

# Editors' Introduction

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Well, here we are. It is difficult to know what to say as we write, teach, and administrate at higher educational institutions that at best feel uncertain and at worst are under fire or acquiescing under pressure.

Feminist work is needed now more than ever.

Feminist work is in danger now more than ever.

Our cover art for this issue, a watercolor painting by Jody Shipka titled “After Dobbs,” shows how a lot of us are processing the election of Trump for a second term and the implementation of Project 2025.

Many in our communities are rightfully scared. In the last six weeks or so, we’ve seen the civil liberties and rights of many people violated, including those affiliated with universities who are researchers, scholars, and practitioners. The rhetorical justifications for rounding up immigrants, including documented and undocumented, have demonstrated the continued need for rhetorical scholars to track the legacies of racism, nationalism, and imperialism as they play out on the political and legal stages and beyond. Academic research in all disciplines is being threatened, with hundreds of millions of dollars in grants terminated for a wide range of research projects, including cancer treatment, renewable energy, and disaster communication strategies. We have a long list of words that are now verboten for grant proposals, including *vulnerable*,

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

*trauma, advocacy, excluded, historically, socioeconomic, and underserved.* Many universities are not admitting graduate students this year for lack of funding. The process of closing the Department of Education has begun. The progress that had been made to address climate change is being abruptly halted and reversed. As feminist scholars, we are calling our representatives in Congress, the House, and Senate. We are participating in protests, supporting students, contributing to community mutual aid initiatives, in some cases raising children, maintaining resilience through self-care, and doing research. This issue is full of valuable and much needed feminist scholarship. We invite readers to note the various ways that we can, though our scholarship, resist. Any research and writing that draws attention to the myriad ways we as feminist are here, we are observing, we are taking note, and we are acting.

## Articles

The essays for this issue offers readers glimpses of the ways that women have addressed or even actively fought back against patriarchal systems and ideas in the music industry, in healthcare, and in the workplace in general. While the overall political climate we note above may make responding to injustice seem insurmountable, these essays demonstrate the small ways to notice and take action against oppressive systems. In Juliette Holder's essay "Loud Mistakes," she looks at the content, distribution, and contexts of two of musical icon, Taylor Swift's albums, *Red* and *Red (Taylor's Version)* to show how Swift rhetorically uses an "apologia of transcendence" to demonstrate her feminist move away from white patriarchal ideas her first album was complicit with. As Holder shows, while on the one hand Swift is able to recount her personal individual process of feminist becoming, her becoming is still marked by privileged position. Holder considers how fans often push celebrities like Swift into what Holder describes as "postures of apology" which makes it difficult for celebrities to rhetorically shift away from such posturing. Holder argues for a more cogent and public-facing engagement with popular culture in feminist rhetorical scholarship so that they more productively share the rhetorical situation of fandom.

In Amy Robillard's essay "Too Smart, Too Productive, Too Much: Intellectual Vibrancy and Misogyny," she presents interviews with forty-five women and non-binary people on the effects of being characterized as "too much." Being "too much" as Robillard explains is a common label that women and girls are given when their behavior seems outside of the expectations for females. Through the interviews Robillard notes a pattern whereby the rhetorical label of being "too much" can have a life-long impact, including difficulty accepting compliments, policing their own behavior, and in school or work settings, literally taking on "too much" work. Robillard's hypothesis is that when women who have been labeled "too much" for so long, they seek to prove themselves otherwise by overworking. This essay demonstrates the importance of tracing the long-term impact of rhetorical terms even at the individual level.

Much like Robillard's qualitative interview methodology, Lori Beth De Hertogh and Cathryn Molloy's article, "It's Not Just Hormones: Understanding Menopause Anxiety Through a Feminist Rhetorical

Framework,” puts survey responses alongside healthcare organizations to explore the rhetorical relationship between menopause and anxiety. As the authors point out, although anxiety is often dismissed by healthcare practitioners as just hormones, they suggest that the stories recounted by the survey participants suggest that something deeper is happening that is “not just hormones.” By using a feminist rhetorical framework to understand not just how the healthcare industry communicates about the anxiety during menopause and participant responses, the authors demonstrate how menopause anxiety is tied not to just bodily changes but to long held ageist and sexist narratives. Thus, the anxiety is both hormonal *and* cultural. In addition to normalizing this life change, they ultimately suggest strategies healthcare organizations might use to rhetorically combat the stigma around menopause and the anxiety it can cause.

## Recoveries and Reconsiderations

We also have three Recoveries and Reconsiderations pieces in this issue, all of which do critical reconsidering: we begin with a reconsideration of Students’ Right to Their Own Language, a resolution now over fifty years old, in the context of generative AI. This essay by Maggie Fernandes and Megan McIntyre shows that just as the authors of the original SRTOL resolution recognized and responded to white overrepresentation and bias in academic institutions, scholars are observing similar, overlapping with academia, white (and masculine) overrepresentation in the tech industry, both situations calling for critical feminist intervention. They examine algorithmic oppression and linguistic injustice embedded in generative AI chatbots, which have taken on added importance since March 1, 2025, when Trump issued a new executive order, “Designating English as the Official Language of the United States.” Fernandes and McIntyre call on us to resist and interrupt language discrimination wherever we encounter it, including in classrooms.

Our next essay is a reconsideration of the cyborg metaphor for feminist rhetorics. The timing for this piece by Kelsey I.M. Chapates is serendipitous, given that this year marks the fortieth anniversary of the original publication of Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” in *Socialist Review*. I (Clancy) wrote my master’s thesis on Haraway and the ways that the field of rhetoric and composition studies applied the theoretical concept of the cyborg into studies of writing, technology, and pedagogy, so I am especially pleased to have read, and to be sharing, this piece with *Peitho* readers. Much has changed in these four decades, in the world and in the discipline, and Chapates brings new conversations to bear on the metaphor of the cyborg, specifically disability studies and religion.

Rounding out our Recoveries and Reconsiderations, we have Patricia Carmichael Miller’s feminist analysis of women in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. This text is ripe for reconsideration, given that many people may be completely unfamiliar with the text and did not encounter it in their high school or college curriculum, and those of us (i.e. Clancy) who *are* familiar with it may not have thought about it since they read excerpts of it for a Western Civ and/or World Literature survey in the early 1990s. Miller’s analysis centers the women characters in the epic: the actions they take and the ways the men in the story react to the women. We can see a similar critical feminist imagination informing Miller’s essay about *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (originally

archived on cuneiform tablets) that we see in the Cluster Conversation in this issue about working in the archives.

### **Cluster Conversation: (Re)Writing our Histories, (Re)Building Feminist Worlds: Working Toward Hope in the Archives**

We could all use some hope at this time, and the editors of and contributors to this Cluster Conversation about hope in the archives certainly inspire us to pursue it. Ruth Osorio, Lamaya Williams, and Megan McIntyre present a collection of essays showing us the tenacity of archives and archivists. The editors write the introduction in a style that invokes a future audience – wanting a way to show future readers what we were thinking in feminist rhetorics right now in the public record. Their essay, and the other essays in this Cluster Conversation, is a self-aware archive, a letter to the future, and it increases our own awareness of our writing as archives too. The cluster includes reflections on working in medical archives, creating new archives, surfacing archives about marginalized people whose stories would otherwise remain hidden, using archives ethically, bodies as archives, and more.

Our term as Co-Editors is ending soon; the spring 2025 issue will be our last, and we will be welcoming our new editorial team: Bryna Siegel Finer, Jamie White-Farnham, and Cathryn Molloy. We are proud of the work we've done as editors, and we're grateful for the encouragement we've received from readers. We would like to thank everyone who has been part of the *Peitho* community the last four years: authors, board members, reviewers, guest editors of special issues and Cluster Conversations, cover image artists, mentors, the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition, and the great folks at the WAC Clearinghouse. Though we remain very concerned about that outlook for research and teaching that critically examine serious problems in the United States and other countries, we're looking forward with confidence to seeing how the new editorial team carries on the work of *Peitho*.