

2019 Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference: Redefining Feminist Activism

The School of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication at James Madison University invites proposals for the 12th Biennial Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference to be held at Hotel Madison in Harrisonburg, VA, November 13-16, 2019.

This year's theme invites participants to reflect on or redefine current trends in and future possibilities for grassroots feminist activism in what we are calling "DIY feminist activism"-- advocacy work that prioritizes inclusion and diversity by engaging in projects that are freestanding, self-supporting, and/or crowdsourced. DIY feminist activism is in tune with overlapping identities and, thus, is inherently intersectional; it celebrates the power of individuals to spearhead innovative, creative solutions to issues and problems that are often neglected or mishandled when left to institutional powers.

Feminist activism can be seen in everyday acts like Jose Garcia's Instagram post urging teen boys to carry tampons and pads to support female peers or 11-year-old Kheris Rogers' "Flexin' In My Collection" clothing line launched in response to her own bullying and now championed by celebrities like Lupita Nyong'o. Activism is Warren Middle School teachers' messages of body positivity painted on stall doors in student restrooms and the 10 women of GirlTrek, a group that encourages Black women to walk for exercise and community connection, who retraced 100 miles along the Underground Railroad route to honor Harriet Tubman.

The term "DIY Feminism," of course, is not new; indeed, feminists have used the generative concept to describe and energize their work for some time. For example, Kathy Bails' (1996) *DIY Feminism* focused on showcasing broad, confident women engaged in innovative, diverse forms of activism. Media scholar Red Chidgey (2009) explained that DIY feminism draws on "genealogies of punk cultures, grassroots movements, and the technologies of late capitalism" to mesh "lifestyle politics with counter-cultural networking" and to "focus everyday acts of resistance and power." More recently, Pinterest boards and blogs use variations of the term as their titles.

Still, much remains to be explored on how rhetoricians specifically might engage in this important work, and sobering realities that mark this epoch make this work pressing. This conference invites activists and scholars to perform, recognize, reframe, and theorize the work that's been done and to imagine the work that could be done in the spirit of DIY feminist activism.

In the wake of the hugely successful Women's March and the March for Our Lives, both featuring female rhetors of all ages, more women+ than ever ran for office in 2018 with several important wins including Danika Roem, the first trans member of the Virginia House of Delegates, and Deb Haaland's primary win in New Mexico that may lead to the first Native American woman in Congress. Grassroots efforts on social media and in local communities seem more important than ever in changing our institutional landscapes. It is this sort of individual-driven work that has the power to fuel collective change that we want to explore at this conference.

With the overarching goal of locating and defining feminisms in action working to make change in this moment and via multiple modalities and positionalities, we invite a wide range of proposals (workshops, roundtables, installations, demonstrations, "how-to's", panels, and individuals) that explore feminisms and accompanying rhetorics from a variety of positions and that seek to answer questions such as the following:

- As the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition celebrates its 30th anniversary, how can the DIY movement serve as a lens for revisioning the feminist rhetorical activism that is the bedrock of so much of our work?
- In what ways is feminist activism a rhetorical, personal, and collective act?
- What does feminist activism look like in community spaces? In academic environments? In community partnerships?
- What can be learned from our embodied rhetorical activities, e.g., as racial minorities, indigenous peoples, scholar-activists, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities and others doing DIY activism for decades/centuries?
- What does DIY feminism look like in our classrooms? In our pedagogy?
- Which aspects of DIY feminism might we challenge or interrogate?
- How can we better foster and support the people, institutions, communities, and maker-spaces where we see feminism/feminist activism in action?
- How can installations or demonstrations amplify and extend DIY activist strategies?
- How can we use conference space to equip one another to perform DIY feminist activism in our local communities?
- How might memoria be an act of DIY activism specifically found in feminist digital/historiographic/archival materials and architectures?

Session Types

We encourage and are open to a variety of presentation styles, in roughly 75-minute segments, including but not limited to:

- Individual Presentation - 75- to 100-word abstract, 250-word proposal
- Panel Presentation, with 3 to 4 presenters - 150- to 200-word abstract, 750-word proposal
- Roundtable Discussion, with 4 or more presenters - 150- to 200-word abstract, 500-word proposal
- “How-to” Workshops, by individual or collaborative presenters - 150- to 200-word abstract, 500-word proposal. In the spirit of DIY, we invite demonstrations and tutorials about how to “do” activism. These “how-to’s” should provide practical guidance for participants to take back to their local communities.
- Interactive Installations, by individual or collaborative presenters - 150- to 200-word abstract, 500-word proposal. Demonstrate DIY activism by showcasing multimodal/digital/sonic/embodied work(s) that invite audience engagement.
- Poster Presentations, by individual or collaborative presenters (1 poster per submission) - 150- to 200-word abstract. Posters will be displayed during all three days of the conference, but presenters must be present for discussions during one set poster session time.
- Saturday Workshops - 150- to 200-word abstract, 500-word proposal, AND outline of proposed activities. Like a how-to, these workshops should provide a take-away for participants, but might require more than a traditional 75-min timeslot. Workshops are participatory, so proposals should articulate how attendees will interact with each other, the presenters, and/or technologies and materials.

Note: Presenters are limited to two speaking roles but may participate in as many other participant roles as desired. Submissions will be blind reviewed. Abstracts must not contain any information that will identify presenters or speakers.

Submissions open: December 1, 2018
Notification of acceptance: June 1, 2019

Proposal Deadline: February 1, 2019
Early registration begins July 1, 2019

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