Feminist Ethos and Global Food Systems Rhetorics on Campus

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Abstract: As an interview-based study of women students' ethos in relation to global food systems and university research on genetically-modified foods, this article illustrates the limits and possibilities for students' rhetorical actions that question their university's research practices. Its analysis shows how students' ethos operated in a range of campus contexts and illuminates how the students' ethos was both scrutinized and made possible by their gendered, student status. Attending more deeply to how students are positioned within the university contributes to rhetoric scholars' ongoing understanding of students' food systems concerns and the rhetorical strategies they deploy to question their university.

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I think students have an incredible responsibility and are needed to shift universities who tend to be conservative with a capital C in terms of their bureaucratic structures and their ability to change. Students provide energy of contesting the status quo.

-Gabrielle, sustainable agriculture graduate student

In *Rethinking Ethos*, Kathleen Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones describe their approach as one that "acknowledges the dynamic construction of relationships within and across locations and between people as constituting knowledge and values. Ethos is neither solitary nor fixed. Rather, ethos is negotiated and renegotiated, embodied and communal, co-constructed and thoroughly implicated in shifting power dynamics" (11). Attending to ethos as negotiated and embodied is central in understanding how student ethos operates on university campuses. As Gabrielle comments in the epigraph, students are uniquely situated at their institutions to evolve its structures and practices.

My research is motivated by investigating the productive rupture of university narratives about food. I locate these ruptures in competing discourses that define students as simultaneously both novices and experts, imagine campuses as purported locations of open dialogue, and buttress public universities' claims about serving the public good. These competing discourses catalyzes the questions: what happens when students, specifically those who study food systems in their courses, ask their university to engage in public dialogue about university research on genetically modified (GM) food? How do students' rhetorical strategies and their feminist interventions

toward discussing how university research serves the public good threaten academic hierarchies and public universities' commitment to the "feeding the world" myth?

Informed by a feminist ecological approach to ethos that highlights how rhetors have used location and relationships to access agency in their rhetorical practices, I center the rhetorical actions of three graduate students in this article by analyzing interviews I conducted with them.[3]These student-participants—Angie, Gabrielle, and Rivka—were all enrolled in an interdisciplinary sustainable agriculture program where they learned how power is distributed in food and agriculture research. I demonstrate for rhetoric scholars how the students' ethos shaped their approaches to engaging audiences on campus and beyond. To do so, I analyze their efforts to learn about their university's GM food research and host open dialogues about it.

My purpose in this article is to illustrate and analyze the limits and possibilities for students' ethos and rhetorical actions that question their university's research practices. I begin with two literature reviews: one on global food systems development rhetorics and one on feminist ethos in rhetorical studies. I then describe my method and the context that prompted the student-participants' questions about their university's research before turning to my analysis of the interview data, divided into three contexts for ethos: 1. Asking questions on campus, 2. Hosting open dialog on campus, and 3. Engagement beyond the contemporary campus.

Ultimately, I argue that the student-participants crafted their ethos to invent rhetorical roles for themselves. These roles were informed by their feminist ideals and science- and social science-based expertise, enabling them to apply academic inquiry and feminist curiosity (Enloe) to their university's practices. My analysis illustrates how the student-participants mobilized their status as students to gather information about the GM food research on their campus and attempt to foster public discussion about the research project since their land grant university purportedly serves the public good. I also analyze student-participants' comments from the interviews on the impact of their gender to the ways they were interpreted and misinterpreted, showing that their ethos as students studying to be scientists and social scientists cannot be delinked from how their gender was read by audiences they encountered. Ultimately, I argue that the student-participants' ethos was both scrutinized and made possible by their gendered, student status.

Global Food Systems Development Rhetorics

Before we can fully understand feminist ethos in rhetorical studies, covering a selection of

3 Per my approved IRB protocol, participants chose to either use a pseudonym or use their first names. Following IRB protocol for this study also necessitates not including any information identifying the institution where the research took place. All participants were given an opportunity to conduct member checking and write a brief biographical statement, which I include the first time I quote from their interview. I interviewed two of these students in person in 2018 and the other student over the phone in 2019.

the extant scholarship on global food systems development rhetorics is necessary for context. My work follows in the feminist tradition of analyzing global food systems issues established by Eileen Schell, work that is invested in how agribusinesses enact top-down models of power that make living more vulnerable for already vulnerable populations. Schell shows how power shapes food infrastructure, creating "a system of trade that is unfairly weighted toward US interests" ("Vandana Shiva and the Rhetorics of Biodiversity" 44). Additionally, Schell illustrates how agribusiness's "feeding the world" framing enables corporations to claim to solve starvation and hunger, but "the reality is that often [low-cost proteins] are dumped on international markets, preventing local farmers from selling their own products" ("Framing the Megarhetorics" 155). Such concerns resonate with the work of Rebecca Dingo and J. Blake Scott, who analyze how documentary film can showcase the systemic harms that world trade policies create for local food systems, specifically how policies that lead to U.S. powdered milk replacing Jamaican milk as the commodity consumed by Jamaicans bankrupted Jamaican dairy farmers.

Concern about top-down power hierarchies that reflect Schell's work also shape Mohan Dutta's analysis of how hunger is situated systemically, related to "top-down development interventions carried out by state-based policymakers and program planners" that reflect nation-state agendas (238). Rhetoricians play a role in understanding this systemic disempowerment. As Andrew McMurry describes, critiquing "the disabling rhetoric of the mainstream food security discourse" (554-55) contributes to addressing the dire consequences of global food shortages, including taking to task persuasive "feeding the world" myths (Schell, "Framing the Megarhetorics" 155).

GM foods also prompt concern. Because GM foods rely on the "transnational enterprise of scientists, regulators, corporations, producers, lobby groups, and other-than-human species," (Gordon and Hunt 116) they thus get debated in ways that reflect science's role in food systems, ethical issues regarding food justice and land use, alarm about corporate power, and scientific credibility (Hunt and Wald). Scholars in rhetoric address global food systems and the impact of industrial agriculture (Ryan; Wilkerson), as well as food systems issues such as food waste and colonization (Bernardo and Monberg; Cooks; Eckstein and Young; Gordon, Hunt, Dutta). Understanding the impacts and implications of such systems is important because of their tendency to "exploit human communities with seemingly wanton disregard," (Young, Eckstein, and Conley 199) as well as food corporations' disinterest in critically engaging the implications of food technologies they use (Broad 225). I thus contribute to these efforts to put forward "ethical and reflexive research practices that attend to…power dynamics, advocate for the sharing of knowledge in non-extractive ways and provide pathways for amplification that do not recreate inequalities," joining other feminist rhetoric researchers with similar concerns (Gordon, Hunt, Dutta 6)[4].

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Feminist Ethos in Rhetorical Studies

Scholars in rhetorical studies who have a feminist orientation to ethos inform my understanding of how rhetors persuade in patriarchal contexts. Such approaches draw on Nedra Reynolds's notion of location as the space of a rhetor's body, geographical location, intellectual position, and proximity to others (Reynolds 335-336, quoted in Ryan, Myers, and Jones 8). In addition, feminist ethos scholars point out the importance of location to relation (Ryan, Myers, Jones 9). Multiplicity is also an element of feminist ethos to which rhetoric scholars attend, including those working on environmental justice efforts, such as protecting clean water. Meredith Privott shows how Indigenous feminisms offer such understandings, drawing on Elizabeth Archuleta's "indigenous feminist ethos of responsibility" to analyze the rhetorics of Indigenous women water protectors in the #NoDAPL movement (90, 98). Privott puts forward the idea that feminist ethos engages "multiple points of authority and agency drawn from both tribally specific worldviews and knowledge from indigenous women's collective survival of and healing from colonial violence and trauma" (76). Paige Conley also understands ethos as multiple, "unmoored from any one, fixed identity" (188).

Part of this multiplicity and fluidity is understanding ethos as collaborative and communal. In Laura Micciche's description, "feminist constructs of ethos often emphasize collective identity and collaboration as significant to knowledge building and to the development of credibility," a conception of ethos that revises the rhetorical tradition's definition of ethos as embodied in an individual speaker or writer in isolation (175). Likewise, defying traditional rhetorical criteria and categories, including understandings of ethos, is part of how Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald describe the selections gathered in their volume that anthologizes women's rhetorics as ethos that reflects multiplicity, including subversion, resistance, and difference (xviii). And feminist concepts of ethos also de-emphasize expertise in honor of learning. Julie Jung articulates this idea while describing Nancy Mairs's work on Alice Walker's writing: "feminist ethos [is] founded not on mastery but on something else—a willingness to go in search of" (25).

Beyond attention to location, relation, and plurality, power as a structure that must be accounted for is another aspect of feminist ethos to which rhetorical scholars attend. Mary Beth Pennington, for example, analyzes the ethos of contemporary environmentalist Judy Bonds by showing how Bonds publicly acknowledges where she stands geographically and culturally as well as use the relationships in which she is embedded to effect change, "creating a dialogue in the process about the ways in which existing power structures obstruct change" (169). Bonds's impulse relates directly to Gabrielle's comment in the epigraph. Likewise, feminist ethos in rhetorical studies pays attention to how rhetors find themselves positioned in power structures, taking their understanding of subordinate status as a catalyst to "craft a viable ethos for participation in a dominant public" (Ryan, Myers, and Jones 4). Public power concerns rhetoricians, as they

and the other student over the phone in 2019.

understand how publics and counterpublics are multiple and ever shifting. Thus, feminist rhetorical scholars who study ethos are especially attuned to how "women must understand that there are multiple publics and counterpublics and work to shift values determined by dominant publics" (Ryan, Myers, and Jones 9).

Student ethos is demonstrated by the student-participants featured here as they center the stated mission of their university to serve the public good, asking their university to practice the values it ostensibly lauds, and they thus confront the dominant values the university supports in pursuing GM research. The location of student ethos is key to note for these student-participants who were not only located on a university campus, but also impacted by being students who are necessarily reliant on campus relationships with faculty and administrators. These faculty and administrators had the ability to amplify or silence the student-participants' questions and concerns. Additionally, the student-participants' ethos as scientists and social scientists was moored and unmoored from their student identities, yielding variable success for their strategies. They used their student ethos to seek answers on their campus about the GM food research underway.

Methods

My study's feminist orientation to analyzing the student-participants' ethos is built into the study design in multiple ways: by centering and elevating the perspective of student-participants who worked to engage their campus communities and administrative leaders; by applying feminist curiosity about who gets to be heard and understood on campus; and by making apparent the hidden, un- and under-archived, and ephemeral nature of students' impacts on their campuses. I adapt the term "feminist curiosity" from Cynthia Enloe, who invites researchers to study globalization by looking to how it shapes women's lives (3, 247, 353). Additionally, for this article I align with Lauren Rosenberg and Emma Howes's concept of how representation of research participants is a feminist issue. As they write, "a feminist ethos of representation as a commitment to continually examining the ideological lenses we use, acknowledging our different (sometimes conflicting) subject positions, and allowing our research participants to shape the work itself" (77). To honor participants' perspectives while I conducted this interview study, I followed in the feminist tradition of writing studies researchers who "participate in a reciprocal cross-boundary exchange" (Glenn and Enoch 24). I designed my interview study featured here to center student-participants' perspectives and invited them to shape the work through the direction they took our individual interviews as well as their contributions to member checking. The ideological position informing my work here is that the student-participants' ideas deserve to be understood by wider audiences, as they were perhaps not fully listened to by those in positions of power at their university.

GM Food Research Context

Barbara George asks: "What happens when public participants, particularly those who must

navigate complex scientific and technical spaces, are able to more fully co-create knowledge about complex environmental risks in their communities? Might such literacies consider a more feminist, contextualized approach to knowledge making about environmental issues?" (255). These questions parallel the queries the student-participants posed to themselves and members of their campus community as they learned more about the GM food research taking place at their university by a food sciences faculty member, which I describe here. As public participants on their campus, they became invested in learning how the GM food research affected both the campus community on whom the GM foods under development would be tested—women students like them—and the communities off-campus who would purportedly eat the food being developed.

The context of the GM food study taking place on campus is important. The story begins in 2015 when Angie, a cisgender, heterosexual white woman currently living in the Midwest and working as a sociologist in academia, received an email with the subject heading "human subjects needed" from researchers at the university she, Gabrielle, and Rivka attended. The email's purpose was to recruit participants to eat GM bananas for a research study and the email opened by contextualizing the research as alleviating widespread vitamin A deficiency in Uganda, where cooked bananas are a popular food. These bananas that research participants would eat for the study were genetically modified, meaning their genes were edited, to produce more beta-carotene. That beta-carotene is converted to vitamin A during digestion. The recruitment email specified that research participants need to be healthy female nonsmokers between the ages of 18-40, specifying that they would eat a diet provided by the researchers, have blood drawn, and be paid up to $900 total for their participation. Recalling her receipt of the email, Angie expressed regret that she did not consent to be a participant in the study, as doing so would have enabled her to gain more information about it, as a participant who would eat the bananas. When she initially received the email, she forwarded it to some of her friends, noting that this GM food research prompted a lot of questions, especially questions related to gendered global development and food systems. She wondered, "Why do we need a transgenic banana? Why are they only testing it on women these ages? Why are they paying people $900?" Angie asked around among her friends in the sustainable agriculture program to find out if anyone else received it, and only one had, so they assumed the email was sent to a random sampling of women students.

Because of its focus on recruiting women only and its stated purpose of addressing vitamin deficiency in Uganda, Angie and some of her fellow students, including Gabrielle and Rivka, became curious about the banana study and its broader context. Their approach was collaborative and collective (Micciche) and they worked together to find out more. They began to research to try to discover other information about the study and ask questions, efforts that connect the student-participants' concerns with those of scholars in our field (Gordon and Hunt 115). Their research quickly showed that the Gates Foundation had provided funding for the GM banana development, which also contributed to the student-participants' concerns about how private fund-

ing sources can motivate university research.

The student-participants' concern and questions reflect and were informed by a wider context of resistance to Gates funding and the foundation's interventions in African agriculture. For example, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) and Community Alliance for Global Justice are two leaders of this critique. Recently, AFSA leaders Million Belay and Bridget Mugambe clearly state their position in the title of their op-ed, "Bill Gates Should Stop Telling Africans What Kind of Agriculture Africans Need," detailing how Gates has long informed Africans that their agriculture is "backward and should be abandoned." Belay and Mugambe show how African agricultural specialists themselves value agroecology, not technological intervention. As they chronicle, "the massive [Gates] resources…have had an outsized influence on African scientists and policymakers, with the result that food systems on our continent are becoming ever more market-oriented and corporate-controlled." Likewise, in the open letter to Bill Gates that responds a *New York Times* op-ed (Wallace-Wells), a long list of food sovereignty and food justice organizations detail the inaccuracies and distortions of Gates's claims, invite him to "step back and learn" from those who are farming in African contexts (Community Alliance for Global Justice/AGRA Watch, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa). The writers also request that publications like the *Times*, "be more cautious about lending credibility to one wealthy white man's flawed assumptions, hubris and ignorance." As they describe, centering Gates's perspective puts at risk the very populations who are practicing agriculture in Africa, a context from with Gates is far removed.

Beyond funding from Gates, the "feeding the world" trope also quickly surfaced in the student-participants' research into the banana study. This persuasive metaphor enables multi-national corporations, as well as universities, to say that they help "save developing countries from starvation and hunger" and promote a rhetoric of concern and care for vulnerable populations across the globe (Schell, "Framing the Megarhetorics" 155). Such claims can justify colonial, top-down research design and practice that potentially disempowers vulnerable populations who may be made even more vulnerable by universities' interventions in global food systems. The IRB recruitment email that Angie described, for example, opened by claiming that cooked bananas play a central role in the diets of people in East Africa, asserting that the genetically modified bananas have been developed to alleviate vitamin deficiencies of these populations. This recruitment email thus invites potential participants to engage in this charitable cause by being the first humans to eat these bananas. The student-participants' questions arose from this framing and justification. In their research about the study, the student-participants could not find any evidence that these East African populations wanted this GM banana (or were collaborators in developing it), prompting curiosity regarding whether the banana study ignored or considered East African farmers' and locals' concerns about this food (George 256).

As the remainder of this article demonstrates, my interest in this case is in the ways the students used their ethos, specifically location- and relation-based strategies, to learn more about the GM banana research project. The public information the students could gather about the study caused alarm and, as Angie stated, the project was justified with "language and narrative in the media about hunger and solving hunger and feeding the world and helping Africa that some of us think is very colonial, racist." The students were motivated to learn more about the study, especially due to its presence on their campus, the location where women students would be eating these GM bananas. As they came together to question their university's research project, Angie, Gabrielle, and Rivka used locational and relational feminist ethos strategies to ask questions and engage audiences, building their rhetorical action from their position as students, on their campus.

Part 1: Asking Questions on Campus

In this section I analyze how students asked questions that reflected their curiosity and concerns. These student-participants counted on their ethos as curious students and researchers to be a pathway to knowledge and learning. Generally, students expect to be able to meet with faculty on their campuses, and, as the student-participants researched their questions about the banana study, they strove to rely on the local expertise of faculty and administrators conducting the study. The events described in this section show student-participants relying on their ethos in multiple and relational ways in order to ask questions, which occurred in the ways they attempted to and were able to meet with faculty and administrators.

Rivka was able to meet with the lead food sciences researcher. Rivka holds a PhD in Soil Science and now studies the efficacy of sustainable soil management practices, while teaching introductory courses in soil and environmental science. According to Rivka, this meeting took place in the faculty member's office, but the faculty member told Rivka that she was unable to provide further details about the study and was reticent to talk at all. Perhaps this researcher felt uncomfortable speaking with a then-student who was not enrolled in her classes or her program. In Rivka's terms, the faculty member's response was surprising. This faculty member insisted that she was only responsible for one small part of the overall study—measuring vitamin A absorption in participants' blood that would be drawn for the study—and thus she was unable and unwilling to comment on the overall study. For Rivka, such a justification for not discussing the study showed an avoidance of systems-based thinking about GM food development and its implications for global agricultural development. Rivka's ethos as both a science student studying soils on campus and her personal affiliation with conventional agriculture, via her in-laws' farm, made her the best student to send in for this interaction, in her estimation:

> The reason why I went to talk to [the lead researcher] was that I felt I could relate to pro-GMO [genetically modified organisms] folks better than the others. I think a world where

> GMOs are used safely and ecologically is a possibility, but the research just isn't there yet. Also, my husband's family owns a farm and they used to grow GMO corn. We also thought [the lead researcher] might be more willing to talk to a "soil scientist" rather than a "social scientist" or "sustainable agriculture" scientist. It seemed though that once we were seen wearing an activist hat, so to speak, some people couldn't go back to viewing us as scholars.

Rivka's description shows a rupture for relational student ethos in campus locations such as faculty offices, then, as her questions were not answered and considered potentially threatening. The boundary that Rivka identified between being a student-scholar and a student-activist was firm in this case, and she wagered that her identity as a scientist could traverse that boundary.

Eventually, the dean of the agricultural college where the lead researcher worked agreed to meet privately with a few of the students who had been asking questions about the banana study. Angie attended this meeting, which she found to be rather unusual. She described how she was told she could not record the meeting, which she wanted to do so other interested students could later listen to the information shared in the meeting. In this extended passage she describes how the meeting proceeded and the reactions she and other students received from the administrators:

> It was the most bizarre twilight zone sort of meeting in there. Because they were trying to tell us we didn't understand science and trying to explain what science is, and [they said,] "We can't believe that students in the [agricultural college] would be saying the things you're saying." We're like, "Well, we're just asking basic research design questions. We can't believe you can't answer them." It was all this "feed the world" rhetoric, and at one point [the dean of the agriculture college] turned to me, and she said, "Have you ever even been to Africa and seen the starving children?" I said, "No, I have never been to Africa, but I have seen hungry kids. We have hungry kids in [our state]. I don't have to go to Africa to understand that our food system's broken." …She was saying that she had [been to Africa and wondered,] Why would we refuse people a way to solve a hunger problem?

This meeting with administrators, in which the dean tried to frame the issues at hand in individual terms—such as by accusing Angie of not understanding hunger because she had not visited Uganda and looked at malnourished children—shows the administrator's attempt to avoid the students' actual questions, dismiss systems-based thinking, and instead enact a top-down, colonial dynamic for the research design.

The administrators positioned the students as naïve and uniformed on the gravity of the problem that the GM banana study would purportedly solve. While the students were somewhat

successful at even getting a meeting with senior administrators, the meeting showed how well the senior administrators could avoid students' concerns and hope for transparency about research design and ethics. Throughout this interaction, the possibilities for student ethos to operate effectively in a dean's office were not persuasive, as the students were positioned as threatening the status quo at the institution.

This meeting also prompted comments from Angie related to the students' ethos being interpreted as threatening. Her thoughts on this issue transitioned into addressing gender and gendered ethos specifically. She described her perspective by stating, "We're not talking about bombing a building, throwing pig blood on anyone. We're just asking questions. What if we were all asking questions? We're not doing anything wrong." Angie also mused that maybe hosting open dialogue on campus and being transparent about research practices was more threatening to the upper administration than any potential physical threat. As Angie said, "maybe that would have been less threatening to have done something to the [lead researcher's] lab than to bring Vandana Shiva to campus and fill the [largest lecture hall on campus] with people to hear her." Shiva's identity as a well-known leader who questions globalization and persuades citizens across the globe to pay attention to the issue of biodiversity made her a fitting speaker for the students to invite, as her interest in prompting people to pay attention and ask questions aligned with theirs (Schell, "Vandana Shiva and the Rhetorics of Biodiversity" 32). The latter event is what the students did, hosting Shiva to foster open dialogue and conversation in public ways. Angie described the importance of practicing a student ethos that questions the institution's practices and how doing so is not threatening:

> You're articulating [questions about the study] very well, and I hate to use this word because this is so gendered, too. We're presenting a rational case. We weren't being really emotional. I think people *should* be really emotional about these things, but it looks like nothing radical was my point. If you google [our response to the GM banana study] out of context, [and] you're not part of the story, nothing we did looks very radical.

Thus, to Angie and her fellow students, part of their surprise at the administrator's reactions came from how they treated the students as though they were taking radical political action, not simply asking questions about food systems. The senior administrator, by invoking starving children, created her own emotional appeal that accommodated her avoidance of questions about the actual study taking place, positioning the students as uncaring and alienating them from the administrator's framing of the institution as a benevolent entity. This strategy aligns precisely with the way that scholars who attend to global development rhetorics have predicted (Dingo and Scott 5), replicating persuasive development discourses that are mobilized by assumptions about the goals and effects of food development projects.

Part 2: Hosting Public Dialogue on Campus

The student-participants planned and hosted a teach-in, an idea arising from their desire to create public opportunities for the research study to be discussed openly. At various times these terms were used by students to describe this event: panel, dialogue, teach-in. All of these terms reflect the rhetorical, location-based goals of the student-participants, to host a public discussion on campus that anyone could attend. Prior to this public conversation, the concerned students and upper administration had published op-eds and other articles about the study. In these written publications, student-writers relied on their relational student ethos to ask questions about their own university's practices, inform public audiences about the study, and invite them to ask similar questions. However, writing op-eds and responses did not accommodate the type of interaction and learning that the student-participants hoped could take place. They wanted their land grant university to be a space where public discussions about research ethics can and should take place. They felt like two separate conversations were taking place in these written conversations and wanted to evolve the discourse, joining perspectives together for discussion.

Gabrielle is a social scientist who studies climate, gender, and socially just agrifood systems and now directs a national program for women in agriculture for a U.S. nonprofit. She described the exigency for the teach-in event and students' intentions to open up conversation about the biotechnology context of the research. As she said, "A lot of the narrative around the study was about 'feeding the world' and helping poor African women and starving babies and this sort of colonial framework, in my perspective, and it wasn't really about [the question of:] are GMO's the best solution to the problems that they're seeking to solve?" The intention of the public dialogue was to address such questions. Gabrielle detailed how she and her fellow students designed the event. She said, "At the time, we tried to recruit a broad base of support from folks with different perspectives," creating an intentionally diverse panel of experts who identify as pro-biotechnology as well as those who question it, and views in between.

The students invited the lead researcher and the dean of the college that housed the lead researcher's department, asking for their involvement or for representatives who could speak to their perspectives. Angie described their response: "They didn't want to take part in our panel. Their claim was that they didn't have any part in planning the panel, so they didn't want to take part in it." Angie recalled one brief moment when it seemed like they would participate, but they wanted to bring seven to ten people. The students responded by asking, "Would one or two from the [agricultural college] like to take part in this, talk about it?" The students' goal was to have one or two experts from this college because they were aiming for a balanced panel that held different perspectives. Once the students asked for one or two people to come instead of seven to ten, they received a response that no one from the researcher's lab or senior administration was coming. Like the op-eds in which the agricultural college dean praised the food science researcher and reified the status quo, this response to the panel invitation showed a lack of openness or investment in public dialogue that they did not plan. In the op-eds, according to Gabrielle, the students claimed that the university should be a place to have a dialogue about biotechnology and not shy

away from controversial topics. The students called for a "reasoned approach," in Gabrielle's terms. She said, "We wanted to actually have a public conversation." It was clear that the senior administration and lead researcher were not interested in having such a conversation unless they had planned it. Ultimately, none of the individuals who defended (and wrote op-eds about) the pro-transgenic banana perspective agreed to participate. The students went forward and hosted the teach-in.

The event took place on campus and featured a variety of perspectives. Experts included a philosophy professor affiliated with the sustainable agriculture program who does work on ethics and food. According to Gabrielle, he created space on the panel to ask what an ethical relationship with research looks like when it includes humans and the food system. And he led the attendees to discuss what are the ethical considerations that do not cut off research before it starts. Angie summarized his contributions as well. The students were asking questions such as: Why are university time, university faculty, and university students being asked to be take part in a study for which there is no response to how is this serving public good? And from Angie's perspective this last detail really bothered people because, as the philosophy professor articulated, so many studies could be shut down because researchers may not yet know how they benefit the public good. While all academic research may not benefit the public good, as a land grant university, research conducted at this school purported to do so.

Another panelist was a social sciences graduate student from Uganda. As Gabrielle described, "He brought his perspective having done community feeding programs and education around nutrition, his thoughts on the transgenic banana, because the focus of the banana [research study] was on Uganda in particular [and] because the banana is such an important nutritional food source. [It is] a staple crop that folks rely on." Rivka recalled this student's perspective on the panel as well and how significant it was to have a person with knowledge of Ugandan food issues as a speaker. Rivka described that this student had been "doing social work in Uganda with children who had malnutrition and he felt the banana wouldn't help because the reason for the malnutrition was diarrhea." As the Ugandan student described, the malnutrition was caused by parasites in the water, as Rivka recalled. So, an effort to increase nutrients, through biotechnology like the transgenic banana, may help a little bit, but the underlying problem was actually parasites and other diseases. Rivka summarized this Ugandan student's point: Ugandans in affected communities need clean water and a water system that does not introduce pathogens.

Overall, the students were able to host the public conversation, even if those most directly involved in the study and those defending the study most ardently did not attend. The students noticed, however, that a representative from the administration did attend as an observer. Gabrielle noted that this person, who works for the agricultural college administration, watched from the side of the room. He also showed up at a different event when students delivered a petition to the university president. This person's presence signifies the university's surveillance of the

student event and administrators' interest in knowing what happened at the event without participating in the public conversation or being subject to questions and discussion in a public forum. To read this occurrence as part of the context of student ethos shows the power of student ethos to gain attention from the university, even if administrators did not take on the participatory role in the public forum that the students hoped they would. In the end, their relational and location-based ethos as students who were able to hold a public conversation on campus that featured experts fulfilled its goal of engaging a transparent and open conversation on biotechnology, research ethics, and transparency.

Another notable detail from that evening is that a pro-biotechnology scholar from a different American university delivered a lecture on campus that night. The student-participants questioned whether this was a coincidence or if the agricultural college deliberately planned this pro-GM food expert to speak on the same date and time as their event, a notion I cannot confirm but that seems plausible. Angie saw this event as both possibly coincidental but also likely an event the senior administration planned to have a competing event to attend and host instead of participating in their event. If Angie's theory is true, the organizers of the lecture were intentionally propping up the expertise of a faculty member from a different institution that affirmed their institutional position over the open dialogue hosted by students at their own university. This competing lecture event could have also captured the attention of campus audiences interested in biotechnology, splitting the available audiences, and leading to fewer people in attendance at the students' event.

Part 3: Engagement Beyond the Contemporary Campus

As the epigraph quotation from Gabrielle illustrates, she felt an obligation to engage with her campus and evolve her university beyond the status quo, helping it become the public good-serving institution it claimed to be. Public audiences took note and the students' ideas gained traction off campus, which was validating. Angie said that she noticed on her campus that exercises in critical thinking were not active. She described the student-led actions to create spaces for critical thinking, which were supported by organizations beyond campus, such as non-profits and community groups who defend food sovereignty and food justice:

> As students together, we had to create that space [for critical thinking and discussion] together because it didn't exist in our classes, it didn't exist elsewhere on campus, and we were really hungry for it the more we found out. Then we were encouraged by local groups, by local communities, by national communities, and so we felt supported. I'd say we even felt encouraged.

The off-campus encouragement validated the student-participants' concerns and broadened the range of audiences paying attention to them, as people who are also concerned about biotechnology and food systems praised the student-participants for their critical thinking about

their university's research.

While this outside encouragement was motivating, the student-participants still found it essential to address the context of their campus and learn about the history of student engagement there so they could show that the questions they were asking were not new or extreme, but instead built on a campus tradition of students questioning the status quo. This evidence also gives historical credence to Gabrielle's point in the epigraph. In this extended passage, Angie described the history they saw themselves continuing, enfranchised by a speech by a former university president:

> We went back into the archives…and found President [X's] speeches from the early 70s, late 60s to students when…students were engaging in political protest on college campuses. He was saying that the university should be a place for this. There was a speech that he gave on the [central campus] grounds to students who were protesting the war in Vietnam. He was saying…that the university should be a space for that and that it should always be a space for that, and that's part of a university, defining what a university is. We would use that a lot [in relation to discussing the banana research]. It wasn't that we were politicizing the university. The university has always been political. Different leadership at [our university] have taken different approaches to it. Instead of trying to silence it or quiet or attack it, saying students have this right.

The students supported one another by using this university history, from the perspective of its highest administrator, to normalize students asking questions and interpreting their university as a space where political conversations take place.

Like Angie, Gabrielle addressed how political conversations should be normalized on contemporary college campuses. She said, "I think a university, if I had sort of my druthers, a university's role would be to create as much space as they can for difficult conversations. For debates. For critiques." These debates and critiques should include self-reflexivity, enabling institutions to question and consider their own role in delivering good research and science. Gabrielle continued, "[Universities] should be receptive to the critique of students. I think what happens often, is that institutions maybe, like pay lip-service to that but they don't actually create a mechanism by which students can actually engage in that. I think they're often seen as [temporary, as:] well, you're going to be leaving. Or like, we'll give you a little bit of recognition, but we're not actually going to change how we do anything." Because students' presence on campus is time-bound, student ethos is seen as temporary and ephemeral, not substantial in position or longevity.

The university's reticence, in Gabrielle's estimation, increased the public support they received. As she said, "Funny enough, that whole issue with the transgenic banana became more of an issue because the institution was so negative in their response to us. Because they

wouldn't participate in our teach-in. If they had come to the teach-in, and we had a good dialogue, I don't know, it might've fizzled out."

As publics beyond campus heard about the students' concern, some attention was not positive. For example, Angie used social media to amplify her perspective and the work of her fellow students, which put her in the position of facing criticism from pro-GMO activists and trolls. An open records request was submitted for her emails after she graduated, as the GMO lobbyist submitting the request suspected she and the other students were being paid to address the banana study, which they were not. Because Angie was a student at the time, practicing extracurricular student ethos to ask questions of her university, her student status meant the university did not have to hand over her emails, by law. As she communicated with the university lawyer who received this request, she learned more about the protected legal status students hold in these contexts. Facing this open records request, which was issued as a threat, also led her to think about how such open records requests are being weaponized against students and those questioning dominant publics in attempts to silence them. Another reading of the university's refusal to turn over Angie's emails could be that the university does support students who question university practices or at least uphold students' rights to their protected status as students with email privacy. Overall, continued awareness of how students' interactions with publics come with unanticipated consequences must remain as a concern, as such engagement can be threatening.

Conclusion and Reflection on Role of Gender

The complexity of student ethos cannot be over-stated, as its overlapping implications based on relationality, location, and multiplicity all played a role in the student-participants' approaches and the outcomes of their actions. In reflective comments about the choices and strategies they used on campus, student-participants attended to the role that gender played, as women students were the most visible people asking the public questions, and what they may have done differently. Gabrielle wondered how differently they may had been interpreted if men in science programs had been the most vocal among concerned students. She noted that positioning a white man as a spokesperson has been a strategy for building ethos and gaining legitimacy, harnessing normative patriarchal ethos. Instead, as she said, the approach of the student-participants was "a more classically feminine role of creating dialogue." They built their strategies, in Gabrielle's description, as aimed to share ideas, communicate with one another, and develop goals together to create a more socially just research program at their university, reflecting feminist notions of ethos.

Because all the student-participants featured here graduated and moved on to careers where they use the interdisciplinary expertise fostered in their sustainable agriculture program, they continue to think about how their ethos operates in contexts beyond their campus. While their concerns regarding GM food development and research ethics now take different forms, they nevertheless draw upon lessons learned from their response to the GM banana study. Some

of them advise students on campuses across the country on extracurricular activities related to public science, such as the movement to divest college campuses from fossil fuels. Angie, now a tenure-track faculty member, commented on how the women administrators at her alma mater held powerful positions that affirmed the status quo of the institution. She said, “Women have a lot to gain by acting in a patriarchal system in ways that are valued by the patriarchal system… That’s how you get tenure.” In her teaching and research, she continues to work toward supporting transparency and feminist, ethical research that serves the public good and invites public comment.

This study prompts further questions, including: How do individuals both on campuses and beyond educational institutions work toward better dialogue on GM foods and global food systems? The experiences of the student-participants here led them to distrust the administrators familiar with the banana study and disidentify with their university. Further, they began to question why the faculty teaching their food systems courses seemed disinterested or uninvested in addressing the implications of their university’s GM food research practices and interventions into global food systems since faculty did not vocally join the students in asking questions. Thus, faculty can take the student-participants’ perspectives to heart and consider why and how teaching and research can critically engage the food systems research underway on their university campuses. For example, in their conclusion of their study on scientific source credibility and goodwill in public understandings of GM foods, Hunt and Wald call for more research “to parse the different ways particular antecedents contribute to public responses to new biotechnologies” (983). These antecedents include attitudes toward food systems’ links to capitalism, government, and corporations, all which rhetoric scholars could locate on their campuses, in collaboration with students. Doing so can contribute to the growing work in feminist rhetoric and ethos related to food and agriculture, expanding methods that are collaborative and communal. As Micciche describes, “feminist methodologies [are] sensitive to situatedness, empathic connections to research subjects, and a view of knowledge as always partial and in process,” approaches that essential to our research, especially as the planet warms and food systems face new constraints and challenges (175).

Taken together, Angie, Rivka, and Gabrielle’s experiences illustrate how a feminist ecological ethos invites recognition of the impacts of contexts and relationships to shape how ethos is mobilized. Scholars engaged in global food systems rhetorics and feminist studies can teach cases like this one and invite their own students to draw implications from the student-participants’ experiences as well as continue to notice and address how GM food research on university campuses is framed and justified. The efforts of the student-participants featured here, informed by multidisciplinary approaches to sustainable food systems and ethical biotechnology food research, made the most of spaces and places where students can access information and communicate their perspectives on campus. Paying attention to students such as those featured here creates pathways for opening “new ways of envisioning ethos to acknowledge the multiple,

nonlinear relationships operating among rhetors, audience, things, and contexts" (Ryan, Myers, Jones 3). All three student-participants spoke about the broader question of what a university should be and how it should serve as a productive space to host discussions about food systems, a welcome space for student ethos applied in a wide range of ways. In every instance the students thought it was obvious and should be assumed that the university, as a place of learning, would host such conversations in open, public discussions. The students-participants' stories help us to appreciate students themselves as deeply invested in prompting universities to be transparent in their research through consideration of students' questions that center the public good.

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