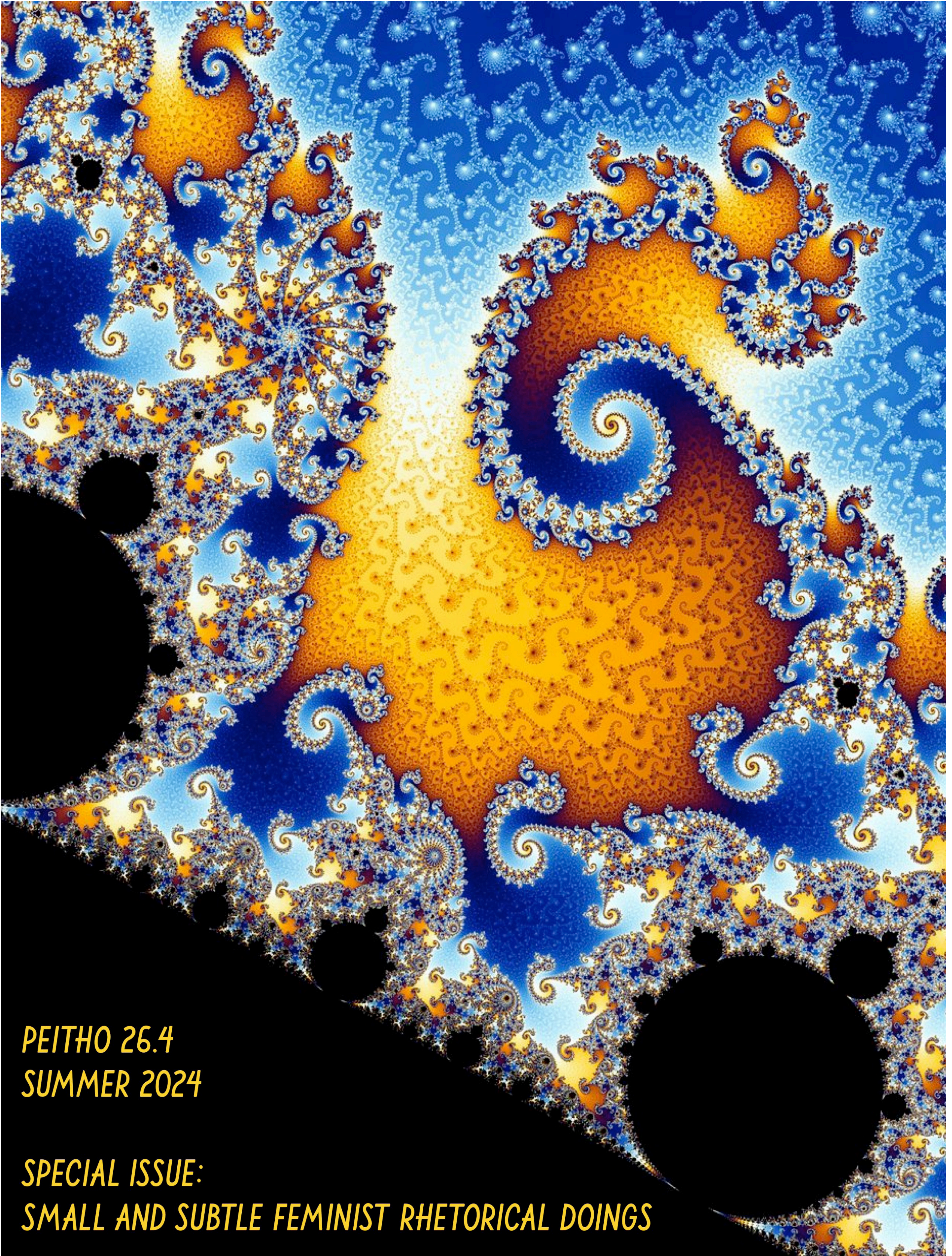

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Cover Art: a fractal in shades of black, dark blue, light blue, orange, yellow, and white. The lower left corner is a right triangle in solid black with the words “Peitho 26.4 Summer 2024 Special issue: Small and Subtle Feminist Rhetorical Doings” in a slightly slanted font, all caps, in yellow. It is inspired by adrienne maree brown’s idea about fractals and patterns: “what we practice on a small scale can reverberate to the largest scale.”

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Vol. 26, no. 4, Summer 2024

Small and Subtle Feminist Rhetorical Doings: An Introduction

Jessi Thomsen and Tammie M. Kennedy

Tags: small and subtle, feminist rhetorical action, quiet feminism, feminist enough, false binaries

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She taught us to never complain about injustices but to do something about them.

—Kamala Harris, 2024 DNC Speech,

describing the influence of her mother, Shyamala Gopalan Harris

As we initially imagined this special issue, we didn't fully consider the tension in the *something* we were asking our contributors to *do*. For context, we were both at the luncheon at the Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference in 2019 when Lisa Melonçon presented on quiet feminism, and we were there for the semi-contentious discussion that followed. Melonçon's notion of quiet feminism sparked our curiosity: Where does quiet feminism fit with radical feminism, and how are we understanding different enactments of feminism? With this special issue, we called for contributors to engage with the question: What constitutes "feminist enough," particularly in feminist rhetorical acts that are considered small, subtle, or quiet? Co-editor Tammie Kennedy noted this phenomenon as she studied women athletes at the same 2019 conference. Although this data was collected during a workshop on feminisms and social sports and fitness at the conference, many of the participants did not identify as "feminist," but they considered their actions within fitness spaces to denote a focus on gender equity and social change. Co-editor Jessi Thomsen has also felt the pressure of these questions while chatting with friends from grad school, turned colleagues in the field, who expressed frustration in projects that they thought were feminist but were consistently turned down from

Jessi Thomsen is Assistant Professor in the Professional Writing Program at Western Kentucky University. She is troubled by the ways our academic and cultural pursuits have so often systematically separated us from our environments and more-than-human neighbors, and she is curious about the possibilities of rhetoric and writing to rebuild reciprocity with the world in which we are always entangled. Her work appears in *English Journal* and *Programmatic Perspectives*. When she isn't teaching, writing, or mentoring, Jessi can be found watching Star Trek or listening to the Mountain Goats with her partner and her two pups, Janeway and Tendi.

Tammie M. Kennedy is Professor of English at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). She teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in rhetoric, film and popular culture, memory studies, creative nonfiction, and writing theory and pedagogy. In 2018, she was awarded the Outstanding Teaching and Instructional Creativity Award, Nebraska University System's highest teaching award. She co-edited *Rhetorics of Whiteness: Postracial Hauntings in Popular Culture, Social Media, and Education,* which was named 2018 Best Co-Edited Book by the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Much of her scholarly and creative work focuses on the rhetoric of remembering practices and how the embodied qualities of memory shape identity, writing, and knowledge production.

inclusion in the conference. Building from Melonçon's talk and these subsequent interactions, we argue that feminisms that are small, quiet, subtle, implicit, and incremental are feminist enough to do transformative rhetorical work. Each article in this special issue demonstrates how, opening up spaces to enact and theorize the ways in which these subtle feminisms work alongside, with, as, and through the radical feminisms that have been so crucial to our collective survival.

As we've been wrestling through this issue on small and subtle feminisms and what is feminist enough—plus, the ideological assumptions embedded in these concepts—we found ourselves wondering what these terms might mean within different contexts. When, in their DNC speeches, Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris echoed Shyamala Gopalan Harris's mandate to "do something," we wondered if that *something* and that *doing* could be small and subtle yet yield change or forward movement. Obama and Harris were imploring the audience to vote, to encourage others to vote, and to engage in civic participation. But in this political climate, to *do something* might actually require a small or subtle act—because big and bold actions can be dangerous or seemingly only productive when communicating with those who are already listening and agreeing. Gender relations and practices are deeply embedded in cultural, economic, and political institutions that necessitate a better understanding of the many forms of feminist action in the west and across the world, which can't look the same in place and time or satisfy a monolithic notion of "feminist" (Mohanty). To paraphrase contributor Charlotte Hogg's musings: Maybe the problem is that we need to reimagine feminist actions as both/and. We need the big and the bold, *and* we need the small and subtle.

What is "feminist enough" persists in fourth wave feminisms, and postcolonial scholarship challenges the Western, democratic assumption that activism must be loud, fierce, and visible (Koggel). Western feminisms have not only ignored the differences between women, they have also privileged the same patriarchal tools to make equitable changes that have oppressed many women (Lorde). Certainly, we need to *do something*, given the extremity of violence and dehumanization—especially toward queer folk, trans folk, women, and BIPOC—which demands action that is radical. Much like feminism, radical has a core definition but can also mean and do and be many things. If, at its foundation, radical is the refusal to play by the rules of the established system, then radical can be implemented in layers, woven through and in tension with the fabrics of a multiplicity of systems. However, so much of feminist rhetorics has seemed to prioritize and implement radical as big, loud, and now. It's in the Women's Marches, the BLM protests against police violence, and the #MeToo movement. But feminism can be deployed in a multiplicity of ways and, perhaps at its strongest, to reconsider feminism itself. Sweeping radical feminist action will not, for example, solicit productive conversations with conservative neighbors. However, small, subtle feminist acts may open a door. And that opening is both generative and radical despite its potential for complicity within an oppressive system. These actions subtly push against the larger oppressive systems in place and simultaneously ask us to, as Royster and Kirsch argue, examine what is beneath, behind, between, and under any "system" of feminism or feminist action that allows one to "do something." This issue chronicles how the notion of feminist action is even more complicated than we had initially imagined and offers contributors and readers a space to build upon how numerous scholars have interrogated feminism as a small or everyday practice (e.g., Cooper; Glenn; Mensik). Further-

more, the issue invites us to pick up and sustain conversations about the relationships among binary road-blocks, such as good/bad and small/loud, which beg for more robust understandings of both/and methods and mindsets.

To introduce this issue, we want to pull back the curtain on these complications by looking "beneath, behind, between, and under" three tensions that have emerged from the thoughtful contributions of our authors and our own wrestling with the possibilities and shortcomings of small and subtle feminist rhetorical acts. These tensions provide a place to consider the both/and:

- first, *being* feminist in tension and conversation with *doing* feminism;
- second, the building of a journal issue on the topic of small/subtle that simultaneously relies on the big/bold acts of authors' writing, research, and vulnerability; and
- third, the potential for small/subtle/quiet to be coded as privileged (especially white privilege) in tension with its potential to offer everyday, subversive, accessible, and powerful opportunities for transformation.

To the first tension: So what is feminist enough? Who decides? And if you don't identify as a feminist, can transformative actions still be considered feminist? Volume and visibility contribute to radical change, but we hesitate to dismiss feminist acts that are small, subtle, or quiet. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards provide an early exploration of this tension in Manifesta (2000), explaining "We dedicated it to the people who say 'I'm not a feminist, but. . .' and to the people who say 'I am a feminist, but . . .' It was our observation that many people felt like they were "disqualified" from feminisms because they hadn't worked out all of their shit" (qtd. in Baumgardner). Furthermore, Roxane Gay explored the notion of being a "good feminist" or "feminist enough" in *Bad Feminist* (2014). Despite the depth of her discussion, there seemed to be more to interrogate on the subject, especially within the space of *doing* rather than *being.* And doing is critical, as bell hooks describes in her 1984 critique of mainstream identity-based feminism: Linking an identity to a social movement or philosophy assumes that calling oneself "feminist" equals a form of collective action that benefits all women's marginalization and strategies for disruption and dismantling gendered practices (qtd. in Falconer Al-Hindi and Kennedy 1). In short, it may be just as important to "do" feminism as it is to be a feminist, whether those actions are radical or small and subtle.

A second tension emerged that was unexpected: the material reality of what we asked of our contributors when exploring the notions of the small, subtle, and quiet. In short, preparing an article for publication is never a small act. It is big; it is labor-intensive; it is putting our thoughts and hearts and bodies into the world in ways that are anything but small and subtle. Vulnerability is never small, and neither is the act of writing, both ideas widely explored by scholars in rhetoric, composition, and critical theory. For example, Tiffany Page, building on the work of scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, J Halberstam, and Eve

Sedgwick, argues that vulnerable writing is a process that "challenges feminist methods to remain open and receptive to what will always resist sense-making, while continuing to respond to the demand that we do justice to the lives of others" (13). So we have, without fully intending to, tasked our contributors with the both/and. Go big and bold enough to write, go small and subtle enough to open conversations that have been overlooked, and go feminist enough to reconsider how our projects do something.

To hold space for the third tension, we found ourselves asking: Is it possible to contribute in small and subtle ways without falling into the complicity of privilege or sustaining the status quo? Feminism that uncritically lands in the realm of white feminism is old news—and pernicious, as such. And it revealed itself in how small and subtle acts can be tethered to notions of privilege. We found ourselves echoing Leigh Gruwell and Charles N. Lesh's concern: "How can we ensure that our curation of this conversation doesn't solely include experiences that reflect our own?" (8). Although we imagined small and subtle feminist action as a way to account for those rhetors who may not feel safe enough to act loud and bold or those whose actions go unnoticed or whose contributions are not remembered (e.g., those living in conservative communities with strict gender/sexuality roles), it seems that small and subtle can easily be coded as white and steeped in privilege, and often has been, historically "haunted" as such (Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe). Those with marginalized identities may feel that they need to *do* in ways that are big, loud, and radical because the change that needs to happen is big and urgent. However, we had hoped (and this issue begins) to push in new directions, acknowledging, on the one hand, the complicity of privilege with small and subtle and, on the other, open a space to see that small/subtle is not just for those with privilege and that it can serve for those who most need big change—in fact, small and subtle may actually do necessary work where big and loud cannot or where big and loud has been falling short or failing to make those changes. To adrienne maree brown's point about fractals and patterns, "what we practice on a small scale can reverberate to the largest scale" (54). Although this special issue, perhaps, hasn't fully realized the potential of small/subtle, particularly for marginalized folks (i.e., in terms of race, queerness, transness), we see it as a place to open these conversations beyond its perceived complicity with privilege, and our contributors have begun to do this work, complicating a privileged notion of small/subtle feminism by considering race, labor, disability, class, and embodiment.

Given the tensions foregrounded in this introduction, it is fitting that we open this issue with **Kristie S. Fleckenstein** and **Nancy Myers's** consideration of quiet activism in the coalitions and fissures across gender and race, as demonstrated by nineteenth-century labor activists Virginia Penny and Lucie Stanton Day. The authors define quiet activism as "modest acts in everyday contexts with modest intents." Furthermore, they demonstrate how quiet activism serves to sustain feminist social movements by binding stakeholders in invisible and conditional ways, contributing to the survival of that movement in moments of division. **Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Jessica Rose,** and **Tiffany Gray** also use feminist recovery methods and public memory to explore the intentions, actions, and reflections of collectors, who are often ignored, and who gather material artifacts, ephemera, and oral histories to preserve and sustain feminist work and activism operate as integral research partners. The authors contend that acknowledging, supporting, and joining

these efforts, despite their subtlety, enriches and amplifies feminist work. **Katie Powell** draws on the concept of haunting that Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe lean into for how whiteness permeates but also shadows everything—there are always echoes and resonances that have broader repercussions, and remain more insidious because they often masquerade as a default or ever-present operating system, such as home ownership and the need to engage in storied community listening detailed by Powell's experience of inheriting a home in the midwest. **Abigail Long** continues examining material feminisms and invites readers to consider how a repeated small, feminist act—a turn to the seams of our composing processes—can illuminate sites of friction in the writing process where writers can renegotiate access.

Building from personal experience, **Maureen Johnson** acknowledges the difficult and sometimes contradictory work of being an advocate for her own embodiment, particularly with the conflicting social narratives of being shamed for being fat and being praised for being a cancer survivor. Rather than subjugate ourselves for perceived shortcomings or considering ourselves poor feminists, she encourages the subtle shift of existing as both a " good" and "bad" advocate at the same time, recognizing that the degree of difference between the two is riddled with contextual nuances. In a different exploration of how bodies contribute to rhetorical action, the next two articles examine subtle forms of feminist action by examining how makeup tutorials function as powerful spaces for realizing feminist agency. Following the steps outlined in YouTube's "Get Ready With Me" video series, **Laura Feibush** argues that makeup can be understood rhetorically as a form of subtle feminism, not just in the way that it appears to others once finished and on display, but in how it instantiates a particular relationship to the self in its application. **Rachel Molko** explores the nuanced ways that Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez engages beauty as self-care, subtly intertwining it with her role as an American civil servant in her Vogue "Beauty Secrets" tutorial. By examining how her understated rhetoric challenges the politics of beauty, this article demonstrates that beauty can serve as both wellness and a quiet form of political resistance.

At the end of the issue, **Charlotte Hogg** grapples in depth with how to navigate expectations of a "right way" to be a feminist when the jumbled and shifting realities of our personal and professional lives sometimes ask for us to adjust the dial based on the rhetorical situation. "The Purple Collar Project" introduces a feminist manifesto addressing class erasure in academia. **Jessica Rose Corey** and **Rhiannon Scharnhorst**, women professors from working-class backgrounds, explore the tensions between gratitude for educational opportunities and anger at persistent systemic barriers. The project advocates for "subtle feminism," emphasizing small acts of resistance against institutional norms.

Even as we turn up the volume in our feminist rhetorical action, activisms, and movements, how do we also maintain and create spaces for the small, the quiet, the subtle? A former student of intersecting marginalized identities once explained that they created pockets of resistance in chats with janitors and whispered friendships at the back of classrooms. This special issue seeks to recognize, recover, and reconsider these pockets, these moments of small and subtle feminist rhetorical action that may not be loud but are every bit as crucial—and are "feminist enough"—for our collective survival and movement toward transfor-

mation. Even so, we still have work to do, both in terms of who we hear from and what we are talking about. So here is what we offer—and the shortcomings of this issue that we hope readers will take up and consider within a diversity of contexts:

- Small and subtle are crucial to feminist rhetorical work.
- Small and subtle accumulate and are enough for feminist rhetorical work.
- Small and subtle need to be better recognized as valuable and forward moving.
- Small and subtle remind us that these acts can occur in a variety of contexts across all sorts of identities and spaces.
- Small and subtle shape scholarly publishing, often maintaining a gatekeeping mechanism that affects who proposes and publishes, reifying marginalization and disempowerment within academic spaces.
- Small and subtle push both to implement anti-racist reviewing and editing practices and to skew knowledge production within the limits of its system.

We seem to have circled back to the question we started with: Is small, subtle, and quiet enough to *do something*? Is it tethered to privilege as well as representative of how *kairos* illuminates the need to disrupt the small/loud dichotomy? The contributions to this issue tell us yes, *but* small and subtle acts only work if we notice and build from them, focusing on generating actions that don't reify the same issues over and over again. So we hope that this issue is an initial noticing, an articulation of some small/subtle feminist rhetorical acts that are out there, which we can build on with more small/subtle work that lead to potentially radical and transformative changes. Like Corey and Scharnhorst articulate, this is not so much a calling out, but a calling to: a calling to all of the work, the moments, the conversations that so often go unnoticed but could do great things if they are seen as filling the same bucket. And maybe we are doing both in this special issue, also. We are calling to, but we are also calling out feminist acts that are not immediately seen as such. Naming has great power. If we convince folks that feminist rhetorical action can be small/subtle/quiet, might we find more folks to bring along with our coalition? Those who might not see themselves as big/radical feminists—instead of having them opt-out, what if we could have them opt-in, even in the smallest of ways? If we are trying to tip a scale or build momentum, every bit counts. Can we *do* feminism without necessarily identifying as feminist? Can we build enough to reach a tipping point to collectively call ourselves feminist enough?

Enough, perhaps, suggests arrival. But maybe it's really just a starting point. We want folks to feel like what we collectively do is feminist enough so that we keep doing it. We are feminist enough, we are contributing, and let's build from there. Feminist enough isn't an arrival, it is a point of departure. Let's affirm "feminist enough," not to assume our rhetorical, transformative work is done, but to feel empowered enough to push forward in increments, to keep *doing something*.

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A Fragile Unity: Quiet Activism across the Fissures in Nineteenth-Century Women's Labor Politics

Kristie S. Fleckenstein and Nancy Myers

Abstract: Drawing on two mid-nineteenth-century "quiet" labor activists—Virginia Penny and Lucie Stanton Day—this article explores the phenomenon of quiet activism: modest acts in everyday contexts with modest intents. Drawing on Penny's encyclopedia of women's work options and Stanton Day's letter-writing campaign to secure a teaching position, it argues that these two women marshaled quiet activism in distinctly different ways to mitigate gendered and racial labor inequalities. In so doing, they crafted small, fragile unities within the gaps of the woman's movement. Through quotidian forms of bonding, these two women, unknown to each other, not only worked toward labor equity but did so in ways that affected partial and contingent connections within and across those gaps. Frequently elided in the historical record, quiet activism serves to sustain feminist social movements by binding stakeholders in invisible and conditional ways, contributing to the survival of that movement in moments of division.

Tags: quiet activism, woman's movement, women's labor, nineteenth century, Lucie Stanton Day, Virginia Penny

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In May 1866, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper spoke at the eleventh National Women's Rights Convention (NWRC) in New York City. Reflecting the fractures dividing the country—and the woman's movement—Harper identifies in her speech the contrary threads of unity and disunity characterizing nineteenth-century women's collective activism from Seneca Falls to this final meeting of the NWRC. Harper opens with consensus, underscoring the need for gender parity as a necessary foundation for women's economic survival. Drawing on her own experiences as a widow deprived of property and livelihood through administrative fraud, Harper underscores fellowship among all women rendered powerfulness in the face of shared gender oppression: "I say, then, that justice is not fulfilled so long a woman is unequal before the law" (458). She follows that truth with a bold reminder that gender parity, especially economic parity, can only be obtained through the collective action—the unification—of all women: "We are all bound up together in one

Kristie S. Fleckenstein is Professor Emerita of English at Florida State University where she taught graduate and undergraduate courses in rhetoric and composition. Her research interests include feminism and racialization, especially as each intersects with material and visual rhetorics in the nineteenth century. She is the recipient of the 2005 CCCC Outstanding Book of the Year Award for *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching* and the 2009 W. Ross Winterowd Award for Best Book in Composition Theory for *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*. She has published articles and book chapters in a range of venues. Her current monograph project explores the role of photography in the nineteenth-century fight for Black emancipation and enfranchisement.

Nancy Myers is Associate Professor Emerita in the Department of English at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, where she was also cross-appointed faculty in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program. Her more recent feminist rhetorical scholarship includes essays in *Nineteenth-Century American Activist Rhetorics, Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor, Remembering Differently: Recollecting Women's Rhetorical Narratives, In the Archives of Composition,* and *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education.* She is coeditor with Heather Brook Adams of *Inclusive Aims: Rhetoric's Role in Reproductive Justice*, with Kathleen J. Ryan and Rebecca Jones of *Rethinking Ethos*, and with Edward P.J. Corbett and Gary Tate of the third and fourth editions of *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. Myers served from 2010 to 2012 as president of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition.

great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul" (458). However, after establishing and fortifying this point of adherence, Harper, then, shifts to dissensus: "You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs" (459). Then she demonstrates the verity of her stark assertion by describing the fissures in the woman's movement, pointing to insults suffered by Black women—such as their humiliating ejection from public transportation—that white women do not experience or even acknowledge. Thus, the exigent need for Black women is not gender equity alone, but gender *plus* racial equity. Harper underscores this double exigence and double division in a searing warning: the unity of women is only a chimera, and the movement's ability to secure the equal rights it so ardently seeks will be undermined until women, movement, and nation become "color-blind" (459).

We open with this account of Harper's speech to underscore the two-fold dynamic of unity and division that haunts the woman's movement from its first years to its current incarnation. Harper lays out in stark terms, first, the necessity of unity, and, second, the fault lines in that unity, insisting throughout that securing the former requires redressing the latter. However, while Harper outlines the nature of the problem and its solution, she does not provide any specifics by which activists—individually and jointly—might make common cause *across* the chasms of race, class, and labor even as they struggle within those fissures. Instead, she leaves for her audience, positioned within their own unique contexts, to determine what fissures to address and how.

Heeding Harper's call for unity within disunity—a call that continues to resonate into the twenty-first century—we explore in this essay the on-the-ground methods of two women, who, through their labor advocacy in the 1860s, sought, in concrete ways, to craft unexpected coalitions in the midst of divisions; first, Virginia Penny, who, through her creation of a labor encyclopedia designed to increase wage-earning opportunities for white middle-class women, sought to knit together the widening divide between classes of women and labor; and, second, Lucie Stanton Day[1], who, in the face of the "co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence" of misogynoir (Bailey 1), shaped targeted collaborations joining racial and gendered fault lines to secure a teaching position denied her by the American Missionary Association (AMA). While both women devised novel strategies to rectify women's labor inequities congruent with their different situations and challenges, each did so through the same method: quiet activism. A low-volume, everyday form of bonding, quiet activism creates a contingent, fragile ad hoc unity anchored in respectful caring, organized by partially shared purposes, and motivated by shared pain. Furthermore, Penny and Stanton Day operationalized and executed quiet activism even as each was caught within and oppressed by the aporia of the fissures she sought to rectify. What results from Penny's and Stanton Day's quiet activism is not unity writ large; instead, it is multiple intersecting unities writ small, evoked through moments of quotidian and conditional affinities that yield humble acts with humble intent. Such quiet activism constitutes a flexible, survivalist economy for individuals and for social movements, sustaining them—binding them up all to-

1 While Oberlin College and Conservatory's historical documents—and much subsequent scholarship—refer to *Lucy Stanton* (Day Sessions), Stanton Day used her preferred spelling—Lucie—in letters and publications. Thus, we default to her choice.

gether—in unrecognized and interdependent ways.

Echoing Sara Ahmed's contention that "survival" is a feminist act (236) and guided by Harper, we demonstrate through Penny's and Stanton Day's work of quiet activism the persistence of hope within nineteenth-century feminist labor politics[2] an area central to women's—white and Black—existence and to the flourishing, or floundering, of the woman's movement. We begin by introducing quiet activism, a mode of acting not through fanfare but through low-key activities, aligning its key characteristics with feminist rhetorics and situating it within the fraught relationship between labor, gender, class, and race, central to the low-volume advocacy of both Penny and Stanton Day. Against this backdrop, we move, in turn, to Penny and Stanton Day who each, driven by persistent hope in ameliorating exigent circumstances, work for a moment of unity, a moment of survival for self, other, and the woman's movement in ways typically unrecognized.

Quiet Activism and Labor: The Work of Unity

Standing on the dais in New York before an audience of men and women, Harper in her 1866 speech powerfully spotlights labor as it intersects with gender and race. For her, this fractured and fracturing intersection constitutes an existential issue, one at the foundation of survival for both individual women and social movements aimed at ameliorating their intersectional oppression. She makes her point and delivers her call for action through "direct and agonistic forms of action" (Balazard et al. 783). As a result, Harper's speech conforms to traditional notions of activism that "champion and romanticize antagonistic, vocal, and demonstrative forms of protest" (Pottinger 215). She embodies one of Cheryl Glenn's "Sister Rhetors": women "who speak, write, listen, and contemplate their way into the public sphere, where they inaugurate politics, practices, and shared understandings" (6). However, by this rubric, unlike Harper, neither Penny nor Stanton Day ostensibly fits within the activist-feminist rhetorics or rhetorical feminist camp. But fit they do, as Glenn would agree. They and other quiet advocates "demonstrate the ways that public *and* private language use can be a means to create a different world" through small and virtually invisible actions (5; our emphasis). Rather than a public display, women like Penny and Stanton Day work within the divides, making micromoves that, perhaps only incrementally, contribute to "the greatest good for all human beings" (5). Claiming quiet activism, especially in the context of struggles for labor rights, enables rhetorical feminists to "recognize quiet disruptions as meaningful to projects of social change" through a fragile and time-stamped unity (Gumbonzvanda et al. 170).

While we assert that both Penny and Stanton Day engage in quiet activism to weave their different versions of a fragile unity, as a named praxis, quiet activism only emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century through interdisciplinary scholarship, research methods, and pedagogy. Variously called *gentle*, *implicit*, *slow*, *slow cook*, *embedded*, and, most frequently, *quiet*, this low-key approach is tightly tied to

2 By labor politics in the 1860s, we mean not only equitable working conditions and remuneration for women's labor tied to gender and race, but also women's opportunities for a range of paid labor positions mostly closed to women. For gendered labor, see Kessler-Harris; for class labor, see Bolt; for racialized labor see Dabel; for 1860s collective labor, see Gamber; and for various forms of labor as quiet activism, see Martin et al.

emotions, daily—even banal—actions, material situations, and local interconnections. Despite its scope and reach, ranging from knitting hats for preemies to planting community gardens, from creating safe spaces to cross-stitching resistance, quiet activism is a phenomenon without a definition (Pottinger 215). However, enactments, including those in the nineteenth century, do share a kinship relationship. While each performance of quiet activism differs from every other performance, in frequently radical ways, all jointly resemble each other, manifested in the assemblage rather than in the isolated individual performances, particularly evident through Penny and Stanton Day. The small and elusive constellation of shared features characterizing quiet activism as a whole includes four elements: material situations, everyday matters, affective bonds, and variegated rhetorics. These four elements are integral to all quiet activism and to its ability to unify—if only partially and provisionally—within and across fissures, bearing their own familial resemblance to feminist rhetorics.

The first element—material situation—highlights the salience of lived experiences and lived practices within the materiality of one's immediate circumstances, reflecting the importance of such elements as Penny's white middle-class upbringing and Stanton Day's Black abolitionist background to the performance of quiet activism. "[Quiet] activism needs to be conceptualized and understood as an activity that emerges from the everyday lived context (place) in which people are embedded," for it is within such embedded contexts that quiet activism arises (Martin et al. 80). The actions of Major Alexis Casdagli, a British prisoner of war in Germany during World War II, demonstrate this: he cross-stitched and circulated samplers that included, in Morse code, such subversive commands as "God Save the Queen" and "Fuck Hitler" (qtd. in Hackney 172). His quiet activism arose from his embeddedness in a specific time, place, and situation. This privileging of material situations—spaces, lived experience, practices, objects—is no stranger to feminist rhetorics. Elizabeth Fleitz sees the "[m]aterial conditions of women's lives, from their bodies to their living situations" as a crucial part of understanding "their ability to be literate and produce rhetoric," and thus a crucial part of the future of feminist rhetorical studies (36). Illustrating the importance of material situations, Ronisha Browdy notes that an integral theme of Black Women's Rhetoric(s) consists of the sustaining and sustained emphasis on Black women's lived experiences—as realities and as "valid points of inquiry"—underscoring the depth of the connection between quiet activism and feminist rhetorics.

Inseparable from material situations is the second quality of quiet activism: everyday matters, an element intrinsic to the economic suffering and labor restrictions Penny and Stanton Day lived daily. Our play on *matters* is deliberate, both as a noun, evoking ostensibly inconsequential details of daily life, and as a verb, illuminating the significance of the everyday. Combined, the two versions underscore the formative power of the mundane facets of everyday life, especially a life lived in precarious circumstances. Such mundanities initiate and propel quiet activism when political advocacy features "the 'private' negotiations of the household, the 'personal' coalitions of the neighborhood, and the 'informal' networks within the community" (Staeheli and Cope qtd. in Martin et al. 79). Nor do feminists in rhetorical studies ignore the everyday. For example, Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline J. Royster not only point to the value of "looking seriously at a web of performances that manifest themselves. . . in everyday activities" (663) but also provide a methodol-

ogy for doing so. In a similar spirit, Jessica Enoch advocates a focus on the everyday, specifying close examinations of the "everyday rhetorical processes that create difference and grant privilege," emphasizing, again, the importance of what "women and men encounter in their daily lives" (115), a dynamic also apparent in Penny's and Stanton Day's circumstances. Thus, the quiet activism emerging from everyday matters becomes a site of inquiry for rhetorical feminists now and in the past.

The third element central to quiet activism and its operationalization by Penny and Stanton Day is affinity building. Complementing material situations and everyday matters is "the importance of emotional connection and relational aspects of activism" (McMellon et al. 6). The interconnections that people forge in their "small-scale spaces" (Martin et al. 81) provide the matrix from which quiet activism arises, an emphasis akin to work in feminist rhetorical theory. Adela C. Licona and Karma R. Chávez's concept of relational literacies elucidates that relationship. Like quiet activism's affective interconnections, relational literacies maximize the generative power of affinities, which are "ripe with coalitional possibilities" because they "imply the labor of making meaning, of shared knowledges, or of producing and developing new knowledges together" (96). Within a shared "space of convening," relational literacies "enable spaces for new kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics" (97), exactly the dynamic unfolding in the quiet activism of Penny and Stanton Day. The complementarity between quiet activism and relational literacies extends to emotion, as well. Reversing the traditional focus on big emotions, particularly anger, unfolding in a linear manner from rage to a collective and highly public action, quiet activism features more subtle arrays of emotions, especially care (Horton and Kraftl). Relational literacies similarly invite "us to imagine how dispersals of generational wisdom, lived histories, love, light, and life might interact in the world and to what effects" (Licona and Chávez 99), encouraging further examination of the overlap between quiet activism and feminist rhetorics, as embodied, for example, by Penny and Stanton Day.

Finally, variegated rhetoric, which we define capaciously, itself takes on nuance and multiple roles in quiet activism, a trait particularly evident in the distinctly different advocacy rhetorics forged by Penny and Stanton Day. First, rhetoric encompasses the myriad symbol systems people use in material situations, everyday matters, and affinity building. While all quiet activism relies on some kind of symbol system for dialogue and conversation—for the requisite listening, speaking, reflecting, and learning—the options are expansive, from oral language to textiles, from flowers to sticky notes, from written to visual texts, from still to animated images. The rhetorics circulating in quiet activism materialize in fluid, shifting, and layered flows, an insight that resonates with the work of rhetorical feminists who are expanding what counts as both the medium of rhetorical action and the rhetorical action itself.

Consonant in so many ways with feminist rhetorics, quiet activism encompasses a means by which people like Penny and Stanton Day can act quietly to unify divisions even as they struggle within those divisions; it keeps alive hope for a different, less perilous future for *all* women. Nowhere is the need for such activism more evident than in the divisive and divided site of nineteenth-century labor politics, which both binds and separates activists within the woman's movement. Harper signals as much in her 1866 speech

through a narrative of her own destitution following her husband's death. Such precarity offers a rich site for the deployment of quiet activism, especially given the tensions already evident within the nascent labor movement itself, marred as it was by the inclusion and exclusion of wage-earning women since its colonial beginnings. The 1860s, within which Penny and Stanton Day engage in their quiet activism, capture the labor fissures motivating their subtle feminist rhetorics.

The first schism develops through the gradual shift in focus in the woman's movement itself from labor to suffrage. The "Declaration of Sentiments," drafted and signed at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, explicitly emphasizes a platform embracing labor as a major issue, arguing to relieve the narrow strictures of women as wage earners: "He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns. . . . He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration" (Stanton 70-71). However, by the 1860s, while working-class women's labor unions and organizations continued to form and expand from their 1820s beginnings, the issue of women's labor rights stalled in the woman's movement. More specifically, in 1863, with the US already deep in the Civil War, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony established the short-lived Women's National Loyal League. As an offshoot of the woman's movement, its goal was to promote a national amendment to abolish slavery beyond the parameters of the Emancipation Proclamation ("Women's"). By the postbellum era, as Harper alludes to in her speech, the focus shifted again, not back to labor, but to the ballot box. Even Anthony's efforts, along with those of other women, to establish the Working Women's Association in 1868 for "the amelioration of working conditions and elevation of those who worked for a living" (Kessler-Harris 95) floundered on the shoals of suffrage as Anthony featured the vote as an agenda item for every meeting. As a result, working women—and women needing work—walked out, leaving an association that did not focus on their immediate material concerns (96-97).

The second schism—labor and class—branches from the first, a disunity especially important to Penny whose quiet activism focused on the dilemma of middle-class white women and labor. According to Alice Kessler-Harris, "suffragists, middle-class non-wage-earners for the most part believed that the ballot was essential to this end [equal rights]," but women in paid jobs maintained "that there were other causes beside lack of the vote for the degradation of female wage earners" (95). This discord grew over time and escalated during the Civil War into a clearly demarcated difference between middle- and working-class women. Christine Bolt confirms the class privileging: "[A]ctivists were generally careful to recognize the attractions for many of their sisters" of the traditional domestic and social roles of women as well as the social advances they had made that expanded their "role[s] in religion, benevolence, and reform" (89). During the Civil War, more and more women—whether single, widowed with or without children, or married with derelict husbands and children—found themselves totally reliant on their individual ability to make a living through paid labor. These women—who were working many hours a day to feed, house, and clothe themselves, and often children—had neither the time, energy, nor interest to seek the vote. This fissure in the woman's movement escalated with more and more working women in industry forming unions, mostly by type of trade, and actively

pursuing equitable labor conditions as collectives, highlighting not only the existence of labor activism but also the highly visible practices of that activism. Thus, Penny's advocacy explicitly operated within these gaps between middle-class white women, labor, and the woman's movement to cobble a conditional unity within and across those divisions. But that advocacy created its own chasm: that between class and race, a chasm within which Stanton Day lived.

The third schism—born of labor, suffrage, and class divides—concerns race. If class, as implicated by labor, constituted a key fracture in the woman's movement, then the intense competition with women across classes for economic survival was compounded by race and immigration, thus adding stress to the united front of the woman's movement. Here Stanton Day found the exigence for her own quiet activism as she struggled with misogynoir's inter- and intra-racial oppression. As German and Irish immigrants streamed into the country, an estimated 300,000 new women moved into the workforce (Kessler-Harris 76). While this immigrant population competed with white middle-class women for jobs, this influx of women into the workforce of the northeastern states limited the possibilities for Black freewomen as well. According to Jane E. Dabel, Black freewomen before the 1860s were employed professionally outside the home and in various positions (72). However, during and after the Civil War, the range of positions for freewomen narrowed to domestic service as cooks, seamstresses, and washerwomen, and these women were in direct competition with the "native-born and Irish" women who also teemed into the large northern cities (68-69). These types of jobs were the lowest paid and longest hours. Thus, these growing concerns, issues, and attitudes tied to woman's suffrage, labor, class, and race tore the woman's movement into two competing organizations by 1869. Living within these schisms and embracing hope, Penny and Stanton Day employed their rhetorics of quiet activism, operationalizing the four constellated traits of material situations, everyday matters, affective bonds, and variegated rhetorics in ways responsive to the divides they sought to narrow.

Working for Women: Penny's Inquiry into Gendered and Class Labor Divides

When Harper spoke at the NWRC, the divisions she articulates were already affecting the woman's movement. The exigency of women's needs for job opportunities and financial parity with men during the 1860s stemmed from the social and cultural view of women's paid labor, as well as the collective activism concerning it. One fissure Harper identified was gender equality with women having the same opportunities and working conditions as men. What she did not identify was another labor fissure already in place: a class fissure. The ongoing and ever-growing fissure within the woman's movement between fair working conditions and suffrage, both tied to gender and class, escalated in the 1840s with the advancement and adoption of labor technologies such as the sewing machine. As such, more and more white and free Black working women and white middle-class women found themselves not just competing for positions but also adapting to piece work assembled into a product by someone else. Speed, long hours, and quantity became the new norm for women's low wages.

Virginia Penny understood all too well the class and gender labor politics in the woman's movement

and in society, especially the ever-escalating financial needs of single, widowed, and married women with children whether working or middle class. Even as the educated daughter of a Kentucky slave-owning family, she spent most of her adult life impoverished; thus, she lived that woman's movement schism between the educated middle class and labor. By the late-1850s, after holding various teaching positions, Penny asked why society limited educated white middle-class single and widowed women to the suitable material spaces of the "school room, sewing table, and kitchen" (*Employments* vii). This social attitude toward *employment suitability* as focused on job type rather than women's abilities kept many white middle-class women restricted to a narrow range of paid employments. Moreover, when hired into the same positions or comparable ones, women received a lower wage than men and often were expected to do more (Kessler-Harris 77-81).

Articulating her distress at the lack of job options and offering a book of possible employments for white middle-class women, Penny aligns herself with white women needing work in the socially constrained labor market and, throughout her encyclopedia entries, offers options and hope for better economic survival. Her longitudinal investigation and documentation of these two fissures of gender inequity and class restrictions in remunerated work environments—issues that the woman's movement and American society dismissed—operate as a quiet and steady activism for women's paid labor. Through Penny's lived life of gentility and poverty, she finds the impetus for her research and writing: through her data-gathering methodology, she builds affinities across gender and class; through her types of possible employments and analysis, she focuses on the everyday matters of women making a living, thus bridging the class divide in pragmatic ways; and through her efforts to publish the encyclopedia, she displays her variegated rhetorics arguing for a broader understanding of white middle-class women's employment suitability and addressing a wider audience including men. Each aspect of her process—life experiences, research methodology, content details, and publication—contributes to building a fragile coalition across gender and class labor politics.

Quiet activism's foundation—material situations—is evident in the circumstances compelling Penny to span the gap between white middle-class women and their working-class counterparts. The disjuncture between Penny's upbringing and her adult life and livelihood, a radical shift from ease to struggle, began with her early life of privilege in and near Louisville and with her education at Steubenville (Ohio) Female Seminary between 1843-1845, which exemplifies the white middle-class Protestant teachings of womanhood and dependency. But once she was a working adult, her life was precarious, always rife with poverty and illness. Out of necessity, she left several teaching positions that broke her health due to overwork and meager payment, an experience which taught her the impossibility of a single woman earning a living as a teacher. With the support of a $6,000 inheritance, Penny set out between 1859 and 1862 to answer the question: What can women do to earn a living? ("Woman's Sacrifice"). In her research and writing of the encyclopedia, Penny's quest encompassed both self-understanding and a quiet activism supporting white middle-class women needing a livelihood. The purpose of her research and writing was threefold: to generate a living wage for herself, to enable like-minded white middle-class women to find living-wage positions,

and to shift societal employment attitudes and practices by expanding opportunities for women in compensated positions. Thus, even in her intention, Penny builds a fragile unity between her own labor history and that of other financially distressed white middle-class women in need of strategies for gaining compensated employment: "What destitute but industrious woman would not . . . enjoy the independence of competency, earned by remunerative and well-applied labor?" (*Employments* ix).

While quiet activism is apparent in Penny's material situation and her motives to investigate employment suitability for white middle-class women, it is further underscored by the affinity building intrinsic to its power, particularly in her research process, which connected the fissure between classes and labor: "At no time in our country's history have so many women been thrown upon their own exertions" (*Employments* v). To support women by connecting with women through ad hoc affinities, Penny sought out working class, professional, and entrepreneurial women for the 533 encyclopedia entries about women's current and potential remunerated positions. She relied on informal and transitory interactions with women workers and male employers; thus, the information was provided from those "with whom I talked in a casual way, they not knowing I had any object in view" (viii). Her brief situational experiences of data-gathering engage in partial ties through her mailed surveys, newspaper articles, and chance encounters and conversations as well as her visits to "factories, workshops, offices, and stores" to witness women at their jobs and to interview them and their employers (viii). As a strategy of affinity building between classes and labor, but not races, this extended research and investigation operate as an illustration of quiet activism through which these brief but highly valuable relationships—with others over information, numbers, and embodied experiences—generate a continual and fluid reconfiguration of data "through successive waves of engagement to create collective . . . identities or assemblages" (Niccolini et al. 326). Systematically for each entry, Penny detailed types of training needed, remuneration for hours worked or products made, and the pros and cons of each type of labor involved, including the discrepancies in wages between women and men in the same positions, crafting a subtle network of ad hoc relationships that narrow the labor gaps.

While affinity building constituted a prominent part of Penny's quiet activism, her encyclopedia entry contents focused on everyday matters to moderate the fissures among gender, class, and labor. Penny offers a form of coalition building through her validation of those working lives as both essential and valuable—as suitable. About these everyday experiences of paid workers, she contends "[n]o reproach should be cast upon any honest employment" (*Employments* ix). By incorporating all types of scantily compensated labor that working-class women and immigrants were already doing—such as types of domestic service, textile and clothing manufacturing, basket weaving, used clothing sales, rag gatherers and cutters, and so forth—Penny spans the class and gender labor fissures by valuing women's industry and by highlighting possible employments for destitute white women. Her extensive research provided the means for her to document the everyday work lives of women and men in positions that white middle-class women might engage, either with their current background or through various forms of training. Doing so enabled these women to see themselves in those positions, to recognize the details of their lives as resources for labor, and to appreciate their labor in their lives, a crucial connection between class and employment suitability. Furthermore,

Penny provides warnings about and commentary on the suitability of many employments, as she does in her extensive and detailed encyclopedia entry on women's teaching lives: "There is no employment more uncertain than that of teacher" (37). She continues with the competition for limited positions between men and women, the low wages, and the difficult work with long hours. Across the content of the encyclopedia, Penny marshaled the details of women's work lives—and potential work lives—to validate all working lives and the spirit of coalition in her research and writing practices as a "labor of making meaning" and in the "shared knowledges" of her interviewees (Licona and Chávez 96).

This analysis of Penny's research and content documentation of her three-year study focuses mostly on the class-labor divide of a woman's suitability for different occupations, yet her rhetorical strategies of critique in the encyclopedia entries and her response to the male-dominated publishing industry demonstrate the variegated rhetorical strategies that Penny employs to traverse the gender-labor divide. This bridging performs her aim to change social attitudes as to employment suitability for all women by expanding her audience from women like herself to all white middle- and upper-class women as well as male employers. Consistently highlighting these obstructions and limitations to women's gainful employment, Penny offers her readers alternative "kinds of understanding, interaction, and politics" (Licona and Chávez 97) by which to shift societal employment practices and expand opportunities for women in compensated positions. Penny uses the rhetorical strategies of question and critique in her encyclopedia entries and paratext—preface, introduction, and appendix—to address the limiting social and economic attitudes about educated white middle-class women for numerous paid employments that she learned from her research engagements. With these rhetorical strategies, she makes visible the limitations of women's labor options, wages, and working hours, thus endeavoring "to ameliorate the problem" that quiet activism addresses (Martin et al. 79-80). For this expanded audience, she consistently notes that dominant social attitudes bar many capable women from "the editor's and author's table, from the store, the manufactory, the workshop, the telegraph office, the printing case, and every other place" beyond domestic service and teaching (*Employments* vii). Penny enlightens her audience as to the plight of "destitute single women and widows" excluded from employment by asking, "Why may they not have free access to callings that will insure them a support?" (vi-vii). Her criticisms point directly to social gender bias: "It is surprising how many objections . . . can be presented by selfish men, who do not wish women to engage in their occupations" (457). That social gender bias is realized through pay inequity, even in positions that both men and women are capable of doing. When speaking of librarians, she notes the discrepancy in pay: "Lady librarians receive from one third to one half as much as men," for which Penny sees no logical reason (19). Her commentary works within the entries and the paratext to expose the social attitudes that create these limitations and to narrow the division between gender and class.

Finally, in her act of self-publishing the copious encyclopedia entitled, *The Employments of Women: A Cyclopaedia of Woman's Work*, Penny again takes on the labor restrictions for white middle-class women needing remunerated work. Through her own material and discursive acts, both aspects of quiet activism, she independently publishes her encyclopedia, as an embodied variegated rhetorical move to respond to

the rejection of the male publishing industry. After circulating her book manuscript with many publishers in 1862 with no success, she copyrighted it under her name, contracted for its composition and plates, and had it printed and bound. Only after this personal expense did the publishers at Walker, Wise & Co. agree in 1863 to use their imprint and promote it with modest advertising, but the firm merely bought the copies they had orders for ("Woman's Sacrifice"). Along with her calculated, comprehensive, and detailed arrangement of women's possible employments, Penny's agency in self-publishing generates a fragile unity across the fissure of social attitudes by demonstrating that—while women and men underestimated what a woman could do, each blaming destitute women for their own misjudgment—change was possible.

Penny's research methodology, entry writing, and publishing of her encyclopedia "imply, create, gesture toward, engender, and enable coalitional possibilities and also re-imaginings" of American societies and the Woman's movement labor politics of the 1860s (Licona and Chávez 104). While Penny's endeavors primarily focus on the discursive realm of rhetoric, combined they illustrate the fluidity and layering of multiple opportune moments of the material situations, brief affinities, everyday lived experiences, and the variegated rhetorics involved in quiet activism, thus generating, even briefly, a fragile unity across the fissure of gender and class in labor politics.

Working for Accord: Stanton Day's Epistolary Quiet Activism

If the gender-labor divide resulted in suffering for middle-class women because of their restricted employment opportunities, then Black middle-class women endured even harsher indignities as they confronted the double prejudice of race and gender. Harper's speech illustrates exactly this dilemma for Black women, who are all rich in wrongs but poor in rights (459). However, what Harper fails to reveal is the degree of complicity between the white *and* the free Black communities in that impoverishment, especially by thwarting Black women's wage-earning work. For example, Frederick Douglass, an ardent supporter of women's rights, scolded Black women who complained about "inadequate wages," labeling such complaints unseemly in comparison to the "wrongs perpetrated upon the defenseless slave woman" (qtd. in Sealander 163). But he did not scold Black men with similar complaints. What unfolds within this fractured site of gender-labor is the further fracturing power of misogynoir, a neologism coined by Moya Bailey in 2008 referring to "historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intra-racial gender dynamic" (Bailey and Trudy 262). As this schism traps Stanton Day—decimating her married life and sabotaging her employment efforts with the AMA—she turns to an epistolary rhetoric of quiet activism, seeking to promote a "dialogue of coalition" and hoping to transform misogynoir's divisive discord into accord.

Literally and figuratively bleeding into Stanton Day's life, misogynoir constitutes a pernicious gender-racial rift that operates historically to reduce Black women's agency and options for action in "interpersonal, social, and institutional ways," a reduction ranging from labor issues to domestic violence (Bailey and Trudy 763). Intersectional in orientation and injury, the concept exposes the ways in which Black women's "vulnerability is exploited" and their "strength weaponized" against them (766), Nowhere are the existence

and the impact of misogynoir more evident than in Stanton Day's attempt to secure a teaching position with the AMA, an organization with both white and Black leadership whose primary goals included mission work, education, abolition, and legal racial equality (*History* 3). However, Stanton Day's interactions with the AMA reflected anything *but* equality.

While Stanton Day's early life as the daughter of a prosperous Black family in Cleveland yielded repeated examples of misogynoir—such as her exclusion from local schools (Lawson and Merrill 190) and white resistance to her presidency of the Ladies Literary Society while at Oberlin Collegiate Institute (192)—the impact of this pernicious form of inter- and intra-racial discrimination became particularly devastating when Stanton Day found herself and her daughter in perilous financial circumstances occasioned by her husband's desertion. Twelve years after her marriage to lauded abolitionist activist William Howard Day and five years after her famed husband left in 1859 for a speaking tour in the United Kingdom (UK), Stanton Day eked out a living in Cleveland as a seamstress without spousal support (198). In a brutal act of misogynoir, Day had returned from the UK in 1863 only to pursue life as a single, unencumbered male in New York (Kinealy 202) where, after a half-decade of familial financial and emotional delinquency, he carved out a highly successful career as an acclaimed abolitionist-Black rights lecturer, activist, and, eventually, minister (220). Stanton Day's entanglements within the double fissure of misogynoir only intensified when she sought to rectify her precarious situation by obtaining a teaching position serving the newly freed African Americans under the auspices of the AMA. However, despite her exemplary education, activist background, and teaching experience, Stanton Day met with preemptive rejection. Because she lived alone with daughter—an anomalous marital situation—the AMA's bi-racial leadership refused to consider her potential candidacy. Stanton Day took this denial not as an end but as a beginning, initiating an epistolary rhetoric of quiet activism.

Through the letters she writes, solicits, and authorizes, Stanton Day marshals the constellated elements of variegated rhetoric, everyday matters, material situation, and affinity building to open up a common space by which AMA board members and she could engage in a dialogue of coalition (Davis 81), thereby ameliorating, if only partially, the inequity of misogynoir's discord. Foundational to that dialogic approach was her choice of variegated rhetoric: the epistolary art. Given the impetus of misogynoir, Stanton Day's use of letters constitutes an especially provocative choice for quiet activism. First, the epistolary genre blurs the private and public, privileging content that includes material situations and everyday matters. As it evolved in the mid-nineteenth century, letter-writing destabilized the supposedly sacrosanct boundary between parlor and public, subtly positioning sender and recipients in a blend of the two. While, initially, letter writing belonged to the purview of (middle-class white) women and the private world of family (Mahoney 411), reduced postage rates and the increased affordability of paper transformed letter writing in the 1850s, expanding its parameters beyond family to achieve a "democratic diversity" (Hewitt). That shift enabled Stanton Day to transform "the 'ordinariness of daily life'"—her material situation and everyday matters—into a "rhetoric of survival" (Davis 81) by undermining the multi-scalar nature of misogynoir, which itself flows across private, public, and institutional spaces. Sec-

ond, letter-writing complements quiet activism by emphasizing affinity bonds. As Elizabeth Hewitt explains, letters in the mid-nineteenth century evoked multiple affinities, materialized through the letter's subtext: its references to absent people, its allusions to others, and its assumptions about shared knowledge of others. Letters no longer involved just two people but, rather, a network of absent people, creating a palimpsest of relationships. Quiet activism relies on affirmative affective bonds—caring relationships—just as misogynoir relies on negative affective bonds—damaging relationships of discrimination. What results, then, from the combination of letter writing and quiet activism is a form of soft communication that layers everyday matters and affinities to effect coalition building, an especially apt rhetoric for unifying misogynoiristic fissures. Stanton Day taps into that power in her letter to George Whipple.

Addressed to the powerful secretary of the AMA (Leonard 41) after her preemptive rejection, Stanton Day's official application letter signals the effort to create a common space of shared respect, a necessary prelude to any reconsideration of the board's informal rebuff. That rhetorical move required Stanton Day to grapple with and undermine a critical facet of misogynoir: its rootedness in the visual and discursive ways that popular culture historically "pathologized" and "malign[ed]" Black women (Bailey and Trudy 763). In Stanton Day's case, the malignancy stemmed from representations in the white and Black public spheres that cast single women outside of male control as a threat to social stability (Dabel; Sealander). By this rubric, the only good woman was a domestic woman, one supporting and supported by a male-dominated household. Enabled by the public-private blurring of the epistolary art, Stanton Day strategized the everyday matters of her private life and the exigencies of her material situation to undermine the binary of threat/helpmeet by recategorizing domesticity.

Through allusions to the "'ordinariness of daily life'" (Davis 81), Stanton Day subtly erodes the damage of the misogynoir's either/or divide by emphasizing her respectable *single* identity as wife and mother. She does so by praising the domesticity of her daughter, not herself. Although only seven, Florence "can sew, knit, sweep, dust and do thoroughly many little services that children are *not* expected to perform" (our emphasis), she writes (Letter to George Whipple). This litany of daily "little services," underscores the child's domestic virtues. However, at the same time, by implication, those virtues accrue to Stanton Day as the single mother who raised and trained Florence in those arts. As the source of the inculcated virtues, Stanton Day recategorizes domesticity as within her purview even as a single mother, shifting her status from dishonorable to honorable. Stanton Day effects a similar transformation in her suspect material situation, shifting her single state from moral failing to moral victory. Her struggle to survive in the face of her husband's desertion endowed her with an inner womanly strength, one worthy of the AMA's esteem. As she explains to Whipple, in the absence of "props" upon which she "can lean," she has learned economy, earning her small family's "daily bread with my needle." Her material survival thus attests to her hard work and self-sufficiency in the face of adversity, qualities that will "fit" her "to *succeed* in any good work." More specifically, she claims her ability to weather challenges lends her a "peculiar discipline" qualifying her to teach in the dangerous and war-torn south. Thus, by maximizing everyday matters and material situations, Stanton Day resists the pathologizing of Black women and realigns herself with AMA values, thereby establishing the groundwork

for an alliance across misogynoir's binary. Stanton Day, then, reinforces her invitation to craft an accord by forging affective ties.

Stanton Day demonstrates two kinds of affinity bonds within two sets of letters: direct bonds in the letters she solicits and indirect bonds in those solicited on her behalf. Each set expands the parameters of coalitional dialogue by highlighting respectful caring relationships between a Black woman and white men of stature, thus contesting a foundational aspect of misogynoir: the polarization of men—white and Black—and Black women across a chasm of inequitably distributed power. Stanton Day's quiet activism calls such polarization into question, demonstrating that a misogynoiristic gender-race division is a choice to be challenged rather than a reality to be embraced. First, Stanton Day spotlights direct affective ties in her letter to Whipple when she lists her white male recommenders by name and their connection to her. For example, Rev. T. H. Hawkes, the minister of Cleveland's Second Presbyterian Church, Stanton Day's devotional home, builds accord between Stanton Day and the AMA board by emphasizing her religious devotion and service, an embodiment of the AMA's Christian values. While the contents of the endorsements offer grounds for coalition building, the identities of the white male recommenders reinforce that invitation because they too are bound to AMA leadership beyond Stanton Day, underscoring the layering of relationships. Whipple, as well as other AMA members, would be familiar with the men and their stature, even sharing reciprocal affective bonds themselves, such as the tight connections between James A. Thome—prelate, AMA agent, former Oberlin professor—and Whipple. Such palimpsestic direct affective ties traverse misogynoir's schism and forge fragile connections between stakeholders in a network of mutual respect that includes Stanton Day. She then buttresses direct affinities with indirect affinities through the letters she authorizes Thome to solicit in an AMA-approved investigation of her marriage.

Second, extending her network of relationships to indirect affective ties with those outside her immediate circle, Stanton Day redresses a key injury of misogynoir— "the disparate treatment that Black women negotiate in society" (Bailey 2)—a dynamic obstructing her efforts to engage in a dialogue of coalition and secure employment. The board's refusal to even consider Stanton Day's application arose out of such "disparate treatment": their condemnation of her marital situation and their admiration for her estranged husband's abolitionist activism. To counter this affective (mis)judgment, Stanton Day gives permission for Thome to research her marriage. The information uncovered through a series of national and international letters to white men familiar with the Day family exposed and challenged Stanton Day's "disparate treatment," supporting a reversal of the dis/approbation gendered dynamic. For example, Hawkes devastates Day's moral superiority by highlighting his failure to honor "the claims of his child upon him," an obdurate negation Hawkes condemns as unchristian (Stanton Day, Letter to Strieby). In addition, Rev. William King, whom Day initially joined in the fund-raising tour, shares a pattern of Day's fiscal improprieties in the UK, thus sapping Day's ethical superiority (Kinealy 219). Further letters provided additional weight exposing and challenging Stanton Day's disparate treatment by the board. In this moment of vindication, Stanton Day and her affinity networks stand as peers—equal in dignity and honor—with the AMA board members, a beginning of accord.

Despite Stanton Day's epistolary efforts to create a fruitful dialogue, the AMA remained adamant in its rejection. By the board's—and misogynoir's—calculus, a man's reputation, even a suspect one, held greater value than a woman's. In her final letter addressed to Michael Strieby, AMA's recording secretary, Stanton Day notes that her greater regret ensues not from the snub but from the board's refusal to engage in any kind of dialogue. However, rather than end her letter in justifiable anger or despair, she, instead, concludes her correspondence with her faith in quiet activism by requesting Strieby to return "the testimonials that I have forwarded to you," thereby signaling her resolution to persevere. Two years later, with the support of the Cleveland Freedman's Association, Stanton Day fulfilled her dream to teach in the newly established Black schools (Lawson and Merrill 200). "With little fanfare and few ripples, her sustained quiet activism worked modestly to achieve a small moment of accord by which she changed lives (Horton and Kraft 20).

Working Forward: Unity and Hope through Quiet Activism

Harper's "We Are All Bound Up Together" clearly and accurately pointed to a double division: first, the gendered similarities in women's issues versus the dissimilarities tied to race and class; second, the conflict between white middle-class women's focus on the vote versus the working-class women's—Black and white—commitment to labor reform as necessary for survival. Harper's vocal and direct activism is valuable to understanding the fraught and ever-changing rhetorical situations in the 1860s United States, especially within the context of the woman's movement. Yet, within all of those fissures and fractures, are moments of unity secured through small acts of quiet activism performed by women who, if only temporarily and conditionally, diminish divides. Emerging from their quite different material situations and inspired by a distinctly different sense of what fissures require unifying, Penny and Stanton Day engaged in quiet activism congruent with both situations and visions. In both cases, the acts themselves, regardless of success or failure, created an instant of fragile unity. Both women, in all their differences and because of their differences, highlight that quiet activism, as a feminist rhetoric performed within a fissure's aporia, is one means of "contend[ing] with the forces troubling us all" in working "to articulate a vision of hope and expectation" for change (Glenn 212). As a counter to the long trajectory of division within the woman's movement, Penny and Stanton Day highlight an equally long trajectory of quiet activism, foregrounding its potential as a rhetorical coalitional strategy operating across time and providing a rich understanding of the ways activisms and feminist rhetorics operate in tandem for change.

As an undertaking of hope and contingent unity, quiet activism invites feminist rhetoricians to search past and present for moments of fragile unity however brief, moments when *feminist* and *not feminist enough* are irrelevant designations. It underscores that feminist rhetorics—and rhetorical feminists—can be modest, mundane, narrowly situated, and unnamed. It underscores that they can be valuable because they are quiet, for, in their semi-invisibility and low volume, such rhetorics and feminists keep unity and hope alive amidst the mundanities of daily lives. Equally important, quiet activism suggests that we recalibrate success not as a measure of goal(s) achieved but as a measure of affective bonds built, of fissures temporarily joined. In other words, the invisible, quotidian performances of quiet activism invite us to revisit the woman's movement,

past and present, to identify other fissures where traces of hope and unity can be found so that we can honor and nurture the feminist rhetorics working in the shadows now.

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The Collectors: "Quiet" Acts of Feminist Praxis

Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Jessica A. Rose, and Tiffany Gray

Abstract: While feminist archival researchers routinely acknowledge the assistance and support of special collection librarians, we often overlook the labor of archival collectors who make activist, recovery, and public memory work possible. This essay explores the significance of feminist archiving methods by providing illustrations of "quiet" feminist praxis grounded in community collaborations. The intentions, actions, and reflections of collectors who gather material artifacts, ephemera, and oral histories to preserve and sustain feminist work and activism operate as integral research partners. Their labor makes possible more visible feminist unsettling efforts and inclusionary practices. The authors contend that acknowledging, supporting, and joining these efforts, despite their subtlety, enriches and amplifies feminist work.

Tags: archivists, collaboration, community archives, overlooked feminism, oral history, quiet activism

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In "Digital Curation as Collaborative Archival Method in Feminist Rhetorics," Pamela VanHaitsma and Cassandra Book explain how networked labor of "curation may function as a collaborative archival method for scholars of feminist rhetorics who are interested in bringing together our field's established strengths in historiographic scholarship" (508). Highlighting collaborative in-the-moment collecting and archiving, they detail how sustained feminist partnering ensures the public memory of women's accomplishments and disrupts traditional collation practices through ground-up archives created by stakeholders. For the sake of this discussion, we intertwine the efforts of collectors and guardians of material culture, recognizing that while this labor may not occur on the frontlines of feminist activism, it is, nonetheless, critical to the preservation of artifacts and ephemera, community records and recognition of local activism, narratives and

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first-person accounts, and overlooked published scholarship and disseminated organizational records.

This essay joins similar studies of feminist archiving methods to 1) recognize subtle acts of collecting that empower others, (2) highlight unsung partnerships committed to documenting women's work, (3) profile often marginalized community, ground-up collecting, and (4) encourage teachers/public scholars/community activists both to document their local activism and add personal materials to existing collections. We showcase two salient examples as illustrations of quiet acts of feminist praxis: a profile of collecting partners Lucy Hargrett Draper and her niece Chrisy Erickson Strum from Georgia State University's Women's, Gender and Sexuality collections, and a brief examination of the New York ACT UP Oral History Project as a model of collaborative oral history practice. Second-wave feminist-archivists Draper and Strum's expansive collecting partnership spans decades and attests to the value of intergenerational collaboration. Conversations with these contemporary self-taught archivists strikingly echo both the frustrations and commitment of earlier feminist collection builders, providing first-hand accounts of the significance of archiving-in-the-moment along with an understanding of how libraries initiate and create large-scale foci of collecting that establish subsequent centers of study (https://research.library.gsu.edu/draper). Next, we discuss oral history gathering and its connections to activism and feminist archival collection practices through an exploration of ACT UP, the New York-based oral history project capturing late 1980s experiences of the AIDS crisis. We focus on the training for oral history interviewers, specifically the ethical frameworks and practices necessary for collecting and archiving stories from sometimes vulnerable community members.

A Discussion of Terms

Geraldine Pratt defines collaboration as "a feminist strategy," one that offers "a means of situating knowledge and a source of support" (44). Adopting this view, archival collection—a tripartite apparatus relying on (sometimes intentional, sometimes incidental) collaborations among archivists, collectors, and users—becomes a cornerstone of feminist research, scholarship, and critique. Within Rhetoric and Composition and feminist scholarship, archives have been defined and discussed as spaces for reconsideration (Glenn and Enoch; Wu), a methodology for revoicing (Anderson et al.; Caswell *Archiving the Unspeakable*), locations that embody feminist ethics (Caswell and Cifor; Cifor and Wood; Agarwal), and places to unsettle dominant narratives and histories (Royster; Arondekar; Kirsch et al.). Despite varied and targeted attention on archival research as a feminist strategy, archival researchers' conversations often focus on materials (as part of a larger project), holistic discussions of collections, research method/ologies, and (more recently) potential pedagogies, leaving the actual work of *collecting* underexplored even though this act lies at the heart of feminist archival labor. However, we assert that the act of collecting, itself, realizes feminist practice, one that may be subtle but that directly supports and leads to feminist scholarship dedicated to recovery and representation. Feminist archivists concur and identify collecting, keeping, and preserving as collaborative practices that require cooperative attention, particularly given recent efforts to reckon with the colonial history of archival practices.

Addressing concepts of critical feminism, archivists Marika Cifor and Stacy Wood contend that "archival theory and practice have yet to fully engage with a feminist praxis that is aimed at more than attaining better representation of women in archives" (2). They argue for "moving beyond representational politics" by engaging in "coalitional work around overlapping and interconnected political realities" (2). Ongoing feminist collecting and collation yields community partnerships and increased recognition of the need to collect materials both in the moment and "ground up" gathering from community members—to preserve materials that undergird subsequent research. In "March into the Archives," Rose and Gaillet profile feminist and archivist efforts to capture events and experiences of the 2017 Women's March by collecting materials and gathering oral histories, both at the marches and afterward. Rose and Gaillet identify feminist archiving that advocates "shifting towards a praxis that includes participation in movements and design of activist pedagogies meant to recover and accurately portray the lives of women" (212). This coalitional and collaborative feminist archival praxis applies to other community archives as well, collections that may not focus on women but that overtly adopt feminist collecting practices. In both cases, definitions of what constitutes "quiet" feminism and supportive activism varies yet stems from similar labor practices.

Like Gowoon Jung and Minyoung Moon, we, too, "define quiet feminism as an agentic, everyday feminist practice performed by self-identified feminists who maintain a low profile in sheltered environments under unreceptive social contexts toward feminism" (218). These authors explore actions of young contemporary feminists working in politically hostile and threatening environments, while the collector-activists' work we profile differs historically by location, collecting purposes, and gathering techniques. However, the efforts of the collectors discussed below simultaneously take place at the periphery of feminist activism and at once are central to its execution and memory. Similarly, in "A Quiet Revolution" (1989), archivist Susan Searing argues for increased recognition of the work feminist archivists perform, declaring that "by their very existence, specialized libraries and archives legitimize scholarship on gender" (20). In a clarion call to both her colleagues and researcher-teachers, she explains:

> Librarians know first-hand that traditional values and familiar practices breed predictable collections and services. We've risked buying books from small women's presses, implementing feminist management styles, coming out as lesbians and standing up for women library users. If we have the full and visible backing of Women's Studies faculty and students, we can build on past accomplishments and inspire feminist research in the 1990s and beyond. (21)

These two discussions pair and define *quiet* and *feminism* from diverse perspectives, one explaining the South Korean political backlash to twenty-first century #MeToo participation and the other constituting a late-1980's plea for realistic recognition of archivists and their roles as both collectors and experts addressing gender and sexual inequality. Yet, in stipulating definitions of overlooked action, these scholars moor discussions of quiet feminism to specific places and times as they reify the primary goal of this *Peitho* special issue, that "ongoing injustices require feminist rhetorical action," in multiple arenas and in different forms. The collectors and archivists we discuss below collaborate across geopolitical spaces to illustrate Searing's

claim about their quiet (disrupted, often misunderstood, and sometimes subversive) work and unsung agency as they actively gather, advertise, and make materials available.

Showcasing the commitment and experiences of critical archivists and collectors recognizes acts of feminism that support transformational research and ensures future generation's access to multi-vocal narratives. Herein, we profile the rationale for collecting and the labor of inspired collectors who maintained a public record while also buttressing, inspiring, and sustaining feminist research projects and narrative threads. In our earlier investigations into unsettling traditional attitudes towards feminist activism and associated archives, we carefully considered Carol Mattingly's challenge in "Telling Evidence: Rethinking What Counts in Rhetoric" to think outside the realm of suffragist women as we sought and described archival collation practices associated with historically disrupted examples of feminist activism (Gaillet and Rose, "Hidden"). This nineteenth-century investigation served as a gateway, leading us to the work of early under-discussed feminist archivers and collaborators, those who provided foundational collections of women's materials—including Mary Ritter Beard and Rosika Schwimmer (World Center for Women's Archives) and Maud Wood Park and Edna Lamprey Stantial (Schlesinger Library/Radcliffe Institute). Though today's researchers may not know their names, these collectors and archivists (and others like them) diligently established and made available holdings that we still rely upon for orienting our histories and refining our definitions of feminism. Their partnerships serve as origin points both for defining quiet and supportive feminism and recognizing archival collecting as they expanded holdings to include feminist materials, providing models whereby we might build upon earlier successes and learn from their mistakes and challenges as scholars continue to unsettle and manage archival holdings through feminist praxis (Cifor and Woods).

We describe and assign the inherently feminist nature of oral history gathering and archiving to the purview of collector-archivists' responsibilities. Echoing recent rhetoric and composition scholarship that addresses the act of remembrance as a mode of rethinking women as rhetorical agents (Gaillet and Bailey; Ryan, Myers, and Jones), oral history methods require interviewers to draw out memories from interviewees through invitational, ethical, and communal engagement. The often unrecognized partnership between oral history interviewer and interviewee also represents a form of quiet feminism focused on collaborative archival collecting.

By highlighting the work of archival collectors, we showcase how quiet acts of collecting represent a feminist praxis of archival unsettling and recovery that requires a reattuning of what it means to engage in feminist activism. The critical work of these partnerships - demonstrated through Draper and Strum's longitudinal collecting project and ongoing oral history interviewer/interviewee connections—confirms that such acts of collecting and preservation represent quiet feminist efforts to build coalitions through connection and preservation. By focusing specifically on the collectors and their work, our study highlights not only their practices and methodologies in choosing how or what to collect, but also their initial motivations for engaging in the work of collecting.

Collecting Artifacts: Partners in Stewardship

For decades feminist archivists and scholars have actively listened, seeking to push the boundaries of whose voices belong in the narratives of rhetorical examination (Glenn; Sutherland and Sutcliffe) by including and prioritizing missing voices in collection practices (Ritchie and Arnold). Listening generates space for under-preserved voices to be collected and resonate, both documenting and witnessing those recollections. As Adrienne Rich suggests, "Listen to the women's voices; Listen to the silences, the unasked questions, the blanks. Listen to the small, soft voices, often courageously trying to speak up" ("Taking Women" 27). To assuage concerns over codifying materials, scholars now deliberately study not only how narratives are collected, studied, and preserved, but also how they may be re-collected, restudied, and redefined within the current moment (Guglielmo).

In applying this lens to collecting and archiving, scholars engage in unsettling convention to elucidate both archival practices and feminist methodologies centered on gathering materials, collecting histories, and gaining understandings about the work that supports archival research (Kirsch et al.). In many ways, however, the act of collecting requires a broader examination of the story of the archive itself, especially in examining both the location of holdings and the practice of generating an archive of representative material. As Antoinette Burton indicates, to fully grasp the story of an archive, scholars must acknowledge "how archives are created, drawn upon, and experienced by those who use them" because the generation of archival material—the collecting of a collection—has a story and a process that coincides with the moment surrounding the gathered documents, items, histories, etc., where each part contributes to the formation of the archive itself (5). Building upon this notion of archival story, Jean Bessette notes that "we must recognize that archives are constructed, consequential, rhetorical" and, therefore, acknowledge collectors' labor as feminist, rhetorical acts of preservation (28). In doing so, we tell a fuller story of archival work by complicating layers of archival documentation, generation, and collecting.

This nuanced labor is characterized by meticulous, long-term, and intergenerational commitment to seeking and preserving material artifacts, publications, and ephemera associated with women's accomplishments and struggles for social justice. We've learned from historical erasures that without this dedication women's narratives and experiences will be lost to public memory and unavailable for study. While we have many important but isolated stand-alone archival collections, we now know that organic, long-term acquisition practices require vision and accumulated resources, ones that don't evaporate when the originary collector is no longer at the helm.

To illustrate, in the 1930s, Mary Ritter Beard (a Progressive era reformer, historian, and author inspired by Lucy Stone) began collaborating with Rosika Schwimmer (feminist, international peace advocate) to establish a World Center for Women's Archives (WCWA). From Beard's correspondence, we learn that she engaged in what we now label "crowdsourcing" to gather oral histories, catalog records of women's accomplishments, and search for artifacts and ephemera in personal holdings and community archives. She focused

on documenting women's work in public venues to prove that women have always been part of public life. To add women's accomplishments to existing intellectual and labor maps, Beard and Schwimmer collected and collated materials attesting to women's accomplishments and fights for equal treatment, instead of solely relying upon narratives of past acts. They attempted to counter ongoing erasure and alteration of public memory associated with women's movements, including suffrage, abolition, and temperance. Beard and Schwimmer's far-reaching and ambitious vision for the WCWA failed to materialize in the backlash of racial conflicts, global political differences associated with US involvement in World War II, and insurmountable issues associated with public interest, archival space, and funding—interminable circumstances that continue to hinder universal collecting initiatives. However, their collected materials became cornerstones of major women's collections, paving the way for now well-known repositories committed to archival collecting and stewardship of women's records. This activist collecting jumpstarted twentieth-century mapping of women's achievements, leading to modern-day notable institutional, museum, and regional collections like the Five Colleges Consortium of critical feminist materials (established in 1966 and including Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith Colleges along with the University of Massachusetts campus).

A beneficiary of Beard and Schwimmer's dispersed materials, Maud Wood Park and Edna Lampial Stantial's 1943 "Woman's Rights Collection" at the Schlesinger Library/Radcliffe Institute, serves as an example of first-wave organic feminist work, one that extends beyond the lives of the collectors in original form/location and set in motion longitudinal, collaborative collecting practices. Their work is notable for the focus on suffrage materials, archivists' interactions with contemporaries, and information concerning activities following the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment. Park, who attended Radcliffe College, collaborated with local women to promote suffrage chapters and college leagues in the Northeast and Midwest. She served as the first president of the National League of Women Voters (1920-1924), and in 1943 she facilitated establishment of the "Woman's Rights Collection" that became the centerpiece of what would become the "Women's Archives" at the Schlesinger Library. Stantial, Park's close friend, secretary, and collecting partner, assisted Park in collecting materials for the initial Radcliffe College collection and served as secretary of the Boston Equal Suffrage Association for Good Government and archivist of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. We know that Stantial lived with Parks and her husband for a short while prior to Park's death in 1955 and, subsequently, continued to collect and collate papers and materials of leading women in the push for women's rights to add to the collection. Stantial also organized Park's personal papers (donated to the Library of Congress in the 1970s) and edited Park's *Front Door Lobby* ("Radcliffe College Suffrage"). Like many feminist collectors, Park and Stantial served as leaders in local activist women's chapters while building ground up archives from the communities to which they belonged. This focus and collection point of view is vital in capturing eye-witness accounts and collecting corresponding material culture. Archivists Diana K. Wakimoto, Christine Bruce, and Helen Partridge define community archives as materials "that have been created, maintained, and controlled by community members within their communities" (295). Quoting Flinn Stevens et al., they explain that "the defining characteristic of community archives is the involvement of members of the community whose records are in the archives in collecting and accessing their history '*on their own terms*' (p. 60, emphasis in original)" —a concept whole-

heartedly embraced by Georgia activists and archival collectors Lucy Hargrett Draper and her niece Chrisy Erickson Strum (295).

Self-identified feminists and activists, Draper and Strum's work adopts tenets of Beard/Schwimmer and Park/Stantial's collecting ideology and picks up chronologically where Stantial's gathering efforts leave off. Draper, who holds advanced degrees in education, history, and law, "headed the first Atlanta National Organization for Women (NOW) Speaker's Bureau from 1968-1971, founded West Point NOW (1973), Kansas Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) in 1977, Georgia WEAL (1978), and the Georgia Coalition for the Rights of Women (1996), for which she authored the Georgia Women's Bill of Rights" ("Lucy Hargrett Draper Collections"). Like Beard/Schwimmer and Parks/Stantial, Draper has demonstrated a life-long commitment to locating and donating twentieth-century women's archives, establishing three major collections of materials and ephemera: "The Lucy Hargrett Draper Center & Archives for the Study of the Rights of Women in History and Law, 1550-2050" at the University of Georgia's Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library in Athens, GA; "The Lucy Hargrett Draper Collections on Women, Advocacy and the Law" at Georgia State University (GSU) in Atlanta, GA; and "The Lucy H. Draper Collections on Women at West Point and 'Women Warriors'" located at the United States Military Academy in West Point, NY.

In a recent interview, Draper describes her rationale for collecting the voices of unrecognized yet foundational feminist activists: "Fifty years ago when I began my feminist activity, I noticed that the unsung heroines in the movement were not documenting the prices that they were paying and the work that they were doing, and I felt that the important role that I played in the various organizations that I founded was to encourage women to save their work product and their collections" ("Donor and Community Partners Call" 1:34-2:03). Draper's activities capture a record of what she labels unheard and overlooked pivotal feminist acts. She also references the difficulties in finding archival partners to house women's materials once gathered, a problem plaguing Beard and Schwimmer's early 20th-century collecting efforts. In glancing backwards at her lifetime of archival activities, Draper praises GSU's "breathtaking" willingness to collect materials on what the public may deem controversial topics (33:03)—a commitment apparent across multiple collections, including the LGBTQ Collection and their developing Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project. GSU's dedication embodies a distinctly feminist praxis that meets, as Draper contends, a need to establish and sustain layered narratives when working with community and activist archives. Community stakeholders, like Draper, often echo Draper's imperative that she "did not want to edit any truth out of [her] collection" (33:03-33:08). She explains, "I owed these women a great debt and Georgia State University… special collections was willing to take the risk of total honesty, and for that I am eternally grateful" (33:22-33:40). In intergenerational cooperation with Chrisy Strum, Draper has also established twenty-first-century ongoing collections. Like her earlier foundational materials now held in three repositories, these in-progress collections also rely upon both archivists' and special collections' unflinching commitment to housing and maintaining materials and crowdsourcing for encouraging in-the-moment archiving.

Draper's contemporary collecting partner Strum, an independent archivist in contemporary areas of women's rights and social justice activism, seeks feminist materials both to augment existing collections originally created by Draper and to establish new archives that resonate with Strum's experiences. In 2017, they established the "Women's Protest Movement Archive 2017," stemming from Strum's participation in the January 2017 "March for Social Justice and Women." Subsequently, the team expanded this collection to include the 2018 "Power to the Polls" women's movement, the 2019 "Women's Wave" movement, a #MeToo collection, and a "Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Workplace" archive. A self-trained archivist, Strum explains, "I am also working on a collection on African-American women in the women's rights and woman suffrage movements, and I just started a collection on the current abortion battle and fight to keep Roe v. Wade as law of the land." Echoing Stantial's position as Parks' intergenerational partner, Strum not only participates in assembling materials but also puts her own spin on feminist collecting and collating to reflect her activism and community alignments. ("Chrisy Erickson Strum").

In discussing the importance of Draper and Strum's current archiving labors, BriGette I. McCoy, Curator of "The Reckoning: Stand Up, Speak Out, Make Change," an exhibit of Draper and Strom's crowdsourced materials from the "Lucy Hargrett Draper Reckoning Collection", describes these twenty-first-century materials thusly:

> Leading up to and after the Women's March of 2017, [Draper and Strum] documented emerging and ongoing activism through what they are calling their U.S. Women's Protest "Reckoning" collection. What they have given Georgia State University is a remarkably rich resource that will continue to grow as movements and campaigns evolve. The collection serves as a companion to oral histories, photographs, textiles and artifacts that have been donated by March participants since 2017. (https://exhibits.library.gsu.edu/reckoning/)

Draper and Strum's labor embodies Adrienne Rich's claim in "Arts of the Possible" that the "relationship of the individual to a community, to social power, and to the great upheavals of collective human experience will always be the richest and most complex of questions." Their collected materials allow researchers to address Rich's "blotted-out" questions, those often found in personal narratives: "With any personal history, what is to be done? What do we know when we know your story? With whom do you believe your lot is cast?" (326).

These three partnerships testify to the ongoing need to emulate systematic collation strategies for capturing, housing, and publicizing the longitudinal labor and voices of women. Their strategies illustrate not only the importance of crowdsourcing and collaboration to amass and safekeep materials but also the inherent value in intergenerational collaborations and required momentum necessary to build on existing collecting efforts. Without often-unacknowledged archival activism and the sustained commitment of repositories to house and maintain materials, we run the risk of losing women's voices and experiences, along with a documented record of social justice and legislative progress. At a time when women's actions, expe-

riences, and even bodies are sidelined and dismissed in national political debates, the fundamental need to preserve personal experience, public memory, and social justice activism is imperative.

Collecting Personal Stories: Oral History as Partnership

For collaborators like Draper and Strum, the drive to preserve ephemeral, yet critical, materials of women's activism across waves of women's movements directly speaks to the rationale for their archival practices; they felt compelled to preserve records of women's activism. Other collectors share this commitment to safeguard community narratives and labor by capturing oral histories. As both a field of study and a method of "gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events," oral histories offer first-person perspectives not fully represented in material artifacts ("Oral History: Defined"). Traditional archives often provide externally composed narratives about a particular subject, whereas oral histories capture individual thought, perspective, and reflection that may be difficult to represent otherwise. As feminist scholar Polly Russell explains in documenting British feminist activism, "[o]ral history methods disrupt traditional academic disciplines," a practice that is "central to the feminist project," making it ideal for capturing the stories of, and bearing witness to, activist communities who are reacting to immediate, temporal events (132).

The practice of oral history has deep roots in activism, particularly in communities where accounts have been ignored, obscured, or misinterpreted; understandably, community members may be wary of outside inquiry and skeptical of how their narratives will be preserved. Ground-up community archives and collections, through which stakeholders take ownership of preservation efforts, address this skepticism. In *Ephemeral Material*, Alana Kumbier investigates queer community archives, explaining that community preservation strategies "manifest a coalitional consciousness" that draws from queer and feminist activist work, as well as engagement with other social and political movements (8). Kumbier clarifies that "without community support and involvement, [community-centered] archives wouldn't grow, necessary work wouldn't be accomplished, and the archives wouldn't reflect the constituencies and experiences they seek to document" (8). Implications of this coalitional engagement extend to oral histories, which are best gathered from individuals who already have connections to or belong to those populations—or by interviewers trained in ethical practices of oral history gathering (see training materials at "Oral Histories at GSU" for research protocols that consider vulnerable populations and how to protect subjects).

To illustrate ethical community practices, consider initiatives like the ACT UP Oral History Project, which documents the stories of the *AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power* (ACT UP). The earliest members of this organization were foundational activists in the movement to destigmatize and medicalize responses to the disease during a moment that was fraught with uncertainty and misinformation. This project demonstrates how tensions between interviewer and interviewee can be alleviated by ensuring the interviewer has a robust understanding of the focused community. When the oral history collector comes from within the profiled community, the connections between the interviewer and interviewee lead to a sense of partnership through

shared relatable lived experiences.

Although artists/filmmakers Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard, interviewers associated with ACT UP, do not identify as oral historians, their work capturing first-hand narratives of members of New York communities initially affected by the AIDS crisis exhibits collaborative collecting and archiving principles. Hubbard explains:

> In late 1988 and early 1989, using a Video-8 camera I had gotten as a grant, I interviewed 7 important members of ACT UP. At that point I had 10 and half hours of videotape and the filmmaker in me said, "How am I ever going to edit all this?" Not recognizing the historical importance of simply recording the thoughts, feelings and insights of people in the moment, I stopped taping and edited the tape. This [current] project serves as a corrective to that early lack of understanding. ("Statements")

Alternatively, Schulman could think *only* of the historical importance, as she lamented "the false AIDS stories told in the few mainstream representations of the crisis," disinformation which she noted was being codified into historical records ("Statements"). Upon quickly reviewing early academic literature that documented activist efforts like ACT UP, Schulman felt compelled to help correct the record; she notes, "I realized that [researchers] did not have adequate raw data from which to understand what had occurred. And that, sadly, many had been trained to not talk to the actual people they were studying to find out what [ACT UP activists] did" ("Statements"). Instead, she discovered that many researchers were relying on popular secondary sources like the *New York Times* for context and history, which Shulman laments leaves out the personal day-to-day, isolative experiences and bigotry experienced by the affected communities. In response, Shulman and Hubbard collaborated from their artistic platform, film, to generate sorely needed data that documented the lives and conditions of activists in New York during the crisis.

Interviewers like Shulman and Hubbard, who operate as internal stakeholders and reside within a given community, often have an easier time building relationships with those they interview. However, empathetic interviewers living adjacent to interviewees are also needed as oral history partners, particularly when community members are affected viscerally as in the AIDS community, first by the disease and then by the discriminatory backlash from an uneducated public. The call to collect these stories supports opportunities for preservation and to process trauma. Feminist scholar Ann Cvetkovich, who also gathered oral histories for ACT UP, clarifies that she consistently "feels compelled upfront" to identify herself not as an oral historian, but as "a culture and literary critic" who comes to oral history through the genre of testimony, an approach used in working with traumatized communities. In discussing her work, Cvetkovitch explains that her use of oral history serves two ends. First, she acknowledges that "[a]ctivism often remains ephemeral and under-documented," making oral history "a useful tool" for exploring activism as a response to trauma. Second, she explains that she had a "hunch" that "oral history could be a way of extending the work of activism by creating a collective memory that persists even after a movement ends" (Cvetkovich).

Cvetkovich found that activist Jean Carlomusto shared similar thoughts regarding vulnerability, particularly when outsider images of activism are combined with what Cvetkovich describes as "memories of death":

> In our interviews, she [Carlomusto] worried about ACT UP's visual history being "used as wallpaper. Whenever you want to talk about activism, just throw in some protest footage, even if it's not about the action you're referring to." She describes her struggle, in the period following her involvement with ACT UP, to live with the experience of mortality and how that has led to her renewed interest in history and archives. (Cvetkovich)

The stories of Cvetkovich, Hubbard, and Schulman demonstrate why oral historians are mistrusted in some communities, explore goals and desires for collecting community narratives, and exemplify why vulnerable communities may require a liaison who is both versed in the community and trained in accurate gathering practices. Professional archivists and oral historians often enlist and train community volunteers to fill this role since the work requires sensitivity and consideration for the deeply personal experiences of those interviewed. In the "Oral History Workshop Series" produced by GSU Special Collections, archivists Laurel Bowen and Brittany Newberry explain that interviewers should gain familiarity with the person, topic, and historical context of their interviewee to develop engaging questions that lead to conversations. Shirley K. Rose, Glenn C.W. Newman, and Robert P. Spindler describe such rhetorical question-asking practices as "critical initial move[s] for opening an archival conversation that can become, in turn, an archival collaboration" between the interviewer and interviewee(s) (121).

Like meaningful question-asking, active listening constitutes a vital aspect of oral history gathering, a practice in which interviewers learn to 'listen' with both their ears and eyes. Active listening can also encourage a more informal, connective experience between growing acquaintances, rather than a stilted, regimental question and answer session among ambiguous parties. Moreover, attention to silences in oral history interviews also plays a significant role in rhetorical listening. Not only do pauses offer the interviewee an opportunity to gather their thoughts, but they can also allow the interviewer an opportunity to rhetorically listen to the silence as part of the quiet feminist praxis of collecting and documenting what silences can mean for the interviewee sharing their experiences (Ratcliff and Jensen).

Given the sensitive nature of collecting oral histories, interviewer training addresses both associated logistics and ethical operational frameworks, including storage of oral histories, Internal Review Board (IRB) considerations (including approval and informed consent), sensitivity training regarding posing questions and listening to shared answers, and recognition that this work may be emotional for both the interviewer and the interviewee. As an interviewer, Tiffany explains that she first had to recognize that oral histories constitute a form of collected stories by and about individuals delivered in their own words and voices. Collecting practices require restraint and an attention to detail that helps interviewers understand the value of knowing when to speak and when to stay silent and let the interviewee direct the path of conversation.

Practically, training protects the housing institution from liability, but more significantly, it generates how to ethically grow the partnership between interviewer and interviewee. In other words, this formal training allows interviewers to operate with a level of awareness, sensitivity, and understanding for the interviewee, which builds trust that the stories and narratives are collected faithfully. Transparent ethical collecting practices prioritize the interviewee, resisting erasure or misrepresentation of shared information.

Interview "partnerships" are built through established ground rules and parameters that set expectations and ensure transparency. Consider Andy Reisinger's opening conversation with World War II veteran and prominent Atlanta designer Charles H. Stevens, an oral history collected for GSU's Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project.

REISINGER: So just a few disclaimers before we begin, that this isn't a private conversation. One day, it will be made available to the public. We hope that it is a fun experience for all of us, but if there is at any time something that I ask that you don't want to talk about, just let me know, or if you need to take a break, just let us know. And my role is just to ask a couple questions, but really to talk as little as possible and let you talk.

CHARLES STEVENS: Kind of lead me in.

REISINGER: Exactly, and lead you along as well. So I will be looking down at my notes, but I'm absolutely listening. So for the formal introduction—today is Friday, March the 13th, 2015. My name is Andy Reisinger and I'm here interviewing Charles Stevens.

STEVENS: Charles H.

REISINGER: Charles H. Stevens at his home in Decatur for Georgia State University's Department of Special Collections and Archives Gender and Sexuality Oral History Project and before getting into the meat of the interview, if I can just get your verbal confirmation that you are aware that we are recording you.

STEVENS: Okay. Am I look[ing] at you or the camera?

REISINGER: At me. So let's just start at the beginning. Can you tell me a bit about when and where you were born? (Stevens 00:00-01:00)

Reisinger's declaration of the process and future use of the recording exemplifies the importance of informed consent to oral history collaboration. Reisinger does not move forward until Steven is comfortable and understands procedures, a practice developed through experience and training.

Interviewers also prepare for equitable and ethical collaboration through preliminary research, a

particularly important task when interviewers don't belong to the project's community. For instance, as a trained oral history interviewer, Tiffany's preparation included surveying her interviewees; they answered preliminary questions regarding their experiences as members of a prominent women's organization from the 1970s. Surveys not only provide foundational information for developing linear, open-ended questions, but also locate interviewees within a historical and socio-cultural context, preserving their agency and experiences. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch's work specifically highlights the need to study women's voices residing outside the boundaries of common feminist rhetorical study and speaks to the nature and necessity of training oral historians to act with compassion and sensitivity. This position may become apparent through language and sentence construction but emerges predominantly in how the interviewer checks in with the interviewee throughout the conversation. Interviewers remind participants that they have the right to edit the transcript of their interview before it becomes public, thus allowing the interviewee agency over how much of their past life they want exposed. For instance, part of Tiffany's training included discussions concerning handling of sensitive information, such as the conveyance of criminal acts performed by or against the interviewee and the incrimination of others. In fact, the special collections department which trained Tiffany has a policy of actively redacting any personal criminal information shared during an interview, making a conscious decision not to collect or retain such knowledge.

Ultimately, oral histories contribute layers and depth for events and communities that, without them, might be flattened and misunderstood—an exigence that demands a feminist methodology. Sugandha Agarwal offers a cogent example of this approach through her research comparing the collection of oral histories by volunteers for Stanford's digital *1947 Partition Archive* to histories collected in Northern India by "grassroots Indian feminists and activists" that emphasize women's testimonies about the sexual violence which occurred during the Partition (7). She contends that adopting a feminist oral history methodology "can result in the creation of new forms of knowledge informed by women's experiences," which may challenge other mainstream or "depoliticized" accounts being collected (7-8). Agarwal cautions, however, that it is important for feminist oral historians working with women's history to continue to prioritize the oral history process by "reworking and developing methodologies and practices that are collaborative, inclusive, and intersectional without abandoning listening," which allows the stories to do the work (26).

Reflecting on these experiences makes clear that oral history work and training reflect a feminist praxis of "looking for opportunities to disrupt or destabilize established memories created by prior acts of recollection and public remembrance" by recording a participant's lived experiences firsthand (Guglielmo 4). As a feminist methodology, oral history, itself, offers a corrective view of history through the lens of lived experience. Therefore, in acting as a guide, trained oral history interviewers learn to partner with those they interview to generate a shared experience of "ethics and care" centered on informed questions and supportive listening about interviewees' personal life stories.

Collecting as Partnership: Continuing the Work

VanHaitsma and Book tell us that, unsurprisingly, "women's labor on large curatorial projects is frequently devalued if not entirely erased" (506). To address this lament and answer library specialists' calls to recognize that humanities scholarship isn't "in conversation with ideas, debates and lineages in archival studies" (Caswell, "'The Archive' is Not an Archives" par. 4), we need to laud the ongoing efforts of archive builders within women's and gender labor histories and invite them to the table for cross-disciplinary conversation. Their work undergirds transformational research; ensures the preservation of loud and visible activism within public memory; and makes available the artifacts, ephemera, and eyewitness accounts of events necessary for creating equitable and ethical historical narratives. These unheralded archival partnerships form the basis of subsequent animated/living collections and provide integral models for supporting current efforts at ground-up archiving associated with identity politics and community documentarian efforts (see Kumbier; Fredlund, Hauman, and Ouelette; and Kirsch, et al.). Critical recovery work fills in archival absences, thus "point[ing] toward a more equitable and moral future, a future that not only shines light on the impotent and rhetorically silenced but that also understands their significance in contemporary terms" (Takayoshi 149). Collaborative collecting furthers this aim by creating a supportive framework that not only makes possible interdisciplinary partnerships among community archivers, researchers, social justice scholars, and community members but also encourages collaborative "decisions about what is and what is not valuable," choices that "are always historically and socially situated" (Takayoshi 153). While often overlooked by public audiences and referenced tangentially in research acknowledgements, the work of the collectors is, in fact, not peripheral but rather integral to unsettling efforts and inclusionary practices.

Likewise, the act of collecting answers a call or perceived need, sometimes from the personal interests of collectors themselves or because of events they've witnessed. Documenting and recording in-the-moment activism allow future collectors to "witness" the work of their predecessors, thus fostering intergenerational partnerships or longitudinal projects that mark archival work as feminist. Archivists, collectors, and history gatherers—like those profiled in this essay—often sit at the periphery of communities. From this obscured position, they subtly support the individuals and groups whose visible work needs safeguarding and the researchers who study these communities. These guardians provide the cornerstones of the work we all do by providing legacy and memory, as they amplify crucial expertise, experiences, and historical events. Their situated and often collaborative efforts are responsive, invitational, and encouraging. Indeed, their work is "feminist enough."

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Ghosts and Groceries: The Subtly Feminist Act of Claiming My Inheritance

Katie W. Powell

Abstract: This article engages with the idea of subtle feminism through tracing the genealogy of the author's new 1926 suburban Midwestern home. By engaging in storied community listening, the author works to engage with those who have lived in the home before her in order to claim the inheritance of both subtle privilege and subtle feminism that they have left her. By investigating the "objective" history of her home alongside the critical lens of story, the author begins to find her place in her community today. Claiming her own subtle privilege alongside the subtly feminist act of running a home allows the author to explore the ways she is both haunted by and responsible for the inheritance that is hers to claim.

Tags: story, community listening, whiteness, critical reflection, spatial justice, domestic

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[Seller Name] for valuable consideration paid, grant with general warranty covenants to Katherine and Tyler Powell, for their joint lives, remainder to the survivor of them, their heirs, and assigns, whose mailing address is [address], the following real property: [property description]. Subject to taxes and assessments which are now or may hereafter become liens on said premises and except conditions, restrictions, and easements, if any contained in former instruments of record for said premises, subject to all of which this conveyance is made.

Be it remembered, the foregoing document was acknowledged before me, a notary public, for the said county and state, this 30 day of June, 2022, by [seller name], grantors in the foregoing deed, and acknowledged the signing thereof to be their voluntary act or deed. (Hamilton County Deed Book 14009, p. 147)

Be It Remembered: An Introduction

I've noticed a subtle shift in the way I view the world, the way I see myself as a white woman, since I became a mother. My definition of my world, for starters, has shrunk considerably and often simply encompasses the walls of my home. From the steep steps of the basement to do laundry multiple times a week, to the schlepping of groceries through the front door and into the kitchen, to the early morning sips of coffee

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I've taken over a laptop scrambling to cram a day's worth of work into a few hours before a sick baby wakes up, I find myself sounding more and more like my own mother when I am finally able to complete one simple task, finish a thought, or string together an email. These moments, though subtle, feel like an act of resistance against the humdrum of life with littles, a kind of feminist act. But even then, I think to myself, isn't creating a safe place for my daughters to land, a world where my 3-year-old wants to be a police officer who drives a firetruck, its own sort of subtle feminism? Subtle choices that run deep.

And then of course, I consider the community outside the steps of my home, and the subtle privileges I am part of that run deep, so deep. We bought a 1926 craftsman home in a small suburb outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, called Wyoming, and I regularly walk my kids to one of 5 or 6 parks in the area. As we walk, a blonde, white mother with two blonde, white children, I notice waves and smiles from cars driving past, responses that are not mimicked when our West African immigrant neighbors cycle to the ATM near our home, or when a Hispanic family leaves the laundromat across the street on Sunday afternoons. Wyoming, one suburb in one city in one state in our nation, perfectly exemplifies the national phenomenon of what Bonilla-Silva calls "the invisible weight of whiteness" (Bonilla-Silva). As a white, educated, financially stable mother, I hold the privilege of those that have carved out a default space for white privileged others to build this home, to build this community. But this legacy is subtle, very sneaky, almost subversive. These subtleties (that honestly are not all that subtle) run deep and uphold a dynamic that preferences my kids over others, that keeps non-white people from moving to my neighborhood, that results in police violence and state-sanctioned murder under the guise of protecting white women like me.

We think of big things when we think of inheritances. Massive estates. Entire libraries. Trust funds. As I've found my place in Cincinnati, in an older home in a nice suburb, I believe I've inherited a big thing. To engage in a subtly feminist act, I seek to claim my inheritance, through the lens of my home, in both the privileges and the oppression that such an inheritance affords. I choose home as the center for exploring, enacting, subtle feminism, because I know, from this very call, that these concerns are subtle, quiet, hidden, and haunting the minds of other white women, scholars, feminists. As a technical communications scholar, I find comfort in the "objective" truth that the deeds telling my home's history provide us (see epistle above). As a feminist, the manager of a home, and a mother, I know there is more to read, understand, and claim as I work, clean, eat, drive, fold, scrub, love, while trying to listen and hear the subtle feminism, the ghosts, the hauntings, of home.

As part of holding the tension between technical communicator (seeker of the "objective") and subtle feminist (seeker of the subtle), I model my journey after the official steps for claiming one's inheritance ("Inheritance Funding"). Like any good lawyer would suggest, I first establish our terminology and ensure you all, the conveyors, are appraised of my methodology. Step 1, authenticating the last will, involves sharing the official documentation of my home and community, the ways in which my claim is "credible" and therefore worthy of consideration. Step 2, Appointing the Executor, involves me engaging in storied community listening to hear the claims, the connections, the struggles I face as I engage with the legacy of the women who

have lived here before me, my ghosts. Step 3, locating the deceased's assets and assessing their value, involves a broader exploration into the assets (burdens) my ghosts have left me with, and I am haunted by, namely of domestic inheritance, gendered oppression, and of course white privilege. And finally, Step 4 involves informing creditors and paying your debts. I listen, and I hear, the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance. But to truly, completely claim it, I must pay my debt and live out my legacy.

The Foregoing Document: Definitions

My eighteen-page mortgage deed begins with a grounding of "Definitions," stating that "words used in multiple sections of this document are defined below." Therefore, I begin with the same sort of grounding, addressing the ways in which I understand terms that help me claim inheritance in my home as a means of enacting subtle feminism.

Subtle privilege and subtle feminism. As established in my introduction, I have found great resonance in the idea of subtle, namely as I explore its practices and enactments in my daily home life. I consider subtle privilege to be those undercurrents of our life and work that give us advantages, whether earned or not. In my case, I function under the often unnamed reality that many of these subtle privileges are part of being white, and being white in America (Kennedy et al.; Tuck and Ree; Powell; Martinez). Subtle feminism, on the other hand, is the small, quiet pockets of rhetorical resistance to maintained systems that oppress others. As do many in this contribution, I pull this definition by engaging in strategic contemplation (Royster and Kirsch), from questioning if I am "feminist enough" (Gay), and from listening to the often-invisibilized labor of the home (Monberg; Kannan). Instead of seeing subtle privilege as the antithesis to subtle feminism, I believe they work alongside each other, and acknowledging one through our rhetorical strategies and our stories is a necessary part of enacting the other.

Haunting: In acknowledging my subtle privilege, it's impossible not to see the legacy of this privilege, a legacy best described for me as a white person as haunting. Hearing other white scholars claim haunting, as Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe do in *Rhetorics of Whiteness*, helps illustrate the pervasiveness of this privilege in every part of my life. The authors point out that our language is haunted by the assumption that mainstream= white. They also say, however, that "whiteness can haunt more than just a term. It can haunt entire texts and people's actions and their identities as well as cultural sites and events at particular historical moments" (16). This exploration of subtle feminism has reminded many of us to examine the ways in which the term feminism is haunted by whiteness throughout history, and in turn the ways perhaps I as a white woman am haunted by the idea of "feminist enough."

Ghosts and Ancestors: Part of enacting subtly feminist rhetoric means seeking out fellow white people who have curated this haunting (Powell and Bratta). While I've been inspired by many texts on the idea of ancestorship, particularly from an Indigenous (Powell; Riley-Mukavetz) and African American (Royster; Gumbs; Pritchard) perspective, I prefer to think of my white house ancestors whose fellow privileges haunt

me as much as they benefit me, as ghosts. Lillian Smith, a white activist, shares in her autobiography *Killers of the Dream*, of "ghosts" that she learned of as a child, ghosts that taught her the contradictory nature of a vindictive God who loved unconditionally yet allowed her community to turn a blind eye to injustices facing her Black community members. My ancestors then, are my "house ghosts," other white women who have lived in my home, who have shared in my subtle privileges (and hopefully some of my acts of subtle feminism), and haunt me.

Inheritance: But what have these ghosts haunted me with? What is the throughline of claiming my subtle privilege, what is the reason to enact my subtle feminism? Google defines inheritance as "the practice of receiving private property, titles, debts, entitlements, privileges, rights, and obligations ("Inheritance"). Certainly, I have received these same privileges, made most manifest in the placement of my home. The idea of inheritance is closely connected to the idea of heritage, and the rhetorics of inheritance/heritage reveal the often undercurrent of the (white) status quo at play. As James Chase Sanchez says in an article about the language of white supremacy, "White people camouflage "heritage" to refer to their specific histories and memories" (52). Inheritance, like heritage, is stated as a signifier to a particular group while feeling harmless to the general public. My definition of inheritance then, is unspoken, unacknowledged, subtly privileged rhetoric that leads to a haunting. I therefore engage in subtly feminist rhetoric to claim my inheritance, both in the subtle privileges of this home and the subtly feminist act of running this home.

For Valuable Consideration Paid: The Methodology

My dissertation, written just a few years ago, wrestled with my role as a white woman in an interracial community group working to install a plaque telling a more complete story of a lynching in our area. Tense conversations, questioned choices, and understanding my own role led to the enactment and study of storied community listening, which I define as an embedded approach to listening that involves critical reflection with oneself, through the use of story, and an active, reciprocal approach to working alongside a community (Powell, forthcoming). This approach was drawn from a critical examination of my positionality as a white female scholar not inherently "from" the place I was writing about. In this article, then, I practice a new kind of storied community listening as I engage in the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance. Part of this tracing, this telling, is to hear the subtly feminist rhetoric both of the fellow privileged white women that have lived within these walls, my ghosts, and the ways in which these subtly feminist acts have perpetuated the injustices of others, the hauntings we are left with.

I want to explore, dive into, and reckon with the privilege that added our name to the deed, to the long list of dreamers, doers, and toilers on this stretch of land. To do so, I first and foremost must listen. My introduction to the concept of listening came from Krista Ratcliffe, who explicitly grapples with the idea of rhetorical listening as a white person. Ratcliffe defines rhetorical listening as "a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (109). Unlike rhetorical listening, community listening involves a collaboration *with* the community, not for or to any given community. In

a special issue of the *Community Literacy Journal,* Fishman and Rosenberg address the idea of community listening, or "a literacy practice that involves deep, direct engagement with individuals and groups working to address urgent issues in everyday life, issues anchored by long histories and complicated by competing interpretations as well as clashing modes of expression" (1). My "community" in this project is the legacy, the inheritance, of women who have lived in this home before me. One of many privileges I share with my ghosts is that it is very easy to find and name them, to place them in our community's history. They exist on public records, in the deeds and mortgages that are still carefully preserved by our County Auditor's office.

What I ultimately want to grapple with, to claim, is the pervasive whiteness, privilege, and false sense of objectivity that make up the story of my house. I know that my story is listed in technical documents, but how do I find it? And where/how do I feminize such "objective" rhetoric in subtle ways? While story has its roots in indigenous rhetorics, I am perhaps most drawn to the idea of story through the concept of counterstory used by critical race theory scholars. Aja Martinez defines counterstory as "the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies" (3). The disruption of a mere string of deeds and wills and marriage licenses allows for an examination of where and how oppressed people have pushed against this oppression and have continued to thrive alongside the building of my home and the construction of my community's legacy. This project, then, is inspired by learning from these scholars' work with counterstory and building on the ways technical communicators have begun to weave story (Petersen and Walton; Haas) to offer a version of storied community listening that is attuned to what's "not said" in the rhetoric of technical documents. Reading between the lines, engaging in storied community listening to claim my inheritance, provides an avenue for knowing, encountering, and uncovering subtle privileges and subtly feminist rhetoric.

Step 1: Authenticate the Last Will and Testament

What is the following "real property" in question? And who gets to authenticate it?

The first step in claiming one's inheritance, according to the all-knowing Google, is to authenticate your will ("Inheritance Funding"). Authenticating your will, or proving its legitimacy, allows it to pass for objective/factual/truthful. Therefore, the first step I must take is engaging with these "objective truths," "facts" that we know from the deeds, wills, mortgages, and other documentation considered legitimate or credible throughout history. In the settler history/ghost story telling of our land, our plat became designated for home life in 1875, when Grant H. Burrows became the president of the Park Place Land and Building Company, and worked to develop the farm into a subdivision. According to the local history of our town, "Park Place was designed to give people of moderate means 'the opportunity to purchase homes on easy terms and within their financial ability'" (Guckenberger 40). One of those people of moderate means appears to be Lydia Thorton, who is listed as the only name on a deed of purchase from Edward Allen in 1875. Is the fact that a single woman is listed on the deed an example of subtly feminist rhetoric? How was it even possible, in 1875, to have a single woman's name on the deed? These objective records then, are not enough to authenticate the

kind of claim I have, the legacy of my inheritance. True authentication comes from critically imagining, storying, the ways in which this one mark on a deed is perhaps its own subtly feminist act. But let's keep going.

Lydia Thorton sold it to Samuel Goodman in August 1882. Though she is still listed as the primary, her husband John Thorton is also listed next to her on this 1882 deed. Samuel Goodman married Ida Wilder on June 21st, 1883, so perhaps they built a home together on this land, though I've yet to find the records for such. The couple had two children, one in 1886 and one in 1890, some of the many children that have shaped their sense of the world on my soil. The Goodman family kept the house until 1906, when they sold "All of lot numbered 65 (65) upon a plat of subdivision of Park Place, as made by the Park Place Land and Building Company" to Lena Stolz (*Hamilton County Deed Book* 943, 237). Lena Stolz originally owned all of Lot 65, which covers the first 200 feet of Winton Avenue from Springfield Pike (heading West). The 1906 City Directory, the year that Lena Stolz came into ownership of our land, features a riveting opening section entitled "Story of a Year's Progress" (Williams). Writers of the text tell the reader that reading this review "cannot be other than pleasant reading to everyone interested in the city's welfare and progress" (6). The overview concludes with updates on the growth of school systems, ending by saying, "In every way—in population, in business and in prosperity—the year has been one in which every Cincinnatian can take just pride" (10). There is a clear rhetoric of progress here, citing alongside the journey of my house the growth of the city. The subtle privilege, however, lies in the inclusion of words like "pleasant reading to everyone interested," or "in every way." This subtle privilege is coded, as most privilege often is, in the haunting rhetoric of whiteness.

Such subtle privilege is found not just in Cincinnati's history, but Wyoming's as well. Geo. Buzz Guckenberger, who wrote "Wyoming: A Retrospective" as part of a celebration of the 125th anniversary of the city's founding, has an equally uplifting take on the prospects of the city during these two formative years for my land. In January 1906, he cites an advertisement for a circus in Wyoming that said "there are thousands just a few miles away who have never heard of us. That some of these may know that we are alive; that our town is the most beautiful suburb of the great City of Cincinnati; and that we ourselves may have the opportunity to renew old acquaintances and form new" (64). One can imagine the kinds of acquaintances Lena might have renewed, the new ones she might have formed. And we can infer that these thousands that have not heard of Wyoming are the oppressed, invisible citizens of the city. Lena then, as she worked and loved on our land, was likely part of perpetuating these subtle privileges, even as she worked to give me "the most beautiful suburb" that I now inherit.

Based on the 1910 city directory, Lena and her husband John owned a grocery store very close to where our home is. Like many of the names in this history, Lena and John are both first-generation Americans. According to 1910 census records, their fathers were both born in Germany. In 1910 John was listed as a "teamster" and Lena a homemaker. The Stolzes had 4 children; 3 daughters (Lula, Margaret, Alice) and one son (John Jr.) ("Ancestry.com")). Here again, the records are not enough to "authenticate" the inheritance of this home. Lena is a single woman listed on the deed, a rhetorical artifact that points to her own

subtly feminist act. And though census records reveal her German roots, they can't tell us of the struggles she and her husband faced as first-generation Americans. Corinna Horst used her dissertation to explore the lives and culture of German immigrant women. She writes that:

> In Cincinnati German immigrant women lived in complex environments of multiple 'Gemeinschaften.' Rather than 'just' being daughters, wives, or mothers, German immigrant women were members of multiple spheres and communities. They were friends, neighbors, helpers, workers, associational members, congregation members, and Cincinnatians. Their daily lives were characterized by negotiating the various communities of which they were a part; their identities within different "Gemeinschaften" were not mutually exclusive but co-existed, further enhancing the constantly changing nature of the entire ethnic community. Closeness, common experiences, and shared interests in the immediate environment, brought German immigrant women together. Independence and interdependence shaped their lives. (Horst 1)

Horst portrays for us the ways in which German womanhood was cast as industrious, immutable, and pleasant. Reading between the lines and enacting a critical reflection with myself, as my storied community listening approach suggests, I can see the impossibilities that my ghosts faced– to claim a new world, to serve as the helm of myriad communities, to navigate what being a woman means in those trying times. These "authentic records" can't show us the struggles of a homemaker, a homemaker with four children, trying to make money and raise kids right, two of the same stressors that kept me awake last night. To engage in the subtly feminist act of interrogating this rhetoric, then, requires story.

In the time that Lena had our entire property, she did a few things with it. In 1921, she sold part of it to "H and M Woebkenberg" (*Hamilton County Deed Book* 44, 338). Our current lot begins 150 feet into Winton Ave from Springfield Pike, and extends 50 feet along it. Lena sold Herman and Marguerite Woebkenberg a portion of that portion of the lot, where it appears they built a home using "Glendale Building & Land Company" mortgage in 1922 (*Hamilton County Deed Book* 1141, 377). In 1924, she conveyed "The East 100 feet and the West 25 feet…and being the same premise (less a strip fronting 75 feet on the South side of Winton Avenue) for therefull depth of said lot, lying 100 ft west on the east line of said lot"-- basically, everything else– to her husband, John L Stolz (*Hamilton County Deed Book* 44, 340). Interestingly, this made him the full and sole owner, perhaps a rhetorical artifact of subtle privilege falling back to the man, or head of the house. Alice, the youngest daughter of the Stolz's, married Karl Goertemiller on September 30th, 1925. Likely in preparation for their wedding, John and Lena sold part of Lot 65 to Karl in June of that year. H&M Woebkenberg sold the other part to Karl in September of that year (*Hamilton County Deed Book* 44, 340). This is when our plot as it stands was ultimately created, so it can be presumed that this is when and where our home was built. Karl took out a mortgage with the Glendale Building and Land Company in November of that year (*Hamilton County Mortgage Book* 1303, 53), and is listed as living at our address, with Alice, in the 1930 Census ("Ancestry.com").

Authenticating my claim to my inheritance, through these primary and secondary sources, reveals that the language surrounding my home is part of a long story of subtle privileges, my legacy one of many women who have lived, homed, labored, and loved within these walls, in this city of progress, in a country of constant change. In trying to authenticate this inheritance, I use storied community listening to discern the subtle ways that the wills, the deeds, even the secondary sources are not enough. My named ghosts—Lydia, Ida, Lena, Marguerite, and Alice—are remembered in gendered and oppressed ways—the fact that a sole woman on the deed is mysterious and unusual, the flippant (or finite) role of "homemaker" throughout the census, and the connection of land to marriage, as was the impetus for the four walls I now write in. I'm haunted by not just these women, but the larger subtle privileges that previous owners of my home have held. I've inherited this subtle privilege, and I join in the rhetoric of progress. The subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance, however, shows a deep well of oppression for others that is not quiet or subtle at all.

Step 2: Appoint the Executor

What claim do we, and the "remainder to the survivor of them" have on this land?

The second step in claiming one's inheritance is to appoint an executor. For me, this appointment has come in occupying this home in this privileged suburb. We gained access to this home by knowing our realtor through a friend, who knew the homeowners, who sold it to us off the market. When I see people around town hoping to get into Wyoming, they still all say some version of "how did you land in Wyoming???" From the Facebook posts I see looking for homes for sale in Wyoming to the veiled racism in the picturesque attitudes the town takes of who "should" live here (see my opening story), engaging in the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance means examining my role as executor, my legacy.

At any given point in my home's history, I can find people who have not simply been on a similar path as me, but been on my exact same path out of our door and into our city. I see, through our placement and positioning in the city then and now, the subtle privileges we hold. At age 26, Karl and Alice Goertemiller were married and Karl took out a mortgage to build our home. At age 30 and 31, the 1930 census reports that they have no children, and Alice stayed at home while Karl worked as a chemist at a soap plant ("Ancestry.com"). How might Alice have viewed her circumstances, her role, spending so much time within the walls in which I still find myself? It is clear in diving into the history of my quaint suburb that Alice Stolz Goertemiller likely fell on the side of privilege. Despite her rise from a young spouse into adulthood and its limitations, her confusing place as a first-generation German American and her likely struggles navigating the sacred yet monotonous work of managing our home, the advantages she was given enabled her to benefit from the subtle privileges that I still feel as I traverse my creaky floorboards today.

Part of claiming my inheritance, authenticating my legitimacy as executor, means finding the honor and the struggle in what my ghosts have faced. The subtly feminist act of claiming this inheritance, howev-

er, is to see the inherent ways in which others have been left out of my home's story. The renters who haven't had the institutional wealth or privilege to purchase. The laborers who added the foundation, laid the brick, and fixed the roof. The sweat that poured from the guys who moved our furniture in, diagnosed our broken dryer, or synced up the outlets and light switches in our basement. The Miami, Shawnee, Hopewell and Adena peoples who lived, homed, and dreamed here on what might have been, what is, sacred ground, before being forcibly removed. Each and every one of the people I draw from, namely the female scholars of color I continually seek for inspiration, remind me of the privileges that I'm afforded because I'm white (Martinez; Lorde). Because I'm able-bodied. Because I'm binary in my gender identity. Because I'm partnered and therefore financially stable. Because even without my partner, I have the financial safety net of my family. So perhaps (white, middle-class) subtle feminism means not only bringing to light the invisible, but un-invisibilizing my race. In "Sick Woman Theory," Hedva admonishes that "Whiteness is what allows for such oblivious neutrality: it is the premise of blankness, the presumption of the universal" (Hedva). What these old texts are not bringing to light is an awareness of race, an acknowledgement of the privilege that exists by being a white immigrant, even alongside the challenges that come with being a female German immigrant.

As I looked through the secondary sources cited in the process of authenticating my will, the idea of race and inclusion does not come up among the hopeful rhetoric of progress. Though there is a brief mention of "transients," both of these city directories essentially paint a picture of a fully inclusive, welcoming, and enriching space. Other, firsthand accounts of "Cincinnati's Colored Citizens," however, suggest otherwise. As Karl and Alice were, likely, working to construct their dream home, Dabney tells the story of a community nowhere close to equal citizenship. Dabney describes his work in saying, "Have strayed far from the cold, formal, stereotyped historical volume in efforts to show the soul as well as the body of a people, who are so little known, so little understood and, for so many years, so much oppressed because of such misunderstanding" (5). And let's not forget, what the records don't show, what was happening in the land of Karl and Alice's grandparents at that time—the rise of Nazi power, Nazi regime, and the likely anti-German sentiment they were certain to face in this new home, sentiment that can't be seen on a census outside of the category "birthplace of father." And while these texts themselves aren't instances of subtly feminist rhetoric, it is my hope that including them alongside my subtle privileges can be—making space, finding a pocket, for resistance to the common narrative.

So alongside their hardships and outside of our home lies a long and brutal history of Indigenous dispossession, settler colonialism, housing segregation, and, even today, under the guise of inclusion, a sort of color-blind racism or abstract liberalism in my small "progressive" town (Bonilla-Silva). Where are the stories of others left out, and what does that mean to my own home legacy? Part of listening and writing this subtly feminist act, then, means challenging myself to contextualize my own story alongside the collective story of settler feminism. To declare myself an appropriate executor, then I need to remember the ways in which, even in our invisibleness, my ghosts and I have managed, continue to manage, to invisibilize others.

Step 3: Locate the Deceased Assets and Determine Their Value

What is the weight of "all of which this conveyance is made?"

The third step in claiming one's inheritance is to locate the deceased's assets and work to determine their value. You now know the authentic, credible version of my house's history, and I've shared the connection, the claim, I have to my ghosts that allow me to serve as a legitimate executor. To practice the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance, I need to read between the lines of these archival documents and determine the value, the weight, of these assets and this inheritance that I'm left with. As the census records reveal, Lena and Alice are both listed as unemployed, or homemakers. Therefore, we can discern that there is a lack of opportunity for them, relegated instead to the work of the home, the work that continues to bring me so much joy as well as haunt me. Part of engaging in this subtly feminist act is not simply to lambast my house ghosts and I for the privileges we face, but to consider the small ways in which their resistance has opened a path for me. I hope to consider what Bratta and Powell have cautioned me to do–draw theoretical frameworks from my own contexts, in order to draw some important cultural touchstones. Drawing out the white, German, immigrant, feminized, oppressed nature of the opportunities of these women (as is made evident in the lack of acknowledgement in their technical documents), shows me their value, their struggle, the weight of this claim I've inherited. Obviously, the most clear claim I have to these women is the physical location of the home, which is after all the focus of this story. And as a part of this subtly feminist act, I need to use storied community listening to explore what the importance of being at home might do to my own shift in my practices and sense of self.

As I read through and seek out my home's history, I glimpse subtly feminist rhetoric within the language of our home, and wonder if my ghosts faced the same. I'm getting hung up on making progress on this project because I'm constantly weighed down by the traditional duties I could imagine of Lena and Alice and Lydia and others who have labored on this land. An hour-long delay in getting started because my toddler needed to do everything herself this morning. Working in a coffee shop next to a daycare I have the privilege to send my kids to, because I have to pick the baby up early to diagnose what I know is another ear infection. Remembering in the middle of my research that I need to add applesauce to the grocery list, or that it's time to change the laundry. In my current life, I struggle to juggle the cooking, the washing, the management of the household, and my family as a whole. But even in that struggle, I see a sort of honor in the work of the home, and the very act of honoring that work as a kind of subtle feminism.

Seeing the importance of this labor requires an attunement to the spatial rhetorical power of the home which, like women, has often been undervalued for the driving force it is. Enoch attends to the spatial rhetorics of the home, which she defines as "the multimodal ways through which spaces gain meaning. They are the material elements that create the space, as well as the pictorial, embodied, displayed, emotive, and discursive understandings that define what a space is and what it should be" (5). Her exploration of women's relationship as they navigated space outside the home answers the call from scholars to view ma-

terial realities through the lens that we view written communication– power, context, and the ways in which our bodies change the space and give it meaning. I argue further that a focus on the work that (white, middle-class) women have done inside the home can exist in its own realm of spatial rhetorical power, its own subtly feminist act.

Though I am not the first-generation American that many of my house ghosts were, I work to instill our value system with my girls as their worlds expand and they learn to respond to them. Horst notes that early German immigrant women, likely around the time of Lydia and Lena, "had a central role as keeper of the house and caretaker of the family. She was to be servant to her husband, children, and the ethnic community which did not fail to glorify the woman as 'Hausfrau' (housewife), 'Mutter,' (mother), and 'Jungfrau' (young, woman, virgin)" (169). In this way, the German immigrant as housewife is seen as essential to the home, almost to the point of being patronized. I recognize that there is often a romanticizing that happens in this traditional image of (white, middle-class) women and the roles in which she can fulfill. And yet, at the risk of adding to the patronizing, it is this very work– the material elements that create a space– that built a foundation for future generations to advance, adjust, and contribute to the life in Cincinnati I now get to enjoy.

Shifting to the lens of spatial power is further legitimized when viewed through a historical context, particularly at the time that Alice Goertemiller and her husband would have been settling into the home I now share with their ghosts. Social politics shifted at the end of World War 1, as men returned home and needed to gain their posts and their power back by reasserting a women's role in the home. This shift in role, and a reassertion from society to put women back in the home, can be seen in the rhetoric used in women's magazines and manuals. Historian Ruth Cowan brings legitimacy to the power of this domestic work through a compelling narrative of household technologies, *More Work for Mothers,* that ultimately argues these technologies have created the domestic dynamics we are left with. Cowan writes that these handbooks suggested that "housework was to be thought of no longer as a core but, rather, an expression of the housewife's personality and her affection for her family…" (177). She asserts that "We can also understand why these women continued to believe not just that their place was in their homes but that the work that they did there had enormous value. Small wonder then that these women, and their descendants, accepted the yoke of women's work in the home and viewed the modern tools with which they did it as liberating, rather than oppressive, agents" (191). White, middle-class women like Alice and others who washed dishes and folded clothes in the same places I do now were socialized, through these rhetorical artifacts of not-so-subtle privilege, into revering their role as housewife. Such reverence continues in the guilt I feel for not taking all of my time to complete those tasks today. For despite my best efforts to split the load with my partner, I struggle heavily with (white, middle-class) guilt around "neglecting" some element of my not-so-spotless home, "outsourcing" my childcare to licensed professionals, and warming up leftovers instead of cooking a fresh meal each night.

It is true that this domestic work of maintaining a home is in fact part of the very evaluation of assets

that I must explore in claiming my inheritance. And it's also true that this work is part of a larger, more expansive look at the subtle ways in which we women of my home have ignored the larger issues of privilege, colonialism, and white-washing that remain part of my community today. By more deeply understanding the competing rhetorics of a kind of worship of housework at play, we can begin to understand where my house ghosts might have begun to gather a real and true sense of themselves in this labor. Listening to the glory in this labor, even though it is often romanticized, allows me to more deeply understand the way that this domestic labor is a kind of material rhetoric, and this honoring is itself a subtly feminist act. And so I am grateful to my ghosts. They reveal the sacredness in this work. But I am also haunted by my ghosts. They remain right on the edges of what and who I need to be.

Step 4: Pay Debts

To acknowledge the signing thereof: Can debts ever really be paid?

To fully claim one's inheritance, one must pay the debts of those that left the will in the first place. On paper, this is as simple as taking those assets, assessing their worth, and redistributing them for justice. In practice, I've authenticated my claim to my home, and my role as executor. I've assessed the weight of this claim, but I haven't yet redistributed the value of the claim for others to enjoy.

This special issue is all about addressing "who or what is feminist enough." As a privileged white woman, I constantly ask myself this question of "enough." I'm white, so am I doing enough to acknowledge my race? I'm middle-class, so am I doing enough to maximize and use my financial privileges? And the list goes on. By practicing my ever-evolving practice of storied community listening, I hope to embed myself in the community, through the very work of being at home, to work toward accepting the invitation toward action. And yet, as you might have read throughout this work, I am weighed down by the guilt of it all. In engaging with the feminist ethos that argues for equal access and consideration for all, I've seen many instances of the ways in which white femininity, often stereotyped as subdued or subtle in itself, gets priority over non-white voices. Part of this story, then, means sitting in the tension between technical communicator and storyteller, between oppressed and oppressor, between scholar and mother, between guilt and action. Framing these tensions, through this story, is my enactment of subtle feminism that allows me to claim my inheritance and engage, draw from, and change my behaviors and the legacy I choose to leave within and beyond this home.

By leaning into the heritage in this home– the German women, the whiteness, the privilege of living in a suburb, the privileges of having a home to keep– I believe I am practicing part of what it means to engage in the subtly feminist act of claiming my inheritance. Feminists, feminine people, feminist practices have all taught me the importance and the power of imagining a new way of thinking that isn't there (Hill Collins; Royster and Kirsch). So what if my way of listening is to lean into and honor the practices and the sacrifices that have been made in my very home? The way to prove this work matters is not through the

official histories, but in these quiet, lived moments. Not just in my literal home but in the domestic labor and sacrifice that have shaped my space as an educator and scholar. It is critical to honor the ephemeral motions and labor that I go through every day. I can't (and, if I'm honest, don't want to) change my social standing or the privileges I have been afforded. And yet guilt is about as unproductive of an emotion as there is. So I am working to vulnerably explore what it might mean to resist social location, or perhaps to press back against the historical weight it is clear I have been given.

Even as I honor those, however, I want to lean into the hauntings of this honor, this privilege to be in this home. In the most recent Octalog, Donnie Johnson Sackey asks us, "What correctives or calls for justice emerge from our research and telling of spatial histories? And what are our roles as researchers and teachers in supporting the work of spatial justice?" (329) In seeking to answer this question, I find my role as a researcher is to be myself—a feminist woman, a privileged mother, a white privileged homeowner—to listen to the subtly feminist rhetoric of this unassuming space—one home in one city in our region—and use story and personal reflection in order to move closer to justice. This act, then, is how I practice a kind of subtle feminism, a subversion of the inheritance that is so subtle one might not even notice their own responsibility within it.

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(Re)Turning to the Seams of Composing as a Feminist Orientation

Abigail H. Long

Abstract: Taking up what Paula Cameron calls a seamful ethic, this article invites readers to consider how a repeated small, feminist act—a turn to the seams of our composing processes—can illuminate sites of friction in the writing process where writers can renegotiate access. The author explores how a feminist seamful ethic might intervene in our understanding of the formative networks of writing partners from which our texts emerge, following Laura Micciche's research on writing acknowledgements. Sharing embodied insights from an ongoing embroidery project, the author engages embroidery as one method to probe the seams of the composing apparatus as a disabled scholar. Attention to the seams of composing creates opportunities for subtle yet meaningful feminist interventions in our orientations toward knowledge-making.

Tags: ethic of seamfulness, material rhetorics, material methods, disability studies, labor, writing process, friction

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Welcome, readers. In the spirit of a feminist *ethic of seamfulness* (Cameron), this text is stitched together with a running thread of narrative autoethnographic reflections. In the italicized snippets, I share glimpses into the seams of my own embodied composing apparatus—the assemblage of entangled materials, experiences, and partners that shape my writing process. I compose my essay in this way to demonstrate how a recurring small, subtle feminist act—a slight turn towards the seams of our writing processes—can accumulate into a feminist epistemological re-orientation that invites disabled ways of knowing. By threading my process throughout this published piece, I am acknowledging the precarity of composing in community from a vulnerable body, writing against seamlessness as an exclusionary disciplinary value, and prompting you to turn with me to the seams again and again. I invite you to follow these threads with me.

Introduction

I compose with my family and our histories: with my mom, my Mucka, my Oma.

As a young girl, I first learned to sew with my mom and my grandmas, Mucka and Oma, collaborating on small projects together, before moving on to sewing next to them. I learned to mend, to extend the life of socks, pants, shirts; to reinforce buttons, repair holes, restitch hems. I learned to look at everything around me as full of potential re-making—to see a snag, a missing button, a burst seam as laden with the possibility of repair. Over time, coupled with my experiences of dynamic disability, these quotidian material practices have reoriented the way I make meaning beyond cloth, recon-

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figuring my understanding of the writing process to be a study of seams. This orientation towards the seams of composing has become central to my scholarly work as I compose my way into the field. As a cumulative practice, this cyclical reorientation towards the seams of composing opens space for feminist reimaginings of access in the writing process. Identifying these seams and the friction within them allows me to negotiate ways of composing that draw on the resources I do have available—including my embodied disability insights, experiences of crip time, and attention to the entangled network in which I compose. In this article, I invite you to consider how a repeated small, feminist act—a turn to the seams of our composing processes—can illuminate sites of friction in the writing process where writers can renegotiate access and invite insights from crip composing practices.

Despite efforts to cultivate inclusive practices and acknowledge the personal, our field continues to privilege "seamlessness," a disciplinary value that elevates polished products and obscures the struggles of the composing process. In the competitive corridors of the academy, presenting polished, seamless prose has been one way that scholars—including many feminist rhetoricians—have been able to gain traction and authority. In the name of "professionalism," we are trained to "tidy our texts" (Ahmed, *Living* 9)—to hide the seams of our thinking, writing, and selves. These "seamless" texts can be incredibly persuasive, artful, and resonant; often, they prove quite accessible for readers given their conciseness and clarity. However, in aspiring towards seamlessness, we may unintentionally obscure the tracks of our thoughts and present our ideas as complete and unrevisable. Furthermore, in decontextualizing "polished writing" from its messy formative process, we risk neglecting feminist commitments to critically attend to the ways power dynamics, labor distribution, material resources, and ableist expectations for legibility impact the writing process. While this may not register as a problem for many enculturated in the field, this performance of seamlessness can disproportionately impact emerging disabled scholars who are searching for ways to sustainably compose their way into the field. The process for tailoring a scholarly identity for disabled bodyminds—for those whose bodies, experiences, and insights misfit within the expectations of academia—is routinely occluded (Obermark). How are emerging disabled scholars to find ways to gain traction when the vestiges of the composing process are obliterated from existing model texts, occluding much of the underlying labor, time, influences, friction, and possible resources? As we enter

I cannot
write about
composing or
rhetoric or
disability or
anything without
bringing my body.
I write with and
despite all my
former selves.
I write with
dreams of my
future selves,
coveting what they
have learned,
yearning for their
guidance,
flinching at their
pain, eager
to become.

the field, how can we negotiate for our particular access needs if the choice points in the composing process—the seams—remain unidentified, if the friction of composing is assumed to be uniformly "manageable" for every bodymind? How might identifying these seams be a small, subtle feminist act?

I write between
heating pad
and ice pack,
between graduate
student stipend
and bill, between
prepping to teach
and grading,
between
insomnia and
exhaustion.
I write with hives,
with headaches,
with hunger.

Although the seams of our composing processes may seem insignificant at first glance, they are rife with epistemological activity and feminist possibilities for re-making the field in more inclusive ways. These seams mark the discrete moments where we negotiate friction and make choices in the writing process; tucked within them are the "hows" of composing. Some of these seams are readily acknowledged steps of the writing process—e.g., conceptualizing an idea, developing a methodological approach, drafting an argument, exploring existing scholarship, and revising a draft. Yet, when we take up a perspective informed by feminist, material, and disability rhetorics, we recognize that many other seams of the writing process are less commonly accounted for, perhaps because they are stigmatized, disproportionately impact disabled writers, or are not considered particularly legible within academic settings. For example, in my experiences as a disabled writer, the following seams of the process are much more demanding than those mentioned above: doing access labor (Cedillo), navigating the "ambient uncertainty" of disabled experiences within academia (Price "Precarity"), working with "bad feelings" about writing (Micciche), managing pain and other symptoms of dynamic disabilities, processing the emotions that accompany the feedback cycle, navigating fluctuations in executive functioning, advocating for the time that is needed to write sustainably, adequately nourishing my bodymind throughout the writing process, balancing my commitments to friends in my network of care, and managing the labor of concurrent domestic demands. These latter seams of the composing process are of particular concern for feminist scholars who seek to account for the material needs of disabled writers and inequitable distributions of labor. Though this shift in awareness may be a subtle one at first, becoming a student of the seams of composing—of the cumulative impact of the small yet agential "stitches" within the processes—can reorient our understanding of the composing process to attend to embodiment while opening more supported space for disabled ways of knowing to emerge within feminist rhetorical scholarship.

Expanding on Paula Cameron's call for a "seamful ethic," in this article, I focus on the ways this ethic can prompt a feminist epistemological reorientation towards the seams of our composing processes. Instead of dismissing the writing process as a normative "given," I invite feminist rhetoricians to engage with disability insights about the seams of composing as sites for negotiating access. This small reorientation is a useful ethic for all feminist scholars because it reveals the subtle ways in which their own composing processes—and their expectations for that of peers, colleagues, and students—might be adjusted to resist ableist academic norms and, instead, support their embodied access needs. In this way, a seamful ethic can intervene in disciplinary pressure to perform seamlessness, an expectation which does not adequately account for disabled experiences of composing in crip spacetime and the accompanying negotiations of friction in the process. Below, I flesh out some ways a feminist ethic of seamfulness can expand our understanding of the writing process, connecting it to existing scholarship in feminist rhetorics, material rhetorics, and disability studies. Next, I turn to Laura Micciche's study of the genre of writing acknowledgements to understand how our field typically represents the networks of writing partners in which our texts are formed, noting the ways this genre often occludes the most friction-full seams of composing. Then, to further explore a seamful ethic, I write about engaging embroidery as method to probe the seams of my own composing apparatus, sharing disability insights from my ongoing project of embroidering my writing acknowledgements on a tote bag. I close with a call to feminist rhetoricians to attune to the seams of our processes, noting how this subtle shift in orientation can support the proliferation of crip composing practices.

I compose
with
frequent
snows
and the
occasional
Syracuse sun,
with blisters
on my heels
from walking
and on my
wrists
from typing.
I live and
stitch and
type with
calloused
fingers.

An Ethic of Seamfulness as Feminist Intervention

I write
to reach for the
unlanguaged edge
of my knowing.

In her 2012 piece in *Hypatia*, "'Curriculum Vitae': Embodied Ethics at the Seams of Intelligibility," Paula Cameron introduced an "ethic of seamfulness" as a means for examining the "(necessary) silences and foreclosures" within academic writing—foreclosures which academic genre conventions often enforce by devaluing the personal (423). Engaging with work by Judith Butler, Cameron uses this ethic to explore the implications of storying, analyzing, and crafting accounts of others' vulnerable embodied experiences, noting the complicated ways these accounts—and the academic conventions with which they are crafted—can simultaneously illuminate and perpetuate unintended harm through the clinical academic gaze and the pressure for

narrative coherence. Cameron invites feminist scholars to reconsider "the specter of academic authority within the context of intellectual and economic history: the author, the expert—whose voice and hands, both steady and unsteady, enact forceful modes of truth on the lives and bodies of real people" (431). Taking up a seamful ethic can reveal the complex active spaces between language and embodied experiences, between disciplinary polish and the processes of composing. Notably, Cameron takes care to demonstrate what she argues for through her writing craft: integrating excerpts of research materials with meta reflections on the writing process and critiques of the way complex texts (both written and embodied) are often flattened in academic spaces.

I write to gather incompletenesses, to bring what's absent into almost-view.

To appreciate the nuances of a feminist ethic of seamfulness, it is important to understand the materially-grounded framework of "seams." In sewing practices, a seam marks the place where two pieces of material are drawn together by a thread. A seam indicates a relationship, constructing a functional coalition across differences and joining two separate pieces into one. Paradoxically, a seam is a site of both vulnerability and strength—the seam creates a juncture between the two pieces and may resist tearing more than one piece of material alone, yet with the snip of a knot and the pull of a thread, it can be undone. A seam is constructed through a recursive pattern of stitches, threading back and forth between two materials to create an emergent third. A seam can be made, un-made, re-made—a seam is a site of agency (both past and potential). A seam is a liminal space of transformation, a space of nepantla (Anzaldúa). A seam is a site of negotiation, a space for small feminist acts. Threaded throughout our bodies, our clothing, and our built worlds, seams are ordinary, ubiquitous, and often overlooked—yet they are sites of significant activity, of possible feminist interventions.

I write to stitch together uncertainties, to bridge the unknown and the less unknown. I write to stick a handle onto concepts, to pull them in, to hug them tight as they reshape me.

Importantly, this project is not simply about sewing, unpicking, or showing seams, but rather about exploring the ways attention to the seams of our composing processes can transform our knowledge-making processes in feminist ways that are more inclusive of crip composing practices. Taking up Cameron's concept of a seamful ethic, we can explore the composing process as situated at the intersection of disability studies, feminist rhetorics, and material rhetorics. Through this lens, a seamful ethic is not simply about making the seams of our compositions visible and make the underlying process accessible; transparency is not the only dimension. Rather, seamfulness is about ethical commitments to recursiveness, responsivity, and relational accountability. It's about being a responsible steward of the avail-

I write with guidance from the editors of this special issue, Jessi and Tammie. I revise with thoughtful suggestions from anonymous peer reviewers, carrying their feedback into

and beyond
this article.
I shape this
publication with
Hannah's generous
production support.

able resources and being accountable to one's network of knowledge-making partners (including people, stories, and materials). To approach knowledge-making with a seamful ethic is to commit to being re-made again and again in relation to the entangled network beyond oneself. Seamfulness resists the static illusion of the "complete"—as an orientation, it tacks back and forth, subtly weaving between what seems known and what seems unknown, ever in-process, inviting feedback.

Furthermore, a feminist ethic of seamfulness is an approach to composition that turns to the seams of our processes as valuable sites for inquiry and insight that can transfer across composing modalities. My understanding of seamfulness is simultaneously textured, material, conceptual, and tied to disabled ways of knowing. Learning from Elisabeth L. Miller's disability materiality approach and Sonia Arellano's theorizing of quilting as method, the framework of seamfulness chews at false binaries between concept and material, process and product, matter and mattering. Attending to the agential seams of the composing process enables us to grapple with the material, ethical, and temporal implications of these choices while centering the disabled bodymind as knowledge maker (Nusbaum and Lester; Price, *Mad at School*; Yergeau). Teasing out the seams of the composing apparatus allows us to more thoroughly account for the ways friction shapes knowledge-making processes (Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*) and to make small and subtle feminist interventions.

I write with
every student I've
ever worked with,
continuing to learn
from them. I am
a student of their
stories, their many
ways of composing,
their diligent
questioning
of prescribed
methods.

When my mind
tries to make a run
for it, my body
tugs my attention
back, chronic pain
too creative to
ignore.
My bodymind
won't let me forget
my bodymind.

As feminist scholars have noted, the theoretical emerges from and feeds back into bodies; no methodological or ethical commitment, therefore, is unaccountable to the living (whether currently, past, or future). Because of the entanglement of access, disability, and ethics of care, feminist scholarship is foundational to my approach to seamfulness. Central to a seamful ethic is a feminist understanding of responsivity: a recursive practice of seeking out, integrating, and responding to unfolding information. As Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch write, feminist rhetorical practices do "not permit us simply to tack on an extra layer of concerns as an afterthought"—in other words, as a one-time retrofit. Rather, enacting responsive feminist rhetorical practices "compel[s scholars] to recast our whole ways of thinking and doing and to situate ourselves more deliberately in the company of others as we reach for more-comprehensive and more-nimble views, attitudes, and expectations" (39). My understanding of seamfulness is further informed by Jessica Restaino's "intimacy as methodology," an ap-

proach which pairs well with qualitative disability studies methodologies to integrate the reflective and the analytical (Nusbaum and Lester).

When theorizing about the affordances of a seamful ethic, I'm not arguing that everyone must show the seams of their work all the time—certainly, showing all the seams of one's process at all times presents its own set of accessibility complications. Rather, I'm proposing a small shift in orientation towards epistemic responsibility which includes a willingness to re-examine the seams of our work when prompted—especially when faced with new insights, experiences, and feedback from people who experience heightened precarity through their embodied experiences of disability, racialization, indigeneity, sexuality, gender, socioeconomic positioning, and systems of colonial violence. Taking up a recursive orientation towards our composing seams is one way to "take responsibility for one's own writing" not as "something one owns," but rather "to be justly responsive to something one has created"—to be willing to revise and recontextualize one's work within a developing, responsive understanding (Pohlhaus 47). As a relational and epistemological approach, an ethic of seamfulness can help feminist rhetoricians resist perpetuating the white possessive move (Moreton-Robinson) of claiming "ownership" of knowledge and settling on a "certainty"; instead, a seamful ethic allows for contextualizing one's work as a living attempt embedded within a community patchwork of meaning-making that respects the abundant ways of knowing outside a specific Western academic tradition (Kimmerer; Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey; Tachine and Nicolazzo; Todd). A call to seamfulness is a call to resist severing one's work from the web of other people's labor in which it has emerged and the communal knowledge-making context in which it has been nourished. Over time, this small, subtle shift in orientation can equip us for more "bold" feminist acts of solidarity by reshaping our posture towards knowledge-making, community, and accountability.

I write from
a white settler
body with
borrowed words
and shared texts
on stolen land.
I write from a
legacy of not-right
relations.
I write within a
chorus of violently
inflicted colonial
silences.

Tracing the Composing Apparatus

I write with two
computer monitors,
with pragmatic yet
grudging trust in
cloud storage.
My digital writing
scrapes the earth.
I stretch my
awareness and find
it suddenly
close—the
cumulative carbon
emissions from
my open tabs,
my powered screens.
I switch
to dark mode,
reducing lit pixels.
My headache
intensifies.

In order to enact this small, subtle feminist shift in our orientation toward the seams of composing, we must identify these seams and the ways we are patterning our work within our composing apparatus—the assemblage of intra-active patterns, sources, experiences, histories, influences, and structures that shape our knowledge production. As Karen Barad argues, "apparatuses are specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetimematter as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming" (142). An apparatus is not neutral; rather, it is a vibrant assemblage which intra-acts with the matter and knowledge it structures, blurrily entangled with the human subject. If we are being made and remade through our writing, then we should consider the subtle ways in which a feminist orientation might intervene—where noticing the friction of composing might lead to a choice to rest, to seek support, to integrate some of our vulnerability into the text. Notably, Barad points out that an apparatus may be most apparent to us at the point where it breaks down—where the threads loosen, the edges fray. If we're not actively looking for the seams of our process, we may only notice them when they split apart unexpectedly—yet this breakdown may become apparent quickly to disabled writers with complex experiences of friction in the writing process, lending them insights into it.

Soon after I began my doctoral studies, my own composing apparatus began to fall apart. The academic patterns that had shaped my thus-far "successful" approach to coursework (e.g., assigned readings, weekly reading responses, class discussions, etc.) no longer worked for me as I embarked on larger projects. As a neurodivergent person living with chronic illnesses, I had scraped together ways to somewhat self-accommodate for the first part of the term, relying on a text-to-voice app to narrate assigned texts aloud while I lay in bed sewing, crocheting, or embroidering—a process which helps me to encode memory while reducing my chronic pain. As final project deadlines approached and my attempts at self-accommodation no longer matched the scale of demands I faced, I began to wonder: how do disabled scholars do this? Is anyone else here writing from bed (Piepzna-Samarasinha; Anzaldúa)? How can I compose my ideas, experiences, and engagement with others in a legible long-form way when the expected patterns no longer support me, when the friction I encounter overwhelms my composing apparatus? To whom can I turn for models of disabled ways of knowledge-making?

I write with
every way
I've ever written,
trying to write my
way toward
newer, gentler
ways.
I compose
with questions,
with a yearning
to write together,
to nourish our
disability insights
in community.

As Mara Mills and Rebecca Sanchez explore in their recent edited collection, *Crip Authorship*, a writer's composing apparatus is shaped by their individual experiences of disability. Disability shapes the ways we move through the world—the ways we navigate physical spaces, grapple with concepts, and relate to the assistive technologies that surround us. As a result, disability reconfigures the friction a writer encounters in the writing process, whether it be from experiencing chronic pain, physical symptoms, nervous system dysregulation, clashes between crip time and imposed deadlines, or other barriers to shaping and inscribing ideas on the page. Crip composing methods can lend access to disability insights about the seams of the writing process. For me, my experiences of disability have tuned my awareness of the ways my bodymind encounters friction in space, time, and knowledge-making, reshaping the ways I make meaning in the world. At the seams of composing, these negotiations of friction can become examples of what Arseli Dokumacı calls "microactivist affordances," which are "disabled people's micro, ongoing, and (often) ephemeral acts of world-building" which "transform disabled people's everyday lives into pockets of site-specific performances" (493). In these small pockets of creative composing negotiation, disabled writers approach knowledge-making sideways, composing "otherwise" with the methods that are accessible. These negotiations of access may seem small or insignificant to those reading a draft; however, for the disabled writer, they can be make or break, facilitating or hindering the composing process. Learning from these disability insights about composing, a feminist ethic of seamfulness involves tailoring the ways we compose to the access needs we have rather than attempting to force a "fit" into the expected methods.

I write with you in mind, dear reader. I can't yet see your face, and you can't see mine. I write with the hope of connecting with you, of hearing your thoughts, of learning from you. I write with gratitude for your time and attention.

Writing Acknowledgements as a Site for Seamfulness

How are scholars articulating their composing networks, and what is included in such claims? One place these networks are partially documented is, of course, the writing acknowledgements genre within published works. In Acknowledging Writing Partners, Micciche investigates the ways writing acknowledgements serve "as a site where authors store information about writing partnerships" (25). While on its face this genre claims to be a way of acknowledging networks of influence, it in fact is often a performance of obfuscation due to the pressures of publishers, power dynamics, and genre/form constraints. As Stephanie L. Kerschbaum notes, the tendency to disembody the scholarly writing process means that "we elide critical elements that shape emergent knowledge as well as possibilities for per-

I write with, through, and around pain. Again and again, my body reminds me. The labor of writing is written into my body.

ception and coming-to-know others" (141). Micciche finds most published writing acknowledgements to overwhelmingly emphasize "good feelings" over "bad feelings," with only infrequent references to disability or illness. Instead of being a site of seamfulness, printed writing acknowledgements are often perfunctory, both "constantly overlooked by scholars of writing and rhetoric…and scorned…by readers and critics alike" (27). The writing acknowledgements section is a type of performed archive, the potential of which is constricted by its expected genre conventions, intended audience (or lack thereof), and alphabetic textual demands. Every archive is teeming with seams, as is every performance—stitched together and pulled taut to obscure tacit decision-making processes and exclusions.

Stitching myself together is a full-time job; I stitch this text together in the seams.

As Micciche's research demonstrates, a writer's composing apparatus expands far beyond what is commonly published in the "writing acknowledgements" section of a scholarly work; it includes people (supportive and otherwise), affect, environment, time, embodied experience, sensory input, material resources, and complex histories. While the role of disability in the writing process needs further attention in writing studies scholarship (Micciche), the field at large has an opportunity to learn from important recent work on this (e.g., Bailey; Cepeda; Mills and Sanchez; Smilges; and Yergeau, et al.).

If the standard print genre of "writing acknowledgements" fails to adequately account for the complexity of our composing apparatuses, how else might we map our process? What methods, then, are suitable for exploring the seams of our writing process—the ways we shape texts and the network of writing companions in which they form? How do we perceive, document, and negotiate the slippery aspects of our formative composing processes, including disabled people's experiences of friction and felt sense within crip spacetime? Certainly, there are textual means of examining these processes. Yet, informed by feminist, disability, and material rhetorics and my personal experiences of disabled meaning-making, I turn to embroidery as method, as one way to attend to the seams of my composing apparatus.

I write nourished by conversations with friends and colleagues: long walk-and-talks with Gabby, voice notes with Karisa, chats with Urmi, prompts to distill my thinking from Zak.

I write because
of and through and
with and
alongside and
despite revolting
fascia, synovia,
nerves, synapses.
I wonder,
I grapple, I reach
for elusive access[1]*.*

To explore my composing apparatus, I am working on an ongoing project of embroidering my writing acknowledgements by hand on a tote bag. As I approached this embroidery project, I wondered: What might I learn about the composing process from materializing my writing acknowledgements off the printed page, slowly working them into cloth, threading them onto a tote bag? How might embroidering my ever-growing writing acknowledgements go beyond the limits of the textual genre, opening up new possibilities for transparency, accountability, and re-orientation through a feminist ethic of seamfulness? What overlooked epistemological seams—and sites for possible feminist re-orientations—might emerge when my writing acknowledgements are circulated in public non-academic spaces, slung across my shoulder in the form of a tote bag? How might this transform my relationships with my writing partners—and the entangled world in which I am writing?

1 Lauren Obermark writes about the role of wonder in complicating conversations about access in graduate English studies: "When I invoke and enact wonder …, I attempt to *resist closure* in conversations about access and disability, situating *access as a process that will never be finished*, and rethinking pedagogical misfits must be part of this ongoing pursuit. When English professors and their students wonder about disability and access, they move away from binaries positioning disability and misfits as problems to be solved, with access acting as an oversimplified savior. Wonder instead allows us to view *access as systemic and networked*, affecting everyone and thus the responsibility of all, continually flowing rather than finite, liberatory rather than solely the legal minimum" ("Making Space…" 178; my emphasis).

Embroidery as Method for Mapping the Composing Apparatus

Recent scholarship at the intersection of feminist and material rhetorics reveals the ways textile crafts compose identity (Arola; Gruwell; lewallen; Patterson and Hsu; Parker) while demanding attention to issues of labor (Goggin and Tobin; Clary-Lemon), survivance (Arellano; Lamberti), and relationality (Shivers-McNair; Small and Bhat; Morrill and Sabzalian). There are many cultural traditions of thread work that utilize specific materials, stitching techniques, and forms of engagement as ways of making, preserving, and circulating knowledge. Within the scope of this article, I am focusing on the ways embroidery as a method has reoriented me to the seams within my composing network through its material affordances. I'm not arguing that embroidery as method is inherently feminist—rather, that this material method has helped facilitate my process of conceptualizing and practicing a feminist seamful ethic. Embroidering by hand is a relatively "quiet" activity, occurring with small movements on a small scale in a private location. Compared to larger-scale, quicker-paced craft forms, embroidery may seem nearly static; if an onlooker were to observe me working on my embroidery project from across the room, they might mistakenly think I was doing nothing. Just as individual experiences of disability may not be legible or perceptible to bystanders, the movement (material and epistemological) of embroidery is not necessarily apparent to those who catch a glimpse of the craft. Despite being a small, subtle, and quiet method, embroidery generates significant epistemological movement through its accumulative properties. For example, as I will explore below, embroidery as method has reconfigured my relationship with time, friction, material, and audience, bringing particular attention to the often-obscured role of disabled embodymindedness in the composing process. (Even the very word "embodymindedness," which I first encountered in the work of J. Logan Smilges, reflects a lesson from embroidery: that entanglement is a pressing reality, whether of body and mind or of thread and fabric.)

I compose
alongside makers
throughout time
and space.
We are gathered
together through
the choreography
of stitching.
I compose in
good company,
overjoyed for
serendipitous
new connections
with generous
fellow makers,
Leah and
Rachel.

While embroidery itself does not consist of literal, structural "seams," the recursive stitching practice of embroidery reflects a "seamful" orientation by repeatedly drawing the maker's attention to negotiations of friction, accumulation, and the inextricability of process and product. It makes me slow down, asking deliberately: what is my next stitch? How does this stitch fit in relation to what has come before? Embroidery as method has prompted me to grapple with the seams of my composing process writ large in ways I cannot access in the alphabetic writing process alone, rendering the fric-

I traverse
the contours
of disability under
many names,
knowing I am
(and my texts are)
read differently
when I disclose my

tion I encounter as a composer more tangible. The resulting understanding threads back into my scribal composing process to illuminate the contours of my network of writing partners. In the following sections, I will explore the ways this embroidery prompt has helped me practice a seamful ethic, facilitating a subtle feminist shift in my orientation and, over time, opening space to reconsider the seams of my composing process and the ways my own composing intersects with "louder" feminist concerns.

embodyminded experiences.

Composing in Crip Time

Embroidery as method has heightened my awareness of how the seams of my composing process unfold in crip time. As Alison Kafer writes, crip time is "a reorientation to time" that "requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time or recognizing how expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies" (27). Crip time asks us how time can stretch to fit our needs and bodies, not the other way around—an understanding of time that can support all writers in tailoring their approach to writing. As a disabled writer in a PhD program, I often struggle to differentiate between the imposed expectations for fast-paced academic writing timelines and the actual pace my disabled bodymind requires. When torn between the intense expectations to quickly generate new work and my chronically ill body's need for a more sustainable pace, I sometimes experience a traumatic nervous system response when writing multiple projects under a deadline, sending my chronic illnesses into a flare and costing me in every other dimension of my life. It's incredibly difficult to write at all—nevermind to constructively reflect on the seams of my writing process—when it is so physically painful. I've found that stepping away from the screen to work with thread has given me the distance to do so. Embroidery lends me access to my body's sustainable composing pace; it allows me to practice spacious composing without the confusion of ableist external expectations for rapid composing. When I embroider by hand, I am able to rest in crip time, allowing my composing process to slow down significantly, stretching across hours, weeks, months at a time.

I write in the active tension between crip time and the demands of academic time, the rapid pace of my ideas and my body's limited capacity to lend them form, the time allotted to me for this task and the years my questions desire.

Because of its gradual, accumulative nature, embroidery as method demands a preponderance of slow time and attention in ways my neurodivergent and chronically ill body can sometimes provide—though not always in ways bound by "calendar and clock" (Anzaldúa 112). Disability has equipped me for this method. I've spent most of my life enduring chronic pain flares, making meaning with the material available within reach as I sit or lie down, sandwiched between heating pads or ice packs. Some days I am not able to write or stitch at all. Some days resting is my process. This

I write within the care of my graduate student writing group—Andy, Jeff, and Zak.

ongoing embroidery project reminds me that this form of spacious embodied discipline—of my body holding me in place, in pain, in a seam, in crip time—is one of my writing companions.

The process of embroidering writing acknowledgements has illuminated the complexity of my other writing companions within crip spacetime (Price, "Precarity"). As I conceptualized this embroidery project, my preconceived notions of the writing acknowledgements genre fell away as this material method opened new possibilities. As a method, embroidery—in all its slowness, its portability, its customization, its invitation to concurrently listen to stories—allows me to approach the task of materializing writing acknowledgments from a new angle, seeing it from a new perspective. It disrupts some of my dis-attentions, what Kerschbaum names the ways we attend to disability as paradoxically hypervisible and unseen. Compared to digital composing, the consequences of speeding through embroidery feel immediate, feel embodied. If you rush, you may tear your fabric, snag previous stitches, prick your thumb, or sew your project to your pants. Hand embroidery slows down the formation of a "big picture," requiring recursive negotiations between the part and the possible whole. Through this embroidery project, I have begun to viscerally recognize that my current writing process is unsustainably costly to my bodymind; my writing habits have prioritized the impossible pace of neoliberal university time (Mountz et al.) and demand for hyperproductivity (Price, "Precarity") over my own wellbeing. Composing with thread—in all its slowness, stillness, and small scope—is teaching me to take the time that both my bodymind and the project need, to trust in the abundance of creativity and insight that emerges from a spacious seamful ethic. The pace that sustains me is the pace in which my composing apparatus can flourish (Bailey).

I compose with scraps: each thread has a place, and I learn to keep looking for it. I putter along, looking again and again with the gentle eyes of my dad for means of frugal mending.

Sitting with Material Sources

I write with the plants in my home, giving them water while they remind me to drink water, too. I partner with them in propagation, remembering many beginnings

This material practice of embroidery has reconfigured my understanding of the friction at the seams of revision. Shaped by the pursuit of optimization and efficiency, digital alphabetic composing often invisibilizes much of the friction in the composing process. When this friction is invisibilized, it does not cease to act on the writer; instead, it slides out of perceptible reach, becoming more difficult to negotiate. The agential seams of the writing process begin to disappear with each comment marked resolved, each deleted phrase, each format overhaul, each revision saved over the last. Unlike screen-mediated composing, which black-boxes much of the material process, embroidery necessitates awareness of what has come before.

are possible with enough time.

The outward-facing side of an embroidered piece is inseparable from the vestiges of the process on the reverse, often quite literally entangled. Embroidery tethers the composer to the material accumulation of composing and its consequences, creating a sweat-salted material archive of labor and friction. For me, embroidering by hand re-materializes this friction, illuminating revision negotiations within my composing process and allowing me to notice where and how I get stuck just long enough to pause and consider intervening.

Because of the concentrated time and attention required, embroidery offers an opportunity to carefully consider my materials as composing companions. Spending ten, twenty, sixty, two-hundred hours with the same materials in hand prompts me to be a student of their sources and their attendant stories. My canvas is a cotton tote bag I bought on clearance over ten years ago at a craft store; I've used it unembellished for years to haul library books or food from the food co-op. As I work thread through its scratchy surface, I wonder about the people who manufactured it—their labor, their working conditions, their families, their networks. I tug at the seam of this expanding awareness, reflecting on how I did not think of the people who made this bag when I bought it on clearance. I stitch with floss from a variety of sources—some purchased new, some gifted, most of it thrifted. It all smells different—sometimes sour, sometimes faint potpourri from being stored in someone's attic, abandoned or donated or released for resale. I wonder about the people who originally bought this floss, about their intentions for its use, their visions for artistic expression, the circumstances of their parting ways with it. The thread, like my attention, snags on the material; I wax it with the beeswax block I've had since I was nine, since my mom and my grandmas, Mucka and Oma, taught me to sew—first by hand, with halting inch-long stitches, then by treadle machine, smelling of wax and oil, then by electric machine. I study the friction of these storied materials, sitting with them and learning to look for the labor invested in them before they found their way into my hands. Sitting with these storied materials subtly erodes the illusion of disconnection, expanding my awareness to include feminist concerns about labor.

I write fueled by croissants and coffee from The Sweet Praxis bakery, iron and vitamin B-12 supplements, and a decade-old SI joint brace from Kelley.

I compose in a shared material world, a world fruiting with beauty, loss,

I consider the material concerns embroidery brings up for me about longevity, wear-and-tear, and preservation. I'm cautious to invest time and energy in embroidering a wearable piece that will necessitate repeated washes, falling apart quickly. If it's out in the world with me, how soon will the sun take back its colors? How might I design and embroider a tote bag that is dynamic and in-process without falling apart—one that will hold up through daily

and the promise of decay. I compose anyway.

use without jeopardizing the labor/craft work I put into it? These questions have worked on me, causing me to slow down and sit with the design process for much longer than I'd originally anticipated. They prompt me to commit to an embroidery practice of acknowledgement while knowing full well that the artifact will decay with use. This growing material awareness causes me to reflect, in turn, on the inevitability of digital decay and to wonder about the ecological impacts of my digital composing practices. This "small" method of embroidery and the seamful ethic underlying this prompt reconfigure my understanding of the material context of my individual composing process, encouraging me to further explore the intersections of "bigger" feminist collective concerns, including environmental activism.

Bad Feelings and Belonging

As I've considered what to acknowledge in thread, I must calculate what "counts" as significant enough to be stitched onto the material. This requires a lot of decisions and reconfiguring; I wonder, as time passes, what will "stick" as significant? Many of the pressures that loom over me as I write are "bad feelings" (Micciche)—by ignoring them in my acknowledgements, am I being untruthful about my process? How might I acknowledge a writing partner that caused me pain, to acknowledge loneliness, guilt, despair, grief, rage? How can I make room for what Smilges calls "crip negativity"—for "bad crip feelings felt cripply" (8)? Threaded with affect, each stitched image, shape, and color represents an intentional decision to memorialize something—even if partially veiled through private symbolism—knowing that hand embroidery revision will not be so simple as "backspacing." Unlike a seemingly-simple edit made in a typed Word document, "deleting" a portion of embroidery requires you to unpick the entire thread, revealing the entangled stakes of each composing choice. Instead, like a tattoo modification, any revisions will be rendered as a form of accumulation, stitching over past acknowledgements—leaving them in place underneath. Each component is tied to the next, the durability of each stitch contingent on its surrounding stitches—including those I am covering up. As I continue to stitch, I cannot ignore what has come before.

I compose with sorrow, anger, and mourning. I write with outrage at ongoing genocides and mass-disabling events. I don't know where to put my grief.

I compose
from an appetite
for belonging
that exceeds my
embodied capacity.
My breath
lurches—
quarter note out,
half note in.
Restructuring.
I notice.
I turn.

During this ongoing pandemic without structural infection mitigations in place, most public spaces and community activities remain inaccessible to me. I haven't and don't plan to give up, yet I'm weary from searching for ways to make connections that do not further compromise my health or that of my community. Even though I often stitch alone at home, I stitch in community in other ways—listening to voice notes from friends, audiobooks or academic articles read aloud, podcasts, or other media. I accidentally prick my finger, bleeding onto the cloth. I daub at the blood with a bit of saliva, a trick I learned from Mucka years ago as I sat with her as she worked on a quilt—sure enough, the stain disappears, released by my own enzymes. I marvel at the vulnerability of our bodies—at the resources they carry, at the need for stories and relationships to access them. In a meditative way, I draw close to my former, current, and potential writing partners by sitting with each word, each image, each stitch, dwelling on the acknowledgement. Even in lonely seasons, this quiet practice protects space to dream in crip time, to remember my loved ones, the sources I'm learning from, and the affective dimensions of my writing community.

Reorienting Circulation and Accountability

Early in the planning process for this embroidery project, I considered stitching a static art piece for my home, much like the majority of my other embroidery projects. However, after reflecting further, I realize that the seamful ethic I'm exploring in my research is one of greater transparency, of circulating one's ethic while under development, of risking the vulnerability of being in process in public: of threading one's feminist ethic beyond academic spaces, genres, and expectations for performances of "perfection." A feminist ethic of seamfulness defies compartmentalization; it spills out of the prescribed containers. It must accompany me in the world.

I write
to move,
to dwell,
to interact,
to meet and
love the world
in new ways.

I write with the
Onondaga Creek
Walk, pressing my
thinking along the
asphalt path.
I write with my
leaky-soled leather
boots, my
multiply-mended
wool socks drying

The unfinished embroidered acknowledgements that live on my tote bag are "open-faced"—acting in, on, and through the world as they circulate alongside me. What are the theoretical, relational, and material implications of carrying my in-process writing acknowledgements with me every day in public—to work, to the library, to the grocery store, to the pharmacy? The intended audience is reconfigured and expanded—and along with it the possibilities for accountability. I am now accountable to be prepared to discuss the project—and my writing acknowledgements—with people outside of my field, people without any background in feminist rhetorics, people who have no relationship with academia whatsoever. The tote bag travels with me across the country and back to attend a conference and to visit

under the desk
by the space heater.
I inhale the
evaporating snow
they carried home.

family. How will I talk about this project with my mom and my grandmas, the people who taught me to sew? The woman walking towards me on the sidewalk who comments on my tote? The student who lingers after class to inquire about it?

As I decide which acknowledgements to embroider on my tote bag, I am also faced with pressing questions about the division between public and private. Does a seamful ethic demand I bare all, putting every influence into thready circulation? I don't necessarily want to put all of my writing acknowledgments out into the public world. This project is causing me to realize that's okay—that across-the-board disclosure of every seam is not necessarily required, that I can make a thorough accounting of my writing partners and then make agential decisions about which to inscribe in thread. Yet, given the affordances of the "genre" of textile embroidery, I wonder how might I engage with the interior/exterior "faces" of the cloth? What would it mean to stitch more intimate acknowledgements into the lining or a pocket—carrying them with me, being re-oriented by them without others being a party to that dynamic? Some acknowledgements might be best served as a private meditative totem in the lining, a prayer tucked into a pocket.

I write with
mentors who take
care with my
work—Patrick, Lois,
Kevin, and Lauren. I
write with the
questions they ask,
the questions that
burrow into my
thinking beyond
a single project,
accompanying
me across
the years.

Gloria Anzaldúa challenges us to consider how we might "begin to define [ourselves] in terms of who [we] are becoming, not who [we] have been" (135). Wearing an in-progress composition out in the world is, for me, a feminist act of seamfulness as well as an act of faith in becoming. It is a way to carry my unfinished-ness with me everywhere I go, to invite conversation about and accountability for my seams. And its material circulation alongside me is not negligible—it snags on my keys and my attention, threading my awareness of my composing network through my daily movement in the world. As Sara Ahmed writes, "bodies do not dwell in spaces that are exterior but rather are shaped by their dwellings and take shape by dwelling" (*Queer Phenomenology* 9). This embroidered tote bag, circulating with my body as I move through public spaces, prompts me to re-orient my relationship with knowledge-making within a broader community, to risk "damage" and trust the possibility of repair. It's teaching me that an ethic of seamfulness means to not be precious with my compositions, but rather, to circulate them because they are precious to me, opening myself up to the possibilities of being re-written.

I write in
fragments.
I tug at
the threads
that hold me,
support me,
constrict me.
I map my
entanglements,
drawing closer to
more and more.

Seamfulness as Epistemological Reorientation

This ongoing embroidery practice reworks my habituated posture towards composing, illuminating the contextualized network of relations in which it is happening. Nourished by my experiences of disability, this posture shapes what is epistemologically possible for me: as Ahmed writes, "what 'comes into' view, or what is within our horizon, is not a matter simply of what we find here or there…What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations that we have already taken" (*Queer Phenomenology* 55). My lifetime of experience with disability and crafting are equipping me to perceive what I perceive, preparing me to engage with the possibilities of embroidery as method as a lens into the seams of composing, and more specifically, my writing process.

I see and
see again,
differently.
I pull out the
seam ripper,
unworking
with care.
I vow to rest.
I try again.
I rest.

I write with doubt,
self-critical and
unsatisfied. I write
with modulated
hope. I write with
every critique I've
ever received,
with the growth it
prompted, with
the sensitivity it
awoke.

When I reflect on my academic writing process in light of what this embroidery project is teaching me, I notice the impact of pressure to produce "seamless writing" in ways that don't align with my embodied experience as a disabled person. I see that much of the friction in my writing process comes from my fear of being misinterpreted, of failing to adequately represent my intent in a legible way, of regretting what I wrote and circulated because I later learned more and revised my thinking. I worry revealing any traces of my ongoing process—the challenges of crip composing within the ableist expectations of academic spaces—will somehow discredit my writing and thinking. But embroidery teaches me that prioritizing these fears does not serve the feminist seamful ethic I am pursuing—that instead, I want my composing process to be responsive to my own disabled embodymindedness, accountable to my writing companions near and far, and recursive. Over the course of my scholarly trajectory, I want to continue learning from others, pursuing being in more right relations with my writing companions, and re-orienting to crip ways of knowing and surviving and thriving. Taking up a seamful ethic is one way to pursue this feminist orientation towards academic composing, to resist demands for legibility at the cost of nuance, to commit to the possibilities of cyclical becoming.

An Invitation to be Remade in the Seams

While I've personally used embroidery as one method to probe the seams of my composing apparatus, I believe there are many ways to enact a feminist seamful ethic, become familiar with the occluded seams of our processes, and invite intervention into those seams. To step into this orientation, I invite you to use whatever method helps you to trace the seams of your own composing process and to consider what insights they might offer emerging scholars: What have you said "no" to in order to develop a given writ-

I write because
I love what others
have written,
who they have
become
through writing,
what they have

ing project? Where has your bodymind encountered friction—in the form of embodied experiences, material constraints, access labor, institutional pressures, or "bad feelings"—in your writing process? How are you seeking insights into the friction others experience in the writing process? How have you negotiated the feedback you have received from mentors, colleagues, and editors? How does your relationship with time impact your composing process? And, importantly, how might returning to these questions again and then again reveal insights into these seams that might serve you and those you are in coalition with moving forward?

gifted their
readers.
I write to revise,
to be changed,
to become, to
transform.

These embodied insights into the seams of composing can serve as a subtle prompt for feminist rhetoricians: a prompt to be re-oriented (Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology), to be re-written (Anzaldúa), and to be "remade in the work" (Restaino 93). An ethic of seamfulness is not a call to disregard the products of our composing. Rather, it is an invitation to begin a pattern of small, subtle feminist inquiries, a recursive mode of becoming. It is an invitation to inhabit crip spacetime, to let meanings unfold unforced. It is a reminder of the lurching, non-linear, asymptotic nature of epistemological endeavors—spiraling into deepening understanding(s), yet never fully arrived (Cameron). Attention to the ways our scholarship is composed—our patterns, our seams—invites opportunities for small yet meaningful feminist interventions in the ways we make and remake the world around us. By acknowledging, preserving, and sharing the seams of our composing processes, feminist rhetorical scholars can become more attuned to the friction of composing, holding more space for the insights, perspectives, and ways of knowing that emerge from crip composing practices. Through an accumulation of small and subtle turns to the seams of our composing processes, this seamful ethic can reconfigure our understanding of the world, offering feminist rhetoricians a posture towards knowledge-making that holds space for feminist interventions of all scales, both quiet and loud, small and large. It is here—in these seams—where we can be remade, one small stitch at a time.

I tie up the
threads of my
thinking—for now.
I do not sever
them.
We will return.

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The Dilemma of Embodied Insecurity: A Subtle Feminist Approach for Embracing Moments of Good and Bad Advocacy

Maureen Johnson

Abstract: The author argues for building a community of scholarship that acknowledges the difficult and sometimes contradictory work of being an embodied advocate. Using her personal experience as a fat woman and a cancer survivor, the author shares the challenges of being an advocate for her own embodiment, particularly with the conflicting social narratives of being shamed for being fat and being praised for being a cancer survivor. Using feminist, rhetorical, and embodiment theories as well as Roxane Gay's idea of a *Bad Feminist*, the author asserts that recognizing both the ways that we advocate for our bodies and the ways we struggle to accept our bodies often requires small feminist acts. Rather than subjugate ourselves for perceived shortcomings,, the author encourages the subtle shift of existing as both a "good" and "bad" advocate at the same time.

Tags: embodiment, fat, breast cancer, advocacy, body neutrality

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Sometimes when I wear a shirt with a wide neck, I have a visible scar that is a small indentation about an inch wide. People may not notice it right away and sometimes I cover it by wearing a shirt with a higher neckline. The scar denotes where my chemotherapy port once resided. The port was a small device used to streamline my treatment for breast cancer. The port lived in my chest for about a year and a half, and its removal left this indentation. That scar represents the impact my diagnosis and treatment for cancer had on my body as well as on my mind. The scar serves as a reminder that I am marked by this disease, and when I let others see that scar, they see my marking. As an embodiment scholar my scars represent an intersection between what I study and who I am. I was studying embodiment long before my cancer diagnosis, but the diagnosis has marked me. It changed my perspective. In some ways it made my desire for bodily acceptance more urgent, and, in others, it deepened my own bodily insecurities that bear scars from years of being in a fat body that society has deemed unworthy. Recognizing the impact of these scars provides a subtle shift in my feminist work. That shift reframes both the way I look at myself as well as the ways I engage in my scholarship.

While they are fully embodied, scars are also rhetorical with meanings that shift depending on the audience and situation. They also have an impact on my ethos, which can shift from a fat woman who chooses not to be defined by societal standards to a breast cancer survivor—oftentimes both at the same time. When I talk about the scar from my port, many have called it my "battle scar," a small blemish that denotes

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my survivor status. But, in a sense, all my scars, both physical and metaphorical, are battle scars, metaphorical markings left by the marginalization of my fat body and physical markings that remind me of the way my body survived cancer. These scars are residue from a capitalistic culture that treats my fatness as a problem to be solved and my cancer survival as a hero narrative used to sell merchandise to women under the guise of supporting the cause. While wearing pink ribbons[1]seemingly supports women, for me the pink ribbon is just another scar, a reminder of the wounds inflicted by my "battle" with cancer.

Because I am both a survivor and a feminist scholar, I lean on feminist research and teachings to guide my advocacy. I comprehend that my existence as both a fat woman and as a cancer survivor is liminal, a state where my experiences can both be seen and ignored at the same time. This liminality aligns with Jeannine A. Gailey's theory of the hyper(in)visibility of fatness. Gailey asserts that fat women are simultaneously hypervisible, as people who take up more space, and hyperinvisible, as people who are marginalized and often ignored or treated inhumanely (7-8). That hyper(in)visibility also applies to being a cancer survivor. Once people see me as a survivor, it makes me seen in ways that I was often ignored as a fat woman. What people choose to see is a cancer survivor, but what remains hyperinvisible is that my survival was not an individual achievement, but rather a combination of luck, determination, and a community of support from doctors, nurses, medical technicians, family, friends, and co-workers. Keeping this aspect of my survival invisible implies that I actively fought the cancer when I allowed treatments to happen to me. While I made the choice to do the treatment and followed the medical recommendations, surviving cancer was not a meritocratic achievement, despite the way it can often be framed. Much like being fat makes me both visible and invisible, disclosing my status as a cancer survivor makes me visible in some ways, but my personalized experience becomes invisible, subsumed by the expectations of cancer narratives. This push and pull of visibility is liminal, a space where I struggle with both my own interpretation of my embodiment and the labels and ideas that others placed upon me.

As a scholar of embodied rhetorics, I want acceptance for how bodies *do* exist rather than some idealized, media-created version of how bodies *should* exist. While I can theorize this space for acceptance, it does not mean that I can always exist in that space. The theory and praxis do not always align. Some days, particularly when I bear the scars of fatness and cancer, that acceptance is difficult. On those days, I feel as if I am not being a good feminist or even a good advocate. Those are the days that are not discussed as readily in our scholarly work. As an embodied rhetorics scholar I need to acknowledge both my advocacy and the difficult days when I allow myself to listen to the structures that tell me that my body is inadequate, unhealthy, and/or unattractive. As a scholar, I know how rhetoric functions to marginalize bodies, to promote essentialized "normal" bodies that are limited by dichotomous approaches to identity. In my work, I complicate the ways we consider embodiment by supporting a more liminal approach. Even with this knowl-

1 Some scholarship has analyzed counternarratives and counterpublics in relation to "Breast Cancer Awareness." Two examples are Lori Kelly's examination of David Jay's "SCAR project" and Phaedra Pezzullo's analysis of the Toxic Links Coalition. In this essay, I focus more on specific personal narratives in relation to breast cancer rather than larger scale projects that resist pink ribbon culture.

edge, with my scholarly tools and research, these theories can never fully address my ontology. I can desire change and even promote for more inclusivity, but still feel insecure and unsure in my own skin. Recognizing my insecurities as well as my desire to advocate for change at the same time is a small feminist act, one that seemingly affects only me but has the potential to create a community of feminist scholars who also struggle with their own insecurities.

Because this process remains internal, it does not involve shouting in the streets or include a specific call to action; it is a small and subtle shift. Like Sara Ahmed suggests, the process is "*sensational*": "Feminism can begin with a body, a body in touch with a world, a body that is not at ease in a world; a body that fidgets and moves around. Things don't seem right" (21-22, original emphasis). Coming to terms with my own body is a feminist act that is not showy or loud. It is quiet and subtle. It may only be clear in the ways I carry myself or how I interact in the world. It may not be seen by others, but it is deeply known by me. It is not a protest in a traditional sense, but it is my own internalized protest against the ways in which I am told to dislike myself. This act is simply taking the time to consider my own positionality, my own experiences. It is knowing that I want the rhetoric about fatness and breast cancer to be more expansive and inclusive, but also learning to tell my own story. This act involves vulnerability, learning to share some of my interiority in a way to help others. That, in turn, encourages others to do the same, to share their own vulnerable moments to connect and point out the ways that the oppressive structures affect our own internalized bodily acceptance.

While I want to identify with the fat activists who promote acceptance of fat bodies, that connection can sometimes be difficult. The marginalization of fat people so pervades and stains our culture, that it can be difficult to recognize (Wann 34). There are dozens of narratives that are both overt and subtle criticisms of fatness, from advertisements for diet plans to social media posts that condemn people for "choosing" to be fat. Many of these narratives portray fat people as ignorant of the health benefits of losing weight when they, like me, are hyper aware of the rhetorics of health and how those rhetorics marginalize. We know that the medical community deems us unhealthy, and that everyday people do the same. We internalize the trauma of these experiences, the hyper(in)visibility that Gailey asserts. Our marked bodies serve as examples of what not to be, and we are constantly reminded that if we just worked harder, our bodies could be more "normal." These narratives remind us that our bodies are unhealthy, undesired, and a societal problem that needs to be fixed.

Fat activism and the Health at Any Size movements resist these narratives and portray more complicated experiences of fatness. In advocating for the acceptance of fat people, it can be difficult to resist the constant pressure to conform to a "normal" body. Also, the constantly changing standards of normality make it even more difficult to conform. Scholars, such as Tressie McMillan Cottom, define these changing standards as tools to support whiteness: "That is because beauty isn't actually what you look like; beauty is the preferences that reproduce the existing social order. What is beautiful is whatever will keep weekend lake parties safe from strange darker people" (44). Thus, these "norms" are designed both to make me, as a white woman, participate in the capitalist enterprise (buy products, join a diet program, pay for miracle cures) and

to exclude BIPOC women from being included in these norms. Scholars such as Sabrina Strings explains how anti-fatness is rooted in anti-blackness, saying that critiques of fat bodies "have been one way the body has been used to craft and legitimate race, sex, and class hierarchies" (6). Although Strings outlines how this hierarchical structure has historical roots, these hierarchical structures persist, deeming some bodies as less valuable than others.

Despite my knowledge of these oppressive structures of normality and beauty standards, I cannot fully erase that subconscious desire for a "normal" body. Roxane Gay discusses this at length in her memoir *Hunger*:

> Every woman I know is on a perpetual diet. I know I don't feel comfortable in my body, but I want to and that's what I am working toward. I am working toward abandoning the damaging cultural messages that tell me my worth is strictly tied up in my body. I am trying to undo all the hateful things I tell myself. I am trying to find ways to hold my head high when I walk into a room, and to stare right back when people stare at me. (Gay, *Hunger* 300-301)

I think many of us feel this push and pull between wanting to live our lives and feeling the pressure to conform to societal standards. For me, I feel that same push and pull whenever I fly. As I prepare for the trip, I brace myself for the discomfort (seat belts that may not fit and a seat width that barely contains my hips) and the look of disappointment on the face of the person who must share the same row with me. As I sit on that plane, there is always a moment when I wish I were thin, so flying would be more comfortable. I even wish I were invisible, that I could be just another person on the plane rather than the "problem" that someone who sits next to me must deal with. I try to make myself as small as possible; I try to take up as little space as possible. On a plane, as with a lot of shared spaces, I am hyper(in)visible. Others watch my body size and render my existence as a person invisible. I feel the stares, the discomfort, the pressure to conform. Then, I remember that no one on the plane is comfortable and that planes are now designed to cram as many bodies as possible into a small space. I remember that my discomfort comes from the ways that planes exist and how society has chosen to blame the fat person on the plane rather than acknowledge that the seats are smaller and closer to each other. In that moment, the advocate takes over, the person who recognizes the injustice of the situation rather than the fat phobia. Even still, the small nagging voice of inadequacy remains; I have just quelled it in a moment.

Recognizing this liminality of the desire to advocate for oneself while also feeling the pressure to conform can be a small form of feminism. It is, as Ahmed said, sensational, understanding the multiple sensations that are occurring at the same time. Additionally, my experience with airplanes offers an example of how I have learned from my body. There are emotions and experiences tied directly to my body and those experiences are a form of knowledge: "Knowledge and meaning are never disembodied—they are always made by some*body*" (Knoblauch and Moeller 8, original emphasis). I do not want to ignore the knowledge that I gained from my embodied experiences, but I also want to stress that there are multiple ways of gain-

ing embodied knowledge, and I allow myself to be frustrated or even angry about the ways I learn from my own embodied experiences. I also allow myself to sometimes wish I did not have those experiences, such as occasionally wondering what my life would have been like without cancer or if I had been thin. Because I know of the deep connection between embodiment and knowledge, I know I would not be the same person. I would not be a person who could vulnerably tell you about how it is to live in my own body and to advocate for more acceptance of the heterogeneity of embodied experiences.

As a fat person there are many moments where others ignore my humanity and look at my body as a problem I can fix. I experience their stares of disgust, their passive aggressive and sometimes outright aggressive condemnation of my "choices," and their ignorance that equates all my health issues to my fatness. But now that I am a cancer survivor, I sometimes receive a reprieve from these condemnations. In a sense, my cancer gave me a free pass to be fat. Strangers certainly still treat me in the same way, but once people discover I am a cancer survivor that disdain for fatness morphs into a battle narrative where I have conquered the disease that scares them. Sharing my cancer narrative makes the audience feel vulnerable because they know that cancer can affect anyone. My vulnerability reminds them of their own vulnerability, which in turn leads to their empathy. In that sense, sharing my survivor status becomes a form of advocacy, where people see me as a survivor in the battle against cancer rather than a victim of fatness.

There are battle metaphors that pervade both fatness and cancer narratives. Both must be "defeated" through battles that happen on a societal level as well as on an individual level. The anti-obesity rhetoric frames fat as a national problem that can be solved through individual hard work, whereas breast cancer rhetorics focus on awareness and individual "heroes" who fight the disease. Many of these rhetorics suggest that fatness is caused by individual behavior whereas cancer happens to people. For example, Kathleen LeBesco suggests that "Fatness also marks one as a failure" (*Revolting Bodies* 58). Fat people are painted in terms of excess and the incapacity for self-control. Similarly, cancer is literally cells that grow uncontrollably, and thus, as Barbara Ehrenreich suggests, sometimes: "cancer is our metaphor for so many runaway social processes, like corruption and 'moral decay': we are no less out of control ourselves" (44). Being diagnosed with cancer can feel out of control, just as we can sometimes feel out of control when we gain weight. We can do all the things we are told are healthy and still gain weight or be diagnosed with a disease like cancer. Fatness and cancer can both occur because of myriad factors including genetics, environment, age, ethnicity, and social class. Most mainstream narratives about these experiences offer more unified narratives where people conquer fatness or cancer. Instead of endorsing more of these limiting narratives, we need complex narratives that address the experiences our bodies undergo and/or the mental weight of coping with those experiences. Rather than just advocating for acceptance, we should advocate for more nuanced and complicated narratives that show a spectrum of embodied experiences.

Another way that fatness and cancer connect is the ways they can both be incredibly isolating experiences and can include an underlying shame in "choosing" to be fat or succumbing to cancer. We use war metaphors to discuss losing weight and dealing with cancer because we look at both as if they are enemies

that need to be defeated. Gailey describes how "Fat is often discussed in hyperbolic terms of 'fighting fat,' 'battling fat,' or the 'catastrophic effects of fat'" (2). These metaphors paint fatness as an enemy that needs to be conquered, and failure to conquer fatness can be detrimental to an individual's health. There are similar metaphorical battles against cancer where, particularly breast cancer survivors are expected to be "chemotherapy warrior[s]" (Haas). People have called me a warrior and it seems like such a misrepresentation of what I experienced. As I already said, treatment is a passive process where you allow doctors to give you treatments that are incredibly difficult on your body. Marjorie Haas points out that the bald image you see of cancer survivors does not come from having cancer, but from the treatment for cancer. Chemotherapy caused me to lose my hair, but it is easier to blame cancer than the medical treatment because that treatment is how we "win the war" against cancer.

By using these battle metaphors, we ignore the human experiences tied to bodies. It is easier to hear the success stories of these "battles"—those who lost weight and those who survived cancer—rather than advocate for existing in fat bodies or even acknowledge the experience of succumbing to cancer. We want to tell people to lose weight rather than make the plane seats bigger. We do not want to discuss how cancer changes our bodies forever and how it does not always provide wisdom or insight. People often expect me to share some great life lessons I acquired from surviving the trauma of cancer. While certainly I have learned many things about myself, I like to remind people that I would have been happy to learn those life lessons without cancer. I also know that people don't want to hear that cancer makes me insecure and fearful, but being an advocate for a more honest representation of that experience means sharing my vulnerability, which sometimes can make people uncomfortable. People are more comfortable with the mainstream cancer narratives where people triumph over the disease. Even as I write this, I understand the irony that I am complaining about not learning lessons through cancer while sharing my experience, but I share my story because it is just that, my story, not some monolithic representation of all cancer narratives. Cancer did provide some insights, but it was not a prosthesis to replace other ways of learning such as age, experiences, and social interactions. Just like any embodied experience, cancer helped me learn, but it neither defines me nor represents my only embodied learning experience.

Therefore, I want to reframe my survivor identity. I survived cancer and now get to advocate by sharing how difficult that work is. Many breast cancer narratives focus on what Kristen Garrison describes as a "rhetoric of triumph," which she says ultimately has a negative effect not only on those who are fighting breast cancer, but also "on those of us who haven't had cancer yet." Additionally, Garrison points out that this rhetoric creates "unreasonable expectations for ourselves and others." By always positioning cancer as a battle, it creates those who win and lose the battle, but there are so many ways of experiencing cancer that are not beholden to a win/lose scenario. That binary, like most binaries, cannot express the complexities of embodied experiences. When I talk with other cancer survivors or read stories of cancer survivorship, they can be similar, but our own individual experiences are so different. Acknowledging those differences is a form of feminist work we can do. It may be a subtle shift, but it can have a more profound impact.

There is a similar "rhetoric of triumph" narrative tied to fatness. These often come in the form of weight loss testimonials, where someone finally starts to "enjoy their life" after losing weight. I will not use a specific example here because there are dozens of these displayed across multiple media every day. These narratives often use a battle narrative to suggest that the fat was defeated and now the person is healthy. We associate fatness and its pejorative partner, obesity, with myriad fatal diseases, even if those same diseases afflict thin and medium size people as well. Even fat activists struggle to fight back to these narratives. Using research from Carla Pfeffer, Kathleen LeBesco says many fat activists have taken measures to "manage" their weight ("On Fatness and Fluidity" 51). This shows that even fat activists struggle to acknowledge the complicated ways in which we exist in our bodies. LeBesco argues for a more fluid view of fatness, one that is not predicated on standards but on the fluidity of individual embodiment so "that we figure out how to give reign to fluidity without demanding it universally" ("On Fatness and Fluidity" 58). LeBesco points toward another issue with a binary of fat/thin and recognizing there are multiple sizes of bodies that do not have to exist as fat or thin. She also recognizes this struggle to accept one's own body while at the same time existing in a world that marginalizes and shames that same body type. Again, recognizing that struggle for internal acceptance is a form of feminism that may not be overt, but can be impactful.

We are all subjected to the societal structures that promote essentialized bodies while criticizing those who do not fulfill those expectations. We know that bodily control regulates how bodies must look, act, or perform, which Michel Foucault would call docile bodies. Docile bodies follow the expectations set forth by oppressive structures; docile bodies conform to standards and "improve" themselves to fit into these standards (Foucault 136). Docile bodies follow essentialist standards for bodies that Jay Dolmage traces back to Aristotelian roots (24). Docile bodies and, in turn, norms are designed to silence those bodies who do not conform to these standards. Norms compose a monolith that erases differences and promotes homogeneity.

The battle against cancer and the battle against obesity creates an essentialized view of both, in which stories become a monolith that erases difference. Through this essentializing, it creates only two ways of existing, either defeating fatness and cancer or becoming an unworthy participant who lost those battles. Narratives about both become subsumed by capitalistic culture that promotes "normality." For example, breast cancer awareness began as a grassroots feminist-centered campaign to get women compassionate and effective treatment, but it has become "an attractive object of corporate charity and a way for companies to brand themselves friends of the middle-aged female market" (Ehrenreich 48). Thus, challenging prevalent breast cancer narratives becomes a challenge to capitalism rather than just creating a space to talk about a more complicated experience. Similarly, Gailey points out fat being used as a war metaphor also suggests that fatness is seen as a disruption to our national security, something that we as a nation need to fight against (2). Existing in fat bodies resists the docile body and thus requires discipline to control. Both the battle against cancer and fat exists as a mythos that ultimately ignores embodied experiences. My body resists essentialism in size, in disease, in survival. Bodies like mine are told we should not exist as they are, but I am advocating that we change that in small feminist acts every day. We do this work by acknowledging that even if we want to conform to these capitalistic standards, our bodies change on their own. Bodies have their own wisdom,

their own knowledges. We must advocate for bodies existing as they are, not as society decides they should be.

These embodied experiences show the complicated expectations placed upon bodies to both exert individual strength and control despite the factors that affect that ability. Narratives have a way of controlling embodied experiences or protecting the stigmas that attempt to control bodies. As G. Thomas Couser points out, "Stigma serves to silence the stigmatized" (79). Couser's analysis of disability memoirs highlights how these narratives reinforce normalized perspectives that endorse a series of disability conventions rather than highlight the actual lived experiences of bodies. As a breast cancer survivor, I feel as if my lived experience does not fit neatly into the experiences of other survivors, and it should not. A pink ribbon cannot convey all the loss and gains I experienced through my treatment and recovery. My own narrative cannot fully erase the feelings of fear, inadequacy, and weakness that exist even now that I am past the all-important five-year cancer free milestone.[2] Language is a tool that has gotten me through so many aspects of my life, and yet it is inadequate to explain my experiences.

Because language alone is not how rhetoric functions. Rhetoric is deeply embedded in our bodies because "the body is also text" (Knoblauch and Moeller 10). Our bodies engage in rhetoric as well as receive and interpret rhetoric. Our knowledge comes from our bodies and my knowledge comes from existing in a body that has both experienced the shame of being fat and the praise for surviving cancer. That shame and praise exist simultaneously, and they shape how I engage with my body as well as how I engage with the world. Thus, I can both advocate for body size acceptance and feel inadequate in my body. I can both encourage friends to get mammograms and remain terrified to get my mammogram every year. Ahmed would describe that as my body's memory and this essay is about how I am trying to put my "body into words" (23). But the words are difficult because our bodies are material beings that words cannot always adequately describe. In a sense, we are all a series of paradoxes because none of us easily fit into the categories that are that are supposed to define us[3]. The same holds true for existing in feminist spaces. We can espouse the importance of equity and inclusion, but enacting these practices is much more difficult. Black feminist scholars, such as the late Audre Lorde and bell hooks, made this point decades ago by pointing out that feminism was mostly focused on issues that affect white women: "There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist" (Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex" 116, original emphasis). In many breast cancer narratives, there is an implied sisterhood of survival, but that can be limiting and does not acknowledge the individual experiences of being a survivor (even the word survivor is not a term that works for everyone). As feminists, we should recognize the complicated experience of people and not erase identities of Black women (hooks 7) or solely promote equality for one's own demographic group. Some of us cannot change our bodies or the way the world responds to our bodies, but we can still use our bodies as a form of resistance (Mckoy 221).

2 Five years denotes a period in which the likelihood of cancer recurrence diminishes significantly.

3 As David Valentine says: "This is, indeed, the basic problem of language: to describe something as seamless as lived experience, one needs categories. Yet a danger arises when those categories come to be seen as valid descriptions of experience rather than as tools used to apprehend that experience" (Valentine 217).

That resistance begins with the interior work of existing as a feminist in a world that does not want feminism (or to eliminate racism, classism or other hierarchical structures). Our everyday lives are inundated with a push for "normality," a homogeneity that erases our individuality and creates hierarchies that marginalize people. That does not mean there is an active push every minute of our days to conform, rather it is a slowly invading process that manifests in small ways every day. For example, how often do you hear someone talk about how they need to lose weight? How many ads do you come across for "superfoods" or "cancer-fighting foods" or even weight loss companies? All these solely seep into your psyche, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to ignore them.

Therefore, there are moments, even in my advocacy and pushing to support my existence, that I fall prey to these norms. I see a diet commercial and think, maybe I should lose weight. I see an ad for a gummy that "miraculously" makes you lose weight, and I wonder, should I buy those? Then there are the moments of guilt, guilt for not being thinner, guilt for feeling I should be thinner, guilt for not being feminist enough. Much like Gay talks about being a bad feminist, I feel like a bad feminist for not accepting my body. But at the same time, pointing out these contradictions is a small feminist act. It is easy to point out the problems with societal standards, it can be harder, more vulnerable, to share how those standards influence us. Sharing that internal struggle is feminist, even if it sometimes makes me feel like a bad feminist.

I know I am not alone in this. There is a growing body neutrality movement which is about not loving or hating your body, rather just accepting it for what it is: "Body neutrality turns the focus to not thinking about appearance at all, instead observing your body with no judgment" (Haupt). I like the idea of body neutrality, but in practice even body neutrality requires work. Again, you must let go of the societal pressures and accept your body for what it is. Unlike other forms of bodily acceptance though, Angela Haupt's article does acknowledge how this is not an easy process. Its last tenet is "Be patient," which acknowledges that this is an everyday process, one that does not just happen in a day. Haupt quotes fitness instructor Bethany C. Meyers, who says: "It's never too late to begin to unlearn some of the things that we've been taught for so long" (Haupt). This unlearning concept sticks with me. In many ways, unlearning is the foundation of all movements that push back against oppression, including feminism. We must unlearn the expectations of "normal" and embrace heterogeneity. To be feminist is to recognize the inherent hierarchical systems that are designed to separate us, make us feel inferior and promote whiteness, particularly white masculinity. To be feminist is to see these power structures, but also unlearn those practices that promote misogyny, misogynoir, racism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and other oppressive structures. Unlearning is not an easy process. It is a slow and constant process that requires us to be patient with ourselves, but also not inflict harm on others while we work through this unlearning process.

With this in mind, I am carefully considering how I unlearn and how I can be patient with myself as I do so. Like Ahmed's point I noted earlier, feminism is grounded in the body (22). Taking this to heart, my body experiences feminism in ways that others do not. As I mentioned earlier, I am a woman in a fat body, who is also a cancer survivor. I have felt marginalization in these aspects of my identity, but I also have a

great number of privileges as a white heterosexual woman with an advanced degree. Even using Ahmed to discuss my own feminism gives me pause to wonder if I am appropriating or connecting. That pause is the difficult kind of work I am talking about here. It is the insecurity that I am not being feminist enough or that I do not understand how my positionality affects those around me. That careful consideration is important to feminism. Sometimes I do that well; other times I do not. I need to acknowledge when I do it poorly, apologize to those I hurt, and learn to do it better next time.

By the same token, when I think about my own position as a fat woman, I am less forgiving. Why do I look at myself in the mirror sometimes and think I am unattractive or refuse to take a neutral look at my body? The aspects of my body that I have always liked were my skin and my hair, and cancer treatment had a heavy effect on those. I temporarily lost my hair, fingernails, and toenails. I have the aforementioned scar on my chest, and small dots were tattooed on my body for radiation treatment. When I look at my body, I struggle sometimes to see past those signs of illness, which makes me feel others would do the same. As a body that has literally been marked by cancer and remains marked through fatness, bodily acceptance, or even neutrality, can be difficult. Much like Gay says: “One of my biggest fears is that I will never cut away all that scar tissue. One of my biggest hopes is that one day, I will have cut away most of that scar tissue” (*Hunger* 301). As someone who bears scars from fatness and cancer and who now moves through the world slower and is more susceptible to minor illnesses, I see that my body has changed. How can I find neutrality when my body won’t do things it used to be able to do?

To even think these thoughts seems inherently unfeminist or even a problem for a scholar of embodiment. Spending so much time recognizing how my body is not normal can feel as if I am embracing the idea of my body not being normal, but I also know that “norms *norm*alize; they exert a near-magnetic effect on people, compelling them, often unwittingly, to fit in or risk censure, condemnation, and in some instances, danger” (Bobel and Kwan 1, original emphasis). Pushing back against norms requires constant vigilance; it is daunting and difficult. Resistance also does not always look the same for everyone. As Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan say, embodied resistance “comes in many forms” (2). Embodied resistance resists norms whether through direct action or even inaction.

Oppressive systems tell us “how to be,” not who we are. Resisting the narrative of “how to be” is a feminist act, even if I am only doing that work internally. In that sense, my choosing my own existence is a subtle form of feminism, a quiet but recursive process that I am constantly reinventing. I do this by talking about surviving breast cancer, but not wearing pink ribbons or other outward symbols of the disease. I do this by existing in my fat body and taking up space rather than trying to shrink myself. But I also do this by acknowledging that I am terrified of cancer returning or going through chemotherapy again. I do this by acknowledging my frustration that I do not fit comfortably in some spaces and sometimes I do not feel attractive. These dichotomous thoughts exist in me, and acknowledging the paradoxes is a feminist act.

Thus, even existing in a nonnormative body is a form of resistance. My fat body is resistance. Not wearing a pink ribbon is resistance. Showing off my scar is resistance. The way to recover from the spiral of insecurities that surround my body is remembering that my body's existence is resistance. Acknowledging that being in a nonnormative body is difficult and that sometimes I am not a good advocate even for myself can also be resistance. When we talk about feminism and embodied resistance, we also need to talk about how difficult it is. I am not saying we should not celebrate the moments when we show our feminist strength, but we need to also talk about the moments, even those private moments, where we are unsure. Where it seems easier if we would just conform. We need to remember as Sara Hendren says: "Our bodies are not just the sacks of flesh that hold our 'real' intellectual selves; they are not fixed entities but mind-bogglingly adaptive, responsive instruments" (29). Our bodies are not designed to be static neutral objects, but rather ever-changing material entities that adapt to the world as it changes. Resisting the allure of normal and all the negative associations it inflicts on our bodies is difficult work. We need more spaces where we talk about that difficulty.

The ability to talk about these paradoxes within ourselves can serve as a sort of feminist acceptance. Embracing our struggles with self-identity alongside our drive for inclusion is accepting both the world as it is and the world as we want it to be. But as we have those conversations, we need to do them with care and not to harm. As Audre Lorde said in her *Cancer Journals*: "Each of us struggles daily with the pressures of conformity and the loneliness of difference from which those choices seem to offer escape" (2). Recognizing that sometimes I want my body to be considered normal does not mean I want to be invisible or even hyper-(in)visible. I need to recognize those moments of insecurity as part of human existence and a symptom of oppressive structures, not a real representation of the complicated ways in which we exist.

Although this is challenging work, we can connect with one another and see these myriad ways of existing through vulnerability, which is the way we connect to one another. We need spaces where we can share our experiences, both the days when we love ourselves and the days when we feel the weight of conformity. We need to acknowledge that we all live with the contradictions that are inherent in existing in a society that deems some people normal while marginalizing the majority of people. We need to show ourselves kindness, even in those moments when we feel as if our bodies are not accepted or wanted by society. We need grace that recognizes letting go of the myriad voices that support oppression does not happen quickly. As Gloria Anzaldúa said: "For if she changed her relationship to her body and that in turn changed her relationship to another's body then she would change her relationship to the world. And when *that* happened she would *change* the world" (71, original emphasis). We need to recognize that the change within ourselves can be just as difficult as change in the world.

I believe that all feminist scholars are really embodiment scholars. After all, our bodies are at the center of all feminist scholarship. Thus, coming to terms with how we think about our bodies, knowing sometimes we feel empowered to find spaces for our particular bodies and other times we feel the pressure to conform is important but sometimes under recognized feminist work. These are sometimes the small femi-

nist acts we perform every day. We engage in small feminist acts both when we loudly declare our existence and when we internally acknowledge our own insecurities. Our feminist work exists both in the loud declarations and the quiet moments of insecurity as well all of the volumes in between. I don't want to pretend I am the only scholar who has made this point, but I feel my own intersections, being a fat cancer survivor, may be recognized by others who have similar experiences.

I also want to say, it is important that we regularly recognize that coming to terms with our bodies and how they affect our scholarship is never ending. Just as society shifts normal to make it impossible for the global majority to achieve, we must re-examine our own relationships with our bodies and come to terms with our own feminist positionality. Feminist work does not just involve declaring you are feminist; it is a series of small everyday acts that sometimes we do well and sometimes we do not. We must remember that sometimes we feel that pressure to conform and not punish ourselves for not being feminist enough. We must return to our bodies, our own experiences, and choose our own ways to be. Being true to that internalized work involves vulnerability, the vulnerability that allows you to exist in the contradictions of being both a good and bad feminist as well as the contradictions of being an advocate for bodily acceptance and still feeling the desire to conform to body standards. Coming to terms with these internalized contradictions and still choosing to advocate for your bodies and other people's bodies is a small feminist act, but one that can be powerful and influential. We need not only to find the subtle ways for us to exist that feel true to us but accept and embrace the subtle ways each of us comes to terms with our own internalized insecurities as well as our bodies. Recognizing your own contradictions provides a small feminist building block that we can use to build inclusive and heterogeneous feminist environments.

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Get Ready with Me: The Subtle, Rhetorical Feminisms of Making Up

Laura Feibush

Abstract: The cosmetic practice of doing makeup—or "getting ready"—is a site for rhetorical analysis presently underrepresented in scholarship about embodied rhetorics. Following the steps outlined in a YouTube-style "Get Ready With Me" video series, this article argues that makeup can be understood rhetorically as a form of subtle feminism, not just in the way that it appears to others once finished and on display, but in how it instantiates a particular relationship to the self in its application. This process illuminates feminist ideologies by bringing about particular visual regimes and patterns of looking, challenging delineations of public and private, emphasizing individuals' embodied lived experiences of identity, and intensifying the presence while resisting the erasure of makeup-users by locating them within particular cultural traditions.

Tags: makeup, cosmetics, beauty work, sensory rhetorics, feminist rhetorics, gender, identity

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Now the cherry-black lipstick's gathering dust in a drawer
I don't need her anymore
'Cause I got this power

-Lorde, "Oceanic Feeling"

In pop-artist Lorde's 2021 album, Solar Power, the singer trades in two earlier eras of dark defiance (Pure Heroine) and reckless abandon (*Melodrama*) for something beachy, sun-drenched, with songs on which she dreams of childhood in the "tall grass" and escaping to an island on "the last of the outbound planes." Eschewing the "cherry-black" lipstick that defined her debut and sophomore albums—*Melodrama* listeners will remember that album's anthemic first line: "I do my makeup in somebody else's car"—Lorde declares in the lyrics above that she no longer needs a vampy lip, which provided merely a painted-on visual impact, now that she has a truer "power." In making this statement, Lorde implies that makeup provides power, or at least an affective intensity that can approximate it, but simultaneously asserts that makeup is unnecessary when more authentic power is available.

Here, Lorde illustrates one of the fundamental paradoxes of makeup: it doesn't matter, and yet it does. On the beach, in possession of her third-album "power," Lorde echoes a critique in some feminist circles of makeup as frivolous and ultimately unnecessary, a concession to patriarchally-imposed beauty standards. It's true: few would argue that even the most dramatic winged eyeliner inflects communicative situations in

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a way that could be described as rhetorical. Even at its boldest, then, makeup's real power to influence, to create change, seems to be minimal—a very minor force. At the same time, Lorde's early-career rise to international attention was no doubt partly enabled by her intentional cultivation of a made-up, goth-girl look, winged liner and dark lipstick in high contrast against her pale skin. From that perspective, makeup appears to be a small yet important tool for self-construction, one that can be skillfully and strategically used to gain visibility, prominence, and influence. Again: makeup is a small thing, besides the point. It doesn't matter. And yet it does.

Against the hard-partying backdrop of her second album, as I mention above, Lorde sings that she does her makeup "in somebody else's car." It's a line that paints a picture of how the singer constructs herself visually, but in liminal, on-the-move spaces that don't belong to her. This lyric is not so much about her makeup's final product, the "final look," but about what the process of doing makeup says about her ephemeral self in the world of *Melodrama*, always chasing the next fleeting taste of euphoria. Taking my cue from Lorde's en-route makeup routine, the aspect of makeup that I explore here more specifically as a form of subtle, feminist rhetoric is not makeup's "finished product," but rather the act of doing, or applying, makeup—the process of getting ready. I propose that makeup can be understood rhetorically as a form of subtle feminism not just in the way that it appears to others once finished and on display, but in how it instantiates a particular relationship to the self in its application—a process that, in small and subtle ways, concentrates feminist ideologies by bringing about particular visual regimes and patterns of looking, challenging delineations of public and private, emphasizing individuals' embodied lived experiences of identity, and intensifying the presence while resisting the erasure of makeup-users by locating them within particular cultural traditions.

Having spent my professional life thus far writing about listening as a rhetorical force, I'm careful not to underestimate subtle communicative choices that are overlooked by many, and I see doing and wearing makeup as one of those choices. In fact, one way that makeup can be understood as a feminist rhetorical art is when we locate its subtle impact within the feminist re-readings of silence and listening of the last few decades. These lines of rhetorical scholarship bear out the idea that women, people of color, and other marginalized rhetors have often made use of alternative modalities as channels for rhetorical agency (Bokser; Glenn; Glenn and Ratcliffe; Ratcliffe). Rhetors of silence and listening take advantage of a full range of communicative tools, especially when they have been disallowed full participation in rhetoric's traditional sites of concentration: speaking and writing (Foster; Myers; Suter). Makeup falls within this set of alternative conduits: after all, the making-up process is largely non-verbal, or extraverbal, and operates in the affective range, acting upon both users and viewers before, beneath, and around verbal or written expression (Corbett). Sensory, extraverbal channels like these are often leveraged when it is not safe for their users to speak out in more direct, unsubtle ways. While often dismissed in the way Lorde demonstrates above, as something "not needed," in its deployment as a subtle rhetorical tool in the vein of silence and listening, makeup emerges as not only feminist, but decidedly "feminist enough."

With its sensorial, extraverbal nature in mind, I aim to show in this essay how doing makeup is a form of subtle, feminist rhetoric by locating it within a particular cluster of theorists, some of whom could be said to descend from earlier scholarship on rhetorics of silence and listening initiated by the likes of Julie Bokser, Cheryl Glenn, and Krista Ratcliffe, but who build upon their contributions with more explicitly multisensory and fully-embodied approaches to self-presentation and public legibility. I analyze makeup, or rather the process of making up, by way of Tina Campt's "quiet" and "quotidian" forms of resistance in *Listening to Images* and Kevin Everod Quashie's further analysis of "quietness" as it troubles a public/private binary. Also taking up variations on these ideas are Jillian Hernandez, Melanie Jones, and Amoni Thompson, who explore cosmetic and other practices of self-presentation as embodied circulations of visual culture that link their participants not just to femininity, but to feminism, through their manifestations of cultural memory and self-possession. The writing of S. Brooke Corfman further helps me articulate the doing and wearing of makeup as a rhetorical encounter in which the body plays an active part, in a process that unfolds even after a look is "completed."

In what follows, I loosely follow the steps of a video in the "Get Ready with Me" genre of the early 2020s to structure my investigations into making up as a form of subtle feminism. I will not be focusing on interrogating "Get Ready with Me" as a genre here, or its circulation through user-generated video platforms like *YouTube* and *TikTok*. Rather, I follow its step-by-step sequence because it emphasizes the idea of applying makeup to oneself as a deliberate process, a knowing encounter with the self in which the makeup-user interacts with themselves, in anticipation of interacting with others. Come get ready with me.

Eyeliner

Most days, I start with my eyes. That's where I apply all colors of the rainbow, especially in shimmer and metallic formulas. When you do your eyes first, you can use your concealer afterwards to help shape, or "clean up" your eye look. Sequence is important. I usually bring my eyeshadow up and out in a soft angle, then outline that shape with my concealer afterwards, creating a soft yet clean "wing" shape. I do it that way because, for the longest time, I could not draw my eyes powerfully up and out with that graphic, cat-eye liner. The outer corners of my deep-set eyes are round, with the outer ridge of my top lid pointing decidedly downwards. I learned to create a real winged eyeliner more recently, aided by liquid formulas that lay down fluidly over my features. When I get it right, I intensify the power of my own gaze as I direct it towards others, even if it's just going to the grocery store or a meeting on campus. I also often run late.

The time it takes to do eyeliner points towards a way of thinking about making up as a subtle, unspoken, yet unmistakably feminist practice of transmitting memory and identity through the body. In her book-length study, Zahra Hankir explores several communities in which eyeliner has emerged as important both visually, in its impact on others, and personally, in what it means to create that bold, "winged" look on oneself. In Hankir's account, the excavation of the bust of Nefertiti in 1912 set off a wave of enthusiasm for dramatically winged eyeliner amidst that moment's rise of "Tutmania" (16). Part of the interest in Nefertiti's

eyeliner may come from its formal, unapologetically extravagant and time-intensive nature—such makeup refers implicitly to the time it took to do, and, by extension, the relative status of the wearer. This is even more the case when we consider that cost was, apparently, not a prohibitive factor when it came to cosmetics, as makeup artist and historian Lisa Eldridge notes that in ancient Egypt, cosmetics "were not the reserve of the wealthy or high-powered," and that "makeup palettes have been found in the most modest of graves and tombs" (76). Instead, the magnetism of Nefertiti's eyeliner highlights the idea of time as a feminist concept. Recent research has framed much of the time women spend on refining their appearance as "beauty work," a form of labor that is, predictably, unevenly distributed along race and gender lines (Lir and Ayalon; Lir; Kwan and Trautner; Palmer). And it is important, of course, to point out the financial, temporal, and emotional "tax" laid upon women by the expectation of beauty work. In its characteristic paradox, makeup carries feminist potential as well as pitfalls. But another perspective on makeup—thinking of it both as a process and as a final product—reframes the time spent on beauty work in a different way. In "Beauty Marks: the Latinx Surfaces of Loving, Becoming, and Mourning," Jillian Hernandez writes of a California-based Instagram makeup artist, Selena Ruiz. Ruiz creates "mask-like" looks on herself, which Hernandez describes as "Chola-goth/Betty Boop tributes to [Selena's] mother Gwen who passed away when she was a child" (79). Hernandez writes: "The makeup is the healing work. Beauty as a practice of mourning, a plastic play that allows one to continue to face life artfully. Recovering, but not forgetting, by transmitting the memory on the body" (79). Here, Hernandez reframes the process of doing makeup as a different kind of work, a palpable form of personal and cultural work: "a practice of mourning…transmitting the memory on the body" (79). The time Ruiz spends doing makeup tributes to her mother upon her own face takes on special significance: a communion with the memory of her mother, perhaps, whose presence may yet be written into her own features and into their shared gestures, across generations, of doing makeup. With this "transmission of memory on the body" in mind, the generous time that would have been given over to Nefertiti's eyeliner takes on new connotations, not simply of the leisure that allowed for it, but the way the ritual of makeup palpably and visibly located the Egyptian queen in her royal and spiritual lineage. When Hernandez writes, in this vein, that her "grandmothers' *máscara* and mascara do genealogical work," makeup as a time-intensive practice continues to take shape as a quiet, embodied feminist art (70, italics mine). From this perspective, the intimate, behind-the-scenes process of doing makeup is as important as the finished look, and it is a process that subtly, wordlessly conveys feminist values of embodied memory and identity.

Foundation

I used to always just grab the lightest skin-tone shade in any product range. It was usually displayed all the way to the left in a row, and marked with the lowest number, like "00—fair" or "01—light." If we "read" a makeup range on the shelf from left-to-right, my light skin tone formed a starting point, a numerical and chromal baseline. The notion of white skin as "unmarked," as "neutral," precipitates within this logic, with higher numbers and deeper pigments deviating from an implicit light-skinned norm. But sometimes even the lightest shades of a foundation range showed up a confounding yellow against my skin, so I

sheered them out to make them work for me. Now I know that's because I'm what the Internet would call a "cool-toned girlie," and these days, with a recent expansion of cosmetics-industry inclusivity, my shade is not always the farthest to the left anymore, or the lowest number. But at the time, it seemed that even I was not really served by an industry whose baseline skin tone was, ostensibly, mine.

Repurposing makeup, or "making it work," can be understood as a form of quietly feminist resistance to an industry that has been willfully blind to some would-be makeup-users. Especially when it comes to foundation, a close shade-match to the wearer's skin is crucial. But even after identifying the right shade, the question remains: who can find their shade on the market? The answer to that question reveals whom, historically, makeup has been made for and by. Now, makeup artists like Pat McGrath lead the cosmetics industry, alongside Black-owned companies such as Fenty Beauty, whose 40-shade foundation launch in 2017 set new standards for skin-tone inclusivity. This was not always the case, however. A *Racked* article by Nadra Nittle traces makeup brands serving Black customers back to Anthony Overton in 1898, through to Morton Neumann, who in 1926 established Valmor Products Co., which catered to women of color as its primary clientele even as its advertising made use of colorism, with the word "brighter" a thinly-veiled stand-in for "lighter." It was not until the 1960s and 70s that Avon and Maybelline began to serve a wider range of skin tones; later, Fashion Fair and IMAN Cosmetics provided landmarks on the journey to the contemporary makeup landscape. But being "seen" by larger players in the industry continues to be a problem, and some makeup-users have had to innovate more than others while participating in the process of making up.

As a result of being overlooked in the beauty industry, Black and brown makeup-wearers found inventive ways to engage in making up. Nittle, quoting beauty entrepreneur Kimberly Smith, notes that "for far too long black women essentially 'became chemists at home,' mixing shades to make the right foundation for their skin." In the absence of lip liners in shades designed to suit their skin tones, Black and Latinx makeup-wearers used eye pencil to line their lips, topping it with a lighter gloss to create a makeshift nude shade. In *Allure*, Thalía Henao explains that this was "more than just a simple makeup hack." She continues: "This style of lip liner was part of a beauty tradition Black women had no choice but to create in a society that intentionally excluded them." Makeup-users repurposing eyeliner and mixing custom shades at home demonstrate what Tina Campt, in *Listening to Images*, might call a "quiet" or "quotidian" form of resistance, developing their own practices of beauty within the limitations of available makeup products. In defining "quiet" and "quotidian," Campt could easily be referring to makeup's undertheorized role as a sensory and feminist rhetoric when she writes: "Each term references something assumed to go unspoken or unsaid, unremarked, unrecognized, or overlooked. They name practices that are pervasive and ever-present yet occluded by their seeming absence or erasure in repetition, routine, or internalization" (4). "Pervasive" yet rendered mundane, made "invisible" by repetition or routine, makeup, too, falls into Campt's understanding of the quiet and quotidian. In a key illustration of quotidian resistance through self-presentation, Campt analyzes a photo series curated by Martina Bacigalupo but originating in the Gulu Real Art Studio, a photography studio in Gulu, Uganda. In this series of seated portraits, the sitters' faces are fully cut out, with a blank square excising their face and head. The face cut-outs could then be used in documents such as ID cards, driver licenses, and other

forms of documentation related to citizenship. This was done because a set of four full, rectangular portraits with cut-out faces incidentally cost clients less than one square photo of the face—another inventive repurposing. And yet, the remainders are powerful, with the sitters' body postures, hand placement, and choices in dress emerging as amplified purveyors of selfhood in the absence of the face. Even though dresses, jackets, jewelry, and handbags are not seen in the official identification photos, they function as small yet deliberate expressions of selfhood and wholeness. Similarly, when repurposing, or "hacking" makeup products to suit their needs in the face of exclusion, makeup-users engage in a quietly feminist practice of resisting their own erasure and, in fact, they continue to skillfully leverage makeup's tools to intensify their presence. Through the process of making up with quiet resistance, they practice a small, quotidian feminism by seeing themselves, and bidding to be seen.

Concealer

When I do makeup, I always go in with concealer. In fact, my first makeup routine was just some slightly-dried foundation from the rim of a drugstore bottle, which I used to conceal; nothing else. Later, I'd amplify my features with black mascara and plum lips, but initially, I just wanted to hide the bumps and redness of acne. Now, I embrace the play of emphasis and de-emphasis: I soften some features with concealer, like my undereyes and the thinner skin around my mouth. After that, I'll glow up with blush and highlighter, steps I wouldn't take without creating a canvas by laying down concealer first.

Makeup is an art of subtle layering. Concealer, furthermore, needs to provide "coverage" but also hide itself, fusing with the skin so as not to appear as a distinct, noticeable membrane. The creation of layers that "hide themselves" gives rise to a quiet troubling of the delineation between interior and exterior, public and private, leading to a measure of choice and agency in what is visible to others and what is not. The very word "conceal" lends itself to one of makeup's less favorable connotations: to fake, pretend, or dissemble. To "conceal flaws" in order to "look better" often stands in contrast to makeup's more positively-framed functions, as a tool for artistic self-expression or for "enhancing" one's own features. In "Why Women Use Makeup," the authors frame these two aims for makeup as "camouflage" and "seduction," or what I might call hiding and emphasizing (Korichi, et al.). They further suggest that people using makeup mainly in these two ways fall into distinct psychological profiles, with anxiety and defensiveness characterizing those using makeup mainly for camouflage, and assertiveness and extroversion describing those mainly using it for seduction (Korichi, et al.). But as I mention above, attempts to camouflage and seduce often occur on the same face at the same time, in the hands of the makeup-user. Dark undereye circles and acne irritations, for instance, may be "concealed," at least partially, while the eyes, brows, and lips are made more distinct. On the surfaces of the cheek and temple, areas may be concealed directly underneath or alongside moves to bring out color or structure through blush, bronze, and highlight. It would be more accurate to say that makeup-users camouflage in order to seduce, or that minimizing some facial features while emphasizing others occurs simultaneously. Concealer reminds us that as a process, using makeup can't be oversimplified into rigid camouflage/seduce or hide/emphasize roles when its layered nature contains many overlapping

functions.

Further, camouflage, from a feminist rhetorical perspective, can also be understood as a form of subtle rhetorical agency in self-presentation. In the use of concealer, wearers intervene into a range of contingencies: blending away a sleepless night in service of work or childcare, for instance, softening the appearance of scars, or reducing the look of melasma, often but not always brought on by pregnancy. It is a type of makeup that is used to hide, at the wearer's choice, various issues with the skin that they may wish to—or feel a need to—keep to themselves. The acne that I had as a pre-teen and teen, and which I still have, is the hormonal type. As a youngster, the deep cysts were an unwelcome, visible signal of physical maturity that I preferred to minimize.

As such, the doing and wearing of makeup complicates a public and private binary in many ways, a quiet, quotidian process that privately works to shape a public self. In *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture*, Kevin Quashie continues a line of inquiry that resonates with Tina Campt's, above, further developing the idea of "quietness." In a seeming contradiction, Quashie formulates "quiet" as a form of expressiveness. But rather than being "synonymous with silence" or "the absence of sound or movement," Quashie argues that "quiet" should be "understood as a quality or a sensibility of being, as a manner of expression:"

> This expressiveness of quiet is not concerned with publicness, but instead is the expressiveness of the interior. That is, the quiet of a person represents the broad scope of his or her inner life; the quiet symbolizes—and if interrogated, expresses—some of the capacity of the interior. (21)

"The expressiveness of the interior" seems, at first, a paradoxical phrase. After all, what is interior is generally not overtly expressed, or able to be seen by others. And yet Quashie formulates a "quality or sensibility of being" that is outwardly expressed but indexes, or outlines, the presence of an interior. In a key example, Quashie points to the iconic 1968 Olympic podium photograph of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, in which the two athletes raise their fists in a Black power salute, their stances and facial expressions outlining, while also protecting, their inner experiences. Like Campt, Quashie locates practices of quietness in performances of Blackness, in particular, but suggests that quietness allows Blackness to be defined not in relation to publicness, as it so often is, but rather in terms of inwardness. Concealer operates through a quiet paradigm. As an outer veil or layer applied over the skin, it comprises a form of publicness that actually turns away from self-disclosure. It provides the shape of an interior—in this case, the bare skin—without revealing what is inside it. Concealer turns the bare skin into an interior, a sub-layer.

And yet, perhaps the application of quiet as a critical framework to concealer is not a perfect fit. In some ways, makeup better resembles the way Quashie formulates silence. Drawing a distinction between quiet and silence, Quashie writes: "the expressiveness of silence is often aware of an audience, a watcher or listener whose presence is the reason for the withholding—it is an expressiveness which is intent and even

defiant. This is a key difference between the two terms…because in its inwardness, the aesthetic of quiet is watcherless" (22). I have written above that makeup relies first upon the gaze directed towards oneself in a mirror, which in turn anticipates the gaze of others—certainly not an aesthetic that is "watcherless," as Quashie puts it. And it's true: other, more overtly visible makeup may operate like silence can, when silence is an intentional force that anticipates and defies a watcher or listener, a non-verbal signifier that pushes back, an invisible forcefield, against communicative expectations. That is how a graphic wing or an engine-red lip operates, at times—as a loud silence, as a preemptive, wordless challenge. But concealer is different, in that it deflects the attention of a watcher, thus remaining watcherless. In a small way, concealer defies clear categories of visible and invisible, public and private, the hidden and the emphasized. It becomes a tool of subtle feminism in the way it can be used to quietly protect an interior through a makeup-user's choice to wear it.

Powder

I loved my grandmother's powder room. I adored the tiny soaps shaped like roses and seashells arranged in an enameled dish next to the sink, and the folded guest towels in muted pastels. These pretty, yet somewhat impractical touches show how the powder room was intended as a kind of "backstage" space for guests, while the bedrooms had other, more private bathrooms that were separated from the shared living spaces by a long hallway. From one side to the other, my grandparents' single-floor home established a gradient from more public to more private, with the powder room stationed in the middle.

In small yet remarkable ways, the spaces in which doing makeup happens ask us to rethink rigidly defined notions of space and gender. Retreating to "powder one's nose" may, at first glance, seem like an example of the "beauty work" that women have often been expected to do, taxing both in terms of time and money (Shlomi and Lir; Kwan and Trautner; Palmer). From another perspective, however, that once again reframes makeup as a process, going to touch up makeup has served as a means for women to move into more private, "backstage" spaces, creating opportunities for backchannel conversations and alternative forms of communication. As far back as ancient Rome, makeup artist and cosmetic historian Lisa Eldridge notes, "cosmetics were usually applied in private, in a small room that would have been strictly the domain of women" (27). Indeed, at first glance, the rooms typically hospitable to the ritual of makeup reveal a politics of space and place that seems to reify conventional gender roles and their correlation to public and private spheres. And yet, makeup's processual nature also opens spatial conduits for challenging those designations. In courtly French circles, for instance, where "getting dressed and rouging your face in front of an audience was part of a public toilette practiced by aristocratic women," Lisa Eldridge notes that nevertheless, "there was a strong element of performance involved in the ritual, with most of the work being done beforehand and without the court onlookers" (33). Here, the stages of doing makeup point to more a nuanced gradient of public and private, interspersed with semi-public waystations, like the powder room in my grandparents' house. In *Classic Beauty: The History of Makeup*, cosmetics historian Gabriela Hernandez, too, makes note of Marie Antoinette's famously "public toilette" (35). She adds detail, however, that

once again points to the semi-public sites for doing makeup as communicative opportunities, in this case for women to engage in discussion unlikely to be allowed in the fully "onstage" spaces of the court. She writes: "An elaborate routine was carefully staged to allow favored members of the royal court to accompany her. In these public forums, women discussed many issues besides their looks and often invited intellectual guests to engage in conversation" (Hernandez 35). As a process, then, doing makeup can again be seen to open up possibilities for exchange outside of rhetoric's more "official" written and spoken conduits, suggesting not rigidly-defined public and private spaces; rather, a spectrum that subtly challenges a gendered spatial binary.

Wearing cosmetics throughout the day reveals how "doing makeup" is really an embodied process that unfolds slowly—quietly, gradually—over time, and which is not finished once the wearer steps away from the mirror. Thinking about makeup this way illuminates not just the blur of public and private space that I point out above, but also time-inflected formulations of gender. The term "powder room" dates to the seventeenth century, when powder was as much a man's concern as a woman's, used to finish both faces and elaborate wigs (Keith; Otranto). The need for touch-ups, and thus, a powder room, further suggests that even the final "product" of makeup, a finished look, is not static—rather, makeup changes as it becomes more "lived in," and the body continues to interact with it. In particular, the skin's natural production of oil tends to seep through layers of makeup. Powder absorbs oils, mattifying parts of the face that tend to become shiny over time. Carried in compact form inside pockets and handbags for reapplications throughout the day, powder lends itself in particular to the sense that the process of makeup doesn't end when the wearer lays down their tools and leaves the house. Instead, the process of makeup continues as its contact with the body is prolonged, a process further influenced by the lived experience of the wearer—their skin-type, body temperature, activity level, and environment.

The ongoing interaction of the body with makeup, as a medium, is brought further into focus by S. Brooke Corfman's analysis of a performance by the Canadian, transmasculine artist Cassils. In Cassils's durational performance entitled *Tiresias*, the artist stands just behind an ice sculpture carved into what Corfman describes as a "paradigmatically male torso of Greek statuary," almost as though wearing it like a breastplate (6). Cassils's presence speeds along the melting of the ice torso through body heat, and yet, as Corfman describes, "the redness visible on Cassils's torso is testament that the performance is more relational, less give-and-take, when the exchange of heat is traced" (6). That is, the ice affects Cassils's body, turning skin red and raw, even as Cassils's body affects the ice by causing it to melt faster. Although Cassils might be said to be simply standing still, the artist's body heat and breath continue as processes, even as the temperature of the environment, too, brings the ice to melt. "The way Cassils's chest rises and falls against the ice," Corfman writes, "[refuses] any sense that the performance is truly static" (14). *Tiresias* calls attention to how media interact with each other and with the environment in a constantly-unfolding way. So, too, with makeup upon the skin. Especially when it comes to powder touch-ups, we see how the body's production of oil interacts with cosmetic media. Permeable and fleeting, makeup interacts with the individuals wearing it in highly personal ways. I have dry eyes, so my mascara usually doesn't smudge with any production of warm tears, for instance, although I know that to be an issue for many of my fellow makeup enthusiasts.

In Corfman's reading, Cassils's performance engages deeply with themes of gender through its slow, proximal unfolding. They go on to trace how the generation of heat has been historically connected to conceptions of gender, with the ancients believing heat to be essential to men, and cold to women (Corfman 10). With this history in mind, performances of *Tiresias*—its eponymous character known in mythology for living both as a man and a woman—destabilize gender assignments by suggesting that "heat retention and exchange…becomes an experience shaped by one's specific history and experiences of embodiment, rather than reducible to an imaginary origin" (Corfman 12). Makeup, understood as a process involved in an ongoing interaction with the body, quietly yet palpably indexes what Corfman calls "specific history and experiences of embodiment" (12). The dually "preparatory-and-ongoing" nature of makeup that I describe here quietly underscores feminist values in the way that, in its own small ways, it reflects the irreducible, holistic, embodied experiences of individuals.

Contour and Highlight

I don't care if a wet-look highlight isn't "in" anymore: one thing about me is I want a gleaming cheekbone visible from space. There's a heightened glint to it— like sun on the water, like light on the blade of a sword. Nothing "snatches" the face like contour and highlight. Makeup-wearers contour by applying a cool-toned product to the cheek-hollows, or anywhere they aim to create a deeper shadow. Then, further heightening the planes of the face, a reflective highlight is applied to high points like the upper cheekbones and temples. Through the skillful contrast of light and shadow, contour and highlight can make a face look sculpted, gorgeously-lit. Beholding such a face, as though carved from marble, viewers may feel like their hair has been "snatched" off.

Although makeup is usually just one small element of an ensemble of tools for self-presentation (which may also include hair, dress, body art, or jewelry, for instance), the cheekbone definition heightened by contour and highlight gives rise to visual paradigms that may be subtly felt and yet rarely articulated, like the optics of a "slay." "Snatching off" someone's hair, or wig, is a term deriving from drag communities, a tradition that makes extensive use of makeup's tools for self-presentation. Indeed, Zahra Hankir notes the outsized influence of drag performance on makeup, noting that many prevalent techniques today, like "the use of hairspray to set makeup, the cut-crease eyeshadow technique, highlighting and contouring, wearing graphic eyeliner, and 'baking'…are just a few techniques borrowed from drag performers" (247-8). In combination with on-point makeup and wardrobe, drag performers also often borrow from techniques developed by Black hair stylists to achieve hair designs so impactful they might be said to "slay." In an essay on what she calls the "slay factor," Melanie Jones reads Beyoncé's 2016 Grammys performance as a demonstration of "slaying," and as an invocation of the Black Feminine Divine. According to Jones, to "slay" is about more than just a striking look—rather, it is connected to the "dark, ancient, radical warrior Goddess" and "Kali, the Hindu Goddess of war and liberation" (106). What it means to "slay" with snatched makeup, then, once again takes on implications beyond the "merely" aesthetic. Invoked among Black women, Jones further defines slaying as a "way of being in the world that encourages Black women to command the moment

and claim their power by self-possession" (106). In this context, the exaggerated, theatrical looks pulled by drag performers come into focus as forms of unapologetic visibility, and as divinely-inspired reclamations of self. When drag performers snatch their bone structure, they carve themselves from marble; drench themselves in a majestic light. Like Nefertiti's regal eyeliner, this time-intensive process of self-construction is one through which drag "queens" claim their roles, and while the makeup itself cannot be called understated, it nevertheless brings about a certain subtle, visual paradigm in which drag performers dare, invite, and challenge the gaze of others, preparing for a slay.

And yet, inviting and challenging the gaze of others is not the only subtle visual paradigm brought into focus by the planes of the face. In another essay by S. Brooke Corfman, "Yentl and the Three-Quarter Profile," Corfman asks how the planes of the face may "participate in gender" throughout Barbra Streisand's 1984 classic, *Yentl*, and offers a pattern of looking that is relational in a different way. Corfman identifies one of the film's central concerns in "Babs' face." Streisand, Corfman notes, famously felt that one side of her face was more feminine and the other more masculine, opting for a three-quarter view of the feminine side to be consistently featured in photographs. Corfman writes: "In Yentl this tension manifests in her sincere belief that her face is ambiguously gendered, that her right side is dramatically, distinctly different from her left. But a face is not one of those things that, like a vinyl record, can be held onto as an anchor."

Corfman suggests that because a face cannot truly be reduced to—or captured by—one side or one view, flipped definitively from A-side to B-side, a face is actually created in an affective accretion, being looked at by another over time. "The more we look at a face, the more it becomes familiar to us," Corfman writes, "and the more familiar it becomes to us, the harder it is to know what it actually looks like separate from our feeling about it." In Corfman's assessment, the gaze of others, especially a loving gaze, ultimately completes a face's features, inseparable from how the gazer feels about the gazed-at. A face is not more or less feminine or masculine, as Streisand believes—rather, a face is "made" over time, through being looked at.

The planes of the face are furthermore so complex as to resist the definite, especially, as Corfman argues in the context of *Yentl* and their own transition, definite gender. During transition, Corfman writes: "I played around with makeup more as an exercise in gendered practice than because I had a strong sense of what I wanted it to accomplish." They go on to joke: "In terms of aesthetic outcome, this was a bad idea." Here, Corfman names a desire to participate in a "gendered practice," not for its "aesthetic outcome" but for something else. In the context of my argument here about the making-up process as a form of subtle feminism, with its multifaceted feminist functions, we can see that perhaps what Corfman is interested in is makeup's gestures, its temporality, the way it invites the makeup-user to see—and subtly craft—themselves, in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. Of studying their own face during gender transition, Corfman writes: "To hold all of the pieces of my face together at once was impossible. Even the face I had, right then—as soon as I looked away from the mirror, something slipped. I had to look right back." In "playing around with makeup," makeup-users instantiate a kind of "built-over-time" gaze for themselves, in the mirror. After all, in doing makeup, we look, look away, look back again. And repeat. Through this intermittent looking

in the process of making up, we build, layer by layer, over time, a version of ourselves. As an experienced makeup-wearer, it even becomes possible to see oneself without makeup and yet imagine its presence, mentally laying a particular shade, shape, or placement over one's own features in the mirror before implementing the look. As a knowing encounter with the self, doing makeup subtly heightens the visual regime that Corfman suggests here, in which a face is truly made through repeated looking—in this case, our own.

Lips

Like Corfman, I notice something different about my face these days, and I wonder if it was always there, or if this is something new. When I catch sight of myself mid-speech, or when blotting lipstick, I see soft lines folding above my top lip, the kind I have seen on older women before. Has my mouth always done that? Or is my face changing, as I get older?

Lipstick, especially red, announces itself, intentional about drawing the gaze. Negotiating the difficulty of being visible in a society that diminishes their value, older women have made particular use of the red lip's small yet impactful effects on the self and others in order to show up in particular ways, more intensely, more "vitally" in their own eyes and the eyes of others. In a study of women over 50 engaging in beauty work, participants suggested that they engaged in beauty work for four main reasons: "the fight against invisibility, a life-long investment in appearance, the desire to attract or retain a romantic partner, and employment related-ageism" (Clarke and Bundon 1). Their thoughts about wearing lipstick in particular reveal much about how society positions older women. One woman reports that when she puts on lipstick before going out, she is "asserting some sort of a profile," while one woman even speaks of its ability to change her circumstances in a vulnerable medical setting, explaining: "In the hospital, for instance, as soon as you put lipstick on, they'll say 'Ah, she's feeling better.' So you can sort of kid them" (208). This woman may "kid" the doctors by adding color to her face, or, in the context of making up as a process that I have been developing here, perhaps it is really the act of attending to oneself that signals "feeling better" to others. Either way, the relationship between beauty work, or the willingness and ability of older women to apply makeup, and employment-related work is a striking one. It is no wonder that the red lip has long been associated with feminist movements concerned particularly with workplace and career equity. To be seen, recognized, and respected in workplace settings has often required strategic use of the small tools of visibility, such as makeup.

Emphasizing the mouth comes with connotations of self-regard and intensified presence when it comes to lipstick. With its wet, shiny texture, lip gloss also emphasizes the mouth through its luscious glint. Gloss is juicy, fun, audacious. Readers who remember their middle school hallways will know, like me, that the act of glossing lips in public is not just intended for its glistening, finished look—it's an act of making up that is also a performance, meant to be seen. In her article entitled "Sittin' Up in My Room," Amoni Thompson analyzes a photo series by Scheherazade Tillet called "…Sitting in the Wicker Chair" in ways that address this dual process-and-product makeup phenomenon, building upon Campt and Quashie's

formulations of the quiet and the quotidian. The photo series consists of portraits of Black girls seated in a wicker chair, inspired by the 1967 photo by Blair Stapp of Huey Newton. For Thompson, these photographs, which capture Black girls in a moment imbued dually with interiority and self-presentation to others, are opportunities to create a new "visual vocabulary" for Black girlhood. She describes one photograph in the series this way: "In the portrait of 15-year-old poet Angelina Cofer, we see her applying her lip gloss while wearing a graphic tee that reads RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY. For those of us in community with or who have once been Black girls ourselves, we know the application of lip gloss is ritual and tradition (cue "Lip Gloss" by Lil Mama)" (6). Generally, we think of doing makeup as a preparatory step, completed before leaving the private sphere to go out and interact with others. But in her portrait, Cofer is captured in the act of applying lip gloss, collapsing the act of getting ready with a more public-facing interaction. Rather than getting her picture taken after her makeup is finished and removed from the frame, here, applying lip gloss is a "getting ready" gesture that emerges as both preparatory and actually the main event. In this sense, Cofer echoes the eighteenth-century courtly rituals of toilette I mentioned earlier, generating an in-between, a semi-public, semi-private space. Invoking the same "self-possession" of "slay" that Melanie Jones draws our attention to, Thompson notes that Cofer's seated body language is not arbitrary: "Sitting," she writes, "becomes a generative modality to communicate Black girl self-possession and preservation" (10). Cofer's body is oriented off to the side, her head turned to the camera for the portrait. It's as though she is really sitting to face a makeup mirror, and simply glancing to the side for the portrait to be taken. Rather than fully orienting towards the gaze of the viewer, then, as in more traditional portraiture, Cofer makes the space and the moment her own, as Thompson writes: "Angelina's gesture of applying lip gloss while seated and facing the eye of the camera provides a portal into the intimate life of Black girlhood, but at her own behest" (6). Allowing the viewer a playful glimpse into her process of self-crafting, Cofer, like the eyeliner-wearers I mentioned earlier, connects herself to "ritual and tradition in her application of makeup" while demonstrating a unique, combined public-and-private gesture of girlhood (6). In Tillet's photograph, the body language of applying makeup becomes a small signal, a subtle means to convey presence and self-possession, allowing the user a way to appropriate space, choose how to appear, and, like Nefertiti's regal eyeliner, link themselves to the "rituals and traditions" in which they participate.

The Not-Final Look

Writing about the role of makeup in her own life, Jillian Hernandez notes that makeup is the kind of "magic you can buy at Walgreens for 99 cents" (79). Easily passed over as inconsequential or frivolous, makeup has in fact formed a relatively accessible set of aesthetic tools for self-exploration and self-presentation across a wide range of historical contexts and communities. A tool for small, everyday transformations that can be had for less than a dollar, it should be accounted for in a repertoire of subtle, everyday feminisms. Touching briefly on a wide range of sites for makeup use, this essay serves as an invitation to start—or reinvigorate—a deeper and more detailed conversation about makeup as a subtle feminist art. As fresh discourse takes shape in our field about cosmetic practices and their complex relation to feminisms, I want to underscore the importance of thinking about makeup not just as a product or "final look," but as a process—un-

folding, continuous; a deliberate encounter with the self that doubles its significance in the way it anticipates later encounter with others. Making up is a process that is not "just" visual but broadly sensory in nature, its contexts and sites of use revealing its nuanced interactions with elements of identity. It prompts us to notice new patterns of looking, and constructions of public and private space. It heightens our awareness of how aspects of culture manifest and transmit upon the body, and how quotidian acts of visibility can function as acts of quiet resistance. Created and experienced over time, without pretending to permanence, makeup's layering and blurring similarly disallows easy designations for exterior and interior, concealed and revealed. Changing over the course of a day in accordance with the wearer's unique lived experience, and over the course of a lifetime as makeup-wearers grow older, the process of making up warrants our attention as scholars for its feminist potentials and pitfalls, its many contradictions. Interrogating makeup may also allow scholars to attune in new ways to other cosmetic practices or elements of self-presentation that operate in a subtle feminist paradigm, such as dress, body art, or jewelry, among many other possibilities. Makeup's fleetingness, worn and wiped off daily, may seem ephemeral by comparison to the metals of jewelry or a tattoo worn for a lifetime. But makeup's impermanent nature also points to its unique affordances— readily adjusted to circumstance, a little different every time. Knowing that no look is really final, we become truly ready.

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Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Vogue "Beauty Secrets" as Civic Education: A Tutorial in Subtle Feminist Rhetoric

Rachel E. Molko

Abstract: This article explores the nuanced ways that Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez engages beauty as self-care, subtly intertwining it with her role as an American civil servant in her Vogue "Beauty Secrets" tutorial. By examining how her rhetoric challenges the politics of beauty, this article demonstrates that beauty can serve as both wellness and a quiet form of political resistance. Through three subtle rhetorical moves—reclaiming feminine agency, embracing cultural visuality, and engaging critically with beauty discourse and practices—Ocasio-Cortez redefines femininity and reclaims spaces traditionally hostile to it. Rather than offering a loud critique of feminist ideals, this analysis emphasizes the small, everyday actions that weave feminism into daily life. AOC's approach in her VBS tutorial subtly shifts perceptions of beauty from objectification to empowerment. By focusing on these small acts, this article highlights the understated power of self-reflexivity in challenging and re-envisioning oppressive cultural norms, making feminism more accessible and relatable.

Tags: visual rhetoric, feminist rhetoric, femininity, beauty tutorials, icons, popular culture

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It was August of 2020, when the "new normal" of pandemic existence began to set in. Already about half the year (so far) was spent working from home, my Boston apartment now morphing from an office, gym, game room, cafe, and living space depending on the time of day. With my body so under-stimulated, I was running on overstimulation of the mind in the form of content; devouring any new television, film, books, or articles I could get my hands on. Another outlet for content happened to be YouTube, and *Vogue* had just released a beauty tutorial by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), the congressional avatar for many millennial women at the time ("Congresswoman"). The series typically featured actors and pop stars, so I was quite intrigued by her presence. I clicked "play" and watched her prep and powder her skin, all the while musing passionately about women's issues and the shaky discourse on feminine beauty and wellness in the mainstream. I'd watched hundreds of beauty tutorials by this point in my life, so why was I moved to tears?

In this video, AOC articulates why beauty rituals can mean so much to women and femmes (see figure 1). Often, quiet moments in the privacy of one's own bathroom or in the company of close friends, beauty practices, routines, and rituals are intimate moments we spend with ourselves in preparation to face the everyday. Largely, beauty has helped women share space and talk to each other as we otherwise have been historically divided (presumably to reduce our power as citizens). The *Vogue* "Beauty Secrets" (VBS) series

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functions as an educational genre, a behind-the-scenes display of feminine embodiment, inviting viewers to consider what it means to reproduce feminine aesthetics with their bodies. Beauty tutorials host the opportunity to provide language to perceptions of the self as well as offer strategies for construction of self, many of which can translate across identifications. Thus, I argue that AOC's beauty tutorial provides a feminist civic education by mediating the relationship between herself, her priorities, and beauty practices—much like the way women's conduct manuals mediated the relationship between women's bodies, their place in society, and their behavior.

While women's conduct manuals often reinforced patriarchal expectations and norms of deference and domesticity, beauty tutorials have the potential to empower individuals and foster agency (Donawerth). In her tutorial, AOC shifts the rhetoric of beauty from prescriptive and authoritative to descriptive and empowering, reflecting broader cultural changes and feminist critiques of traditional beauty standards. What I initially perceived as a "trivial" reframing of feminine interests, I realized instead the tutorial performance was a small, subtle, and subversive feminist rhetorical act. On the surface, there's nothing particularly subdued about the video itself—the discussion on feminist issues is direct and clear (and reductive at times), the video is featured on a public mainstream platform, the *Beauty Secrets* series is presented by *Vogue*, the foremost authority on fashion and beauty in the world, and the rhetor herself is an unabashedly vocal champion of her beliefs in the political sphere. However, the way that AOC weaves a civic education into the narration of her skincare and beauty routine *is* a subtle feminist rhetorical move. The move itself is brought forth through another quiet practice, that of self-reflexivity—work that is carried out from within, synthesizing the many contexts within which we find ourselves and exploring where we stand in those realities. By taking time to process what it means to be hypervisible in the public sphere and what it takes for her to feel her best inhabiting a position of power—and then articulating those insights—AOC is able to embed a feminist rhetoric that is indeed personal and political, loud and subtle.

Figure 1: The introductory text for AOC's VBS tutorial ("Congresswoman"). Image description: a screen capture from a YouTube video, with its small icons along the bottom, a blank gradient that goes from white at the top to medium gray at the bottom. In a sans-serif font in the center are the words "Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Guide to Her Signature Red Lip."

For Representative Ocasio-Cortez to share "beauty secrets" as a political figure and feminist activist challenges the stereotype that feminists and/or people with power should not also be interested in beauty as self-care. She demonstrates that being a feminist does not require rejecting traditional feminine interests. All the while, she maintains her ethos as a champion of women's interests that does not wane when transferring contexts or audiences—she is known for providing other similarly transferable knowledge in other non-traditional educational contexts, including Instagram stories and Twitch broadcasts. However, the beauty tutorial is a particularly fertile rhetorical genre to engage feminist ideas as the tutorials function as sites that reflect how beauty can be collaboratively deployed as a critical language (White 153). As a result, AOC practices resistance to the feminist (and misogynist) schools of thought that perpetuate makeup as a tool of objectification from patriarchy. As demonstrated in the video, AOC employs a self-reflexive methodology of self-care to interrogate gendered and racist notions of beauty and beauty practices within a discourse of civic education. She re-places these notions in a discourse of self-care through three rhetorical moves: 1) reclaiming feminine agency; 2) embracing cultural visuality; and 3) engaging critically with beauty discourse and practices.

A Methodology of Self-Reflexivity as Self-Care

My definition of self-reflexivity as a "self-care practice" builds on, and sometimes diverges from, work in rhetorical studies. Feminist rhetoricians have typically engaged self-reflexivity in the context of research methods or pedagogy, with the goal in both cases to more ethically account for oneself and one's positionality in relation to research, research subjects, and students. For the purposes of this article, I define self-reflexivity as a practice of self-care that produces personal consciousness by monitoring the relationship among one's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors with one's socio-material experiences and circumstances. As Michel Foucault argues, working from the outside-in allows us to prepare "for a certain complete achievement of life" (III, 2). Thus, this article frames self-reflexivity as a small and subtle self-care method by which one builds a foundation for authenticity, preservation, and motivation—the tenets of civic education.

This framing also reveals self-reflexivity as a small and subtle *rhetorical act* because it involves a deliberate, introspective process where feminists can critically examine their own assumptions, biases, and positionality within their discourse. Unlike overt rhetorical strategies, self-reflexivity is an introspective process that is often private and personal, making it less visible and but potentially more nuanced than other forms of rhetorical action like public protest. Self-reflexivity doesn't always directly confront or challenge inequities in a visible manner, but the process itself can help to undermine or detach oneself from the ideological status quo. By engaging in self-reflexivity, feminists like AOC demonstrate how to complicate simplistic understandings of identity, power, and privilege, focusing on reflection and dialogue as a quieter, more persistent form of resistance. In turn, acts of self-reflexivity often yield gradual, internal shifts in understanding, which can ripple outwards to influence larger feminist practices and discourses.

Interrogating the notion of self-care through self-reflexivity also invites consideration of the ethical implications of self-care practices within rhetorical engagements. In her 1988 book *A Burst of Light,* Audre

Lorde said, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare" (120). While many embrace Lorde's philosophy, others contend that self-care has been co-opted through commodification, cultural appropriation, and self-indulgence. Noting the dangers of such a framing, Sara Ahmed writes, "To think of…self-care might seem to be a neoliberal agenda, a way of making feminism about the resilience of individuals" (236). However, in *Living a Feminist Life* Ahmed echoes Lorde in advocating for the necessity of self-care for feminists. More specifically, she suggests that in order to survive, we must set ourselves up to withstand the added pressure that feminism adds to our lives—to show up, to instigate change, to hold ourselves to a higher standard of personal conduct, to hold individuals and systems accountable for their role in an unjust status quo. Ahmed continues, "Sometimes: to survive in a system is to survive a system. Some of us have to be inventive, Audre Lorde suggests, to survive" (237). Through self-reflexivity as self-care, individuals can identify the sources of stress, burnout, or emotional exhaustion as an invention tool for action. Rhetoricians are not new to the idea of invention, but this framing of self-care-as-invention invokes the material circumstances of a lived life and what it means to survive. By critically reflecting on their own needs and limits, individuals can develop self-care strategies tailored to their specific contexts and circumstances. By reflecting on the broader social, cultural, and systemic contexts through self-reflexivity, individuals can assess how their self-care practices align with principles of social justice, equity, and inclusivity. They can examine how their self-care choices may impact their ability to engage responsibly and ethically in rhetorical practices, ensuring that self-care does not become an excuse for disengagement or avoidance of challenging issues. Thus, I forward feminist self-reflexivity as a small and subtle rhetorical act because it operates on an internal, personal level, challenging and refining feminist thought and practice in nuanced ways that contribute to broader social change over time.

Reclaiming Feminine Agency

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (see figure 2), my fellow self-identified Latina[1], feminist, and millennial, became the youngest woman ever elected to the U.S. Congress. From 2019 to the present, she has served as U.S. Representative for New York's 14th congressional district.[2] Amanda R. Matos, Senior Director of Constituency Campaigns at Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Harvard Kennedy School alum, writes that AOC's internet presence "demystif[ies] the US government for the American public" (91). Much like AOC's quest to demystify the U.S. government for the American people, her small demonstration and description of her beauty routine demystifies self-reflexive praxis as it pertains to feminine embodiment through self-care. While it may not be the outcome for every person who engages such a tactic, Representative Ocasio-Cortez finds small moments in her beauty routine to reclaim feminine beauty practices as a tool for empowerment and agency. In this section, I argue that by reclaiming the power to choose to engage with beauty, AOC models how citizens can reclaim beauty practices as expressions of autonomy rather than

1 Latino/a/x refers to individuals whose country of origin is within the Latin American territories (including Mexico, South and Central America, and the Caribbean Islands). Individuals from countries where the primary language is Spanish, like Spain, are considered Hispanic. For example, people from Brazil may identify as Latin but not Hispanic, but people from Puerto Rico are likely to identify as both..

2 The 14th district includes AOC's hometown of the Bronx, portions of north-central Queens, and Rikers Island in New York City.

conformity to external expectations.

Figure 2: AOC of the start of her tutorial before putting any products on ("Congresswoman"). Image description: AOC smiles in front of the camera, hair in a ponytail, wearing a black crew neck shirt and hoop earrings. In the background is a tan wall and a towel bar with two taupe hand towels hanging from it.

With public speaking a central element of her position as a congresswoman, AOC speaks about beauty with eloquence and ease—one with a quintessential millennial quality especially appropriate for the YouTube tutorial form. Throughout the video, she utilizes reflexive rhetoric to synthesize her sociopolitical convictions with a demonstration of beauty tools and techniques she has adopted over the years. Early in the tutorial, AOC takes a moment to highlight the importance of these personal lifestyle choices to challenge the assumption that feminine beauty practices are an antithesis to respectable, dignified, and worthy concerns. In reference to the details of her beauty routine, AOC says,

> The reason why I think it's so important to share these things is that first of all, femininity has power…Just being a woman [giggles] is quite politicized here in Washington. There's this really false idea that if you care about makeup or if you care, if your interests are in beauty and fashion, that that's somehow frivolous. But I actually think these are some of the most substantive decisions that we make and we make them every morning. ("Congresswoman" 1:16-1:56)

The conversational nature of the tutorial, where AOC narrativizes her experience with feminine beauty practices and situates them in personal socio-material experiences, brings the fraught relationship between feminine beauty practices and professionalism into the public discourse. The kind of exposure proffered by the tutorial, rather than AOC's visuality in session or on the campaign trail, comes with a sense of vulnerability. Her giggle after she says, "just being a woman," demonstrates that she is herself negotiating her feminine embodiment and how it is perceived "in Washington." The element of struggle revealed in her

giggle is a subtle reflection that empowerment does not require that one have all the answers, or that one be completely settled in their quest for identity and agency. However, a self-reflexive beauty and wellness practice allows AOC to take stock of the constraining aesthetic sentiments so that she can take an intentional, critical stance against them. In so doing, AOC continues to make sense of the world within herself with a firm grasp on her feminist intentions.

Feminists themselves have yet to shake negative perceptions of femininity in gender scholarship. In her response to *Femininity and Domination*, Patrocinio P. Schweickart criticizes Bartky's abandonment of femininity as a destiny of victimization. She writes, "Feminist consciousness has to involve a contradictory attitude toward femininity—not just a critique, but also an appreciation of the moral intuitions it harbors. Feminism, as I see it, is a struggle not only for the realization of women's rights, but also for the vindication of women's values" (190). Because feminism is influenced heavily by feminine values, I believe it is important to name them as such. Distancing ourselves from the origin of feminist ethics precludes us from pointing to the androcentric moral discourses that dominate and reinforce the status quo. In embracing feminine values, we must also embrace feminine style. Otherwise, we join in the cacophony of critiques of feminized appearance, rather than critiquing the system that justifies inequitable treatment on the basis of such appearances.

The history of radical feminists' rejection of patriarchal control of the body continues to permeate mainstream and academic discourse on feminine appearance. Feminisms of the 1970s were divided by ideas of lipstick as a symbol for liberation or as a symbol of women's continued oppression (Schaffer). For example, lesbian feminist scholar Sheila Jeffreys urges that feminine beauty should be redefined as a harmful consequence of patriarchy, rather than being seen as a source of empowerment. Jeffreys' life as an activist is defined by her decision to abandon both heterosexuality and her feminine appearance. "I gave up beauty practices," she shares, "supported by the strength of thousands of heterosexual and lesbian women around me who were also rejecting them. I stopped dying my hair 'mid-golden sable' and cut it short. I stopped wearing make-up. I stopped wearing high heels and, eventually, gave up skirts. I stopped shaving my armpits and legs" (qtd. in Bindel). Jeffreys' story is an example of the internalization of feminine beauty practices as a moral failure, that any self-respecting feminist sacrifices—or worse, betrays—her politics by accentuating her cheekbones or lips. This logic dismisses the reality of women's oppression to which Jeffreys refers. Getting women into the workforce hasn't solved the labor issue; women tend to take on more work in their personal and professional lives and do not earn equitable compensation to their male colleagues. Similarly, devaluing or rejecting beauty and fashion doesn't get us any more respect or any closer to ourselves. Consequently, Jeffreys discounts feminist activists who embody their identities through feminine style and those who do not find that their sexuality is a choice. Feminisms such as the brand practiced by Jeffries do not loosen the social constraints on non-male bodies; they simply adopt reciprocal constraints.

In alignment with Jeffreys, gender studies scholar Sandra Bartky theorizes that femininity is, in fact, constructed—that the outcome of femininity is construed by a "practiced and subjected body on which

an inferior status has been inscribed" (*Femininity and Domination* 71). Bartky is describing the status quo, where femininity functions in patriarchy to objectify and oppress, an assessment with which I do not necessarily disagree. Why else would we need to fight for women's rights if women were not assigned an inferior status under the guise of weak femininity? My challenge is to reconsider the placed blame on femininity as the explanation—or justification—for women's oppression.

Rather than dismissing femininity as merely a tool of oppression, I propose a more nuanced perspective. By reexamining femininity through a lens that recognizes its potential for agency and resistance, we can uncover the subtle ways in which it can be reclaimed and redefined. For example, AOC gives more context to her beauty ideology:

> I went from working in a restaurant to being on cable news all the time, and I was really not used to that kind of a shift. And, you know, I think I initially really struggled with that. I really did. And at a certain point, I just learned that you cannot get your feelings of beauty and confidence from anyone but yourself. You, that is one of the most ultimate gifts that you have to give to yourself. ("Congresswoman" 6:36-7:14)

Here, she explicitly describes her struggle with self-regard as she transitioned from a private to public citizen. She does not claim that feminine beauty practices gave her confidence, or that cosmetics gave her ability to face aesthetic scrutiny. She rightly locates the source of beauty and confidence as one that comes from within the self and in caring for the self. This claim implies that personal validation is not invalidated by an investment in self-presentation, but that they may work in tandem. Speaking back to the frivolity she alluded to earlier in the video, AOC frames the reclamation of aesthetic care as "a gift that you have to give yourself" that is a valuable and worthy use of time.

This perspective challenges the common notion that beauty practices are inherently superficial or self-indulgent. Instead, AOC suggests that these practices can be meaningful acts of self-respect and empowerment. By framing aesthetic care as a personal gift, she shifts the narrative, illustrating how intentional self-presentation can coexist with, and even enhance, inner confidence and self-worth. Here she expounds on this idea further as she applies concealer:

> And so, you know what? I just decided I'm not going to waste my time and if I'm going to spend an hour in the morning doing my glam, it's not going to be because I'm afraid of what some Republican photo is going to look like. If I'm gonna do an hour doing my glam, it's because I feel like it. And that's really the difference, my body, my choice [laughs]. ("Congresswoman" 7:15-7:44)

Ending this statement with "my body, my choice" underscores that the personal continues to be political in the small moments we take to prepare our bodies for the day ahead. Invoking the popular feminist

chant from Women's and Pro-Choice marches, she elucidates the element of protest in engaging feminine beauty practices. Jane Donawerth notes the "importance for women [to claim] their bodies for rhetorical use" in terms of elocution and performance (16). For AOC, her beauty routine is not only a method of self-care, of self-love, but it is a challenge to feminine constraints in a diminishing culture. AOC locates an exigence for spending her time with herself to monitor the relationship between her feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and socio-material experiences in a beauty routine when she says, "because I feel like it." With an affective exigence guiding her, AOC contrasts the agentive nature of deciding what is the right way to present the self with the worry of how her political opposition (Republicans) are going to construe, or rather, misconstrue, her choice to embody femininity.

This juxtaposition highlights the tension between personal agency and external judgment, emphasizing the power dynamics at play in how women are perceived. By deliberately choosing to embrace femininity on her own terms, AOC transforms what could be seen as a vulnerability into a statement of strength and autonomy. Her beauty routine, therefore, becomes a site of resistance—a way to assert control over her own image while challenging the expectations and criticisms imposed by a patriarchal society. While applying glitter eyeshadow, AOC explains the deliberation it took for her to embrace a sparkly look in session:

> You know, I used to think that I wouldn't be, I would be taken less seriously and as you know, as the youngest woman in Congress and as a woman of color, it's so hard to be taken seriously. It's just, you know, it's like any workplace where sometimes it feels like you have to jump up and down for anyone to listen. It's just really difficult because some people are just born in bodies that are naturally taken more seriously, you know. I used to think that glitter or shimmery eyeshadow…I would think, 'Oh man, like this isn't going to, this isn't gonna help me out, right?' Like people already try to diminish me, diminish my voice as young and frivolous and unintelligent. And so first of all, I tried the shimmer and it looks fire, it looks good. It helps me feel better. ("Congresswoman" 13:43-15:13)

Here, she makes connections among her perceived legitimacy as a congresswoman and her age, ethnicity, and feminine presentation, negotiating the interplay between her identity and socio-material circumstances. Matos observes similarly that AOC's "ability to govern is constantly put into question across party lines because of the layering of her ethnicity, age, hometown, and political ideology" (91). AOC points out that like in many other professions, when non-men[3] at her intersection wish to be heard, they have to put in more effort than others. Namely, those "born in bodies that are naturally taken more seriously," as AOC says above, like cis white men. She shares that she reflected deeply on how a shimmering eyelid might impact her already reduced stature among her colleagues, but she comes to a revelatory conclusion. Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez realizes that she likes the look of the sparkling eyeshadow, and that in appreciating her artistry, she feels better—it might not seem like a wild feat, but small choices can have big implications.

3 I utilize the term "non-men" to acknowledge that women, trans women, and non-binary people must exert more energy in order to take up space in male-dominated professions.

Through the decision to wear the shadow, she demonstrates self-care by putting her affective needs before the normative expectations placed on her.

Additionally, the fact that the colors and textures she works with stand against visual rhetorics of a "serious" or credible ethos offer a visual resistance to patriarchy. Were AOC to utilize beauty to comply with the male gaze, she would choose neutral colors and avoid flamboyant textures. The typical millennial phrase, "it looks fire," demonstrates a degree of enthusiasm in her appearance. Finding justification for practicing feminine beauty in joy, in good feeling, is a feminist reclamation of power and a self-care act. There is agency in reflecting internal desires in aesthetics and in influencing the way one feels by working from the outside in. As a civic educator, AOC emphasizes the importance of making choices in beauty practices for one's own reasons, reasons uncovered in a practice of self-reflexivity. By reinterpreting beauty practices through a feminist lens, AOC reclaims them as sources of power and joy. This transforms beauty from something imposed and restrictive into something that can be liberating and celebratory. And, importantly, it is a subtle challenge to the notion that beauty is inherently superficial or anti-feminist, instead framing it as a complex site of identity,expression, and invention.

Embracing Cultural Visuality

Having analyzed AOC's approach to feminine beauty practices as a self-reflexive exercise with agentive outcomes, I turn my attention to her donning of red lipstick as a visuality of pleasure and protest. In this section, I argue that the ways in which Representative Ocasio-Cortez offers a civic education by promoting a broader understanding of beauty that includes diverse body types, skin tones, and cultural practices. Understanding beauty as a site of cultural engagement encourages individuals to use their beauty practices as a form of resistance and advocacy. By celebrating culturally specific forms of beauty, individuals can appreciate beauty practices as diverse expressions of identity. However, this small rhetorical act is not one that originated with Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez. Powerful women throughout history have worn a red lip: Cleopatra created a red pigment from carmine beetles to wear on her lips; former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's red lipstick print on a napkin was auctioned in 2015 for two thousand pounds (Klein; Palumbo); in the early twentieth century, Suffragettes donned red lipstick as a mark of the independent, emancipated woman at a time where it was scandalous for middle-class women to be seen with visible signs of cosmetic adornment (Schaffer; Ware).

As a cultural rhetoric, Red lipstick holds meaning for Black women and Latinas. Fashion historian Shelby Ivey Christie reflects on her relationship with red lipstick, sharing, "for me, red lipstick is about shifting the narrative around what red lipstick traditionally meant for Black women. There's a long history of hyper-sexualization that is amplified by caricatures of Black women with exaggerated red lips" (qtd. in Ware). Here, she refers to minstrel shows and mammy caricatures. Also pushing back against negative stereotypes of Black women, author of "Red Lip Theology" Candice Marie Benbow shares that she wears red lipstick "to work, church and every place I see fit to affirm my beauty and power in this world." For Benbow, red lipstick

has been a tool for her to heal the inner 10-year-old that attempted to cut off her own lips with scissors in the bathroom—perhaps a healing tool born from a self-reflexive engagement with beauty as self-care:. "There is something about a red lip that signals power, fierceness, elegance, sensuality, agency, ownership—everything people who are told they are not beautiful should not have." In this sense, wearing red lipstick can be a small but substantive choice that asserts presence, radiates confidence, and draws from feminist history. In fact, a Harvard study yielded that the "lipstick effect" is one where those who wear lipstick experience higher levels of self-esteem, correlating positively with academic performance (Palumbo et al.). Importantly, this shows that the self-esteem afforded by lipstick is not inherently tied to external perceptions of the self.

While not a student, AOC attests to the confidence imbued in the red lipstick tube, sharing "I will wear a red lip when I want confidence, when I need a boost of confidence" ("Congresswoman" 4:56-5:01). Developing self-confidence could be understood as a feminist motivation for self-care or space of invention. As a woman with a high-pressure career and constituents relying on her for better living conditions, it makes sense that AOC would look for opportunities to augment–"boost"–her confidence. Referring to the cultural aesthetics of a red lip, AOC says, "And of course, being Latina, this is like very much our culture where we come from" (4:48-4:56). Amanda R. Matos of Planned Parenthood identifies that AOC's red lip is but one component of her Latin pride. She goes on to frame AOC's hoop earrings and twisted hairstyle at her congressional swearing in ceremony as an homage to her Puerto Rican heritage and Bronx roots. Culture writer Bren Lee Gomez writes that "never in [her] wildest dreams" did she imagine seeing the red lipstick and hoops combination in a political setting—and, as we know, visual representation has a ripple effect. As a Latina myself, I am aware of the simultaneous pride and burden that comes with pairing red lipstick and hoop earrings. Gomez says that the combination is "an instantly recognizable symbol of Latina culture, a look that both defines and is defined by the Latina experience" and also "bear[s] the invisible weight of both misogynistic and racially charged criticism." Representative Ocasio-Cortez chooses to wear them both despite, and potentially because of, these implications (see figure 3).

Figure 3: AOC at the end of her tutorial, red lipstick, and gold hoops visible ("Congresswoman"). Image description: a screen capture from a YouTube video: a smiling AOC is against the same tan wall with a towel bar and taupe hand towels, but she is now in full makeup.

It is striking to see a Latina bringing this visuality into the political sphere, a choice that would not have as the same impact were she a white woman—as appropriated styles are often seen as more acceptable when worn on a "more acceptable" body. In her article, Gomez shares her experience growing up as a Mexican American woman in the United States, living through the Trump presidency that championed a wall to keep Mexicans out, and growing up with a mother who made her choose either lipstick or hoops before she left the house in fear of prejudice. "Every time she puts on her hoops," Gomez writes, "she shows up for Latinas, and every time she shares another snippet of her beauty routine, she shows up for women." Gomez reveals the ways in which AOC's seemingly small and superficial choice to wear red lipstick in moments of significance can have a large impact on individuals in the audience.

In an exchange with a supporter on Twitter, AOC locates her style inspiration in Justice Sonia Sotomayor, maintaining the history of feminine empowerment through fashion and style. Supporter @AshleyAlese tweets, "As a woman of color, I've been told countless times to 'tone down' my look; that red lipstick and hoop earrings are not professional. Seeing @AOC rock her hoops & red lips to be sworn into Congress was important to ME and so many other people" (Mistry). In her tweet @AshleyAlese shows that representation matters in relation to race and gender, but also in the form of fashion and style. In her response, AOC tweets, "Lip+hoops were inspired by Sonia Sotomayor, who was advised to wear neutral-colored nail polish to her confirmation hearings to avoid scrutiny. She kept her red. Next time someone tells Bronx girls to take off their hoops, they can just say they're dressing like a Congresswoman" (Ocasio-Cortez). Rehearsing a historical precedent in American government that discouraged a feminine presentation through the color red, AOC proudly carries on the act of defiance in solidarity with Justice Sotomayor and encourages her support-

ers to cite a new precedent that she set with feminist intention. The historical association of red lipstick with women who have fought for their rights gives it a feminist significance. By wearing red lipstick, AOC takes a small opportunity to connect with this legacy of resistance and empowerment, aligning herself at once with both a broader feminist movement and her own cultural background to shift what it means to belong.

Engaging Critically with Beauty Discourse and Practices

In the case of the tutorial, AOC discusses feminine beauty practices for the role they play in her own identity formation, connecting them both to her politics and her positionality as an American Latina from the Bronx. The problematic aspects of beauty are not lost in AOC's beauty tutorial. In fact, it is AOC's self-reflexive engagement with beauty practices that make the artifact particularly impactful in acknowledging these setbacks. Throughout, AOC demonstrates how she is herself wrestling with the politics of beauty, locating the complex ideological implications of feminine aesthetic practices in a shared experience of "getting ready." In what follows, I explore the way AOC embodies a critical engagement with beauty by exploring the "why" and "at what cost" are we engaging in the feminine aestheticization of the self. By deploying small and subtle practices, Representative Ocasio-Cortez models a critical examination of societal and cultural standards of beauty that encourages individuals to make informed decisions that align with their values and beliefs.

Viewers of AOC's beauty tutorial may converse with other audience members in person or in the comments, but ultimately must engage in internal dialogues. These dialogues may be either subconscious or conscious forms of self-persuasion via self-reflexivity. When individuals consume popular culture, consciousness is produced via internal dialogue stemming from an individual engagement with the content, rather than a small group interaction. For example, reading essays is a process of conversing with the creators of those texts, but the creators cannot actively respond to the reader's questions and ideas. Instead, readers must engage in their self-reflexivity (the internal dialogue and resulting self-persuasion) that may lead to building one's self-esteem, recognizing gender inequities, or developing a critical perspective. Representative Ocasio-Cortez prompts women/femmes to 1) consider how and why we beautify and 2) to decide how and why we engage with beauty practices each day. As a result, such self-reflexivity opens up spaces for feminist actions.

Representative Ocasio-Cortez does not take for granted the choice she makes to adopt feminine beauty practices, though the opportunity to minimize the choice is available to her. As evidenced throughout the video, it is clear that she has, or has been made to, consider the implications of her self-presentation. This is significant because it is evidence that women internalize the expectations on them to present as more or less feminine through beauty. However, AOC shows how a self-reflexive engagement with beauty allows for authenticity and rhetorical strategy. As she builds the base of her face beat under her eyes and along her nose creases, she explains why she feminizes her appearance:

> Our culture is so predicated on diminishing women, right? And kind of preying on our self-esteem. And so it's quite a radical, my opinion, it's quite a radical act and it's almost like a mini protest to love yourself in a society that's always trying to tell you, you're not the right way, you're not the right color, you're not the right, you know, whatever it is. And when you stand up and you say, you know what, you don't make that decision, I make that decision. It's very powerful, but that doesn't mean we can't have fun. ("Congresswoman" 5:08-5:50)

This passage illustrates quite clearly the pleasure ("fun") and protest ("mini protest to love yourself") aspects of beauty that I assessed in the previous section, culminating in the agentive choice ("decision") in engaging fashion and beauty. However, I situate it in this section because it demonstrates that the discourses that circulate about beauty standards inform AOC's self-reflexive practice. Self-reflexivity functions as a filter through which she makes the distinction between complying with those standards and rejecting them. Fashion and beauty practices offer a moment, even if a small one, to embody an opposition to the way women ought to be, ought to look. If anything, this sentiment offers one compelling reason to enjoy a ritual of beauty in order to reflect one's interiority through aesthetics as well as an opposition to dominant ideology.

On another note, embodying a critical engagement with feminine beauty practices requires an awareness of the dangers of complicity in patriarchy and the limitations of feminine beauty practices in orienting our relationship to our bodies and ourselves. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell writes that those "who excel in producing what is beautiful and pleasing in masculine terms will not be praised for their skill but condemned on grounds of aesthetics or for a kind of 'feminine' incompetence" ("Consciousness-Raising" 50). In her tutorial, AOC presents rhetorical competence by straddling the needs of the mass audience and maintaining the nuance of feminist interpretation—defying Campbell's illustration of feminine aesthetic destiny. While drawing on a winged liner (see figure 4):

> We live in systems that were largely built for the convenience of men. And oftentimes were designed with the subjugation of women and queer people in mind. And so every time we make a decision, when you make a decision for you, when you're like, you know what, I'm going to do this, I'm not going to do this thing that's expected of me…because if it's expected of me, just because it's been the norm, who has the norm been serving? ("Congresswoman" 12:30-13:05)

Naming the implications of heterosexist patriarchy, AOC again reminds viewers of the motivations that continue to uphold social systems and what it means to resist them. By asking viewers to question who the norm has been serving, she is asking them to consider how that might perpetuate the status quo. As discussed earlier, I turn toward self-reflexivity for a method to take inventory of one's personal wellbeing, aesthetic and otherwise. In doing so, one might encounter the opportunity to protect oneself from the damage, burnout, and personal neglect that can occur in a dedication to social justice causes as witnessed byhe visible toll it takes to participate in politics and activism leveraged against women in the media. In her

recent memoir, What Happened, Hillary Clinton observes that "the few times I've gone out in public without make-up, it's made the news." Again, the double-bind of feminine style and appearance yields a potential distraction against the social change and political reform for which they advocate. In this case, Clinton's choice not to mask her "tired" appearance became a feminist issue (qtd. in Ellison).

Figure 4: AOC drawing on winged liner with an eyeliner pencil ("Congresswoman"). Image description: a YouTube screen capture showing AOC very close to the camera, holding an eyeliner pencil close to her face, carefully applying eyeliner with a neutral facial expression.

In her tutorial, AOC makes multiple connections between her work as a congresswoman and the way it manifests through her body. She says, "I have not gotten much sleep last night at all [sic], welcome to life in politics. We are trying to get people healthcare, making sure that they are taken care of in a pandemic, people are fighting too much, and so I have bags under my eyes" ("Congresswoman" 00:20-00:35). Here, she speaks to the way her duties and responsibilities, and the turbulent affective nature of the job, interrupt her sleep hygiene and how it manifests on her face. With the somewhat glib "welcome to life in politics," she implies that a lack of sleep is part of the job description. She continues, "I travel between DC and New York pretty much every single week…That's seven days a week. That's a lot of traveling. It is also a huge toll on skin" ("Congresswoman" 2:32-2:59). Again, she illustrates the demanding nature of congressional work on her time and presence. While not using the physical toll as a reason to reduce her commitment to her community and colleagues, she demonstrates an awareness of the bodily changes she's experiencing as a result of her role as a representative. In this sense, AOC reflects that there is not a clear line between the personal and political as a policymaker as well as a citizen. Practicing self-reflexivity, in this case, can help AOC manage her health and hygiene to prevent exhaustion or illness. And, in turn, her cosmetic ritual functions as a small place to care for herself and tend to the consequences of her demanding position in government in a way that suits her.

The double-bind of femininity becomes a quadruple-bind when one layers the material consequenc-

es of time and money in relation to gendered presentation. The beauty tutorial itself can remedy the aspect of time by providing information on what to buy, how to apply it, and in what order to do so. In this sense, the tutorial provides a service to those interested in beauty but not interested in the trial-and-error and costly research that comes with building up a beauty routine. In the VBS video, AOC spends approximately three minutes discussing the "pink tax." The pink tax is a gender-based price discrimination that is constituted by a markup on goods and services designed for the feminine maintenance and expression.

Representative Ocasio-Cortez refers to the luxury tax on menstruation products and the higher rates on women's dry-cleaning services, but there are also price differences between short and long haircuts, apparel such as jeans, and razors (where pink razors marketed toward women are often more expensive and less effective). While applying eyeshadow, AOC says,

> In my opinion a pink tax is not just about money, it's also about time. And I think right here, what we're talking about is a perfect example. If waking up in the morning and doing your makeup gives you life, then that is amazing and you should do it. But what we are also seeing all too often is that women who wear makeup, there are studies that show that women who wear makeup or regularly wear like a decent amount of makeup, kind of show up to the office in glam, also make more money. And so at that point, it stops being, these calculations and decisions, stop being about choice. And they start being about patriarchy [giggles] where if we look attractive to men, then we will be compensated more. And that, to me is, the complete antithesis of what beauty should be about. I think beauty should be about the person who is applying it. And so these things add up over time and on top of all of that we're not even paid at the same level as men. And so our expenses are higher, our time is less and we're not even getting paid at an equal rate. Can't catch a break. ("Congresswoman" 10:59-12:29)

Here, AOC contrasts the way one sacrifices time for the joy in one's practice of beauty ("gives you life"; "our time is less") with the financial consequences of eschewing glam from one's professional presentation ("show[ing] up to the office in glam, [are] also mak[ing] more money"). The awareness of these trends in gendered compensation adds pressure to bring the visuality of femininity to the office for one's livelihood–or to avoid scrutiny in the case of Hillary Clinton. This kind of pressure, as AOC states, tends to overshadow the intersection of authenticity and calculation that she otherwise champions. In all cases, self-reflexivity comes with a plethora of realizations, some that result in empowerment and others that, importantly, help individuals appraise the sociopolitical and professional landscape within which they are located. As a civic educator, AOC encourages individuals to question who benefits from beauty norms, how they are constructed, and how they can impact internal and external perceptions and livelihoods.

Limitations

With all of the potential good that can come from reclaiming beauty practices as small, everyday approaches to feminist self-care, there are limitations to the change they can bring for people, communities, and institutions. For example, self-care as demonstrated by Representative Ocasio-Cortez invokes consumption and consumerism by suggesting a number of products that range in price and ingredients. On the one hand, the beauty industry is heavily commercialized, and in some cases, it exploits societal beauty standards for profit. On the other hand, the beauty and wellness industries are making an effort to eliminate toxins and animal testing. However, some of the products shown are produced by conglomerates that still engage in questionable and inconsistent ethics. Emphasizing that products are necessary elements in a network of femininity may be perceived as perpetuating a neoliberal agenda of individualism and consumerism.

Additionally, reclaiming fashion and beauty as areas for empowerment does not undo the history of these realms' complicity in systems of regulation, surveillance, and subordination. Janell Hobson writes on the ways in which beauty has been used to subordinate minoritized women: "In male-dominated culture," she writes, "all women are judged by their physical attractiveness and evaluated in comparison to particular standards of beauty based on white supremacy" (7). As a result, convincing people in "deviant" bodies that they're not beautiful is a way to take their power and maintain the status quo. Being pretty is a privilege in patriarchy, just like generational wealth is a privilege in capitalism. The life-altering potential of being seen as a beauty subject should not be overlooked. Like AOC, we might question what kind of power comes with beauty: Are those considered beautiful "restricted because they are not subjective agents of change but merely sex objects?" (Hobson 8). What do we have to gain by being called beautiful? How do we circumvent norms and standards to reclaim beauty for ourselves? How does feminism(s) shift what we find beautiful?

Conclusion

As Representative Ocasio-Cortez demonstrates, beauty can be a small and subtle tool leveraged to represent oneself confidently in pursuit of social change (as she does in a historically white and male institution that is the U.S. House of Representatives). Her beauty tutorial transcends the superficiality often associated with feminine beauty practices and emerges as a powerful tool for feminist civic education. By recontextualizing beauty routines within a framework of self-reflexivity and empowerment, AOC challenges the historical norms enforced by women's conduct manuals, which once dictated how women should navigate their bodies, behavior, and place in society. Through her tutorial, she not only shifts the rhetoric from one of prescriptive authority to one of personal agency but also engages in a subtle yet profound feminist act. This act is not merely about advocating for women's rights in a direct, overt manner; it is about reclaiming spaces traditionally deemed trivial and using them to articulate a deeper, more personal feminist narrative. AOC's approach is a reminder that the personal is political, and through the seemingly mundane act of a beauty tutorial, she provides a nuanced, reflective, and empowering civic education that encourages individuals to think critically about their place in society and how they choose to present themselves within it.

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On Being a "Good Girl" and on Doing Good

Charlotte Hogg

Abstract: In this essay, the author grapples with how to navigate expectations of a "right way" to be a feminist when the jumbled and shifting realities of our personal and professional lives sometimes ask for us to adjust the dial based on the rhetorical situation. What if "loud" and "quiet" or "radical" and "enough" were seen as coalitional: both/and instead of either/or? At the same time, how do we know when we're adjusting the volume based on our exigence and audience and not because it's easy or comfortable? She considers how *being* good and *doing* good has too often been convoluted by and for white women and unpacks the ways the scripts of how to be a good girl and how to be a good feminist can keep us talking the talk more than walking the messy walk.

Keywords: good girl, white feminism, sororities, coalitional feminism

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We cannot keep pulling each other's feminist cards because of our contradictions.

--Brittney Cooper

I sat at a round table near the far edge of the room with one of my doctoral advisees for Lisa Melonçon's plenary talk on quiet feminism at the Feminisms and Rhetorics 2019 Conference at James Madison University. I'd traveled from Fort Worth where just the month before Atatiana Jefferson, age 28, was shot inside her home by a police officer. I'd participated in a small but mighty protest on my campus, one zip code away. This was six months before COVID took us all inside and Breonna Taylor, 26, was shot inside her home in Louisville, Kentucky.

I listened to Melonçon's keynote with interest due to my own research on women identifying across a range of feminist sensibilities (or declaring they weren't feminist) as well as personally trying to figure out how to be a better ally as a teacher, colleague, and citizen. I recall little about the talk itself except what Patricia Fancher posted on Twitter:

Charlotte Hogg, professor of English at Texas Christian University, specializes in rhetoric and composition, women's rhetorics, rural literacies, and creative nonfiction. She is the author of *White Sororities and the Cultural Work of Belonging*, *From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community* and co-author of *Rural Literacies* with Kim Donehower and Eileen Schell. They also co-edited *Reclaiming the Rural: Essays on Literacy, Rhetoric, and Pedagogy,* and with Shari Stenberg, she co-edited *Persuasive Acts: Women's Rhetorics in the Twenty-first Century*. Her writing has appeared in *The Washington Post, Inside Higher Ed, College English, Rhetoric Review, Peitho, Puerto del Sol, The Southeast Review,* and elsewhere.

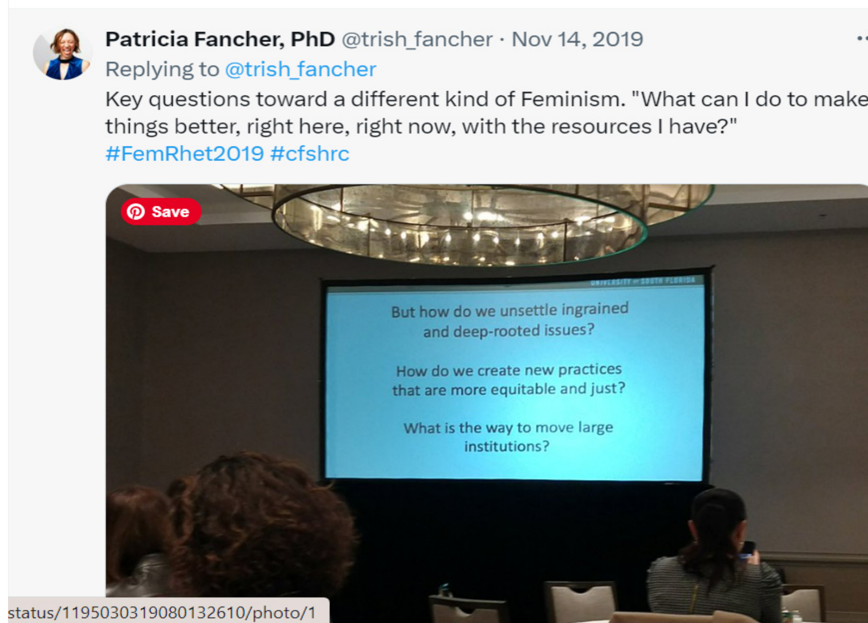

Figure 1: a photograph taken at a conference presentation room. The lighting is dim, but a large chandelier hangs from the ceiling. We can see the backs of several attendees' heads and a slide on a projection screen with three questions, which are listed below.

The three questions from Melonçon's slide: "But how do we unsettle ingrained and deep-rooted issues? How do we create new practices that are more equitable and just? What is the way to move large institutions?" I think these are thoughtful, ambitious questions. I later learned in Michelle F. Eble's Twitter response to Melonçon's talk that Erin A. Frost's term "apparent feminism" in technical communication seems relevant here:

> a methodology that seeks to recognize and make apparent the urgent and sometimes hidden exigencies for feminist critique of contemporary technical rhetorics. It encourages a response to social justice exigencies, invites participation from allies who do not explicitly identify as feminist but do work that complements feminist goals, and makes apparent the ways in which efficient work actually depends on the existence and input of diverse audiences. (5)

Sitting in that room, the title, "Quiet Feminism" didn't spark rhetorical listening. Many in the audience pushed back, and their questions felt right and made so much sense. Quiet suggests complicit, just like silence (see writer and philosopher Julian Baggini's thoughts on this). Or quiet can be timid and slow, and the stakes are too high for that. Or quiet is more available for those who are privileged and not being harmed. Quiet can be these things, and we should work hard against that kind of quiet. But quiet isn't always an unwillingness to do good. It might be trying to move the needle with those who will shut down and dig in their heels otherwise.

I have an acquaintance who on Facebook consistently said dismissive things about a huge swath of the country during an election season. I asked what kind of reaction she got from her online friends. She

explained that she didn't have any who weren't "blue staters." I couldn't help but think: it's a lot more comfortable acting boldly when you know you don't have to persuade anyone.

I remember thinking after the keynote that I should be quiet (!) on seeing some value to the notion of (albeit poorly named) quiet feminism. I worried my feminist card would be pulled, à la Brittney Cooper's epigraph above. Yet I eagerly submitted to this special issue call to explore how we exist as feminists in the field and in our lives on multiple fronts to do the coalitional work of feminism. I'm not focusing here on whether we identify as feminist, as Roxane Gay so accessibly did in *Bad Feminist* a decade ago, but the exigence is in the same realm. She addresses the ways she didn't fit the reductive perception of feminism (one she used to hold herself). Her book explores how "bad feminism" is really a nuanced feminism that comes from not having what seems the "good" or "correct" response.

Gay didn't always feel that feminism spoke for her, as feminism has repeatedly failed "women of color, queer women, and transgender women" and that "for years, I decided feminism wasn't for me as a black woman, as a woman who has been queer identified at varying points in her life, because feminism has, historically, been far more invested in improving the lives of heterosexual white women to the detriment of all others" (xiii). I'm a white, cis, straight, feminist who knows and is complicit in this history, striving to be a better-educated ally, which I define as someone who supports and boosts those marginalized individually and systemically. Sometimes my rhetorical situations involve those who haven't embraced any kind of feminism, let alone problematic white feminism. Quiet/apparent/subtle feminisms can be a way to move the needle.

Relatedly, Gay's book is grappling with seeking to live as a feminist rather than meeting some kind of feminist ideal. As she explains, "feminism is flawed because it is a movement powered by people and people are inherently flawed. For whatever reason, we hold feminism to an unreasonable standard where the movement must be everything we want and must always make the best choices" (x). She goes on to add: "the problem with movements is that, all too often, they are associated only with the most visible figures, the people with the biggest platforms and *the loudest, most provocative voices*" (x, emphasis added). For Gay, known as one of the keenest cultural critics on gender and race, it was the loudest voices that overdetermined what feminism was and how to be a feminist that initially led her to resist feminism.

I approach the issue here from a different perspective as someone who embraces feminism and had to learn that *being* good as a feminist is different than *doing* good as one, and this plays out in many ways that I explore in personal and professional contexts. Our feminist work can happen through doing good in multiple ways—small, grand, subtle—that move our collective project forward.

Teasing Apart Being Good and Doing Good: Learning Ways To Be Feminist

I lived in such a small town in the 1980s that in junior high we were automatically on the volleyball and basketball teams. In two years of playing basketball, reaching a bit higher than my opponent for a jump ball was my biggest accomplishment. My tall, blonde coach told my parents at conferences, "I can't say much about your daughter's athletic ability, but she's the only one who gets along with every junior high girl." I was a neutral space amid mean girl drama. After I could opt out of sports in high school to be the basketball statistician, on the sidelines but still in the mix, and later when I held jobs and started navigating adulthood, the trait of getting along with everyone became a source of pride. Until it didn't.

Up until I found feminist theory and history in graduate school over two decades later, I didn't see signals that it was anything but good to *be* good and to be liked and to be a peacemaker. I know now that this is the luxury of my whiteness, this privilege to sidestep discomfort. I'd also had good training in making others comfortable, I learned. In my PhD coursework, I was assigned Margaret Finders' *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High*. I realized I'd been a "spacer," or what one teacher called the girls in the room she seated between the boys: "naughty boy, spacer, naughty boy, spacer. It's terrible but it's what you have to do to survive" (Finders 124). I didn't know my presence, ponytailed girl with an overbite, was orchestrated in that way in elementary school, but I do know that many women still become or are made spacers to make others' paths easier or faster or brighter.[1] Being good can be a code for how women should placate or reward civility masked as a way to hamstring women. But I want to reclaim the notion of spacer not as one who is positioned by others and rewarded for being docile but a role one instead takes on themselves to create a space to maneuver in different rhetorical situations.

To be the kind of "good girl" rewarded in a patriarchal society means to follow and maintain the status quo, but to be a "good woman" in feminist communities means to undo that: to speak out, and speak up. (Cue America Ferrera's monologue from *Barbie* here.) Sometimes volume becomes a barometer for effectiveness for and commitment to change. The jumbled and shifting realities of our personal and professional lives sometimes ask for us to adjust the dial based on the rhetorical situation. What if "loud" and "quiet" or "radical" and "enough" were seen as coalitional: both/and instead of either/or? But how do we know when we're adjusting the volume based on our exigence and audience and not because it's easy or comfortable? We can't always, but I want to consider how *being* good and *doing* good has too often been convoluted *by* and *for* white women (and perhaps others, though I want to stay in my lane with the examples and my own experiences I draw from). What if sometimes the scripts themselves get in the way (this is how to be a good girl, this is how to be a good feminist), and keep us talking the talk more than walking the messy walk?

Too often, we shortcut our positionality markers, but I pause to share a few glimpses behind the

1 Another twist: Academia is still full of spacers; I can't count the times I've answered an email or taken on a task that a less responsive or less generous [usually male] colleague didn't. In those moments I'm not silent, but I do feel complicit in contributing to a patriarchal system. At the same time, in those moments I seek to support—not serve—others where I have the institutional heft to do so, like grad students or contingent faculty.

scenes of my labels as white, cis, straight girl from the Plains and how that informs, aligns, and pushes against the intellectual work of feminism. In short: we can't ignore our lived realities and how we navigate those in our rhetorical sphere. In my case, as a white girl-then-woman, being good (compliant for others) and doing good (working to create better for all) has been difficult to detangle. I was a spacer in fulfilling cultural scripts of (white) womanhood like the legacy of the cult of true womanhood, scripts also well learned by my parents. My parents had been settling into married life and parenting their first child in the late 1960s, witnessing the volatile decade from their tv screen. They weren't Boomers but the Silent generation, known for civility and playing it safe. Not only was my family risk-averse, we were literally in the middle and not where the media told me the action happened—I spent my childhood in Minnesota, North Dakota, and then rural Nebraska. The first Black person I spoke to was another child at the roller-skating rink in Fargo; I was about eight, and he was probably a year or two younger. He was small and I felt protective of him after I built up the courage to say hello before we skated beside each other. Even then I think I understood on some level that this fascination with meeting a Black person was wrong. But I had, along with half of the United States, recently seen *Roots*, and I was horrified with what I learned about what white people did to Black people. Maybe I was virtue signaling even then, talking to the boy at the roller-skating rink and later asking for (and receiving) a Black Barbie for my birthday.[2] My reaction may have been part earnestness in wanting to show—and tell myself—that I knew right from wrong, that I wasn't one of the bad white people. Being good and doing good were conflated then. Doing good was keeping a small boy company who I worried others might not be kind to.

Issues became thornier when I saw conflicting messages about being good (behaving as maintaining a wrong status quo) with doing good (acting out for a greater good). In high school in the 1980s, I became engrossed with learning about the turmoil of the 1960s—civil rights marches, flashes of Woodstock, scenes from Vietnam protests on campuses. My mom had gone to Kent State, although it was before the 1970 National Guard shooting. This was more a skidding over of cultural moments than hearty intellectual work, high schooler that I was. I see now it was partly a fascination with those who weren't rule followers, who pushed back for what was just. They were *doing* good by not *being* good in the ways I'd been rewarded as a spacer. I sat in my bedroom and listened to Peter, Paul, and Mary. I'd wonder what I'd have done had I been on a college campus at that time—would I have rallied for what was right, or would I have watched, awed at bravery from the sidelines but afraid to join in as a rule follower and good girl? These seemed the only two choices.

A Spacer Turns Researcher

The tensions surrounding being good and doing good have been prevalent in my research in how and whom I study, in seeking to understand how we do and don't make moves to forward all women. I've studied older, rural, white women and National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) (read: "historically" white) sorority

2 I mean here the original Black Barbie, still saved in my mementoes. During a revision of this piece in June 2024, the documentary *Black Barbie* premiered on Netflix and shows the Black women who pushed to create her and the import of the representation to Black girls and women.

women. Though different populations, they generally don't take on the label feminist, falling between the cracks of academic conversations on gender and feminism and/or have tenuous relationships with feminism. My goal is to complicate assumptions about them without glorifying or vilifying them. To do good here from a researcher's perspective is to render a more nuanced portrayal of women without simply replicating and centering an uncritical whiteness.

Jacqueline Jones Royster's codes of cultural conduct in her 1996 CCCC Chair's address, "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own," are a guide to doing good in our research:

> If we can set aside our rights of exclusivity in our own home cultures, if we can set aside the tendencies we all have to think too narrowly, we actually leave open an important possibility. In our nation, we have little idea of the potential that a variety of subjectivities—operating with honor, respect, and reasonable codes of conduct—can bring to critical inquiry or critical problems. What might happen if we treated differences in subject position as critical pieces of the whole, vital to thorough understanding, and central to both problem-finding and problem-solving? (33-34)

Royster brings compassion and generosity to a critical eye. When I chose to write about NPC sorority women, I felt ambivalence because of imagined or real pushback for focusing on organizations who aren't feminist and have a history of exclusion based on race, religion, and class. And yet: my interest in studying them was to examine how those ideologies function rhetorically within this system to which five million women belong, how ideas of womanhood and whiteness are shaped.

For me, studying organizations that are pro-woman but do all they can to avoid the term feminist meant examining diluted ideas of feminism about promoting women's individual empowerment but not seeking equality for all. These feminisms appear to eschew being good as complying to the patriarchy, celebrating instead boldness and speaking out but without doing good to uplift all women. Many mark the late 1980s to early 1990s, the end of the Reagan/Bush years, as the rise of "postfeminism," the kinds of feminism found in mainstream culture discussed by Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, and Camille Paglia (all white women), and erupting during a time when women's power was more visible in popular culture but women were also met with great scrutiny. Most agree that postfeminism or power feminism puts more focus on the individual rather than the collective and syncs up with capitalism and neoliberalism. Catherine Rottenberg points to the ideas forwarded by Sheryl Sandberg's 2013 bestseller *Lean In* that invoked "a new feminist vocabulary, where happiness, balance and 'lean in' were replacing key terms traditionally inseparable from public feminist discussions and debates, namely, autonomy, rights, liberation and social justice" (qtd. in Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 7). It's all about empowerment of self, not a collective lifting up of others for social justice, speaking out to claim voice or space unlike the speaking out expected of allies to those who are marginalized. Rather than a quiet or subtle feminism, it's loud and bold, the volume up to perform, but not for doing good for all women.

I've consumed and been consumed by these feminisms; white feminism is a more palatable, mainstream feminism. I found feminist theory in graduate school in the last half of the 1990s. Not surprisingly, the feminism I learned was taught by white, second-wave feminists even as my feminist theory or rhetoric classes also taught womanism, fractures in white and Black feminisms, racist constructions and policing of Black women's bodies, LGBTQ voices, and indigenous ways of knowing. Still, white feminism persisted by Rafia Zakaria's definition of a white feminist is "someone who refuses to consider the role that whiteness and the racial privilege attached to it have played and continue to play in universalizing white feminist concerns, agendas, and beliefs as being those of all of feminism and all of feminists" (vii). Kyla Schuller supplies a useful historical framework:

> For nearly two hundred years, a large and vibrant tradition of white women has framed sex equality to mean gaining access to the positions historically reserved for white middle-class and wealthy men. The goal, for these feminists, is to empower women to assume positions of influence within a fundamentally unequal system. Many of these feminists even argue, explicitly or implicitly, that their whiteness authorizes their rights. They weave feminism, racism, and wealth accumulation together as necessary partners, a phenomenon that has a tidy name: white feminism. (2)

Schuller's book is focused on how this has played out historically in the U.S. She traces how key figures from nineteenth- to twenty-first-century U.S. history were white feminist activists who not only ignored intersectionality but actively tamped down sisters of color. In each chapter she shows the ways "white feminism is an active form of harm, not simply a by-product of self-absorption" (4). What Schuller calls a counterhistory alerts readers who have been exposed to mainstream, feminist histories the ways some of the most lauded, visible activists were damaging to women of color, even as they did other important, activist work.

First- and second-wave white women feminists who seem to get the most acclaim were activists: putting themselves on the line, Alice Paul radicalism. *Well-behaved women rarely make history.* The racism of first-wave feminists is increasingly visible to those who've had the luxury of not paying attention, and stories occluded are being revealed. Journalist Sydney Trent shares how founders of Black sorority Delta Sigma Theta marched on March 3, 1913, on Pennsylvania Avenue the night before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. "Segregated in the back of the suffrage parade by its white organizers, the Deltas and other African American women were pioneers in paving the way for future Black political activism" (Trent). They weren't in the program, Trent explains:

> As organizing for the March 3 parade got underway, led by 28-year-old Alice Paul, [Ida] Wells-Barnett was forbidden to march with the all-white Chicago delegation out of fear that her presence would offend Southern women. The fiery crusader, her 60-member strong suffrage club and the other African American activists were consigned to bring up the rear.

Women like Paul weren't being good girls by patriarchal standards, but they also weren't forwarding a full feminist project to do good for all women. In short, loud isn't always good. Good isn't always loud. And someone like Paul is deemed too feminist or not feminist enough, depending on the feminist cards being checked.

Small Changes: Reading the Room

So many of us working to do good can fall short. I sought to reach both feminist scholars and sorority women—sometimes feminists, often not, yet championing women at every turn. I was trying to reach across the aisle in an effort to do some good through useful, fresh understanding. At the same time, I worried I'd be dismissed by the very readers I wanted to reach, those on either side of a feminist gulf.

One of the recruitment (then known as rush) advisors I knew when I was an undergraduate in an NPC sorority said when we were preparing for recruitment: "some are flowers, and some are pots." She meant that some women are best equipped—through appearance and social skills—to woo for our chapter and that others are…less so. I was to delegate accordingly as Rush Chair. The statement itself is ugly in the context it was used, but I think of that metaphor in other contexts now. I'm a much better pot than a flower who's bigger and bolder. Is that quiet feminism? Subtle feminism? I hope to be a productive spacer—not functioning solely as a buffer for others but seeking to do good at a lower frequency.

I also know that as a pot, and a white pot at that, I can sometimes cross the aisle to try to make a shift. During a visit with my parents around 2015 or so, Fox News was finding extreme bathroom examples to ignite transphobia around bathroom bills. My mom and I were in the living room, chatting it up as we always did. She'd just read a long profile in the *Lincoln Journal-Star* about a high school student who was trans and enduring policies about single-sex bathrooms at school. It was this youth's life story and struggle they faced using the bathroom for gender assigned at birth that made my mom question the news she was seeing. We talked about the piece, and she said, "I hadn't thought about how hard it would be for someone in that position." I talked about a friend of mine raising a trans daughter and kept the issue close to personal stories. She was rhetorically listening, and she felt open to speaking with me knowing I was a safe space—a new kind of spacer—even if we didn't agree on some issues. It felt like a small-change moment.

In *White Sororities*, I describe a volume of a national NPC sorority magazine (members of each organization are subscribed for life) published in 1992 that included candid discussions about sexual assault. It was, in the context of publications that were often epideictic enterprises, progressive. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Greek-life organizations were facing huge resistance. One collegian in *Kappa Alpha Theta Magazine* writes how one of the fraternities they were due to have a mixer with were singing a song at a football game with sexually lewd and demeaning lyrics. They canceled their mixer with them and asked them to quit singing the song at football games. The fraternity agreed. The sorority member and author of the piece, Becca Foote, crystalizes the rhetorical situation wisely, acknowledging: "as a women's organization, my chapter

feels strongly that we must protect our interests as women. Yet as a women's fraternity, we feel we must protect our interests as Greeks. Over the past few years, we have become increasingly aware of the fact that these interests often clash" (10). She describes the stakes:

> We did not wish to punish or humiliate the men by reporting them to the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Affairs or the Judicial Inquiry Officer. We also did not want to give our school newspaper another opportunity to ruthlessly slander the Greek system. But we did want to make them aware of the powerful message they were sending to the women on Penn's campus. How could we do this without seeming self-righteous and alienating ourselves from the fraternity? (10)

Foote and her sisters made efforts to take the men to task, to call out sexism, and these are significant in a patriarchal context. They acted, though they didn't want to destabilize the system. And yet they recognize and try to call out a problem in a noteworthy way.

The women were praised for taking action. Next to Foote's piece in the magazine was a statement from Minnesota Senator David Durenburger lauding the Thetas for not going to parents or the law but "appeal[ing] to higher values and us[ing] the consciousness of the community as a moral voice" ("From the Congressional Record" 11). These Thetas did a good thing, and it's more than the Greek-life culture asked of itself then (and often even now). They did it in the confines of their rhetorical situation, and they were lauded for it. They respected women and each other, and they made a small gesture. They were asked by the fraternity to participate in a workshop to help educate their brotherhood, relying on women to do the labor that the men should take on. Foote ends her piece:

> As our nation becomes more aware of pressing issues such as sexual harassment, hazing and alcohol abuse, the Greek system has justifiably been called into question. As fraternities continue to be brought up on charges for such abuses, the demise of our system becomes almost inevitable. Should Greek women support their Greek brothers by remaining silent and watching their fraternities go one by one? Should Greek women ignore the problem because they aren't willing to give up the social opportunities that fraternities offer? What we must realize is that we are not supporting fraternities by sitting quietly on the sidelines. Instead, we must support them by working with them to educate ourselves so that we can salvage a system, which in my opinion, is well worth preserving. (10)

It's naïve and hopeful to assume that these acts could snowball and keep moving things forward. This was written over thirty years ago, and so much hasn't changed but also so much has. It's not enough, but it's something. It's not enough to settle there, but I don't want to write off women like Foote, either. I want her moment of doing good to be something to build from, not something to write off or worse, belittle.

Doing Good by Moving Forward

A last moment from the NPC sorority research: the national sorority magazines talked about suffrage. In April 1913 The Pi Beta Phi *Arrow* reprinted Carrie Chapman Catt's speech on the enfranchisement of women. She was a member at Iowa State, later following Susan B. Anthony as President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and helped organize the International Women's Suffrage Alliance. She, like so many white suffragists, exhibited racism. Journalists and researchers describe her as not racist to terribly racist and all between.

Catt was a bold voice in the feminist movement. The issue seems to be not whether she made strong contributions—did good work—but whether she should be framed as a hero. These, apparently, were the only two options. A story in *The New York Times* reveals that Iowa State renamed a building for her in 1996, followed by controversy. Yet twenty-six of twenty-seven women (all white from what I can glean) in the Iowa legislature signed to keep the building with her name while the president of the local NAACP, George Jackson, said, "The university needs to publicly acknowledge that sometimes good people can do bad things," and that the building name should be changed ("Suffragette's" 30).

I share the example of Catt not because of the building name and how she is—or should be—remembered, but because using Catt as a teachable moment is doing good and continuing feminist work. The *Times* article ends with the voice of a Black student at Iowa State:

> But Ms. Wondwosen, one of 660 blacks on the campus of 24,000 students, said Mrs. Catt did not work for change, either. "Women of color couldn't vote in the South until 1964," she said. "So I would say if she were still alive, what did you do after 1920 to guarantee that women of color could vote? She didn't do anything." (30)

Wondwosen tells us a way for white women to do good: to always be thinking of the next step and who was overlooked and how we can do more. Of course, a Black woman shouldn't have to do the labor of pointing this out for white women. Still, she gets to the heart of doing good as *continuing to move forward*. This can mean not gauging progress as only how fast and bold but for the most good for the most people, particularly marginalized people. [3] I say this not easily but with a renewed sense of not patting ourselves on the back for what feels like doing good and then considering the work done. I'm not suggesting that slow or subtle is better—we know that the idea of proceeding slowly is also a way to lapse into white comfort—but that it can be an effective approach for moving forward, so that we come at change from a both/and and not either/or stance.

Near the end of *White Sororities* I note that while I'd like to say I'm like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, I'm more like Amy Klobuchar. But I should have named Katharine Hayhoe instead; that's who's aspirational

3 Thank you to Mohammed Iddrisu for the ideas from a lunch conversation that helped me think about these ideas

to me. She's a well-renowned and well-known climate scientist who teaches at Texas Tech and devotes much of her time trying to reach evangelicals to understand and accept climate change. Her husband is a pastor, and in addition to publishing in her field, she spends a good deal of her time crossing the aisle, publishing op-eds, and seeking to reach skeptical audiences.[4] She seeks environmental justice; her cheery and open face and demeanor never neglect the gravity of her mission. She is doing good in a way that doesn't fit an iconic feminist image of a strong activist but is reaching out for solidarity. I don't operate like AOC does in my world for a number of reasons, but I'm grateful as hell for her voice, just as I am for Hayhoe's. We need both to have the most rhetorical impact. Hayhoe models that instead of wasting precious time looking back over our shoulder to see if someone is waiting to pull our feminist card, we can move forward in many ways, even if modest, like talking to a parent about bathroom bills. But instead of patting ourselves on the back, we roll up our sleeves and ask, *what's next?*

4 (See Bethany Mannon and Megan Von Bergen's "Talking Climate Faith: Katharine Hayhoe and Christian Rhetoric(s) of Climate Change," *enculturation: Rhetorics and Literacies of Climate Change*, Fall 2020, for much more on this)

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The Purple Collar Project: A Manifesto For Quiet Rebellion Against Class Erasure

Jessica Rose Corey and Rhiannon Scharnhorst

Abstract: "The Purple Collar Project" introduces a feminist manifesto addressing class erasure in academia. The authors, women professors from working-class backgrounds, explore the tensions between gratitude for educational opportunities and anger at persistent systemic barriers. The project advocates for "subtle feminism," emphasizing small acts of resistance against institutional norms. Through personal narratives and analysis, the authors critique the myths of meritocracy and resilience that perpetuate inequality in higher education. They also expose the daily challenges faced by academics from low socioeconomic backgrounds and propose strategies for change. The manifesto calls for reimagining notions of academic labor and success, rejecting individualistic narratives in favor of collective action. By sharing their experiences, the authors aim to create space for more nuanced conversations about class in academia and inspire others to join their movement for equity and authenticity in higher education.

Tags: feminist academics, class, rage as a productive emotion, resilience, autoethnography, manifesto, labor issues

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We are women[1] **professors, scholars, and educators.** We are the daughters and granddaughters of factory workers, waitresses, and laborers. We are the first in our families to go to college, to get advanced degrees, to enter the hallowed halls of academia. We are the inheritors of a promise—the promise of education as a means of social mobility, as a way to break free from the constraints of class and circumstance.

We are also the inheritors of a lie. We internalized the lie of meritocracy, the lie that hard work alone is enough to overcome the structural inequities that permeate our society and our institutions. We are the products of a system that celebrates individual resilience while ignoring the systemic barriers that make resilience necessary in the first place.

1 Our definition of woman is inclusive of all marginalized genders including women, women-identifying individuals, and non-binary and gender non-conforming people. The authors identify as cisgender women.

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Dr. Rhiannon Scharnhorst is a Senioe Lecturer in the Thompson Writing Program at Duke University. Her research explores the intricate relationships between writing objects, feminist writers, and archival methodologies and contributes to our understanding of how material culture and feminist thought intersect in the realm of writing and literary production. Through her innovative approach to archival research, she illuminates new perspectives on the creative processes and historical contexts of feminist writers. At Duke, she brings her expertise to bear in teaching writing and critical thinking skills to students across disciplines.

We are tired of being grateful. We have been grateful for the scraps we are thrown, grateful for the opportunities that should have been ours by right. We are tired of being told to be resilient, to be gritty, to be tough. We are tired of being told that our anger is unproductive, that our rage is unbecoming.

We are angry. We recognize the institutions that exploit our labor, and we are angry at the systems that devalue our contributions, narratives that erase our experiences. We are angry at the class ceiling.

We are not alone. We are a growing movement of women professors who are refusing to be silent, who are refusing to be complicit. We are the Purple Collar Project, and we are here to stay.

This is our manifesto.

Our Collars Are Purple

We chose to name this manifesto The Purple Collar Project because it mixes the concept of blue collar jobs (manual, skilled labor, often carried out in low-paying jobs) with pink collar jobs (service-oriented jobs, performed predominantly by women) to suggest that women[1] professors like us engage in acts of subtle rhetorical feminism when they resist erasure of socioeconomic bias across the institution. The familiarity of consistently overextending ourselves (often with meager financial returns) for the sake of trying to meet the (frequently unclear) expectations of others and secure our professional ethos, while simultaneously finding solace in the educational promise that led us to higher education in the first place, keeps us tethered to the narratives of individual merit across academic institutions. The promise of education was, for us, not about jobs and paychecks but about the opportunities it might afford us to do something different from our families of origin. However, a recent University of Colorado study found that "university faculty are, on average, 25 times more likely to have had a parent with a PhD than the general population. In addition, those faculty tended to grow up in neighborhoods that had a 24% higher median income than the general public" (Nietzel). Moreover, first-generation college graduates are overrepresented in teaching-focused faculty positions and underrepresented in research-focused faculty positions (Kniffin 61), which are often considered more prestigious and accompanied by higher salaries. These statistics show not only how we are outliers but also why we are socialized to feel grateful for succeeding in a space that doesn't seem meant for people like us.

Narratives about individual education histories and their psychological and economic consequences are not new (Rose; Smith; Westover); at the same time, current conversations in higher education around resilience and mental health are at an all-time high after the shutdowns of COVID-19. We've read stories about graduate-student labor issues (Oppenheimer) and articles dismantling the promise of success in meritocracies (Markovits). Rarely, however, do we see academics in significant writing studies journals engaging with the "class ceiling" (Hurst) as foundational to the broken system of the professoriate. Notably, a pivotal 1993 text, *Working-Class Women in the Academy: Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*, stands out for its feminist engagement with class in academia (Tokarczyk & Fay). The editors of this manuscript critique the imprecise nature of class discourse, advocating for "if not multiple definitions, at least a fluid one" of the working-class academic woman (5). We seek to advance this critical dialogue, recontextualizing it for contemporary discourse, in large part because we find these are the conversations we have behind-the-scenes at conferences, in the hallways with contingent faculty, and in confidence with friends.

The manifesto is a genre borne out of both the frustration with the inequity of the status quo and one borne of hope. Manifestos are often considered loud genres, "once the serious business of warmongering princes, party politicos, and revolutionaries" (Hanna). That said, we choose the manifesto explicitly for its "elasticity" as a genre, particularly as it has been adopted more recently by a diverse group of artists and writers, such as Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber's *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* and the collaborative project "On Multimodality: A Manifesto" (Wyosocki, et al.). Manifestos can be screamed; they can be whispered. What is coming to define the genre is *what* it does and not necessarily

how it does it. What matters most in a manifesto is that people's emotions become the very air that carries a message.

In our manifesto, we are calling *to* rather than calling *out;* while we identify issues with particular practices and institutional biases, we are more interested in what happens when we begin to coalesce around the everyday ways in which feminist teacher-scholars enact subtle resistance to socioeconomic erasure. Through this process, we hope to validate the experiences of others who may see themselves reflected in our stories and to foster a sense of community among those navigating similar challenges.

Rage is Our Fuel (even though we seem 'nice')

The Purple Collar Project was born from the rage we carry in our bodies—a simmering fury in the pit of our stomachs—and the ongoing experiences that shape us as feminist academics and rhetoricians. This rage is fueled not only by present injustices but also by the paradox of our positions. As Ballif, Davis, and Mountford suggest in *Women's Ways of Making It in Rhetoric and Composition*, the narrative of "making it" pervades academia, especially for women faculty. Yet, for those of us who've risen from lower-class backgrounds, this narrative is incomplete. We occupy a contradictory space: celebrated for transcending our circumstances, yet forever tethered to histories we can never fully reconcile and institutions rarely reflect our full humanity.

Rage is often dismissed as an "outlaw" emotion in feminist work, seen as unproductive. Cheryl Glenn describes this dismissal as a "roadblock to accepting the power, agency, and validity of all emotions" that don't evoke positive feelings in listeners (88). Our rage, however, isn't always obvious or loud. For various reasons, explored in the stories that follow, we haven't always been comfortable with this anger, partly due to the expectation to appear grateful for having "made it."

Instead, we've learned to harness our rage quietly, challenging its dismissal by using it to fuel what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch call an "ethics of hope and caring." This approach teaches us "to listen and speak, not just with our heads but with our hearts, backbones, and stomachs" (146), with patience and quietude as key features.

By acknowledging our rage, even when it feels uncomfortable or negative, and sharing it with each other, we've come to embrace it as a powerful force. This process of listening to, and speaking from, our anger has led us to this project. It allows us to navigate the complex terrain of being both "successful" academics and individuals still grappling with our working-class roots. Accepting rage as our fuel hasn't been easy, largely due to our own histories and the societal expectation to appear "nice" and grateful despite our inner turmoil. Even now, it is precisely this rage that drives us to challenge the incomplete narratives of success in academia and to create space for more nuanced understandings of our experiences.

The roots of our rage run deep, intertwined with our personal histories and the complex journey that brought us to our current positions in academia. Each of us carries a unique story of resilience, struggle, and the ongoing tension between our past and present selves. These individual narratives not only illustrate the source of our rage but also demonstrate how it continues to shape our perspectives and drive our work. Our goal in sharing these narratives is to highlight the often ignored experiences of academics with working-class roots. These stories also serve as crucial components of our feminist toolkit (Ahmed 236), since storytelling forms a "habitable space" that we often find lacking in our environment, and hopefully they also become a space for readers to seek commiseration as well (Powell).

Jess's Fuel

I grew up in a suburb about twenty minutes outside of Cleveland, Ohio. I was raised in a family and near a city that seemed to thrive on the notion of resilience. The circumstances of my childhood required resilience to survive. Further, my understanding and experience of resilience lead to my current struggles as a feminist professor from a low socioeconomic background. I find myself wanting students to demonstrate an ability to 'do what needs to be done regardless of extenuating circumstances—the way my grandparents, my brother, and I have done. Nonetheless, I am angry and disappointed at having given so much to, and at having always done what needed to be done within, a system that will never match my contribution. The unjust circumstances for me to overcome should have never existed to begin with.

My grandmother was awarded custody of me and my brother when I was seven and he was four years old (Fig. 1). Because I had been attending school intermittently, I was behind my peers academically (and because of various forms of trauma, socially). I was placed in all the "basic" classes and was enrolled in tutoring and psychotherapy. But by the end of the academic year, I had moved from the "basic" English class to the "advanced" one. There was some natural ability involved there—because I've never seen the inside of an "advanced" math class. But this "resilience," rooted in academic success, planted the seed for my later identity as a scholar, though it would be many more years of subpar grades before I made a conscious decision to pursue that identity.

Although I didn't have a model for academic success per se, my grandparents had instilled in me the value of hard work and a sense of duty, which never took into account any notion of being inconvenienced. My grandparents were born during the Great Depression, during a time when, and in environments where, helping others was a moral obligation. As an adult, my grandmother worked in a factory and has endured an entire life of hardship. My grandfather worked as a property manager for apartment complexes and had also overcome his own share of personal misfortune before he died of COVID-19 in 2021. And yet they consistently offered their time, energy, and financial resources to those who needed it. So, what I was taught, and deeply internalized, was that I was supposed to work hard for what I wanted (without instant gratification) and then to both be grateful for what I had received due to my hard work and to help others along the way. Arguably, this mindset is a reasonable expectation; however; it can quickly turn exhausting and fail to hold unjust systems accountable for the fact that I (and many people) have to work so hard for the same—or lesser—reward as others. I contribute to a system, regardless of whether—or to what extent—it "gives back."

Figure 1: Four smiling people stand in front of a house with white siding.

Rhiannon's Fuel

I am somewhat unique for the women in my family—33 now, I have no children, have never married, and work at a prestigious university as a "professor"[2] after finishing my PhD. One grandmother finished eighth grade and left school to work, spending the bulk of her career as a nightclub waitress. My aunt dropped out of high school before eventually getting her GED. My stepmother got her bachelor's degree—at age 54. All were married young with multiple children. I share a snapshot of this family lineage to highlight how unusual and significant education was a "way out" for me, even within one generation; it was through education that I would go beyond what was the norm of the women around me.

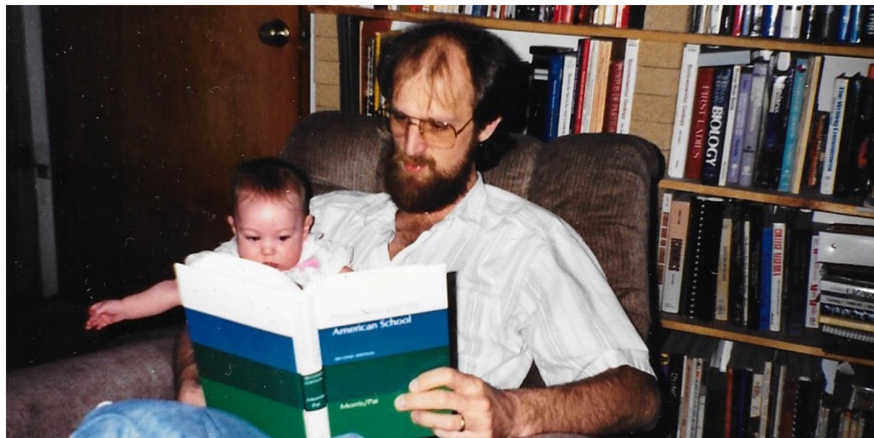

Figure 2: A photograph of baby Rhiannon sitting in her dad's lap while he reads from a textbook.

2 Technically, my formal title is Senior Lecturer. I am considered a member of the regular-rank faculty, which includes those with tenure. Trying to explain academic title hierarchy and the ins-and-outs of the job market system to my family has primarily led everyone to just call me "professor," so I honor them by using the term here. The distinctions between academic titles is just one example of how I see class patterns replicated—and how my own history compels me to provide clarity about the distinctions as such.

At the same time, my closest family member is my dad, who spent ten years getting a bachelor's degree part-time while working at the Coleman Company in Wichita, Kansas (Fig. 2). I spent childhood weekends in the factory with him, often getting to use the copier machine (a joy of mine!) to make copies of forklift invoices for him. He spent 43 years at Coleman, and during that time I routinely heard about institutional issues, management problems, and workers' rights at the factory.

It is probably this background—the promise of education as a way out coupled with the work ethic that means having your six-year-old making copies on the weekends—that makes me especially cognizant of labor discourse across the educational landscape. And now I work as a (factory) faculty[3] member at a school that charges more for one year's tuition than anyone in my family made—and in fact charges more than I and many others in the humanities make now still. How do I couple my own history with the narrative that I should be "grateful" to be where I am? That my students should be grateful to be here? That we should all be grateful to institutions that have no thought or care for us? More often than not, I'm simply angry. And it wasn't until I started using that anger to do something—even small acts—that I started to feel better.

Let's Name and Expose the Bullshit

This is the daily grind of overstuffed inboxes, underpaid classes, and the endless hustle for scraps of recognition. It's the sting of being told to be "grateful" while our labor fuels the academic machine. We may not be able to dismantle the entirety of the machine in one fell swoop, but we can call out the bullshit and find subtle ways of pushing back against it (Fig. 3).

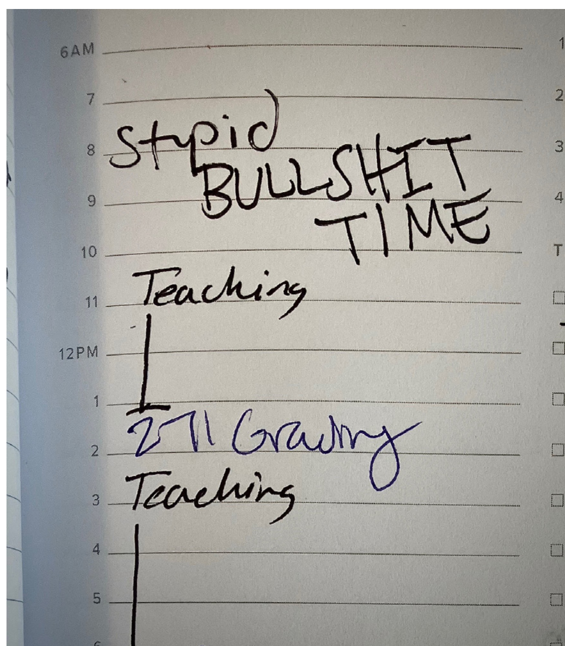

Figure 3: Close-up photo of a calendar page.

3 More than once in writing this piece I accidentally replaced the word "faculty" with "factory" and the irony wasn't lost on me. With administrative bloat and the growing contingent workforce, aren't we all just factory workers in the educational machine?

The Bullshit of Meritocracy

The academic world loves to preach the gospel of meritocracy, but we're here to call bullshit. Jess and I, despite our different paths, have found common ground in recognizing the absurdity that permeates our professional lives. We didn't grow up in the same world of privilege as many of our colleagues and students, and this shared outsider perspective has become our lens for exposing the lies of the system.

Every day, we witness the same tired narrative: work hard, and you'll be rewarded. Fair pay, equity, manageable workloads—these are the carrots dangled before us. But let's be real—in the patriarchal structure of academia, these promises are as substantial as smoke. We're told our hard work matters, but the when, how, and to what extent remain mysterious. Those questions are addressed at the institution's whim. It's a false agency, a rigged game where we're always one step behind.

The neoliberal university doesn't care about your dedication or your sleepless nights. It will wring you dry and still demand more. The idea that hard work alone determines success in higher education is the biggest lie of all. In a just world, maybe. But in our capitalist world, we have learned it's all about who you know, where you come from, and how well you play the game by pleasing the powers that be.

We use our rage in small but potent ways: calling out workload inequities in faculty meetings, strategically choosing collaborators, and sharing our stories with students when it matters. But it's a tightrope walk. How do we stay vulnerable while maintaining professionalism? How do we avoid being seen as "different," "special," or "lesser"? How do we protect ourselves while still doing the necessary work?

Let us make these struggles concrete: we are women who have endured trauma at different points in our lives, become "successful" by our own definitions of the word, and fulfilled responsibilities and met deadlines. Along the way, we didn't seek accommodations, even if we would have been deserving of such. These experiences can cause us to struggle with those who don't seem to have the same "grit" or meet "buck up buttercup" expectations. At the same time, we realize that the system unfairly requires people to "buck up" and that perpetuating some of those standards serves patriarchal ideological narratives. This internal conflict is yet another manifestation of how deeply the myth of meritocracy has embedded itself in our psyches, even as we work to dismantle it.

These narratives we share may be softened, less "loud," than some might expect from a manifesto. That's deliberate. Even in rebellion, we must consider the reality of CVs, job applications, and promotion materials. But make no mistake—our stories, however muted, are powerful catalysts for those who recognize themselves in our words.

We reject the toxic norms of "resilience" (Duke Endowment Report); grittiness" (Duckworth); and "toughness" (Pinkser) that the system uses to gaslight us into compliance. Instead, we offer our experiences

as a mirror, a rallying point, a validation for those who've felt alone in their struggles against the bullshit of academic meritocracy.

The Bullshit of Doing It All

As we expose the myth of meritocracy, we confront another pervasive lie: the idea that we can and should "do it all." The bootstrap mentality is deeply ingrained in our psyches, a double-edged sword that has both propelled us forward and trapped us in a cycle of endless striving.We've internalized the mantra of "keeping our eye on the prize," believing that if we just push harder, work longer, we'll break through to a better place. On paper, it seems we've succeeded—we've climbed from our working-class roots to become writing professors at a top-ten university. But this apparent success story masks a more complex reality.

The truth is, we're given titles instead of equitable pay and promotions instead of economic stability. The system dangles the carrot of advancement while conveniently forgetting to mention that the race never ends. We're expected to be grateful for these symbolic victories, even as we continue to straddle socioeconomic lines, never fully belonging in either socioeconomic world. This expectation of gratitude comes with a hefty price tag: constant service. We're left grappling with how to serve others without becoming servants to a system that demands everything and gives little in return. How do we embody our values while adapting to fit into spaces that weren't designed for us?

In our quest to "do it all," we"ve become cultural chameleons, infiltrating spaces that once seemed off-limits. But in doing so, we've inadvertently become "the other" - fitting in everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. As Dews and Law and Lubrano have noted, this is the paradox of our existence: we're insiders and outsiders, success stories and cautionary tales, all at once.The bullshit of "doing it all" isn't just about workload—it's about the exhausting mental and emotional labor of constantly code-switching, of trying to bridge worlds that the system is designed to keep separate. It's time we call out this impossible standard for what it is: another tool of patriarchal oppression masquerading as opportunity.

Our Daily Practice is Subtle (Remember: we seem "nice")

A driving force of this project was the acceptance that systemic change is not immediately feasible from within. Instead, we must find creative, often quiet, ways to resist and reshape our academic lives. This includes saying "no" when possible, pursuing scholarly work that may not be traditionally valued by our institutions, and finding allies across the spectrum of our work lives.

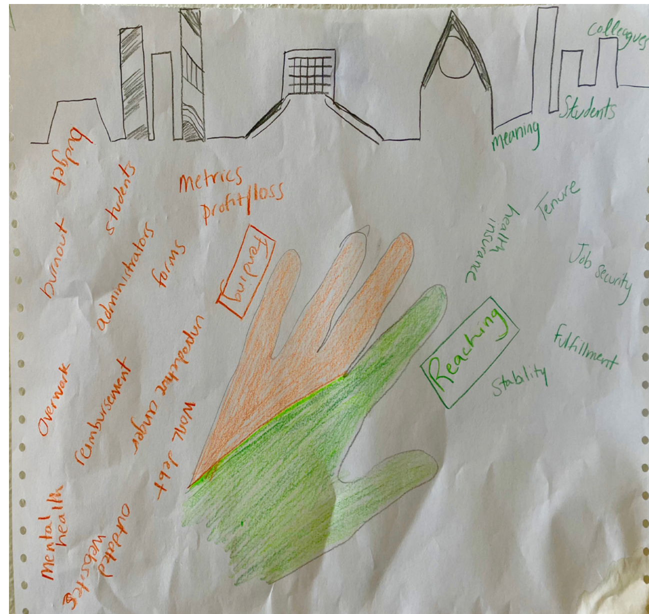

Figure 4: A drawing on paper depicts a hand

In sharing our stories, we expose the everydayness of our academic lives, of practicing (imperfectly) the "reaching out while fending off" of institutional work (Schnapp and Presnor). This often looks like reaching towards things like job stability, credibility, and meaningful work while simultaneously fending off overwork, financial instability, and overly complicated bureaucratic systems that only pay lip service to addressing real issues (Fig. 4). In the following narratives, we lay bare the subtle feminisms woven into our daily resistance, the quiet acts of defiance against a system that seeks to grind us down. Key to either of our daily practices is imperfection: what keeps us so often from saying "no" to doing something are feelings of guilt and insecurity (born out of the bullshit named above).

Jess's Daily Practice

At 39 years old, I struggle to reimagine my identity. I am no longer "the job." And I'm no longer willing to be the "team player" because the idea that there is "no I" in "team" is true in spelling and in theory, but not in practice.

I want to be clear that my identity shift is not a temper tantrum. I am not pulling back because I am not getting what I want. More simply, this is not "quiet quitting" (Creely). I am choosing to change in light of new awareness of my own motivation and the motivations of the institutions in which I live and work. Previously, I understood my academic pursuits and the positions that would come from them as a positive outlet for my psychological struggles, one that held the promise of being able to help my family while also serving a "prove them wrong" mentality regarding a lack of support from people who should have supported me (emotionally and/or financially) along the way. What I failed to realize is that internal motivations and rewards don't warrant external injustices. People deserve to engage in meaningful work and be awarded equitable salaries and fringe benefits. As the job demands more of me—and I'm not allowed to demand

more of it—I need to find new ways of being.

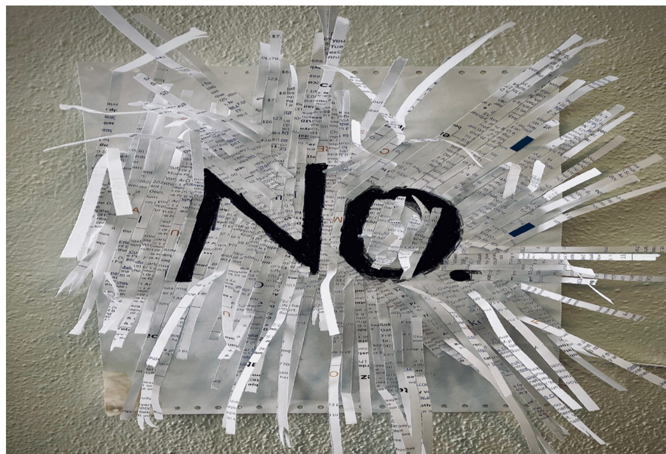

Figure 5: An artwork created by Rhiannon during the process of drafting this project.

So, I prefer to think of my identity reconstruction—and acts of saying "no" to some requests—as carrying out "subtle feminism," whereby I advocate for myself (Fig. 5). And at a very wealthy institution populated by mostly wealthy students, I need to carve out a sense of belonging in different and sustainable ways. Along those lines, I have recently become a member of our University's office for first-generation and/or low-income students (DukeLIFE), another act of "subtle feminism" that allows me to align my values publicly but in some ways silently– "subtly" but meaningfully (Duke University Office of Undergraduate Education). In my original DukeLIFE profile, I described myself as an "underdog," emphasizing how I am both vulnerable (through naming my background as different from the norm) and called to take on more work to exist on a campus that routinely minimizes its own role in the economic stratification of higher education (Leonhardt). My work in the institution has brought about feelings of pride, contentment, and gratefulness, as well as feelings of disappointment, discontent, and resentment. Holding these tensions is, in itself, an act of subtle feminism.

Rhiannon's Daily Practice

My story doesn't fit neatly into the academic mold. My journey from a child making copies in a factory to a faculty member is one fraught with contradictions — a deep gratitude for the opportunities afforded by education, yet a simmering anger at the systemic barriers that remain. This unique vantage point allows me to critically examine the narratives of meritocracy and institutional benevolence that permeate academia. It's like having a flashlight in a dark room: I can shine the light where others might not even notice the darkness.

Most often, I redirect my rage into teaching—how can I make sure these students are aware of what happens behind the scenes of a university? Thus, I leverage my background as a pedagogical tool, connecting with students who share similar stories and challenging the assumptions of those from more privileged backgrounds. I ask them honest questions about what it means to do this work; about what the purpose of education is; about the hierarchies of academic labor behind the scenes that no one has bothered to expose to

them.

Additionally, by openly sharing my own "failures"—the times I stumbled, the times I questioned my career path—I create space for vulnerability and authenticity in my classroom. These small acts of disclosure may seem inconsequential to some, but they chip away at the façade of effortless success and open up a dialogue about the realities of class in academia. This is not to say this strategy works for everyone; it's simply to say it is one subtle way I try to create space for thoughtful change.

We Reject False Promises and Substitute Our Own

This manifesto is not just a theoretical document; it's a call to action rooted in our lived experiences. It urges us to recognize the power of these small, subtle acts of feminism—the everyday resistances that chip away at the status quo. In embracing our anger and channeling it into purposeful action, we create space for a more inclusive, equitable, and authentic academic experience. We gather our fragments, assemble our stories, and amplify our collective voice for change.

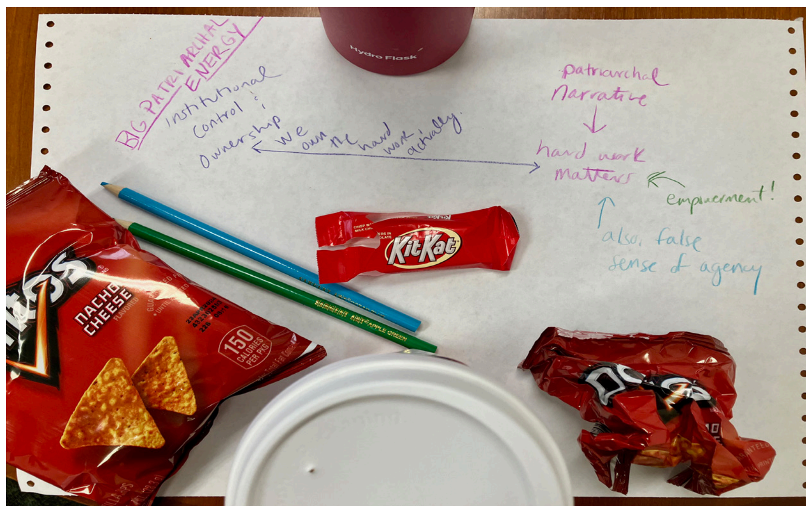

Figure 6: A photo of a tabletop scattered with snack foods, paper, and pens.

We envision this project as a living, breathing example of rhetorical feminism (Fig. 6.) By sharing our personal narratives and images from our lives as we composed this piece, we begin to dismantle the invisibility of class and labor issues faced by women professors. We have dissected oft-touted values of resilience and hard work, acknowledging the inherent vulnerability of our positions within a system that thrives on perpetuating these very ideals. We can't promise this will fix much—if any—of the major systemic problems. But maybe it can spark a broader conversation and connect us with others who share our frustrations.

Moreover, we are in the process of transforming The Purple Collar Project manifesto into a non-profit organization. In drafting this work, Jess found a space of belonging and energy that she had long been searching for. After completing the first version of this text on a Friday evening, she spent the entire weekend thinking, "What if the Purple Collar Project" was more than a manifesto and a line on a CV? And what if we provide the space for others to share their narratives loudly or quietly—or loudly *and* quietly? We are assembling our fragments into something much larger.

We end, then, with a series of calls-to-action. These calls are coming from inside the house, so to speak. We want to reiterate our commitment to an "ethics of care" but also empower others to challenge the status quo and continue to build a more supportive academic environment across institutions. This will look different for different folks; actions themselves can be as simple and subtle as necessary. Our calls to action are intended to be read as reflective and meaningful first steps to thinking through the reader's own relationship to this issue. Feel free to use our work to quietly justify not engaging in the bullshit, to loudly challenge the myths when you encounter them, and/or to contribute to the larger Purple Collar Project narrative.

Our current "success": in academia comes with the responsibility to critique and change the very systems that claim to have elevated us.

Subtle Calls to Action You Can Start Practicing NOW

Question your own narrative: The "myth of meritocracy" makes us believe in a false sense of personal agency. How do your experiences, shaped by your socioeconomic background past and present, influence your approach to established practices within the institution?

Challenge the "bullshit" of academic life: Question the daily operating bullshit of bureaucracy, even if you do so quietly. Recognize the power of subtle subversions against institutional norms. Reflect on how you can practice such subtle subversions.

Disrupt individualistic narratives: Counter narratives like "grit" and "toughness" that pressure academics, particularly those who escaped hardship through education, to feel grateful for their burdens. What can countering these narratives look like in your position at your institution?

Assemble with others: We invite academics, particularly women, to assemble with us by sharing your stories at [The Purple Collar Project.]

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