

ABSTRACT

COUNTERPUBLIC INTELLECTUALISM: FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING RHETORICS ON TUMBLR

by Kyle Ross Larson

This thesis introduces “counterpublic intellectualism” to the field of composition and rhetoric as an oppositional mode of intellectual public engagement. I argue that power differentials complicate public intellectualism and its modes of publicity. After building the theoretical foundation and outlining the participatory research design, I offer findings from two case studies on feminist counterpublic bloggers on Tumblr. I introduce “Farrah” of *Feminist Women of Color*. She uses agitational rhetoric to provoke consciousness-raising. Drawing upon Black feminist autoethnography, I argue that Farrah offers an interactional model for feminist counterpublic intellectualism. The second case study involves Liz Larabee of *Saved by the bell hooks*. She uses mashup memes of *Saved by the Bell* stills and bell hooks quotes to invoke consciousness-raising. Drawing upon Kristie Fleckenstein’s visual antinomy, I argue that Larabee offers a thematic model for feminist counterpublic intellectualism. Lastly, I discuss the broader theoretical, pedagogical implications for the field.

COUNTERPUBLIC INTELLECTUALISM: FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING
RHETORICS ON TUMBLR

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

by

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Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

2016

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This Thesis titled

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has been approved for publication by

The College of Arts and Science

and

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Dedication

For Taylor.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank all of the participants: Taylor, Farrah, and Liz. Taylor, thank you for being a part of this research from the start. You inspired the inquiry into this subject matter, and I am grateful for your influence. I love living, experiencing, growing, and collaborating with you. You truly give another level of meaning to the word “partner.” Farrah, thank you for allowing me to earn your trust. The case study doesn’t even begin to scratch the surface on your multifaceted approaches to (counter)public engagement. Your activism inspires me. Liz, thank you for being so incredible. Your humor and wit are inspirational. I look forward to seeing you flourish in graduate school. Learning from you all was an honor and privilege. I cannot thank you enough.

I would like to thank my Chair, Dr. Jason Palmeri. I remember when we first met on Skype to discuss composition and rhetoric when I was still at New College. You’ve been a mentor to me this whole time, and I am undoubtedly better for it.

I would like to thank my committee, Dr. Kate Ronald and Dr. Tim Lockridge. Kate, I am extremely appreciative to have worked with such a tremendous scholar and person. I’m going to miss your Ronaldisms. I’m thrilled I had the pleasure to work with you and learn from you. Please enjoy your retirement. I would be lucky to accomplish half as much as you. Tim, your words of encouragement are always uplifting, truly reinforcing my belief in the value of this work. These words of encouragement keep me going.

I couldn’t be more appreciative of all the support.

CHAPTER ONE

COUNTERPUBLIC INTELLECTUALISM: A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

Roughly a year ago, I logged into Tumblr—a social media microblogging platform—and began scrolling through the posts on my dashboard. One post particularly caught my attention (see fig. 1), and I continue to find its insights valuable:

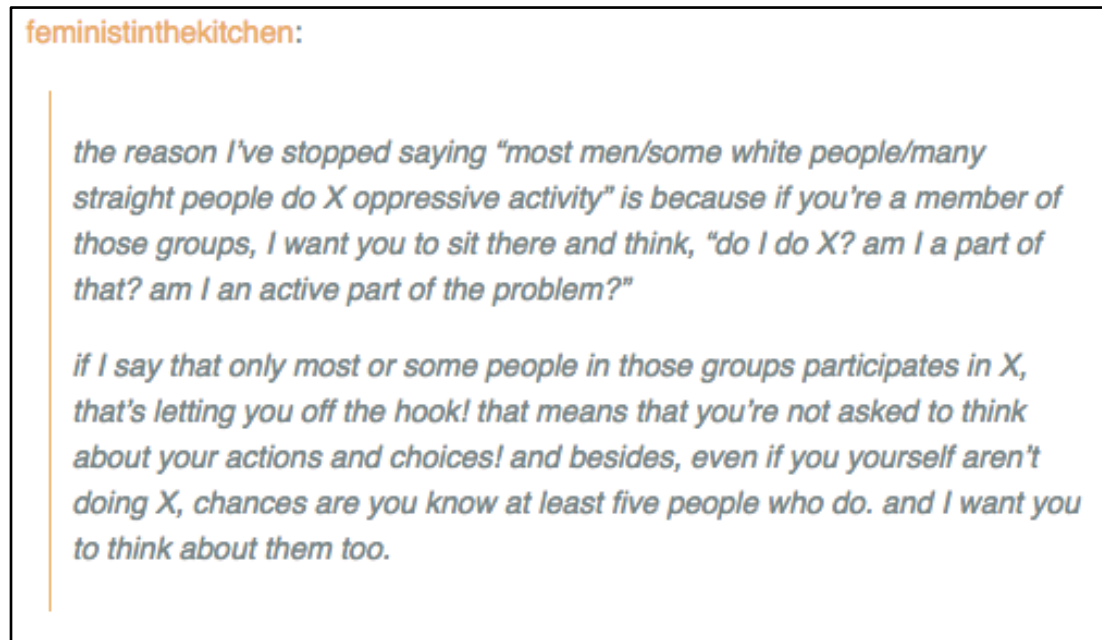


Fig. 1. Reasons for essentializing dominant groups from feministinthekitchen.

What strikes me about this post is the feminist blogger’s articulate, four-sentence explanation of dominant group essentialism as a consciousness-raising rhetorical tactic. It explains that dominant group audiences tend to position themselves outside of culpability. The blogger recognizes these audiences’ evasion of critical self-awareness and uses essentialism to provoke their accountability. For this reason, fig. 1 exhibits a form of counterpublic intellectualism about writing and rhetoric.

The post also resonates with me on a personal level. As a White, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied man, I have a lot of privileges—one of them being not needing to know what I don’t know about power, privilege, and oppression. I would have once contested this type of essentialism as inaccurate or inexact. But this contestation would be

an oversimplification of the rhetorical ways in which language operates. In other words, it would confine language to literal interpretations, thereby positioning language acontextually outside of the social realm. In this way, the critical work of feminists on Tumblr assisted me and continues to assist me in the never-ending process of becoming critically conscious. Although having encountered the post with this understanding, I remember wishing to have come across it sooner.

As I continue to reflect on this post, I often think about its insights in relation to my students—many of who come from privileged backgrounds. One of my White students in the 2016 spring semester expressed disapproval of dominant group essentialism during a class discussion on racial justice activism. Connecting my past and present consciousness, I aim to guide students through critical reflection on their assumptions while also recognizing the intellectual and emotional labor required of them to do so. I drew from this post’s insights in this pedagogical moment, asking the student about the possible reasons behind this essentialism. The critical feminist discourse on Tumblr exists as a consciousness-raising intellectualism in this way, thereby inspiring me to research it for this thesis. Indeed, Paul Butler calls for academics in the field of composition and rhetoric to undertake the role of public intellectual in order to engage “the public sphere” in discussions concerning writing and rhetoric: “Within the context of composition studies, public intellectuals can accurately convey the field’s theoretical knowledge about writing to the general public” (392). At the same time, he doesn’t complicate the dominant tradition of public intellectualism. For this reason, I undertake Christian Weisser’s call for composition and rhetoric scholars to undertake the role of activist intellectual in order to “promote change in our communities and public spheres through three general and interconnected means: through the classroom, through scholarship, and through our own public actions” (*Moving Beyond* 123). I argue that part of this role is recognizing the ways in which intellectualism operates outside of the academic realm.

In this chapter, I aim to introduce “counterpublic intellectualism” to composition and rhetoric as an oppositional mode of intellectual public engagement. In doing so, I will first offer a brief overview of Jürgen Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere in order to complicate it and dominant models of public intellectualism with perspectives from

Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner. Their critical insights allow me to conceive of intellectualism and intellectual public engagement within a theoretical framework that accounts for the existence of multiple publics, as they operate through different modes of publicity and within different relations to power. I then offer a theoretical foundation for counterpublic intellectualism in the context of feminist consciousness-raising rhetorics. After expanding upon this foundation through an overview of previous research on feminist counterpublicity, I introduce the importance of feminist public engagement on Tumblr as an extension of this research for the field.

Publics & Counterpublics

Habermas argues that the bourgeois public sphere holds public authorities accountable for state-society relations. The bourgeois public sphere, in other words, consists of private individuals who “come together as a public” (Habermas 25). In doing so, they reflect on their common public interests while engaging in critical-rational deliberation about the functions of society as it relates to the state. With the resulting formation of public opinion, these bourgeois intellectuals can hold public officials accountable to society through the mass publicity of those opinions (Habermas 30-1). Fraser critiques Habermas in “Rethinking the Public Sphere.” In particular, Fraser takes issue with four assumptions supporting his insights on the bourgeois public sphere: 1) participation in public discourse as accessible to all citizens; 2) one singular, dominant public as the democratic ideal; 3) public discourse as concerning the common good, not “private issues”; and 4) sharp separation between civil society and the state as a requirement for a functioning democratic public sphere.

Habermas’ first assumption neglects to account for power differentials and the effects of these differentials (“Rethinking” 63). Because power differentials create and are created by a stratified society (like the United States), the second assumption actually restricts public discourse and is less democratic as a result. This assumption doesn’t consider that oppressed groups historically have found it advantageous to establish “subaltern counterpublics” outside of the supervision of dominant publics. Fraser defines these subaltern counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit

them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (“Rethinking” 67). Given this context, the third assumption fails to understand that the cultural classifications of “public” and “private” always “work ideologically to reinforce the boundaries of public discourse in ways that disadvantage subordinate groups and individuals” (Weisser, *Moving Beyond* 124). Lastly, the assumption of needing sharp separation between civil society and the state to have a functioning democratic public sphere doesn’t account for the existence of ‘weak publics’ (whose discourse involves opinion-formation, but without the institutionalized power of decision-making) and ‘strong publics’ (whose discourse involves both opinion-formation and the institutionalized power of decision-making).

Fraser later critiques her own analysis of Habermas’ assumptions. In *Transnationalizing the Public Sphere*, she argues that many scholars—including herself—haven’t questioned or modified the ‘Westphalian’ frame in the “national-territorial understanding of publicity” (16). Scholars were not considering, in other words, public discourse within globalized, transnational contexts. As a corrective to this oversight, she reveals six social-theoretical assumptions in Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere that don’t account for transnational contexts: 1) public opinion as addressing a territorially-bound modern state apparatus with the power to regulate citizens’ affairs and solve their problems; 2) rational-critical public deliberation as forming public opinion between citizens, thereby shaping laws; 3) the national economy as a central focus of the public’s concern; 4) publicity as circulating through national media, particularly national press and national broadcasting; 5) public deliberation as being conducted in a shared national language; and 6) national vernacular literature as structuring public-sphere subjectivity (12).

Accordingly, Fraser reorients the two features that she considers work together in constituting the critical force of publicity: normative legitimacy and political efficacy. Normative legitimacy entails the consideration of public opinion as only legitimate if everyone potentially affected is able to participate equally as peers in public deliberation (*Transnationalizing* 27). Two conditions affect the normative legitimacy of public opinion: “the inclusiveness condition” and “the parity condition.” Fraser writes, “Whereas the inclusiveness condition concerns the question of *who* is authorized to

participate in public discussions, the parity condition concerns the question of *how*, in the sense of on what terms, the interlocutors engage one another” (28; emphasis in original). Within the Westphalian framework, scholars assume the national citizenry as the answer to the question of *who* is authorized to participate. Within the transnational framework, however, Fraser argues that the ‘all-affected principle’ is no longer applicable solely to nation-states: “Applying that principle to publicity, it holds that all potentially affected by political decisions should have the chance to participate on terms of parity in the informal processes of opinion formation to which the decision-makers should be accountable” (29). As a result, all affected people—regardless of national citizenship—must be able to participate in deliberative processes as peers for public opinion to be legitimate. In this way, the inclusive condition and the parity condition work together in constituting normative legitimacy (31). She later even renames this principle to the ‘all-subjected principle’ to appeal “to *all* who experience subjection, albeit in different ways and according to different temporalities” (149). To be clear, I don’t believe Fraser intends to imply here that this new understanding of normative legitimacy negates her previous critique about needing to consider power differentials in public deliberation. Rather, I understand Fraser as simply erasing the boundaries of the nation-state from further imposition on the inclusiveness condition within normative legitimacy.

Political efficacy is, again, the second essential feature that constitutes the critical force of publicity. Public opinion is only efficacious if mobilized as a political force to hold public power accountable to the will and conditions of the people (*Transnationalizing* 31). Like normative legitimacy, two conditions affect publicity’s efficacy: “the translation condition” and “the capacity condition.” Within the nation-state framework, the translation condition pertains to the power of public opinion to flow from weak publics to strong publics in order for public opinion to be translated into binding laws since strong publics have the power of institutional decision-making. The capacity condition, on the other hand, pertains to the ability of the state to reign in private powers as well as organize society according to the wishes of public opinion (31). But unlike normative legitimacy, simply erasing the boundaries of the nation-state from this conceptual framework doesn’t necessarily work as a solution. Instead, the challenge becomes, according to Fraser, the creation of transnational public powers that are also

accountable to transnational public spheres (33). With this in mind, one can better understand the organizational principles of publics and counterpublics.

In particular, Fraser argues that the all-affected/subjected principle is essential to the formation of a public. A collection of people constitutes a public not through shared citizenship, but through “their co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives” (*Transnationalizing* 30). Michael Warner’s insights are productive here, complementing Fraser’s argument about the formation of a public to an extent while also further emphasizing the importance of participation (Warner 57). In *Publics and Counterpublics*, he offers seven characteristics of a public: 1) a public is self-organized; 2) a public is a relation among strangers; 3) the address of public speech is both personal and impersonal; 4) a public is constituted through mere attention; 5) a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse; 6) publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation; and 7) a public is poetic world making. I find Warner’s theory on publics and counterpublics useful because its focus on circulation offers insights into the ways in which counterpublic discourse operates through the counterpublicity of social media.

Some differences do exist between Fraser and Warner in regards to counterpublics. As previously mentioned, Fraser understands subaltern counterpublics as discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses outside of the supervision of dominant publics in order to foster oppositional understandings of themselves and their realities. Warner attacks Fraser’s interpretation as “the classically Habermasian description of rational-critical publics, with the word ‘oppositional’ inserted” (118). He also argues, “It is not clear that all counterpublics are composed of people *otherwise* dominated as subalterns” (57; emphasis in original). To be fair, Fraser articulates her definition in the context of critiquing the ways in which Habermas’ assumptions of the bourgeois public sphere neglect power dynamics, disembodied interlocutors, and thus establish a dominant patriarchal public sphere. But one could argue that, in doing so, she seems to unintentionally erase embodied performance from the production and circulation of counterdiscourse. In contrast, Warner explicitly addresses counterpublicity outside of and in opposition to the limits of rational-critical deliberation:

Counterpublics tend to be those in which this ideology of reading does not have the same privilege. It might be that embodied sociability is too important to them; they might not be organized by the hierarchy of faculties that elevates rational-critical reflection as the self-image of humanity; they might depend more heavily on performance spaces than on print; it might be that they cannot so easily suppress from consciousness their own creative-expressive function. (123-4)

In other words, counterpublic rhetorics could involve oppositional practices that resist privileging rational-critical deliberation as the only acceptable mode for public discourse. Since bodies and embodied performances can often mark subaltern individuals as ‘Others’ within the contexts of dominant publics, one must be sure not to privilege rational-critical deliberation to the detriment of realizing the ways in which counterpublics can operate in “performance spaces” and use embodied multimodal counterpublicity to participate in the counter-formation and transformation of their consciousness.

Tumblr functions as one of these performance spaces for counterpublics. Marty Fink and Quinn Miller, for instance, offer insights into the ways in which individuals identifying in opposition to dominant discourses of gender and sexuality use Tumblr to create spaces of digital self-representation. These performances subversively interrupt and refashion dominant straight cisgender modes of perception. As Warner states, members of counterpublics “make their embodiment and status at least partly relevant in a public way by their participation” (58). For example, Fink and Miller find—among other things—that the rhetorical practice of “mixing . . . cisgendered and trans bodies within tumblrs that run off of submissions from users . . . rejects ideological distinctions between cis and gender nonconforming embodiment” (622). That is, this counterpublicity decision to not differentiate between photos with cisgender subjects and photos with transgender or gender nonconforming subjects establishes a normative condition in opposition to the publicity of dominant publics. It rejects the ideological distinctions between dominant gender representations and therefore challenges the dominant publics’ modes of perception.

In fact, Tumblr is an important social media platform for counterpublicity. Fink observes that “people use Tumblr’s specific temporal possibilities to register style and sexuality in relation to lived experiences of gender, race, class, diaspora, and ability with which they critically and creatively engage” (614). At times, these critical and creative engagements on Tumblr—especially within feminist counterpublics—evolve into fierce intellectual discussions and debates. Fink recognizes counterpublicity on Tumblr as intellectually intriguing due to the production and circulation of counterdiscourse evolving from the complex daily lives of people identifying in opposition to dominant discourses of gender and sexuality: “broad facets of everyday experience and personal expression countered the fetishizing practices of dominant media by expanding the conceptual scope of what trans sexual representation might entail” (624). For this reason, one must not ignore the importance of considering a broad understanding of counterdiscourse outside of the dominant conventions of rational-critical deliberation and outside of the dominant avenues of publicity.

Indeed, a counterpublic is still a public. But a counterpublic is also in tension with and/or in opposition to dominant publics while consciously or unconsciously maintaining an awareness of the counterpublic’s subordinate status (Warner 56). Drawing upon Fraser and Warner, Frank Farmer articulates the following minimum requirements for qualifying as a counterpublic: “an oppositional relationship to other, more dominant publics; a marginal, subaltern, or excluded status within the larger public; and an identity wrought by, and refined through, the reflexive circulation of discourse” (21). Because of the tension between counterpublics and dominant publics, counterpublic rhetorical practices can differ from the recognized dominant rhetorical practices of wider publics. As Laura Micciche states, “A feminist orientation to writing creates lines of deviation rather than lines of obedience” (176). Counterpublic discourse and counterpublicity “remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power” (Warner 56). Counterpublic rhetorics, as a result, “remain open to affective and expressive dimensions of language” (Warner 58). In this way, performative rhetorical practices can be essential to a counterpublic’s resistance to dominant publics.

Of course, tension can also exist within counterpublics and between different counterpublics. For instance, critical feminists on Tumblr have invented terminology

such as “TERFs” and “SWERFs” to pejoratively describe and call out “trans-exclusionary radical feminists” and “sex worker-exclusionary radical feminists.” Because counterpublic rhetorical practices differ from dominant practices due to the members’ critical relations to power, counterpublics operate on their own terms rather than on the conditions of dominant publics: “Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying” (Warner 56). Consequently, understanding a counterpublic’s alternative dispositions and protocols often requires at least some form of membership or experience within that counterpublic. One must therefore understand counterpublic intellectualism within the context of a specific counterpublic and its own rhetorical practices.

(Counter)Public Intellectualism

In light of this critical framework of publics and counterpublics, the dominant model of public intellectualism and its connection to the bourgeois public sphere become clearer. Daniel C. Brouwer and Catherine R. Squires offer a thorough breakdown of public intellectualism in “Public Intellectuals, Public Life, and the University.” From their comprehensive review of mainstream literature on public intellectualism from 1987-2002, Brouwer and Squire decipher three primary (and, at times, overlapping) topoi about public intellectuals: *breadth, location, and legitimacy*. Breadth entails four components of public engagement: 1) ability to address a range of issues; 2) ability to articulate an in-depth knowledge of those issues; 3) ability to intervene in those issues through various modes; and 4) ability to have an actual or possible audience for this work (35). Location signifies the platform(s) on which intellectuals engage their publics. Legitimacy consists of five aspects of intellectual engagement: 1) degree of partisanship or ideological loyalty; 2) quality of training or credentials; 3) use of personal voice; 4) support from academic communities; and 5) support from public communities (38). To be clear, Brouwer and Squires don’t suggest that public intellectuals need to account for all of these aspects of the three topoi in order to earn the title of ‘public intellectual.’ Rather,

these aspects simply indicate mainstream literature's account for these traits in its discourse on public intellectualism.

Within this dominant model, Melissa Harris-Perry is a public intellectual for whom I have much respect. Having earned a PhD from Duke University, she worked as a political science faculty member at the University of Chicago from 1999-2006. She then served as an Associate Professor of Political Science and African-American Studies at Princeton University for five years. Afterwards, she left to begin her career as a television host and political commentator on MSNBC. Harris-Perry departed the network after four years because she felt she no longer had control over the content and direction of her show, resulting in a public dispute with network executives (Wemple). She now works as the editor-at-large for Elle.com. Given this context, one can observe that Harris-Perry fulfills Brouwer and Squire's three topoi of public intellectualism. Her MSNBC show's breadth ranged from covering topics such as the politics of Black hair and issues within popular culture to covering topics such as social justice movements and the election cycles. She also reaches large audiences as a political commentator on a dominant publication avenue and even holds public discussions with intellectuals like bell hooks, thereby receiving support from both public and academic audiences.

Harris-Perry is a fierce public intellectual, for sure. At the same time, she is an academic who most often engages publics through corporate publication avenues. Dominant publics privilege these locations and forms of legitimacy. Indeed, she deserves much recognition and respect for her intellectual engagement. Yet, not everyone has the ability to attend and teach at prestigious universities in order to receive the academic legitimacy for a corporate news agency to offer itself as a location for public engagement. In other words, location and legitimacy are not apolitical. In the same way that Habermas' bourgeois public sphere neglects to account for power differentials, the dominant discourse on location and legitimacy in public intellectualism neglects an explicit consideration of power differentials.

For this reason, counterpublic intellectualism operates differently in terms of legitimacy and location. Warner states, "[E]xpert knowledge is in an important way nonpublic: its authority is external to the discussion" (144). The legitimacy of counterpublic intellectualism, in other words, is *internal* to the discussion rather than

based on one's credentials or one's presence on dominant publication avenues. Therefore, its legitimacy depends on the audience's identification with and uptake of the insights in a text. And since counterpublics invent and circulate counterdiscourses in order to develop oppositional interpretations of their realities and identities, consciousness-raising functions as a significant rhetorical practice of feminist counterpublic intellectualism for identification. Stacey K. Sowards and Valerie R. Renegar articulate five rhetorical practices of feminist consciousness-raising: 1) sharing personal stories through public venues; 2) engaging with feminist perspectives and texts in classrooms; 3) interacting with popular culture; 4) exploring issues of diversity and new audiences; and 5) creating new means for self-expression. Consciousness-raising rhetorics evolve in response to rhetorical exigencies based on social, cultural, and political changes (Sowards and Renegar 541). New rhetorical problems demand new rhetorical solutions. Counterpublic intellectualism doesn't operate through dominant publication avenues—such as, academic journals and corporate news outlets. Rather, it operates through counterpublicity as a solution to exclusion from these dominant publication avenues. Counterpublic audiences who identify with texts tend to grant legitimacy democratically through circulation: “Success in this game is not a matter of having better arguments or more complex positions. It is a matter of uptake, citation, and recharacterization” (Warner 144-45). The argument's quality matters, of course. But without the institutional power structures of dominant publication avenues, issues of circulation come to the forefront. Therefore, counterpublic intellectualism operates through counterpublicity as a means to circulate oppositional texts with which audiences identify for the sake of raising and transforming consciousness.

Feminist Counterpublicity

Counterpublicity is not apolitical, of course. Politics is inherent to it. Dominant publics often attempt to disparage and discredit counterpublicity as a means to maintain their control of power. For instance, blogs are a significant medium for feminist counterpublicity and consciousness-raising. Jordynn Jack addresses sexist perceptions of women's blogs and blogging practices in “We Have Brains: Reciprocity and Resistance in a Feminist Blog Community.” She observes, “[A]lthough women and men have

rejoined the blogging phenomenon in roughly equal numbers (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004), recent studies have shown that male bloggers tend to garner more attention for their blogs, especially those that focus on war, economics, political commentary, and other traditionally masculine topics” (327-28). Jack offers a brief overview of the three main arguments against women’s blogging practices—arguments that serve to devalue their intellectual contributions and exclude them from recognition in scholarship. These arguments are the following: 1) women’s blogs are more “private” than the “public” blogs written by men; 2) women’s blogs involve more “insignificant, superficial commenting” and less “meaningful, significant communication”; and 3) blogs discourage effective debates because they promote interaction among like-minded individuals (329-30).

Jack uses these critiques as a backdrop for research on a blogging community called *We Have Brains*. She describes this blog and its practices as “a collaborative project . . . for bloggers interested in feminism. Each week, bloggers share responses to a writing prompt dealing with an issue of interest to feminists” (330). Her findings—as can be expected—refute the sexist arguments against the value of women’s blogs and blogging practices. In particular, Jack illustrates how *We Have Brains* isn’t necessarily any more public or private than men’s “public” blogs. Linking to each other’s blogs, indexing each other on their blogrolls, and commenting on each other’s blogs help establish *We Have Brains* as a public (334). As previously addressed, the ideological distinction between public and private functions in a way that privileges the public discourse of men at the expense of women’s public discourse. Rather than men’s blogs being more “public” and women’s blogs being more “private,” they might simply operate within *different publics* with different practices of publicity. Therefore, dominant channels of publication privilege patriarchal publics.

In regards to the second argument against women’s blogs and blogging practices, Jack challenges what counts as “insignificant, superficial commenting” and what counts as “meaningful, significant communication.” She critiques the value assumption that women’s blogs don’t consist of meaningful discourse by illustrating how personal interaction and critical reflection occur on *We Have Brains* in ways that build feminist community and perform consciousness-raising. Arguing against the “social currency”

value model that undermines the importance of commenting as a blogging practice, Jack illustrates an “energy exchange” value model as an alternative. She states, “[C]ommenting involves key values of reciprocity and understanding that may be overlooked and devalued in a social currency model, which emphasizes individual reputations and personal gain” (336). The energy exchange value model, on the other hand, “is more about making emotional connections with others than it is about attracting readers” (336). Under this value model, commenting does entail meaningful, significant communication for feminist blogging communities because it practices the key values of reciprocity and understanding that help build and sustain the community itself. Furthermore, this value model undermines the dominant tradition of public intellectualism and reflects an important aspect of counterpublic intellectualism. For, the goal of counterpublic intellectualism isn’t the neoliberal mission of individual reputation and personal gain. Its goals are identification, invention, and transformation through the circulation of oppositional discourse for social change.

Jack also addresses the final argument that suggests blogs discourage effective debates because they promote interaction among like-minded individuals. She demonstrates that many debates occur on *We Have Brains* involving a mix of both invitational and agonistic forms of rhetoric. She observes, “Their interactions enable them to share perspectives, to reflect critically on their values and beliefs, to debate different viewpoints and to use those reflections to determine effective ways of taking action on feminist issues” (338). Blog communities are not monoliths without the presence of difference, for disagreement and debate are common practices within these performance spaces. Through this research, Jack persuasively illustrates that sexist assumptions devaluing women’s blogs are simply not accurate accounts of the rhetorical practices experienced on blogs such as *We Have Brains*. Further, I find her arguments to be increasingly relevant and valid for feminist counterpublics on Tumblr as well.

Jessalynn Marie Keller also challenges dominant publics’ perceptions of the counterpublicity of feminist blogging practices. In particular, she researches the ways in which teenage girls blog as a means to engage in feminist political activism as cultural producers. Keller argues that girls’ feminist activism has long been ignored due to mischaracterization of them as simply consumers of culture, but that her analysis of their

blogging practices demonstrates the failures of this assumption. She states, “Girls’ participation in blogging communities, as both [*sic*] bloggers, readers, commenters, and re-posters, exemplifies participatory culture as space that may offer girls more political agency as cultural producers than other traditional spaces for political activity” (435). In order to draw this conclusion, she uses as case studies two popular blogging communities for teenage feminists.

One of her case studies, for example, involves a blogging community called *FBomb*. The founder of *FBomb*, Jessica, started the blog to create a space “specifically devoted to teenage feminists amidst a growing number of feminist blogs addressing young adult (and adult) women,” such as *Jezebel*, *Feministing*, and *Feministe* (437). One of the *FBomb* contributors, Natalie, acknowledges that teen feminists’ primary challenge is to find a supportive community and that the Internet enriches this search in a way zines previously did: “The Internet lets girls reach out and fills the void that ‘zines’ used to, although it’s a lot more accessible to blog than to make a ‘zine’” (437). For instance, *FBomb* offers one of the bloggers, Helen, a supportive community where she learns about feminism. She claims, “I learned it [feminism] all through the Internet. This feminist blogosphere is really really important – especially for people that might not have access to that sort of knowledge from people around them” (438). While zines indeed deserve recognition for their powerful contributions to the histories of feminist activism and community-building (see Licona), the Internet seems to be able to foster further potential for transnational feminist engagement, as Helen’s location in the Middle East illustrates. Keller also emphasizes the importance of this reflection on zines and blogs as a form of counterpublicity: “In drawing the connection between ‘zines’ and blogs, Natalie is aligning blogs as a method for both networking and community-building amongst feminist teens and positioning girls’ blogging practices within a lengthy history of girls’ media production and feminist activism” (437). Establishing blogs within the histories of feminist cultural production helps stake out a position for the validity of academic research on feminist blogs and blogging practices.

Keller’s case study of *FBomb* aligns with insights from Jack’s research on *We Have Brains*. Keller describes their blogging practices: “*FBomb* bloggers do not consider themselves working toward a singular goal with other community participants, but

instead, emphasize dialog and competing ideas as foundational to their own feminist politics” (438). As one can observe, Keller’s research findings support Jack’s refutation that blogs *do* have effective debates among diverse thinkers and entail significant, meaningful communication. Further aligning with the insights from Jack’s research, Keller notes an important connection that commenting shares with fundamental feminist practices: “Natalie agrees that the comments section of the *FBomb* is a productive space to build community through the sharing of personal experiences, functioning in a similar way to the consciousness-raising circles popular with feminists in the 1970s” (439). Again, one observes the important role of commenting in feminist blog communities and the connection of this role to histories of feminist praxis. As Keller argues, “A more fluid understanding of identities [in third-wave feminism] has . . . led to a diversity of activist practices, and many of these strategies use technology in ways that both extend historical uses of technology by feminists, while also using it in new ways to address contemporary concerns, especially in regard to community-building and networking” (434). Drawing heavily from Anita Harris’ framework for activism, Keller illustrates the ways in which girls use their blogs as counterpublic rhetorical platforms to “talk back” (a term she adopts from bell hooks) to neoliberal, patriarchal culture. I suggest these blogs are counterpublic rhetorical platforms because, as Keller explains, Harris’ framework for activism is not necessarily outcome-oriented (similar to the social currency value model as well as the dominant model of public intellectualism), but is rather a space for the creation of a public self (similar to the energy exchange value model as well as feminist counterpublic intellectualism). In this way, blogging functions within feminist activism as a rhetorical practice of counterpublicity to create, develop, and claim a feminist identity in the dominant context of neoliberal, corporate media.

At the same time, one must consider critical feminist praxis outside of neoliberal frameworks, especially within transnational contexts. Mary Queen examines the digital circulations of representations of the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan in “Transnational Feminist Rhetorics in a Digital World.” She argues, “Through neoliberal rhetorics of modernity and progress, U.S. neoliberal feminism not only distances itself—both temporally and spatially—from the Other Woman, but also reinforces a global hierarchy system in which one-third world U.S. feminists act as

‘saviors’ of two-thirds world women imprisoned within oppressive, violent, traditional/fundamentalist patriarchal structures of underdeveloped nations” (472). The uses of neoliberal rhetorics of modernity and progress problematically “shift our own vulnerability to and culpability in the violence of U.S. patriarchal and capitalist practices onto the backs of two-thirds world women, and claim agency and self-representation for ourselves while denying this same capacity to them” (472). In other words, neoliberal frameworks of association practice a form of Western imperialism in the conceptualization of the “Other.” U.S. neoliberal feminism, for instance, often characterizes Muslim women—especially Muslim women who wear the hijab—as lacking agency and needing to be “saved” without recognizing these women’s agency. Moreover, wearing the hijab can also function as a feminist, anti-capitalist form of resistance (Ernst 148). In short, U.S. neoliberal feminists associate Western industrialization with social progress. They impose this association onto the “Other Woman” as a standard for all women to achieve. In doing so, these feminists neglect to understand and/or acknowledge the agency these women practice in their everyday lives.

Adopting a critical transnational perspective, Jessica Ouellette offers a transnational analysis of feminist blogging practices in “Blogging Borders: Transnational Feminist Rhetorics & Global Voices.” Researching the lack of engagement on a global feminist blog called *Gender Across Borders (GAB)*, she analyzes its contributors’ blog profiles and posts. Ouellette observes that most of the contributors were from the Global North while most of the blog posts were written about women in the Global South. Additionally, she notes that 15 of the 20 contributors were White women and one of them was a White man.

Looking more closely at the writing style of the contributors’ blog profiles, Ouellette critiques the use of the distant third-person voice for the contributors’ personal descriptions. This stylistic choice, for Ouellette, creates disembodied texts that contradict the blog’s purpose: “Issues related to gender, sexuality, race, class, etc. are always already subjective, and thus always active and personal; therefore the passive impersonal structure of the profiles undercuts GAB’s earlier invocation for a participatory, engaged community” (Ouellette). She further argues that the distant third-person voice “conceals the writers’ agency, making imbalanced social relations of power between the writers,

readers, and the subjects within the texts” (Ouellette). Ouellette continues the analysis by demonstrating the ways in which the blog profiles’ use of this generic journalistic convention of style inadvertently positions the ‘Other’ within a Western imperialist framework. In doing so, the blog profiles seem to invoke U.S. neoliberal feminism’s practice of distancing itself from the “Other Woman,” as Queen illustrates.

The blog posts function in a similar manner. For instance, Ouellette analyzes a blog post on the sterilization of women in Uzbekistan. She notes that the writer of the blog post addresses readers using the second-person pronoun “you” while asking them to imagine discovering that they no longer have uteruses. Ouellette critiques this rhetorical decision: “In other words, it appears that women from Uzbekistan are not presumed audience members. Rather, ‘their’ lived experiences are used and described in order to frame a human rights violation to readers outside of that experience; thus readers must ‘imagine’ the experience” (Ouellette). Rather than write for global audiences, *GAB* largely presumes a Western audience based on their stylistic choices. In this way, *GAB* functions within the framework of U.S. neoliberal feminism at the expense of its intention to be a global feminist blogging community—perhaps thereby not fostering transnational feminist engagement within the community.

Counterpublicity on Tumblr

As these previous studies indicate, blogs are important locations for the counterpublicity of feminist activism and intellectual public engagement. While much scholarship on technofeminist rhetoric has focused on blogging communities embedded in stand-alone websites, scholars have an

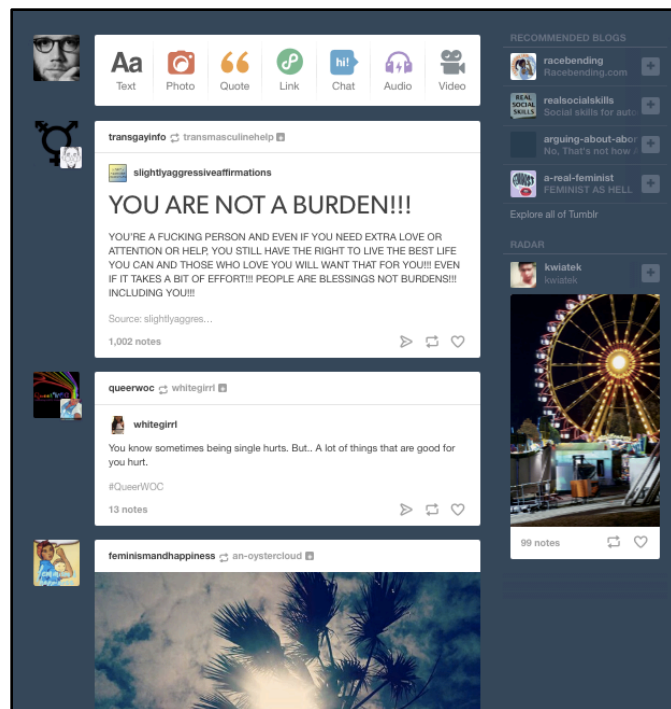


Fig. 2. Screenshot of Tumblr’s dashboard.

opportunity to extend this research and focus critical attention on feminist blogging publics circulating on Tumblr's more fluid technological architecture as a social networking microblogging site. Fig. 2 illustrates the central activity dashboard for bloggers on Tumblr. As illustrated, this platform allows bloggers to publish text (also called 'mini-essays' by some, depending on the content), photos, quotes, links, chats (which allow people to construct hypothetical arguments), audio files, and videos. Bloggers can add hashtags to a post to provide context about its content or circulate it beyond the blogger's followers.

B. J. Renninger articulates how Tumblr is distinct from other social media networks in ways that facilitate counterpublic discourse. Like users of other social media networks, Tumblr bloggers make profiles when creating their accounts. But unlike Facebook, for instance, these bloggers can (officially) have pseudonyms and thematic titles as their account names rather than have the accounts identified with their real names. This feature leads people to consider their Tumblr profiles to be "semi-anonymous." Further, this semi-anonymous status in addition to Tumblr's editable HTML themes offer people a level of freedom for self-representation in its design (Fink and Miller 612).

Instead of a 'friends' model, Tumblr offers a 'follower' model with one-directional ties rather than "bi-directional confirmation for Friendship" (boyd and Ellison 213). Renninger argues that Tumblr's follower model contributes to counterpublic discourse. He observes, "Unlike Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace, public lists of followers on Tumblr are rare and are only visible in some page formatting styles. This allows users wanting to expose themselves to counterpublic communication to follow Tumblelogs freely without expecting which blogs they follow to be easily exposed" (9-10). In contrast, when users 'like' a counterpublic's Facebook Page to expose themselves to its posts, they must make the effort to hide these 'likes' in order to keep these interests from appearing in the 'newsfeeds' of their 'friends.' At the same time, however, these 'likes' would still appear in the user's profile. Tumblr's lack of these "public displays of connection" (to use boyd and Ellison's term) can further protect Tumblr bloggers' counterpublic identities and networks.

Tumblr's public commenting tools function in many similar ways as other social media commenting tools—but with some interesting differences. Like Facebook, Tumblr allows bloggers to 'like' and reblog posts; however, Tumblr does differ from Facebook in the way that it provides bloggers with a little more privacy in regards to 'liked' posts and a little less public pressure in regards to commentary. As previously mentioned, Tumblr bloggers' 'likes' don't appear on their followers' dashboards. At the same time, a savvy blogger can usually access another blogger's 'liked' posts with the following URL: tumblr.com/liked/by/username. While access to 'liked' posts through the URL doesn't secure complete privacy for Tumblr bloggers, it does at least make it more difficult for other's to see those 'liked' posts by not displaying them to followers and by adding another step to the process. Tumblr bloggers also must reblog a post in order to comment on it. This feature allows the blogger who published the original post (or "original posters") to decide whether or not to respond to comments without having these comments displayed on their original posts for their followers to see. Although followers can check a post's notes (which is essentially an archive of all the blogs that 'liked' or reblogged the post) to see if anyone commented, these comments are not as prominently connected to the original post as the central discursive space, like the comments on Facebook.

Like most social media sites, Tumblr displays posts to users on the dashboard with a reverse-chronological stream—meaning that the newest post is at the top of the stream. But an "individually calculated social algorithm" curates the reverse-chronological newsfeed on Facebook, "privileg[ing] new posts over old ones and assumes one only wants to see posts that garner a lot of interactions or that are from certain people or organizations that one interacts with regularly" (Renninger 10). I find this Facebook feature to be problematic because it has the potential to encourage confirmation bias by having a user encounter content that the user likely already agrees with or "interacts with regularly." Facebook's algorithm also encourages the circulation of apolitical content by privileging words such as "congratulations" (Yarrow). Tumblr's dashboard, however, doesn't use an individually calculated social algorithm to privilege certain posts over others. Instead, bloggers can experience a diversity of posts in the same stream. This feature can normalize counterpublic discourse due to its no-longer-

marginalized positioning in relation to the potential dominant public discourse appearing in the same dashboard stream: “The diversity of posts one sees when one logs on to Tumblr allows people to be exposed to various kinds of address—public and counterpublic, silly and serious” (Renninger 10). This normalization of counterpublic discourse through Tumblr’s dashboard is important for counterpublics who seek to change the status quo and raise consciousness. It essentially creates the existence of a new status quo, one in which the counterpublic discourse is no longer at the margins for them (Fink and Miller 622).

Based on these features, Renninger offers six dynamics of use that can explain the reasons for Tumblr being a central platform for counterpublicity. I rely on Renninger’s robust analysis of Tumblr’s dynamics of use moving forward in order to highlight the ways in which Tumblr fosters feminist counterpublicity. To begin, the commentary on Tumblr is trackable while also being deemphasized. As previously mentioned, commentary doesn’t display on the original post because bloggers must share the post to comment on it. Indeed, the original poster and followers can track the commentary by searching through the post’s notes; however, the original poster and followers would need to visit a commentator’s blogsite if the commentary is extensive. In establishing this barrier, “Tumblr posts welcome dialogue, but do not widely broadcast responses to posts as comments on other blogs do” (Renninger 11). Although this feature might be understood as inhibiting dialogue, it could also be understood as decentering the dialogue from the original poster, thereby making the post less of a commodity, less about the individual, and more about the circulation of ideas.

Tumblr also de-incentivizes trolling, which is “argumentative or negatively provocative commenting” (Renninger 11). Deemphasized commentary discourages trolling to an extent presumably due to the trolls’ lack of audiences besides their own followers—that is, if they even have any followers since trolls regularly make fake accounts just for the sake of trolling. Tumblr further de-incentivizes trolling by allowing owners of the blogs to choose whether or not they wish to require followers to be following their blogs for two weeks before being allowed to comment on their posts. Considering the amount of harassment women experience online (see Jane), I believe this

feature especially serves in favor of feminist counterpublics and really any counterpublic prone to attack from aggressive dominant publics.

Owners of Tumblr blogs can also choose whether or not to allow users to ask anonymous questions. While this feature works in the service of counterpublics in certain circumstances, some blog owners might disable it because the feature does allow hostile bloggers to antagonize or harass the owner of the blog if they wish. Disabling the feature, one could argue, helps prevent receiving antagonistic, hateful messages. At the same time, disabling the feature can also discourage followers from asking important questions that they're too embarrassed to ask publicly. In fact, this type of exchange is frequent in feminist counterpublics on Tumblr. Of course, these features cannot completely dissuade attacks from out-groups. For instance, trolls—especially those from social media networks like 4chan—have harassed Tumblr feminist counterpublics by posting animal abuse photos and videos while tagging them with #feminism or #LGBTQ (which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter).

Additionally, the original posters are easily discoverable. Tumblr posts list them as the source at the bottom of each post. Being able to find the original poster allows new bloggers to find other bloggers to follow. More importantly, it also helps new bloggers discover influential members within counterpublics who are worth following. This capability is important because it means that Tumblr's dashboard places nearly equivalent emphasis on posts from new bloggers and seasoned bloggers (Renninger 12). Therefore, new bloggers might experience some difficulties finding influential counterpublic members. A more obvious indicator of an influential counterpublic member though is the amount of notes the blog's original posts receive. A less obvious—but perhaps more significant—indicator is the amount of questions (or 'asks') they receive and answer. Certain blogs receive hundreds of 'asks' a day and need to have moderators to answer them frequently. Without having an individually calculated social algorithm control which posts bloggers encounter on their dashboards, Tumblr establishes a balanced blogging platform for new (and perhaps historically marginalized) voices to disseminate their ideas and experiences.

Furthermore, the "Ask" button on Tumblr blogs, as previously mentioned, offers significant opportunities and some risks for counterpublics. People who are new to

certain counterpublics can find and ask those who are more experienced certain questions that would otherwise be embarrassing to ask. Likewise, people who are outside of these counterpublics can seek further information from those within them. Some Tumblr bloggers use this feature as the foundation for their blogs (such as the blog, *Yo! Is This Racist?*), inviting others to ask them questions that might otherwise go left unanswered. The owner of that blog can then respond publicly or privately.

Tumblr's consolidation of counterpublic discourse is significant as well. Bloggers assign hashtags to posts in order to make the posts easily searchable, to increase their circulation, and to provide context to the post's content. With hashtags like #feminism, #asexual, #blacklivesmatter, one can find counterpublic discussions without much hassle. And with the commentary on posts being organized in such a way that shows the genealogy of the conversation, one post can offer users much insight into issues affecting a certain counterpublic (Renninger 12). Tumblr does limit the circulation hashtags to the first five hashtags on the post, so using the first five hashtags on a post with circulation in mind is important.

Looking Forward

With these insights in mind, Tumblr offers a productive research site for feminist counterpublicity and counterpublic intellectualism. In researching counterpublic feminists on Tumblr, I hope to undertake both Weisser's call for academics in the field of composition and rhetoric to undertake the role of activist intellectual. In doing so, I wish to demonstrate that the field can learn from the intellectual labor already taking place within counterpublic discussions around writing and rhetoric. Instead of disseminating the field's knowledge to wider audiences alone (as Butler argues), I ultimately argue and hope to demonstrate that building relationships with counterpublic intellectuals who already engage in these discussions can offer much potential for composition and rhetoric scholars. I dedicate the following chapters to this project.

The second chapter outlines the methodology and methods undertaken for this research. With my positionality as a White, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied man, researching critical feminist counterpublics is suspicious to these counterpublics. Therefore, I believe illustrating this research process is important for future research on

counterpublic intellectualism. The following two chapters are case studies of two feminist counterpublic bloggers on Tumblr. I first introduce readers to “Farrah” (the blogger’s chosen pseudonym) who runs a blog called *Feminist Women of Color* and channels anger through agitational rhetoric to create a rhetorical space and provoke consciousness-raising. Farrah’s rhetorical practices complicate the importance Kristie Fleckenstein places on social action that attends to the “web of relationships” through compassionate means. I argue that her blog offers an interactional framework for the ways in which feminist counterpublic intellectualism operates on Tumblr. The second case study involves Liz Larabee who runs a blog called *Saved by the bell hooks*. She creates mashup memes of stills from *Saved by the Bell* and quotes from bell hooks. I argue that her blog offers a thematic framework for the ways in which feminist counterpublic intellectualism operates on Tumblr. In doing so, I use Fleckenstein’s theoretical framework of visual antinomy to illustrate Larabee’s consciousness-raising rhetoric. I believe these memes challenge academics to reconsider the publicity of (counter)public intellectual engagement as well as offer the field of composition and rhetoric a model for considering multimodal remix as an extension of the field’s scholarly work. Afterwards, I conclude the thesis with a discussion on some broader theoretical and pedagogical implications for the field.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY & METHODS

Like previous research on the counterpublicity of feminist blogging, this research recognizes the importance of what Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch call “social circulation” as a robust feminist practice of inquiry. They write, “[T]he concept of social circulation functions as a metaphor to indicate the social networks in which women connect and interact with others and use language with intention” (101). With this robust inquiry practice, researchers make sure to “pay attention to the ways that ideas travel in order for us to become more consciously aware of patterns of intellectual and social engagement” (138). In short, I understand social circulation as a foundational analytical undertaking operating through this research. It asks researchers to understand the ways in which recognizable patterns of intellectual and social engagement are not apolitical, for the privileging of recognizable patterns have historically excluded and currently exclude women’s meaning-making practices (Royster and Kirsch 98-99). In researching critical feminists on Tumblr, I recognize them as rhetorical practitioners of intellectual and social engagement through their circulation within feminist counterpublics and beyond to wider publics.

This analytical effort to recognize social networks outside of dominant traditions of publicity works in conjunction with three other practices of inquiry—critical imagination, strategic contemplation, and globalization—that help feminist researchers further develop multidimensional, polylogical perspectives on rhetorical performances and processes (Royster and Kirsch 138). Critical imagination challenges researchers to step outside their own habits and customs of thinking to consider what is known, what is not known, and what is yet to be known. Assisting this process, strategic contemplation asks researchers to step back in critical reflection, listening to embodied research experiences as sites of knowledge while also engaging with other perspectives. And when engaging with these other perspectives, researchers must consider global points of view, taking care to not establish U.S.-centric, Eurocentric cultural logics as their default range

of consulted perspectives. With these methodological inquiry practices in mind, I attempt to answer the following research questions:

- What rhetorical strategies, naming practices, tropes, narrative modes, and issues addressed do critical feminists on Tumblr use to name the conditions of their existence, raise their consciousness, and challenge oppressive norms in prevailing social discourses?
- How do these rhetorical practices perform this feminist counterpublic's intellectualism of public engagement?

In this chapter, I articulate the process of developing the methodology and subsequent methods for the research based on the above questions. I articulate this process in order to foreground some of the intellectual messiness of research. In doing so, I reflect on an experience with an initial assumption made at the beginning of the research design and my corrective response to this assumption. I then offer an overview of Heidi McKee and Jim Porter's methodological framework for digital feminist research as well as the ways in which I use participatory practices to adopt this framework. I hope this participatory approach to the research helps mitigate my privileged positionality and perform ethical research practices based on this positionality. Afterwards, I offer a brief description of the methods of this study, recounting the experiences along the way.

Ethos & Positionality: A Methodological Approach to the Tumblr Feminist Counterpublic

At the initial stage of conceptualizing this research on feminist counterpublic intellectualism, I first wanted to find the counterpublic's prominent bloggers who discuss subject matter concerning the field of composition and rhetoric. However, I also assumed that I would initially remain at a distance from the counterpublic itself and didn't consider the ways in which positionality frames research designs. Filipp Sapienza references the assumption I made in his article "Ethos and Research Positionality in Studies of Virtual Communities." He writes, "When investigating the nature of computer-mediated groups, researchers often strive for credibility by using distanced data-gathering methods" (90). In other words, I had assumed that this distance would establish a credible research foundation before moving towards participatory research practices with the

counterpublic. But this assumption is incorrect. My positionality as a White, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied man informs the entire research process—from design to interpretation to production. If I remained at a distance to find the counterpublic’s prominent bloggers whose insights concern composition and rhetoric, then I would have imposed my own value assumptions of who does and doesn’t concern the field based on criteria external to the counterpublic itself. I view this initial shortsightedness as a neglectful assumption. Researching this particular feminist counterpublic demands building an ethos through an astute awareness of positionality and its implications at all times.

As a corrective response to this initial assumption, I asked Taylor Meredith to participate in designing the research with me. Taylor is a biracial Black woman who is an active blogger in this feminist counterpublic. She runs the signal-boosting Tumblr blog titled *Tay Talkin Bout Stuff* (previously titled *Pass It On, Stay Informed*). She is also my partner. Furthermore, I adopted McKee and Porter’s methodological framework for ethical feminist researchers in digital environments in order to foreground feminist ethics at all stages of the research process. For this reason, Taylor and I applied McKee and Porter’s six characteristics of technofeminist ethos to the research design. Moving forward, I list these six characteristics below as well as the ways in which Taylor and I developed a research design to fulfill and adapt these characteristics. I also illustrate some of the ways in which I have practiced these qualities during the research process to account for my positionality.

1. Committed to social justice and improvement of circumstances for participants

The first quality of an ethical feminist researcher in the digital environment entails a significant commitment to social justice and reciprocity. McKee and Porter critique the idea of knowledge as the sole purpose of research as “the desired outcome of positivist methodology”—which “is not the ultimate ethical aim of feminist methodology” (155). Instead, the ultimate ethical aim of feminist methodologies is to advance social progress and improve the lives of participants and others. I participate on Tumblr using the blog titled *Public Rhetoric*—which Taylor and I designed together—as a way to engage with the feminist counterpublic, demonstrate my commitment to social justice, and practice

allyship through blogging. To be clear, I am not self-identifying as an “ally.” Too often, people who wear the label of “ally” don’t engage in critical self-reflection to disidentify with dominant, oppressive consciousness. Consequently, these people continue to perpetuate the same oppressive practices that they pride themselves on helping to dismantle. Instead, one must always practice allyship through continuous and consistent self-reflection, listening, and learning.

A blogging practice of allyship can entail various rhetorical acts. Some of these acts are smaller than others. For instance, reblogging posts from counterpublic feminist blogs is a smaller rhetorical act of allyship. It helps signal boost their insights to wider publics and potentially gain them more followers and recognition for their intellectual labor. My first well-circulated rhetorical act of allyship involved Franchesca Ramsey, a prominent racial justice activist. Ramsey became popular on YouTube and now also runs an online MTV series called *Decoded* that addresses issues of race in popular culture. Additionally, she is a writer and contributor on *The Nightly Show*, a political satire show airing on Comedy Central. Following her on Twitter, I saw her writing a multi-tweet argument one day. Taking advantage of the kairotic moment, I quickly took screenshots of the tweets, posted them to Tumblr in chronological order, and tagged her (@chescaleigh) at the bottom of the post. She was notified of the tag through Tumblr’s notification system and reblogged the post, thereby circulating her Twitter argument to her followers on Tumblr. Her followers then continued to circulate the argument by reblogging the post themselves. At this point in time, it has 984 notes of interaction—meaning the number of people who have ‘liked’ or reblogged it (Larson, “Franchesca Ramsey”). Over the past year, I have performed this practice several times since Ramsey is a fierce commentator on Twitter and receives a lot of ‘hate followers.’ On the evening of April 22, 2016, Ramsey surprisingly sent me a message through Tumblr’s messaging services thanking me for screenshotting and posting her tweets to Tumblr. I tried to play it cool, unsuccessfully.

My most circulated rhetorical act of allyship occurred directly following the November 13, 2015, terrorist attacks in Paris, France. Seeing “Muslims” begin to trend as a topic of discussion on Twitter, I imagined that the tweets would be either Islamophobic rhetoric condemning an entire religion for the actions of a few terrorists or anti-

Islamophobic rhetoric proactively opposing and intervening in the upcoming surge of Islamophobic rhetoric. Fortunately, the latter was the case. I quickly took screenshots of four of the tweets, posted them on Tumblr in an order that somewhat constructed an argument, and tagged the post with the following hashtags: #paris, #parisattack, #islamophobia, #racism, and #terrorism. I also included the following commentary underneath the screenshots of the tweets: “Quick reminders while the horrible events of the #ParisAttack are still unfolding. Be safe, my friends” (Larson, “Paris Attacks”). With the attacks occurring only a few hours beforehand, the post went viral. At this point in time, the post has 85,722 notes of interaction.

The research outcome(s) must benefit the counterpublic and/or participants, as McKee and Porter emphasize. While participants have indicated that the act of conducting this research itself seeks to benefit the counterpublic by uplifting its intellectual labor, I have also made efforts to help improve the circumstances of my participants personally. For instance, Liz Larabee and I became ‘friends’ on Facebook. After seeing her publish a post about needing to prepare materials for her graduate school application, I offered to provide feedback on the materials. I used my personal experiences with graduate school applications and my years of consulting experience in writing centers to advise Larabee on her CV format and content—similar to the practices of reciprocity for which Ellen Cushman advocates (13).

2. Careful and Respectful

The second quality of an ethical feminist researcher entails being careful with and respectful of the participants. McKee and Porter argue, “[T]he welfare and betterment of research participants, both collectively as groups and as individuals, is paramount, taking precedence over research findings, over methodological considerations, over disciplinary or institutional values” (155). This research engages with a targeted feminist counterpublic. In other words, critical feminist bloggers on Tumblr are often the targets of hateful messages involving everything from death and rape threats to racist and sexist insults. In fact, people create online initiatives solely for the sake of trolling feminists on Tumblr. One specific example is “Operation Happy Birthday”—a celebration of the 12th anniversary of 4chan (a social media network particularly known for misogynistic

discourse). A group of 4chan users decided to troll feminists on Tumblr for Operation Happy Birthday by tagging Tumblr posts showing horribly disturbing content with #Feminism (Clark-Flory and Cuen). Anyone going through the feminism tag on Tumblr to learn from the circulating feminist discourse would then encounter this awful content. In effect, it functions as an attempt to silence this counterpublic.

Consequently, feminist bloggers on Tumblr often take a great deal of precaution about their identities. For instance, Farrah responded to my outreach message to her blog with a bit of suspicion. After asking about what participation in the research would entail, she wrote (and gave me permission to quote):

[I]n order for me to agree to this (after I get a better understanding of just what it is I'm signing up for), I'm going to have to ask for some kind of way you can show me that I'm safe to say what I want and that you're not, I don't know, some troll on the Internet who just wants to mess with me. I know that might sound like a pain, but I just want to make sure my words are not misrepresented or [sic] used in hurtful ways. We can talk later about how to do this. ("Personal Communication")

Of course, her suspicion is reasonable. Operation Happy Birthday illustrates why she would be suspicious of a White, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied man asking her to participate in research (and thereby reveal her identity). In order to gain Farrah's trust, I recognized that I needed to give her some form of power in this situation—something a troll arguably wouldn't do. This power came in the form of the contact information for the university IRB committee board and my IRB faculty advisor, Dr. Kate Ronald. I instructed Farrah that she could and should contact them at any time—especially if I do *anything* to violate her trust. I instructed her that she could use the contact information to have them hold me accountable. Farrah took further precaution by contacting Ronald to inquire into my credibility. After receiving Ronald's verification of my identity and endorsement of my intentions, Farrah confirmed with me that I gained her trust. The confirmation demonstrates that—at least in this case—offering explicit power over researchers can be an effective means for digital researchers in my positionality to earn a participant's trust.

Farah's level of caution illustrates the seriousness of harassment critical feminists on Tumblr experience—particularly for a North African Muslim of Color like Farrah. I would argue that the ways in which hostile groups target critical feminists on Tumblr reflects the threat their fierce feminist intellectualism poses to the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Especially due to this level of harassment, being careful about my participants' welfare is crucial. To ensure a research process centered on care of my participants, I kept all of the research data on my password-protected laptop in an encrypted file. I also backed up the data using an encrypted external hard drive. That way, Farah's identity would be protected.

Respect is also an essential quality to an ethical technofeminist researcher. McKee and Porter state, "Respect for participants means acknowledging their agency, heeding their wishes, consulting their wisdom" (155). I consulted the wisdom of the feminist counterpublic by requesting assistance with the research design from Taylor—who again runs *Tay Talkin Bout Stuff*, a signal-boosting blog in this counterpublic. Part of respecting the counterpublic, as Sapienza argues, is learning their language and social customs (105-106). When helping me design *Public Rhetoric*, Taylor composed a list of fundamental rhetorical practices performed on Tumblr as well as some of the more specific practices performed within the feminist counterpublic. The following list is her writing:

- **Follow.** Like most (if not all) social media, one of the best ways to get followers/interact on Tumblr is to first follow other users. Some users will follow you back once you've followed them, but that's not necessarily why following is so important. It's mainly because that way you'll have new content on your dashboard to reblog and respond to. And some users only allow you to comment on their material if you're following them (or, as a specific Tumblr setting allows, if you've been following them for two weeks).
- **Respond.** If the user allows it, you'll sometimes see little speech bubbles in the bottom right-hand corner of Tumblr posts. There's a limit to how much you can say in these response fields, but you're not expected to say a lot here anyway. Utilize this space for short, concise comments or questions. If you have more to say, you should send the user an "ask" or "fan mail."

- **Private message.** Most users have their “ask” boxes enabled, while more private users will have them disabled. Others will have the ask box disabled only to anonymous questions. Almost all users have their fan mail enabled though. Fan mail is especially helpful if you have a lengthy message, as there’s a limit on how much you can say in an “ask.” You can utilize these messaging systems for almost any reason. Ask a question or simply tell the user you like their blog. Who doesn’t love to hear that?
- **Reblog.** This is a perfect way to not only add great content to your blog, but users are alerted when you reblog from them (both the original user and whoever you reblogged from are alerted).
- **Reblog and comment.** Users are also alerted on their dashboard when someone adds something to their post. Sometimes simple reblogs go unnoticed, but if you add commentary there’s a better chance the original user may check your blog out. Also this is the perfect way to start a dialogue, because it’s not uncommon for people to then reblog you and reply to what you’ve said. This is how those long conversations get started.
- **Tag people.** Tumblr now allows you to tag users, the same way you would on Twitter. Simply type @username and the user will be alerted on their dashboard that they’ve been tagged. You can do this when you reblog and add commentary, to make sure your post is being seen by someone. If you’re reblogging someone’s original content, even a simple additional comment like, “I love this post, @username. Thanks for sharing” can go a long way.
- **Tag your posts.** You know the importance of tagging, since lots of social media sites use this feature. Tagging on Tumblr not only lets people find your posts more easily on the dashboard, but it also lets people find specific posts of yours once they’re already on your blog (you can create a list of tags in your sidebar with links so people can easily search for specific topics). Keep in mind: only the first five tags on your posts show up in the search engine, but you can add as many tags as you want in order to help categorize your material for your blog.

- **** Trigger Warn as you see fit.** And if you trigger warn, it would look like this: “sexual assault tw” (Add in your blog’s sidebar that you’re open to trigger warning material if someone calls you on it.)
- **Make original content.** I’m a big believer in reblogging posts if they’re well done so that the original poster gets credit, but it’s also important that you only have content on your blog that you’re 100% happy with. This means that if someone has shared an article and added commentary that you don’t like, you shouldn’t reblog the post and erase the comments. Rather, you should go right away and share the link yourself and add your own original commentary. Original posts show up in searches. Reblogged posts do not. So the fastest way to get more followers is to post awesome, original material.
- **Share a variety of post types.** Share photos, article links (adding a short excerpt is always a good idea), quotes, etc. *Having a wide variety of mediums is great for learners of all types.*
- **Search tags.** Search [tumblr.com/tagged/\(whatever\)](https://tumblr.com/tagged/(whatever)). Also use the search field for more options such as “most popular” and post categories (video, photo, etc).
- **** Find less popular blogs.** They’ll be more likely to follow back and respond.
- **Make your blog look good and easy to navigate.**
- **Faux pas.** Don’t derail. Don’t erase other people’s comments. Don’t lecture anyone who’s not in your community (men and white people and heterosexual and cis people).
- **Hyperlink to sources when necessary.** (Meredith)

Taylor’s list offers a foundational overview of the rhetorical blogging practices in this feminist counterpublic. I incorporated this knowledge into my participation in and engagement with the counterpublic—as illustrated in the above discussion on blogging practices of allyship. Royster and Kirsch state that an ethics of hope and care involves “immers[ing] ourselves in the times and lives of the women or others we study” (146). Blogging on *Public Rhetoric* for over a year now, I have been able to immerse myself in these women’s digital environment. During this time, I have been able to observe the ways in which the counterpublic discourse interacts with Tumblr’s interface, thereby learning more about the construction of the counterpublic itself and its rhetorics. To do

so, I have challenged myself to step outside of my own thinking processes and value assumptions to consider less recognizable, less dominant rhetorical practices.

3. *Critically Reflexive*

Similar to critical imagination and strategic contemplation, the third quality of an ethical technofeminist researcher entails demonstrating self-reflexivity and critical consciousness. As McKee and Porter state, “Self reflexivity and critical consciousness about one’s own position, gender, and status are key features of feminist thinking” (155). Engaging with feminist counterpublics especially necessitates being able to demonstrate critical consciousness and a radical openness to critique. Royster and Kirsch agree: “An ethics of hope and care requires a commitment to be open, flexible, welcoming, patient, introspective, and reflective” (145). For this reason, the homepage of *Public Rhetoric* features a link that announces, “Call me out if I make a mistake.” This link directs people to the page on which they can write me a private message. By announcing my openness to critique, I seek to demonstrate critical reflexivity to the feminist counterpublic. This demonstration is fundamental for establishing an ethos as a researcher. For, this counterpublic is in direct opposition to the privilege I embody.

Interestingly, Farrah answered one of the survey questions in a way that seems to inquire into this ability. The question asked her how I could practice reciprocity, what interests her about feminism and consciousness-raising on Tumblr, and what she would like others to know. She answered, “I guess I’m just curious how you yourself got into feminism, and what you think about the feminism that’s on Tumblr? What do you think, as a white man, when you see blogs run by POC that make fun of white people and give white people a really, really hard time? Does this discourse make you uncomfortable?” (Personal Survey). I responded that it doesn’t at all make me uncomfortable. I indicated how I would have been uncomfortable with this discourse years ago, but came to understand it more fully after spending time absorbing and reflecting on the insights. In this way, I attempted to illustrate to Farrah that critical feminists on Tumblr have contributed to the raising of my own consciousness and inspired me to research feminist counterpublic intellectualism as a result. In other words, I attempted to illustrate critical consciousness through my recognition of the process of unlearning and relearning.

4. Flexible

The fourth quality of an ethical technofeminist researcher is flexibility. McKee and Porter assert, “Engaging in feminist research requires a willingness to make adjustments in the project, to modify a project protocol as needed to make it more careful, reflexive, dialogic, and ethically rigorous” (156). I began this research with the sole intention to better understand the ways in which scholars in the field could better disseminate scholarship to publics. It began, in other words, with the intention to better position the field as an influencer of feminist rhetoric on Tumblr. Since then, I now realize that critical feminists on Tumblr don’t necessarily need the help of the field’s academic scholarship. While indeed the field’s scholarship could inform feminist rhetorical practices on Tumblr, feminist rhetorical practices on Tumblr can also inform the field’s scholarship. I realize that having academic rhetorical scholarship as the “thing to be learned” by this counterpublic positions these rhetorical practitioners within a deficit model. That is, it positions them as lacking something. But like the change in direction I made after being made aware of my oversight in regards to positionality in research design, I have also modified this intention by positioning the field itself within the deficit model. That way, these feminist theory-building rhetorical practitioners on Tumblr are the ones who have the insights.

5. Dialogic

The fifth quality of an ethical feminist researcher in the digital environment entails being dialogic. McKee and Porter characterize a researcher’s dialogic quality as the following: “Feminist researchers often consult and consider a variety of viewpoints in making research decisions, inviting participants to join in the decision-making processes, either in terms of providing feedback at a particular moment or in terms of co-researching collaboratively” (156). I adopted a dialogic process in this research in a few different ways. First, Taylor—as a participant in this feminist counterpublic—assisted me with the research design. But she is also only one individual from this counterpublic, and one individual does not have the authority to speak as the sole informant on the entire counterpublic.

For this reason, I also held a two-hour Skype meeting about the research design with a participant who lives in the Netherlands. Although the participant and her blog are not present in the study at this time, she insightfully indicated that one of the final methods could entail an online meeting between the participants. This meeting would function as a focus group that discusses the findings of the research as well as places the participants and their insights in discussion with one another. The participant informed me that this meeting would also contribute to reciprocity by personally introducing the bloggers to each other. After receiving this suggestion, I submitted and received approval on a revised IRB form to include this method as an option. I haven't yet hosted this meeting due to time constraints from all parties involved, but do plan to host it later as I continue to build on the research presented in this thesis.

6. Transparent

The final quality of an ethical feminist researcher in the digital environment outlined by McKee and Porter entails transparency. To fulfill this quality, I use a couple of practices. First, I foreground my positionality on *Public Rhetoric* by having a picture of myself as the blog's thumbnail as well as including a brief positionality statement in the description of the blog (which is common practice in this feminist counterpublic). I also quote passages from the scholarly texts informing this research and publish them on *Public Rhetoric*. Additionally, I have shared the draft of each participant's case study with that participant for approval. For, I aim to represent these bloggers and their intellectual labor appropriately and accurately based on their standards.

My past year of experiences on Tumblr listening to and learning from this feminist counterpublic enriches this research. McKee and Porter's six characteristics informed the ways in which I built an ethos in this feminist counterpublic in light of my positionality. Indeed, adapting them to the research design, using participatory practices, and interacting with the feminist counterpublic assisted me in crafting a set of foundational methodological principles with which to ensure ethical research practices.

Methods

Based on this technofeminist methodology, I believe case studies are the most appropriate qualitative tool for answering the research questions. Case study research offers me a means to explore, discover, and explain rhetorical practices based on grounded knowledge from the counterpublic (MacNealy 197). Of course, I cannot generalize the research findings outside of the context of the case studies themselves. But I hope they offer preliminary insights on feminist counterpublic intellectuals' rhetorical practices in order for future research to begin building a more robust theoretical framework on counterpublic intellectualism. In fact, case studies function as an appropriate qualitative tool for this purpose (MacNealy 197). With this in mind, I use three primary data collection methods (excluding the previously discussed final focus group with the participants): surveys, interviews, and rhetorical analyses.

I have selected the participants on the basis of the difference in their blogs and blogging practices. I made initial contact with Laribee and Farrah after a significant amount of time following their blogs and observing their rhetorical practices. I used Tumblr's messaging system for the initial contact. In the message, I first stated my admiration of their blogs, supported this statement with a specific aspect of their blogs that I admire, introduced the research briefly, stated my positionality, and asked if they would be interested in learning more about the research. Laribee's blog follows a central theme, using the popular modality of memes with stills from *Saved by the Bell* and quotes from bell hooks. This interaction between popular culture and feminist theory creates a humorous juxtaposition, inspiring the blog's audience to circulate the memes widely and inspiring me to select Laribee as a participant who can offer insights on counterpublic engagement. Laribee's rhetorical practices for the blog could offer the field of composition and rhetoric insights on the circulation of academic scholarship for wider publics. Farrah's blog functions as an interactional model of counterpublic intellectualism rather than a thematic one. Undertaking Royster and Kirsch's call for a global perspective in research, I selected Farrah due to her commitment to non-Western perspectives. She provides insights into the ways in which counterpublic intellectuals engage multiple publics and counterpublics on local, national, and transnational levels. Farrah's blog also complicates the Laribee's individualist blogging model since she recruited moderators

with different positionalities to contribute to the blog. I hope that placing the rhetorical practices of an individualist thematic blog in discussion with the rhetorical practices of a collaborative interactional blog offers an initial, diverse foundation for future research on counterpublic intellectualism.

Surveys

I used two criteria for the survey questions. The first criterion was general inquiries into Tumblr and Tumblr feminist counterpublics. Pursuing this purpose, I included the following questions on both participants' surveys:

- Why do you blog? Why did you choose Tumblr as the social media site for this blog?
- Would you consider Tumblr to be a hub for critical learning and intellectual dialogue? If so, how would you characterize the intellectualism on Tumblr—especially within feminist circles?
- Who do you imagine your followers/audiences (whether supporters or non-supporters) to be?
- In what ways do you receive pushback or criticism from your followers and/or trolls? Do posts on certain topics receive more pushback than others? In what ways do you respond?
- What else do you think I should know about feminism(/consciousness-raising) on Tumblr?
- What else would you like others to know about your and your blog?

I intended these questions to produce general insights into the nature of feminist blogging practices on Tumblr and offer specific context on the blogs themselves. I was able to code the answers to these questions, analyzing the codes for similarities and differences between the responses. When encountering differences, I used the responses to the blogger-specific survey questions and the interviews to account for the differences between their general-inquiry responses. The second criterion was specific inquiries based on the particular type of blog and the blogger's rhetorical practices. In order to craft these questions, I read about a year of their posts in order to observe their interactions over time, take notes on particular recurring interactions, and archive specific

posts using Tumblr's affordances. With these two criteria, I attempted to connect global blogging practices on Tumblr to local blogging practices in the feminist counterpublic. As Royster and Kirsch observe, "Attention to contextual analyses brings us recursively to the impact of technologies, as a vibrant contemporary context, on rhetorical performances" (142). For instance, I learned in this contextual analysis that Farrah's choice of Tumblr as a blogging medium for public engagement corresponds with her use of agitational rhetoric. Farrah mentioned in the survey how Facebook's handling of user reports on certain posts privileges dominant publics at the expense of counterpublics (Personal Survey). On Tumblr, she can engage the feminist counterpublic using her preferred rhetorical practices without the risk of having her Tumblr account suspended like her Facebook account. I incorporate the remaining findings from the surveys into the case studies. (See Appendix A for a full list of Laribee's survey questions, and see Appendix B for a full list of Farrah's survey questions.)

Interviews

The interviews followed the participants' completion of the surveys. In the same way that the survey questions built upon basic observations and preliminary analyses of a large collection of posts, the interview questions built upon the answers from the surveys. That way, I could ask for further elaboration and ground my data in the participants' insights (as Royster and Kirsch suggest). For the interviews, I used the technology that the participants suggested and preferred. For instance, Laribee's interview was conducted over the phone, and Farrah's interview was conducted through Skype. Unfortunately, I did experience quite a bit of technical difficulties during Farrah's interview. I initially set up two recording devices. The first recording device was on my computer, and the second recording device was on an iPad. But during the interview, I ran out of memory on my computer, thereby stopping the recording. Additionally, the free recording app downloaded on the iPad (called Voice Recorder) would only record and save two-minute files, stopping the recording and causing gaps about a few seconds in length between each file. (I wouldn't recommend that app, y'all.) I finally addressed these technical difficulties during the interview by using the Voice Memos app on an iPhone. I incorporate the findings from the interviews into the case studies.

Rhetorical Analyses

Laribee's blog is thematically uniform in nature. That is, it features quotes from the same feminist theorist (bell hooks) in the same mode (memes). Laribee also waits for some time to pass before posting a new meme and doesn't reblog posts from other blogs. For this reason, I find that a rhetorical analysis of the blog's posts allow for more generalizable insights about Laribee's collective blogging practices. Farrah's blog, on the other hand, is more interactional and less thematically uniform. It involves a wide range of posts on varying topics through different modes, thereby making more systematic data collection necessary. I have collected a data set of posts based on the timeframe of a month, ranging from April 10, 2015, to May 10, 2015. This data set consists of 138 posts (compared to Laribee's 12 posts within that same timeframe). I discuss the results of this data collection within Farrah's case study.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMINIST WOMEN OF COLOR: AGITATIONAL RHETORIC IN THE (SPIDER) “WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS”

“For the record, I’m still angry. And I think a lot of us in this room are still angry. We have a lot of reasons to be angry. And I get that it’s a turn off for some people. But I’ve learned to embrace that anger. It means that we don’t accept the status quo. It means that we know that our culture and our institutions can do better. My anger makes me strong, and it makes me bold. And that’s what I see in a lot of today’s young activists. It may not be palatable to some. But I don’t think we care.”

– Kamilah Willingham, 2015 National Sexual Assault Conference

Farrah is a North African Muslim of Color who moved to the United States with her parents. She is also the creator of the Tumblr blog *Feminist Women of Color* (*FWOC*). She describes her mission for the blog to followers: “I’m here to bring – as well as share from others – perspectives that need to be heard but are being ignored. No longer will I tolerate the silence” (“About Us”). This description follows an acknowledgement of growing up in a city with few People of Color and attending a high school in which White people made up 98% of its student body. *FWOC* features a section for “Personal Posts” on its menu, and two of Farrah’s posts populate this section. In the personal post titled “My Struggle,” Farrah reflects on her experiences living in this racially homogenous environment and internalizing self-hate as a result: “Ever since I became aware of how different I am from those who surrounded me in school and in stores and how I saw that no one around me looked like me except my own family I began to feel alone. I began to wish that I wasn’t different. I began to wish I was white” (“My Struggle”). She attributes leaving this city and attending college elsewhere as a catalyst for developing the critical tools necessary for identifying “all of the struggle, pain, feelings of loneliness and isolation I felt as well as the reasons for my feelings” (“My Struggle”). She also indicates that coming to self-love through critical consciousness is a difficult journey, but “the very process of addressing and challenging the forces in place that work to keep me down is a victory all on its own” (“My Struggle”).

Farrah's reflection on her struggle with self-love and development of critical consciousness reminds me of Deborah Gould's analysis on the ways in which activists channel feeling states into productive energy for resistance. As Audre Lorde states, "Anger is loaded with information and energy" (127). Gould's insights involve ACT UP, a direct action advocacy group that formed to fight the AIDS crisis. These activists participated in naming practices to channel their grief into action-oriented anger for the sake of harnessing its energy for social action (Gould 233-35). Having developed critical consciousness, Farrah seems to channel her feeling state resulting from dominant consciousness into productive energy for resistance. She challenges "the forces in place that work to keep [her] down" while also valuing the consciousness-raising process of resistance. Consequently, she decides to take social action and create an intersectional feminist blog on Tumblr: "I started this blog because I'm very passionate about the oppression of POC and wanted to express my own opinions on the topic. Not only that, but I felt that perspectives from Arab Muslim women were severely lacking on this site, so I decided to give it a shot" (Personal Survey). Interestingly, Farrah's creation of *FWOC* also serves as a critical intervention. She reasserts herself into an environment (albeit a digital environment) where she had encountered few perspectives like hers in order to contribute these perspectives to counterpublic discourse. As she states, "No longer will I tolerate the silence" ("About Us"). Creating *FWOC* therefore functions as a rhetorical act of resistance that breaks the silence and amplifies her perspective and the perspectives of others.

Run by Farrah and her moderators, *FWOC* offers its approximate 10,200 followers an encounter with an array of posts on varying issues, often responding to exigencies from sociopolitical contexts. These posts can range from original posts to reblogs on topics such as issues of racism to requests for donations. For this reason, I have collected a random data set of posts within the timeframe of a month. The dates of these posts' publication range from April 10, 2016, to May 10, 2016. Within this timeframe, *FWOC* published a total of 138 posts. Reblogs account for 111 (~80.43%) of the posts, and 10 of these reblogs (~9%) include additional commentary. Furthermore, 13 of the reblogs (~11.71%) are signal boosts for donation posts (that is, posts from bloggers requesting emergency financial assistance). The 27 original posts (~19.57%) consist of

24 'text posts' involving alphabetic writing (~88.89%), 2 posts answering questions from followers (~7.41%), and 1 post featuring an article (~3.7%). Fig. 3 illustrates the thematic variety of issues addressed on the blog within this data set:

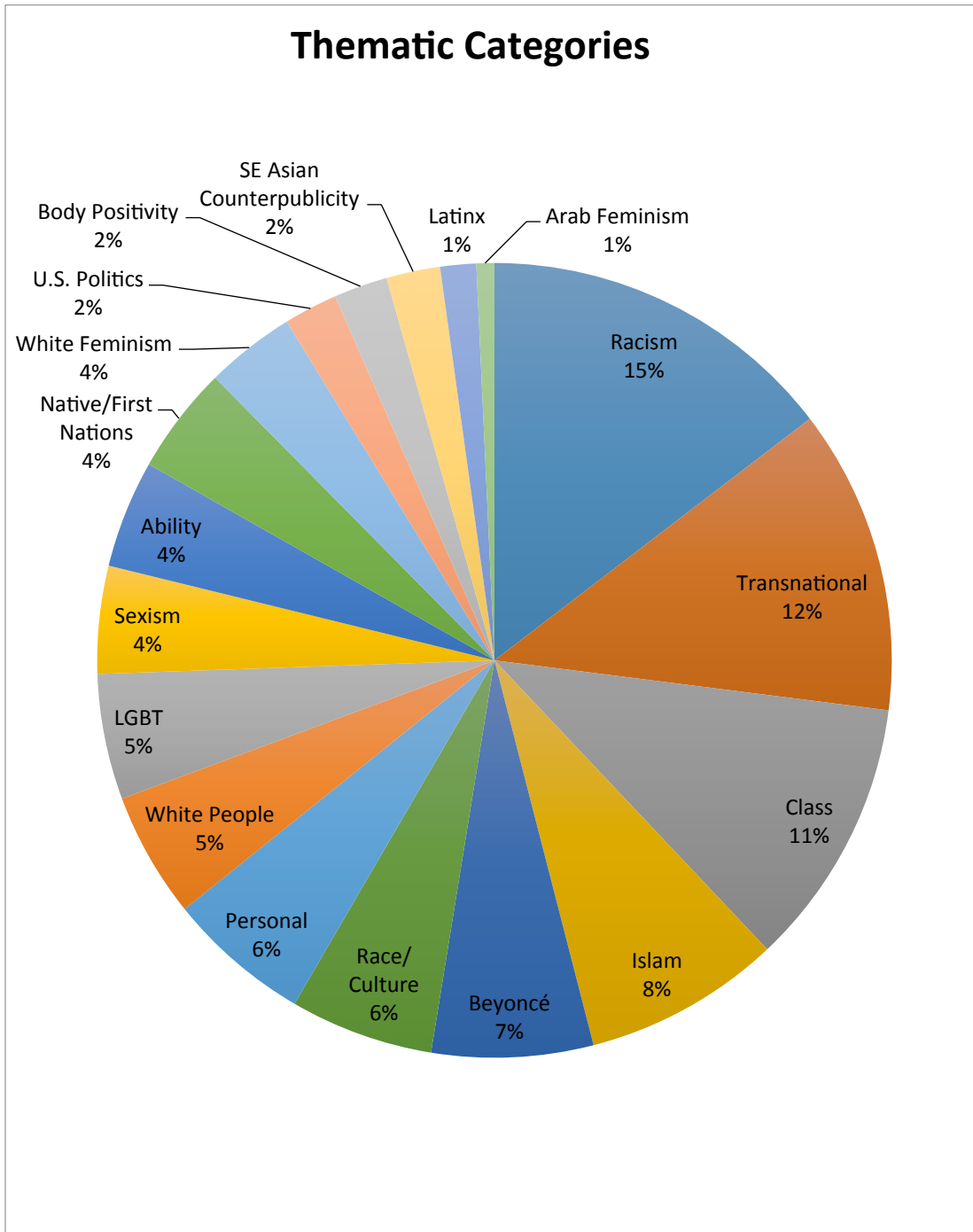


Fig. 3. Pie Chart of Posts' Thematic Categories & Their Percentages

I have determined these main categories by performing a rhetorical analysis of each post collected for the data set. For example, I have labeled donation posts under the main

thematic category of “Class” because these requests for financial assistance relate to class struggle. I am referring to them as “main categories” due to the complexities of intersectionality when coding each post as a segment of data. That is, posts on White people are often also posts on racism or Islam or white feminism—or even all four of them together. To grapple with the complexities of intersectionality when coding, I determined the main category based on the topic in a post’s subject positions.

With this in mind, I would like to draw attention to the Beyoncé category. After Beyoncé released her visual album *Lemonade*, people like Iggy Azalea critiqued Beyoncé’s use of the name “Becky” in the reference “Becky with the good hair.” *FWOC* published a number of posts defending the naming practice and critiquing Azalea for her ‘White fragility’ (to use Robin DiAngelo’s term). Considering the ways in which counterpublic bloggers respond to exigencies from sociopolitical contexts, acontextual data collection for thematic sampling is unable to offer a representative data set for revealing the common issues addressed in Farrah’s counterpublic blogging practices. Therefore, I argue that thematic sampling based on Farrah’s insights better grounds the research through a targeted collection of specific blogging interactions, thereby offering a more revealing data set for a rhetorical analysis of the posts and practices. Farrah states, in particular, that the misconception of Muslim women as inherently oppressed is a significant recurring theme in her blogging practices: “I do feel that the concept of Muslim women being helpless and demure is a common theme that I do my best to deconstruct and demolish” (Personal Survey). The word “demolish” here is noteworthy. It reflects Farrah’s approach to the rhetorical situation for which she identifies with anger as a rhetorical invention tool of resistance for agitational consciousness-raising. In fact, Farrah’s agitational consciousness-raising rhetoric complicates Kristie Fleckenstein’s insights on social action.

In *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*, Fleckenstein suggests that people are interwoven together in what she calls a “web of relationships.” She argues that social action must involve compassionate means for the sake of achieving compassionate ends (7). The web of relationships is fragile, and one must attend to the fragility of this web in order to reach the end goal of compassionate living. Fleckenstein states, “This form of social action helps people maintain the health of

their communities, their individual spirits, and their cultures” (7). These assumptions, however, don’t seem to account for oppressive structures of power and their effects. Oppression harms the health of marginalized communities. It destroys spirits. It conquers cultures. People are not interwoven together in a fragile, innocuous web of relationships. People are interwoven together in an institutional, oppressive *spider* web of relationships. And those in power have the privilege of mobility without becoming stuck. They perpetuate the construction of the oppressive silk threads of the web, sticking marginalized groups into systems of oppression while also blaming them for being stuck. In this rhetorical situation, *breaking the web* can offer a productive rhetorical means to achieve just ends.

Farrah’s experiences of multiple oppressions as an Arab Muslim woman establish a rhetorical situation in which agitational rhetoric is conducive for breaking the spider web of relationships and creating a rhetorical space to raise consciousness and effect change. For instance, Fig. 4 is one of the posts from the data set described above that offers an example of Farrah’s agitational rhetoric:

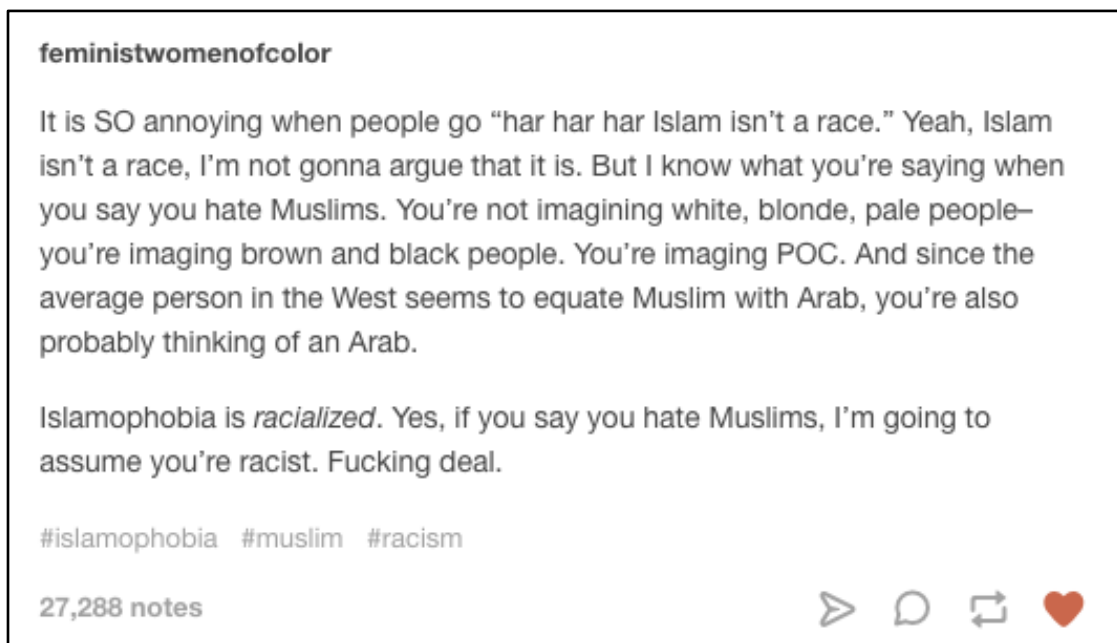


Fig. 4. Text post by *FWOC* on the racism of Islamophobia.

Here, Farrah expresses frustration at the ways in which people attempt to derail discussions about the intersections of race and religion in Islamophobia by ignoring its intersection with race. That is, people attempt to derail conversations about the racism of

Islamophobia by taking the discrimination out of social context in stating that Islam isn't a race. Farrah indicates that she's well aware of that fact. At the same time, she understands and explains that Islamophobic rhetoric essentially misrepresents "Muslim" and "Arab" as synonymous, thereby establishing Islamophobia as a form of racial and religious prejudice (Ernst 29). The fact that "Arabs comprise roughly 18 percent of the world Muslim population" attests to this anti-Arab racist stereotype (Ernst 60). Being an Arab Muslim provides Farrah with credibility in this feminist counterpublic to talk back to this misrepresentation and prejudice using her situated experiences at these intersections. With this ethos, she uses writing to channel her frustration with these experiences into agitation through mockery and call-out—as illustrated in the use of "har har har" and the use of second-person pronouns. She doesn't resist mocking and calling out those who argue differently because their Islamophobic arguments enact rhetorical violence against her and those in her positionality as an Arab Muslim.

Farrah also talks back against the ways in which Western (white) feminism perpetuates this rhetorical violence. She states, "I definitely think that certain groups of women, especially Muslim women—are just assumed to be these helpless victims of the patriarchy, and somehow need saving by white women behind computers" (Personal Survey). This statement reflects her experiences on Tumblr with this colonialist, paternalistic, patronizing assumption held by White women. Suggesting a tactic for coping with these situated experiences, she first expresses transcendence through humor before moving to frustration and anger: "I find it laughable, and also patronizing and insulting" (Personal Survey). In fact, the second personal post from Farrah on *FWOC* is commentary on how Muslim women's choice to wear the hijab doesn't mean they're oppressed. In this post, she performs an understanding of her situated limitations by stating that she doesn't speak for all Muslim women and their own situated experiences. With that understanding, she attacks the assumption that Muslim women are necessarily oppressed because they wear the hijab. She writes, "It is incredibly insulting for you to make the assumption that we lack such a degree of control over our lives that we cannot even decide how it is that we are to be dressed" ("Wearing a Hijab"). With the plural first-person pronoun "we," Farrah illustrates her ethos as a Muslim woman—someone who has the authority to talk back against this misrepresentation. The second-person

address in this passage also functions rhetorically. It calls out the audience and provokes readers to reflect on these assumptions as people who hold them. Even if she isn't writing to an explicit Islamophobic audience, this address nonetheless operates in a way that holds readers accountable for these assumptions.

Most interestingly, Farrah flips the perspective on readers using her own situated experiences as a Muslim woman living in the United States. In doing so, she positions her audience as people living in the United States or at least Westerners who presume the United States respects women and values their choices. She states, "I would also like to point out that as a Muslim woman in the United States I face **severe** societal pressures to NOT wear a burqa or hijab" ("Wearing a Hijab"; emphasis in original). Indeed, wearing a hijab can be dangerous for Muslim women in the United States. In December of 2015, an Islamophobic White man named Gil Parker Payne approached a seated Muslim woman during a Southwest Airlines flight from Chicago, Illinois, to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Addressing her hijab, he yelled, "Take it off! This is America!" After she refused, he violently attacked her by completely pulling it off her head (Gibbs). Even with these attacks, people informed by Western, Eurocentric cultural logics tend to presume moral superiority in terms of national gender relations. Carl Ernst explains, "[T]he scientific language of racial categories and the alleged evolutionary superiority of Europeans were key elements in the ideology of colonial ascendancy. A new and surprising weapon in the colonialists' arsenal was the language of European feminism" (143). Indeed, Farrah articulates frustration with the pervasiveness of this colonialist mentality—especially the ways in which white feminists perpetuate it on Tumblr. To be clear, 'white feminism' doesn't necessarily mean "feminism practiced by White women." One can be White and feminist, but not a 'white feminist.' Rather, white feminism is a particular strand of feminist thinking that upholds Eurocentrism and white supremacy for the expedient advancement of Western, White women. Farrah's frustration with this strand of thinking and its failure to account for intersectionality is clear in the following post: "White feminists need to get the fuck over their goddamn Western, Eurocentric superiority complex" ("White Feminists Need..."). In fact, white feminists don't seem to realize that *wearing the hijab* can be an anti-imperial, anti-capitalist form of feminist protest (Ernst

148). Instead, they project their own cultural assumptions onto others who might not adhere to those same cultural assumptions.

Because of the rhetorical violence of these assumptions, maintaining these oppressive silk threads of Islamophobia through compassionate rhetoric could likely leave the spider web of relationships intact. In other words, it could maintain the same oppressive power dynamics by settling for the idea that the oppressors would voluntarily free the oppressed. Martin Luther King Jr. acknowledges in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail” the false assumption of this idea: “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.” One way to demand freedom from the spider web of relationships is to break the oppressive silk threads. Agitational rhetoric can function in this way. It opens a rhetorical space where one didn’t exist before the provocation for the hope and sake of effecting change (Welch 36). With the post in Fig. 4 having 27,288 notes of interaction at this point in time from other counterpublics, transnational (counter)publics, and dominant publics, its counterpublic provocation is certainly successful at opening a space to demand a response from wider publics. Indeed, oppressors might re-spin the oppressive silk threads of the spider web. But they must labor to do so.

Farrah often uses agitational rhetoric to break the spider web of relationships between her and white feminists. For, she doesn’t see them as part of her community and finds value in agitation (Personal Interview). She states, “With white feminists, I critique them a lot. I get messages from them. I don’t have any problem interacting with them, really. I just let them know what I think. I’m pretty aggressive about that” (Personal Interview). One post especially illustrates her use of agitational critique to channel the frustration she experiences when engaging with white feminists on the topic of Muslim women:

I am so tired of white people, especially white women, sharing opinions about Muslim women and the hijab that are false and that they pretty much pull out of their ass. It’s annoying as fuck. You all talk about how ~oppressed~ and ~hopeless~ and ~powerless~ Muslim women are, without even realizing that your stereotypes and generalizations and

Eurocentric narratives are what make Muslim women look so helpless and weak. (“I Am So Tired...”)

Her critical recognition of the ways in which white feminists foster Islamophobic, anti-Arab sentiments fuels her agitational rhetoric. In this post, she demonstrates an awareness of multiple audiences. In particular, her use of the third-person plural pronoun “they” when speaking about White women indicates Women of Color, People of Color, Muslims, Muslim women, or at least allies as the intended audience. To this audience, she expresses frustration with her exhausting interactions with white feminists who patronizingly speak to a Muslim woman as if they are authorities on Muslim women. She then shifts to the second-person plural address “you all” to call out White women as the audience and state how they participate in the oppression of Muslim women. With this audience, she surrounds their social justice “devil terms” (to use Richard Weaver’s term) with tildes—otherwise known as the “snark mark”—to indicate verbal irony (Katz). Using snark marks against their devil terms undercuts the shaky rhetorical foundations of their arguments through mockery, thereby illustrating Farrah’s consideration of their arguments as without foundation in the realities of Muslim women.

Furthermore, Farrah coordinates both the three devil terms as well as her three critiques of white feminists with two conjunctions (“and”), invoking a parallel relationship between the devil terms and the points of critique. Along with the redundant uses of the conjunctions suggesting white feminists’ excessive disregard of Farrah’s situated insights, this parallel relationship reinforces Farrah’s statement of frustration and exhaustion with white feminists’ stereotypes of Muslim women as oppressed, generalizations of Muslim women as hopeless, and Eurocentric narratives of Muslim women as powerless. Evolving from these types of exhausting experiences with white feminists, Farrah channels her frustration and uses agitational rhetoric with the recognition of the limits of compassionate rhetoric: “If you’re a feminist who’s against Muslim women and them wearing the hijab, kindly go fuck yourself. I’m not gonna be nice about it anymore. Just go fuck yourself. Full stop” (“If You’re a Feminist...”). To further break the spider web of relationships, she runs another blog on Tumblr called *Just White Feminism Things* to critique and mock white feminists through the multimodal agitational rhetoric of its memes.

Fig. 5 offers a representative example of these memes and their rhetorical practices. It showcases what appears to be a stock photo of a White woman with blond hair expressing anger while holding her smiling face in her hand as if it were a mask. The accompanying text reads: “claiming to be an ally, but then showing your true colors and getting angry when you are challenged on your racism.” The memes on this blog all use the present participle form of a verb at the beginning of the text. This tense indicates continuous action, thereby illustrating white feminists and their continuous disingenuous allyship and ideological alignment with white supremacy. Farrah states, “I always choose pictures that would probably . . . piss white women off.



Fig. 5. Meme by *Just White Feminism Things* on allyship.

And then they just get so mad at me... I don't know what it is about white feminists. But like, I like it when they get mad at me” (Personal Interview). Farrah articulates a rhetoric of agitation through these photos. The image in Fig. 5 conveys the hypocritical nature of white feminist support for Women of Color through an invocation of “two faced.” Through mockery, these memes attempt to agitate and disrupt the imbalanced power differentials white feminists attempt to establish with Muslim Women of Color in the name of “feminism” (read: white feminism).

I also find the use of corporate stock photos to be intriguing. Upon reflection, I would argue that it could function in a way that positions white feminists in alignment with the media production of dominant publics. If doing so, it would offer an implicit counterpublic critique of how white feminist identities and practices are subservient to the *nomoi*—that is, the habits and customs of thinking (Jarratt 74)—of dominant publics through their consumption of and situatedness in capitalist mass media production. After all, Hollywood productions often misrepresent violence, Arabs, and Islam as synonymous, whitewash People of Color from major cinematic roles, and cast People of

Color in stock roles that perpetuate harmful stereotypes when they are actually casted (Ernst 193-94). With Farrah's blogging practices, one can understand her agitational rhetoric as a counterpublic praxis that seeks to break the spider web of relationships and unsettle the *nomoi* of white feminism for the purpose of opening rhetorical space, raising consciousness, and effecting change.

Black feminist autoethnography (BFA) functions in a strikingly similar way to these counterpublic blogging practices. Rachel Alicia Griffin introduces it in "I AM an Angry Black Woman: Black Feminist Autoethnography, Voice, and Resistance." She writes, "[T]he stories we tell about our lives matter. Stories can inspire self-reflexivity, expose the intricate workings of power, and bring complicity and complacency with domination to light" (151). BFA is a rhetorical mode of self-reflexive narrative writing that empowers marginalized perspectives in resistance to dominant discourses. Black women—and Women of Color more generally—use this mode as a means to share lived experiences in light of multiple oppressions, embrace intersectional self-definition, resist the imposition of dominant public consciousness, and account for the ways in which they might reproduce oppressive norms (Griffin 143). Using autoethnographic writing as an embodied methodological praxis for situating themselves and their experiences within sociopolitical contexts (see Spry), they can also resist speaking for others and others' situated experiences (Griffin 143).

For these reasons, BFA is a significant rhetorical invention tool for Women of Color in counterpublic resistance to dominant publics. In fact, sharing personal stories is an important feature of feminist consciousness-raising in general (Sowards and Renegar 541). But it's particularly important for Women of Color as counterpublic intellectuals: "BFA emerges as a conduit to resistant voice and situates Black women as not only knowers, who read dominant culture as a means to survive, but also as known through our words and expressions" (Griffin 150). In other words, the writing serves to hold dominant publics critically accountable for their oppressive silk threads in the spider web of relationships. In this way, BFA establishes the composing process itself as a rhetorical means to develop critical consciousness. The autoethnographic writing also showcases Women of Color's intellectual labor of passionate critique when circulated through (counter)public avenues of publication. In this way, the writing can contribute these

marginalized perspectives to dominant public discourse if able to reach wider publics, thereby potentially effecting change. Therefore, BFA functions especially well as an intellectual mode of writing for intersectional feminist blogs—as Farrah demonstrates with *FWOC*.

Robin Boylorn uses BFA blogging practices for the *Crunk Feminist Collective*. She reflects on these practices in her article “Blackgirl Blogs, Auto/ethnography, and Crunk Feminism.” She writes, “I use the blog as a feminist project, an open space and forum where I can interject and interrupt the cultural narratives that lack critical interrogation. As a crunk space the blog is a house for my anger and frustrations, rage and redemption. It was a place to interrogate privilege, privilege intersectionality, and consider the legitimacy and importance of marginalized lives” (77). Like Farrah, Boylorn uses the blogging medium as a means to channel anger and frustration for the sake of intervening in public discourse. She offers critical perspectives on dominant public narratives, using the blog as a “public space to think about and through the racist, classist, sexist, ableist, heterosexist notions of reality in popular culture and everyday life” for marginalized populations (76-77). Addressing these issues through blogging personal experiences allows Boylorn to channel anger as a rhetorical invention tool for critiquing dominant structures of power. In doing so, she can raise her consciousness on the ways in which oppressive conditions impact her situated experiences.

BFA situates Farrah’s agitational consciousness-raising rhetoric within the broader evolving feminist tradition of autoethnographic writing. Audre Lorde argues, “Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change” (129). Critical feminists consider the use of anger as a necessary rhetorical tactic of agitation for breaking the spider web of relationships. In fact, feminist counterpublic discourse often sets itself apart from the logocentrism of dominant publics with an increased emphasis on the use of pathos as a valid form of expression (Weisser, “Subaltern Counterpublics” 613). Christian Weisser writes, “Rather than seeing anger as a violation of good will, counterpublics may be more open to seeing it as a *demonstration* of good will. If a speaker cares about the subject and is invested in the audience’s hearing it, he or she may use anger to signal a passion or eagerness to be heard” (“Subaltern Counterpublics” 613; emphasis in original). In other words, the use of

anger can function as a rhetorical appeal to demonstrate and build ethos within a counterpublic. In agreement, Tami Spry argues that an increased emphasis on pathos resulting from critical consciousness corresponds with the rhetorical efficacy of autoethnographic writing: “A reader of autoethnographic texts must be moved emotionally and critically” (714). The use of anger through agitational rhetoric signals for counterpublic audiences one’s bold refusal to remain at all complacent in alignment with dominant consciousness. Consequently, it enhances a counterpublic audience’s uptake of the autoethnographic writing for consciousness-raising and circulation.

In this way, BFA is more than a mode for resistance to dominant publics. It also functions in its resistance as a mode for building community among counterpublic individuals and building coalitions between different counterpublics. Griffin explains that the writing of situated perspectives can “spark the possibility of identification and trust between and among different identities and interests” (151). In other words, the autoethnographic writing can offer guidance and perspective to readers, especially those who don’t have frequent access to oppositional perspectives in their physical environments or who simply wish to have their situated experiences and feelings reaffirmed as valid. The embodied writing style in these posts—that is, how they articulate expressions of pain, anger, and transcendence through situated experiences—can resonate with others who share similar experiences and shake those who have privileged experiences to consciousness. In alignment with Spry’s insights, Boylorn writes:

[A]uto/ethnographic blogs resonate with readers due to their realness, subjectivity, emotionality, vulnerability, reflexivity, and bravery. Blogs and auto/ethnography are emotionally intelligent texts whose success is largely determined by their capacity to instigate a reaction in readers, either resonance or response. Accordingly, auto/ethnographic blogs have the capacity to be life-changing and life-affirming, helping to make possible the change we want to see in the world. (77)

In counterpublics, the emphasis is on developing oppositional interpretations and identities as a means of resistance. For this reason, agitational rhetoric might not necessarily be addressing the audience provoked. Indeed, one could consider provoked

audience(s) to be the unintended audience(s). Considering that Farrah’s perception of her followers are “primarily supporters, open minded people, or maybe allies,” her rhetoric addresses an intended audience of those who are developing these oppositional interpretations and identities rather than being directed towards those who are being called out (Personal Survey). Certainly, both audiences can be the case. But one shouldn’t assume the latter without first considering the former.

For instance, Fig. 6 features Farrah’s response to an ‘Ask’ submitted to *FWOC*. As illustrated, the follower articulates her appreciation for Farrah’s intellectual, emotional labor frequently addressing racism and Islamophobia. This anonymous blogger demonstrates identification with Farrah

through the acknowledgement of their shared positionalities as Muslim Women of Color. The blogger then reflects on the vulnerability that she experiences in her situatedness. But she can draw strength and inspiration from Farrah’s blog and insights to be confident in her own self-actualization. Boylorn writes about how making her own situated experiences available to a public audiences outside of academia was at first anxiety-inducing due to the wider readership; however, her experiences with receiving feedback like Farrah’s feedback in Fig. 6 became

empowering: “The immediate feedback I received made me feel comfortable revealing private experiences in a public forum because I knew that my experiences represented other blackgirl realities. I felt it was important for me to insert and interpret my experiences as a black woman feminist and to invite readers to be vulnerable, brave and vocal about their own experiences” (Boylorn 76). This feedback loop then becomes a community-building mechanism in blogging counterpublics. In this way, bloggers can help support and uplift each other’s

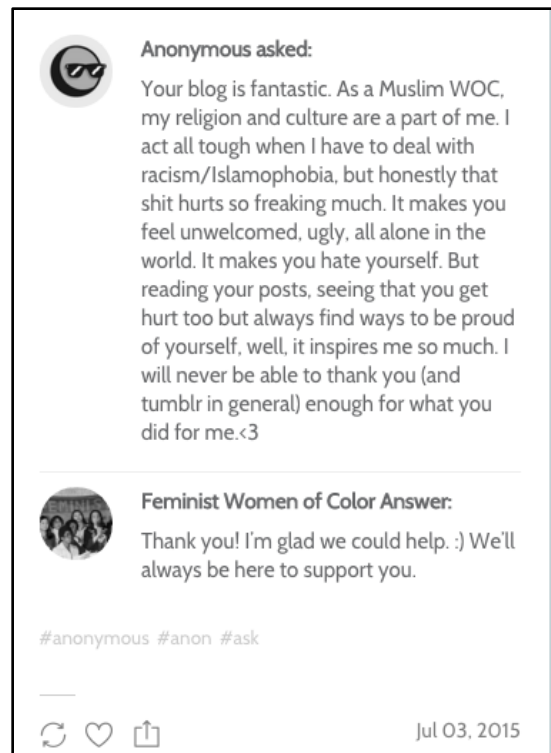


Fig. 6. An anonymous ‘Ask’ answered by *FWOC*

oppositional identities and practices whether or not they are the content creators or the content followers (Farrah, Personal Survey).

This initial anxiety, however, does reflect one of the struggles in feminist counterpublic intellectualism. Similar to Boylorn's initial anxiety with expressing vulnerability in a public forum to wider audiences, the anxiety in this feminist counterpublic on Tumblr appears to result from a public desire to always project perfection in critical consciousness. In other words, newer bloggers tend to project themselves as if they don't make mistakes (Farrah, Personal Interview). These cultivated self-images of counterpublic identity can then lead to rather toxic exchanges when bloggers challenge each other's ideas: "I don't blame people for getting angry and being passionate about issues, but sometimes it almost feels like people are competing with one another or trying to somehow create this image of being a perfect human being who never makes mistakes. That's really not possible" (Farrah, Personal Survey). Farrah does acknowledge that all bloggers, including her, at some point will feel the need to project perfection in critical consciousness and engage in these types of exchanges when challenged. But she also indicates that seasoned counterpublic bloggers on Tumblr are more open to critique and better understand how to pick their rhetorical battles (Personal Interview). Here, Farrah reflects an insightful recognition of the dialogical commitment in feminist autoethnographic writing "to be challenged, changed, embraced, and interrogated in the performance process" (Spry 716). Perhaps this desire to project perfection stems from a misconception of critical consciousness as a product of identity in the digital environment rather than a continual process of identity formation. Perhaps in the vulnerable consciousness-raising process of destabilizing their dominant public consciousness, feminist counterpublic bloggers experience anxiety as a result of their shifting foundations of identity, consequently driving them to seek secure footing in the projection of perfection in critical consciousness as a desired product of identity.

Indeed, one must recognize the risk of agitational rhetoric perpetuating the "angry Woman of Color" stereotype for dominant public audiences; however, dominant publics create and use this stereotype as a means to undermine and silence dissent from Women of Color. To do so, dominant publics construct an emotional habitus that functions as a political regulating force for public alignment to their *nomoi*:

There are strong biases in U.S. society against anger and protest, and, not surprisingly, against the two in conjunction. Angry protests violate norms of decorum and typically are seen as unnecessary in a democratic polity like the United States. In part as a result, shame, embarrassment, and fear of social rejection readily attach to political activities that occur outside routine channels. In that sense, feelings, which might seem trivial in exploring all things political, are profoundly consequential. Given their consequentiality, it seems vital to think about the ways in which feelings are produced; the ways in which power relationships are exercised through and reproduced in our feelings; the ways in which a society's or social group's emotional habitus disciplines us; and how our feelings, as well as a given emotional habitus, shape our views of what is politically possible, desirable, and necessary, thereby helping to establish a political horizon and to determine whether we turn to political activism—and in what forms, if we do. (Gould 46)

I quote this passage at length due to its fierce insight into this issue. Dominant publics determine what social action is and isn't possible, desirable, and necessary with their self-interests in mind. For instance, consider the ways in which dominant publics (particularly politically conservative ones) characterize discussions about race and racism as “divisive” while often not characterizing racism itself as divisive. This characterization seeks to perpetuate the normative construction of the spider web's oppressive silk threads of racism by attempting to silence those who recognize the existence of the threads. Having these threads of racism become recognizable is a risk for dominant *nomoi* (hooks 13; Lorde 128). Therefore, dominant publics dictate what can be said and how it can be said in order to maintain and reinforce their ideological privileges (Weisser, “Subaltern Counterpublics” 612). Women of Color have many valid reasons to be angry—as expressed by Hoda Katebi, an anti-capitalist, feminist Iranian-Muslim fashion blogger: “So, I want to say yes, I am absolutely angry. Anger is *righteous*. Anger is *powerful*. Anger is *valid*. And my anger is *justified*” (“Feminism”; emphasis in original). When dominant publics create social norms and conditions that seek to limit Women of Color's rhetorical options, these dominant publics establish a power dynamic in which the

expression of dissent is on their own terms for the sake of preserving their own self-interests. The use of anger in feminist counterpublics is simply a bold refusal to accept these conditions that uphold their oppressions.

Anger can be a productive outcome of consciousness-raising in this way. Gould describes how consciousness-raising groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s recognized anger in their emotion work: “Feminists challenged individualized and psychologized understandings of what many women were experiencing as depression, pointing to the social origins of that feeling state and renaming it *anger*. That interpretive emotion work encouraged women to understand themselves and their situations in new ways and indeed to feel differently, to feel angry rather than depressed and self-questioning” (28; emphasis in original). Being embedded in the *nomoi* of dominant publics entails internalizing dominant consciousness (Freire 51). This consciousness aligns individuals with the dominant emotional habitus, thereby suggesting what is and isn’t possible, desirable, and necessary. Embracing anger acts as a response to the critical recognition of dominant consciousness, and this response can hold it critically accountable for the individual: “When we turn from anger we turn from insight, saying we will accept only the designs already known, deadly and safely familiar” (Lorde 131). Gould argues for this reason, “Feeling anger is sometimes an achievement, and not always easily accomplished” (91). It’s not always easily accomplished due to the normativity of dominant *nomoi* and the ways in which these *nomoi* naturalize oppressive conditions. Anger can develop from the consciousness-raising recognition of socially constructed oppressive conditions. Therefore, feeling anger becomes a means to resist being complacent with these conditions.

Furthermore, as Farrah demonstrates, channeling anger as a rhetorical invention tool offers considerable potential for producing social action. It can not only develop from critical consciousness, but its use through agitation can also help provoke the development of critical consciousness for audiences. Lorde states, “The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth” (131). In other words, as Gould argues, the use of anger through rhetorical agitation disrupts the dominant *nomos* of decorum, thereby producing a sense

of discomfort. This discomfort can act as a destabilizer to dominant consciousness and lead to critical consciousness-raising insights. For this reason, breaking the spider web of relationships can function as a productive rhetorical means to a just end.

In part, Tumblr appears to function as a platform for feminist counterpublic intellectualism due to its large presence of people from different backgrounds with different perspectives. Sowards and Renegar write, “Third wave texts are self-directed in that they are cathartic for the writers, but they are also other-directed because readers learn about new experiences or relate to the writers’ experiences” (548). With feminist counterpublic bloggers reflecting on their situated experiences through autoethnographic writing and sharing content related to those experiences, Tumblr’s counterpublicity creates dynamic, critical interactions among and between positionalities. Farrah explains, “I like the different perspectives I can get from people who are different from me, who think differently from me... I like that I can engage with people who also are . . . from my community and try to understand their own opinions and feelings... It’s just easier to access different opinions on Tumblr than it is anywhere else... I think it’s just easier to be more well-rounded” (Personal Interview). Bloggers can curate these different counterpublic texts on Tumblr through their dashboard so that they have access to and frequent encounters with them. Consequently, people can encounter a range of narratives from different counterpublics with different insights. Farrah reflects on encountering competing counterpublic perspectives on her dashboard (Personal Interview). Agreeing with both posts after she first read them, this encounter provokes consciousness-raising through a dialectic reflection on the competing insights (Sowards and Renegar 547). In this way, counterpublic intellectualism on Tumblr also fosters coalitional consciousness-raising.

Farrah exhibits a coalitional consciousness (to use Adela Licona’s term). For instance, *FWOC*’s menu contains a section called “Favorite Blogs” populated by a list of 15 counterpublic blogs. Farrah even further demonstrates a coalitional consciousness in her management of the blog itself. Instead of remaining the only individual who publishes content on *FWOC*, she decided to enlist moderators through a recruitment process. This process entailed creating a survey for people who are interested in the position to complete. After reading through the responses and selecting her preferred

candidates, she held a meeting with them on Sykpe or a chat room. Lastly, she had them agree to some general rules and terms before inviting them to moderate *FWOC* (Farrah, Personal Survey). Farrah explains her purpose for recruiting moderators: “I only have a set of experiences due to my own background, and so I can’t ever fully understand or address the difficulties and needs of other groups. And so, I thought it was important to recruit different people in order to have a more diverse and expansive reach and understanding of the issues facing POC/WOC” (Personal Survey). Using feminist autoethnographic writing to address sociopolitical issues through situated experiences is a significant counterpublic intellectual practice. While Farrah’s positionality indeed offers valuable perspectives to circulate, she also understands the limitations of her perspectives. For this reason, she enlists moderators to expand the audiences of *FWOC* and address issues with which she doesn’t have lived experiences. Similar to Boylorn, these moderators and their posts help diversify and raise her critical consciousness (Farrah, Personal Interview).

Based on Farrah’s blogging practices, I argue that feminist autoethnographic writing contains significant research potential for the field of composition and rhetoric. Future research studies on feminist autoethnographic writing processes might further bring to light the continued importance of consciousness-raising in the current sociopolitical context. In this historical moment of the Black Lives Matter anti-lynching movement and the continuing rise of Islamophobic rhetoric in the United States, I argue based on this case study that autoethnographic writing serves as a rhetorical invention tool that can counter the normativity of dominant consciousness—particularly its problematic *nomoi*—and potentially resist anti-intellectualism by situating lived experiences in sociopolitical, transnational contexts.

Furthermore, I argue that unruly rhetorics (to use Nancy Welch’s term) offer the field of composition and rhetoric fascinating research potential. I do understand calls for civility in public deliberation. Indeed, civility is the democratic ideal—although it is an ideal that inequitable power relations complicate. In this way, it suggests a Habermasian bourgeois public sphere that forms public opinion through critical-rational deliberation between peers. But with the recognition of power dynamics, a dominant group’s call for “civility” from marginalized groups can often operate as a thinly disguised means to

silence dissenting perspectives. A dominant group's call for civil decorum rarely seems to respond to a marginalized group's call for civility in the dominant group's construction of the institutional, oppressive spider web of relationships. Lorde offers a reminder of the difference between a dominant public's hatred and a counterpublic's anger: "This hatred and our anger are very different. Hatred is the fury of those who do not share our goals, and its object is death and destruction. Anger is a grief of distortions between peers, and its object is change" (129). If too much focus is on the civility of marginalized groups (according to the standards of dominant publics), then not enough focus is on justice in the actions of dominant groups. Farrah's use of anger through agitational rhetoric in her interactions with white feminists breaks the spider web of relationships as a means to open a rhetorical space for just ends. As Lorde states, "If I speak to you in anger, at least I have spoken to you" (130).

With this in mind, I believe Farrah's counterpublic intellectualism can inspire the field's scholarship to research the ways in which anger and agitation function as a rhetorical means to a just end. I would like to call for more research on agitational rhetoric—both as a productive means to just ends *as well as* an unproductive means to ideological stagnation. This future research, I suspect, might find that agitational rhetoric and listening rhetoric (to use Krista Ratcliffe's term) aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, competing rhetorical approaches. That is, I suspect that agitational rhetoric and listening rhetoric can operate together in the same rhetorical moment to foster dynamic, complex rhetorics of social action. Indeed, a myriad of contextual circumstances would need ethical and rhetorical consideration in this future research. But I believe further case study research with thick description would begin to illuminate these circumstances, uncovering similarities and differences between the rhetorical situations for the sake of building broader theories for effecting social change.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAVED BY THE BELL HOOKS: CIRCULATING VISUAL ANTINOMY FOR CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

“No idea can become a movement if the concept is never shared.”

– Tumblr Blogger, *AndOverHereWeSee*

Liz Larabee is a 32-year-old White woman who lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She works as an illustrator, writer, teacher, and entrepreneur. Larabee is also the creator of the Tumblr blog *Saved by the bell hooks*—the 10th most viral blog on Tumblr in 2015 (Year in Review). As the title suggests, the blog features mashup memes that circulate stills from the popular late ‘80s, early ‘90s television show *Saved by the Bell* with direct quotes from bell hooks. The blog’s memes all have a similar aesthetic: capitalized yellow font layered on

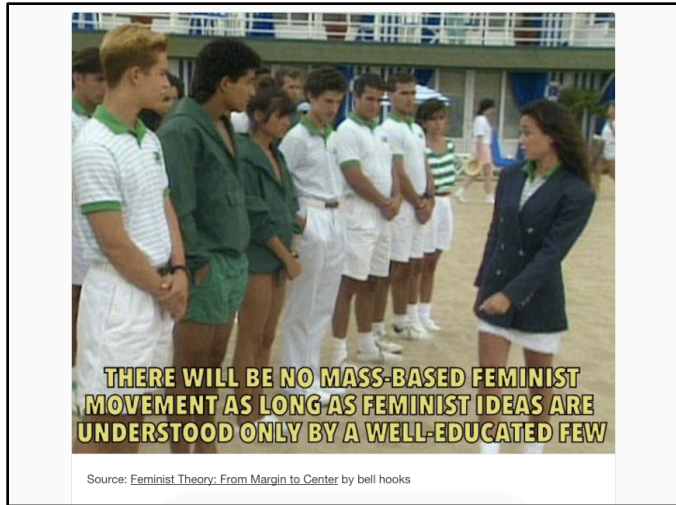


Fig. 7. Meme on educational privilege in feminism.

top of one of the show’s stills with a link to the quote’s source text directly beneath the meme (as shown in Fig. 7). Larabee reflects on her external exigencies for creating the blog:

My interests are all over the map, but in recent years I have developed a strong commitment to being vocal about politics, social inequity, and marginalized voices. I initially began it (the blog) after chatting with some friends at a bar. We had been talking about the representation of people of color in Hollywood, the representation of women in the film *Selma*, and how the conversation about both had shifted since the media coverage of Ferguson. This was also on the heels of the original #OscarsSoWhite

hashtag which is even more painfully relevant this year. There is an embarrassing failure of work extended to and recognition for people of color in Hollywood. That these themes remain speaks at best to ignorance and at worst to willful discrimination. Add to that my penchant for puns, wordplay, humor, and memes. It was a natural extension of my interests. (Collins; Personal Survey)

As this passage illustrates, Laribee uses the blog to talk back to popular media's problematic representational politics through a mashup of its images with feminist theory. This multimodal mashup invokes the rhetorical concept of synchresis. David Sheridan et al. explain synchresis as "the process by which separate semiotic elements . . . that involve separate modalities add up to a semiotic whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (136). Here, the separate modalities consist of images and words—including the words functioning as hashtags. Understanding the interaction between these separate modalities and their greater multimodal effect involves recognizing the ways in which visual antinomy operates within these memes as a form of social action for consciousness-raising.

Kristie Fleckenstein introduces visual antinomy in *Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom*. She describes it as a visual habit that "predisposes individuals to engage in popular literacy: the self-sponsored, nonacademic acts of meaning making that can be used to resist dominant constructions of reality" (120). Visual habits are social constructions that privilege certain ways of interpreting reality, thereby maintaining the dominance of certain cultural logics over others. Krista Ratcliffe offers a useful explanation of cultural logics: "If a claim is an assertion of a person's thinking, then a cultural logic is a belief system or shared way of reasoning within which a claim may function" (33). In other words, a cultural logic is the epistemological foundation on which interpretation and understanding function. This foundation isn't void of power, for dominant publics establish their cultural logics as the implicit epistemological default. The normativity of dominant visual habits, therefore, maintains the pervasiveness of dominant publics and their cultural logics. Fleckenstein outlines four reasons antinomy offers a framework for transformative social action that can resist and disrupt these dominant constructions: 1) its Kantian association with intellectual

paradoxes; 2) its Sophistic association through the Greek word *nomos*—often understood as meaning “human laws”—thereby signifying antinomy as “against lawfulness”; 3) its Burkean association with disruptiveness through ensuring only temporary impositions of meaning on reality in order to allow for a multitude of meanings; and 4) its Burkean association with transformation due to invention through paradox (116). With this foundation, Fleckenstein offers a productive theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which consciousness-raising occurs through memes on social media networks like Tumblr.

I do, however, wish to incorporate an alternate definition of *nomos* than the one illustrated above. While this earlier definition of *nomos* seems appropriate for Fleckenstein’s purpose, I do find Susan Jarratt’s sophistic definition to be more appropriate for illustrating the relationship between the circulation of memes and consciousness-raising. As Sheridan et al. explain, “If we place circulation at the center of rhetorical theory, the essay or speech cease to be privileged genres; proverbs, aphorisms, buttons, and stickers become preferred options” (62). I argue that memes also become preferred options, especially in light of visual antinomy as a theoretical framework. Providing a means to center circulation for antinomy, Jarratt defines sophistic *nomos* as “provisional codes (habits or customs) of social and political behavior, socially constructed and historically (even geographically) specific” (74). This articulation of *nomos* brings circulation to the forefront by positioning knowledge- and identity-formation within a socially constructed, ecological rhetorical model. That is, it accounts for ways in which the circulation of antinomy can affect intellectual, social, and political behavior. In doing so, it better accommodates the existence of multiple cultural logics, as they exist within different publics and operate from different relations to power. With this in mind, one can understand antinomy—rather than as “against lawfulness”—as resistance to dominant publics’ provisional codes of social and political behavior.

Bricolage, paradox, and agenic invention are three rhetorical practices of visual antinomy for resisting and subverting dominant *nomoi*. Fleckenstein suggests how these rhetorical practices are important to consciousness-raising: “Through bricolage, paradox, and agenic invention, antinomy constitutes an important new way of seeing, one that enables the perception of new subjectivities and realities” (117). In other words,

antinomy supports consciousness-raising because it helps challenge dominant consciousness and construct alternate interpretations of one's self and one's reality. As a visual habit, it allows for the introduction of alternate perceptions of the world through bricolage, the disorientation of one's perceptions of the world through paradox, and the resituation of these perceptions anew through agenic invention. As a rhetorical practice, it allows for the juxtaposition of competing logics in order to create a perceptual paradox for the sake of establishing an ambiguity out of which invention and transformation occur.

Bricolage is the foundational rhetorical practice of visual antinomy. *Bricolage* is a French term referring to “the process of creating something new by cobbling together bits and pieces of the old” (Fleckenstein 117). Building upon Michel de Certeau's insights, Frank Farmer argues that bricolage transcends the conventional consumption-production dichotomy (34). Consumption indeed becomes an alternative form of production when it assembles new perceptions, thereby illustrating how antinomy functions as a visual habit and a rhetorical practice of cultural production. Counterpublics adopt bricolage as a rhetorical practice of cultural production by taking fragments of dominant publics in order to create a style that subverts the *nomoi* of those publics (Fleckenstein 117). The cut-and-paste fragmentation of feminist zines, for instance, is a good example of bricolage as a counterpublic rhetorical practice (see Licona). In similar fashion, the juxtaposition of disparate elements in visual antinomy exposes dominant provisional codes of social and political behavior and invokes alternative ones as a means of resistance.

Laribee functions as a counterpublic bricoleur in this way. By cobbling together stills from the popular media of dominant publics and critical insights from intersectional feminism, she establishes a juxtaposition in the memes that can talk back to the dominant *nomoi* of those publics. Laribee explains the intentions behind her blog's use of juxtaposition:

bell hooks' works were perfect for this project for two reasons: the first being that just practically speaking, her name works for mashing up with Saved By The Bell. The second and more meaningful reason is the content of her writing. She is best known for her writings on intersectional

feminism, specifically on the ways that race, class, and gender play roles in the systems that perpetuate oppression. Many of these systems of oppression go unseen by people they [*sic*] don't experience the oppression, including 11-year-old Liz Larabee watching *Saved By The Bell* for six hours a day. That SBTB was a normal element of my upbringing, and that that is the case for almost everyone I know, I found its juxtaposition with hooks' biting criticism particularly compelling as a mirror. (Collins)

Interestingly, Larabee uses visual metaphors to describe the recognition of oppression. It speaks back to her past experiences consuming the *nomoi* of dominant publics through popular media in light of later developed critical perceptions and subjectivities. As she states, "It was a show created within an industry and culture postured toward patriarchal aesthetics, storylines, and motivations" (Wall). Juxtaposing stills of this show with insights from intersectional feminist theory places the two in discussion with one another.

As a means of resistance and subversion, moreover, it holds a mirror to dominant publics from a counterpublic standpoint to reflect a critical perception of those publics.

In Fig. 8, for example, one can observe an image of Zack Morris holding a life-size cardboard cutout of Kelly Kapowski. The accompanying quote from hooks reads, "Identity is always about representation." This juxtaposition talks back to a *nomos* of dominant publics. As indicative in Larabee's inclusion of the hashtags "cardboard kelly" and "Human Zack," the juxtaposition reflects a critique of how the media of dominant publics construct sexist standards of representation and therefore identity. In



Fig. 8. Meme on identity and representation.

particular, these media often represent men as multi-dimensional individuals who can fulfill many different social, professional, and emotional roles. At the same time, these media often represent women as one-dimensional characters that seem to follow a patriarchal formula for what women can be, do, and feel. The meme's still image offers audiences a one-dimensional, cardboard Kapowski in the hands of Morris to represent and critique this misrepresentation in light of the quote. That is, the meme's visual antinomy through juxtaposition re-presents the *nomos* with the still while working to unmask the hidden assumptions embedded in that *nomos* with the quote.

Importantly, bricolage alone is not subversive. It must operate in conjunction with paradox in order for subversion to be possible, according to Fleckenstein (118). For, the interaction between bricolage and paradox creates a "visual crisis" for audiences. This visual crisis stems from the ambiguity created by the incongruity of competing cultural logics in a bricoleur's juxtaposition. Fleckenstein argues, "A visual crisis opens the door for subversion because it calls into question the specious unity of the status quo" (118). The pervasiveness of dominant publics' *nomoi*, in other words, creates a sense that their cultural logics are the only cultural logics. In conjunction with juxtaposition, paradox works to disrupt that sense so that one can begin to recognize alternative cultural logics. Fleckenstein accounts for three different levels of paradox in visual antinomy for disrupting dominant publics' normativity: 1) gaps in visual narratives; 2) contradictions among images; and 3) contradictions between images and words.

Larabee's consciousness-raising rhetoric of visual antinomy operates on the third level of paradox. In Fig. 9, for instance, one can observe Morris and A.C. Slater looking at each other while wearing military camouflage with the accompanying hooks quote, "The rhetoric of nationalism is totally homophobic." Morris and Slater embody a rhetoric of nationalism through their military camouflage attire, thereby establishing a visual crisis in light of the insights from the quote. This paradox results from the contradiction between the cultural logic of the still and the cultural logic of the words. In particular, a dominant public's cultural logic of the still could invoke—as indicative in Larabee's use of the hashtag "machismo"—connotations of patriarchal masculinity, patriotism, pride, power, strength, force, competition, etc. But the cultural logic of the words in conjunction with the still image could invoke a re-visioning of the image's cultural logic for dominant

publics. In other words, Slater’s bare arms could no longer only suggest strength, but also perhaps eroticism, as he and Morris stand closely together making eye contact—while being careful to perform their patriarchal masculinities through power postures and homophobic touch isolation. Their eye contact could especially provoke a re-visioning. Whereas it could connote aggression with a dominant cultural logic as Morris and Slater stare each other down, one could re-vision the eye contact as a concerned Morris and a caring Slater intimately sharing a moment.

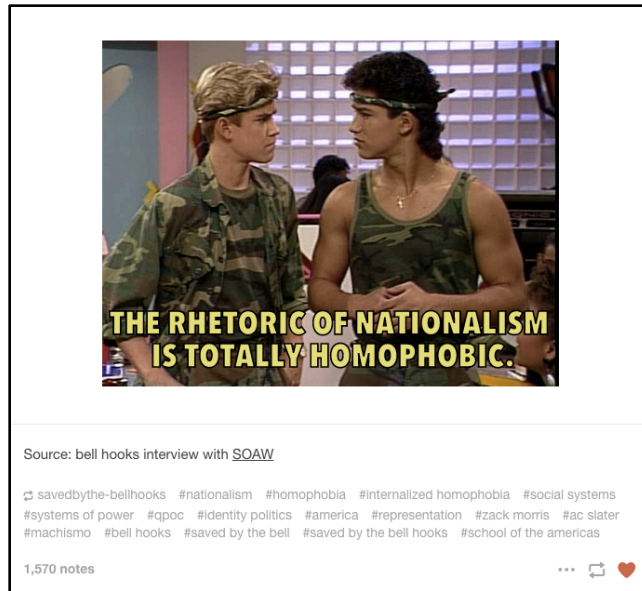


Fig. 9. Meme on nationalism and homophobia.

Fleckenstein argues, “Through paradox, perceivers become intensely aware of the constructive nature of vision and of their participation in that vision” (119). In other words, through paradox, individuals can come to realize the social construction of their perceptions and their knowledges based on those perceptions. The paradox in Fig. 9 places dominant publics’ perceptions and cultural logics in discussion with other ways of seeing and knowing, thereby introducing a reliance on a logic of both/and rather than on one cultural logic over another cultural logic. In doing so, the meme can reveal the existence of dominant publics’ *nomoi* and subvert their specious unity through the introduction of alternative cultural logics.

Fig. 10 offers further illustration of visual antinomy’s potential for resistance. In this meme, one can observe a still of Kapowski smiling while accompanying the hooks quote, “The beauty standard was a reflection of white supremacist aesthetics.” This meme’s juxtaposition talks back to a dominant *nomos* of white supremacy through a critique of the White, Eurocentric beauty standards that Kapowski embodies. Its paradox, like in the previous example, results from the contradiction between the cultural logic of the still and the cultural logic of the words. Kapowski arguably embodies an ideal

Eurocentric beauty standard represented constantly in the popular media of dominant publics. In light of the cultural logic of the words, however, the meme can establish a paradox against the *nomoi* of dominant publics. That is, it can expose the dominant publics' construction of a beauty standard that privileges Eurocentric physical features as the implicit default of what is considered beautiful and desirable. If dominant publics consequently foreground a reliance on a logic of both/and through the recognition of the quote's cultural logic, then they could potentially come to a better understanding of their own complacency in white supremacist aesthetic practices.

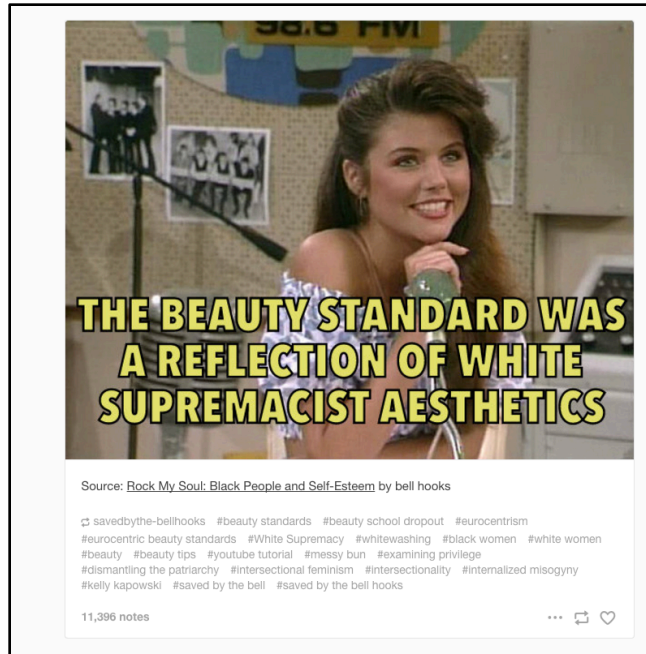


Fig. 10. Meme on white supremacist beauty standards.

Even further, Laribee's choice to use an image of Kapowski smiling invokes an intersectional critique of White women's complacency with this white supremacist standard of beauty. Laribee reflects on 'white feminism' and its oppressive practices: "White feminism is so puffed up. It's so proud because it posters as 'we're finally getting shit done,' and that can be so dangerous because there's such arrogance that goes along with that while . . . still shutting out Black women" (Personal Interview). As mentioned in the previous chapter, 'white feminism' doesn't necessarily mean "feminism practiced by White women." After all, Laribee is a White woman. One can be White and feminist, but not a 'white feminist.' Rather, white feminism is a particular strand of feminist thinking that upholds white supremacy for the expedient advancement of Western, White women. Of course, this strand of feminist thinking marginalizes Women of Color. Even though white feminists would argue that they are fighting for the liberation of "all women," the ways in which their practices fail to account for intersectionality suggest otherwise. With this in mind, one can see that Fig. 10 also offers an intersectional critique

of white feminists through a smiling Kapowski for complacency in the role white supremacy plays in dominant beauty standards. Therefore, the meme operates on the third level of paradox in visual antinomy to disrupt and subvert the normativity of dominant publics' perception of what is and isn't considered beautiful and for what reasons.

The recognition of the multiplicity of perceptions and knowledges can have a destabilizing effect on individuals' understanding of their realities and subjectivities. On the one hand, their recognition of being complicit in dominant perceptions and knowledges could have an unfavorable impact if it hinders the development of critical consciousness as a result of them feeling as if they lack agency. But this resituation of perceptions resulting from bricolage and paradox could also have a favorable consciousness-raising impact and lead to individuals' uptake of agenic invention as subversive rhetorical practitioners. Fleckenstein argues that agenic invention "situates the perceiver as an active inventor of vision, not merely as active participant in vision. Through agenic invention, individuals develop a new vision—a new image—of what can be or should be, thus impelling people to action" (120). In other words, their recognition of the multiplicity of perceptions and knowledges outside of dominant publics can empower them to act with rhetorical agency in critical consciousness. Therefore, agenic invention contributes to one's ability to not only resist the *nomoi* of dominant publics through the development of critical consciousness, but also subvert the *nomoi* of dominant publics through rhetorical practices that could help lead others to critical consciousness. As a rhetorical practice, Larabee's agenic invention accounts for her decision to respond kairotically to external and internal exigencies, to develop a theme based on responding to these exigencies, to choose a platform based on this theme, and to act through a mode based on the exigencies, theme, and platform.

National sociopolitical contexts around race and representation contribute to Larabee's uptake of agenic invention as a rhetorical practice. Fleckenstein writes, "[Agenic invention] arises out of the conscious contribution of the perceiver to the perception so necessary to antinomy" (127). In other words, individuals must actively participate as counterpublic bricoleurs in the recognition of paradox as a means to harness the subversive power of agenic invention. As previously illustrated, Larabee's uptake of agenic invention as a rhetorical practitioner arises out of a discussion with her

friends in which she used her current cultural logic to critique a dominant public's cultural logic (which is also a previously held cultural logic). She states, "When we talk about how much better we as a nation have become in terms of race relations, or racial representations in media, I think we are using flawed logic based on the perpetual obscuring of stories about people of color" (Adams). Here, she places the flawed cultural logic of a dominant public in critical discussion with her later developed cultural logic. Importantly, with these external exigencies, she also responds to internal exigencies involving her desire to engage further with intersectionality: "[I]f I can identify with whom particular things have meaning, then I can . . . make stronger connections to issues, issues at the heart of the matter and actually speak to the people I'm curious about learning about" (Personal Interview). In light of current events and her desire to further contribute to the development of her own critical consciousness, she is then impelled to rhetorical action for what can and should be. That is, she exhibits agenic invention through her decision to create *Saved by the bell hooks* as a kairotic response to external and internal exigencies in order to help critique dominant publics' media practices of representation as well as contribute those critiques to her own cultural logic.

Furthermore, Laribee demonstrates her agenic invention as a rhetorical practitioner through her thematic development and choice of platform. She states, "I think many events in 2014 helped prompt a reexamination of status quo in ways that pushed it (how intersectionality interacts with arts culture) closer to the center of the national conversation. And bell hooks is at the center of the intersectionality conversation" (Adams). She further argues, "hooks' writings, among others, speak to a school of feminism (intersectionality) that is gaining traction among millennials. Her examinations of patriarchal white supremacy in media produced by the dominant culture are especially relevant in the way that media is consumed by millennials. Through the platform of Tumblr, for example, memes that critique the dominant culture are as easily accessible as those that perpetuate it and are oftentimes juxtaposed in the newsfeed [*sic*]" (Collins; Personal Survey). Laribee exhibits agenic invention through the development of a theme that responds to the exigencies and the choice of a platform based on that theme. In other words, she recognizes the ethos that hooks maintains among millennials who are familiar with the ways in which hooks critiques patriarchal white supremacy in the media of

dominant publics. She then draws upon her personal experiences of consuming dominant media through *Saved by the Bell* and mashes up the two in a way that also corresponds with the intended audience’s information literacy: “By putting content (like the writings of bell hooks) where socially conscious millennials have a better chance of reading them (like Tumblr), the content will help mold the subsequent conversation” (Personal Interview). In fact, Limor Shifman characterizes Tumblr as a “meme hub”—where Internet users upload and negotiate a large amount of memes daily (13). With memes critiquing dominant culture and memes perpetuating dominant culture juxtaposed, the Tumblr dashboard itself operates through bricolage. The competing cultural logics of these memes establish a paradoxical rhetorical encounter with the dashboard for bloggers, thereby potentially invoking a visual crisis. As a result, bloggers have the potential to engage in the process of crafting the active, participatory, critical perception necessary for agenic invention (Fleckenstein 127). Laribee condenses this experience with the Tumblr dashboard into one memetic encounter through the visual antinomy of her memes.

Using memes to help shape sociopolitical conversations and her own understanding of those conversations also demonstrates Laribee’s agenic invention as a rhetorical practitioner. Shifman argues, “Memes have always played an important role as venues for expressing opinions and subverting the established order (149). For instance, one can observe the ways in which Laribee attempts to engage these memes with national conversations around race and police brutality. Fig. 11 is a still of three characters having a conversation while standing in front of lockers. The accompanying hooks quote reads, “The rage of the oppressed is never the same as the rage of the privileged. One



Fig. 11. Meme responding to the Charleston Shooting.

group can change their lot only by changing the system; the other hopes to be rewarded within the system. Public focus on black rage, the attempt to trivialize and dismiss it, must be subverted by public discourse about the pathology of white supremacy, the madness it creates.” This meme includes the following significantly kairotic hashtags: #charleston, #hate crime, #confederate flag. Using these hashtags with this meme functions as a way for Laribee to place hooks’ insight in discussion with the national conversation about the murders of Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Tywanza Sanders, Rev. Sharonda Singleton, Cynthia Hurd, Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, Ethel Lance, Susie Jackson, Myra Thompson, and Rev. Daniel Simmons Sr. at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17, 2015, by the racist Dylann Roof. Laribee also later reblogged this same meme from herself as a way to place it in discussion with a grand jury’s decision not to indict the cop who murdered the 14-year-old Tamir Rice. Therefore, she uses the hashtags to contextualize these memes for the sake of having them enter and inform significant conversations.

The use of playful memes as a mode to inform sociopolitical issues is significant. It offers a means of critical engagement that could mitigate the unfavorable impact of visual antinomy’s disorientation and increase the productive potential of visual antinomy’s consciousness-raising effect. Laribee states, “My goal for the blog is that it continues to challenge and delight those people to whom it is a challenge and delight” (Collins). In particular, audiences seem to delight in the blog’s mashup of popular culture and intersectional feminist theory. Referencing the incongruity theory of humor, Shifman argues, “[C]omedy derives from an unexpected cognitive encounter



Fig. 12. Meme on feminism as process.

between two incongruent elements, as in a pun... (79). In addition to the pun in the blog’s

title, the meme's mashups offer audiences a playfully incongruous encounter with feminist theory through popular culture. For instance, Fig. 12 is a meme with a still image of Jessie Spano dancing. The accompanying hooks quote reads, "Feminists are made, not born." Feminism is a process, not a destination. And feminist resistance can be exhausting. This particular meme can demonstrate through the playful image of Spano dancing that one doesn't have to only engage feminism with the seriousness of academic rigor. Larabee writes, "I try to be as funny as possible, as representatively diverse as possible, and to cover a range of topics" (Personal Survey). Humor can function as a location for self-recovery, and self-care is an act of resistance against dominant publics that would desire for counterpublic intellectuals to burn out of agenic invention and fade out of circulation. Using memes as a mode helps fight against burn out and offers a playful means to engage in serious conversations. Shifman explains, "As pop culture is part of people's everyday lives and cultural identities, using it to talk about politics makes the latter more approachable. Pop culture thus serves as a platform through which individuals communicate with each other about politics in a playful and engaging way" (136). In other words, the mashup offers individuals an approachable engagement with critical feminist insights. Using pop culture to deliver this content mediates visual antinomy's unfavorable disorientation through the use of humor while still invoking a visual crisis through the memes' competing cultural logics, thereby contributing to the enjoyment of the blog's critical engagement.

Consequently, *Saved by the bell hooks* is quite successful. As previously stated, it is Tumblr's 10th most viral blog for 2015 (Year in Review). In fact, the blog received 20,000 followers in a matter of days after its creation (Larabee and Henderson). Individuals from *The YWCA of America*, *Insider Higher Ed*, *PennLive*, *Moxie*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Blavity* have interviewed Larabee about *Saved by the bell hooks*, and several other websites have featured it. Shifman ultimately indicates six factors for viral success. These factors include: 1) positivity/humor; 2) provocation of high-arousal emotions; 3) packaging; 4) prestige; 5) positioning; and 6) participation. Interestingly, *Saved by the bell hooks* appears to fulfill all of these factors. It uses humor through the mashup while provoking high-arousal emotions by using quotes about racism, sexism, and classism and placing them kairotically in discussion with sociopolitical issues. The

blog's memes also package the message simply by using a consistent style and single stills. Laribee positions them on Tumblr—which, as previously discussed, is a meme hub and a platform known for being populated with counterpublic feminist discourse. Laribee observes, “[A]nyone with access to Tumblr can encounter pockets of critical theory that might be able to realign how we think about the world” (Collins; Personal Survey). Further, she states, “Internet-based searches on Tumblr have become a valuable tool for young people hoping to educate themselves on how larger conversations are developing. It is fascinating to watch how memes both contribute to and reflect how people talk about things” (Collins; Personal Survey). Additionally, the memes appeal to prestige through the use of direct quotes from bell hooks, and Laribee urges further participation by encouraging followers to read additional texts on intersectional feminism (Laribee, “Intersectionality”). Shifman does warn that a heavy reliance on popular culture images for political memes risks depoliticizing the insights (138). At the same time, this depoliticalization might be the point. For, normalizing counterpublic *nomoi* functions as a consciousness-raising means to agenic invention.

Laribee's rhetorical practices of agenic invention did further contribute to the raising of her own consciousness, specifically as a result of the creation and circulation of the memes. She reflects on her intellectual experiences as a result of circulation: “[O]ne of the experiences I had through this blog was being able to observe . . . what content was being responded to most organically... Those were essentially like coded pieces of data, and being able to track their responses has been really helpful to me in terms of learning what are hotspot issues within the larger issue of race and class and gender” (Personal Interview). To illustrate, her most successful meme features Kapowski interacting with an apparently unamused Lisa Turtle in a movie theater (see Fig. 13). The accompanying hooks quote reads, “Black women have felt they were asked to choose between a black movement that primarily served the interests of black male patriarchs and a women's movement which primarily serves the interests of racist white women.” Unlike the implicit critique of white feminism through the use of a smiling Kapowski in Fig. 10, this meme's quote explicitly calls attention to Black women's reaction to white feminists and Black male patriarchs. But with the still image, it especially emphasizes the critique of white feminism: “The picture I thought was effective because it sort of shows, . . . even in

the context of like Kelly trying to interact with Lisa . . . there's no possible way for Kelly to represent Lisa in whatever it is that Kelly is trying to do here" (Laribee, Personal Interview). At this point in time, the post contains 85,409 notes. Laribee observes based on this meme's success, "That idea's popularity speaks to a failure on behalf of feminist and racial justice efforts in our history. Progress can't be made when the tools of that progress undermine the basic needs of the people it purports to aid" (Collins). Because of this popularity, she also came to realize her own privilege in not recognizing the resonance this insight maintains within the impacted communities (Personal Interview). That is, experiencing the ways in which people identified and interacted with the circulating meme drew her attention to the significance of its insight, thereby encouraging her to reflect further on it and become more conscious of it.

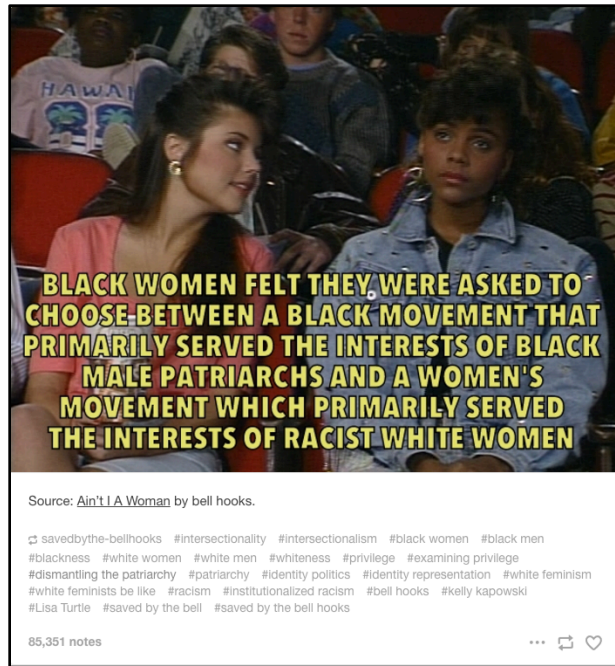


Fig. 13. Meme on Black women and white feminism.

Most interestingly, Laribee recognized and theorized a potential problem with consistently using Turtle in the memes. She calls it "The Lisa Problem" (Laribee, "The Lisa Problem"). In particular, the quote in Fig. 13 functions as if it reflects Turtle's thoughts. Since Turtle is the sole Woman of Color on *Saved by the Bell*, Laribee found that the consistent use of one Woman of Color to speak about issues of race risks becoming a new form of tokenism (Personal Survey). In other words, she didn't want the consistent use of Turtle to imply that these issues at the intersections of race, gender, and class apply to every single Black woman in the same way. She states, "I don't want black women to become a stock character in how I talk about the world" (Personal Interview). This insightful acknowledgement and critical foresight speaks to Laribee's cautious approach to counterpublic engagement. As a White woman, she must avoid the pitfalls of

white feminism and be mindful of how circulating these memes could potentially affect the communities invoked in them. In this way, she demonstrates an astute awareness of intended and unintended consequences in visual antinomy's cultural production as a rhetorical practitioner.

She developed two different rhetorical blogging practices to address 'The Lisa Problem' and avoid the risk of creating a new form of tokenism. First, she branched out and created "sideshows" on *Saved by the bell hooks*. For instance, some of the sideshows include the following: "Cornel West Wing" (a mashup of Cornel West and *The West Wing*), "Brangela Davis" (a mashup of Angela Davis and the *Game of Thrones* character Bran Stark), and "Howard Xena" (a mashup of Howard Zinn and *Xena, the Warrior Princess*). The memes in these sideshows perform similar rhetorical practices of visual antinomy as the ones performed by the *Saved by the Bell* memes. But the sideshows allow her to use *Saved by the bell hooks* to address a wider range of issues, incorporate different voices, and have a wider representative range of characters.

Additionally, she began to use the quotes in a way that makes outside observations on the reality perpetuated by *Saved by the Bell* as a rhetorical practice of defamiliarization. She discusses

wanting to "have the content or the words interact with the image in terms of . . . an observation. Like, there are a bunch of White people interacting and sharing this truth that . . . is separate from what it is we're seeing happening on the screen" (Personal Interview). Fig. 14 is a good example of this practice (as well as previously discussed examples). In this meme, Kapowski and Spano are having a conversation by one of their lockers. The accompanying hooks quote reads, "White women who dominate

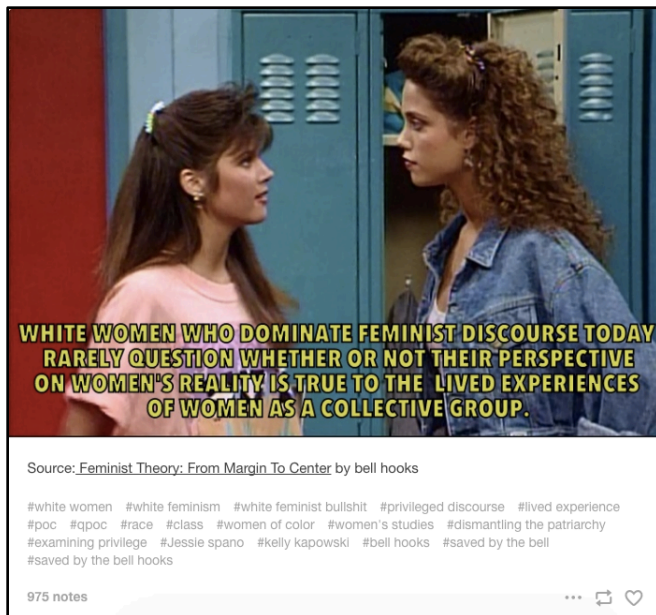


Fig. 14. Meme on resolving "The Lisa Problem."

feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group." Illustrated by how Kapowski and Spano are only speaking to each other, the juxtaposition between the still image and quote invokes an observational critique of how white feminists don't include intersectional perspectives in their discourse and/or allow intersectional perspectives to inform their discourse. It speaks less directly to the action being presented in the still and more directly to dominant cultural logics informing the production of the show itself since Laribee doesn't present the subversive cultural logic in the quotes as if it is coming from the characters themselves (like in Fig. 13). Rather, as previously discussed, she juxtaposes the two cultural logics and creates a paradox as a way to talk back to dominant publics. Laribee's rhetorical practices of agenic invention, as a result of her cautious approach to public engagement, come full circle by setting up the conditions of visual antinomy for the followers of her blog.

Laribee's experiences with *Saved by the bell hooks* are transformative. She attributes her own intellectual growth in feminism to the process of constructing and performing these rhetorical actions: "[M]y own intellectual shift in terms of intersectionality and through feminism really has . . . correlated with the *Saved by the bell hooks* project... I feel like I was learning on the ground while making these things" (Personal Interview). In fact, this blogging experience shifted her professional trajectory. She observes:

I think the sociology of Tumblr is an underused tool, and it's certainly one I'm grateful for in my own development. I had no idea the blog would gain any traction, nor did I expect that it would propel me into a different career path. I had spent years as a portrait artist/director of a grassroots arts collective in Harrisburg. This blog helped me solidify my decision to redirect and go to grad school (I'm attending UMD in the Fall for a Masters in Library Science) to study disparities within access to education. (Personal Survey)

As a rhetorical practice, visual antinomy supports and fosters consciousness-raising. It also functions as a means for resistance and subversion of the dominant publics' cultural logics for counterpublic rhetorical practitioners. Fleckenstein appropriately argues that

one's resistance to and subversion of dominant publics depends on that individual's uptake agenic invention. While people can act to help individuals recognize and understand alternative ways of being and knowing, these individuals must always retain power over their own agency. Foregrounding a reliance on the cultural logic of both/and, visual antinomy leaves space for the audience's agency. As John Poulakos states, "Rhetoric is the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible" (36). Larabee's rhetoric of visual antinomy functions as a form of counterpublic intellectualism through popular literacy. It offers a playful means of feminist intellectual engagement that disrupts dominant publics' *nomoi* to suggest that which is possible with alternative cultural logics.

With this in mind, Larabee provides the field with insights on ways in which to disseminate scholarship in (counter)public venues. Popular culture can serve as a vehicle for intellectual public engagement. Packaging scholarly insights into memes also challenges academics to pay more attention to style in their writing. Larabee states that she looks for quotes that offer complete, digestible ideas in a short amount of space (Personal Survey). Scholars don't necessarily need to fill academic publications with this style of writing. But remixing scholarship into public texts and even using these texts to respond kairotically to sociopolitical events could function as extensions of the field's scholarly work.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

These past chapters offer an introduction to what I call “counterpublic intellectualism” primarily through case study research on two feminist counterpublic bloggers. The first chapter situates this research in the field’s scholarship. I argue that scholars and rhetoricians should recognize intellectualism in the context of power as it relates to publicity. Dominant avenues of publicity—including academic publications, print media, and corporate media—limit the range of intellectualism to recognizable forms offered by those in positions of power. After illustrating some of the difficulties and successes during the research process through a discussion of the methodology and methods, I introduced two feminist counterpublic bloggers.

Both bloggers articulate a passion for social justice. One can observe that Farrah’s sociopolitical exigency is one of critical intervention through social advocacy. She wishes to act in response to a silence in the representation of Muslim Women of Color’s perspectives on Tumblr. Responding to this exigency, she uses agitational rhetoric as a means to just ends—particularly in regards to the relationships of power into which white feminists attempt to place Women of Color. Larabee’s sociopolitical exigency is the sexist and racist representational politics of dominant popular media. With her positionality as a White woman, she wishes to raise her consciousness around these issues through the process of social advocacy. As a means to act in response to these internal and external exigencies, she understands that her role as ally is to act while always in the process of listening and learning.

Farrah offers an interactional framework of feminist counterpublic intellectualism. Her rhetorical practices complicate the importance Kristie Fleckenstein places on social action that attends to the “web of relationships” through compassionate means. Based on the findings from this case study, I argue that Farrah’s interactional counterpublic intellectualism functions as a model of public engagement that recognizes power differentials in the context of publicity, thereby complicating public intellectualism as a model for dominant publics. Returning to Daniel Brouwer and

Catherine Squires' three primary topoi (breadth, location, and legitimacy) about public intellectuals, one can observe the validity of counterpublic intellectualism as a means of intellectual (counter)public engagement. Again, breadth entails four components of public engagement: 1) ability to address a range of issues; 2) ability to articulate an in-depth knowledge of those issues; 3) ability to intervene in those issues through various modes; and 4) ability to have an actual or possible audience for this work (35).

Farrah demonstrates an ability to address a range of issues through *Feminist Women of Color (FWOC)*. These issues range from Islamophobia to popular culture. Farrah's use of personal experiences provides her audiences with situated knowledge of those issues, invoking the tradition of feminist autoethnography in the process. Furthermore, her (counter)public engagement operates through various modes. For instance, she addresses class through signal boosting donation posts, addresses racism in white feminism through memes, and reblogs insightful commentary on popular culture. As Taylor Meredith—who runs the feminist counterpublic signal-boosting blog *Tay Talkin Bout Stuff* and who assisted me with the research design—indicates in her list of feminist rhetorical practices: “Having a wide variety of mediums is great for learners of all types” (Meredith). Therefore, Farrah helps make the posts on *FWOC* more intellectually accessible in this way. And she can also have a larger readership with *FWOC* than a good amount of academics can with their scholarship (Boylorn 76).

As addressed in Chapter 1, location and legitimacy are not apolitical. Uplifting blogs as a location for intellectual public engagement is a political act, but Robin Boylorn already offers a model attending to the relationship between academic scholarship and (counter)public blogs. The field of composition and rhetoric is certainly no stranger to pushing disciplinary boundaries. The legitimacy of counterpublic intellectualism requires the field to continue challenging established boundaries of power. Again, Brouwer and Squire offer five aspects that constitute the legitimacy of public intellectuals: 1) degree of partisanship or ideological loyalty; 2) quality of training or credentials; 3) use of personal voice; 4) support from academic communities; and 5) support from public communities (38). Indeed, counterpublic intellectuals do *not* necessarily fulfill these criteria at first glance due to the ways in which power operates in the criteria. Farrah shares that counterpublic bloggers can initially project themselves as if they don't make mistakes,

but that experienced bloggers are more willing to be open to critique. Arguably, this insight addresses the first two criteria of legitimacy for counterpublics. I would disagree that training and credentials only entails academic training and credentials. To be clear, I do agree that academic training and credentials are important intellectual experiences. But I would also agree that intellectual public engagement with embodied, situated experiences through blogging offers another valid model for training and credentials. The legitimacy of counterpublic intellectualism is *internal* to the discussion rather than based on one's external credentials or one's presence on dominant publication avenues. For this reason, its legitimacy depends on the audience's identification with and uptake of the insights in a text. Boylorn argues that this uptake depends on the use of personal voice (77). With the use of personal voice, counterpublics are more likely to circulate the text, thereby demonstrating (counter)public support. The only missing criteria then is academic support, and I hope this thesis helps lay some of the groundwork for future research to also lend its support to counterpublic intellectuals. The field's recognition of counterpublic intellectualism can in itself offer an exigency for rhetoricians to diversify citation practices, intellectual pursuits, and (counter)public engagement.

One of the fundamental differences, however, between public intellectualism and counterpublic intellectualism appears to be the role of identity-formation in its purpose and process. Again, Nancy Fraser defines subaltern counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" ("Rethinking" 67). Public intellectuals certainly invent and circulate discourses through dominant publication avenues. Many of them likely do have Twitter accounts—perhaps even Tumblr blogs, like Robert Reich. But arguably, these accounts largely exist for them to disseminate discourse, not for them to raise their own consciousness. Based on these case studies, I find that this transformative oppositional practice of critical consciousness-raising is central to feminist counterpublic intellectualism. Feminist counterpublics create a space *for themselves* on Tumblr. Their audiences are not the widest possible "general" (read: dominant) audiences like public intellectuals. Rather, their intended audiences are often those who are also developing these oppositional interpretations and identities. Therefore, people who are not a part of a

certain counterpublic, who don't understand its discursive practices, and who attempt to engage with it can potentially receive antagonistic responses due to suspicion or frustration.

For this reason, the second case study on Liz Larabee offers valuable insights for the field. In particular, *Saved by the bell hooks* provides a rhetorical model for academics seeking to disseminate their knowledge to feminist counterpublics in the digital environment. At the same time, scholars in the field of composition and rhetoric are much less well known than bell hooks, whose feminist theory maintains considerable ethos in feminist counterpublics. As Michael Warner argues, “[E]xpert knowledge is in important way non-public: its authority is external to the discussion” (144). For scholars of rhetoric and composition who wish to undertake Paul Butler’s call for public engagement and Christian Weisser’s desire to engage with counterpublics, a reliance on academic ethos doesn’t align with the paradigm of ethos within counterpublics—at least for this feminist counterpublic on Tumblr. Academics must instead appeal to their counterpublic audiences and these audiences’ paradigm(s) of ethos by building relationships with them from the ground up. For, one cannot assume that academic credibility is persuasive to this audience’s attention. It’s often not. Cultivating transparent relationships with the (counter)publics would be most fruitful for public engagement, as this research suggests. To do so, the research process as it applies to the personal embodied experiences of the individual researcher needs to be public—similar to the ways in which Boylorn uses Black feminist autoethnography for the *Crunk Feminist Collective*. Blogs engaging with the field’s research interests exists (arguably, no matter the area of concentration). Interacting with them in this capacity helps foster consciousness-raising in the development of *both* (counter)public and academic knowledge.

Furthermore, I argue that feminist counterpublics on Tumblr—based on the insights from these case studies and my research experiences—offer the field of composition and rhetoric insights on digital writing pedagogies. In particular, rethinking traditional course design and curriculum structure would appear to be beneficial. A post circulating on Tumblr speaks to this issue (halfdesiqueen). In this post, the blogger talks back to the misrepresentation of digital activism as “slacktivism.” She discusses the ways in which posts on Tumblr—what she calls “mini-essays” when referring to the posts

using alphabetic text—better help her understand complex sociopolitical theory than the articles and books assigned to her in college courses: “Like you get these really digestible posts that clearly spell out either theoretical concepts or their practical applications. And I sure as shit don’t get that in school or in my daily interactions” (halfdesiqueen). Like Farrah, she equates the intellectual accessibility of discourse on Tumblr with the amount of different perspectives that people from different backgrounds offer (halfdesiqueen). Other bloggers’ responses to this post largely lauded and elaborated upon it by sharing their own personal reflections on how counterpublic insights on Tumblr have raised their consciousness and shaped their lives.

I don’t believe I can overstate the significance of this insight for the field of composition and rhetoric, especially since pedagogy is one of the field’s most central intellectual concerns. The increased use of social media in the composition classroom is a promising development. I encourage compositionists to continue using social media in the classroom. I also encourage them to consider the pedagogical implications of these “mini-essays” published by different bloggers from different backgrounds who express their at times competing perspectives in various modes. For instance, feminist counterpublic posts on Tumblr often contain threads of critical deliberation between bloggers. These threads can involve multiple modes of media and offer significant insights that I argue would benefit composition and rhetoric classrooms. These feminist counterpublic insights—as these case studies highlight—situate the discussion within lived experiences and engage with popular culture in a way that can center students and their popular literacies. This student-centered approach could arguably allow compositionists to use popular, activist literacies as the central pedagogical foundation for course designs and curriculums, guiding students to develop and refine their academic and professional literacies based on this foundation. Of course, future pedagogical research is necessary for determining the efficacy and validity of this claim.

For this reason, I would like to offer a course design that implements these insights and provides suggestions for future research. David Sheridan et al. write, “Too often, the university classroom in general, and the writing classroom in particular, reinforce passive-analytical- rather than practice-activist-oriented dispositions” (171). This thesis research, in particular, suggests certain ways in which composition courses

can reflect a practice-activist-oriented disposition. For instance, an activist-oriented classroom would involve using social media platforms to foreground *continuous, consistent use* of intellectual activities that achieve the course's learning outcomes. The 2015-2016 first-year composition learning outcomes at Miami University are the following: 1) rhetorical knowledge; 2) organization, style, and revision; 3) composing process; 4) inquiry, invention, and research; 5) writing technology; and 6) reflection (Saur and Leckie 102). To meet these outcomes and design an activist-oriented classroom, instructors can develop a curriculum that revolves around the fourth learning outcome of inquiry, invention, and research. The case studies illustrate that these three intellectual habits are central to feminist counterpublics. Raising counterpublic consciousness must involve inquiry into alternative ways of knowing and being, thereby inventing new knowledge paradigms through various research practices and processes. For this reason, the activist-oriented course would require students to conduct both academic and public research throughout the entire semester—not only for five weeks.

In doing so, this course would also foreground students' continuous, consistent engagement with their specific areas of interest. Instructors should begin the semester by asking their composition and rhetoric students a few fundamental questions, including: *What do you care about? What makes you angry? What do you want to learn? How can you learn more about it?* As Farrah's case study demonstrates, anger is a powerful motivating resource for social action. Therefore, it could also function as a pedagogical resource for motivating students to intellectual action. Having students conduct research that relates to their own interests is an essential feature of an activist rhetorical education (to use Carmen Kynard's term). As Sheridan et al. explain, "When teachers ask students to map rhetorical options for addressing public exigencies, they are simultaneously normalizing a social practice and encouraging students to see themselves as potentially involved in shaping the surrounding culture" (174). Each week of the semester would involve a pedagogical unit of focus with students implementing the lessons in their writing on social media and in their bi-weekly reflection papers. These units would build upon each other throughout the entire semester so that students become better rhetorical practitioners as the course progresses. For instance, understanding technological writing environments could be the unit of focus for the first and/or second week of the semester.

During this time, students would be creating and designing their Tumblr blogs and Twitter accounts for this activist-oriented course. I believe Tumblr and Twitter are the most appropriate social media platforms for the course due to the possible levels of engagement on these platforms as well as the level of anonymity students can maintain with these accounts. Without student anonymity, questions about the ethics of requiring students to publicly publish their writing on social media would certainly be valid.

Obviously, students' answers to the above questions would result in a range of interests. Some of these interests might not directly relate to what some would recognize as involving sociopolitical concerns; however, sociopolitical concerns constitute a context in which all things operate. Students who believe their interests to be apolitical would benefit in discovering the ways in which these interests shape and are shaped by sociopolitical contexts. That way, they can see themselves as shaping surrounding culture, as Sheridan et al. suggest. Indeed, some negotiation between students and the instructor might be necessary. But I believe the amount of front-loaded pedagogical labor required for these negotiations would better place students and their learning outcomes at the center of the curriculum while allowing them to see themselves as active producers of culture.

For the purpose of clarity, I would like to offer an illustration of this course design. This illustration consists of an imaginary student named Jordan who enrolled in this hypothetical activist-oriented composition and rhetoric course. After each fictional illustration of the course activities, I make an unsupported argument for its pedagogical value in order to suggest opportunities for future research. To begin, Jordan is an 18-year-old White woman who is working hard to attend the university's prestigious business school. She plans to supplement her business degree with a fashion minor. (I am using this imaginary example over more obvious ones because I wish to illustrate the ways in which sociopolitical concerns exist in areas of interest that students may mistakenly believe to be apolitical.) Based on the questions I asked at the beginning of the semester, Jordan disclosed that the mistreatment of animals angers her, thereby initially inspiring her to research and advocate against the use of animal fur in the fashion industry. I informed her that she would need to create Tumblr and Twitter accounts for this course. Considering the answers she provided, I also advised Jordan that Instagram could also be

an additional social media platform to consider for the course based on her interests. She indicated agreement due to her own personal experiences on Instagram where she encounters many accounts dedicated to publishing fashion content on the platform. I made sure to notify her that she shouldn't have any personal information displayed on any of these accounts, indicating the rule's presence on the syllabus. These accounts are for the course, and requiring students to post on social media without anonymity would raise ethical concerns.

I focused the first two weeks of class on understanding technological writing environments. I assigned students to read the following texts: 1) danah boyd and Nicole Ellison's "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship"; 2) Marty Fink and Quinn Miller's "Trans Media Moments: Tumblr, 2011-2013"; and 3) Joel Penny and Caroline Dadas' "(Re)Tweeting in the Service of Protest: Digital Composition and Circulation in the Occupy Wall Street Movement." While this course only assigns a few articles, I felt like these articles were beneficial for students by grounding them in the history of social media and its counterpublic affordances of use on Tumblr and Twitter. In class, the students and I discussed the significance of these insights, foregrounding rhetorical and critical literacies of the platforms on which they were designing accounts and becoming functionally literate (if not already functionally literate). For instance, Jordan and others discussed the use of Instagram filters, raising questions like: How does one use filters on Instagram? What are the best filters? For what purposes? Why do so many of the filters make darker skin appear whiter? Do these filters whitewash People of Color's skin? What do these filters and our value assumptions about them say about us personally, socially, and culturally? Developing functional, rhetorical, and critical literacies of these technological platforms was a semester-long project (see Selber). While these topics were the unit of focus for the first two weeks of the course, students continued to revisit them in class discussions and in their bi-weekly reflection papers throughout the semester.

Students then began using their Tumblr blogs and Twitter accounts the following week. Jordan used her Instagram account as well. Students started following other accounts and sharing their content. Since I focused week three of the course on the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos, I asked students why they followed certain

accounts over others, thereby leading the way into upcoming discussions on rhetorical analysis. They mentioned, for instance, follow recommendations offered by the platforms. Returning to the rhetorical and critical literacies of technology, I asked them what practices determined these recommendations, what other associations the platforms perhaps could've made, and why it might recommend some accounts over others. I then asked them again about their reasons for following those accounts. They analyzed the accounts for logos, pathos, and ethos: What do these accounts have as their profile pictures? What types of content do the accounts post about the students' areas of interest? How do these types of content make the students *feel* about their areas of interest? How can students channel these feelings to productive ends for their research? Jordan followed a few animal rights groups, high-end fashion brands, fashion magazines, retail companies, fashion bloggers, beauty bloggers, and celebrities. She discussed largely following people and institutions she already knew from her familiarity with dominant media. She recognized the blue checkmark on Instagram and Twitter as ethos, for they must have a large audience or are at risk of impersonation to have an "official" account. Jordan also suggested that quality commentary on the fashion accessories exhibited in the images on Tumblr functions as a blogger's use of logos, consequently building the blog's ethos for audiences. I then turned the class discussion to ways in which they can use ethos, pathos, and logos for their own blogs and accounts based on the observed rhetorical practices. Although future pedagogical research is necessary to determine its efficacy, I argue that this activity could allow students to gain rhetorical knowledge through analysis and imitation of their desired (counter)publics' literacy practices. In a similar way that Taylor helped me with the research design and created the list of feminist counterpublic practices on Tumblr, students would regard the accounts that they follow as informants on the literacy practices of the particular (counter)publics. They would develop their rhetorical knowledge based on the continuous and consistent analysis, imitation, and practice of writing and rhetoric throughout the entire semester.

Each week, students used Twitter and Tumblr to share other people's posts and write their own posts. They used the course and section number as the hashtag (#ENG111cf) for each post they shared and/or wrote in order to turn in these assignments. For the course, I required them to share at least 20 posts a week on both

platforms—half of which included writing additional commentary either to interact with the original poster or to comment on the quality of the content itself. By doing so, students encountered a good amount of content pertaining to their areas of interest. They used rhetoric to create and develop online networks and relationships with those they followed. They performed rhetorical analyzes of the posts and their contents, generating more public discourse around their areas of interest. For instance, Jordan analyzed a popular fashion blogger’s writing style for commenting on the fashion exhibited in the post. She shared the blogger’s post and incorporated her rhetorical analysis as additional commentary. Indeed, performing a short rhetorical analysis of one post doesn’t necessarily compare to the intellectual labor required to write a rhetorical analysis in a four-to-six page paper. But I argue that the continuous, consistent practice of rhetorical analysis as well as weekly instructor feedback on the analyses could further assist students in learning and normalizing these intellectual activities as a common social practice. Again, future pedagogical research is necessary to validate these claims.

Furthermore, I required students to write five of their own posts a week—one of which needed to entail an insightful quote from their academic research related to the area of interest. For these original posts, I encouraged students to use autoethnographic writing to situate their personal lived experiences into sociopolitical contexts with their areas of interest. One evening, Jordan encountered a post by Zendaya—a fashion savvy celebrity and activist she followed. Being interviewed by *Cosmopolitan* (another account Jordan followed), Zendaya discussed being unhappy with her hair and makeup during a photo shoot. When she informed her publicist, however, the publicist responded, “You should be just be happy with it – they haven’t had a black girl on the cover since forever” (Donovan).

Jordan wrote one of her original Tumblr posts about this interview. Writing the post challenged her to do further public research external to the interview itself and read more about the issue’s prevalence because she experienced difficulty articulating her feelings about it. She used autoethnographic writing in the post to situate her lived experiences and reflect on her previous failure to recognize the existence of this problem. Jordan also reflected on the accounts she previously followed, analyzing their problematic representational politics through the lens of her recently developed

understanding of it. She expressed anger and embarrassment at her failure to recognize that most of the accounts she followed predominantly practice and perpetuate White, Eurocentric standards of beauty. But she inevitably channeled this feeling state into social action; she changed her research trajectory to instead advocate for ethical social practices in the fashion industry. Jordan's shift in research trajectory resulted in her writing later original posts on cultural appropriation and labor exploitation. Being unaware of or indifferent to these sociopolitical issues in the fashion industry at the beginning of the semester, Jordan later became invested in what used to seem like distant issues by applying them to her own lived experiences through autoethnographic writing. Based on Farrah's case study as well as my own research experiences on Tumblr, I argue that autoethnographic writing can be empowering for the writers and their audiences—an argument both Boylorn and Rachel Griffin support. As a pedagogical tool, I believe autoethnography—when practiced consistently and continuously throughout the semester—could serve as a means to situate students as invested intellectuals in their areas of interest. Of course, future research on autoethnographic writing as a pedagogical resource is necessary to validate this assumption.

For the weekly academic research post, I encouraged students to remix the scholarship using multimodal rhetoric. I introduced this requirement a few weeks into the semester by using the memes from *Saved by the bell hooks* as examples of multimodal remix for scholarship. I encouraged them to have fun with this activity while also making sure to remix with circulation in mind. For this reason, I provided students with a handout that outlines Limor Shipman's breakdown of memes and their successful characteristics. We also had class discussions on feminist zines and the ways in which these zines use rhetorical practices for resistance and subversion. Jordan, for instance, used the activist tactic of "culture jamming" to critique the practice of labor exploitation in the production of Michael Jordan's brand of athletic shoes. Leah A. Lievrouw describes culture jamming as a tactic that "captures and subverts the images and ideas of mainstream media culture to make a critical point" (73). In particular, Jordan culture jammed the brand by using digital technology to parody the brand's iconic logo. She replaced Michael Jordan's "jumpman" logo with a similarly designed logo illustrating an exploited laborer restrained at the ankle by a ball and chain unsuccessfully attempting to jump and reach a

round loaf of bread, which obviously represents the original logo's basketball. Jordan juxtaposed this logo with a quote from her academic research on the insidiousness of the United States' uncritical praise of capitalism as the pinnacle economic system while normalizing its reliance on oppressive labor exploitation.

I argue that consistent and continuous engagement with academic research throughout the entire semester could help build a research habitus for students. The idea is to help students further develop their information literacies through the normalization of research practices and processes. This activist-oriented course design's emphasis on focusing each student on a single area of interest could assist the student in developing an in-depth, polylogical understanding of their areas of interest. This understanding could develop through public research encounters with texts that offer many different perspectives from people with different backgrounds. Using autoethnographic writing would situate students and their lived experiences within the sociopolitical contexts of those interests, thereby potentially empowering them as invested intellectuals. The consistent, continuous remixing of academic research offers students a variety of ways with which to reconceptualize and further engage their research. It could also further develop students' multimodal rhetorical knowledge through the dissemination of academic research into publics and counterpublics using popular modes such as memes. This idea of dissemination would also appear to challenge the knowledge cartels in academia. Future research, however, is necessary for these assumptions to be recognized as valid.

Every two weeks, I required students to submit reflection papers on their own practices and research written in an academic writing style. In other words, students wrote these papers as a means to learn to properly format their papers, organize their paragraphs, support their claims, quote their research, cite their sources, etc. In these reflection papers, students analyzed the ways in which their rhetorical practices relate to the practices of those they follow and engage on Tumblr and Twitter. They reflected on recently discovered insights surrounding their areas of interest and what these discoveries meant for the direction of their future research. They acknowledged gaps in knowledge because the diverse range of perspectives encountered in their academic and public research raised new critical questions for them. I also required each bi-weekly reflection

paper to be a little longer in length than the previous one. At the end of the semester, these reflection papers culminated into student research papers on their areas of interest and experiences on social media. For instance, Jordan adapted the research paper into a business portfolio for her application to the business school. In the portfolio, she included an original social media strategy built from her experiences in the course. She used her research and rhetorical analyzes as supporting evidence for the strategy, advocating for ethical, socially conscious business practices in the fashion industry.

While the above illustration is indeed fictional, I offer it as an attempt to clearly illustrate the argument. An activist-oriented composition classroom based on the insights from other scholars and from this thesis offers the potential to further position students as intellectuals while still achieving learning outcomes. I hope this illustration demonstrates that an activist rhetorical education doesn't entail indoctrinating students to advocate for the instructor's political agenda (as some may fear). Rather, it entails privileging student engagement with a significant range of perspectives from people with different backgrounds on a specific area of interest. With these engagements, students can further inform themselves as intellectuals on their topics of interest, learning to resist binary thinking and appreciate the fact that an issue contains more than just two sides. I argue that a social issue often exists as a metaphorical cube; in this metaphor, the issue contains six different sides with four different perspectives informing each side. Embracing this complexity, an activist-oriented composition classroom can use social media as a powerful location for encountering and engaging with these intellectual perspectives. Indeed, pedagogical and administrative challenges will exist with this course design; however, these eventual challenges also offer exciting possibilities for future pedagogical and (counter)public research.

In the end, I hope this research demonstrates that critical feminist counterpublics on Tumblr offer fierce, clever rhetorical practices of intellectual public engagement for composition and rhetoric scholars to explore. The theoretical foundations for such an exploration are secure with the support of academic scholarship, as outlined in Chapter 1. But the case studies in this research seem to highlight exigencies for the field to reconsider the form of intellectualism that effectively engages publics and counterpublics. Learning from counterpublic intellectualism, scholars can become better

public/activist intellectuals. I often see the field's journals circulate their newest issues with a link on Facebook, a tweet on Twitter, etc. These practices seem to work well for disseminating the literature to those in the field who follow the journals' social media accounts. At the same time, I fear that this dominant publication practice doesn't allow the field's important insights to circulate across the academic public's metaphorical borders—that is, if they were even intended to. The Tumblr blog *Feminist Ryan Gosling* is arguably better known than many of the field's feminist rhetoricians. Therefore, I argue that the field can extend its scholarly work, pursuing the (counter)public circulation of scholarship with the same intellectual rigor it pursues the production of that scholarship. The idea is to recognize that scholarship can be fiercely counterpublic. It can exist as autoethnographic “mini-essays,” reminding me of the paragraph-long intellectual musings in Theodor Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. It can exist as memes, applying the field's multimodal rhetorical theories to scholarly publication practices. It can exist as a kairotic intervention in sociopolitical discussions and events, echoing Farrah's “No longer will I tolerate the silence” in its refusal to let injustices in the spider web of relationships remain normative conditions. The texts would undoubtedly look different, for they must function differently. And that's okay.

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APPENDIX A

1. Would you like me to use a pseudonym or your real name? If a pseudonym, what pseudonym should I use?
2. Why do you blog? Why did you choose Tumblr as the social media site for this blog?
3. Would you consider Tumblr to be a hub for critical learning and intellectual dialogue? If so, how would you characterize the intellectualism on Tumblr—especially within feminist circles?
4. Who do you imagine your followers/audiences (whether they be supporters or non-supporters) to be?
5. In what ways do you receive pushback or criticism from your audiences and/or trolls? Do posts on certain topics receive more pushback than others? In what ways do you respond?
6. What is your process for finding the quotes to use and pairing them with the photos? What tools do you use to make the posts?
7. Do you always use direct quotes, or do you sometimes paraphrase?
8. You consistently use the same yellow font with all capital letters. Was this a purposeful decision? If so, for what reasons?
9. I love your commitment to citing and linking to the source texts. For what reasons do you choose to link to Goodreads?
10. You use the following quote in one of your posts: “There will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well-educated few.” In what ways does and/or doesn’t this quote on accessibility speak to the mission for and the impact of your blog? In what ways does your blog with its humorous pop culture theme and critical content help reach and raise the consciousness of people who might not otherwise engage with or experience bell hooks’ insights?
11. In what ways do you use the posts to respond to current events?
12. In your Moxie interview, you mention having an increasing interest in transnational feminism. How do you see transnational feminism working on Tumblr, and how do you use the blog to engage with transnational feminism?
13. How do you see your allyship working through this blog?

14. What else do you think I should know about feminism on Tumblr?
15. What else would you like others to know about you and your blog?

APPENDIX B

1. How did you come to feminism?
2. Why do you blog? When did you start this blog? Why did you choose Tumblr as the social media site for this blog?
3. Would you consider Tumblr to be a hub for critical learning and intellectual discussion? If so, how would you characterize the intellectualism on Tumblr—especially within critical feminist circles?
4. Your blog accepts submissions. Do you receive a lot of submissions? What is your process for selecting the submissions to publish?
5. For what reasons did you decide to enlist the help of moderators? How did you go about finding these moderators? What is the role of the moderators in comparison to your role?
6. How many followers do you have? Who do you imagine your followers to be (whether they be supporters or non-supporters)?
7. In what ways do your followers support you? In what ways do you support your followers?
8. In what ways do you receive pushback or criticism from your followers and/or trolls? Do posts on certain topics receive more pushback than others? In what ways do you respond?
9. What tactics do you use in your posts to help raise consciousness around certain issues? For instance, do you use personal experience? Do you criticize, educate, sympathize, etc.? In what situations do you come from a place of understanding? In what situations do you come from a place of critiquing?
10. I love that your blog engages with global social issues and with people from other countries besides the United States. How do you see transnational feminism operating on Tumblr? What tensions do you see occurring and reoccurring? How do critical feminists on Tumblr help decenter and/or call out the Western Gaze and US-Eurocentric discourse?
11. What else do you think should be known about feminism and consciousness-raising on Tumblr?
12. What would you like others to know about you and your blog?

13. How can I practice reciprocity? What would you like to know about feminism and consciousness-raising on Tumblr?