

Symposium

Building a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Ethos: Three Dialogues for WPAs

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INTRODUCTION

In late November 2018, at the request of the *WPA* editors, the two of us invited a number of feminists to be part of a symposium on building a twenty-first-century feminist ethos for *WPA* work. The journal editors envisioned this as the first of a series of spring symposia, with future installments devoted to race, LGBTQ issues, ability/disability, and so on.

This invitation to create an interactive symposium followed a conversation on the *WPA-L* listserv in which the two of us (editors) and many of the coauthors in this symposium participated; the listserv conversation quickly moved far beyond the listserv onto social media and other platforms, and came to acquire its own hashtag, #wpalistservfeministrevolution. We emphasized in our response to the invitation that we didn’t want the symposium to be a rehash or continuation of the listserv discussion, but instead to push forward productive avenues for future work, with attention to two guiding questions:

1. How do we build an intersectional feminist ethos into *WPA* work?
2. What does “radical inclusion in *WPA* work” require, look like, inspire, or unfold?

The symposium invitation also coincided with the call for the 2019 CWPA conference, “More Seats at the Table: Radical Inclusion in Writing Programs.”

We invited feminists from three groups to participate: graduate students interested in WPA work; current or former WPAs in their early careers; and current or former WPAs in their later careers. Those who agreed to participate represent a wide array of experiences, positionalities, and writing programs. Putting these voices and experiences into respectful conversation guided by feminist principles would, we hoped, result in a greater understanding of what it means to build a twenty-first-century feminist ethos for WPAs.

We asked each group to engage in dialogue, first within their own group, and then in response to the dialogues written by the other two groups. We provided the groups with potential prompts to spark conversation:

- What does a twenty-first-century feminism look like in the contexts of WPA work? What is the work of the feminist WPA?
- What principles underlie (or should underlie) feminist WPA work in a twenty-first-century context? What principles underlie your own work? Can you share a time when you were constrained in enacting those principles and how you navigated those constraints (or didn't, or couldn't)?
- What rhetorical, personal, and collective practices shape the feminist WPA? What does the “feminism” of this institutional location generate, disrupt, resist, critique, or enable?
- What stories, strategies, tactics, theories, practices, etc. are central to the work of the feminist WPA in the twenty-first-century? What tactics and strategies have been effective (or not effective) in your own experience?
- What are some issues, experiences, or concerns that newer members of the field would like their feminist WPAs and senior feminist scholars to take up?
- What is the work of allies, collaborators, advocates, and activists in the (quasi-) public spaces that support and surround WPA work?
- What synergies might feminist WPAs find in non-Western, cultural, and embodied rhetorics? How might these rhetorics inform, influence, or expend the practices of intersectionality central to feminist WPA work in the twenty-first-century?
- Which aspects of feminism need themselves to be disrupted or interrogated?

After the groups wrote their individual dialogues, we placed them side by side in a shared Google document and asked all participants to contrib-

ute dialogic responses to other participants. This happened via comment bubbles to encourage extended conversations.

What you will find printed in the journal is a tiny slice of the conversation that ensued. In the interest of readability we have excerpted some responses and do not demarcate partial responses from the original, lengthier text. For this reason, we encourage you to read the full conversation, which is available online at: <http://wpacouncil.org/wpa42n2>. In the slice of the full dialogue represented below, we attempt to highlight some of the pressing issues and framing ideas that arose and gained traction during the conversation, including:

- the concept of “shattering” (proposed by Heidi Estrem, who regretfully was unable to fully take part in this dialogue), which is defined below by Annette Powell as, “a dismantling of identity” with especially “unique and devastating consequences for women of color”;
- erasure and power(lessness);
- empathy;
- the intersectionality of hierarchies;
- isolation;
- “coping culture”;
- how to approach work that is “un-owed” but nonetheless needs to be done; and
- the concept of the body/embodiment.

LATER-CAREER WPAs: LINDA ADLER-KASSNER,
SUSAN MILLER-COCHRAN, PEGGY O’NEILL, MYA
POE, ANNETTE POWELL, AND SHELLEY REID

As longstanding WPAs, our work is rooted in the intellectual conversations of the WPA community, theory, research, and personal experience. We begin with three quotations. Our first quote comes from “Remodeling Shared Governance” by Kirsti Cole, Holly Hassel, and Eileen Schell:

Applying the feminist label to the space of shared governance operates in the context of opening access, including diverse voices, building relationships, sharing knowledge, and achieving goals collectively. We can derive these principles by beginning with questions like the following:

- How can we make the existing structures work?
- How can we transform them to make them better, more inclusive, and accessible for all stakeholders?
- How can we reach outside the structure/system and leverage other actors/agents to make it effective?

- What coalitions can we build and enact?
- What happens when the ideal of and goals for engagement . . . fail? What happens when shared governance [that's Cole, Hassel, and Schell's focus, though perhaps one could insert any kind of "shared" here . . .] doesn't work, and when our feminist ideals cannot be realized? How do we maintain hope and carry on? (15)

Our second quote comes from black feminist Appalachian author bell hooks. hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* was an important reading for many of us. In her 2012 *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*, hooks writes about the process of community building:

Many of us found that it was easier to name the problem [of domination] and to deconstruct it, and yet it was hard to create theories that would help us build community, help us border cross with the intention of truly remaining connected in a space of difference long enough to be transformed. (2)

For hooks, "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" is the covert ideology that is "the silent cause of harm and trauma" (*Writing* 4–5).

Finally, in discussing what feminist principles guide us, our colleague Heidi Estrem wrote (in an early stage of this draft, before time commitments constrained her continuing involvement), "I feel like my principles are regularly shattered by the actual human beings I work with." The notion of shattering resonated with us in different ways and became a useful metaphor to guide our response.

Peggy: The intersectional matrix in *Surviving Sexism in Academia* is helping me think through my experience as well as the way institutions are structured and how that positions me and others, especially women of color, and those who are nonheterosexual, non-Christian, etc. I wonder how we could create something like this matrix but with specific references to WPA work?

I was also thinking about how individual women's behaviors, sense of self, and embodiment are affected by institutional racism/sexism and individual racist/sexist behaviors, assumptions, values, and experiences. These can be benevolent as well as hostile—and often I think the benevolent is more difficult to confront because it isn't hostile. Fran Sepler's chapter in *Surviving Sexism* explains how women often respond to this kind of behavior through absenting and adaptation: "Common forms of attitudinal adaptation include becoming sullen and withdrawn, creating alliances with other unhappy persons in the workplace, and becoming combative or engaging in passive aggressive behavior" (300). This kind of adaptation is referred to as the death spiral, because the target "looks unstable, incom-

petent, or both” (300). While Sepler is speaking specifically about the bullying, which is hostile, this kind of adaptation is often seen via benevolent forms of sexism/racism. It makes me think about how I view a female colleague who doesn't show up for meetings or office hours, complains all the time, critiques others' ideas, or is sullen, all to her own detriment. It's really hard to work with someone like this even if you understand her response and where it is coming from. I know some of our faculty of color (and women faculty more generally) will complain—in safe spaces—about their peers. They understand why a colleague may be responding this way, but they also express concerns about the how this response is detrimental to all POC (or women) on the campus. I have been working with someone on campus to strategize on ways to help these faculty members reboot, so to speak, but it is HARD!

Annette: Shattering is an interesting way to frame intersectionality. It references a dismantling of identity that has unique and devastating consequences for women of color. Often purported allies help, but this assistance comes at a cost—this is the shattering for me. Unfortunately, I often feel that I can't be myself. Most significantly, whenever I do raise points of concerns, my self-proclaimed feminist colleagues are “hurt” or see themselves as victims. They are selective in how they receive the message and who they receive it from. There is nearly an exclusive focus on gender; thereby, obscuring the significance of race. A shattering of identity and a shattering of any integration between two complementary yet unique concepts—race and gender. It is also the shattering of the way issues are often framed. Specifically, because there is a splintering off (or neutralization of race), gender is emphasized as the only site of structural oppression so that race is ignored and patriarchy is maintained both intentionally and subconsciously by embracing the *status quo*. Here, intersectionality can explain how women are positioned in the academy.

How women of color, specifically black women, are positioned in the academy, and how they are perceived, inevitably limits what they may or may not be able to do. This is important, not just in terms of how it harms us, but how it harms the institution. By this I mean the failure to interrogate the way gender and race play out and how it reinforces inequality. From my perspective, the feminism discussion only gets us partially there, in terms of breaking down structural barriers. Ultimately, this is/should be what we're trying to do here. We don't want binary discussions, rather we want multidimensional ones that promote a comprehensive evaluation of structural inequality in writing programs. So, the failure to address these issues actually hurts the institution.

Mya: There is the work of running programs, but feminism for WPAs needs to include changing WPA culture through scholarship, as well as pushing the professional organization to recognize a broader range of leadership, develop innovative grant opportunities, and be more inclusive in the consultant-evaluator service. To do these things, we need to shatter bifurcations in WPA work. For example, white women can learn a lot through the experiences of women of color, especially working-class women of color, in leadership positions. Their experiences and expertise can reshape institutional structures in ways that white women may not see. And there is much beyond race alone here—whether it be intersectionality (Crenshaw) or super-diversity (Vertovec). There are also deep issues surrounding labor in relation to gender, race, and ableism. Let me offer a personal story. As an urban Appalachian white woman from a mixed-class background, I spent too much of my career working at an elite institution that positioned my non-tenure-track WPA work as support for mainly male, tenured colleagues. I was often frustrated how the benevolent face of international elitism hid its underpinnings in “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, *Will to Change* 17). Two engineering faculty—a disabled, working-class white man and an Indian-American woman from an elite background—helped me work toward intersectional leadership and how not to withdraw, as Peggy noted at the beginning of this exchange. Instead, they helped me work within the existing structure so that I was able to publish my research, obtain grants, and work to create a more inclusive program (and keep my job so I could pay my rent). In return, I helped them innovate their classes and programs, which brought them and their students more recognition as well as more engagement with writing. That process of building a coalition, though, was stunningly slow. How can our professional organization help WPAs in the twenty-first-century context move more strategically and quickly to build such community?

Linda: I don’t think of myself as operating from explicitly feminist principles. Principles, for sure . . . and I’ve written about where these come from (community organizing, including Saul Alinsky [who had his own issues with sexism, to be sure!], as well as Rinku Sen, Marshall Ganz, a little bit from Judaic principles like *tikkun olam*). Also, as a culturally Jewish person (but not even remotely religious!), I also think about Maimonides’ ladder. The second-highest level of “giving” on that ladder is giving anonymously, so that neither giver nor receiver knows who one another is. The first is providing a sustaining gift in a dignified manner, so that people don’t need to become dependent on others.

Do I point to Maimonides because it has influenced me, or because it justifies my own feelings? I’m not sure—that’s a sort of chicken-and-

egg conundrum. I'll just say that it's there. It resonates for me because the "giver" is a facilitator, but not someone who is (a) in the middle of things or (b) is necessarily recognized for what they do in the midst of the activity being undertaken. I also am not a wilting lily when it comes to calling out, pointing to, and trying to change moments of sexism, classism, racism, and all else—but fundamentally, as a pragmatist, I still (sort of) believe that systematic change needs to be systematic—i.e., come from and through systems that have a logic and a flow to them, that don't depend on one person, and that reflect values shared by many and are enacted by many. In this way, the "assistance" is a mutually constructed activity. At the same time, I know that pragmatism itself is an ideology (and I think here of Cornel West's book, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*) that has been rightfully challenged because of its inherent racism. And I've sometimes been rightfully challenged by acting on these principles. Were some of those challenges tied to perceptions of my gender, though? I don't know. But thinking about all of these things: pragmatism, systems, whiteness, racism, gender . . . has my own thinking much in flux.

Shelley: As a field, we've been talking about the conflicting interests of our constituencies and identities, and thus of the "right vs. right" decisions that WPAs need to make, at least since Louise Wetherbee Phelps' 1993 essay, "A Constrained Vision of the Writing Classroom." For me, the daily conflicts in WPA work feel rooted in economic class, because that's so often an indicator of where systemic power lies. When I think about my program work, I've felt most strongly my identity as the sole tenured person in a large (60–70 person) community of contingent faculty. So there I draw on feminist principles primarily as they help me consider strategies for inclusivity and fairness, of attending to bias and power structures. When I'm looking inward, at my own survival, and . . . upward? . . . to the power structures in the university, I draw more explicitly on feminism. Being a feminist WPA as a woman puts me in odd positioning of power/not-power, depending on the room I'm in.

I'm thinking, too: what next? What do I do with my feminist understanding as I look out to other WPAs? If I can't assume my colleagues are acting feminists, much less assume they are acting antiracists, as Annette notes, even when they profess that goal, what then? How do we move on from "shattered"? How do we ethically use the power we have, as Carrie Leverenz and others have asked, to increase others' agency within these systems? I've been inspired by recent backchannel conversations in which women WPAs recommit themselves not just to thinking but to acting in ways that are more explicitly, overtly, deliberately feminist—reclaiming their time, reaching out to other women colleagues, telling men (and some-

times women) directly when they are disrespectful. That, and more asking and listening, because that's how you don't get caught by surprise, shattering yourself or someone else.

Susan: I completely empathize, Shelley. The only tenured faculty members in our program are the administrators, and they are all white

Genevieve: Susan, I remember when you said this in a meeting and it was the first time that I realized what being on the Executive Board meant. At the first CWPA conference I went to, someone confused me for a maid at the hotel. I have never said this publicly because at the time, I was a graduate student. I was put on the Diversity Task Force and tried as much as I could to make suggestions, but felt erased in the process. . . . Finally, when I asked the CWPA to make a statement in support for Ersula Ore, but was denied, I realized that I had to make a space where I could do explicit antiracist work within the CWPA community, which is why I created the People of Color Caucus.

Ashanka: Genevieve, I think you raise an important point: genuinely including our voices and listening to our ideas, rather than erasing us and simply including us to meet a quota

women. This has disrupted many of the assumptions I had about feminist work in the academy, and it has caused me to think very carefully about how feminist principles inform my work and what strands of feminism I am drawing on. Feminist WPA work for me has meant collaborative work, being intentional and intersectional about inclusivity. It has meant working to be radically transparent. It's messy, and it's not always "efficient." And it means being willing to hear and acknowledge when I've made a mistake and need to learn from a new perspective. That's more often than I'd like, but I am trying to learn to live in the conflicts instead of seeking efficient resolution.

Feminism for WPAs needs to include **intentionally nominating women of color to positions of authority in our professional organizations as well.** I was stunned to learn, when I chaired the CWPA nominating committee, that we could not nominate any women of color for CWPA President because **none had ever served on the Executive Board. Not one.**

EARLY-CAREER WPAs: GENEVIEVE GARCÍA DE MÜELLER,
KAREN-ELIZABETH MOROSKI, AND M. MELISSA ELSTON

As early-career WPAs, we are faced with doing the emotional, daily, and disciplinary labor (Caswell et al. 2016) of engaging a changing student body whose cultural, emotional, and educational needs are shifting. We integrate activist, intersectional, and intentional pedagogies that center the lives and identities of our students and engage in critical imagination(s) of ethical care (Kirsch and Royster 2010). The role of feminism in our work is to expand access to discourse in higher ed (and beyond it), while also creating space to challenge higher ed discourse. Further, our hope in expanding access is not to do so through assimilationist means or pedagogies, but rather by challenging the academy's practices and value judgements about language, style, genre, and content in both our coursework and our programmatic choices.

Karen-Elizabeth: As a writing center administrator (WCA), I'm responsible for administrative tasks in my writing center as well as the training of undergraduate peer tutors. Both tasks can be (and have been, by many people) carried out in straightforward ways that whitewash, straightwash, and classwash the experience of student writers under the guise of good-natured "students' rights to their own voices"—but I feel like this sort of affirmation, left without nuance, begins to reek of #AllLivesMatter. If WCAs are to be advocates for student empowerment, we must think and rethink our ideas of outreach, diversity, and representation. And to take a step beyond that: I find it insulting when writing centers and student support services are framed solely as bastions of retention—we should, as intentional shapers of campus discourse, see ourselves as bastions of advocacy and inclusion. The question shouldn't just be "How do we retain student writers from underrepresented communities?" but rather, "How do we encourage them to represent and celebrate themselves? How do we expand our welcome?"

We know from hooks that "A love ethic makes this expansion possible" (*Outlaw Culture* 290). But how are we identifying which students need our focused support? Genevieve's response below argues for incorporating activist genres and strategies into classroom practice (and, for me, tutorial practice). When we explore/empower the intersections of our own identities, we better equip ourselves to see those complexities in others and to value them.

In a writing tutorial, this practice of seeing and valuing is especially crucial. Current discourse in writing center studies pushes against past ideations of "good" English(es), and asks for more critical and reflective consideration of the ways in which domestic Englishes and transnational Englishes contribute value to writing and voice. Inspired by scholars like

Vershawn Ashanti Young, Aja Y. Martinez, and Romeo García who write on writing centers and race/ethnicity/language and Harry Denny's scholarship on class/family background and writing, our writing center's training curriculum and continuing education have evolved to encourage tutors to consider invisible differences such as class and educational background alongside realities of race, ethnicity, and visible difference.

Because so many writers on my large university campus are rural, first-generation college students, I am particularly concerned about tutors thinking of "diversity," without thought of class, location, or family background. How could I empower them to view their tutees differently? How could we come to see first-generation rural students—writers of Appalachian or Creole Englishes—for example, as in command of a rich and beautiful identity whose narrative content could be tutored, but whose voice should not immediately be erased in the service of Standard Academic Prose?

The crux of the tutor training course has become exploring identity, with essays and assignments focused upon parsing identities as writers: **Did the students' parents go to college? Where did they grow up? What is the kindest thing anyone's ever said about their writing? The harshest?** What identities or intricacies inform how they access or experience their educations?

Linda: Hearing from faculty colleagues has made me realize how central empathy is to all of this work.

Karen-Elizabeth: I think the hardest part . . . is trying to approach this type of framework/ideology/pedagogy in ways that really resonate with or empower undergraduate students. We want them to use these intersectional, feminist approaches in their lives and tutorials, but it's work we as professionals are still struggling to embody, too.

We continue to challenge ourselves to do the ongoing work of feminism in writing center studies, finding ways to thoughtfully empower and include writers in the fullness of their identities.

Genevieve: As Karen-Elizabeth and Melissa point out, calls for "diversity and inclusion" often erase difference in favor of strategies that assimilate students into the academy, especially within the context of rhetorical transference; however, there are equitable anti-assimilationist frameworks engaged in caring

ethically for students and the differences they embody. Created at the University of New Mexico, WACommunities is a model of writing across

the curriculum embedded in antiracist strategies and focused on interrogating issues of race, ethnicity, and linguistic diversity in academic and community-writing contexts (Kells, Guerra). The model intersects theories of translanguaging, antiracist writing assessment strategies, critical race theory, cultural rhetorics, and policy studies to create writing strategies, build writing assignments, and form assessment models in the disciplines. As a graduate student, I was a cochair of the Writing Across Communities Alliance at the University of New Mexico. During my time with the Alliance, I helped to create and codirect the Albuquerque Community Writing Center as well as organize events that interrogated the intersections between race and language. Now as a director of a WAC program, I aim to integrate this work into my initiatives on campus and in the community, particularly with the immigrant and refugee population disproportionately affected by racist policies.

Student migrant transnational, transcultural, and translanguistic practices in the U.S. are often in direct response to U.S. immigration policy and university systems bent on marginalizing ethnolinguistically diverse undocumented students and community members (Schmid, Jacobson, García de Müeller). Immigrant rights activists are experts at utilizing the kairotic moments generated by US immigration policies and its intersections with public discourse on migration. However, often these strategies appeal to neoliberal ideologies that gatekeep the most vulnerable persons. Although immigrant rights activists find points of entry in the conversations and legislative work around deterring and criminalizing migration, ultimately these rhetorics of meritocracy ensure that acceptance is always contingent (Chávez, Perez). A section of the immigrant rights activist movement instead draws on migrant activist genres that navigate through these linguistic points of entry and reshape the immigration landscape to oppose rhetorics of neoliberal meritocracy. This undocumented migrant agency cultivates linguistic ecologies that create new spaces for compositionists to conduct antiassimilationist work and for writing program and WAC administrators to make programmatic changes. Cultivating ways for students to use these migrant activist genres and strategies, focuses the classroom on ways to acknowledge, value, and integrate translanguaging and transcultural citizenship. For this work to be valued at the university, writing program and WAC outcomes and assessments must account for migrant students to reposition their linguistic skills into an academic setting as they shift the linguistic landscape of the university.

WACommunities calls for programs to consider their local space and do work as it pertains to the community of the university. The goal here is to determine what is feminist and what is antiracist at the local level and to

ask administrators to do the work of building coalitions between students, community members, and faculty. This might manifest as a community

writing center, pedagogy, and assessments focused on migrant activist genres, or other local practices. **The important thing here is that antiracist work is feminist work; approaches vary and must be locally responsive to the community of students.**

Vyshali: Genevieve, I found myself wondering how this antiracist and feminist work gets framed for students, tutors, and faculty who might be initially resistant to such ideas or hesitant to enact them because of their own positionality. How contingent on the community of tutors and faculty is this antiracist work? How do we counter such resistance or hesitancy when and where it appears in our own ranks?

Karen-Elizabeth: Vy, These are things I grapple with very much at the helm of a writing center—especially because we have to commodify/market our “brand” of pedagogy to the university and its writers. So when we’re trying to frame this expansive, intersectional, feminist approach to student writers . . . we are forever trying to persuade faculty AND student writers alike that there’s value in this approach.

Shelley: Karen-Elizabeth, I think this also ties back to your sense of how big and how new this kind of work feels: it can seem like we—whoever “we” are—don’t have the expertise, bandwidth, charisma, standing, time to tackle such big hard local projects. But taking up Genevieve’s point that we have to adapt feminist and antiracist strategies locally places us all as being learners while we’re leaders, and thinking that way may help us step up and step in, informed and listening and creating spaces to imagine and begin to enact change.

Melissa: In addition to navigating local conditions, there’s a broader tension that we collectively need to acknowledge, one that our discipline hands us from the outset: Even as we labor to meet students’ shifting emotional, cultural, and educational needs, we labor within an academic field that is historically racist, ableist, and heteropatriarchal as far back as Aristotle. Rhetoric—at least the portion of Western tradition that claims this moniker—was formally conceptualized by thinkers who understood women as inherently subject to men, beings for whom silence was golden and obedience to a man’s direction was natural (Aristotle). **We pretend this history away at our peril.** And we become its institutional standard-bearers unthinkingly when we reify the popular myth of rhet-comp as a neutral site of inquiry, when we fail to engage in the explicit antiracist and intersectional feminist action that Karen-Elizabeth and Genevieve describe.

My current institutional role, like that of many WPAs at teaching institutions and community colleges, means that I'm responsible for developing curriculum, assessing composition sequence outcomes, and running professional development for 40 colleagues in a given semester, many of whom are well educated in fields like literature, but do not have a rhet-comp background. This is where things get tricky for me: I am simultaneously charged with mentoring other instructors to become more engaged rhetoricians while at the same time disrupting the popular academic narratives surrounding rhetoric, many of them propagated by well-meaning current-traditionalist writers and thinkers in our own field. This often means "authorizing" folks to shift pedagogical norms in the composition classroom that they assume are inviolable—yet which continue the soft legitimization of white/Eurowestern supremacy and toxic masculine discursive patterns:

- Students can't write essays in first person. You can't be personal and scholarly at the same time.

Mya: I agree, Melissa. Lately, I also have been curious in thinking about what the survival of Aristotle's texts means when we credit their survival to Abu'al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Rushd, also known as Averroës or the Commentator. What if our field complicated the history of Western rhetoric a bit more?

Melissa: Mya, YES. Even the so-called Western tradition is indebted to the Muslim world and its thinkers. In other words, our field has relied on invisible intellectual labor from the start. I think there's a significant implication or two within that realization, both for rhetoric teacher-scholars and for us as WPAs.

- Rhetoric isn't about listening to other people. It's about compelling them to listen to (or read) you.
- Wait, you're saying everything's not an argument? Yes it is! The Greeks said so. The Romans said so. The title of this book over here says so.

The other challenge/question that an engaged intersectional feminism compels me to ask myself is this: Do my administrative and mentoring practices remove systemic barriers and inequities, or do they simply promote superficial, virtue signal-y engagement with concepts like feminism, decolonization, or antiracism? This is the difference between suggesting that colleagues namedrop Gloria Anzaldúa in their reading lists vs. encouraging them to actively support DREAMers and undocumented students via their syllabus policies—such as excusing absences due to deportation battles.

Within the current #MeToo moment, we keep telling abusive and exploitative men that their #TimesUp. For these superficially liberatory pedagogical practices—the ones which build privileged colleagues’ careers and buttress their reputations, but do nothing to challenge resurgent, Trump-era white supremacy or improve the material conditions of marginalized students’ and instructors’ lives—I think it’s important to use our institutional roles to signal that #TimesUp on those, as well.

GRADUATE STUDENTS: ANICCA COX, ASHANKA KUMARI, VYSHALI MANIVANNAN, MANDY OLEJNIK, AND SHERITA V. ROUNDTREE

As graduate students who are learning how to participate in writing program administration, we are subjects of existing administrative practices while we also help shape it and carry WPA work forward. Our vulnerability often limits the ways in which we can challenge or disrupt. We too encounter and perform emotional, daily, and administrative labor, and we recognize and embrace much-needed feminist and intersectional approaches. In this dialogue, we share our insights and our experiences to examine ideas of

power and privilege, trauma, oppression, relationality, positionality, and the constraints and lack of agency WPA work can or does impose.

Mandy: As Catherine Latterell reminds us, **we cannot have discussions of graduate student and faculty WPAs without considering the power dynamics between them.**

I’d argue that this is also true when thinking about principle-based decision making in WPA work, for as ideal as our principles may be, we as graduate students exist in a complicated hierarchy that does not always allow us to act according to our principles.

For example: a faculty member came into our business WAC and writing center once complaining about how the international students “couldn’t write” and were “so hard to work with,” which is obviously problematic and directly conflicts

Mandy: . . . I feel very intimidated responding to early- and later-career faculty/WPAs in this . . . dialogue as a first-year PhD student. I know the point . . . is a respectful dialogue, [but] power dynamics are real and palpable—in this dialogue, on the WPA-L, and at our institutions.

Vyshali: It has felt intimidating to be the first two respondents in this dialogue . . . Even as a sanctioned activity for this journal, challenging the *status quo* means potentially discomfiting those who abide by and/or benefit from [it].

Peggy: I became a grad student at 31, and had no patience for the way it tried to infantilize me or

with one of my guiding principles, that every student brings valuable expertise into the classroom. I said nothing (despite what my principles would tell me) because I was a soft-spoken, female, MA-student, assistant director with limited power and a lot to lose if my confrontation caused trouble or created an issue.

We exist in systems of masculine hierarchy that may dictate how graduate students feel and what agency they think they have. In our administrative work, how can we truly embrace a principle like “every [graduate student administrator] brings valuable expertise into the [WPA program],” even (especially!) when they feel that they do not?

Ashanka: During my graduate teaching practicum, our 45th US president won the election. Days after, we discussed strategies for communicating our collective grief and frustration as primarily liberal teachers with students who might or might not feel the same. A white, male colleague reported directly asking students to share their emotions, which resulted in what he described as a productive postelection conversation. He recommended similar approaches for our classrooms. I pushed against this idea.

I am a brown, Indian-American woman with long, dark brown hair. Sometimes I wear glasses. A visible white patch of vitiligo occupies the right side of my face, which I do not attempt to cover up with makeup despite regularly wearing it.

undermine my confidence and experience. I understand how the system works, but I worked at trying not to give in to it. Yes, I know that is easier for me to say given my privilege. ([A professor] told me that I had to jump through hoops if I wanted a PhD, and I retorted loudly that I resented being treated like a circus animal). I felt obligated to call out things to the WPA.

Mya: It has taken me a very long time to write responses on this forum. . . . [W]e point to disability, but then it falls away. We point to class, but then it falls away. While racism and sexism [are] very much part of the conversation today, our professional organizations continue to put abusers in positions of power. Until our professional organizations address these issues, none of us will have a safe community.

Annette: Right from the beginning [of my time in the graduate program that Peggy and I were enrolled in] I felt marginalized. I noticed how Peggy navigated the space, [but] as the only student of color I did not feel authorized to voice my disapproval. It was clear that men in the program were given much more latitude. . . . I . . . very much felt that even the women had a privilege that allowed them to be whoever they were. I was/am black in a very structurally white environment. Intersectionality

further complicates how I had to navigate the space as a graduate student, and even now as a tenured professor. My experience was also isolating, as I was the second African-American to earn a PhD in the history of the department. [People had] a level of professional and personal discomfort [with me] because there had been limited interaction with people of color in the department.

My teacher wardrobe consists of colored cardigans paired with sleeveless blouses and dress pants or dresses. Laura Bolin Carroll describes these visual characteristics as the first impressions students use to analyze and make assumptions “about what kind of teacher [we] will be” (45). Like many teachers, especially those of us from underrepresented backgrounds, who identify as woman or “other” in primarily white institutions, I remain highly aware of my body in the classroom.

I cannot imagine speaking to students about the political climate in spaces where voices and bodies like mine are often under attack. As we enact intersectional feminist WPA work, we must remain cognizant and develop strategies that meet the diverse bodies and needs of teachers and students. What might seem a “best practice” may not apply for all teachers.

Vyshali: I entered the field in crisis. I was a graduate student at a school I couldn’t afford, teaching in exchange for tuition remission, discovering I had fibromyalgia, and watching from afar as Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict intensified. I missed required teaching workshops. I disclosed to my feminist director, who sympathized, reminded me of the profession’s demanding nature, and I understood. I was disposable. I could cope or resign. This was

Karen-Elizabeth:

Vyshali, “coping culture” is so widespread and deeply seated amongst underrepresented folk everywhere but especially in higher ed. There’s an unseen, but deeply felt culture of quiet shouldering and enduring that I see so often in early-career academics and especially in those of us whose intersections expose us to a longer litany of challenges or ignorances. When I try to imagine a

my introduction to WPA work and composition pedagogy, and the message was clear: your (chronically ill) body and (non-Western, traumatic) experiences are unwelcome (Price; Dolmage). The edict of academia is endure and conform. **I was ashamed that I couldn’t, ashamed of the field for theorizing about identity politics but normalizing academic ableism, linguistic sexism, the racialization of cognition. Disaffected, fearing repercussion, I coped.**

Maybe my director’s reaction was a well-intentioned lesson, but it felt

like an inoculation. As in toxic femininity, which positions “women of color feminists as the disruptive bodies that transgress fictive, ideal feminist spaces” (Risam), my disclosure threatened this idyllic space, bringing disability to bear on feminist frameworks seeking to focus solely on patriarchal privilege, ignoring other axes of oppression. Nonwhite, disabled, I was contagion getting over the silo wall.

I tell this story now for what it taught me then: that the embodied, nonwhite, nonnormative knowledges that make us vulnerable also make us valuable. We must make space for this in composition pedagogy and WPA work.

Sherita: My first encounter with WPA work started in theory before it manifested in practice. Through the lens of “troubling the boundaries” within the context of writing programs, Craig and Perryman-Clark introduced me to conversations about how WPA experiences do not fall into a one-size-fits-all narrative, especially for Black writing program administrators and teachers of writing (38–40).

As a Black woman WPA and a graduate student, at times, I have had to disrupt preconceived notions of my right to belong and bolster my credentials in order to move equitable representations of teacher experience from theory into practice. Because of my subject positions, I often have to negotiate how I bring up discussions about race, gender, age, and class in WPA work so that my contributions are not deemed a personal issue instead of a programmatic issue.

Part of the constraint is figuring out how much energy I have to defend my identities alongside the responsibilities associated with my work as a graduate student WPA.

Intersectional frameworks account for how structures of power do or do not account for the precarious identities of marginalized communities (Crenshaw 140) and offer a

world in which I—or you, or anyone else struggling under systemic erasure or insensitivity—could thrive, rather than cope . . . I have to admit I can’t imagine it. It’s so far removed from my experience as a nonbinary person with a disability.

Karen-Elizabeth (one, if not the only, out nonbinary persons in all of undergraduate education at a large university): Sherita, YES!

We don’t concretely owe anybody else the immense amount of emotional, psychological, and even physical labor that goes into the defense or explanation of our experiences/identities. At the same time, there’s constant pressure to vocalize needs or perspectives so that others will (hopefully)

listen or consider those needs/perspectives. . . . it's exhausting.

Shelley: Given a field so overtly committed to the principles of access and diversity, one might think we'd be better at recognizing how individual stories and bodies and experiences are not "merely" personal but also fundamental to righteous programmatic action. I think Karen-Elizabeth's point above is really important here: "It takes courage, and is WORK. . . . At the same time, leaving that work undone because it is un-owed doesn't create the opportunity for others to know and listen." That final question—what to do with the work that is un-owed but which, if left undone, makes other important work more difficult—resonates strongly with me.

guide for WPA work to foster spaces of belonging. These spaces of belonging encourage critical pedagogies that allow WPAs, teachers of writing, and writing students to enter into classrooms with their whole selves and unpack the moments when they cannot. It is in these productive spaces between disruption and troubling boundaries where I envision feminist WPA work at this moment and for the future.

Anicca: As the assistant director of a first-year English program, I was fortunate to be mentored into WPA work by a thoughtful director. We learned together: she about leadership, me about being a professional in a discipline. We also made mistakes together, many of them. Our relationship taught me the importance of feminist principles in WPA work, centered on mentorship, accountability and an "ethics of care" (Leverenz 2010).

However, we were, nonetheless, mired in constraints beyond our control that would serve to push back on and complicate these ways of knowing. Situated in an English department fairly hostile to rhetoric and composition, where senior "feminist" colleagues repeatedly made excuses for older, white male faculty who made inappropriate sexual comments and devalued our work, we were constrained by budgets and non-tenure-track labor conditions that undid any high-minded notions of fairness we might have clung to. As a graduate student now "studying" WPA work, I understand this negativity as typical. I also carry those lessons: to respond to unfair conditions with clear acknowledgment and a commitment to change them; to solve problems *with*—not *for*—others; and to advocate vertically, work laterally, and act creatively. And yet, even as I garnered useful practices from that experience, I emerged years later, not unscathed. I carry that too.

CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As Mya Poe expresses so eloquently in one of her replies, our moments of conversational concern tend to ebb and flow—opening up and dropping off. In these moments of disruption and engagement, feminist WPA work appears as always interventional—but therein lies the rub. As interventional, our work as feminists may also appear limited. Temporary. Isolated. And yet as M. Melissa Elston also notes, something in our national political climate has shifted—a series of silences have given way. We are talking about our experiences in ways we have not before.

It would be easy to conclude this symposium on a glib note, congratulating ourselves for having a dialogue. Instead, we'd like to recognize the challenges and imperfections of this attempt at dialogue and intersectionality. One visible inequity, for example: The words of senior scholars and early-career WPAs have taken more space in the symposium than those of graduate students. The graduate students' initial symposium submission garnered a great deal of commentary and subsequent dialogue, but that is less evident here than in the complete web version. Despite our best efforts, this dialogue unfolded toward a re-centering of established power, unintentionally granting weight to more senior and professionally "established" voices in the field. The graduate students commented on their anxieties about the power inequities, but commenting and changing are two different matters; some inequities will persist.

Those who have experienced racism, sexism, and/or punishment for speaking out or simply existing in their bodies cannot just "put those experiences aside" when well-meaning but more powerful interlocutors invite them to have a conversation. The work of "rethinking and remapping each other" (as Anicca Cox described her experience in an email) models twenty-first-century feminism as a series of interventions that are, at times, unavoidably unsettling and inequitable. The act of dialogue itself may lead those involved to feel vulnerable and unheard all over again. This symposium provides an opportunity, then, to ask those with more power and privilege in our field (including ourselves) to be aware of the consequences of people's positionalities and the emotional work that real dialogue requires.

We end with a call to continue these conversations with vulnerability, bravery, and a willingness to stay with the discomforts of the process. There are more experiences to be shared in our programs, our online spaces, and the venues where we gather face-to-face. We look forward to learning together as the work toward greater equity and inclusion continues and gains visibility.

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