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Editorial Leadership

Editorial Board

About the Journal: Peitho seeks to encourage, advance, and publish original feminist research in the history of rhetoric and composition and thereby support scholars and students within our profession. For submission guidelines and requirements, please see http://peitho.cwshrc.org/submit/.Peitho (ISSN 2169-0774) is published twice a year, in the Spring and Fall. Access to back issues of Peitho are part of the Coalition membership package. Coalition membership is $10 for graduate students and $25 for faculty; more information is available at cwshrc.org.

Cover Art: a watercolor painting in shades of gray showing the head and shoulders of the Statue of Liberty. Lady Liberty is covering her face with both hands in despair. Her nails are a muted red color. The painting was created by Jody Shipka and is titled "After Dobbs." At the bottom of the image are the words "Peitho 27.2 Winter 2025" in red, all capital letters, in a futuristic, glitchy font called Paralelismo ML, downloaded from justseeds.org."

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Rebecca Dingo and Clancy Ratliff

Keywords: Crisis, mutual aid, resistance, climate change, resilience, research funding, immigration

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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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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 excepting 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 Though 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*.

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Loud Mistakes: Fandom as Rhetorical Situation, Transcendent Apologia, and Taylor Swift's *Red*

Juliette Holder

Abstract: Fandom is a rhetorical situation that should be of interest to feminist rhetorical scholars. Faced with difficult odds and significant scrutiny, many women in the public eye find themselves having to apologize, strongly linking apologia to popular feminist rhetorical work. As a case study, this article compares the content, distribution, and context of both *Red* and *Red (Taylor's Version)* to interrogate how Taylor Swift uses an apologia of transcendence in her re-recording as an attempt to move past her complicity in white patriarchal ideals. While Swift's apology can recount her individual feminist becoming, it cannot see past her privileged position to become an intersectional feminist model for liberation. However, because fandom often forces celebrity women into postures of apology, feminists-in-progress like Swift are left with few other rhetorical options. To make way for more productive celebrity feminist rhetorical acts, feminist rhetoricians should directly engage with popular culture discourse and purposefully shape the rhetorical situation of fandom through public-facing writing.

Keywords: Taylor Swift; apologia; #MeToo; pop culture; fandom; celebrity rhetoric

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Feminist pedagogy is not supposed to stay in a classroom. Like bell hooks once stated in an interview, "Whether we're talking about race or gender or class, popular culture is where the pedagogy is, it's where the learning is" (hooks). This truth should point feminist rhetorical scholars to the world of popular culture—we have an interest in knowing what forms popular feminism takes and what rhetorical moves popular, even celebrity, feminists are using. In particular, this article takes up one of the most prominent pop culture figures, one of today's most prolific rhetors, Taylor Swift, with the intent of analyzing how women in popular culture wield feminist rhetorics and, more broadly, how fandom functions as a rhetorical situation that shapes those rhetorical acts.

Feminist rhetoricians and scholars of other disciplines have long debated whether or not Swift is "feminist enough" and the value of celebrity feminism, including that of Roxane Gay and, more recently, Kim Hong Nguyen. These evaluations of Swift join the tradition of feminist rhetorical scholarship on women in popular culture, including Kimberly Fain's recent work on Beyoncé. An as-of-yet understudied trait that Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, and countless other women share is that they perform their (often feminist) rhetorical acts within the specific context of fandom. Many elements of fandom and the people who engage with it (either as fans or celebrities) still face rampant "gendered gatekeeping and spreadable misogyny" (Scott 77). Fandom is a particularly difficult space to navigate when "Many women rhetors find that there is no comfortable ethos to employ if they want to shift the dominant discourse on a particular topic" because

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dominant discourses, like fandom, still want women to be silent and submissive (Ryan et al 2). Faced with difficult odds and significant scrutiny, many women in the public eye find themselves having to apologize, strongly linking apologia to popular feminist rhetorical work.

At the same time, fandom is an incredibly useful rhetorical space for feminist work. In her book *Feminist Fandom*, Briony Hannell argues that online fandom is an important expression of 4th wave feminism, which is itself marked by digital modes and a connection with popular culture. According to Hannell, feminist fandom helps participants (fans) make sense of feminism and make feminist sense of texts. Fans use feminist ideas to critique pop culture texts—but they also use pop culture texts to understand feminism itself. In other words, many people encounter and engage with feminism through popular culture alongside academic study (if such academic study is accessible to them at all). Engagement with popular culture is, increasingly, a pathway to a feminist identity (Hannell 28).

To explore how the rhetorical situation of fandom impacts feminist rhetorical acts, this article explores Taylor Swift's re-recording and re-release of her album *Red* as a case study where the rhetorical situation is especially highlighted. We will first look at Taylor Swift's original release of her album *Red* (2012), showing the links between her "authentic womanhood" ethos to female empowerment and validation, but also to whiteness and privilege. We will then move to the ways Swift uses the re-record of *Red (Taylor's Version)* (2021) as an apology for her participation in the harms of patriarchy by recontextualizing the album (and herself) as part of the #MeToo movement. In the context of fandom, Swift's feminist apologia rhetoric is able to narrate her own feminist becoming in potentially powerful ways, although the full impact is hindered by the commodification of Swift's apology.

(Taylor's Version) as a Feminist Project

In 2019, Taylor Swift announced that the master recordings of her first six albums had been sold by her former record label (Big Machine Records) without her knowledge, in an attempt to get her to return to the label. Almost immediately, Swift began casting the story in feminist terms. In a social media post, she likened the way record label officials treated her to that of gender-based aggression. She also writes, "When that man [Scott Borchetta: Swift's former manager] says 'Music has value,' he means its value is beholden to men who had no part in creating it," and that these are attempts at "Controlling a woman who didn't want to be associated with them" (Swift).

Swift announced she would re-record those older albums. She is now in the process of re-recording and releasing her first 6 albums under her new label (Universal Music Group), with the subtitle "Taylor's Version." Since Swift is replacing her old masters, she is purposefully attempting to make the new versions sound like the old ones. The "Taylor's Versions" add a few previously unreleased "vault tracks" to each album, but the bulk of the content is designed to be identical. In other words, the sonic experiences of listening to "I Knew You Were Trouble" and "I Knew You Were Trouble (Taylor's Version)" are the same. Still,

through this album, Taylor Swift is updating her own ethos and mythology by updating the texts and surrounding messages associated with her music—something Swift herself labels as a feminist project.

When Swift first released *Red* in 2012, she did not consider herself a feminist; she also developed an ethos of white womanhood, which relied on racist, patriarchal, classist assumptions about the world. In returning to her work years later, Swift—having now undergone a feminist awakening—felt the need to correct her ethos, not only for the ways it left her open to sexist attacks, but also for the ways her acceptance and continued association with this previous ethos left other, less privileged women open to similar (or in many cases more amplified) criticisms. Swift takes up a posture of apology that relies on transcendence, a strategy that helps rehabilitate her image as more feminist than before. But while Swift's apology can recount her individual feminist becoming, it cannot move Swift beyond her white, upper-class, privileged position to become an intersectional feminist model for liberation.

The major elements of Swift's ethos are well explored by Adriane Brown, whose research on Taylor Swift fan forums traces how Swift's projection of "authenticity" and "relatability" function as a core element of her appeal. Swift's fans celebrate the ways she takes seriously people, feelings, and ideas that are often dismissed or ridiculed. This was especially true when Swift began her career at the tender age of 16. Anyone can enjoy Swift's music, but her ethos as an "authentic" American girl (now woman) makes her appeal stronger for women who see in Swift an affirmation that they matter, as they relate to her image and her lyrics.

Of course, Swift is no longer a 16-year-old girl singing about high school crushes. As she's grown, her ethos has evolved and become arguably more complex—yet the foundation of "authentic womanhood" remains. Paul Théberge, for instance, explores in "Love and Business: Taylor Swift as Celebrity, Businesswoman, and Advocate" how Swift negotiates these different pillars of her ethos, concluding that she prioritizes her "pop star" persona (which Théberge links to authenticity and girlhood, in line with Brown) to the detriment of her success as a businesswoman or advocate. Increasingly since 2019, Swift has tried to play up her role as a feminist, LGBTQIA+ ally, and an industrious, professional woman through more political lyrics, statements on social media, and her documentary *Miss Americana*. However, Théberge argues that these elements of her ethos—relatable celebrity, passionate ally, and savvy businesswoman—are often in conflict and that Swift struggles (as anyone would) to balance them well. Indeed, studying Swift's ethos involves studying multiple Taylor Swifts, as well as the ways those personas and roles are managed.

As scholars have engaged with those various "Taylors," many have reflected upon Swift's complicated relationship with feminism and feminist rhetorics. Swift now self-identifies as a feminist. While there is no reason to assume Swift's feminist statements are insincere, and perfection is certainly not required to be a feminist, it is useful to unpack how Swift's feminism does and does not speak to the current issues that non-famous feminists care most about. Swift also provides a useful case study for how feminist messages move through and are received by the general public. This is the exigency of Myles McNutt's work that argues that Swift's primary rhetorical move in her *1989* "voice memos" is to emphasize her roles as writer, creator,

and boss in the studio. She is centering herself as a woman in a male-dominated environment to claim the authority and space she has earned in a world that is not welcoming to women. This is an admirable move. Swift is, in fact, often quite vocal about defending herself as a songwriter. *Peitho* author Samira Grayson applauds this habit and positions it as a model other feminist writers might imitate, paving the way, too, for more scholars to take Swift seriously as an object of rhetoric and writing studies scholarship. However, McNutt questions the ultimate effectiveness of Swift's "girl power" messaging, since it does little to change larger systems. Swift holds on to and asserts the space she's worked hard to claim (and that is worthy work), but McNutt argues that she stops short of ensuring that those systems are changed to make it easier for others to succeed. It's worth noting that Paul Théberge's research on Swift's business, philanthropic, and activist efforts paints a much more complex picture. It would be impossible (and likely unhelpful) to deem Swift's feminism as either "good" or "bad." As with the rest of us, Swift's feminism remains in progress.

Therefore, it is not the goal of this paper to determine whether Swift has done "enough" in her feminism but to simply acknowledge that the feminist, rhetorical message that sticks most strongly in fandom is one that centers Swift—her authenticity, her true, now empowered, self. Melissa Avdeeff, similarly, makes the case that Swift's authenticity, which inherently centers herself, makes the activist work she is attempting to undertake more difficult. It is hard to elevate people with different, less privileged identities when Swift's own identity has, for so long, been the centerpiece of her public persona. In these ways, Swift's complicated relationship with feminism reflects a problem that persists in many strands of feminism. As Tracee L. Howell articulates, "There is no excuse for the fact that we white, mainstream feminists universalized the experience of being a woman, and so everything that followed, all the *theoria*, all the *praxis*, all of the activism, the fundamental fight, everything was necessarily framed to support the survival and flourishing of white women only" (Howell). In effect, everything is run through the filter of Swift's embodied identities, ensuring that her straight, white, able-bodied, upper-class, and otherwise privileged point of view is never really questioned, much less dismantled.

The literature reviewed above provides invaluable insight into Swift's ethos, and how her presentation of authenticity can be both empowering in some ways and alienating, even harmful, in others. This research sets the stage well for examining how Swift is returning to these texts and moments of her own past, seeking to update them. While she cannot rewrite the past, she is attempting to rewrite how people perceive her past, maybe even seeking to shift not only people's perceptions of her now, but her memory of how she was back then.

To promote this new view of self, Swift engages with apologia. In their foundational article, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves," Ware and Linkugel identify four postures of apologia: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Apologia has become increasingly applied to online discourse and ethos formation, such as in Ramona Wheeler's work "Blogging in Defense of Themselves." In an exploration of The Chicks' public fall from grace that resulted from the band's remarks against then-President George W. Bush, Emil Towner makes the case that studies related to apologia can go beyond image restoration to "uncover the

rhetorical and social implications of a rhetor's words and actions," and this provides an exigency for studying a figure like Swift (294).

However, in the case of The Chicks[1] or other famous instances of apologia, there is usually one incident that, at least in the eyes of some audience, serves as an infraction and demands an apology. But Swift is not trying to correct a single public wrong or bounce back from one singular event. Her ethos developed slowly over time, under the influence of many voices. And over time, Swift came to understand that this ethos may perpetuate harm to women, including herself. The re-creation of her own identity explored here, then, is one of a woman who has matured, grown, and no longer feels that her public persona fits her values.

To correct her ethos, Swift leverages the re-release of her album *Red* to apologize for her complicity in patriarchy by way of transcendence, linking her old ethos and her current re-recording project to the #MeToo movement.

Harms of Patriarchy & Swift's Complicity

At the time *Red* was released (2012), Swift had developed a powerful ethos. She was seen as "relatable" and "authentic." Along with Swift's picture of girlhood, however, came notions of chastity, innocence, and propriety. Brown notes that Swift's "average girl" ethos "constantly and implicitly privileges a vision of 'authentic' girlhood that is invested in whiteness, heterosexual monogamy and romance, and middle-class propriety and consumption" (162). Often presented as a foil to Miley Cyrus or other famous young women, Swift was seen as the more "proper" and "better" example of girlhood—*Vanity Fair* dubbed her the "anti-Lohan" (Brown; Sales). In evaluating the visuals of Taylor Swift's and Kanye West's respective 2010 VMA performances (ones that served as each artist's response to Kanye's infamous interruption of her acceptance speech a year prior), Shaun Cullen explores how Swift positions herself as an exemplar of white womanhood, drawing on imagery reminiscent of *Gone With The Wind*, concluding that her "performance suggests Swift's purity and authenticity" (Cullen 38). Brown summarizes, "Thus, while fans elevate Swift as a role model and strive to emulate her, this elevation is embedded in the cultural valuation of white femininity. Fans' explicit and implicit adherence to 'the Swiftian Way' requires girls to constantly maintain an image of proper girlhood" (176).

There is certainly a darker side to Swift's "All American Girl" image; in some ways, this public persona was harmful to Swift herself as well. It brought great scrutiny to her dating life. On the one hand, her willingness to write about love is what made her "authentic" and "relatable," but that same disclosure of her personal life left her vulnerable to ridicule when her relationships "failed." Openly writing about dating and relationships secured Swift's position as a relatable figure; however, this brought immense scrutiny along with accusations that she wasn't "chaste" or "pure" enough.

1 This band was formerly known as "The Dixie Chicks." Band members changed their name in 2020 to gain "[distance] from a name associated with the Confederate-era South" (Tsioulcas).

The ultimate result of this tension was that Taylor Swift's dating life became a national punchline for years. In a 2013 interview (one that reemerged in 2021 to significant criticism), Ellen DeGeneres presents Taylor with a bell and asks her to ring it when a photo of a man she dated is shown on screen. As Taylor grows more and more visibly uncomfortable, Ellen berates her for not playing along and accuses her of lying. In an unaired longer version, Swift begs "Stop it. Stop it. Stop" (Tannenbaum). Swift tries to explain her reasoning, "This is the one thing that I have, it's like the one shred of dignity that I have…. People go and make guesses about [who her songs are about] and the only thing that I have is like that one card" and "It makes me feel so bad about myself every time I come up here you put like a different dude up there on the screen, and it just makes me really question what I stand for as a human being" (Tannanbaum). Ellen and the audience laugh throughout the segment, suggesting that, yes, Taylor should feel bad. Chelsea Handler weighed in saying, "My theory about Taylor Swift is that she's a virgin, that everyone breaks up with her because they date her for two weeks and she's like, 'I'm not gonna do it.' [...] Every guy thinks they're going to devirginize her, and they're not. She's never going to get devirginized, ever, ever, ever, ever" (Johnson). Popular attitudes towards Swift at this time can best be summed up by a meme that circulated in various forms and is attributed to various sources that states "Taylor Swift should write a song called 'Maybe I'm the Problem. [2]"

Swift was, of course, aware of all these jokes, along with the countless others that took on similar forms. In a 2013 *Vanity Fair* article, she presents her defense: "For a female to write about her feelings and then be portrayed as some clingy, insane, desperate girlfriend in need of making you marry her and have kids with her, I think that's taking something that potentially should be celebrated [...] and turning it and twisting it into something that is frankly a little sexist." (Sales). Even though the article admits she "has a point," the power of that critique is undone a bit by another quote from Swift that is left as the final word of the article: "I have my sanity button that I push. I push this button that's like 'Stop complaining, your life's great, stop, do not complain about this life, stop, this life is amaaaazing.' Sanity button" (Sales). In this exchange, Swift seems to agree with her detractors that to push back against the criticism she receives is insanity. That as payment (or punishment) for her success, she must be willing to submit to the version of herself the public has crafted, which means Swift, in developing an ethos of an "all-American girl" had to take the brunt of the ridicule most American girls face. Her most vulnerable feelings become "just another whiny breakup song," and Swift herself is simultaneously cast as a conniving seductress and a silly, naive innocent girl. She's caught between the madonna and the whore. Swift positioned herself as a representative, a voice, for girls and young women but ultimately complied with misogynistic ideas and chose to uphold patriarchal systems, even at the expense of her own comfort.

All of these interpretations of Swift's character swirl around and attach themselves to the album *Red*. The *AV Club's* review of the album includes this assessment: "*Red* is the next step toward putting those awkward teenage years behind her. Swift's last album, 2010's *Speak Now*, touched on a few adult issues; the

2 In 2022, Swift would release the song "Anti-Hero" which contains the lyrics "It's me. Hi. I'm the problem. It's me," seemingly as a response to the criticism.

fairy-tale-princess dreams of her first two albums were stored away along with—depending on how 'Dear John' should be interpreted—her virginity. With *Red*, she's become even more unforgiving of the long trail of ex-boyfriends she's left behind" (Gallucci). The fact that a major media outlet would find it acceptable to speculate about Swift's virginity in a review of her music points poignantly to the fact that the discourse surrounding her music plays a significant role in shaping her work. *Red* has always been tied to her authentic womanhood ethos, and all the ways that women, then, are harmed by patriarchy.

Swift was simultaneously the victim and perpetrator of these sexist ideals. Without discounting the pain Swift endures, it is worth questioning how much more severe these messages and expectations might be for women who do not share Swift's privilege, whiteness, straightness, able-bodiedness, or class status (at time of writing, Swift is a billionaire). Swift's privilege, in many ways, impacts the severity and material consequences of the sexist messages leveled at her. Swift finds herself in the tension of deserving an apology but also needing to apologize for the ways these ideas about womanhood play themselves out.

Feminist Awakening

Swift was 23 when *Red* was released for the first time in 2012. That year, responding to *The Daily Beast* asking her if she considered herself a feminist, Swift explained, "I don't really think about things as guys versus girls. I never have. I was raised by parents who brought me up to think if you work as hard as guys, you can go far in life" (Setoodeh). Two years later, though, Swift embraced a feminist identity saying, "As a teenager, I didn't understand that saying you're a feminist is just saying that you hope women and men will have equal rights and equal opportunities. What it seemed to me, the way it was phrased in culture and society, was that you hate men. And now, I think a lot of girls have had a feminist awakening because they understand what the word means. [...] I've been taking a feminist stance without actually saying so" (Thomas).

A few years later, in 2017, Taylor Swift appeared in court and entered into larger cultural conversations centered upon the #MeToo movement. Years prior, a radio DJ sexually assaulted Swift. She reported it, and he was fired—so *he* sued *her*. The court ultimately sided with Swift, and her compelling, blunt testimony made headlines across the country. She told *Time* for their #MeToo "Silence Breakers" issue, "My advice is that you not blame yourself and do not accept the blame others will try to place on you" (Dockterman).

In *Miss Americana*, the documentary about Swift, she connects her experiences with the sexual assault and subsequent trial to her belief that she needs to be "on the right side of history" and be more vocal about her politics, partly because "Something is different in my life—completely and unchangeably different—since the sexual assault trial last year. No man in my organization or in my family will understand what that was like" (Wilson 1:01:24-40). Putting these values into practice, Swift explicitly revealed her political beliefs in 2018, against the wishes of her management team and male family members. In an Instagram post, Swift aligned herself with the Democratic party and emphatically against Donald Trump. The post was a sensation; it resulted in 65,000 people registering to vote—many for the first time (McDermott). Swift's music

and ethos have become entangled with her feminism and, specifically, her participation in #MeToo.

Transcendence & Apology

When Swift re-recorded and re-released *Red (Taylor's Version)* in 2021, both Swift's sense of self and the cultural landscape had shifted dramatically in the near decade since the release of *Red*. These changes happened slowly and in complex ways. An emerging feminism connected to #MeToo is among the most important shifts for Swift. When returning to *Red*, Swift recognized that she wasn't the same woman who originally released the album. Her public persona attached to the album no longer fit. The re-recording and re-release of *Red (Taylor's Version)* provided Swift with an opportunity to apologize. This apology takes the posture of transcendence. Ware and Linkugel write that transcendent apologies "take in any strategy which cognitively joins some fact, sentiment, object or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view that attribute" in a way that "moves the audience away from the particulars of the charge at hand in a direction toward some more abstract, general view of [the speaker's] character" (280). In Swift's case, she places her complicity with patriarchy in a new context of the #MeToo movement after her own experience with sexual assault.

In re-releasing the album *Red*, Swift has gone back in time to when her association with authentic white womanhood was strongest. She announced her re-recorded version of *Red (Taylor's Version)* by saying "Imagining your future might always take you on a detour back to the past." The re-recorded songs are faithful recreations that effectively replace the originals; *The New Yorker* called the new versions "indistinguishable" from the old (Battan). As she returned to *Red*, Swift did not change the songs themselves but the conversations and associations surrounding them, transforming them into a transcendent apologia.

Through recontextualizing and redistributing *Red*, Swift was able to recreate her ethos in more feminist ways, not by disowning her past but by implying that those more feminist, less problematic versions of herself were there all along. A posture of transcendence lets her apologize without admitting guilt or placing full blame on her younger self. She was simply held back and distorted by the sexist systems Swift found herself a part of—an iteration of patriarchal abuse that #MeToo seeks to call out. Now that Swift has grown and found more freedom, she can trace her more feminist views into her own past. Applying the work of Sara Ahmed to Taylor Swift, Monique McDade argues,

> Feminist becoming begins when we return to past experiences, often violent experiences that we have suppressed or normalized out of self-preservation and find in them a harmony between what we sensed as the experience unfolded and what we know about it now after having accumulated many such experiences. [...] Taylor Swift's effort to re-record her first six albums is a "feminist becoming" as she literally reinhabits her sonic pasts. But Swift's unprecedented decision to rerecord the music she produced with Big Machine Records is also her move to reclaim a past that she did not have ownership of. (McDade)

This new version of *Red* is presented to fans as a fuller, more complete picture of the album, mirroring the fuller, more complete picture of herself and her character that Swift is also hoping to present.

Like all her albums, *Red (Taylor's Version)* includes a note from Taylor in the album liner. In it, she describes the album like so: "Musically and lyrically, *Red* resembled a heartbroken person. It was all over the place, a fractured mosaic of feelings that somehow all fit together in the end. Happy, free, confused, lonely, devastated, euphoric, wild, and tortured by memories past. [But] something was healed along the way. [...] This will be the first time you hear all 30 songs that were meant to go on Red." This introduction is labeled "prologue," which emphasizes the constructed, performative element of *Red (Taylor's Version)* and the version of Taylor's life that it presents. It is a reversal of the "authentic" diary-like representations of the original version. At the same time, though, Taylor posits that this version is the one that was "intended" all along, that just like the heart it represents, the original *Red* had been broken and only through the re-release becomes a "complete picture." And this picture, unequivocally, is Taylor's. It's Taylor's Version. Here, Swift is simultaneously communicating that the new version is the most honest, the most her and, paradoxically, it is also the most upfront about the inauthentic, constructed nature of Swift's work. Through this, Swift reclaims her own words—legally and symbolically—by attaching them to her name and disassociating her "authenticity" from its gendered, racial, heterosexist connotations (Cullen). By positioning the re-recordings as a reclamation project, Swift highlights that the original versions were not really hers. Those original albums—and the version of Swift that created and released them—existed under the control of men working in the music industry. Creating "Taylor's Versions" of her albums is about more than legal ownership, it is about Swift throwing off patriarchal control. Swift is primarily sorry, it seems, not for the harms her earlier ethos may have caused by becoming complicit with patriarchy but sorry that she was not able to be this free, this feminist, earlier.

This fuller picture of Swift displayed through *Red (Taylor's Version)* shows Swift as a more powerful, more feminist figure. To incentivize purchasing the albums, Swift includes 9 "vault songs" on *Taylor's Version.* The vault songs are songs she wrote back when she was writing for the original release of *Red*, songs she planned to include but ultimately removed under the advice of her record label. Two of them—"Better Man" and "Babe"—were given to other artists when they were cut from *Red*. Both were celebrated and award-winning. In reclaiming them now, Swift communicates that she is no longer letting other people tell her stories. Other people can no longer speak for her. Most of the vault songs do fill out the picture *Red* paints with more detail. Some of them were, perhaps, cut because they paint a more mature picture of Swift—"The Very First Night" discusses "nights at the hotel" spent with a new boyfriend. Or because they are more aggressive in tone—"I Bet You Think About Me" does not shy away from insulting an ex. "Nothing New" turns its gaze against gender roles and systemic patriarchal violence: "They tell you when you're young 'girls go out and have your fun.' Then they hunt and slay the ones who actually do it." The vault songs supplement *Red*, continuing its same themes, but with a stronger awareness of and pushback against her previous ethos.

The most talked about vault song is a longer version of an original *Red* track: "All Too Well." *Red (Taylor's Version)* includes a re-recorded version of "All Too Well" and a vault track "All Too Well (10 Minute

Version)." This longer version, previously unreleased, is the original version of the song Swift wrote for the album but had to cut down. The resurrected lyrics speak about power dynamics, age gaps, and gendered expectations and the role they played in the relationship falling apart: "I was never good at telling jokes, but the punchline goes, I'll get older but your lovers stay my age." In its expanded form, "All Too Well (10 Minute Version)" paints a very different picture of the breakup the song has always described. This song functions as a smaller iteration of what Swift is doing through *Red (Taylor's Version);* she is pulling back the curtain on what was edited out, cluing us into the whole story, which is one where gendered power dynamics and emotional manipulation held Swift back. This isn't just the story of "All Too Well." It is the story of Swift's feminism.

On the cover of *Taylor's Version*, Swift poses in a car's driver's seat: a place of literal control. This image resonates with Swift's role as director for Taylor's Version's visuals. Prominently featured on all the album's music videos is a title card that indicates the work is "Owned by Taylor Swift." While promoting *Red (Taylor's Version)*, Swift made appearances at NYU—where she received an honorary doctorate—and Tribeca Film Festival, where she was interviewed as a director of the short film "All Too Well: The Short Film." She also appeared on late-night shows and *Saturday Night Live*, often performing the longer "All Too Well." This redistribution elevates her work. Even though the themes of heartbreak stay the same (or are even expanded), "All Too Well" evolves from "another breakup song" to art worthy of serious discussion and acclaim. Swift comes away perceived as a serious player in the industry, one who is capable and savvy, because of her ability to shift the conversation. Even when the media did default to the "Taylor Swift dates too much" narrative, Swift dismissed them and this time did not take it back—saying in a Tweet "2010 called and it wants its lazy, deeply sexist joke back" (@taylorswift13). In pointing to the sexism at work in the media, Swift pushes readers to (re)consider *Red* as an artifact influenced by those same patriarchal forces: forces the new Swift is attempting to transcend.

Still, in returning to her past, Swift takes care not to dismiss or disparage herself. Instead of hiding or disowning her former ethos, Swift returns to and recreates those versions of herself, creating new links between her current more feminist ethos and who she was then. Swift presents her shift in ethos as one of discovery or unveiling. Swift has grown in confidence and regained ownership of her name, work, and ideas—literally and figuratively. Her apologia of transcendence communicates that she is sorry she was not able to do better back then. Operating now with more life experience and greater freedom from patriarchal control, this version of Swift, who has seemingly been repressed all along, can make herself known.

It would be a mistake to assume all of this is "mere" rhetoric, just for show or self-promotion. In fact, there is much about Taylor Swift's life and work to admire from a feminist perspective. The truth is she has achieved marked success in a male-dominated space, while celebrating femininity. By all accounts, she is generous. She donated to local food banks during every stop of the Eras Tour. When the first leg of that tour wrapped, she gave every crew member, cast member, and truck driver a $100,000 bonus. As she puts together a cast of background singers and dancers, she seems to be making more concentrated efforts to represent

more diversity in terms of gender, race, age, and body size. In 2023, she cast a trans man as the romantic lead in her music video for "Lavender Haze." She regularly posts about the importance of voting and directs people to voting registration information. She used her music video for "You Need To Calm Down" and the VMA acceptance speech for it to rally people to sign a petition asking the Trump administration to pass the Equality Act. While less visible, her greatest acts of activism are perhaps within the music industry. It is because Swift kept her music off Spotify and Apple Music for so long that all artists now receive payment for streams during listeners' free trial periods.

Limitations of Swift's Apologia Rhetoric

While her recent actions build a case for Swift's feminism-in-action, its limitations must be noted. As a privileged white woman, Swift has considerable blinders. In 2015, Nicki Minaj tweeted disappointment at not being nominated for Video of the Year at the VMAs, an award Swift was nominated for. Minaj expressed a belief that only "other girls" with "slim bodies" are ever recognized by the media and pointed toward misogynoir often exhibited by the media. Swift, assuming Minaj was calling her out personally, tweeted, "I've done nothing but love & support you. It's unlike you to pit women against each other. Maybe one of the men took your slot." The media, adhering very much to what Minaj accused them of, began construing Minaj as an angry woman attacking Swift and "playing the race card" (Lipshutz). Without an intersectional understanding of oppression, Swift was unable to understand the nuances of Minaj's critique (which was a critique of the media, not even of Swift, as she pointed out). To her credit, as Minaj responded and clarified both in tweets to Swift and in media comments (something Minaj should not have had to do), Swift listened. She ultimately tweeted, "I thought I was being called out. I missed the point, I misunderstood, then misspoke. I'm sorry, Nicki" (Feeney). Since then, it appears as if the two women have become friends, as they frequently reference each other on social media and in acceptance speeches, noting their support for each other. Swift's feminism is in progress, and it is admirable that she seems to be open to correction and learning.

Swift has positioned *Red (Taylor's Version)* as part of her feminist becoming process, as evidence of what she's learned about feminism so far. In re-releasing this album, she has updated its presentation and context, arguing through apology that she can only now reveal the full, more feminist picture of it—and of herself. Specifically, Swift's connection to the #MeToo movement provides her with the reasoning for why she was not this feminist until now. Her participation in patriarchy was itself an act of patriarchal oppression. Her own complicity is recast as an act of abuse against her; male figures (her record label, her abuser) created that complicit version of her. In attaching *Red (Taylor's Version)* to #MeToo, Swift attempts to transcend her earlier ethos.

This rhetorical strategy is successful to a degree. Swift is mostly effective at changing the narrative around herself. She is seen now as powerful, serious, and—to many people—someone who works for the greater good. However, Swift's posture of apologia recognizes that Swift was not just hurt by patriarchy; she hurt others (especially less privileged women) through her complicity with and promotion of white patriar-

chal, classist ideals. Her apologia of transcendence, linking her re-recordings to her connection to #MeToo, primarily pursues absolution over accountability. As it tries to make amends for centering a narrow white, upper-class, privileged view of women, Swift's apologia approach runs the risk of merely repeating those mistakes, making Swift's own personal comfort the point of her apology. In fact, Swift's apology might be seen to function as a form of what Pritha Prasad and Louis M. Maraj term "benevolent gaslighting," which is "the tendency to eschew blame through a rewriting of history" (323). Swift can recount her personal experience of feminist becoming, but her apology does little to free *others* from patriarchy once filtered through the mechanism of her public persona and its vested interests (though not necessarily Taylor's personal interest) in upholding current social hierarchies.

It is useful, at this point, to separate out Taylor Swift—the real human being—and Taylor Swift—the performer, the corporate construction. There is a difference between Swift's real, embodied existence in this world and the ways patriarchy, #MeToo, and feminism have influenced her and the way her accounts of such things are woven into her public persona. There is no reason to doubt Swift's accounts of her growing feminist awareness, her dedication to feminist causes, and her commitment to learning and doing better. In fact, hers can be a powerful act of feminist storytelling. That feminist messaging grows weaker when transferred onto Swift's public persona, which may be more feminist but is still limited in important ways. This is because Swift's public persona is a construction of corporate interests. Unlike the living, breathing Swift, those corporate interests cannot really unlearn classism, racism, ableism, or sexism, as systems of oppression are inherent to them. They can only appropriate feminist language, commodifying feminist storytelling.

"All Too Well (10 Minute Version)" is a great example of this. One line reads "You were tossing me the car keys. 'Fuck the patriarchy' keychain on the ground." In context, this can be read as Swift critiquing her then-boyfriend's outward alignment with feminism by buying keychains bearing feminist slogans while he himself exploits power and age differences between them to make Swift feel inferior and dependent upon him. It *could* be a critique of commercial feminism, a lesson Swift—the person—learned about the disconnect between popular feminist slogans and merchandising and real commitment to gender equality. As this message moves into her public persona, it becomes commercialized. The official merchandise store for Taylor Swift is now selling "Fuck the Patriarchy" keychains. A fantastic example of missing the point. But one that is embraced by some fans and, apparently, sanctioned by Swift or at least her constructed public self.

This is, perhaps, the most dangerous part of Swift's associating her own feminist becoming with #MeToo. In doing so, Swift may be perpetuating what has been a major criticism of how the #MeToo movement has evolved and become more "official." Caroline Dadas summarizes, "Keeping #MeToo focused on white, cisgender, straight women is not only exclusionary to marginalized populations but also counterproductive to achieving the goals of the movement" (Dadas). As such an influential, high-profile figure, Swift's linking of herself to #MeToo may imply that the movement "belongs" to privileged white women like her, which does indeed betray the origins and goals of the movement. It is not wrong for Swift to have found

healing and solace within the movement; there is danger in her elevating herself as a primary or representative actor within it.

When Mistakes are Very Loud: Public-Facing Scholarship as Feminist Response

In 2019, Swift told *Vogue*, "It's hard to know how to [advocate] without being so fearful of making a mistake that you just freeze. Because my mistakes are very loud. When I make a mistake, it echoes through the canyons of the world. It's clickbait, and it's a part of my life story, and it's a part of my career arc" (Aguirre). While most of us do not have to contend with the intense spotlight and scrutiny Swift speaks of here, many of us can relate to a fear of making mistakes. Still, we recognize, as Swift does, that mistakes are inevitable in life. They are inevitable, too, in the process of stepping into a feminist consciousness and learning to detach from white patriarchal ways of thinking.

In this context, Swift shows us what's at stake for feminists-in-progress, and fandom provides insight into a complex rhetorical situation that may require new and different rhetorical moves. Swift invites us to consider the extent to which the default posture for women in public (and fandom specifically) has become one of apology. The loudness of mistakes, which Swift speaks of, is one of fandom's hallmarks, meaning that Swift is not the first and will not be the last celebrity feminist who undertakes apologia. Women, in particular, who are often cast as "interlopers," will likely find themselves anticipating the need to apologize in order to remain active in fandom conversations at all (Scott 76). In fandom spaces—and indeed in much of public life—a woman's mere presence is still seen by patriarchy as an affront in and of itself. Swift faces prejudices and patriarchal attitudes that cast her as wrong or deviant merely for existing in public, but she also faced more valid criticisms from feminists asking Swift to reckon more with her own complicity in upholding white patriarchal ideals. In all of these rhetorical contexts, competing camps expected Swift to apologize.

As a result, Swift's apologia of transcendence has to do a tremendous amount of rhetorical work. It must recount Swift's feminist becoming, reckon with her complicity, and seek to make a practical difference, moving feminism from theory to practice. Apology, while powerful, cannot do all of this at once, as Swift's case shows.

Unless the rhetorical situation of fandom shifts in profound ways, feminist rhetorics in popular culture risks becoming largely defined by the only partially effective rhetorical tool of apologia. Fortunately, when feminist rhetorical scholars are engaged with popular culture, we can use our expertise to intervene; we can move beyond understanding the rhetorical situations women often work within and shape what those situations look like in the future.

To do so, feminist rhetoricians should not only embrace popular culture, especially fandom, as an area of study, but we should also actively work to shape those popular conversations by engaging in public-facing scholarship. In embracing new genres, methods of delivery or circulation, and audiences, public

writing can be both a tool of community building and resistance (Ryder). This makes it an especially useful tool for feminist rhetoricians because "there is no 'authentic' feminism that exists beyond its popular manifestations, and the popular itself remains a site of struggle over the meanings of feminism" (Hannell 6).

Feminist rhetorical scholars have an obligation to join this project of meaning-making. By writing not just about but also with and in sites of popular feminist discourse, we can provide more people—those who may never have the opportunity to sit in our classrooms—with pathways into stronger, more intersectional feminist identities. We should continue holding people accountable and calling them in, while affirming that their presence in the feminist project, and commitment to being better, doing better, and making communities better, is nothing to apologize for.

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Too Smart, Too Productive, Too Much: Intellectual Vibrancy and Misogyny

Amy Robillard

Abstract: Based on interviews with 45 women and nonbinary people, this article shares the results of an analysis of the effects of being characterized as "too much" for being too smart or too productive at school or work. One of the lifelong effects of being labeled too much is a difficulty accepting compliments. This article considers that effect in depth, especially the back-handed compliment that persuades women to take on more service work in their fields.

Keywords: misogyny, too much, labor, service, compliments

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A couple summers ago, my husband and I spent a couple days in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, at the foot of the Smoky Mountains. We hiked during the day and, completely depleted from those hikes, visited breweries in the late afternoon. One evening, we visited a pizza place in nearby Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, a tourist town best known for Dolly Parton's theme park, Dollywood. We had to wait a little bit for our table, but as soon as we were seated, our young waiter—maybe twenty years old—came to our table, took one look at us, and said to my husband, "If she gives you any trouble or talks too much, there's an *eject* button located under your table." And then he laughed and took our drink orders without making eye contact with me. My blood pressure went up twenty points.

I told Steve we had to say something when the waiter came back. If he wasn't willing to say something, I would. Steve nodded.

When our waiter came back with our drinks, he said it again. "If she's too much, just push the *eject* button under your side of the table," he said to Steve.

"Please stop saying that," I said, barely able to contain my fury. I can't believe I said "please."

He finally looked at me, perplexed.

"Stop saying the thing about the eject button. It's incredibly misogynistic."

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"It's mis…? I don't know that word."

I take a deep breath. Why am I not surprised? "It means you're being incredibly sexist when you say things like that and it makes me want to leave. You have to stop saying things like that about your women customers."

"Oh, I say it all the time. People laugh."

"It's not funny. You're suggesting from the get-go that women are a problem. That's misogyny."

Both times he mentioned the *eject* button, our waiter mentioned the phrase *too much*. He was working from a cultural commonplace that women are prone to emotional excess, that we talk too much, that we make things difficult for those around us because we are too much. This is an ideological belief that goes as far back as the Victorian age. In her recent book, *Too Much: How Victorian Constraints Still Bind Women Today*, Rachel Vorona Cote observes the many ways in which our culture diminishes women for their emotional excess. "To be 'too much,' as I define it, connotes a state of excess that either directly or indirectly derives from an emotional and mental intemperance: exuberance, chattiness, a tendency to burst into tears or toward what is typically labeled mental instability" (12). She notes the ways *men's* excesses are, of course encouraged, pointing to the way, for instance, a soldier's valor in battle, "achieved through intense feats of physical duress, violence, and the willingness to sacrifice oneself, has always been hailed as morally upstanding and the most preeminent index of patriotism" (8). Notably, a bifurcation exists here between women's *emotional* excesses and men's heroic excesses. Men are also expected, Cote writes, to be excessively hungry and horny (10), but women's appetites, we know, are to be denied or shrunken lest they be perceived as too much.

What we don't see in Cote's definition of too muchness is an excess of intelligence, smarts, or productivity in school or the workplace. While Cote does address workplaces, her focus in the book is on exuberance and the shame that comes from being characterized as too loud rather than the shame that comes from being told you are too smart for your own good or you are too productive. You need to just calm down, take it slower. Don't do so much. In this article, I am interested in the phrase *too much* specifically in the context of women's intelligence and productivity. I am interested in the phrase and all that surrounds it: the forms it takes in women's lives, the times it is wielded and to what effects. In what follows, I analyze interviews with forty-five women and non-binary people who have experienced the label *too much*. These women have been told they were too much at home, at school, at work, and they have been both ridiculed and taken advantage of for their smarts and their productivity. When a woman's productivity advances *her* interests, it is seen as a problem; when it advances the interests of others who don't want to do that work, it is welcome. By all means, be too much in the service of others.

Methodology

In the summer and fall of 2023, I interviewed forty-five women and nonbinary people about their experiences with the label *too much*. I wanted to understand who called them too much, in what contexts participants' responses to being called too much, the effects, short-term and long-term, of being called too much, and how all of this connects to the logic of misogyny. In addition, I wanted to expand the research beyond the academy; of the forty-five people I interviewed, ten, or twenty-two percent, are not academics. The average age of interviewees was 45. Five, or eleven percent, are BIPOC.[1] All names in this article are pseudonyms.

Thirteen of the forty-five participants I interviewed remarked at some point on the phenomenon of *feeling seen* by the call I'd put out asking for volunteers in July 2023. Even as I was shaping the call, I realized that in order to participate in the research, volunteers would have to self-identify as being too much and that doing so might prevent some people from contacting me. Sensitive to this, I wrote, at the top of the call, "All my life I've been told I'm too much." I wanted this line to resonate with people. And it did.

"So much of my inner life has been and continues to be affected by self-policing to avoid being 'too much' that I wanted to volunteer to be interviewed for your study, but even this late in life (age 58), it's such a painful experience that I realized that I can't talk about it," one woman wrote to me. She did not sit down for an interview with me. Another woman wrote in an email, "I saw your call for participants, and I have rarely felt so seen. I welled up as I read it, because I felt like someone finally gets how I have felt my entire life." This sense of recognition underscores how deeply ingrained and universal this experience is for many women. From being told they were "too smart for their own good" to being perceived as having too many opinions in their professional lives, these women found an opportunity to voice a lifelong struggle.

By acknowledging this shared experience in my call for participants, I tapped into a collective narrative that resonated strongly with many women. The feeling of being seen suggests that for many, this was one of the first times they had been invited to reflect on and share the full arc of their experiences with the *too much* label. The call for participants provided validation for feelings and experiences that many had internalized and, perhaps, never fully articulated. These interviews, unlike their homes, schools, and workplaces, were spaces free of judgment.

I primarily asked interviewees to tell me stories about times in their lives when they were characterized as some form of too much. What happened? Who said it to them? How did they respond and how has it affected them since? As I did in *Misogyny in English Departments*, I ground these stories in a theory of precarious narratives. "Narratives, like lives, are differently precarious. A narrative becomes particularly precarious when its support is in question: a narrative becomes more precarious when others do not tell the same kind of story or when others question the truth value of one's story" (8). The more stories told about our experiences being labeled *too much*, the less precarious each story becomes, and the more able others

are to share their stories of being labeled *too much*. Together, these stories move from individual stories to a collective, one that accomplishes the social and rhetorical work of refusing the label *too much*. This article is one part of a larger project and will join together with future work to build an even larger collective of stories of the power of women speaking out together about being labeled *too much*.

Of the types of too much I coded for in the data, sixteen out of eighteen are what I'm calling outward-oriented characteristics, or those that involve a woman putting something into the world, with the top two being talking too much and being too emotional. Only two of eighteen are what might be characterized as taking in too much: too fat and too needy. This suggests, of course, that women are characterized as too much far more often for their production—you might even say their giving—than for their taking or their appetites. This makes sense according to the logic of misogyny. Though women are expected to give, it's *what* they're supposed to give that matters in a patriarchy. They are supposed to give, for instance, attention, and when they are talking, they are not giving attention. Likewise, when they are understood to be too needy, they are seen as taking, which is, according to the logic of misogyny, a punishable offense.

When I say the logic of misogyny, I draw on Kate Manne's work in *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, where she writes that in a patriarchy, men are entitled to *receive* and women are obligated to *give*. The passage that is burned into my brain from Manne's book is this one:

> Women may not be simply human *beings* but positioned as human *givers* when it comes to the dominant men who look to them for various kinds of moral support, admiration, attention, and so on. She is not allowed to *be* in the same ways as he is. She will tend to be in trouble when she does not give enough, or to the right people, in the right way, or in the right spirit. And, if she errs on this score, or asks for something of the same support or attention on her own behalf, there is a risk of misogynist resentment, punishment, and indignation. (*Down* xix)

When women do not give what is expected of them—feminine-coded goods such as affection, attention, care, loyalty, and nurture—or when they ask for any of those things or for masculine-coded goods such as respect, compensation, or power—they are liable to be shocked back into their place with any number of "down-girl" moves.

> Girls and women may be down-ranked or deprived relative to more or less anything that people typically value…. This may happen in numerous ways: condescending, mansplaining, moralizing, blaming, punishing, silencing, lampooning, satirizing, sexualizing, belittling, caricaturizing, exploiting, erasing, and evincing pointed indifference. (*Down* 30)

When participants in this research found themselves in a position in which *they* possessed the masculine-coded goods such as intellect and productivity and they were in a position to earn respect as a result—in other words, when the traditional patriarchal tables were turned—they found themselves receiv-

ing the message that being smart and doing a lot of work were, actually, not positive attributes. They were, instead, opportunities for questioning and shame.

I was on the edge of this work when I wrote *Misogyny in English Departments*. In that book, I wrote that, when she is "in her place," a woman "does not have opinions. She does not ask for feedback on her work if she is a student. She does not attempt to make suggestions about her area of academic expertise. She does not call out anybody in her department, most especially her chairperson, for lying. She does not take credit for her work. She does not try to change things" (72). When she is not in her place, of course, she is challenging what Manne characterizes as men's epistemic entitlement (*Entitled* 141), the "unwarranted sense of entitlement on the part of the mansplainer to occupy the conversational position of the *knower* by default: to be the one who dispenses information, offers corrections, and authoritatively issues explanations" (*Entitled* 140). While Manne is writing about mansplaining here, it is easy enough to extend her point to the work I am doing here; when women demonstrate expertise or are immensely productive at work or school, they risk unseating men from their default positions of authority.

The surveillance of "too much" in childhood and education

One of the biggest differences between this project and my earlier project on misogyny in English departments is that this one involves a label that has been attached to women and girls, in so many cases, from the time they were children. Their parents and teachers told them they were too much from the time they were 3, 5, 8 years old. The impacts of this label have been lifelong. So when I put out a call for volunteers to participate in this research project, I was asking for women to come forward with stories not just about their experiences in their workplaces (as I had with the English department research) but also their experiences in their homes as young children and in school. The people I spoke with have been hearing *all their lives* that they are too much. This belief about too-muchness becomes deeply internalized, shaping self-perception in profound ways. When I asked women about their responses to being characterized as too much, they report internalizing shame ("Shame. A lot of shame. It's like I had this happy giant balloon and somebody puts a pin in it and now I'm Eeyore with nothing." "Especially when I was younger, it was a lot of shame and fear."), shrinking ("When I was young, it was trying to be less. Just like trying to keep it in." "When I was younger, it was to shrink. It was to become less." "For so long it was to box myself, to try to make myself smaller."), and shutting down ("In the past I think I very much internalized it and shut down and was like, oh, that is true, of course I don't deserve to ask for those things." "Typically and especially when I was younger it was shutting down and sort of being like, you're right and using that to push things back down and try not to be as much." "My knee-jerk reaction when they mean it with mal intent is to shut down."). All of these responses have multifaceted effects on one's capacity to develop socially and emotionally.

The kinds of too much participants talked about are many: they have been told that they talk too much, that they feel too much, that they are too curious, that they ask too many questions, that they are too adventurous, that they are too loud, that they are too fat, too tall, too big. They take up too much space, they

have too many ideas, they are too opinionated. They are too logical, too caring, they have too much energy, they spend too much time in their rooms. They are too happy, too proud, too committed. They smile too big, showing too many teeth.

What's more, the surveillance of too much begins early. It begins early and it shapes little girls' and then adolescents' and then women's behavior as it highlights all the things that are too big. The surveillance of too much settles in even before little girls begin school. "Some of my first memories as a child were being told I was too much," said one participant when I asked her when she first remembers being told she was too much. "I knew all of those messages before I was five," says another. "When I was three, my grandmother used to tell me that I was too smart for my own good." This participant, now 63 years old, says, "I think about that so often." "I don't feel like I have a memory before that," says another. Age 3, age 5, age 8, age 9, age 10. Morgan recalls that they heard it in kindergarten. "I was in a small group, and I was running ahead of everyone in everything, and it was a chastisement of getting too far ahead. That is Morgan being too much right now. Morgan, you need to calm down. 'Too much' and 'calm down' in my mind are so completely connected." In Morgan's story we see that they are being called too much because they are running too far ahead. They are too quick. They are too smart. They are too much for school.

Three of my interviewees told me stories about being too much for school. Like Morgan, Grace, an associate professor of English, tells me that in the space of the classroom, where she was always tracked in honors classes, she was always bored and so she was always doing too much.

I distinctly remember a teacher in middle school telling me—even though I sat in the front row and I paid attention and I did well—I think I had a 98 at the end of the year, and this was a high school-level class that I was taking when I was twelve—that I was drawing too much. I remember being told by my teacher who I otherwise liked and had a nice rapport with, that when I was a famous fashion designer, he would say that I was in his class, but for the moment could I please stop drawing instead of doing the work. Except I was doing the work. I was also drawing.

Then there's Charlotte, a content strategist, who tells a story about being too much for her AP Psychology teacher in high school.

> I would find inconsistencies between, like, the school materials and our textbook or like what the teacher was saying about some sort of theory or framework or concept and I would be like, hey, that's not exactly what this says, can you help. I don't know how to say, can you help me understand, but that's the polite way to say, you're full of shit. I don't know exactly how I would word it, but I would point out that I was confused by misleading language or things that were conflicting and I would be sent to the principal's office. That was my AP Psychology class and literally after a certain point I was told not to go to the class anymore. I just went and did the work in the principal's office.

And finally there's Nicole, a labor studies professor, whose story is eerily similar to Charlotte's.

> When I was in high school, I had a math teacher who was ex-military, ex-Marine, and we didn't mesh, let's just go with our personalities were quite different and I was always the person who was like, I think you skipped a step there, how did you do that? I have a question about this and everyone else is kinda sleeping through class, right, and so I remember that he put something on the board and he explained the answer and it was wrong. It was absolutely just incorrect. So I didn't say it during class, but I went afterwards and I was like, that wasn't the right answer, and he lost it on me. He was like, why do you just always have to be asking questions and correcting things, in this over-the-top military sort of way that was just, as a teenage girl, crushing to me. I just started crying…. Later, he was like, I think that was completely inappropriate, she can't come back to my class. I was a sophomore. That's the last year of math I took in high school. I did correspondence math after that because I was in a small rural high school. That was the only math teacher and he didn't want me back and by that point I was like, I don't want to see him because it's so upsetting…. He was like, without mincing words, you are always just too much. That's what he was saying and the words he was using.

Grace, Charlotte, and Nicole were all good students. Grace's infraction was that she was understood to not be paying attention, while Charlotte and Nicole were pointing out inconsistencies between what they had learned and what was happening in front of them in the classroom. For this, both Charlotte and Nicole were punished with exile from the class itself. If we think about what Charlotte and Nicole were doing by the lights of misogyny, we can see they each put their teacher, a figure of authority, into a position in which they could be humiliated. Perhaps, for these male teachers, having a mistake pointed out *by a girl* was humiliating and they felt the need to respond by banishing the offender from class.

In her essay, "'Put on the Diamonds': Notes on Humiliation," Vivian Gornick writes that "Nothing, nothing, nothing in the world can destroy the soul as much as outright humiliation. Every other infliction can eventually be withstood or overcome, but not humiliation." But what humiliates you is not the same as what humiliates me. Humiliation is a result of an absence of self-respect, and, as Gornick puts it, the "circumstances that can make people feel bereft of [self-respect] are as variable as persons themselves." But I want to suggest that for those of us in the knowledge business—teachers, writers, academics—circumstances that make us feel bereft of self-respect and thus humiliated are those in which our intellect is called into question. Even more, circumstances in which an authority based on our intellect, is called into question. Thus, it makes perfect sense that Charlotte's and Nicole's teachers banished them from class. One's inclination, Gornick explains, when one's right to exist is challenged, is "to crawl out from under the rock that held their prodigious capacity for shame in place, and stand up shooting."

The surveillance of "too much" at work

From the stories women told about doing too much work or having too many ideas at work, the theme of humiliation emerged rather quickly: humiliation for doing too much but also the belief that you're doing too much is humiliating others by making them look inadequate. This belief is dependent on a culture of comparison and competition, of one-upmanship and zero-sum games. A woman's productivity becomes a problem when she is winning the competition.

Jordan, an associate professor of English, tells me about a "waste-of-space male professor" in her department "who very much has asked not to be on committees with me because he does nothing and I do a lot, so I think there is some of that, I think I highlight the ways he is a waste of space." Nicole's colleagues are more direct with her. She tells me, "I've been in situations where people are not working at that speed and not taking on these projects and not traveling as much and not going and they're like, why don't you just keep it down for the rest of us who are just kind of getting by?" Asked about what she believes is the tipping point for being perceived as too much, Stacey, a professor of political science, says, "I think with men in the work environment the tipping point is if I seem to be making them—they perceive that my success or my participation makes them look weak." Natalie, a creative writing professor, tells me about how she perceives the differences between her motivation and her colleagues' motivations for getting work done:

> So I was doing too much… I was really passionate. It's a theme, actually, that goes back to my high school and college, I pursue things because I'm really passionate about them, so that fuels me doing them and working on them. Whereas my colleagues—actually as I'm talking to you about it, it feels so much like high school—are just like, well I'm gonna do this to check off the box. And if you're motivated by checking off the boxes then you don't like to do it and you don't do as much and I understand that but I wasn't motivated at the time by checking off the boxes, I was passionate about what I was doing, so I was doing a lot of it. And again, it was like, that's too much…

When I asked Natalie what she believes is the tipping point for being perceived as too much, she echoed what Stacey said. "Apparently as long as I don't call attention to myself and as long as it doesn't look like I'm doing much more than anyone else, I'm fine. But if I start doing that, then that was the tipping point. I had a male colleague at the time who had published fifteen books—nobody cared. But with me, everyone turned against me. They automatically assumed—not everyone, but many, many people, they automatically assumed that if I was doing all that, never mind that I was doing it over fifteen years, that I must be getting away with something."

Maya, a healthcare professional, has been told by others in her workplace that she does too much and that she expects too much from others. "The message I heard was to 'dial it back' and let other people do it," she tells me. "The problem is that my expectations are too high and I should not take over projects just because I don't like the way others do it. The problem is that I don't see these projects moving forward

at all." After her latest performance review, Maya says, "It has become clear to me that most people just want to do the minimum and when I come in and propose change, people do not like it."

Similarly, Eileen, an architect, tells me about needing to coddle the male engineers she worked with lest they take offense at what she told them to be true.

> I had to review drawings, and one engineer told me—I would say, this conflicts with this wall or, you know, fire vamp needed here or whatever—and he's like, you can't tell engineers what to do. You have to just say that you think it's not right. Like I was being too aggressive to actually call attention and do my job. So that's the kind of thing I ended up with. I mean, I just couldn't interpret it any other way, that, as a woman, I was too much. Like, I had to couch everything in my emails, you know, lest I seem too pushy, you know. Too pushy, too loud, too domineering, I guess.

Brooke, an associate professor of English, tells a story, too, about having too much information and not being heard, and being discounted in the workplace. Having "rung the bell" five years earlier about the problems with funding teaching assistantships in the department, Brooke notes that her chair didn't listen. Didn't see the problem.

> I told them multiple times, but what I ended up with was, well, you just got overworked and you're really very angry, so let us handle it and you just go write your book. Having too much information, too much understanding, taking the actual time to give a crap about this department—it was too much. In fact, I shared this data at a faculty meeting and I had this male faculty member—we're friendly, we've been out to dinner, we're not BFFs—he looked at me and he said, "I just don't believe those numbers. I just don't think you're accurate." And I'm like, here's my citations. This is where I got it. It's available, you could go look for it yourself. He's like, "Yeah, I just don't believe it." So being too much, having too much understanding, then makes you easily discounted apparently.

Just *knowing* things, understanding them, is seen as too much in some work spaces. Knowing more than the men in those same work spaces threatens to humiliate them. One aspect of the patriarchy that Manne's work makes quite clear is that men are entitled to masculine-coded perks and privileges such as "social status, prestige, rank, and the markers thereof," but also that they are entitled to the *absence* of shame and humiliation (113). This is a perk that women's knowledge and productivity threaten.

At the same time, so many women told me that their too-muchness at work is perfectly fine when it can be taken advantage of. Jennifer, an academic administrator, says,

> What ends up happening in my experience when you're too much is people don't like you, but they know you do the work, so I get a lot…. I was chair of the college-wide curriculum committee as an

> untenured faculty member because you're too much until people need stuff done and then, all of a sudden, you're not too much. How about doing this, and this, and this?

Jennifer tells me that she perceives the requests to do more and more and more as a kind of misogynist punishment. "There's a punishment of more. You need to do more. Okay, so do this and do this and do this." For her supervisor, also a white woman, Jennifer believes she was too much. "I had too many ideas. I was too efficient. I was too good at what I did, and she punished me. I mean, like physically moved my office, punished me, to a closet."

Lily, a graduate program coordinator, observes a similar phenomenon in her line of work. "In leadership, I think it's mostly been embraced especially because sometimes professionally it's hard to find people who want to do the work. So they're like, oh, we're happy that you like too much work, right? Like, we're good with it." Brooke makes a similar point when she says, "It's okay if you're too much in the service of other people—if you're working sixty hours a week as the grad director or associate chair, that is perfectly great. Be too much. Be all in everyone's face." Alison, an associate teaching professor, says, "It's funny because I think that as a person who's too much I'm someone who's relied on heavily to get shit done. Nobody has to worry that they have to follow up with me or do any of these things. So I'm kind of like, why the critique if you're so reliant on me to be this way?" Cote, the author of *Too Much: How Victorian Constraints Still Bind Women Today*, might respond that, "when in the service of a capitalist hegemony, they [our excesses] may be overlooked or excused—even when, in certain cases, they ought not to be—and sometimes they may even be encouraged" (12).

There's a fine line, though, one women must not cross, between being too much in the service of others and being *proud* of that work. That, too, is too much. Suppress those positive emotions. Says Tori, "I was told by my father that I made people uncomfortable, that I had to rein myself in and control what I showed of my intelligence or what I showed of my talents because other people would feel insecure around me, that I was showing them up, that I had a lot of—that taking pride in my work, being good at something and being proud of it was a bad thing. Because that would make other people feel bad."

So a woman's pride in something she's good at has the potential to make others around her feel badly about themselves. This schooling starts young. Tracy tells me this about her family dynamics when she was a child:

> I couldn't outshine my brother. I was often labeled too much because I was a showoff. I was smart, I was loud, I liked attention, I was tall, and I often overshadowed my brother. I wasn't ever punished for being too smart on its own, but if I showed any happiness about it or I talked about it, I was a showoff. It wasn't the fact that I was smart, it was that I found *happiness* in that. I think girls and women are called too much when they are happy, especially when they are happy about anything that might be about themselves.

Women and girls internalize the message early that they are not supposed to be happy about the things they are good at, and they are instead supposed to approach what they do with some level of remove. Natalie says she hears "calm down" a lot at work and, "it's often because I'm excited in a good way, like I get overly happy and excited about a situation even at work and people are like, what is with you? If something seems really good, I don't hold back. I get treated like, why are you doing this, why are you acting this way?" One of Tracy's final statements to me really stings: "I was terrified of being made fun of for being happy."

Effects of being characterized as too smart and too productive

As I mentioned above, women internalize the label "too much" and it begins to have pernicious effects on their self-perception. We just heard Tracy tell us that she grew up "terrified" of showing happiness for fear she would be made fun of, for she understood happiness to be a kind of too much. Internalized effects of being told one is too much again and again at school and at work include self-doubt, self-policing, and anxiety. Externalized effects include lost job opportunities, convoluted communication in the workplace, and being ignored or cut out of important meetings and decisions.

Kerry tells me about "having to put up a bit of a shield" in the workplace because she knows that whatever she tries to do, be it in leadership or in advocacy, she knows she's going to get a response in which she is labeled too much. "Whether it's like, oh, that's too much for us to discuss right now or that's not on the table or you need to tone that down or if you would address that issue in a different way, right. Knowing that there are gonna be all these different ways that you're gonna be told that what you're asking is too much or how you're asking is too much." Charlotte describes a "constant self-doubt that conflicts with the confidence that I naturally have about my work." She tells me about how she feels like she has to

> constantly question myself and then question the risks of communicating what I'm thinking. If one more person on earth tells me to pick my battles, we're gonna burn it down. It's not a battle. I'm not fighting with you! I'm trying to understand how we can make this better. It's not a battle. Communication and dialogue is not conflict. That is the biggest thing. You have to literally edit yourself every step of the way during your day when you're working in order to not be perceived as combative.

In Charlotte's words we hear echoes of Eileen being cautioned against telling engineers what to do; such a move would have gotten her labeled as too pushy or too aggressive. Similarly, Lily describes a "self-policing" she can feel taking over her in the workplace. "It never goes away. Like, you don't unlearn it." Alison tells me that she spends a lot of time just worrying about being perceived as too much. "You know, like, going back and reading emails I sent." Having been labeled too much for so long leads women to expect it from others, and this shapes their behavior in the workplace.

Stacey also names anxiety as an effect of being characterized as too much. But the anxiety came not just from the label, but from the way others treated her because they perceived her as too much. She tells me,

"I think I was a threat, and I don't know why, to the men in the department. Because they expected me to be subservient and follow what they wanted done or they expected me to fail. Either scenario was fine with them, but I wasn't doing either. So they were coming after me, making up rumors about me, gaslighting me. I had panic attacks before meetings. I was a mess. I was a big mess." Stacey also points to the ways she has been ignored at work. "I think there's a way in which people just don't acknowledge you. One of my professors once said in politics if you want to kill something, if you want it to go away, like a terrorist movement or something, you don't give it any attention. One of the responses is to starve me." Relatedly, Nicole describes being cut out of important decisions completely when three older white men in her previous department "completely left me off emails."

Both Jennifer and Tori describe lost job opportunities as a result of being labeled too much. Jennifer tells me, "I think I've lost job opportunities because of it—I'm pretty positive I have—and I know I probably have lost out on fellowships or grants—maybe opportunities that people didn't recommend me for, I'm sure I have…. But if I would have been just a little bit less good at what I do, it could easily have been used against me. I have to perform at a very high level so it's not used against me. At least, that's how I feel. There's no room for error." Tori tells me about a previous career in software development that did not advance as far as it could have because men ran out of patience with her. She was perceived as too ethical for the CEO and "opportunities were closed to me. It's a significant financial loss, which I've never talked about."

Something Kendra said sticks with me as I think about what is lost when women are continuously criticized for being too good at what they do:

> The ways in which I'm too much—another one is too passionate. You're too passionate about this work. I can't help it. I don't have another way to be. It's not like I decide which Kendra I'm gonna put on in the morning. That aspect of my personality has been very consistent…. I think the aggregate message of, there is something wrong with you because you don't comply, fit this, you're too much, I think the aggregate message contributes to anxiety and sleeplessness and pushing myself past the point of my own wellbeing and taking on too many things.

As I noted above, most of the women I spoke with have been hearing that they are too much since they were children. I appreciate Kendra's observation about the aggregate effects of being characterized as too much; we are not talking about one time. We are talking about a lifetime. We are talking about home and school and work and everything in between. Too much becomes a cloak women are unable to remove.

On taking compliments

Though I did not pose it this way in the interviews, another effect of being labeled too much is a difficulty accepting compliments. I asked participants how they respond to compliments because I suspected that women who have been characterized as too much all their lives would not be very good at accepting compliments because they do not enjoy being the center of attention—because attention, in a patriarchy, is what women are supposed to *give*, not receive. And for the most, part, I was right. But it's also true that many women spoke about being particularly uncomfortable taking compliments about their work. While they may be able to take compliments about something superficial, such as an article of clothing, taking a compliment about their work is more difficult. Sonia, an associate professor of English, for instance, says, "I hate it. I'm so bad at it. If it's about my clothes, I tell them where I got them. I got it on sale….That I can handle. I like your glasses—that's fine. If people compliment my work, it's very uncomfortable for me. Even though it's gratifying. Send me an email about it—love that. Text me about it, great. But tell me in person and I just deflect it." Sadie tells me that she, too, would tell someone what she paid for the skirt they just complimented, but if someone complimented a piece of her writing, "that doesn't feel possible that I could receive a compliment on something like my writing. So then I have to talk about how it's really just a steaming pile of shit. Like, you're just saying that because you're my friend. Because I talk too much, I would have to give you a long-winded explanation." Cassandra, a college student, tells me that she diminishes compliments completely. "I don't take compliments well. I am very self-critical. I think my work and my products are an extension of myself and if I'm calling myself into question then I'm constantly questioning my work." *If I'm calling myself into question*, Cassandra says.

But in so many of the cases that I've shared here, we see that it's others calling women and their work products into question. Calling them into question because their productivity and their good ideas threaten others in the work space. So we can see the way that these beliefs become internalized. As one participant, Kate, a prisoners' rights advocate, puts it, "I ignore them. [Taking compliments] is standing out and calling attention—the opposite of the lifetime of work, hard work I have devoted to being smaller, quieter, and unseen." When you're called too much again and again, you become persuaded that your work is not worth taking credit for. You deflect a compliment. You say it wasn't all you. It was the team. Jordan tells me, "I keep saying, oh, it's the students, the students did the posters, the students did the work, go compliment the students. I'm always like, well, thank you, it was a lot of work, but it was worth it and look at the students—like deflecting that way." And here's Sonia again: "I write a lot of collaborative things, so if people compliment my research, I can always be like, oh, well, it wouldn't have been as good without these other folks. I just make it about the group."

Many women talked about the ways they have found themselves needing to "train" themselves to take compliments more graciously or to "practice" getting "better" at receiving compliments. For instance, Kerry, a professor of English, says, "I've had to teach myself to not just downplay. I'm very uncomfortable with compliments." Charlotte says, "I've been getting better. I've been able to be like, oh, thank you so much,

that really means a lot, or yeah, I've really been working on that or I love that you say that, thank you for recognizing that this is something that's important to me." Tori tells me, "I have trained myself to say, thank you, I appreciate that, or thank you, that means a lot to me." Similarly, Natalie says, "I have started to train myself because I think it's important to respond to them in a positive way." Brooke tells me, "I've been trying to be better. I've been trying to take them, to start a different conversation. It used to be I would make excuses for why I had the complimentary thing and it has everything to do with trying to be small. I don't want to walk into a space and have all the attention."

It is not hard to see a through-line from being told you cannot take pride in your work or your intellect to being unable to accept a compliment for that same work or intellect. "One of the characteristics of a woman that's too much in my head is a woman who is too self-involved or self-absorbed so I worry all the time that I am going to come across as being selfish or too self-absorbed," Tracy tells me. Lauren, a doctoral student in rhetoric and composition, explains,

> I think I have something in my brain that won't let me believe them [compliments]. So, while I might tell you, Oh, Amy, my first year as a PhD student, I got a short story published, that was really cool, I got a 4.0, which was really hard to do, I made new friends, I got a book chapter proposal accepted, right—and those four things are all things that actually happened, I can tell you those thing with excitement and not feel a sense of accomplishment or joy. And then if you compliment me on those things, it's just, I can't hold on to it. It's like gas. It's like a gaseous substance. And I'm working on that. That's something I have to work on.

It's like a gaseous substance, Lauren says. It evaporates. Women hear it and it just disappears. It has nothing to stick to. No belief in the value of one's work.

And then there is the backhanded compliment, the one that is designed to encourage women to do more of the kind of work that so many men do not want to do. Brooke identifies that kind of compliment as, "You're so good at that, you should really do it." This kind of compliment is what we might call the flip side of learned incompetence—if I don't know how to do it, I won't have to. The backhanded compliment in the context of the workplace is designed to get women to do more service work. As I wrote in *Misogyny in English Departments*, "What is most notable about the ways women are expected to give in the realm of academic service is that it is simply *expected* that they will do it and they will do it well; at the same time, it is simply *expected* that men will not do it and that when they do it, they will do it poorly" (45). Brooke also said, in the context of department service, "I'm like, dude, just because I have the capacity to be chair does not mean I want or need it in my life."

The message to women in the workplace is this: Do enough work that we can take advantage of it, but not so much that you make others look bad. But—and this is an important *but*—it's not just any work that we want to take advantage of, as my interviewees have demonstrated. It is *service work*. Do all the

administrative work you want. Take on the role of curriculum coordinator, of graduate director, of writing program administrator. Put your too much to work for the department in any of these ways and we will take full advantage. As Kendra, a linguist, puts it, "People tell me I'm too cerebral, too smart, too intellectual, but like everywhere I go, that translates into, hey, we got a job for ya. If we can parlay your too-muchness to our advantage, we will gladly do so." You will be characterized as too much when your critical work, your scholarship, is so abundant that it makes others around you feel or look inadequate. This applies to academia, sure, but it also applies to industry, according to my interviewees.

A lifetime of being insulted, of being characterized as too much, leads, for so many women, to an inability to accept compliments. This is not surprising. When girls and young women are persuaded to believe that accepting compliments about their smarts or being proud of their intellect will make others—boys and men—"feel bad" and they have simultaneously grown up in a culture that persuades them to believe that preventing boys and men from feeling bad is their priority, they will be less inclined to accept compliments about the products of their intellect. They will find themselves in the position of having to "train" themselves to accept compliments about their work. They will need to be on the lookout for back-handed compliments meant to lure them into more service work that men do not want to do.

In her book, *On Gaslighting*, Kate Abramson writes about the characteristic phrases of gaslighting such as "crazy," "paranoid," and "acting out" that function evaluatively and "communicate both that the person is not psychologically well and that there is something morally objectionable about her perspective, attitudes, or behavior" (119-20). I would add *too much* to this list. When we label a woman *too much*, we evaluate her as a party to excess, as someone who is psychologically unwell as a result of that excess. Drawing on the work of P. F. Strawson, Abramson writes,

> Think about the stance we adopt toward someone we think of as seriously psychologically unwell. A central feature of this stance is the overwhelming tendency to see those who are psychologically unwell as beyond the reach of reason and the condition with which they're afflicted as an excusing one, or at least potentially so. We adopt what Strawson calls the "objective stance" toward them—we see them as an object of "treatment," someone to be "managed or handled or cured or trained."

Women as objects of treatment, as persons to be managed or handled or cured or trained. This is exactly what the *too much* label accomplishes, as we see with my experience in the Tennessee pizza parlor. Even more seriously, though, the *too much* label pathologizes aptitude, capacity, potential, and women's mere existence. We must share stories of the ways we are diminished in our everyday lives so that others might see themselves in them; we must make way for more stories, making them less precarious as we go.

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It's Not Just Hormones: Understanding Menopause Anxiety Through a Feminist Rhetorical Framework

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Abstract: Throughout this article, we place qualitative survey responses into conversation with how menopause and anxiety are rhetorically positioned by influential healthcare organizations. Our article illuminates how everyday people experience anxiety related to menopause and how their stories reveal something deeper at play than hormones. As our research reveals, anxiety during menopause is not simply because of hormones—it is also a result of the way menopause is rhetorically positioned in social constructs around women and aging. Using feminist rhetorical frameworks alongside participant responses, we unpack the ways that menopause anxiety is tied to ageist and sexist narratives and argue that until healthcare organizations recognize that anxiety is both hormonal and rhetorical, women's midlife health will not improve. We conclude by offering strategies healthcare organizations can use to rhetorically address the stigma around menopause anxiety and, thus, to enhance the ways menopausal people experience this life transition.

Keywords: menopause; anxiety; stigma; healthcare, communications

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Introduction

A quick survey of menopause educational materials from The North American Menopause Society to the Cleveland Clinic to the Department of Health & Human Services reveals "anxiety" as a commonly listed symptom of menopause. While emphasis on the mental health components of the menopausal transition has been a mainstay of menopause discourses for some time, emphasis is ordinarily placed on mood swings and uncontrolled anger and not necessarily anxiety, as shown in popular culture representations such as Kitty's menopause meltdown on *That 70s Show* in which she rages at everyone with little-to-no provocation. Yet the ways anxiety is rhetorically framed in medical communications is just as reductive. Anxiety is often represented in these materials in generic terms (e.g., fear, worry), and individuals are advised to proactively mit-

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igate anxiety by changing their diets, seeking medication, getting more exercise, drinking less alcohol, and reducing stress. Indeed, most messaging on menopause symptoms is overly simplistic. Even Dr. Mary Claire Haver, hailed as a progressive pioneer in medical approaches to menopause, often focuses her messaging on how to address menopause symptoms via ways that mirror mainstream diet culture—e.g., diet, exercise, supplements, and fasting (Haver).

While the assumption that women can easily solve menopause anxiety through diet and exercise is problematic, what's most worrisome is this: healthcare organizations almost exclusively frame anxiety as an individual's *hormonal response* to menopause and rarely as something that we find to be just as, if not more significant—anxiety as a psychological reaction to negative stereotypes about women and aging. In this way, anxiety (like the concept of hormones itself) serves "an enthymematic purpose" that allows "long, complex arguments to be condensed into something simple" (Koerber 181). As Amy Koerber points out, over-simplifying the complexities of female biology and "female problems" (182) like anxiety allows individuals to ignore complex gendered constructs about women, thus perpetuating "deeply embedded judgments" about women and their bodies (Koerber 191).

As two feminist rhetoricians in the throes of perimenopause who experience chronic anxiety, we believe that feminist rhetorical frameworks can help us acknowledge that anxiety thrives in many capacities during menopause and that marking the rhetorical factors that drive such anxiety can help destigmatize it. We see the decoupling of menopause anxiety and stigma as being especially important for healthcare organizations that support women during midlife and beyond. Throughout, we argue that while hormones play a role in perimenopausal and menopause anxiety, the condition is *also* tied to ageist and sexist narratives. Thus, until healthcare organizations recognize that anxiety is both hormonal *and* rhetorical, the conversations around menopause will remain stagnant.

We support this argument by drawing from 180 survey responses[1] on peri/menopause symptoms, support, and social stigma to reveal that symptoms of anxiety are influenced by stigma around women and aging. Throughout, we use feminist rhetorical frameworks to unpack these connections, to illustrate the deeply embedded stigma around menopause, and to offer ways feminist rhetoricians can change the narrative. While our analysis contributes to conversations across multiple sites of disciplinary inquiry such as rhetorics of health and medicine and rhetorics of reproductive justice, we focus on feminist rhetorics as we see the fundamental issue of menopause-driven stigma as originating in sexist, misogynistic, and gendered views about women and aging—topics of long-standing concern to feminist rhetoricians.

Notes on Methods

We designed our survey to understand people's attitudes and opinions about menopause, the types of symptoms they experience, and where (if anywhere) they seek care and support. Recognizing the differ-

1 Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of survey questions.

ent ways that menopause might be experienced as a lived, material reality and wishing to capture the rich, diverse experiences and dispositions menopausal persons possess, we shared our survey across social media channels populated by diverse groups and communities; we sent individual recruitment messages to community-leaders in menopause who represented diverse and inclusive perspectives; we chose a survey because we wanted marginalized participants to feel as anonymous, safe, and comfortable as possible when responding. While our participant pool still skewed largely white, affluent, and educated, it did include many people who experience multiple forms of marginalization, including those with disabilities and chronic conditions; queer individuals; nonbinary individuals; transpersons; persons at or below the poverty level; and Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

Alongside and in contrast to our data, we rely on medical texts and their descriptions of the relationship between menopause and anxiety to illustrate our central claim that such texts overemphasize hormonal flux and deemphasize stigma, misogyny, and ageism as strong etiological factors when it comes to menopause and anxiety. Throughout, we rely on longer narrative responses to our survey questions as these emitted the most agentive and rhetorical forcefulness; we could "hear" these respondents recalling these experiences, and many were delivered in narrative form. We want to point out, though, that the word "anxiety" appears in the survey results overall 45 times—even when it is given as a one-word response to a question on symptoms, which was often the case. Thus, our data reveals the pervasiveness with which menopausal persons experience anxiety.

Our project also considered spaces where resistance to purely hormonal accounts of menopausal anxiety already exist and how and why such places show the power of marginalized positionalities to articulate this complexity. In 2019, Omisade Burney-Scott, a "Black Southern feminist, storyteller, and reproductive justice advocate" launched a Black Girl's Guide to Surviving Menopause (BGG2SM), a "Black women-led multidisciplinary project in the menopause and aging landscape" dedicated to "creating new dialogical tools necessary to support our narrative and culture shift work" (Burney-Scott). BGG2SM was born out of Black women's knowledge that menopause and aging is uniquely stigmatizing for Black communities. As Burney-Scott boldly puts it: "Patriarchy and misogyny seeks to erase the value of Black women. We live in a youth-crazed, youth-centric, youth-focused society which marginalizes older women" (Burney-Scott). In these marginalized places, there *is* a clear statement on ageism, stigma, and sexism in relation to menopause.

As we designed our survey and sought to learn more about stigma and menopause, we kept in mind Burney-Scott's words—that marginalized persons are particularly impacted by negative rhetorical constructs around women and aging. Moreover, as we analyzed the data across demographics, we observed that the stigma and discrimination associated with menopause was pervasive—all groups primarily used negative words when we asked them what "comes to mind" when they think about peri/menopause. This revealed to us that marginalized and BIPOC communities are forced to navigate *multiple layers of stigma around menopause*—the deeply embedded prejudices and discrimination around race, gender, and ability as well as the continual "lack of information around how non-binary, Black women, and femmes" experience aging (Burney-Scott).

We also tried to be aware of how, as White, middle-class women of privilege, we needed to resist "locking ourselves into the tunnels of our own visions and direct experiences" (Royster, 33).

Cheryl Glenn's notion of rhetorical feminism also guided our analysis as we considered feminism as a theoretical tool that can help us practice feminism in ways that enact change and ignite hope (Glenn 2018). In other words, while we criticize the gaps and erasures rhetorically enacted by healthcare communications that provide over-simplified views of hormones and anxiety, we also acknowledge that there are, indeed, opportunities to reimagine (Royster and Kirsch) such documents in ways that support both the goals of medicine and acknowledge that menopause anxiety stems from more than just hormonal changes.

Readers will notice that our organizational approach is thematically driven, rather than arranged according to a traditional "Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion" (IMRAD) format. We blend elements of classic qualitative inquiry with a themes-driven style of research reportage. The first theme we take up is stigma and ageism—particularly as they play out in feminist rhetorical scholarship and related work on menopause. We then examine what the North American Menopause Society deems "the most complete and current discussion" on menopause. Next, we look to more participant stories that illuminate gaps and erasures within discussions about anxiety and menopause. We conclude with feminist rhetorical strategies healthcare professionals can use to acknowledge the cultural reasons that may cause or contribute to menopause anxiety.

Finally, we acknowledge that menopause anxiety is a complex experience and is neither the result of just hormones or rhetorical stigma alone. Indeed, it is impossible to prove that anxiety is rooted in one cause or another. Instead, anxiety is a mélange of hormonal changes, life experiences, psychological and emotional shifts, and relearning one's place in a society that does not value aging. What we wish to emphasize, then, is that anxiety thrives in many capacities during menopause and that marking cultural factors around it can go a long way in destigmatizing anxiety, especially if acknowledged by medical organizations.

Rhetoric, Stigma, and Ageism

Feminists have long pointed out that menopause is a uniquely stigmatized life transition. In the 1990s, Gail Sheehy underscored the unabashed sexism toward aging women in her widely read book, *The Silent Passage*. Numerous authors and poets from Anne Morrow Lindbergh (*Gift from the Sea*) to Lucille Clifton ("To My Last Period") have captured how the older version of a woman's self is perceived as less beautiful, less useful, and less valuable than her younger self was.

Acutely aware of such discrimination, Judy Segal argues that ageism is rhetorically wrought and that it lives in the same plane of existence as do other damaging forces, such as sexism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia—all of which function, through language and other persuasive choices, to inflict inordinate suffering. Menopause discourses, moreover, mirror ageist ones in the push to outsmart aging with the

correct products and procedures—a phenomenon that Segal explains well. What is specific about ageism, says Segal, is that it "takes as its object ourselves—our future selves" as well as, in some cases "our present ones: old people may be, and frequently are, ageist, wanting to dissociate from others of their age; embarrassed, really, to be old" (Segal 168). Ageism, we would add, is uniquely capable of creating and fueling "felt" stigma, or the brand of stigma that has to do with a person's negative opinions and beliefs about what they have internalized about themselves. Segal concludes by suggesting that ageism could be combatted rhetorically if people who are young could begin to see themselves *as continuous with* the people they will someday be if they are fortunate to live long enough—old people (Segal).

In a related piece, Segal uses enthymemes to explain how ageism works: "Major premise: All people who are frail or dependent on others are not valuable Americans. Minor premise: Old people are frail and dependent on others. Conclusion: "Old people are not valuable Americans" (Segal 182). The result of this enthymematic logic is that old people are meant to exist at the margins of American life and culture. She also uses epideictic rhetoric as a tool to show how, particularly in political discourses, ageism is perpetuated and challenged; Biden is criticized for being old and frail, for example, while Trump emphasizes his strength and stamina, likening it to a younger version of himself when he claims to feel as good as he had 20 years ago (Segal).

In a similar vein, Jen Gunter argues we should be wary of arguments that fail to recognize that "the experience of menopause is negatively affected when youth and reproductive status are revered" (n.p.). Gunter cautions that ignoring the cultural and social factors that shape menopause can lead to an overemphasis of menopause as a medical condition, a throwback to 1960s framings of menopause as a disease to be fixed through pharmacological intervention. Gunter stresses that menopause, like pregnancy and puberty, is not a disease but a natural life experience. But what is important to observe here is that, unlike pregnancy or puberty, many women spend half their lives or more either in perimenopause or menopause. The fact that menopause spans such a significant portion of a woman's life is critical because it means that many women will spend most of their lives navigating the cultural stigma around aging women. This makes it all the more important for healthcare organizations to do the important work of recognizing the cultural, biological, and rhetorical layers of menopause.

But even with the abundance of perspectives about stigma and aging, it is somewhat surprising that current medical literature still fails to meaningfully acknowledge it. However, as Segal aptly points out, the discourses on "healthy aging" do more harm than good, and medical discourses on their own do not have the capacity to undo the damage done by ageism and cannot solve this problem (Segal). What we observe is that the worry, the negative feelings, and the shame around menopause get put into the category of anxiety—a catch-all bucket for virtually any uneasy feeling experienced during menopause; most of the time, this bucket is attributed to hormonal changes. While we do agree that medical discourses cannot, on their own, solve the issue of ageism, we do think that if medical texts were to better acknowledge the everyday lived experiences of menopausal persons as they are mired in stigma, anxiety could be alleviated in a more thorough way than

it is when hormonal causes are overemphasized.

Here's an example: The NHS, Scotland's national health information service, states that "Changes in your hormones during menopause can impact your mental health as well as your physical health. You may experience feelings of anxiety, stress or even depression" (NHS). They explain that these symptoms may manifest as a "loss of self-esteem," "loss of confidence," or "low mood and feelings of sadness or depression" (NHS). Moreover, they also claim that "these psychological symptoms are a result of the *changes happening to your body* and can have a big impact on your life" ("Signs and Symptoms of Menopause," emphasis added). Undeniably, hormones can drive such feelings. We are not arguing that they cannot be the cause of anxiety. However, we take issue with the premise that they are the main or even only cause of menopause-related mental health struggles. As our survey respondents reveal, hormones are not the only—and perhaps not even the most significant—contributor to anxiety. Consider, for instance, what these survey respondents say:

> *"I work in an all-male environment 2 females 30 plus males. They actually laugh at any symptoms related to perimenopause."*

> *"I am worried that my brain fog has a detrimental effect on my performance at work and do my best to cover it up, working more slowly and triple checking everything. I freelance and worry that people wouldn't use my services if I told them about the perimenopausal problems I'm experiencing."*

It is not a stretch to imagine that employees who work with colleagues who "actually laugh at any symptoms related to perimenopause" or who fear losing their jobs because "people wouldn't use my services if I told them about the perimenopausal problems" would lead to significant anxiety. Undeniably, triple-checking everything is an anxiety coping mechanism. What's more, how these respondents describe their experiences reveals a prevailing rhetorical trend that mocks and dismisses aging women; they either experience that reality or actively fear it.

Feminists have long pointed out that aging women are held to different standards than men. As women age, they become crones; men become distinguished. The prevalence of adages such as "men age like wine and women age like milk" further illustrate the sexist ways society rhetorically frames aging women. In her work on women's reproductive rhetorical agency, Heather Brook Adams uses the phrase "a rhetorical imprint of gendered anxieties" to describe the "gendered anxieties that emerge alongside women's increasing capacity for sexual autonomy" (Adams). While Adams' focus is on social access to oral contraception, her notion of a "rhetorical imprint" as it relates to "gendered anxieties" offers a way to think about the gendered anxieties that emerge from perimenopause. Our study, for example, shows the gendered anxieties around peri/menopause and aging through participants' stories like this one:

> *"I had my first ever anxiety attack at my daughter's school Christmas fair. It was boiling hot in the room, she had bought some slime, opened it and got it everywhere. I had a hot flush*[2]*,and I remember feeling totally overwhelmed, helpless and hopeless trying to clean her up. I wanted the ground to swallow me up. I wanted to be as far away from there as possible. I wanted to cry, howl even. It took all my resolve to leave in a dignified fashion."*

This respondent's use of phrases like "I wanted to cry, howl even" and "I wanted the ground to swallow me up," underscore the deep social shame that accompanies the menopausal transition. Her anxiety attack, as she tells the story, is inextricably linked to embarrassment. A hot flush is perhaps the most common symptom in menopause (according to *Johns Hopkins Medicine*, over 75% of women experience them), yet the pervasive rhetorical imprint of gender-based stigma makes it impossible for this participant to experience this symptom in a public place without also experiencing extreme anxiety over a relatively mundane occurrence—a child spilling something ("Menopause"). While it is entirely possible that this respondent's anxieties have worsened due to hormonal changes, we find clear evidence in her story that she is also experiencing anxiety related to stigma and fear that she will be "caught" having a menopausal symptom in a public place.

Not surprisingly, too, medical discourses about anxiety and menopause mirror the discursive patterns of other mental health diagnostic criteria with emphasis placed on the impairment of or interference with everyday life. The blog post, "Mood Changes During Perimenopause Are Real. Here's What to Know" from The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), describes anxiety, for example, as a "constant worrying that gets in the way of your day-to-day life" (Silver). With deep fears like others noticing a hot flush and fear of losing employment, it is difficult to attribute all of menopausal anxiety to hormones. Even when hormones are clearly a factor, too, it's also evident that stigma is at play, as in this participants' story:

> *Someone chose to pull me up on something I'd posted on Facebook about brexit being a total bag of sh*te and I knew he was about to try and belittle me—I had to literally run out and fall apart in the toilets. Tears, peeling off soaking clothes from the sweat. It made me fear going anywhere. I stopped going places … I'd say perimenopause and even more fluctuating unpredictable hormones have made it so I can't trust in myself. It strips that away and leaves anxiety in its place.*

As their narrative makes plain, this person's entire sense of self is shifting. The fact that some of their suffering is likely hormonally affiliated is undeniable, and she most certainly attributes anxieties to hormones. Yet there is also evidence that public perceptions of their value, intelligence, and worth are also an acute cause of distress. Anxiety around menopause does certainly appear to influence many women's day-to-day lives. But a major contributor to such anxiety—the belief that aging women are only good enough, as one participant put it "for the scrap pile"—goes unmentioned in the ACOG blog post. Indeed, a search of the catalog of ACOG web resources using search terms such as "menopause stigma," "stigma," and "stigma and

2 While many in the U.S. use the term "hot flashes," the term "hot flushes" is used in the U.K. and elsewhere. Both terms mean the same thing. Our survey included women in Canada and the U.K. as well as in the U.S.

aging" reveals no references to how peri/menopausal anxiety is connected to broader rhetorical trends that label menopause women as aging like "milk" rather than "wine." Such omissions are important to note as menopausal persons such as our participant who believe it is "hormones" that have led them to feel like they "can't trust themselves" are not equipped to also acknowledge that this experience of self-mistrust is also driven by cultural stigma.

Current Healthcare Discussions

In 2020, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) released the 9th edition of The Menopause Guidebook. Described as "the most complete and current discussion of menopause available anywhere," the guidebook covers topics from premature menopause to heart health to sexual function ("Menopause Guidebook, 9th Edition"). Noticeably absent from the seventy-four-page guidebook, however, is content that recognizes the relationship between anxiety and stigma. While anxiety (described by the handbook as "the agitated sense of anticipation, dread, fear, or panic") is referenced multiple times throughout the guidebook, it is either barely or completely unconnected to underlying rhetorical beliefs around aging women (The North American Menopause Society 43).

Perhaps the closest the guidebook comes to acknowledging the relationship between social stigma around peri/menopause and anxiety falls on page seven, with a description of anxiety-like symptoms for individuals experiencing premature menopause:

> Just as important as the physical aspects of premature menopause are the emotional ones. Premature menopause can cause distress to a woman's sense of self. For women who still want to have children, the effects may be particularly damaging. Premature menopause may increase concerns about body image, sexuality, fertility, and the perception of growing old prematurely. (7)

The guidebook's use of words such as "emotional," "sense of self," "damaging," and "increase concerns" point to the recognition that the menopause transition can be fraught with anxiety-inducing feelings. What's interesting, though, is that such anxieties in response to personal and social expectations is only referenced as an individual reaction to life stage transitions and not necessarily as related to social stigma, misogyny, and ageism. In fact, in some ways, the wording reinforces such dispositions; these things are only concerning if they happen to a still-young person. It's notable, then, that this topic only comes up in relation to *premature menopause*—or a time when an individual goes through the transition significantly earlier than expected. Rhetorically, this demarcation of premature menopause as anxiety-causing due to loss of youthful markers and fertility does not go far enough in emphasizing that such stigmas *create the conditions in which such losses will cause anxiety.*

We lament NAMS's lack of progressive content in terms of calling out ageism, misogyny, and sexism as they play out in the menopause experience. However, among organizations from NAMS to ACOG to

the NHS, there are exceptions, and the National Menopause Foundation's rhetorical position on stigma and menopause stands out. On the "About Us" page of their website, they proclaim: "We're creating a positive change (shift) in how people perceive, understand and experience Menopause" and that "We want women to have access to information and networks that ensure that Menopause is a positive and empowering time in every woman's life" (National Menopause Foundation). In other words, the NMF recognizes that menopause is a uniquely gendered experience that creates negative rhetorical imprints "in how people perceive, understand and experience" menopause. Although content and resources (e.g., blogs, podcasts, literature) the NMF offers on menopause stigma are scarce, we see their recognition that menopause is stigmatized as an important first step in rhetorically normalizing— and even celebrating—women and aging. Yet such discourses, particularly in sanctioned sources of information and support for menopausal women, feel rare.

Perhaps more importantly, even for those who experience peri/menopause during "normal" or expected times of life, the rhetorical imprints that propel the idea that women "age like milk" remain. One survey respondent, for instance, described their experience with peri/menopause as something that "temporarily ruined my life. I felt old, washed up, and a shadow of my former self." Words like "ruined" and "shadow" suggest that this participant sees the process of aging as one that fundamentally diminishes their sense of self and value to others. While it is typical for one's sense of self to evolve as we age, menopause creates a uniquely negative view of the natural aging process, as is evidenced in the participant stories that follow.

More Participant Stories

As we have argued throughout, we believe that, based on our own experiences and the experiences of our participants, that experiencing anxiety—even extreme anxiety and panic—during the menopause transition is not only about hormonal changes. We believe that clinically significant anxiety can also emerge in response to the acute stigma, ageism, and misogyny that are an undeniable and visceral part of this life phase. When people are convinced hormonal changes alongside attendant changes to the self and cognitive abilities are to blame for this anxiety, there is not enough rhetorical space to consider how mitigating such toxic factors could alleviate this prominent symptom. In the following participant stories, we see evidence of such suffering:

> *Let's see—recently, I was having a one-on-one meeting with an undergrad student (male), and I started to feel like I was having a low-level panic attack, like I was hot and jumpy and I couldn't breathe. A little nauseated, because that's also how I roll. I took off my mask (because I was still masking at work) and sipped my water, which wasn't cold enough. In my head I was like,"am I going to have to tell this poor kid that I'm having a hot flash and I need to walk around the halls for 2 minutes or I'll die?"*

While the participant reported that the feeling passed and they did not have to share this personal information with the student, this example illustrates that the social stigma associated with menopausal symptoms prevented the participant from being able to say, simply: "Excuse me, I'm having a hot flush that

is making me very anxious and I need to step out," the way it might be possible to do if it were, instead, a coughing fit or a need to use the restroom. It also seems highly likely that the hot flush itself and the fact that it was happening in a workplace setting caused a panic attack.

And while that participant was able to make light of the experience, others had ominous reportage of altered realities with implications for material conditions, as in the respondent who told us simply that they'd suffered from "*severe anxiety,* and that they "*Didn't cope well became very distressed and anxious and ultimately unable to continue working.*"

We noted, in fact, that many participants identified the workplace as an especially fraught place for menopause-related anxiety, as in the participant who said,

> "Anxiety has affected me significantly at work and I had to seek help as I could no longer do my job. I felt exposed and a failure. I'm still working through this."

The felt stigma in this response is extreme. Not only did anxiety interfere with the respondent's ability to do their job—something that could most certainly happen in hormonally-driven anxiety—but the sense of being exposed as a failure and the need to continue to work through that feeling show something else at play: the suffering that comes from stigma.

The sense that everyday life has been altered by the severity of anxiety was something else we saw a lot in the results, as in the person who lamented that they "*Have anxiety now and have had lots of moments hiding away in toilets if out socially.*" The idea that a person would be reduced to hiding in bathroom stalls is unbelievably daunting. It's difficult to think that this extreme reaction could be hormones alone and not at least partially to do with how very awful it is to be, as participants described, treated as if they are transitioning into irrelevance, invisibility, and worthlessness.

And perhaps such insinuations as they circulate in *doxa* in a variety of ways influence the way a person feels about themselves during this fraught transition. They might feel something like this person experiences: a brand of anxiety that is an "*overwhelming sense that I could not cope in situation that I'd coped without even thinking in the past, having tears as anxiety took over, embarrassing myself with 'feelings' fighting against rational side of brain*." In this example, the respondent makes it clear that they are suffering, in part, in response to the feeling of having changed and of having lost a sense of control over emotions and lost a capacity to cope. While it is entirely possible that some changes that have occurred for this person are in response to hormones, it is also possible that they are starting to see themselves as less than capable because their status as an aging woman has rendered them diminished in others' views, and those views have become internalized. Such feelings of embarrassment could even lead to what another respondent reported: *"I had to watch my mood and how I behaved at work. Previous to menopause I was very patient but I lost all patience in menopause*."

In these varied responses, we see clear rhetorical themes of suffering, fear, embarrassment, and dismay. Such things, we argue, could be at least partially addressed if there were more spaces to openly discuss and challenge ageism, sexism, and misogyny as they deeply impact such experiences.

Moving Menopause Rhetorics Forward

At the beginning of this article, we promised to not focus exclusively on gaps and erasures in medical communications. To be sure, recognizing these rhetorical trends is a necessary first step. But Glenn's notion of rhetorical feminism calls for us to do more than critique; she also asks us to foster hope. With that in mind, we offer the below strategies that healthcare organizations who support women's midlife health can use to more fully recognize the relationship between menopause anxiety and social stigma. Through such recognition, these organizations—whether they are formal menopause associations or the on-the-ground obstetrician or midwife—can play a positive role in helping women navigate the layered physical, emotional, and social complexities of menopause.

The recommendations that follow lean into queer, trans, and BIPOC scholars and activists in two ways. First, these recommendations inhabit a reimagining of how we understand, care for, and attend to marginalized, menopausal bodies and to the voices and experiences that are "still largely under considered and uncredited" (Royster 32). Second, in our recommendations we want to both call for, and move beyond, "access" to menopausal knowledge and care. As minoritized, trans and queer scholars have argued, real change is about both gaining access to critical healthcare (Edenfield et al.) as well as creating the ability for minoritized communities "to dream, to act, to build" healthcare spaces that are authentically inclusive and individually responsive (Sánchez, Green, and Flores 3). The recommendations below are a starting point from which to dream, to act, and to build healthcare frameworks that both provide meaningful medical care and destigmatize menopause.

- **Acknowledge that anxiety is more than just hormones.** Anxiety during menopause can be the byproduct of hormonal shifts—as well as worry over others' perceptions of aging. Medical documents can adopt language that addresses both concerns using statements such as "Anxiety around menopause can be more than the result of hormonal changes. It can also be a response to negative views of menopause." As feminist rhetoricians, we can also increase the visibility of this issue by arranging spaces at key conferences, such as *CCCC* and *Feminisms and Rhetorics*, for perimenopausal persons to convene and give and get support related to anxieties.

- **Recognize that Black and marginalized communities experience menopause differently and that this might increase feelings of anxiety.** As a 2023 New York Times article entitled "How Menopause Affects Women of Color" underscores, for women of color, the menopause

transition can be even more complicated. Research has found that the duration, the frequency, the

severity and even the types of symptoms can look different across races. When women of color seek out care, they often encounter physicians who aren't aware of those differences and aren't fully equipped to help them navigate the transition. That can feel like a dismissal of their concerns—a familiar experience for women of color at the doctor. (author PG)

To more explicitly support marginalized individuals during the menopause transition, healthcare documents can include language such as "Anxiety during menopause can be connected to both hormonal changes *and* to racial, social, and cultural beliefs about menopause. This may make it difficult to talk about menopause, navigate the symptoms, and to find information and care." Asking providers to acknowledge that women of color experience menopause differently and that women of color understand for themselves "when something is off" can create space for more productive dialogues and conversations about support and care.

- **Encourage healthcare providers to talk about menopause stigma and its connection to anxiety.** Provider educational materials should include content that helps physicians talk with patients about the stigma associated with gendered conditions like menopause and how such stigma can contribute to anxiety. For instance, materials could include guided statements that a physician could adapt to various clinical settings. For example, a provider might say to a patient: "There is, unfortunately, shame associated with menopause symptoms like hot flushes and emotional anxiety. As we develop a care plan, let's talk about ways to recognize that anxiety can be caused by hormonal changes as well as worry about how others' view menopause." Such guided statements and other educational materials can help physicians talk with patients about social stigma around menopause as well as create opportunities to emphasize that menopausal women are not, as one survey respondent put it, meant "for the scrap pile." In a book we are currently co-authoring with five other feminist rhetoricians, we aim to create a text that will be legible to such care providers and that will do some of this work.

- **Avoid focusing exclusively on anxieties around aesthetic changes.** While many persons experiencing menopause have concerns over issues like weight gain, hair loss, skin dryness, and more, it is important for healthcare providers to help women address these concerns while *also* acknowledging that these issues are rooted in sexist social perceptions of women and aging. Providers, for example, might say to a patient "Let's find ways to address your concerns about the physical signs of aging while also discussing ways we can manage feelings of anxiety connected to how society views aging." In other words, we want to encourage providers to avoid decoupling stigma around women and aging with the aesthetic treatments they provide. One example of such decoupling is the Weill Cornell Medicine toolkit on women's health which in the "Cosmetic Skin Treatment" section tells women that "Advancements in medicine and technology over the years have made it possible for women to safely achieve a more youthful appearance." Nowhere in this section does it acknowledge that society puts absurd pressures on women to maintain

"a more youthful appearance." As feminist rhetoricians, we are well-positioned to do the work of pointing out the underlying sexism in the correlation between menopause anxieties and the loss of youthful "beauty."

- **Encourage individuals experiencing menopause to connect with others.** Healthcare documents and guidebooks might include links or QR codes to non-profit organizations such as "Let's Talk Menopause" where users can discover the stories of others experiencing the menopause transition ("Let's Talk Menopause"). As one of our survey respondents revealed, sharing menopause "*anxiety issues with [other] women*" can be a powerful way to feel heard and to find strategies to cope with the changes around menopause. As mentioned above, feminist rhetoricians undergoing the menopause transition could be great sources of support for each other, and such connections might be made at professional meetings.

Future Directions: Digital Toolkits & Menopause in the Workplace

While these recommendations are a good starting point for considering how feminist rhetoricians can intervene in menopause healthcare spaces, there is more to be done. Moving forward, we hope to develop a digital toolkit that further unpacks the above recommendations. The toolkit will provide concrete, actionable steps that midlife healthcare providers, practitioners, and activists can use to develop inclusive communications that acknowledge the relationship between anxiety, hormones, and stigma.

In developing the toolkit, we plan to look to models such as Weill Cornell Medicine's "Women's Health Toolkit" and The Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health (OASH) toolkit on mental health, sexual health, reproductive health, and heart health for women. Unlike these toolkits, whose focus is on providing healthcare information to lay readers, our project will speak to an audience of healthcare professionals, urging them to develop educational materials and in-office practices that acknowledge the cultural stigmas associated with menopause. Our toolkit will also urge practitioners to better acknowledge the multiple layers of stigma that trans, queer, disability, and BIPOC individuals experience and how such lived experiences can further fuel menopause stress and anxiety.

Another area we would like to explore and—indeed, have already begun to do so—is menopause in the workplace. To date, we have collected dozens of menopause workplace policies from companies around the globe and, alongside several other collaborators, are analyzing what these policies reveal about workplace support for menopause. In many ways, our research is motivated by our collective experiences with menopause in the workplace and by the despairing comments about working during menopause that many of our survey respondents shared. One respondent, for instance, shared that *"Anxiety has affected me significantly at work and I had to seek help as I could no longer do my job. I felt exposed and a failure. I'm still working through this."* As researchers and peri/menopausal women, we want to learn more about why some menopausal women feel like "a failure" in the workplace and to understand how we might find ways to support, celebrate, and

empower, women as they simultaneously work and age. Through research on menopause and anxiety, the development of toolkits for healthcare professionals, and current research on menopause in the workplace, we plan to continue to address this gap in the field and to encourage more conversations about a life transition that over half the global will experience.

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Appendix A: Menopause Survey

Perimenopause means "around menopause" and refers to the years during which your body makes the transition to formal menopause. Perimenopause can start as early as thirty years old or, in some cases, even younger. Menopause refers to the full end of the menstrual cycle.

This survey will ask you questions about your experiences and feelings associated with perimenopause and menopause.

1. When you hear the words "perimenopause" and/or "menopause, "what words come to mind?

2. Which of the following resources have you consulted on perimenopause and/or menopause? Please check all that apply.

- Healthcare providers
- Healthcare apps
- Newspaper articles
- Websites
- Blogs
- Books
- Magazine articles
- Mother
- Family members
- Friends
- Coworkers
- Other

3. Which of these symptoms of perimenopause and/or menopause have you experienced? Please check all that apply.

- Irregular periods
- Vaginal dryness
- Hot flashes/flushes
- Chills
- Night sweats
- Sleep problems
- Mood changes

- Weight gain and slowed metabolism
- Thinning hair
- Dry skin
- Dry eyes
- Sexual difficulties
- Loss of breast fullness
- Migraine
- Other

4. When you've experienced menopausal symptoms, from which of the following people have you asked for accommodations or support? Please check all that apply.

- Healthcare provider
- Supervisor/boss
- Friends
- Family
- Coworkers
- Intimate Partner(s)
- Children
- Elder or Mentor
- No one

5. When you've experienced menopausal symptoms, from which of the following people have you avoided seeking accommodations or support? Please check all that apply.

- Care provider/doctor
- Supervisor/boss
- Friends
- Family
- Intimate Partner(s)
- Children
- Elder or Mentor
- No one
- Other

6. We would like to know more about your above responses. Why did you seek (or avoid) asking for accommodations or support for your symptoms?

7. When you recognized that you were in your perimenopausal transition, how did you feel about it?

8. Describe a time when you experienced a symptom of perimenopause or menopause in a public or workplace setting. How did you cope?

9. In general, how do you think people or society perceive menopause?

10. What is your age?

- Under 21
- 21-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+

11. 11. What is your gender?

- Female
- Nonbinary
- Transman
- Transwoman
- Male
- Prefer Not to Say
- Other

12. Do you identify with any of the following groups or communities? Please check all that apply.

- Immigrant
- LGBTQIA+
- Transgender
- Indigenous
- Refugee
- BIPOC
- Disabled
- Other

13. Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

    - Asian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - White
    - Black or African American
    - Other

14. Are you of Hispanic or Latinx origin?

    - Yes
    - No

15. What is your annual household income?

    - Less than $10,000
    - $10,000 to $19,999
    - $20,000 to $29,999
    - $30,000 to $39,999
    - $40,000 to $49,999
    - $50,000 to $59,999
    - $60,000 to $69,999
    - $70,000 to $79,999
    - $80,000 to $89,999
    - $90,000 to $99,999
    - $100,000 to $149,999
    - $150,000 or more

16. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

    - Less than high school degree
    - High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
    - Some college but no degree
    - Associate degree in college (2-year)
    - Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
    - Master's degree
    - Doctoral degree

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Recoveries and Reconsiderations: Linguistic Justice and Storying Resistance to Generative AI

Maggie Fernandes and Megan McIntyre

Abstract: In this piece, we argue that linguistic and algorithmic oppressions are inextricably linked to one another, a relationship illuminated by the work and experiences of Timnit Gebru. To begin, we briefly trace the history of calls for linguistic justice within writing studies, with specific attention to the adoption of Students' Rights to Their Own Language. We then connect the need for linguistic justice to calls for algorithmic justice in the context of generative AI, large language models, and machine learning. Then, using a feminist research approach that emphasizes storytelling and centers the lived experiences of women, we tell the story of Gebru's experiences resisting harmful AI at Google and combating institutional whiteness within the tech industry. We conclude by connecting Gebru's fight for an AI ethics that centers the lived experiences (and languaging) of historically marginalized groups to writing studies' disciplinary investment in language variation and linguistic justice and argue that algorithmic justice requires linguistic justice.

Keywords:: algorithmic oppression, linguistic justice, generative AI, storytelling

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Introduction: Linguistic and Algorithmic Injustices

The generative AI moment brings to the fore how linguistic injustice and algorithmic injustice are intertwined. White language supremacy – characterized as it is by insidious notions of singular correctness and the destruction of the cultural and social dimensions of languaging – is deadly, particularly for marginalized communities. Generative AI – characterized as it is by environmental devastation (Hogan and LePage-Richer), labor exploitation (Merchant), and the elimination of marginalized languages and language varieties (Owusu-Ansah) – is similarly devastating, frequently to these same communities to more serious degrees. These two threats rely on one another for their continued perpetuation, and we understand the urgency to combat linguistic and algorithmic injustice to be aligned with the movement for GenAI refusal in writing studies (Sano-Franchini, et al.). In sketching these conversations, we hope readers will reconsider how to engage with linguistic justice in their research and teaching with the grave realities of algorithmic oppression in mind.

Linguistic variation and justice have, of course, long been of concern to scholars and teachers in

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rhetoric, composition, and writing studies. In March 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication adopted the *Students Right to Their Own Language* (SRTOL) resolution. The main text of the resolution itself is brief; it reads

> We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language -- the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.

SRTOL was the product of significant work by Black women in the discipline: Geneva Smitherman was one of the key authors of the resolution, and her work, as Smitherman notes in her retrospective on the development of SRTOL, built from the work of Ernece Kelly, particularly Kelly's "Murder of the American Dream," as well as Kelly's leadership of the NCTE Taskforce on Bias and Racism.

As Staci Perryman-Clark, David E. Kirkland, and Austin Jackson make clear in the introduction to *Students' Right to Their Own Language: A Critical Sourcebook*, supporters of SRTOL believe that "unless students' rights are affirmed in full in classrooms and beyond, students will be unfairly positioned in our academies and our economies to fail. That is, these scholars see a direct relationship between language awareness, rights and respect and social, academic, and economic outcomes" (5). The argument of SRTOL is that as literacy educators, we have a specific set of responsibilities to our students, including the responsibility to help them develop the tools that allow them to achieve their own rhetorical goals and express themselves in the forms and in conversation with the communities that are meaningful to them. We have a responsibility to understand the language we teach, including how its varieties and dialects function, how that language is acquired, and what it means to support the linguistic expressions of all the students whom we teach.

To illustrate the significance of algorithmic justice for rhetoric and writing studies, we consider the story of Timnit Gebru, who has been one of the most important voices articulating AI ethics and the sociocultural harms of Large Language Models (LLM). Our telling of Gebru's story is informed by feminist research methodologies that center the lived experiences of women, particularly women of color (Jones, Bramlett, Plange). We highlight Gebru, because she is one of several Black scholars and activists who have been at the forefront of the conversation about artificial intelligence and algorithmic oppression (O'Neil; Noble; Benjamin; Broussard; Gebru and Buolawamini). Gebru's work – particularly in her co-authored article "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big?" ("Stochastic Parrots") – also highlights the ways that algorithmic oppression and linguistic oppressions are inextricably linked and part of a longer history of eugenics (Gebru and Torres). Likewise, we believe Gebru's story tells us a great deal

about the importance of lived experience in feminist and anti-racist projects, including the work to resist the inevitability of artificial intelligence.

Timnit Gebru, Stochastic Parrots, and the Fight for AI Justice at Google

Timnit Gebru is an Eritrean-Ethiopian computer scientist who has been a prominent voice in the ethics of artificial intelligence since the late 2010s and who is perhaps best known for being fired by Google in December 2020 after documenting racism and sexism inherent in the company's approach to artificial intelligence. While her controversy at Google made Gebru a public figure of AI skepticism, Gebru's career as a major voice in the ethics of artificial intelligence did not begin at Google. In 2017, Gebru collaborated with MIT researcher Joy Buolamwini while she was working as a researcher at Microsoft. Together they published the groundbreaking paper, "Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification," which revealed the gender and racial biases embedded in commercial face recognition systems. In 2018, Gebru was hired to co-lead the Ethical AI group, which was charged with investigating the social implications of artificial intelligence, including generative AI, at Google in 2018. Two years later, Gebru was fired over the paper that would become the now widely-cited "Stochastic Parrots."

Countering the so-called intelligence of artificial intelligence, this paper – co-authored by Emily Bender, Gebru, Angelina Major-McMillan, and Margaret Mitchell – characterized language models as *stochastic parrots.* Stochastic–from the Ancient Greek *stokhastikos*, which means "guesswork"– describes the randomness of language models, how they comprehend language or make meaning of their training set data but instead generate randomly plausible language. In this article, Bender and her co-authors challenged the project of LLM research by pointing to the various ethical problems with this technology, including the enormous environmental and financial costs, the lack of diversity in the training data, and the risks of homogenized AI-generated language. Specifically, AI-generated text represents the language practices of wealthier countries and communities and "overrepresents" younger Internet users and men (613). While this research was presented at the Association for Computing Machinery Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency in 2021, it was first shared with Google in 2020 while Gebru worked for the company. After reading its damning findings about the nature of LLMs, Gebru's supervisors demanded that she retract the paper and its findings. Although the research paper had undergone an extensive review process–more rigorous than most research, according to her colleagues–Gebru was ordered to retract the paper from consideration. Gebru refused and asked for an explanation about how the retraction order had been determined and for a clear "understanding of research parameters, what can be done/not, and who can make these censorship decisions" (Gebru).

In the days after Gebru's unceremonious and disrespectful dismissal–in which she returned from vacation to find that she had been locked out of her company email– Gebru went public with her experience at Google. Jeff Dean, Google's head of artificial intelligence, refuted Gebru's account, claiming that she had resigned and explained that the research paper had not been submitted with enough time for it to be approved

for public presentation. Gebru shared online that this was not the case. Soon after, members of her Ethical AI team joined Gebru online to counter the company line that she had resigned. They published a letter and petition, titled "Setting the Record Straight #ISupportTimnit #BelieveBlackWomen" on the Google Walkout Medium account, in which they refuted the lie that she had resigned and demanded transparency about Gebru's termination, transparency about the decision to censor the research paper, and renewed commitment by Google to academic freedom and research integrity. This letter was signed by 2,695 Google employees and 4,302 supporters from academia and industry. Despite the broad support for Gebru and clear evidence that her dismissal was retaliatory and unprofessional, Google representatives did not apologize or acknowledge the research or evident institutional oppression.

Since her dismissal from Google, Gebru founded and has served as the executive director of the Distributed Artificial Intelligence Research Institute (DAIR), an interdisciplinary, globally-situated research center that refutes the "inevitability" of artificial intelligence, and co-founded Black in AI, a nonprofit organization that strives for the Black representation and inclusion in the field of AI. Ultimately, Gebru's experiences before and after her controversial firing from Google point to the importance of lived experience in technological advancement. In an interview with Rolling Stone, Gebru shared that while she never anticipated her career trajectory, the problem of race in AI research became apparent when she attended conferences. "There were no Black people — literally no Black people," Gebru said. "I would go to academic conferences in AI, and I would see four or five Black people out of five, six, seven thousand people internationally.… I saw who was building the AI systems and their attitudes and their points of view. I saw what they were being used for, and I was like, 'Oh, my God, we have a problem'" (O'Neil). Her current efforts work to center marginalized experts in artificial intelligence research, an important step to countering the kinds of oppressive outcomes outlined in "Stochastic Parrots." Prior to her firing in December 2020, Gebru was one of very few Black women who worked for the company, amounting to only 1.6% of total research scientists (*Diversity Annual Report - Google Diversity Equity & Inclusion*).

Gebru's story helps us to see how algorithmic oppression and linguistic oppression are linked, not just via the language models that perpetuate homogenized language, but via white institutions that maintain white supremacy via hiring, firing, and silencing. Within the context of the technology industry, this hostility can be traced to the myths of meritocracy and postracialism that are strongly embedded in the predominantly white male culture of Silicon Valley with implications for hiring practices (Noble and Roberts). Safiya Noble and Sarah T. Roberts demonstrate how "postracialism does not end at hiring and representation in employment ranks" (122). Rather, a "racially, educationally, and class-wise homogeneous Silicon Valley technological elite" perpetuates colonialism, imperialism, and Western extraction through "design and manufacturing choices [that] have implications for populations across the globe" (122). [1] As Sara Ahmed

1 Since 2010 (Luckerson), increased demand for cobalt and copper to manufacture "clean" energy sources, like rechargeable batteries, and smart devices like iPhones and MacBook Pros, has been directly directly linked to genocide and human rights violations in Congo (Imray). The hidden costs of mineral extraction and increased emissions from data centers typically are paid by communities of color first (Kerr), although it is evident that unchecked climate crisis, which is worsened by the expansion of LLMs, concerns us all.

reminds us, "The struggle to recognize institutional racism can be understood as part of a wider struggle to recognize that all forms of power, inequality, and domination are systematic rather than individual" (44). Consequently, to critique racism and whiteness as it is embedded within technology and institutions, as Gebru did, is very challenging within a company such as Google that can more easily identify Gebru and her research as the threats to their algorithmic technologies, rather than the more intrinsic, foundational nature of racism.

Linked Oppressions: Algorithmic White Language Supremacy

Reconsidering the story of Gebru's fight for AI justice at Google is instructive for how we can combat white language supremacy within rhetoric and writing studies and in higher education at large by resisting the inevitability of this racist technology. We must recognize how white language supremacy (Inoue) is embedded and encoded in LLMs, and as Antonio Byrd argued in his recent piece, "[l]inguistic punishment includes violence against bodies and land: colonialism, imperialism, genocide, and slavery paved the way for English dominance in contemporary global economies" (136). LLMs continue a long history of violence through the English language and perpetuate a whole host of linguistic injustices. These injustices include, among many material consequences, linguistic profiling, which have deadly legal consequences, as well the erasure of marginalized languages. In "Defining Moments, Definitive Programs, and the Continued Erasure of Missing People," Alfred L. Owusu-Ansah offers a critical reminder of the limitations of LLMs for supporting linguistic diversity, gesturing to interactions with ChatGPT which reveal its inability to represent Ghanaian English; in doing so, ChatGPT perpetuates the erasure of language variation of peoples who "do not have the global capital to increase the volume of their utterances" (146). And so, Owusu-Ansah asks us to consider the people who are left behind by LLMs, whose languages and identities are erased by the proliferation of LLM writing outputs: "Shall we lower the voices of the machines for a moment and hear the voices of 'we,' the missing people. Or, as we listen to the machines, we can pause and reflect on how they are defining us using the same values, characteristics, and meanings that colonialism has placed on us for centuries" (146). For those of us who are critical of generative AI, we must remember language bias, too, and its varied material consequences for our students.

We recognize that this is a fraught conversation, even within writing studies. For example, a recent MLA/CCCC working paper on writing and language instruction during the AI age highlights both the risk LLMs pose to linguistic diversity, as well as arguable benefits that LLMs might offer to "[w]riters who come from diverse and various linguistic and educational backgrounds [who] may benefit from the more sophisticated grammar, style, and genre editing capabilities of LLMs by receiving access to the 'language of power'" (Working Paper 1). It is true that students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds feel pressures (from within and beyond the academy) to erase their own varieties and dialects in the face of racism, xenophobia, and classism, but such erasures should not be necessary. As writing scholars, we should reject the racist and xenophobic premise that English varieties of all stripes lack "sophisticated" grammars, styles, and genres. Power circulates via particular kinds of dominant Englishes, but we reject assertions that our role as educators is

to further reinforce those problematic power structures and language assumptions. And we also reject the notion that a tool that reifies these language assumptions adds value to writing classrooms, as Kynard and Baker-Bell do in their work.

Some corners of writing studies and English education have long been complicit in furthering these racist, classist, and xenophobic assumptions about so-called good writing. As Carmen Kynard reminds us, writing studies' widespread use of rubrics and outcomes that prioritize, privilege, and even demand so-called "academic" English is part of the reason that students turn to generative AI tools in the first place: "It shouldn't come as a surprise that students will turn to AI to write [the] white-standardized essays" most likely to be rewarded by writing courses, programs, and teachers. We know of course that this focus on standard English also dominates classrooms outside of writing studies, but we feel the need here to account for how our discipline, specifically, is complicit in the erasure of linguistic variety even as it proclaims its ongoing commitment to linguistic justice via SRTOL and the more recent This Ain't Another Statement! This is a DEMAND for Black Linguistic Justice!, which was released in July 2020. This Ain't Another Statement makes clear that "socially constructed terms like academic language and standard English are rooted in white supremacy, whiteness, and anti-Blackness and contribute to anti-Black policies (e.g., English only) that are codified and enacted to privilege white linguistic and cultural norms while deeming Black Language inferior" (Baker-Bell, et al.). Any tool that further codifies these white linguistic and cultural norms – as generative AI tools do – does active harm to students, who speak and write in a whole host of Englishes.

Some might consider the fight against generative AI to be an unwinnable uphill battle, or a fight that belongs to teachers and scholars invested in the study of technological change and artificial intelligence/machine learning. The truth is this work belongs to all of us invested in linguistic justice. SRTOL – which remains the official position of CCCC – centers the needs, rights, and experiences of linguistically diverse students in a way that articulates writing teachers' responsibility to all of our students; it also emphasizes the power that teachers have to support or do lasting harm to students. In a moment of AI hype, SRTOL serves as a reminder to resist homogenized language–the kind of language prompted and spat out by LLMs–and to defend linguistic diversity (which calls on teachers to make space for language varieties in their assignments and assessments) and to fight for linguistic justice (which requires teachers to also acknowledge the ways that racism and xenophobia have shaped classroom language expectations and redress those wrongs; see Baker-Bell and Inoue) in our classrooms and beyond. As Stephanie Jones reminds us, counteracting linguistic injustices requires an increasingly "a human-centered approach," one that centers lived experiences and languages in practice.

How long will we affirm what we know about students' rights to their own language before we make these statements matter in pedagogy and policy? How long will technologists and ethical computer scientists reveal the impacts and implications of algorithmic oppression before regulatory bodies take action? While those of us in writing studies may not have the influence of technocrats like OpenAI's Sam Altman, Twitter/X's Elon Musk, and Apple's Tim Cook, among others, the urgency for linguistic justice offers

a chance for us to act and push back against technochauvinism, which has been articulated by Meredith Broussard as the "technolibertarian" belief that technological advancement can solve all problems (8). Critically, Broussard demonstrates how technochauvinism is being carried out by "a small, elite group of men who tend to overestimate their mathematical abilities, who have systematically excluded women and people of color in favor of machines for centuries, who tend to want to make science fiction real, who have little regard for social convention, who don't believe that social norms or rules apply to them…and who have adopted the ideological rhetoric of far-right libertarian anarcho-capitalists" (85). From where we sit now, it's easy to see how the culture of technochauvinism has set the stage for technofascism[2] (McElroy). At this moment, we think of Asao Inoue's 2019 CCCC keynote, in which he urged us to "stop justifying White standards of writing as a necessary evil" because students "only need it because we keep teaching it" (364). Similar justifications are circulating about the need to teach AI literacies (see the MLA-CCCC Joint Task Force on Writing and AI's *Student Guide to AI Literacy*). Inoue has made it clear that White Mainstream English is deadly, but its death toll only increases with the age of generative AI. Bias for White Mainstream English has enabled the proliferation of generative AI, both in writing classrooms and beyond, and leaning in to teach so-called "ethical" AI literacies will only worsen this bias and its impacts on our students and our planet. What is the human cost of White Mainstream English? What is White Mainstream English's carbon footprint? And how do we measure the harms of institutional whiteness and the refusal to listen to experts like Timnit Gebru? When is enough enough?

Next Steps: Moving Beyond White Mainstream Language Parrots

Following the example of Gebru and AI ethicists, it isn't too late for teachers–writing teachers or teachers across the university–to take up the call to promote not just linguistic diversity but linguistic justice in their classrooms and to resist tools and technologies built on algorithmic injustices. In fact, the AI moment is an opportunity for *all* of us to do better by our students. Ultimately, centering linguistic justice is also a way to do algorithmic justice. It is also a way to reject the shared eugenic enterprise of linguistic oppression and artificial general intelligence (AGI), which Gebru and Torres explain is rooted in eugenic frameworks of IQ. So, how do we champion linguistic diversity during the generative AI moment? We would point here to the work of April Baker-Bell, whose book *Linguistic Justice* highlights how monolingual and Whitestream-only approaches to literacy education do harm to students, particularly Black students. Both *Students' Right to Their Own Language* and *This Ain't Another Statement* offer important frameworks for welcoming linguistic diversity and promoting linguistic justice. As one step toward more linguistically just classrooms, *This Ain't Another Statement* explicitly calls on faculty to stop using White Mainstream English as the single standard against which they judge student writing. We call attention to the organizational commitments and scholarship about linguistic justice because we recognize the way that the outputs of LLMs flatten language variety and disconnect language practices from their historical and cultural underpinnings, as we

2 Erin McElroy uses the language of technofascism to describe both "the mechanisms and technological fantasies through which fascist conditions of possibility materialize"(100) and "the technologies, for instance eugenic techno-science, co-constitutive with fascist future making" (135). GenAI, with its hype-fueled attention to efficiency and destruction of all difference (including linguistic difference), reflects the goals and values of technofacism McElroy articulates here.

discussed above. These frameworks have implications for course design (including reading lists), assignment and assessment design, and faculty approaches to feedback. Moving toward ecological approaches to writing assessment (Inoue) and embedding students' and teachers' lived experiences into writing assessment decisions (Tinoco and Barrera Eddy) allow teachers to create more equitable assessment spaces for students from all linguistic backgrounds.

White mainstream language kills, as we've been reminded time and again. It is imperative that we recognize that linguistic justice is also environmental justice, racial justice, gender justice, and disability justice. Linguistic justice is necessary to redress settler colonialism, and linguistic justice is necessary for a healthy democracy that works for everyone. In January 2025, Gebru spoke to Bloomberg News about generative AI hype and whether the realities around AI have changed since the publication of "Stochastic Parrots," saying "[t]he academics who should be informing the public are not doing their jobs. Academics should be making claims that should be substantiated." As writing teachers and writing studies scholars, we deeply understand the importance of linguistic variation and justice, with its roots in our earliest disciplinary documents, and the eugenic histories and consequences of linguistic homogenization and erasure. We can answer Gebru's call in writing studies by championing linguistic justice and rejecting the eugenic project at the heart of generative AI.

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Forty Years Later: Reconsidering the Cyborg as a Feminist Metaphor

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Abstract: Revisiting Donna Haraway's cyborg from "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" is an opportunity to trace metaphors used for interdisciplinary work that question structural binaries to assess their strengths and limitations. Analyzing the cyborg's transference, especially in Technical and Professional Communication, disability studies, and religious studies, draws attention to how metaphoric values change. Such decisions can be read as revisions of feminist criticism itself. Tracing the cyborg deepens not only our understanding of it as a metaphor but also the intersectional nature of feminist rhetorical scholarship as seen in the values attributed to the cyborg with each application.

Keywords: cyborg, metaphor, feminist rhetoric, intersectionality

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Cyborgs abound in modern science fiction, often as tools of militaristic and patriarchal regimes. Yet, cyborgs extend beyond the entertainment world. The metaphor is used in numerous fields including feminist, disability, religious, organizational, political, and rhetorical theory. Widespread use of the term indicates a desire for and potential in the cyborg to be more than media has allowed. While reflecting on cyborgs today, I look to past notions of the cyborg to reconfigure it as a model for connection, not destruction. While the piece has been cited and reprinted many times over, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" by Donna Haraway first appeared in Socialist Review in 1985. The cyborg's use over the past four decades in feminist criticism draws on Haraway's archetype. In an interview with Gary Olson, Haraway defines the cyborg as "a polluted category" (4). She also calls the cyborg a fraught and limited trope for the "pain as well as possibility involved in contemporary technoscience and the inextricable weave of bodies and machines and meaning" (Olson 26). The cyborg is always in the middle; constantly renegotiating itself in the face of new encounters, conditions, and connections. While the cyborg can represent technology's interaction with writing, it is also a corollary for considering the political stakes we engage with daily. However, the cyborg is not merely a metaphor. It is the enactment of socially and politically laden values. Reconsidering the cyborg 40 years later, is an opportunity to take stock of feminist rhetorical scholarship's values. The goal of such reflection is to reclaim the blurred boundaries between clarity and abstraction, theory and praxis, and science and religion through an intersectional metaphor that values confusion, connection, and dissensus. In revisiting the cyborg, we might find new ways of engaging with current notions of

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being that problematize existing divisions in a productive manner for advancing rhetorically aware engagement with others by rearticulating metaphors as shorthand for values. Adopting the cyborg as a metaphor for coalition building exposes "truths" valued in feminist theory that often overshadow productive exchanges. These include but are not limited to the desire for a perfect language, the want for a "perfect" example of feminist intersectionality, and the resistance to fields such as science and religion because they "undo" the work of social feminism. Reconsidering the cyborg reconsiders the values within feminist works, enabling critique that acknowledges tensions as productive, instead of striving for perfect unison.

Haraway's Cyborg

Collectivity carries a strength, but it can be founded on dissensus and continual engagement. Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" provides feminist and rhetorical scholars alike with the opportunity to trace the usage of the cyborg as a metaphor for interdisciplinary work via coalition building that ultimately questions assumed values. The rhetorical strength of Haraway's cyborg lies in its use of irony as both "humor" and "serious play" (149). Irony is "about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes…about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true" (Haraway149). The cyborg, as an ironic metaphor, defines values that then can and should be held in tension with one another. The cyborg is neither human nor natural nor technological. It is "a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource" for "fruitful couplings" (Haraway 150). The cyborg seeks new connections because it is built through interaction. Later in the same passage, the cyborg is also named "the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the 'West's' escalating domination of abstract individuation" (150–51). Calling out the West speaks specifically to the political and social dimensions of the cyborg. Abstract individuation based on Western principles privileges the one over the collective. Yet, the cyborg acts as a socialist critique steeped in irony. Juxtaposing the cyborg as both a "fiction mapping" and an "apocalyptic *telos*" encapsulates the dichotomy between social opportunities for collaborative couplings and biological boundaries imposed by society. It also highlights the hold individuation has within Western society. We desperately need the cyborg's contradiction to model intersectional coalitions by inhabiting the values of hope and potential destruction to invoke critical care into the ways we engage within feminist rhetoric. The cyborg embodies tensions that arise in interdisciplinary work, but do not annihilate it.

In both oppositions, the cyborg is an *oikos* for oppositional terms to reside. Nature-civilization, human-technology, beginning-end, are additional "natural" binaries Haraway challenges through the cyborg. By housing the terms in a single category, readers understand the binaries as constituting a larger whole represented by the cyborg. Haraway creates a "cyborg world" that enables "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" by deconstructing assumed binaries and locating them in the cyborg (154). The cyborg world is metaphorical but no more so than our world. We fabricate stability that is undone by our own inability to engage without metaphor without creating and approximating. The cyborg reminds us that "totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality" due to its partial nature

(Haraway 181). Interacting with the cyborg amounts to constant exchange of values as seen in its initial and more recent use.

Some Initial Replies

In the decade following Haraway's seminal text, feminist scholars in technical and professional writing, rhetoric more broadly, and religious studies interrogated the cyborg, its strengths, and its weakness. Specifically, the cyborg prompted research into the interactions between humans and technology while writing. Johndan Johnson-Eilola's own investigation of hypertext in "Control and the Cyborg" is an example of how the cyborg "usefully problematize[d] our relationships to technology and society" (383). Like Johnson-Eilola, Pamela Gilbert used the cyborg further feminist inquiry into hypertexts and questions of representation in "Meditations upon Hypertext." She approached the cyborg as an ideal hypertext that is often excluded from literature despite its usefulness for narrating identity. In both examples and Haraway's essay, the cyborg is never solely concerned with technology. It was and is a social feminist critique. The cyborg merely speaks to writing and technology as part of larger social concerns. Carol Winkelmann in particular used cyborg theory as a paradigm for electronically mediated collaboration within first-year English classrooms. Winkelmann's version of cyborg theory in "Electronic Literacy, Critical Pedagogy, and Collaboration" offers a multipolar view of human nature and highlights human interdependency without discounting or centering technology. Instead, the cyborg "internalizes" technology to subvert cultural domination (Johnson-Eilola 384). The connection between technologies, society, and representation is not accidental. In the same interview, Olson describes Haraway as "particularly concerned with encouraging political action, not just in areas of technoscience but in all areas of political life" (3). Representation, via technology and the cyborg, is inherently political. Drawing on posthumanist concerns over dichotomous hierarchies, Michelle Ballif offered the cyborg as the embodiment of what she called "Third Sophistic posthumanist transrhetoric(s)" (TSPT) to combat "a crisis of representation" in the late 90s (52). Throughout "Writing the Third-Sophistic Cyborg," Ballif advocated for a cyborg that resists "we-formation" just like TSPTR resists resolution. Resolution puts an end to continual engagement which ultimately silences or excludes difference.

One glaring exclusion is Haraway's own dismissal of religious imagery in her many definitions. William Covino points to this oversight in his reading of the golem alongside Haraway's cyborg noting how they were "products of an institutional grammar" (357). He concludes "Grammars of Transgression" by asserting that the cyborg is not an improved golem, but a reinvention of it that is based on the grammar of technology. It is "a materialized technological metaphor, whose capability for heresy is compromised" because of its technological precision (Covino 370). That compromise is equally critiqued by Elaine Graham whose "Cyborgs or Goddesses?" explored how goddess feminism risked inverting gender binaries while likewise othering the goddess. Graham argued that Haraway reinforced the divide between religion and the secular like Covino because the cyborg was represented along definitional terms instead of interactionally.

In 1998 Ballif commented that "now 13 years old," the cyborg "is both old news and a premature call"

(61). At forty years old, the same argument can be made. Far beyond the scope of this article are generations of additional scholars who engaged with Haraway and furthered her creation. The cyborg is in many ways still old news. However, the cyborg is equally a premature call for contemporary feminist rhetorical scholarship. While others have used the golem, goddesses, and later ecologies to encourage relationality, the cyborg most directly resists strict definition while acknowledging connectivity in ways that we are still not comfortable with. Disciplines embrace we-formation to gain authority leading to exclusion and silence.Black feminists have leveled this far too correct critique against mainstream academic feminism for generations now.[1] The cyborg resists finite definition and we-formation; necessitating users remain open to others and find pleasure in uncertainty. Feminist rhetorics needs to continually build coalitions, develop relationships with science and religion, as well as think intersectionally and our metaphors are one way to do that. Prior to looking at more recent usage of the cyborg, the next section focuses on metaphors as way to better understand the values they represent. The cyborg still embodies modern feminist assumptions. It also highlights the variable nature of metaphors and their ability to become shorthand tools, applied to things, spaces, and people.

Metaphor as Shorthand

Prior to Haraway's use of the metaphor, cyborgs abounded in science fiction but less so in feminist theory. Her goal was "to build an ironic political myth" with the cyborg that emphasized "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" for socialist-feminist theory (149, 154). Such a myth mirrors the nature of metaphors as both move through discourse, encouraging interaction to better understand a concept. Metaphors function due to ongoing processes of idealization and reappropriation. Writers identify key characteristics they want to emphasize in their subject. They then identify terms with similar characteristics and highlight their chosen feature(s) by comparing the two using metaphors. In short, the identification and abstraction of the characteristic is an idealization while the application in a different setting is reappropriation. The result is a movable 'shorthand' comprised of the values most beneficial to a rhetor in the moment of application. Each use of a metaphor changes its meaning as the process of idealization and reappropriation repeats.

But this is not how metaphors are conventionally described. Metaphor is typically defined as the use of one term in place of another to emphasize characteristics transferred from one semantic domain to another. Aristotle's *Poetics* defines metaphor as "the application of a word that belongs to another thing" (1457b7). Cicero similarly described metaphor as "when a word applying to one thing is transferred to another," due to similarities (4.34.45). However, metaphors also supply a "vivid mental picture" (Cicero 4.34.45). Transfer, via metaphor, therefore necessitates an audience's ability to imagine a concept based on a speaker's use of metaphor to highlight shared characteristics as a rhetorical strategy. Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* expands Cicero's definition, identifying four ways "transference" occurs: substituting one animate thing for another; substituting one inanimate thing for another; substituting something inanimate

1 The Combahee River Collective Statement, Kimberle Crenshaw's "Mapping the Margins," and Patricia Hill Collin's "The Politics of Black Feminist Thought" are three of the many examples from around the time Haraway published her piece.

for animate; or substituting something animate for inanimate (8.6.4). Each variety of trope outlined identifies specific characteristics of the subjects of discussion and highlights those characteristics by making them central to the "vivid mental picture." Today, scholarly (and public) use of "metaphor" largely follows in this line of thinking where metaphors transfer properties to aid comprehension. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's book *Metaphors We Live By* is one example. They contend that the "essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 5). This recalls Aristotle's argument that "to use metaphor well is to discern similarities" so it is not merely the application but the ability to assess the proper sense of a term and then find an equally similar term to use in place of the original (1459a9). Rhetors' engagement with the term indicates the creative and created qualities of a metaphor. Metaphors are not merely transferences of qualities but are built and modified with each usage.

While metaphor is largely understood as a static rhetorical concept, there are more complicated understandings of the term. Transfer, according to Patricia Parker, "includes the possibility of competition for the same place and the threat of expulsion…The 'transfer' of metaphor seems inseparable from a kind of violence or violation" (38). Because metaphors inherently cross "predetermined boundaries" they are akin to a "foreigner or 'alien' usurping the place properly occupied by the original term" (Parker 36, 37). Each use of a metaphor has the potential to undo both the "original" and metaphorical term. Claiming a metaphor can exist eliminates the original term's sole ownership of its characteristic. Substitution means replicability and language, through iteration, is nothing but replacement. The result is that a metaphor's origin becomes less stable. Derrida's "White Mythology" questions the existence of any proper home of literal or historical meaning for metaphors. It is not that the characteristics of one discrete entity are applied to another. Every conception of an entity is already metaphorical as language approximates features and characteristics. But characteristics are based on how a rhetor engages with and selects qualities for transfer. Transporting characteristics is a migration of thought and value. For Parker, this process makes metaphor a "structuring principle," not just a figure of speech (52). Any time a metaphorical comparison is made, values of the entities are established.

Potential connections between ideas depend on the needs of discourse not an original meaning. Derrida, expanding on this point, argues:

> "the issue is not to take the function of the concept back to the etymology of the noun along a straight line…This implication of the defined in the definition, this abyss of metaphor will never cease to stratify itself, simultaneously widening and consolidating itself" (253).

The point of using metaphors is not to adhere to a strict sense of the term since no strict sense ever existed. Metaphors offer ways of viewing the world, excluding views, and inscribing values upon the stances we take. Each iteration of a metaphor inscribes a value system to gain something deemed valuable. Specifically, the process of metaphorization is "*idealization* and *reappropriation*" (Derrida 253). Idealization creates the "vivid mental image" Cicero mentions which allows metaphors to become their own entity as they migrate. Resulting metaphors are not merely applications of characteristics from one entity onto another. Metaphor

is both "a space of disorientation and discovery" that allow us to complicate and develop concepts through our idealization of them, even if we do not know where idealizations will lead (Parker 50). Through repetition, metaphors are reappropriated and become shorthand for values and characteristics with each move changing the metaphor and its value. The cyborg is a metaphor in every sense of the term, espousing values that are beyond the rhetor's intent but aware of its ironic and hypocritic nature. Configurations of the cyborg spawn and morph, "wandering" further from home, as the metaphor is taken up by contemporary scholars, inviting opportunities for reflection.

The Cyborg's Modern Reception

Cyborg Writing

Despite Johnson-Eilola's claim that "the cyborg is a process" and "an activity" it is still used as a linguistic tool (394). The cyborg appears in writing and writing is fundamental to it. Haraway considers writing "the technology of cyborgs…cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against one code that translates all meaning perfectly…cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution" (176). Clear language is a myth that metaphors expose while also representing our search for a "universal scientific language" (Parker 43). The cyborg's contradictory nature acknowledges the need for language but pushes back at the totalizing nature of "perfect communication" as a goal for scholarship. Ajnesh Prasad and Hans Asenbaum independently use the cyborg as shorthand for the entanglement of values and competing systems within political spheres that make "perfect communication" impossible. Prasad advances "cyborg writing" as a form of feminist embodiment (437). Highlighting the rhizomic nature of the cyborg, Prasad employs an ecological perspective to leverage Haraway's emphasis on multiplicity because the cyborg is not easily defined, so its language should reflect that.

Not unlike initial interest in hypertext, cyborg writing functions as a "radical site of infinite possibilities" that disrupt dualities bringing attention to how writing is involved in "feminist revolution" (Prasad 431, 432). The main feature of cyborg writing, per Prasad, is that it is "epistemologically informed by experience" and uses the situated and embodied experiences of the writing to deconstruct Western binaries (434). Prasad's premises for cyborg writing make the practice a tool for individuals who have experienced oppression because of Western binaries. In the process, it contends with the desire for "abstract individuation" that Haraway acknowledges in both the cyborg and society (151). Cyborg writers are engaged in a "struggle for language" to articulate their experiences while resisting a totalizing narrative due to an imperfect language. Cyborg writing "inserts uncertainty into any notion of universality," upsetting notions of privilege surrounding certain narratives (Prasad 441). However, a paradox arises given that "[c]onceptions of the cyborg define the individual" (Asenbaum 1545). Features highlighted in cyborg writing come to define the writer as with characteristics in a metaphor. The audience uses the defining features of the writing as shorthand for the writer and their experience, caricaturizing them.

To counter the totalizing potential, Asenbaum employs "cyborg activism" in their analysis of Anonymous as an extension of cyborg writing. Cyborg activism is "the continuous process of reconfiguration of the modern binaries of equality/hierarchy, reason/emotion and nihilism/idealism" (1547). Constant reconfiguration acknowledges the nature of metaphors as potentially violent while also built. Cyborg activism provides new ways of playfully mediating experiences in material and electronic mediums that further disrupts assumed binaries not imaginable at the time of hypertext. More directly, cyborg activism, using cyborg writing, is not a secondary step or a translation of bodily experiences onto a screen. It is a form of "serious play" that "must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man" (Haraway 175). Cyborg activism blurs the idea of the fall from a "perfect language." Removal of the "either/or" categorization allows for intersectional "ands" instead. By creating a space for seriousness and play, imagination and politics, the pushback to a perfect language metaphorically articulates the ongoing relations that come from the cyborg and ought to exist in feminist scholarship.

The Cyborg and the Crip

Clearly, the cyborg is not merely theoretical. Its nature and usage are tied to one another or the "myth and tool mutually constitute each other" (Haraway 164). But how they constitute each other matters. The totalizing tendencies of language (and metaphors) reify binaries that negatively influence usage of the cyborg through questions of representation. Alison Kafer's "The Cyborg and the Crip" identifies uncritical usage of the cyborg and challenges its necessity within disability (also called crip) studies, while acknowledging how it allows the discipline to conduct "necessary work" (125). Haraway contends that the "boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise for us" in the cyborg (153). Kafer's discussion of "cyborg technology" in relation to disability representation and reliance on medical technologies within a world designed for abled bodies is one imprecise boundary (105). Like Covino and Graham, Kafer is fairly critical of Haraway. The human-technology divide Haraway seeks to complicate is ultimately affirmed and crip studies must contend with the fallout of persons with disabilities being associated with cyborgs. Reading the cyborg as theoretical and physical shows the material impact rhetoric has and how theory and praxis are intertwined. "Mapping" via the cyborg has a physical nature to it, requiring movement around and between structures often created to impede progress.

The cyborg is an often-used metaphor for investigating intersectional identity. However, because there are other options—golems, goddesses, rhizomes, ecologies—it is important to remember that "cyborg theory is not necessary…but, at the same time, it can help us do necessary work" if we also acknowledge its potential harm (Kafer 125). Kafer sees the human-technology binary Haraway opposes being affirmed by the cyborg metaphor, forcing crips to become physical metaphors for cyborgs because of their reliance on technologies. Such unintended consequences intensify as cyborgs becomes "shorthand for adaptive technology" (Kafer 107). Adaptive technology, according to Kafer, is an example of "cyborg technology" that white feminists use for "idealizing, and thus otherizing" disability representations while ignoring abled persons' equal reliance on technology (105, 114). Idealization is fundamental to the creation of a metaphor and sets the

foundation for value laden equation of crips with cyborgs. Like Prasad, Kafer is concerned that metaphors, because they are "shorthand," flatten the otherwise intersectional identity and deeply personal experiences of a disabled person. Using the metaphor in disability studies affirms a relationship between the crip and cyborg that becomes "seamless and self-evident" which ultimately reduces the crip to a caricature and adaptive technologies serve as metonymies for personhood (Kafer 107).

Feminist work lauds crips for their resilience without engaging with the experiences of disabled persons in a way that will aid feminist critical theory through dissensus. Dehumanizing the crip via their "cyborg technologies" is part of the medicalized history of the cyborg which predates Haraway's text. Kafer details the term's scholarly history stressing that "the breakdown between self and other, body and machine, takes on a different hue in the context of coercive medical experimentation and confinement" (128). Adaptive technologies, and the cyborg, are attempts to "normalize the body," eradicating the experiences of a disabled person, and make normative ableism the "goal" or "cure" as a modern instance of we-formation (Kafer 107–08). Technologies overshadow the person and become their identifiers as was the case with cyborg writing. Identities take on different meanings when viewed through a "prism of institutionalization" because autonomy is stripped away as part of the medical process (Kafer 128). "Cure" implies a deviation that others and infantilizes the crip because they need another to intervene and save them from their maladies. Kafer's emphasis on the physical and social realities of the medical diagnoses of disabilities embodies Haraway's use of the cyborg for connecting theorical implications of its usage with the real-world impact metaphors have while still acknowledging their potential harm. Kafer hints at this connection when reminding readers that "[o]ur metaphors, our tropes, our analogies: all have histories, all have consequences" (128).

Kafer reclaims the metaphor for crip studies, as has been done with the term crip, and in the process re-politicizes the disabled body by way of the cyborg's inherent political nature. Cyborg, while important for modeling feminist coalitions, and therefore their interdisciplinary means, is not a singular application. Kafer's analysis shows the impact a history of abuse can have on a metaphor and reaffirm it as a totalizing characteristic. She wants a version of the cyborg that morphs with each use based on the larger system's ecology. Cyborg should be used as "social context" not metaphorically, to blur the boundaries keeping disabled persons others, without being reductive (Kafer 118). Understanding the misuse of the cyborg and identifying how its history has shaped the metaphor enables crip studies to consider how to continue using the cyborg inclusively. While critical, Kafer's analysis can be articulated as a reaffirmation of the tension Haraway desires within the cyborg, and another iteration of the cyborg that accounts for new binaries that arose after its creation. "Idealizations" based on such iterations add to the overall tension housed in a singular metaphor.

Cyborg Religion

If creation is the "idealization" portion of metaphors Derrida discusses, then "reappropriation" plays with that creation. In "I'd Rather be a Sinner than a Cyborg," Lucy Tatman plays with the contradictory

religious language in "A Cyborg Manifesto." Analysis of the religious language indicates epistemologies built into the cyborg and the values it carries with it to other fields for use. Including religion revises Haraway's definitions and arguably better meets the goals she lays out for the cyborg. It embraces the omnipresent nature of the potential for connection between materials, and/or ideologies. More broadly, there is history of association between metaphors and religion to convey complex ideologies that runs parallel to scientific inquiry. Parker captures the paradox: it is "nostalgia" for Eden, as Tatman argues, while also "the search for a universal scientific language," as seen in Prasad, Asenbaum, and ancient theorization of metaphors (44, 43). We want language that tells us the proper sense of an experience though cyborg writing will never allow this. Because metaphors are "grounded in our physical experience" they can be imperfect and still "provide an essential means of comprehending religious and cultural concepts" as the two are interrelated (Lakoff and Johnson 40). Metaphors are physically manifested in the experiences we have and the systematic structures those experiences are shaped by. Metaphors therefore must include religion because of its integral role within the social formation of thought, let alone writing. Tatman recognizes the cyborg as a cultural and religious metaphor given its apocalyptic and salvation-like message. While Haraway's cyborg is "irreverent" and "does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden," Tatman acknowledges the "serious play" of the language used (Haraway 151, 149). Religious references are both "playful and ironic," like the cyborg itself, meaning they have serious implications (Tatman 53). Dismissing religiosity using religious language is an intentional engagement with religion regardless of the desired effect. Metaphorically claiming the cyborg as "our ontology" implies a religious-like function used to comprehend experiences both through its metaphorical and ontological designation (Tatman 52).

Given that metaphors are created, the cyborg has an origin (though Haraway says otherwise). Tatman dates the cyborg's birth to the middle of the 19th Century as the child of salvation theory, Marxist theory, and the Industrial Revolution (58). She gives the cyborg a "genesis" but one that is outside the "garden." The cyborg's lack of a homeland is integral to its usage and runs counter to the traditional dominance of "place" within metaphor theorization as pointed out by Parker (36). Like the cyborg's parents, metaphors used in feminist critique rise from social contexts meaning they are not tied to a physical location, though they deeply engage with them. The cyborg and its use springs from omnipresent ideologies. Addressing the use of religious language when describing the cyborg metaphor, instead of dismissing it as Haraway does, better engages with the socio-political realities we experience and their constant presence in our scholarship. In this sense, we can see how the "apocalyptic" nature of the cyborg is a recognition of its religious nature as Edens and the end times are equally involved in religious and secular notions of being. Critique becomes a (re)creation of values signified by our metaphors, leaving behind previous assumptions and giving rise to new ones.

Like the cyborg, we are "making and remaking temporary homes…to cultivate, any 'where' as a garden" (Tatman 62). The ideologies we use to understand our experiences, be they religion, culture, or the cyborg, are the "gardens" where our origins are remade based on new interactions with others and other perspectives. The gardens are the origins of theories, subfields, and activism as well as an *oikos*. Lacking a singular "garden" gives rise to an indefinite number of gardens reflecting the infinite possibilities for connection

embodied by the cyborg metaphor. It mirrors the "wandering" described by Parker or "detour" according to Derrida by moving between places and ideas. In becoming an "ontology," the cyborg is a religion, ascribing value to the "incarnation" of "flesh and machine" in more than descriptive terms (Tatman 60). The cyborg is incarnated in the gardens where material and social mechanisms interact. It is present in the "flesh and machine" of Kafer's cyborg technology; the intersectional experiences of Black feminists who are idolized while continually excluded; the patriarchal systems of oppression that overshadow othered persons' experiences; the ableist language of environmental research; and the theory-praxis divide rampant in academia. Just as Haraway argues feminists cannot avoid scientific arguments, neither can it silence disability studies, or merely limit the cyborg to past technological inquiries.

Conclusion

The tension that arises by engaging with the cyborg in modern times expands the possibilities of analysis by not requiring a strict definition, bringing values under reconsideration. Analyzing Haraway's cyborg, and its proliferation since, exposes the technological, political, and material concerns within feminist work. There are of course countless other metaphors for feminist intersectional work. So why reconsider the cyborg? Put plainly, the cyborg's strength is in its downfalls. It is messy. There is a pleasure and power in the confusion of boundaries, language, and mixing of the physical and nonphysical that prevents stagnation. The cyborg's irony and hypocrisy are reminders of our own. Reevaluation of the cyborg must contend with its limitations which are built in reminders of our own biases. Reconsidering the cyborg is a call to also critically attend to each metaphor we use and the values they are shorthand for. As metaphors wander, we have the opportunity to create and change the values ascribed to them, acknowledging a productive tension. The cyborg forces us to confront values because they are no longer hidden behind stability. Turning toward dissensus does not annihilate feminist work or its significance. Tension is a form of attention. It calls attention to the places and people currently silenced and oppressed. Learning to live with tension and the imperfect ability to communicate by way of the cyborg is a form of intersectional critique that reorients feminist inquiry toward coalition building by reconsidering our values and metaphors.

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Nevertheless, She Resisted: Feminist Ethos and Agency in The Epic of Gilgamesh

Patricia Carmichael Miller

Abstract: "Nevertheless, She Resisted" challenges the concept that female agency is located exclusively in texts written by women and argues that reframing representations of women reveals resistance to the existing patriarchal social structures that excluded, erased, or overlooked them. This study is a forensic social anthropology that reconstructs the ethos of ancient women. It proposes a new rhetoric that examines the negative space occupied by female characters around and between the central male characters in texts written by men. I argue first that we can understand the ethos of women in ancient cultures even through texts that were written by men and for a culture that valorized masculine values, and second that modern principles of feminist ecological criticism can reposition the way we view women's social, emotional, and cultural agency. Combining Ryan, Myers, and Jones's feminist terminology of interrupt, advocate, and relate with the idea of resistance offers a new framework for studying ancient texts, identifies new terrains for feminist rhetorical applications, and further broadens the field of women's studies.

Keywords: negative space rhetoric, ethos, rhetorical feminism, ecological feminism, Gilgamesh, epic

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Introduction[1]

Because ancient epics are often unattached to the perspective of a single, named authorial point of view, they represent the central communal zeitgeist and values of a people who lived in a specific time and region and demonstrate a specific rhetorical function. And yet, as the old saying goes, the people who tell the story control the story: the unnamed storyteller of Beowulf and the legion of traveling Homers who carved narrative footpaths across Anglo-Saxon England and the Mediterranean had to have been primarily men. The epideictic narratives they told were tales of masculine valor and values, mythologizing the central, nation-building stories that shaped their cultural and national ethos, defining what it meant to be a warrior and leader, what it meant to be a man, and the characteristics of the monsters they fought, many of whom were female. Within the epic genre, women are often monolithi-

1 The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is situated in the literary canon alongside *The Odyssey, The Iliad*, the *Sagas of the Icelanders*, The *Aeneid*, and *Beowulf* as foundational epic texts that reflect nation-building and heroic and psychocultural values. The oldest parts of Gilgamesh comprise the second oldest text in existence after the *Pyramid Texts*. The five Sumerian texts that describe Gilgamesh's exploits date from the Old Babylonian period, or roughly 2000-1600 BC (Sonik "Awe" 493). The origin story dates to the 28th c. BC when the historical Sumerian figure Gilgamesh reigned as the fifth ruler of the First Dynasty of Uruk, ca. 2750 BC. The epic story existed as an oral tale and in poetry fragments before the full narrative epic was preserved on cuneiform tablets by the 12th c. BC Akkadian poet Sîn-lēqi-unninni (Sonik, "Awe" 493). The text that we read today is an amalgam of Bronze Age cuneiform tablets from early third-millennium Sumerian poems, second-millennium Babylonian tablets known as the "Standard Tablets," and the eleven cuneiform tablets from the library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh (7th c. BC), which comprise the most complete set to date (Kennedy 121).

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cally idealized, stereotyped or otherwise relegated to the silenced background or the fearsome, murder-worthy foreground: Penelope, quiet, patient, and faithful; Grendel's rage-filled mother; the passive, seized Helen; Medusa, whom history has villainized for the sin of being raped by a powerful male; in Virgil's hand, Dido's political savvy becomes a story of betrayal, heartbreak, and suicide. All of these female characters come to us through epic, myth-building stories that are primarily for, by, and about men. Just as "history itself is a masculine archival domain and academic discipline" (Bahrani 36), ancient rhetoric has always been understood as implicitly masculine rhetoric. The types of narratives that advance nation building and manifest destiny have historically smothered the female voice, isolating and restricting the movements of women on islands, in fortresses, as foils and handmaidens, on the fringes.

Though for more than five decades feminist scholars have reinterpreted agency and ethos through a viewpoint that countered a cultural taxonomy that women did not control but inherited, a class of women remains underexplored: the representations of women in ancient narratives. As a way of reconsidering the roles of women in texts where they had no direct path to shaping their own narratives, we must ask ourselves how and if we can determine the ethos and agency of a group who left few texts behind them written in their own hand. Specifically, we must ask whether we can determine feminine agency and ethos through a text written by a masculine hand and what we can understand about women's agency in the stories of a culture long dead to us, a culture where the preponderance of texts were written by men in celebration of masculine values. Iraqi scholar Zainab Bahrani observes that "Women are often absent in historical records, not just those from antiquity. But the issue is clearly not simply one in which we have men's records and nothing about women. It is the way in which women, woman, or femininity are deployed in texts that becomes an important research question" (37). As we have seen feminist scholars recover the work of Enheduanna and reassess the influence of Aspasia, this study is a foray into both reconsidering the way that we read texts and reclaiming the ethos and agency of females through a feminist ecological lens in the world's first known epic, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Ecological Feminism: Resisting and Reframing Men's Talk

In their 2016 text *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, Kathleen Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones created a framework that outlined an "alternative theory of ethos at the confluence of ecological thinking and feminist rhetorical theory… that both describes women's public ethos construction relative to time, contexts, and different relationships and attempts to collect, name, and observe patterns" (2). The study outlined here uses their framework to uncover new and unexpected sites of rhetoric: principally the epic, a genre traditionally dominated by masculine rhetoric. The methodology suggested in this study represents a significant contribution to the field of feminist narrative rhetoric in that it applies a feminist ecological approach to the negative space in ancient epics, opening the door to (un)(re)covering the ethos of female characters in places where they have not yet been recovered. Mirroring Cheryl Glenn's feminist rhetorical theory which questions previous rhetorical assumptions in "The History of Rhetoric" ("*Whose* history? *Whose* rhetoric? *Which* rhetoric?" [*Rhetoric Retold* 5]), we should similarly be asking of

texts where females are merely represented: "*Where* is ethos in the silent/invisible class?" "*What* is ethos in the silent/invisible class?" "How is women's ethos being socially constructed?" and, more narrowly, "Out of the masculine lens that that speaks for women, how are women resisting the narrative?" Critics may say the answers to these questions are unknowable, and they may be correct. However, I would resist that argument by pointing to Gilgamesh himself, who is considered to have been a historical figure and who himself represents the values of his culture; if the character of Gilgamesh represents the values of his culture, shouldn't all the characters be similarly representative of their culture? Furthermore, echoing Glenn and other feminist scholars, I also resist the flawed argument that women had no ethos and no representative voice because they left little documentary evidence behind, and I offer a counterargument that women's ethos can be reconstructed through the rhetoric of negative space in both the textual representation of community values and in the representations of their relationships with each other and with men.

In 2006, Lorraine Code proposed a theoretical framework of ecological thinking that considered the "interconnectedness" of matter; it looks for "horizontal patterns and interconnections of diverse, multiply complex epistemological terrains" (279). Ecological thinking and ecological feminism internalize and politicize the ecology movement, positioning matter and actions in an alliance that work together in a dynamic and interrelated relationship web. Ryan, Myers, and Jones reframe Code's theoretical framework, contending that "women can seek agency individually and collectively to *interrupt* dominant representations of women's ethos, to *advocate* for themselves and others in transformative ways, and to *relate to others*, both powerful and powerless" (3-4). To these three terms, I add a fourth term: *resist/resisting*. If feminist texts or actors perform agency by interrupting the dominant narrative, serving in roles of advocacy, and/or establishing patterns of relationship-building, then they also do so by resisting or breaching the prevailing norms of civil society, particularly when society is engaged in (re)(op)pressive practices. "Resistance" implies self-knowledge, self-advocacy, critical thinking, and redirecting an action, however obvious or subtle those behaviors or language practices may be. "Resistance" directly contradicts the assumption of powerlessness or invisibility. These four concepts (interruption/interrupting; advocacy/advocating; relation/relating; resist/resisting) are descriptive categories of the kinds of ethos the female characters in *Gilgamesh* display and the rhetorical strategies they employ, often in resistance to more static constructions of ethos that have historically privileged public expression.

The subject of this article takes on one previously unexplored site as the location for feminist ethos: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a nearly 4800-year-old text whose female characters initially appear to exist as foils reflecting the dominant traits and exploits of the primary male characters and who represent a broad assumption about the lack of agency of women in the ancient world, a lacking that is in part tied to their

representation.[23] Cheryl Glenn's term "mapping the silences" (*Rhetoric Retold* 1) – or creating a rhetorical cartography to chart the ways women speak, remain silenced or are silenced – gives us a blueprint to examine the ways in which negative space suggests presence through absence. In this study, I propose a novel rhetorical methodology for examining a text's negative space for content. Ancient narrative texts can be approached as rhetorical archaeological sites of paleo-feminist rhetoric, opportunities to sift through the layers of stone and soil to unearth a clearer understanding of how women lived, what mattered to them, and how they related to each other. Creating a new "rhetoric of negative space" – which examines the rhetorical space around and between the central male characters – reconsiders how we recover and reconsider feminism in texts written by men. From analyzing how women are represented in narrative epic, we can infer the sources and expressions of their agency and continue the work of understanding the lives of women living in cultures long dead.

In *Male and Female* in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tzvi Abusch summarizes the full scope of the representations of women in *Gilgamesh*; yet, of all the gendered cast of characters he references, only "a prostitute" and Ishtar make the list of female characters mentioned, which reinforces the placement of females in Gilgamesh in the negative space around, between, and behind the male characters ("Introduction" 3-4, 7). Bahrani writes about the "hidden woman" in Mesopotamia, or the "woman as trace," arguing that women are largely suppressed in the historical record (35, 36). While suppression and silencing are part of the broad historical narrative of women ("It is for men to talk"), feminist narratives may be hiding in plain sight. In *Gilgamesh*, time and again the female characters are the primary catalysts of action; males may be the primary actors, but females are the agents who set the action in motion. Women are never far from the central action in *Gilgamesh*: they are the locus; they are what men keep returning to until the epic itself ceases with the image of *Gilgamesh* looking over the progeny he is able to create: the walls of the city.

I argue that we can in fact push back on the texts written by men to uncover the important liminal space occupied by women, a space that Nedra Reynolds calls the "betweens." I argue that we can understand the ethos and agency of women in ancient Sumeria through epic texts that were written by men and for a culture that valorized masculine values, and that, while women's lives may have existed on the boundaries and in the "betweens" in ancient texts, applying a framework of feminist ecological criticism can reposi-

2 For example, though *The Odyssey* post-dates *Gilgamesh* by more than a millennium, it reflects a shared feminine standard typically associated with "good/bad" women or "good/bad" wives in ancient texts. In *The Odyssey*, "good wife" Penelope's loyalty and silence are virtues. In Emily Wilson's translation of *The Odyssey*, Telemachus reflects the gendered power imbalance when he silences his mother, telling her:

> Go in and do your work.
> Stick to the loom and distaff. Tell your slaves
> to do their chores as well. It is for men
> to talk, especially me. I am the master. (I 356-359)

This is an important line, because Penelope is silenced: she doesn't resist; she simply returns to her room and weeps until the listening and all-seeing Athena intercedes to give Penelope's "eyes sweet sleep" (I 364). Penelope's passivity is a void into which slips the dominant Athena, who (like Ishtar in *Gilgamesh*) embodies both feminine compassion and masculinized agency.

3 For a comparison of the silencing of Mesopotamian women, see the edict on p. 11, where outspoken women are threatened with having their teeth smashed in by bricks.

tion the way we view their agency. Ultimately, I argue that this framework represents a meaningful shift in the way we can study ancient texts. Looking for evidence of women who are supporting a feminist agenda through advocating on behalf of themselves or others and exploring women's power within established social structures provides a valuable heuristic for examining other ancient texts. This model of rhetorical criticism can be widely applied to any society, not necessarily ancient, where men or cultural precedent control the records and the means of written expression. This way of reading texts identifies unexplored terrains for feminist rhetorical applications and further broadens the field of women's studies.

Ethos Construction: Character and Community

Our legacy understanding of ethos derives from Aristotle's description of "excellence of thought" and "excellence of character" (II03a 15). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that "none of the virtues of character come to us by nature" (II03a 19): instead, people acquire character through habituation, or practice. The etymology of the Greek word *ēthos* describes "custom," "habit," and "a habitual gathering place" (Halloran 60; Ryan, Myers, and Jones 6); its essential meaning supports the image of people congregating around core ideals and values that are both reflected in and reflective of personal, individual character, the social character of the wider community, or a broad historical period (Halloran 62). It also more pointedly defines ethos as embodied in intrinsic and extrinsic intelligence, authority, character, credibility, trustworthiness, and virtuosity. Ethos as it abides in character emerges through enacting goodness of character. We become good by being good, through practice: "For what one has to learn to do, we learn by doing… for legislators make citizens good by habituating them" (Aristotle II03b 1). In an Aristotelian world, those exhibiting strong ethos have significant agency and influence. As Aristotle's most persuasive appeal, ethos overtakes logos to convince an audience that a person within a text – not necessarily exclusively the creator of a text – can be trusted to give advice, to behave correctly, to reflect community values.

In many respects, *Gilgamesh* is about the evolution of the principal male character through his encounters with female characters. We see over and again Gilgamesh's flaws, the unfolding of his character, the communal standard-bearing and social contract that "good" kingship must eventually both project and uphold in order to create the strong walls of an ethically upright city. Time after time, the females in *Gilgamesh* are enacting character by doing the right thing: they give the right counsel, they appeal to the right goddess, they shepherd those who need protection. In his evolution from tyrant king to just king, Gilgamesh learns from women.[4] He becomes the legendary king of strong ethos and good character portrayed in the opening lines of the epic ("He who saw the Deep, the country's foundation/[who knew the proper ways,] was wise in all matters!" [I1-2]) through his constant interactions with the female characters, who look after his safety, who give him a protective companion, who counsel him on the right way to live his life, who look after his interests while he sleeps. Gilgamesh only enacts "right behavior" through learned behavior. Michael Halloran writes: "If *ethos* is manifested in rhetorical action, and if *ethos* is formed by choosing ethical modes of action, it follows that educating a person in rhetorical action, schooling him in proper rhetorical habits is a means

4 He also learns from his friendship with Enkidu, who is himself feminized (see Notes 27 and 29).

of forming his character" (61). This is a critical detail because in many ways the *Gilgamesh* text is about the moral and civic education of Gilgamesh: he is transformed from uncouth, uncontrolled, animal-king to something considerably more human. This education is ushered in through his encounters with females who model either the way he should be behaving or by tempering him in some way—teaching him, softening him, showing him how to be more human.[5]

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca distinguish between classifying heroes based on "characteristic acts" vs. "essence," which "characterize and explain the behavior of certain classes of beings" (327). Translating the ethos of act-essence to *Gilgamesh*, the essence of "king" is incompatible with the act of "rapist" in Mesopotamian culture; how do we know this? In addition to the law codes, the text tells us that essence and act are at odds by the appeal of the raped to the powerful Ishtar and by her subsequent intercession. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca write that "deficiency… [is] correlative to the notion of essence" (328); the concept of deficiency directly correlates to Aristotle's description of ethos in *Nicomachean Ethics*: "so for these reasons excess and deficiency belong to vice, and the middle state to virtue; 'noble in one simple way, bad in all sorts of ways'" (1106b 34-35). The women in *Gilgamesh* exhibit the middle state of virtue, or the absence of cultural and social deficiency, and therefore serve as models of cultural and social behavior. In *Gilgamesh*, we can see how females occupy a shared space with the primary males by determining the "relationship between act and person, and individual and group, [that] recur whenever events, objects, beings, or institutions are grouped in a comprehensive way" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 327). These groupings are repeatedly reinforced throughout *Gilgamesh*; the patterns that women enact attest to their communal ethos. For example, the brides exhibit communal ethos when they police themselves because the social structure isn't protecting them. In other evidence of communal or group ethos: Ninsun, Shiduri, and Shamhat are physically embodied: they pray, they seek shelter and think, and they enact the arts of rhetoric to persuade men. The brides, Uta-napishti's wife, and the Scorpion-man's wife collectively contradict the masculine narrative and thus resist it. Ishtar, Ninsun, and Shiduri are women who do not act on the relative to the desires or direction of men: they are not the agents or enactors of masculine decision-making; rather, they decide. Ninsun, Shiduri, and Shamhat exhibit agency through interpretation and listening, but above all through language. The repeated pattern of group agency suggests that social value is manifested in the acts of the females in *Gilgamesh* (see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 327).

Ethos creation in the characterization of females in Gilgamesh is also manifested in the Aristotelian ideal of moderation. Aristotle writes that virtue lies in "the middle state" between the extremes of vice (II06b 35); he defines good character as "honesty and unselfishness… courage, temperance, and justice" (Taylor, Translation Preliminary Note). These ideals also apply to the much older *Gilgamesh* text, which both excoriates the lack of these qualities in male characters and celebrates these same qualities in the female characters, who repeatedly represent an appreciation of, desire for, and exhibition of temperance. Both primary male characters enact the opposite of "good character": Gilgamesh who plunders, who rampages, who is out of control, who flouts the laws of Uruk; and Enkidu, who – in the process of being "tamed" by

5 Recall that Gilgamesh is "two-thirds of him god but one third human" (I 47-48).

Shamhat:

… drank the ale, a full seven jugfuls.

His mood became free, he started to sing,

His heart grew merry, his face lit up. (P 101-105)

Enkidu further embodies the vice of immoderate "excess and deficiency" described by Aristotle in the act in throwing the Bull of Heaven's shoulder at Ishtar, his superior, "the ablest] of gods" (VII 159). In other words, the text shows us immoderation and intemperance in the two primary male characters; these traits are counterbalanced by the ideal of moderate and temperate female behavior.

The Greek ideals of moderation and self-awareness ("nothing in excess" and "know thyself")[6] describe Gilgamesh's flaws; like Oedipus, Gilgamesh—who sees himself as a god—must confront the full range of human experience, and it is only through the loss of someone he loved and the confrontation with his own mortality that he does become fully human. Unlike Oedipus, Gilgamesh is led to this understanding through the female characters of the text: through their counsel, their virtue, their enactment of ethos. The female characters embody the virtues that Gilgamesh himself lacks and that the text itself states are valued by this society. He becomes human not through muscular, godly feats of slaying Humbaba or the Bull of Heaven, but through loving Enkidu and grieving his death. Arguably, Gilgamesh comes to embody ecological feminism himself, at least in part: his grief and his understanding of his legacy interrupt the masculine ideal; and he relates to Enkidu with strong emotion, enough that grief wastes his body and transforms him into an animal. In short, while this is a text about the hero Gilgamesh and his epic adventures, his ethical and moral evolution is inextricable from his encounters with the succession of females in the text; moreover, his own eventual ethos and legacy as a great king is built upon the foundational ethos of the female characters, which is representative of communal values.[7]

Contextualizing Mesopotamian Womanhood: Enheduanna and Ancient Women

Women comprised three classes in ancient Mesopotamia: the elite (wealthy, often married, sometimes priestesses, sometimes literate), semi-free, and slaves. Regardless of their social class, any woman could be sold into slavery by a male member of the family for any reason, such as a consequence of divorce or to settle a debt, and likewise men could divorce their wives for any reason, though divorce initiated by women was far less common and initiating it could be punishable by death (Halton and Svärd 18). Outside of elite social structures—royal or powerful households[8]—history gives us little information about Mesopotamian wom-

6 Given Aristotle's life (4th c. BC) post-dated the creation of *Gilgamesh* by more than two millennia, the virtues of ethos he lauded are justifiably in question. However, Gilgamesh was demonstrably violating the existing laws codes by taking the virginity of the brides in his community; the evidence is not only in legal codes but in the text itself: the brides appealed to a higher authority for protection.

7 Halloran writes that "*ethos* emphasizes the conventional rather than the idiosyncratic, the public rather than the private" (60).

8 The British Museum, University of Pennsylvania Museum, and Iraq Museum house artifacts, such as a lyre, funerary jewelry, and cylinder seals, excavated from the death pit of the Akkadian Puabi (ca. 2600-2450 BC); the opulence of these artifacts

en's lives beyond records of slave trades, legal codes, letters, statues and engraved tablets, terra cotta reliefs, inscriptions on tombs and statues, and some wisdom literature, but the scope of information is relatively miniscule compared to the historical record on men's lives. This documentary deficit has resulted in the broad consensus that Mesopotamian women experienced restricted agency (Halton and Svärd 17).[9]

The 2022-2023 exhibition at the Morgan Library titled *She Who Wrote: Enheduanna and Women of Mesopotamia*, along with the Morgan Library curator Sidney Babcock and Erhan Tamur's edited collection of essays in *She Who Wrote* and Sophus Helle's translation of Enheduanna's writings, have revivified both the scholarship and the general understanding of the complex lives of ancient Sumerian and Akkadian women, far extending their scope of influence. Babcock and Tamur study the representations of ancient Near Eastern women in art and artifacts, among them the most well-known historical female figure of the 23rd century BC, Enheduanna, the poet, priestess, and powerful daughter of the Akkadian ruler Sargon, the first named author in history, and perhaps the first feminist. Enheduanna herself dates to ca. 2300 BC. As the chief priestess of the central cultic temple, she would have wielded considerable administrative power in Ur. To contextualize the era out of which Enheduanna emerged and to understand the remarkable the scope of her agency, consider this Old Babylonia law that dates to 2350 BC – roughly 50 years prior to Enheduanna's life span:

> If a woman to a male has spoken… [bad] words (?) which exceed (her rank?),
>
> Onto the teeth of that woman a baked brick shall be smashed,
>
> And that brick will be hung at the main gate. (Foreman 26)

This broad public threat to women functions as a foil to showcase Enheduana's extreme power and self-awareness of her own high-ranking authority. "I am Enheduanna," she states on cuneiform tablets, artifacts themselves that are "object[s] of literacy, authority, and cultural memory" (Sen 80). Attaching her name with her text is both liberatory and representative of Enheduanna's awareness of her rank, particularly given "The Exaltation of Inana" is written largely to expose and respond to an injustice done to her by her father's male successor. Her use of the first-person pronoun is of essential importance in this text. Midway through "The Exaltation of Inana," Enheduanna begins using the first person "I" and repeats the pronoun 26 times throughout the remainder of the poem, reinforcing both an ontological positioning and the "theme of power [that] recurs time and time again" in her texts (Helle 143). She writes:

> I am Enheduana, I
>
> Am the high priestess.

along with the presence of attendants and the visual depictions on the cylinder seal suggest she may have been a queen but certainly attest to her status as a woman of considerable power

9 This concept is challenged by Sophus Helle and Kutay Sen. Helle ascribes the increased restrictions on women's agency to have occurred in the latter half of the 2nd millennium BC, which eclipsed women's agency (160). Sen ascribes the isolation of women to the "long-standing disregard" of scholarship that is "dominant in the discipline," reflecting a bias that "equat[es]… women with domestic space" (77).

I carried the basket

Of offering, I sang

The hymns of joy. (Helle, "The Exaltation of Inana" li. 68-69)

"I am" and "This Am I" are ethos-creating, generative, authoritative, self-creating phrases: out of the identity-less vacuum emerges the self-naming Self. Attaching "I" with "Enhenduanna" reflects a joint epistemological self-awareness and acknowledgement of her ontological position, an act that suggests ownership, ethos, and agency.

Gilgamesh began as a 3rd century BC Sumerian oral tale. The Early Dynastic period that produced the oldest cuneiform fragments of *Gilgamesh* is representative of a Bronze Age civilization transitioning into a period of urbanization and city-state formation. However, the cuneiform tablets that comprise the full range *Gilgamesh* texts are drawn from an amalgam of sources and reflect multiple eras and civilizations spanning two thousand years of Bronze Age history (see Note 1). In contrast to previous scholarship equating later Akkadian women with and relegating them to mere "domestic space," women in earlier Sumerian communities occupied a prominent administrative position (Sen 77) as the backbone of the textile economy and in the production of bread and beer.[10] Brigitte Lion, whose research studies the roles of women in the Ancient Near East, argues that women's lives were nuanced and suggests that evidence exists women had opportunities for influence, for example in managing their estates in their husbands' absence (l06). Yet even though larger numbers of women than previously thought may have known how to read and write (Meador 223), the preponderance of texts, documents, letters, laws, inscriptions, and records were written by men, for men, and about issues that concerned men (Lion 95, 106). Furthermore, the comparatively little documentary evidence we do have of women's lives was principally recorded by male scribes. While we have tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets that give us information about Mesopotamian society, the historical lives of women have remained largely opaque, which is among the reasons why the Enheduanna texts are so valuable: the subject matter is about a historical and powerful woman written in praise of another powerful female.

Contextualizing the Female Characters in Gilgamesh

The three groupings of women in *Gilgamesh* presented here reveal a significantly greater agency about women that was previously based on legal codes and cultural and historical mores present in the later Mesopotamia. Alhena Gadotti argues that ancient Sumerian literature upon which the oldest *Gilgamesh* tales are based "had everything to do with real women" (195). And yet, as a hybrid text (oral and later cuneiform) whose narrative mirrors values that shifted across centuries and regions, the Gilgamesh text shows us the ways in which women's lives were becoming increasingly restricted and female agency deteriorated (Gadotti 195). Helle writes that women in the 3rd and early 2nd millennium had more power than women in subsequent centuries, but "around the middle of the second millennium BC, i.e., roughly the period when Sîn-lēqi-unninni was collecting and revising *Gilgamesh*, a cultural shift downward took place that we have

10 Enheduanna was an Akkadian woman writing in Sumerian (Babcock and Tamur 19).

yet to fully understand" where power was stripped from priestesses and female goddesses were reassigned/reclassified as male (160); and women in later centuries were "considered to be the mediums of evil power, a dangerous, uncontrolled female power" (Westenholz 253). By the first millennium BC, Mesopotamian women had been largely excluded from the scribal class, and femininity – or the woman's experience – was exclusively being defined by and filtered through the male scribal elite (Matuszak, "Assessing Misogyny" 269).

If "domestic work [is] regarded as defining… womanhood" (Matuszak, "She Is Not Fit" 242), then none of the women represented in *Gilgamesh* reflects the typical – and perhaps inconsequential – woman, since none are portrayed as engaged in domestic work or associated with homes. The exception in this text is Shiduri, who is the only female embodied in her house and the only female who has an occupation ("ale-wife"). Arguably, the female characters in *Gilgamesh* function as ideals that counter the general assumption about the restricted roles women occupied in the ancient world. Consider the positions many of the women in *Gilgamesh* possess: independent woman surrounded by "vats of gold," priestesses, temple prostitute (who are governed by gods, not by men), revered and influential mother, young brides who collectively band together to stop a civic wrong: women who display prized masculine traits of action, reason, agency, and wisdom. The characterizations of females in *Gilgamesh* shine a light on the limited roles that women were thought to have played in this ancient society; a feminist reconsideration of their characters gives them an agency that traditional scholarship hasn't previously afforded them.

In short, when we read *Gilgamesh*, we are looking at values that span the interests of a millennium and a half, covering vastly different civilizations. While far from homogenous, the text of *Gilgamesh* nevertheless telegraphs information about two cultures that valued masculine traits: physicality, territorial dominance/domination, masculinity, fertility, city-building, and conquest, typical characteristics of the epic genre. Rivkah Harris writes that "what we find in the epic are essentially male attitudes toward women, human and divine" where "women are supporting and subsidiary characters in the cast" ("Images of Women" 220).[11]Though we do not see the women in the *Gilgamesh* tablets interacting with each other, we do see recurring examples of woman-to-woman communication and references: the brides' decision to band together in solidarity against Gilgamesh; the brides' group appeal to Ishtar; Shamhat's attestations to the wisdom and ability of Ninsun. And, while readers might not see the direct interaction between women, we do see the regard that women had for each other and the awareness of the specific types of power women held and offered to each other.

The locational niches women occupy in the *Gilgamesh* epic are geographical, emotional, and cultural. Female characters are situated in temples, taverns, and marriages, though ultimately they exist on the boundaries of a story about the relationship between two men. *Gilgamesh* depicts male-male relationships and male-female relationships, but no direct female-female interactions; men act and women often react,

11 Louise Westling associates womanhood in *Gilgamesh* with the earth, the landscape itself: the "virgin wilderness," the "feminine mysteries" (506); she explores the tension between the masculine hand as it moves across the feminine landscape, dominating both women's bodies and the physical geography itself.

though their reaction often interrupts patterns of dominance. As stated above, women are often the catalysts for action; they bridge scenes and function as threshold keepers between one epic act and the next. Women's lives and agency are also background foils: they support, listen to, interpret for, mentor, and legitimize men. Men keep returning to women in this story for advice, for sex, to make bread, for comfort, to express what they are feeling, and we can gather much information about the agency of Mesopotamian women based on how they are represented and by how often they move to the center of the story as agents who propel the action forward. The categories of women in the text—virgins, prostitutes, mothers, goddesses, women independent of men, wives—all establish ethos through interrupting the narrative, relating to the emotional condition of the male characters, and/or advocating for themselves and others in unexpected ways.

Through the lens of ecological feminism, we evaluate the ethos of the women in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* according to the following grouping of sub-themes: through the category of the violated brides, we see women organizing to interrupt the prevailing narrative and advocate for their collective welfare; through the goddess Ishtar and the wealthy working woman Shiduri, we see women exercising traditionally masculine power; and through the characters of Shamhat the Harlot, Ninsun the Mother, and the unnamed wives – the Scorpion-man's wife and Uta-napishti's wife – we see women interrupting the narrative by transforming potentially subordinate positions into positions of power.

In all of these cases, not only do we see women resisting, we witness them resisting successfully.

Women's Collective Power of Resistance

Ethos of the Violated Brides: Interrupting/Advocating/Resisting

The female characters in *Gilgamesh* are in many ways defined by their archetypes: prostitute, mother, wife, goddess. One character grouping, which I call the "violated brides," does not fall into this category. After the epic opens praising the lifetime achievements of an older Gilgamesh whose statesmanship is evident in the strength of his city ("He built the rampart of Uruk-the-Sheepfold,/of holy Eanna, the sacred storehouse./ See its walls…/view its parapet that none could copy…/that no later king could ever copy!" [*Gilgamesh* I 11-17])[12], the narrative begins with the equivalent of an extended flashback. *Gilgamesh* starts by establishing Gilgamesh's spiritual and physical dominance and by establishing a binary relationship between those who have power and those who do not. Gilgamesh is described first as "two-thirds of him god but one-third human" (I 48), and then by his physicality (I 51-62). He is a giant: nearly three times as tall as any man (eleven cubits, or over sixteen feet high), broad chested (four cubits, or roughly six feet wide), long limbed, and large footed (I 52-54): a Colossus. In contrast to the feats of the older Gilgamesh described in the opening lines of Tablet I ("legacy-building Gilgamesh"), the young Gilgamesh of forty lines later is a tyrant by virtue of the authority he usurps and by the sheer physicality that reinforces his tyranny. Young Gilgamesh is a ruler who pillages

12 Hereafter, the author supplies only the tablet number and the lines to the Gilgamesh text. Variations: the George text substitutes lines from the Pennsylvania Tablets (P) and others if they clarified the passage more than the Standard Babylonian.

his city as a warrior-class sexual predator, dominating the most vulnerable in society and violating the legal codes and social rules of both the Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations by claiming the right of the first night. He "harries without warrant" the young sons and daughters of Uruk: "By day and by night his tyranny grows harsher" (I 68-69); he "lets no girl go free to her bridegroom" (I 76), and he "will couple with the wife-to-be,/he first of all, the bridegroom after" (I P 159-160). Gilgamesh is motivated by exerting non-consensual, dominant masculinity over the brides and bridegrooms, and by extension over all the people of Uruk. Like other powerful and immoderate gods and men – Zeus, Poseidon, Oedipus – Gilgamesh lacks moderation and self-regulation. Among other flaws, his is a crime of excess (Gabriel 414; Sonik, "Gilgamesh and Emotional Excess" 393), and though Gilgamesh is two-thirds god, the one-third of him that is human is governed by the laws that also govern other humans, as the Scorpion-man's wife later reminds us (IX 51).

Gilgamesh's violation of the social contract is the first major flaw the text gives about the epic hero. After telling the audience Gilgamesh was a great and wise ruler at the end of his reign, the story begins with his malfeasance and disordered rule. As he opens the epic dominating both the narrative and the young brides of Uruk, Gilgamesh is also violating the principles of "right rule." Rape in Mesopotamia was considered foremost a crime against the father and husband, and the laws of Hammurabi[13] were explicit in the description of willingness, force, and sexual relations, and they were equally explicit in the penalties assessed for breaking the law. Middle Assyrian laws state that if a man forcibly rapes a married woman, he could be killed (Ross 158). And even though the laws were skewed in favor of masculinity and though the character of Gilgamesh is not held accountable in the opening lines of the epic (and in fact appears to be above the rule of law), the text tells us that his behavior was considered wrong by virtue of the urgency of the brides' collective appeal to the protective goddess Ishtar and by her immediate intercession. In short, the violated brides' appeal to Ishtar constituted a political move: an appeal to a higher authority to uphold laws that would protect them. Gilgamesh's acts breach the laws of a society deeply invested in creating legal standards for governance across multiple centuries of *Gilgamesh* retellings, from the 24th century BC Akkadian ruler Sargon, known as "the paragon of kingship" (Helle xvii) to the Babylonian Hammurabi in the 18th century BC, famous for his codex of laws micromanaging social behavior and economics (Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 214). Furthermore, a young woman's loss of virginity before marriage represented a threat to a family's economic interests, as they had a financial stake in the marital union; under Akkadian law, a bridegroom could reject a bride who wasn't a virgin. The loss ultimately jeopardized her social standing in the community (Lerner 247, 253). The audience hearing this epic would have understood the full implications of Gilgamesh's acts violating the marriage contract.

We see the brides' display of ethos in the way they resolve their "problem." Resolution in *Gilgamesh* doesn't come from the family patriarchs or the bridegrooms: the brides themselves are the ones who band together and seek help from another female, not from the men who are culturally responsible for their well-being: it was "The warrior's daughter (Ishtar), the young man's bride, to their complaint the goddess Ishtar paid heed" (I 78). The solution to Gilgamesh's sexual assault and abuse of power was not a rebuke or

13 The Code of Hammurabi dates to the 18th c. BC, corresponding roughly with the Standard Babylonian tablets.

punishment of Gilgamesh himself; rather, the brides' appeal set in motion a sequence of events that ultimately leads to the creation of Enkidu as a diversion for Gilgamesh.

This section of the text sheds light on key *a priori* proof that ethos dwells in the negative space. First, Gilgamesh's rapes violate the social structure and the laws of the period. Second, the average age of marriage for girls in Mesopotamia was fifteen. Third, unmarried women were considered politically and economically disempowered: property of their fathers and brothers. Because of these factors, the violated brides' acts of self-advocacy through resisting and interrupting an abuse being enacted by a political and gendered "superior" support agency according to Ryan, Myers, and Jones's framework as they collectively halt what Gilgamesh is taking from them. They resist by successfully interrupting the prevailing power structure and by using it as a weapon of restraint against Gilgamesh. A group who was in the intermediary stage between childhood and adulthood – a powerless group by virtue of their social position, age, and gender – performed a public act of courage by harnessing the power of the group, appealing to the right female in power, and effecting change. Ultimately the violated brides resist the status quo as a collective, and they are successful, because "resistance… is at the core of agency" (Hedge 310). Halloran's statement that "I choose my character, not my personality" (61) is particularly reflective of the brides whose agency is a choice they enact in an act of self-preservation and preservation of the social contract. It is also reflective of the flaws of Gilgamesh's innate id.

The brides' story is positioned as the text's first conflict, and its resolution results in the successful thwarting of a political tyrant by a group of girls, which is an unusual opening plot twist for an epic. Ryan, Myers, and Jones write that "women can seek agency individually or collectively"; they can "advocate for themselves and others in transformative ways" (3). The brides' act cements women's communal ethos early in the narrative, establishing a feminist framework for female characters to exercise their authority in self-advocacy and self-protection if no one else will. This act of communal agency is reflective of ways in which women have historically needed to "police themselves" (Elizabeth Wilson 151) in societies where patriarchal laws or customs did not advocate on their behalf. Ryan, Myers, and Jones define "interruption" as the "breaks, divides, hitches, disruptions, disturbances, ruptures, or breeches –counters to traditional ways of behaving or conversing—to change the status quo of dominant values and practices" (23). When the brides "interrupt" a tyrannus rex by appealing to a higher religious authority, they engage in resistance to the highest masculine legal and civil power. If the king will not uphold the social contract in a "just" society, then the brides will advocate for themselves. That in itself is an astonishing act of power – and an astonishing display of communal ethos.

Women Exercising Masculine Power

Ethos of Ishtar: Interrupting with Masculinized Power

Ishtar is the revered and often-invoked cult goddess of Uruk, which was the largest and most developed city in Sumer, said to have had a population of anywhere between 20,000-50,000 residents at its peak, a

megalopolis by Bronze Age standards (Halton and Svärd 6). One of the immediate ways we can understand the prominent position of Ishtar in Sumerian society is through the height and location of her temple: the two tallest structures in the center of Uruk are the temples of Ishtar and Anu, Ishtar's father. Their prominence as urban monuments are rhetorical signifiers: the gods, and these two in particular, are the combined powerful focal point of civic life around which human life revolves. "An old axiom in urban sociology," writes Manuel Castells, "considers space a reflection of society" (18). In her text *A City of Marble*, Kathleen Lamp supports the rhetoric of any urban space, categorizing the architecture and "physical appearance" of Augustan Rome under "rhetoric and persuasion" (2). The rhetorical text of urban architecture signposts social and civic values. In the case of the historical city around which *Gilgamesh* is centered, the most commanding feature is the temples, squarely positioning religion as a civic source of power.

Tablet VI in the Standard Version is primarily about taking down the most powerful goddess in Uruk: reprimands and physical threats come from Gilgamesh, then from Ishtar's father, and finally from Enkidu.[14] Ishtar's principal embodied scene in Gilgamesh is an interaction with Gilgamesh and Enkidu after they have returned to Uruk having slain the monster Humbaba. After Gilgamesh bathes and puts on clean clothes, "Lady Ishtar looked with longing" at the "beautiful Gilgamesh" and she makes a play for him (VI 6); she proposes marriage, offering him power and possessions beyond his wildest dreams. Ishtar says: "Come, Gilgamesh, be you my bridegroom!/Grant me your fruits, O grant me!" (VI 7-8). In fifteen lines of verse, she tells him if they marry she will give him a house, a chariot, power and respect, and her love, and he spends the next 55 lines rebuking her, listing a catalogue of her past lovers and the terrible ways she treated them. He cruelly says, "[*Why*] would I want to take you in marriage?/[*You, a frost*] that congeals no ice,/…a palace that massacres warriors/…a waterskin that [*cuts the hands*] of its bearer" (VI 32-37). Gilgamesh then mocks her sexual experience in the Mesopotamian version of slut shaming, telling her:

> You loved Ishallanu, your father's gardener,
>
> who used to bring you dates in a basket,
>
> daily making your table gleam.
>
> You eyed him up and went to meet him:
>
> "O my Inshallanu, let us taste your vigour:
>
> put out your 'hand' and stroke my quim!" (VI 64-69)

Moreover, when an enraged and weeping Ishtar approaches her parents and asks her father for help in punishing Gilgamesh for insulting her, Anu says, "Well, was it not you who provoked King Gilgamesh/so he told a tale of foulest slander,/slander about you and insults too?" (VI 89-91), again in the Mesopotamian equivalent of "what were you wearing the night you were raped?" In a final masculine assault in this scene, after Anu relents and agrees to send down the Bull of Heaven to rebuke Gilgamesh for insulting a powerful

14 Abusch notes that the Gilgamesh/Ishtar conflict in Tablet VI was not in the original Old Babylonian text, but rather was inserted later ("The Development and Meaning" 618). Bahrani writes that in Mesopotamian art, "sexuality [w]as the very essence of the feminine" (44), i.e., sexuality was indistinguishable from "woman." Gilgamesh's and Enkidu's reactions to the goddess likely reflect the influence of a later, more restrictive and misogynistic culture.

goddess, and after Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaughter it, Enkidu throws the Bull's shoulder at Ishtar – i.e., at the patron goddess of the most powerful city in Mesopotamia – threatening her with "had I caught you too, I'd have treated you likewise,/I'd have draped your arms in its guts!" (VI 156-157).[15]

Recall that their response is elicited only by Ishtar's offer of marriage, riches, power, and fame to Gilgamesh, and so this begs the question: why are three male characters rebuking a female divinity and how does this shed light on the ethos of women in Sumerian and Akkadian societies? As a major goddess in Sumerian and Akkadian lore and as the patron goddess of Uruk, Ishtar occupied a more privileged position than either Gilgamesh or Enkidu. In "The Exaltation of Inana," Enheduanna confirms the cultural respect and power that Ishtar evokes in saying "that Inana [Ishtar] is the ruler of the universe" (Helle x). And yet, challenging this position, we learn from Ishtar's father that her offer provoked Gilgamesh and that she was "asking for" degradation, and we witness that she is insulted, denigrated, and physically threatened by someone far inferior to her: Enkidu, whose threat doesn't even merit a response.[16]

The message here is that sexual aggression or even simple forthrightness coming from females is unattractive and threatening; sexual assertiveness is a masculine trait, as we see from Gilgamesh with the brides in the opening lines. Compare the representation of Ishtar's sexuality to that of Shamhat's: procuring Shamhat to tame Enkidu is initially suggested by the hunter's father and corroborated by Gilgamesh himself. The text doesn't show us the means by which Shamhat was solicited in this transaction; she is simply instructed to lay on the ground, show her body to Enkidu, and let nature take its course. In other words, Shamhat doesn't incur wrath because men are in control of her body, and therefore she does not threaten the patriarchal order. Ishtar, however, does – at least when she the one is initiating sex.

Immediately after the scene with Ishtar, Gilgamesh visits the "serving girls of [his palace]" – another class of silent women – and asks them:

> Who is the finest among men?
>
> Who the most glorious of fellows?
>
> Gilgamesh is the finest among men!
>
> [*Gilgamesh the most*] glorious of fellows! (VI 171-175)

In this scene, after rejecting the highly revered goddess of love and war and slaughtering the Bull of Heaven, Gilgamesh shamelessly solicits the admiration of servant girls over whom he presumably has economic and bodily control to reassert his masculine authority, a move that displays immaturity, vanity, and a desire to re-establish dominance. Gilgamesh's response to a woman of power is to turn to a group of women

15 Ironically, one Tablet later, as he lay dying shortly after killing the Bull of Heaven and threatening Ishtar, Enkidu, having forgotten throwing the Bull's shoulder at her, refers to Ishtar as "the ablest of gods" (VII 159).

16 In fact, the textual response to Enkidu's threat is that "Ishtar assembled the courtesans, prostitutes and harlots,/over the Bull of Heaven's shoulder she began rites of mourning" (VI 158-159), which circles back to the sacred and (suggested) respected role of Shamhat as a temple prostitute.

who have no power. He reflects a temperamental disposition that lashes out when a female of higher status reveals her higher status, and he returns to powerless girls to re-establish his position in the cultural order that historically places him at the apex. This scene, easily overlooked, can be situated alongside the text's other grouping of "girls": the violated brides, who themselves are also girls on the cusp of womanhood. Where one group exhibits intrinsic ethos by identifying a problem, interrupting a narrative they couldn't initially control, and ultimately advocating for themselves and thereby changing the narrative, the serving girls' response is either lost or muted, a response that becomes a minor foil to the violated brides' expression of agency.

When Ishtar proposes marriage, she is fully enacting ecological feminism by interrupting the cultural narrative with her own masculinized power. Her proposal implies she has more power than Gilgamesh and that she is fully capable of giving *him* power and goods without ceding any of her power to him. Her proposal implies that she knows it; his response implies that he knows it as well, but resists. Ishtar's proposal also represents the degree to which power embodied in a woman challenges the patriarchal hierarchy, particularly when a female exhibits the kind of sexual powerplays typically expected of men. Ishtar's offer of marriage and goods, along with the display of her own power, threaten Gilgamesh, and he reacts by asserting his "superior" masculinity through shunning, shaming, and belittling her and by asserting his dominance over her. The text further attempts to exert masculine dominance over Ishtar with the rebuke of Ishtar's father and Enkidu's act of throwing the Bull of Heaven's shoulder at her.

What is happening in this scene is two-fold. Even though the text outwardly reprimands Ishtar via what the male characters say and how they respond to her, in the negative space we see how Ishtar's display of agency challenges and threatens the masculine power narrative; we can see the cultural bias in the strong reactions her agency provokes in the male characters; we see the impact of Ishtar exercising of her own ethos in Gilgamesh's vain response as he strives to salvage his ego in front of serving girls who are far beneath his social status. While Gilgamesh's, Anu's, and Enkidu's reactions to Ishtar in these scenes support the prevailing cultural assumption that men have a right to assert their dominance over women, regardless whether they are stronger or weaker than they, their reactions also suggest an undercurrent of fear of a power that women might have over men, and the need to control it.

In other words, the negative space rhetoric shows us that the masculine drive to control female power implies that females had power to control. Looking at feminine ethos through this lens disrupts the narrative of the "subordinate status" (Ryan, Myers, and Jones 4) of women. More importantly, it challenges the absence of ethos in the vast historical space where women were not writing their own lives.

Ethos of Shiduri the Tavernkeeper: Emotional Respite and Relating

The first person Gilgamesh encounters in the Netherworld on his quest for immortality is Shiduri, who occupies a unique position in this text. Shiduri is part of the otherworldly "beyond the mountain"

population of Tablets IX and X; she lives at the edge of the Netherworld; she is the one who instructs him how to finish his quest to find Uta-napishti, the immortal Noah-like figure who survived the Flood and who, along with his wife, guards the secret of immortality. Described as a minor goddess who lives at the edge of the world, Shiduri is given an unusual amount of narrative description: we know where she lives (in an "inn by the sea"), what she does ("tavern-keeper"), what she wears (she is "swathed in hoods" and "veils"), and her general financial status (she has "potstands" and "vats all of gold"). Allocated 28 lines of speech and 37 lines of listening, Shiduri is engaged in an active dialogue with Gilgamesh as she keeps asking him questions to determine the core of his motivation. Functioning as an empathetic relator, Shiduri's central purpose is to bolster Gilgamesh, to listen to him, and to advise him frankly. She initially tells him that he should give up his quest, and, upon realizing this is futile, she advises the correct way for him to keep searching for it.

More than any other female in this text, Shiduri is associated with embodiment and physical place. She is initially defined by what *she is* and what she is *not*. She is introduced in the first line of Tablet X by name, occupation, and location: "Shiduri was a tavern-keeper who lived by the sea-shore" (X 1). Like Shamhat, Shiduri is a working woman. She is neither defined by her relation to a male figure nor her lack thereof. Her name is not also her occupation ("Shamhat"/"harlot" or "Uta-napishti's wife"; Shiduri's name means "she is my rampart").[17] The text refers to her as "Shiduri" once in the first line of Tablet X, and thereafter she is referred to as "the tavern-keeper" eleven times, never again by her name. In other words, she is strongly associated with her occupation and her means to get money, and she is surrounded by the material evidence of her success.[18]

In many ways, Shiduri is a threshold figure: the way-station she occupies is not just a tavern, not just her home, but the gateway that Gilgamesh and anyone else who seeks everlasting life must pass through. The first introduction of Shiduri is likely found in the final lines of Tablet IX. Lines 190-194 of Tablet IX are among the missing, but the female form we understand to be Shiduri, who makes a full appearance in the opening line of Tablet X, first makes her first appearance in Tablet IX in this way:

> As Gilgamesh walked about [*in wonder,*]
>
> she lifted [her head in order] to watch him. (IX 195-196)

This quality of watchful wariness and assessment is carried over into Tablet X "as the tavern-keeper watched him in the distance" (X10). Though Gilgamesh is legendary in Uruk, Shiduri fails to recognize him and instead seeks shelter from a wasted man who has turned wild in his grief. Shiduri is a female character who, like the violated brides, reflects instinctual self-preservation and existence independent of masculine authority. Like Ninsun, she acts completely according to her own agency; she is her own authority. By virtue of the fact that she lives alone, governs herself through an occupation, doesn't answer to a man through

17 Harris suggests that "Siduri" (alt. spelling) may be translated as "young girl" ("Images of Women" 225).

18 In Old Babylonian law books, alewives, also known as "ale-wife" or "bar-wife," had the personal means to make small loans to people (Abusch, "Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial, Part 1" 60; Stol, "Women in Mesopotamia" 137), corroborating the image of material abundance associated with Shiduri's introduction

a marital or filial relationship, and possesses knowledge that Gilgamesh seeks, Shiduri embodies agency arguably more than any other female character in this text. Like Ishtar, Ninsun, and Shamhat, Shiduri offers something to the male characters in *Gilgamesh* that they do not already possess, whether it be social status, wise counsel, or sexual awakening. Ninsun and Shiduri listen, and they offer men conversation assesses and responds.

Most importantly, Shiduri is given embodied movement and brief interior monologue. Unlike any other female in *Gilgamesh*, the text tells us what she thinks, not only what she says or does. Shiduri sees Gilgamesh approaching the tavern looking dishevelled, "fearful [to look at]":

> As the tavern-keeper watched him in the distance,
> talking to herself she spoke a word
> taking counsel in her own mind:
> *For sure this man is a hunter of wild bulls*
> *but where does he come from, making straight for my gate?*
> Thus the tavern-keeper saw him, and barred her gate,
> barred her gate and went up on the roof. (X 10-16)

Like the brides, Ishtar, and Shamhat, Shiduri is represented as active rather than passive. The difference between Shiduri and the brides is that the young women who live in the city take action by appealing to the more powerful Ishtar, whereas Shiduri protects herself by retreating to the roof of her house where he cannot easily get her, and apparently she remains throughout their interaction.[19] Similar to the brides, Shiduri is portrayed as having more agency over her body and decision-making: she sees Gilgamesh approaching and the text tells us she acts to protect herself. The line "taking counsel in her own mind" reflects an agency that continues to build the ethos of female characters in the epic. Bear in mind that Gilgamesh is a created text, and therefore rhetorical decisions were made in its creation and perpetuation. All the female characters might have been two-dimensional, like the serving girls or the sketched out Aruru, who created Enkidu. Instead, we are given an assemblage of female characters who are thinking, resisting, interrupting, watching, assessing: doing all the consequential tasks that engage independent critical thinkers. This fact strongly supports negative space feminine ethos in *Gilgamesh*.

Gilgamesh arrives at Shiduri's doorstep broken, clothed in ragged animal skins, paradoxically more human and more tame than he has been portrayed to this point. His weakened animal state functions as a literary foil to the powerful animal state embodied by Enkidu, who is described in Tablet I by the hunter

19 Partial and entire lines are missing from this section, so the possibility that Shiduri descends from the roof to interact with Gilgamesh exists (such as between X 22 and X 25 after Gilgamesh asks Shiduri why she has barred her gate and retreated to her roof; after those lines, the text resumes with the two of them in conversation). However, the lines in the George text suggest that Shiduri remains on the roof during their conversation, ostensibly in an act of self-preservation. X 18 says that Gilgamesh "lifted his chin, *and turned [towards her]*," indicating that he is looking up at her during the conversation that occurs between X 19–X 91.

soliciting Gilgamesh's assistance in the following way:

There was a man [*came by the water-hole*,]
Mightiest in the land, strength [he possesses,]
[his strength] is as mighty as a rock from the sky. (I 150-152)

By comparison, in his animal state, Gilgamesh is described by Shiduri as:

"cheeks [so hollow,] your face so sunken,
[your mood so wretched,] your visage [so] wasted…
[Why are] your features burnt [by frost and by sunshine,]
[and why do] you wander the wild [in lion's garb]?" (X 40-45)

When Gilgamesh engaged in his predatory animal/sexual nature with the violated brides, he was paradoxically the well-dressed and legendary city builder; when he approached Shiduri – though he was clothed in animal skins – he was the functional opposite of a predatory animal, so weakened and non-threatening that Shiduri asks him to tell her his story. Shiduri's interaction with Gilgamesh from this point forward shows how fully the ethos of women has shifted in the epic. *Gilgamesh* began with the hero taking what he presumed was "his" – separating parents from their children and raping young brides – to now approaching a strange woman's house not with malintent but for counsel and ultimately consolation. George writes that in an earlier Sumerian version, in this scene Shiduri advises Gilgamesh to cast aside his sadness and his quest for immortality:

But you, Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,
Enjoy yourself always by day and by night!
Make merry each day,
Dance and play day and night!
Let your clothes be clean,
Let your head be washed, may you bathe in water!
Gaze on the child who holds your hand,
Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace! (George xxxviii) [20]

In these lines, Shiduri reveals her ethos in the way that she relates to Gilgamesh, by telling the com-

20 On his death bed in Tablet VII, in a speech where Enkidu curses Shamhat for having tamed him, his language indirectly supports the Sumerian/Akkadian values that Shiduri urges Gilgamesh to seek:
[I will] curse you with a mighty curse, …
A home to delight in [you shall not acquire],
never to reside in the [midst] of a family! (VII 104-107)
Shamash the sun god immediately rebukes Enkidu for cursing Shamhat "who fed you bread… and poured you ale… and clothed you" (VII 135-137); Enkidu recants the curse and blesses her (VII 152).

paratively more powerful Gilgamesh that he is essentially wrong in his pursuit of immortality and that he should instead embrace the fullness of life and human experience. It is important to step out of the text at this point and to consider rhetorical effect this language might have had on Mesopotamian audiences hearing this story: they are witnessing a weakened Promethean ruler who is being counselled with sound and sage advice from a single female to simply abandon the epic quest for immortality and to savor the deep pleasures of mortal life; Gilgamesh ultimately discounts the advice, but the story does not reward him for discounting a female's advice; in fact, the opposite happens because the end result of his quest is futility. He had what he sought, and then he accidentally let it slip away. Shiduri's relating ethos represents right thinking that is attached to her independence: like Ninsun and Shamhat, Shiduri relies on her own judgment when dispensing advice – and her language reflects wise counsel. Abusch notes that "It is significant that just as a prostitute, a woman, humanized and acculturated Enkidu at the beginning of this version, so a tavern-keeper, another woman, humanizes and acculturates Gilgamesh at the end. Women here represent the values of life" ("The Development and Meaning" 617).

Most importantly, the text reinforces the ethos of the community through Shiduri herself. It reinforces shared communal values through her counsel to Gilgamesh that his fevered quest for immortality was immoderate by virtue of her advice that he should enjoy his humanity: get a wife, enjoy her; have children, enjoy them. These were communal ethotic values that the females in this text exhibit repeatedly: a steady resistance to immoderation; a steady exhibition of wisdom and sense; a desire to uphold the values of the community; and a keen understanding of what it takes to uphold those values.

Women Transforming Subordinate Positions into Positions of Power[21]

Ethos of Shamhat: Sexual Power and Relating

Not only is Shamhat one of the sexiest women in Mesopotamian literature, she is also the first woman to speak in the text, she is given more lines of speech than any other female character (94 total[22]), and she is the first female figure represented with extended embodied mobility.[23] Shamhat's name is her profession: *samhatu* translated means "temple prostitute." She occupies a respected threshold role as the agent who helps the violated brides in the mysterious unfolding of divine will. As a city-dweller, her initial role is venture into the wild to precipitate the semi-bestial Enkidu's separation from his herd, to "defile" him through seduction (I 199), and thus cause the herd to reject him so that she can bring him back to Uruk to block Gilgamesh's interference with marriage rites (rape); this is accomplished in the epic's plot via a hunter who asks his father for advice on how to stop Enkidu from freeing the animals from his traps. The hunter's father tells him to seek help from Shamhat; once the hunter travels to Uruk, he appeals to Gilgamesh, who

21 This category also relates to the violated brides.

22 In the George edition: I 207-I 212; I 224-I 298; P 54-P 65; P 96-97; P 145-146.

23 Prior to this scene, the text implies embodied mobility for the violated brides ("The warrior's daughter, the young man's bride/to their complain the goddess Ishtar paid heed" [I 77-78]) and greater mobility for Aruru, the goddess who creates humans and who created Enkidu: "The goddess Aruru she washed her hands,/took a pinch of clay, threw it down in the wild./In the wild, she created Enkidu, the hero" (I 101-103).

also tells him to "take with you Shamhat the harlot!" (I 162). Shamhat's body is introduced as a corpus manipulated by men, yet she expresses the feminist ecological ethos of relating to the powerless Enkidu through her civilizing and mentoring role. Though her body is manipulated by decision-making that doesn't consult her, she nevertheless exhibits considerable power over Enkidu and occupies a pivotal role moving the text forward. It is not just her body that drives the plot forward, it is also the agency and rhetorical prowess that she exhibits over her speech.

Shamhat's clearest display of ethos is through the way she relates to Enkidu through her sexuality, which awakens him to his humanity. Once she is in the wild, Shamhat "unfasten[s] the cloth of her loins" and "spread[s] her clothing" on the ground so that she could "treat the man to the work of a woman" (I 192). The sex Shamhat has with Enkidu civilizes him and ushers him into the world of civil human behavior (Bahrani 42; Sonik, "Minor and Marginalized" 787): post-coitus, his herd does in fact reject him, thus sealing his fate that he will leave the wild and enter civilization. After coupling with Shamhat, Enkidu's agency deserts him; originally created to be an equal "match for the storm" of Gilgamesh (I 97), he is now alone, having been rejected by his animal tribe, and he has neither kin nor community, a state that weakens him.[24][25] Further, as Enkidu's agency wanes, Shamhat's increases. Shamhat's seduction becomes a rhetorical maneuver, which is "one of the oldest and most effective forms of nonartistic rhetoric" (Kennedy 121), and one of the most persuasive. After sex that lasts for six days and seven nights, Enkidu "sat at the feet of the harlot, watching the harlot, observing her features" (I 203-204). This subordinate positioning, which contrasts starkly with Gilgamesh's physical and psychological dominance earlier in Tablet I, suggests emotional attachment, and it seals Shamhat's ethos in a position of power.

In this dominant position, Shamhat then mentors Enkidu on what it means to be a civilized human (Bailey 139); his position in this case is receptive listener: "her words he heard, her speech found favor, a woman's counsel struck his heart" (P 68-69). Though she had been instructed simply to treat Enkidu to the "work of a woman," the next lines reveal Shamhat's own volition and the god-like power she now holds over him: "By the hand she took him, like a god [she led him]" (II 36). As she relates to Enkidu in this dominant mentoring capacity, Shamhat begins by educating him on the rules and customs of the "dwelling place" of humanity: the city. Shamhat does this by using language as another rhetorical seduction technique, enticing Enkidu to want to come to Uruk: "Let [the people] see your face… Go, Enkidu, to Uruk-the-Shepfold,/ where… every day [in Uruk] there is a festival" (I 226-228) and where there are "harlots, most comely of figure" (I 230). She persuades with the lure of masculine friendship, flattering him with the tale-within-a-tale narrative that Gilgamesh has had multiple dreams about Enkidu's arrival. In effect, she tames Enkidu on multiple fronts: by creating an emotional attachment first based on sex ("let me take you," she says, asserting dominance), followed by the dual lures of religious connection and establishing a connection with men:

24 The George text reads: "Enkidu possess no [*kith or kin.*]… and [*has*] no brother/Standing there, Enkidu heard [what (Ninsun) said],]/and thinking it over, he sat [down *weeping.*]/His eyes brimmed with [tears]" (II 175-180).

25 Compare Enkidu's reaction and situation with the images of community associated with the female characters in *Gilgamesh.*

Come, I will lead you to Uruk-the-Sheepfold,

to the sacred temple, home of Anu and Ishtar,

where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength. (I 209-211)

Shamhat proposes that Enkidu come with her to Uruk, and he agrees; female leads, and male follows. In this long dialogical passage, Shamhat exhibits her mastery over multiple rhetorical strategies, and she succeeds. In fact, she succeeds at doing what the hunter who initially procured Shamhat could not: removing Enkidu from the wild and leading him to civilization.

We should consider Shamhat's prostitution and the entire world that she opens to him (food, drink, clothing, sex, socialization, urbanization) as the sacred passageway between one's wild animal nature and a higher form of kinship and civilization.[26] Will Kynes suggests that the pre-civilized Enkidu is "at the animal-human boundary" of human existence and connects his uncivilized state with "animal-like qualities" (502). What the character of Shamhat accomplishes in the scene with Enkidu reveals how females interrupt the norms, similar to the appeals of the violated brides. In the Shamhat section, the hunter's father and Gilgamesh decide what Shamhat (or Shamhat's body) will do: they both describe in exactly the same phrasing how Shamhat's seduction will play out: she will disrobe, show herself, and Enkidu will be entrapped. Shamhat is initially voiceless, simply doing what the hunter and Gilgamesh instruct her to do: she should show neither fear nor disgust at coupling with a human who is also an animal ("Do not recoil, but take in his scent" [I 182]). However, what happens next is entirely Shamhat's undertaking: she creates a desire in Enkidu for social inclusion. She feeds him "cultivated" food: beer and bread, i.e. transitioning him from a hunter/gatherer to a farmer/herder by introducing him to the food of settled, communal, and agricultural people. She is not merely seducing him with her body: she is enticing him to leave the woods, to leave an animal life and become a city-dweller, a person who likes prepared food, who desires kinship and family, whose bodily presence is forecast, anticipated, and desired. This we know by the long, persuasive narrative Shamhat tells Enkidu, relating the story of Ninsun's prophetic dream interpretation that anticipates the arrival of Enkidu and shaping out the powerful emotional connection they will share ("Like a wife you loved it, caressed and embraced it:/a mighty comrade will come to you and be his friend's saviour" [I 267-268]).

As she shares Ninsun's prophesy with Enkidu, Shamhat exhibits her full rhetorical agency by delivering the longest uninterrupted text of any female character in *Gilgamesh*: 79 lines. She uses language to entice Enkidu to want to come to Uruk:

You are handsome, Enkidu, you are just like a god!

Why with the beasts do you wander the wild? (I 207-208).

Additionally, after establishing the broad physical allure of Gilgamesh – so "fair in manhood, dignified in bearing/graced with charm," Shamhat follows this description with flattery: "Before you even came

26 Contrast this with Gilgamesh, who is already civilized, but who corrupts the social and legal codes by raping the brides: he must overcome his animal nature, and he does this through his love for Enkidu and his grief over Enkidu's death.

from the uplands,/Gilgamesh in Uruk was seeing you in dreams" (I 243-244). By telling Enkidu that Gilgamesh has had multiple dreams about his arrival, she cleverly dangles the lure of connection and community as another technique of persuasion. Telling a person whose herd has just rejected him that a great and handsome king is anticipating his arrival functions as an irresistible rhetorical lure, an act employing pathos; of course Enkidu bites and accompanies her to Uruk.

The emotional attachment Shamhat awakens in Enkidu is a social taming mechanism, generating his evolution into both civic and moral awareness. Shamhat doesn't tell him to protect the new brides about to be raped; Enkidu has been civilized through his sexual encounters (arguably more than Gilgamesh himself) and intuits that Gilgamesh's rape of the new brides goes against the social grain. And though it is Gilgamesh, the godly man, who is outwardly the more civilized figure, it is Enkidu, the human animal, who understands the social contract implicit in participating in urban life, and it is he who intervenes on behalf of the vulnerable females according to his own civic conscience and moral code. Enkidu's "right action" is another foil for Gilgamesh's poor behavior. Enkidu is on the side of the prevailing social norms: he blocks Gilgamesh from "wrong kingship" by physically barricading the door that Gilgamesh is about to enter on his quest to have sex with a new bride. The text uses the word "defile" to describe Enkidu's body after having had sex with Shamhat ("Enkidu had defiled his body so pure" [I 199]), yet the subtext is that by defiling the bodies of new brides and new marriages, it is Gilgamesh who has defiled the social and political order of Uruk. Gilgamesh is the one who must be stopped, and the text gives us a chain reaction of women as the solution to stopping him.[27]

We should consider Shamhat's prostitution and the entire world that she opens to him as the conduit between one's wild animal nature and a higher, more sacred form of civilization. Through Shamhat, Enkidu transitions to the fully civilized human experience; he adopts human clothing, eats their food, drinks their ale, enjoys sex with a woman, upholds the values of the city, and protects the innocents of Uruk by fighting Gilgamesh, "[Powerful, pre-eminent,] expert [and *mighty*,] (I75), the one who "built the rampart of Uruk-the-Sheepfold" (I 11), reflecting a moral code Gilgamesh does not understand, but that is in line with the Sumerian and Babylonian social and legal codes protecting marriage. Shamhat is the channel through which Gilgamesh's unchecked power and tyranny end.

Ethos of Ninsun: The Relating Advocacy of Mothering

The divine Ninsun fulfils the "benevolent mother" literary trope; she is identified alternately in this and other period texts as the Wild Cow, the Holy Mother, a goddess, and the Great Queen. In *Gilgamesh*, she is frequently referred to as "clever and wise, well versed in everything" (I 258, I 260, III 17). Ninsun both advocates for her son and relates to him through mentoring; she offers guidance in the form of dream interpretation and protection through her intercessional prayers to the more powerful sun god, Shamash. Her depiction supports Ryan, Myers, and Jones's definition of advocating/advocacy as individuals who are "advocating

27 This chain reaction begins with the brides and moves to Ishtar, to Aruru the fertility goddess who creates Enkidu, to Shamhat, and ultimately to Enkidu, who is described multiple times with feminine language (Gilgamesh covers Enkidu's face like a "bride" in VIII 59; Ninsun tells Gilgamesh "like a wife you loved" Enkidu in I 267).

for their own right to speak authoritatively or negotiating the complexities of speaking for others" (111). Unlike Penelope who is silenced and dismissed by Telemachus, when Ninsun speaks, Gilgamesh listens. He regularly seeks her counsel and obeys her judgments, and she has earned the respect of Shamhat and Enkidu. As a mother, Ninsun enacts considerable authority in Gilgamesh.

A major source of Ninsun's power is her "prophetic agency" (Halton and Svärd 28). Ninsun first appears as a reference in Shamhat's storytelling, as Shamhat introduces Ninsun as "clever and wise" (I 258), before portraying Ninsun as being skilled with interpreting the canon of dreams. In Shamhat's narrative, Gilgamesh dreams of a falling star and an axe[28]; in one of Gilgamesh's dreams, Ninsun interprets Enkidu as a star that "fell down before" Gilgamesh; he "lifted it up, set it down at my feet,/and I, Ninsun, I made it your equal" (I 262, 266). Ninsun's casual assumption of dominance in these two lines reinforces her powerful position after Gilgamesh cedes control by laying down the star at her feet. Ninsun also correctly predicts the arrival of Enkidu, his place in Gilgamesh's life ("Like a wife you'll love him, caress and embrace him,/ he… will often save you" [I 271-272]),[29][30] and her ultimate acceptance of him ("I, Ninsun, made [Enkidu] your equal" [I 266]). The text establishes first that Ninsun has skill over a dream-interpretative rite that was culturally valued—i.e., Ninsun's ability was known and recounted by Shamhat—and second that Ninsun has a strong filial connection to Gilgamesh: he listens to her counsel without questioning it. Further, Ninsun's prophetic ability associates her with uniquely interpreting and understanding divine motivation, and this affords her considerable social value both in her personal power over Gilgamesh and in her wider reputation in the community: she is known, and Shamhat's storytelling supports this. By introducing Ninsun in this way—as the subject of praise by another woman for possessing a culturally valuable skill—the breadth of Ninsun's agency is established in the text.

In the ancient near east, reading dreams was regarded as an art requiring intelligence and divine inspiration; dreams were perceived as symbols that required interpretation, typically by women who functioned as interpreters of dreams (Harris, "Images of Women" 221). While it was more commonly a priestess's job to function as an intermediary between the divine and the mortal, women were recognized for their command of "mantic faculties or techniques" (Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 219, 221, 222).[31] Consider the story of the Sumerian god Tammuz who urgently called for his sister to come interpret

28 Ninsun's skill with prophesy has been correctly described: in Enkidu's death scene, Gilgamesh's lament describes Enkidu as "The axe at my side, in which my arm trusted" (VIII 46); and Gilgamesh does loves Enkidu like a spouse, as we see during Enkidu's death scene.

29 Enkidu is described as being a wife to Gilgamesh multiple times and as taking over Ninsun's dream interpreting function for Gilgamesh in her absence. Westling notes that Enkidu "replaces women as the object of Gilgamesh's attention" (505); even from the moment of his origin, he is fashioned with long locks of hair "like those of a woman" (I 106). When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh's grief transforms him into a womanish figure, as he describes himself: "I shall weep for Enkidu, my friend,/ Like a hired mourner-woman I shall bitterly wail!" (VIII 45), which he which he in effect does through most of Tablet VIII, metaphorically becoming both female spouse and mother to Enkidu upon his death:

> [Gilgamesh] covered, like a bride, the face of his friend,
> Like an eagle he circled around him,
> Like a lioness deprived of her cubs (VIII 59-61)

30 The playwright Zeynep Avci wrote a revisionist version of *Gilgamesh* from a female perspective challenging traditional conception of masculinity, where Gilgamesh and Enkidu are lovers (see Purnur Ucar-Ozbirinci).

31 Further, an 18th c. BC message from Samsuilana-sarrum reaffirms the importance of the dream interpreter: her prophetic

a dream for him:

Bring my sister, bring! Bring my Geistnanna, bring my sister! Bring my scribe who understands tablets. Bring my sister! Bring my songstress who knows songs, bring my sister! Bring my wise one who knows the meaning of dreams, bring my sister! (Bar 84)

In this example, Tammuz's urgency for his sister is palpable as is the breadth of what Geistnanna can do for him: she reads, she connects him to music, she understands the subconscious. The broad toolbox of what she offers to her brother provides a relief that no one else can offer. Because dream interpretation was cathartic and connected to deciphering divine will, dream interpreters were seen as powerful figures who healed troubled minds (Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 219), thus strengthening the currency of women possessing this skill.

In each of his interactions with Ninsun, we can see the extent to which Gilgamesh relies on her; he repeatedly turns to his mother for counsel on multiple occasions, soliciting her advice and trusting her over his male advisors. This concept of "counsel" from women is a theme that repeats throughout Gilgamesh: the hero receives counsel from his mother (dream interpretation) and from Shiduri (unsolicited advice); the brides receive counsel from Ishtar; Uta-napishti receives counsel from his wife; Enkidu receives counsel from Shamhat. At the beginning of Tablet III, Uruk's elders advise Gilgamesh what to do when he and Enkidu go to the Cedar Forest; instead of responding to them, he tells Enkidu:

Come, my friend, let us to the Palace Sublime,
    into the presence of the great Queen Ninsun
Ninsun is clever and wise, well versed in everything,
    she will set our feet in steps of good counsel. (III 15-18)

Before he leaves for the Cedar Forest, he asks his mother: "I beseech you, give me your blessing as I go on my journey!/Let me see again your face in safety" (III 28-29). The emotional bond between mother and son is the most emotional and powerful male-female connection in *Gilgamesh*, and the steady, recurring role that Ninsun has throughout the text reinforces her profound influence over the hero and the plot.

Ninsun's ability to legitimize Enkidu is another source of her agency in Gilgamesh. After she appeals to Shamash in a sixty-line monologue to keep her son safe, she "declared her will" (III 120) to adopt Enkidu

role in Samsuilana-sarrum's life supersedes her name:

Tell the mayor and the aldermen of the city: Samsuiluna-sarrum sends the following message:
May the gods Samas and Marduk keep you in good health!
I am sending you this table of mine (to warn you): Nobody must come near the house of the woman dream-interpreter
Ummi-waqrat. I have bought that house and all its bricks. If somebody so much as touches a brick of it, I will go to court against all of you as provided by the pertinent ordinance of my lord (ie, King Samsuiluna) (Oppenheim, *Letters from Mesopotamia* 91).

("Enkidu, whom [I love,] I take for my son" [III 127]). While she does this in part to guarantee an added layer of protection for her son as they voyage out on their quest to kill the monster Humbaba. By adopting Enkidu, Ninsun provides him with the valuable currency of community and family. Karen Sonik notes that while Shamhat changes Enkidu from "homo ferus to homo urbanus" and persuades him to leave the wild to become a civilized person, Ninsun exclusively provides him legitimacy through the public acceptance represented by adoption ("Minor and Marginalized" 792). Her power to legitimize Enkidu in the city sphere comes through her offer of a family connection: he is no longer an animal in the wild fringes of civilization, existing without the protection of parentage, a lacking that moves him to tears. In Tablet II, upon their first meeting, Ninsun says, "Enkidu possesses no [kith or kin]/Shaggy hair hanging loose…/he was born in the wild and [has] no [brother]," to which Enkidu's "eyes brimmed with tears" (II 175-180). Providing a connection to a powerful family secured Enkidu's ethos in both Uruk and in legend. We can better understand the significance of possessing this kind of familial capital by comparing Ninsun's offer of legitimization with the historical record of Ur-Namma, a 22nd century BC ruler of Ur, who claimed that Ninsun was his mother, Lugalbanda (Gilgamesh's father) his father, and Gilgamesh his younger brother in order to cement his own ethos as a legitimate ruler (Meador 87).

Furthermore, the counsel that Ninsun gives to both Gilgamesh and Enkidu was largely a woman's job according to Sonik, who notes that the characters who give counsel in Gilgamesh are – in order of counsel given ¬– Ninsun, Enkidu, Shiduri, and Uta-napishti ("Gilgamesh and Emotional Excess" 393). Gilgamesh's respect for his mother is constant; he is constantly turning to her for "good counsel" (III 18), for her blessing. Sonik writes that "the motif of counsel, as well as the consequences of its absence, winds through, and arguable binds together, the [Standard Babylonian] Gilgamesh Epic" ("Gilgamesh and Emotional Excess" 396). This also connects to Shamhat, who instructs Enkidu on the ways of the city/sexual awakening, and the brides, who seek counsel from another female for protection.

Ninsun's ethos covers three essential areas of power in this text that support Ryan, Myers, and Jones's feminist ecological approach: the relating powers of interpretation, the relating social power of legitimizing, and advocating on Gilgamesh's behalf with the sun god. All her lines in the text relate to her son's welfare in some form or fashion, even her legitimization of Enkidu. Ninsun is a female character whose ethos is derived from her interpretive abilities, her facility with providing good counsel, and the power she has over her family. Ultimately, she "is clever and wise, well versed in everything," and that is the fundamental source of her ethos in the community.

Ethos of the Two Wives: Interrupting and Advocacy

Of the three female characters who appear after Gilgamesh has embarked on his grief quest, one is the named Shiduri and the other two are simply referred to by their marital status: the Scorpion-man's wife and Uta-napishiti's wife. Weiershäuser argues that unnamed women in heroic stories "remain in the background, silent and passive—the story is about the male's quest" (274), reinforcing Bahrani's concept of the

"woman as trace." And yet, though the speaking roles of the two wives may be trace, the implications of their speech and actions are consequential.

The first unnamed wife is given one line of text, the most minor speaking role in the epic. She appears in Tablet IX as Gilgamesh approaches the entrance of the Netherworld and must convince the gatekeepers, the Scorpion-men, to allow him to pass through the mountains. The Scorpion-man "calls to his mate," telling her that "flesh of the gods is his [Gilgamesh's] body" – and she replies that only "two-thirds of him [Gilgamesh] are god but a third of him is human" (IX 49-51), functionally correcting him, keeping to the truth, and reasoning. She is right and he is wrong. The text doesn't show that she interrupts and is wrong; the text shows that woman resists through interrupting man and is *correct*. She reminds listeners that *Gilgamesh* is fundamentally a story about a man on a human quest of understanding and immortality, not a god's quest.

Located in the last tablet of the text, the second unnamed wife, Uta-napishti's wife,[32] is a bookend to the brides' opening section literally and metaphorically. Unlike the other major individual females in the epic, the brides and the wives are nameless[33] and are only described according to their wedlock status; further, one group is at the beginning of wedded life, and the other—Uta-napishti's wife—is locked in eternal wedded life. Claiming just five lines in the George edition, Uta-napishti's wife occupies a subversive niche so small it could easily be overlooked. Though the wife mostly hovers in the background doing her husband's bidding, each time she speaks she subtly rebukes him, resisting the power structure that her husband represents. In her first parcel of speech, Uta-napishti squats over Gilgamesh, mocking his inability to stay awake and thus gain immortality. He says, "See the fellow who so desired life! Sleep like a fog already breathes over him." Uta-napishti's wife replies:

> touch the man and make him awake!
> The way he came he shall go back in safety,
> by the gate he came forth and he shall return to his land! (XI 213-217)

Her response to Uta-napishti's observation is a call to action, pivoting his attention to Gilgamesh's safety and well-being, an act similar to Shiduri's advice to Gilgamesh to abandon his quest and embrace a human life. She also refers to him as a "man," not as a god, similar to both Shiduri and the Scorpion-man's wife.

The second time Uta-napishti's wife speaks, Gilgamesh and the ferryman are in their boat, having just left the shore on their journey home. Gilgamesh has left emptyhanded in his quest for immortality, and Uta-napishti stands on the shore watching them depart. Uta-napishiti's wife intervenes with a rebuke, telling her husband that

32 The progression of females presented in these tablets moves from virginal bride to prostitute to mother to goddess to independent woman to wife.
33 The serving girls are also nameless.

Gilgamesh came here by toil and by travail,

what have you given him for his homeward journey? (XI 274-275)

As a result of her urging, the boat returns to the shore, and Uta-napishi does what his wife asks, telling Gilgamesh where to find the plant that will give him immortal life. Each line Uta-napishti's wife delivers represents resistance to her husband and a pivot toward advocacy for Gilgamesh. Each brief line Uta-napishti's wife speaks contradicts her husband, prodding him to act in ways that will benefit Gilgamesh, when Uta-napishti's inclination is otherwise.

In *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, Rivkah Harris notes that women who are considered older are not only largely absent from ancient Mesopotamian texts, unlike in Greco-Roman texts (88), but they are also "marginalized members of society" (92). In Mesopotamian literature, postmenopausal women were post-sexy, post sexually desirable; outside of the functional age of child bearing, they were assigned "grandmother" status to help child-bearing women with children,[34] an attitude that modern women are still fighting to this day. Harris defines an "older woman" as post-menopausal, one who is "no longer defined in terms of procreative or erotic sexuality, when she stopped bearing children and so ceased to be a source of anxiety for men" (*Gender and Aging* 88). In this way, Uta-napishti's wife stands in stark contrast to all the other representations of female in Gilgamesh as one who is cast outside the frames of sexuality and child-rearing. By virtue of her immortality, Uta-napishti's wife is trapped in post-sexual old age that is represented as nurturing and benevolent in contrast to her husband.

Though Uta-napishti's wife exists on the fringe, she is the active agent in the interaction between her husband and Gilgamesh. Without her prodding, Uta-napishti would have let Gilgamesh leave with only clothes that would remain immortal, not his own skin. Twice Uta-napishti's wife directly resists her husband in the interest of protecting a vulnerable and weakened Gilgamesh. In just five lines, Uta-napishti's wife advocates for Gilgamesh, keeps him safe, and ensures he gets what he seeks. She acts against her husband's direction, but both times he listens and changes his behavior. There is a certain irony that the beginning of this epic – which profiles Gilgamesh plundering through girls' bodies, girls are who on the cusp of being wives – is contrasted with the wives at the end of the journey who watch over his body, protect his mortality, and resist their husbands by telling the truth and acting as agents of advocacy.

Implications

This study began with a series of questions: Can we legitimately use a feminist lens to determine women's ethos in texts that are written by men? Can we understand women's ethos through and in texts that entirely exclude the authentic voice of women? And to these questions, I would also add Zainab Bahrani's essential question: "If woman is hidden in history, how do we find her?" (36). By applying Ryan, Myers, and Jones's theoretical framework of interrupting, relating, and advocacy to *Gilgamesh* alongside an examination of the ways that female characters resist the prevailing masculine narrative, evaluating women's ethos in

34 See Rivka Harris, "Chapter 6: Older Women" in *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*.

texts where women exist on the periphery can successfully be accomplished under the parameters of ecological feminism.

I have laid out a method for examining texts that wouldn't ordinarily be perceived as being within the scope of feminist analysis, and I have shown that we can gain important insights by reading ancient texts through feminist frameworks. This method offers a process that scholars can use to begin the work of wide-scale search and recovery for unexpected sites of rhetoric, such as narratives in world communities where feminism and women's narratives are either oppressed, underground, or otherwise unawakened. Based on this model, the way forward for scholars who want to identify novel sites to apply feminist theory is to search for communities and texts where the narrative is out of balance, where women's—and any subaltern—voices "belonged" to the community, where a masculine voice spoke for the values of a male-dominated community, and where there were comparatively few records left by women. We can and should revisit the exemplars of the canon to understand the ways in which the colonized express their agency through resisting, interrupting, advocating, and relating to the existing power structure. The critical first step is textual interrogation—analyzing what the "betweens" in women's behavior and speech in narratives written by/for men are showing rather than telling us—and to evaluate what these patterns signify about flesh and blood women.

The larger implication argued here is that feminist rhetoric can open itself to studying not only an array of ancient texts but any text or "culture as text" where marginalized voices are subsumed into the dominant narrative, specifically when the dominant narrative speaks for the non-dominant group or speaks over the non-dominant group; in other words, it is possible to look *at* and *through* the dominant hand to determine the ethos of the dominated group even when the dominated group is represented by someone outside of that group. Not only can we be looking for new sources of feminist rhetoric, but we *should* be actively searching for them. Cheryl Glenn calls on feminist scholars to persist in the search for "underrepresented groups" and "new ways of expanding the discipline" (*Rhetorical Feminism* 50); and Nedra Reynolds writes that "what's needed are studies of ethos in written discourse that extend outward to include multiple texts as well as the historical and political context for those texts, the ways they are read and responded to, the ways they get interpreted, adjusted, or appropriated" (334). The method I have laid out in this study is a new paradigm for feminist rhetoric that answers their call.

The "negative space" approach outlined in this study is a significant contribution to narrative rhetoric in that it employs a feminist framework to texts that have previously been unexcavated. Reading ancient narrative texts through an ecological feminist lens requires looking for acts and speech that portray resistance to the masculine narrative in addition to searching for acts that interrupt, relate, and advocate. This chiaroscuro method of rhetorical analysis sifts through the rhetoric of negative space to recover what dwells in the shadows by analyzing what appears in the light. Reading ancient narrative texts through feminist frameworks uses "critical imagination as an inquiry tool" (Royster and Kirsch 20). In 1997, Cheryl Glenn wrote that "for years, we ignored the borders of the [rhetorical] map, the shadowy regions where roads run off the edge of the paper and drop away at sharp angles" (*Rhetoric Retold* 3). The method outlined here maps part of the cartogra-

phy that recovers and reconsiders the geographic and rhetorical positionality of women who, at first glance, have been thought to have been silenced or whose voices have otherwise been overlooked. Interrupting, advocating, and relating are powerful terms in the hands of the un- or under-observed. Resistance is powerful; resistance in the hands of people who know or sense they are oppressed is a powerful tool of liberation.

The answer to Bahrani's question above – "If woman is hidden in history, how do we find her?" – can partly be found in the Assyriologist Natalie May's statement: "As soon as one starts looking for women," she writes, "they are inevitably found" (249). In other words, we must keep looking and locating; we must keep reconsidering what we know, and we must continue the material, forensic work of resisting and interrogating a historical record largely shaped by men. We must not overlook texts simply because we assume what we are looking for either isn't there or can't be found. The epideictic, nation-building epic genre is an especially fertile source for this kind of study. In her chapter on feminist rhetoric in *Comparative World Rhetorics*, Mari Lee Mifsud writes, "I need to tell of the telling of the telling of the story" (312). This is how we should feel about the representations of women inhabiting the masculine world of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*: we should ask ourselves less "who tells the story?" or "who is the story about?" and more "what alternative social and cultural information can we glean about the way in which the characters are drawn? How does the story reflect the values and roles that women occupied in a society so heavily dominated by the masculine hand?"

While *Gilgamesh* could hardly be called a text where the agency of women is transcendent, a lot of information can be gathered about the relational sources of power that women had in Sumerian and Akkadian civilizations and how those sources of power shifted from one civilization to the next; we can also surmise how listening to and retelling this tale must have confirmed and circumscribed that power. We have been led to believe that ancient women had little agency, that they primarily occupied a "domestic space" (Sen 77), and while property records and legal codes Mesopotamia do corroborate restrictions on women's freedoms, women's actual agency, subversive or otherwise, is reflected in the artifacts left behind: the few letters they wrote, the few hymns, the letters written to their husbands or lovers, the letters their children wrote to them, the references to women in texts, on tombs, on slave trade records, on inscriptions, in legal codes, and the powerful female deities they worshipped. We can see the "telling of the telling of the story" in *Gilgamesh* through the interconnectedness of ecological feminism; and if we cannot see the story of ethos directly, we can work to see it indirectly, in the negative spaces.

Gilgamesh ends his days much like his epic counterparts Odysseus and Beowulf, an older, wiser hero surveying the landscape and reviewing, at the close of day, the spoils of his reign: the city wall, the physical structure that upholds the narrative of his life and guarantees him the immortality he sought.[35] For the female characters in this text and possibly for the women living during those thousands of years on the Fertile Crescent who heard and retold this story, their city wall was the social architecture that contributed

35 See Albert B. Lord's "Gilgamesh and Other Epics" for a focused comparison between *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, and *Beowulf*.

to their agency and ethos; their city wall was the border between erasure and resistance, interrupting, and advocacy. If men in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* are the builders of city walls, then it is the women who are invested in upholding the essential socio-emotional structures required for those living within the walls.

We know that ethos is a multi-dimensional, highly nuanced word with multiple layers that are measured by what the narrative eye chooses to examine and overlook, either consciously or unconsciously. We also know that ethos exists even when we cannot see it, just as we know that a wide spectrum of colors exists the naked human eye cannot detect. Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* concludes with the image of the long-silenced voice of the heroine's dead father as it reaches her through alternative means: through the transmission of ever-present electromagnetic radio waves that have been simply waiting for the correct mechanism to receive them. In much the same way, the voices in ancient epics are telegraphed to modern listeners, keeping pace with our own evolving understanding, embodying the values, the fears, the world views of the communities that produced them, communicating to us what it meant to be alive in a culture long dead.

This study is essentially a forensic social anthropology that reconstructs the ethos of ancient women. It is the rhetorical equivalent of finding shards of broken pottery embedded in the soil and reconstructing them to understand their place in a society that no longer exists. For the purpose of rereading, reframing, reimagining how we can hear women's voices in texts that seem to exclude a feminist interpretation, we must continue to conceive of alternate methods of looking at the familiar. Zainab Bahrani writes that "It is the standard historical studies of antiquity, their methodologies and approaches to the material, that must change. And the fixed nature of these methodologies that need to change also has to do, of course, with the reduced voices of women in the academic field. So we look for the trace of women within exclusionary discourses, both ancient and contemporary" (33-34). We have been given a different toolset in this study that applies modern feminist rhetorical reasoning to the close reading of an ancient story. By reshaping and reframing the way we determine what ethos might look like for a population that had been largely stripped of voice, a population that LuMing Mao calls the "concealed, the excluded, and the erased" (452), I argue that modern readers should reconsider the ways we read or regard ancient epics – and any text – where women either are portrayed as silent or overlooked and that we should reconsider assumptions that women's lived experiences mirrored their representation in texts that were written by and for men. In reconsidering the ways that we read ancient texts that are heavily skewed toward a man's experience and described through a man's hand, we can excavate and examine the lives, values, and agency of women in any region and across any era.

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

Introduction

Ruth Osorio, Lamaya Williams, and Megan McIntyre

Keywords: hope, archives, future, stroies, historiography, feminist research

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> *"Hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. […] Hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency." —Rebecca Solnit*

In 2018, Cheryl Glenn wrote, "The work of feminist rhetorical historiography is far from done; in fact, it has just begun–and it is anchored in hope." Following Glenn, we explore hope in this cluster as a methodological imperative in the archives. Informed by theorists Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Rebecca Solnit, and Cornel West, the writers in this Cluster Conversation envision hope as a radical orientation toward building new worlds and a willingness to do the work to make those worlds possible. Following the models of Jacqueline Jones Royster, Charles Morris, Terese Guinsatao Monberg, and others, we see archives and archival methods as a particularly valuable part of doing such work. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues in *Decolonizing Methodologies,* "To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things" (36). Archives and archival methods are vital to creating such alternative histories and knowledges.

> *"Cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension." – Rebecca Solnit*

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Megan McIntyre is the Director of Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Arkansas. Her research focuses on equitable pedagogies and writing programs, feminist archival research methods and historiographies, and questions of agency, equity, and criticality in response to the rise of Generative AI. She loves reality TV, reading, and teaching.

Hope explodes temporality–in other words, hope exists outside of linear or simplistic notions of time. And so do archives, as they carry echoes of the past to the present and future, and then back again as we re-orient our understandings of identity and categorization. In this cluster, we look to the past for reminders of resistance and survival–road maps from Black creators like Pauli Murray, who, as Coretta Pittman demonstrates, carefully maintained a personal archive of letters and diary entries as a testament to her "abiding hope and faith in the living word." Pittman ponders who will tell the stories of African American women, especially those, like Murray, whose contributions have been historically overlooked. We also have scholar-teachers grounded in the present reflecting on the past, such as Kaylee Laakso leveraging her positionality and decolonial methods when researching Indian Removal rhetorics in federal archives. Megan Heise documents recent archiving among young people living in the Ritsona refugee camp, exercising their agency to share their voices beyond the walls/confines of the camp to a world that needed–and continues to need–to hear them. Their work says, we are here, we are human, we create. These narratives remind us that hope exists outside of linear timelines–so our own introduction does the same.

> *By reimagining archival practices [...], hope emerges in the form of restorative justice—acknowledging the vital contributions of indigenous women, resisting the erasure of their knowledge, and fostering a future where scientific inquiry and cultural heritage coexist with mutual respect and recognition.* – Rachel O'Donnell

Present: It feels like a strange time to write about hope. As we write in early 2025, natural and human catastrophes are occurring across the planet, from climate change-fueled wildfires to humanitarian crises to genocide. Pain and fear permeate. Seismic shifts are occurring politically and carrying academia along with them (sometimes with the silent complicity of members of the academy). What originated as politically coordinated attacks on Critical Race Theory (CRT) have become sweeping indictments of diversity and inclusion, framing these concepts and their related efforts toward progress as the inverse of merit. We live in a time of anti-Black, anti-trans, anti-immigrant, and anti-science legislation, book bans, laws barring access to reproductive care, a disabling pandemic, and the continued and purposeful divestment from education at every level. The world is burning both literally and metaphorically. We cannot deny these realities. Things are bad, and there's every reason to believe that they will continue to worsen. As we are writing this, tomorrow seems less and less certain. Between climate despair and war, between the relentless attempts to erase the very existence of trans people, undocumented immigrants, and disabled people, the future is not guaranteed for so many of us and our loved ones. Is there, then, any hope left to be found? There is, the contributors to this conversation say. And we affirm that deep belief: despite this violence, people are still capturing the movements, moments, and creations of survival so that future generations can understand–we were here, we are here, and we will be here.

> *"Always incomplete, the archive still holds traces of lives ignored that scholars can reanimate, providing hope for glimpsing what once was forgotten. Such hope, of course, does not right the wrongs of denying care to Black Americans - rather, it can help us sort the remnants and traces of what remains so that we can better understand and honor those whose memories live among the lexical and visual absences within archives."* –Julie Homchick Crowe and Ryan Mitchell

These home truths about the current state of the world make hope more necessary and important because hope is not a passive feeling but an ongoing commitment, an action. It's a practice and a responsibility and a necessity. We recognize hope as a subversive choice in the face of so much harm and pain. Hope doesn't replace our (reasonable) fear about the present and the future, but it does give us a way to live with the fear as active agents in the world and as members of communities for whom and to whom we are responsible. Speaking to the dangers of tokenization and the many voices, stories, and experiences who have been excluded from white feminist spaces and conversations, Audre Lorde reminds us, "Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression." Being in community, making art, and telling stories are all acts of hope in the face of a dehumanizing present. And at its heart (as the contributors to this Cluster Conversation make clear), the kind of feminist archival work explored throughout this Conversation is about telling stories in, among, and for communities. The versions of feminist archival research represented in these pages require us to be responsible for and to others. They say to us all, "More voices! More people! More humanity!" These are acts of hope.

> *"And herein lies the hope—that in reconsidering the potential of the archives, we might resist prevailing myths and, instead, listen to community members' stories to guide our way."* – Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Jessica A. Rose

We see the practice of feminist historiography and archival work as inherently hopeful because these methodologies center stories, people, and communities who have been excluded, ignored, overlooked, hidden, buried, and denied. **Telling these stories matters because the people who tell the stories and the people whose stories are told matter**. Much of the work offered in this Cluster Conversation attends to stories that were actively ignored, buried beneath totalizing narratives. By archiving familial artifacts, Vyshali Manivannan leverages "parable, rumor, and memory" to resist the erasure of state-sponsored genocide and ongoing oppression of Tamils in Sri Lanka's North-East–and to document embodied diasporic disabled lives through culturally specific forms, interrogating what becomes "archivable" after violent ethnic biblioclasm. The work of feminist historiographers and archivists makes new space that allows these stories to breathe. They expand our sense of the past and offer new visions of the future. The hope embedded in this kind of archival work is that it reminds us all that other stories exist, other histories exist, and if other histories exist, perhaps other presents and futures are possible, too.

> "Hope is not the same thing as optimism. Never confuse or conflate hope with optimism. Hope cuts against the grain. Hope is participatory. It's an agent in the world. Optimism looks at the evidence to see whether it allows us to infer that we can do 'x' or 'y.' Hope says 'I don't give a damn, I'm gon do it anyway…'" – Cornel West

Past: Feminist historiography and archival methodologies are approaches that allow us to better understand the perspectives of those who have been marginalized. They make room for important voices that show us that there are many ways to be human, and that no dominant power structure gets to determine who is worthy of a seat at the table. We all have value. These approaches allow us to make visible our experience. Our stories affirm that even when deliberately silenced, purposefully overlooked, or strategically buried, we are here. We exist. And we have existed. Non-compliant bodies archive the stories of survival, as Sumaiya Sarker Sharmin's decolonial approach to the South Asian American Digital Archives reminds us. Feminist historiography and archival work both preserves and resurrects our stories as evidence of our existence. Studying the archives reminds us that people have always been resisting the silences, shouting for our society to see the totality of our shared humanity.

> "The feelings, lives, and identities we document, our personal pasts, our traumas, our bodily autonomy, our hubris and our anxiety: can the order of archives turn this anxiety into hope? Yes! To nurture hope, you must allow yourself to heal. To heal, you must make sense of what came before." –Andre Perez, Mary Escobar, and Wendy Hayden

Our histories, accounts, and artifacts are records of our undeniable truths, even as efforts attempt to erase or silence history. As Teresa Romero points out in her archival work on Chicana in Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional, "I have inherited these stories to keep our cultural history alive." Kat Gray offers case studies from Virginia Tech University that provide an approach to better understand historical archives as a way to articulate feminist and queer orientations to research today. Gray's work also interrogates the role and positionality of the archival researcher. Her work prompts us to consider responsibilities and consequences that emerge in attempting to "replace progress narratives with richer, more complex understandings of institutional culture and history." Similarly, Jessie Male also asks us to think critically about how archiving allows us to revise uncomfortable and violent historical narratives via her discussion of Grace Talusan's memoir as a site of "radical deconstruction and narrative reorientation." Histories, these contributors remind us, are never gone, and these histories are all we have to build our futures on. What we need, their work says, are as many histories, as many voices, as many people as we can manage to bring with us into whatever futures we can build.

Future: Even as children, we seem to understand the importance of the impulse to preserve the present in order to speak to the future: we compile and bury time capsules, perhaps, or write letters to our future selves. Unspoken in many of these activities: in ten years, there will be a grown me to read this letter– in fifty years, there will be new gangs of children, roaming the land hungry for the glimpse into the past.

> "In inventing an archive that records remembrance, resistance, resilience, and adaptability from the ephemera of Eelam Tamil diasporic life and being-disabled in the U.S., I resist (in some small way) the violent erasure and rewriting of Eelam Tamil history and culture and of my disabled self-knowledge and oracular instinct; I help myself reconcile my experiences of chronic pain and intergenerational trauma. In creating and reinscribing archives of the painfully specific and universal lies hope." Vyshali Manivannan

To hope today is to believe there can be a tomorrow, as Alexandra Gunnells' article on archiving as a hopeful pedagogical practice shows. Working with University of Texas - Austin students, Gunnells discusses how digital archiving makes visible "hidden or absented aspects of student life" for "future generations" of Longhorns. Similarly, Kerri Hauman and Emily Goodman see teaching with archives as an act of hope. By inviting students to update Wikipedia with the hidden histories of queer Kentucky, "we are writing/righting the historical record so that the future is not about erasure but about the sharing of these histories so they are openly available to future generations of Kentuckians." Like the time capsules from our childhoods, teaching archives allows our students to speak to the past and the future.

When we wrote this CFP, which stemmed from a CCCC panel, we were prepared to read many drafts of people researching and teaching with archives, seeking out messages of hope from the past. What we did not anticipate was the number of pieces we'd receive that spoke to the urgency of archiving *this* moment. Theodora Danylevich's "Crip Pandemic Archiving and/as Hope" documents their experience co-curating a tapestry of disabled odes to survival in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when disabled people were seen as experts of surviving an apocalypse and at the same time utterly disposable. In their efforts to make a "reparative and accessible archive," Danylevich's archive acts as a space of resonant encounter, a crip kinship across time and space. Danylevich's crip pandemic archiving praxis orients itself to future disabled creators, who will always be under attack. Their archives remind *now-us* and *future-us* that with community, with love, with care, we can survive and grow together.

We believe that feminist archival research can help us learn how to do the work of hope in a time of despair. That hope is not based on a credulous belief that archives offer unmediated access to histories and experience. Feminist writer Rebecca Solnit explains, hope is "an ax you break down doors with in an emergency [...]. Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope." A hopeful orientation to archival research, then, is not built on naïveté, but rather, requires that researchers open themselves to conversations from the past as they also interrogate the social construct of the archive and thoughtfully consider how silence(s) (Jones and Williams) and erasure (Garcia; Sano-Franchini) function in archives.

So, we choose hope, as do the contributors to this Cluster Conversation. We choose to believe better futures are possible and that telling as many stories as possible will help us build those better futures.

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Archives, Criticism, and Care: Tending to Archival Work in the Rhetoric of Health & Medicine

Julie Homchick Crowe and Ryan Mitchell

Abstract: This essay centers care as a generative methodological orientation for feminist rhetorical historians working in medical archives. Moving beyond archival research that prioritizes recovery, the authors outline how caring for the materials housed in medical archives shifts focus to the ideological and institutional infrastructures that shape how rhetorical histories of health and medicine are preserved and produced. Through theoretically informed mediations on their respective work in polio and AIDS archives, the authors illustrate how seemingly mundane archival practices can significantly impact how researchers engage with historical materials and the stories they tell. This essay encourages RHM scholars to develop a more nuanced understanding of how archives shape and constrain historical narratives by foregrounding care as an intellectual, embodied, and sensuous mode of engagement. Ultimately, the authors argue that caring for medical archives requires a commitment to understanding and addressing the transhistorical forces that continue to marginalize and silence marginalized communities.

Keywords: care, archives, infectious disease, health, rhetorical histories

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Introduction

Rhetoricians of health and medicine study diverse texts to understand the rhetorical practices that constitute and resist the normative scripts that define what it means to occupy un/healthy bodies. This task can be particularly harrowing for those of us who work in medical archives. The objects we work with often tell stories of sickness, loss, trauma, and institutionalized violence that quite literally pile up on top of one another, providing material evidence of the physical, emotional, and textual weight of illness. In writing rhetorical histories of health and medicine, it can be tempting to alleviate some of that weight by recovering hidden, potentially liberatory strategies housed in medical archives. Through such acts of recovery, we might attempt to reanimate the stories of victims of biomedical neglect and abuse in ways that (re)invest them with familiar forms of rhetorical authority. However, as critical feminist, queer, and queer of color scholars from a range of disciplines have repeatedly demonstrated, focusing too narrowly on acts of recovery risks inadvertently reinforcing the exclusionary and patriarchal discourse norms endemic to liberal

Julie Homchick Crowe is an assistant professor in the Communication & Media Department at Seattle University. Her research focuses on the ways in which health and science discourse reflect political ideologies, particularly in the areas of infectious disease, health and wellness, and human biology. Some of her primary areas of study include the constituting of health subjects and identities, in public health discourse and nationalist rhetoric. Her work appears in *The Journal of Medical Humanities, Rhetoric of Health and Medicine, Environmental Communication, The Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry, Science & Education*, and other outlets.

Ryan Mitchell is an assistant professor in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stony Brook University. He studies the vernacular construction and transhistorical circulation of health risks, drawing on interdisciplinary theories coming from the rhetoric of health and medicine, rhetorical historiography, queer theory and criticism, and body studies. Much of his current work has focused on the popular imaginaries surrounding appraisals of sexual health and safety, with particular attention paid to the rhetorical force of sensation and feeling. His writings have been published or are forthcoming in *Argumentation & Advocacy, Quarterly Journal of Speech, Rhetoric of Health and Medicine, POROI*, and *Journal for the History of Rhetoric*.

models of the public sphere.

Feminist researchers working in medical archives can avoid such affirmations by following Glenn's (2018) lead and developing tools "exploring other sides of rhetorical production and histories" (114). Moving beyond concerns for merely incorporating excluded voices into already-established rhetorical frameworks, the tools that Glenn calls for prompt active, self-critical reflection on how we—as historically and politically situated knowledge-producers—orient ourselves conceptually, methodologically, and affectively to the documents we study. Instead of engaging with archival materials from a detached zero-point perspective, Glenn urges feminist rhetorical historians to "attempt respectful, dialogical connection rather than impartial detachment" (99). In other words, Glenn's vision of archival work demands that feminist rhetorical scholars embrace an ethics of care—not just for the documents and ephemera we interact with, but also through careful attention to our own positionalities and the lives of those made both present and absent within an archive's holdings.

It is in this spirit that we outline how "care" functions as a critical tool that feminist-aligned rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) scholars can employ as we enter medical archives. Along with gesturing toward a terrain that is all too familiar to RHM scholars—health care—care also indexes an ethical orientation toward the continual, transhistorical networks of labor that support our work in archives. "Care is work," reminds health humanities scholar Rachel Adams (2023), "an attitude toward others, and an ethical ideal" (19). As a critical tool for rhetorical histories of health and medicine, care not only shines a light on the often-invisibilized work done by the historical figures we study, but also on the transhistorical infrastructural networks of labor required to preserve historical materials and, importantly, the work that we as academics must do to produce our scholarship.

This short essay, therefore, positions care as a generative keyword for RHM historical work, conceptualizing it as an intellectual, embodied, and sensuous mode of archival engagement, a critical mode of intimate encounter with histories of both health and wellness and death and dying. In other words, we understand care as more than just a researcher's careful handling of historical materials with common tools like gloves, tweezers, and weighted page holders; we also see care as an epistemological and affective type of rhetorical *tending* to 1) discrete archival holdings, 2) the stories they tell, 3) the wider rhetorical and institutional ecologies within which they circulate, and, finally, 4) the potential histories researchers can co-construct with those materials. At base, then, caring for medical archives means taking archives on their own terms.

As we see it, the first step to taking medical archives on their own terms is setting our gaze on the material and institutional infrastructures that condition what types of information we encounter in our research. Below, we share formative experiences working in the archives of two US-based public health calamities: the polio pandemic and the AIDS crisis. Through theoretically informed mediations on our engagement with the material "vibrancy" (Bennett, 2010) of these archives, we show how caring for historical

materials within RHM animates what has been lost in text, body, and the spaces in between. Not only can the careful tending to buried and forgotten stories help us better understand lived experiences of disease, it can also help prompt self-aware reflection on how we might produce rhetorical histories of health and medicine without retreating into mere recovery. Ultimately, we aim to demonstrate a way of caring for medical archives that engages them as repositories of knowledge as well as living entities that demand ethical, respectful, and critical interrogation.

Archives and Erasure (Julie)

In my work on the polio epidemic of the 1950s in the US (Crowe, 2022), the archives I worked in for the project illuminated the power of absence, not just in the archive, but in the events of history the archive embodied. The project broadly sought to explore how the identity of the "potential victim" in public health campaigns was articulated, namely during the polio and HIV/AIDS pandemics in the US. I conducted this research during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic as well, which made the topic not only more salient but also forced the project to rely on digital archival materials given the wide closures across the country. Using the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library digital collection, I was able to locate materials from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (later called the March of Dimes) and from the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation.

The images and advertisements were telling - FDR on crutches with other polio patients at Warm Springs; children in wheelchairs with text saying "I could be your child"; and more. Many offered support for my argument that potential victims become constituted as subjects in pandemics, particularly in cases where one might not suspect their vulnerability and, as became evident, if the potential victims were white. Scholars like Naomi Rogers (2017) had already, of course, noted that polio became more and more of a "white disease" through the 1940s. FDR's facility only served white patients, March of Dime Posters largely only featured white children, and those clamoring for healthcare resources began to argue that Black people were immune to the disease when in fact, as Rogers notes, "Black polio cases were missed as the result of medical racism" (p. 785). In working with this archival material for the first time, the observable absence of Black people was so noteworthy, not just because of a lack of records or a simple incompleteness in materials, but because of how that archival absence signified a lack of diagnoses, care, and treatment for Black Americans.

Considering such erasures, Jackie James (2003) offers a relevant exploration of her work in the polio archives, though the absences she notes are those of documents and ephemera that erase the voices of those who still live with polio and its after-effects, which creates a false binary between a pre- and post-polio vaccine world. As such, she notes that, "Archives are a place where the bodies and lives of those who were not convenient, valued, or of interest in a given historical moment are often erased" (49). Extending her observations, though, historians and rhetoricians must not only account for what happened and wasn't recorded, but also attend to what *didn't* happen. In the case of the minimal archiving of Black individuals with polio, we must first recognize that it is not simply a lack of documentation of polio victims that erases them from his-

torical narratives, but an actual lack of diagnoses and care in the first half of the twentieth century. Simply put, the records aren't there because the care wasn't there, either.

We are likewise pointed elsewhere – outside of the traditional archive – to notice the persistent erasure of Black bodies and voices in medical care. Through repeated narratives of insusceptibility to disease or suffering, absences in the archives permeate public consciousness and often serve as a smokescreen for denying medical attention. Consider, for example, racist narratives about Black mothers in labor - the denial of their pain and the erasure of voice has led to an abysmal maternal mortality rate in the US, where Black women are 2.6 times as likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women (Hoyert, 2021). We must, then, think about erasure as both part of and beyond the archive. In denying that the archive is just a traditional storage house of knowledge, Foucault (1972) maintains that the archive is instead a discursive practice and set of relations that "establish statements as events" (128) so that when we encounter erasure we can see that it is not just the physical absence of material and records, but an embodiment of and repeated denial of care and treatment. We, therefore, see within and without the archive, an erasure of pain or suffering through a "field of stabilization" (103) in a way that is not fully inscribed in detail in the text of the archive, but rather is noticeable in the "dark margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech" (Agamben, 1999, p. 144). For the medical rhetorician and historian, then, the care that the scholar must take in medical archives is not just about material attention to the archive's holdings, but also about the care extended into the margins, the absences, and in the writing of the histories of those who were not just denied space in the archive, but denied medical care as well.

The space in between text and the absences within an archive, ultimately, tell us about whose voices and bodies were valued and whose were not in the history of health and medicine. Foucault's and Agamben's work, though, in some ways, provides us hope for thinking about how we can reclaim these voices and lives and animate them anew. If we can see the archive as more than the text, pictures, and documents that we see in file boxes or digital collections, then we can likewise engage in modes of archival inquiry that interrogate the fascia holding archival artifacts together. Always incomplete, the archive still holds traces of lives ignored that scholars can reanimate, providing hope for glimpsing what once was forgotten. Such hope, of course, does not right the wrongs of denying care to Black Americans - rather, it can help us sort the remnants and traces of what remains so that we can better understand and honor those whose memories live among the lexical and visual absences within archives.

Access, Infrastructures, and Intimate Relationality in AIDS Archives (Ryan)

The tragic loss of life caused by HIV/AIDS means that much of the "official" knowledge about the early years of the North American AIDS crisis comes to us through archives. To be sure, these archives perform the crucial task of preserving *some* of the ways that People with AIDS (PWAs) and their allies fought against social prejudice, medical neglect, and political apathy. Nevertheless, the materials contained in most institutional AIDS archives can perpetuate a problematic "founding narrative" of AIDS activism

(Cheng et al. 1). This narrative disproportionately emphasizes the efforts of the white, well-connected, highly resourced, cosmopolitan gay men who mobilized in the 1980s and '90s while overshadowing the significant contributions that BIPOC, trans, disabled, poor, and women activists have made and, indeed, continue to make to various HIV/AIDS movements. Not only does the partiality of AIDS archives lead to the production of lopsided histories, it also hampers contemporary efforts to reduce the unequal burdens that HIV/AIDS imposes on minoritized communities. Lapses in preventive screenings caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with rising racism, homophobia, stigma, and poverty, have resulted in a troubling increase in new HIV diagnoses, particularly among Black and Latine populations (CDC). Thus, despite the availability of effective pharmaceutical interventions such as HAART and PrEP, HIV/AIDS remains a pressing public health, political, and social justice issue.

Addressing the intersecting social, political, and material demands of HIV/AIDS undoubtedly requires renewed attention to how we write histories of the epidemic. However, writing more robust histories involves more than merely incorporating the overlooked contributions of marginalized activists into existing AIDS timelines. As Cindy Patton points out in her foreword to Jih-Fei Cheng, Alexandra Juhasz, and Nishant Shahani's important edited collection, *AIDS & The Distribution of Crises*, "It is not simply [enough to say] that histories of AIDS have ignored women, or Black individuals, or children, as if inserting these groups into the founding narrative resolves the issue" (ix). Instead, emerging critical AIDS scholarship must account for how archiving practices themselves—acquisition procedures, processing protocols, indexing techniques, and storage methods—continue to hinder more equitable and just forms of AIDS activism. As Marika Cifor has recently warned, "Framing AIDS and its archives as relics of a distant past defangs contemporary AIDS crises in the United States." Cifor contends that responding to the crises that surround HIV/AIDS requires scholars to self-consciously resist the "depoliticization" that results from the "simplistic historicization" of the epidemic and instead begin interrogating the archival infrastructures that preserve what are only ever provisional AIDS histories (5).

Guided by these insights, I suggest that rhetorical historians of health and medicine might resist such simplistic historicizations by attuning ourselves to the different institutional and affective practices that care for the materials housed in AIDS archives. Reflecting on an experience when I inadvertently accessed an early AIDS activist's unredacted medical records, I consider how this failure in infrastructural care allowed for an excessive degree of access that compelled me to develop a responsive sense of intimacy with the activist. By problematizing the dynamics between infrastructural access and care, I outline how intimacy—as an ethical and methodological orientation—creates opportunities for writing more comprehensive rhetorical histories of health and medicine without violating patients' rights to privacy.

The Event

In the fall of 2019, I visited a small, queer-run AIDS archive. I was interested in studying the discursive negotiations that took place as early AIDS educators, the majority of whom had minimal practical

medical experience, accommodated technical information about AIDS. I had come to this archive to review the records of one particularly influential AIDS educator who frequently collaborated with members of the mainstream medical establishment. Working through the collection, I found ample evidence of this activist's rich correspondence with doctors and public health representatives alike. I had that wonderful feeling that everything was falling into place.

Halfway through my visit, I opened a folder containing pages and pages of un-redacted sensitive medical and financial documents. I was looking at lease statements, bank account ledgers, disability applications, papers that noted his social security number, and perhaps most shockingly, medical discharge papers that detailed specific diagnoses, insurance information, and payment plans. What lay on the table before me was overwhelming evidence of the harrowing tolls of AIDS. I had proof of the activist's disabled body, his economic precarity, and the sheer scale of the assault that AIDS waged on his personhood and security. The information I uncovered added textured nuance and uncharacteristically acute vividness to my mental construction of the activist.

To be sure, the comprehensiveness of the collection was exciting, and I pulled out my camera to begin taking pictures of what I had found. However, before I could focus my lens, I realized that I had not only stumbled upon a massive HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) violation but I had also been given tremendous access to intimate details about this man's life that made him vulnerable to exploitation some quarter of a century after his death.

HIPAA, Infrastructural Access, and Historical Intimacies

HIPAA regulations, as Susan Wells and Nathan Stormer (2018) have argued, make historical work in the rhetoric of health and medicine particularly difficult (27). While restrictions have loosened significantly since the US Department of Health and Human Services approved the so-called Final Rule in 2013, which removes legal protections for people who have been dead for over 50 years, the documents I viewed that day fell outside of that exception. Upon recognizing this, I was put into a tricky situation. In the intervening years, I have not, and will not, use any of this information in any publications. And yet, I still find myself seduced by these documents. I wonder what types of histories I *could* tell if I wasn't ethically and legally obliged to disregard this information. I think about the power of this type of information to illuminate the unimaginable vulnerability of many of the earliest AIDS activists. I also think about how an awareness of this vulnerability underscores the material weight of medical records more broadly, how affect and feeling open up different avenues for accessing medical archives.

Undergirding all these considerations, however, is an acute awareness that a violent rupture in the archive's infrastructure is what allowed me access to this abundance of sensitive information in the first place. Nathan Johnson (2018) suggests rhetoric scholars working in archives ought to embrace what he describes as an "infrastructural approach" to medical artifacts. This approach attends to knowledge-making as

an embodied process that moves through pre-existing design, classification, and storage practices. The often "mundane" practices that allow for archival research weave dense infrastructural webs that "connect users with the shared networks of standards, classification, protocols, and algorithms that provide the dependable background of knowledge work" (63). For feminist rhetoricians composing rhetorical histories of health and medicine, thinking infrastructurally allows for considering how medical archives toggle between logics of visibility and invisibility, access and inaccessibility. What is compelling about the mundanity of archival infrastructures is their capacity to obscure themselves. Per Johnson, "When infrastructures are working well, their components work together seamlessly and are unnoticed." When something goes awry, when an element of an infrastructural system fails to achieve its intended purpose, the infrastructure becomes visible, and "massive interruptions in knowledge work" ensue (63).

This is precisely what happened in the queer history archive I was working in. The infrastructural safeguards established by HIPAA had broken down, and information meant to be hidden became immediately visible. As a researcher, I was forced to consciously reflect on my affective orientation toward both the archive and the activist. I could no longer take my role as a disinterested knowledge worker for granted. Instead, I needed to reflect on how to handle this material with care in the hopes that I might protect both this activist's legacy and the archive that helped preserve that legacy. Because of this infrastructural failure, I had to contemplate how, why, and for what purposes I accessed this activist's information. I had to determine how I might protect the feelings of care that encountering this sensitive material had engendered in me, which, in effect, meant extending my care for archival materials to a care for this activist and his right to privacy and dignity.

When joined, these dual concerns—access and care—facilitated a reckoning with how an archive's material infrastructure facilitated a type of *transhistorical intimacy*. Ara Wilson (2016) argues that experiences of intimacy (understood generally as a mode of "relational life" that extends across public/private, official/vernacular, and local/historical distinctions) are, in fact, infrastructural accomplishments (251). For Wilson, "Understanding how infrastructures enable or hinder intimacy is a conduit to understanding the concrete force of abstract fields of power by allowing us to identify actually existing styles rather than a priori structures" (248). Infrastructures, put more simply, lubricate specific experiences of connectedness and relationality at the expense of others.

Notably, tracing the intimate pathways that emerge through an archive's infrastructures gives momentary form to diffuse, transhistorical systems of power that make minorized communities vulnerable to violation, abuse, and exploitation. In my case, a breach of institutional protocols helped me recognize the importance and limitations of HIPAA protections. Encountering information legally designated as private made my relationship with this activist more immediate and intimate. I was able to feel how institutional protocols, the very same ones invisibilized by archival infrastructures, continue to put queer people at risk. I could, if only imaginatively and momentarily, grasp the structural, emotional, and institutional vulnerability that PWAs experienced as they demanded attention and resources.

Caring for Medical Archives

It has been a quarter of a century since Wendy Sharer (1999) wrote that rhetorical historians "cannot afford to ignore the various processes…that affect the corpus of the historical record on which we may be able to construct diverse and subversive narratives that challenge previous, exclusionary historical accounts" (124). Sharer's call to action remains particularly important for RHM scholars, given our close attention to sensitive textual traces of pain, suffering, and trauma. "[T]he listener to trauma," notes Dori Laub (1992), "comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event" (62). Carefully tending to the archival practices that preserve and continue to enact traumatic medical events helps rhetorical historians of health and medicine interrogate and manage what KJ Rawson (2018) has described as "the rhetorical power of the archive" (331).

By positioning care as a tool that feminist RHM scholars might use to steer our historical projects, we have operationalized care as *both* a means of ethical engagement *and* a critical intervention into the material practices that sustain the archives in which we work. As we step back from these two accounts, we are reminded of Jacques Derrida's argument that "...the question of the archive is not a question of the past…It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of responsibility for tomorrow" (1996, 36). Above, we have shown how care might be employed as a framework that rhetorical historians of health and medicine can use to respond to past medical abuses and work toward more just health futures. As we have argued, an initial step in caring for RHM histories means tending to archival materials themselves, the stories they tell, their infrastructures and ecologies of circulation, as well as their potential to construct new histories. In approaching medical archives with care, feminist RHM researchers might ensure that those lives living within archives are reanimated so that they, too, might be cared for once and for all.

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Crip Pandemic Archiving and/as Hope

Theodora Danylevich

Abstract: My contribution, "Crip Pandemic Archiving and/as Hope" develops three core principles of what I describe as a "crip pandemic archiving praxis": (1) an **institutionally parasitic** relation to academia, (2) a **non-rehabilitative** editorial praxis, and (3) the creation of archives as a **persistently kairotic** space in relation to visitors/users. These principles emerge from reflection on experiences and lessons learned co-curating "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry." I argue for crip pandemic archiving praxis as a critically hopeful feminist methodology, and my goal is for the principles to serve as a portable framework for community members, scholars, instructors, and students to use and iterate in our collective work thinking beyond hegemonic archives and towards restorative, visionary cultural formations.

Keywords: disability studies, kairotic, access work, archives, feminist methodology

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ORIGIN STORY[1]

It began with a question to editors of the open-access peer-reviewed scholarly journal of the Cultural Studies Association, Lateral, in the thick of early pandemia 2020-2021:

> Is there a space or precedent on the site for us to solicit and curate some sort of online exhibit or collection of evidence of crip life, vibrancy, creativity, survival, grief, etc.? Perhaps, something that would ultimately look like a mosaic or a tapestry of thumbnails? Not scholarly articles, but still engaged in a process of peer review?
>
> [The answer was a generous and excited "Yes"]

My co-editor Alyson Patsavas and I had just finished co-editing a scholarly section of essays with *Lateral* entitled "Cripistemologies of Crisis: Emergent Knowledges for the Present," where "cripistemologies" describes situated knowledge of disabled and multiply marginalized communities. Our collection articulated a critique of crisis rhetorics circulating in the first Trumpian moment in 2017. We argued that emergency and crisis rhetorics can (and do) lead to the erasure and devaluation of experiential knowledg-

1 I would like to acknowledge Aly Patsavas, without whom there would not be a "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry" to speak of. I am grateful to J. Palmeri, Clare Mullaney, and Ruth D. Osorio for support and feedback on the present article.

Theodora Danylevich (she/they) is a scholar-educator in Writing and Disability Studies as well as Women's and Gender Studies and the Medical Humanities, with a background in 20th century American Literary and Cultural Studies. Their work has appeared in *Rhizomes, Journal of Bioethical Inquiry, Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, and *Lateral*. As an educator, they are interested in hacking the classroom space as a site for public engagement and an engine of transformative knowledge production. As an editor, she is invested in reimagining scholarly publishing towards greater access, inclusion, and creativity. They are also currently at work on a book project that develops a methodology of [sic]k archiving to theorize and enact Black feminist crip worldmaking.

es and survival tactics held by disabled, racialized and lower-income communities that routinely weather ongoing crises. We highlighted the danger in overlooking this cache of cultural knowledge, both depriving the broader public of vital information, and treating already vulnerable groups as disposable at a time when they most need our care and attention.

Enter the pandemic, and we were faced with a fever pitch of crisis, and with the temporary wider awareness of pervasive sickness and proliferating pressing threats to life and livelihood. In this context, Aly and I became convinced that we needed something more concrete, representative, and accessible to really make what we had termed "cripistemologies of crisis" something material and multiply particular. Inspired by Mia Mingus's injunction to "leave evidence" in the face of cultural invisibility and invalidation,[2] we desired to create a gathering place for the work that those in the disability community were engaged in for mutual aid, coping, visibility, processing, and expression. We wanted to create a persistent and accessible repository of works and documentation. And so, "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry" began to take shape. This project, which felt like the hopeful thing we could do in dark times, redefined archiving as a minoritarian and feminist endeavor: We knew that this thing we were creating would need to be accessible and flexible, that it would muddy disciplinary and institutional boundaries, and that it would definitely be non-traditional with regard to the type of content that is typically put out by a peer-reviewed scholarly journal. With Lateral as a welcoming space and site that is all-online and open access, our experimental archival venture would have a persistent and accessible digital presence that could function as more than a publication or an archive. These affordances of the digital medium are particularly meaningful in the context of ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that disproportionately affect disabled populations, present and future.

In the context of this cluster conversation, *(Re)Writing our Histories, (Re)Building Feminist Worlds: Working Toward Hope in the Archives*, I attend to the ways that our emergent, crip, and pandemic-informed archiving praxis was both hopeful and feminist through its infrastructural commitment to access: We centered access at every step and layer of our convening, curating, access-testing, and publication of the collection. To put it more simply, we did our best to ensure that every step and aspect of the project accounted for access needs. This is a caring way to do archiving, and it is one that foregrounds the fulcrum of *access work as care work*, and thus vitally both feminist and crip — and as a fundamentally hopeful, world-making praxis.[3]

ACCESS WORK, EVIDENCE, AND CRIP HOPE IN THE ARCHIVES

Access work and caregiving are crucial to daily life and also function as sites of cultural evidence and visibility for daily lived experiences of disability. In our introduction to the second installment of "Crip Pandemic Life: A Tapestry," we (Aly Patsavas and I) write:

2 See Mia Mingus' blog, *Leaving Evidence*: https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com.

3 I am indebted to conversations with T.L. Cowan, Jina B. Kim, and Libbie Rifkin, which inform the way in which I continue to think about care in the archives, affective infrastructures, and care work as worldmaking.

> Our work with "Crip Pandemic Life" has made apparent to us that there can be **a transformative mutuality of evidence and access in the moment and process of archiving**; particularly when creating an archive centered on the values of evidence and access. As Aimi Hamraie describes it [in our introductory roundtable], **access work is "culturally productive and transformative. And it leaves evidence. For example, when we transcribe something, that leaves evidence: we can archive that.**" (Danylevich and Patsavas, "With Grief and Joy," emphasis added)

To restate, briefly: access work is synergistic with evidence; it always leaves a mark; it is never not "culturally productive and transformative." The way in which Hamraie puts the pieces of access and evidence together really helps to shed light on the way in which access work is always-already an archival act as both process and structure. Putting it this way also powerfully valorizes care work and gendered labor, not typically considered worthy of an archive.

In hopeless times, it is particularly grounding and comforting to hold on to evidence of access work; of crip visibility and community in action. In other words, hope in hopeless times can take the shape of an archive of the evidence of our care for one another. Like giving ourselves and each other an object or a structure by which to ground ourselves in times of grief and despair. It has to do with persistence, with the concrete, the holdable, the visitable, the usable, and with the citable. As I reflect on this work, I get misty and filled with gratitude— it was a labor of love and a tangible daily source of hope and community in a tumultuous time.[4]

For a provocation, I turn briefly to queer theorists Lisa Duggan and Jose Muñoz in elaborating a praxis of hope in hopeless times: In "Hope and hopelessness: a dialogue," Duggan and Muñoz articulate a politicized praxis of hope that is very much rooted in negative, critical feelings, operating *in conjunction with* hopelessness, as indicated by the "and" in the title of the piece. Duggan offers that "Hope is the energy we use to smash, not depression (grief, sadness, despair, hostility, anger, and bitterness) but complacency in all its protean disguises" (281). In their particular, cranky-queer articulation of Hope, there is a drive towards liberation rooted in dissatisfaction, grief, rage, crankiness. It is, indeed, about desire and about transformation; a potential for world-making that relies upon coming together over negative feelings. To quote Muñoz, what they are articulating is a "certain practice of hope that helps escape from a script in which human existence is reduced" (278).

> Pause: If a politicized praxis of hope is about an escape from a certain reductive script of existence, what role can archiving play here, you might ask? This question is salient because archives can, indeed, be reductive and de-politicizing: Roderick Ferguson describes as an "affirmative action of power," whereby the "archival economy" of the academy enfolds minority difference only to constrain and configure it to its regulatory and hegemonic ends (*The Reorder of Things* 12). However in

4 See Mia Mingus' "'Disability Justice' is Simply Another Term for Love," *Leaving Evidence*, 3 November 2018, https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2018/11/03/disability-justice-is-simply-another-term-for-love/. Accessed 7 March 2025.

> his analysis of the fight for Black studies in the late 1960s, Ferguson—following June Jordan's lead in referencing a critical host-parasite relationship for Black studies within the institution—[5]offers the proposition that "Black studies [like a parasite] would exploit the academy for sustenance, residency, and dispersal, imagining ways to be more in the academy than of it" (*The Reorder of Things* 108).

Just as the disability rights and justice movements are indebted to the civil rights movement, so a crip archival praxis is shaped by the critical parasitic relation advanced here by Jordan and Ferguson. Thus, I offer that a crip archival praxis is culturally transformative, affording us a proliferative escape from a reductive existential-archival script; offering alternative ways, times, and spaces to be/move.[6] This is meant to be resonant for marginalized groups threatened by invisibility and erasure, and for whom archives have not often been inclusive: A politicized praxis of hope in *but not of* oppressive times and spaces.

PRINCIPLES

Shaped by a core infrastructural value of access, I offer the following principles of crip pandemic archival praxis to in/form how we might go about conceiving, gathering, and caring towards a hopeful archive:

1. create a **space/process** that is **Institutionally Parasitic**
2. follow a **Non-Rehabilitative** approach to soliciting, curating, and presenting content
3. create a **Persistently Kairotic** space of engagement for the **community**

Briefly illustrated, with examples from our project:

Space/Process: Institutionally Parasitic

This is a way to survive and to be "in but not of" the scholarly worlds of cultural studies, historiography, and archiving.[7] For us, this was a mode of "hacking" access — or, creatively finagling ways to make our archiving project accessible to ourselves, our contributors, and our audience. First, for ourselves: we brought interdependency through co-authorship into a space that fetishizes the single author: I, an adjunct,

5 Ferguson riffs off of the notion of parasitic relationality here based on a stunning line from June Jordan's 1969 essay on the fight for Black studies, articulating a critical "[…] we acknowledge the difference between reality and criticism as the difference between Host and Parasite." ("Black Studies: Bringing Back the Person," in *Moving towards Home: Political Essays.* Virago, 1989. [26], qtd. in *The Reorder of Things* 108.)

6 Here, I am referencing Roderick Ferguson's chapter in *Aberrations in Black:* "Something Else to Be: *Sula*, T*he Moynihan Report*, and the negotiations of Black Lesbian Feminism" and Margaret Price's chapter in *Mad at School*: "Ways to Move: Presence, Participation, and Resistance in Kairotic Space" (*Aberrations in Black* 110-137, *Mad at School* 58-102).

7 This specific phrase is a reference and a nod to Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, on the "the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university," as elaborated in their open-access, co-authored book *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (26).

partnered with a tenure-track faculty member (Aly) for the project, and subsequently we partnered with the director of the Disability Cultural Center (Margaret Fink) at Aly's institution, the University of Illinois, Chicago.

As a collective, our institutional location and partnership allowed us to access institution-specific research funds and grants so that we could pay a research assistant, access consultants, ASL interpreters, CART captioners, where such funds are not (yet) typically factored in. We were also able to fund an invited roundtable of some of the scholars-authors whose work inspired our project. For this roundtable, as well as for my editorial labor, we made a point of remunerating adjunct and contingent faculty contributors equitably — that is to say, at a higher rate than those with job security — for their intellectual and editorial contributions. This was a form of "hacking" the disbursal of funds to which we had recourse, prioritizing access and equity in a labor economy that assumes that scholarly writing pays for itself in the currency of accrual towards rank in a tenure-line faculty paradigm.

One other way in which we hacked access was with time: Urgent in its affect, the project also took time, allowing for the stops and starts, recursions and elasticities of a crip *pandemic* temporality. [8]We wanted it to be something manageable, something meaningful; something that meets the moment. And so,

> At the end of the day, a collection edited by two disabled and chronically-ill people required a much more interdependent process, as we navigated various bodymind crises and flares, respectively. This meant that at different times and for different components of the project, we stepped in for each other. […] We took, and offered, more time, many times. (Danylevich and Patsavas "With Grief and Joy")

Crip time - for contributors and authors, for peer reviewers, and for ourselves. One way that this particular access work is created an archivable imprint lies —proliferative— in the fact that we ultimately split the publication of the collection over two separate issues of the journal in order to accommodate differing timelines.

Content: Non-Rehabilitative

This is an approach to soliciting, curating, and presenting content with a sensibility of stewardship. For us, this began with the call for papers, which was more properly a call for contributions, since we weren't soliciting traditional scholarly papers. In the context of the pandemic, we were painfully aware of an exacerbated, ableist schism regarding "scholarly productivity." Mostly, this meant that those with proliferating caretaking demands and/or health crises found it impossible (or nearly so) to "produce scholarship." Attuned to the many disabled, gendered, and racialized scholars and cultural workers facing this predicament, we

8 This is a reference to Ellen Samuels's essay, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time" in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no.3, 2017, https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5824/4684. Accessed 7 March 2025.

explicitly sought, instead: reflective writing, documentation of existing creative and/or activist or mutual aid projects, poetry, and art. Work that we received ultimately fell into three categories: documentation of and/or reflection on praxis projects, reflective essays, and creative works.

A non-rehabilitative orientation towards our work also meant that, in making recommendations for revisions, we were mindful not to erase atypical modes of writing and expression, while also bearing in mind the level of accessibility of a given piece — not only in terms of accessibility elements such as image descriptions and screen reader compatibility, but in terms of jargon, idiosyncratic writing, or layout that might pose access issues. Informed by my work as an instructor of first-year writing, I found myself recommending that contributors offer a "reader roadmap" at the outset of their pieces; and, where jargon arose, to be sure to define it or, if needed, to include a glossary. In our multi-modal introductory roundtable, we modeled a non-rehabilitative orientation towards a reader/visitor uninitiated in disability studies jargon by including a glossary that defined and contextualized key terms. Our graduate assistant Corbin Outlaw comments about this element of the piece, which they authored:

> I like to talk about how things 'feel' and for me, this glossary is like a waterbed, or a big bean bag chair to sit in while you read or listen. (Danylevich and Patsavas "With Grief and Joy")

Finally, resisting any illusion of "wholeness" or completeness in our archive, we included a "Continuing Threads and Proliferations" google-document with the second installment of the project. This document, with content gathered by Corbin Outlaw, is accessible to anyone for viewing and suggesting, and links out to praxis projects, essays, and creative works from groups who weren't well-represented in our collection.[9]

Community: Persistently Kairotic

If Kairos is the moment of learning, or, a timely space-time[10] of knowledge and power production/exchange, then this concept is a key feature of how doing hope in the archives as crip archiving works. Specifically, it makes a lot of sense to think of our hope for the collection in relation to our community of visitors/users operating as a persistent and accessible kairotic space—to borrow Margaret Price's use of the phrase (Mad at School). Crip knowledge, specifically in times of crisis, is something that we felt was fleeting and in need of preservation, and, as Sandie Yi put it in our introductory roundtable, the pieces in the collection serve as survival manuals, and as recipes for crip kinship (Patsavas and Danylevich "Crip Pandemic Conversation"). I add the word "persistently" to kairotic to emphasize the way in which the online and open-access archive offers a sense of permanence to otherwise fleeting encounters that forge and sustain access to community and knowledge.

9 The "Continuing Threads and Proliferations" resource can be found here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lAg81bev-HbK5PJLGjXNXaPgbnUiOZmzCCxgpiZCBkkE/.

10 This formulation is a reference to the notion of "crip spacetime" developed by Margaret Price.

While the collection as a whole and each contribution is intended as a persistently kairotic space, our process and framing-oriented introductory roundtable as well as our closing accessible publishing workshop book-end the project as artifacts of persistently kairotic space that hopes to frame and supplement the user/visitor's encounter with the collection. Both involved synchronous discussions that were variously documented, archived, and rendered multiply accessible on the site.

With the introductory roundtable, we invited scholars and creatives whose work inspired and shaped the project for a recorded conversation about the collection. With this, we concretized a citational infrastructure of a genealogy of work into an introductory roundtable, also a novel instantiation of both literature review and acknowledgments. The roundtable took place on Zoom with ASL interpreters and captions, which were later edited for accuracy. The recording was uploaded to the site, and we generated an edited transcript, as well as a detailed glossary for any jargon or niche terms and phrases that arose, including a hyperlink in the edited transcript as well as a time-stamp corresponding to the Zoom recording, so that the term could be easily referenced in context. Finally, our closing workshop on accessible publishing was in person at UIC and on Zoom. This workshop was a required component for one of our funding sources, and also yielded an Accessible Knowledge Production Manifesto. The manifesto is included in our introduction to the second installment of the collection.[11]

Ultimately, hopefully, and urgently, a crip archiving praxis can serve as an iterable framework with which a radical elsewhere and elsewhen can begin to emerge, with and through our collective traces of access as evidence of — and capacity for — love.

11 This is the 2023 introduction, "With Grief and Joy - Crip Pandemic Life, A Tapestry: Part II."

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Rhetorical Attendance as a Practice of Hope

Kat M. Gray

Abstract: This reflective piece examines the author's experiences of creating an archival cultural rhetorics dissertation project. The project examined a protest event, Denim Day, staged by Virginia Tech's Gay Student Alliance in January 1979. By chance, in 2019, when she began working on this project, Virginia Tech held a Denim Day Do-Over during April's Pride Week Celebration. The article begins by examining the rhetorical situation in which institutions commemorate their histories, foregrounding the problems that arise when an institution thinks of its own happiness first. Next, she invites readers to listen closely to the stories GSA members told about the event, both in the archival materials from 1979 and in the 2019 oral history interviews that highlighted their work. These stories are complex and show that the GSA was navigating very hostile territory as they attempted to advocate for themselves. They did so with wit and courage, in spite of the backlash they received. Gray closes by framing Mira Shimabukuro's concept of rhetorical attendance as a way to listen in and to the archives.

Keywords: cultural rhetorics methods, archival studies methods, queer studies, rhetorical attendance, slow scholarship, unruly rhetorics

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In this piece I reflect on the methodological lessons of my dissertation project, an archival cultural rhetorics study examining how representatives of Virginia Tech University, a large, land-grant institution, memorialized histories of institutional oppression against gay and lesbian student activists. In particular, I focus on what it means to encounter materials in the archives and then *listen to them*. I explore the way that Mira Shimabukuro's "rhetorical attendance" helped me to do this work, paying particular attention to what it means to attend when we find dissonance and gaps in the materials we study.

In Spring 2019, I took an archival studies course and found a special collection that caught my interest: the Timeline of LGBTQ+ History at Virginia Tech. Through the timeline, I learned about a remarkable event in January 1979, when the VT Gay Student Alliance (GSA) incensed straight students, faculty, and administrators alike with an event called "Denim Day." The flyer in VT's *Collegiate Times* newspaper read simply "Support gay rights! Wear DENIM today!" (Timeline of LGBTQ+ History at Virginia Tech). Subsequent letters to the editor revealed a range of responses from outright homophobia to veiled threats; to my surprise, around 50% of the responses defended both the GSA and gay rights. I was most compelled by letters from GSA members who wrote to explain themselves. The "purpose of Denim Day," they wrote, was "not a head count" (Noll 4) but rather "an exercise in oppression" (Noll 4; Benoit 4) meant to *force* straight students to experience a taste of the discrimination visited on their queer peers. Despite the innocuous advertising, the GSA knew what they were asking of their classmates: to suspend judgement, to walk in anoth-

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er person's shoes, "if only for one day" (Benoit 4).

Through serendipity, Pride Week in Spring 2019–the same semester I took my archival studies course–featured a Denim Day Do-Over. The slate of events promised to draw on the archives to tell the story of Denim Day 1979 and also to unveil a brand-new oral history exhibit commemorating the 40th anniversary of the event. I was eager to see how the Resource Office and Newman Library would bring Denim Day to life. The archival materials themselves gave me what Sara Ahmed would probably call "killjoy joy" (2023, 76). Frustrated with being bullied and unable to express themselves, the Gay Student Alliance forced the rest of campus to pay attention. As the materials show, a large number of students responded negatively to Denim Day 1979, calling it a "stunt" or "game." I was delighted by the GSA's bravery and their willingness to rile up the entire campus with a protest.

In 2019, the idea of wearing denim to show your support for gay rights sounded simple, perhaps even passé. Context is critical for understanding the type of rhetorical gesture GSA students made. Virginia Tech, and Southwest Virginia more generally, was not a place where people could be openly queer. As early oral history interviewees Eugene Lawson and Scott Sterl recounted an "unspoken acceptance" and a "live and let live" attitude, though no one ever asked or affirmed whether the couple was gay (10:59-12:05). Southwest Virginia had a code: *you can be gay, just don't talk about it*. The Gay Student Alliance made a tactical decision to ignore this code to argue that gay love was as natural as slipping into a pair of jeans and walking across the Drillfield to class.

In fact, the GSA's actions in 1979 reverberated throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia; archival records indicate that the university received a phone call from then-governor John Dalton, who vented his displeasure that university administration allowed the event to happen (Kelly). After the phone call, GSA student leaders were called to the Dean of Students' office and told that they would "never again" hold such an event (Kelly). Prior to this event, queer students fought to have their organizations *recognized*; it took four years after their first attempt in 1971, and the university fought them at every turn. The Timeline of LGBTQ+ History preserves administrative communications from the time that reveal the distaste and distrust with which high-level administrators viewed these openly gay and lesbian students. Martha Harder, Dean of Student Programs, attended the student government meeting where the first gay student organization was approved in 1971. Harder expressed her skepticism that the organization was not "just an organization for gays to meet more gays" (para 3). She forwarded the matter to VT Counsel Walter Ryland, who repeated this accusation then added his own disparaging remarks to the record, writing "Pardon my repressive bias, but I can see them holding teas now" (4). From the beginning of their attempts to organize on campus, queer students were treated as bad-faith actors and repeatedly accused of lying about their motives. Further, as Ryland's letter and Dalton's phone call attest, VT administration believed that recognizing a gay student organization would be detrimental to the institution itself.

As the Do-Over approached, I studied the materials in the archives and I started to wonder: how

would the 2019 event tell the story of VT's 1979 administration banning queer students from expressing their queerness? How would the institution respond to the rich, "lively" (Cifor) archives, which told a very clear story of institutional injustice? The events surrounding Denim Day Do-Over (a radio show, the Do-Over photo at the Moss Arts Center, and a theater performance staged the night afterwards) highlighted the rich experiences of queer alumni and promoted a nuanced understanding of their activist work. However, VT as an institution (through event appearances by administrators and through university-sponsored social media accounts) focused on how the modern institution exceeded its discriminatory past. High-level university administrators attended the Do-Over photo, along with the much-beloved VT Therapy Dogs, who promoted the event on Instagram (@vttherapydogs). University social media promoted Denim Day Do-Over as an opportunity to "celebrate our progress," but framed Denim Day 1979 as an event intended to "promote awareness" rather than as a protest (@virginia_tech). In practice, people representing the university minimized the institution's participation in the oppressive response to Denim Day (students were "ridiculed and abused" but the institution declined to say by whom [@virginia_tech]).

The institution admitted that discrimination happened in the past, but it was quick to use Denim Day Do-Over as proof that the university made progress towards its goals of equality for all community members. Centering such an event around the university's reputation (and its purported improvements) takes focus *away* from the LGBTQIA+ community to create a progress narrative. A progress narrative has a happy ending (*it used to be bad here, but now it's fine*), and the allure of this rhetorical choice is that it produces good feelings. As Ahmed wrote, we are encouraged to accept the actions of an institution and its agents, particularly when our expressions of discontent might disturb institutional happiness (2012, 146-147). However, when commemorative events center institutional happiness, it is likely they will flatten the very experiences they claim to center.

The archives and the still-living queer alumni exceed this progress narrative. They remind us that the "real story" is far more complicated and nuanced than a linear, straightforward movement into an ever-improving future. These stories are worth telling, even if (perhaps especially when) they make us uncomfortable. If we respond to discomfort by *listening* rather than rushing to respond, we allow ourselves the space to see new and surprising connections in the archives.

"We Knew They Hated Us, We Just Did It Anyway": Denim Day 1979

In this section, I invite you to listen with me to the GSA's student activists. These students, as you will see, clearly understood their position on campus and articulated a carefully thought-out response to the homophobia they experienced. Denim Day 1979 was months in the planning (Kelly), and GSA representatives knew what the likely response would be. Nancy Kelly, then-president of the organization, said as much (with a smile) in her 2019 interview with VT archivists: "we knew they [straight students, faculty and administration] hated us [the GSA], we just did it anyway."

Campus erupted. After the event, the *Collegiate Times* ran the headline "Jeans Noticeably Absent" (Fischman); retailers in Blacksburg claimed to have sold out of corduroy pants (*Timeline*). Students wrote in to complain about the GSA's choice of denim. Junior Tony Pirrone asked the GSA why they chose "the Tech uniform" and accused the organization of being "so worried" that they "wouldn't get support" that they felt a need to "claim those who were possibly uninformed of this 'stunt' and accidentally wore denim" (2). Earle McMichael, Kevin Squires, Walter Nelson, and Sue Betterly wrote that it was "not fair to play on people's preference to wear denim" and wrote that they hoped "most other normal people" did not support Denim Day or gay rights (2). Mike Comper was offended by the "dress games" (4) he accused the GSA of playing, and Nancy Howe chided them for their "stupid tactic" (4). A group of engineering students went further, requesting that gay students be moved to an "alternative lifestyle dorm" which "should be painted pink making it easily recognized and avoided by people of the 'normal lifestyle'" (6). They closed their letter with a threat: "Then again, maybe a better solution is for the gays to just stay in the closet and consider themselves lucky" (6). But Denim Day 1979 was never about showing or getting support; it was about who belonged on campus and who was allowed to take up space. The defensive responses highlighted here illustrate fear about sharing space with people we deem "not like us."

GSA members did not remain silent in the face of criticism. Several wrote in to explain Denim Day from the organization's perspective. Steve Noll and Beth Benoit offered particularly noteworthy responses, to which I will now return. Steve Noll, alumnus and GSA member, stated plainly in his letter that "[t]he aim of denim day was not to get a headcount of our supporters" but rather "an exercise in oppression – this time for the perpetrators" (4). He continues by refuting accusations made against the GSA in the letters to the editor discussed above. He turns accusations of the GSA "imposing our ideals on the general public" on their head by accusing "that same general public" of "consistently and cruelly impos[ing] its standards of oppression and inequality on non-male, non-white, non-straight citizens since our society began" (Noll 4). Noll refused to accept shame from his peers and argued passionately that values are "infinite in variety and no less valid than those norms straight society clings to with such tenacity and in such hypocrisy" (4). He framed queerness as a "vital and basic… aspect of life," which the GSA forced into view by comparing their struggles with queer identity to "deciding what pants to wear" (4). Through this framing, the GSA made a powerful argument about the humanity of queer people and their right to love and be loved.

Beth Benoit claimed to be the originator of the idea, and clarified that "[t]he people involved in planning Gay Awareness Week[1] did not pick denim because they were afraid they wouldn't get enough support for gay rights: denim was chosen because it is the student uniform. And therein lies the point" (4). The GSA chose denim, in other words, because it was *normative*; as an act of protest, Denim Day gave the "uniform" at Virginia Tech a different meaning, forcing straight students to grapple with their choices in ways they were not accustomed to doing. Benoit describes the purpose of Denim Day as "mak[ing] people think… about not being able to do something as natural to them as putting on a pair of jeans in the morning" (4). She chastised her peers who became angry, writing that she was "just as angry, if not a thousand

1 The larger slate of events, of which Denim Day was only one part, was called Gay Awareness Week.

times angrier" that queer people are considered "sick" and unable to express "mild displays of affection" without being othered (4). She framed queerness as "the right to love another human being" and told her straight peers in no uncertain terms to examine their privilege (4). Benoit fiercely defended the GSA's choice of denim and stated in no uncertain terms that the very point of the protest was to cause discomfort.

As Kelly's statement that "we knew they hated us" indicates, the GSA did not expect that better treatment would result from their actions. Many, in fact, recounted their lives on campus becoming *less* safe. Nancy Kelly was followed by a car full of young men who threw a brick at her and then chased her on foot (Kelly). Scott Beadle, another GSA member, was ridiculed in the dorm showers; he and Nancy Kelly both had their dorm room doors set on fire (Beadle, Kelly). Yet, as Noll's and Benoit's letters indicate, and as fellow GSA member Andrew Alvarez also discussed, better treatment was never the point of Denim Day.

In his interview for the Denim Day 40th Anniversary collection, Andrew Alvarez explained how Denim Day changed the trajectory of his life. Alvarez stated that he was "raised by a military family. My father was a lifer. He was a Marine and Catholic and Cuban, and I was the first-born son. So I had a lot of baggage that I had to throw off" (2). During this time, said Alvarez, "the whole activism thing, that period was survival" which became a part of "stepping into my own identity" (2). As he saw it, "the day itself was less dramatic than the night before when we had to put the flyers underneath the doors" (Alvarez 13). Though Alvarez "fully expected to be verbally accosted, maybe physically," there were only "a few guys" who even opened their doors (13). Promoting the event changed him; he explained that "the person that walked outta that building was a different person than started this process" (13). For Alvarez, "[w]hatever happened that week was sort of anticlimactic because I felt so empowered by the act of just being out and letting people know about this event that, of course, pissed people off because they only had jeans" (13). Alvarez foregrounded "how I felt when I left that building, like I would never again feel like I had to apologize. That I had every right to be there" (13). Through Denim Day, Alvarez learned to accept his identity as a gay Latino. The act went far beyond counting supporters, or pissing people off–it gave queer students the courage to take up space and to use their platform to call out intersectional oppression.

I view Denim Day 1979 through the lens of what Jonathan Alexander, Susan Jarratt, and Nancy Welch called "unruly rhetorics." Unruliness is a "rhetorical tactic" that "pays conscious attention to framing" and to "bodies engaged in political action" (Alexander, Jarratt, and Welch 12). Unruly behavior like Denim Day 1979 "interrupt[s] existing norms of political debate and discussion," in this case to protest homophobia on VT's campus (12). Further, "some bodies in particular contexts are prone to being constituted as unruly," a fact which members of the Gay Student Alliance used to their advantage (Alexander, Jarratt, and Welch 13). As the examples above show, GSA members crafted, quite purposefully, an event that would disrupt the status quo at Virginia Tech. GSA members knew that participating in Denim Day would draw negative attention to them, but they took that risk to fight for basic respect. Though Denim Day was banned for 40 years after 1979, since the 2019 Do-Over, VT Pride Week always includes a Denim Day–a time for LGBTQIA+ Hokies to remember the queer students who fought for their rights almost half a century ago.

Rhetorical Attendance in the Archives

Given the tendency of institutions to create progress narratives, archivists and archival scholars have a responsibility to pay close and careful attention to the materials in the archives. As cultural rhetorics scholar Jennifer Sano-Franchini argues, this work takes time; for that reason, she foregrounds the need for "slow scholarship" in the archives (25). Through slow scholarship, Sano-Franchini, Hyoejin Yoon and Therese Monberg argued, we can find "overlooked histories" (8). Rearticulating these histories is a process of creating "alternative institutional memory" (Monberg, Yoon, and Sano-Franchini 9); these memories reveal the complexity of institutional histories and thicken histories in productive ways by giving space to voices silenced by progress narratives.

To hear these voices, we must first learn how to listen. As Krista Ratcliffe suggested, listening is rhetorical–and rhetorical listening "signifies a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (1). This, she argued, is a productive and necessary challenge to "the logos that speaks but does not listen" (23). In her book *Relocating Authority*, Mira Shimabukuro expanded rhetorical listening with the concept of rhetorical attendance. Rhetorical attendance is a model "of the deeper forms of intersubjectivity reception" which require "stretching toward with mental vigilance, with physical readiness, with intent" (Shimabukuro 21-22). Attendance is not passive, but "requires an explicit awareness and mention that culture and experience inform our decisions about when to ask questions and when to say silent, about how to contemplate the implications of our work and anticipate the feelings of those with whom we stand" (Shimabukuro 27). Attending in this way requires sustained energy and attention. As Shimabukuro wrote, we must "look, listen, and look again" in order to "attend to the no-shows, to the what is not said" (28). To attend is to *go over again* in order to reorient towards discordant notes, complicated causality, and previously unheard voices.

To do rhetorical attendance in the archives, then, we should center the unexpected–the dissonances we encounter when we access archives. We should ask what those discordant moments have to do with the cultures in which we live. Shimabukuro considered two questions central to rhetorical attendance: "what tells us something is missing? How do any of us know it's more complicated than that?" (14). To find answers, we must "[attend] to the social position of the archive, an active site of remembering and forgetting" (Shimabukuro 31). Archives, in other words, are not neutral, but culturally inflected and always changing. Conceived as rhetorical attendance, archival work is "a complex interacting array of knowledge still being collected, still being shared, still being redistributed back to the people whose material lives served as the source of that knowledge" (44). The materials in the archive and the material lives they represent always exceed our expectations in ways we cannot predict until we encounter them. The materials we find may surprise us, and they are likely to complicate any attempts at a simple overarching narrative.

Rhetorical attendance gave me a way to refine my thinking about these materials, to come back to them always asking "what *haven't* I seen yet?" As a practice, it is generous, reflective, and centered in care

towards the people whose lives are represented (in small scale) by the materials in the archives. Rhetorical attendance helps us slow down in the archives so we can take sufficient time to understand the stories being told. We should not assume that rhetorical attendance gives us the "real" or "full" story; rather, it complicates the narrative, drawing our attention to struggles, silences, and open questions. In these places, we can find a reflection of who we are as people, good and bad, messy and complicated, and trying to hear each other over the noise. How we shape the materials we find into stories is ultimately up to us as scholars, but taking time to do slow scholarship allows us to give the people represented by those archives the patient attention they deserve.

I began this project in 2019 and it was completed in 2023. In other words, I had plenty of time to encounter (and re-encounter) the materials in the Denim Day archives. During that time, I came to know the members of the 1979 Gay Student Alliance in particular ways. I admired their wit and the courage with which they went about their daily lives after drawing an outsized amount of attention to the tiny town of Blacksburg, Virginia. Their presence on campus at the Do-Over called back to a worse time in history, but knowing where we came from can be a way to change where we go. Like dandelions, the GSA found a way to thrive in poor soil. Their struggles, their determination, and their ultimate victories stand out as stories of hope. Too, they are stories of not allowing the limitations of today to circumscribe the possibilities of tomorrow.

Questions to Center Rhetorical Attendance

Below, I offer a set of questions to help us practice rhetorical attendance in feminist archival studies work.

- What claims do these materials make, and which cultural logics support those claims?
- In what different ways could this event be remembered? How many different perspectives can you identify in the archives? How might these perspectives affect your viewpoint as the writer?
- How does our own culture inform our experience and interpretation of the materials in the archive?
- How do we identify a gap in the archives? How do we know something is missing? Where we find gaps and silences, what rhetorical, material, or cultural circumstances attend them?
- What embodied experiences do we bring to, and have within, archives and public history events?
- Where do we experience discomfort when we attend to our materials? How can that discomfort help us gain a new perspective on the archive?
- How and where do we find difference, misunderstanding, and uncertainty in the materials? If we highlight that story, how does the narrative change?

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We Will Continue to Update This Page as We Collect More": Archiving as Hopeful Pedagogy

Alexandra Gunnells

Abstract: In the face of an increasingly volatile political and social climate, is it possible to locate archives as sources of hope for the classroom? This essay contends that it is possible if we consider the very act of archiving as a hopeful practice that teachers can and should incorporate into their pedagogy. Through a sustained analysis of a group archiving project implemented in a course on the rhetoric of digital archives, this essay explores how students utilized digital archives to preserve the hidden and absented aspects of student life at the University of Texas at Austin for future generations. The essay concludes by considering how this project model may be applied to other courses.

Keywords: archives, activism, student life, pedagogy, composition

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"We are not building [the archive] to remember or understand the past but to think the future."

- Ida Hiršenfelder, "Body archive/the body as the archive," 75

"Stories are powerful. The stories we believe, the stories that we *live into* shape our daily practices, from moment to moment. They have the power to promise some futures and conceal others."

- Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World*, 20

On April 24, 2024, the Palestinian Solidarity Committee at the University of Texas at Austin initiated a student walk-out and sit-in on the campus's South Mall to protest the ongoing genocide in Palestine and to call on the university to divest from manufacturers supplying weapons to aid Israel's war on Gaza. This peaceful demonstration was quickly interrupted by dozens of troopers from the Department of Public Safety (DPS) clad in riot gear. On foot and horseback, the troopers aggressively dispersed student protests, arresting upwards of 57 protestors in the process. On April 29, protestors returned to the South Mall to set up a pro-Palestine encampment. Once again, DPS troopers arrived and in the hours that followed, troopers attempted to disperse the group with flash bang explosives, used pepper spray and zip ties to subdue protestors, and denied water to those who refused to leave the encampment. At least 100 protestors were arrested by the day's end.

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There are no shortages of such events, either - indeed, one feels inundated daily by news headlines. For instance, in the months since the protests at UT, the genocide in Palestine rages on; SB 17, which prohibits diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at Texas colleges and universities, is in full swing; Donald Trump is re-elected as president of the United States. In the midst of these increased attacks on education and the mounting concerns about the new political regime, the work that we do in the academy – particularly for those of us in the humanities – feels increasingly precarious. How do we collect, sort, and make sense of it all? During the Fall 2024 semester, I taught a course on the rhetoric of digital archives; my students and I examined how digital archives – including the Digital Transgender Archive, Documenting Ferguson, and South Asian American Digital Archive, among others – are leveraged to preserve marginalized community identities and histories in the face of structural violence and systemic oppression. As I grade my students' group archive projects, I am struck in particular by one archive, which catalogues student protests and activist movements. The archive's Vietnam War collection includes a photograph from a May 1970 issue of *The Daily Texan* depicting Austin police officers subduing student protestors with batons and tear gas. In their Palestine Protests collection, I spy an eerily similar photograph: an Austin police officer arresting a student protester while a DPS trooper in full riot gear watches nearby. These two photographs were taken over fifty years apart, yet their similarities speak volumes. In their project reflections, one of the group members explicitly names this comparison, noting that many UT students are largely unaware of the long history of student-led protests on campus and the suppression of such protests by university administration and law enforcement.

It would be difficult, at first glance, to locate hope in this anecdote – and yet, that is precisely what I intend to do in this teaching proposal. More specifically, I intend to argue that archiving itself *is* a hopeful practice and that incorporating archival construction in our course designs orients us towards a hopeful pedagogy. By identifying archiving as hopeful, I do not think of hope in a passive sense, as simply *hoping* for circumstances to improve. Hope, rather, exists in the very act of archiving; to *archive* something is to preserve it, to gift it to a future audience. In doing so, archiving has the potential to create a sense of community for its audience or, in other words, a sense of kinship that extends across time and circumstance. This teaching proposal will demonstrate this idea of archiving as a hopeful act through a discussion of the core component of my rhetoric of digital archives course: the "Archiving Student Life at UT" group project. Through the process of building digital archives, students are encouraged to explore the possibility of, in Bibhushana Poudyal's words, "transforming archives into a hospitable space for historically and structurally marginalized, excluded, absented, and oppressed voices and experiences" (179).

The "Archiving Student Life at UT" group project consists of three core components: a digital archive proposal, a digital archive, and individual project reflections. The digital archive proposal provided space for each group to indicate their initial plans for their digital archive, including their intended platform, plans for archive-level and collection-level organization, and the type of materials they intended to collect. Each "final" archive had to abide by particular guidelines; it had to include a landing page, an "About" section, and a minimum of three collections. Following Jana Smith Elford and Michelle Meagher's

work on feminist archiving principles, the "About" section of the archive had a particular function: it introduced audiences to the archive and provided space for students to introduce themselves as archivists, thereby making their positionalities explicit (365). However, before we could embark on the project, the first question that my students and I faced was: What constitutes student life at UT? I wanted my students to have a great deal of agency in determining *what* to archive – the first step in this process was therefore allowing students to define what student life meant to them. I distributed a Google Form to students that included a list of potential topics related to student life to choose from and a space for students to list additional topics of interest to them; based on the results of the survey, the top seven most popular were designated as the group archive themes. The most popular topics represented a wide variety of possibilities, ranging from UT football to student volunteer organizations. Three groups ultimately created archives and project reflections that spoke directly to the idea of hope discussed earlier in this piece: student protests and activist movements, women's history, and performing arts.

The archives and individual project reflections written by students in the three groups listed above illustrate my central claim that archiving is a hopeful practice that can and should be incorporated into our pedagogical practice as writing instructors. For instance, the performing arts archive strove to make visible one of the hidden or absented aspects of student life at UT: the history and performances associated with the Department of Theater and Dance. As one student reflection noted, universities such as UT that boast prestigious sports programs often prioritize such programs at the expense of more artistic endeavors like performing arts. Thus, this archive responds by documenting photographs and videos that relate to three specific components of the performing arts at UT: the Madrigal Dinner, the musical *Ride the Cyclone*, and the dance showcase *Fall for Dance*. In addition to documenting a wide variety of material, it should be noted that this archive contains a contact page including an email address and social media handles where archive visitors can submit materials to the archive. By including this page, the archive speaks directly to the sense of hope discussed earlier in this piece: it establishes a future-oriented ethos and fosters a feeling of community by calling for submissions from users.

Visitors to the UT women's history archive are met with an overwhelming sense of pride; the landing page of the archive is emblazoned with the statement "She Starts Here – Then Changes the World." The (primarily) photographic materials collected for the archive documented crucial moments in women's history at UT from the 1880s to the present in diverse areas such as academics, athletics, and civil rights efforts, to name a few. For instance, the group archived materials related to notable women in UT's history, including Jesse Andrews, the first woman to graduate from UT; Edith Clark, the first female professor of engineering at UT and in the United States; and Gloria Bradford, the first Black woman to graduate from the UT School of Law. In many ways, the women's history archive illustrated the sense of kinship that can be fostered through the act of archiving. One student reflection in particular acknowledged the turbulent fight for women's rights throughout United States history, noting that women today still face the challenges of navigating a male-dominated society. However, this student simultaneously reflected on the responsibility that she and her group mates felt to document the materials they found in a manner that honored the legacy of women at

UT. Through documenting more recent events in UT women's history, such as the campus-wide Women's History Month Celebration, this group gifts additional aspects of women's history to future generations.

Finally, to return to the beginning of this piece, the student protests and activist movements group documented five student protests that occurred at UT, beginning with the Rainey Protest in 1944 – a protest against the firing of University of Texas president Homer Price Rainey – and ending with the Palestine Protests in 2024. All of the project reflections from this group specifically acknowledged the lack of publicly available information regarding the history of student protests at UT. For instance, two students pointed specifically to the 1969 Battle of Waller Creek, where students protested the removal of trees along Waller Creek during the expansion of the football stadium, and the 1999 UT-10 Protest, where ten students were arrested after protesting the university's delay in creating the Asian American Studies Department. As one student explained in her reflection, learning about these protests impacted her understanding of the university and its values; she questioned why such information was hidden from the public eye and fairly difficult to find. On the other hand, in the wake of the university's harsh response to the May 2024 Palestine protests, one student reflection articulated the connection he felt with past student protestors who similarly faced the university's attempts to suppress their activism. Crucially, this group articulated the importance of being able to contextualize the protests they witnessed in May 2024 within a much richer legacy of student activism at UT.

There are certainly limitations and implications that any teacher hoping to assign a similar project must take into consideration. For instance, some student groups, such as the performing arts group, had to rethink their original plan for the archive when faced with a scarcity of materials; thus, considerations about the depth versus the breadth of these archives will be incorporated into my next iteration of this course. Furthermore, the decision to utilize digital platforms – particularly when creating archives that represent marginalized communities or contain sensitive information – is a key consideration, as it can raise significant concerns regarding privacy. Therefore, in addition to guiding students through the process of treating archival materials with care, I also had to contend with how to guide students through the process of selecting an appropriate digital platform. For instance, selecting platforms that allow for privacy settings so that they are only accessible to the instructor was necessary in several cases. While it is of course necessary to address these limitations, I nonetheless maintain that this group archiving project offers students a critical perspective on the importance of archiving. As Ida Hiršenfelder reminds us, the very act of archiving is a gesture towards the future: it is an offering for future users, an attempt to think of future possibilities for our communities. By engaging students in the process of archiving student life at UT, this project reinforces the hopeful nature of archiving while also encouraging students to form a deeper understanding of their university and community. Student reflections frequently reported how the archival materials collected contextualized their own sense of belonging within the institution, as well as the role that they can play to impact the university's future. Finally, students finished this project with a deeper understanding of the living nature of the archive, as well as their own potential to be the ones who take up the mantle of archival hope from those that came before them. After all, there will always be more to collect.

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WikiHope: Teaching Feminist Historiography through the (Re)Writing of Queer Narratives from Kentucky on Wikipedia

Kerri Hauman and Emily Elizabeth Elizabth Goodman

Abstract: In this teaching discussion, we explain how we have used our Wikipedia Edit-a-thon—an act of critical feminist historiography—to teach hope as action in correcting archival exclusions in digital spaces. In particular, we illustrate how partnering with a local, nonprofit LGBTQIA+ organization, the Faulkner Morgan Archive (FMA), enabled us to expand the presence of queer Kentuckians on Wikipedia, specifically, and in the cultural imagination writ large. We discuss how our event provided students with insights as to how to unsettle scholarly gatekeeping and expand public dialogue around the lived experiences of marginalized people. While not every edit our students have made remains, the process of editing has undoubtedly made an impact on our learners, our small liberal arts campus, and the culture of the platform. Moreover, we assert that this process allows our students to engage with both the historical material and Wikipedia as "archival queers," thus changing the historical narrative from negative to positive and removing the stigma of centuries of shame for a hopeful future of pride.

Keywords: archival queers, critical feminist historiography, Kentucky history, Southern queerness, Wikipedia edit-a-thon

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In the cultural imagination, there are no queer people in Kentucky. As a commonwealth, we are more famous for our citizens' contributions to the movements against LGBTQIA+ rights (e.g., Mitch McConnell and Kim Davis[1])) than for them. While there are undoubtedly anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments among some, most notably those with disproportionate amounts of legislative power, Kentucky is home to vibrant queer communities with long, rich histories. The fact that these histories are unknown is the result of structural forces aiming to silence these communities and characterize queerness as recent and coastal. Queer folx, however, have been working for decades to preserve the memories of their ancestors who have called Kentucky home. In particular, the Faulkner Morgan Archive (FMA) has been accumulating papers, oral histories, and other ephemera to remind the public that there have always been and will always be

1 Kim Davis is the former county clerk for Rowan County, Kentucky who is well known for having denied marriage licenses to queer couples after the Obergefell v. Hodges decision in 2015.

Emily Elizabeth Goodman is an art historian, curator and critic, and Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Studio Art and Art History Program at Transylvania University in Lexington, KY. Her research focuses on issues of gender, labor, and food in American women's art in the 20th and 21st centuries. She is the author of the book *Food, Feminism, and Women's Art in 1970s Southern California* (Routledge 2022). More recently, her critical, curatorial, and scholarly work has focused on contemporary women artists in the American South. Her writing can be found in *Hyperallergic, Under-Main, Number Magazine*, and in journals including *Performance Research and Public Art Dialogue*.

Kerri Hauman is Associate Professor and Program Director of Writing, Rhetoric, and Communication and Director of First-Year Seminars at Transylvania University in Lexington, KY. Her research focuses on digital and feminist rhetorics as well as writing program administration and faculty development. She is co-editor of the book *Feminist Connections: Rhetoric and Activism across Time, Space, and Place* (U of Alabama P 2020) and of the website Digital WPA (WAC Clearinghouse 2023). Her work has also appeared in books such as *Professionalizing Multimodal Composition* and journals such as *Pedagogy*.

LGBTQIA+ folx in our commonwealth.

Archives like the FMA are an important form of cultural memory, but their engagement is local and has limited ability to combat the national perception that Kentucky is simply hostile to queer people.[2] One tactic to challenge this myth is through disseminating these narratives in a public forum, like Wikipedia. As professors at a small liberal arts college, we saw an opportunity to establish a partnership between the FMA and our annual Transylvania Liberal Arts+Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon (Transy LAF) in March 2024 in order to bring these stories to Wikipedia. In this teaching discussion, we explain how this collaboration between an historical archive and our undergraduate students made visible the narratives that have been purposefully excluded from history and how these efforts garnered hope for all involved.

Beginning in 2017, the two of us—a rhetorician and an art historian—used Art+Feminism's framework to establish Transy LAF, an event that brings together students, faculty, staff, and community members to collaboratively address Wikipedia's gender gaps.[3] It is well documented that Wikipedia's editors are primarily cishet white men; because of this bias, content on Wikipedia over-represents the (stereotypical) interests of this demographic at the expense of folx from marginalized communities (Berson et al.). To combat these prejudices, a group of scholar/artist/activists founded Art+Feminism in 2014, creating open-access resources and guidelines to initiate Wikipedia edit-a-thons around the globe. Using their toolkit, we have expanded our focus beyond art and to include folx from other marginalized identities. Therefore, we have eagerly partnered with the FMA and use our Wikipedia activism to preserve and share Kentucky's LGBTQIA+ history.

The work of Transy LAF is critical historiography. Our work follows in the tradition of feminist historians, like Joan Scott, who highlighted how considering women and gender more broadly would expand historical records while also transforming disciplinary practices and "[forcing] a critical reexamination of the premises and standards of existing scholarly work" (1054). Through collaboratively editing Wikipedia pages, we endeavor to make visible topics that are systemically written out of the historical record and to have our students experience and critically question the process of documenting history.

Wikipedia—which at present functions as the preeminent, nonprofit, open-source digital encyclopedia—is an archive. According to the Society of American Archivists, an archive is "the documentary evidence of past events [; t]hey are the facts we use to interpret and understand history." Whereas historians

2 Because Kentucky's most well-known politicians are staunch conservatives who have used their roles to limit and roll back the rights of marginalized folx writ large, and due to the myriad articles, books, and other works of media that have cast Appalachia—a region for which Kentucky is often a synecdoche—as regressive, bigoted, and undeserving, the commonwealth has become mythologized as homogeneous and hostile to change. This perception is primarily maintained by outsiders; Kentuckians recognize our heterogeneity and the various and significant contributions of our people both within and beyond our borders.

3 This event is open to the entire campus and the Lexington community. We require students in the relevant classes we're teaching (e.g., Women in Art, Digital Rhetoric) during the semester Transy LAF occurs to participate; other faculty might require their students to participate or offer extra credit to students who do. Often, students bring friends with them. As such, we have a broad array of students from different classes with an array of experiences and expertise.

like Roy Rosenzweig, Robert S. Wolff, and Robert L. Nelson and Heidi L. M. Jacobs argue that Wikipedia is a historical text, we maintain that the way information is presented, sourced, and chronicled on Wikipedia renders it also an archive. Because Wikipedia is a compendium of various primary source documents—including news reports, websites, press releases, photographs, and blogs, alongside peer-reviewed academic work— the site serves the dual purpose of preserving and writing the historical record. In this way, writing for Wikipedia allows our students to practice being both archivists and historians.

Because Wikipedia is digital and public facing, the histories contained within are accessible by a broad audience, one that is far greater than the FMA's scope. Writing the histories of queer Kentuckians into Wikipedia allows for their biographies to be learned by a general public, and it connects that public to the archival history of the LGBTQIA+ community in Kentucky. As Josh Porter, Assistant Executive Director of the FMA, noted in an interview with us, "once this information is out there . . . it opens up the opportunity for more research." He offered the example of queer Kentucky painter Edward Melcarth's Wikipedia page, which our students created this year. Melcarth was a world-renowned artist who taught at institutions including Columbia University, the University of Louisville, the Parsons School of Design, and the University of Washington. His art has been exhibited in diverse venues over the last fifty years. And yet, he had no Wikipedia page until March 2024. Porter continued: "when you Google [Melcarth,] now there's a Wikipedia page that tells you everything about him. People are more likely to . . . want to learn more," which might even lead them to the FMA website since archival materials are linked on Wikipedia.

While Wikipedia editing increases the visibility of some figures in this way, significant barriers to publication remain. Because over the years we have experienced several challenges to our pages over the concept of "notability"[4] (Wikipedia:Notability), we train students to look for as many sources as possible to support their work and demonstrate the value of the contributions of their subjects. In so doing, we encourage students to defy archival guidelines in order to correct historical omissions through research.

As such, our students undertake a process of discovery in preparing their Wikipedia pages, which is a common topic in their reflections.[5] One student found it especially challenging to find information to add to existing pages on artist Stephen Varble and designer Charles Lisanby. They write:

> One thing that surprised me about this project was the amount that I had to really dig for information deeper than surface level . . . about Varble and Lisanby. I think that I have been so accustomed to having sources like Wikipedia at my disposal that compile all of this kind of knowledge for me,

4 Per the Wikipedia Notability guidelines, "No subject is automatically or inherently notable merely because it exists: the evidence must show the topic has gained significant independent coverage or recognition, and that this was not a mere short-term interest, nor a result of promotional activity or indiscriminate publicity, nor is the topic unsuitable for any other reason. Sources of evidence include recognized peer-reviewed publications, credible and authoritative books, reputable media sources, and other reliable sources generally." Because the types of sources that are required for notability have historically omitted the lives and experiences of marginalized folx, including members of the LGBTQIA+ communities, this guideline ultimately reinforces their erasure from the platform.

5 We each assign our students to write a reflection after participating in Transy LAF as a part of their course work.

> I didn't realize how difficult it was to curate it by hand. I was also shocked how little information there was about these influential artists.

Partnering with the FMA meant that students had ready access to numerous sources to build their pages, which, in turn, allowed them to significantly expand these biographies.

Our students have also learned how historiography highlights or minimizes parts of an individual's identity. For example, our students collectively worked on the page for Kentucky artist Henry Faulkner (for whom the FMA is named). While Faulkner previously had a Wikipedia article, there was almost no recognition of his queerness. Students used FMA materials to correct this omission. This revision of the page led one student to reflect on "how histories are written and whose histories are told," saying:

> Before this assignment, I thought that if someone's relationships were not discussed, this was because they were not anything worth noting and then I moved on. But learning that Faulkner did have relationships and that people went out of their way to hide these relationships because they were queer, changes that. . . . People who collected Faulkner's work yet also were queerphobic objectified Faulkner's work because it was pretty, but chose to ignore the oftentimes queer undertones of these pieces.

The students thus saw how historical records obscure details that do not align with hegemonic narratives and learned strategies to combat this erasure. Part of our students' enterprise as archivists and historians during Transy LAF is to re-narrativize the biographies of marginalized folx away from certain dominant myths.

In this year's edit-a-thon, our goal was to challenge two significant myths about queerness in the South, more generally, and Kentucky, specifically. First is the belief that there are simply "no queer people" in the South. As the founder of The Invisible Histories Project, Joshua Burford, has noted: "The narrative is that there isn't queer Southern history, or if we have one at all, it's super young, which is a very nice way for people to dismiss us completely. As if somehow, we haven't been part of the conversation from the beginning" (qtd. in Mcclantoc 68). The second myth is that all Southern queer folx must escape the region. Keshia Mcclantoc attributes this to "metronormativity," the idea that to live a legitimate life as a queer person, one must move to coastal urban spaces (Halberstam, Herring, Thomsen).

Through our edit-a-thon, we are able to challenge both of these myths. Our students' reflections indicate that our efforts allowed them to see queerness in Kentucky as historical. As one student writes, "There was something revelatory about working with the physical evidence of powerful queer Kentuckians. Queer people have always existed in Kentucky, and narrowing the focus of the edit-a-thon to draw attention to these individuals resulted in a rewarding experience." Because we worked with the FMA to (re)write these Wikipedia pages, students were able to see and demonstrate to others the rich queer history of Ken-

tucky.

Our students felt strongly that our work also challenged the metronormative, coastal, and Northern-centric narratives that have marginalized their own experiences. As one trans student wrote, "I was able to help uplift my community and support one of my trans sisters. This was profoundly emotional for me, and made me think about narratives that center queer suffering in America and particularly the South. Queer people are everywhere in America, but narratives in the South often focus only on the hardships the LGBTQ+ community faces." They specifically noted how people outside of the South presume "the queer experience anywhere outside of a big city is just one of suffering and repression." Getting to learn and share a different narrative made this student proud to be a queer Kentuckian.

For our students, engaging with the FMA and (re)writing queer Kentucky history was not a disembodied endeavor. Rather, the participating students went beyond simply exploring a queer archive to embodying the identity of "archival queers" (Morris). As Morris and Rawson note, being archival queers occurs "when we acknowledge the stakes in recognizing, engaging, accumulating, and speaking these traces, these holdings, these embodiments of queer pasts for self and communities, for transformation" (79). Through activating the queer histories within the FMA materials, students "resist the archive as a purely intellectual space and . . . seek out affective relations with the past" (Morris and Rawson 80).

Our students' reflections demonstrated deep personal connections they found with the individuals whose histories they were writing. As one student who wrote about contemporary painter Wylie Caudill explained:

> When LGBTQ+ Kentuckians see people like themselves represented, it can foster a sense of pride and belonging within those identities. This rings true on a personal level. . . . I found that Wylie and I had a lot in common in terms of our upbringings. We are both from rural areas in Kentucky, and we were both raised in the church. I also feel like we both have developed our LGBTQ identities during college. Seeing someone with such a similar background and writing about his successes has validated some of my aspirations and hopes for the future.

Seeing themselves reflected very specifically in the lives of the people whose stories they were telling demonstrates that students experienced the "intentional quest for affirmative identity formation" that Morris and Rawson say allows archival queers "to read queer triumphant history as a positive genealogy of queer identity when the realities of lived queerness may not seem so successful or glamorous" (80). This reading of the archive was not an exclusive experience of LGBTQIA+-identifying students; most students recounted feeling a personal, affective connection to the histories they were writing based on their shared relationship to Kentucky. This meant that all students were approaching the research and writing process as archival queers regardless of personal identity.

Transy LAF not only changed how students related to archival histories, but it altered their relationship with queer temporality more generally. Our project is similar to the pedagogical projects advanced by Pamela VanHaitsma, in that we are "prompt[ing] student participation in public discourse that attends to the past while advancing claims about LGBTQ lives in the present and future" (257). By looking to the past from the present with an affective lens, these students began to imagine themselves and other queer folx in the future.

Moreover, our project engages in the process of retroactivism; according to Jean Bessette, building on Lucas Hilderbrand: "retroactivism is the generative function of shaping and drawing from the past for present identity formation and future politics" (11). Our efforts produce a doubling of the work Bessette says is involved in retroactivism, as initially the FMA and subsequently our students "impugn, deconstruct, and scavenge existing historical accounts and libraries, and compose new histories and archives out of the detritus to shape identification and political leverage" (11). Both the archive and the Wikipedia articles produced from it make the history of queer Kentuckians visible in new ways, in direct opposition to the political forces that would prefer to assert it has never existed.

In this way, our project engages with José Esteban Muñoz's concept of queer futurity. Muñoz considers "the future [as] queerness's domain" (1), noting that "queerness [is] a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in service of a new futurity" (16). The past and the present for queer folx in Kentucky has been marked by numerous attempts at obfuscation and suppression, but the work of the FMA and Transy LAF changes this for the future. In our collaboration, we are writing/righting the historical record so that the future is not about erasure but about the sharing of these histories so they are openly available to future generations of Kentuckians.

Queer archives like the FMA make visible the longevity and resilience of Kentucky's queer communities, and from those histories we can see paths through the present and into the future. By learning the stories of those who lived openly, often in the face of systemic oppression, students find connection, identification, and most importantly, hope. They recognize their mutual entanglements with other Kentuckians, and in so doing experience shared humanity. As Morris and Rawson note: "To be part of a vast movement is comforting, even when that movement shares experiences of profound injustices and oppression, because there is a shared strength and pride in facing and overcoming injustice" (80).

Our activation of this archive through Wikipedia editing furthers that sense of collaboration and augments the hope therein. That students are writing for a public beyond our commonwealth— and engaging affectively together with each other and the queer folx of the past to dispel myths about Southern queerness—they begin to see their power and agency against queer marginalization. They understand that structures and histories are malleable and can just as easily tell a positive story as a negative one about what it means to be queer in Kentucky. This shift in framework is radically hopeful; it promotes the future that Muñoz and others assert is possible. As Porter told us, in terms of Kentucky queer history, the FMA "[does]

n't want [the public] to think of Kim Davis. We want them to think of Sweet Evening Breeze. . . . when people think of Kentucky and queerness, we're trying to get them to think positively rather than negatively." As such, changing the historical narrative from negative to positive removes the stigma of centuries of shame and allows for a hopeful future of celebration and pride.

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The Response-ability and Responsibility of Archiving

Wendy Hayden, Andre Perez, and Mary Escobar

Abstract: In this paper, we consider our responsibility as archivists or archival researchers and our response-ability to specific kairotic moments. We explore questions on response-ability and responsibility: In documenting the past, or what will be the past, are archives inherently about hope? How are we both subject and researcher in the archives of our current moment? Both archival researcher and archivist? When does an archive become an archive? The archives offer a kairotic space, referring not only to timeliness but also to identities, and opportunities to document and produce counternarratives. Mary's personal experience in researching her own history in her family's garage is in conversation with Andre and Wendy's academic approach. Yet, that conversation reveals that narratives are not split into academic and personal, but using an academic lens on our personal histories and a personal lens on our academic interests.

Keywords: archival pedagogies, archival literacy, responsibility, personal histories, culturally, sustaining pedagogies

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In what ways can investigating relics of the past provide us with perspective in the present and hope in the future? How are we both subject and researcher in the archives of our current moment? Both archival researcher and archivist? When does an archive become an archive? These were the questions we wished to tackle when we undertook the project of exploring one's responsibility and response-ability of archiving. We each contributed a different perspective to this project: Wendy, a Professor, mentor to both Andre and Mary, and WPA who does extensive research in archiving; Andre, a former student of Wendy's, a current Ph.D. student, and an adjunct lecturer whose research interests are the pedagogical uses of narrative and communal knowledge production; and Mary, a former student of both Andre and Wendy and a recent graduate of Hunter College working in primary education, who contributed her experience going through

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family history found in the garage of her childhood home. We combined our perspectives in a collaborative way that ignored what could perhaps be perceived as a hierarchical relationship between the three of us by combining the academic interests of both Wendy and Andre and infusing them into the story of Mary's experience doing archival work.

In developing this piece, the authors each brought with them their own set of experiences. We centralized the archival experience of Mary who was able to confront her past through archival work, gain perspective of her family history through the lens of an adult now engaging with the archives of her family's history, and generate hope for building stronger familial connections. We recognized from the beginning of our writing process that the traditionally academic contributions of Andre and Wendy combined with Mary's personal experience was not a barrier, but a strength. Mary's personal experience has an academic lens, just as Andre and Wendy's academic experience has a personal lens.

Taking a narrative approach led by Mary's experience archiving her family's history, the authors of this piece seek to connect the responsibility of knowledge creation through archival research to an archivist's response-ability to the deeply emotional work done in archiving. We felt the best way to accomplish this was to walk the reader through Mary's experience in italicized text while Wendy and Andre make connections to broader pedagogical and methodological questions surrounding archiving and storytelling as pedagogical tools educators can use. All of us took part in developing questions, drawing conclusions, and editing to offer the story you find below. Thus, each of us contributed differently but substantially to this piece.

Is Archiving Inherently about Hope?

What you're wading into transpired my final semester of college. It's about childhood trauma, mental illness, generational legacies, and so much more. It's about needing to know you exist and needing to learn how to care for yourself. Again, and again.

FEBRUARY

The garage contained boxes of hastily consolidated ephemera, keepsakes, and trash, sloughed along from move after move after move over thirty years. Squirreled away was a stack of notebooks containing the pieces of myself I left behind when I moved. I knew as the pressure of clearing out the rental house tightened on my mother, the little meanings hiding in those forgotten boxes would be tossed. If I wasn't there to intercept them, so many of the memories contained in the garage would be– gone. The rationalization "I just need to know that I existed" propelled me back home and into those boxes.

For three days I sat on the floor of the garage with piles surrounding me- jumbled mounds of school projects, report cards, playbills, letters, recipes scrawled on index cards or clipped from newspapers and maga-

zines that told a story where yield, convenience, and price dictated our meals. The garage became my domain– every time siblings ventured in, I sent them away, assuring "I have a system! Trust me, it'll all come together, I promise!"

The hubris of thinking your memories are worth documenting and preserving seems not dissimilar from the narcissism of thinking you get to have kids to have a tiny nation you're the tyrant of. But that's not it— something inside every one of us aches to be seen, no matter how painful that can be.

I didn't have nearly enough time for everything, but I'd done a service. I had to go back to know I'd been alive. That there was a me that was "a pleasure to have in class." More than that- a me who had promise, who had adults invested in them, who, perhaps, had another trajectory.

Sometimes I read newspaper clippings relevant to our family, always looking for the one that verifies what loomed mythical to me as a child. I remember telling people what my grandfather did; I didn't know he'd done it because my mom's mother had finally left him:

> *"Arson, Suicide Suspected in DeWitt -Oct 14, 1974:*
>
> *Police suspect arson and suicide of the death of DeWitt Township man and the burning of his home Sunday night. The township fire department found the Raymond O. Fink home at 15541 DeWitt Road engulfed in flames when it arrived at 7:36 p.m. Sunday. Firefighters pulled Fink, 48, from the burning house and discovered he had a gunshot wound in his chest. Police said he was dead at the scene. An autopsy was scheduled today to determine the exact cause of death. Fink was apparently by himself in the home when the fire and shooting took place, according to preliminary police reports" (Arson).*

The archives offer a kairotic space, referring not only to timeliness but also to identities, and an opportunity to document and produce counternarratives. What we are writing, what we are experiencing, are tied to a particular time and place. At the same time, archives are not fixed but changeable as they respond to specific kairotic moments. If we think of the archives as representing a specific historical moment, we can then ask: Is archiving inherently about hope, hope that what we are building in the archives is part of the past? Perhaps the hope that our fight for reproductive justice might at some point be finished, for example. In this context, we are not only affected by but also affecting the moment the archive represents. As we do, we create a sense of control or agency in becoming the archivist and subject of the archives.

On the other hand, as Gomez notes, it can be problematic to freeze issues to a past moment, seeing them as endemic to the past and not the present, such as "creating a temporal distancing from past racial harms" (184). We can uncritically relegate these issues and feelings to a specific time or underestimate their effects in the current time.

Mary describes how her project helps her to exert control over her history at a pivotal time in her life. Definitions of archives usually imply or state their use-ability or value to researchers--rather than the archivist. Archival studies scholar Michelle Caswell emphasizes the role of archives in resisting "symbolic annihilation" and the importance of "seeing yourself in history," what Mary includes in her concept of self-care in the archives.

Archives as a Responsive and Responsible Pedagogy

MARCH

I struggle to untwine: what does CARE mean? If contingent on attention, on time, it's simply not something you can give to ten children. I'm almost conditioned to see care as an insult, as evidence of inadequacy– if someone's giving it they must have known you needed it– you must have given that away.

I think about what is kept of our most intimate moments. I write this now so I may remember. I think about archives and elision. I think about vantage point, perspective, and perhaps most of all, the esteem inherent to committing the act of documenting your recollection. It was up to each family member what they did with the box I saved for them. I took one picture of words that are certainly not mine to tell. That's the thing about archives, ***who gives consent to be archived****? But I needed those words saved, needed evidence of them in my own eyes– maybe it's only archived if you open it, after all.*

Mary's journey is propelled by a need to know that the childhood she remembered was real and was seeking to find present purpose by reaching back into the past. This responsibility to one's cultural roots, memories, and experiential knowledge is a key tenet in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Methodology (CRM). The frameworks of CRT and CRM position personal experiences as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding (Solórzano and Yosso). Mary's impulse to hold on to these physical things fulfills a need to legitimize her experiences. Archival work provides space for legitimizing the experiences of those to whom the artifacts belonged and of those engaging with them at any given moment.

The archivist shows awareness of the interconnections to a larger narrative as they place the artifact in the context of a specific time or place. As the archivist generates the narrative of the artifacts, they also generate new knowledge. This work of the archivist is necessarily transdisciplinary. Navigating the convergence of different knowledges becomes the responsibility of the archivist and the archivist's ability to respond, their response-ability, is key to how they can traverse archival space.

Critical Race theory provides a theory with which to ground our work and Critical Race Methodology provides a methodology we can use to explore CRT, but we need a pedagogy which can put these tools into action. Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) is an actionable approach to pedagogy which builds on the tenets of CRT and CRM. Educators have a responsibility to guide students navigating the archives and

they can employ the framework of CSP to help achieve this goal. CSP "seeks to perpetuate and foster--to sustain--linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. CSP positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good and sees the outcome of learning as additive… as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (Alim & Paris 1). CSP in the archives provides the space to empower students to make their own connections while challenging them to reflect on their positionality.

Further, archival research challenges the student to exercise a type of cultural dexterity, understanding the artifact's context in both the past and the present. The archive is an ideal place to invite students to use their experiences to contribute and generate knowledge while allowing them control over their narratives of intersectionality, positionality, and identity. CRM provides a methodology to help achieve this purpose and CSP provides the educator with the pedagogical framework to foster this type of learning environment.

Archiving Our Own

APRIL

Is it worth it to document why I feel mad? I lack object permanence. Out of sight, out of mind. –Maybe that's why I grasp at sayings, hold tight to fragments of meaning /How much is my (in the recently re-discovered words of 13-year-old me!) "control freak" disposition a response to my out-of-control brain? I'm both buffered and beleaguered by the similarities in struggles from 13 to 32. But I know it's worth it for the relief it brings me. Even in the one notebook I brought back– It was all there. It's all painfully, obviously, there. A plaintive striving for sense in a world of sensory upset. I must forgive me for what I forgot.

Just settling into my new apartment, raw from the breakup but luxuriating in the privacy that feels (still!)"too good to be true," I find out my mom's brother Joe passed away. As next of kin, she had to go through his apartment, though she hadn't seen him in 5 years. None of her kids met him. After so many years on the street, what had getting his own place meant to him?

Archives have been central to the work in rhetoric and composition—finding or creating a history of the field, but also seeing value in what others may not. Glenn and Enoch distinguish the capital-A archives from the lowercase-A archives, equally important to both disciplinary history and the process of research as a lived process. "Archiving our own" individual programs can show our discipline's importance to larger institutions (Longaker et. al). The many research projects about CUNY's composition and rhetoric past shows the institution's importance to the field, for example. The Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives is an example of centering individual experiences with reading and writing, and the field shows why these narratives are important by making them worthy of study, both in research and in teaching (Comer et al.).

When we read through student writing from the past in our archives, we realize that these students

may not have known their work was preserved. What, then, is our responsibility to them?

The Responsibility of Archival Work in the Stories We Tell

MAY

Eight weeks from my first trip, I'm back in California, picking through the apartment of an uncle I barely knew existed. I keep anything that has his name on it. I can't parse it now, but I know with later eyes I can construct a timeline of his life. The story his siblings tell, of his transience and vagrancy, of his schizophrenia. Getting it secondhand, thirdhand now, I think about coping mechanisms and the pain we had in common.

On his kitchen table there's a note that says "March 20, 2024- From here on out, my execution of life will be immaculate and impeccably executed! For proof, every time my feet touch the tile kitchen floor, I will do at least one set of dips– to let myself know that I mean business! H– from now on only once a week- if that!" He was dead less than three weeks later.

His ebullient tone echoes the way I speak to myself in writing, from my perennial to-do-lists appended by frantic assurances that "I love you!! It's okay!!" –all the way back to the way I engaged with my elementary school journals. But there's no such thing as an archive of one. Every moment documented is a prism of all occurring around you.

All archival researchers grapple with the question of whose story gets told and who gets to tell it. Critical Race Methodology uses the tool of personal narrative to disrupt, critique, and contextualize the master narrative in any moment of time. The archivist, through storytelling, can challenge the hegemony of the master narrative. This work certainly lends itself to the anti-racism goals of CRM but can also extend beyond that. An archive's stories can dismantle or reinforce power relationships, can "serve as tools for both oppression and liberation…in bringing about or impeding social justice, in understanding and coming to terms with past wrongs or permitting continued silences, or in empowering historically or contemporarily marginalized and displaced communities" (Caswell et al. 1).

The archivist, in constant conversation with the artifact, bridges the gap between the researcher and artifact. In this way, the archivist becomes part of the archive by virtue of how they engage with, organize, and/or interpret the artifacts. Each subsequent archivist engaging with an archive is adding to the conversation while also becoming an artifact of that archive. This cycle is productive and necessary for the development of knowledge in archival space.

Response-ability of Archival Work: Hubris vs Hope

JUNE

Never not seeking stability in the shifting sands of my own mind, I know I may be the sloppiest archivist for my own story, just as I struggle as an unreliable narrator of my own life. But there is so much self-love inherent in the act of preserving mine and my family's legacies– especially the painful parts.

TODAY- July 2024

When does an archive become an archive? For some, it must be a dispassionate ledger, rotely recounting details of immense or (in)significance. For others, a desire to document threatens to veer into the pathological. But that's the whole thing- disorders, dis/orders, are all only so defined as they impact other people. It's easy to embrace an archive if we like the picture it paints. My mother may have been able to toss years of recipes without a second thought, but I struggle to even throw away the scratch paper from my students' sentences at the end of the day.

The feelings, lives, and identities we document, our personal pasts, our traumas, our bodily autonomy, our hubris and our anxiety: can the order of archives turn this anxiety into hope? Yes! To nurture hope, you must allow yourself to heal. To heal, you must make sense of what came before. For the first few months of the semester, I chafed against an endeavor so unapologetically self-centered. It felt not just un-academic, but unbecoming. It isn't that I've now decided I'm worth it. But Joe has allowed me to know that some of this will come to matter and maybe not just to me. It's all there. It's all painfully, obviously, there. There's relief in irrefutable proof you existed, even if the meaning you extract speaks, ultimately, only to you.

Because the archivist is simultaneously creating and receiving knowledge, they are both subject and researcher. In this way the work of the archivist is always incomplete because any person's experiential knowledge is limited to their own experiences. Another archivist engaging with the same artifacts may develop alternative, sometimes conflicting, narratives. Thus, the archivist is a subject of critique as much as the artifacts. This difference should not be avoided but, rather, embraced. The contrasts in experiential knowledge create a rhetorical space for us to collaboratively build knowledge, come to consensus, act, and transform the destructive hegemonic ethnographic discourses that may exist in relation to the archive.

This project enabled Mary to contend with painful family legacies through an intellectual lens, while still honoring her emotional realities. Within this framework, she interrogated sources of shame that had originally led to her to feeling alienated from higher education. Andre and Wendy interrupted this perception, as they both implicitly validated her presence in academic spaces, and explicitly conferred value on her personal experiences. This will reverberate acutely as Mary continues in education, running a literacy program serving low-income, primarily migrant students. She understands intimately the urgency of need-

ing language to articulate your experience, and the existential importance of being able to document it. As educators, we can utilize archival work to help our students explore their identities, histories, and cultures. The process of archiving is storytelling, storytelling generates knowledge, knowledge generates hope, and hope is the essence of the archives.

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Hope through Archive: Refugee Youths' Counterstories in the Ritsona Kingdom Journal

Megan Heise

Abstract: Amidst a harsh increase in anti-refugee sentiments and policies in 2017, teen and young adult residents of Ritsona refugee camp outside of Athens, Greece launched a digital magazine called the Ritsona Kingdom Journal (RKJ) to share their perspectives, hopes, and frustrations with the world beyond the gates of the camp. This contribution, written by a volunteer facilitator who worked with youth on the RKJ in 2017, focuses retrospectively on how these refugee youth created their own archives of this time in their life. Throughout the duration of the RKJ's publication until 2019, the youth of Ritsona crafted counterstories against binaristic misconceptions of refugees as either pure victims or villains. These acts of prefigurative counterstorying and self-archiving are inherently hopeful, challenging both what constitutes archives in the first place, as well as the dominant anti-refugee paradigms of then and now, in order to imagine and enact alternative futures.

Keywords: hope, counterstory, archive, refugee youth, prefiguring, Ritsona Kingdom Journal

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Figure 1: "Sunrise over Ritsona" (Bashar, Sagvan, Abdul, Amar, Borkin, and Mohamed, "A Day in Ritsona" 38).

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From the Author: A Note on Form, Purpose, and Context

From July through December 2017, I (see Figure 2) volunteered as a facilitator in the Youth Engagement Space (YES; see Figure 5) run by a Swedish humanitarian organization called Lighthouse Relief, in Ritsona refugee camp (see Figure 1), outside of Athens, Greece. Opened a year earlier, in 2017 Ritsona housed 750 residents, half of whom were children (Latonero, Pool, and Berens 16), and the majority of whom were Syrian or Iraqi (Farhat et al.). In the YES, I worked with youth on numerous creative projects and activities, including the *Ritsona Kingdom Journal (RKJ).* As Lighthouse Relief explains on the landing page for the now-archived *RKJ,* "In spring 2017, young people in Ritsona came to us with a bold proposal: launch a publication that was proudly and unambiguously their own." Published from 2017 to 2019, the *RKJ* featured art, writing, and photography produced as part of YES creative workshops, as well as "everything from letters to global readers, essays on displacement, original photography of daily life in Ritsona, and many pieces of thoughtful and powerful artwork" (Lighthouse Relief).

This contribution to the Cluster Conversation is both *about* the *RKJ,* and stylistically modeled *after* the *RKJ, i*n an intentional attempt to amplify not only its contents, but also its form. Rather than a singular article-type essay, this contribution mimics the form of a multimodal digital magazine, with photography by youth from the *RKJ* interspersed with short original essays. My aim is to illustrate how the youth of Ritsona used the *RKJ* as an archive of their own voices in the discourses surrounding them, creating through the *RKJ* alternative narratives, paradigms, and ways of being beyond the narrow frameworks that seek to position refugees as victims or villains, and that posit war and hatred as the only realities.

Figure 2: The Author in the YES (Youth Ritsona, "YES Workshops" 12).

Leave Signs: Hope in the Archives

Outrider poet Anne Waldman meditates on the power of archive as a feminist and activist practice: "through Archive we show humanity…the consciousness of the future…we were not just slaughtering one another." An archive is where we "leave signs," to draw on Clarke, of struggle, triumph, and alternative ways of living and being (48). Taking these ideas together, our work in uncovering and crafting archives can be not only a sign to the future that we lived our lives differently than the majoritarian narrative of devastation, but can also *create* a future full of alternative ways (other than war, hatred, and greed) of relating to one another, an ultimately hopeful future.

However, in order to achieve this potential of archive, our definitions of what constitutes "archive" need to shift as well. Gaillet and Rose define archives in part as "collections of materials related to a person, family, or organization that have continuous social and cultural value" (125). This common definition raises questions around who decides "social and cultural value," when, how, and why. As Shipka notes, archives determine theory, but theoretical values also determine what gets archived. Glenn and Enoch propose a reorientation of focus towards "lower-case-*a* archives," through which we can expand our understanding of *what* can be considered an archive, and *who* can be considered a curator (17). For example, Basinski redefines the role of curators to be "involved with the manifesting and facilitating of new forms, otherworldly forms" (58). This focus on manifestation is in conversation with Tuhiwai Smith's argument that by honoring alternative histories and prioritizing alternative knowledges, we can "form the basis of alternative ways of doing things" (36). This is an inherently hopeful view of archive(s) – that by challenging what is included in/as archive(s), we are not only leaving signs of our hopes for the future, but also actively creating that better future. It is exactly this hopeful work of prefiguring a different future that I argue the youth of Ritsona enact through the *RKJ* as an example of a lower-case-*a* archive of their dreams (see Figure 3), frustrations, and realities while living in Ritsona.

Figure 3: The "Dreaming is Free" mural (Youth Ritsona, "Dreaming is Free" 1).

Redefining Refugee": Counterstories Against Anti-Refugee Rhetorics

The realities that the youth of Ritsona were dealing with in 2017 were fraught on a number of levels, from the material waiting game of asylum claims, to the harsh global responses to the rapid increase of forcibly displaced persons around the world. Global political events like Brexit, the U.S. Muslim Bans, and the EU-Turkey Deal both reinforced, and were themselves in reaction to, anti-refugee attitudes and rhetorics. These policies, as Gotlib notes, have real life or death consequences for refugees, yet, as McDonald points out, their own perspectives are so rarely heard or respected on these issues. This dynamic suggests that even those individuals or institutions that are seemingly "pro"-refugees can still inflict harm, intentional or not, by positioning refugees, "as a problem and the sponsor [those working alongside refugees] as a solution" (MacDonald 39). This framing hints at other binaristic labels that are imposed on refugees, such as "victim/savage, suspicious/silent, and fearsome/invisible" (MacDonald 46).

When I arrived at Ritsona in the summer of 2017, the YES was in the midst of a powerful project for the *RKJ* called "Redefining Refugee" (see Figure 4), in which youth wrote their own definitions of "refugee," on t-shirts with paint markers. The YES program facilitators explain that this project "was born of a desire for youth to express their voices and claim ownership of labels that they have been assigned" (Youth

Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 5). This focus on reclamation is in close conversation with counterstory, which Martinez describes as a way for "minoritized people to intervene in research methods that would form 'master narratives' based on ignorance and assumptions about minoritized people" (21). I see the "Redefining Refugee" project as one way in which the youth of Ritsona crafted counterstories for and in the *RKJ* to push back against anti-refugee rhetorics.

All shirts in the spread speak directly or indirectly to misconceptions about refugees, including, "We aren't your enemy" (Youth Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 5). Another reads, "Put yourself in my place. Be stateless. No land. No stability. No safety. Then judge me" (Youth Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 5). One resists victim narratives by writing, "We are Syrian but we have humanity, and I don't need anyone to look down on us," while others share mantras such as, "Don't give up and be confident in yourself" (Youth Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 6). There are numerous calls to shared humanity, rejecting the dehumanizing discourse surrounding refugees, including one t-shirt that reads, "Where is the humanity? I am not only a refugee. I am human." (Youth Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 5). Some youth spoke to the concept of being "normal," explaining that a refugee is, "a normal person who gives smiles and hope to the world" (Youth Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 6). These (re)definitions represent counterstories against the victim/villain binary, for audiences of both the youth themselves, and a broader, global public, through publication in the *RKJ*.

Looking at the "Redefining Refugee" project as a small cross-section of the *RKJ*, it is clear that youth were incredibly aware of the pervasive discourses that portray refugees as either dangerous or helpless, as villains or victims. Through this project, youth actively created an archive that proposed alternative narratives, paradigms, and ultimately ways of living beyond hatred, death, and destruction. In other words, this project was youths' way of recovering, prioritizing, and curating *their own voices* against a global discourse that sought to silence them or put them into narrow boxes with inaccurate labels. Since many of the challenges of 2017 are still present and prevalent in the lives of refugees, the Redefining Refugee project, as a lower-case-*a* archive, remains a powerful reminder to global audiences to attune to and center the voices of refugee youth in the issues that impact them the most.

Figure 4: Example shirts from the "Redefining Refugee" project (Youth Ritsona, "Redefining Refugee" 6).

Hope, Revisited: The Ritsona Kingdom Journal's Impact

YES founder Daphne Morgen has shared that the magazine helped youth "have some control over the information being produced about them. In a world where they have very little control over their circumstances, this can be powerful" (Keung). These sentiments are echoed by youth creators themselves; one youth I knew in Ritsona, Michael, explains, "You can't do anything here….When you have nothing to do, painting helps. I take my paints out and I can explain things" (King). The need to create and to share these creations is further clarified by Michael's older brother George, sharing, "We created the magazine because we wanted to tell people that we are here and that we are people with many talents" (King). Furthermore, another teen I knew in Ritsona, Borkin, explains, "I want to capture everyday life in the camp and of all my friends. I want people outside to see how we live here" (King). In their own words, young people in Ritsona sought not only creative expression, but also a global audience for their work. It is exactly through this global audience that the *RKJ* can continue to make an impact, even after its publication has ceased.

Looking back at the *RKJ* seven years since it started, it is clear to me that it was an act of curation and archive on the part of its youth creators, an inherently hopeful act of cataloging both their daily life for readers living beyond the confines of Ritsona camp, and for expressing their aspirations and frustrations through creative outlets. By sharing counterstories in the *RKJ* against the prevalent victim/villain binaristic

misconception of refugees, youth rewrote the narratives surrounding their lives. By reorienting the conversation towards shared humanity, youth prefigured a different, better future, a future enacted on a daily basis in the YES and through the *RKJ*. To return to Tuhiwai Smith, I see the youth of Ritsona, through the *RKJ,* as producing alternative histories of this fraught time, which remind global viewers of different ways of being and doing. For these readers of the *RKJ*, even all these years later, may we take the lessons offered by the youth and honor them in our own archives, our own memories, and our own acts of prefiguring alternative futures.

Figure 5: The YES circa 2017 (Youth Ritsona, *Ritsona Kingdom Journal* 40).

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Unlearning the Archive: Delinking, Positionality, and Hope

Kaylee Laakso

Abstract: Researcher positionality drives research design, information sourcing, methodology selection, and experience in the archive. This personal reflection offers a limited case study in privileging positionality alongside decolonizing methods such as delinking and détournement to engender transformation and hope in archival research. Positionality, deception analysis, and decolonizing methodologies elucidate power imbalances surrounding Indian Removal rhetorics and their (re)presentations in federal archives. Drawing from archival research at the Library of Congress, this case study argues for positionality-driven research approaches and the incorporation of alternative archival sources. This study highlights ways researchers can navigate archival limitations, interrogate dominant narratives, and expand methodological approaches.

Keywords: positionality, decolonizing, colonial rhetoric, deception, archives, Indian Removal Act of 1830

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> "Positionality of the researcher can inflect the contours of the project: how it both opens and narrows the boundaries." Jean Bessette

Bringing an attunement to one's subjectivities, biases, identities, preferences, and perspectives and their effects on these openings and narrowings can be personally enlightening as well as pedagogically and methodologically advancing. Positionality drives our research approach and informs how we experience archives and artifacts. Understanding predispositions can impart greater objectivity into the research process by enabling us to enact countermeasures within the research design to root out subjectivities. Significantly, positionality and positionality statements can illuminate opportunities for critical engagement and methods for unlearning and relearning to find new paths in the archives. Researcher's positionality statements highlight the importance of diversity in research while enhancing the credibility and relevance of their work by offering consumers a more holistic contextual understanding of their choice in sources, methods, style, and worldviews. Furthermore, positionality statements enhance consumers' discernment of fact patterns, analysis, and storytelling, enabling researchers to engage more effectively with published works or extend the research's findings.

To illustrate the role of positionality in opening and narrowing boundaries, I offer a brief personal reflection as a limited case study for privileging positionality as a tool that can ultimately elucidate hope

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in the archives. I additionally portray how decolonizing methods such as delinking and détournement can effectively accompany positionality to offer maximal transformative potential. Contemplating how my positionality both opened and narrowed boundaries in recent archival research on the Indian Removal Act of 1830 at the Library of Congress (LOC), I invariably think of Qwo-Li Driskill and Malea Powell's powerful positional acknowledgments in "Dreaming Charles Eastman: Cultural Memory, Autobiography, and Geography in Indigenous Rhetorical Histories." Referencing Driskill's statement, "The archival project was not created *for* Indians. It was created to consolidate knowledge *about* Indians. And yet, here I am, an Indian in the archive," Powell offered, "And yet, here *I* am, an Indian talking about what it means to be an Indian in the archive, what it means to be the object looking back, the objectified engaged in the process of making knowledge about the processes that led to my objectification" (117). Partly sharing Driskill and Powell's positionality of being American Indian in the archive, I, too, witnessed the perpetuated disparities and objectification.

As a cisgender woman of Northern European and American Indian ancestry and member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, I inherently gravitated toward researching the Removal policies and treaties that displaced tens- to hundreds of thousands of American Indians from their homelands east of the Mississippi. My professional background shaped how I approached this research by leading me to trust that the Library of Congress would offer a comprehensive and authoritative view on Removal. After all, the Library of Congress "is an unparalleled world resource. The collection includes millions [of] cataloged books and other print materials in 470 languages; millions of manuscripts; the largest rare book collection in North America; and the world's largest collection of legal materials, films, maps, sheet music and sound recordings" ("General Information"). However, despite the collection's robustness, I encountered vulgar silence in representations of tribal and Indigenous voices. Disappointingly, the LOC Research Guide on the Indian Removal Act (re)presented the rhetoric of the colonizer at the resounding exclusion of the colonized, systematically displaying congressional publications, Andrew Jackson papers, historic newspapers highlighting state and federal government articles, maps of land cessations, and Martin Van Buren papers, and just one direct reference to a Cherokee newspaper article on Removal (Library of Congress, Cherokee). The resulting disproportionate inaccessibility to Indigenous narratives and (re)presentations is the byproduct of centuries of rhetorical layering propagating colonizer narratives and norms.

I witnessed how the vulgar silence of Indigenous voices threatens to erase public memory of the exploitation and ill-treatment, not only of my ancestors but also of countless others. Confronted with this painful realization, I sought out methods to understand the biases and agendas that led to this predicament. Pondering the state and function of the archive, I found myself calling upon the decolonizing method of delinking, unlearning my instinctual ways of being and seeing to open my eyes to new ways of learning and relearning. Delinking calls for critical disengagement from colonial epistemologies in order to reconfigure knowledge production toward a decolonial pluralism wherein many worlds coexist (Mignolo 463). Delinking, as championed by Mignolo, has been theoretically and methodologically explored by scholars including Wanzer, Cushman, Baca, and Garcia, among others. Cushman et al. expand delinking by advocat-

ing a pluriversal approach that incorporates Kirsch and Royster's creative imagination and considers cultural logics and their role in enabling rhetoric, epistemic shifts, and the possibility of decoloniality (Cushman et al. 15-16). Seeking to engage this pluriversal delinking approach in practice, I critically interrogated the LOC's dominant narrative and sought alternate spaces that foregrounded American Indian voices. I questioned the curation of sources by examining absences and presences. I analyzed land cessation maps and treaty documents for their content and how they obscured or erased Indigenous agency. I additionally explored alternative resources like the Seminole Tribe of Florida's Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum to center Indigenous perspectives and challenge the overwhelmingly disproportionate colonizer records within federal collections.

Seeking to reveal power imbalances in the archive and archival material, I employed the tool of active disentanglement against prevalent colonizer narratives. This disentanglement practice, in concert with my academic positionality as a deception researcher, drove me to recognize underlying deceptive messaging within Andrew Jackson's and the federal government's rhetoric. Specifically, Jackson's benevolent narrative framing of Removal stood out for its deceptive concealment of the government's forceful actions. Jackson's use of euphemistic language signaled coercion behind a guise of benevolence that Kenneth Burke would describe as "terministic screens," wherein language choices direct attention and shape perceptions (Burke 45). Jackson's deceptive terminology was especially evident in his annual addresses to Congress. His repeated emphasis on voluntariness sought to manipulate public perception, garner support, and circumvent opposition while enabling him to maintain a pretense of morality. Jackson's benevolent rhetoric effectively served as a smokescreen to camouflage the government's power imbalances and egregious actions by foregrounding the federal government's legitimacy narratives while obscuring the oppressive realities of its actions. This deceptive juxtaposition aligns with Barton Whaley's concept of "hiding the real while showing the false" (Whaley 27). Recognition of this perceptible deceptive tactic enabled me to critically interrogate the archival material and its embedded power structures more deeply.

My interaction in the archive further impelled me to explore how reflexivity and reframing may elucidate hope. Linda Tuhiwai Smith defines *reflexivity* as taking greater control over discussions and handling Indigenous issues and social problems (175). "Reframing occurs in other contexts where Indigenous people resist being boxed and labeled according to categories which do not fit" (Smith 175). Critical examinations through reflexivity and reframing can facilitate opportunities for halting discriminatory characterizations while unlocking divergent considerations for learning, being, and knowing.

Seeking to reframe my approach while acknowledging logistical and historical challenges with obtaining documentation of Indigenous voices regarding Removal policies, I expanded my scope of information sources to include local and state government, tribal, and university historical centers and museums. Despite my intention to employ reflexivity by foregrounding Indigenous discourse, I generally encountered the same disproportionate inaccessibility to Indigenous artifacts and narratives across local and state government and university historical centers and museums as I had with the LOC. However, I notably found that the Ah-Tah-Thi-Ki Museum held primary and secondary sources of artifacts from the time of Removal,

including newspaper clippings and government correspondence. These sources provided insight into Indigenous communities' realities, representing a counterpoint to the federal government's carefully constructed Removal narrative as orderly and benevolent.

Equipped with this broader set of artifacts, I explored how to leverage methods such as détournement to identify, extract, and exploit elements from underlying power structures to engender new perspectives. Jason Black, paraphrasing Guy Debord, defines détournement as a repurposing of "the rhetoric of those in power to drain the original language of its oppressive assaults in the service of propping up the disempowered" (Debord qtd. in Black 12). Détournement efforts first sought to expose injustices and question claims of morality and ethics by contrasting colonial narratives with Indigenous accounts and critically interrogating the government's rhetorical strategies. The second step in my détournement effort was to critically imagine ways to exploit and effectively repackage the government's oppressive terms and themes into empowering language and ideas for Indigenous populations. Researchers can employ détournement to reveal and counter oppressive rhetoric in the archive and artifacts.

The fluid nature of challenges with (re)presentation mandates flexibility in solution-making and implores a combination of methodologies to explore alternative pathways to prioritize collaboration, understanding, and opportunities for hope. My research drew inspiration from the archival approaches of Hagan, O'Neal, Luker, Punzalan, and Marsh, as well as from the postcolonial and decolonizing frameworks of Bastian, Stoler, Cushman, Duarte and Belarde-Lewis, and Garcia. I sought to build on their work by employing numerous decolonizing tools and open-ended fact-finding, patterning, and storying to generate holistic findings and explore alternative pathways.

By examining my positionality, I realized its power to inform the development and employment of research designs, methodologies, pedagogical modalities, and analysis. Harnessing my positionality, I used decolonizing methodologies to interrogate, unlearn, and relearn the archives and artifacts I encountered. These decolonizing methods critically evaluated dominant and normative ways of seeing, being, and knowing to uncover new possibilities for interpretation while illuminating opportunities for hope as a researcher. This increased awareness and empathy fostered intellectual growth and ultimately delivered an actionable methodological transformation practice that continuously yields opportunities for modification, application, and hope.

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Storied Methodologies: Finding Hope in the Archives

Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Jessica A. Rose

Abstract: Engaging Indigenous archival methodologies, this essay seeks opportunities for settler scholars to learn from layered and inclusive storytelling methods and to reconsider the value of storywork traditions that reflect listening spaces and models of resistance. We find hope and new possibilities for an expanded view of rhetoric in this approach, one grounded in responsible and ethical approaches for learning from and incorporating community research practices into our work—while neither appropriating nor assuming knowledge we do not yet possess.

Keywords: Indigenous Methodologies, storywork, invitational rhetoric, unsettling archival research, oral histories

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Hope sparkles like water in the clean carafe.

—Adrienne Rich, "Letters: March 1969"

Choctaw scholar, novelist, screenwriter, playwright, and humorist LeAnne Howe explains the significance of the storytelling theory she terms *tribalography*, the "Native propensity for bringing things together, for making consensus, and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another" (qtd in Squint xi). In a 2012 interview, she explains how tribalography is tied to "the fact that Natives always, always, always are always adding to their story" and including "white people, Black people, other red people, yellow, brown, we are constantly adding to our story" (Caison 67). Highlighting this inclusion of everyone, this resistance to "exclude or cut people off," even when Indigenous people are absent in non-Native authored works (Caison 68), Howe reveals a space for hopefulness in studying transformative Indigenous archival methods and storytelling methodologies. In this essay, we explore ways in which we can all learn from these layered and inclusive storytelling methods that rely upon archival materials and sources to upend traditional colonial and settler ways of creating narratives. Acknowledging the significance and influence of tribalology methods, Howe expresses her delight in the reception of these ideas, her pleasure in being

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"helpful to people trying to understand the way that Native people tell stories, and *what we want*…reciprocity" (qtd in Squint xii). We contend that including Indigenous storytelling practices as a focal point in archival research methods attempts to address both reciprocity and hopefulness.

Listening Spaces

> If we want archive stories to unsettle rather than settle archival research, we need a better sense of what stories are, what they do, and how we might best deploy them in innovative and incisive ways.
>
> --Jean Bessette, "Unsettling the Archive Story"

Malea Powell, in "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians *Use* Writing," proclaims that stories "have the power to make, re-make, un-make, the world" (396). Powell's article arrived at a moment when work on Indigenous studies in Rhetoric and Composition was scant and "suffer[ed] from the burdens of a colonial mindset and a general lack of understanding about the diversity of American Indian cultures and histories" (397). She traces these misunderstandings back to origin stories of the Western rhetorical tradition, which classically resist the notion that "some of us read and listen from a different space" (397). Her stance echoes practices of other disciplines that were already challenging the colonial mindset, recognizing "different spaces" of listening as locations of research. For example, Indigenous scholars including Linda Tuwihai Smith, Jo-Ann Archibald, and Jelena Porsanger were already working to decolonize scholarship, identifying Western research methods as inherently colonial and "aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts" through problematization (Porsanger 106). Porsanger notes that this approach assumes that "in relation to Indigenous peoples, their entire existence seems to be a problem or a question for researchers, often formulated as "The ... (insert name of Indigenous group) problem" or "The ... (insert name of Indigenous group) question" (Porsanger, quoting Smith (90), 106). Ernest Stromberg further explains, "In the aftermath of white military conquests and subjugation, [Indigenous people] who would speak or write on behalf of Native rights and cultures were and often still are addressing an audience that generally assumes its own superiority. It is not a rhetorical situation conducive to mutual dialogue" (5). Indigenous research methodologies resist this framing, instead centering human experience and alternate forms of meaning-making to avoid linear thinking and to make room for deliberation and recursive thought. The lessons of this resistance have broader applications, particularly for constructing knowledge by viewing archives as locations that innately center human experience.

Models of Resistance

> Hope can be what sustains life in the face of despair, and yet it is not simply the desire for things to come, or the betterment of life. It is the drive or energy that embeds us in the world – in the ecology of life, ethics and politics.
>
> --Mary Zournazi, *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*

Feminist scholars (in particular) were early adopters of storytelling methodologies (what Archibald terms "storywork") as part of an organic heuristic that prioritizes discourse and broader material culture as evidence (see Haraway, Hartman, Nooiger and Sol Cueva, and Royster and Kirsch). They seek "to develop mechanisms by which listening deeply, reflexively, and multisensibly become standard practice not only in feminist rhetorical scholarship but also in rhetorical studies writ large," particularly when working with archives (Royster and Kirsch 20). For instance, in thinking about how we teach archival research, historical scholar Michael-John DePalma identifies an ethical relationship between the topics and subjects that scholars choose to explore and their accompanying research methods. Considering archives as a space for "ethical in(ter)vention" that privileges communities, DePalma observes that "the movement toward more expansive understandings of archives and communities [is] well underway, and the need to approach them as dynamic and culturally situated is fundamental to our dispositions as scholars of rhetoric and composition" (212). He contends that by acknowledging all materials in a particular collection as community "texts" and privileging those communities within the work, we foster ethical research practices, both for ourselves and the next generation of researchers.

These broadened perspectives of methodology offer hope and suggest new possibilities for an expanded view of rhetoric, one that leads to diverse paths of inquiry and prompts researchers to reconsider the collaborative role of storytelling creation and circulation as methodological practice. In this vein, Stromberg lamented the lack of an Indigenous "book-length project" in 2006, explaining that as "the scope of rhetorical studies expands, any attempt to comprehend the rhetorical traditions of the United States that neglects the practices of American Indians remains significantly incomplete" (6).

An Invitational Model

Works like Emily Legg's brilliant 2023 *Stories of Our Living Ephemera*: *Storytelling Methodologies in the Archives of the Cherokee National Seminaries, 1846-1907* address this breach. In particular, the chapters articulating Indigenous methodologies, reflective archival research practices, and pedagogical storytelling invite study and recognition. Stromberg describes his collection *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance* as an "invitation and an introduction to [Indigenous] traditions" (8). The concept of *invitation* is important, indicating a notion of hospitality that at once is welcoming yet implies mutual respect.[1]Legg succinctly explores this relationship in discussing the inherent tension between honoring community practices and contributions while not appropriating those intellectual ideas and history:

> "I've encountered the phrase, 'Well, that's interesting, but that's your thing.' or, 'Oh, I'm not doing anything on Indigenous rhetorics, so I didn't cite any Indigenous people–I don't want to appropriate

1 LeAnne Howe and Padraig Kirwan's edited collection *Famine Pots: The Choctaw-Irish Gift Exchange*, 1847-Present (Michigan State UP 2020) illustrates a longitudinal, cross-community appreciation of community membership and an integration of material culture research practices. For a discussion of ways in which invitation and hospitality ethically play out in this ongoing relationship, see Lynée Lewis Gaillet's "Circumventing 'Hospitality": The Enduring Legacy of 19th-Century Choctaw Nation and Irish Solidarity." The CEA Critic, vol. 85, no. 3, 2023, pp. 217-232

> that work.' And yet, when I read current scholarship, especially related to storytelling, object-oriented ontologies, 'new' materialism, I am struck by the similarities to my own research on Indigenous ontologies with the news publications making the materialist turns as well as theories that marvel at the role of stories, and yet, the bibliographies read as a modern erasure of Indigenous voices." (235)

In addressing issues regarding appropriations of cultural rhetorics or pedagogical knowledge-making, Indigenous scholar Andrea Riley Mukavetz reinforces that we don't "have to be native, work with native people, or tell stories the way [she tells] stories to find these practices useful and meaningful" (121-22). Yet, bridging respect and learning about community practices while repelling outright appropriation and "academic aggression" are legitimate concerns (Legg 237). Feminist and Indigenous scholars committed to unsettling archival research practices help us to identify ethical hybrid methodologies. Legg's monograph overlays scholarship with traditions and community ideologies to reimagine material culture, suggesting that "we (Indigenous and settler scholars alike) can reflect on our own pathways in ceremony and work to Indigenize our teaching, our writing methods, and storied ways" (24). Her exploration of ways to encourage cross-generational listening and learning (including collaborating with the dead) outlines an Indigenous methodology featuring storywork that views archives as a well-source of knowledge, one that transcends time and space. She explains that if we make our stance clear, focus on situated storytelling that privileges the experiences of stakeholders, and interrogate the "boundaries we place between our research practices and our ways of being and knowing in the world," then we can bridge research methods/positionality in ways that "[sustain] a community of knowledge-makers across time" (Legg 24). Archival researchers committed to unsettling existing holdings and expanding layered and nuanced historical narratives recognize in Legg's detailed and communal methodology a generative and novel approach that at once feels feminist and hopeful given the possibilities for transforming and broadening the aims and goals of primary investigation.

Reimagining Praxis

Considering nuanced concepts of position/ality, Legg's cautionary, yet sanguine, tales of archival research methods avoid linear storytelling, move beyond narrow Enlightenment archival practices, and listen for interwoven narratives. Contributors to *Unsettling Archival Research: Engaging Critical, Communal, and Digital Archives* and other recent scholarship committed to decolonializing archives likewise convincingly illustrate the need to disrupt traditional narratives through augmented storytelling practices that reconsider perspective, approaches, participants, and evidence; however, intersectional, detailed methods for doing this work aren't readily available. Legg's "networked knowledge-making praxis," stemming from an Indigenous mapping framework, organically decolonizes archives by re-landscaping the discipline to make room for multiple voices (past and present) to collaborate (21). Hope, however, is not found in a specific reimagination of method or praxis; instead, hope resides in *the act* of reimagination.

Outlines of this reimagination of praxis appear in activist-archivists' calls for keepers to unsettle

and reconsider how materials are collected, archived, and preserved (see Caswell and Cifor; Puzalon and Caswell; Jagger; Christen; Jimerson; Quinn; Duff et al.), though they are most evident in the works of Indigenous scholars like Legg, Smith, Archibald, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and Andrea Mukavetz. Legg notes that "[as with] stories, the path to knowledge and theoretical uptakes (in an academic sense) meander through important shifts in the ways we do things and a (re)positioning in our relationships to story and knowledge-making to strip away the deeply embedded tendencies of Eurocentric meaning-making" (17). The lessons that she and other activist/Indigenous scholars impart stress that although we may be trained through Western academic research traditions, that education does not preclude a recognition or acceptance of other traditions—including alternate ways of sensing (seeing, listening, embodying). The broad hope that scholars (especially non-native researchers) can take from nuanced and communal Indigenous methodologies resides in the inherent possibilities for reimagining approaches to archival research, not in the adoption of a particular framework for scholarly inquiry.

Thus, Legg's methodological discussions represent a point of unsettling that considers how we might re-envision academic inquiry, reconsider what counts as evidence, and (re)position work in the archives to acknowledge complex realities, communities, and varied ways of knowledge-building. This approach respectfully makes room for alternate purposes, inclusion of multiple narratives, broadening the well of available knowledge, and constructing an awareness that cannot be reached otherwise. As Cheryl Glenn explains, even "feminist rhetoricians need to rethink our own research agendas and scholarly stance as we widen our understanding of who and what can be defined as rhetorical and as we appreciate more fully the vast range of methods, methodologies, and epistemologies currently in circulation" (210).

Engagement

> The moment of hope is when the "not yet" impresses upon us in the present, such that we must act, politically, to make it our future.
>
> —Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*

Legg identifies a convergence of the *not yet* and the *future*, building upon Powell's *different space* and providing inspiration for settler researchers to answer Glenn's call for expanded feminist and archival research goals and projects. Highlighting differences between (Western) research paths that result in knowledge production and (Indigenous) research paths that enhance ways of knowing, Smith explains that Indigenous research methods center community concepts and worldviews to empower members to "know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (39). However, while reminding us that "research practices, methods, and theories are culturally located and specific," Mukavetz explains that "[w]hat relationality and there-ness, as intercultural research practices, can offer researchers is a way into making cross-cultural (research) relationships visible" (121-22). For community outsiders, considering how engagement with Indigenous research practices might occur in non-appropriative and respectful ways becomes imperative.

Responsible approaches for incorporating research practices as an outsider or investigating members of a community to which the researcher doesn't belong stem from interrogating researcher positionality, along with adopted method/ologies. In explaining their concept of "critical imagination," Royster and Kirsch provide guiding questions to promote ethical and respectful engagement when researching "those whose voices have rarely been heard or studied by rhetoricians" (20). They ask:

> [H]ow do we render their work and lives meaningfully? How do we honor their traditions? How do we transport ourselves back to the time and context in which they lived, knowing full well that is not possible to see things from their vantage point? How did they frame (rather than we frame) the questions by which they navigated their own lives? What more lingers in what we know about them that would suggest that we need to think again, to think more deeply, to think more broadly? How do we make what was going on in their context relevant or illuminating for the contemporary context?" (20)

Similarly, when researching archives, Smith suggests a set of questions that serve as a heuristic for interrogating power and recentering subjects and communities in new projects. These questions correlate with Indigenous research guidelines:

> Whose research is this?
>
> Who owns it?
>
> Whose interests does it serve?
>
> Who will benefit from it?
>
> Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
>
> Who will carry it out?
>
> Who will write it up?
>
> How will the results be disseminated?
>
> (Smith quoted in Porsanger, 113)

Using Smith's questions as a benchmark, we might also examine the archives, themselves, to query holdings and examine relationships that might be cultivated among researchers, subjects, and the materials, asking overlapping but also additional correlated questions:

Where are they collected?

How did the materials come to be placed in the archive?

Whose stories are told?

Whose interests do they serve?

What communities are featured in the materials?

These questions interrogate community origins and invite collaborations, grounding investigations in identity and origin stories. Writing the backstory of a collection and its associated community provides critical research avenues, ones tied to narratives, oral histories, and material artifacts that support storytelling and preservation efforts.

The Hope

"The possibilities of struggling together toward something more beautiful, more human, fill me with hope.

—Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetorical Feminism*

Western conceptions of storytelling relegate the practice to creative spaces that reinforce cultural truisms, reiterate tropes, and detail apocrypha rather than using narrative as a way to identify patterns and share knowledge. However, archives often require Royster and Kirsch's concept of "critical imagination" to stitch together what has been lost or never offered for keeping. Hybrid methodologies incorporating storytelling provide researchers a bridge for preserving and connecting community histories to the present, making sense of inconsistencies and static that have accrued over time.

Indigenous methods innately understand the value of storytelling as storywork, not just providing "color" but serving as a crucial element in constructing knowledge. These methods intersect with feminist and archival scholars' theories and practices for unsettling and expanding knowledge-making, particularly when considering hope simultaneously as a methodology, an action and an intellectual framework for cultivating change that is essentially "more respectful, sympathetic, ethical and useful," aspects that define all responsible research (Smith 9). And herein lies the hope—that in reconsidering the potential of the archives, we might resist prevailing myths and, instead, listen to community members' stories to guide our way.

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Deconstructing *The Body Papers*: Multimodal Memoir as Feminist Archival Practice

Jessie Male

Abstract: This article turns to Grace Talusan's memoir The Body Papers (2019) as an important study of multi-modal composition as an archive of evidence, and a space to navigate intergenerational, medical, historical and sexual trauma through the use of image and alphabetic text. Moreso, this article demonstrates how the memoir utilizes archiving as method, disrupting dominant means of autobiographical production. Building on scholarship in Critical Disability Studies and Trauma Studies, the article shows how Talusan uses archival materials and methods to name and (re)claim sites and sources of violence, her memoir thus emerging as a site of radical deconstruction and narrative reorientation.

Keywords: memoir, multimodality, disability studies, composition, pedagogy

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Content note: This essay contains references to sexual violence

I first discovered Grace Talusan's memoir *The Body Papers*, winner of the 2019 Restless Books Prize for New Immigrant Writing, while cat-sitting for a friend, the small-yet-plump book propped on top of a tall stack in the corner of the apartment. I pulled it down, immediately intrigued by the image at the center of the shiny teal cover, a human-like figure made up entirely of scraps of documents. "United States Department of Justice," was printed on the left leg. The small fingerprints of a child were printed on the other. What I later learned, as I read the book in a single sitting, was that these were quite literally "the body papers" of the author, and a small sampling of the 50 scanned documents appearing throughout the memoir.

Talusan certainly isn't the first memoirist to include images embedded alongside alphabetic text. In my earliest encounters with autobiographical writing, I'd start at the middle of the book, studying the carefully chosen photographs of the authors and their family members in significant settings and at pinnacle moments in their supposedly extraordinary existences. Yet in autobiography, the materials felt additive, like bonus material, not unlike the special features on DVDs rented from Blockbuster. In *The Body Papers*–Talusan's interrogation of individual, intergenerational, and medical trauma, including incest and undergoing a preventative mastectomy—scanned documents achieve what alphabetic text alone can not convey; it is this melding of materials which effectively articulates Talusan's reckoning with painful and, at times, unspeakable experiences. In this, the memoir serves as a valuable repository of Talusan's memories as well as an

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archive of documents that validate and complicate those recollections. Yet even more than demonstrating the archive as an object, Talusan highlights how multimodal composition as an archival method can serve as a practice of radical deconstruction and narrative reorientation. Throughout the memoir, she places images against alphabetic text to name and re/claim sites and sources of violence. This is a transgressive move towards narrative repossession (Laub 85-86), resisting political/social/cultural attempts at silencing and diminishing the experiences of trauma survivors.

In the Restless Book Prize judges' commentary on their decision to publish *The Body Papers,* they state: "Talusan uses documents—such as immigration papers, cancer test results, and legal certificates—to map an associative path to memory and the epicenters of reverberating injury and trauma" (n.p). Though the judges situate Talusan's book as a "trauma narrative"—just as I, too, name her as a "trauma survivor"—in addition to the lens of Trauma Studies it is useful to analyze the book through a Disability Studies framework. Disability Studies increasingly grapples with the ways that disability is a fully embodied experience that "does not occur in isolation" (Kafer 8), inviting space "to acknowledge—even mourn—a change in form or function" (Kafer 6). This iteration of Disability Studies resists over-reliance on the social model ("fixing society") without devolving into the medical model ("fixing the body/mind"). A Disability Studies framework positions disability as relational and tenuous–an active, shifting state that very much aligns with the judges' language of "association" and "reverberation." Talusan's text moves in cycles, an endless grappling without the concise resolution popular in many trauma memoirs. Throughout the book, Talusan does not detach her preventative double mastectomy from the sexual abuse she experienced as a child, nor from her diagnoses with anxiety and depression. She allows her book–like her body–to hold multitudes.

Moreso, the emphasis Disability Studies places on disabled kinship and access intimacy (Mingus) is useful as Talusan traverses systems which often stigmatize and isolate trauma survivors. It would be easy to interpret *The Body Papers* as a tragedy; there is so much pain on the page. And yet, the book contains many sections highlighting communal care, including moments of "that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs" (Mingus). Talusan's mother, running the shower and helping her bathe after the mastectomy, "cooking all [her] favorite food, even though [she] had no appetite" (201-202). A picture of Talusan in a hospital hallway, keeping pace with her sister, Ann, after Ann's own preventative mastectomy. These moments are hopeful alternatives to common tropes of desolation and/or tragic submission that are imbued in many stories of illness. And though the memoir remains, at its core, an archive of an individual's journey towards better understanding and living with the impact of trauma, it is also an archive of the networks working to sustain Talusan's existence.

I believe *The Body Papers* would be a powerful memoir if it existed solely as alphabetic text. Talusan is a visceral storyteller, weaving descriptions of food, place, and character to convey joy and devastation amongst several generations of family members. Even the simplest sentences carry tremendous weight. "There are so many ways that life can break your heart," she writes (20). Yet, whereas this quote could be interpreted as passive—the heart is broken by life—Talusan actively *confronts* each heartbreak through her

compilation of visible, impenetrable evidence. Talusan's inclusion of photographs, government documents, and letters reveal systematic and familial perpetrators who committed violence against her, utilizing multimodality as an act of resistance. Perhaps the most striking inclusion is a family picture taken in front of the Statue of Liberty. In the image, five family members take up the foreground—Talusan's mother, two siblings, and her grandparents. Her grandfather, tall and thin with round glasses, stares directly at the camera. New York City is a stop on an epic road trip. Talusan's grandparents are visiting from the Philippines and her father is "excited to show his parents America" (111). It is in the backseat of their car, on this trip, that Talusan's grandfather begins to abuse her.

What does it mean to link one's abuser inextricably and visibly to one's memoir? Talusan does not change her grandfather's name or smudge details to eliminate identifiable factors. She does not use the language of legality present in the front pages of many memoirs. Talusan openly presents her grandfather to her readers, through name, face and age in which the assaults occurred. "This is what happened, and happened, and happened," she writes, compiling a list, beginning at "I was seven, and he was seventy," until "I was thirteen and he was seventy-six" (124-125). These declarative statements counter a question Talusan poses about her grandmother's refusal to acknowledge the abuse: "If you wish that something isn't happening, does it make it disappear?" (115). By archiving her experiences, Talusan demonstrates that the answer is *no*. The abuse does not disappear. By including the image of her grandfather taken on the precise day abuse began, Talusan illustrates that she *will not forget* and she *won't let others* forget. Through memoir, she shapes how others receive her experience.

Talusan's "collection of evidence" is increasingly profound when considering the level of scrutiny survivors must undergo when naming assault, as well as the many other factors that might prevent people from naming the experiences. "As soon as I told my parents what happened, they warned me to keep it quiet," she recalls. She adds: "They knew a story could destroy you" (127). Though she fears repercussions, even while writing the memoir, Talusan refuses to suppress her truth. Dori Laub, trauma researcher, writes that, "repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change" (qtd. in DeSalvo 210). Here, Laub echoes Arthur Frank's identification of "the wounded storyteller" in which "telling stories is a form of resistance [in which] the flow of experience is reflected upon and redirected; resistance through the self-story becomes the remaking of the body self" (170). Echoing the fragmented image on the memoir's cover, such "remaking" is not complete recovery, or "return to normal" but instead, a restoration. Talusan does not give in to her suffering, but rather, rebuilds from it.

In the oft-cited Regarding the *Pain of Other*s, Susan Sontag writes: "Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us" (89). Though I respect much of Sontag's writing on illness and pain (her *Illness as Metaphor* a quintessential text at the intersection of Literary Studies and Disability Studies), I don't agree with her reductive claim about the distinct roles performed by photography and narrative. Memoirs often leave the readers—and the writers—with more questions than answers, further tangling the threads of truth as opposed to unspooling them. Of the abuse by her grandfather, Talusan

writes: "It is tempting to draw an arrow between cause and effect, but there is no making sense of what he did to me" (119). Similarly, I'd argue that the visceral response to a photograph depends on the viewer's relationship to the subject. Yet, as Talusan demonstrates, photo and text in conjunction can enable a deeper understanding and provoke a more visceral response than reliance on solely one medium. For example, the chapter "Monsters" includes official school photos alongside captions indicating the years kindergarten through eighth grade. To an unfamiliar viewer, these pictures are just like the standard school photos present in most American households, stuck in a wallet or on a fridge. Yet in tandem with the descriptions of abuse, the reader understands there is an alternate, devastating reality to what is present in the photograph. In the second photo, taken the year the abuse began, seven-year old Talusan looks forward, hair parted in the middle, with a smile showing adult teeth grown in. Unlike Sontag's analysis of war photography, in which the viewer becomes "a spectator of calamities that take place" (18), it is the normalcy, the everyday, of the school photographs that haunts here.

Talusan does not sugarcoat the impact that writing this story has on her body and mind. She writes: "Every time I write about this part of my life, I get a rash. I am covered in small itchy bumps on my trunk and arms and thighs. All the places he touched" (128). By describing the long-term visible ramifications of the abuse, she deviates from linear narratives of healing and social pressures to "move on" or "get over it." She heeds memoir scholar Louise DeSalvo's demands that "we not write what we think the culture wants to hear, that we not spare our readers the site of our bodies" (198). And though Talusan articulates disassociation—she recalls a picture she once drew of herself, in which her head floated above her body "like a balloon" (149)—her language throughout the memoir is heavily embodied; for example, she spends two pages describing a boil she picks until it pops. The boil is a metaphor for pain seen and unseen, the scar is from a wound, but it is also a mark—or perhaps, an archive of existence. Though she may at times feel invisible, the blood is a reminder that she is there.

Similar to her descriptions of physical pain and discomfort, Talusan acknowledges the ways "the dual experience of the abuse itself, visceral and disgusting, and the denial of the abuse drove [her] deeper into mental illness" (146). By capturing the impact cultural and social stigmatization and personal shame have on her actions, Talusan evokes the political/relational model of disability; her cognitive and physical being is shaped by her traumatic environment as well as the silence surrounding it. She writes that when depressed, "I'm full of guilt about my depression" and amongst friends she cannot completely be present because "this grayness thrives on isolation" (142). These descriptions–in the chapter titled "Unspeakable Sadness"— are juxtaposed against images of "Grace with her parents before they dropped her off for the first year of college" (136), and of Talusan with her arm around a friend, holding plastic cups at a party in their first apartment after graduation. In these photographs of key developmental markers the impact of Talusan's childhood abuse are ever present and—as the chapter title indicates—unspoken. And yet, the chapter concludes with a narrative turn in which Talusan's father reveals a letter sent years ago to his own father: "*I know what you did to Gracie. You are dead to me*" (151). Whereas until this moment Talusan's father downplays the impact of the abuse, in this moment we understand—as Talusan does—her father recognizes the

weight of what occurred, and imparts consequences on her abuser.

I have spent much time here focusing on the use of multimodal composition to convey Talusan's story as a survivor of sexual abuse. Yet, as indicated earlier in this essay, The Body Papers is an archival (re) collection of how multiple traumas resonate through Talusan's body, and shape her understanding of how she moves through the world. Throughout the book Talusan grapples with the impact of intergenerational trauma, including the ways colonialism may have informed her grandfather's penchant towards violence, and how her family was shaped by a failed immigration process. In addition to family and individual photographs, Talusan includes immigration documents–some still with redactions–which indicate governmental denial of the family's citizenship status. "CHILD," one document states in big bold letters, surrounded in an otherwise tight script. "Subject is a 9 year old child…deportability established…departure to coincide with parents" (66). In tandem with the documentation, Talusan recalls the laborious process—over six months—to retrieve her immigration files using the Freedom of Information Act. She writes: "The dozens of pages I had in hand seemed weightless compared to the heavy burden those missing pages placed on my mind" (73). Here, Talusan "breaks open lies of omission" (xi)—the Restless Book Prize judges' words—and "force[s] difficult questions to the fore" (Gilmore 14). As readers and witnesses to these exclusionary policies and other forms of institutional violence, we too must grapple with difficult questions: *How do gaps in time and/or evidence shape understanding about ourselves and others? What does it mean to tell the story of being "a subject"? How might the archive serve as a reflective point when faced with further administrative violence?* For Talusan, the process of narrative (re)construction means repositioning herself from the status of "other" and reorienting herself to the center, and thus, reclaiming her power.

One can not talk about trauma without addressing grief; the latter can reverberate decades after a life-changing act. Acknowledging the grief that has come post-spinal injury, the memoirist Christina Crosby writes: "I want and I need to remember the body I once was…Forgetting is impossible" (201). Similarly, Talusan uses the memoir form to chronicle and archive her body pre-and-post preventative mastectomy–a procedure also undergone by two of her sisters. In the chapter "Carriers," she describes the days before her mastectomy, stopping "in front of the bathroom mirror after showering to memorize my breasts…I thought of how the first buds appeared through my electric-blue dance costume at age eleven; how water felt like velvet when I swam topless with my girlfriends in the summer" (199). In this description, grief and joy co-mingle as Talusan prepares for the medically invasive procedure. As in previous chapters, she does not shy away from the truth of her body, noting, post-mastectomy, "I hadn't expected this hollowing out of my chest, and I was horrified by the concavity, this bowl scraped clean" (202).

And yet, amongst this grief, Talusan locates a group of other women who underwent preventative mastectomies, helping shift her outlook on the procedure. "I got better. I found community…I learned the term 'previvors'—those who haven't yet developed cancer, but who carry a predisposition," she writes (203). Through the discovery of new kin and new language "something inside [her] unclenched," opening up space to be "grateful for [her] breast mounds—a fair trade for peace of mind" (204). This transition away from

self-hatred and towards self-nurturing was facilitated through disability kinship, "fierce and patient and tender and rare…tinged with grief and pain and also with defiance" (Reaume). Just as Talusan can serve as a model for readers with resonant experiences, it is Talusan's connection to other "previvors" which enables her to value her new body and treat it with kindness.

"Feelings are not facts," is an oft-repeated phrase in the teaching of nonfiction. And though this can be an important distinction, the prioritization of fact over feeling has often been weaponized during the recall of trauma. In "Carriers," Talusan offers us both feeling and fact, enabling us to question what is (im) possible to capture through data. The chapter opens with the image of her test results "POSITIVE FOR A DELETERIOUS MUTATION," followed by medical jargon (190). This fact was instrumental in shaping her decision making process. Yet her test results can not capture the complexity of Talusan's embodied experience and her evolving relationship to her body as well as towards motherhood, which she, after much hesitation, decided against. The chapter ends with an image of joy—Talusan smiling wide and holding her young niece, Naomi, who years before survived childhood cancer. "Sometimes what you long for is what you already have," Talusan writes (207). Here, she evokes a hopeful defiance, harkening back to the shifting ways she viewed her post-mastectomy body. Talusan does not need to be a mother to have maternal bonds. She confidently deviates from socially constructed expectations.

The year after I first encountered *The Body Papers*, I invited Talusan to virtually visit a first-year writing class I was teaching on "Representations of Disability in Contemporary Memoir." Several students asked her the question of "why." *Why choose to write about painful experiences? What was the cost to her own well-being, as well as her relationship with her family members?* In response, Talusan recalled a phone conversation with a distant cousin on the day of *The Body Papers* official release. Having read of Talusan's abuse, her cousin deemed it possible to share the story of her own victimization by the same perpetrator. This moment demonstrates the radical, transformative possibilities of memoir, enabling survivors to express out loud what society prefers they keep quiet.

For Talusan, hearing her cousin's story validated her own experience, indicating a kind of reciprocal recognition. She understands the significance of this reciprocity. Talusan shared:

"People do tell me, mostly women of color, immigrants, Filipinx, will tell me they read my book multiple times and they'll write me messages… Even if they aren't writing an essay or story, they are writing to me, and I hope something is released from that" (class archives).

What Talusan describes is a kind of mutual witnessing facilitated through shared vulnerability. The "release" is a kind of productive undoing–an "unclenching" made possible through her readers textually marking their own traumatic experiences. Their writing is, thus, also an archival process, the message box a location to name what is often cloaked in silence. As such, Talusan's multimodal composition initiates a kind of domino effect, her proclamations enabling others to follow, to articulate and document what so

many others would rather dismiss.

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Pain and Relief Come of Themselves: A Digital, Multimodal, Fictocritical Archive

Vyshali Manivannan

Abstract: Archival logic locates coherence in objectivity and completeness, but archival research— especially for multiply-marginalized BIPOC—is haunted by the question: "Who is inventing me, for what purpose, with what intentions?" (Miranda, 2013, p. 14). Our collective history is littered with razed libraries, book depots, universities, cemeteries, temples, and memorials, eroding our trust in the permanence of formal, institutional, centralized archives. In composing an archive that records remembrance, resistance, resilience, and adaptability from the ephemera of Eelam Tamil diasporic-disabled life in the U.S., I attempt to resist the violent erasure and rewriting of Eelam Tamil history and culture and of my disabled self-knowledge and oracular instinct. This archive contains a selection of quotidian cultural and medical objects and photographs that my family and I instinctively conserved—potentially for how they precipitate thought, feeling, and memory and provide opportunities for remembering the past and forging hopeful futurities. These objects map my thoughts, feelings, and associations about cultural identity, collective trauma, chronic pain, and radical possibility. The attendant parables attempt to recover a culturally specific past through culturally specific storytelling, without demystifying their inclusions and juxtapositions, flattening affect, or insisting on empirically verifiable truth. This archive is designed from below, meant to be read, felt, and deciphered from below, in solidarity with the familial archivists, oral historians, chronically ill patients, and other culture workers who must extensively self-document and for whom archiving is an expression of resistance and resilience. In creating and reinscribing archives of the painfully specific and universal, lies hope.

Keywords: disability studies, rhetorics of chronic pain, intergenerational trauma, archives of displacement, South Asian parables, fictocriticism

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"Pain and Relief Come of Themselves: A Digital, Multimodal, Fictocritical Archive" is a digital, multimodal text that can be accessed at the following link: https://visforvali.github.io/peitho-archive/entrance.html

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Caribbean Healers in the Botanical Archives

Rachel O'Donnell

Abstract: What does it mean to organize medicinal plants of interest to Indigenous women in archives organized by last name of European botanical scientists? In this personal reflection, I recount my story looking for the 'missing' women in the colonial history of the botanical sciences, and the natural knowledge they possess and pass down, specifically of abortifacient plants, in the botanical archives. Botanical archives often house collections of correspondence, field notes, manuscripts and other writings, and collections are arranged alphabetically by botanist's name. This categorization, both of plants and of people, reveals a European-trained male botanist as a knowing individual and silences many women who grow, develop, and heal with these plants, making entire communities unknown and 'unknowing.'

Keywords: botany, Abortifacients, colonialism, archives, science, discovery

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What does it mean to organize medicinal plants, especially those of interest to Indigenous women, in archives organized by the last name of European botanical scientists? When we go looking for the 'missing' women in the colonial history of the botanical sciences, and the natural knowledge they possess and pass down, specifically of abortifacient plants, in the botanical archives, it is often missing.

I came across my own research topic on abortifacient plants by accident. I had been studying International Relations and Latin American Politics in a doctoral program and had decided to take one course outside my program. The course I signed up for was called Historical Perspectives on Women and Nature, and in it, we read histories of female scientists, Feminist Science Studies, and scientific writings by women. I was most taken with the work on a 'masculine' form of science and the history of botany, which seemed especially connected to what I came to call women's 'natural knowing,' the idea that Indigenous women in particular had a scientific understanding and development of medicinal plants, including those used for contraception and abortion. In a 2016 paper titled, "The Politics of Natural Knowing: Contraceptive Plant Properties in the Caribbean," I made sense of this term by in part examining how Indigenous and local knowledge of medicinal plants, particularly those with contraceptive properties, played a crucial role in the development of European botanical sciences during the colonial era. The archival research I did began to highlight the significance of Caribbean natural knowledge in shaping historical perspectives on nature and the interplay between European scientific practices and Indigenous understandings. By employing a feminist methodological approach to analyze concepts of natural knowledge and knowledge production, I was able to emphasize the centrality of women's knowledge in the use of specific plants for fertility control throughout the region.

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Through this work, I was able to underscore the importance of recognizing and valuing Indigenous knowledge systems, particularly in the context of colonial history and the development of modern scientific methods. My research, I hope, contributes to a broader understanding of how local knowledge has influenced scientific practices and the politics surrounding knowledge production.

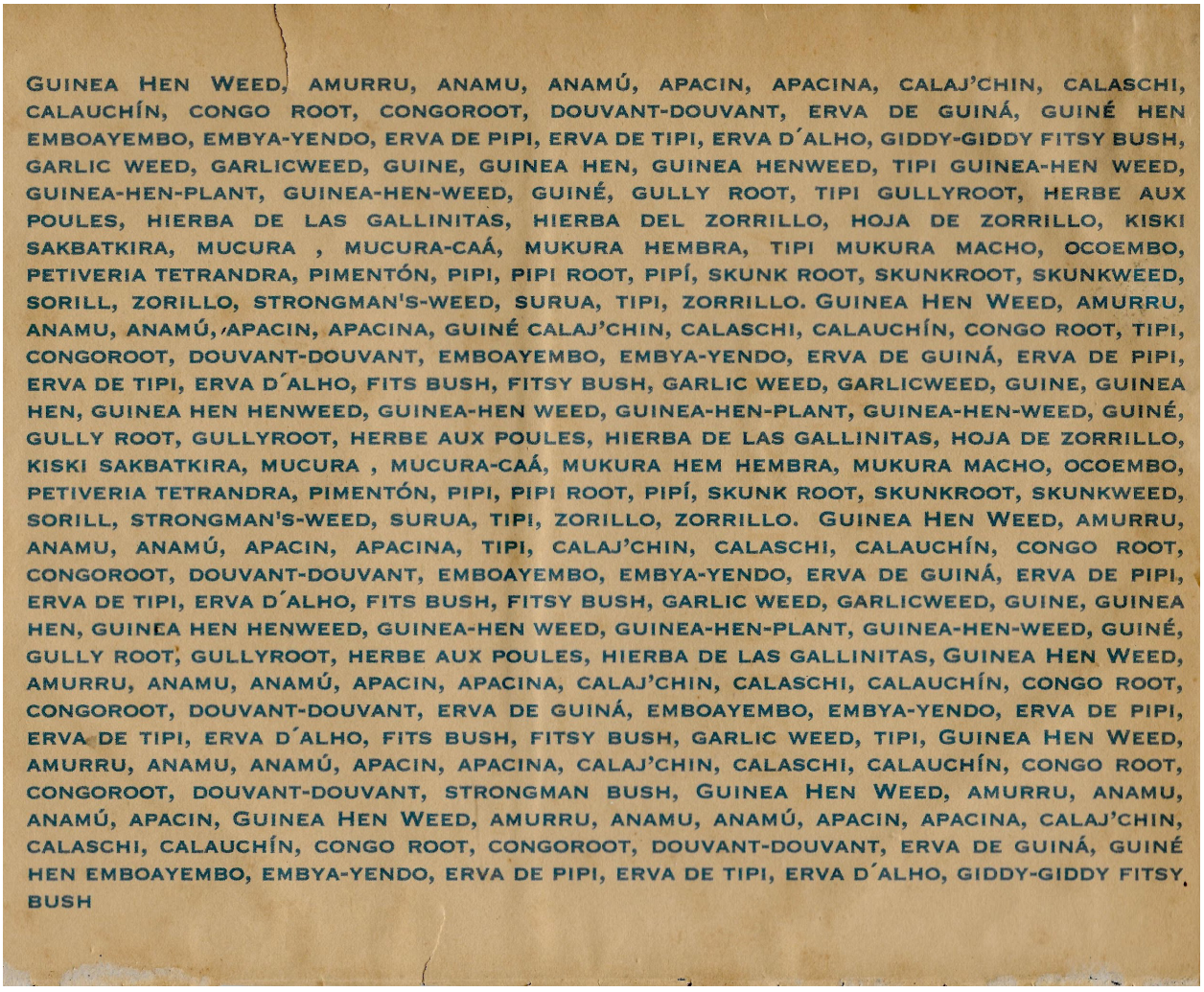
I also remembered, from doing international development work in rural Guatemala, that Mayan women in that community often had elaborate plant-based remedies growing alongside their homes in their gardens and fields, and often reflected on their plant uses as part of their everyday lives. If I complained of a stomach ache, I would be given chamomile or peppermint or a combination of both, or other remedies from the wide selection of available plants. Eucalyptus was used during ritual bathing in the temazcal. Midwives, healers, and herbalists often spoke of what plants they used to assist with birth or pregnancy, and women spoke of plants they used to 'bring down their menstruation,' coded terms for fertility and pregnancy management. I soon learned of 'abortifacient plants' and wrote about them—their legacy, their usages, and the ways in which much of this information is present or perhaps disappeared with the professionalization of botany in the early modern period.

Botanical archives at universities, museums, and institutes house many documents in their collections. They often have correspondence, field notes, manuscripts, and other writings of importance to the field of botany and botanical history. Researchers often use these archives to make sense of the 'discovery' of plants and plant species, the legacy of where plants have been found and what they have been used for, and the way in which they were discovered. Botanical exploration has been closely linked with colonialism, as many physician-botanists in the early modern period were funded members of the Royal Academies who traveled from Europe to other parts of the world to 'uncover' natural products and gather plant specimens to study and return to gardens and herbariums in Europe, often for profit.

Archival collections like these are arranged alphabetically by the botanist's last name. This categorization, both of plants and of people, centers a European-trained male botanist as a knowing individual. What did he work on? Where did he travel to look for the plants? His name is present, and what he named the plant is present. But what is missing when we center his name? This type of cataloguing silences the many Indigenous communities, and women in them, who grow, develop, and heal with these plants, making entire communities categorized as unknown and 'unknowing.' These were often the people who found the plant specimens for European collectors, helped differentiate among plants, and shared their knowledge of plant properties. Yet, in the botanical collections, only professionally trained European men with connections to the Royal Academies are deemed worthy of the title of botanist. The names of the Indigenous collectors are of course not even recorded.

Plants themselves are often catalogued and categorized as well. On a recent visit to the Smithsonian Herbarium in Washington, DC, I walked past many pressed plants named in Linnaean fashion, with a Latin binomial. Herbarium collections are arranged alphabetically by name of the plant, so the plant I was

searching for, *Petiveria alliacea*, was named by 'the father of modern botany,' Carl Linnaeus, for his friend, botanist James Petiver and the plant's garlic smell. Petiver was an early modern physician-botanist from Europe, known for his mistreatment of Indigenous people when he was working in the field. The attached image by artist Wendy Morris lists only some of the known local names for the plant, including Apacina, Anamu, and Guinea Hen Weed, used throughout Latin America and the Caribbean for medicinal purposes, including as an abortifacient. The archives do not catalogue the plant at all by these local names.



Title: Congo Root Guinea Hen Weed

Wendy Morris 2022

Blue inkjet print on recuperated paper

Photograph: Petiveria alliacea growing in Garden of Medicinal Plants in United States Botanic Garden, Washington, DC

2024 image by Rachel O'Donnell

In the Register of Botanical Biography and Iconography database, the Smithsonian Botanical Collections, the Gardens at Kew, the Natural History Museums in the US and the UK, the Linnean Society, all the botanical information is listed alphabetically by botanists. When I went to do my first archival research at the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation at Carnegie Mellon University, for example, I had to guess at which male botanists and collectors, from Europe or later the United States, went to search for plants in the locations I was interested in, mostly Central America and the Caribbean.

The collection of Hans Sloane provides a powerful case study for how Indigenous women's knowledge became obscured or stolen in the archives. Hans Sloane was a collector, and his collection would later be the basis for the British Museum. Sloane was trained in London and France as a physician. In 1719, he became President of the Royal College of Physicians; in 1727, he was elected President of the Royal Society. He also became the pre-eminent collector of his time, amassing many thousands of books, manuscripts, specimens and objects, gathered by numerous hands from around the world. In line with his will, the British Museum was posthumously created to house this collection as a national public trust.[1]

While in Jamaica at the turn of the 18th century, Sloane collected more than 800 plant specimens, live animals, shells and rocks, and wrote notes on local plants, animals and customs. The frontispiece of his *Voyage of Jamaica, an account of the natural history of Jamaica and its neighboring islands* is of a ship. It was published in London in 1707. He undertook this journey to improve his knowledge of Caribbean species and discover useful and profitable new drug, and see how the slave trade and emergent plantation systems created possibilities for new scientific knowledge (Delbourgo 7-21).

When I look for information on Guinea Hen Weed, the known abortifacient used by Jamaican women, used previously by those enslaved, and now being extracted and genetically modified for a potential cancer treatment by US pharmaceutical companies, I can find records of the early botanical writings about the plant. I have to look under the name Hans Sloane, for information on its first 'discovery' in Jamaica. We can only imagine what Sloane's time in Jamaica looked like—which healers did he ask for plant specimens? How did he coerce them into speaking of their location and usage? How did he record this? In 1673, Jamaica's white population was approximately 7,800, already outstripped by an estimated 9,500 enslaved Africans. A century later, Africans outnumbered colonists by some 200,000 to 18,000. Which part of the population do we suspect had knowledge of this plant?

Sloane's writing about enslaved Caribbean women gives insight into how he approached them in his research. Hans Sloane wrote of enslaved Caribbean women in the early eighteenth century: "They are fruitful and go after the birth of their children to work in the fields, with the little ones tied to their backs" (qtd. in Bush 121), reinforcing the commonly held belief that only white European women were subject to pain in

1 His entries on many plants are still understood as botanical history and science. *Cacao*, for example, featured anatomical description, notes on the preparation of drinking chocolate, and extensive excerpted commentary on the cacao nut's function as a form of money in Native American societies. It omitted to mention the role of enslaved Africans in harvesting these nuts in the Caribbean (Delbourgo).

childbirth and that African women could produce an endless number of children. Indeed, it has also been shown that many physician-botanists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries promoted the ideas that medicines derived from certain areas were only appropriate for the bodies that came from those parts of the world. They argued that certain peoples were more connected to the natural objects themselves. Are these the same women Sloane or his assistants asked for their botanical information? Is this what is living in the archives in Sloane's collection at the British Museum and other places?

The domination of male botanists obscured some of the contraceptive aspects of the plants, advantages that the Indigenous women would have certainly known and noted if given a platform in the archive. The most illustrative example comes from Sloane's later description when he describes this plant, *Petiveria alliacea* (before it was named such) as Guinea Hen-Weed, and as food for cattle. He writes again of its strong smell and taste: "Hence Cows Milk in dry Seasons, in the Savannas, tast[e] so strong of it as not to be savoury, and the Flesh of Oxen tast[e] of it so much as scarce to be endured, and their Kidnies after a very intolerable manner [sic]" (172). Sloane and his contemporaries were therefore well aware of the effect of *Petiveria* on mother's milk, meaning that its use of an emmenagogue, or plant that could restore menstruation, was well-understood. John Riddle, who offers us the most complete description of abortifacient plants throughout history, argues that any 'emmenagogue,' or plant known to 'bring down the menses' was perhaps a coded term for contraceptive use or abortifacient for centuries, since a woman who is pregnant may have a need to hide or terminate a pregnancy and resume menstruation. In Europe, up until the nineteenth century, a woman was not necessarily considered pregnant until the child's quickening or movement could be felt, allowing a woman time to figure out a way to force her menstruation to return and not speak of a pregnancy (Riddle 179-182). The importance of listing a plant that 'induces menstruation' is more appropriate here, given Sloane's context and time period, than one that 'procures abortion.' Yet he left this out. Would the Caribbean women of Jamaica have left this out? Did they leave it out or did they tell him and he ignored it? We don't have the record of those who collected the plant on his behalf.

What would it mean to redo the archives by plant name? By local plant name? If we list the plant as Guinea Hen Weed, we will honor the local name in Jamaica, and if we list it as *Petiveria alliacea*, we organize it as named by Linneaus, the 'father of modern botany,' again named for another white male European botanist who was known for his poor treatment of those in the field. Should we organize by plant name? Location? Usage? What would it mean if I could walk into the botanical archives and search for abortifacients? What kind of political situation would we need that would even allow me to do this?

An archive centered on collective, Indigenous women's knowledge would be a radical departure from current systems of botanical cataloging, prioritizing relational and communal understandings over individual names or colonial hierarchies. Such an archive would organize its collections by local plant names, cultural practices, and geographic contexts, emphasizing the uses, stories, and lives tied to each plant. It would integrate oral histories, ritual practices, and visual representations contributed by the communities that have stewarded this knowledge across generations. This approach would challenge the silences of tradi-

tional botanical archives, foregrounding the labor, creativity, and resilience of Indigenous women who have sustained ecological and medicinal traditions. By reimagining archival practices in this way, hope emerges in the form of restorative justice—acknowledging the vital contributions of Indigenous women, resisting the erasure of their knowledge, and fostering a future where scientific inquiry and cultural heritage coexist with mutual respect and recognition.

The colonialist foundation of botanical archives, where plants are catalogued under the names of European scientists rather than the local names and knowledge systems from which they originate, reflects a broader pattern of colonial extraction and erasure. This practice exemplifies how archives have historically served as tools of empire, framing Indigenous lands and peoples as objects of "discovery" while erasing their roles as creators and custodians of knowledge. Naming a plant after Hans Sloane or Carl Linnaeus—rather than its local names like Guinea Hen Weed or Apacina—reinforces a narrative that centers European authority while obscuring the systemic violence and exploitation underpinning these "discoveries." Recognizing this connection underscores the necessity of decolonizing archives, creating space to critically engage with the legacy of imperialism and honor the epistemologies and contributions of the communities whose knowledge has been appropriated.

Title: Guiné

Wendy Morris 2022

Woodcut[2]

2 I include Wendy Morris's drawing of Guinea Hen Weed and Ann Shelton's photographic work on plants that have been important to women. Both artists counter narratives that center male botanists in this story, and reconsider in what ways

Botanical archives have much to offer us in terms of the rhetoric of science, and below, I place at the forefront the images of the plants, and not the images of the botanists. You may know the names of these male botanists, or you can look them up, and I'm not going to reprint them here. Some of them are very famous, like the two mentioned above, and some even have plants (re)named for them. You can look them up easily and find their papers, field notes, and letters, by their last name in many of the botanical archives listed above. What you won't find are the names of Caribbean healers, including those who continue to do this work, that are lost or invisible to us. Yet it is thanks to them that we have much of this plant knowledge, including the rows of plant specimens in herbariums in the United States and Europe. Please remember them as you look at the images of these plants below, one plant, whose Latin name reflects one male European botanist, and what importance it may have to the rest of the globe.

plant knowledge has been developed and maintained in Indigenous communities, mainly by women, throughout the world.

Title: On certain days or nights she anoints a staff and rides (brugmansia, datura [misleading], huacacahu, trumpet flower, angel's trumpet, snowy angel's trumpet, angel's tears)

Ann Shelton, from the series i am an old phenomenon, 2022 ongoing

In a postcolonial reading of these botanical archives, we can imagine the coercion and extraction of scientific knowledge, and we know the fame and wealth that came from the way it was collected and brought to Europe. This is the work of feminist history and politics, where we can uncover what little information we have, bring it to light, and hope for a better world in which the Caribbean healers who maintain and develop are given reparation and honored for the scientific work they have done. We can argue for the importance of a feminist methodology that highlights the role of the communities making use of these plants to both botanical history and science. And we have some artists' reimaginings of abortifacient plants and the ways in which they are used, and the memory of those who placed the plant in our archives in the first place.

"As is the case with many hunter-gatherer cultures, the women of the Paleolithic hunters and gatherers certainly knew a number of fertility-regulating plants, such as mugwort, wild carrot seeds, savin juniper, polypody fern, and others. The reindeer hunters of Lascaux had huge quantities of mugwort, which in the correct dosage can trigger the monthly cycle, but we don't know whether these cave painters used it in this way, or as a ritual plant. Probably the Paleolithic peoples knew such a function, as today the Shoshone and other Native Americans do, in addition to estrogen-containing herbs, such as the gromwell, or stoneseed (*Lithospermum*) that prevent ovulation."

Wolf D. Storl, "The Healing Lore of Neolithic Farmers," in *The Untold History of Healing: Plant Lore and Medicinal Magic from the Stone Age to Present* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2017), 109.

ABORTIFACIENTS & EMMENAGOGUES

"Both of the infamous texts on witch hunts, the German *Malleus Maleficarum* (the Witches' Hammer) of Henrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger and the French *Demonomanie* of Jean Bodin, railed against midwives and various forms of birth control commonly practised by women in that period. Ordinary women through their use of herbs in cooking also acquired knowledge of herbs for various medicinal purposes. Midwives, however, had expert knowledge."

Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan, *Witch Hunts: Culture, Patriarchy and Structural Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 134.

A manuscript of Pseudo-Apuleius Platonicus's *Herbarium*, showing a pregnant woman alongside a woman holding pennyroyal and using a mortar and pestle, 13th century, miniature.

"Pennyroyal—this herb is famously written about by Nirvana singer-songwriter Kurt Cobain, a song that was never released as third single of the album In Utero (1993) due to Cobain's death. On the abortive quality of the tea, also stimulating menstrual flow as emmenagogue Cobain says: I threw that [Pennyroyal Tea] in because I have so many friends who have tried to use that [as abortificant] and it never worked."

CPR (Charlotte Rooijackers) in *All Heal (Valerian)*, an exhibition presented by Rongwrong (Amsterdam, 2017), quoted in Laurie Cluitmans, ed. *On the Necessity of Gardening: An ABC of Art, Botany and Cultivation* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2021), 120.

Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), 1487, trans. ed. Christopher S. Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 163.

"[...] sorcery is used not only to prevent someone from being able to carry out the carnal act, [...] but also to prevent a woman from conceiving, or if she does conceive, to cause her to have a miscarriage. A third way is added along with a fourth in that in a case where they do not cause a miscarriage, they eat up the baby or offer him to a demon. There is no doubt about the first two ways, since without the help of demons a human can use natural means, like plants and other impediments, to cause a woman to be unable to beget or conceive [...]"

Chichester's English Pennyroyal Pills, c. 1887, advertising pamphlet. New York Historical Society

"Like many medical writers during the Middle Ages, Trotula does not disclose the secrets, at least not openly. She provides no details about birth control devices, either of the contraceptive or abortive variety. Just the same, without saying so she lets her readers and patients know how to produce an abortion. She tells us about emmenagogues or menstrual stimulators. A woman with a delayed menstruation should drink artemisia in wine and take baths. If this combination does not work, there is a stronger combination: take artemisia together with other herbs."

John M. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 32.

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Pauli Murray Hopes To "Supply Insights" In Her Archive

Coretta M. Pittman

Abstract: In 1956, Pauli Murray's first autobiography, Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family, was published. Thirty-one years later, Murray's second autobiography, Song in a Weary Throat: Memoir of an American Pilgrimage, was published posthumously in 1987. Pauli Murray captures the remarkable life of her maternal grandparents in Proud Shoes because she was able to access archival materials, family records, and interview senior members of her family. In Song of a Weary Throat, Murray writes about her own extraordinary life because she assiduously kept correspondences, diaries, journals, drafts of speeches, newspaper clippings, letters to the editors of the New York Times, and various other materials. As an African American, Murray keenly understood the value of primary documents to help document the life of African American people. In this article, I rely on letters and journal entries I read in Murray's archive to illustrate her belief and hope in the archive.

Keywords : Pauli Murray, Black women writers, Black women's archives, autobiography, social justice, sexual orientation

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Introduction

Anna Pauline "Pauli" Murray was a poet, lawyer, civil rights activist, professor of law and politics, co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), and the first African American woman ordained as an Episcopal priest. She[1] earned several degrees, including an AB in English from Hunter College in 1933, three law degrees, an—L.L.B., L.L.M., and a J.S.D.— in 1944, 1945, 1965 from Howard Law School, the University of California, Berkeley Law School, and Yale Law School respectively. She also earned a M. Divinity degree from General Theological Seminary in 1976. Pauli Murray accomplished all this at a time when many Black women were unable to earn one degree let alone five. One of the best kept secrets about Murray is that she wrote two autobiographies, *Proud Shoes: The Story of An American Family*, published in 1956 is the first genealogical history of a Black family traced in the United States; her second autobiography, Song in a *Weary Throat: Memoir of an American Pilgrimage*, completed in 1985 and published posthumously in 1987. To conduct research for Proud Shoes, Murray relied on materials maintained by members of her maternal family, conducted oral histories interviewing family and community members, and read documents housed at "historical societies, state archives, the National Archives in Washington, and school and

1 In private letters, Murray sometimes referred to herself as Pete. At other times in her life, Murray sought male hormone treatments. Of course, during Murray's lifetime she was not able to transition to a male or to live publicly as a gender nonconforming person or as an out lesbian. This makes referring to Murray complicated. Some scholars use female pronouns, others use male pronouns and still others use gender neutral they/them pronouns. I have chosen in this article to use she/her pronouns given the topic. I am writing about Black women's archives and in the materials I cite Murray uses she/her pronouns.

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church records" (*Proud Shoes* xvi). To write her second autobiography, Murray relied on her personal papers she had been collecting throughout her adult life. Obviously, Murray recognized the importance of the archive as a way to maintain historical records, specifically for Black people; she also recognized that writing inspired by materials in the archive could bring people's past to life.

Pauli Murray lived an extraordinarily interesting and complicated life, and we know this because she left traces of her life recorded in diaries, journals, and letters to close friends, family, and acquaintances. This article explores part of her writerly life while writing her autobiographies. To that end, I focus specifically on a tiny part of her archival materials that includes letters between Murray and Caroline Ware[2] which also includes feedback about *Proud Shoes* from Helen Lockwood.[3] I also analyze a couple of Murray's diary and journal entries about writing Proud Shoes and a letter where she describes drafting *Song in a Weary Throat*. Furthermore, I briefly highlight more broadly the scarcity of Black women's archives in juxtaposition to Murray's which is vast and accessible.

Pauli Murray donated her papers in 1970 and 1973 to Harvard University's Schlesinger Library. After Murray passed, Karen Watson, her grandniece, donated more of Murray's papers in 1987. A portion of Murray's collection includes "135 file boxes spanning the years 1827-1985…22 photograph albums…[and] 120 audiocassettes," (Hollis for Archival Discovery, Harvard Library, Pauli Murray). In the archival materials I reviewed, Murray does not use the term archive or explain her archival process; she does, however, reveal in a 1971 letter to Ware she "happily…tended to document important experiences as [she] went along" (Murray archives, MC, Box 78, August 19, 1971). This comment to Ware acknowledges that Murray knew for many years she would write another autobiography. What is revealed in the Collection Overview section of the Pauli Murray Papers' finding aid webpage is an explanation describing Murray's archival process:

> The arrangement reflects Murray's filing system as closely as possible. Murray clearly kept alphabetical and chronological correspondence files, employment files, and files containing personal and autobiographical information … Murray apparently kept a number of separate alphabetical groupings within her subject files.

(https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/48744#).

It is evident in the collection that she assiduously kept correspondences, diaries, journals, photographs, drafts of speeches, sermons, poems, short stories, newspapers clippings, letters to the editors of the

2 Caroline Ware was an historian who taught at Howard University from 1941-1961. Pauli Murray met Ware when she was a law school student at Howard in the 1940s. Pauli Murray sought feedback from Ware on both autobiographies.

3 Helen Lockwood was a professor of English and one time department chair of English at Vassar College from 1950-1956. Caroline Ware and Lockwood were friends, and Pauli Murray came to know Lockwood through her friendship with Ware. Although Lockwood and Murray exchange letters, I do not cite them in this article. I cite from a letter written by Ware to Murray which includes feedback from Lockwood concerning *Proud Shoes*..

New York Times, and various other materials for future review, analysis, and publication.

As an African American who understood that history that is told and written lives on in perpetuity, Murray's archive is an embodied expression of the desire to be seen and remembered. This desire for the archive to keep alive Murray's contributions to history is reminiscent of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams's call for the discipline to make space for the histories written by and about voices on the "margins." In brief, Jones and Williams suggest a "new kind of interrogation" that encourages the discipline's histories to be "recursive, one that allow[s] us to re-see and re-think" (583) which stories are told, acknowledged, and centered. Their suggestion to "re-see" and "re-think" helps me to think about the archive and the way it can function historiographically to tell the stories of marginalized individuals and groups even beyond those in rhetoric and composition. Pauli Murray's archive comes to mind instantly because she wanted her contributions to American society to be seen and for Americans to "re-think" the ways she contributed to major social justice movements in the twentieth century.

To better understand Murray's archive, it is necessary to consider the archives of other Black women writers. Jean-Christophe Cloutier writes about the Black American literary archive. He notes both the absence of Black women's archives and the extent to which the repositories that house the few "remain neglected" (13). To emphasize his point, Cloutier points to Ann Petry's collection at Boston and Yale University to make a broader statement about Black women's archives. He admits, "the history of the Ann Petry archive is a particularly painful reminder of the many ways—both external and self-inflicted—in which black women writers' archives are scarce" (Cloutier 13). Moreover, Cloutier admits in his own quest to learn more about Petry that "evidence gathered in the Ann Petry Collection at Boston University began to point to another, undisclosed manuscript collection at Yale and the research efforts [he] undertook in [his] fevered attempt to find it" (13). Lack of information about the location of Petry's archives, and more broadly, lack of care for Black women's archives concern Cloutier. Although he is referring to the literary papers of Black women writers, his assessment is apropos. The collections are small and the information about Black women's archives is scarce no matter the genre.

A similar point is underscored by Natasha N. Jones and Miriam F. Williams who explain the difficulty of gaining access to Black women's mental health archives for their research purposes. Their goal had been to learn about Black women's mental health from "the mid to late 1800s" (179). They learned, however, that the records they needed had been "restricted" (180). Equally upsetting, Jones and Williams were told that additional records containing information about Black women's mental health was on microfilm but poorly maintained (qtd. in 183). Such denied access to them and accountability to maintain records that include the experiences of Black women frustrated Jones and Williams. They admit, "this meagerness, this disappearance of, or, more appropriately, the **disappearing** of Black lives and lived experiences has been persistent and consistent, making hard work for researchers, scholars, or individuals interested in tracing the Black experience in the US across the centuries" (184). These realities are indeed problematic, which makes it all the more remarkable that Murray had the presence of mind to not only keep her papers but donate them in hopes that

access would reanimate her life in death.

Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family: Journal and Diary Entries and Letters

Jean-Christophe Cloutier points out that Black writers in the twentieth century "accumulated papers" (9) because, "in part, many African American authors lived with a constant threat of annihilation and in part because of a forced self-reliance, they deliberately developed an archival sensibility whose stakes were tied to both politics and aesthetics, to both group survival and individual legacy" (9). Indeed, in the voice of a third person observer, Murray writes in an undated typed synopsis of *Proud Shoes* the importance of recording her family history to make a point about her family legacy. She acknowledges, "that neither her family nor herself have been failures, that that struggle for status and achievement is basically the heart of America, that as long as there are Americans like the Fitzgeralds, white or black, something solid and essentially good will endure in America" (Murray archives, MC, Box 78 ND). This third person observation provides Murray the opportunity to acknowledge her own achievements without appearing grandiose while also linking her own successes to the achievements of her maternal family whom she knew to be good, decent Americans. In sum, these good, decent Americans, including herself, deserved to have their stories documented and told to the larger public so that their contributions would not be forgotten.

While Murray was intent on writing about the Fitzgerald family, she acknowledges in her private journals that writing can be hard. In one January 1953 journal entry, Murray worries about whether she had something to contribute to the world in writing *Proud Shoes*. She admits:

> I did a little revision work on the book today. But nothing new and original. I wonder whether I have anything in me worth saying, or whether I am really capable of saying it. Sometimes I think I am a big fake all around…Is my story important to tell? I think so, yet the burning passion to get it down on paper which I had last spring seems gone from me.
>
> (Murray archives, MC, Box 1, January 10, 1953)

The next day Murray, continuing to fret, writes, "I seem to be plodding along, just pitching it out, unable to decide what is significant and sayable and what is not" (Murray archives, MC, Box 1, January 11, 1953). Of course, Murray eventually completes the autobiography which provides such important genealogical and historical details about her maternal family.

To know Murray is to know that she processes much of her life through her letters to family, friends, and acquaintances. Thus, the correspondence between Murray and Ware reveals a writer longing to perfect and preserve her family's stories and her own independent and interdependent life among family and friends. In a typed letter dated January 21, 1953 to Ware, Murray tells her the Saxton award she received to write *Proud Shoes* provided financial relief but also "psychological value…—it kept the spirit alive—and

while I am a long way from a best seller, I think when it finally comes it will be worth reading. I want it to reflect the blend of laughter and tears which after all is the essence of every life and therefore universal" (qtd. in Scott 80). Pauli Murray is referring to the Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Award given to writers by Harper & Brothers, which she received in 1952. In an undated handwritten letter to Murray, Ware tells her she likes the introduction to *Proud Shoes.* Caroline Ware offers the following feedback, "The introduction-prologue is terrific. It packs a wallop and sets the stage for both. The writing is fine as is with just a wee bit of paring here and there. It would be better a little shorter" (Murray archives, MC, Box 78, ND).

Caroline Ware gives more detailed feedback on November 22, 1953, which also includes feedback from Lockwood. They focus on "structure" (qtd. in Scott 84) and "presentation" (qtd. in Scott 85). Regarding structure they comment, "both of us think you should go from p.15 to the chapter on the Fitzgeralds without bringing grandmother in until you have given grandfather's narrative to the point where he marries grandmother" (84). Concerning presentation they offer the following, "we think it should be narrative and character throughout, avoiding editorial treatment, genealogical excursions, historical reviews, essays, etc." (qtd. in Scott 85). The feedback ends with enthusiastic support for Murray's eventual book to come. They declare, "It's a wonderful and absorbing story, with some superb pages, and many more that will be as good when the unnecessary detail or comment is weeded out" (qtd. in Scott 85). In between jobs and the passing of her adopted mother, Pauline Dame Fitzgerald, the maternal aunt who raised her, Murray continues to add chapters to the manuscript even as she admits that the stresses of life make writing challenging. On December 10, 1955, Murray writes to Ware, "Proud Shoes, like a veteran from the wars, hobbling along home. Have rewritten one chapter and completed four new chaps since my return from New York and end is definitely in sight—word limit almost exceeded" (qtd. in Scott 104).

Nearly one year after the December 1955 letter to Ware, Murray's book was published on October 17, 1956. A *Proud Shoes* file contains a review written by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt published in *The Washington Daily News* on Wednesday, October 24, 1956. Mrs. Roosevelt concludes the book review by suggesting, "I think this book is American history, which all Americans citizens should read. It will bring pride to our Negro citizens and greater understanding to all of us who, tho of another race, are part of the human brotherhood and are citizens of the same country which all of us love in the same way" (Murray archives, MC, Box 79, 24 October 1956). In a January 1, 1957 diary entry, Murray reflects on the year 1956. She begins by noting her trials and triumphs by admitting, "it was a tumultuous and very significant year for me…the Stevenson campaign and simultaneous publication of Proud Shoes; rave book reviews but no book clubs" (Murray archives, MC, Box 103 1 January 1957). The autobiography did not sell as well as Murray hoped, nevertheless, it was an achievement for her as a Black woman in the 1950s.

Song in a Weary Throat: Memoir of an American Pilgrimage: Journal Entries and Letters

Move forward fifteen years later and Murray definitely has something to offer the world about her life. She hypothesizes to Ware in 1971 about a biographer who might write about her life. Murray confesses, "The significant thing which came through to me was a very real question as to whether an active individual should attempt an autobiography for publication or merely leave a record to supply insights to future biographers" (Murray archives, MC, Box 78, August 19, 1971). This revelation from Murray underscores what Helen Freshwater writes about the purposes of the archive. For Freshwater, "the archive exists in and through text, as the written record of another time" (733). Freshwater's concept of "another time" is evident in the same 1971 letter to Ware when Murray reflects on feedback she had received from her on drafts of four chapters of *Song in a Weary Throat.* Pauli Murray appears overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information she wants to transmit from memory to page that she reveals in the letter that she might have to leave "Notes for my Biographer" (Murray archives, MC, Box 78, August 19, 1971). In other words, Murray recognizes her archive may provide "another time" for a biographer to come along and tell a different part of her life's story.

In journals and letters to friends, Murray makes it clear that she often thinks about her physical and mental health, her intrinsic worth, money, or lack thereof, employment, social status, and even her sexual orientation. Yet, there is something else on her mind. Murray thinks about her legacy, which in turn means she thinks about the archive. In Murray's second autobiography, *Song in a Weary Throat,* she recounts how precious she viewed her papers. For instance, in 1969 student protestors at Brandeis University had taken over a building that housed Murray's office which "contain[ed]…file cabinets crammed with manuscripts, research notes, correspondence, and other irreplaceable records" (Murray 535). Murray worries, at first, about the student protestors using the building as a weapon against the university administrators because "one student had told [her] half-jokingly that in a confrontation they just might burn down [her] office. [She] feared that if the rumored threats were carried out [her] most cherished possessions would go up in flames" (Murray 535). Murray became enraged, however, when after the student protestors left, she returned to her office to find the students had "appropriated personal items, helped themselves to [her] books and supplies, and left behind notes of their strategy sessions" (Murray 535). Pauli Murray valued her papers too much for them to be defiled or damaged by student protestors. She was, in fact, already thinking about the future of her papers, i.e., her legacy, even as she lived in the present.

The Archive: Pauli Murray's Crowning Achievement

I take seriously Royster and Williams's observations that textual histories need to be more inclusive, thus, I offer as have Jessica Enoch, Eric Darnell Pritchard, Candance Epps-Robertson and others for an expansive understanding of histories that can provide a macro, micro, and meta lens on the ways history is written and remembered. Jacqueline Jones Royster and Williams remind us that "history is important, not just in terms of who writes it and what gets included or excluded, but also because history, by the very

nature of its inscription as history, has social, political, and cultural *consequences*" (563). No one understood these realities more than Murray. Amid so much turmoil and change in the twentieth century, Murray's decision to maintain the papers and artifacts of her life was prescient. Throughout her life, she challenged gender and racial oppression and won and lost key civil rights battles. Murray wanted the battles and sacrifices recorded by way of a written history. This law of self-regard that Murray advances by collecting her papers for a future archive illustrates her abiding hope and faith in the living word.

It may be that of all of Murray's accomplishments, her crowning achievement is that she kept her papers, photograph, and other key documents and donated them so that scholars would someday write about how she and her family contributed significantly to American society. Troy R. Saxton, a most recent biographer, notes "Murray provided an incredible resource to tend and expand the historical record" (294). Murray understood, like Royster and Williams and Jones and Williams that the voices and contributions of Black people should not be ignored. Black people are an integral part of American society and their contributions to discipline specific histories and to American society more broadly need to be documented and made public. The collection that Murray assembled and subsequently donated provides the backdrop for a kind of eternal hope that her history, in fact, will live on in perpetuity. Hope, along with foresight, carried Murray far. As Cheryl Glenn tells us, "...with hope comes a collaborative belief in some kind of future, some alternatives to the current situation" (123). Murray's hope to "supply insights" for biographers and scholars alike to tell a more complete story is that belief come to life.

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Unveiling Perspectives: A Personal Journey Navigating the Archives for a Thesis Research as a Chicana Scholar

Teresa Romero

Abstract: My aim for this project is to reflect upon the process of utilizing California State University, Dominguez Hills' archives for a thesis project to interpret the voices of the Chicanas who were (and continue to be) overshadowed during the 1970s Chicano movement. The organization was called Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional; they gave their community a voice by providing resources, leadership roles, and solutions to the problems. I was driven to use the archives to personally see their organization's logo to interpret their design choices. I utilized the CSUDH's archives to take note of the similarities and differences of the multiple versions of the logo, and I connected my findings to my own personal knowledge and histories to interpret it. The process therefore created a path to have a meaningful interaction with the past to obtain new knowledge that led to an emotional understanding. This chapter can help benefit student researchers who are using the archives to interpret the visual rhetoric of the design choices made to create an image. Readers can see how I used my own culture to connect and to understand, and therefore how a researcher's cultural resources are integral parts of interpretation.

Keywords: archives, Chicana, logo, thesis, visual rhetoric

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Introduction

In all of my years at California State University, Dominguez Hills, I never knew where the archives' room was located. As a former graduate student in the English department, with a master's in English Literature: Rhetoric and Composition, I was not aware we even had a place containing archives until my second year in the graduate program. I have always imagined the archives being in an old musty room in the hidden basement. Of course, this may be the case for some universities, yet the archives at CSUDH are currently located on the fifth floor of the university's library. The archives' room is a room that can only be entered with the permission of the staff since they have their doors locked. The space itself appears to be spacious and new. When entering the space, you are instantly struck by two polar opposite smells of old and new. The space itself contains tables on one side and bookshelves behind them. The walls had a few paintings that unfortunately I cannot recall to describe them. One wall had only pure windows looking over the university's campus. It was a nice view to look at when I wanted a break from my research. The archives themselves were in another room that only archivists or staff were able to enter. Overall, the space appeared to be well taken care of.

Teresa Romero is a Chicana feminist scholar. She graduated from California State University, Dominguez Hills where she earned her bachelor's degree in English Education and her master's degree in English: Literature Option with Rhetoric and Composition Emphasis. She has previously worked as a teacher assistant and as a tutor, specializing and supporting children with learning disabilities. She currently works as a research assistant, and as an English tutor at two community colleges located in Los Angeles, where she strives to learn new ways to support students and instructors to succeed. In her spare time, she loves to explore the outdoors either on a hike or camping with her family. When she is not spending time with her family, she enjoys reading a fantasy book with a side of good coffee.

My aim for this thesis project was to go to the archives to look at the visual image of an organization's logo called Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional. CFMN was an organization established by Chicanas during the 1970s Chicano movement to provide resources, leadership roles, and, most importantly, a voice to these women. Dr. Kendall Leon, a former English professor, addresses that these women felt that their needs were not being addressed during the Chicano Issues Conference, so ". . . these women physically left and met separately" (Leon 2). During the operation of CFMN, it led to many "ideological arguments," and ". . .the documents themselves served as foundational texts for the Chicana movements and are later reproduced and used to invent what it means to be a Chicana" (Leon 3). I went to the archives to collect data on the differences and similarities within the images of the logo with the guidance of my thesis chair, Dr. Mara Lee Grayson. The photo that I took is the standard CFMN's logo that was taken in CSUDH's archive. The photo is a black and white silhouette of a woman's profile with a flower placed on the side of her head. The flower is the most interesting aspect of the image. It is a floral motif from Jorge Enciso's book, *Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico,* the floral motif is designed in a Aztec style with layered petals, giving it an appearance of a geometric pattern.

Fig 1 *CFMN Standard Logo*. 2023.

After collecting the data, I prioritized interpreting the choices of the design of the (standard) logo because I did not want any scholarly works to influence my own ideas and understanding of the material. According to Dr. Lyneé L. Gaillet and Dr. Jessica Rose, "Archival research requires you to arrive at interpretations of events and ideas independently, rather than solely relying on the interpretations of others or published scholarship" (Gaillet and Rose 128). The interpretations I had for the logo came from my own prior knowledge and my understanding of my culture. The scholarships and sources were later utilized to connect

and put the puzzle of all of these ideas together. With the help of my readers, Dr. David Sherman and Dr. Roderick Hernandez, they both provided me with historical context and additional sources that validated my interpretations. Overall, the archives morphed from being a foreign space to a sacred and comforting one.

Navigating the Sacred Space

Although I was not lost within the physical space, I was lost mentally— yet it was not an unfamiliar experience. Throughout my academic career, I have encountered this sense of lostness and (un) belonging as a Chicana scholar. I have never done this kind of research nor was I guided before entering the archives. Hence, I was left with one question that many ". . . first time often ask, "Where do I begin?"(Gaillet and Rose 128). However, this experience of the unknown was not unfamiliar. The archivist provided me with a box containing folders of artifacts related to the Chicano movement; however, I was interested in only one of the folders. Upon obtaining the folder, I began to feel overwhelmed. I did not know how to start and what to look for. I went through the folder carefully and I began to skim through letters, brochures, flyers, and newsletters. As I looked through, the overwhelming feeling started to subside and I started to lose myself within the artifacts' words and images.

Before looking at the logo itself, I was drawn to the other artifacts the folder provided. I was not sure if it was nervousness on how to start examining the logo that caused my attention to be captured by the letters that were in the folder. Some of the letters had a faded yellowish color due to age and had a rough texture as I attempted to delicately hold it in-between my fingers. I don't remember much about what some of these letters contain, but what captured my attention was the greeting of the letter: "Querida Hermana" (Dear Sister). The term "querida" may translate to dear, but it is a more endearing and meaningful term in Spanish. There was something special about being addressed as a sister through the lens of a reader. I felt welcomed by the letter which demonstrates the impact that these two words may have had when the organization was active. Altogether, to address their audience as a sister establishes a meaningful connection within them which creates a community of *la hermandad* (sisterhood).

Although most of the documents were faded into a yellow or brown color, I noticed the brochures and flyers utilized bright colors. They mostly looked well preserved and almost new. The only thing that suggested their old age was the faded letters within these artifacts or documents. If I remember correctly, there was a brochure that still had a shine and it felt almost smooth and soft to the touch. Most of the brochures and flyers contained bolded letters and encouragement to join and to take action: "La Mujer: Acción y Cambio" (The Woman: Action and Change). Some of the flyers and brochures contained this title. Even though the word usage is simple, it is impactful to inspire women to join their cause. As the reader, looking at the bolded letters, bright color paper, and a bold title can be overwhelming; however, it was designed to capture the attention of the reader and to send a clear message. The boldness of these documents screams their frustration that it is time to be united as sisters to create change.

Overall, there were familiar and unfamiliar sensations as I explored the artifacts. Going through each document, I was excited. I got the opportunity to touch and feel the dry, rough, smooth texture of these historical documents and smell this old musty odor that did not bother me in the slightest. Even though I got an opportunity to physically experience these new sensations, it changed to a familiar emotion ofl frustration and sadness. I was reminded that these women were fighting to be heard within their community and within society. Without them, the Chicano movement would not have been successful. In addition, the new generation of these women would not be where we are now. Yet, we still struggle today which reminded me of my own struggles and challenges.

Experiencing all of these new or familiar physical and emotional sensations, I had forgotten about being in a foreign space. As I looked up and out the window for a small break, I felt a sense of tranquility. I then knew that this space was familiar and sacred to me because it holds an emotional conversation between the past and the present. A silent dialogue where there are no words needed. Therefore, the archival space passed down to me a knowledge of a mutual emotional understanding that I will share with other Chicana scholars.

My Inheritance of Knowledge

Before going to the archives, it was difficult to find more information about the history and story behind the organization CFMN. If there was any mention about them that I could access, they were merely a footnote. Essentially, utilizing the archives not only provided the information I needed, but also it provided a significant bonding experience.

After skimming through some of these artifacts, Dr. Grayson came to my rescue to guide me through the process of taking the information and organizing it to collect data. We agreed to create a system that divided the data into three categories: those that contain the same elements of the standard logo, those that had different elements of the logo, and those that had both elements. While looking at multiple images of the logo and categorizing them, I also was analyzing and interpreting the meaning within the design of the logo. Although I did not voice most of my thinking process at the time, my recent emotional bonding guided me to micro focus on what was hard to see. When I first saw the logo online, I was looking at it as a whole rather than taking it apart and examining each one individually. My experiences and my culture became sources to interpret the meaning of the logo: "And rhetorical feminism values emotions and experience as authentic sources of knowledge, as features of rational argument" (Glenn 35). As a rhetor, I did not realize the importance of using the benefits of my emotions as well and using them as a source to look at what is not being directly said. I could not simply use a textbook or online databases to provide that information. Thus this small significant moment in the archives became crucial to how I proceeded with this project.

From the beginning, I knew there were some Aztec and Indigenous influences with these design choices. Nonetheless, I did not know how important these influences were. I know La Virgen de Guadalupe was an essential aspect to the making of the logo. La Virgen Guadalupe was once known as *Tonantsi* an Earth goddess who was desexed from her "serpent/sexuality, out of her. . ." and she "became *Guadalupe*, chaste protective mother. . ." thanks to the confirmation of (Anzalduá 37). There were other influential women that are also part of the image of the logo, *La Malinche* and *La Llorona*. I grew up listening to their stories. *La Malinche* is an interesting individual where many still debate today. Some may see her as the lover of Hernán Cortés and a traitor to her people, while others see her as a victim of trying to survive her predicament. *La Llorona*, the weeping woman, her story ends tragically where she will forever search for her dead children. In the end, these female icons are combined where the ". . .Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada to make us ashamed of our indian side, and la Llorona to make us long-suffering people" (Anzalduá 40). Altogether these women specifically utilized these three icons to emphasize their identity as Chicanas and what it means to be an *hermana*.

I have inherited these stories to keep our cultural history alive. Given the opportunity to use these stories and connect them with voices of these women through the image of the logo, it brought me a sense of relief as a scholar and as a Chicana. It all started to come together within the archival space. It brought me a sense of hope that finally made me feel that I belonged.

Conclusion

Being able to interact with the archives gave me the opportunity to glimpse on what these Chicana women were thinking and feeling during their frustrating and motivated journey to fight against the oppression they were experiencing. Although I was not able to understand "the work that happens in archives. . ." fully, I was able to be ". . .[informed] the ways we see and 'reclaim' figures" through an emotional understanding (Enoch 60). The archive itself is a sacred space that holds knowledge of different perspectives and experiences. It becomes personal when you are looking and examining the physical history of your cultural background. Within this personal connection, I felt seen and heard since I understood their experiences and I did not feel alone. Their experiences validate everything I have gone through. I don't have anything (an object) that was passed down to me. Afterall, the purpose of having archives is to tell not just the history but also the story of our ancestors which ". . . [legitimates] ourselves through legitimating them" (qtd. in Enoch 59). Seeing these documents made me feel that I finally have something that I can see, hold, and share to the future generations. Even though I cannot physically pass down these artifacts, I can pass the oral history and knowledge I have attained during this journey. Traditionally, oral stories are part of our culture to keep our history and stories alive. I will have my own history and story to share with future Chicana scholars.

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Reimagining Non-Compliant Bodies as Archives: A Feminist Decolonial Approach

Sumaiya Sarker Sharmin

Abstract: Epistemic racism and other forms of inequality dominate mainstream archival narratives. In contrast, community archives such as Moving Memories, recorded in SAADA (South Asian American Digital Archives), promote counternarratives, in opposition to the dominant archives. In my exploration of the contours of systemic inequalities that silence the transnational existence of non-normative brown people, I critically reflect on South Asian trans/queer voices and their embodied experiences. In this essay, I locate hope in community archival practices for a liberatory future.

Keywords: community archives, hope, queer migrants, memory, body, epistemic racism

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This essay examines the South Asian American Digital Archive's (SAADA) *Moving Memories* exhibit to illustrate how community archives promote counternarratives that disrupt heteronormative archival epistemic racism and other forms of inequality. Extending Vox Jo Hsu's proposal of reimagining "body-mind" as an archive, in order to critically reflect on South Asian trans/queer voices and their embodied experiences, I explore the contours of systemic inequalities that silence the transnational existence of non-normative brown people. As acknowledged by scholars like K.J. Rawson and Jean Bessette among others, the absences of non-conforming bodies in institutional archives have obliterated their history and rendered their experiences invisible in the present, but these silenced voices can be traceable in the community archives such as SAADA.

Founded in 2008, SAADA was created in response to the dearth of archival materials that recorded the experiences of South Asian Americans. As explained by Michelle Caswell, the co-founder of SAADA, "no archival repository was systematically collecting materials related to South Asian American history. None even had South Asian American history as a collecting priority" (27). Broadly speaking, SAADA features a range of materials that document the lives of South Asian Americans, but the *Moving Memories* project specifically focuses on Bangladeshi brown trans/queer migrants in the USA. A collection of oral histories, the accounts included therein document how heteronormative bio-necro politics forced non-conforming bodies to migrate to the Global North, but as Queer/Trans People of Color (QTPOC) in the U.S.,

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their bodies carry an additional burden, making them vulnerable to the mechanisms of systemic oppression that elide marginalized/oppressed people.

Dominant archival narratives overlook transnational QTPOC migrants' history and memory by preferring Western culture. I emphasize that archives need intersectional and transnational theories and practices to combat archival imperialism and oppression. Archival accounts that only present Westernized notions and dominant ideologies cannot be objective (Bessette 25). More so, "archives aren't natural repositories but rather an ongoing set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention" (Bessette 25). Influenced by power relationships, can't we say that dominant Western archival narratives – be that historical, social, or cultural – decide whose story is important? Cheryl Glenn also mentioned that the stories in selected archives were ignoring the representation of others. Considering the exclusionary practices in official archives, community archives engage in the critical work of countering the power of archives in making immigrants, QTPOC folks, and other racial minorities invisible.

I argue that the archival formation of such prototypes can contribute to the liberation of non-compliant bodies. Inspired by Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, I am imagining QTPOC bodies as non-compliant bodies who counter normativity by their "wayward practices" against heteropatriarchal structure and the racialized oppressive system. In the process, the community archives also initiate the rupturing of the racialized appropriation of some trans/queer bodies in institutionalized archives. By representing the voices of brown queer migrants, I contend that digital community archives such as SAADA contribute to the dismantling of systemic inequalities.

I examine how *Moving Memories* exhibits in SAADA intervene in the racialized heteronormative logics by including a series of stories of Bangladeshi queer, migrants, and racial minorities, who are otherwise considered monolithic under a single normative racial frame as South Asian minority. Dwelling within an unsettling diasporic space, their stories reveal the entanglements of state-sanctioned violence, heteronormative racial logics, relationships, belonging, and "the sites of unbelonging" (Hsu 9). I employ Hsu's "diasporic listening" as a narrative methodology for understanding counter-stories embedded in the *Moving Memories* archive. According to Hsu, "Like Romeo García's 'community listening,' diasporic listening is 'imagining the possibilities of new stories in and with others'" (11). As I listen to their oral interviews, diasporic listening enables me to connect their individual embodied experiences to the historical patterns of treating QTPOC people as others in the US. The reason I consider the archival materials counter-stories is because careful rhetorical listening suggests that QTPOC migrants in *Moving Memories* are not subscribing to the normative notion of the West as a progressive queer-friendly space; rather, they complicate queer embodiments by invoking the challenges of migration, visibility, and social mobility.

By listening closely to their narratives, I find how the racialized colonial logics impinged into their personal spaces and rendered them invisible as QTPOC migrants in the US. Despite leaving their home country for a liberatory space for trans/queer people, a few interviewees in *Moving Memories* shared their

stories of "(un)belonging" in the US. In addition to carrying the traumas of violence against trans/queer people and minorities in Bangladesh, the stories reveal their bodies' carrying the experiences of racism, alienation, heteronormative oppressions, traumas of losing homes, absence of financial support for migrants, fear of deportation, and different forms of inequalities in the US. "I didn't want to be white, but I also didn't really know where I belonged," Nancy Haque, a second-generation Bangladeshi American, deplores to illustrate how racist experiences impinge on the QTPOC community in the USA (*Moving Memories*). Like Haque, several QTPOC migrant interlocutors in this community project critique US racialized structures, unsupportive migration policies, lack of economic support for transnational migrants, and other forms of vulnerabilities in their diasporic lives.

The identity of being a QTPOC in the US seemed more uncomfortable than coming out as gay in Bangladesh, as Faisal Misha in an interview regrets their migration to the USA. Like Misha, Rasel Ahmed questions his migration to the USA as a queer. Reminiscing fleeing Bangladesh after being targeted for killing for his queer activism, Ahmed juxtaposes mental health precarity as a migrant with his fear of being murdered in Bangladesh. Sharmin Hussain further shares the intricacies of growing up as a "dark-skinned Muslim girl" in New York where racialized heteronormative logics generated relationship traumas. After dealing with clinical depression and unemployment during their stay in the USA, Suhaila, a queer college student, eventually, found their home in Bangladesh. "When my father came to visit me, he said, 'why don't you come back to Bangladesh? You know, if you stay here, you have to earn your place in society from scratch. But in Bangladesh you have a home. You have your family. You have a friend circle. You can get a job'" (*Moving Memories*).

As I read and listened to their diasporic stories — following Hsu's proposition to "body-mind as archives" — I could identify experiences of oppression in QTPOC Bangladeshi American and migrant bodies in *Moving Memories*. What can be more authentic than listening to the embodied experiences of non-compliant bodies that point out existing inequalities through their survival and resistance? Listening closely to these stories could be our methodological sites for understanding borderless mechanisms of manifold oppression. In critically engaging with their embodied feelings, I also recognize "feelings can be the site of rebellion" (Ahmed 72). With their non-conformity in the face of obstacles, the bodies become the site of resistance. While racialized heteropatriarchal ethnic norms targeted their bodies for discipline and punishment both in Bangladesh and in the USA, the counternarratives elicit resistance to socially constructed bodily and behavioral norms in transnational spaces. Their counternarratives challenge the body politics of creating docile bodies.

As a springboard for documenting the consciousness-raising stories and memories of the everyday marginalized people, community archives, such as SAADA, play a significant role in queering the dominant archival expectations. However, even with documentation, there are several caveats that archives have in preserving information. Archives cannot represent all embodied experiences and memories. Many non-compliant bodies do not share their stories on a public forum. But their bodies store the scars, experiences, and

memories of generational traumas, heteronormative, gendered, racialized oppression, distorted nation-state perception, and many other forms of discrimination. According to Hsu, "The body, too, is an archive – that we carry with us our experiences and the stories we are given. We exceed them too, but these are the materials from which we build our worldviews" (149). The living bodies are always archiving information. Non-compliant bodies are storing the traces of systemic inequalities and oppressions against them: their bodies are archives.

I listen to more interviews. Initially, a sense of relief and happiness washed over Puja when she had finally arrived in the USA, as Puja was subjected to gendered and religious marginalization in Bangladesh. But the racialized nation-state discriminations against immigrants and migrants rattled Puja's sense of belonging in a newfound home: "Just trying to stay here has been a lot of work. I am now telling myself, 'No, I'm old. I'm old enough right now and have been in the U.S. for seven years. I'm just tired of being treated like this. Like shit all the time.'" Puja shares how she is perpetually treated as an "other" in White America. Like Puja, Huhu says "I was doing things that other white kids were doing but people were not mixing with me. I was used to being called a lesbo or whatever. But I hadn't expected that I'd be called that even there [in the USA]" (*Moving Memories*).

Their counternarratives offer us a glimpse of multilayered oppressions against marginalized communities. "What we see is not a progress narrative where society gets less racist over time culminating in a multiracial America, but a cyclical repetition of oppression in which a minoritized community is doomed to suffer the repeated consequences of white supremacist violence" (Caswell 5). Their experiences conform to what feminist and queer scholars have identified as systemic white supremacist violence. To add, the dominant approach of progressive narrativization of Western culture has consequences. It tends to normalize the dominance of Western culture while obscuring the structural inequalities, racism, sexism, and ableism embedded in the system. Thus, to create more presence of these absent/unrecognized stories, we focus on community-based archival knowledge production to generate future histories and memories of marginalized communities. *Moving Memories* also offers us a larger understanding of transnational experience across and within the borders of the nation-state (Hesford & Schell 466).

I should note that the history of Bangladeshi QTPOC marginalized groups is disproportionately absent in mainstream archival repositories. Hsu uses the term "perpetual foreigners" to suggest the racist placement of QTPOC's identities in the USA. I argue that the archival exclusion of Bangladeshi immigrants' histories marks their identities as invisible foreigners even within a continuum of "perpetual foreigners," as if Bangladeshi immigrants' history is unworthy of documentation. Archives are conduits of power: "They can be a tool of hegemony; they can be a tool of resistance" (Schwartz and Cook 13). Traditional archives have always privileged Western bodies. A community-based digital archive that is freely accessible, such as *Moving Memories*, is then conducting the "liberatory memory work" to document Bangladeshi migrants' existence in the USA (Caswell 27).

The formation of community archives in this case acts as a tool to resist symbolic violence that occurs when some marginalized groups' history receives preferential treatment at the cost of many other minorities rendered invisible. At the same time, a community-based archival intervention fights Western hegemonic "memory institutions" that perpetuate white heterosexual dominance by obliterating the memories of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ folks with diverse "sexual and racial identities" (Caswell 33; Glenn 9). Community archives reveal the discriminatory master narratives that have been used to obstruct the empowerment of minorities. The revolutionary nature of community archives plants seeds of hope in the present by bringing forward the stories that are traditionally muted and disrupted by the majoritarian problematic narratives (Martinez).

Liberatory Hope

Hope is found in the non-normative stories that resist the normative oppressive structure with their queer desires projected transnationally. Drawing from Caswell's concept of "archival liberation," I locate hope, which is anchored in community archival theories and practices. They promote ground-up archival practices to dismantle imperial representation. "Archival liberation" ensures "both cultural recognition (through representational belonging, with the caveat that such recognition is self-recognition from minoritized communities) and a redistribution of resources (through material reparations)" (Caswell 94). We see hope in the visibility of migrant stories which also suggests the significance of community-based archives to promote cultural recognition and to challenge the dominance of Western culture.

By creating a space for "a counter-narrative, liberated from the judgment and classification that subjected" trans/queer people "to surveillance, arrest, punishment, and confinement," the community archives recognize the collective hope of archival revolution rooted in non-compliant bodies' stories that continue to guide us "how the world might be otherwise" (Hartman 3). Such practices in community archives create another kind of hope which I call radical hope**.** The inclusion of *Moving Memories* in the SAADA archive is therefore a significant example of highlighting the multifarious experiences of migrants and South Asian American queer bodies in the US. Moreover, the voices complicate Bangladesh's homophobic social environment by documenting racism, traumas of migration, QTPOC's vulnerabilities, and the challenges that stem from invisibility in the United States. These non-compliant stories create a space of hope as they offer a vision for charting our collective activism.

Beyond institutionalized archives, informed by feminist and decolonial scholars, including Jacqueline Jones Royster, Gesa Kirsch, Cheryl Glenn, Aja Y. Martinez, Michelle Caswell and beyond, I emphasize that focusing on community archives can disrupt archival epistemic racism and other forms of inequalities. Since exclusionary practices in the archives are foundational to epistemic racism, creating repositories such as *Moving Memories*, as in the community archives, is an engagement in the critical work of unsettling epistemic violence by representing marginalized QTPOC history and memory.

To intervene in archival exclusion, intersectional and transnational feminist approaches and queer

theory in conjunction can disrupt heteronormative archival epistemic racism and other forms of inequality in archives. Not only does *Moving Memories*' queer approaches circulate consciousness about systemic inequalities against QTPOC, but the community archive itself works as a mode to say yes to different identities, desires, people, and lifestyles (Rhodes and Alexander). At the same time, community archive "offers ways to disidentify with hegemonic rhetoric, with the dominant rhetorical histories, theories, and practices articulated in Western culture" (Glenn 4). In *Moving Memories*, the communities document their own stories that highlight feminist and queer ethics of working toward dismantling archival power structures. In the process, community archives contribute to dislocating archival master narratives that have long been used to obliterate minority history and memory by providing access to the stories of marginalized people. *Moving Memories* disrupt mainstream QTPOC narrative expectations by sharing their disidentification with Western progress narratives. Thus, community archives represent liberatory hope for marginalized communities.

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Book Reviews

Review of *The Sisterhood, How a Network of Black Women Writers Changed American Culture*

Heather-Anne Jaeger

Thorsson, Courtney. *The Sisterhood, How a Network of Black Women Writers Changed American Culture.* Columbia University Press, 2023. https://doi.org/10.7312/thor20472

Keywords: black feminism, activist coalitions, feminist research, book review

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When beginning a study focusing on "labor" within African American literature, I encountered Courtney Thorsson's *The Sisterhood, How a Network of Black Women Writers Changed American Culture*. Written in a non-chronological order, Thorsson structures her chapters to provide an overview of The Sisterhood, which was a Black women's writing collective that existed from 1977-1979. Thorsson's work offers a deep exploration into a myriad of complexities about how Black female writers supported one another in the 1970s to create space for their work within publishing and academic worlds. Through her expansive archival research, Thorsson sheds light on the often invisible, collaborative rhetorical labors that Black women undertook – labors which have significant impact on today's publishing norms and academic discourse.

In her introduction, Thorsson outlines her three primary arguments. First, The Sisterhood should be used as both a model for Black feminist collaboration and a cautionary tale about the risk of membership burnout that can arise from the relentless pursuit of racial and social activism. Second, the group's collaborative labor in the 1970s was instrumental in increasing the visibility of African American women writers in the 1980s. Third, Thorsson frames the story of The Sisterhood and Black feminism in the 1970s as a reflection of shifting relationships between political organizations, literature, and the academy. Thorsson's tone throughout the introduction is reverential, acknowledging the debt many, like herself, owe to the unseen labor of Black women who laid the foundation for Black feminist literary and rhetorical scholarship. Her introduction firmly establishes the importance of her work: to give credence to collaborations

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inspired by The Sisterhood that evolved Black feminist thought in the 1970s.

Chapter One, "Revolution is Not a One-Time Event," takes its title from an Audre Lorde quote, referencing the group's ongoing commitment to liberating Black women's identities and creative expressions from those who marginalized, misrepresented, and appropriated their stories and thoughts. Thorsson argues that this commitment helped shape the field of Black feminist literary and rhetorical criticism. She grounds the reader in the historical context of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and explores the influences of critical organizations like the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and the Combahee River Collective. Initially, The Sisterhood—founded by Alice Walker and June Jordan—served as a space for Black women to collaborate and share their written work. However, the group soon expanded its mission to challenge the dominant white institutions, such as the publishing industry and academia, that marginalized their voices. Thorsson argues that through their collective efforts, The Sisterhood not only increased the recognition of Black women writers in the late 1970s but also worked to control the terms of that visibility by promoting, publishing, and reviewing their own writings, ensuring that future work by Black women would be protected from the critical backlash and harassment they had previously faced.

In Chapter Two: "An Association of Black Women Who are Writers/Poets/Artists," Thorsson delves into the origins of The Sisterhood, which developed in response to the hostile reception of Ntozake Shange's play *for colored girls* by Black male viewers, critics, and writers. Originally presenting the group as a collective response to the intersecting oppressions of sexism, racism, homophobia, and misogyny, both within their work environments and in reaction to their writings, Thorsson articulates how The Sisterhood came together to support one another to validate one another's work. She writes, "The Sisterhood – mothers, writers, teachers, editors, [and] activists – came together knowing that advocating for Black women's writing was an uphill battle," especially when their targeted audience was Black women (59). Their labor enabled The Sisterhood to collectively advocate for greater recognition of Black women's writing and to challenge the publishing world's negative responses.

Recognizing that gathering together was only phase one of The Sisterhood, Thorsson writes in Chapter Three, "To Move the Needle in Black Women's Lives," about the group's second phase: expanding their collaborative relationships and efforts. This expansion led many members to travel to the Southern United States and the West. In this chapter, Thorsson reinforces her primary argument and examines the repercussions of membership burnouts, internal conflicts, and societal pressures that strained the group's efforts with this additional workload. She analyzes Jordan's poem, "Letter to My Friend the Poet Ntozake Shange," which provides insight into the emotional toll this labor took on the women involved with their already demanding domestic duties, travel, and professional careers. This chapter is significant due to its examination of the various factors that led to the group's disbanding in 1979, and it invites the reader to consider how future collectives might learn from these challenges and explore strategies for a more sustainable balance between personal and organizational demands.

In Chapter Four: "A Community of Writers Even if They Only Slap Five Once a Month," Thorsson focuses her content upon the contributions of Michele Wallace, Toni Cade Bambara, and Cheryll Y. Greene, who are essential figures in Black Feminist literature. Though they were not official members of The Sisterhood, Thorsson included these three women in her study to emphasize the importance of each of their works to the field and to demonstrate how The Sisterhood required a more extensive network outside of their membership to support its goal of uplifting Black female writers. Thorsson notes multiple times within her text the importance these women placed upon their relationships, noting how at the end of the day, it was the camaraderie and friendship that made The Sisterhood special to Black women in the 1970s.

Chapter Five: "A Regular Profusion of Certain/Unidentified Roses," examines the impact of The Sisterhood and its successes in the 1980s. By addressing their Black feminist politics during the Reagan era, their resistance to limitations in academic curricula, and their growing impact on the publishing industry, Thorsson ensures these women's contributions receive the recognition they deserve. However, while she celebrates the accomplishments of The Sisterhood, Thorsson remains critical of the "'renaissance of Black women writers,'" which she argues was co-opted into the rhetoric of multiculturalism and diversity in academia. This critique is sharp and challenges the reader to consider how institutions often commodify or dilute radical movements.

In Chapter Six, "The Function of Freedom is to Free Somebody Else," Thorsson explores the legacy of Toni Morrison and her pivotal role within The Sisterhood. This chapter highlights Morrison's sacrifices and achievements, especially by providing recognition to Black women writers through her role as an editor, mentor and writer. In addition, Thorsson discusses the role The Sisterhood played in January 1988, when members joined other Black intellectuals and helped sign a letter in the *New York Times* to advocate for Morrison's nomination for the Pulitzer Prize. Thorsson's deep respect for Morrison is evident, though the chapter also raises important questions about the costs of visibility and the personal toll it takes to be a public luminary.

Chapter Seven: "Making Use of Being Used" is Thorsson's most contemporarily relevant chapter, which brings the book's themes full circle by exploring the legacies of The Sisterhood within academia. Thorsson examines the shifts that occurred in the 1980s and the continued efforts of Black women to ensure Black Studies, Black Womanism, and Black Feminism maintained a place in academic institutions. The chapter is enlightening in the way that it explores how Black feminist thought has been institutionalized in universities. Thorsson does a notable job of ensuring that their work remains visible within history and has a place in scholarship. She writes, "To tell the story of The Sisterhood is to reckon with the costs Black women intellectuals paid, are paying, to make the world more just" (202).

In her "Conclusion," Thorsson reaffirms the collaborative spirit of The Sisterhood, emphasizing her purpose in sharing these women's stories. Thorsson urges her reader to look toward the 21st century, reminding us that racial and gendered justice remains unfinished. She concludes with a final call to action to her

readers, encouraging them to help make this world more just. Believing that change can be inspired through the written works of the Black women in the 1970s, Thorsson recounts how prominent Black studies is in today's cultural atmosphere and reinforces that the responsibility for progress should not fall to one group; instead, we must collectively continue to bring visibility to those who have been marginalized and forced to be unseen.

Thorsson's book is a rich, well-researched text that would engage any scholar in feminist rhetorical studies, as The Sisterhood is a collective of women dedicated to advocating for their voices in our academic and publishing world. They sought to elevate their marginalized positions and establish themselves as authoritative contributors to literary and scholarly discourse. In a time of ongoing societal shifts and uncertainties, Thorsson's work serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of supporting those who face discrimination, offering a model for collective action. While her unchronological chapters occasionally feel disorienting, her arguments are clear: The Sisterhood's collaboration and networking led to significant successes in the 1980s for Black women's writings, and their organization should be continually studied to inform future generations.

Review of *Storying Writing Center Labor for Anti-Capitalist Futures*

Xuan Jiang

Giaimo, Genie, and Daniel Lawson. (2024). *Storying Writing Center Labor for Anti-Capitalist Futures*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. https://doi.org/10.37514/PRA-B.2024.2401

Keywords: invisible work, metalabor, emotional labor, anti-capitalist

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After reading *Storying Writing Center Labor for Anti-Capitalist Futures*, an open-access book about writing centers (WCs), I believe it deserves open read, review, and publicity. The 274-page-long book can be a quick read, but not an easy read, because it hurts you, moves you, connects you, and enacts you. So, you want to reread and share this book with others.

There are three Acts, interrelated but distinct sections, in the unique structure of this book. Genie N. Giaimo and Daniel Lawson write Act I and III as well as edit Act II. Act I profoundly dissects several writing-center-specific problems by rooting out political and economic factors as a macro-view frame. Act II allows WC practitioners–directors, tutors, faculty, and other administrators–to share their stories, at various levels and in diverse dimensions, referred as story authors hereafter. Act III calls for action to take on "an anti-capitalist framework" for WC labor so that WC laborers are "interpellated and thus create more solidarity among various intersectionalities of identity" (20).

The book displays a complicated landscape of WC studies, within, across, and beyond writing center space. To advance the knowledge of writing center labor studies, it introduces some thought-provoking concepts, such as emotional labor and metalabor. *Metalabor* is "work: it exacts a toll on the worker; it is expected of the worker, but in and of itself it is not *valued*" (207). The authors value emotional labor as much as metalabor, and several sections of the book propels call for action through converging multiple voices and keeping those voices un-altered. Along with the term *invisible work*, this book gives a conceptual model to dissect the scope and relations of these three work-related concepts (see the figure below). *Invisible work* is "the uncompensated, gendered, and thus unvalued work of the domestic sphere… and translates into the

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work sphere of writing centers" (207).

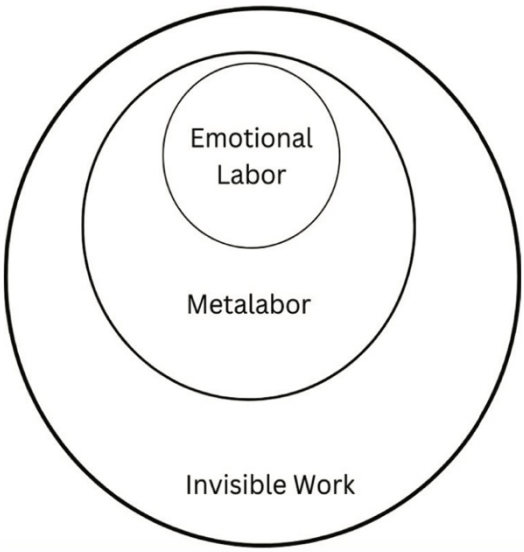

Fig. Relationship between invisible work, metalabor, and emotional labor

Giaimo and Lawson build upon existing literature to introduce and articulate these three concepts in WC field in Act I. Agreeing with Morrison and Nanton (2019), Giaimo and Lawson call for the writing studies and WC fields to make the profession more "deeply welcoming rather than rhetorically welcoming" (19). In Act II, the book authors have done so by inviting and compiling 34 lived stories from authors who work or affiliated with WCs in the U.S. Act II, as a collection, displays many distinct aspects of the lives of WC folks and transgresses the boundary of professional and personal dimensions. These stories, categorized into six themes, are 3-page short stories but their impact on readers like me is long-lasting. I feel my emotions–anger, sadness, joy, and pride–in reading along with these real-life, real-time stories which contextualize, visualize, problematize and strategize WC labor. Because of how those stories make me feel and connect me as a WC fellow, I remember many of them and strongly recommend the book to readers who see themselves connected with WCs or at large with higher education.

Among the 34 story writers, six are anonymous, three pseudonymous, and 25 use real names. Over a quarter of scholars pragmatically chose to share their stories without being identified. Rhetorically, such a decision shows their approach to compromise with real-time threats in their profession. WC scholarship welcomes these lived accounts to strive for a field of justice and inclusion; these WC laborers balance their righteous will to contribute to this communal goal with their individual concerns.

Many of the story authors, as I infer, might have never shared or written such type of stories at such a deeply personal level. Those lived stories provide images and scenarios in readers' minds and rhythmize readers' heartbeat with power and connections. The chapters in Act II are catalysts of "deliberate, intentional action" to produce transformation (Wright 17). While typical academic books which provide "nutrition" to your cognition, this book also provides "discomfort" to your emotion. It makes you cry and laugh with tears and ponder!

For instance, Muriel Harris, the leading founder of Purdue's WC and its OWL (Chapter 6), articulates the uniqueness of WC labor as that "there is the multiple aspects of administering a writing center that instructors…do not have to deal with" (52). Vincent Belkin (pseudonym) says in Chapter 30 "emotional labor is perhaps the most difficult and most ignored side of directing a writing center" in the sense that writing center directors "tend to know our students better than the average professor does…this IS emotional labor that often goes unaccounted for and rarely gets discussed" (163). This also applies to tutors who know their student writers more, hence they experience more emotional labor. Emotional labor permeates feminist theories and gendered practices because the other side of it is love – labor of love. Such labor of love is reflected in not only how WCs operate but the field's publications, such as Rebbeca Hallman Martini's story (Chapter 9) about the founding of the *The Peer Review*. As the newest and amiable journal in the WC field, *The Peer Review* has been fighting for writer's voices and agency in the politicalized publishing field, as they value writers' intellectual labor, not simply conforming the field's publication rules.

Thinking of writing center administrators (WCAs) and tutors as predominantly female, Candis Bond in Chapter 37 warns readers that "WCAs may give more than they take, but this need not always be synonymous with exploitation" (137). The exploitation, seen in individuals, is an ecological system through critical analysis between the WC and its laborers, and, at large, English and institutional colleagues. That is seen from Chapter 16, written by an anonymous author who executed strategic thinking and action for their WC even when their career was under great jeopardy. The exploitation happens to Lucy (pseudonym), the only chapter author with liminal relation to her WC. As a WC affiliated faculty member, Lucy, in good faith, works to "build a community around writing center best practices but fails" (219), because the director ignores her expertise and contribution.

I position my intersectional identity–a transnational BIPOC female WCA–in reading the book and drafting this book review. Just as Giaimo and Lawson acknowledge "our BIPOC colleagues are doubly or even triply 'taxed'" in their WCs when performing "invisible work" (17), BIPOC story tellers in Act II would experience doubly or even triply emotional labor when sharing their stories, no matter how overt or covert those relate to their identities. And because "not only is the labor itself devalued, but so is the BIPOC WCA's selfhood" (19), BIPOC colleagues engage in double-faceted metalabor for the WC and themselves through negotiating, advocating, coalition building, and other work to "make working possible, feasible, and/or sustainable" (32). Hence, it is not hard to understand that although their outcry in the stories is real, multiple BIPOC chapter authors choose to be anonymous or pseudonymous, as they have learned from realities and have rational concern about repercussions. Their agentic decision echoes with Giaimo's hope that "these stories–counterstories, testimony, testifying, and narrativizing–raise consciousness and lead us to develop more protective behaviors, even as we advocate for change" (43). I believe stories have such power to accomplish such a mission; they can reach readers' "hearts and souls". BIPOC WC colleagues want to be brave and need to be safe with their hyper vulnerable lived stories and intersectional identities. For instance, Silk Jade, pseudonym, showed her double tax as a BIPOC experiencing metalabor and emotional labor, in years of communicating stakeholders to hold them accountable for the "mistake" in her job category. Silk Jade mapped her

journey of exile from her home culture and denial from her working institution. Although aiming to get rid of her liminal professional situation, Silk Jade also sees herself as an exile "in the hope of landing a position that will allow for some form of advancement" (209).

Besides my connection with Silk Jade, I feel my WC story resembles Daniel Lawson's "serendipity," defined as "when you go looking for one thing and you find something much, much more valuable" (43). My translingual abundance enriching my pedagogy encourages multilingual students to identify and utilize their own abundance; conferencing with students and tutors also helps me advance my research and teaching. While my job description is vague and job category is ambiguous, I am able to research any topics I like and explore out-of-WC opportunities. In this sense, liminal and marginal status has its flexibility and freedom. Furthermore, another layer of my identity–transnational–connects to the term "grand narratives" in Chapter 16. The anonymous author starts with a grand narrative about working in higher education and acknowledges the power of grand narratives. For transnational scholars residing in U.S. higher education, the "grand narratives" interweave an American dream–U.S. higher education is worldwide famous for its innovation, impact, and meritocracy.

Although Giaimo and Lawson hope more BIPOC colleagues would contribute to the book, I see each story, no matter written by BIPOC or not, contributing to the diversity and inclusion of the book. The book embraces writers in the process of "quiet quitting" (230) or during the practice of "pleasure activism" (228). Furthermore, no matter who the authors are through various social identifiers, they share something untold or unwritten–loss and trauma, denials and exclusions, resilience and perseverance, because those are super personal, greatly vulnerable, and thus highly protected and hidden. The professional experience and life trajectory of these writers, including but not limited to motherhood and daughterhood, contribute the real-time nature to this book and connect themselves to the real-life of the broader academic community. I salute Giaimo and Lawson, because of not only their logical structure of the book, and innovative and communal way to motivate WC laborers to write something "untraditional" and unconventional, but also their transparency and repositioning themselves as readers and writers. For instance, the book concludes, "WCs are very good at supporting students… but they are less prepared to support themselves" (235). In a similar vein, writing centers might be very good at supporting students of color, but they are less prepared to support their BIPOC staff. Such a book empowers WC folks with communality and transparency and informs potential newcomers to the profession.

In summary, I think this book reflects WCs' self-positionality–intimate and emotional in the ocean of knowledge and cognition of academia. Believably, this book may not be quoted or cited heavily, according to some scholarly matrix, but it will not sit with dust thanks to people like you, dear reader. It will have some wear and tear from you and other readers whom you share. In this sense, reading this book activates or renews "community membership" of WCs and helps build a larger community of WC workers and supporters.

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Review of *Stories of Our Living Ephemera: Storytelling Methodologies in the Archives of the Cherokee National Seminaries, 1846–1907*

Ana W. Migwan

Legg, Emily. *Stories of Our Living Ephemera: Storytelling Methodologies in the Archives of the Cherokee National Seminaries, 1846–1907*. Utah State University Press, 2023.

Keywords: book review, stories, colonization, indigenous rhetoric

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In *Stories of Our Living Ephemera,* Emily Legg uses previously scattered historical and traditional stories from the Cherokee National Seminaries to further the call for Indigenous stories as a rhetorical device in educational practices and research within colonized institutions. The book weaves together stories and historical data as a way of "decenter[ing] the histories of rhetoric and composition" for continued rhetorical resistance to institutional assimilation (19). Legg also intertwines her methodology with her own experiences in chapters like "Origin Stories" and "Archives Out of Story" as a clear example of how Indigenous praxis can work. Additional knowledge Legg relies on to formulate decolonized education principles include the Cherokee medicine wheel and the four cardinal directions. These traditional cultural tools allow Legg to center her methodology on merging the present and the past of Cherokee and Indigenous rhetoric while emphasizing the need to focus on community and all relations. Ultimately, the book serves past and present Indigenous scholarship by building on voices like Rachel C. Jackson and Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq and continuing the conversations of voices within the Cherokee seminary archives. By expertly capturing critical storytelling for community engagement, Legg welcomes in all relations to learn from the Cherokee archives and apply knowledge-making practices to their teaching, writing methods, and storied ways.

Legg's *Storytelling Methodologies* is broken down into four sections as a way to organize the book with the Cherokee four directions. The Cherokee medicine wheel begins with the east, which is where the book's sections begin. Part two on making relations relates to "complicat[ing] Eurocentric means of archival means and historiography by acknowledging and making relations with the histories of the Cherokee National Seminaries with Cherokee ontologies and traditional stories" (15). This section serves as a call to action for fellow Indigenous folks to challenge the way Euro-centric lenses have changed origin stories and places the importance not in dominant narratives of such white-washed stories, but in reconciling documented versions (such as archival versions) with present oral versions; it is pertinent to Legg that each be

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brought into relation with one another.

In the first chapter, Legg's argument is prefaced with family stories and research stories to reframe foundational disciplinary stories. By doing so, Legg revisits established theories from Malea Powell and Shawn Wilson to move away from archives as our true origin and toward a revisionist history that relies on relational accountability (45, 51). The background woven into this chapter guides part two's conclusion in the second chapter where Legg takes off the wolf's (settler's) shoes and dusts off the archives boxes to go where White researchers have previously ignored. In this chapter, she makes it clear that she did not discover these boxes even though she argues for knowledge and meaning-making from their contents. Legg applies the methodology of responsible listening and remembering to recover because avoiding the archives is equal to erasing the stories of ancestors documented within.

Legg's third section transitions her argument to the north to look at knowledge through story. Most notably, in chapter three this concept is explained through the continued Euro-centric lens that presides over research. According to her "...two-dimensional intersections of Euro-centric research isn't just a passing moment that, once we move past it, exists as just a footnote in our methodologies" (83). Through this explanation, Legg explains her situational awareness of stories and their need for continued renewed reflection as another form of relational accountability. By grounding oneself in reflective practice, she explains that the importance of story lies in the telling of it and understanding that stories are also living (84-105). This theory allows for balance to be brought to maintain ways of being for Indigenous peoples in applied theory, pedagogy, and methodologies. As for chapter four, Legg expands on the north direction by expanding on how storytelling methodology is a productive and participatory way of deepening relations. Throughout this section she continues to build on prominent theory from other Indigenous scholars, such as connecting Powell's rhetorical survivance to spoken stories. These scholars assist Legg in asserting her importance in merging past and present stories to resist Eurocentric methods of Indigenous frameworks.

Moving her methods to the western direction in section four, Legg argues that stories are a way of honoring the ancestors and their teachings of passing down knowledge and wisdom. In chapter five, not only does Legg find buried stories and accounts from Cherokee ancestors, but she finds new meaning for rhetoric of Indigenous past. The Cherokee voices within the archives did not report narratives of assimilation. Rather, they were thriving and alive as they always had been; this observation led to Legg questioning the narrative of assimilation as the ones who benefit from such a narrative are those asserting power over the assimilated, rather than the minoritized groups reclaiming their power (134). This chapter dives into reworking narratives through storytelling as a way of practicing balance and maintaining sovereignty through education.

Building on the wisdom of her Cherokee ancestors, Legg focuses chapter six on stories surrounding a pre-colonization hereditary, priestly clan "called the "Ani-kutani," "Nicotani," "fire priests," or the "Unatani"'(169). By incorporating these stories into her argument, she is able to present a valuable perspective on

what is deemed "valuable" in one's research and the value behind writing. Most notably, she settles into the shared-knowledge that "For the Cherokee, the work of writing is more than just a vessel of content or external storage; writing is a material technology that is a source of self-determination, an act of resistance, and a preserver of culture" (174). Those interested in discussions surrounding written and oral Indigenous language(s) may find this chapter particularly helpful—especially for the purpose of survivance and the continuation of what Indigenous ancestors have started for modern generations to preserve.

The final chapter of this section, and of the book, continues the narrative of cultural survivance and keeping alive past traditions through the piecing together of missing texts from the Cherokee archives with online copies kept within family lineages. The particularly compelling stories of chapter seven surround: the "brave, mighty warrior" as an answer to how Cherokee ancestors survived removal and starvation (198-200), as well as the sometimes humorous, sometimes heartfelt, or sometimes insightful perspectives from the Cherokee female seminary newspaper, the *Cherokee Rose Buds* (200-209), and finally how the Cherokee pushed back on colonists like Andrew Jackson by proving their intelligence through colonialist standards (209-219). Reflecting on each of these stories, Legg concludes that by widening the net of mainstream research topics we can uplift narratives of survivance that seek to combat beliefs of Native cultures experiencing total assimilation or complete erasure.

Emily Legg finishes with an epilogue and call to action for the "constellating of Indigenous histories with contemporary experiences" through ceremony and storytelling (223). By understanding that her audience is likely made up of two categories: fellow Natives and non-Native peers, Legg divides her call to action to what would best suit each going forward. For her Native peers, she asks that they continue her work in walking and talking with the ancestors. One way of doing this is by acknowledging the relationship through reciprocity: when you draw from the ancestors knowledge it is good practice to share developments on such knowledge back to them through ceremony.

Advice for both audiences is to follow Andrea Riley-Mukavetz's advice by practicing relational accountability: engaging with the ancestors as more than just participants because they are intergenerational colleagues and collaborators (230). Bringing Malea Powell back into the conversation, Legg emphasizes that this must be done without privileging one story over another (231), as this would be a direct reflection of how colonialism has prioritized its narrative over others. If everyone—especially those from a minoritized point of view—engaged with storytelling in their research by telling their *own* stories, the pushback on colonization would create a version of academia where marginalized voices don't have to focus on surviving, but rather thriving together.

Legg argues that we need to "...indigenize [our] stories/theories regardless of the content or focus of our research and writing, knowing these stories do not just belong to Indigenous spaces" as a way of embodying the Indigenous pedagogical knowledge-making that she lays out in her book (234). While Natives apply their ways of being to the content they produce for the academy, so should non-Natives apply this work

with proper acknowledgment—even if their work supposedly has nothing to do with Indigenous rhetorics—because Legg often finds there is overlap between current conversations between Native and non-Native rhetoric. Not engaging is simply another form of erasure.

The first step for non-Natives engaging with Indigenous rhetoric is acknowledging the "colonial settlerism deeply embedded in archival [or any] research, researchers can then begin on the path of ceremonial research and reconciliation" (238). The final pages of Legg's epilogue details the steps that must be taken when critically engaging with Indigenous rhetoric. She argues these are: making relations through critical practices like positionality, accountability and reciprocity, engaging with Indigenous rhetoric through story, engaging with your own ancestors wisdom (whomever that may be) with respect, and maintaining all relations as a continuous process. Finally, by turning to our culture keepers, what Legg calls stories, we are upholding the responsibilities we have to one another, as well as reframing limiting stories of the past with new answers that merge previous and modern knowledge.

While Emily Legg's methodology of storytelling may feel exclusive to one field, the information provided throughout could be applicable to any researcher, instructor, or scholar. However, this conversation is particularly useful for those working in the field of rhetoric and/or composition studies—as previous pieces published by Peitho cover overlapping topics such as anti-racist and feminist rhetoric, sociocultural writing for belonging, and storytelling through counter narratives. Legg's book weaves together a compelling argument for how each of these topics could be applied to either your theories or your classroom. Not only does Stories of Our Living Ephemera provide a great example of how to incorporate storytelling into scholarship or classrooms (by doing exactly what she is explaining in her methodology), but it also exemplifies accountability to the people (past and living) that she is basing her methodology on. Legg's book is more than just a "how to" for non-Natives to apply Indigenous rhetoric to their work, but rather it is a refreshing challenge to critically engage with conversations outside of your own culture. Emily Legg highlights Indigenous conversations within academia to continue the survivance established by foundational scholars before her while asserting the need to keep pushing for more. Survivance doesn't end with a meager seat at the table—it continues until all relations and their ancestors are treated with respect, reciprocity, and account-

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Review of *The Erotic as Rhetorical Power: Archives of Romantic Friendship between Women Teachers.*

Katie O'Malley Perrin

VanHaitsma, Pamela. *The Erotic as Rhetorical Power: Archives of Romantic Friendship between Women Teachers.* The Ohio State University Press, 2024. https://doi.org/10.26818/9780814215609

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Many misunderstand the erotic as something distinctly sexual. Though the erotic is indeed grounded in shared intimacy, it is not necessarily sexual. Drawing on Audre Lorde, Pamela VanHaitsma argues that the erotic should be understood as a creative power that can spur social change, break down the public-private binary, and ignite rhetorical practices such as writing, teaching, and public speaking. Specifically, VanHaitsma builds a rhetorical theory of the erotic as that which holds the potential to animate intellectual, pedagogical, and political desires. She builds on several strands of scholarship, beginning with Black feminist work by Audre Lorde, Saidiya Hartman, and Sharon Holland. She also extends both queer and feminist history, complementing scholarship by Jessica Enoch, Lillian Faderman, and Ela Przybylo. In line with the work of Karma Chávez and Qwo-Li Driskill, VanHaitsma engages conversations about decolonizing the archive. In all, *The Erotic as Rhetorical Power* offers readers a compelling rhetorical theory while exploring historically marginalized modes of relationality and challenging traditional historical-archival methods.

Vanhaitsma advances a rhetorical theory of the erotic through what she calls an eroto-historiography of romantic friendships in the long nineteenth century. She pulls from settler archival material to understand same-sex romantic partnerships between four pairs of women: three white couples and one Black couple. Sarah Holley and Caroline Putnam were educators and abolitionists; Irene Leach and Anna Wood were educators at a women's seminary; Gertrude Buck and Laura Wylie were administrators and educators of rhetoric at Vassar College; and Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown, were educators and domestic workers. The chapters of the book interrogate the white women couples' romantic friendships. These romantic friendships were traditionally deemed nonsexual, an alternative to the domestic and reproductive labors associated with heterosexual marriage. VanHaitsma instead understands them as potentially, but not necessarily, sexual, yet marked by passion and erotic intensity that functions as a source of energy. Meanwhile, between each chapter, VanHaitsma writes what she calls "imaginative interludes." In these interludes,

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VanHaitsma uses Jacqueline Jones Royster's "critical imagination" and Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" to imagine alternative lives for Rebecca Primus and Addie Brown. Primus and Brown's romantic friendship was disrupted by racial and economic constraints that caused them to part ways. Further, VanHaitsma was unable to locate Primus's letters to Brown in existing archives, necessitating the process of critical fabulation.

VanHaitsma is keenly aware of the settler colonialism and racism infusing the archives of her study, particularly in the way details about Primus's and Brown's lives are absent. Throughout the book, VanHaitsma persistently uses decolonial language in acknowledging the settler occupied lands on which the rhetorical practices of the erotic took place. Through the critical fabulation in the imaginative interludes, VanHaitsma displays awareness of the ways structural racism informs her study. These imaginative interludes allow VanHaitsma to depict a new story for Primus and Brown that interrupts the white eroto-historiography of her other chapters.

VanHaitsma begins her archival analysis by looking at how Putnam and Holley's romantic friendship propelled their pedagogy and abolitionist work. Choosing a same-sex romantic partnership permitted these women to evade domestic and reproductive labor, allowing them to channel their time and energy into teaching without being labeled as spinsters. Before teaching, Holley spent several years speaking on the abolitionist circuit. VanHaitsma elucidates that though she spoke to "promiscuous audiences," the fact that she lived with another woman (ironically) subdued any notions of sexual promiscuity in her personal life. Interestingly, Holley and Putnam actually reproduced traditional heterosexual relationship dynamics with Holley performing public-facing lectures and Putnam taking on private "conversational rhetorics," or more interpersonal engagements about abolition. This power imbalance would later lead Holley to exert abusive control over Putnam, not allowing her to see her close friends. Additionally, though the women teachers were radical in their pursuit for abolition, VanHaitsma shows how the residues of settler colonialism haunted their later work at the Holley School. In all, Putnam and Holley's case demonstrates how the erotic can fuel radical abolitionist ends while simultaneously reifying power structures like the public-private sphere and settler colonialism.

Dwelling further on the erotic's potential to reify certain power structures, VanHaitsma's next chapter turns to Leach and Wood. She argues that the erotic of Leach and Wood's romantic friendship energized particularly conservative intellectual desires that reified western notions of beauty and white nationalism. Leach was Wood's school-teacher-turned-friend; and ultimately, these women lived and taught together at the Leachwood Seminary in Norfolk, Virginia. Their archival material is significant, but little attention has been given to their romantic partnership, as most scholars largely explain their relationship as a strategic way to skirt reproductive labors. VanHaitsma contends that whether or not their relationship was sexual, their erotic fueled their commitment to conservative and belletristic rhetoric. By belletristic rhetoric, she means a form of commonplace rhetoric that encourages students to draw beauty out of ordinary things. Unfortunately, these notions of beauty were very white and Western. Further, Leach and Wood prioritized

teaching wealthy, white women, and their erotic was "thus constrained by their ongoing investments in hierarchical distinctions, culturally as well as politically" (104). Thus, though they educated women, Leach and Wood's same sex romantic partnership shows how the erotic as rhetorical power can be constrained by and used for hegemonic ends.

Of course, while the erotic as rhetorical power has the potential to be used for conservative ends, it can also be used toward radical ends. VanHaitsma elucidates a sapphic erotic of egalitarianism between Wylie and Buck. Buck was the first person to earn a PhD in rhetoric from University of Michigan and Wylie hired her to help run the English department at Vassar College. The two women lived together in what was known as a "Boston marriage," a long-term financial and emotional commitment between two unmarried and educated women. Throughout the chapter, VanHaitsma develops an erotic of "sapphic egalitarianism" based on the way Buck and Wylie ran the Vassar English department together. Unlike other relationships in the book, Buck and Wylie's was not hierarchical. Even though Wylie was Buck's superior, they largely worked together and advanced an egalitarian approach to leadership. Additionally, the women's division of labor allowed Buck to publish in large quantity and Wylie to be the leader of the local suffrage organization. While their egalitarianism was progressive in many ways, it was also problematic in that it neglected to engage meaningful difference, especially when it came to race. As VanHaitsma points out, "Buck and Wylie's evasion of difference was not passively neutral or indifferent, in other words, but actively exclusionary" as they only hired teachers with the "right" background (168). Additionally, Buck practiced what was then known as the organic theory of education, tied to ideas of natural social differences and thus part of a larger racializing, colonial project. In all, while Buck and Wylie's erotic of sapphic egalitarianism was in some ways progressive, the radical nature of that relationship was limited by white feminism and settler colonialism. Their case is a good example of how the erotic as rhetorical power can be used for both liberatory and hegemonic ends. VanHaitsma reminds us that the erotic is merely potential, and the practice of the erotic can subvert or solidify oppression.

VanHaitsma disrupts the accounts of white women's romantic friendships in her interludes. First, she imagines that Primus and Brown were able to spend ample time together, sneaking between each other's rooms each night, generating an erotic that fueled their abolitionist endeavors. Employing Hartman's critical fabulation, VanHaitsma imagines an alternative reason why the letters between Primus and Brown stop. Instead of Brown marrying a man, VanHaitsma envisions a life in which Brown was hired to work at the Primus Institute. Their erotic continues to fuel their educational pursuits and racial justice advocacy as they live and work side by side as white women did. Finally, VanHaitsma imagines a future archive that includes the lost letters that Primus wrote to Brown, allowing more fuller rhetorical attention to this partnership. In this interlude, Vanhaitsma acknowledges the shortcomings of her own imaginings to paint Primus and Brown as cis-women in a stable queer relationship in short stories that fall between the pages of larger stories about white women. She admits that in some way she is trying to "console" herself with these imaginings, and perhaps that is not fair to these women.

Perhaps VanHaitsma is right that her attempt to recover the romance between Primus and Brown is in some way self-gratifying. Yet is it not the truth that rhetoricians often engage in an affective process of criticism, attending to what *feels* significant to them? I know I do. What if this affective engagement is just what the erotic as rhetorical power demands of us? In VanHaitsma's consoling of herself, she is enacting the erotic by *imagining* a different story. She *desires* a different ending for Primus and Brown. Perhaps her interludes are her application of the erotic as rhetorical power in her own work. She may find it self-gratifying, but her critical awareness of this process actually distinguishes her scholarship and opens up space for other scholars to deliberately study archival materials and marginalized modes of relationality. In all, VanHaitsma literally and figuratively speaks to rhetoricians' affective engagements with criticism, opening up space for more exploration of the creative rhetorical power of the erotic.