

Introduction

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This collection takes up questions of truth, ethics, and representation that arise when we study the reading and writing practices of women and marginalized people, including historical subjects who can no longer speak for themselves or respond to our depictions of them. It comes at a time when research on women's rhetoric continues to grow, with scholars expanding the boundaries of rhetorical scholarship and refining available methodologies. This research has expanded the canon of rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies (RCL) to include more diverse voices. Though the scholarship takes many forms, it often uses archival texts and historical sources, such as primary documents or oral history interviews. Because the education of women, people of color, and the working class has historically taken place in settings outside of formal schools, scholars have looked to alternative sites to document writing and speaking practices that have flourished in local, grassroots settings as well as institutions other than primarily white colleges and universities.

The growth in research on women and reliance on new kinds of archives and sources have sparked new conversations about methodology and ethics. Far from being an afterthought, the researcher's ethical stance helps to determine what counts as rhetorical practice, how we analyze and interpret rhetorical texts, and what we can know about the meanings and uses of these texts. For feminist scholars, attention to ethics means asking: What's at stake? Who stands to benefit? How might publication affect our subjects—living or deceased—as well as their families and communities? While questions about ethics involve the consequences of our research, a focus on representation calls our attention to agency in the work: whose voices are heard, and in what way? As Peter Mortensen and Gesa E. Kirsch explain, considering questions of representation involves asking, "What does it mean to speak for others, to render their experiences in writing? Can we speak for and about others without appropriating their experiences or violating their realities? What happens to their experiences . . . after they have

been passed through the ‘critical filter’ of the researcher?” (xxi). As Gesa E. Kirsch puts it in the introduction to *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, studying rhetorical history often means that we are writing about “women who are no longer alive, who can no longer speak back, explain, or set the record straight” (7). Ultimately, ethical considerations guide our use of theory and methodology and vice versa. And as Sandra Harding points out, methodological decisions, ultimately, lead us to epistemological questions about how knowledge is produced and “what kinds of things can be known” (3).

The projects represented in this volume are diverse. They include studies of female aviators, factory workers, incarcerated women, teachers, students, activists—and more. But in reflecting on the methodological tensions and ethical issues they have encountered, the authors share a concern central to feminist rhetorical research: How do we represent women and marginalized people honestly, neither holding them up as exemplary rhetors nor denying their agency and full humanity? What obligations do we have to the people we write about and to their descendants and communities? The individuals represented in these various projects may not be *human subjects* in the sense that empirical researchers use the term, yet they are all too human, and our representations of them are not value-neutral, nor free of consequences.

FEMINIST RHETORIC THROUGHOUT THE DECADES

Feminist rhetoricians do not seek to present objective truths or straightforward historical accounts. Instead, as Elizabeth Tasker and Frances B. Holt-Underwood explain, feminist rhetorical work “gains ethos not from objectivity but from community” (55). Tasker and Holt-Underwood offer a useful definition of feminist rhetorical research: this form of scholarship “emphasizes the need for historical recovery” of women’s rhetoric and revision of the traditional canon that has excluded it; “examines gendered aspects of composition instruction . . . and opportunities”; and “studies gendered aspects of historical texts—situations in which women had a voice, used language publicly, or persuaded an audience, and situations in which women were silent or silenced” (55). Feminist rhetoricians acknowledge that our work is shaped both by the community practices and values of the subject and by the subjectivity of the researcher. The embrace of contingent truths over empirical findings has meant that from the outset, feminist researchers have had to carve out new methodologies for our work. It would not be accurate, therefore, to say that methodology is a new concern. Rather, as research takes new forms, we encounter new questions about the work of recovering and reinterpreting women’s rhetorical history.

Although there are different ways to conceptualize the evolution of feminist rhetorical research over the last few decades, one way to under-

stand its trajectory is to think in terms of three broad movements and trends: (1) recovery and revision of women's texts and of the rhetorical canon, to include more diverse rhetors; (2) case study research on particular sites of reading and writing; and (3) projects that expand the boundaries about the kinds of linguistic practices that "count" as women's rhetoric.¹ While histories of rhetoric and composition began to emerge as early as the 1980s (mostly focusing on college writing),² a landmark moment for women's rhetorical history occurred with the publication of Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold*.³ Glenn wrote women back into a rhetorical canon that had excluded them and "consciously [rendered them] invisible and silent" (2). In addition to Glenn's history, anthologies—including Shirley Wilson Logan's *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Women* and Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald's *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric*—opened access to new primary texts. Critical studies such as Kathleen Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, Nan Johnson's *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866–1910*, and Jacqueline Jones Royster's *Traces of a Stream* offered new interpretive and analytical frameworks. And edited collections such as Catherine Hobb's *Nineteenth-Century Women Learn to Write*, Hobb's and David Gold's *Rhetoric, History, and Women's Oratorical Education*, Andrea Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, and Molly Meijer Wertheimer's *Listening to Their Voices* presented a wide range of female rhetors and rhetorical practices that had previously been un- or under-explored.

Since the late 1990s and into the present, a growing number of rhetorical case studies have examined women's language use in particular contexts and communities. Often taking a descriptive, ethnographic approach, these studies have explored women's writing and speaking practices in settings that include postsecondary colleges and universities (Adams; Donahue and Moon), activist institutions (Hollis; Kates), professional associations (Skinner), and historical movements (George et al.; NeCamp; Wan). They have looked at particular communities of women (Gold and Hobbs; Shaver) and at the rhetorical practices of young women (Greer; Lueck; Wood) as well as studying the use of rhetoric in women's civic and activist work (Harrison; Mattingly; Share). Kelly Ritter has argued that the concept of archival ethnography is a useful framework for this kind of scholarship, which "paint[s] a full and unadulterated picture of a particular community in a particular chronological time" (464). This proliferation of research has been aided by the growth of venues for presenting and publishing work in feminist rhetoric.⁴

Today, scholars are continuing the recovery and case study work, while also pushing the boundaries of research. The projects represented in this

book demonstrate the expansiveness of emerging research, reminding us that women's linguistic practices take many forms that are worth documenting, sharing, and talking about. Emerging scholarship demonstrates that when women participate in public discourse, their communicative practices and styles may look different from previous, male-centered models, or even seem arhetorical at first blush. These practices may include silence, listening, or indirect persuasion (Bordelon; Glenn, *Unspoken*; Ratcliffe). The expansion of the kinds of texts that rhetoricians work with has broadened our understanding of what counts as feminist rhetoric. Work such as Jessica Enoch's *Domestic Occupations* and Sarah Hallenbeck's *Reclaiming the Bicycle*, for instance, calls attention to the way that women's rhetoric is mediated through material goods and products, embodied practices, and spatial relationships, which shape our constructions of gender and our understanding of what is desirable or permitted for women rhetors. As Hallenbeck puts it, a focus on material and spatial rhetoric looks beyond a "women as rhetors" approach to one that "seeks to identify the rhetorical means by which gender difference is constituted and maintained" ("Toward a Posthuman Perspective" 18). Scholars have also considered how texts once assumed to be private or mundane—such as cookbooks, diaries, or scrapbooks—may circulate within communities of women (Eves; Lueck; Sinor). Other recent projects have pointed to the importance of collective rhetorical practices (Sharer; Shaver), interdisciplinary and transnational discourse (Enoch and Ramírez; Gaillet and Bailey; Ramírez; Wu), and twenty-first-century activist movements (Stenberg and Hogg). Finally, the expansion of feminist rhetorical research has sparked pedagogical innovation and opened new possibilities for teaching writing through archival sources and digital repositories (Enoch and Besette; Hayden).

FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

Although interest in methodology is not a new development for feminist researchers, the conversation about methods and methodology gained steam between 2010 and the present.⁵ Writing at the beginning of the decade, Jessica Enoch pointed to the need for more discussion of practical research methods. Such conversations, she noted, give researchers "the opportunity to assess the practices that open up and close down historiographic possibilities, [and to learn] more about the . . . thruways and roadblocks that allow for and prevent alternative histories [from being] composed" ("Changing Research Methods" 49).

A number of subsequent volumes, including Kirsch and Rohan's *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, and Ramsey et al.'s *Working in the*

Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition, addressed the need for practical advice and helped to solidify a set of common research practices. In Kirsch and Rohan's collection, individual scholars offer reflections on the strategies that they used for particular projects, including studies of family archives, place-and-space-based research, and research on specific populations, including LBGTQ people, Indigenous people, and Japanese Americans. The essays are personal in nature, as the scholars narrate their journeys through the archives and articulate the questions and frameworks that guided their studies. Likewise, the essays in *Working in the Archives* take up practical questions about methods—the “how to” of feminist research. These questions include how to search for potential archives, what to expect when visiting a physical archive, and how to analyze primary sources and form useful questions about them. The contributors also discuss the relationship between researchers and the librarian-archivist, who plays an important role in determining what materials we have access to and how they are categorized (which, in turn, affects our ability to locate them). And *Working in the Archives* touches on twenty-first-century archives that include digital and visual collections. In addition to these two collections, Lyneé Lewis Gaillet, in a 2012 special issue article in *College Composition and Communication*, provides a useful review of previous research on archival research methodology and insightful discussion of some of the key questions that researchers encounter when conducting historiographic work.

The publication of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch's *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies* in 2012 has had an immediate impact on feminist scholars, including those represented in this collection. The book addresses the need for a coherent philosophy, theoretical framework, and research vocabulary; as a result, it has become the guiding methodological text for feminist rhetoricians. Royster and Kirsch challenge scholars “to ask new and different questions and to find more and better ways to listen to the multidimensional voices that are speaking from within and across many of the lines that might divide us as language users—by social and political hierarchies, geography, material circumstances, ideologies, time and space, and the like” (4). They offer a new interpretive model, one that “honors the particular traditions of the subjects of study, respects their communities, amplifies their voices, and clarifies their visions, thus bringing evidence of our rhetorical past more dynamically into the present and creating the potential, even with contemporary research subjects, for a more dialectical and reciprocal intellectual engagement” (14). This model is intended to help researchers move beyond “rescue, recovery, or (re)inscription—as we normally talk about the three Rs of our work . . . to enable a more dialogic relationship

between past and present, [our subjects'] worlds and ours, their priorities and ours" (14). Royster and Kirsch encourage feminist scholars to do work that is infused with an ethic of reciprocity, reflexivity, and attentiveness to our subjects' rhetorical contexts as well as our own ethical positions. As Lisa Mastrangelo has put it in a *Peitho* retrospective on the impact of *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*:

Their framework has offered us a way to read and re-read the texts and histories that we have put aside in the past because we weren't sure how to read them. They have moved us beyond the essentialized notion of adding voices to the history of rhetoric and composition and have instead compelled us to more radically (re)view our work. They've pushed us to ask harder questions about intersectionality and to be more critical of our micro and macro histories, "good" vs. "bad" narratives, and the ways that our stories get distributed and move about in the world. (160)

Royster and Kirsch's four key terms—*critical imagination*, *strategic contemplation*, *social circulation*, and *globalization*—come up throughout this collection, demonstrating the extent to which *Feminist Rhetorical Practices* has solidified the theoretical framework for feminist rhetorical research and changed the landscape for a new generation of scholars.

With a shared theoretical framework and common set of methods and methodologies in place, it is a timely moment to take up questions of ethics, representation, and interpretation that arise when researchers in composition, rhetoric, and literacy write about historical subjects. This collection does just that, looking at issues that range from publishing practices in feminist scholarship to discussions about archival practices and the affective dimensions of historical research. The chapters address questions such as: How do we write fairly about historical subjects who are not entirely sympathetic—or, on the other hand, about those to whom we are especially attached? How do we negotiate issues of access and circulation, especially for texts written by or about vulnerable people, such as those who were incarcerated or otherwise confined in institutional settings? How do we negotiate the balance between telling individual versus collective stories? How might we involve descendants of our historical subjects in our research efforts, and create a dialogue with them? When working on global topics and multilingual texts, how do we deal ethically with issues of translation and language variation? The authors offer their experiences as case studies for analysis and reflexivity. In doing so, they demonstrate practical ways for addressing and answering questions of ethics and representation. We hope that their openness will help both new and seasoned feminist researchers navigate these issues.

THEMES AND CHAPTERS

We've arranged this book by assembling pairs of chapters that speak to similar themes; however, many of the chapters address multiple themes and speak to one another in ways that could have easily led to alternative groupings. In this section, we present our chapter pairings and discuss the themes of the collection, while drawing from the contents in a recursive way.

Chapters 1 and 2—Reva E. Sias's "Searching for Myrtilla Miner's School for Colored Girls: Afrafeminist Strivings, Ethical Representations, and Nineteenth-Century Archives," and Sara Hillin's "'For Their Day and for Our Own': Navigating the Use of Diverse Sources in Feminist Rhetorical Analysis"—raise questions about the relationships between writers and their subjects. In her study of a normal school for nineteenth-century, free Black women, Sias describes the dilemma of representing women who were denied a public voice in their time. She argues that Afrafeminism serves as a productive framework for a project designed to make women's discourse more visible. Sara Hillin, on the other hand, explores the challenge of writing about exemplary women—in her case, African American women aviators—while avoiding the tendency to treat their texts unquestionably as "representation of truth," rather than products of complex systems of circulation and meaning-making. These themes are echoed in later chapters by Jessica Enoch and Elizabeth Miller, as well as Jennie L. Vaughn, who present complementary narratives about representing subjects with complex legacies.

Chapters 3 and 4—Elizabeth Lowry's "Invitational Anger: Naming Forbidden Emotion in Native American Women's Autobiographical Writing of the Nineteenth Century" and Jessica Enoch and Elizabeth Miller's "Historiographic Disappointment: Archival Listening and the Recovery of Politically Complex Figures"—raise questions about the affective dimensions of feminist rhetorical research. For Lowry, those questions center on how we represent women rhetors' displays of emotion, especially anger. While some researchers gloss over emotional moments in order to present their subjects in a positive light, Lowry argues that this tendency can lead to an erasure of the righteous anger of oppressed women. She calls on scholars to employ rhetorical listening in order to look more closely at the affective dimensions of rhetoric and to validate emotions that women have traditionally been expected to downplay. In chapter 4, Enoch and Miller ask how we might ethically represent historical subjects who don't share (or may even oppose) the values and beliefs of contemporary researchers. They present a series of practices that can help researchers negotiate the tensions between their own values and their subjects', most especially the practice of archival listening. In chapter 9, Gracemarie Mike Fillenwarth continues this thread,

writing about the struggle to fairly assess the significance of historical texts and rhetors held in high esteem.

Chapters 5 and 6—Laura Rogers and Tobi Jacobi’s “(Re)presenting Lila: The Ethics of Sharing Stories from a 1920s–Era Training School for Girls,” and Caitlin Burns’s “Ethics and Access in Mental Health Archives”—explores issues of access and ownership, focusing on the texts of incarcerated girls and hospital patients, respectively. Rogers and Jacobi describe the ethical dimensions of using documents written by and about incarcerated girls, considering who has the right to tell their stories and how to do this in a way that promotes justice and compassion. Burns describes the difficulty she encountered when studying the writing of patients at Bryce Hospital, a psychiatric facility. While her subject wrote newspaper articles and advocacy pieces intended to circulate widely, the archivists and owners of the collection have chosen to limit access to her records, citing privacy concerns. Burns points to the conflict between these two goals: at what point does privacy become erasure, and who gets to decide? In chapters 8 and 9, by Jane Greer and Gracemarie Mike Fillenwarth, the authors also consider questions of access and agency that arise when writing about women who wrote under institutional constraints.

Chapters 7 and 8 suggest ways that ethnographic approaches can inform archival research. In chapter 7, “Representation, Relationships, and Research: Building a Living Archive through Feminist Inquiry,” Jennie L. Vaughn examines the relationships she formed with the descendants of her research subject during the course of her archival research. Vaughn argues that, though challenging to navigate, these relationships can invigorate the research experience, help to create a living archive, and allow researchers to better understand the legacies of complex figures. In chapter 8, “On Pins and Needles: Multi-Sited Ethnography and the Archives,” Jane Greer explains how she used multi-sited archival ethnography when researching a cache of letters written by women garment factory workers, letters that resisted her attempts to fit them into a tidy narrative. This approach allowed Greer to eschew simplistic conclusions as she strove instead to allow the documents to speak for themselves.

Chapters 9 and 10 focus on collectivist versus individualist approaches to historiographic research. In her study of immigrant women’s rhetorical education, “Contexts and Communities: Valuing Collectivity in Feminist Rhetorical Inquiry,” Gracemarie Mike Fillenwarth argues that a focus on collective rhetoric can help scholars to understand the writing and speaking practices of marginalized groups whose individual voices may not be preserved in official archives. We juxtapose Fillenwarth’s chapter with Kathleen T. Leuschen and Risa Applegarth’s “Stabilizing Stories: Personal Narrative and Public Memory in Recent Activist Histories,” which argues

that when writing about living subjects, we encounter a productive tension between individual personal narrative and public memory. In this chapter, Leuschen and Applegarth also suggest that histories of the recent past offer an opportunity to practice a more layered form of inquiry.

Chapters 11 and 12 deal with both practical and methodological issues involved in research—specifically, translation and publication. Cristina Ramírez’s “The Rhetorics of Translation: A Feminist Method for Inquiry, Recovery, and Theoretical Application” offers a view of translation as a feminist act that reaches across cultural and linguistic divides. Ramírez challenges scholars to make the translation process more transparent. We pair Ramírez’s chapter with Wendy B. Sharer’s chapter, “Venues and Voices: Welcoming Greater Participation in Feminist Rhetorical History and Inquiry,” which looks toward the future of publishing for feminist rhetoric. Sharer argues that the tendency to privilege individual or exemplary rhetors threatens to obscure the rhetorical work performed by ordinary women and their more “mundane” texts, and that current publication practices reify this tendency. She calls for an expansion of publication venues and practices.

Altogether, the essays in this collection offer new ways of thinking about how feminist scholars might engage in the work of recovering, interpreting, and sharing women’s rhetorics, and how we grapple with the ethical challenges raised by this work. It can be messy and complex, but it is also rewarding and invigorating. We hope these essays spark more discussion, encourage more sharing, and lead to more fully realized, theoretically rich projects in feminist rhetorical inquiry.

NOTES

1. For more comprehensive reviews of the history of feminist rhetorical scholarship, see Tasker and Holt-Underwood for a chronology through 2008, and Gold for a discussion of the key movements in this subdiscipline.

2. See Berlin, Brereton, and Connors.

3. See Enoch and Jack’s collection, *Retellings*, for perspectives on the impact of Glenn’s work on current scholarship.

4. These venues include *Peitho* and the Feminism and Rhetorics conference, as well as several book series and journal special issues.

5. To differentiate between the terms *method* and *methodology*, I rely on Kirsch and Sullivan’s definition. Whereas *methodology* refers to “the underlying theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed,” *methods* are “[techniques] or [ways] of proceeding in gathering evidence” (2).

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