WALKING AND TALKING FEMINIST RHETORICS

LANDMARK ESSAYS AND CONTROVERSIES
Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics

Landmark Essays and Controversies

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I’ve spent a most pleasant few weeks reading this collection and a decidedly frustrating morning trying to find the origin of a phrase that haunted me as I read. Linda Buchanan and Katie Ryan have presented the field of feminist rhetoric (as well as composition and rhetoric, women’s rhetoric(s), women’s studies and just plain rhetoric—just to complicate the terrain we travel a bit more) with an important and timely collection of primary scholarly work, the first collection of late twentieth and twenty-first century published scholarship in this field that they claim is here to stay. Feminist rhetorics, they assert, is “no longer a promising possibility or a nascent area of study but has, in fact, arrived.” I agree with them, and I applaud their bold yet careful stance in framing this “walk through” feminist rhetorics.

First, putting this collection together was clearly no walk in the park. Although Buchanan and Ryan use meandering metaphors to describe both their choices and the paths they hope their readers will take, the authors and stances they collect here require the reader to spend more time at certain stops than others, and I’m particularly grateful for the editors’ candor in admitting that “the essays gathered here do not delineate a hierarchy of scholars, a chronology of events and ideas, a stable or fixed body of knowledge, or the parameters of feminist rhetoric. They simply reflect our walk through this metaphorical field and record our journey to this point in time.” I frankly don’t see how they managed to make the difficult choices I know that they faced. After all, “landmarks” can be individual, personal as well as communal, public. And yet, in their careful introductions to these essays, particularly the case studies of “controversies” in the field, Buchanan and Ryan frame this research in ways that are bold, new, and indeed present a field that has arrived, that wants more to look forward than backward. In other words, they retrace our paths—walking familiar ground—but as we amble, we hear new talk about what the journey might mean and where it might lead.
Reading Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics, though, I just couldn't get the lines about "talking the talk" vs. "walking the walk" out of my head. It's usually phrased as "Don't talk the talk if you can't walk the walk." Or more pejoratively, "Sure, he can talk the talk, but can he walk the walk?" (I use "he" deliberately because I'm confident that this maxim is decidedly male. In fact the OED tells me that it's been in use since 1921, and its contexts include wrestling and prison sentences.) Like the maxim "Talk is cheap," to "talk the talk" means that you are able to talk theoretically—or "talk a good game"—about how something is/should be done; but if you can "walk the walk," you know what you're talking about. In other words, walking denotes firsthand, practical experience, and moreover, it means connecting that practice to theory. It strikes me that feminist rhetoricians almost always do both, by necessity. Denied the right to speak historically, as the scholars collected here show, feminist rhetors more often than not devised theory from practice, not the other way around. Determined to chart new ground, as the essays here also show, feminist researchers and teachers insist on the consequences of theory. And, as the editors of this collection show in both their opening definitions of feminist rhetoric and in their listing of strands they see in the collection, theorizing practice, holding theorists accountable for practice and practitioners for theory, remains the ground of all we do. Feminist rhetoricians, it occurs to me, might be one group that also turns this expression around to insist that someone who can walk the walk must also talk the talk.

One more expression kept running around in my head as I read Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics. It's most commonly associated in rhetoric, composition, literacy, and education with another liberatory project, the book that Myles Horton and Paulo Freire "talked" into being: We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change (1990). That book was dedicated, as is this one, to the collaborative enterprise of dismantling oppressive structures of power and creating new methods of inquiry and pedagogy. But the phrase comes originally from a poem by Antonio Machado, a twentieth century Spanish poet (1875–1939). The full lines are: "Searcher, there is no road/We make the road by walking" (sometimes translated as "Wanderer, Traveler" or as "Wayfarer, there is no road"). I would argue that Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen Ryan, along with all their collaborators, both current and past, have walked us onto a new road, our steps a little surer, all the while holding themselves to the promise of continuing the journey and the conversation.

Works Cited


Introduction

Walking and Talking through the Field of Feminist Rhetorics

Having passed through the familiar and patriarchal territory of exclusionary rhetoric, we are moving into a frontier—the rhetorics of the future that await our exploration, our settlements, and our mapping.

—Cheryl Glenn, "sex, lies, and manuscript"

In response to Cheryl Glenn's call to explore new rhetorical frontiers, feminist scholars have left familiar terrain and begun to produce the inclusionary "rhetorics of the future" envisioned above. Historiographers, rhetoricians, and theorists have challenged established tradition(s) and canon(s) and, in the process, created a unique interdisciplinary field of study—feminist rhetorics. What do we mean by feminist rhetorics? We use the term as an umbrella of sorts to encompass the many projects and purposes of ongoing work in the field. First, feminist rhetorics describes an intellectual project dedicated to recognizing and revising systems and structures broadly linked to the oppression of women. Second, it includes a theoretical mandate, namely, exploring the shaping powers of language, gender ideology, and society; the location of subject(s) within these formations; and the ways these constructs inform the production, circulation, and interpretation of rhetorical texts. Third, it constitutes a practice, a scholarly endeavor capable of transforming the discipline of rhetoric through gender analysis, critique, and reformulation. This feminist practice entails identifying and examining women rhetors and women's rhetorics, making claims for their importance and contributions to the discipline, and, in so doing, regendering rhetorical histories and traditions. Fourth, it consists of a body of scholarship recording the field's intellectual, theoretical, and practical pursuits. Fifth, the term encompasses a community of teacher/scholars with shared interests in the intersections of gender and rhetoric. Sixth, it describes a political agenda directed toward promoting gender equity within the academy and society. In other words, the rhetorical work of this community of feminist teacher/scholars—in the classroom, at conferences, in publications,
through outreach—encourages others to think, believe, and act in ways that promote equal treatment and opportunities for women.

The field of feminist rhetorics, then, is both broad and deep. One of our goals in creating *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics: Landmark Essays and Controversies* is to demonstrate that the field is no longer just a promising possibility or a nascent area of study but has, in fact, arrived. As we undertook the tasks of selecting and arranging significant work in feminist rhetorics, we were mindful of Nedra Reynolds’ admonition to choose guiding metaphors with care, especially when describing the efforts and accomplishments of pathfinders and explorers (an apt description of the scholars and women rhetors included in this volume). Spatial metaphors, such as Glenn’s figuration of feminist historiography as a mapping of new territories, are inspiring for their depiction of trailblazers making new discoveries, so it’s not surprising that Glenn’s (re)mapping metaphor has been taken up in many other works, including Jacqueline Jones Royster’s “Disciplinary Landscaping, or Contemporary Challenges in the History of Rhetoric.” Other spatial tropes have also proven fruitful, for instance, Gloria Anzaldúa’s border-crossing metaphor, which emphasizes movement and “resistance to territoriality or containerization” (Reynolds 36). It, too, has been widely adopted by feminist rhetorical scholars, as is evident, for instance, in an essay in this volume, Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford’s “Border Crossings: Intersections of Rhetoric and Feminism.”

However, the tropes that, ultimately, proved most helpful to us in framing our project were walking and talking. The walking metaphor derives from Reynolds’s *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Differences* and connotes “continual improvisation, a type of performance that continually privileges, transforms or abandons the spatial elements in the constructed order”; it also signifies agency, for “walkers can pause, cross, turn, linger, double-back and otherwise have control of their actions” (69). We especially liked how the walking metaphor valorized intellectual flexibility and openness as well as the reflexivity and curiosity necessary in interdisciplinary studies. Further, it helped us to envision our project as a journey into the metaphorical field (or meadow) of feminist rhetorics. There were no established paths to follow, so we made our own way, directing our steps toward regions that enticed us. We frequently paused, zigzagged, or circled back to examine things more closely—sometimes together, sometimes apart—and when we resumed our travels, carried part of what we’ve seen within us. Although this edited collection necessarily reflects our particular journeys, we are confident it acknowledges many of the terrain’s most important landmarks.

If walking allowed us to explore the field of feminist rhetorics, then talking enabled us to understand what we’d seen. Discussion was essential to our effort because the landscape we traversed was forever in transition and often seemed to change before our eyes. The talking metaphor, therefore, emerged naturally from our exchanges, which helped us process our observations and develop a richer and fuller sense of the field together than we could have apart. We also appreciated the insights and contributions of Samuel R. Evans and Barbara Hebert, doctoral students in rhetoric at Old Dominion University, who wrote introductions to Case
Study 2 and 4 respectively. Our collective efforts ensured that an assortment of “voices, perspectives, and representations” were incorporated into the project, a feminist objective that was important to us (Hawisher and Selfe 112).

The walking and talking metaphors further suggest that our particular path through the field of feminist rhetorics necessarily differs from the ones that others might take or make. Our account of the journey (as represented by the selection and arrangement of material in Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics) is, therefore, partial, encompassing aspects of rather than the entire field. We acknowledge this limitation at the outset. Due to space constraints, we could not attend equally to every area of feminist rhetorical scholarship, so this collection necessarily reflects our own concerns and locations. We have selected work that focuses on historical and contemporary women rhetors and women’s rhetorics, chiefly in the West; on gender bias within the discipline as well as the changes that occur when bias is acknowledged and contested; on research methods and methodologies capable of recuperating forgotten or devalued rhetors; and on the distinct rhetorical sites, means, and manners employed by women. What is less well represented than we would like is feminist scholarship on gender and rhetorical education; on the impact of culture, nation, and ethnicity on women’s rhetorics; on transnational feminisms and global communications; and on gendered rhetorics in digital environments. Our selected bibliography acknowledges work in these areas to suggest starting points for those interested in learning more about them. Moreover, the essays gathered here do not delineate a hierarchy of scholars, a chronology of events and ideas, a stable or fixed body of knowledge, or the parameters of feminist rhetorics. They simply reflect our walk through this metaphorical field and record our journey to this point in time. Our journey is ongoing, so we invite readers to amble and ruminiate alongside us, whether this constitutes their first or fortieth foray into feminist rhetorics.

Before detailing the contents of Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics, a brief overview of the rhetorical situation that produced the field is in order. As has been well documented by Gerda Lerner and Marilyn French among others, patriarchal structures and institutions developed some ten to twelve thousand years ago, producing a gender hierarchy that effectively controlled women’s reproductive bodies and proscribed their participation in public spaces. This hierarchy had an enormous impact on the emergent discipline of rhetoric (in the West), which flourished 2,500 years ago when Athens became a democracy and granted male citizens a voice in determining the direction of the city-state. It soon became apparent that those who spoke well might convince others of the existence of problems or the best means of resolving them, thereby not only shaping the course of political events but also acquiring power in the process. The resultant demand for instruction in the arts of public speaking produced teachers and, ultimately, the discipline of rhetoric. At the time of its inception and for most of its history, the presumed student, teacher, practitioner, and theorist of rhetoric has been male, so the discipline’s pedagogies and precepts evolved to meet his needs. Consequently, the discipline was founded and developed with elite male speakers as the prototype. As Robert Connors ob-
serves, “rhetoric was the domain of men, particularly of men of property. The continuing discipline of rhetoric was shaped by male rituals, male contests, male ideals, and masculine agendas. Women were definitively excluded from all that rhetoric implied” (“Gender Influences” 24). As a result, the traditional rhetorical tradition—spanning Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and Augustine to Campbell, Blair, and Burke—was saturated with gendered biases and assumptions (Bizzell, “Editing” 110).

Scriptural, social, and ideological constraints limited women’s discursive opportunities, constraints that ranged from Saint Paul’s injunctions against female preaching to the cult of true womanhood. Although excluded from public forums of influence and power and ignored by the discipline itself, women, nevertheless, thought about, studied, and practiced rhetoric, indirectly for much of western history and, incrementally over the past 350 years, more directly. Scholarly efforts to excavate this history began with Doris Yoakum’s “Women’s Introduction to the American Platform” (1943) and Lillian O’Connor’s Pioneer Women Orators: Rhetoric in the Ante-Bellum Reform Movement (1954), both of which made early cases for the existence and significance of pre-Civil War women’s speeches on woman’s rights, abolition, temperance, and moral reform. However, it is Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric (1989)—a two-volume work that detailed the distinctive rhetorical style and accomplishments of nineteenth-century women rhetors and recovered their work—that conventionally marks the beginning of contemporary feminist scholarship on women rhetors and women’s rhetorics.

Since the publication of this milestone, a near avalanche of feminist research has appeared and profoundly altered the discipline of rhetoric. Why? Once its prototypical elite male speaker was replaced by a woman, the discipline required deep revision in order to accommodate the constraints and particular strategies of a new constituency. In fact, incorporating women into the traditional rhetorical tradition “require[d] not merely the readjustment of existing scholarly priorities, but a whole new set of priorities” (Bizzell, “Editing” 113). Feminist historiographers developed research methods and methodologies capable of recovering women rhetors of whom little record remains. Further, feminist scholars discovered women’s rhetorics in formerly disregarded sites and genres and, in the process, broadened what counted as rhetoric and as evidence, necessary moves as the standards “traditionally used to value rhetors simply did not always apply well to women” (Mattingly, “Telling” 105). In short, feminist researchers not only questioned established rhetorical categories, definitions, criteria, principles, and practices but also identified gender biases that slighted the full range and inventiveness of marginalized rhetors.

The field of feminist rhetorics has emerged from these investigations. Although initially centered on women in the United States, scholars have begun to branch out and examine women’s rhetorics in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and other global regions and ethnic locations. This expansion signals feminist rhetoric’s vitality, as does the number of field-specific organizations, conferences, publications, publishers, and teaching materials now in existence.
Feminist rhetorics incorporates scholarship in women's studies, history, philosophy, law, anthropology, communication, and English, but the latter two disciplines, in particular, have produced important organizations for those investigating the nexus of gender and rhetoric. In English, the most significant is the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (the Coalition), a group that meets yearly at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Dues-paying members stay in touch year round via a list-serve and newsletter, Peitho. Meanwhile, the Organization for Research on Women and Communication (ORWAC) provides a similar gathering place for feminist scholars in communications. ORWAC meets yearly at the Western States Communication Association Conference and maintains contact through the biannual ORWAC Newsletter. Both disciplines sponsor national and regional conferences that provide feminist scholars with presentation and networking opportunities. The Coalition, for instance, sponsors the biennial Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference, and many major conferences in English studies regularly include panels, presentations, and workshops on feminist rhetorics, including the CCCC, Rhetoric Society of America Conference, International Society for the History of Rhetoric Conference, and National Communication Association Conference. Important regional venues include the Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference and the Western, Southern, and Central States Communication Association Conferences. Publishing opportunities in the field have also multiplied, with a number of journals welcoming work in feminist rhetorics. The longest running focused journal is *Women's Studies in Communication*, which has been in operation since 1977 and is sponsored by ORWAC. The Coalition hopes to follow suit and develop *Peitho* into a journal dedicated to feminist scholarship in rhetoric and composition. General journals in communications and English studies also welcome work in feminist rhetorics, including *College English, College Composition and Communication, Philosophy and Rhetoric, Quarterly Journal of Speech, Rhetoric Review, Rhetorica*, and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. Finally, a number of academic presses exist that publish scholarly monographs and collections in feminist rhetorics. The most active is arguably Southern Illinois University Press (SIUP). SIUP regularly produces rhetoric and composition texts written from a feminist perspective and also sponsors the Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms series, edited by Cheryl Glenn and Shirley Wilson Logan. Since its inception in 2002, this series has published many noteworthy books in the field of feminist rhetorics (see the selected bibliography).

A growing body of resources for courses in feminist rhetorics and rhetorical history has also appeared although some critical needs remain, chief among them being a collection of landmark scholarship in the field. Granted, useful compilations of research in feminism and composition are available (e.g., Jarratt and Worsham's *Feminism and Composition: In Other Words*, Kirsch and her collaborators' *Feminism and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook*, Phelps and Emig's *Feminist Principles and Women's Experience in American Composition and Rhetoric*), but they include little on women's rhetorics. *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics: Landmark Essays*
and Controversies responds to this gap, gathering significant work on gender, feminism, and rhetoric responsible for creating a new area of study and reshaping the discipline as a whole.

As editors of this collection, we have read and reread a great many books and articles about women and rhetoric over the past two years and—through the processes of analyzing and synthesizing, selecting and arranging, introducing and explicating this material—have developed a kairotic sense of the field’s major lines of inquiry and areas of controversy. In the course of our efforts, we have identified five major strands in the work of feminist rhetorical scholars:

- Reclaiming forgotten or disparaged women rhetors and rhetoricians and making convincing cases for their contributions and accomplishments. An example of this type of research is Jacqueline Jones Royster’s Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women, an interdisciplinary study of nineteenth-century black women’s literate practices and rhetorical efforts to protest racial injustice and promote racial uplift.

- Examining the interrelationships among context, location, and rhetoric and tracing how these shape women’s discursive options, strategies, and choices. For instance, in A Feminist Legacy: The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck, Suzanne Bordelon first situates the educator within the Progressive Era; then details her interconnected theories of rhetoric, citizenship, and equality; and, finally, traces their application in Buck’s classroom, theatrical, and suffrage activities. Bordelon places Buck’s rhetoric within surrounding systems of power, gender, politics, economics, and education and shows how they mutually inform and illuminate one another.

- Searching for gender bias and, when it is found, retheorizing (or regendering) rhetorical traditions. Lindal Buchanan’s Regendering Delivery: The Fifth Canon and Antebellum Women Rhetors illustrates this approach, replacing the male orator at the center of the fifth rhetorical canon with a woman and speculating on the changes that gender makes to the theory and practice of delivery.

- Interrogating foundational disciplinary concepts—such as rhetorical space, argument, genre, and style—in order to expand and, when necessary, redefine the realm of rhetoric. The 1996 special issue of Argumentation and Advocacy illustrates this approach. Because many “feminists contend[ed] that argument as a process [was] steeped in adversarial assumptions and gendered expectations,” this journal issue examined alternative approaches and conceptions in order to “open up studies of argumentation” (Palczewski 164, 168). Feminists undertake this sort of critical scrutiny and conceptual reframing in order to generate novel approaches to established disciplinary precepts and practices.

- Challenging traditional knowledge-making paradigms and research practices (including criteria, methods, and methodologies) when they prove inadequate for investi-
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and gating women rhetors and women’s rhetorics and developing inventive and robust alternatives. In “A Lover’s Discourse: Diotima, Logos, and Desire,” C. Jan Swearingen interrogates questionable applications of evidentiary criteria, which are often used to support textual (re)constructions of figures like Socrates, Jesus and Moses and to impede the recovery of women rhetors (28). Through skillful interpretation and application, Swearingen transforms Diotima from a shadowy figure in Plato’s Symposium to a feminist priestess and healer who teaches Socrates about “love, discourse, and birth” (26, 28). Swearingen’s critical (re)readings of historiographic methodology and recovery of Diotima thus illustrate an important goal of feminist research.

This list of research concerns is not comprehensive, but it does provide a starting point for distinguishing among the various approaches to feminist rhetorics represented in this sourcebook. What is more, these lines of inquiry guided the organization and arrangement of our project. Part 1. Charting the Emergence of Feminist Rhetorics presents five early essays that created a foundation for the field by challenging women’s exclusion from rhetorical history and theory. Additionally, they introduced some key concerns and knowledge-making paradigms that emerged as scholars began to challenge gendered assumptions within the rhetorical tradition. In Part 2. Articulating and Enacting Feminist Methods and Methodologies, six essays examine distinctive issues in feminist rhetorical scholarship. Of particular concern are the ethical, interpretive, and methodological questions that researchers confront when recovering women rhetors of whom there is little trace or when examining unconventional rhetorics. The six essays in Part 3. Exploring Gendered Sites, Genres, and Styles of Rhetoric address areas little studied within the traditional discipline of rhetoric. Private conversation as well as bricks and mortar become the available means of persuasion employed by women to shape public life and assert the value of their collective efforts. Finally, Part 4. Examining Controversies: Four Case Studies presents exchanges between or among scholars on matters that not only shaped the field’s past but also inform its present and future directions. Case Study 1 considers whether feminist scholarship best proceeds by integrating women rhetors into the established canon of public speakers or by retheorizing the discipline through the lens of gender. Case Study 2 concerns the nature of persuasive discourse and debates whether it constitutes a gendered form of violence or means to power. Case Study 3 examines how nineteenth-century women’s entry into American colleges influenced rhetorical education while Case Study 4 explores credibility and ethics in feminist historiography. The book concludes with a selected bibliography of feminist rhetorical studies, identifying anthologies, edited collections, special journal issues, and significant monographs for those interested in further study.

The discipline of rhetoric—which consists of the study, practice, and theorizing of public discourse—developed in response to the Athenian context and has survived due to its ability to adapt to social, ideological, political, economic, and technological changes. Thanks to the efforts of feminist rhetorical scholars, rhetoric is being reshaped once more, this time in
order to accommodate gender and incorporate women rhetors who have existed but have been largely ignored throughout history. As you read the essays in this volume and learn about researchers' efforts to recover the forgotten and retheorize the discipline, we hope that your walk through the field of feminist rhetorics will be rich and rewarding. We encourage you to create your own path and to "pause, cross, turn, linger, [or] double-back" to contemplate what you find along the way (Reynolds 69). And when you are ready, we invite you to add your voice to the field's continuing conversations about women, language, and power.