infection with the COVID virus (or undergo diagnostic verification of this acute phase) ("Evaluating Cases"). The enactment of COVID infection has many competing and incommensurable ontologies due to the nature of the disease, mis- and disinformation about spread and symptoms, and lack of access to reliable and widespread testing in the U.S. Here, I am using enactment as defined by Mol to refer to "activities [that] take place" and are made "visible, audible, tangible, knowable" (Mol 31, 33). These ontologies could include COVID infection as positive rapid test; as symptoms; as diagnosis; or even as exposure to another COVID positive person. COVID infection as a positive rapid test comes about in the intra-action of the virus itself being detectable in the body (in a specific time window) with the right kind of test, and the infected person knowing how to perform the test accurately, interpret the results, and translate or record these results through a picture of the positive test, report from a medical provider, or a social media post, just to name a few agential entities in this assemblage.

Alternatively, we can consider the ontology of a COVID infection as asymptomatic or in a person who is not displaying any obvious or external symptoms of the acute illness that the virus causes. This assemblage may include a positive test (but doesn't have to), a detectable viral load in the body, the communication from a friend, family member, coworker, or acquaintance that

relates a likely or definite exposure to the asymptomatic person, viral spread levels in the community, and, importantly, —the belief that COVID is a) real and b) in the body of the asymptomatic person. Even if the enactment of a COVID infection aligns with an enactment of Long COVID, Long COVID has similar challenges "hanging together" due to the excessive scale at which it is affecting both U.S. and global populations and the number of body systems, organs, and elements within the human body. The messy, sometimes conflicting ontologies of Long COVID challenge the rigid SSDI system regarding the definition of disability and accompanying proof required to verify such a disabling condition. In the next section, I take a closer look at some of the language in SSDI policy documents that intra-act with physicians, bodies, patients, and the virus to enact multiple ontologies of Long COVID.

The Body, Disease, Disability Multiple

Discourse, humans and nonhuman objects and phenomena, space, time, and even cells conspire to enact multiple ontologies of disease and disability. The goal of multiple ontology theory and praxiography (the ethnographic study of or "story about practices") is to understand how objects are enacted depending on the assemblage of human and nonhuman actors that catalyze particular ways of being (Mol 5). When doing praxiography, ethnographers study the practices that enact diseases (or disabilities) differently across multiple sites and contexts. For example, Mol asserts that atherosclerosis, the disease at the center of her study, is enacted across multiple sites (the clinic, the pathology department, the operating room) through multiple practices (a conversation, a physical examination, the dissection and examination of an artery, a biopsy of an artery) and that these enactments are distinct, yet related, ontologies (43-51). By studying disease enactment, Mol "shift[s] from an epistemological to a praxiographic inquiry into reality" (32). Instead of studying the perspective of patients or doctors, Mol wants to know not what disease *means* but how disease is *done* and she does this by "foregrounding practicalities, materialities, [and] *events*" (12-13; emphasis in original). In Mol's view, patients are their own ethnographers who can communicate "how living with an impaired body is done in practice" (15; emphasis in original). Mol explains, "ontologies are brought into being, sustained, or allowed to wither away in common, day-to-day, sociomaterial practices" (6; emphasis in original). Long COVID ontologies can cohere as a lack of productivity, as diagnosis, as the inability to generate sufficient income, or as the inability to work in overlapping legal, medical, and social contexts. In this section, I use Molly Margaret Kessler's rhetorical enactment theory and Nathanje Dijkstra's research on disability claims and praxiography to understand how language, as part of an assemblage, enacts disability through practices that require claimants to know about, apply for, and appeal to receive SSDI benefits.

Language, instead of representing experience or reality, is itself agential in creating Long COVID's multiple ontologies. Rhetorical scholars using feminist new material concepts like praxiography or multiple ontology theory move the focus away from an "autonomous human rhetor" as the sole actor in a rhetorical context by attending to the agency and materiality of human and

nonhuman entities, including rhetorical discourse, and these entities' contribution to ontologies (Booher and Jung 26; Moore and Richards 8; Kessler 313; Friz 182-83). This is especially true when discourses instruct and educate the supposed experts in claimants' disabilities: physicians. Language intra-acts with electronic databases, doctors, government employees, applicants and their bodies, time, and space in medical documentation and bureaucratic policy, revealing where "decision-making authority" lies because this language determines not just who can receive benefits but who is found, legally and ontologically, to be disabled (Glew 15). For example, the SSA specifies acceptable types of "objective medical evidence" that can substantiate a medically determinable impairment (the cause of disability according to SSDI) which include signs and laboratory findings where signs refer to "one or more anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities that are observable, *apart from the claimant's statements* (description of symptoms)" ("Establishing a Medically Determinable Impairment (MDI)"; emphasis added). This means that a person with Long COVID cannot access benefits through personal testimony alone. If they do not have records of an acute COVID-19 infection, an initial diagnosis of COVID-19, or information from a healthcare provider about the existence of Long COVID symptoms, their case may be dismissed upon arrival. This kind of physician-provided evidence relies on the definition of disability—a cornerstone of SSDI policy. This definition is a key actant in assemblages that bring disability ontologies into and out of existence. The SSDI definition understands disability through bodily measurement of capitalist production in work settings and relies on the ethos of the medical establishment, rather than the claimant's embodied knowledge or experience, to assign truth claims to disability.

The attempt to define disability as a stable, fixed, uniform experience or characteristic is futile, but such definitions are often used to regulate disabled bodies in violent and exclusionary ways. Kafer has critiqued how workfare systems like SSDI and workplace discrimination laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act define disability as a discrete, individual characteristic (11). Kafer argues that the act of defining itself is misguided because disability is a fluid, relational, assemblage that, as Jasbir Puar has suggested, arises from "events, actions, and encounters between bodies" (Puar qtd. in Kafer 10). Kafer maintains that the institutional "desire for fixed definitions" of disability is inherently tied to "the economic effects of such fixing" (11). These economic effects, within SSDI, determine who is worthy of financial assistance and who is valid in their claims of being unable to financially support themselves in an ableist, capitalist economic society. Samuels views such definitions as attempts to find the "'truth' of disabled bodies" that depend on "the belief that disability can in fact be measured, named, and quantified" (123). Dijkstra posits that the incapacity to work and disability itself are messy, complex, multiple, and "moving target[s]" that exist differently based on intra-acting practices (71). Ultimately, the inability to work is assigned a financial amount based on a claimant's previous work history, severity of disability, and impact on their life—as reported and determined by physicians ("Disability Evaluation").

Those who apply for disability benefits through SSDI seek financial support due to an inability to generate sufficient income through work. The U.S. Social Security Administration, which runs the SSDI program, defines disability and impairment as:

> [The] inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months . . . [in which the impairment] . . . results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities that can be shown by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques [and] must be established by medical evidence consisting of signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings. ("Annual Statistical Report" 2-3)

Instead of defining disability as a natural human variation or result of inaccessible environments, this definition emerges straightforwardly from the medical model of disability. The seemingly arbitrary measure of 12 months for a disability to be considered long-term instead of short-term contrasts with many experiences of disability, and especially Long COVID, as fluid, recursive, and non-linear or what Samuels terms "crip time" ("Six Ways"). This definition also assumes that disability can plainly "be shown" through medical examination and deliberation upon the "abnormalities" of the body or mind which is an example of "the medical language of illness" that Samuels argues "tries to reimpose the linear, speaking in terms of the chronic, the progressive, and the terminal, of relapses and stages" onto disabled bodies and lives ("Six Ways"). The "signs, symptoms, and laboratory findings" are further scientific and medical measurement tools that seek to enact disability as, for example, a blood test or a visit summary written by a physician. This medical evidence required to determine disability within SSDI is another example of Samuels' biocertification. Not only does SSDI devalue patient testimonials or lived experience, these practices of biocertification enact disability as diagnosis which then have to be reinterpreted and re-enacted as the inability to work by SSA employees.

Along with diagnosis, Long COVID can exist as a lack of productivity; as the inability to generate sufficient income, or as the inability to work. SSDI policy language, especially the definition of disability, intra-acts with the chronicity of Long COVID and its disabling symptoms, rendering its ontologies contingent, non-linear, and fluctuating. Building on Mol's multiple ontology theory, Kessler develops a theory of *rhetorical enactment* that reveals how multiple disease ontologies become meaningfully bound to (or separated from) the self through language (295). This theory further justifies a rhetorical focus on the discursive as an agent in the assemblages that enact multiple disease and disability ontologies. Long COVID as the inability to generate sufficient income is connected to Long COVID as the inability to work because SSDI measures work by the amount of substantial gainful activity (SGA) that disabled claimants can participate in ("Annual Statistical Report" 2-3). SGA is "a level of work activity that is productive and yields or usually yields remuneration or profit" ("Annual Statistical Report" 208). Instead of measuring how much money a disabled

person can produce and using this measurement to determine if they are disabled, patient's lived experiences and material realities must be privileged and valued in the distribution of financial support in workfare programs, institutional determinations of disability, and research on disability ontology. Scholars can use rhetorical enactment to examine how patient discourse about their experience with disease and disability helps to delineate the boundaries of multiple disease and disability ontologies especially as these ontologies are incorporated or related to the self (Kessler 300-301).

Conclusion: How to Do Work and Disability Differently?

As we continue to theorize the multiple ontologies of Long COVID and disability more generally across many contexts, how can we think about or do disability differently? Given the focus on work ability in SSDI, how can we think about work differently in a way that does not perpetuate ableist ideas of productivity? How can we theorize disability and work being enacted in further feminist and disability rhetorical research? When disability is enacted as the inability to work and this inability determines disabled people's financial security in a neoliberal capitalist economy, the responsibility of surviving is wholly individual. Maintaining or accessing the right to work only serves the economy, not disabled people and their lives and well-being. Numerous scholars (Vipond, Blattner) have critiqued the argument that the "right" to work is liberatory, arguing instead that it leads to "the diminishment of social assistance and public services in favour of privatization and the deregulation of markets" (Vipond 3). In a discussion about how the right to work or pursue work is enshrined in many national and international legal documents, Charlotte Blattner critiques the idea that this right is liberatory for disabled people stating, "People expect work to give purpose and meaning to their lives...work is the linchpin of income, rights, and social belonging" (1380). In these legal documents, the right to work is often associated with achieving happiness, social relationships, greater "physical and mental health," and "self-realization" (Blattner 1380). The pre- or corequisite of paid labor to happiness and inclusion in society is especially important to critique when examining the way that disabled people are expected to receive and maintain disability benefits. Decisions regarding how to present oneself, what symptoms to share or emphasize, and constant self-monitoring required by SSDI claimants are highly rhetorical experiences that deserve more attention in rhetorical scholarship on work, disability, and institutional discourse.

Long COVID is still a new and not fully understood chronic illness that has disabled millions of people, preventing many of them from working full-time, or at all. Even years into the COVID-19 pandemic, it's unclear how COVID infections will affect individuals and populations in the future. The fluctuating and varying symptoms of Long COVID are not easily characterized as generally causing long-term or "total" disability for all individuals and trouble the binary of long- vs. short-term disability insurance or support programs precisely because Long COVID does not have a predictable, uniform timeline. In defining disability as the inability to work as measured

by a medical diagnosis of physical or mental abnormality, SSDI presents challenges for people with Long COVID due to the difficulty in receiving a diagnosis of or treatment for this disease. Additionally, the commonly experienced fatigue or energy-limitation of Long COVID is not always consistent in its severity or effect on productivity, thus making it even more difficult to definitively measure a person's ability to make money and ironically placing a higher burden on them to update SSA with their ever-changing embodied capacities. Dijkstra sees a praxiographic approach to disability studies as an interdisciplinary endeavor that can intervene in essentialist or completely cultural theories of disability as well as gender (60-61). Long COVID is neither enacted completely within the body nor completely in social discourse. Studying the multiple ontologies of Long COVID can hopefully change such narrow and complex avenues to social and financial support for disabled people, thus engaging in the ameliorative purpose of research present in much feminist, disability, and rhetorical scholarship.

The case of Long COVID underlines the importance of continuing to push for policy and social change that ensure financial security for disabled and chronically ill people and that is not contingent on the ability to work or any other neoliberal ideas of productivity and societal value. Continuing to examine the multiple ontologies of disability through new materialist theories and methodologies in feminist, rhetoric of health and medicine, disability studies, and labor contexts should center justice and improved quality of life for disabled and chronically ill people. I encourage feminist rhetoricians of work and labor to both incorporate disability praxiography into their analyses and see what affordances practice-based ontologies offer to thinking about how disability, race, gender, and other identity categories can iniform work-related rhetorical inquiry.

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TikTok's Excessive Labors: Attention, Algorithms, and Aestheticized Content Creation

Ashley Hay

Abstract: Although much has been written about the gendered nature of work in feminized online contexts, critical attention to masculine postfeminist iterations of work is growing. By interrogating how femininity and neoliberal sensibilities extend beyond cisgender female bodies, scholars can attune to the political effects of neoliberalism and postfeminism upon differently positioned digital subjects. This is especially relevant in the context of content creators whose success hinges on the relationships they form with their audience—as with sex working content creators, whose labor lies at the nexus of the content creation and sex work economies. Through a frame of rhetorical excess, this essay attends to emerging rhetorical and material strategies of work designed to capture the attention and libidinal energies of viewers. Specifically, I analyze TikTok content creator Repairman67's navigation of the digital attention economy, whose positionally specific strategies construct authority and intimacy even as he carefully navigates TikTok's changing platform constraints. Pedagogical short-form videos and livestreamed lifestyle content represent excessive iterations of work in the attention economy; through their production, Repairman67 encourages viewers' consumption of his technosexual identity.

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Tags: TikTok, content creation, rhetorical excess, attention economy, digital work

Popular TikTok content creator Repairman67's username reads as a subtle play on a pornographic trope: a blue-collar worker—a "repairman," though sometimes alternately a plumber, pool boy, or delivery man—enters a woman's house and fulfills all her sexual fantasies. In this fantasy, the *repairman* is a stand-in for the *everyman*: an ordinary, lower-to-middle-class figure who encounters a sultry, sexualized middle-to-upper-class woman to whom he readily provides his "services." It is a classic, though dated, trope for a reason: men, the primary viewers of porn, can see themselves in the everyman figure and believably fantasize about a woman who is as wildly attracted to them as they are to her.

With 1.3 million TikTok followers, smaller Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) accounts, an active OnlyFans presence, a merch line of sweatshirts and sweatpants, and a podcast, Repairman67 is well-known as a frequent thirst trapper, kinky sex educator, online sex worker, and general lifestyle influencer.[1] Despite his name's allusions to a pornographic trope, however,

1 Thirst traps are sexually provocative photos or videos posted to social media, where 'thirst' alludes to the viewer's unresolved sexual frustration.

Repairman67 explains his username on his FAQ page in a different, more personally revealing, way: “When you call a repairman he fixes things and then leaves. You don’t keep the repairman around after he has done his job” (Repairman67, “Repairman’s FAQ”). Repairman67 himself, at least in this public document, does not associate his name with its pornographic allusion, which represents a twisty, salient reminder. Despite Repairman67’s roots in online sex work, his public brand holds meaning beyond a flattened reading of one part of his online persona. This juxtaposition offers a frame of reference for this essay: the labor of content creators online is usually not as neat or cohesive as we might initially believe. The changing demands of the attention economy drive creators to create fluid and responsive textual and paratextual content for both their viewers and the platforms upon which they operate.

Repairman67 is a useful case study to examine gender and the rhetoricity of work for a few reasons. On the one hand, Repairman67 is emblematic of a cohort of creators who occupy a contested digital space that conjoins sex work, content creation, and aestheticized forms of labor, whose precarity rests largely on financial instability, risks of de-platforming, and identity-based harassment (Are and Briggs 2; Duffy, Ononye and Sawey 14; Rand and Stegeman 2103). On the other hand, Repairman67’s content creation has undergone rapid transformation, which can lend insight into the pace of digital life and labor—a pace which is, by all accounts, increasing every day, even as this temporality participates in broader systems of power (Sharma 9; van Djick). Repairman67 also occupies a relatively unique space on TikTok, demonstrating the co-constituting forces of gender, sexuality, and race in the context of content creation and sex work. His online presence carries an aesthetic and an ethos driven largely by his appearance, which is white, slender, tattooed, pink-haired, and masculine.

Although much has been written about the gendered nature of work in feminized contexts, critical attention to *masculine* neoliberal iterations of work is a burgeoning field of study. Driven by economic precarity, highly competitive markets, and outsourced labor, neoliberal workplaces produce neoliberal subjects—workers who are both entrepreneurial subjects and surveilled, laboring bodies (Moore and Robinson 2776). From a gendered standpoint, neoliberalism shares key logics with postfeminism, including those of personal choice and individualistic enterprise (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 10; Gill, Kelen, and Scharff 231). By interrogating femininity and postfeminist sensibilities that extend beyond cisgender female bodies, scholars can attune to the political effects of neoliberalism and postfeminism upon differently positioned digital subjects (O’Neill 115; Rumens 252). This is especially relevant in the context of content creators whose success hinges on the relationships they form with their audience, which, in a postfeminist context, entails emotional and entrepreneurial forms of work.

Sex working content creators face additional constraints beyond the average content creator, particularly in the formation of these relationships. Like other gig workers, sex workers on TikTok are often simultaneously “entrepreneurs, independent contractors, employees, contracted

and freelance managers, and producers" (Berg, "A Scene is Just a Marketing Tool" 161). However, unlike other gig workers, they navigate an algorithmic landscape that liberally and frequently removes their content for violating TikTok's 2023 Terms of Service, which bans "sex, sexual arousal, fetish and kink behavior, and seeking or offering sexual services" ("Terms of Service"). However, this algorithmic landscape is also increasingly defined by user experiences of digital lethargy, detachment, disillusionment, and fatigue (Berry and Dieter 5). This culture contributes to what Sarah Banet-Weiser calls an "economy of visibility," where digital workers face precarity, targeted content moderation, and opaque platform governance as they seek popularity metrics within a highly competitive industry (2). Subsequently, TikTok has become a space utilized to amass followings and then to send followers off-app to more lucrative revenue streams, such as OnlyFans or Etsy. This all points to a broad technological sexscape that demands ever-evolving strategies to capture user attention, harness libidinal energies, direct followers to external income streams, and respond to changing algorithmic and social codes to remain successful. In other words, Repairman67's livelihood rests upon his ability to remain visible by creating content, forming relationships, navigating TikTok's algorithms, and directing attention to and beyond his sexual content—work that represents, in this essay, excessive forms of labor.

Indeed, content creators labor in a technological environment driven by logics of excess writ large. In *Bodies of Work: The Labour of Sex in the Digital Age*, Rebecca Saunders argues that excess is "crucial to the ways in which digital pornography binds sexual desire to digital capitalism" (28). Excess is therefore tethered to the digital attention economy, where the viewer finds their time searching for pornography prolonged—it is the journey, not the destination, that draws the viewer in, certain that fulfillment of their sexual desires is always just around the corner. As Saunders writes, "the unfulfillable and insatiable nature of desire materialised in the endless pornographic possibilities of digital porn creates the conditions for further, economised searching" (48). In other words, digital pornography is defined by rhetorical and visual excesses. As I argue in this essay, this excess is rooted not only in the materiality of sex or bodies, nor in desire alone, but also in the interwoven platformification and circulation of libidinal energy online.

Although there is, officially, no pornography on TikTok, excess here speaks to a broader cultural imperative that has left its imprint on digital space. The algorithms behind TikTok's platform—their perpetual collection of data, never-ending touchpoints through which people are moved and transformed by coded space—also represent, and produce, further forms of excess. For example, when TikTok adopted the policy to suspend creators with direct links to OnlyFans, Repairman67 changed his bio to link out only to his Etsy shop, relying on his followers' investment of time and knowledge to find him elsewhere, representing additional work for both him and his followers. Despite these constraints, however, Repairman67's original identity is not left behind—he participates in this digital excess through increasingly nuanced strategies for capturing libidinal attention. Subsequently—at least on TikTok—it is not sex that Repairman67's viewers

are consuming, but his entire technosexual identity.[2]

In this essay, I turn my attention to Repairman67's navigation of the digital attention economy as an example of a creator with a multiplatform digital strategy whose excessive iteration of labor is located in both the content creation and sex work economies. Spanning approximately one year—October 2022 to October 2023—this essay attends to Repairman67's changing modes of work responsive to TikTok's changing platform. First, I frame this project through a material feminist lens driven by TikTok's neoliberal and algorithmic platform. Then, I argue that facets of Repairman67's identity are strategically leveraged through work that includes his construction of a pedagogical ethos—where he performs and commodifies his sexual authority—and his livestreamed lifestyle—which invokes intimacy with his viewers by collapsing the borders between his work and personal life. Finally, I discuss two takeaways of this essay, refocusing on what we can glean from Repairman67's positional location within the broader paradigm of material feminist work.

Sex Work, Content Creation, and the Attention Economy

Locating sex working content creators' labor on TikTok calls for attention to both a gendered neoliberal ethos shaping work expectations for digital laborers and to platform structures that content creators navigate to make themselves—and their work—visible before a wide audience. In neoliberal contexts, there is the tendency to treat individuals as businesses: the neoliberal subject is a constellation of traits and assets which must be invested in and optimized for maximum output (Gershon 539). Rooted in market rationality, self-optimization becomes a logic unto itself, where the individual is expected to remain in a state of upward growth. For content creators and influencers laboring online, these neoliberal rationalities can be highly gendered.

Gendered labor can take the form of viewers' expectations for content creators to perform authenticity and produce aspirational content. For example, Emily Hund points out that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated viewers' desire for influencer authenticity—a performance of 'real life' intimacy, often by women—which was already heightened through continual and ephemeral technologies, like livestreams (141). Even prior to the pandemic, Brooke Erin Duffy's account of the aspirational labor system of social media production, largely driven by women, describes a rhetoric of creative production paired with a rhetoric of brand consumption, reifying feminized norms—including demands for 'authenticity'—of neoliberal digital cultural work (443). Other norms can include a valorization of entrepreneurship (Brown 22), a hyper-individuated ethos of responsibility (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 8), and a mobilization of futurity (Rottenberg 339). These norms are not unique to, even if they are frequently driven by, female digital subjects. For example, Shirley Xue Chen and Akane Kanai point to gay male beauty influencers' mobilization of "girlfriendship," a highly gendered digital intimacy that can be leveraged to forge affective bonds

2 Meenakshi Gigi Durham's technosexual subjectivity refers to "the figure of a new sexual subject emerging through a matrix of media technologies required to navigate an environment of multimedia corporealities" (22).

and sell products (103). They argue that gay male influencers participate in postfeminist hegemonies through their performance of "authentic" individuality, campy femininity, and depoliticized queerness before their predominantly female audiences (113). Within this neoliberal workplace, men adopt performative markers of successful feminine entrepreneurship to achieve visibility—like authenticity and aspirational content. Content creators who strategically subvert some norms of hegemonic masculinity, while upholding others, can find success in feminized digital work contexts.

Content creators also interact with TikTok in fluid, strategic, and, occasionally, subversive ways. TikTok is notable for its platform governance through recommendation algorithms, where app users interact primarily with a curated feed (called the "For You Page," hereafter "FYP") that is constellated through massive amounts of collected data. The result is a churning, fluid environment that features algorithmically determined videos on an "infinite scroll" that can produce extreme "filter bubbles" for its users (Wang 63). Feminist scholars have long been vocal critics of the matrices of power that underlie interaction among technological artifacts, generated epistemes, and cultural imaginaries (Haraway 39; Murray and Ankerman 54). Algorithms and code represent digital infrastructures with tangible constraints and implications, and much scholarship has pointed out that presumably "objective" computational forces have material and oppressive effects on our lives (see Bucher; Kotliar; Noble).

The contemporary creator economy is driven by codes—many quite literal—both online and off.[3] Feminist scholars are subsequently well-positioned to consider how creators, platform users, and codes co-constitute each other with an eye toward disrupted normativities, embodied performances, and changing economic, political, and libidinal economies. Contemporary coding sorts bodies and produces space through biopolitical regulation, the transformation of users into objects via coding, and the augmentation of spatial experience through digital representations (Cockayne and Richardson 1643). Thus, when code helps to construct a workplace, as it does for a growing cohort of laborers online, we must recognize its regulatory spatial resonance. Code's biopolitical regulation of social life and digital space produces norms that render some bodies identifiable—and legible—and others transgressive and illegible (Are and Briggs 2; Cheney-Lippold 171; Cockayne and Richardson 1650). This shapes how bodies move through code, and how code moves through bodies—a necessarily opaque process, but nonetheless one which is productive for thinking through human interaction with digital platforms.

Digital platform economies are therefore spaces where domination and oppression are multiple and interwoven, particularly for those at the margins (Durham 127). Sex workers are "caught up in complicity with hegemonies a well as resistances against them" in the context of technosexual demands in the digital economy (Durham 127). In scholarly contexts, universalized

3 I allude here to John Cheney-Lippold's biopolitical definition of code: "cultural objects embedded and integrated within a social system whose logic, rules, and explicit functioning work to determine the new conditions of possibilities of user's lives" (167).

gestures of western feminism struggle to account for online porn content creators' contextual interactions with economies of sexual desire. As Heather Berg argues, research that resists exceptionalizing and pathologizing sex workers can deepen our understanding of work under late-stage capitalism ("Labouring Porn Studies" 75). Platforms, however, can participate in the devaluation of sex work, reinforce existing racial hierarchies, and foster competition between sex workers (Rand and Stegeman 2113). In the second quarter of 2023, for example, TikTok suspended just over eight million "LIVE" sessions, and 39% of video removals were due to violations of "Sensitive and Mature Themes" ("Community Guidelines Enforcement Report"). Sex work and producers of sexual services—particularly those considered transgressive or kinky—exist within a stigmatized public sphere which has historically pathologized nonnormative sexual behaviors, creating an impetus for creators of kinky sexuality to hide their content.

On TikTok, Repairman67, like other creators of sexual content, participates in a digital sexual landscape characterized by a fragmented constellation of practices designed to appear before interested audiences while simultaneously subverting TikTok's algorithmic and censoring gaze. Hashtags, for example, can signal sexual content to users while simultaneously subverting algorithmic moderation. A generic hashtag like #fyp would indicate that a creator hopes their video gets picked up and placed in front of new and unpredictable audiences, widening their digital reach—but using no hashtags at all would usually indicate the opposite. Creators will use variations of terms that signal specific interests or identities without outright declaring "sexually explicit" content, such as #bratsoftiktok, #femdomtok, or #seggsytime. Repairman67 almost never uses captions (the text below a TikTok video) or public hashtags, but when he does, he uses the simple hashtag #ding, signifying that he is neither trying to reach broad audiences through the FYP nor trying to speak exclusively to a #KinkTok subculture. #ding is a hashtag unique to Repairman67's own content, and although it's difficult to ascertain why he chose it to locate to his own content, there is doubtless some strategy behind its use. Like users, scholars hoping to access kinky, surveilled content on TikTok must remain aware of the platform's censoring gaze, in addition to the codes designed by and disseminated from content creators on the platform. There is much unspoken and unseen labor from sex working content creators behind the scenes—their strategies to both utilize and subvert censoring algorithms, paired with more traditional strategies of visibility, authenticity, and aspiration is, in short, excessive. This recognition drives my analysis of Repairman67's paratextual, textual, and visual strategy in two types of content: his instructional short-form video series and his casual, domestic livestreams.

Pedagogical Excess: Sexpert-as-Commodity

Through a frame of excess, I see Repairman67's rhetorical and material modes of economic production across platforms, brands, and performances as labor strategies driven by neoliberal rationalities and technosexual demands in the attention economy. Repairman67's labor exists at the nexus of both the libidinally excessive expectations of contemporary pornography and the

quantitatively excessive algorithmic demands for the public performance and dissemination of the self. Subsequently, Repairman67's pedagogical work is responsive, in part, to TikTok's algorithms that simultaneously censor and circulate, which code a workplace that the content creator must utilize, maximize, and circumvent to achieve visibility.

As a form of work closely tied to his sex work, Repairman67's educational TikToks encourage consumption of his sexual knowledge and expertise. This a performance akin to Paula Sequiera-Rovira's porn star sexologists who leverage their pedagogical experience to become figures of sexual authority (142). Between July and October 2022, Repairman67 had produced a series of seven educational videos—each receiving hundreds of thousands of views—scripting various questions that newcomers to BDSM (Bondage/Discipline, Dominance/Submission, Sadism/Masochism) scenes might ask. Through this series, Repairman67 constructs his pedagogical authority to cover topics ranging from roleplay to aftercare (Repairman67, "#ding," 23 Aug. 2022; Repairman67, "#ding," 5 Oct. 2022). In each of the seven videos, Repairman67 plays two personas: the door-knocking questioner looking for guidance on a variety of BDSM topics, signifying a "sub," or submissive BDSM positionality, and the "boss" who provides knowledge and erotic guidance, akin to a "dom," or dominant positionality.

Every video opens with the first persona, Repairman67's confused self. This persona is casual, often wearing a plain t-shirt or hoodie, featuring just a head and upper torso. Questions introduced immediately after the greeting, include "is subspace, like, a real thing?" and "does it always have to be about pain?", which frame the content of the rest of the video. Immediately after the question is asked, the video jumps to Repairman67's second persona, the "boss." This persona dresses differently, wearing thin gold glasses and a dark suit, sitting behind what is, presumably, a desk. Frequently, the boss will follow up with questions of his own or provide a brief answer which leads to further questions from the first persona, facilitating a back-and-forth exchange that becomes more specific over the course of the video. Repairman67's formal dress, location behind a desk, subtle leatherwear, and concerned-but-eventually-declarative language construct a power differential between the two characters characteristic of a dom/sub relationship.

In this series, Repairman67 is not just a pedagogical authority sharing advice, but also an object of desire: one brief glance at the comment section of these videos demonstrates that viewers can learn something about BDSM while simultaneously enjoying the eroticism of Repairman67's dual performances. And although the series ended relatively quickly—it lasted only about three months—the imprint of Repairman67's sexual authority is visible in later videos, where he occasionally answers BDSM-specific questions from his comment sections and livestreams. This form of content creation marries libidinal energies with a pedagogical offering. The labor that Repairman67 invested in this short video series is not merely that of content creation—the inventive work to script, shoot, and publish—but also that of visibility, persona, and affect,

excessive in their extension into the content creator's commodified persona. Viewers are encouraged to consume not just the erotic performance of the sex working content creator, but also the sexual episteme they embody and dispense. This is one step toward the transformation of Repairman67's brand, where viewers find consumptive value in not just sex-as-commodity, but, more importantly, sexpert-as-commodity.

Authority is a pivotal part of the creator economy, although expertise online can take many forms. Repairman67's path to acquiring authority—which, in turn, supports visibility and quantitative metrics—is, in part, facilitated by his sex work experience and positionality. That Repairman67's positionality can be viewed as emblematic of one iteration of masculine sexual success means that his content creation and visual appearance together are essential aspects of his digital work. Repairman67 performs a desiring, and desired, figure in these instructional videos, allowing his audiences to map onto his performance their own desire for knowledge, expertise, and sexual success. Thus, we see one strategy of content creation in the attention economy: the production of content that specifically utilizes and deploys various parts of the content creator's constructed persona, where each of these parts are available for consumption.

Livestreamed Excess: Lifestyle-as-Commodity

Beyond pedagogical consumption, viewers can also consume Repairman67's mediated lifestyle and sexual practice through viewing and interacting with his frequent livestreams. This is a relatively recent transformation of Repairman67's digital content strategy. When this project began, in October of 2022, Repairman solely produced TikTok content in the form of short-form videos; as of October of 2023, Repairman67 livestreams almost every day. Livestreams are both a lucrative revenue stream and another strategy for creators to find visibility on the platform. As with TikTok videos, livestreams will appear in FYPs through TikTok's recommendation algorithms, making the visibility creators can achieve with livestreams a game of both strategy and chance. *TikTok*'s "LIVE" feature allows viewers to buy "Coins" in-app to send "Gifts" to select creators, which range from one coin (worth just over one cent) to thirty thousand coins (about four hundred dollars).[4] Viewers can also comment publicly on the livestream, and content creators can respond at their discretion. When Repairman67 livestreams, he works to encourage viewers' consumption of his entire persona through access to his offline lifestyle. In contrast to his pedagogical videos, Repairman67's livestreams feature a casual, "unfiltered" intimacy from the privacy of his home.

Repairman67's livestreams, most fundamentally, showcase the more mundane elements of his lifestyle and appearance. He wanders around his house, makes coffee, responds to comments about his clothing and hair, and occasionally answers questions specific to sex and kink. In the latter case, this typically involves product recommendations, answers to technical questions ask-

4 TikTok's in-app "Coin" calculator charges $0.74 for 70 coins. Users can purchase up to 17,500 Coins for $185 or input a unique amount.

ing for further detail on advice he's given before, or, more rarely, responses to general inquiries about topics like wax play or aftercare. Rhetorically, this sends a nuanced message about the consumption of the worker in the context of sexuality, a domain often imagined as confined to the private. The thinning borders between public and private in the context of the livestream—where viewers are invited into the creator's mediated home—comes into conflict with the excision of kink from the public sphere and relegation to the "private" bedroom (or dungeon). For sex working content creators, the growing cultural expectation that "influencers must continuously navigate a porous border between personhood and business" is textured by these cultural constraints (Hund 150).

Repairman67, notably, does not stream from his bedroom, which, for sex working content creators, might carry pornographic undertones—instead, his "private sphere" is his living room or kitchen, each mundane in their own way. This distances the livestreams from his more overt sex work—possibly for the sake of TikTok's censoring gaze—yet still invokes a degree of intimacy through his audience's virtual invitation into his "authentic" living space. The tension between public and private are negotiated through careful attention to the material location of the livestream. The sex working content creator, even when—especially when—not performing sex remains beholden to the excessive demands of the many economies in which they are embedded. Although TikTok's platform is one workplace for content creators, the home is another; it is not uncommon for content creators to use their home as a regular backdrop in their content. This heightens the collapse between home and work, and public and private, even as the collapse promotes viewers' perception of intimacy and authenticity.

Although previously Repairman67 constructed a sexual authority through his pedagogical work on the platform, here Repairman67 performs a casual, intimate masculinity reminiscent of postfeminist "girlfriendship" cultures that produce "authentic" interactions between content creator and viewer (Chen and Kanai 100). With an eye toward Tristan Bridges and C. J. Pascoe's work on "hybrid masculinities"—men's selective and dynamic uptake of traits stereotypically associated with marginalized masculinities and femininities—the labor underwriting Repairman67's alternative performance of sexual success becomes more visible (246). Repairman67 is white, muscular, tattooed, pink-haired, and straight: superficial markers of a persona that engages a "dialectical pragmatism" to play with social and symbolic boundaries of masculine sexual success from a relatively risk-free position (Demetriou 345). Repairman67's visual appearance nods to his transgressive sexual content and opens the door for his participation in the gendered sphere of sex advice, traditionally dominated by women's magazines (Frischherz 553). Repairman67's constructs a gendered intimacy through his appearance, the location from which he livestreams, and his dynamic, casual interactions with viewers. On the one hand, white, kinky masculinity engenders an iteration of sexual success through sanctioned desire, authority, and credibility; on the other, *hybrid* masculine alignment with kinky, BDSM, historically queer communities facilitates a degree of trust predicated upon his authenticity, mundane lifestyle, and invitation into the private

home. Significantly, while Repairman67's performance of kinky hybrid masculinity remains transgressive under TikTok's *official* guidelines, both BDSM and pornography have, in recent years, faced widespread corporatization under consumer capitalist cultural forces (Saunders; Weiss). Further, given Repairman67's following and reach, the culturally transgressive nature of his content is debatable.

Regardless, Repairman67's TikTok livestreams illustrate the transformation of the content creator through several vectors. Polyvalent performances of desire slot neatly into platformed channels of desire, and both together contribute to an ethos of excess in the late capitalist digital sphere. It is not just Repairman67's visual appearance, but also his material location which represents gendered strategies of work in this algorithmic neoliberal sphere. Repairman67 operates in a sphere in which postfeminist, neoliberal narratives of sex work dominate public perception, but he leverages these constraints and an iteration of hybrid masculine sexuality to construct an "authentic" intimacy with his viewers, where sexual production is, if never fully absent, certainly pushed to the background.

Between October 2022 and October 2023, Repairman67 decentered his sex-work-specific content and re-centered his lifestyle content, selling his holistic self as a product, rather than sex as a product (at least on this platform). Perhaps this is responsive to a changed algorithmic landscape, where TikTok has become increasingly notorious for removing and shadow-banning sex workers and sexually explicit content. Or perhaps this is reflective of the nature of content creation more broadly, where digital laborers are most accurately considered gig workers whose labor blurs the borders between work and life, consuming the worker temporally, during their "off-hours," and spatially, in their home.

Lessons from Repairman67's Labor

Despite claims in its "Terms of Service," TikTok does not excise sexually explicit content or sexual solicitation from its platform; it merely facilitates new manifestations of sexual desire's binding to digital economies. In this context, excess, in its myriad forms, represents one lens through which scholars can attend to the transformation of sex and labor in the digital sphere. As a workplace, TikTok's platform surveils and constrains the many content creators who make a living, in part, on the app. However, we have also seen how the digitally producing subject works within, around, and beyond these constraints. Sex working content creators like Repairman67 represent generative case studies because they tend to be inordinately self-aware of their paratextual strategies regarding their own content and are strategic in the more aestheticized elements of their performance. Both forms of strategies respond to the excessive labor demands of the attention economy. Repairman67 embodies a hybrid masculine sexual performance that nuances this rhetoric even further—where authority, intimacy, and kink together contribute to his iteration of content creation.

There are two primary takeaways from this project. The first is that gendered labor on TikTok has material implications for content creators who are not cisgender women—neoliberal feminized iterations of cultural work online participate in cultural matrices that affect creators like Repairman67. Repairman67's positionality as a kinky, white, masculine sex working content creator means that he draws upon conceptual resources dispersed across many communities—a hallmark of the digital producing subject whose audience is broad, varied, and algorithmically unpredictable. Work in the attention economy demands careful attunement to strategies that utilize and subvert algorithms, hail many audiences simultaneously, and harness libidinal energies to remain visible and monetizable. In Repairman67's case, pedagogical authority is married with casual intimacy through multiple forms of content that leverage different facets of his identity to appeal to viewers. Rhetorically, this involves attention to appearance, aesthetics, and subtle visual signifiers that draw or distance sexual desire—work that may have been formerly invisible to viewing audiences.

The second takeaway is that scholars who focus on feminism and sex work cannot ignore the role of sex as a catalytic agent, but must simultaneously recognize the complexity of any libidinal economy—where there is not always *material* grounding in sex (Durham 81). The economy of desire, even sexual desire, does not necessarily need sex to find productive value. Repairman67 operates under both frameworks: sex is both a commodity and is not materially necessary for subsequent commodification. Given algorithmic governance of sex work and the simultaneous visual and rhetorical demands of sex on the internet, rhetorical invention of strategies to manage the visibility and commodification of sexual labor takes place. Even as some content creators detach their labor from (explicit performances of) sex, the commodification of their aesthetic and their knowledge remains fertile ground for visibility and revenue in the creator economy, a rhetorical form of sexual labor of its own. Instead of manifesting pornographically on TikTok, excess libidinal energies transform into consumption of anything and everything that the digital worker is able and willing to sell: their expertise, their advice, their time, their merchandise, their lifestyle, their aesthetic, and, in some notable cases, even their bathwater (Bishop).

Where does this leave scholars? Intersectional approaches to labor, including those of digital and sexual subjects, are clearly necessary, where code, performance, identity, and visibility all contribute to the unique material rhetorical trajectories of the contemporary digital content creator. Scholars attuned to other identities would find different labor strategies for grappling with the collapsing boundaries between work and personal lives online, or alternative performances of authority, intimacy, and authenticity. While critical attention to masculinity in gendered work contexts is necessary, we know that "masculinities" is better conceptualized in the plural—and attention to variously masculine interactions with neoliberal, postfeminist, or digital work contexts can tell us much about the reification and disruption of gendered norms (Connell 57). Because sex work and sexuality cannot be detangled from race, gender, and class, Repairman67's whiteness mobilizes his construction of pedagogical authority even as it allows him to strategically distance

himself from his sex work. Sex working content creators along different identity vectors face constraints that would necessarily change their rhetorical strategies in this work. Additionally, because of its opaque learning algorithms, TikTok is a constantly evolving workplace. While this project examined the interplay between one creator and the platform, I look forward to seeing how scholars continue to characterize other corners of the app, where content creators do work differently.

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The "Anti-Work" Movement: Articulating a Challenge to the Protestant Work Ethic

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Abstract: By analyzing a particular moment surrounding a controversial *Fox News* interview in the circulation of "anti-work" discourse on *Reddit*, this article explores how the rhetorical production of "anti-work" discourse in neoliberal mass media challenges previous notions of the Protestant work ethic's connection to worker identity formation. Interweaving methodologies from political theory, cultural studies, and rhetoric, I consider how this discourse resists exploitative work practices, signaling hegemonic shifts crucial for social movement. The pandemic has brought forth a shared precarity that has crossed previously insulated identities, allowing a potential for such re-articulating of desires and needs. Combined with the late-capitalist, neoliberal order, this particular time works as a *kairotic* moment for potential shifts in narratives of work and labor, including the disruption of the dominant ideology of the Protestant work ethic. As people vocalize workplace grievance and exploitation, a potential rearticulation of workers' desires and work identity comes into play. These shifts also necessitate thinking outside of the system toward post work imaginaries. Scholarship attuned to these new forms of discourse might aid the process of developing new hegemonic articulations by describing and prescribing them, motivating us to act upon the socio-economic welfare of our precarious status.

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Tags: Anti-work, Protestant work ethic, worker identity, social movement, post work imaginaries

During a now-infamous 2022 episode of *Jesse Watters Prime* on Fox News, the conservative host asked his guest, with a smirk, "Why do you like the idea of being home, not working, but still getting paid by corporate America?" ("Jessie Watters takes on the one who operates the Anti Work Group"). Over the course of three minutes on primetime television, Watters grilled Doreen Ford, a long-time moderator of the subreddit r/antiwork, during a segment on the burgeoning

"anti-work" movement. On a split screen, viewers watched as the boisterous, clean-cut Watters rushed through a few patronizing questions, constantly cutting off Ford, who was streaming from a dimly lit, messy basement bedroom, unkempt and stumbling through her answers. Basking in the glow of over one million followers and recent mainstream exposure, the r/antiwork community watched as the conservative political analyst nearly smote the movement on the spot. Within two days, the subreddit's posting volume collapsed to less than half, over 35,000 members unsubscribed, and Ford was removed as moderator (Medlar et al). Ego bruised and battle wearied, the community cleaned their wounds with reforms and restructuring of the platform. Posts began flooding in again, with top posts stating that the interview was merely an attempt to quell the rising popularity of "anti-work" sentiment or, similarly, that the community's foundational ideals should not be swayed.

While the origins of the phrase "anti-work" are unclear, many consider it an extension of previous work disillusionment and exploitation, now repackaged in hashtags and viral trends. R/antiwork considers the phrase a useful distinction from "anti-job," because "a job is just an activity one is paid for and we are not all against money," or "anti-labor" because "we're not against effort, labor or being productive. We're against jobs as they are structured under capitalism and the state" ("r/antiwork" FAQ). In his *enculturation* article, "Burning Out: Writing and the Self in the Era of Terminal Productivity," James Daniel points out, "to oppose work is not necessarily to oppose labor as such but rather to critique participation in the institutionalized and market-bound forms of work that structure contemporary life" (Daniel). According to BBC journalist Brian O'Connor, the "anti-work" movement "seeks to do away with [the] economic order that underpins the modern workplace. 'Anti-work,' which has roots in anarchist and socialist economic critique, argues that the bulk of today's jobs aren't necessary; instead, they enforce wage slavery and deprive workers of full value of their output" (O'Connor). In the late-capitalist, neoliberal era, on the heels of a disastrous pandemic, such critiques have become glaring in the face of heightened essential worker exploitation and rampant wealth inequality.[1]

Labor data also signals growing resentment in the workforce. "Quiet-quitting," or "acting your wage," briefly became popular sentiments that articulated such resentment towards working beyond explicit job expectations and proper remuneration. According to a 2022 poll by workplace research company Gallup, "'quiet quitters' made up at least 50% of the workforce" (Harter). Gallup's data also pointed to the lowest level of work engagement in the past decade, with Gen Z and younger Millennials being the primary generations vocalizing disengagement and discontent at work. In their analysis, Sandro Formica and Fabiola Sfodera connected the trending concept of

1 I prefer Wendy Brown's Foucauldian inspired notion of neoliberalism here. She states, "It [neoliberalism] names a historically specific economic and political reaction against Keynesianism and democratic socialism, as well as a more generalized practice of 'economizing' spheres and activities heretofore governed by other tables of value" (21). Neoliberalism becomes a rationality when the "economic rationality becomes a governing (or political) one... the field of normative reason from which instruments and techniques... are forged" (121). See, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Zone Books, 2015.

'quiet quitting' to "The Great Resignation" in 2021, when "over 47 million Americans voluntarily quit their jobs" (900). A 2022 Pew Research Center poll cites that "low pay, a lack of opportunities for advancement and feeling disrespected at work are the top reasons why Americans quit their jobs last year" (Parker and Horowitz). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the trend of quitting escalated even higher in 2022 (Iacurci). Even as the Great Resignation moment has passed, the uptick in wages over the past few years gave some employees a momentary advantage in the job market. While direct causation can be hard to determine, such viral discourse associated with the "anti-work" moment and actual resistance performed in the labor force have simultaneously increased.

In this essay, I argue a deeper rhetorical analysis of the "anti-work" movement reveals the shifting ways in which people critique work. In addition, I argue such critique reflects a larger rearticulation of the Protestant work ethic, illuminating how upcoming generations are questioning the ties of work to identity. Many workers during the pandemic were confronted with the stark realities of "essential" work: risking their personal health for the economic vitality of the market. With rising inflation, a scarcity of necessary commodities (notably toilet paper and masks being hoarded or upsold), and a precarious future, many workers were expected to forge ahead, upholding the ceaseless production of the neoliberal economic order. The previously lauded Protestant work ethic, working hard towards future success, became a distant reality for many. Sustainability practices became popular amongst social media users, such as spending idle time learning long forgotten crafts or figuring ways to make food without the risk of shopping in public or paying gauged prices (Beck). For some, the lockdowns became a wakeup call to a life outside of the daily grind. Today many workers are still fighting the notion of returning to offices, citing transportation and/or childcare costs, or even an overall sense of ease working away from the corporate environment (Bloom). In sum, the pandemic worked as a hammer to crack open the preconceived ties of identity to work. Now workers are lessening their investment in work and setting boundaries that clarify a separation between work and life.

By analyzing a particular moment surrounding the controversial Fox News interview in the circulation of "anti-work" discourse on *Reddit*, this article explores how the rhetorical production of "anti-work" discourse in neoliberal mass media challenges previous notions of the Protestant work ethic's connection to worker identity formation. Interweaving methodologies from political theory, cultural studies, and rhetoric, I consider how this discourse may articulate political resistance to exploitative work practices that signal hegemonic shifts crucial for social movement. The pandemic has brought forth a shared precarity that has crossed previously insulated identities, allowing a potential for such re-articulating of desires and needs.Combined with the late-capitalist, neoliberal order, this particular time works as a kairotic moment for potential paradigm shifts in narratives of work and labor.

Shifting Tides of Work and Labor

Work and labor studies have seen a particular uptake since the pandemic, with attunement to the precarity of the essential worker, such as interrogating the notion of 'dying for the economy' (Darian-Smith), as well as the 'Great Resignation' of 2021 spearheading research on worker mental health and wage exploitation (Formica and Sfodera). James Daniel's definitions of work and labor are useful to help delineate the importance of grievances against work, rather than labor, in "anti-work" discourse, as much of the opposition to "anti-work" discourse seems to evolve around a misunderstanding and/or conflation of the terms work and labor. Daniel conceptualizes labor as "fundamentally associated with production," while work "may be distinguished as the formalization of labor practices, often localized in sites or organizations," such that "work names the conditions and locations of labor, though not necessarily stable or consistent ones" (Daniel). These conditions and locations have become especially fraught given the massive waves of instability across social and economic lines, coupled with intense bouts of violence against minority communities and the erosion of democracy itself. Given the socio-economic precarity in post(?)-pandemic times, it seems crucial that reprisals of work and labor discourse, and their concurrent analysis, are fruitful for understanding the ways in which such discourse is often a constitutive element of socio-economic upheavals.

Much attention has been given to inequalities that have been further exacerbated (and/or illuminated) by the pandemic. Important intersectional interventions have also elucidated the heightened economic and health precarity for marginalized communities. In the Council on Foreign Relations 2021 study, journalist Joshua Kurlantzick notes that "[s]imply by killing more poor people and minority citizens per capita in these countries, COVID-19, along with ineffective government management of the pandemic, has fragmented poor and minority families, leaving them with fewer potential wage-earners for the future and potentially more financially strained than wealthier peers" (9). In the neoliberal era, many were faced with a stark realization of capitalism's hold on society, though this is no new story. In *Digital Objects, Digital Subjects* (2019), Kylie Jarrett argues that "for anyone who is not a white, cis-, het- man, it is difficult to see precisely what is novel about the conditions in which all of life is subsumed into capital... Yet women, people of colour, and LGBTQ+ have never experienced such contexts as places of autonomy or agency" (104). As women became the majority of remote workers during the pandemic (Palarino et al.), many saw an uptick in labor, though not necessarily an uptick in perceived value (Gaskell). The pandemic also imposed a newfound sense of precarity across a wide spectrum of American workers, challenging the preconceived notions of success and value attached to a strong work ethic. For those privileged enough to work from home, lockdowns and shutdowns pervaded their previously insulated realms, as massive groups inched closer towards economic and health precarity than ever before. Such precarity has begun to destabilize previous notions of the Protestant work ethic.

Most Americans are familiar with the Protestant work ethic, exemplified in John Winthrop's shining "City Upon a Hill" metaphor, through which hard work "came to be seen not as a burden or bare necessity but as a privilege, a glory, and a delight" (Porter 537). According to business scholar Gayle Porter, this work ethic is one of "impressive economic accomplishment" that is historically attributed to the combination of capitalism and democracy, with capitalism effectively combining the impulses of asceticism and acquisitiveness (535). Porter argues that historically, the unique work ethic "supported the balance of these impulses- the desire to have things along with the belief in deferred gratification. Together these factors fed into the democratic ideals adopted for governance" (536). Democratic traditions of participation in social and political processes, combined with potential individual success by way of capitalism, together "support and are supported by an ethic of hard work and striving for ever greater future rewards" (541). Throughout the course of the twentieth century, work became such "an integral part of personal identity that some people [came to] invest their entire sense of well-being in work related activity" (Porter 538).

The workplace can also reify such identifications. As many current scholars working at the intersections of gender and work reiterate, work "plays a significant role in both the production and reproduction of gendered identities and hierarchies: gender is re-created along with value," and such identities "can sometimes alienate workers from their job and other times bind them more tightly to it" (Weeks 10). The alienation exacerbated by inequitable wealth contributions, isolated remote work, and hazardous working environments during, and post, lockdown destabilizes previous notions of work identification to overall security and well-being.

Despite this destabilization, historian James Livingston explains why many are still under the spell of the Protestant work ethic. In his 2017 *The Baffler* article, he argues that there are two assumptions that underlie the resistance to an "anti-work" ethic. First, the Hegelian and Marxist assumption that a "trans-historical element of human nature, is the site on which human subjectivity-individuality-is conceived and constructed," and second, Marx's historical progress, that "the proletariat can constitute itself as a class-conscious agent of progressive historical change- overthrow capitalism, install socialism, and so forth- only insofar as its avowed political purpose becomes the abolition of the social conditions that created it in the first place: alienated labor" (92). He further argues that in the absence of this social stratum of historical progress, "talk of opposition to capitalism or transition to socialism becomes intellectually ungrounded, creating the hot air that inflates liberal balloons" (92). The Protestant work ethic's ties to capitalism, democracy, and this intrinsic element of human labor has created a near impenetrable armor around the concept of work altogether. Livingston's final statement echos the "anti-work" message:

The question is, what happens if we dispense with this bourgeois conception of work and the ego ideal that attends it? Instead of repatriating work from overseas or reclaiming factory labor from the robots on the shop floor, or increasing public spending to create full employment,

what if we said, fuck work. Or, more politely: 'We prefer not to. Work and life are not the same thing. And now that work matters less in the making of our character because socially necessary labor is, practically speaking, unavailable, we can create lives less burdened by its demands.'" (98)

Despite the stature of the Protestant work ethic, I argue there is a shift seeping in, whether from consistent wage degradation, increasing inequality, or the pandemic's glaring insight into the commodification of workers' livelihoods. While collective organizing has seen an uptick in recent years, the recent reiterations of workplace resistance and support on community platforms such as r/antiwork move from a reformist understanding of work to a radical notion that loosens these Protestant ties of identity to work.

R/antiwork and the Rise of the "Anti-Work" Movement

Spearheading this challenge to the Protestant work ethic is the subreddit r/antiwork. R/antiwork describes their subreddit as "for those who want to end work, are curious about ending work, want to get the most out of a work-free life, want more information on "anti-work" ideas and want personal help with their own jobs/work-related struggles" (r/antiwork). Founded in 2013 as a discussion forum for radical, anarchist views on work, the subreddit experienced exponential growth during the pandemic. According to Medlar et al's analysis, "[i]n late 2021, r/antiwork became the fastest growing community on Reddit, coinciding with what the mainstream media began referring to as the Great Resignation. This same media coverage was attributed with popularising the subreddit and, therefore, accelerating its growth" (1). While r/antiwork is a communal space to share workplace grievances or articulate desires for ending work altogether, many use the space to advocate for work reform by circulating union literature, workers' rights legislation, and even support for strikes. The subreddit's FAQ page provides advice on organizing, resources for labor action, and a library full of books and articles ranging from sociologist David Graeber's *Bullshit Jobs* to Karl Marx's foundational theories found in such works as *Capital*. There also seems to be an acknowledgment of users' different political views, offering information on anarcho-syndicalism, Marxism, communism, and other strains of radical political ideologies. Top posts of all time include screenshots from users quitting their job due to exploitative demands, videos of strike walkouts, and links to mainstream newspaper articles and tweets covering rampant inequality, socio-economic upheavals, and other worker related news.

One notable circulation among the subreddit was the discourse surrounding the aforementioned "quiet quitting." While the term first appeared over a decade ago, its viral resurgence brought the phrase back into the zeitgeist. In March 2022, *TikTok* user Brian Creely criticized the term while reviewing an *Insider* article (Ito), interpreting the practice as "taking it easy" (Creely qtd. in Marsden). Zaid Khan's counter video hit *TikTok* shortly after, gathering over 3.5 million views (Marsden). Khan, as well as several other self-described Gen Z workers, considers quiet quitting

as “still performing your duties, but you’re no longer subscribing to the hustle culture mentality that work has to be your life” (Khan). NPR’s Planet Money described the trend as “setting boundaries and simply completing the tasks you’re supposed to complete within the time that you’re paid to do them — with no extra frills” (Rosalsky and Selyukh). The phrase’s positive connotations associate the act of resistance with a life separated from the work self, to visualize a future not dominated by the economic stranglehold of capitalism. Such a view falls in line with the “anti-work” movement.

The subreddit was quick to jump on the misconceptions surrounding the phrase “quiet quitting,” with top posts criticizing the term as a “bullshit term made up to describe people not allowing their job to take advantage of them anymore” (u/Iwilllieawake). Other top posts, such as the 3.1 K upvoted, “I’ve been ‘quiet quitting’ for a week and have never been more relaxed” (u/TerrBear5317), received praise, as well as skepticism over the phrase itself. One poster referred to the term as a capitalist marketing ploy to degrade doing your normal work, while others shared their own joys found within putting up boundaries at work. Both “quiet quitting” and “anti-work” discourse, like most viral or trending social media topics, immediately sparked debate over the anti-work movement’s actual focus. Yet the backlash ignited further discourse around worker exploitation and workplace volatility. Through an ecological circulation of the term, the concept leaped from social media platforms to online magazines and mainstream newspapers, putting it on the radar of those typically outside certain platform communities. With headlines like the *New York Times* article, “Hating Your job Is Cool. But Is It a Labor Movement?” (Whang), and *The Atlantic*’s “Quiet Quitting Is a Fake Trend,” (Thompson) popping up in the first pages of a Google search, “anti-work” discourse was getting attention, regardless, or perhaps because of, the critiques.

Growing in subscribers, who call themselves “idlers,” the subreddit continued to see an accelerated growth rate of posting until Doreen Ford’s infamous *Fox News* interview in January 2023. Above the Fox News banner, “The War Against Working,” Ford was unable to articulate the ideology behind the subreddit, that “[w]ork puts the needs and desires of managers and corporations above and beyond workers, often to the point of abuse through being overworked and underpaid,” or that idlers were not against “effort, labor, or being productive” but against the exploitation caused by capitalism and the state (r/antiwork FAQ). Instead, Ford espoused the virtue of being lazy. Rather than critique the systemic issues surrounding notions of working to live, she only mentions her part time job as a dog walker and rent-free accommodations at her parents’ house. She also seemed ignorant of the staunchly conservative mass media platform she was communicating with. Mentioning her desire to become a philosophy professor only further enraged conservative viewers, many of whom tune into Fox News prime to find validation in a culture war aimed at academia itself. *Vice* summed up the anti-work community’s reaction best:

> They are angry that Ford did an interview with a media platform that is predisposed to be biased against a movement that's broadly anti-capitalistic, leftist, and pro workers' rights. And they're mad that the movement—which includes many "essential" and blue-collar workers who put in 40-, 60-, or 80-hour weeks just to make ends meet—was so easily able to be portrayed as lazy communists who want to stay home all day and get free stuff from the government. (Koebler)

Watters was able to tap into the predetermined beliefs held by many *Fox News* members, that the American dream is built and maintained on the premise of the Protestant work ethic. Anything that challenges such an ethic must automatically be lazy, and most importantly, anti-American. "Anti-work" discourse goes directly against these deeply embedded notions of the Protestant work ethic, questioning the ceaseless output while unsettling ties of identity to work. Peaking at 2,658 posts the following day, the subreddit soon went private while the moderators began implementing reforms to the site (Medlar et al). After opening to the public again, r/antiwork's subscriber growth resumed quickly. The community was not ready to shut down. The top subreddit post of all time (48k votes) concerning the interview on r/antiwork states, "If the Fox news interview has you concerned about Antiwork, then congratulations, you now know how it feels to be weaponized against your allies" (u/Meta_Digital). Others acknowledged the interview as an attempt to quell the subreddit's growing popularity. Medlar et. al's research on comment and subscriber data revealed that while a drastic drop in subscribers followed the interview, the quality of discussion has remained the same (7). Their research also reveals the correlation between mainstream media coverage and the subreddit's activity. After the interview, dozens of publications brought r/antiwork back into the headlines. Many articles were praising the community and the "anti-work" movement (see Needleman, Kelly), though others are still in line with *Fox News*, considering the subreddit simply a community of modern youth who no longer understand the value of work or the momentum of an actual movement (Polumbo).

Rearticulating an American Work Ethic

I argue this resistance to "anti-work" discourse lies within the dominant narrative of the Protestant work ethic, a Gramscian hegemonic bloc bolstered by a long history of capitalist and democratic desires that constitute a form of American identity.[2] By questioning these presupposed intrinsic ties to work, Americans are tasked with transforming their ideologies surrounding work and labor. Passed down through generations, many Americans have been taught that hard work pays off both spiritually and literally. From Protestant preachings about working towards grace to the American dream of upward mobility, these Americans allow for work to symbolize their life's purpose. While there are periods of American history where work was crucial in the formation of society, the rapid transformation of technology and industry has displaced previous notions of

2 "As described by Michael Denning (1997), a Gramscian historical bloc is "a complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble of the superstructures," "an alliance of social forces and a specific social formation" (p. 6)." (Dolber 3699).

work and labor geared towards a means of survival for communities evolving through Western expansion. Later automation led many to believe in a future of fifteen-hour work weeks. However, the growth of the administration sector, along with a rapid advance of economic inequality, has assisted in keeping American workers exploited. In his provocative 2018 book, *Bullshit Jobs*, David Graeber argues there is a clear moral and political reason for keeping the working classes continuously working: "The ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger... And, on the other hand, the feeling that work is a moral value in itself... anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing, is extraordinarily convenient for [the ruling class]" (xix). In the current neoliberal, late capitalist era, upward economic mobility is also drastically decreasing. Continuous hyperinflation, increased commodification of the housing market, and stagnant wages are keeping lower and middle classes from achieving any previous notion of the American dream.

R/antiwork, through its informative posting and sharing on the community platform, seeks to challenge this narrative of the Protestant work ethic by articulating a disconnect from imposed worker identity or a sense of value found within the work ethic. According to psychologist George M. Alliger, "anti-work" "asks whether work should even exist. Or it suggests that human labor, especially wage labor, is corruptive of human personality and society. This corrosion occurs despite and perhaps to some extent because the ethic and expectation of work is everywhere, so pervasive as to be almost indiscernible" (2). Under neoliberalism, society has moved further and further away from welfare policies towards a continuous, ceaseless means of production. The "work hustle" mentality of the millennial generation, where overworking and job glorification were among trends of young white-collar workers, has permeated into a corporate expectation of an all-encompassing work culture. However, in the aftermath of the pandemic, the "anti-work" message is gaining traction, with worker grievance transforming into a critique of the Protestant work ethic itself.

While previous labor and feminist movements have called for greater equity in the workplace, Marxist Feminist scholar Kathi Weeks takes this further. She argues that many sometimes fail to understand, or simply ignore, the underlying neoliberal rationalism that frames the patriarchal and late capitalist ideology permeating the Protestant work ethic. What might happen if society began to shift away from this neoliberal work ethic? To privilege life over work? While these questions seem utopic, it just might be this utopian way of imagining that creates real affective change. Echoing Michelle C. Smith, future hope must contain a "necessity of a utopian impulse" (153).

Imagining a Post-Work Utopia

While r/antiwork experienced a setback with the *Fox News* interview, the r/antiwork community rebuilt upon a shared foundation of an imagined future where work is no longer exploitive and detrimental to life itself. Posters sharing their workplace grievances and the responding support have unlocked larger conversations about the Protestant work ethic entirely, and though these resentments have been vocalized throughout history, the hyper communicative nature of the networked public sphere has amplified the circulation. Catherine Chaput argues for a "critical thinking tethered to affective acumen... not only will this critical ontology of our selves revive anticapitalist discourse, but also stands to propel a number of other oppositional movements that have been stymied by a biopolitical governmentality at odds with its critique" (*Market Affect* 160). Through activist politics, Chaput argues, "[a]ctive participation in disruptive moments produce different bodies, different subjectivities, and different affective terrains" (160). A potential disruption in the capitalist discourse lies within posting and sharing "anti-work" discourse on digital platforms.

The ecological circulation of such discourse lays the groundwork for inventing innovative approaches to work and labor. Rhetorician Dan Ehrenfeld states that "the public sphere is a social-material reality that continually provides the grounding for imagined worlds, or 'fictions.' And it is simultaneously a 'political imaginary' that nevertheless materializes itself in the world, coming to 'exert a real force"' (310). Considering the networked public sphere in the same light, I propose looking to the circulation of "anti-work" discourse, and how it (re)articulates these imagined worlds of different work culture, as fictions that may materialize with real force through actualized workplace resistance. For social media followers of similar threads of "anti-work" discourse, championing each other to reject toxic work culture through posts, shares, and likes, creates an imagined world where "people should self-organise and labor only as much as needed, rather than working longer hours to create excess capital or goods" (O'Connor). As people vocalize workplace grievance and exploitation, a potential rearticulation of workers' desires and work identity comes into play.

Such shifts necessitate thinking outside of the system: post work imaginaries through utopian demand. Weeks asks us to consider an alternative to capitalist society that escapes the socialist bent, as socialism is no longer the "persuasive signifier of a postcapitalist alternative" (29). Weeks identifies a form of imaginary as a "utopian demand," a "utopia without apologies" (175-76). To function effectively, "the demand must constitute a radical and potentially far-reaching change, generate a critical distance, and stimulate the political imagination... a utopian demand should be recognizable as a possibility grounded in actually existing tendencies" (221). The late capitalist model, one that depends on the biopolitical and socioeconomic exploitation of the majority, must be challenged politically. As Weeks notes, "Freedom... depends on collective action rather than individual will, and this is what makes it political" (222). For Weeks, and other scholars calling for "anti-work" politics, these movements must push past calling for equal wages, more jobs, better

benefits (though all of these are valid), and instead ask the bigger question: why continue to uphold the exploitative nature of work to begin with? Why not see the *value* of a life outside of work itself? It is a big ask. It is huge. And certain bodies are at risk of more violence for asking these questions. But like the utopian demand, it is rooted in real life and gives some semblance of hope towards the dark days on the horizon.

Platforms such as *Reddit*, often dismissed for their magnification of hive-minded, and at times hateful, dispersal of information, are fast becoming the best locations to track how digital communities (re)act towards the precarious nature of our times. Tracing the various conversations that span community-based platforms and mainstream media helps to illuminate individual identities interacting within the public sphere. While one must, at times, dig through the disinformation or trolling, we may uncover real stories of real people that articulate potential hegemonic shifts. I see potential for these digital conversations to impact the socio-economic realities outside of these platforms. *Black Lives Matter* showed us the power of hashtag circulation in July 2013, leading to police reforms and organizational changes, such as increased training and bans of no-knock warrants (Ray). The #MeToo movement also provided a platform for collective grievance and organizing. Women's testimony led to several legal and career take downs of prominent men, as well as bringing awareness to the overwhelming number of sexual assault victims (Burgess). Both movements used the affordances of digital circulation to create awareness and find modes of collective organization geared towards changing the narratives around race and gender. In comparison to other social movements and their collective strength on digital platforms, there are potential affordances in the circulation of "anti-work" discourse that can be articulated with more organized, long-standing social movement organizations and tactics. These social movements can disrupt the dominant hegemonic ideology of the Protestant work ethic. Scholarship attuned to these new forms of discourse might aid the process of developing new hegemonic articulations by describing and prescribing them, motivating us to act upon the socio-economic welfare of our precarious status.

As many continue to grapple with the aftermath of the pandemic and lockdowns, scholarship on work and labor is vital to uncover the ways in which ties to previous notions of work ethic and identity become challenged in the face of such socio-economic upheaval. While attending to specific occupations or official documentation for sites of unrest provides data for such changes, broader conversations on digital community platforms can also enrich our understanding of how workers are articulating their grievances. Scholars interested in work-related rhetorics may look to these forms of discourse as not only a way to illuminate these individual and collective responses to such shifts, but also to denaturalize neoliberal attitudes about work.

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Afterword: Rethinking Rhetorics of Gender and Labor

Jessica Enoch and David Gold

Jessica Enoch is Professor of English and Director of the Academic Writing Program at the University of Maryland. With David Gold, she published the edited collection *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor*, and her monograph *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work* won the Winifred Bryan Horner Outstanding Book Award in 2020. Enoch's work has appeared in such outlets as *Rhetoric Society Quarterly, Rhetoric Review, Quarterly Journal of Speech, College English*, and *College Composition and Communication*. Her current book project is titled "*Remembering Suffrage: Feminist Memory at the Centennial of the 19th Amendment*." Enoch currently serves as the president of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition.

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Tags: remote work, care work, temporality, emotional labor, domestic labor

Our edited collection *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* was published in 2019, and at that time, we, along with our seventeen contributors, set out to meditate on the relationship between gender and work, identifying it as an underexplored area in rhetorical studies writ large and feminist rhetorical studies more particularly. We saw the value in taking on this inquiry, asserting that "to be able to argue for how, why, and on what terms one works is critical to human existence," since "[w]ork affects one's sense of independence, quality of life, daily sustenance, individual and familial survival, intellectual engagement, personal happiness and fulfillment, innovative thinking, and entrepreneurial spirit" (3-4). We prioritized the connection between gender and work, asserting that this pairing would especially "revea[l] the special and significant challenges women have faced as they have attempted to understand and intervene in the conditions of their labor" (4).

Little did we know that just a few months after the publication of our collection, our understandings of and experiences with work would dramatically change due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. By March of 2020, the country went into lockdown. People who could work virtually did so (or tried to), creating new workspaces within their homespaces. Front-line workers—nurses, doctors, grocery store workers, and delivery people—stayed on the job and placed

themselves in harm's way, often working with limited access to protective equipment or safety protocols. There was a clear class divide in terms of those who could telework, with one Pew research study finding that "62% of workers with a bachelor's degree or more" were able to work from home compared to "23% of those without a four-year college degree" (Parker et al.). Mothers especially were doubly tasked with working virtually and supporting their children's online schooling; in consequence, mothers disproportionately exited the workforce to care for their children, and the nation experienced what some termed a "female recession" or "she-cession" (Khazan). These dire concerns were further deepened by anxieties relating to a faltering economy and job loss. Such radical and almost immediate changes to work prompted many people to reflect critically on the role their jobs and labor played in their lives, as the nation was abuzz with news of individual and collective acts of work-related resistance, social media activism, union organizing, and calls for establishing more human (and humane) relationships to work.

As we write now in 2024, seeking a sense of normalcy since the onset of the pandemic four years ago, this new reckoning with work is prominent in the public imagination. Given our contemporary context, then, Michelle Smith and Sarah Hallenbeck's *Peitho* cluster conversation "Gender and the Rhetoricity of Work" could not be more exigent and kairotic. The essays herein give *Peitho* readers the opportunity to consider and reconsider definitions of and engagements with work and especially to explore how power and rhetoric continue to animate work experience. We thank Michelle and Sarah for creating this opportunity, and we especially thank the authors in this *Peitho* issue for directing our field's attention in new ways. In this afterword, we sit with these essays, appreciating them for how they reorient our understandings of work and offer new heuristics for continued inquiry.

In "Work and the Rhetorical Enactment of Disability," Kristina Bowers exposes the institutional logics that make it difficult for those with long Covid to apply for, receive, and maintain Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. In particular, medical models of disability centered on workplace productivity take priority over a "claimant's embodied knowledge or experience," and a neoliberal understanding of personal responsibility displaces "government, community, or even workplace resources" in favor of an "individualized mandate" to manage care. Bowers's call to further study these discourses is of pressing interest to feminist rhetorical scholars, particularly given the higher rate of Covid cases and death experienced by minorities; the disproportionate effect of Covid on women-dominated employment sectors; and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care duties that fall on women (Luck et al.; Yavorsky et al.). This work is a reminder too of how women have historically engaged in collective action to challenge the medical establishment and unfair labor conditions, and calls *Peitho* readers to acknowledge—and act on—the need for both historiographic and contemporary empirical research to better understand these practices.

In "Not Just Doctors," Lillian Campbell attends to the experiences of women of color working in healthcare through a case study of three tele-observers in a Virtual Intensive Care Unit.

Though requiring minimal formal training, the position necessitates considerable rhetorical skill as well as often-unrecognized embodied medical knowledge, skills devalued in the institutional contexts in which these women work. At the same time, these women's healthcare work offers them a degree of autonomy and job security rare for workers in low-prestige roles in the health-care industry—and elsewhere. Campbell asks readers not to forget that women of color are overrepresented in low-wage and hazardous jobs in health care (Dill and Duffy), and her work amplifies recent calls in feminist rhetorical studies to prioritize working-class women and their undervalued labor (Hallenbeck and Smith; Keohane; Popp and Phillips-Cunningham). Campbell invites us to think more critically about the rhetorical, emotional, and embodied capacities and labor necessary to navigate these specific health-care contexts. She especially encourages consideration of the trauma these women witness from afar but are unable to act on relieving, and to meditate more broadly on the unaccounted workplace trauma marginalized workers may experience across employment sectors.

In "You Have Time and You Should Cook, *Tonight*," Ashley M. Beardsley explores the rhetoric of popular cookbook author and television host Rachael Ray, known for her use of "fake-outs," shortcuts that cooks can use to elevate simple preparations to impress guests and family members. Beardsley finds that Ray promotes agency for her audience by "recovering and circulating cooking knowledge" and employing a teaching style reminiscent of learning alongside a family member. At the same time, in "emphasizing women's responsibility to cook" and underplaying planning, preparation, and clean-up time Ray "contribute[s] to normalizing gendered invisible kitchen labor." Beardsley's treatment raises questions about the extra scrutiny women in the public eye (like Ray) receive, the ways by which domestic rhetorics may simultaneously leverage and constrain women's agency, and the extent to which women entrepreneurs may both promote and undermine feminist discourses. Beardsley further calls readers to consider how workspaces are privileged and the ways time is accounted for in "discounted" spaces like the home, where "labor-saving" devices and stratagems have often reinforced gendered work expectations. Building on Beardsley's essay, we ask: What other instances of time-compression inside and outside the home are we missing? What rhetorical tactics enable this compression and what are the consequences?

Ashley Hay's essay "TikTok's Excessive Labors" suggests the ways that relationships to labor have been altered by what digital media scholars term the "platform society" (Dijck et al.), one in which social and economic life is increasingly mediated by digital platforms and driven by neoliberal logics. Hay finds that even a successful online entrepreneur as Repairman67 must negotiate an uncertain landscape of ambiguous platform policies, oblique algorithms, and shifting audience expectations that challenge old understandings of content producer and content consumer. Hay also makes clear that sex workers, no matter how seemingly empowered, operate in a market rife with exploitation, their precarity exacerbated by platform technologies and cultures that blur public and private boundaries (boyd) and by ambiguously articulated and capriciously

enforced regulations regarding what constitutes "sexual" content. This work emboldens disciplinary understandings that online writing ecologies are not neutral spaces, but rather increasingly mediated by commercial interests that ultimately own the spaces where "public" life takes place. Hay thus summons digital feminist scholars to consider how platforms like TikTok are spaces of work and to attune themselves to the labor-related concerns that come to life when considering social media from this perspective.

We find in Kelsey Taylor Alexander's "The 'Anti-Work' Movement" a specific case of how the Covid-19 pandemic catalyzed a widespread interrogation of work. Here, Alexander considers the anti-work movement—a movement that challenges prevailing assumptions that one's identity is reliant on work, that questions the risks workers are expected to make on the job, and that encourages people to "lesse[n] their investment in work and se[t] boundaries that clarify a separation between work and life." More specifically, Alexander explores how the popular Reddit forum r/antiwork responded to scrutiny as a result of a *Fox News* interview with its moderator that cast the group in an unflattering light. While the community initially suffered a drastic loss in membership, it "rebuilt [itself] upon a shared foundation of an imagined future where work is no longer exploitive and detrimental to life itself." In centering anti-work discourses, Alexander invites readers to interrogate the assumptions and expectations we have about work, to re-imagine the kinds of practices and lifestyles that we want to maintain as workers (and as humans), and to question the lack of sustainability in many of our work environments. Of course, feminist scholars must consider how the anti-work movement reverberates across lines of difference, power, and privilege to explore who makes these calls for anti-work (and for whom) and how work gets redistributed within new anti-work contexts like "quiet quitting." This essay too should inspire historiographic investigation regarding how the current anti-work movement engages both reformist and radical movements from the past that have impacted the ways work is understood and practiced.

Read together, the contributors to this *Peitho* conversation prompt readers to meditate on how work has changed in our lives and surrounding contexts, and to think critically about the ways power and privilege intersect with work. These essays ask readers to reflect upon how the Covid-19 experience has introduced new and recast familiar terms of work, and they encourage scholars to explore emerging discourses surrounding paid leave, domestic labor, long Covid, access fatigue, virtual work, time-space compression, productivity, care work, digital/social entrepreneurship, the Protestant work ethic, anti-work, remote work, work's temporality, emotional labor, efficiency, quiet quitting, and more. These contributors too compel readers to think about who has access to work and what kind; what supports (childcare, paid leave, scheduling flexibility, social security, tax credits) are available to certain workers; and what *other* labor workers need to take on to be able to work. For readers laboring in universities, where marginalized students and scholars are disproportionately burdened by inequitable labor loads (Hsu and Nish; Kynard), this *Peitho* conversation encourages readers to inspect our own institutional contexts and to investigate—and even intervene into—how work is distributed, recognized, and compensated. And of course, these

essays summon feminist scholars to consider how their theoretical, political, and pedagogical dispositions orient them to this conversation and what new kinds of intellectual work these dispositions position them to take on. As respondents, too, we recognize our own perspectival limitations, and we hope that readers of this conversation will be inspired to pursue diverse lines of inquiry we have not yet imagined.

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Book Review

Review of *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives*

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Keywords: archival research, archives, feminist methods, pedagogy

Kirsch, Gesa E., Romeo García, Caitlin Burns Allen, and Walker P. Smith, eds. *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2023

Archival work, as the editors write in *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives*, has taken on new urgency. Increasing awareness of inequity pushes researchers to grapple with colonialism and racism that pervade everyday systems, especially in archives and education. Archival researchers are called to unsettle the givens and assumptions of archival research, many of which work to marginalize the histories of oppressed groups. The contributors to this volume understand "unsettling" as bearing witness or "peeling back the layers of what is constituted as settled so as to be able to witness, (re)orient oneself to, and carefully reckon with wounded/ing and haunted/ing spaces, places, and memories" (4).

This collection aspires to chart a path for new archival research, methods, and methodologies as well as to "(re)imagine and (re)weave futures and worlds" (7). Especially attuned to erasure, gaps, and silences, the fifteen chapters address archives' ability to create connections across the past and present as well as archives' power to oppress. The collection finds relevance mainly to archival researchers and educators in rhetoric and composition, and it provides insightful critiques of as well as new tactics for archival work.

Contributors draw heavily from feminist scholarship as feminist scholars' interests in re-

covering historical voices often involves and dovetails with archival research. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's key practices of "critical imagination" and "strategic contemplation" from *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* find their way into multiple essays in this collection. In addition to and alongside feminist approaches, contributors draw critically on "decolonial, anticolonial, Indigenous, antiracist, queer, communal, and transnational perspectives, frameworks, and approaches" (8).

The field of archival studies is also prominently featured; the essays in *Unsettling Archival Research* explicitly engage with archival studies, specifically critical archival studies and social justice within archives. Many of the essays in this collection reference archival studies scholars and archivists Michelle Caswell, Anne Gilliland, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, J. J. Ghaddar, and Marika Cifor. Caswell's 2016 "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies" is especially notable; in this piece, Caswell explains that humanities scholars mainly view "the archive" as "a hypothetical wonderland" while, for archival studies scholars and archivists, "archives—emphasis on the 's'" refer to record collections, stewarding institutions, and physical locations (I use the faux plural "archives" in this review to acknowledge archival studies). Caswell further writes that humanities scholars and archival studies scholars "are largely not taking part in the same conversations, not speaking the same conceptual languages, and not benefiting from each other's insights." Caswell argues that this neglect is gendered and classed due to the archival studies field being "feminized and relegated to the realm of 'mere' service-oriented practice" —a concern which should be especially relevant to feminist scholars in rhetoric and composition.

Unsettling Archival Research is divided into three parts, each with five chapters. The first part, Unsettling Key Concepts, interrogates key terms in archival work, leading archival researchers to reconsider basic assumptions and ideas taken for granted. These authors disrupt settled ideas about fondness for the past and encourage dissatisfaction with what archives show on the surface in order to think more critically and recognize multiple narratives.

In Chapter 1, "Unsettling the 'Archive Story,'" Jean Bessette examines the complexity and power of archives stories—the histories of archives as well as stories researchers tell alongside their research in efforts to reflexively describe personal archives encounters—which can settle and reinforce colonial archives tropes, such as fetishizing the power of the archives. To unsettle archives stories, Bessette suggests constellating them. Placing archives stories in relation to each other allows for a broader depiction of archives which highlights stories' multiplicity and variations, unsettling tropes.

Following that, Wendy Hayden's "Rescuing the Archive from What?" takes up the idea of "rescue" in the archives, including rhetoric and composition's "rescuing" of the archives for our disciplinary history. Hayden engages with Caswell's concern of how humanities scholars treat

archival studies and considers rhetoric and composition's own relationship to archival studies, noting that rhetoric and composition scholars often acknowledge the work of and collaborate with archivists. Hayden also addresses students' roles in unsettling "rescue" and "rescuer."

Jackie M. James, in "Narratives of Triumph: A Case Study of the Polio Archive," encourages the methodological approach of kairology to unsettle, recover, and amplify erased histories by asking what narratives an archives presents, why certain materials are in an archives, and what counternarratives might exist. As James uses a case study of a polio archives, this essay may be of especial interest to those who study the rhetoric of health and medicine. James also makes comparisons to the COVID-19 pandemic, showing that "by studying haunted histories, we reveal the haunted, entangled present" (49).

Kalyn Prince's "Nostalgia in the Archives: Using Nostalgia as a Tool for Negotiating Ideological Tensions," explains how nostalgia romanticizes the past while excluding certain voices from history. Prince considers two examples of artifacts from the University of Oklahoma's Western History Collections: an oral history interview conducted by a government investigator about Indigenous people of Oklahoma and a radio show by and for an Indigenous community. In making sense of the juxtaposition and discomfort of the records' proximity, Prince advocates for using critical nostalgia which helps researchers determine beneficial and problematic aspects of the past, allowing for a reconsideration of "the kind of home we want to live in, the kind of world we want to see" (64).

In the last chapter of this section, Kathryn Manis and Patty Wilde, in "A Matter of Order: The Power of Provenance in the Mercury Collection of Marion Lamm," unsettle the archival idea of provenance or archival arrangement. While provenance is often thought of as impartial, it is a "necessarily human" and interpretive act (70). The authors illustrate this with a Harvard University collection about mercury poisoning in twentieth-century Ontario that is arranged in a way which prioritizes the collectors and archivists while deemphasizing Indigenous perspectives from the Grassy Narrows and White Dog communities—for whom the mercury crisis is still ongoing. Manis and Wilde end this essay with suggestions and strategies for expanding understandings of provenance.

The collection's second section, Unsettling Research, Theory, and Methodology, explores opportunities and pitfalls of archival theory and practices, revealing tensions between what is settled and unsettled at various archival sites. The case studies in this section highlight different kinds of archives—from more-formal sites such as state archives to less-formal spaces such as community archives—and call upon researchers to unsettle usual approaches and try out new ways of tackling archival research.

Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Jessica A. Rose start off this section with "Hidden in Plain Sight: Rescuing the Archives from Disciplinarity." This essay returns to Caswell's "'The 'Archive' Is Not an Archives," and notes that humanities scholars and archivists share similar goals. Gaillet and Rose connect archival studies practices with feminist rhetoricians' recovery practices and turn to examples of community activism and "everyday archives" as case studies, specifically the AIDS Quilt project and Georgia State University's Southern Labor Archives materials on Dorothy Bolden, a civil rights activist. Gaillet and Rose encourage stronger collaborations between humanities scholars and archivists to discover hidden archives, create shared pedagogies, and highlight community contributions.

María Paz Carvajal Regidor's "(En)Countering Archival Silences: Critical Lenses, Relationships, and Informal Archives" brings in critical race theory to allow greater insight into provenance and influence analysis of archival materials. Carvajal Regidor specifically looks at Latinx student writing in a formal, academic archives and an informal archives, both on the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus. She notes how the formal archives silenced student voices while the informal archives countered those silences. For example, the formal archives only houses the final drafts of *La Carta*, a student publication, while the informal archives houses drafts in-progress, revealing "decisions, processes, and labor" of the student writers (114). Carvajal Regidor recommends that scholars search beyond formal archives in order to do justice to marginalized communities.

In Chapter 8, "Let Them Speak: Rhetorically Reimagining Prison Voices in the Archives of the Collective," Sally F. Benson turns to the New Mexico State Archives, exploring archival materials created by people obstructed from speaking for themselves, specifically, a newspaper, *The Enchanted News*, by incarcerated journalists at the Penitentiary of New Mexico from the 1950s to the 1970s. Benson approaches this work from an explicitly feminist historiographer of rhetoric viewpoint, hoping for a more-inclusive view of archives practices. Benson aims to "bear witness to people both historically disenfranchised and quite literally removed from public awareness altogether" (130). Excerpts from the newspaper intersperse the essay, helping give voice to the silenced journalists.

Pamela Takayoshi's "Bearing Witness to Transient Histories" encourages reparative work in archives by recentering neglected histories and writing histories "in a way that points toward a more equitable and moral future" (149). While not focusing on specific archives, Takayoshi notes the difficulty of learning about nineteenth-century women's mental health care from women themselves. Using the example of Clarissa Lathrop, a schoolteacher who was locked in an asylum against her will, Takayoshi shows how archival absences can be recuperated through methods of critically imagining social context and strategically contemplating intersectional positionality.

In “The Rhetorical (Im)possibilities of Recovering George Barr: Toward a Decolonial Queer Archival Methodology,” Walker P. Smith builds on Charles E. Morris and K.J. Rawson’s “archival queers” to bring a decolonial-queer approach to archival work. Decolonial and queer theory have been thought of as incompatible as English has been the “dominant mode of queer theorizing” and queer theory has not easily translated to contexts outside of Europe and the US (168). However, through focusing on Barr’s contributions to the Edgar Rice Burroughs’ Archive at the University of Louisville (Burroughs authored the Tarzan and John Carter series), Smith suggests that decolonial and queer theory become compatible once their incompatibilities are recognized and queer histories reject singular, Western narratives.

The last of the three sections, Unsettling Praxis and Pedagogy: Toward Pluriversality, addresses archival research in classrooms and the community with especial attention to power and positionality of the multiple identities present in these spaces. As with the previous section, authors explore different kinds of archives, including academic and digital archives. Multiple essays also take up students’ involvement in the archiving process (and not just archival research) as well as courses incorporating archivists. These essays consider how educators can help students prepare for, engage with, and unsettle archival research.

Liz Rohan, in “Archival Imaginings of the Working-Class College Woman: The 1912–1913 Scrapbook of Josephine Gomon, University of Michigan College Student,” discusses a scrapbook she created as a recovery project of a working-class student who might have been otherwise lost to history. Rohan unsettles existing archival materials by “commenting on their value, making them more accessible, and filling the ‘social need’ for stories about working-class students” (207). To shore up gaps in the historical record, Rohan employs strategies of imagination (specifically critical imagination and Gilliland and Caswell’s “archival imaginings”) and creativity. Selections from the scrapbook as well as discussion around incorporating imagination and creativity into the classroom provide inspiration for educators looking to incorporate similar projects into their teaching.

“Decolonizing the Transnational Collection: A Heuristic for Teaching Digital Archival Curation and Participation” by Tarez Samra Graban considers diasporic, transnational, digital archival collections, such as that of Joyce Banda, a former president of the Republic of Malawi. Graban explains how students can be involved in processing and pre-processing archival collections and considers this work in the context of globalizing undergraduates’ course of study. Drawing from feminist historiography work and archival social justice, Graban proposes a set of heuristics for decolonial approaches to curating transnational digital collections, heuristics involving reparative action, tracing instead of stabilizing archival collections, and delinking archives from geopolitical assumptions.

Jennifer Almjeld’s “Archiving as Learning: Digital Archives as Heuristic for Transformative Undergraduate Education” may be of especial interest to *Peitho* readers as the essay describes a

class project of building a feminist rhetorics digital archives in preparation for the 2019 Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference at James Madison University (a site that still exists). Almjeld discusses how building this archives unsettled student identities through questioning students' positionality as feminist scholars, archivists, and participants inside and outside of the conference community. Almjeld writes the experience was "both a success and a failure" (256), and the explanations of lessons learned will be useful for those interested in similar class projects.

In Chapter 14, "Settling Emerging Scholars in Unsettling Territory: A Case Study of Underrepresented Students Working with Dominant Culture Collections," Rebecca Schneider and Deborah Hollis describe a course they designed at the University of Colorado Boulder in which students interacted with an academic archives. The authors discuss how students from historically underrepresented communities "can be empowered to confront, reveal, and amend the hegemony of academic archives" through assignment design, collection use, and consideration of emotional intelligence (260). These strategies settled students in the archives, allowing them to gain not only the skills but also the confidence to use archives.

The final chapter, "Unsettling Archival Pedagogy" by Amy J. Lueck and Nadia Nasr, theorizes "how we might rethink the goals of archival research in our classroom to make students' limited positionality, discomfort, uncertainty, and other such moments the center of a rhetorical research course in the archives" (285). They discuss challenges of moving toward unsettling moments—such as archival erasure or record embargoes—instead of avoiding or normalizing these moments and how assigning this work values "examining privilege, seeking difference, and bearing witness" (297).

The essays throughout this collection are useful for scholars both new and experienced with archival work. For those unfamiliar with archives, these essays' rhetoric and composition standpoints allow fellow rhetoric and composition scholars to envision connections to their own work and begin stepping into archival work. Additionally, experienced archival researchers may use this collection to rethink, reconsider, and gather new inspiration for the ways their work intersects with archives. The third section, Unsettling Praxis and Pedagogy, is especially relevant to those who wish to incorporate archives into their teaching and desire to unsettle their archival approach.

As someone interested in archives not only from a feminist historiography perspective but from a public history and archival studies perspective, I believe this collection's prevalent engagement with Caswell's work and the push toward working alongside archivists and archival studies is needed. This collection cannot mend all the issues Caswell mentions in "'The Archive' Is Not an Archives" but provides a starting point for scholars in rhetoric and composition. Interdisciplinary connections and collaborations with those doing the labor of arranging and providing access to records allows scholars to engage with archives in a more informed and thoughtful manner.

Furthermore, as the editors note in the Introduction, this collection is the beginning of a needed conversation, and topics for future discussion include deeper dives into digital archives, creating archives with communities, increased collaboration with archivists, antiracist archival work, Indigenous archival practices, and more pedagogy-focused approaches. I agree with these topics and believe that greater attention toward community archives holds especial promise for moving forward. The contributors in this collection have shown how archival work can exist in the classroom, and bringing archival work into communities may allow for even greater impact of reparative archives or unsettling colonialism and racism.

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