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Introduction. Actions Un/Becoming a Feminist Administrator: Troubled Intersections of Feminist Principles and Administrative Practices

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INTRODUCTION

Actions Un/Becoming a Feminist Administrator: Troubled Intersections of Feminist Principles and Administrative Practices

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Performing Feminist Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies articulates multiple tactics that rhetoric and composition scholar-teachers may employ to perform feminist administration.¹ The idea for this book emerged at the 2003 Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference in Columbus, OH, when we were drinking coffee, reminiscing about graduate school days at The Ohio State University, and commiserating about current administrative duties. We had recently redesigned first-year writing programs at our respective institutions.² But, interestingly, we found ourselves talking not about program design, but rather about the tensions we noted between our deeply held feminist beliefs and our daily administrative duties. Among other things, we talked about balancing day care and day jobs, about being perceived as moms on the job, counseling young female teaching assistants in their search for classroom authority (especially in situations when their authority is challenged by undergraduate men), and trying to make contentious issues, such as gender's intersections with race, class, age, or technology, visible in a program-wide curriculum. More selfishly, we questioned whether the tensions we noted between our deeply held feminist beliefs and our daily administrative performances engendered actions un/becoming a feminist administrator.

This question, spurred not by guilt, but by a genuine desire to improve our performances as feminist administrators, led us to express a desire for an administrative primer for performing feminist administration in rhetoric

and composition studies. Granted, the past decade has witnessed an ongoing scholarly conversation about feminism and administration within educational circles and within rhetoric and composition studies. Education scholarship³ includes publications on feminist theory, feminist practice, and feminist leadership. Rhetoric and composition scholarship⁴ exposes how feminists have administered writing programs,⁵ writing centers,⁶ learning centers, and other university sites, many doing so at their own peril within institutions that value publication more than administrative service. However, because no one book has focused solely on performing feminist administration in rhetoric and composition studies, the idea for this collection emerged as a means to fill that gap.

This collection's focus is unique because it analyzes how performing feminist administration is complicated by the politics of multiple locations: (a) administrative locations, (b) institutional locations, and (c) cultural locations.

The first location—administrative location—is an important consideration in performing feminist administration because rhetoric and composition faculty often find themselves impressed into all kinds of administrative service, not just writing program administrator work. Thus, contributors were invited to write from different administrative locations (e.g., writing program administration, writing center administration, writing across the curriculum administration, departmental administration, higher administration, and national administration as journal editors or organization officers).

The second location—institutional location—is an important consideration in performing feminist administration because administrative location is always complicated by institutional status or rank (i.e., whether the administrator is a graduate student, adjunct faculty, untenured faculty, or tenured faculty, either associate and full professor). Thus, contributors from a variety of these institutional locations were invited to discuss how the power differentials of these locations affect their performing feminist administration.

The third location—cultural location—is an important consideration when performing feminist administration because administrative and institutional locations are always inflected by cultural locations, such as gender. Thus, contributors were invited to address how gender intersects with other cultural categories, such as age, class, race, institutional reputation, and so on, in their performances of feminist administration.

This collection's focus on performing feminist administration from a variety of administrative, institutional, and cultural locations enables contributors to analyze the often-troubled intersections of feminist principles and administrative practices. To explore these troubled intersections, contributors make the following moves in their chapters:

- Identify issues of concern,
- Share experiences and contextual knowledge,
- Theorize these experiences in light of feminist thought and practice, and
- Offer pragmatic recommendations for performing feminist administration.

It is important to note, however, that contributors do not all agree on their feminist principles or their administrative practices: Indeed, a strength of this collection is that the chapters challenge one another and, we hope, readers.

Given this focus, this collection forwards three claims about performing feminist administration. First, gendered issues still exist within rhetoric and composition studies, thus validating the need for performing feminist administration. Second, all feminist administrative performances are historically and institutionally situated, yet the examples in this collection may serve as models that readers may adapt for their own situations when deemed appropriate. Third, the dominant trope that emerges for performing feminist administration is oxymoron (i.e., the ability to keep two conflicting ideas in one's head at the same time and to engage that conflict as a springboard for productive feminist action).

THEORETICAL GROUNDING: LOCATION AND PERFORMANCE

This collection's focus on administrative, institutional, and cultural locations is inspired, in part, by Adrienne Rich's concept of a politics of location and, in part, by Judith Butler's theory of performativity.

In "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," Adrienne Rich posits the concept of a politics of location as a materialist feminist stance that holds both feminists and feminist theories accountable for the situatedness of their own knowledge production. More than a naive standpoint theory that assumes all members of a cultural group experience life similarly, Rich's politics of location starts with the body, a particular body (her own), as it occupies multiple cultural locations that are both communal and particular (i.e., not only does she inhabit the cultural multiple locations women, American citizen, half-Jewish, mother, lesbian, poet, etc., but she also experiences these cultural categories and their intersections in particular ways that form her own particular identity; 212–213). Although Rich acknowledges common socialization that women (and men) encountered in the United States in the last half of the 20th century, she emphasizes that her

politics of location are a reflective praxis through which a person may learn to recognize and analyze not just her common socialization, but also his particular identifications with that socialization—identifications that, in turn, shape his or her identity. When such recognition, analysis, and articulation render socialization visible, possibilities emerge for a person to reinforce, revise, and/or interrupt the socialization.

If we lay Rich's politics of location alongside Butler's theory of performance, then Rich's reinforcing, revising, and/or interrupting may be read as performances of identity. Both Rich and Butler would agree that names (e.g., *woman*, *white*, *U.S. citizen*, *WPA*) are associated with already-existing, yet mutable, cultural scripts (i.e., scripts for gender, scripts for race, scripts for nationality, scripts for writing program administration). But Butler further explains how a person's performing such scripts constructs a person's identity. For example, in terms of gender, she describes the performance of such scripts as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (*GT* 44). From this theoretical stance, identity is not grounded solely in a person's preexisting interiority, but rather emerges in a person's conscious and unconscious performances of cultural scripts, which function as "highly rigid regulatory frame[s]" (44). From this theoretical stance, identity is not a fixed essence that precedes performances but rather is an on-going construction that emerges via performances (25). From this theoretical stance, agency and restrictions on agency arise not solely from individual will, but rather from whatever acts are allowed (or disallowed) within cultural scripts; more importantly, because such scripts are internalized within a person's body through identifications and disidentifications, agency arises from gaps that emerge when such internalized scripts collide with each other and/or with a person's bodily experiences (*GT* 187). Thus, a person's performances generate an endless play of (dis)identifications that continually constructs a person's identity.

With Rich and Butler in mind, contributors to this collection challenge themselves and readers to recognize and analyze multiple performances of feminist administration (particularly the collision of feminist principles and administrative practice) and, thus, perform their own scripts of feminist administration.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

This collection contains 14 chapters that examine how feminist administration may be performed in various administrative, institutional, and cultural locations within rhetoric and composition studies.

Part I. The Politics of Connecting Ethics, Theory, and Praxis

Part I questions how ethics, theory, and praxis converge (or not) when one performs feminist administration. In "What's Ethics Got to Do with It?: Feminist Ethics and Administrative Work in Rhetoric and Composition" (chap. 1), Carrie Leverenz identifies four key tenets of feminist theory—(a) standpoint theory, (b) care, (c) the concrete other, and (d) process, which she argues may inform administrative work in Rhetoric and Composition *if* these tenets are revised for current historical moments and particular locales. Rejecting the idea of a feminist administrative utopia (what *would* such a site look like?, she asks), Leverenz addresses three challenges to feminist administration: (a) institutionalized assumptions about what a good administrator is, (b) resistance from "concrete others," and (c) a woman's own assumptions about what a good administrator is. Echoing Leverenz's concern with utopian visions, Jeanne Gunner in "Checking the Source(book): Supplemental Voices in the Administrative Genre" (chap. 2), defines *administrative genre* as a site where writers are encouraged to promote a utopian vision (i.e., to "assume and reproduce an ahistorical space and a politics of political cleansing, leading to a utopian valorization of seamlessness, transparency, and a uniform *sensus communis*"). Although Gunner acknowledges her complicity in perpetuating this genre, she challenges it here by outing its partialness and searching for "supplemental ways of being in administrative roles," ways that are grounded in feminist theories, such as Gloria Anzaldúa's. Echoing Gunner's skepticism of the administrative genre, Sibylle Gruber, in "When Theory and Practice Collide: Becoming a Feminist Practitioner" (chap. 3) questions whether the feminist theories that many of us hold dear (such as Rich's, Butler's or Anzaldúa's) are actually productive grounds for feminist administration: Indeed, she provocatively argues that many of our best-loved feminist theories need to be revised given particular cultural locations and historical moments.

Part II. Performing WPA Work: Challenging Feminist Assumptions About Collaboration

Part II explores the role of collaboration in performing feminist writing program administration. In "Collaborative Writing Program Administration as Intellectual Inquiry" (chap. 4), Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Letizia Guglielmo (a tenured professor and a Ph.D. student/lecturer, respectively) argue that traditional feminist collaboration is a valid tactic for performing WPA work. Such collaboration, they argue, deemphasizes the

service function of a first-year writing course and elevates the course as a site of knowledge-making for teachers, scholars, and administrators. More skeptical about feminist collaboration as it plays out between composition WPAs and literature TAs, Christine Farris (a tenured full professor) invokes in "The Maternal Melodrama of Writing Program Administration" (chap. 5) the Barbara Stanwyck character, Stella Dallas, as a trope representing the gendered and classed position of WPAs within literature-based English departments. Like good mothers, such WPAs may efface the disciplinary rigor of composition to smooth the way for first-time teachers, whose professionalization is then completed and claimed by colleagues in literature. To resist this Stella Dallas trope, Farris offers a collaborative model for WPAs and TAs that negotiates the aforementioned power differentials. Even more skeptical of collaboration than the two preceding articles, Ilene Crawford and Donna Strickland (both assistant professors who once were graduate student WPAs) claim in "Interrupting Collaboration: Feminist Writing Program Administration and the Question of Status" (chap. 6) that collaboration between faculty WPAs and graduate student WPAs, although useful, should be "tempered" by interruption, which they offer as a necessary trope for feminist administration in that it provides agency "to disrupt . . . the bureaucratizing of the affective." In "Three Models of Mentorship: Feminist Leadership and the Graduate Student WPA" (chap. 7), Julie Nelson Christoph, Rebecca S. Nowacek, Mary Lou Odom, and Bonnie Smith (all former graduate student WPAs) critique tensions that confront GWPAs and their collaborative work not just with faculty and undergraduate students, but also with nonadministrative graduate student peers. To negotiate such tensions, these coauthors also offer three tactics of mentoring: (a) friendship, (b) guidance, and (c) diplomacy.

Part III. Performing WPA Work: Challenging Institutional Assumptions about Gender and Agency

Part III demonstrates how performing feminist administration requires an agency for negotiating feminist and traditional assumptions about gender. In "A Tale of Two Tech Chicks: Negotiating Gendered Assumptions About Program Administration and Technology" (chap. 8), Amy C. Kimme Hea and Melinda Turnley (both assistant professors) reflect on their experiences not only as graduate student administrators, but also as tech chicks: From this dual position, they identify troubled intersections of administration and technology in WPA work, explaining that both sites have masculinist histories that have been subject to recent scholarly critiques. Within these dual critiques, Kimme Hea and Turnley offer WPAs (especially those less technologically savvy than they) ways to reimagine

agency (i.e., ways to “complicate notions of technological mastery, which support deterministic, essentialist framings of agency and run counter to rhetorical, critical engagement with technology”). In “Managed Care: All-Terrain Mentoring and the ‘Good Enough’ Feminist WPA” (chap. 9), E. Shelley Reid (an assistant professor) defines how the intersections of her two administrative functions— untenured program director and teacher-mentor— intersect in ways that demand an agency for performing care. Consequently, she has learned to redefine *care*— “both personalized care and procedural justice”— in ways beneficial to both herself and the people she encounters daily. In “Defining Moments: The Role of Institutional Departure in the Work of a (Feminist) WPA” (chap. 10), Kathi Yancey (full professor) speaks across three different moments in her WPA career and reflects on the agency needed for institutional departure, which she defines as moments when she chose to leave not a WPA position, but an institution. She further reflects on the lessons learned from these moments, not the least of which being that such departures have “underscored [that] the agency I do have, . . . enhanced my work as a WPA, and through reflection, . . . brought a developing philosophy to my WPA work that in turn gives it a kind of coherence.”

Part IV. Performing WAC and WC Work: Challenging Spaces in the University and in Feminist Theory

Part IV explores how performing feminist administration in WAC programs and in WCs provide sites for revising not only traditional spaces within the university, but also traditional spaces within feminist theory. In “‘Where Else Should Feminist Rhetoricians Be?’: Leading a WAC Initiative in a School of Business” (chap. 11), Kate Ronald, Cristy Beemer, and Lisa Shaver (tenured WAC director and graduate student assistant directors, respectively) contend that the tensions “between content and context, boldness and modesty, leading and serving” provide sites for articulating sometimes contentious relationships between feminism and administration, as exemplified by their WAC project at Miami University of Ohio. Moreover, they argue that traditionally masculinist sites, such as their business school, are precisely where feminist rhetoricians should be to challenge the means and ends of knowledge production at the university and in U.S. culture. In another challenge to masculinist traditions, in “Centered Women: Gender and Power in the Writing Center” (chap. 12), Carol Mattingly and Paula Gillespie (tenured writing center directors) revisit early notions of feminist theory, such as collaboration and nurturing, that undergird much early writing center work to argue that, in our current cultural moment, the writ-

ing center may serve as a site for extending “such early feminist values by complicating them and, perhaps, extending feminist principles into situations outside the writing center.”

Part V. Performing Chair and Editorial Work: Challenging Institutional and Disciplinary Practices

Part V visits sites of administration other than WPA, WAC, and WC work where feminist administration may be performed in ways that revise institutional and disciplinary practices. In “Herding Cats: Feminist Practices and Challenges in Chairing an English Department” (chap. 13), Linda Hanson (a 13-year contract faculty who subsequently became a tenured faculty member and later chair of her department) discusses how the intersections of feminism, rhetoric, and writing pedagogy provided her with descriptors (e.g., *collaborative, inclusive, relational, faculty-centered, contextualized, dialogic, recursive, positive, and celebratory*) for feminist administration. These descriptors framed her work with colleagues to develop departmental community, reexamine departmental curriculum, and initiate more opportunities for faculty. Finally, in “*Computer and Composition Online: Feminist Community and the Politics of Digital Scholarship*” (chap. 14), Kristine Blair and Lanette Cadle (faculty journal editor and then graduate student assistant editor) explain how online journal editorship provides unique opportunities—via the submission process, active editing, and the promotion of open source scholarship—for feminist mentoring of men and women in their rhetoric and composition doctoral program at Bowling Green State University.

These chapters extend invitations for further research and online conversations. If you would like to contribute to these conversations, please visit our website at www.femadmin.org.

COMMON THREADS

When we reflected on common threads among contributors’ chapters, we realized that the dominant trope for performing feminist administration is oxymoron—the ability to keep two contradictory ideas in one’s mind and still function effectively. Although this trope is a time-honored definition of *intelligence*, as seen in Thomas Dewey’s progressive theory of education, this collection demonstrates that oxymoron is also a time-honored presumption in performing feminist administration. Some oxymoronic link-

ages made by contributors focus on administrative mindsets: linking *grounding* and *flexibility* in feminist ethics, linking a *need for* and a *suspicion of* rhetorical theory as grounds for WPA work, and linking a *belief in* and a *skepticism about* existing feminist theories. Other oxymoronic linkages focus on administrative practices: linking *collaboration* and *interruption* in nonpeer administrative power dynamics, linking *silence* and *power* in women's gender-inflected identities, and linking *personal care* and *programmatically procedure* in faculty WPA's daily interactions with graduate and undergraduate students. The linkage that haunts all contributors' daily lives is the necessary linking of *mindsets* and *practices* (i.e., *talk* and *action*).

Together, contributors articulate oxymoronic linkages that expose troubled intersections of feminism and administration in rhetoric and composition studies. The contributors do not present these troubled intersections as failures or as opportunities for utopian solutions. Rather, they present these troubled intersections as sites of agency for challenging themselves, their colleagues, their students, their institutions, and the field of rhetoric and composition studies. Sometimes such challenges result in what the contributors consider productive results. Sometimes not. As such, this collection provides a rich, vital resource for graduate students, junior faculty, and senior faculty in rhetoric and composition studies. After all, scholar/teachers can administer only as well as we are prepared.

Ever aware of academic politics and the institutional constraints of promotion and tenure, contributors offer advice for navigating not just the competing demands of scholarship, teaching, service, and personal life, but also the troubled intersections of feminist principles and administrative practices—troubled intersections that arise when one performs feminist administration oxymoronicly. Each chapter suggests that these three moves constitute actions becoming a feminist administration: (a) recognizing troubled intersections of feminism and administration, (b) struggling with these intersections, and (c) negotiating them again and again and again. Indeed, each contributor's performance suggests that these three moves constitute actions becoming a feminist administrator.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. In this collection, *feminist administration* signifies the performance of an ideology that foregrounds gender as a lens for interpreting and acting justly within the world while recognizing that gender always exists in the presence of other lenses, such as race, class, nationality, age, and region (Bem).
2. For descriptions of Kris and Becky's writing programs, see www.marquette.edu/english/first-year/index.shtml; Ratcliffe, "Coming Out"; and www.english.ttu.edu/comp/default.asp?serial=1465.
3. Feminist scholarship in education includes *Managing Women* by Sue Adler, Jenny Laney, and Mary Packer; *Gender Images in Public Education* by Camille Stivers; and *Gender Matters in Educational Administration and Policy* by Jill Blackmore and Jane Kenway.
4. Feminist scholarship within rhetoric and composition studies includes chapters in Louise Phelps and Janet Emig's *Feminine Principles and Women's Experience in American Composition and Rhetoric*; chapters in Susan Jarratt and Lynn Worsham's *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*; chapters in Shirley Rose and Irwin Weiser's *The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher*; and notable articles, such as Marcia Dickson's "Directing Without Power: Adventures in Constructing a Model of Feminist Writing Program Administration" and Jeanne Gunner's "Decentering the WPA."
5. Recent scholarship on writing program administration has defined these problems more clearly (e.g., Rose and Weiser's *The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist*; Irene Ward and William Carpenter's *The Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators*; Linda Myers-Breslin's *Administrative Problem-Solving and Writing Centers*; Carol Hartzog's

Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration; Stuart C. Brown, Theresa Enos, and Catherine Chaput's *The Writing Program Administrator's Resource A Guide to Reflective Institutional Practice*; and Barbara L'Eplattenier and Jill Mastrangelo's *Historical Studies of Writing Program Administration*).

6. Similarly, Writing Center scholarship includes administrative components, such as Gary A. Olson's *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*; Linda Myers-Breslin's *Administrative Problem-Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers*; Christina Murphy and Bryon Stay's *The Writing Center Director's Resource Book*; and articles in *The Writing Center Journal*.

CHAPTER 1

1. In *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Max Weber remarks that a bureaucracy is characterized by concrete divisions of labor, a hierarchical organization of personnel in which managers supervise subordinates, and rigid rules of operation that ensure bureaucratic control over production. In "The Feminist Case against Bureaucracy," Kathy Ferguson argues that changing bureaucracy requires not just the hiring of more women, but the introduction of feminist discourse into the discourse of bureaucracy.
2. For a more comprehensive introduction to the field of feminist ethics, see Samantha Brennan's, "Recent Work in Feminist Ethics"; Eve Browning Cole and Susan Coultrap-McQuin's, "Toward A Feminist Conception of Moral Life"; Alison M. Jaggar's, "Ethics Naturalized: Feminism's Contribution to Moral Epistemology"; and Margaret Urban Walker's, "Moral Epistemology."
3. As Hartsock makes clear in her introduction to *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*, her concept of a feminist standpoint is influenced explicitly by the idea of the Proletarian standpoint in Marxist theory. Her goal is to explore the ways in which the perspectives of men and women in a sexist society may parallel those of owners and workers in a capitalist society.

CHAPTER 4

1. The following are select collaborative presentations and publications incorporating profiles of writing instruction. These works grew out of collaborative administration practices at Georgia State University. In addition, dozens of individually authored presentations and publications were produced by those of us involved in first-year composition instruction and administration at GSU. Not included in this list are numerous collaboratively produced and disseminated reports, accreditation documents, assessment guidelines, and scoring rubrics.