

# Editor's Introduction

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**Keywords:** [Gaza](#), [methods](#), [new materialism](#), [transnational](#), [digital media](#)

**Doi:** [10.37514/PEI-J.2024.26.3.01](#)

We work to produce the spring 2024 issue of *Peitho* amid global trauma and violence. The war in Gaza continues, with arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity issued by the International Criminal Court for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Hamas leader Yehiya Sinwar and other Hamas leaders. In Sudan, the conflict between two military factions, ongoing for the past year, has resulted in mass destruction and displacement. In the Democratic Republic of Congo hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced by armed conflict, inter-communal tensions, land disputes, and natural disasters. On Rebecca's campus, like many other campuses across the world, students protested the war in Gaza and begged their campus leaders to divest from Israel, a move they hoped would quell the violence. Also, like other campuses, students formed an encampment but were met with hundreds of police in riot gear who violently chased down and threw students, faculty, and community members to the ground. One hundred and thirty students, faculty, journalists, and medics were arrested, had their hands zip tied, were hauled onto local public transit buses, and were held overnight in our basketball/hockey stadium. Those who were arrested reported that they were refused water, bathrooms, and food. One student reported having their leg broken by the police. Graduating seniors have not been allowed to graduate due to impending conduct hearings. Unfortunately, many college student protesters have faced similar violence for the civic act of protest. For universities to bring state riot police into a peaceful protest is not only dangerous (indeed the protests only became violent when the police acted in violence) but it also reflects an alarming trend toward dismantling democracy and silencing dissent. As feminist rhetoric and

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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).

composition scholars who have worked to empower student voices and the foster an understanding of the relationships among power, identity, geopolitical and geo-economic location, and rhetorical situation, this attack on students who were attending to such relationships is deeply distressing. For us, student protesters represent the possibility for a better and more just world. Their activist tactics remind us that as a field we must continue to grow and change.

The articles in this issue reflect some of the ways that scholars see that the field must adapt and change to our changing culture and world. For example, Mais Al-Khateeb's essay, "Marking the Boundaries of Care in/and Definitions of Refugee Medical Encounters" demonstrates the utility of a transnational feminist lens to the study of Rhetoric of Health and Medicine and Technical Communication. While importantly the essay demonstrates the racist, imperialist, culturally relativistic, and gendered logics beneath the cultural interventions that healthcare providers are trained to offer refugees, the essay itself is also remarkable for how it cogently lays out its theoretical intervention. Through this intervention, the essay demonstrates new methods and questions that lay bare how cultural interventions are often entangled with the logics of US exceptionalism and thus limit how care workers respond to refugees.

Much like Al-Khateeb's essay pushes the field to develop new feminist methods to understand and respond to our changing world including the migration of people to the US, both Faith Kurtyka and Caroline Dadas each call for new feminist methods to understand and explore rhetoric as it circulates on digital media.

For example, Kurtyka's essay counters the claim made by many feminist scholars that attribute displays of personal confidence on social media as a form of popular feminism and thus somewhat empty and limiting. In "'It Helps Me Feel More Comfortable': Creating an Affective Public to Build Confidence on Instagram," Kurtyka demonstrates how a specific group of Instagram users from an exercise group create an affective public that offers writers confidence, but that confidence, the essay shows, leads to a form of subtle everyday activism. Tracing the Instagram usage of a local chapter of a national group of college students dedicated to supporting each other at university gyms, Kurtyka demonstrates how the group alters the composing platform and uses feminist methods to build each other up and function as a community and not as confident individuals. Kurtyka's ethnographic method is unique and demonstrates a feminist method that works understanding community writing and composing practices over individual users.

Caroline Dadas demonstrates the need to mix both feminist and queer methods to address the ethical concerns she encountered when attempting to write and study the #MeToo movement online. In "When Ethics Get in the Way: The Methodological Messiness of Analyzing #MeToo," Dadas describes the initial attempt to research this movement as failure. Dadas shows that sometimes researchers need to abandon projects and rethink them in order to be open to reframing their goals and approaches. In addition to exploring the ethics of methods for studying sensitive materials, Dadas offers a compelling exploration of the differences, affordances, and overlaps of queer and feminist methods illustrating how the two can work together to create a more ethical approach to understanding the rhetorics of hashtags like #MeToo.

Both Kurtyka and Dadas's essays demonstrate how we need new methods, tools, and ethics for studying social media composing and circulation in our present moment. For example, throughout the season of spring 2024, a viral question made the rounds on all social media platforms, which inspired this issue's cover art: as a woman, if you were alone in the woods, would you rather encounter a strange man or a bear?

Women everywhere stated, without much hesitation, that they would rather deal with a bear in the woods than a strange man. The reasons varied; here is a compilation of some:

- The bear wouldn't pretend to be my friend
- The bear would only kill me, not sexually assault me first
- If it was a bear, no one would ask what I was wearing or if I drank too much
- A bear hunts to survive, a man hunts for fun
- A bear wouldn't record it and use it as blackmail
- A bear would attack to protect her cubs
- A bear wouldn't brag to his friends
- We aren't choosing the bear because we think we would survive, we choose the bear because we know there are worse things than just being killed.
- Statistically, the bear is the safer choice
- If a bear attacks me, everyone will believe me
- I wouldn't be forced to have a bear's babies

Men responded with surprise and, in some cases, annoyance at what they perceived as women's paranoia about strange men. Some men admitted that it gave them pause when other commenters asked the same question for daughters: if your daughter were alone in the woods, would you prefer that she encounter a strange man, or a bear? Also, if your daughter were alone in the woods, would you prefer that she encounter a strange woman, a strange man, or a bear? The men immediately recognized the strange woman as the safest option. It's unclear how much this conversation advanced some men's awareness of the everyday dangers that women contend with, but it resonated with many people, and it feels important.

## Cluster Conversation

In this issue is a Cluster Conversation titled "Teaching Feminist Rhetorical New Materialisms," which gives the story of an undergraduate honors seminar course called "Talking to Animals, Listening to Nature." The students, Kate Criner, Jessica Julian, Catherine Schanie, and MarLee Yow, each have reflections on their exposure to rhetorical concepts, especially Edward Schiappa's idea of "Big Rhetoric," connecting their thoughts with experiences in nature and expressing a passion to work for change in their communities. Each of the pieces by students has a brief preface by Megan Poole, the professor teaching the course, who also introduces the Cluster Conversation by situating it in rhetorical theory. As faculty members, we may wonder



how students are processing what we do in class, and this Cluster Conversation demonstrates how thoughtfully students reflect on ideas from class and integrate them into their prior knowledge. We are pleased to publish work on feminist pedagogy, especially given the folding of the longtime journal *Feminist Teacher* in 2017, and we have been happy to see the interdisciplinary work in *Feminist Pedagogy*, a journal published by DigitalCommons@CalPoly starting in 2021.

We conclude by noting that this is our first issue being published on the WAC Clearinghouse platform. We want to thank Mike Palmquist, Michael Pemberton, and the whole WAC Clearinghouse team for their help and the work they did to migrate the archives to the new site (old issues will also remain archived at the Coalition's website). With this change has also come a change to our formatting: we are moving to PDF-only instead of both PDF and HTML to eliminate duplication of efforts. We hope that readers enjoy this issue and the new platform.