AFTERWORD

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Composing Feminist Interventions: Activism, Engagement, Praxis asks the question: how does the positioning of teacher/researchers as feminists affect their community-based teaching and research? To answer this question, the authors in this collection offer narratives of their community-based teaching and research practices. The focus on narrative-as-method is important. As stories grounded in personal experience and scholarly conversations of community engagement (such as those forwarded by Berry et al., 2012; Deans et al., 2010; and Grabill, 2007), the narratives in each chapter function not simply as personal expressions but, rather, as crafted stories grounded in critical self-reflection and critical reciprocity. As such, the narratives afford the authors of the chapters, their community partners, and their readers the ability to identify operative categories and tactics used to frame the narrative events, first, so that writers and partners may collaborate in defining their experiences as well as their interpretations of their experiences and, second, so that readers may (when appropriate) transfer the operative categories and tactics to their own locales. In conceptualizing narrative as a dominant method in this collection, the editors Kris Blair and Lee Nickoson invoke a scholarly tradition of teacher/researchers who have employed narrative as a critical tool for understanding not just their own subjectivities but also the subjectivities of students and the cultural spaces that they all share. As a contribution to that scholarly tradition, the chapters in this collection introduce feminism(s) as a lens for conceptualizing and performing community-based activism, engagement, and practices, including pedagogy.

As a method of critical reflection for teaching and research, narrative has been championed by prominent theorists in a variety of disciplines. For example, education specialists Patricia Cranton and Edward W. Taylor (2012) argue in "Transformative Learning" that such learning is grounded in the narratives that we construct about our daily lives: "Individual experience is the practical knowledge, skill, and understanding of the wor[l]d that every adult brings into the classroom"; thus, narratives of these experiences function as "'pedagogical entry points'" for classroom activities that are potentially transformative (p. 198). Additionally, in *Time and Narrative*, philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1990) defines subjectivity in terms of narrative emplotment (pp. 52-54): "By bringing together heterogeneous factors into its syntactical order emplotment creates a

'concordant discordance,' a tensive unity which functions as a redescription of a situation in which the internal coherence of the constitutive elements endows them with an explanatory role" (Atkins). In these two representative samples, narrative emerges as an important method of pedagogical and scholarly practices, and such practices of narrative serve three important functions. First, narratives explain to ourselves and to others what events we are narrating. Second, narratives explain to ourselves and to others what we have learned about these narrated events. And third, narratives explain to ourselves and to others how we are constructing our own subjectivities (as points of view), the subjectivities of others (as characters in our own narratives), and the cultural spaces that we all share (as settings).

But how are these three expository functions of narrative complicated when storytellers are positioned as feminists?

This question invokes the problem of gender and feminism that has haunted narrative studies as well as gender studies. In "Gender and Narrative" Susan Lanser (2013) defines the problem as follows: "Whether we date the inception of narrative poetics to the ancient Greeks, the Russian Formalists, the Anglo-American New Critics or the French structuralists, we can safely say that questions of gender were not among the field's early distinctions or concerns." But late twentieth-century feminism brought such questions to the fore, identifying possibilities, limitations, and complications of narrative as a method of generating knowledge.

Examples of late-twentieth-century feminists that engaged narrative include bell hooks (1989), Judith Butler (1990), and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). In *Talking Back* hooks celebrates the possibilities of narrative as a tactic of resistance. Though ever mindful of white appropriation of black stories, she nonetheless advocates storytelling as one means of talking back, a tactic of resistance that allows storytellers to redefine their own, and others', subjectivities as they engage in activist projects; in this way, hooks links telling stories to writing theory (p. xi). While sympathetic to the link between storytelling and theory building, Butler (a plenary speaker at the 2017 Conference of the International Society for the Study of Narrative) nevertheless invokes Lacan in *Gender Trouble* to delineate the limits of storytelling, particularly for understanding one's own subjectivity (and, by implication, others' subjectivities as well). Butler warns:

> The constitutive identifications of an autobiographical
> narrative are always partially fabricated in the telling. Lacan
> claims that we can never tell the story of our origins, precisely
> because language bars the speaking subject from the repressed
> libidinal origins of its speech; however, the foundational

> moment in which the paternal law institutes the subject seems
> to function as a metahistory which we not only can but ought
> to tell, even though the founding moments of the subject, the
> institution of the law, is equally prior to the speaking subject
> as the unconscious itself. (p. 91)

Further complicating feminist functions of narrative and its impact on understanding subjectivities and cultural locations, Crenshaw advocated for feminists to adopt intersectionality as defined in her *Stanford Law Review* article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." Though Crenshaw originally posited intersectionality to "denote the various ways that race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences" (p. 1244), the concept has since been extended to argue "that diverse aspects of identity [e.g., race, gender, class, region, age] converge to create the social positions, perceptions, limitations, and opportunities of individuals and groups" (Lanser). This extended concept of intersectionality renders feminism as only one intersecting thread of a teacher's or a researcher's identity even as it recognizes the multiplicity of feminisms.

With the aforementioned ideas of narrative, subjectivity, and intersectionality providing a discursive background for *Composing Feminist Interventions*, the authors of each chapter provide readers ways to link not just personal storytelling to composition theory but also personal storytelling to methods associated with the teaching and research associated with community outreach. In the process, the authors in this collection perform disciplinary changes in rhetoric and composition studies that have been instigated by feminism.

In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* (an oft-cited book in this collection), Jaqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch (2012) identify myriad disciplinary changes in rhetoric and composition studies that have been effected by feminism. One obvious disciplinary change identified by Royster and Kirsch and performed in this collection is the construction of "a new and changed landscape for narratives in the history of rhetoric" (p. 13). This "changed landscape for narratives" emerged, in part, because of work associated with what Royster calls "the critical imagination," a method that attempts "to account for what we 'know' by gathering whatever evidence can be gathered and ordering it in a configuration that is reasonable and justifiable in accord with basic scholarly methodologies" (p. 71). Both as history writ large and as individual rhetor-theorist writ individually, this renarrating of rhetorical history makes a space for authors in this collection to tell stories their own activism and engagement at a variety of community sites. For example, in "Historical Female-run

Settlement Culture as a Blueprint for Contemporary Place-based Pedagogy," Liz Rohan (Chapter 5) broadens the map of rhetorical history by narrating events associated with "female-run settlement culture," constructing a method that interconnects archival research with narrative and critical imagination.

A second disciplinary change advocated by Royster and Kirsch and performed in this collection is an enhanced study of "social circulation," a term Royster and Kirsch define as "[s]ense making at its best . . . dynamic, with knowledge and expertise drawing from many sources that cannot always be neatly contained within traditional disciplinary boundaries" (p. 138). *Composing Feminist Interventions* embodies this change in that its focus extends into many different community sites, its methods are constructed to offer analyses of myriad social/ cultural structures, and its community-based teaching and research topics vary widely—from the emergence of social media (e.g., Mary Sheridan's chapter 11 on "Digital Media Academy as Site of Graduate Student Professional Development), to the effects of technologies on collaboration in the public sphere (e.g., Douglas Walls, et al.'s "Safely Social," Chapter 20, which investigates how women who have suffered from domestic abuse may link to their online support networks without comprising their own safety), to the effects of activism on public policy (e.g., Barbara George's "Literacy, Praxis and Participation in Environmental Deliberation," Chapter 13, which analyzes the rewriting of energy production policies within three different states).

A third disciplinary change identified by Royster and Kirsch and performed in this collection is an emphasis on ethics, specifically feminist ethics. The chapter authors are concerned with identifying the feminist ethics that undergird their feminist teaching and research practices; in addition, the authors are concerned with the ethical implications of their teaching and research practices. For example, in "Post-research Engagement: An Argument for Critical Examination of Researcher Roles after Research Ends, Megan Adams (Chapter 1) calls attention to the ever-changing role of feminist researchers and the resulting need for clearly planned ethical engagements with project communities. In "Methodology and Accountability: Tracking Our Movements as Feminist Pedagogues," Emily R. Johnston (Chapter 3) defines feminist "ethical practice" as methods that challenge students to stretch the limits of their privileged comfort zones—methods that may not be feasible, desirable, appropriate, or indeed "ethical" in other settings where feminist research happens, thus calling attention to the kairotic influence on ethics. In "Listening to Research as a Feminist Ethics of Representation," Lauren Rosenberg and Emma Howe (Chapter 4) define feminist ethics in terms of "a feminist ethos of responsible, strategic practice" of ethnographic and archival research, a practice that keeps its eye on how gender influences citizens in the public sphere.

Given my own interests in rhetorical listening as well as other means for inviting listening into conversations about rhetoric, I am delighted that this collection broadens our disciplinary understanding of how listening may serve as a feminist tactic. In "Reciprocity as Feminist Intervention and Political Activism: An 'after-action review,'" Mariana Grohowski (Chapter 2) incorporates listening as a tactic for developing productive reciprocity among researchers and participants who work together to analyze case studies in order to figure out how civic engagement occurs. In "Listening to Research as a Feminist Ethics of Representation," Rosenberg intersects my rhetorical listening with Royster and Kirsch's "strategic contemplation" (pp. 21-28) in order to develop a tactic of mutual contemplation that enables her to teach "citizenship literacy" while her co-author Howe develops an accompanying tactic of archival listening. In "Ohio Farm Histories: A Feminist Approach to Collaboration, Conversation, and Engagement," Christine Denecker and Sarah Sisser (Chapter 9) offer the tactic of listening deeply as a feminist means of honoring, not appropriating, the farm stories collected as part of their project. In "Competing Definitions of Success: Rhetorical Listening in Multimodal, Community-based Writing Projects," Danielle Williams (Chapter 21) extends rhetorical listening to the digital realm, describing how rhetorical listening helps develop assessment methods that community partners may use to evaluate students' community-based multimodal projects. And in "'Because your heart breaks and it moves to action': Digital Storytelling Beyond the Gates," Stephanie Bower (Chapter 24) also extends listening into the digital realm, advocating a tactic of active listening that she claims engenders transformative learning.

And with the idea of transformative learning, I have returned to where I began.

So in conclusion, what I admire about this collection is how the narratives of feminist teaching and research merge the academic sphere and the public sphere, the classroom and the community. As such, these narratives have important implications for feminist research practices. That is, knowledge and knowledge-making are located not just within the university but also beyond its walls. The authority for knowledge-making resides in reciprocal interactions among students, community partners, and teachers, not simply in teachers' proclamations or textbooks' claims. Project assignments reflect real-world needs and purposes; project designs cross genres and media; and finished products benefit from actual participant-audience input. And everyone involved in each project reflects on the ethics of their actions (or inaction).

This last implication holds promise for feminist pedagogy. For when students study narrative as a tool of critical self-reflection and critical reciprocity, they develop as citizen-scholars who are invested in knowledge and engagement and

who are possessed of a feminist literacy. As such, these students as citizen-scholars will, it is to be hoped, know the difference between facts and opinions. They will recognize how they are invested not just in their own successes but also in local and global communities. They will understand that reasonable people may disagree but that such disagreements may be performed in good faith and are best engaged not as agonistic debates that demand winners and losers but as reciprocal interactions that represent the will of the majority while respecting the rights and the dignity of the minority. And finally, they will be able to recognize the ethics undergirding the feminist teaching and research practices to which they are exposed, and, as a result, they will be able both to recognize how power dynamics haunt their daily lives and then to discern when and how to perform activism, engagement, and other needed praxes.

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