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In recent years, feminist pedagogy has shifted from a central position in composition to the margins of the discipline. This dissertation will argue that women's rhetoric in its scope and diversity presents methods of resolving what has become a tension between the agenda of composition and of feminist pedagogy. Through analysis of current composition pedagogy and several women's rhetorical texts, this dissertation outlines emerging women's rhetorical methods in order to suggest classroom practices and other pedagogical considerations to help resolve the conflict. The methods examined include the role of the audience in terms of community and collaboration, the ways in which students gain agency through action, the possibility of empowerment through affirmation, and the necessity of aligning with the rhetorical situations and choices. The conclusion considers larger institutional implications of implementing these methods and practices.

WOMEN'S RHETORIC(S) AS A METHOD FOR FEMINIST PEDAGOGY IN  
COMPOSITION STUDIES

by

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To My Family and Friends

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As I walked into my first interview for a college teaching position, I was confident that what I had to say would both impress and inspire the panel I was about to face. The interview was with a group of faculty at a local community college and my first task was to simply talk about anything that interested me and the topic did not have to be education. Having just completed the graduate course “Women’s Rhetoric(s) and Feminist Pedagogies,” I was inspired by the potential I believed feminist pedagogy held for teaching writing, and I was sure my interviewers would be as well. For five minutes, I pontificated about how I would use feminist pedagogy in the composition classroom, an approach, I suggested, which would ultimately offer the possibility of liberation for all of my students. In retrospect, it is not so surprising that my audience was not convinced with the ideas in my presentation. I spent the next forty five minutes answering questions and listening to faculty’s teaching experiences that were aimed at convincing me how feminist pedagogy might hold some potential but that it doesn’t necessarily fit with the aims and goals of a writing classroom, especially in a community college. I left with a teaching position for the next semester feeling slightly deflated although still convinced that feminist pedagogy was the answer.

Since that time, I have had a variety of teaching experiences from that community college faculty-in-training position to a graduate teaching assistantship at a large state

university, and then an adjunct position at a small private college. I have taught a wide variety of composition courses as well as some women's studies classes and I have even gained experienced teaching in several different online environments. Throughout all of these experiences my mindset has always been that I wanted to empower my students through feminist pedagogy, yet, I didn't grow into the feminist teacher I aspired to be for many reasons such as: the reality of the writing classroom; the shifting goals and aims of different programs and institutions expectations; or the lack of concrete pedagogical scholarship that specifically addressed feminist writing classroom practices. Additionally, outside of my graduate classes, I never heard fellow teachers mention or discuss feminist teaching. When a colleague would ask the topic of my dissertation I would begin to espouse feminist pedagogy and women's rhetorics but the conversation wouldn't develop beyond my explanation of the focus of my work. As a teacher it became harder and harder to focus on what I believed important, such as valuing student's languages within institutions that asked me to develop students proficient in academic writing. In my women's studies classes I suppose I convinced myself that I was a feminist teacher because we discussed gender and race issues, but in reality the topic alone does not determine the theory behind the intended pedagogy. My feminist pedagogy did not extend much deeper than a set of tacked on practices such as putting students in a circle to discuss readings. My frustrations began to shift as I gained some perspective when I taught a Women's Rhetorics and Writing course and started to make connections between women's rhetorics and what I wanted to achieve with my feminist writing pedagogy.



As I taught the Women's Rhetorics and Writing course, trends began to emerge across women's writing and speaking that helped me to begin to reconsider the kinds of writing I asked students to engage in across the semester. I continued to investigate these trends and considered how to apply them within my composition classes in an effort to mend the disconnect I experienced between my own feminist approach to teaching writing and the efforts that eventually developed into the work of my dissertation. Back then I believed that all I had to do to be a feminist composition teacher was relinquish some authority in a community-based, process-focused classroom and emphasize some personal exploration in student writing. Since identifying a variety of trends across women's rhetorical texts, such as the way women speakers often use affirmation as a means to develop their ethos, my approach to feminism in the writing classroom has shifted for the better. In this dissertation, I consider why feminism and composition complement each other as well as conflict, I examine the roles of various rhetorics – classical, women's, feminist - in composition, and offer suggestions for improving feminist pedagogy in the composition classroom by outlining methods that teachers can take from women's rhetoric. For a variety of reasons, feminist pedagogy has not met its full potential in the writing classroom; it has not been implemented in a practical way to improve reading, writing, and thinking because it has either been sidelined, not taken seriously, or used for more political than practical purposes. Women's rhetorics offer different ways of approaching the teaching of writing, specifically regarding the practices that help bring a balance to the masculine-encoded tradition of composition and the feminine-encoded values of feminist pedagogy because women rhetors have had to

engage that balance in order to be heard. Women rhetors have historically demonstrated a balanced action in their writing, speaking and thinking because they negotiated topics, audiences, expectations, and goals for women in a masculine world. Composition teachers can look to these women for their methods but also for their words that value “both/and” rather than “either/or.” Women rhetors, as Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald suggest in their anthology, have had to engage “available means” on a much different, deeper level.

In “Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric,” Barbara Biesecker begins her essay addressing the issue of tokenism and the recent attempts by researchers of women’s rhetoric to expand the rhetorical canon. While Biesecker recognizes and appreciates the knowledge gained from reading and studying these recovered women’s voices, she takes issue with the way the canon privileges the individual rather than the collective, and how simply including individual women will reinforce this practice. She writes that, “The exaltation of individual rhetorical actions is secured by way of the devaluing of collective rhetorical practices which, one cannot fail to note, have been the most common form of women’s intervention in the public sphere” (144). Similar to Biesecker’s argument, this dissertation is the result of analyzing women’s rhetorical texts, wherein my research focuses specifically on writing compiled in Ritchie and Ronald’s *Available Means: An Anthology of Women’s Rhetoric(s)*, and demonstrates the use of emerging rhetorical trends and strategies across twentieth century American women’s writing and speaking that could better define the role of feminist pedagogy in the composition classroom. Ritchie and Ronald’s book is an invaluable

resource filled with primary texts that expands and revises notions of women's writing and speaking. The individual women analyzed within their resource serve as strong examples yet serves to empower the collective voice rather than the individual.

Just as Biesecker cautions that "the mere accumulation of texts does not guarantee that our ways of knowing will change when the grounds for their inclusion, and likewise, our way of deciphering them, remain the same" (145), Ritchie and Ronald acknowledge this necessity of doing more than simply amassing texts. They follow up their anthology with a companion text, *Teaching Rhetorica*, which sets out to address the question: "How does the study of gender inform writing instruction in the post-secondary classroom?" (back cover). The collection of essays in this edition purports to consider the pedagogical implications of women's rhetoric but in my opinion falls short of reaching the intended goal. One possible reason that the essays don't accomplish their goal is the pushback, especially in composition, against scholarship that focuses on pedagogy rather than theory, which is an issue that has been the focus of some important scholarship in the field.

I argue that teachers can draw theory from women's words and also draw method and pedagogy, all of which may in turn lead to writing theory. In her essay "Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of *Ecriture Feminine*," Lynn Worsham suggests there is a "pedagogical imperative" that threatens to water down theory and rhetoric. This pedagogical imperative in the dominant narrative perpetuated about the field of composition studies, which reinforces the theory/teaching binary that women's rhetorics looks to dissolve. Likewise, Chris W. Gallagher, in his book *Radical Departures*:

*Composition and Progressive Pedagogy*, addresses this notion that Composition and Rhetoric is “too pedagogical, not focused enough on ‘theory building’” and suggests that “pedagogy is theory producing” (xvi). Gallagher’s joining of pedagogy and theory in a reciprocal relationship helps to close the gap that widens when the binary is reinforced in scholarship, such as Worsham’s essay. This joining of two binaries is similar to way women’s rhetoric asks us to see women’s practice, or writing and speaking, as theory. Theory is not superior to or always prior to practice and pedagogy but rather is something that can spring from the practical usage. Gallagher makes the important point that theory and pedagogy do not have to emerge from the academy, which is why he favors the terms “teacher” and “learner” (xvi). This dissertation addresses this notion that theory and pedagogy can and should emerge outside institutional bounds because a majority of the women’s texts I analyze are from contexts outside of academia, yet can apply to the teaching of writing. Similarly, Biesecker argues, “Thus, for the feminist historiographer interested in rewriting the history of Rhetoric, the plurality of practices that together constitute the everyday must be conceptualized as a key site of social transformation, and hence, of rhetorical analysis” (157). So the practices of applying women’s methods to the writing classroom and offering their methods as rhetorical choices to students will begin to alter the everyday writing and speaking, which when analyzed can help rewrite the history of rhetoric and be a site of “social transformation.” So, the space left between what *Teaching Rhetorica* aims to do and actually accomplishes is where my dissertation fits into the conversation regarding a pedagogy that incorporates women’s rhetorics. This dissertation approaches the gap from an interdisciplinary approach that brings together

three disciplines and sets of intersecting theories: women's rhetorics, feminist pedagogy, and composition.

Chapter two, "Composition and Feminist Pedagogy: Connection and Conflict," discusses the emergence of composition and feminism, reviews their seemingly natural connections and considers the conflicts that arise between the two fields. I address these issues to show that feminism not only works well with composition, but that it is not currently being engaged in productive ways in order to demonstrate how women's rhetoric can help heal the divide. Additionally, I acknowledge the important role expressivism has played in the history of the relationship between the two fields.

Chapter three, "From Rhetoric to Rhetorics: Women's and Feminist," discusses the roles of rhetoric in composition studies and the emergence of women's rhetorics. I outline the tenets of women's rhetorics in order to establish a foundation for the remaining chapters. Additionally, I draw out some distinctions between feminist rhetoric, women's rhetoric, and feminist pedagogy and suggest that some scholars have attempted to apply women's rhetoric to composition but their efforts have fallen short.

Chapter four, "Women's Rhetorical Methods: Possible Solutions," maps out why and how women's rhetoric can help bridge the divide between feminist pedagogy and women's rhetoric. I introduce four women's rhetorical methods: affirmation, audience, alignment, and agency and provide an analysis of the roles these methods currently play to suggest how women's rhetorics can shift them to become more effective. Within this chapter there is also analysis of various women's rhetorical texts to help illustrate the methods and theories that can be drawn from women's words as well as suggestions for

practical classroom application. I end the chapter by considering issues or additional considerations for teachers and scholars when using women's rhetorical methods.

Chapter five, "Conclusion: Possible Implications," begins to suggest the positive repercussions the incorporation of women's rhetorical methods might have on not only the classroom but also on university-wide assessment, interdisciplinary scholarship, and the role of the composition class in academia.

Women's rhetoric both bridges the divide between traditional composition theory and feminist pedagogy, AND offers new possibilities for real world rhetoric and writing, which may impact the larger field of composition studies. This suggestion of engaging a women's rhetoric-based feminist pedagogy is not something that I offer to close down options for feminist teachers, nor is it an attempt to narrowly define the field in a hierarchical way, but rather I offer the approach as an option to help shift feminist pedagogy from the margins to the center composition studies. In this way there is not an attempt to dominate a masculine discourse but rather see the possibility that is held by engaging both feminine and masculine rhetoric in a balanced way. Women's rhetoric offers feminist teachers this balanced approach because, historically, women have had to negotiate and strive for this balance when speaking or writing. It is this same practice that we want to bring to our students. This dissertation does hope to set some boundaries, which are necessary in order for feminist pedagogy to flourish. Boundaries provide feminist teachers a way to expand rather than floundering around without a sense of what feminist pedagogy can bring to writing classrooms.

## CHAPTER II

### COMPOSITION AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY: CONNECTION AND CONFLICT

When looking back on the inception of the fields of composition studies and of feminist pedagogy, it can be difficult to construct two separate timelines. Although composition classes were in place at some institutions as early as the late nineteenth century, most modern composition programs developed in the face of open admissions policies in universities in the 1960s as feminist pedagogy emerged alongside of the Women's Rights and Civil Rights movements. The 1960s were a time of great upheaval and social change in this country and the feminist movement saw its impact across many different fronts. Just as feminism, as well as the women's movement and civil rights groups, were working towards equal opportunity for a variety of underprivileged groups in places like the workforce and legal system, composition programs and open admissions were also looking to level the playing field for students. While composition and feminism work well together to challenge teachers to reconsider what is meant by good writing as they look to bridge the personal and the political, there are many reasons why the two conflict and feminist pedagogy within composition has been marginalized.

The 1960s social movements may have started in individual communities but quickly moved into the university, specifically with composition studies. In many ways composition and feminism responded to the dominant social issues of the time, including

the struggle for citizenship and desire for equality in this country. The two fields grew from political beginnings as they acknowledged the citizenry's need for access to better, more fulfilling, egalitarian lives. Both feminism and composition developed to extend the promise of American democracy to those who had been left behind or excluded. This goal is especially apparent with composition studies because it materialized to address the needs of students who were woefully underprepared for writing in the academy. As open admissions in universities paved the way for more of the general population to earn an education, universities quickly learned that they needed to do more than simply open their doors. Composition answered the urgent call to aid unprepared students for whom learning to be academically literate was crucial to avoiding failure.

Composition developed to address a variety of needs that included not only assisting unprepared students but also supporting the needs of college faculty and writing within the disciplines. Many students were not able to adequately write academically nor succeed in their programs because, as even the students themselves recognized, they were not prepared for the kind of writing required in college-level classes. Additionally, teachers were unprepared for meeting the demands of teaching and helping students to produce the kind of writing that met the requirements of the university. In 1975, approximately five years after the City University of New York (CUNY) adopted their open admission policy, Mina Shaughnessy responded to the dilemmas teachers faced when she published *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for Teachers Basic Writing*. Her main focus in this book centers on the pedagogical process of educating those students that she refers to as basic writers. At that time, incoming students wrote placement essays



and were positioned in one of three groups: those who were prepared for college writing; those who got by in high school, but did not thrive and would be challenged in academia; and the last group, the basic writers who, arrived in overwhelming numbers, appearing to be “ineducable” (2-3). As she explains in her introduction, a large portion of the incoming student population during those years “stunned the teachers” with many instructors claiming that their entire class was “going to fail,” were “remediable,” and “appeared by college standards to be illiterate” (3). Shaughnessy aims to help “prepare the inexperienced teacher for some of the difficulties he is likely to encounter and even provide him with an inventory of necessary supplies” (4). These “inexperienced teachers” consisted of faculty already in place at the university alongside a new crop of incoming teachers called on to fill the gap by providing writing instructions to basic writers. The identity of these teachers, the roles they filled, and the students they taught helped contribute to the marginalization of the composition in the academy.

These basic writing, or composition, instructors hired to teach those seen as the least prepared were viewed as temporary and secondary in contrast to what full-time faculty viewed as the “real” work being done in English Departments. Most writing instructors were women with former (or current) high school teaching experience without specific training in teaching college writing. Lacking advanced degrees, these instructors were hired as temporary and/or part-time lecturers or adjuncts unable to attain tenure track positions, yet saw this as a point of entry to teach college students. Because of basic writing’s marginal positioning, Susan C. Jarratt notes that, the discipline of composition developed as an alternative site, responsive to students and “against elitist literary

culture” (“Feminist Pedagogy” 114). Since composition was undervalued and viewed as an “alternative” discipline the majority of the positions were offered without opportunities for advancement or tenure, so positions were seen as expendable and not surprisingly a lot of the available positions fell to female teachers. Add to this the large presence of female faculty in the discipline as demonstrative of one of many links between composition and feminism. Jarratt argues that women were “doubly disenfranchised...as women and as compositionists” (“Feminist Pedagogy” 115). Women were, and still often are, undervalued in the academy as teachers in many of the same ways the composition was/is sidelined in the both the English department and the larger university. As Eileen Schell argues in her book *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor, and Writing Instruction*: “Women’s training and inculcation into the ethos of self-sacrifice, service and dedication to routine work contributed to their involvement in first-year composition instruction” (33). Because women are viewed as caretakers or nurturers in a field that is often viewed as a service to the university it aids in the low hierarchical positioning and non-disciplinary status of both composition teachers and the field.

Composition has a history of being viewed as a service to both the students and the university. This identity and marginal status positions composition low on the hierarchy in not only the English department but the entire university as well and so typically composition receives fewer resources and less funds, full-time faculty, and respect. This marginalizing legacy of service is one that composition departments rejected, and continue to reject, because of the notion that if composition is servicing the

“real” disciplines then it is at the mercy of the demands and expectations of other departments, which inhibits composition from defining its own identity as a discipline. One identity that is often placed on the field, which Sharon Crowley discusses in her book *Composition on the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, is the view of freshman composition as a gateway to academic discourse and legitimate courses of study rather than a place where the real work of the university is accomplished (253). Some of the demands placed on composition include the notion that composition should shoulder the sole responsibility for teaching students how to write for all occasions and that because students take this course they should not require additional instruction or reinforcement by the teachers in the various disciplines. Because of the way composition is often defined from outside the field and because the aims are often determined by other more valued disciplines, composition has been inhibited from gaining both respect and disciplinary status. Part of the creating and making of disciplinary status for both composition and feminism is the development of scholarship about it.

The simultaneous emergence of substantial scholarship in the two fields both separately and together with investigations into issues of gender and writing is another connection that helped reinforce the natural marriage of composition and feminism. While both composition scholarship and gendered writing scholarship can be traced back to the beginning of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1970s that both fields began to stake their claim. As composition was beginning to try to establish itself by defining disciplinary concerns in published essays, women scholars such as Florence Howe, Joan Bolker, and Sally Miller Gearhart were beginning to ask questions about the differences

gender made to composing processes. The roots of this natural merging of composition and feminism are evident in Howe's essay, "Identity and Expression: A Writing Course for Women" (1971), she writes: "The growth of my own feminist consciousness has led me back to theory of teaching composition" (41). Howe's works, and the work of other gender scholars at the time, helped lay bare the link between the fields of composition and feminism as both endeavored to bridge the personal and political as well as the public and the private in order to provide access for students and citizens.

The fact that there are these earlier works by women helps to reinforce that gender issues were not only part of the cultural conversation at the time but academic and theoretical ones as well and that feminism's influence on composition emerged with women rights in the 1960s and early 1970s. Before this point academic and theoretical discussions of feminism were often relegated to private discussions between disenfranchised female faculty and mixed with the occasional classroom practices rather than being present in an overt way that can be easily traced. In their essay "Feminism in Composition: Inclusion, Metonymy, and Disruption," Joy S. Ritchie and Kathleen Boardman suggest that some of the 1970s scholarship by authors such as Robin Lakoff, Mary Hiatt, and Joan Bolker focused on issues of women and language and women and style that helped to set the stage for the explosion of feminist writing scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s (13). These innovative articles considered issues of gender in writing and began to question assumptions about epistemology, form, style and language use in academic writing, particularly in English departments.

Although it is clear that feminists were part of the earlier conversation, feminism's most influential beginning, as a set of theoretical assumptions with its own research and texts, is often marked by the publication of two specific pieces written in the 1980s. The first, which appeared in *College English*, is "Style as Politics: A Feminist Approach to the Teaching of Writing" (1985) by Pamela Annas, in which she looks at the ways that women's writing is grounded in the personal but can be simultaneously viewed as political. This idea is drawn from women's rhetorics at the time, such as Gloria Steinem's famous proclamation that "the personal is political." The second, published in *College Composition and Communication*, is Elizabeth Flynn's "Composing as a Woman" (1988), which argues the point that men and women write differently. These two essays mark a turning point within composition studies.

Annas's essay introduces an argument, which speaks to the expressivism movement at the time, by suggesting that writing teachers need to find a way to value students' subjective, personal voices in their papers as a way to empower students and validate their writing. Expressivism is a set of nontraditional pedagogical practices that developed in opposition to current-traditional methods which shifted the focus of the writing classrooms away from correctness and more towards valuing student voices and empowering students to see writing as a way of making meaning. This same valuing is evident in Annas's essay when she writes: "The kind of writing I finally want these students to be able to do...is committed and powerful because it takes risks, because it speaks up clearly in their own voices and from their experience..." (71) Basically, just

like the expressivists, Annas challenges teachers to reconsider the kinds of writing they value in their classrooms and to see students as making meaning in their writing.

Flynn's essay follows Annas's in bridging personal and political by focusing on showing how men and women write differently. Her analysis of writing instruction suggests that the current approach to teaching and discussing writing is masculine and not suited for female writers. While initially groundbreaking, Flynn's argument that men and women compose differently has received criticism by those who claim her argument is essentialist. The essentialism debate is one that has loomed large within the feminist community. Essentialists see gender rooted in biology. This is problematic for many feminists because of the way the premise can limit what it means to be a woman. With Flynn's essay, and many essays that address women's ways, there is often critique that questions the value in defining feminine characteristics and practices because not all women adhere to one set identity and any digression from a defined norm can be used to further oppress women. In regards to these early works, such as those by Annas and Flynn, one might note that women needed to start somewhere and in order to be heard or considered within the field women needed to first define a space. In 1990, Flynn revisits her essay in "Composing 'Composing as a Woman': A Perspective on Research" where she reflects on the process of writing the original essay, responds to its critical reception, and recounts that her purpose in writing was to bring awareness to the importance of considering feminist and gender issues alongside composition. At the time she wrote this reflection, the call she sounded in her first essay was still relevant and just starting to be

considered by scholars: “feminist studies and composition studies have not engaged each other in a serious or systematic way” (“Composing as a Woman” 245).

Although many feminist scholars eventually took heed to the call for more engagement between the two disciplines and began to produce scholarship that focused on issues of gender and composition, feminism remained marginalized in the academy. While throughout the 1990s there was an explosion of scholarship that focused on issues of feminism, pedagogy, and composition, it did not have a large-scale impact on program or institutional goals and aims and Ritchie and Boardman argue that feminism in the field remained ancillary. The marginalization of feminism seems to stem from a variety of sources but clearly there is a backlash to the assumptions about its political agenda and goals in the academy.

So far this chapter has tried to review and reveal some of the interconnected history of feminist pedagogy and composition. The two fields developed in similar ways because of the contexts that surrounded them. Both composition and feminism emerged to respond to the needs of the disenfranchised. Both endeavored to provide access, in a variety of ways such as healthcare, the legal system and/or the tools necessary to help students develop into successful readers and writers in academia. At a time that saw great upheavals in the university, both disciplines shared a willingness to experiment and consider alternative paths to provide access to students. The bond the two disciplines share is clear but what is just as important to consider is the how and why the two disciplines diverge.

## **The Conflicts**

While expressivism within the teaching of composition is often viewed as an approach that helped form a strong bond between feminism and composition, some scholars feel the relationship is more of a cause for disagreement. In her essay “Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict,” Susan C. Jarratt succinctly explains why, in her view, the expressivist approach in the composition classroom is “troublesome” for feminist pedagogy. Jarratt’s main argument is that the expressivist turn asks students to consider personal experience but does not ask them to turn that perspective back to the public and “locate personal experience in historical and social contexts” (“Feminism and Composition” 307). Technically, her assessment is that expressivism may help reinforce rather than dissolve the public/private binary. While the dissolution of dichotomies is a goal of feminism, one reason why feminism has not been as successfully engaged in composition is because of this occasional reinforcement of different binaries or a lack of knowledge as to what to do once binaries are removed, and so this becomes a place where women’s rhetorics can intercede.

An additional tension with expressivist pedagogy and feminism in the composition classroom is the way this pedagogy posits the teacher as nurturer, facilitator, or coach and often requires that the teacher cede some of his/her authority. From one perspective this is a positive role for teachers as it often leads to a classroom atmosphere that is non-confrontational and supportive with the focus of student writing not resting solely on academic argument but rather on valuing students’ explorations, their personal experience and their development of voice in their writing. For many of these reasons,



this approach to teaching writing resonates on different levels with many feminist teachers but this role has also been critiqued by feminist scholars because historically women have had to fight in order to have a voice as well as be able to establish authority in a variety of situations, including classrooms. This rejection of authority can seem counterintuitive to feminists due to all the work that had to be done in order for women to be heard.

While the main focus of teacher issues and concerns with feminism might center on gender and teacher authority, other foci include issues of the gendered body and gendered communication as it relates to classroom dynamics. This issue of teacher authority has been taken up by many feminist scholars, such as Michelle Paine, Shirley Logan Wilson, and Min-Zhan Lu, as well as many others whose scholarship fill an entire chapter of *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*. Some of the most influential books on the subjects range from Nel Noddings *Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education* to Gail B. Griffin *Calling: Essays on Teaching in the Mother Tongue*, and bell hooks *Teaching to Transgress*. Most of these books advocate an approach to teaching which nurtures the student to some degree and finds ways to value all students equally. As Noddings argues, it makes sense that if teachers ask students to risk who they are with reading, writing, and speaking assignments they need to know teachers have their best interests in mind and care for their well-being. Noddings's work is important for many reasons, especially when considering women's rhetorical methods. She focuses on the necessity of the bond between the "cared-for" and "one-caring" with the importance of establishing a relationship-- a recurring theme in women's rhetorics.

Conversely, this idea of nurturing, or mothering, within the teaching profession is often critiqued, especially given the marginal position women already maintain in university writing programs. Critics believe this role for female teachers reinforces the idea of woman as caregiver, which takes away from any authority women are already struggling to gain and inhibits room for growth. Kathleen Weiler agrees with some of this assessment and argues for a different identity for female teachers in her 1988 book *Women Teaching for Change*. Weiler analyzes issues of power and relationships in the classroom and calls on teachers to challenge sexist notions, behaviors and assumptions in a way that more openly politicizes the classroom. Weiler argues that teachers cannot avoid conflict in the classroom and learning to deal with conflicts can empower both students and teachers. Whereas expressivist approaches to teacher authority in composition classrooms may have initially won over feminists, the role of the teacher is a highly debated issue within feminist pedagogy, and further scholarly consideration has resulted in a place of tension for feminism within composition. While some of the issues between the two fields are centered on the applications and aims considered as both expressivist and feminist, there are other reasons for the divide between the fields.

Feminist pedagogy entered the classroom in a very loose, undefined way. Feminists embraced the perspective that it is better to remain open to the possibilities for classroom practices rather than follow a narrow authoritative agenda. Additionally, feminist pedagogical practices were, and are, often added to the status quo as an option or a technique rather than a rejection of or revision to traditional approaches. In other words, the practices were not implemented in a way that rethought the dominant paradigms.

When the new practices that did challenge traditionally accepted ones appeared they were applied to a discipline, which adhered to the same basic theory and goals, and so it became, as Jarratt argues, a case for conflict. One of the strongest examples to illustrate this point about the issues with feminist practices and their application to the composition classroom is the gap between process and product.

The traditional masculine-encoded composition classroom values the final product, the essay. This final piece of writing is usually what concludes each unit and each end of the semester. The final product is what receives the grade and so this becomes the thing of value; the thing that students work to succeed at writing. Feminist teachers, as well as others, such as expressivists, endeavor to value the process. There is recognition that there is much for the student to learn from engaging in the process of writing with a focus on the actions towards the final product especially since the improvement students are capable of extends far beyond the 15-week semester. Feminist teachers try to be realistic about what can be taught and achieved in this period of time and recognize that the product should not be the ultimate determining factor in students' progress. Feminist teachers also try to give recognition to students who engage in the process by awarding credit for such activities as brainstorming, drafting, and revising, but on a larger departmental or college level, with the emphasis on things like assessment, the thing valued is the final product. As a result, it is difficult for feminist teachers to reward students for the process because even if they tried, the teacher knows that she must grade the student by other standards. Thus it becomes more and more difficult to successfully bring together the practices of a feminist pedagogy and the aims and goals of the

composition program or the larger university. So the feminist pedagogical practices of valuing process gets snuck in or pasted onto the masculine-encoded goals of a composition classroom and feminist pedagogy does not make a lasting impact on the individual students or the program at large. This false sense of putting an empowering ideal, such a valuing voice and process, into practice but then requiring the student to achieve something completely different by course end is problematic. Students are sent one message from the teacher and then the teacher is required to assess based on completely different standards and expectations. In this case, the dominant, masculine-encoded approach to teaching writing maintains the position of power as feminist teachers try to implement practices that end up getting simply tacked on.

The way most teachers seem to view feminist pedagogy is as a set of classroom practices that can be sprinkled into ongoing writing instruction. In many ways these practices that are occasionally engaged are often just viewed as good teaching rather than feminist practices. There needs to be more to a feminist pedagogy than just making explicit practices such as valuing difference and building community. In order to make change teachers and scholars need to reevaluate the methods of both feminist pedagogy and composition. There needs to be a balance of what have been termed feminine and masculine in our practices and our goals. My argument is that a feminist pedagogy with a women's rhetorical foundation can offer a set of principles and methods to guide teachers in making decisions to achieve equity and success.

Not only are feminist practices loosely defined and sporadically used but often they develop and are presented in direct opposition to traditional writing classroom

practices. So dichotomies, the very things that feminists look to tear down, are often reinforced by well-meaning teachers. Dichotomies get reinscribed by feminists in their efforts to offer alternative theories and practices because the practices advocated often develop in response to the norm rather than from a feminist or women's rhetorical source. In some ways, this "in opposition to approach" is problematic because, as Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests in "Difference 'A special third world women issue'," when one names or defines something with a direct reference to the thing that already has power, the original is allowed to maintain the power. The newer practice or approach becomes "othered" and will always be discussed in relation to the one that is able to retain its power. Once this occurs the practice and/or approach will never be taken seriously and, as happens so often with the case of feminist pedagogy, the practice is not theorized, does not impact the goal of the course or classroom, and is subjugated to a proverbial bag of tricks when a teacher wants to try something different. For example, in the composition class, the concept of collaboration and community is often at the forefront of feminist pedagogies and set up against the traditional classroom lecture but the concept needs to move beyond simply having whole class discussions in a circle. Kenneth Bruffee and John Trimbur argue in their work that classroom collaboration is something that can and should be deeply theorized with considerations of the roles and aims of consensus and dissensus. Unfortunately, feminist pedagogy often reinforces the theory/pedagogy divide and fails to draw together theory and practice.

Peter Elbow's embracing of the contraries is important to consider here in regards to both expressivist composition, binaries, and feminism. Elbow is considered one of the

earliest expressivists who had a huge influence on composition practices. In *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*, Elbow championed the idea of the teacher as coach rather than ruler, which is an approach many writing teachers still use to this day. In 1986, Elbow wrote “The Pedagogy of the Bamboozled” in which he revisits some writing classroom practices that have developed from Paulo Freire’s works. He considers how teachers might be deceiving classes by suggesting they incorporate certain liberating classroom practices but are not, in fact, successfully enacting what they profess and so are “bamboozling” themselves and students. Elbow suggests that this occurs with many of these practices that he himself, and other expressivists, have encouraged teachers to use in the classroom, such as giving up authority, valuing collaboration, etc. What makes this essay important from a feminist standpoint is that Elbow is able to revisit and revise his earlier thoughts on classroom practices. The process of reviewing and revising is important to feminists and rhetorical scholars recovering women’s writing and speaking. Additionally, feminism can learn from the ways Elbow tries to bring together and embrace theory and practice. Throughout a majority of his scholarship, especially in the bamboozled essay, Elbow often argues for “both/and” rather than “either/or.” Breaking down dichotomies and embracing both/all possibilities is something feminists value but are not always successful in engaging. Elbow works to bring together a multitude of possibilities when he critically engages with what teachers and students should be aiming to achieve in the classroom. For example, when he examines the roles of the teachers, he continues to support the idea that teachers can be the ally to students but argues that many teachers are forgetting they are also “hurdle” and “credit-giver.” He

suggests that when teachers refuse to embrace and be honest about these other facets to their role, students can become confused and believe teachers “are more truly allies of the student than this contradiction permits” (88). Teachers must embrace “both/and” in order to maintain a balance in their roles and be successful employing a feminist pedagogy. Embracing contraries is a feminist strategy because it requires that more than one approach and truth be held at one time.

The dichotomization of standard and alternative discourses is another binary that often widens the gap between feminism and composition. Within the university only certain discourses are acceptable for academic work. Although feminist teachers may want to value alternative discourses and language usages, in the end there is a certain goal the larger university has for student writing and often the composition department is tapped with the responsibility of insuring this happens. Feminism and expressivism may encourage the valuing of student’s personal experience in their papers but critics, such as current-traditionalists, might question if this practice is really serving the student. One place teachers might have to engage this conflict is during the writing of syllabi and the determining of the course outcomes. Most times these outcomes are dictated by the department or the university and so while teachers may want to value something other than academic discourse their efforts are hampered. For feminists, writing is a process that makes meaning and issues of who gets to make knowledge, or epistemology, have always been at the forefront. The fact that expressivism looks to put the power of meaning making in students’ hands falls in line with feminist values but not always with the aims of the university. Academia only places value on certain discourses, such as the

academic, and “other” discourses and practices, get regulated to an undervalued, alternative position.

On the whole, feminist teachers and scholars have tried to avoid narrowly defining specific pedagogical practices in order to keep possibilities open. As Lynn Worsham suggests in “Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of *Écriture Feminine*,” feminists do not want to, or should not want to, turn practices into pedagogy (such as *écriture féminine*) because there is a risk of institutionalizing, which is counter to the practice of disruption. On the one hand, this attention to not reinforcing the marginalization of certain teaching practices is respectable given the history of feminism and women’s rhetorics; on the other hand, not having defined practices has led to the idea that feminist pedagogy should be considered merely play or preparation for the “real” work of the writing.

In “Discourse and Diversity: Experimental Writing Within the Academy,” Linda Bridwell-Bowles addresses the issue of alternative discourses and even argues, as Kate Ronald and Joy Ritchie sum up in their intro to *Teaching Rhetorica* that: “‘alternative discourses’ end up as just that –alternative, marginal, lower in hierarchy” (Ronald and Ritchie 5). Although Bridwell-Bowles acknowledges this, her essay still explores and promotes the use of “experimental writing” in composition classrooms. Additionally, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede in their essay “Crimes of Reading and Writing,” which is the opening essay to *Teaching Rhetorica*, write that as teachers, they did not know “how students will experience various rhetorics” but that they “regularly invite students, for



example, to experiment” (28). This essay is just another example of feminist pedagogical scholarship reinforcing this undervalued positioning.

In “Riding Our Coattails, Subverting Tradition: The Tricky Business of Teaching Rhetoric(s),” Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald explore what happens when they try to teach and incorporate women’s ways of speaking and writing into their classes in critical ways that legitimizes women’s rhetorics. Many of the student concerns deal directly with feeling conflicted about what language to use in their academic writing. One student, Thelma, suggests she will continue to write in an authoritative academic voice with her school writing and will work on a nonacademic voice in private but she still feels conflicted as with her academic work and feels she might have acquiesced “to the ‘father tongue’” (“Riding Long Coattails” 236). This essay certainly suggests and speaks to the need for the balance between the mother and the father tongue (“Riding Long Coattails” 234); but the concern is with teaching women to write and think like women in a world that still values the masculine tradition. When feminist pedagogical practices are presented as alternative or experimental it helps maintain feminism’s marginal position within the academy.

Because feminism is often viewed solely as a social movement with a political agenda, this framing has aided in feminist pedagogy’s conflict with composition and has resulted in some resistance from faculty, students, and institutions. The use of feminism and gender as a topic within the classroom or as a way to assert political agendas was, at one time, a highly debated topic. In her 1990 essay “The Other ‘F’ Word: The Feminist in the Classroom,” Dale Bauer recounts some of the feedback provided about a feminist

teacher in which the two main objections from students are that the “classroom is out to be a ideologically neutral space free from instructor’s interests and concerns” (385) and that “feminism is not a discipline, that gender issues are based on perspectives unsuitable for the labor of the intellectual” (386). The many negative narratives surrounding feminism have led many to be suspicious of it aims and its place within the academy.

Just as women’s rhetorics has interrupted classical rhetorical history, feminist pedagogy has worked to fracture traditions of writing instruction and to offer different ways of approaching the composition classroom. Composition tried to posit a “single theory of writing process” and feminists critiqued this notion of a “singular universal concept of truth” (Ritchie and Boardman 16). Feminists offered new ways of looking at meaning making, what counted as evidence, how to approach the classroom, the role of the teacher, and many other pedagogical shifts to the current-traditional method. The disruptions, in both composition and rhetoric, have been necessary for women to forge a space from which to assert their influence but this has worked both for and against feminism within composition. Some scholars suggest that by promoting alternative practices and agendas feminist pedagogy has hindered composition’s growth as a cohesive, respected discipline within the university. Ritchie and Boardman suggest this disruption may have hindered composition from “full disciplinary status” (16). While I would argue these changes were necessary, rather than continuing in the same vein, it is time to see how to fill in the gaps and spaces with the voices and methods of women and feminists. A shift needs to occur in order to see the gaps as places of possibility rather than simply as disconnection.

The terms “fracturing,” “resisting,” and “interrupting” have such negative connotations. Rather than the fracturing being viewed as a space of possibility for women’s rhetorics and feminism in the writing classroom the space has become a stopping point. It is time to begin to consider how feminism can offer ways to heal the necessary spaces that it has created. We can look to the history of Women’s Studies programs to see how some of the recovering work has left holes and caused conflicts within the field. Women’s rhetorics and feminism within composition stymied and didn’t continue to evolve because the fracturing was viewed as a breaking or shattering, which stopped or halted the process. This dissertation does not aim to offer further fracturing of the field of composition, although I recognize that one can never know all the possible results, and a shift in the foundation could occur if women’s rhetorical methods are implemented. Rather than continue to derail and interrupt, I am attempting to mediate, repair, and/or offer a place of balance for feminism in the writing classroom. I view this process of breaking as opening up space for new methods. With the fracturing of the dominant approaches, views, narratives, or whatever it may be, there opens a space for something new to generate, for more to happen. Feminism, rightly so, forged spaces within the field of composition and it is in relationship with women’s rhetorical voices that feminists will be able to generate and insert new methods.

Undervaluing composition studies and writing teachers, both entities the university is dependent on to help provide a solid foundation for students, is similar to the silencing that women speakers and writers have had to contend with throughout history. This similar legacy is just one reason why the infusion of the methods and voices of

women rhetoricians can help make a positive change within composition. Women rhetors have had to, and continue to, struggle to be heard and valued. These struggles are similar to the ways that the field of composition has had to push back against English departments and the larger university. Just as women rhetors had to fight for the right to voice, and even if they didn't gain that space or right they had to claim it, composition programs have had to struggle in a multitude of ways including staffing, financing, and even just respect. Women rhetors are not the only ones who have acknowledged and shifted what Aristotle meant when he suggested finding the "available means." Writing teachers and feminists in the classroom know this battle well and could learn from women rhetors and their methods to work for a voice in the classroom, the larger university and even in scholarship.

Gail Hawisher suggests that the relationship between feminism, rhetoric, and composition is one "we prize rather than disdain" and is a relationship that formed because of "shared interest in pedagogy" (xvii). Feminist pedagogy has not always been on the margins of composition studies but more recently seems to have been sidelined as teachers struggle to define and implement feminist pedagogy in their classes. Although, currently, feminist pedagogy seems to have fallen by the wayside in composition; both feminist pedagogy AND composition continue to remain on margins of the university. In the next chapter, I will discuss how women's rhetorics is in a comparable position in regards to the larger field of rhetoric and the university as a whole and why this parallel positioning helps to strengthen my suggestion for women's rhetorics as the key to an effective feminist writing pedagogy. Feminist composition teachers need to use the

recovery of women's voices as lessons for how to grow feminist pedagogy in the writing classroom and expand the possibilities for Women's Studies programs. Now is the time for women's rhetorics to fill the space by offering methods but not in a way that narrowly defines or determines what a feminist writing pedagogy should look like but offers suggestions to open up the possibilities for what feminism and composition can offer each other.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM RHETORIC TO RHETORICS (WOMEN'S AND FEMINIST)

One quality or action is nobler than another if it is that of a naturally finer being; thus a man's will be nobler than a woman's. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* I.9

The history of rhetoric is dominated by masculine, patriarchal purposes, values and voices. Rhetoric, or persuasive speaking and writing, as we know it today dates back to Ancient Greece where the foundational assumption was that the speaker would not ever be a woman because, as Quintilian stated, a strong rhetorician is a “good man speaking well.” This assumption about the permanent positioning of the man as speaker in the rhetorical situation helped determine who could speak for hundreds of years.

Robert J. Connors succinctly defines the masculine field of rhetoric when he writes that “rhetoric was the domain of men, particularly men of property. The continuing discipline of rhetoric was shaped by male rituals, male contests, male ideals, and masculine agendas. Women were definitely excluded from all the rhetoric implied” (“Gender Influences” 401). This approach to rhetoric not only continues to inform understanding of rhetoric and persuasion today but also the teaching of writing and speaking across university composition and communication programs. There is evidence of Aristotle's canons informing many aspects of the final writing product from the linear, dominating persuasive arrangement to the traditional masculine style of academic prose. While the

field may have shifted and evolved, on the whole the traditions have maintained their influence and remained largely uncontested. In this chapter, I discuss the roles of rhetoric in composition studies and begin to outline the emergence of women's rhetorics and draw some distinctions between feminist rhetoric and women's.

While many early Greek male rhetoricians, from Isocrates to Plato and Cicero to Quintilian, contributed to what is known as classical rhetoric, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has left an indelible mark on many disciplines including communications and composition. In this work he defines rhetoric as the art of discovery of the "available means of persuasion" (181). *Rhetoric* hands down the five canons (memory, invention, arrangement, style and delivery), the three kinds of oratory (deliberative, epideictic, and forensic), the three appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), and suggests invention strategies such as heuristics and topoi. Aristotle defines rhetoric as an art in which the speaker, assumed male, looks to persuade his audience in order to reach agreement. From this work we learn, and in many cases continue to teach, many things including where to look for arguments, how a speaker should present himself, what to consider with the audience, and how to polish the style for presentation. For Aristotle, rhetoric "may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (181) but it is also a counterpart to a form of dialectic that is "a rigorous form of argumentative dialogue between experts, can test whether absolute truth has been achieved" (Bizzell and Herzberg 31). While Aristotle goes to great lengths to describe how rhetoric and dialectic are similar (Kennedy 80), the contrast lies within rhetoric's art of persuasion, whereas dialectic assumes universal truths that are held by the (male) speaker, truths that can be

communicated to the audience but are not discovered in the process of composing, as some believe today. Women and feminist rhetoricians often critique two of the first tenets of classical rhetoric: the assumption of the speaker's gender and this dialectical method of transmitting universal truths.

Despite the struggle to define women's rhetorics both as a separate discipline and as well as part of the classical rhetorical tradition, women's rhetorics has developed into a field of academic consideration. To help draw a distinction between classical and women's rhetorics, it is important to consider the purpose they each developed to serve. With classical rhetoric, men needed a system to maintain order and transmit standards, rules and laws in public arenas such as courts of law. As Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn and Andrea Lunsford write in their essay "Border Crossing: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism": "Western rhetoric began...as a response to disputes regarding property, regarding borders" (402). Although rhetoric, and its uses and purposes, have developed and progressed across the centuries, classical rhetorical was originally aimed at "conveying but not creating" truth (Bizzell and Herzberg 5). The seat of knowledge was not questioned because of the assumption that it was always the man, the one with the power and respect, who was speaking in order to communicate the truths. The purpose was to maintain and control knowledge, which is in stark contrast to the ways women and others who employ "alternative" rhetorics seek to assert and valid new ways of speaking and writing. Classical rhetoric was developed in part to maintain or establish boundaries, something that women, people of color, and other underprivileged groups struggle to push, bend and break.



Women did not begin publically speaking and writing on a larger scale until they began to gain access to literacy and education into the eighteenth century, which was an access that dramatically increased in the nineteenth century. Earlier literacy was basically the Bible and perhaps the occasional newspapers or miscellaneous home or family business documents. It was not until the nineteenth century that women began to be admitted to institutions of higher education and gained access to a variety of written texts. For women, speaking and writing did not develop out of the desire to dominate, define, or limit language practices like some classical rhetoricians but rather it developed when women spoke out from the need to transform the material conditions of their lives. More often than not their aim was the creation and exchange of ideas rather than the passing down of unquestioned truths. Women's approaches and methods developed out of women working to be agents of societal change.

Most women didn't intentionally develop new methods to contradict or counteract classical rhetorical forms rather their methods and theories developed from their practice when they had no other option but to act on their own behalf. For example, in the 1848 "Declaration of Rights and Sentiments," a document from the Seneca Falls Convention, women fought against inequality by appealing for their citizenship -- an appeal most white men would never have to make. The authors implore the government when they "insist that they have immediate admission to all rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States" (141). Within the document the collaborators use some patriarchal language, in fact the very language of the Declaration of Independence, in an effort to appeal to their audience, but they also employ a variety of women's

rhetorical strategies by shifting the identity of speaker to female and breaking down dichotomies to “demand equal station” for women and men (139).

Throughout history, women were often excluded from the public realm in a variety of ways including being barred from public speaking and education; despite this there were often women who spoke and gained literacy. The history of women’s discourse is firmly rooted in both religion and education. Interestingly, more women gained the right to education when it was determined that literate women were important for the overall good of society. For example, women were encouraged to learn to read in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries so that they could teach the Bible and aid in the spread of Christianity. But even earlier, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, works from women such as Margery Kempe and Christine De Pizan, had already begun to create religious arguments and subvert traditional beliefs in order to demand rights and privileges. In her 1666 book *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures*, Margaret Fell argues for women’s rights to speak in the church, when she writes, “But all this opposing and gain-saying of women's speaking, hath risen out of the bottomless pit, and spirit of darkness...and so let this serve to stop that opposing spirit that would limit the Power and Spirit of the Lord Jesus, whose Spirit is poured upon all flesh, both Sons and daughter...” (70). Fell argues that church officials take scripture out of context and then turns the church’s arguments back on the church itself in order to argue for women’s rights to speak in religious settings. An example of this turning back of arguments is the practice of quoting lines of scripture and then offering “alternative” interpretations for her audience, “Here he did not say that such women should not

prophesy as had the revelation and Spirit of God poured upon them, but their women that were under the Law, and in the transgression, and were in strife, confusion, and malice in their speaking...” (69). This method of subverting the dominant argument is just one of many rhetorical religious strategies women employed, in addition to the contention that God himself directed the female author in question to read and write.

Along with the imperative to understand and teach religion, women gained access to education through the arguments recounting how men might benefit from educating women. Women argued of the importance of raising children, specifically sons, to be literate to educate the next generation, and that good wives needed an education. This is evident in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in which she proffers many ways that both men and the family will benefit from an educated wife and mother. She suggests mothers are the child’s first teacher and “unless the mind have uncommon vigor, womanish follies will stick to character [of the children] for life” (104). She even suggests the happiness of both sexes depends on equality when she writes, “To render mankind more virtuous, and happier of course, both sexes must act from the same principle; but how can that be expected when only one is allowed to see the reasonableness of it?” (101). These women’s rhetorical strategies use religion, education, and the benefits to men to argue for a change to status quo and a move towards equality. These are just a few of the countless ways recovered women’s rhetorics exhibit women seeking power, in contrast to men’s aims to maintain it.

## **Recovery of Women's Voices**

The recovery of women's words in a variety of forms and genres, such as speeches, letters, poems, and essays continues to be extremely important to women's rhetorics. Most scholars agree that it is vital for women to know their history and form a collective consciousness or group memory. Those peoples or groups who have been silenced or otherwise "othered" need to know that they are not alone in their efforts to be heard. As Gerda Lerner argues in *Why History Matters*, "People without a history are considered not quite human and incorporate that judgment in their own thinking...they often cooperate in their own oppression" (208). Without a collective history of who women are, what women have accomplished, how women have been marginalized, and how they have used language and rhetoric to gain agency and voice, women, as a group, risk remaining stagnant and oppressed.

Although women were silenced throughout the years, they were not completely absent; however, the lack of recorded history of women speaking and writing compounds the silencing. Consequently, women's rhetorics scholars have largely focused on the recovery of women's words. This emphasis on recovery is understandable given the large void left by the absence of women in the tradition whose words were lost or just unrecorded. On the one hand this reflects a cultural deficit because, as Robert J. Connors argues in "Gender Influences: Composition-Rhetoric as an Irenic Rhetoric," women were denied all access to education, writing, and public speaking for hundreds of years and it was not until around the Middle Ages that select women were able to begin to learn how to read and write in their own homes, mostly for religious reasons. On the other hand,

while rhetorical scholars like Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg may not have had a deep history of women's voices to draw from for their anthology of rhetoric, in this day and age scholars still have a bit of a history dating back to the Middle Ages but this is not reflected in Bizzell and Herzberg's text. Even today, women's words are more likely to be found in anthologies devoted to women's words exclusively, like *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetorics*, than they are in something like *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, which only includes twelve women rhetors and works by men discussing Aspasia as compared to forty-two male rhetors in its sixteen hundred pages. While Bizzell and Herzberg do provide examples of women's rhetorics included within the dominant tradition, attempts like these that add in a few women to appear more balanced risk tokenizing the works of the female authors. As the editors note in the preface to the 2001 edition, the second edition includes more women's rhetorics and rhetorics of color, which were not in the first edition because "give the state scholarship...it would have been very difficult to represent any alternative Western tradition" (v). They also note that canonical rhetoricians still "loom large" but they hope this introduction of alternatives rhetorics will "point to directions for future scholarship" (v). Interestingly, *Available Means*, an anthology of all women's rhetorics, which was published the same year (2001) and includes texts from sixty-seven women, yet Bizzell and Herzberg only include twelve women. This helps illustrate the huge discrepancy about what is considered valuable rhetorical theory. The issue for many rhetorical scholars is not a lack of textual material but rather a reluctance on the part of historians to see women's acts of rhetoric as theory.

It was not until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when scholars began to question what constituted a women's rhetoric and the initial work of both gathering and analyzing women's voices began. In her late 1980s/early 1990s two-volume companion, *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, Karyln Kohrs Campbell offers the first anthology of women's rhetorics focusing on the speeches and texts of female suffragettes, abolitionists and supporters of the temperance movement. In these volumes, Campbell approaches rhetoric using an Aristotelian lens, just as Ronald and Ritchie, as she gathers and annotates texts in order to invite readers to both analyze women's use of the available means of persuasion and consider the ways in which women begin to break rhetorical barriers. Following the publication of these volumes, several other anthologies have been published in an attempt to recover and include women's voices in the rhetorical tradition. The most notable are: Andrea A. Lunsford's collection, *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition* (1995), Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (1997), two separate volumes by Shirley Wilson Logan *With Pen and Voice: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century African-American Women* and "*We Are Coming*": *A Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*, and then Joy Ritchie And Kate Ronald's *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*. All of these anthologies are important because they give voice to silenced women and provide a resource for teachers as they begin to consider how women's words challenge and revise traditional rhetoric.

The important place that recovery work holds within women's rhetorics is not often questioned because without these efforts women's words would continue to be

suppressed and the rhetorical tradition would not evolve. One question that scholars struggle with is how to study women's and other "alternative" rhetorics in ways that both validate their autonomous existence and speak for the voiceless, while simultaneously positioning the rhetorics on a level field with classical rhetoric. Should women's rhetorics be defined as a separate tradition with a relationship to classical rhetoric, or as women - and often feminists - should there be a resistance to maintaining frameworks that reinforce existing hegemonic relationships that duplicate cycles of oppression? In other words, should women just be included in the dominant tradition? Do women need their own tradition? Or does the dominant tradition need to be reinterpreted?

A majority of the scholarship in women's rhetorics embraces language and boundaries defining women's rhetorics as an alternative tradition, which attempts to challenge, fracture, and revise our understanding of the classical rhetorical tradition. Writers and teachers such as Ritchie and Ronald help define the ways women rhetors subvert or resist classical rhetoric. In the intro to *Available Means* they write, "any group that has been absent or silent must first demarcate and identify its own terrain to establish a presence where one has not existed" (xviii). Considered in this way, women's rhetorics is defined as an alternative rhetoric, which requires that it always be in relation with or compared to and studied alongside the classical tradition. From one perspective, this paradigm might help women's rhetorics to gain autonomy through dissidence but from another perspective, it might also help maintain power structures and never allow the discipline the autonomy it deserves.

From one perspective, when the language used to describe and study rhetoric is too focused on how the rhetorics are “alternative,” this very designation can promote boundaries that force the rhetorics into “othered” positions. If women’s speaking and writing is always set up in opposition to classical masculine rhetoric, as if it cannot be defined without the tradition, alternative rhetorics risk always be considered “less than,” or not worthy of, what the dominant tradition achieves. This type of positioning is common in rhetoric classrooms that try to introduce alternatives by pairing the texts up with classical examples for comparison purposes. In fact, one of my comprehensive examination questions asked how I would design an undergraduate history of rhetoric course that “balances rhetorics with patriarchal rhetorical traditions.” My response paired Aristotle with Sonja J. Foss and Cynthia L. Griffin, Quintilian with Helene Cixous, and Plato with W.E.B. DuBois. Even the framing of this question suggests that in order to value the alternative, one needs to analyze it alongside the classical tradition rather than on its own or with other alternative texts. By continually referencing the classical tradition in order to understand a rhetoric labeled alternative the dominant, respected rhetoric, which is usually masculine, is given more weight and more value than the “newer” rhetoric. The practice of continuing to value the same voices, or the canonization of the dominant voices, prevents the growth of disciplines on many levels. If men’s texts and voices maintain the normative position in language and literature classes by providing the frame to understand “others,” the recovery work will have no purpose beyond recovery. This is certainly the case with women’s rhetorics. Given that the masculine tradition forms the basis of the majority of composition programs across the



country and informs the conventional understanding of academic discourse in the university, an othering of women's rhetorics has precluded their works from becoming more foundational in the composition classroom. With men's texts maintaining the normalized position, their theories and methods continue to influence the writing that is valued by students and scholars. Women's rhetorics are pushed to the boundaries.

While there are many scholars who support the categorization of women's rhetorics and the placing of various rhetorics into relationship, for reasons like Lerner's, which focus on what is gained through naming and defining, others theorists argue that this act might contribute to women's marginalization rather than reverse it. Some scholars, such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, reject all dominant notions or models when thinking about these issues. Minh-ha rejects any reference to the male model because reference or comparison allows the masculine to remain the norm or the standard, in effect maintaining its power and hegemony over the "other." She is extremely skeptical of any system that has a single ruling system. Her standpoint, which critiques analysis methods focused on making comparisons to dominant paradigms, looks to challenge or question current boundaries rather than looks for ways to implement more. While discussing identity Minh-ha argues that,

The constant need to refer to the 'male model' for comparisons unavoidably maintains the subject under tutelage. For the point is not to carve one's space in 'identity theories that ignore women'...but to patiently dismantle the very notion of core (be it static or not) and identity (162).

From this perspective, the defining of what constitutes a women's rhetorics outside of the tradition is viewed as more beneficial than adhering to already established notions. On some levels the ideas of scholars, such as Minh-ha, agree with Audre Lorde's assertion that, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (112).

From another perspective, it makes sense to study women's rhetorics, and other rhetorics, alongside the traditional standard. Often learners can come to some sort of understanding when the dominant viewpoint of a field of study is used as a lens to analyze and consider something previously unknown or misunderstood. In the academy academics learn to analyze by considering how things are both alike and not alike. It is easy to put traditional rhetoric and women's rhetorics in relationship and show how women both accommodate and resist rhetorical expectations. With both approaches there is an educated acknowledgement of the tradition, while with resistance there is an acknowledgement of the emergence from tradition and toward a balanced arrangement. Analyzing women who resist convention reveals women using a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" strategy. Such a method can help teachers to validate women's voices in the classroom while resisting the notion that a writer must choose one process. This can exemplify to young writers how they have many tools at their disposal rather than one narrow approach to writing.

Many women's rhetorics scholars acknowledge that there is value in establishing how women's rhetorics are both similar to the norm and different from it; how they fit into the standard expectations and how they break them down. Ede, Glenn and Lunsford show both positions in their essay where they analyze the traditional, Aristotelian canons:

memory, invention, arrangement, style and delivery, and theorize that “feminism offers rhetoric a reason to bridge differences, to include, and to empower, as well as a politicized space to discuss rhetorical values” (401). In the essay the authors examine what many scholars think of as the uncontested classical canons and show how feminist practice challenges the tradition. The authors place women squarely in the tradition by aligning their words and choices with the canons but also explore how women subvert and destabilize these categories. It is this “both/and” approach to studying, analyzing, and using women’s rhetorics that breaks down stifling dichotomies and offers the possibility of more freedom of voice—an approach which is also useful in the composition classroom.

### **Defining Women’s Rhetorics**

What exactly constitutes women’s rhetorics has evolved over time but seems to reflect a variety of criteria. There are many markers of women’s rhetorics and while, not surprisingly, some of the markers are also considered feminist, it is beneficial to first acknowledge these practices as the ways women used language, feminist or not. In their book *Teaching Rhetorica*, Ronald and Ritchie propose that the central uses of women’s rhetorics: “challenges dominant epistemologies, asserts new topoi/contexts from which to argue, places material experience—especially that of women—at the center of knowledge formation, and it reconnects language/rhetoric to action and change” (11). If one were to make a list of defining characteristics it might include: woman as speaker, issues of physicality, the redefining of what constitutes evidence, a multiplicity or breaking down

of dichotomies, a mixing of canons and topoi, and a distinct intersection of theory and practice. In the following paragraphs I examine and define these characteristics of women's rhetorics, as well as consider the differences between women's and feminist rhetorics, in order to provide a solid foundation before moving onto chapter four where I look at how feminism and composition studies can benefit from women's rhetorical methods.

One of the most obvious, and most important, distinctions that women's rhetorics make is the revision of the understanding of speaker. Women's rhetorics position the woman as speaker and as writer, which is a position a woman would have never found herself in during Aristotle's time and is one that was denied to women for many years. Classical rhetoric posits a male speaker and so the location from which all rhetoric and knowledge develops is masculine. With the introduction of women speakers, there arise new locations and contexts from which to speak. While the classical locations assume public locations, like courts of law, regarding issues such as property and boundaries, women's rhetorics assume other locations often regarded as private, for example kitchens and nurseries, to discuss issues such as education, suffrage and reproductive rights.

Historically, and even still today, when a woman attempts to speak or write, one of the first issues she has to address is claiming the right to speak. This act of claiming a voice and taking responsibility for a representation of woman as speaker/writer involves a variety of challenges including refuting the way women have been presented as inferior throughout history. As Ronald and Ritchie argue, "One of the most important exigencies for women has been to refute, correct, and revise depictions of womanhood that have

placed women in the inferior, vilified, stigmatized position” (“Teaching Rhetorica” xxv). For women, the seemingly simple act of voicing carries with it the rejection of silencing and misrepresentation as well as the expansion of the definition of who can be named speaker.

Connected to this idea of woman as speaker is an issue that arises when women shift the gender of the speaker and location from which one speaks. Issues of physicality emerge since women as a group are generally valued for their bodies and not their minds and audiences are required to reimagine the role of the body in the rhetorical situation. As Dale Bauer suggests, “Gender complicates one’s position, and this gendered mode of identifying is political...[it] becomes a set of choices that signify the marking or signing of one’s body in the world” (388). The seemingly simple act of women rhetors claiming the body as a place of power rather than oppression or shame helps women to gain agency. Women used the body, often a space or site of oppression, to empower themselves and reconsider the ways that women are more than just the body in the public realm.

One feminist female writer often consulted in regards to issues of body and women’s rhetorics is Helene Cixous and her work in “Sorties” and “The Laugh of Medusa.” In these texts, Cixous deals with this mind/body split and the ways in which the body is often viewed as inferior to the mind, in order to suggest the ways that women must embrace the body. She writes, “Write your body; your body must make itself heard” (289). For Cixous this act of writing the body is a feminine activity in which women reclaim the primary way they have been historically oppressed in order to voice. Cixous

sees a strong bond between women's language and sexuality and so this method calls on women to speak and write from a feminine position, rather than a masculine one. Because language creates meaning her hope is that by women embracing the female body and its sexuality the power and linearity of male discourse will be disrupted. Issues of physicality in women's rhetorics extend as far back as Margery Kempe in 1436 as she used her body in the role of a mystic to act as a conduit for God's word. Another important historical example is Sojourner Truth, who makes use of her tall, dark physical body to gain authority in the absence of her ability to read and write, as she addresses a hostile audience at the Women's Rights Convention in 1851. In her speech Truth proclaims, "Look at me! Look at my arm!...I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and not man cold head me—and aren't I a woman?" ( 145). She acknowledges the reality of her body and attempts to subvert audience assumptions of her femaleness. Subversion is a common rhetorical strategy that women rhetors use in a variety of ways.

Rather than limiting how speakers and writers support claims and positions, women's rhetorics help to redefine what counts as evidence by rupturing expectations. One of the main ways women do this is by positioning personal experience as a credible, reliable source. There are many positive repercussions with this shift in perspective about the kinds of evidence that are respected and valued. In her scholarship, Min-Zhan Lu explores how this use of the personal can give rise to empathy: "experience should motivate us to care about another's differences and should disrupt the material conditions that have give rise to it" (239). Feminist activists have been arguing for years about the positive repercussions of personal as political in the larger global community. In the same

way, in reference to teaching and female students, Elizabeth Flynn writes that, “we must also encourage them to become self-consciously aware of what their experience in the world has been and how this experience is related to the politics of gender. Then we must encourage our women students to write from the power of that experience” (“Composing as a Woman” 253). Not only can this shift have a positive universal impact but also an important local one in writing classrooms. Within women’s rhetorics, the shift from impersonal, objective, universal, logical support to personal and subjective is important because theories and methods are rooted in and supported by the material conditions of women’s lives.

In her short memoir, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, Dorothy Allison uses stories of her violent upbringing to assert her story, her version, and her truth. Allison speculates on the power of language as she shares intimate stories of her upbringing because, as she writes, “I am the only one who can tell the story of my life and say what it means” (70). With statements like these she helps transform the notion of story and the personal into a powerful, trusted method to gain agency. Rather than a method or form of support that diminishes a writer’s ethos in the audience’s eyes, personal experience becomes a method through which women gain authority.

Another way women push back against established rhetorical boundaries in order to gain authority is through the mixing of rhetorical choices in fluid, untraditional ways. Women rhetors and feminists enact this by valuing multiplicity and breaking down dichotomies, which leads to a valuing of difference. This fluidity extends to women’s methods in a variety of ways such as the mixing of canons, as explored in “Border

Crossing: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism.” In their essay Ede, Lunsford, and Glenn, examine Aristotle’s five canons while simultaneously considering at how women rhetors and feminists, who are often writing and speaking from the margins or borderlands, subvert and unite canons. Similarly, Annette Kolodny discusses the merging of form and content in her analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft in “Inventing a Feminist Discourse: Rhetoric and Resistance in Margaret Fuller’s *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.” Because Wollstonecraft’s form, which seems to not have a beginning, middle, or end, reflects her topic of women’s rights, which women still do not have closure on, the work has been devalued for its nonstandard form that rejects the imperative to progress in a linear way towards closure.

The various ways women rhetors comingle genres, canons, topoi, style and arrangement is also evident in women’s rhetorics merging of the personal and the political and of theory and practice. Women’s theory in their writing and speaking is just one of the ways that women rhetors begin to bend the boundaries of what is valued as rhetorical theory. Because women often did not have the luxury of time or the attentive audience needed to begin to theorize, women’s theory often exists in practice rather than mediation on that practice. Women’s rhetorical acts are theoretical and as feminist pedagogy moves to incorporate women’s rhetorical methods it is these theories that need to be considered. The contexts need to remain attached to the theories in efforts to see the theory in everyday life.

In the introduction to *Available Means*, Ritchie and Ronald discuss a variety of topoi shifts that are evident in women’s rhetorics such as: the focus on education, challenging



domination, problematizing the term “woman,” women representing selves rather than begin represented by others, and two others that will be especially important to this dissertation: “accommodation and subversion working together” and “recognizing/valuing difference (xxiv). “Accommodation and subversion” together is important to understanding women rhetors because without this method many more women would have been silenced. In order to both speak and write, the first challenge, for many women, was to gain access to the dominant conventions, often through education. In this case, women needed to learn the master’s tools to use the methods for writing and speaking and also to subvert them for use with a new set of speakers, agendas, evidence, etc. Women first had to gain authority by showing they understood the convention of speaking and writing; once they at least gained an audience they could begin to push the boundaries. These strategies were used not only to gain access to speak but also with the constructions of arguments. In her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft accommodates her audience to support her appeal for rights by suggesting to her male audience members how women’s rights will better the lives of men. She questions women’s abilities and roles within the family when she asks, “Can they [women] be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of poor babes who they bring into the world?” (96). Clearly, she is suggesting, it would be best for man and his children, if women were better in the domestic realm. So in asking for rights and education, Wollstonecraft accommodates the male expectation that women belong in the house but then subverts their arguments against education for women to show how it will help maintain and better their position in the home.

Without a valuing of difference, which goes beyond simply recognizing, the recovery work within women's rhetorics might have not been as abundant. Women's rhetorics researchers engaged in a practice of valuing difference which helped give voice to many women who had been previously silenced and very often the women they uncovered also modeled this same practice in their writing and speaking. Audre Lorde is one of many "othered" women (othered for race, class and sexuality) who provides methods and models in her writing that exemplify the importance of valuing difference, rather than simply tolerance. Lorde names difference as a way to bring women together, a point which she often declares, "...I speak these words in an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence" ("The Transformation" 304-305). This topoi is especially important in light of the rightful critique often levied against women's rights activists and feminists that too often the desires and rights of those with power within the movement, usually white, upper-class women, overshadow the needs of women of color and/or of the middle or lower class. Within the recovery effort, studying women's rhetorics and teaching methods not only values the diversity of women's voices but also recognizes how women themselves achieved this in their writing and speaking. Because of how deeply connected women's rhetorics, feminism, and pedagogy are the three terms and fields are often confused but it is important to make a distinction between the terms.

### **Feminist Rhetoric vs. Women's Rhetorics vs. Feminist Pedagogy:**

Many women's rhetorics and feminism scholars often conflate women's rhetorics and feminist rhetorics, which can lead to a variety of questions for consideration. Is it necessary or important to define feminist and women's rhetorics in mutually exclusive ways? Is it just as important to see the interconnectedness and as it to make a clear distinction between the two? Is women's rhetorics the larger umbrella under which feminist rhetorics falls? And finally, why is this dissertation addressing the ways women's rhetorics, rather than feminist rhetorics, can positively impact feminist pedagogy?

The distinction between feminist and women's rhetorics is often blurred; the assumption is often made that women's rhetorics is feminist and vice versa. A case in point is the essay "Border Crossing: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism," in which Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford suggest they are examining the canons and the intersection of classical rhetoric and feminist rhetoric but one could easily question why the authors chose to look at the canons from a feminist rhetorical viewpoint and not a women's rhetorical perspective, or at least a combination of both. Throughout the essay, the authors exemplify and support their reconsideration of the canons with a variety of women's rhetorical examples such as bell hooks, Jane Tompkins, Julia Kristeva, Toni Morrison, Mary Daly and many, many others, but I would argue that not all of the women's rhetorical examples are necessarily feminist. For example, in the analysis of invention the authors explore the point that women have had to historically challenge the masculine figure of the rhetor, which they support with quotes from bell hooks and Audre

Lorde. In the case of both quotes, the women seem to be drawing on their experiences as women and not feminists. The example from Lorde begins, “As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge” (Ede, Glenn, and Lunsford 413). The very next paragraph of the “Border Crossing” essay begins with, “If in making these claim, contemporary feminists...,” which could just have as easily stated “contemporary women” (413). While Lorde and hooks are clearly both feminists, they are also women, which continues to beg the question why the feminist connection and not one with women’s rhetorics.

Although the two rhetorics have many similarities, there are some distinctions that can be drawn between feminist rhetoric and women’s rhetorics. The introduction to Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Cindy L. Griffin’s *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* is especially helpful in trying to define feminist rhetorics, despite the fact that their definition is very broad: “Rather than confuse, we suggest that this variety opens up choices and possibilities and speaks to the very nature of feminism. It is rooted in choice and self-determination and does not proscribe one ‘official’ position that feminists must hold” (3). Here again, just like with women’s rhetorics scholars, the focus is on opening up possibilities for feminist rhetoric rather than trying to narrowly define. While it is understandable that the rhetoricians would want to open up opportunities because historically women and feminists have been denied a place and a voice, clear boundaries would be helpful in establishing the field and would give scholars a place from which to expand ideas.

Some of the key characteristics of feminist rhetoric from the introduction of *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* include: women articulating experiences and ideas while claiming their rights and lives, a focus on equity and eliminating oppression, alternative ways of being, including women-centered perspectives, and treatment with the feminist values “respect, caring, reciprocity, self-determination and interconnection” (Foss, Foss and Griffin 2). The authors outline the framework and define three key components for how they use the term feminism: “validates values and experiences often associated with women,” “gives voice to individuals marginalized and devalued by the dominant culture,” and “establishes and legitimates a value system that privileges mutuality, respect, caring, power-with, interconnection, and immanent value” (5). While there are definitely parallels and similarities between this list and the women’s rhetorics list of features, the one main difference within feminism is the addition of the focus on equity and elimination of oppression, which adds in more of a political component to the rhetoric.

It is interesting that the feminist rhetoric, as defined by Foss, Foss and Griffin, appears to exclude males/men/the masculine more so than women’s rhetorics. One would think that men would be less represented in or less able to access women’s rhetorics than they would feminist rhetoric, which is a rhetoric that aims for equity in a more inclusive, global sense. A review of women’s rhetorics reveals that male speakers and writers might be able to access most of the characteristics such as: the alternative canons and topoi, the fluidity and the multiplicity, the personal, and the intersection of theory and practice more so than the feminist response of claiming women’s rights, lives and

experiences through women-centered perspectives and alternative ways of being. Women's rhetorical methods and strategies are more accessible as choices for BOTH genders, which is why this dissertation argues for what women's rhetorics can offer the seemingly struggling feminist pedagogical approach to teaching writing. While some of these feminist rhetorical values might underpin an instructor's philosophy and feminist pedagogy, it is women's rhetorical methods that can help students make skilled moves and choices in their writing in a more accessible way. The feminist perspective can tend to politicize the classroom in a way that can take something away from the aims and goals of writing instruction by focusing on agendas, whereas women's rhetorics brings us back to methods, theories, practices, and strategies that helps students develop into more successful writers, which should be one of the main foci of a composition classroom. Feminist pedagogy has not sufficiently used women's rhetorics to help with its application and advancement in the writing classroom. The models that feminist pedagogy relies on run contrary to the true aims of a feminist pedagogy-- aims and goals that are better addressed through women's rhetorical methods.

### **Intersections of Rhetoric and Writing Instruction**

The intersection of rhetoric and writing instruction, which is still apparent in the current-traditional approach to teaching writing, can be traced back to Alexander Bain's 1888 text *English Composition* and his modes of discourse (Glau 74). Bain's approach to teaching writing focused more on the technical aspects and what he called the "modes of discourse," all of which were deeply influenced by Aristotle and still influence many

composition programs today. Different methods were, and are, being employed in programs, partly because of the influx of different student voices and identities (i.e. not all white privileged males), and as in the 1960s and 1970s, some writing programs began to shift and consider issues such as the voice of the writer, students' stories and experiences, and the social aspect of meaning making. Expressivism, which developed in opposition to current-traditional, helped shift the focus from grammar and correctness to more nontraditional practices "based on a theory of relations between language, meaning making and self development" (Burnham 110). Key players in this movement include Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Ken Macrorie. Expressivism moved the focus from rules and correctness to meaning making, which "anticipating feminist pedagogy, work to subvert teaching practices and institutional structures that oppress, appropriate, or silence individuals" (Burnham 108).

With expressivism, not only did the focus of the methods of the writing classroom change for some programs but also the way the instruction was or was not theorized. Many expressivists chose not to focus on theory and instead focused on the actual pedagogical practices because they felt their first responsibility was to teach. So unlike early writing instruction where a direct connection could be made between the classroom practice and the methods and theories, of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, the foundation for expressivism was not grounded in the method and theories of rhetors. Expressivism aimed to subvert oppression and value the individual's voice and agency, which was the perfect opportunity to theorize about women's rhetorics and alternative rhetorical methods, had women's texts been recovered. Even today, with all the recovery work with

women's rhetorics, composition pedagogy's methods and approaches are not directly gleaned or developed from women's words; although, for some, there seems to be misunderstanding or an assumption that women's rhetorics and feminist pedagogy are in fact one or that they automatically inform each other.

Just as women's rhetorics and feminist rhetoric are often conflated, women's rhetorics are often merged with feminism or feminist pedagogy but the connection is not ever made crystal clear. There is an assumption that women writers, speakers, thinkers, teachers, and rhetoricians are all feminists and that all the various agendas coalesce in such a way that they can be grouped together without making distinctions when it comes to both rhetoric and pedagogy. Some scholars assume that in discussions of women's rhetorics that they are addressing, sometimes indirectly, pedagogy as well, and that the jump from discusses of rhetoric to pedagogy is easily made. As Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede suggest, in "Crimes of Reading and Writing," it has been important to "reclaim women's contributions to rhetorical history and practice, these contributions will not automatically have consequences for the day-to-day teaching of writing" (16). Scholars and teachers need to make explicit connections between women's rhetorics, theories, methods, and practices, and feminist pedagogy.

Although there have been attempts to make this connection, often the texts and essays that suggest that they will use women's rhetorics to theorize about teaching miss the mark or continue to examine the same issues over and over, such as female teacher authority or the role of consensus in collaboration. For instance *Teaching Rhetorica*, the follow up or companion text to *Available Means*, sets out to merge theory and pedagogy



with practice. Ronald and Ritchie share the questions they asked of the writers for this volume, which focus on what women's rhetorics has meant to their teaching of writing. One question, for example, is "What difference does the emerging canon of women's rhetorics make to our teaching of writing and rhetoric?" (2), but questions such as these are not directly addressed in the resulting text. Looking at the list of essays in this volume one will see a highly theorized list of ideas and topics and some titles that suggest practical application but end up falling short. Essays in the collection include: "Shifting the Center of Gravity: The Rhetorics of Radical Pedagogy, 1968-1975," "Documenting Violations: Rhetorical Witnessing and the Spectacle of Distant Suffering as Pedagogy," "Objects, Memory, and Narrative: New Notes Towards Materialist Rhetoric," and "Gender, Rhetorics, and Globalizations: Rethinking the Spaces and Locations of Women's Rhetoric in Our Field." Not one essay in the volume directly addresses the practical pedagogical application of women's rhetorics.

Additionally, the authors write: "there's been little documentation or theorizing about its effects on teaching writing and rhetoric or running composition programs. We're not simply interested in how we *add* these women rhetors to our courses, how we stir them into the canon we already teach or use them as texts for classes..." (Ronald and Ritchie 5). A closer look at the contents of the essays reveals that the connection to pedagogy is glossed over. These essays miss the mark in regards to theorizing about women's rhetorics and writing pedagogy. They occasionally touch on pedagogy but don't specifically theorize women's rhetorical methods to develop ideas about classroom and practices. Women's rhetorical scholars are not practicing what they preach in regards to

viewing women's acts of rhetoric as theory. We need theory but as women have shown us the practical can be theorized, so why, in our own scholarship, do we often replicate the "master's" expectations for scholarship rather than pushing the boundaries, especially given the topic and how we arrived at this meaning making?

It is important to note that feminism sometimes enacts some of the same limiting or exclusionary practices as masculine rhetoric has engaged in. The classical tradition of masculine rhetoric devalued and often silenced both women's experiences and women's rhetorics. So feminism, in an attempt to not participate in the same kind of marginalizing, attempted to first leave the door open for the most possibilities, which didn't allow for the field to come together as a discipline in a cohesive, respected way. Next, as is evident in *Teaching Rhetorica*, feminism seems to side with the valuing of theory, which reinscribed more of the norm in academia, and in doing this devalued pedagogy. This volume purports to focus on pedagogy but even a glance at the titles of the essays reveals a more theory-based agenda. It is as if feminists can't get out of their own way. Instead of trying to forge their own path, one which values pedagogy as a site for change and evolution, feminists provide more of the same. The catalyst to provide methods to refocus this approach is women's rhetorics.

In *Teaching Rhetorica*, Ronald and Ritchie suggest that they want to define rhetoric in a broad sense and do not want to confine it to the classroom, but my question regards who is going to step forward and offer some boundaries for women's rhetorics in the writing classroom? Boundaries are not always confining or limiting but rather in many ways can be freeing and can open up the possibilities. All one needs to do is think

of parenting and the ways children thrive with boundaries because they know their limits and they know they have the support of the boundaries. Boundaries can be freeing. Feminist teachers don't know what the boundaries are nor do they know the possibilities women's rhetorics holds because scholars have, for too long, been trying not to pin pedagogical practices and strategies. Ronald and Ritchie claim feminist theory thrives because of "its fluidity, multiplicity, contingency, and polymorphous complexity" (3) but from my perspective, this undefined approach has not helped feminist pedagogy make a positive impact on the writing classroom. In fact in my nine years of teaching at several different schools, the only time I have heard feminist pedagogy or women's rhetorics addressed were in the confines of my graduate classes and seminars. Ronald and Ritchie claim that it is,

far less important to glean a unified set of readings, teaching methods, assignments and course outlines from a study of women's rhetorics and from scholars' work gathered in *Teaching Rhetorica* that to think expansively about how this new field of women's rhetorics changes our conception of theory/practice and rhetoric/composition (11)

but this writing that sets out to expand the field is not connecting back to what is actually happening in the classroom.

In academia, pedagogy falls below theory in the academic hierarchy. Pedagogy is to theory what women's rhetorics is to rhetoric and is what composition studies is to the English department. Developing pedagogical methods, strategies, approaches, and practices is not simple and unfortunately this view of effortless, untheorized, easy connections is what pedagogy is often reduced to. I think that Ronald and Ritchie, in

*Teaching Rhetorica*, both heed what they believe to be Lynn Worsham's warning about theory and practice as well as see the importance of making the pedagogical connection because they have concerns about "making easy connections between women's rhetorics and teaching strategies" (Ronald and Ritchie 5). In "Writing Against Writing: The Predicament of Ecriture Feminine," Worsham, warns against the imperative to try to find a complimentary classroom practice or teaching strategy for every theory. While this point is important, because there is clearly a significant place for theory outside of pedagogy, Worsham's suggestion seems to go to the "either/or" place she was trying to avoid. For the most part, feminism tries to embrace a "both/and" paradigm instead of the dominant practice of "either/or," which often only offers the extremes, does not see a middle ground and boils down options to dichotomies. Worsham suggests not using every single theory as a teaching practices but she does not suggest that teachers ever do this, which seems to be how her essay has been interpreted and applied across the fields of composition and feminism. Just as there is a place for both defining women's rhetorics in and of itself as well as incorporating women's voices in the traditional canon, there is also a need both allow theories to be theories as well as to apply theories to the classroom and teaching instruction for practical pedagogical purposes.

While there are those who endeavor to discuss women's rhetorics or feminist rhetoric along with teaching writing, the few scholars who do address pedagogy do so in a superficial way by often intentionally avoiding classroom practices for a variety of reasons, such as attempting to avoid reenacting domination and keeping possibilities open rather than too narrowly defined. While on the one hand, given the history of rhetoric and

writing instruction, these positions are understandable. On the other hand, just as there is a need to gather women's voices as a group in order for women to know their history and feel they have a backbone or foundation in the discipline, so too do we need to gather and build upon specific pedagogical practices, methods and theories that have emerged from women's rhetorics. Without this there is a risk of getting doubly silenced or remaining boiled down to one practice or method, such as sharing authority in classroom circles that value personal experience.

Worsham argues for the need to read *écriture feminine* outside of patriarchy because by keeping the same paradigms to consider the value of this discourse many find it "lacking, fraught with contradictions, riddle with (theoretical) inconsistencies, and short on concrete strategies for changing the material conditions of everyday women's lives" (105). The same might be said of how women's rhetorical methods are applied to the composition classroom. If same purposes and goals remain in place for the writing classroom and nothing begins to shift, it will be easy to devalue what the women rhetors have to offer to writing instruction. So while the initial goal here to consider how women's rhetorical methods might positively impact writing instruction, implementing women's rhetorical methods into a feminist writing classroom might help shift feminist pedagogy, and even composition, from the margins. In this chapter, I have established the role of rhetoric within composition studies and both defined women's rhetorics and examined its roles within composition, rhetoric, and feminism. In chapter four, I will argue how women's rhetorics helps mend the divide between feminism and composition

and offer a variety of methods and possible classroom practices that have emerged through my analysis of a variety of women's rhetorical texts.

## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN'S RHETORICAL METHODS: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that when change comes it cracks everything open. (Dorothy Allison)

In *Why History Matters*, Gerda Lerner suggests that in order to bring about equality, society does not need a violent revolutionary change because all such an act accomplishes is a shift from the existing hierarchies to a new social hierarchy, and furthermore, she argues, “violence begets violence” (Lerner 106). In order to help end the hierarchies and continuing violence, Lerner suggests that the primary focus for change should be on ending sexism. She writes, “Without the abolition of sexism, none of the other hierarchical concepts and systems can be successfully ended...as long as sexism constantly re-creates inequality in the family and in the consciousness of men and women, hierarchy will be reborn” (109). She asserts that differences are used to create and maintain power and that an end to sexism stems from breaking down dichotomies and seeing difference as a norm, rather than as “an excuse for domination” (17). This breaking down of dichotomies is integral to both the success of feminism in the composition classroom and to the implementation of women’s rhetorical methods. My argument that feminist pedagogy, which addresses sexism, needs to be revived in the

composition classroom through the inclusion of women's rhetorical methods attends to many of Lerner's arguments and suggestions regarding inequality and change.

Currently, there is tension between the agenda of composition studies and feminist pedagogy. Whereas composition studies generally aims to teach students the process of writing and the proper academic conventions, feminist pedagogy focuses on issues of inequality and the necessity of making space for those who have been historically marginalized by difference. One might argue that traditional approaches to composition look to maintain dominant discourse, while feminist pedagogy looks to disrupt it. While there are plenty of reasons why feminist pedagogy might not mesh well with composition studies, there are ample reasons to suggest otherwise. The divide between the two disciplines has not been addressed in a way that values both the traditional masculine approach and feminist theories in a relationship that does not privilege one approach over the other. Women's rhetorics can attend to this gap by offering strategies for methods teachers can engage once binaries are dissolved and for valuing difference in language; rejecting the notion of labeling women's rhetorics alternatives; and by rethinking feminist practices and incorporating reflection in the classroom. Feminism seeks to break the privilege that results from the masculine/feminine dichotomy and women's rhetorics offers a way to restructure the distinctions to value difference and create more choices for writers. The implementation of these approaches and practices is not a violent, overthrow of composition but rather a way to begin to breakdown dichotomies in writing teachers' practices, which often privilege male rhetorical choices and masculine, logical academic language and methods while silencing those who cannot or do not conform. By



incorporating women's rhetorical voices into pedagogies, assignments, and class readings, and by offering women's rhetorical methods as options for students to consider within the writing process, feminist teachers will begin to change the way the language is used and ultimately, the discourse that is privileged. My goal here is to rethink feminist pedagogy in a way that works from inside the academy, although the repercussions of this act can impact rhetoric outside the university and possibly return to shift the foundation of composition programs.

In order to begin to shift the privileged discourses in the academy, feminist writing teachers need to work in ways that do not present rhetorics in dichotomous, divided, or unequally valued ways in our writing classrooms. In the process of class planning, feminist writing teachers need to acknowledge the history of silencing women and the way rhetorical scholars had to interrupt, revise and retell in order to begin to reconceptualize the teaching of writing and rhetoric in college classrooms. In the intro to *Available Means*, Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald suggest the title includes the “parenthetical plural ‘rhetoric(s)’ to highlight not only these tensions between accommodation and resistance but also to point to difference within an emerging rhetorical tradition” (xviii). Women speakers and writers have already begun the work of pushing the boundaries of traditional rhetoric in many ways. Writing teachers need to fully and accurately incorporate all rhetorical methods—masculine and feminine—into writing classrooms, so students do not have to struggle to develop methods and strategies that should already be available to them. Students need to see where true boundaries are so they can push and expand from there. If rhetoric is truly the “available means of

persuasion” then teachers need to endeavor to see all of the means, so students learn about the options available for their toolbox of writing and speaking.

Women’s rhetorics help bridge feminist pedagogy and composition studies in a variety of ways. While feminist pedagogy looks to breakdown binaries, because of its aim for equality, it doesn’t offer solutions or models for what should happen in the writing classroom after the dissolution of the dichotomies. Here is just one place feminism has stalled in its application in composition. Feminists argue that writing teachers need to value different or alternative teaching practices, strategies and voices but there are not ample models and scholarship to support this. First and foremost, women’s rhetorics acknowledge the need to dissolve binaries and disengage the dichotomous relationship between feminist pedagogy and composition but then it also intercedes to offer methods for writing classrooms. While women’s rhetorics can help tackle a multitude of binaries, two important ones that currently help reinforce the divide between feminism and composition are the pedagogical and political divide and the gap between what is labeled traditional versus what is deemed alternative.

There are a multitude of approaches to the teaching of composition but it seems that the perspectives tend to focus either on pedagogy and the process of learning to write or lean more towards focusing on the political aspects of writing and discourse. Teachers and scholars have an understandably difficult time incorporating both approaches in their scholarship. A scan of the lists of pedagogies in the earlier published *Eight Approaches to Teaching Writing* and later published *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* reveal a shift in the approaches to teaching writing from a focus on the processes of writing

(“Writing as Process,” “Basic Writing,” “The Writing Conference”) to more critical approaches with a political tilt (“Cultural Studies and Composition,” “Community-Service Pedagogy,” “Feminist Pedagogy”) (Fulkerson 656). There are some scholars, such as Chris Gallagher in *Radical Departures* or Richard Fulkerson in “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” who argue that the latter group of pedagogies, ones that attend to critical or cultural concerns, could be problematic because they shift the focus away from the goal of developing competent writers. Women’s rhetorics helps to close the gap between the political and pedagogical by bringing the focus back to the teaching of writing in the composition classroom while also attending to some of the larger power issues.

By incorporating women’s rhetorical texts and strategies in the classroom teachers are afforded ways to discuss both the writing and the politics in their feminist pedagogy. For example, Patricia Williams’s “The Death of the Profane” offers teachers both theory, through her ideas, and models to show the drawing together of binaries in writing such as the personal and the political and the legal with everyday life. For students, this essay not only exemplifies the merging of the binaries, but provides students with much needed models of personal writing and narrative joined with the analytical and academic. In this essay Williams recounts her personal experience with racism and reveals how this incident impacted her personal life as well as legal and academic work. She writes: “So that was the first telling of this story. The second telling came a few weeks later, for a symposium on Excluded Voice, sponsored by a law review” (412). Here is the merging of the personal and political. As a writer and lawyer she addresses this incident in her

writing and speaking but personally finds “catharsis” through writing in her journal and hanging a sign on Benetton’s storefront. This essay also reinforces other trends and methods that emerge across women’s writing such as gaining agency through action (what were the various actions Williams took to voice?), audience (what consideration did she make or reject when choosing to act on this issue?) and affirmation and alignment (what did Williams have to validate, acknowledge, choose to see, “get with” in order to make the proper choices given the variety of ways she chose to demand that others acknowledge racism?). In addition to addressing to the merging of binaries and the author’s rhetorical strategies and choices, classes can discuss issues of oppression, racism, and uses of anger and rage. She writes, “I am still struck by the structure of power that drove me into such a blizzard of rage. There was almost nothing I could do, short of physically intruding upon him, that would humiliate him the way he humiliated me” (411). But there is something she can do and she shows her audience this with the integration of her feelings, the racism, and her words in several different ways. William’s essay shows how the merging of theory and practice can offer many positive results that help not only to mend the gap between the disciplines but also to offer teachers ways to theorize about pedagogy and practically implement women’s rhetorics into the classroom.

Another divide that has emerged in composition as a result of attempts to implement feminist pedagogy to writing classrooms is the split between traditional rhetoric and what has been defined as the “alternative” or “diverse” rhetorics. Although the commitment to breaking down binaries is a feminist value, often feminist pedagogical practices,

readings, and assignments, are presented as alternatives in the writing classroom, which reinforce rather than dissolve the dichotomies, which can subjugate this feminist practice. For example, in "Discourse and Diversity: Experimental Writing within the Academy," Lillian Bridwell-Bowles acknowledges this dilemma of naming discourses alternative and tries to help the issue by using different terms such as naming the discourses "diverse" but her use of the term "experimental" for the practices reinforces othering. This "othering" works to reinforce hierarchical dichotomies that perpetuate the view that the alternative is less valued or less necessary than the default or "natural" choice, which in this case is traditional, academic discourse. As Beverly J. Moss and Keith Walter argue in their essay "Rethinking Diversity: Axes of Difference in the Writing Classroom," the "*perceived standard* involves judging the behavior of the self and the other, whatever is different from one's own behavior becomes part of 'everything else'" (422). Women's rhetorics can address this issue of alternatives by incorporating more voices and strategies into the classroom on a level field with traditional approaches in order to help to decrease what might be considered "everything else."

When writing teachers consider women's rhetorics, they are presented with women writers and speakers who often actively endeavored to draw on both the masculine and feminine as well as the emotional and logical; in other words, they actively brought the binaries together in a way that can be modeled to students or at least presented as options for crafting ideas and composing papers. This merging of binaries, the traditional and the alternative, is present in many women's rhetorical texts, such as Maria W. Stewart's "Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall." In her speech, Stewart uses logical questions with

an emotional appeal when she specifically addresses the white women in her mixed gendered and raced audience with, “O, ye fairer sisters, whose hands are never soiled, whose nerves and muscles never strained, for by learn experience. Had we the opportunity that you have had to improve our moral and mental faculties, what would have hindered our intellects from being bright...” (112). Here she draws on traditional, logical reasoning to make the connection between access to education and quality of life, as well as the hardships women of color have had to endure, with the hopes that white women might connect on an emotional level to this women’s issue of the struggle for the right to education. Stewart helps to validate a mixing of the logical and emotional appeals when, given the rhetorical situation, logic would have been the default appeal. Stewart, and many other women rhetors, exemplify the bridging of binaries and provide examples of “alternatives” in their regular discourse, which provide important models for teachers and students. The gap between traditional rhetorics and the “alternative” is a problem in composition and is a similar divide or problem that is enacted in many places where inequality and oppression are present. Bringing women’s rhetorics to the feminist writing class does much more than simply bridge the divide of feminism and traditional writing pedagogy, it is a uniting that results in positive repercussions for students’ understanding, critical thinking and access.

This reconsideration of what teachers might have previously been naming “alternative” practices leads to another way that the divide between the disciplines is addressed. Women’s rhetorics offer feminist writing pedagogy ways to value difference by showing how language works. In their essay, Moss and Walter aim to encourage

teachers who want to value difference by “broadening our repertoire of pedagogical strategies and widening methods of sampling and evaluating student ability, knowledge, and achievement,” to begin in their own classrooms rather than wait for larger institutional curricula change (3). As a writing teacher this is one of the areas I struggle most with, especially when commenting on and grading students’ papers. I know from the works of authors such as Lisa Delpit and Geneva Smitherman how important valuing diversity in language is to student learning and development but then I am faced with program and university determined course outcomes and when I comment on student papers my focus almost naturally turns to marking places that do not adhere to academic discourse conventions. Moss and Walter discuss how teachers need to shift the approach in teacher comments from correct/incorrect to appropriate/inappropriate “in this or that context” (424). Teacher efforts should be placed on empowering students to make appropriate choices or to use the most suitable strategies rather than trying to focus only on a model of correct, standard usage.

Women’s rhetorics in composition introduce a wide variety of strategies into the classroom, many of which speak to the experiences of students and the strategies they are already drawing on in their often same, marginalized, othered positions. Just as women were often pushed into positions of silence, many students have experienced similar positioning because of race, class, gender, sexuality or simply from the experience of not believing they belong in the university setting. In her memoir, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*, Dorothy Allison, a woman marginalized for many reasons, shows how correct use of language does not always have to be the goal and reveals with

her writing the power of language can construct truth. She reinforces the power of story:

But that is not how I am supposed to tell it. I'm only supposed to tell one story at a time, one story. Every writing course I ever heard of said the same thing. Take one story, follow it through, beginning, middle, end. I don't do that. I never do. Behind the story I tell is the one I don't. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear. (39)

Here Allison is questioning dominant paradigms about correctness and claiming her agency by subverting expectations by simultaneously telling multiple stories with multiple meanings. Throughout her memoir Allison provides multiple examples of nontraditional rhetorical and stylistic choices that more accurately portray this version of her life story. Students and teachers alike can begin to rethink what is acceptable and appropriate in students' writing through both analyzing and applying women's rhetorical methods and strategies found in texts like Allison's. Making rhetorical choices based on what is appropriate for the situation opens up choices for students rather than the way that focusing only on correctness narrows possibilities. My hope with this dissertation, and the suggestion to consider women's rhetorical methods, is that a larger change can result from the local shift in pedagogy in composition classrooms. Composition teachers working with the students can also begin to provide models for the administration to see how to value difference and diversity.

The introduction of different models and texts that value diversity is just one way women's rhetorics help feminist writing teachers rethink what were previously seen as feminist practices. Women's rhetorics provide feminists with ways to re-theorize and re-see practices in a way that shift the activities from something tacked on to something



central to accomplishing both the pedagogical and political goals of composition. In the feminist writing classroom, the practices need to help students become both better writers and begin to develop an awareness of the power of language and discourse. One practice that is integral to feminist pedagogy, and is often misused, is group work. I have both viewed this misuse in my observations of well-meaning colleagues' classrooms as well as been the facilitator of many group work sessions gone wrong. Oftentimes this occurs because teachers set up situations and tasks either too constraining or on the converse without enough boundaries and purpose because the teacher's role and authority are not clearly defined. In her essay "The Risky Business of Group Work," Hephzibah Roskelly addresses some of the issues surrounding how group work can be ineffectively implemented and argues that this might be because the purposes –socializing and criticizing – are often in conflict (123). Roskelly proposes the need to recognize and then mediate these issues by valuing both socializing and critiquing, which is a merging that is feminist in nature. This merging of supposed dichotomous purposes is a feminist act that women's rhetorics can help better implement by providing models and theories.

The dissolution of binaries, revision of alternative practices, valuing of difference, and rethinking of classroom practices are all intimately connected to another way that women's rhetorics helps repair the divide between feminism and composition. This way is through the central positioning of reflective practice in the composition classroom for both writing teachers and students. Because of the ways women were, and still are, often silenced, they have had to incorporate a great deal of reflection about what rhetorically works in their speaking and writing processes and practice. Faced with not only being

denied the right to speak and write but also denied the right to an education, women rhetors have had to negotiate both how to access traditional rhetorical methods and develop their own strategies in order to be heard. This practice of using reflection to help guide the process of writing, the strategies for revision, the rethinking of assumptions when reading and discussing, as well the revising of classroom practice can help strengthen the relationship between feminism and composition.

Asking teachers and students to reflect on who they are and what they believe and value is not easy and is not something either group typically wants to engage in answering but as many composition scholars, such as Ann Berthoff, Peter Elbow, and Kathleen Yancey, have long advocated, reflection leads to better writing, reading, and thinking. In her book, *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Yancey writes that reflections involves “a *looking forward* to goals we might attain, as well as a *casting backward* to see where we have been...[and] we thus *project* and *review*” (6). She continues to outline the process of reflection by suggesting that it involves two more pieces: *dialogue* and *discovery*. This process of reflection is one that women rhetors had to engage on many levels as they fought to be heard and as they tried to both align with traditional strategies and revise them to meet their specific situations and subjects. One other important point that Yancey offers is that reflection is a true merging of theory and practice, which is another characteristic of women’s rhetoric. She writes that in merging the two, “it makes possible a theorizing of practice based on practice, a means of extending and differentiating earlier practice, and then of theorizing anew” (7). Women’s rhetorics offer many opportunities for feminists and composition teachers to both theorize

about women's words to inform writing pedagogy as well as find ways to practically employ women's rhetorical strategies and methods in the writing classroom.

The methods that emerge across women's rhetorics are both a result of the ways women's rhetorics heal the divide between the fields and evidence of the women's practices and strategies that help this bridging to occur. As I looked across a large number of women's texts a variety of trends became apparent. Here I look at four of those trends and the methods that result when applied to the feminist composition class. The methods that surfaced through my analysis of women's rhetorical texts include: affirmation, audience, alignment, and agency. There are an abundance of women's texts and speeches that exemplify each of the women's rhetorical methods proposed below. The initial factor when deciding which texts to analyze was whether or not the authors or texts appeared in *Available Means*. Since this dissertation offers a critique of *Teaching Rhetorica*, which is the companion text to the anthology, I thought my analysis and reflection on teaching practices might be more useful if they could be applied to the resources that are readily available for teachers. My hope is that teachers will be able to apply the methods I discuss below to multiple texts and both use and revise the teaching practices that work well for their classrooms. I offer these methods not as a definitive list of what women's rhetoric can bring to composition, or to shutdown the possibilities but rather as a place from which to begin the practical analysis and application of women's words and rhetorical strategies for the feminist composition classroom.

## **Affirmation**

Affirmation is a good starting point for this explication of women's rhetorical methods and possible resulting practices because this act of first affirming what one is presented with is crucial to all of these methods. So often teachers and students look first to their own agendas and needs and past what is being offered in the given situation. The act of affirming or validating is important for teachers and students. Teachers need to first affirm where students are academically and specifically as writers in the class. Students need to begin to shift their perspectives to affirm the writing situation and their place in the process. Affirmation is deeply connected to ethos in that by starting with a validation one can often find a place from which to speak. By first affirming what is, the teacher and students will be better able to implement some of the other methods proposed in this dissertation, such as alignment, which could ultimately lead to agency.

Issues of ethos and affirmation are apparent each semester when I am faced with the challenge of helping my students become stronger thinkers, readers, and writers. I often discuss critical thinking in my classroom and make comments on my students' work to ask that they "think more critically" or "dig a little deeper." When students enter the college classroom and are presented with "critical thinking and writing" they are usually already very familiar with the term and have many preconceived notions. For a majority of students, the concept of being critical or engaging in critique signals to first disagree, or as Peter Elbow defines it, doubt first, rather than affirm what is being presented. Additionally, critical thinking is often conflated with argument and argument often signals conflict and disagreement. The limited focus on teaching argument and

persuasion in the composition classroom is one place where feminists have tried, although unsuccessfully, to shift the aims of the writing classroom but simply dismissing argument is not the solution either.

Within composition theory, the issue of affirmation has been addressed by Wayne C. Booth and Peter Elbow in what they call a rhetoric of assent. One main difference between the two authors' ideas is that Booth searches for a middle ground and Elbow argues for the value of the extremes— both believing and doubting. In his 2005 article, "The Limits and Alternatives to Skepticism: A Dialogue," Booth addresses the issues of assent in a variety of ways that connect to the methods and perspectives women's rhetorics can bring to feminist pedagogy and the writing classroom. Elbow's essay, "Bringing the Rhetoric of Assent and the Believing Game Together—and Into the Classroom," affirms the majority of Booth's arguments, notes some digressions, and then extends the concept to consider how this rhetoric might support the classroom.

Elbow opens his essay, which is in dialogue with Booth, by recounting the five main tenets of assent that both he and Booth agree on. With their approach to the issue, both authors "question the pervasive assumption that good thinking centers only on argument as a process of skeptical scrutinizing for flaws and contradictions" (388) and concur that this process happens in community rather than individually. Where they differ is in the use of the term "critical thinking," the value of extremes vs. middle ground, what happens when students change their minds, and Elbow puts a bit more emphasis on disagreement, while Booth leans more towards agreement. The second half of Elbow's essay considers classroom practice and application and ends with the point

that he and Booth are fighting “against either/or thinking,” which is a feminist notion, although feminism is not discussed in his essay (398).

Wayne C. Booth describes the phenomenon of negativity and critique that is seen all over, not just in academia: “justified skepticism has turned into *utter* skepticism about all assertions” (“Limits” 380). Not only is skepticism invading classrooms but it is present in so many aspects of daily life. One need only tune into a news program or website to be immediately bombarded with dissent from all directions. While students are familiar and often comfortable with dissent, they seem more willing to engage in certain situations and not others. Interestingly, students are less likely to doubt another student’s writing than they are a professional piece of writing. Peer review and commenting on other student’s essays can be difficult for students and even the most seasoned teachers. While I agree with the sandwich technique of responding, which suggests teachers both start and end with a piece of positive feedback, peer review or critique is a place where some doubting might present fruitful results in the revision process.

It is important to note that Booth’s exploration of a rhetoric of assent includes many connections to two of the other methods that I explore in this dissertation: agency as well as audience, the latter of which he considers in terms of community and collaboration. In his essay, Booth suggests questions a reader might ask when engaging in a rhetoric of assent, “When *should* I assent to your argument, your case, your claims, and when *should* I go on resisting, offering my reasons that you are wrong?” and “How can you and I trust each other to work *honorably* together as we decide what to assent to?” (379). These affirming questions provide models that students and teachers can ask

of each other, of student writing, and of professional writing. Rather than doubting or critiquing the speaker or conversely assuming the speaker is trying to, or has a right to, impose on the audience, these questions draw out a dialogue, rather than a transaction, between writer and reader that gives both parties agency in relationship by working in a collaborative effort to consider when to affirm/assent rather than first doubt. Booth asserts that when this happens some of the aims of the rhetoric of assent are met, which are to reduce “misunderstandings” and hopefully “entice students into further learning” (387). These aims clearly fall in line with the goals of feminist pedagogy. With this Booth helps to confirm how it is the nature of the methods discussed in this dissertation to work in collaboration with one another in the writing classroom.

The place that feminists have taken up the issue of assent and dissent is with the role of argument in composition. Feminists have long offered a critique of the role of argument and persuasion in the composition classroom. In her essay “Beyond Argument in Feminist Composition,” Catherine Lamb discusses how feminist teachers might consider mediation and negotiation in addition to argument. Her critique is of monolithic argument and her purpose in writing to offer alternatives as she suggests that argument “still has a place, although now as a means, not an end” (281). In 1995, Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L Griffin offer a different approach in “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for Invitational Rhetoric.” Here Foss and Griffin recognize that sometimes there is a need to persuade but suggest a method of invitational rhetoric which “offers an invitation to understand- to enter another’s world to better understand an issue and the individual who holds a particular perspective on it. Ultimately, its purpose is to provide the basis for the

creation and maintenance of relationships of equality” (13). Their work looks to expand rhetorical constructs and provide ways for oppressed groups to transform systems of oppression, which feminist pedagogy aims to do as well. While a useful way to help rethink the goals of the composition classroom, invitational rhetoric seems to be an idea relegated to scholarship and academic discussion not an idea that has been applied to the classroom in practical ways, but this is where women’s rhetorics can intercede.

As is the case with the majority of the composition scholarship I review in this dissertation, more recent theories (or I should say expressivist and social epistemic approaches) about teaching writing have clear links to women’s rhetorical methods and theories but the connection has been overlooked. For example, Booth asks some important critical question about how one might employ the rhetoric of assent by really listening and without “waffling” or “surrendering to vicious cases that should be fought against” (“Limits” 386). This possible conflict is one many women speakers have had to tackle as they had to both retain their femininity or their identity as women as well as strategically employ traditional rhetorical strategies in order to work for many “vicious cases” such as the right to vote, to be educated and to be treated with humanity as equals. As Elbow suggests in his essay, “if someone *tries* to see something from someone else’s point of view, then they will often succeed,” (“Bringing” 394), which is a common strategy among women rhetors as they ask audiences to put themselves in the position of the oppressed, as act which must begin with the affirmation by the speaker and audience that the experience of the oppressed exists. In many cases, just this recognition by the oppressor about the oppressed is the most crucial step. While this is a common trend



across women's rhetorical texts, one woman rhetor who best exemplifies this is Zora Neal Hurston.

Hurston models the method of affirmation in a variety of ways throughout her essay "Crazy for this Democracy." Although part of her purpose is to critique the way democracy has been denied to African-Americans, in an act of affirmation Hurston first acknowledges the situation in the country at that moment, assents to the positive attributes of democracy, and affirms that she too wants the rights and privileges offered by "The Arsenal of Democracy." She uses irony, bitter humor, sarcasm and false naivety to develop her ethos and claim a place from which to speak in order to help validate her views and her right, and all African-Americans' rights, to democracy.

Towards the beginning of her essay Hurston declares, "All I want to do is get hold of a sample of the thing, and I declare, I sure will try it. I don't know for myself, but I have been told it is really wonderful" (248). She is well aware that her audience believes democracy is wonderful and she asserts her right to have the opportunity to participate. Part of her rhetorical approach is to present a bit of false naivety, as if to say that she can't possibly know if it is really good until she tries for herself. She writes, "They tell me this democracy form of government is a wonderful thing" (248), as if to acknowledge that only her audience holds the knowledge about this democracy that she does not have, but really this is not the case. This is important because she assumes her audience doesn't believe she could possibly know anything, so she plays to their assumption by saying she doesn't know and stakes her claim to experience this right. She continues with this strategy as she questions the term "global" and where the Atlantic Charter extends to, and

discloses, in a tongue in cheek way, that by using her new atlas she can see how the oceans may have impeded the spread of freedom. Her false naivety is delivered with a sarcastic tone in order to affirm to the audience what she knows.

Her sarcastic, bitter humor develops her ethos and validates her position that extends through the essay as she questions the use of the term “Arsenal of Defense” and proposes that perhaps F.D.R. really means “arse-and-all” and “Ass-and-all” of Democracy (249). Her reseeing of this term shifts the power away from those who are refusing African-Americans the right to the full benefits of democracy. The use of humor is a strategy often employed by powerful speakers to assert their authority. With her humorous critique she further legitimates her right to speak as she recounts the historical implications of democracy and all of the contradictory actions the United States has been taking as she continues to argue for her rights. She writes: “If our government has been willing to go to war and to sacrifice billions of dollars and millions of men for this idea, I think that I ought to give the thing a trial” (25). At this point she uses the ethos she has established and her critique of the country’s actions to validate her call for the repeal of Jim Crow laws: “I am for complete repeal of All Jim Crow Laws in the United States once and for all, and right now. For the benefit of this nation and as a precedent to the world” (251).

While Hurston appeals logically, an approach that would connect to her intended audience of the transgressors, she blends or mixes, as women rhetors often do, this more serious appeal with a balance of light-heartedness and humor, which affirms the necessity of democracy for all rather than simply outright condemning the current situation. She

writes, “I have been made to believe in this democracy thing, and I am all for tasting this democracy out. The flavor must be good” (249). But while her approach invokes logic and humor, her tone lets the audience know that they should best not tell her that she does not have the right: “The Hurstons have already been waiting eighty years for that. I want it here and now” (250). She asserts her right to this democracy that has been idolized but hasn’t allowed for rights for her people.

Hurston affirms her position as a black woman being denied a right and then establishes how this denial is really a global issue. Here there is a validation of the merging of the personal and political and the logical and emotional as she demands both her individual rights but also the rights of her people. She weaves her personal desire for freedom and democracy throughout this essay that affirms her right not only for democracy but also her right to speak. She begins with one woman’s declaration that she would like to “try”-out democracy but moves to how this notion is best for her family, the nation, and the entire world. Through a variety of affirming and validating strategies, Hurston complicates the rhetorical situation of a black woman demanding her rights and develops an ethos that allows her to use both humor and knowledge.

When the students and teachers look to first deny, argue against, disagree with, or simply dismiss, there can be many negative results in the classroom and throughout the writing process. When one starts from a place that denies what is present, what is valuable, and what is possible, the potential for discussion, revision, growth, and change is limited. Women rhetors can help writers to see the importance of coming together first, to see the opportunity each reading and writing occasion offers, to find ways to

affirm the place from which they are speaking and writing, and to open to what has already been presented rather than to first shutdown. Women rhetors, such as Hurston, provide models and strategies, such as humor and irony to help students learn ways to validate their own ideas and right to speak - ethos. One way that affirmation can begin to make an immediate impact is an approach that feminist pedagogy promotes: simply say “yes” to the experience one is having as a writer, reader, thinker, person, student, and teacher. Meet the student where they are. Women rhetors can help provide models and methods for affirmation, which might begin to dissolve the boundaries between argument/persuasion and invitational rhetoric, as well as between dissensus and consensus, in the classroom community.

For students and teachers, this method of affirmation can manifest itself in a variety of ways when applied to theory and practice in the feminist composition classroom. A common occurrence with students is an immediate rejection of a challenging reading or piece of writing, both in class discussion or students’ personal work, which often leads to the disengagement that is pervasive in so many college classrooms. For example, usually when I enter the classroom after having assigned a particularly difficult professional, published piece of writing to read for homework, such as Mary Louise Pratt’s “Art of the Contact Zone,” I am immediately met with student responses such as, “I didn’t like that reading” or “The author wrote in such a confusing way and rambled. I didn’t know what she was talking about.” Rather than trying to find something that they do understand in the reading or trying to affirm the validity of the academic essay that I have provided them with, probably for good reason, students look

to discredit first. The students' negative responses can often set the tone for the remainder of the discussion and students who usually don't talk can often find something to say to discredit the reading so they too can add to the discussion. As a teacher I can engage my authority by beginning the discussion with questions and writing prompts that ask the students affirming questions, such "What did the writer do well here in terms of connecting with her audience?" or "Where do you find yourself agreeing and why?" By modeling critical thinking that validates first, I can to shift the way the classroom community engages with reading assignments. Additionally, teachers can incorporate texts, such as Hurston's, that model this approach of validating, so they have examples before working on their own drafts. A large majority of women rhetors find ways to first validate particulars about the situation whether that is the current or historical state of circumstances, women's positions in the world, the place from which the rhetor is speaking or the audience's anticipated resistance or stance on the issue. When students jump past acknowledging what it is, to simply, or only critiquing what they disagree with, they miss out.

Often, when students are asked to engage in asking questions of a text, an author, a sample, their own work, etc., this translates to students as needing finding ways to disagree, find fault or gaps, or doubt. This notion could stem from both the language the teacher is using and has used in the students' past and the language of the course books, assignments, and feedback. Although a gross generalization, I would suggest that, on the whole, composition textbooks, both readers and rhetorics, have started to shift the language of critique and persuasion that dominates or negates to a more open-minded

focus on critical thinking. These improvements include more diverse and inclusive readings, more sample essays, and chapters on writing that encourage critical engagement and rhetorical thinking rather than perpetuating limited, doubtful critique. The book I currently use is *From Inquiry to Academic Argument* edited by Stuart Greene and April Lidinsky and published by Bedford/St. Martin. It is both a reader and a rhetoric, which I find to be most successful in my classes. In one of the first chapters, which discusses the academic practices of readers and writers, students are encouraged to make “inquires.” The text explains how inquiries begin with “observations,” “asking questions,” and “examining alternatives” (13). While the encouragement to observe is positive, with the students I have observed, because of their preconceived notions about critical thinking and questioning, the direction to question and find alternatives starts with a denying rather than affirming. The questions they ask look to find fault and the alternatives aim to show how the writer could have done a better job. Doubting rather than affirming sets a different foundation for discussion and subsequent writing activities.

The apathy I experience in the classroom is often rooted in student’s rejection of anything they don’t deem necessary or enjoyable as well as in a mindset that suggests they look at the negative first. While there are a majority of factors that contribute to this attitude, in part, an untheorized, tacked on, common feminist practice that encourages students to speak their minds might contribute to the way students approach the class, and often school in general. Texts like Hurston’s help to show students that opinions need to be backed up with knowledge to affirm their ethos. Given Hurston’s identity and the larger rhetorical situation, one way she validated her right to speak was through

displaying her knowledge about this democracy in order to be heard by her audience. She also presented her knowledge using a variety of appeals and strategies, such as sarcasm and humor rather than straight logic. This reinforces to students that the goal is not to just be able to cloak their ideas and essays in logical, academic discourse but to have something to say, even if the way they decide to say it varies.

Another way feminists have interceded with this issue is the consideration of the roles of consensus and dissensus in the composition classroom. When trying to address the issue of continual doubting teachers should not strive for a classroom that consistently reaches only for consensus. A healthy dose of skepticism is important especially in this day and age when all a person has to do is view something on Facebook, click “like,” and have all their views defined in one line phrases that encourage no further exploration or support of issues. I often welcome dissent in the classroom because it helps to enrich discussion while forcing students to negotiate different perspectives. I have found myself on occasion challenging students to disagree with me in class discussions as a way to liven up discussion because truthfully, when everyone agrees class can get boring. There are plenty of us who have suggested to our students that they argue the position they do not agree with rather than the one we do. But in retrospect, if all I offer are models of dissent, these practices further reinforce cynicism on the part of the students. It is important that students learn to question and have a critical mind but the first move should not always be to deny or critique when the act of first affirming offer students additional possibilities as readers and writer. For example, that first affirmation does not even need to be an affirmation of the author’s position in a reading but could be an

affirmation of the act, the approach, of what works, before diving into a place that denies, which could be viewed as a form of silencing. By first denying there is a shutting down of possibility, which is something women, peoples of color and all groups that have been others or marginalized have had to fight against.

The point here is not to assert that affirmation is the most important way to approach critical thinking but rather that affirmation is being offered as a method that students can add to their academic tool bags. Students, and teachers, are well-versed in skepticism, and given its pervasive power in this society, the concept of affirming might be a difficult concept for students to apply or acknowledge. In fact, it may be even more difficult for educators who schooled in writing instruction and rhetoric that encourages critical thinking that encourages doubting critique. Taking a different action, another one of the women's rhetoric methods, is one of the first steps to altering patterns.

Remembering that affirming does not necessarily suggest agreement rather it offers an approach that affirms the speaker/writer's voice before passing judgment. Lastly, what both Booth and Krista Ratcliffe propose in different ways is that assenting or affirming allows us to develop a rhetoric of listening, which is a much needed practice in this day and age. Booth suggests: "Never assume you should doubt everything, but never assume that you should not change your mind, if you really listen. Always at least TRY to listen" ("Limits" 386). A rhetoric of listening helps to bridge the divide between dogmatism and skepticism ("Limits"). Teachers need to affirm student experience by first meeting students where they are but students also need to learn to recognize where they are as



writers. Women's rhetorical texts often provide both ways for teachers to theorize about this issue and models for use in the classroom.

### **Audience: As Rhetorical Consideration, Collaboration, and Community**

Within the composition classroom, the concept of audience has manifested into a variety of theories and practices. Traditionally, within composition theory, "audience" refers to Aristotle's rhetorical situation and the relationship between speaker, audience and topic for a specific purpose within a given context. For Aristotle, in *Rhetoric* 1.3, audience is a primary consideration in any situation: "Of the three elements in speech-making-speaker, subject, and person addressed – it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech's end and object" (185). Typically the rhetorical situation is represented by a triangle with the speaker, audience, and topic at the different points connected by the sides. Although from the lines of the triangle there is the understanding of a relationship between the three, there is also a divide. The speaker is not the audience and the audience is not the speaker and although they may have attributes in common, the speaker is separate from the audience. Due to this divide, the speaker is usually looking for a connection with the audience, and although the audience might not return desire for connection, the work to form the association often falls solely on the speaker. Because of the divide it is easier for the speaker to make assumptions about the audience in his efforts to connect and persuade the audience for his purpose about the given topic, which in some cases could deepen the connection and in others deepen the divide. The lines

between the speaker and audience suggest connection and divide, but in either case they are always in some form of a relationship.

Wayne C. Booth echoes Aristotle's approach to audience in his 1963 essay "The Rhetorical Stance." His premise is that writers need to achieve the proper stance in regards to the relationship between author, subject and audience and that for persuasive writing to be successful one needs a proper balance. In this essay Booth refers to a argument made by Jacques Barzun in *Teacher of America* that "students should be made to feel that unless they have said something to someone, they failed" (143). This premise that reaching the audience should be the most important goal of the writing process is one that still pervades many writing classrooms today. In 1975, Walter Ong began to evolve this stance a bit by arguing that writers need to both imagine an audience of readers but also imagine themselves in the role the audience has cast for them, which is a perspective that begins to provide the audience with opportunities for more agency. In the 1980s, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford compare the ideas of what they term "audience-invoked" versus "audience-addressed" rhetoric and suggest writers need to both adapt and give life to their audience, which is a position that posits more power with the writer. Linda Flower, in her essay "Writer-based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," moves from oral speech to written texts as she suggests that there are two ways writers compose and that audience awareness with reader-based prose is both more complex and something writers should strive to achieve. Peter Elbow responds to Flower and other prevailing audience scholarship at the time, including his own work, and argues for a different view of audience awareness, in "Closing My Eyes as I Speak: An Argument for

Ignoring Audience.” This essay proposes that writers already have such a strong audience awareness that they would benefit from turning it off. He ends this essay, with an idea derived from considering Meade and Vygotsky, which is that, “We learn to listen better and more trustingly to *ourselves* through interaction with trusting *others*” (“Closing” 190). These later essays prefigure another aspect of the audience discussion that intersects with the concepts of discourse communities and collaborative learning, which is more feminist in its approach because it take a closer look the the relationship between writers and audiences.

In my experience in the composition classroom, I have been faced with students whose beliefs about the writer and audience reinforce a divide or dichotomy rather than embrace a view that all pieces of the rhetorical situation are a connected whole. Students are quick to separate themselves from the audience because it easier to make assumptions and/or coerce something or some group that they do not see themselves a part of. This dichotomization is challenged by authors such as Kenneth Bruffee who argue about the collaborative nature of learning and composing, which is an approach that meshes well with feminist pedagogy. Bruffee is at the forefront of the “social turn” in composition studies when he shifts the conversation to the role of collaboration between speaker and audience.

In his 1984 essay “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’,” Bruffee discusses the social construction of knowledge and suggests that in order for students to learn academic discourse they must have opportunities for academic conversation and collaborative learning activities within that discourse community. His

essay focuses on the process of conversation, internalized thought, and subsequent student writing. While academic discourse proficiency does seem to be the goal here, Bruffee does acknowledge that academic discourse is not the only discourse one may acquire but within his work there is definitely a privileging of “normal” discourse over “abnormal” discourse here. Feminist critique of Bruffee focuses on both the marginalization of alternative discourses and the inherent problems of encouraging consensus within learning communities. In 1989 John Trimbur responds to Bruffee and other collaborative learning proponents in his essay “Consensus and the Difference in Collaborative Learning.” Here Trimbur criticizes consensus in collaborative learning, especially given the way this goal lends itself to the silencing of those not in agreement with the conversation. He offers the concept of dissensus and argues it is “more important as a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other” (Trimbur 610), which is a concept that falls in line with feminist pedagogical aims to value difference, especially marginalized voices.

Feminist scholarship addresses both the concepts of discourse communities and collaborative learning, which can offer teachers different ways to theorize about audience, but beyond these topics and a couple often quoted essays, there are only minor mentions, rather than major audience considerations. The most notable essay to address audience concerns was written by Sonja K. Foss and Cindy J. Griffin in 1995: “Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for Invitational Rhetoric,” which, in order to suggest a different approach, outlines concerns about the way traditional rhetoric focuses on persuasion in a

way that dominates the audience. This perspective of rhetorics that act upon the audience is a common critique within feminist scholarship.

Foss and Griffin argue against the traditional rhetorical approach and equate persuasion with coercion. The authors see the approach as an act of domination and argue that while there may be a place for persuasive rhetoric, they want to advocate for “an invitation to understanding” (13). The problem they see with traditional persuasive rhetoric is that speakers look to promote “change, competition, and domination” in regards to audience rather than to present alternatives that advance “equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (4) At first this essay received a lot of praise for its critique of traditional rhetoric and the way Foss and Griffin asked teachers to reconsider how they teach purpose. I remember reading this in a graduate class and initially thinking that the authors had come up with a solution. During the class discussion, there was an initial excitement about the potential these ideas held for the way we, as teaching assistants, approached writing in the classroom, but the conversation and response to this essay shifted to one of critique. Part of this critique centers on the view that an understanding, cooperative rhetorical model is considered a stereotypical feminine reaction, which denotes a process of receiving and not acting. Women have been historically marginalized for their caretaker roles and this seemingly passive, accepting approach might reinforce this notion and compound the oppression. From my perspective, there needs to be a shift from viewing receiving as something passive to seeing it as an act; an act that does not require domination.

Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogue view of language extends to support the claim that all writing is collaborative, in part, because whatever is written (or stated) is always in response to a prior "utterance" (159). While Bakhtin's writing and theory may be difficult for writing teachers to digest, let alone implement, the idea of the collaborative nature of language and writing emerges in the majority of women's rhetorics, especially with women's consideration of audience. These concepts can help teachers to begin to shift the way students view their use of discourse, as well as their concept of audience, from something that must be dominated to seeing that the writer can creatively collaborate with the audience. The relationship between audience and writer can shift from the speaker drawing a boundary as if to say "I am not you" (but I will act upon you) to "I am really nothing but you" (and I need to consider you). When the speaker considers the audiences' ideas, needs, and assumptions, the act is collaborative and receptive (feminine) rather than an act that converges up and penetrates (masculine). Women's rhetorical audience considerations often engage the process of speaker and audience working in a true dialogue with a reciprocal exchange that is generative and works to produce less dominating, but not less successful, pieces of writing.

There are many examples of women writers and speakers both employing the collaborative approach to audience as well as offering theories and methods in their acts that can be applied to activities in the composition classroom and as strategies that teachers can present to students for their writing. A powerful example of a variety of rich audience considerations from a women's rhetorical point of view is Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision."

In this essay, Rich both anticipates and directly addresses several audiences, or a mixed audience, as well as works to gather women together into a collaborative community of writers and thinkers working for change because, as she ends, “As women, we have our work cut out for us” (281). Here Rich is addressing the role of revision, especially for women writers, as a way to see anew, develop fresh vision, and even to “survive.” At the same time she is encouraging women, she is simultaneously addressing the stodgy, limited, masculine-defined and ruled Modern Language Association and the first public event for The Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession. In anticipation of this mixed audience she draws on different sources to support her ideas including women’s writing, academia, and her own life and poetry.

First and foremost, readers can get a clear sense of the audience of people, or women, whom Rich is addressing through the way she calls upon the women of the audience and draws on their common experience to make her points. Although the original occasion is a speech, the text of the speech was subsequently revised for publication and throughout this revision process, Rich keeps her direct remarks to her audience, such as “Every one of us here in this room has had great luck...” (272). She both identifies directly the women she is speaking to and clearly shows the audience how she is a member of their collective grouping as well. Her use of the word “we” is her acknowledgement to the audience that what she is suggesting about women’s experiences, roles, and futures involves her own person and life as well. She is asking women to think and act in different ways, and she not only asks them, but also suggests she is or will do it too: “Until we understand the assumptions we are drenched in we

cannot know ourselves” (270). This move is important because the speaker and audience become more directly connected and it would appear that Rich is not acting upon them but suggesting she will act with them. To further support this connection, and in addition to the use of words such as “we” and “us,” Rich draws on personal experience to exemplify her own struggles and attempts to revise and rethink.

Rich not only lays bare the audience she is addressing but also analyzes the audiences of other women writers as evidence for her larger arguments, which reinforces both a sense of interconnectedness and the importance of audience consideration in the rhetorical situation. She uses the example of Virginia Woolf and asserts that although Woolf’s intent was to write for women, a reader can see by the way she holds back her passion and restrains her anger that she is making these choices for the men in her audience. Rich connects Woolf’s writing with the way she herself deals with the same struggles as she writes her poetry but mimics the masculine trope of keeping a sense of objectivity in order to gain the much respected universality. Part of Rich’s analysis of this phenomenon has to do with misconceptions about equality because, as she writes, at a certain time, “to be equal was still confused with sounding the same” (273). In these sections of her essay Rich helps draw together the possible audience/speaker divide.

Just as Hurtson drew on a large knowledge base to develop her ethos, Rich incorporates a variety of women, voices and sources of evidence to support her points and draw women closer together. Rich presents readers with a variety of reflections on authors such as Virginia Woolf, poets such as Marianne Moore, and even Rich’s own poetry. My reading of her use of an array of women is that female readers, and perhaps or hopefully



males, can begin to see the ways women (people) are intimately connected and how we have a responsibility to one another. Ronald and Ritchie make an important observation about what Rich's writing offers, it is that writing leads to change when "writers pay attention to their words and how those words reflect, resist or revise those lives around them" (267). This addresses concerns that Foss and Griffin consider with their invitational rhetoric and the critique that argument and persuasion often impose on or dominate the audience. Here Rich is taking a stand but doing it in a way that does not divide the audience from the speaker but draws all parties more closely together. This move alone as an option in composition classrooms can begin to help shift the dominating approach of argument and academic discourse.

Rich's use of a variety of voices and her critical, personal responses as to how these sources and voices impacted her process of becoming a writer are extremely important. In this piece, Rich recognizes that she did not develop into a writer on her own but her journey was aided by her responses to Woolf, both the encouragement, critique and expectation of her father, the various poets, male and female, who she both worked to imitate and reject as well as the people in her life including other women who were struggling with issues such as womanhood and parenthood. Both Rich's attention to and acknowledgment of audience in her writing and her reinforcement of the necessity of collaboration are important audience considerations for teachers and students in the composition classroom.

Chris Gallagher, in *Radical Departures* argues that "Pedagogy is what happens when people seek to produce knowledge together" (xvi) and "Pedagogy is always a form

of collective action” (xvii). Gallagher’s observations that pedagogy emerges from collaboration connects with women’s rhetorical strategies. As a teacher, the concepts of both audience and community have always been very important to the way I approach the classroom and the practices I employ but I have always questioned the effectiveness of my approach. The front page of my syllabus always includes the following statement or disclaimer, which I borrowed and revised from a former professor:

**Classroom Community and Courtesy:** This class will be a writing and learning community. You will be responsible for evaluating and delivering constructive criticism to your fellow classmates as well as discussing “risky” topics. While learning about certain subjects, it is inevitable for us to get uncomfortable. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate for us to be disrespectful. Although students should view the classroom as a safe place to express ideas, any behavior that is discriminatory or otherwise isolating to other students will not be tolerated. We will tackle all issues as learning issues. We will not threaten, belittle, intimidate, blame, or mock anyone. If you do, you may be withdrawn from class. We have a responsibility to one another to create a healthy learning environment that does not promote hostility or discrimination. We must maintain a mutual respect and behave in such a way that does not disrupt our community.

This idea that the classroom will develop into a community is important to consider, especially since the concept has been critiqued.

With feminist pedagogical practices, community often boils down to putting chairs in a circle and then having a whole class discussion. Women’s rhetoric can help teachers to rethink this practice. While a circle of chairs is often considered a feminist practice it isn’t unless the practice is underpinned by feminist methods or theories. In many writing programs sitting students a circle is the sign of good teaching but the notion of community often stops with this practice when it needs to be pushed further. As Ratcliffe argues, “Indeed, without careful consideration of classroom dynamics, a teacher

may unknowingly dominate students' collaborative work via heavy-handed discussions or teacher-centered directions" (154). Students do not see themselves in the work of creating together and they need to feel a responsibility towards one another. The practice of peer review or occasional group work is often a tolerated activity that students just try to get through. As a whole most students suggest that they would rather work on their own or that group work doesn't work for them. Students do not see the work of community as actually creating together and they certainly do not feel a sense of responsibility towards the creative process of the other students in class. Texts, like Rich's, offer teachers opportunity to theorize about community and provide students with models of collaboration and connection in "real life." Students often make the assumptions that we live in a world that only rewards individual achievements and ideas, and while on some levels this is still true, by providing students with ways that collaboration is both valued and privileged this notion can begin to shift.

While many feminists operate under the assumption that collaborative learning and establishing a sense of community in the classroom are feminist practices these practices have had their fair share of critique. As previously discussed Trimbur and others, such as David Foster, argue that the goal of consensus in the community has the potential to silence. Trimbur has responded to this issue with his explorations of dissensus. Others, such as Greg Myers, levy the claim that consensus building through collaborative learning conceals "how knowledge and its means of production are distributed in an unequal, exclusionary order" (603). In her essay "Collaboration, Conversation, and the Politics of Gender," Evelyn Ashton-Jones addresses some of these

critiques as well and argues that simply removing the teacher-student hierarchy does not logically lead to the conclusion that the resulting collaborative learning system is not patriarchal. She suggests that “group participants, conditioned to interact according to gender-based roles, may well unconsciously reproduce those roles” (11) in classroom settings. While her concerns are valid, what she speaks to is not something that is innate in the practice of collaborative learning but rather something that might, and often does, result from viewing collaborative learning and community building as untheorized, tacked on practices. A feminist classroom that employs a variety of women’s rhetorical methods can address this issue.

Although initial collaborative attempts in the writing classroom might result in inequality due to gender role adherence, this experience offers an opportunity for teachers to open up dialogue about the group dynamic and encourage students to start from a place of affirmation in when engaging with the classroom community. When I put students into groups in the first couple classes of a semester, I make sure that I determine the groups so I can try to balance genders, if not also races, in each group. After a couple of group activities, by the beginning of the second week, I begin to ask the students to reflect, both in writing and then in large group discussion, about the different roles students took on, who spoke, who felt silenced, how the discussion started, who dissented, who agreed, and so on, so that as a class we can begin to consider issues of language and power in terms of their experience in the classroom. This line of class discussion opens of the possibilities for a variety of approaches grounded in women’s rhetorical methods. Students are then called on to consider their responsibility to other students in the class

(audience) and the larger global community as well their roles as both audience members to others and speakers/writers who will be aiming to reach an audience. The discussion can be used to bridge to analysis of texts and readings by both male and female rhetors, which students analyze to develop strategies and methods for their own writing. While initial consideration of group dynamics will consider the experiences and roles of the different genders and races, as a class we move from this a focus on the difference to consider the variety of choices community members and audience approach in writing by looking at the choices available to all by both male and female rhetors. If the focus were to remain on the difference there is the risk of perpetuating current hierarchies but instead teachers can discuss gender and power but then move to how this impacts student writing and opens up possibilities for student writing. Ashton-Jones assumes, or draws on limited experience, with her analysis because she does not discuss the role of the teacher in the collaborative process, thus taking away her agency. As many feminists have argued, teachers cannot pretend to give up their power in the class because in reality they cannot. The reality is that teacher's can maintain a position of authority, which answers Susan Stanford Friedman's argument that collaborative learning reaffirms "any kind of authority of incompatible with the feminine" (Ashton-Jones 9), by facilitating an collaborative learning environment that helps lay bare the power dynamics at work. Since the goal of the writing classroom is to help students develop into stronger writers, which means many different things to different programs and teachers, discussion of gendered issues needs to move to practical application in writing pedagogy. A teacher might start with discusses of gender, power, and language but ultimately needs to link

that to writing practice in a way that begins to shift or disrupt the reproduction of the traditional, patriarchal academic discourse. So often, in classrooms I have visited, the enactment of feminist pedagogy gets stalled at the discussion of gender and is not used to directly impact writing instruction.

In order to imagine audience, students need to learn to see themselves not only as members of audiences or excluded from audiences from but as part of a community. The experience of being a student is often one of isolation, especially in this time when we have access to so much technology but it often puts up more boundaries than offers the connections that perpetuated by dominate narratives (Selfe). Students need to feel they have not only have something to offer but have a responsibility to others. Women's rhetorical texts like Rich's offer students with examples of both how to approach audience and how the process of developing into a stronger writer, reader, thinker does not happen on one's own. Then when faced with the choices they have students can make more informed decisions about how they want to approach audience. Most likely when they can see themselves as part of their audience or an audience, they can feel a sense of responsibility, such as respect and equity. These choices that reflect the experiences they want as audience members and should learn to develop the same in their relationship to audience. Ede and Lunsford's professional writing offers both models and methods that can help teachers to encourage to see collaboration as a kind of community building. By understanding that writers do writer together and collaboration is something to be respected students can start to chip away at the idea that writers are no individuals hold-up in an attic waiting for inspiration to hit, which will pour perfectly from their brains to

the page. Rather successful writers engage with other writers who are actually part of their audience.

Peter Elbow and Wayne Booth's 2005 dialogue regarding the rhetoric of assent connects to these considerations of classroom community and collaboration, and help to bridge this women's rhetorical method of audience with the method of affirmation. In their essays, Booth tends to lean more consensus in his approach to the rhetoric of assent in classroom practice while Elbow leans more towards promoting the value of dissensus. Booth writes that, "The pursuit of a rhetoric of assent is the pursuit of a community of inquirers" ("Limits" 388) and, according to Elbow, Booth "leans a bit towards saying, in effect; if we don't have good reasons to disagree, let's agree or assent" (393). While Elbow is not against consensus, he states that his goal is "in contrast, to *seek out* divergence" ("Bringing" 393). For Elbow the interesting paradox is that the believing (affirming) game often leads to disagreement, which, from the feminist perspective, is an interesting comingling, which offers the "both/and" teaching opportunity rather than the "either/or" approach to conversation and learning. Both affirming and disagreeing can lead to a more fruitful dialogue and learning experience. Elbow does stress that with the believing game it is "highly *communal* rather than individualistic...we can only play the believing game well if we do it collectively and cooperatively" ("Bringing" 393). So although dissensus and disagreement might occur there can still be a valuing of community (here audience) in the process and the possibility that opens from engaging in the process together in a way allows for multiple outcomes is one that offers agency to

the writers and thinkers, which is a feminist pedagogical practice and method this dissertation will discuss.

### **Alignment**

The method of alignment, which women's rhetorics offers to feminist pedagogy, is a method of juxtaposition that provides empowerment through timing, variety, and choice. This method supports my argument for a return to more rhetoric-based, process-focused composition classroom that incorporates concepts of *kairos* and genre. In the last thirty years, one concept that has resisted static definition and has been reconceptualized in order to provide students with choice is the concept of genre. It is in this act of reseeing the concept that helps make it compatible with women's rhetorical approaches. When both genre theory and the rhetorical concept of *kairos* are merged with women's rhetorics, they can be expanded to offer students more opportunities to align their choices. Women's rhetorics can help teachers introduce students to more choices and new uses for genres as students consider the perfect use of timing.

The concept of genre has both maintained some of its original, fixed meaning and usage as well as evolved into a contemporary theory of teaching writing, which will be useful to consider alongside women's rhetoric. Original concepts of genre connected it directly to form and reinforced a form/content divide. The focus was on what the final product looked like rather than the process of writing and meaning making. The task of identifying the genre of a text was, and still is, useful within literary studies, especially if there is an awareness that new genres emerge and evolve. Additionally, this use of genre



is still taught in the composition classroom and in textbooks as a way to help students learn form. In Patsy Callaghan and Ann Dobyns's rhetoric textbook, *A Meeting of the Minds: A Brief Rhetoric for Writers and Readers*, in the section entitled "Conventions of Genre or Form," they write: "Because many work situations involve repeating processes or tasks, conventional forms have been created to make that work efficient and also to make communication clearer" (332). They continue to explain that these conventions of genre are important because instructors "don't want to be distracted by unnecessary elements, complicated features or errors" (333). Likewise in Lester Faigley's *Writing: A Guide for College and Beyond*, he explains that genre "is a term of a kind of writing or form of communication" and that genre "has a strong influence on the style that you use" (40). From these views, there are certain appropriate "containers," or forms, into which language can be poured to fulfill the writing task. Clearly, this approach to writing can be very constricting rather than liberating. Students are limited as to what the final product can look like and what elements, features, and style they can choose to achieve the chosen form. The focus is more on correctness than appropriateness. This same critique of the restrictive nature of the writing process has been levied against some rhetorical approaches to teaching writing that focus too much on one aspect, such as audience. In Lloyd F. Bitzer's 1968 essay "The Rhetorical Situation," which explores the nature of the rhetorical situation, he writes "Beyond exigence and audience, every rhetorical situation contains a set of *constraints* made up of persons, events, objects and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain the decision and action

needed to modify the exigence” (8). These claims of constraints in the rhetorical situation echo early process movement scholars’ ideas.

Current genre theory is rooted in the classic rhetorical concept of *kairos*. *Kairos* is a consideration of the time or context; when a speaker or writer considers *kairos* he or she reflects on a variety of factors, including audience, time, and place, that might limit the communication. In Isocrates “Against the Sophists” *kairos* is the “fitness for the occasion” (Bizzell and Herzberg 69). For Plato and the Sophists, *kairos* is “the immediate social situation in which solutions to philosophical problems must be proposed” (Bizzell and Herzberg 81). This rhetorical consideration looks deeply at what is appropriate given the rhetorical situation, which can be helpful as a way to focus the rhetorical choices for writers, but it is often seen as limiting the possibilities rather than providing access to more choice. One connection between *kairos* and genre theory is the importance of the situation, how it is reproduced and how the reader, writer or rhetor responds. In her essay “The Genre Function,” Anis Barwashi suggests that, “Genres helps shape and enable social actions by rhetorically constituting the way we recognize the situation within which we function” (340). Genre theory considers the recurring situation, the responses and how conditions and responses help the situation recur, which opens up the possibility for choices and meaning making rather than shutting them down.

When writers and speakers want to respond to specific situations they seek the approach of genre. In her 1984 essay, “Genre as Social Action,” Carolyn Miller argues for a “rhetorically sound definition of genre [that] must be centered not on the substance or the form of the discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish” (151). Miller, and

other genre theorists, shifts the focus from focusing solely on the end result, to more of a process-based approach. This process/product binary is not the only dichotomy that genre theory seeks to unite. As Amy Devitt argues in her essay “Generalizing about Genre,” genre theory “illustrates how to unify form and content, place text within context, balance process and product, and acknowledge the role of both the individual and the social...[which] may even lead us to a unified theory of writing” (573). This reconfiguring of genre encourages the writer to take an active role in the construction and response to meaning making through an unlimited variety of choices with open up the possibility for writers to align with the alternatives.

Women’s rhetoric can provide methods and models for expanding the concept of genre theory for writing. Devitt argues that, “Genres *construct* and *respond* to situation; they are *actions*” (578), which is a sentiment that Bawarshi echoes when she argues that genres, “define and organize kinds of social actions, social actions that these texts rhetorically make possible” (335). Although I will focus on alignment with my analysis of Gloria Anzaldua, her text also exemplifies how all of the women’s rhetorical methods of audience, alignment, action/agency and affirmation weave together and inform one another to provide theories, practices, and methods to help improve feminist pedagogy and writing instruction.

The union of genre theory and women’s rhetorics helps students to not only align with the alternatives but to affirm all the possible choices, to develop a deeper consideration of and relationship with audience and community, and to continue to see that writing is action, all of which are exemplified in Anzaldua’s “How to Tame a Wild

Tongue.” Anzaldua’s essay is an important example of the rhetorical considerations and choices writers can and must make when composing. Additionally, this essay models the mixing of genres that is often present in women’s rhetorical texts. Anzaldua looks to both shatter dualities and readers’ expectations in her essay about the ways in which she has been silenced.

Anzaldua writes about the different times her in her life when others tried to silence her. As a child, teachers and parents tried to control her speech either by forbidding her to speak Spanish or by requiring that she speak a certain kind of Spanish with a specific accent. In this essay, as the author of her life and ideas, Anzaldua seizes her agency through her assessment of the rhetorical situation and chooses when it is appropriate to use English and Spanish in her writing. She mixes and blurs the languages in her essay, sometimes translating and other times not. For example, she writes, “*El Anglo on cara de inocente nos arranco la lengua*. Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (358). With this action of blending Anzaldua decides who in her audience to let in and who to exclude. From one perspective, it seems that she is privileging the reader who can speak both languages, which also exemplifies her commitment to breaking down dualities. Anzaldua gains agency through the alignment and juxtaposition of the two different languages.

Genre mixing is another rhetorical feature that is exemplified in this essay. Anzaldua mixes not only languages but also autobiography, narrative, poetry, and history in this text. To illustrate her ideas in it is more appropriate that she support a point with a line from a poem and at other times better to offer a reflection on her childhood

experiences with language. When she recounts how she tried to “overcome the tradition of silence,” her support comes from the books and songs of her youth (362). While this mixing of genres is not a classical rhetorical approach, what is interesting is how Anzaldua is supporting academic feminist points about the power of language such as, “Language is a male discourse” (358) and “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (362), with diverse forms of evidence. Although the critique she offers is most likely a point made to an academic audience, her appeals and support push the boundaries of expectation. Anzaldua’s essay helps to connect the method of alignment and choice to issues of style and form through her mixing of genres and refusal to mold her ideas to fit the expectation of an academic essay. In reflecting on her process of becoming a writer Gerda Lerner writes, “I already knew then that form is the shape of the content. But it is not some idea abstract ‘shape’—it is content as shaped by the creating artist, content filtered through the prism of the artist’s entire life experience” (41). Theorizing about genre can help students and teachers to think about the merging of shape and content, which is evident in a many women’s texts.

Anzaldua’s essay speaks to the idea that if, as a person and a writer, one does not make a choice then the choice can get taken away from them. In this way the women’s rhetorical methods of alignment and agency are clearly linked because readers can see how having and making choices is self-actualizing for Anzaldua. She writes that sometimes, when asked about her identity (“Que eres?”), her response will depend on the situation - Mexican, Chicana, or Tejana. Here she gains agency through aligning with her

multi-layered identity and names herself in multiple ways. The act of naming and self-definition has been a powerful, rhetorical strategy for women.

Issues of choice, timing, and genre in women's rhetorical texts can help to inform writing pedagogy and the students' toolboxes in a variety of ways. Historically, various pedagogical trends in teaching writing have vacillated between practices that are too prescriptive and those that are too lax. Students often have to contend with too many rules or not enough guidance and cannot find ways to thrive in either environment because the extremes, or dichotomies, often result in unsuccessful teaching practices. Often, teachers are faced with students who enter classrooms expecting to be filled with content, which they believe they need simply retain for only the duration of the semester or class. On the contrary, writing classrooms ask students to engage in a process of growth and change but students often continue to grasp for clearly defined sets of knowledge and rules. When teachers do set down the "rules" of writing, their intentions are often well-meaning and are usually in response to students who want to know exactly what they need to do to become successful writers. In the composition classroom, examples of this include such common writing rules as: five to seven sentences per paragraph; draw the reader into the paper in your intro; provide a thesis in the last sentence; one idea per paragraph; never end a sentence with a preposition; and the list goes on. Students are eager to write down, absorb, and try to apply these rules, in every writing situation, as if these are fixed conventions that one can never stray from. Mary Astell in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* addresses this issue of alignment when discussing writing, "And perhaps the great secret of Writing is the mixing of all these in

so just a proportion that everyone may taste what he likes without being disgusted by it contrary” (82). The method of alignment and juxtaposition provides an opportunity to rethink prescriptive rules that reinforce correctness by empowering writers with choice to encourage appropriateness.

There are many women’s rhetorical texts that can be used as models in classes or by teachers who want to theorize about rhetorical choices and audience. Strategies to reach mixed audiences seem even more relevant today for teaching students but it is also something women have been strategically addressing for years. In classical times, before women were permitted to be part of the audience or even speak and write, it was not difficult to imagine the limited identity of the speaker and audience. Women’s education and access to the public sphere changed the possible dynamics of the rhetorical situation, which is a shift that women writers and speakers had to consider as soon as they began to voice. While audiences, speakers, and contexts were evolving, many of the traditional approaches remained static. Given the diversity in this day and age, choices of the strategies and approaches women have historically used can provide a wide variety of choices and examples for students to consider in their writing.

Although Aristotle outlined three dominant appeals in *Rhetoric*, ethos, pathos, and logos, typically the most respected appeal, and the one taught within institutions that value academic discourse, is logos. The logical, rational approach is valued over appeals to emotions and character. Booth argues that dogmatism has “taken its toll: ‘We *know* that the only form of demonstration is empirical evidence, ‘scientific’ proof; any reliance on emotion (pathos) or mere reliance on character (ethos) is irrelevant to serious

judgment” (“Limits” 380). Women’s rhetorical methods and models can begin to infuse the options of all of the appeals back into the classroom, which offers students more alternatives and allows them to align more skillfully to the *kairos* of the situation. One way we see women often appealing to ethos and pathos is through the use of personal experience as evidence, which is another method which current-traditional writing programs try to silence. The personal in academic writing is often viewed with immediate cause for skepticism and doubt and so here we see a convergence of women’s rhetorical methods of affirmation and alignment. By immediately dismissing personal experience, but viewing it as a choice, we can build a bridge between skepticism and assent while affirming alternative choices such as ethos and pathos. Booth argues, “We can, indeed we must, assent to the validity of some values, while remembering warnings that our version of any of them as the *only* true conception is always questionable” (“Limits” 381). A powerful women’s rhetorical example is Dorothy Allison’s *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* in which she asserts her version of her lived life and concludes that “*I can tell you anything. All you have to believe is the truth*” (94).

As teachers we need to give students boundaries, not rules, because it is within boundaries where students can be empowered by both knowing the limits, usually imposed in academia, and then can see the place where those boundaries can be transgressed, shifted, adhered to, etc., given the situation and writing project. Rules often provide a false dichotomy of right and wrong and limit the possibilities in many ways such as composing, supporting, addressing the audience, purposes, etc. Boundaries offer the possibility for expansion when students find the right alignment in their writing while



rules limit, constrict, and choke. Students need to learn to use rhetorical strategies to align many variables in order to be successful. Teachers don't want to give students so much freedom that they flounder around without direction but we also don't want to suffocate them. Women rhetors offer perfect examples of this because they often had to learn the larger expectations for language use and speaking and writing before they could begin to compose in a way that others might hear them. Although women learned these standard or classical expectations, they also broke boundaries, transgressed, and began to make space new rhetorical possibilities. Women rhetors have been shifting and pushing these boundaries for years but since their voices were often silenced or not valued in places like the academy and freshman writing classes, these new possibilities have not been engaged. Student writing outside the boundaries are seen as play or alternative or teachers don't have a way to value this writing. When students align with the best choices in all writing situation, when they are given all of the rhetorical choices, they can produce their best writing.

### **Action Leads to Agency**

The final method that I will briefly discuss in this chapter is the agency that results from engaging with the various women's rhetorical methods (audience, alignment, and affirmation). Through implementation of the women's rhetorical methods discussed in this dissertation and with future considerations of how women's rhetorical texts and theories can help improve feminist writing classrooms, students will continue to develop a variety of ways to gain the authority to speak and write. Agency as a method values the

actions that writers and speakers take when engaging in a process of writing as well as the establishment of clear purposes by teachers and students for a wide range of writing occasions. Students begin to see that engaging in the process by taking purposeful action can assist in the development of their agency.

Rhetorical agency deals with both the acts of the subject and how one becomes a subject. Within composition theory, agency is considered in a variety of contexts in conjunction with authority, ethos, standpoint, subjectivity, and in a variety of other ways. This array of approaches and terms results from the myriad of ways that teachers try to help students develop into autonomous writing subjects. A working definition of agency for this dissertation and section might be: willing subjects, representing themselves by engaging in processes of action and of meaning making through language with the potential to influence others and/or make a difference. Again, the words to emphasize here would be “action” and “process” because the act of becoming an agent or gaining agency is ever changing and evolving. Rather than being acted upon the subject engages in the process of acting for or acting with, which manifests itself in different ways given the rhetorical situation. Rarely is student writing discussed without some consideration of how the theory or practice might encourage or prevent the writer or subject from gaining agency. This is equally true within feminist and critical pedagogies because, historically, not all people have been able to name and define themselves. The agency that results from acting is especially pertinent for women writers and speakers, as well as many “othered” groups, who have been denied access to defining their own personhood. Referring back to Quintilian, a rhetor is a “good man speaking well,” which is an

assumption that men with power or education would be the ones doing the acting and all “others” would need to develop methods to gain agency. Seeing writing as an empowering, purposeful act can shift the ways teachers and students develop agency.

In her essay “How Ought We to Understand the Concept of Rhetorical Agency? A Report from the ARS,” Cheryl Geisler recounts the focus of various discussions from a 2003 meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Society, which addressed current issues of agency in education. According to Geisler, a shift in perspective that seemed to occur at the meeting was that rather than looking at what rhetors lacked, the scholars started to look for “a richer understanding of rhetorical agency by examining how rhetors without taken-for-granted access do, nevertheless, manage to exercise agency” (11). It is this kind of shift in perspective that needs to happen when one endeavors to analyze the speaking and writing of women rhetors. Rather than focusing solely on how women were denied agency, it is more useful for feminist pedagogy and composition theory if writers and scholars look to see what strategies were employed to gain agency, which can then empower students. In the section of her essay on future direction for rhetorical studies, Geisler suggests that “Balancing concern for educating students in rhetorical agency while at the same time developing a society that grants agency more broadly may be one of the major challenges” (15). Through rhetorical consideration of the ways women speak and write, the resulting theories and methods can attend to Geisler’s suggestion and impact both the writing students within the academy as well as transfer over into larger society.

Agency as a rhetorical construct is a highly debated issue within rhetoric and composition. While many scholars and teachers would agree that helping students gain agency or authority in their writing is important, there is much disagreement about how to teach this. In her exploration of agency and revisionary expressivism, Michelle Bailif critiques approaches to agency that require the subject to embrace predetermined, socially defined positions in order to be considered active agents. She writes that, “Taking responsibility for one’s position and speaking from one’s position can be read as commanding that one remain ‘faithful’ to the place which one stands –assume it, embrace it, represent it – faithfully” (88). She continues on to argue that, “Speaking true to the place wherein you have already been spoken is not a point of departure, and this, I would argue, is not revolutionary, is not liberating, is not ethical” (88). While there is certainly value in her ideas about subject positions, especially since many people have been disenfranchised based on their gender or race, here she seemingly sets up a dichotomy between embracing the position that is defined for a person and rejecting or finding a point of departure. Rhetors, and students, should be presented with more options for developing their ethos and claiming their identities as speakers and writers. I would argue that women rhetors can provide models and ways of theorizing about agency through the embracing of both how a subject is socially defined and how the subject wishes to define herself. Agency should not simply help students conform to standards and norms but should also empower students to effect change through writing. The approach to valuing both is yet another dichotomy that women rhetors can help dissolve. This act is a result of not only the dissolution of binaries but is also the result of having clear purposes.

When students begin to develop purposes for their writing outside of the class they become even stronger agents for change. Failure to relay a purpose or help students develop a clear sense of purpose in the composition classroom can be a reason students are sometimes inhibited from gaining agency or employing it. In *Composition in the University*, Sharon Crowley suggests, as other scholars do, that one reason for first-year writing's tenuous position in the university is its status as a required course. Crowley argues that this positioning presents students with an artificial writing situation concerned with students producing writing for teachers to assess rather than providing authentic, motivating writing situations and experiences, and the result of this is that writing instruction does not "stick" (8). This critique is especially important to consider not only because of the way outside faculty view the course but also as composition reflects on what pedagogies best improve student writing. If students don't understand the purpose of a writing task and cannot think beyond the writing they are doing for the particular class then the skills they start to develop will not stay with them and transfer into future classes. It seems that when presented with writing opportunities in other classes, or in life, many students don't know how to apply what they learned in their composition classes. The incorporation of women's rhetorical texts that embrace more than one subject position and that act in the world and provide students with genuine examples, strategies, and writing experiences is one way writing teachers can begin to shift approaches to the classroom to help students gain agency by being able to apply what they learned in composition in other classes and the real world. For example, Sojourner Truth, actively constructs herself as both as both black and a woman in her speech in

which her purpose was to gain equal rights for all women: “and aren’t I a woman? Look at me!” (145). In her speech, “To the Troops at Tilbury,” Queen Elizabeth I, constructs herself in many ways, including both as a woman and as a leader, while pursuing her purpose of gaining the confidence of the troops and her people: “I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman; But I have the heart and stomach of a king” (49). Neither of these women let the subject positions that have been socially defined for them, based on things such as gender, race, and class, inhibit their ability to actively define who they are given the current purpose they are trying to achieve. In fact, not only do they define for themselves but they embrace the roles already defined for them and actively define their subject positions. A more contemporary example of this active, purposeful agency, which also combines all of the women’s rhetorical methods, is Dorothy Allison’s memoir, *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*, which is also excerpted in *Available Means*.

Allison’s memoir is a perfect culminating text to analyze for this section on the agency that results from the women’s rhetorical methods discussed in this dissertation because her work incorporates not only all of the methods but also a wide variety of women’s rhetorical strategies. In *Teaching Rhetorica* Ronald and Ritchie suggests that Allison “illustrates dramatically that women’s rhetorical contexts, situations, and exigencies demand different rhetorical strategies” (8); this memoir does all that and more. *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* provides teachers and students with a woman’s rhetorical text that exemplifies an author taking the action to name her history and demand her agency.

Allison begins with the simple phrase: “Let me tell you a story” (1) as she draws the reader into her memoir of “abuse, incest and hopelessness among the working-class poor white women in a South Carolina family” (Ronald and Ritchie 7). In the opening pages she uses her voice and her forthcoming story to question readers’ assumptions about epistemology and to draw together the divide between personal story and universal truth. Here there is no question that truth and knowledge emerge from her ideas and her personal experience as she declares, “I’m a storyteller. I’ll work to make you believe me...the story becomes the thing needed” (3). Through both acting to tell her story and walking the reader through the process and meaning of her life as it unfolds, Allison develops both her ethos and her rhetorical agency.

One traditional rhetorical strategy Allison reclaims to develop her ethos as a lesbian speaker is the use of repetition combined with her personal voice and experience. She uses this to continually reaffirm to the audience the things she knows from her lived experience. Interspersed throughout the book, set off in italics, Allison reminds the reader of “*Two or three things I know for sure...*” By the end of the memoir the cumulative list is far more than “two or three” and by then she has reinforced to the reader not only her credibility as the author but also her version of the story and the meaning she wants to give to her life. This is not her only use of repetition in the book. Additionally, Allison repeats the phrase “Let me tell you,” in which she continually asserts her position and authority as speaker – as storyteller.

Allison makes it clear throughout the book that if she had not taken the action to tell her own story that her life would have been defined for her. She gives value to both

the process of telling her stories and the necessary action she took to write them: “What I am here for is to claim my life, my mama’s death, our losses and triumphs, to name them for myself. I am here to claim everything I know, and there are only two or three things I know for sure” (52). Allison argues that without claiming this authority over her life the stories that would be told about her might “destroy me, erase me, mock and deny me” (71). In a most powerful statement she claims, “I am the only one who can tell the story of my life and say what it means” (70). Here readers see her agency, the authority she has over her life experience and how empowered she is as she recounts the tragedies and the triumphs. This example of her act of putting these words on the page, not necessarily in a linear, logical fashion in order to persuade her audience to believe one truth, but rather to see her process of naming and defining her life through writing, offers students and teachers a powerful rhetorical example.

Agency through action and process can mean many things in the writing classroom. This final method is a place where many of the methods start to come together. Student writing will benefit from the students seeing themselves both as part of a community (audience) and as active subjects (agency), which is something that women’s rhetorical methods offer. Reynolds argues that “Agency is not simply about finding one’s own voice but also about intervening in discourses of the everyday and cultivating rhetorical tactics that make interruption and resistance an important part of any conversation” (59). This is the resistance and interruption that I find most useful. When students can begin to act and write on not only within academic discourse but also in everyday discourse. Writing classes can help students to find their voice but then as



teachers we should also help students to understand the choices that are before them and help empower them in this decision making process to see that their words are a form of action.

Much of the discussion of agency argues for the students' need to gain agency in their writing but often students don't understand what they are gaining this agency for; students don't often identify a purpose worthy of addressing and so this not only makes agency difficult to attain but also to keep. Ronald and Ritchie in *Teaching Rhetorica* suggest that with women's rhetorics sees or gets the "immediacy of experience and action, attached to meaning" (12). Texts like Allison's memoir and many of the selections in *Available Means* illustrate what it looks like to write and speak for a purpose. Allison's purpose is multi-layered but she is writing to name her story and her life as a way of resisting the narrative that would most likely be imposed on a poor, abused, lesbian woman. By analyzing examples, such as Allison's, teachers can help insure that writing assignments early in the semester clearly define the purpose for students so they have a sense of what they are aiming for and why. As the semester progresses and classes have more discussions about purpose through the analysis of various texts, teachers can ask students to define their purposes in their writing. This skill is one they will need not only for future classes but also for real world writing. When students develop the ability to clearly define purposes their writing will have more clarity and substance and will begin to seek out the ways they can use writing skills to effect change on a larger scale.

Additionally with this method, I am specifically arguing that students can gain agency by taking the action to become better writers. When they see the potential that

writing holds, that the act of writing is actually doing something in the world, that it is a generative activity and that things can result from writing, students can begin to shift their perspectives. Gerda Learner argues what most composition teachers know, “Writing is learned by doing; there is no escaping that” (42). With this method I am arguing that students not only need to have a purpose in order to gain agency but also suggesting that feminist composition needs to build a foundation on the merging of process pedagogy with a rhetorical approach to teaching composition. Agency through action is closely related to process theory, which is something expressivists and most feminists value in education. According to Melanie Sperling in *Theorizing Composition*, ““Process Theory’ makes the assumption that writing is more than the sum of its formal textual part...texts are shaped by these processes and help shape the processes in return” (243). So it is the practice, the progression, the method, or the taking of the action, which is vital to the (writing) pedagogy rather than simply focusing on the outcome. As a teacher I see the value in students trying to develop their writing because I know that although I might not see the fruits of those efforts during the current semester with the student, if they continue to take the actions, they will gain the desired result. In his discussion of the rhetoric of assent, in explaining why the final decision is not his focus, Peter Elbow writes,

We’re both interested in the process of *changing our own minds*...For me, it means creating a change *in* our minds through playing the believing and doubting games. In order to play, you have to out your mind through the changes – and playing will create a change in the end (“Bringing” 392).

This slight shifting in perspective, with the help of women’s rhetorical models and methods, can help teachers and composition programs to figure out ways to put more

of a value on process. One way to think about action and writing or pedagogy is that taking the action to engage in the process with the eventual goal of becoming a better writer is an act which can give agency. Fifteen weeks is a short time to make significant change and progress, but we need to convince students that in taking the action towards the goals of shifting their writing they will make significant strides. Krista Ratcliffe argues that: “Instead, what is understood about the move from awareness to action is that students and teachers have to repeat it again and again, given different times and different spaces” (157). Just like women rhetors who spoke on subjects such as a right to education or to vote the result was not immediate but the action toward the goal built upon itself until the desired goal was a reality. Students need to understand that they need to take these actions over and over again. Women’s rhetorics exemplify why this is necessary. Just as the right to vote or to an education was not won with one letter or one speech, neither will all the issues our students are writing about. And the point is not always the result with writing, but the practice of engaging in the process of trying to become a better reader or writer or speaker.

Also, writing as action can clearly be shown and modeled with women writers. Models of women writers can help students see how writing is accomplishing something; it is doing something. Teachers can use the inspiration from these women rhetors to remind ourselves that we are doing more than simply teaching students how to succeed in academia but we are helping provide students with skills and methods that make a difference in the real world. Students are inspired by real world application more than we think. This can help to broaden goals and purpose in classroom.

## Considerations

While women's rhetorical methods offer a variety of liberating possibilities to feminist pedagogy in the composition classroom, there are some issues that emerged during the writing of this dissertation. One of the most important issues is the question of whether or not to name women's rhetorical methods "women's" in the classroom. As a feminist writing teacher, I struggle with whether not there is more value in drawing a clear distinction between the kinds of rhetorical methods presented in the composition classroom or presenting all methods on an even playing field. Do teachers need to name the rhetorical methods and strategies "masculine" and "feminine"? Is there a risk in only naming the alternative rhetoric "feminine" and allowing the masculine to retain the traditional, default position of power? Some teachers who employ a feminist pedagogy argue that gender needs to be at the forefront of the pedagogy and classroom. Ratcliffe writes that, "Pedagogically, exposure makes gender visible in classroom discussions, whether as a category of analysis or as a position of speaking and writing" (158). For some, that gender awareness is the key to a successful feminist pedagogy, but when I think about the writing class, I wonder how true this is. I see the value and importance of discussing power issues in regards to language and meaning making, but should be the most important goal in a writing classroom be an awareness of gender difference? Will that help my students gain more agency and become better writers? Can we recognize the difference without naming it?

In her essay "The Reproduction of Othering," Laura Brady touches on this issue of naming in relationship to some important women's pedagogical texts such as, *The*

*Reproduction of Othering, In a Different Voice, and Women's Ways of Knowing*, in order to explore how women's texts and methods are othered. Brady analyzes an interview with Mary Belenky in which Belenky was asked about her use of the term "women's ways." Belenky responds by arguing that the world is already rigidly defined in binaries and dualisms and that it is important when studying women to be clear that the topic is women. She also suggests that just because these practices or ways were identified by studying women does not mean other groups cannot or are not using them the methods and strategies. From one perspective, this can get problematic because of the hierarchies and unequal positioning and one would assume that most men would not want to be identified as using a woman's way of knowing. Brady asserts that the problem with naming difference is not inherent in the naming and that it is possible to use others as referents in order to see contrast (21). But at this juncture, how possible it is that new terms will be developed that will not fall lower on the hierarchy?

So it is with this issue about unequal positioning that I am concern about with naming women's rhetoric "women's rhetoric" in the classroom. Do freshman composition students need to attach gender to the different strategies and methods they are using? What is the value? Or by not naming, but integrating the voices, methods, and strategies can teachers begin to change the landscape of discourse used in the university? Can composition teachers use women's rhetorical tools without naming them in order to change the master's house? Perhaps the composition classroom is not the place to fully take on the politics of the issue with our students.

Here is an example to show why I think the specific dualistic naming could be problematic for the kinds of change that could result from the integration of women's rhetorical methods. In a classroom discussion or peer review of a student paper, the discussion might consider a stylistic choice that the author made such as the way the student author affirms opposing positions. If the strategies or method can immediately be determined to be woman's rhetorical strategy, named so because of the rigid dualism already in place, the use of this strategy, especially by a male student, might be seen as a weaker strategy or something that should be revised out of the paper. Just as with Carol Gilligan's work, although the intent in naming the gender is not to suggest essentialism or promote inequality, the structure in place encourages this to happen. Rather than reinforcing binaries, the goal of the feminist composition classroom should be to remove the power these rigid binaries hold, which can begin to happen by changing the language and discourse our students compose in while suggesting strategies on an even playing field.

The issue of how to name the methods and strategies within the composition classroom is an issue for further consideration and study. What has become clear throughout my process of writing this dissertation is how intimately connected all of the women's rhetorical methods and how the implementation of women's rhetorical texts and theories can help bridge the gap between feminism and composition by attending to a wide variety of dichotomies. This implementation of women's rhetorical methods offers opportunities and possibilities for feminist pedagogy to positively impact the composition classroom, the field, and possibly the university.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION: POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

In the last chapter of her book *Composition in the University: Historical and Polemical Essays*, Sharon Crowley concludes with a suggestion for a refocusing of the universally required first-year writing course. She proposes that writing teachers should look to the advantages of ancient rhetoric for pedagogical considerations in the writing classroom. Here Crowley makes no mention of women's rhetorics, a discipline that was still developing at the time she was publishing this text (1998). If Crowley had expanded and acknowledged feminist rhetoric as a field alongside ancient rhetoric, or expanded her notion of rhetoric to include women then her proposition for a return to the central role of rhetoric—both women's and ancient—would have better attended to her earlier critique of the purpose of composition pedagogy where she argues that the universal requirement of a first-year writing course “has nothing to do with what students need and everything to do with the academy's image of itself as a place where a special language is used” (257). By suggesting that ancient rhetoric might better inform writing programs Crowley misses the mark by reinforcing this “special language” consisting of argument-based, linear, masculine, academic discourse, rather than employing methods that might shape students “as the people they are, people who have differing histories and traditions and languages and ideologies” (9). While Crowley does recognize some of the limitations of classical

rhetoric for modern composition theory, she does so in the second to last paragraph of her conclusion in which she suggests that ancient rhetorical theory should be “exploited with caution” (264). Her basic critique here is that ancient rhetoric is limited because it was developed for men of certain classes to speak to limited audiences using mostly logical reasoning. She writes, “Classical rhetorical theory was devised a long time ago in cultures that were rigidly classbound and whose economies depended upon slavery. They were invented for the use of privileged men, speaking to relatively small audiences” (264). This critique opens up the space for consideration of how alternative rhetorical approaches and new languages can compliment and bring balance to somewhat limited, traditional composition theory. Women’s rhetorical methods in the feminist writing classroom, and in fact, in *all* composition classrooms, value the student, their histories and languages, and their differences. In addition to a positive impact on the writing classroom, the infusion of these methods can have a multitude of implications for the department, for the university and for composition scholarship.

### **Classroom: Expanding “Toolboxes” and Rethinking Academic Discourse**

There are many implications that result from a consideration of how women’s rhetorical methods help feminist classrooms rethink what was previously considered alternative and help teachers to value difference in language. Students’ “toolboxes” of strategies expand with opportunities to compose in a variety of discourses, which result in teachers and writing program administrators rethinking the role of academic discourse in the composition classroom. By incorporating women’s rhetorical methods, teachers will



be able to expand upon the scholarship by African-American rhetorics and composition theorists such as Geneva Smitherman, Lisa Delpit and Keith Gilyard as well as current ESL theorists, to develop strategies to value students' home languages. This will continue to aid in the revision of acceptable discourse in the academy, while students' rhetorical choices for their composing and revising continue to expand and empower students to become active, purposeful agents both in the composition classroom and beyond. Women's rhetorics opens up the strategies and possibilities for student thinking, composing, and revising, which may result in a revision of not only academic discourse but real world language usage as well.

Typically the goal of the composition classroom is to help students become better writers but a more manageable aim might be the expansion of student's writing toolboxes, and by toolboxes I mean the resources and strategies students can call upon in future writing situations. Often the objective is to see some sort of mastery in the final product where students develop into stronger writers, but the reality that most teachers know consists of limited improvements observed or achieved over the course of one or two semesters. Rather than students leaving the composition class with a narrow understanding of only masculine, traditional, argumentative discourse, which they may struggle within their own compositions, they can see this discourse as one of many options they might call upon if appropriate in future situations. For example, this toolbox would contain all of the appeals, with logos on an even playing field with pathos and ethos, with a student's knowledge of how to mix these appeals to discover new ways of examining the rhetorical situation. Also included would be an understanding of the

method of affirmation, which a student might use in a variety of situations that call on her to validate herself, her knowledge, or her audience. While argument would certainly be included as a strategy, it would not be a student's "go to" solution, nor would the five-paragraph essay. Many composition classes ask students to engage in some sort of personal writing assignments, which can put students in positions that ask them to reveal or disclose things about themselves that they may not want to share, such as sexuality, family background, or embarrassing moments of the past. With the expanded toolbox of rhetorical options, teachers and students have a multitude of ways to develop their ethos, places from which to write, methods to both subvert and accommodate the assignment, as well as methods to both conceal and reveal in a way that empowers the student to be an active agent in the writing process for a specific purpose. Students are then able to decide upon purposes more confidently with the assurance of a variety of means to reach them.

This toolbox is a representation of the dissolution of the binary of traditional versus alternative strategies; the toolbox embraces all strategies on an even playing field. Through the composition class, and a variety of teachers' methods, students are empowered to make choices rather than just take on academic discourse. In "Whose Culture? Whose Literacy?" Keith Walter argues that "Traditionally...school has set up a false dichotomy, forcing non-mainstream students to choose one—the "correctness" of the school and its practices—or the other—the "ignorance" of native and natural ways of using language and literacy" (Odell 159). By bringing together a variety of language usages, voices, and approaches to speaking and writing, through women's rhetorical methods and texts, students who struggle with nontraditional language practices will

more likely thrive in an environment that values what they bring to the table. Women rhetors were, and are, often in the margins as speakers and writers, so they had to develop strategies in order to be heard. Students are often marginalized in similar ways either by race, class, sexuality, or even just as new students within the university, so the strategies and approaches that women rhetors employ, even just in their fight to be educated, can resonate with student writers on many levels. These strategies abound in women's rhetorical texts, such as Sojourner Truth's speech when she states, "nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles or gives me any best place...and aren't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm!" (144-145). Truth speaks to the way she is made to feel out of place by those who do not view her as a woman and through this acknowledgement gains an audience for her ideas. It is these types of models and strategies that will help students develop into more purposeful writers.

As discussed in chapter four, another way that women's rhetorics attends to the gap between feminist pedagogy and composition studies is by reading women's rhetorical texts as theory and even introducing some of the texts as models and readings in the classroom. The use of these texts can help teachers introduce new approaches and activities to the classroom. Through the introduction of a wide variety of strategies and the valuing of different voices in the classroom, women's rhetorical methods may begin to shift the larger purposes and goals of the writing classroom and composition studies as well. Just as the introduction of the process movement started as a pedagogical approach to the classroom, to find that its influence moved from the classroom to impact the goals and tenets of the composition studies, the return to a more rhetorical approach that

employs women's rhetorical methods through equality and balance has an impact on the field at large. Crowley argues that the purpose of the composition class has been to "shape students to behave, think, write, and speak as students rather than as the people they are, people who have differing histories and traditions and languages and ideologies" (9). She contends that the course serves to discipline students to a specific kind of academic discourse that is concise, explanatory, qualified and logical, and this is especially true when the main goal of the composition classroom is to develop writers proficient in academic discourse. When academic discourse becomes one of the goals rather than the central goal (the discipline of rhetoric and composition has always embraced many goal for the composition classroom), students are no longer molded into one kind of student but rather "people," as Crowley suggests, who make active, aligned decisions that validate their roles in the process and in the world.

### **Department: Rethinking Assessment**

Women's rhetorics assists in a rethinking of the role of assessment in the writing classroom. In my own experience, I would often slip into role of the teacher who gave higher grades because the student worked hard or the grade reflected the relationship I had with the student, who was kind, nice, dedicated, etc., but it did not reflect the final product. When I realized this, I knew I needed to change my approach. In her essay "Why I (Used to) Hate to Give Grades," Lynn Z. Bloom discusses the various reasons that grades are misleading and "big trouble." One important point she makes is that grades "undermine good teaching" (364). To a certain extent this is true because, as she

suggests, students want to be told what to do and they aim to give teachers what they want in exchange for a good grade. Students who “engage in that transaction they give up both passion and concern,” which is what most teachers don’t want, especially writing teachers enacting a feminist pedagogy. Given the expectations of the programs and institutions that I taught for, which often let instructors know that the average grade for first-year writing is a grade of C, I began to shift the way I approached grading and my usual As and Bs turned into Cs, and often Ds. I began to use a list of specific criteria that students were required to meet with each essay, and I often referred students back to the course outcomes in my feedback and final comments. My comments to students began to reflect how they could adhere to the guidelines instead of recognizing what their piece of writing was doing well and how I could help the student improve on what they were trying to accomplish. I was helping to produce the students I didn’t want: the ones who only want to please me. This is where women’s rhetorics intercedes with assessment by helping bridge this binary of what the student wants and needs versus what the teacher and institution demand. Women’s rhetorics offers feminist teachers clear ways to value difference and offers ways to integrate reflection into various stages off the process, which leads to implications for the grading aspect of teaching writing. When women’s rhetorics helps shape the content and aims of the composition classroom, how teachers and institutions assess student writing will need to shift.

Through the integration of more reflection, grades can and should reflect more than a student’s ability to compose an A paper or simply meet teacher’s expectations. By exemplifying how women rhetors had to reflect on their rhetorical approaches in many

different ways, women's rhetorics help negotiate the needs of the students who often want good grades at any cost and the teachers who want to fairly and accurately assess students' writing. In her book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*, Kathleen Yancey argues that teachers need to see "reflection as a means toward making possible to help students learn about writing as they learn to write" (20). Her idea attends to the critique levied against social or cultural pedagogies for not focusing on the goal of improving student writing, by suggesting a process and product that centers on writing instruction. Yancey sees this turn towards expanding the role of reflection as positively impacting composition through opening up curricula options, holding students accountable for their writing, allowing students to "articulate [within] their own native languages," seeing reflection as "process and product," and helping students to theorize about their own writing (18-19).

For a variety of reasons women rhetors have in the past and continue to constantly reflect on their approaches and strategies when writing and speaking. Historically, many women had not acquired the necessary rhetorical writing and speaking instruction and had to reflect on others' usage to develop their own strategies. Given the shifting roles of the speakers from male to female, and the adjustment to a variety of factors including topics, such as education and rights, women were constantly reevaluating how best to reach audiences. For example, Patricia Williams' essay, "The Death of the Profane," reveals her process of reflection both on the incident at the Benetton store and its impact on her life and her writing about the incident for personal and public reasons. She considers how she decided what to include and how her approach to the topic had to shift based on a

variety of rhetorical factors. In order to examine how she conceals and reveals within her writing based on changes given the audience and the situation, she writes about her experience through multiple genres such as: in her personal journal; in an article for a symposium; and then in an essay for a law school conference reflecting on how she might further develop this topic for a law review. The evolution of Williams' ideas and words through her reflection on her experience and her writing offers writing teachers opportunities to theorize about the role of reflection in their classrooms. Because women constantly reflect and refine their practices, the measure of their achievement resides not in their adherence to tradition or correctness, but in their individual efforts for success in the strategies they employ. One way to implement this approach of reflection into classroom practice is by having students deliberate on the choices they make through the writing process on the drafts and the final product. Many times students can explain and offer sensible rationale for the choices they made in their writing even if those moves are not clearly on the page. When I assess if a student can explain the methods and strategies they tried to use in their paper, even if they are not completely successful, I can still give credit because the students learned the concepts and attempted in their writing. This shift in assessment helps to merge the process/product divide by valuing both the student who can accomplish the task and the student who understands and attempts but still turns in a work in progress. Teacher assessment that includes measures for success versus correctness opens up possibilities for students' writing that may not be something accurately demonstrated at the end of one semester.

This dissertation reflects upon the varying trends across women's writing and speaking in order to develop broad methods that feminist writing teachers might apply to their pedagogy. Teachers and students need to be open to reflecting on what emerges from engagement in the writing process rather than holding narrow expectations for final products. In her essay about grading, Bloom quotes Annie Dillard to suggest that teachers should "encourage and accommodate writing that is full of, in Annie Dillard's words, 'unwrapped gifts' for the teacher and 'free surprises' for the authors, writing what they care about" (365). Ultimately, most teachers want students who care about their writing, but in order for this to happen methods of assessment need to evolve. As Chris W. Gallagher argues in *Radial Departures*, "pedagogy is a process of shared and reflexive inquiry that must be co-constructed by those who engage in it" (xxii). Teachers and students can begin to rethink the role of grades when they focus on reflection as a process.

### **Scholarship: Reinforcing the value of interdisciplinary work**

Women's rhetoric helps improve feminist pedagogy by narrowing the divide with composition studies as well as valuing difference and rethinking assumptions not only in the classroom but also in the scholarship. The infusion of women's rhetorical methods helps to reinforce the value of interdisciplinary work and opens up the possibility for a variety of scholarship opportunities within composition. As James Slevin argues in *Introducing English: Essay in the Intellectual Work of Composition*, teachers and scholars need to shift the framework to see "composition as a discipline of practices and



activities, and not as a guild, makes it not something you work *in* but something you work *with*” (48); the idea being that one can more easily work *with*, rather than *in*, more than one discipline at a time. Although often denied disciplinary status, the fields of women’s rhetorics, composition and feminist theory are interdisciplinary and are constantly evolving, shaping and informing each other. One of the reasons that all of these disciplines work so well together is because since their inception they have remained interdisciplinary in nature. By working together to help improve composition, a women’s rhetorics-based feminist pedagogy helps to reinforce the importance of interdisciplinary scholarship in the academy.

Historically, the academy privileged disciplinary work that focused on singular bodies of knowledge in research and publishing more so than interdisciplinary work and scholarship on teaching. Academia’s dominant narrative suggests a pedagogical imperative in scholarship and therefore devalued composition because of its interdisciplinary nature. Conversely, composition demonstrates many interdisciplinary studies that have improved the way composition teachers approach language and learning within academia. One study specifically is *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* by Shirley Brice Heath in which she studied the home communities and literacy and language practices of students in Piedmont Carolina. This ethnographic study was instrumental in examining how cultural communities impact children’s language development. The study helped encourage subsequent inquiries and scholarship focused on improving the academic success of working class and minority students through a change in educational methods. Because of its influential role,

composition's foundation in interdisciplinary work is something scholars in the field should continue to pursue and highlight rather than abandon. This argument echoes the goal Slevin set out in his more recent book, which is to emphasize composition's "inclusiveness and commitment to inclusiveness," which is something that women's rhetorics brings to both the composition studies and reinforces with interdisciplinary research.

Women's rhetorics helps to reinforce the importance of interdisciplinary studies, while also attending to Slevin's contention that a goal of composition should be to redefine institutional concepts of disciplines. He argues that this goal should "make the discipline of composition not just a model but *the* model for other academic disciplines" (162). Composition may begin to have a larger institutional impact on the defining and remaking of the disciplines by playing to its strengths in interdisciplinary pursuits both in scholarship and in classroom practices, and through the implementation of women's rhetoric and their methods.

### **Historical: Evolving notions of what it means to be a service course**

The above issues of interdisciplinarity and scholarship are closely tied to the reasons why composition is framed as a service course in the university or, as Gallagher suggests, how composition and rhetoric has for sometime been "the undervalued stepchild of English Studies" (109). Part of this notion developed from the historical perspective that composition studies developed to serve the needs of both the university and the student. This notion positions composition as a service course at the mercy of

other “real” or valued disciplines within the university. Composition’s status, as far as disciplinarity, hovers in between the desire, by many, to be considered a respected discipline in order to belong to the academy, and the rejection of disciplinarity because rather than maintain and transfer a body of knowledge, composition participates in the constant creation of intellectual knowledge that is ever evolving. Again, this is another dichotomous relationship which compounds the marginalization of composition by setting up the binary of “disciplinarity-as-instrumental-service and disciplinarity-as-ivory-towerism” (119). Women’s rhetorical methods first shatter the binary by complicating this notion of service. Historically women speakers and writers have voiced in the service of a cause greater than the individual and it is this perspective that can help shift notions of service in the academy.

Interestingly, in his essay “Let’s Do the Numbers,” Robert Miller argues that if composition were to “abandon the ethic of service that defines the field” (Gallagher 118), he fears the result would be more of focus on scholarship through individual projects that reinforce “ivory tower version of disciplinarity...while abandoning the needs of students” (Gallagher 118). Just as composition scholars should not abandon interdisciplinary scholarship, they should also not be so quick to reject the role of service in composition studies. Composition needs to revise, or re-see, the role of service despite the many scholars who argue to the contrary. One of those voices, for example, is Michael Murphy who argues in his essay “After Progressivism,” that composition’s failure to attain disciplinary status is a result of its ethic of service: composition cannot serve its own purposes if it adheres to what the institution requires. While to some extent this may be

true, Slevin complicates ideas like this one regarding the emergence of composition as a service to the university. He suggests that the discipline of composition was invented by students with faculty and “developed in response to the work we [students and teachers] required of one another” (54) rather than for the needs of the student and university. This notion that composition developed as a service *for* those who need the service *by* those who needed the service-teachers and students-gives more agency to the discipline. The incorporation of women’s rhetorical methods can further support this train of thought as well as help composition studies rethink what it is we serve, such as critical thinking, choice and agency.

Historically, the majority of women’s speaking and writing has been composed in the service of greater societal problems such the right to education, healthcare, or suffrage and if a woman wrote or spoke in a more individualistic manner there was a clear connection to some larger societal issue, because for women the personal is political. While their speaking and writing can be viewed as service, the fact that women composed for a greater societal good that often included themselves, both the individual and the larger community, can begin to help students and teachers re-see what service can look like. Such a realization can help demonstrate to students as to how they can make a difference through defining a clear purpose in their writing. *Available Means* is full of women’s letters, speeches, and essays that speak out in the service of others. As is the case with most women’s writing and speaking, both the occasion and purpose for women’s words is clearly evident. Students see the importance of not only service but also purpose by reading texts such as Mary Astell’s “From *A Serious Proposal to*

*Ladies*,” where she argues for women’s rights to education or Ida B. Well as she calls for the end to lynching or Andrea Dworkin as she demands twenty-four hours without rape. By reading and analyzing women’s rhetorical models, students can begin to see that these women were active agents in their service and really made a difference. For composition, a shift can occur when students understand that their ideas and writing have potential, and that writing is actually doing something.

It is not just in the academy but in many contexts that “service” has a bit of a negative connotation: those who break the law can be required to do community service; faculty are required to provide some sort of, usually undesirable, service to the university; when a person’s car has a problem it is taken in for service; waiters and waitresses must meet customers’ needs and desires or serve them; and usually the idea of service is coupled with the thought of little or no compensation, therefore of no value. Composition needs to co-opt the term “service” in order to overturn the idea that this is a negative concept. Just as Gallagher asks that compositionists rethink the definition of the word “discipline,” which was originally directly connected to teaching and learning rather than simply indicating a body of (often) static knowledge, composition scholars need to rethink this idea of what it means to service. Women’s rhetors can help teachers and students see the value of service. Perhaps as notions of service begin to shift on a smaller level they will spread throughout the university

In recent years, the gap between feminist pedagogy and composition has widened and both fields have struggled to move from the margins to the center of the university. Much of this positioning is the result of a variety of dichotomies that polarize the fields

from each and from the larger university. The integration of women's rhetorical methods can not only help dissolve these dichotomies but also improve feminist writing classrooms by offering balanced strategies and techniques that open up possibilities for students' critical thinking within composition, and in return create a positive impact on the field's position within the university.

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