

# From Textual Subjects to Voracious Feminists: Rethink Constitutive Rhetoric

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**Abstract:** Based on a feminist reconceptualization of Maurice Charland's constitutive rhetoric, I analyze a teaching praxis within the framework of feminist rhetorical theories. I argue students transition to feminist positionality not only through textuality and identification but also rhetorical appeals of affective proof, invitational rhetoric, and rhetorical listening. Such learning practices engender community, dialogue, and emotional connection in the classroom, resulting in a perspective shift in some students. They are inclined to become feminist allies.

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**Keywords:** feminist rhetorical pedagogy, affective proof, invitational rhetoric, rhetorical listening, constitutive rhetoric

## Introduction

In the fall of 2020, I taught an undergraduate rhetoric course on women, gender, and sexuality at an urban research university. This course was redesigned based on a project completed at a diversity in teaching faculty seminar organized by the provost in 2018. I was a faculty fellow in the seminar. Working closely with teaching consultants, instructional designers, and liaison librarians, I revised the syllabus, enhanced course content, and created new classroom activities and assignments that reflected the current state of women, gender, and sexuality studies in rhetoric and communication studies. With a year's preparation, I selected readings in the following categories: foundational writings by feminist foremothers, readings focused on the field of rhetoric, contemporary feminist advocacy in the U.S. and discourse of women around the globe. I compiled this reading list to expose students to materials that address the intersection of historiography, contemporary feminist advocacy and discourse of women around the globe so that students would have a grasp of the depth and scope of the rhetoric on women, gender, and sexuality. Upon the completion of my project, I sought to have this course designated as a general education course, particularly in the category of philosophical thinking and ethics, because I discovered that few courses in that category centered on women, gender, and sexuality. With the intention to reach a broad segment of students across the university, I endeavored to engage them in feminist and philosophical thinking and in the ethics of women's rights, gender justice and equity.

This research was conducted in a unique context. The university is in a metropolitan area, which is progressive and democratic in its political views. The university administration upholds diversity and inclusion. Most students come from the vicinity of the university or from the East or West Coast. In addition, the composition of the student body is another factor to consider because most students were white from middle class backgrounds. They tended to express liberal or progressive views. For this reason, I selected the readings from university press publications and academic journals which were liberal leaning. If this course was offered at a university in another region with a different demographic, the learning outcome may be different.

I subsequently taught this class in the Communication Department in fall of 2020.<sup>1</sup> The Communication Department<sup>1</sup> offered this course as an upper-level course and a general education (Gen Ed) course which satisfied the requirements of philosophical thinking and ethics, diversity, and global issues, as mentioned above. The class was cross listed with Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies

(GSWS) program at the university. The course's final enrollment filled thirty-four of the thirty-five offered seats and attracted nineteen communication/rhetoric majors. The remaining students came from other humanities, social sciences, and science programs at the university. According to the demographic information volunteered by the students, twenty-one self-identified as White, three as Asian American, four as Latino, one as African American, two as Chinese, one of African descent, and one of Middle Eastern descent. With regards to gender, thirty-three students self-identified as women and one student as a man.

Drawing from my experiences designing and teaching this feminist-oriented Gen Ed Communication Studies class, this paper considers what is an effective feminist pedagogy for students who, as Elizabeth Bell and Kim Golombiski term it, are in a state of "between-ness" (295)—not stalwart feminists, but sympathetic to feminist ideas, as evidenced by choosing to take a communication studies class focused on rhetoric, women, gender, and sexuality. What would be a desirable learning outcome for such students? Is a perspective shift toward feminist values and practices considered a favorable consequence? Or are there specific pedagogies a feminist teacher might apply so that those in between students would have a desire to become feminist allies if not feminists themselves?

For the purposes of this paper (and the class I teach), I define feminism as a movement to end gender inequality, as well as intersectional inequality including race, class, sexuality, and

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1 Due to the pandemic, this course was offered remotely and recorded. After submitting my request to use students' writings and short excerpts of transcripts without revealing students' identity in my research, I received a clearance from IRB (Institutional Review Board) at the university. I also obtained the written consent of the students to use their work—their term papers—in this study. I chose these research materials to reflect the interface between rhetorical feminist pedagogy and students' engagement, the dynamic of a feminist rhetorical classroom, and students' subsequent perspectives shift toward feminist causes. The subsequent discussion of theoretical framework elucidates feminist rhetorical classroom practices.

disability (Crossley)<sup>2</sup>. To achieve this end, feminists need agency to affect changes. Rhetorical scholars Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin uphold values of equality, immanent value, and self-determination in rhetorical practices (364). Foss and Griffin suggest that within feminist rhetorical acts, women may claim they are legitimate rhetors and enunciate subject matters they deem important. Yet, feminists do not fight a lone struggle but must engage all those who feel an affinity to it.

Many feminist teachers emphasize critical reflection and exchange, civic participation aimed toward progress in hope for a more equitable future (Glenn 126), critical engagement over mastery, and they may be influenced by feminist scholar Charlotte Bunch's four-step pedagogical method: describing what exists, analyzing why that reality exists, determining what should exist, and hypothesizing about how to change what is to what should be (Bunch 251-253). This pedagogical approach has shaped generations of students into ardent feminists upon leaving the classroom, who subsequently joined the rank of their forebearers in the quest for women's rights, gender justice and equity. Yet, I argue students transition to feminist positionality not only through textuality and identification but also rhetorical appeals—affective proof, invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening. This recognition is based on a feminist reconceptualization of Maurice Charland's constitutive rhetoric, which I discuss at length further below.

Important to this feminist rhetoric and communication studies class, feminist rhetorical scholars Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and Andrea Lunsford have argued for new ratios among logos, pathos, and ethos—women, gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability—be added to proofs, complicating the conventional wisdom of rhetorical theory (440). Feminist rhetorical practices stand in contrast to traditional rhetorical theory. While traditional rhetorical theorists often critique a “rhetorical situation” (Bitzer 217)—exigency rhetorical strategies, and resolution—rhetorical feminists insist on a critical theory of recasting rhetoric as a broad arena in which rhetors engage in a wide range of rhetorical behavior and demonstrate various rhetorical expertise and prowess (Royster and Kirsch 133). Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gisa Kirsch validate this feminist reconfiguration of proofs in their introduction of a new rhetorical feminist methodology. They contend that an interpretation of rhetorical artifacts is not final and conclusive but inclusive—as more elements are factored in, critical examinations can expand (Royster and Kirsch 19). In this perspective, inclusion of historical context, exigency, speech act, bodily experiences, and, more importantly, affect and emotion as extended objects of study leads to a richer understanding of rhetorical research and feminist approaches. In other words, a feminist rhetor persuades, motivates, mobilizes, and engages an audience beyond the singular goal of exigency resolution. Expanding further, Michelle Ramsey emphasizes the importance of context when analyzing feminist rhetors in various

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2 On the first day of the class, I asked students to share why they took this course. They gave a variety of reasons. A few said they were feminists and wanted to take a class on women, gender, and sexuality. Some communication majors said that the Communication Department had not offered a course on women, gender, and sexuality in recent years and that they wanted a course with this focus. But more than half of the students took the course because it satisfied the University's General Education requirement of philosophical thinking and ethics.

time periods. By attending to context, feminist scholars can articulate how society defines women, contest that definition and create a new form of public vocabulary (Ramsey 363). Charlotte Hogg demonstrates the importance of context in her analysis of conservative women's rhetoric. She argues that rhetorical practices dismantle binary practices by "seeing or creating additional ones" (397). Likewise, David Gold analyzes how the binary vision of heroes and distractors impacted his students' examination of rhetorical artifacts. He observes that his students "often seek heroes . . . They may have difficulty in moving beyond an either/or lens in contextualizing the figures they encounter" (Gold 162). And finally, Celest Condit proposes the notion of "gender diversity" as an alternative perspective which envisions gender and identity as mobile, multiple affiliations that are formed through discursive interactions (9). As Condit, Hogg, and Gold make clear, it is urgent that feminists seek alliances beyond the narrow confines of advocates and dissenters in order to facilitate cogent change. Taken together, these scholars show how there are alternatives to a dichotomy in examining public discourse and that a multi-angle, fluid interpretation reveals the complexity and richness of this object of study. In rhetorical studies, how to engage subjects who occupy the in "between-ness" and who do not immediately identify as feminists has merited little attention. To address this gap, my research draws from these aforementioned feminist rhetorical approaches alongside a feminist reconceptualization of Charland's concept of constitutive rhetoric to examine, beyond the binary focus of feminist and non-feminist students, those students who occupy the in between. This study is an in-depth analysis of how students, who do not claim to be feminists but who support women's rights, made a transition towards alliance with feminist thoughts and actions. As a result, I offer a feminist rhetorical analysis of how these in between students make the transition from being uncommitted to feminist values, to being receptive to feminist stances, and to becoming feminist allies. I argue rhetorical appeals of affective proof, invitational rhetoric, and rhetorical listening play central roles in transfiguring some students' ideological orientations. In what follows, I draw from a qualitative study of my classroom to describe the strategies that have worked in a feminist rhetorical classroom, how the role of a feminist teacher enabled these alliances, the classroom's successes, and the rich variety of feminist rhetorical pedagogical approaches employed in the classroom.

## Teaching philosophy

To begin and to foreground how I integrated feminist rhetorical concepts with a feminist reconceptualization of Charland's theory of constitutive rhetoric, I demonstrate how my teaching philosophy was informed by the premises of several scholars. Likewise, because most students had not expressed their positions in feminism, I reflected on how to engage them in the concepts of my course. When teaching a first-year writing class, John Duffy argues that mutual trust and honesty are the key to effective learning—students attend to differences of opinion and respect those with whom they disagree. Second, based on my conversation with the faculty of Gender and Women's Studies program at the university, I decided on a "student centered," discussion-based format so that students had a shared agency and authority. My pedagogy also drew from Tina

Chen's notion of employing an "ethics of knowledge," or not teaching students what to believe but helping students develop an ethical approach so that they make decisions that lead to belief (157). Chen's approach echoes feminist and sexuality studies scholar Adrienne Rich's vision of a superior university education in which the education is formed by "an ethical and intellectual contract between teacher and student [...] that must remain intuitive, dynamic, unwritten" (610). Rich reminds us that "we must turn to [that intellectual contract] repeatedly if learning is to be reclaimed from the depersonalizing and cheapening pressures of the present-day academic scene" (610). Cheryl Glenn elaborates on the ways superior classroom practices are made possible. She states, "Rhetorical feminist teachers embrace educational values that respect personal experiences, and encourage active engagement and collaboration, values that are imaginative, often liberatory, and can diminish the assertiveness, competitiveness and hierarchy that have long held the rein in the academy" (140). The guidance of those feminist scholars and teachers provides the underpinning of my feminist rhetorical pedagogical practices: creating a classroom in which trust became the foundation of the classroom culture; building a community in which students respected, validated, and supported one another; facilitating multilateral and dynamic discussions; and adjusting when necessary.

To stay true to this pedagogical approach, my role as a feminist teacher was central. Royster and Kirsch use "possibilities" as a lynch pin to envision the liberatory consequences of rhetorical feminist practices in impact and outcomes (109). On rhetorical feminist pedagogy, they argue that a teacher has the privilege and power of helping students to liberate themselves as thinkers and language users to "set in motion a process of 'casting bread on the water' and creating circles of responses" (109). On feminist pedagogy, Lesley Barlett imagines a feminist teacher's responsibility as "what we communicate to them, what we perform and what we hope will happen as a result of these performance." (97). Feminist rhetorical classroom practices present a case study to support their premise—that some students redefine their self-location and take a path of personal growth that extends beyond the classroom.

As a feminist teacher, I endeavored to facilitate such growth. I was not a mere observer but a facilitator who strategically guided the directions of students' conversations. For example, as part of the learning outcome for the course, I strove to inform the students of a feminist positionality through engagement, reflection, community building and mobilization. Based on my conversations with the faculty of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Study at the university, I concluded that most of my students were different from theirs—not ardent feminists but middle of the roaders, in between feminist ideas and feminist allyship. I faced a challenge: how to expose these students to women and gender issues so that they would be more receptive to feminist stances. I decided on several learning objectives. First, students would be encouraged to believe they were agents of change. For example, they read course materials of how many women negotiated gender inequality in the workplace so that they saw that they had a stake in learning and understand how they could engage in activism upon entering the workforce. Secondly, students

connected readings to their lived experiences so that they found learning engaging. For example, they learned about gender roles in relationships and marriages. When reading about how many women, though highly successful in their careers, were main caregivers in relationships or marriages, many students discussed how their grandmothers, mothers and other female relatives negotiated these challenges and how the students themselves had to mitigate these issues when they entered relationships or marriages.

Next, students were motivated to engage in feminist acts. For example, I selected a reading about how hashtag activism had raised public consciousness for gender justice, #Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice, which informed the students of #YesAllWomen, #SurvivorPrivilege, #WhyIStayed, #TheEmptyChair, #MeToo and #GirlsLikeUS. These readings triggered heated discussions. Many students talked about how they retweeted hashtag activism to extend the sphere of influence to their peers and society at large. This way, I encouraged students to be aware that they engaged in feminist acts. Seeking common ground and building a community made the classroom more than a place for academic learning. It was, as Penny Burke and Sue Jackson note, “a place learners found a sense of belonging” (45). Students belonged because they had a voice, and they could discuss topics that mattered to them. The learning objectives of engagement, reflection, and community building illuminate how an epistemic turn could occur.

As another example, when we discussed how to be allies with transgender people, students were willing to share their firsthand experiences. Many knew people from their hometowns who had gone through a gender transition and recounted the ways their towns, schools, and fellow students responded. I affirmed their observations and posed follow-up questions to prod them to think in depth so that they came to see the implications of their thoughts and connected their observations with active themes of transgender rights movements, showing them how they could be allies of change against the growing national anti-trans movement. In keeping with the global perspective of this class, I encouraged students to share what they knew about the transgender rights movements in places outside of the U.S. The students in the class from Columbia, East Africa, Morocco, and China all told stories about transgender issues in their home countries. As a feminist teacher, I wanted to draw out their feminist thinking and show them how they could become agents and allies against anti-trans structures. This sort of open dialogue and pedagogy that centralized feminist principles described above made it possible for me to create a classroom environment where feminist constitutive pedagogy could take place because I did not emphasize logic, reason, linearity, or causality but rather lived experience, dialogue, and affect. The next sections show how, due to a feminist reframing of constitutive practices in the classroom, students were able to move beyond the in “between-ness” of feminism and toward feminist allyship.

## **Feminist Reconceptualization of Constitutive Rhetoric**

Before moving on to show how feminist reconceptualization of constitutive rhetoric works

in the classroom, I show how and why it is necessary to ground constitutive rhetoric in feminist rhetorical theories. Charland's notion of rhetorical process signifies logic, reason, linearity, and causality, which amounts to what Lorraine Code calls a "single undisputed norm," (80) implicit in hegemonic rhetorical practices of "white, male, elite performances in public domains" (Dingo, Riedner and Wingard, 181). To complicate this model, rhetorical feminists argue that lived experiences, dialogue, and affect constitute an essential part of a rhetorical process. Glenn calls for an adjustment of rhetorical appeals so that emotion and experience balance logic and reason: "[Reshaping] the rhetorical appeals [includes] a reshaped logos on dialogue and understanding, a reshaped ethos is rooted in experience and a reshaped pathos values emotion" (149-150, italics mine). By reframing proofs, feminist rhetorical theorists take issue with theories such as constitutive rhetoric—conceptual realignment, the goal of rhetorical process, occurs not only through moral exhortations but also an ecology of dialogue, community building and emotional connection.

Indeed, I argue that, in a feminist rhetorical classroom, trust, sharing and solidarity between the teacher and students and among students lead to an intended outcome. Affective proof, inviting speaking and rhetorical listening—an integral part of identification process—result in a paradigm shift in some students.

Feminist rhetorical theory reframes traditional rhetorical theory. Many theorists apply Charland's notion of constitutive rhetoric to analyze rhetorically constructed subjects in political discourse. Charland's work is influenced by several theorists of political discourse. First, Charland incorporates Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation as the key process in production of ideology (133). In addition, building on Kenneth Burke's proposal in *A Rhetorical of Motives*, Charland identifies identification rather than persuasion as an efficacious rhetorical process. (134). Finally, Charland applies Michael McGee's concept of the people, a rhetorical vision an ideologue uses to unify their subjects. An ideologue preconceives an outcome in which subjects visualize themselves as the people: a collectivity eager to join the vision held out by the ideologue. With those theoretical foundations, Charland's constitutive rhetoric illuminates how a rhetorical subject transforms: through texts, then through identification, and, finally, through change. Change is not brought about by persuasion but through identification—an interpellation of subjects who enact what is ascribed in the text.

In Charland's vision, textuality is the first step to create a rhetorically constructed subject. Charland explains the textuality of subjects: "We cannot accept the 'givenness' of 'audience,' 'person,' or 'subject', but must consider their very textuality, their constitution in rhetoric as a structured articulation of signs" (137). Charland presents a case study to illustrate his point. He argues that Quebec sovereignty based itself upon the asserted and new existence of a rhetorically invented identity, "Québécois." That identity, and the collectivized people québécois, are interpellated as political subjects who undergo a process of identification. A subject is not persuaded

to support sovereignty. Support for sovereignty is inherent to the subject position addressed by pro-sovereignty rhetoric (Charland 134).

Though constitutive rhetoric traditionally analyzes political discourses, I contend that it can be applied to a classroom setting. First, in some academic institutions in the U.S., teaching practices reorient students' values and attitudes (e.g., diversity and inclusion) through the curriculum. A classroom is construed as a springboard in a student's lifelong journey of ideological orientation. Second, in a feminist rhetorical classroom, students are immersed in feminist theories and values, with the expectation that they will be champions and advocates upon leaving the classroom. In this regard, a classroom is analogous to an ideological process in a large political setting. Thirdly, in a classroom setting, the praxis of constitutive rhetoric results in evidence-based, measurable, and quantifiable indexes, which in turn informs feminist rhetorical pedagogy of how teaching impacts students' outlook both textually, through narrative hauling, and extra textually, through community building, affect and dialogue. Finally, this communication class of gender and women's rhetoric met a big challenge. Due to a mix of beliefs—while a few students were staunch feminists, other students were uncommitted to feminist causes—the feminist teacher strove to influence those middle road students. Constitutive rhetoric, through textuality, identification, and locus of action, is a useful basis, therefore, to analyze a rhetorical process in a classroom setting and observe how identification leads to a positionality shift.

Contemporary rhetorical scholars continue to engage constitutive rhetoric. Thomas Farrell argues that, as an intersection of theory and practice, constitutive rhetoric is valuable in its emphasis on collectivity, audience, and identity in the sphere of human history (327). Katja Thieme uses Charland's theory of audience positioning to analyze audience design in Canadian suffragist movements. Helen Tate counterargues the effectiveness of constitutive rhetoric in her study of a failed attempt by white lesbian feminists to form a feminist identity during second-wave feminism. In this perspective, constitutive rhetoric, with its focus on textuality, identification, and transformation, is pertinent to analyze positionality shift in rhetorical processes in diverse contexts.

## **Feminist Rhetorical Praxis**

In examining each constitutive feature of the course, I critique Charland's theory via the lens of feminist interventions. In the first class, students read Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Emma Goldman, and Simone Beauvoir. I attempted to accomplish threefold goals: 1) inform students of feminist foremothers' historical stances, which would undergird discussions throughout the course of the semester; 2) have students trace the origin of empowerment to its continuation and shift in contemporary times; and 3) help students understand how histories of rhetoric has informed social changes in contemporary times. These goals fit into Nan Johnson's model of social change of "articulation/definition, debate, institutionalization/cultural inscription and cultural upheaval, and back wave," which could start immediately or decades later (qtd. in Glenn 139). By



learning the historiography of feminist foremothers, students built referential points—appealing to a common frame of reference—which guided students’ perception of how feminist battles should be won. Feminist foremothers laid down the ideological framework of what position a woman should occupy in society: men were Self; women were Other who were subordinate to men in political, social, economic, and biological spheres; a woman’s struggle was overcoming being an Other and gaining equal footing with men. Reacting to the readings, one discussion question invoked heated responses from students: “Responding to Simone Beauvoir’s argument that a woman is an Other, how can you overcome being an Other?”

Students first identified the core value of feminism: overcoming being represented or positioned as an Other, as defined by Beauvoir. Students’ conception of overcoming an Other was to bring about changes in the real world. Their ideas were detailed: first, the students saw community as a source of strength. Several students argued that they should always back each other up. A student gave an example: if they saw another woman in an unsafe situation, they would not hesitate to come to her rescue. Furthermore, they advocated for an inclusive feminism—for women and men to be open to each other’s perspectives and seek common ground. Students saw solidarity, community and coalition building as building blocks of feminism, which would become the overarching themes in students’ shared outlook on feminism. Feminist pedagogy stresses a symbiotic relationship between identification and dialogue. Students “investigate their individual performances of self and voice, and they are ultimately invited to view and discuss those with their peers” (Gold 168).

The second referential point revolved around diverse perspectives on how to overcome being an Other—from the mundane to the noble. A student shared her perspective based on assignments she had completed for another class. When she read a fairytale, she interpreted the story as portraying symbolic values society placed on young girls: a woman could only have a blissful life if a prince charming had rescued her. She argued that such readings instilled in young girls the value that women were less worthwhile beings than men. Other students argued feminism should sprout from a more fundamental level—impacting youths in their formative years. Several students said that it was crucial to educate both girls and boys at an early age to instill in them feminist values and ward off the pervasive toxic masculinity, which Carol Harrington defines as “misogyny, homophobia and men’s violence” (345). Jennifer, an American student, noted:

By integrating early feminist education into academic curriculum among elementary and middle school students, young boys can learn the harmful effects of toxic masculinity and how to act in manners that do not perpetuate toxic masculinity. In doing so, society will establish inclusivity of gender equality and progression, which will teach boys and young men to recognize, reject and challenge simplified masculinity and to create cultural change.

Students' statements reflected a cross section of their diverse interpretations of the core feminist value of feminism. Overcoming being an Other can be as mundane as a critical reading of a class assignment or as noble as reforming early and secondary education. Despite differences of opinion, however, students revealed they were unified in their attitude in feminism activism: every act, no matter how big or small, counted as advocacy. A feminist could either be a steadfast feminist or one who engaged in a single feminist act. Everyday resistance and grassroots activism became a referential point unifying students who began class in various positions along the feminist spectrum.

## Forming Identification

In this section, I will discuss how identification—the crucial stage of the transformation—occurred when students were exposed to feminist narratives. Charland argues, “Ideology is material because subjects enact their ideology and reconstitute their material world in its image” (143). Charland argues that, once interpellated, a subject will transition from a textual to a real-life position and participate in the ideologue’s ideological vision.

Students assumed the identity of textual subjects—positions rendered in texts they were exposed to—when they were introduced to value-laden feminist narratives. I selected readings in *Finding Feminism: Millennial Activists and the Unfinished Gender Revolution* by Allison Crossley (2017). Students related the readings to their everyday life experiences, and how they participated in feminist acts as college students. They read “Where Have All the Feminists Gone?,” “The Bonds of Feminism: Collective Identities and Feminist Organizations,” and “Can Facebook be Feminist? Online, Coalitional, and Everyday Feminist Tactics.” Sample discussion questions included: “Do you agree with Crossley’s argument that feminists of your generation focus on inter and intra solidarity?” “Do you agree with Crossley’s argument that there is a collective identity among your generation of feminists?” and “Are you an everyday feminist?”

Though sharing similarities with millennials, students claimed they belonged to Generation Z. In the younger students’ view, feminism was alive and well but unique to their generation. One student noted they did not want to be labelled as mainstream feminists but was adamant about adopting their own distinctive approach to carry out feminist causes, seeing themselves as everyday feminists who believed feminism should start at the grassroots level and occur in everyday acts. They endorsed Crossley’s descriptions of college students equating clothing, verbal expressions, and daily interactions with peers as feminist practices. Positioned as everyday feminists, they were receptive to texts that connected their conception of feminism to lived experience.

In an identification process, engaging in narratives where subjects are exposed to rhetoric in oral or written forms becomes a protracted and extended repositioning to feminist values and practices. Readers take up, negotiate, accept, resist, or ignore narratives (Guest 31). Transforma-

tion occurs when a reader “moves beyond a purely personal response toward a consideration of the [artifact’s] cultural and historical embeddedness, its broader meaning” (Kuhn 8-9). An ideological exercise, however, was not straightforward acceptance: students agreed with, doubted, or rejected values in the texts. It was the introspecting and critiquing that facilitated students’ progression to feminist positioning. In feminist theories, textuality entails not only self-knowledge but also activism and affect investment. Clare Hemmings describes epistemological knowledge, activism, and affective investment as critical stages: Empathy—extending one’s view beyond their subjective concerns and imagine the world through others’ eyes; agency—the ability to engage in acts of resistance; and affective resolution—willingness to be emotionally invested. Narrative hauling, wrought with critical reading, introspection, self-knowledge and affective investment, accounts for the positionality shift of some student to feminist stances.

## Extra Textual Considerations

Identification is not a complete process without the underpinning of affective proof, invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening. Charland’s process of interpellation is causal and linear. Yet, in this communication class on women, gender, and sexuality, I found that interpellation is more intricate—subjects are interpellated not only by the moral appeals but also the rhetorical ecology. As Kathleen Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones note, feminist ecological ethē open new ways of envisioning ethos to acknowledge the multiple, nonlinear relations operating among rhetors, audiences, things, and contexts (3). In this perspective, gendered experiences—understood through affective proof, invitational rhetoric and rhetorical listening—situate an identification process in nuanced and complex ways, leading to a full understanding of the synergy of a feminist rhetorical classroom.

Consider first the role of affective proof in identification. Affective proof—personal is the political, solidarity and community building (Campbell)—becomes an integral part of the identification process. Leslie Hahner explains how intricacies of affective proof impact the identification process: “affective components of rhetorical address constitute preferred identities, which render intelligible subjectivities and the modes of identification to become objects of desire. [The] privileged subject finds comfort and agency in the space of advantaged identities” (160-161). Affect in a rhetorical process counter-argues the emphasis of hegemonic practices on logos and reason, whereby women seek affective proof as ways to practice rhetoric—emotion, personal narratives, and solidarity are often preferred, desirable, and effective ways to communicate with one another and the public. In this communication class, students supported one another, creating a community through discussions. Throughout the semester, there was a warm and respectful classroom culture. Jack, a male student, discussed the impact of conversations on him:

I believe the class discussions we had are the most effective way to learn and understand the issues presented. Listening to the stances of everyday people and educated

people made it so much more relatable. When we had the discussions, it allowed me to think of my mother, my sister and my girlfriend and it showed me a perspective that I was not listening to before. My vision for the future is simple: more conversations.

Jack's comment revealed the synergy among speakers, listeners, and the environment of community building. On why women's narratives are unique, Christiane Boehr argues that their voices "provide ways to explore how a person experiences the self in relations to surroundings, documenting the interplay of inner and outer world" (n.p.). The connection of the personal to the political is not lost on Jack. As a mindful and receptive listener, he resonated with these women's personalized narratives and connected them to his own lived experiences and world view. In this perspective, the personal is the political model intertwines what Boehr refers to the "I-voice," with the "You-voice," in a "relational environment" in which women (in my class, including a man such as Jack) grew together (n.p.). Affective proof—dialogues, community and personal is the political—played a key role in the identification process in this communication class on women and gender.

Just as important as affective proof, identification occurred extra textually in relational ways. It was bilateral: speakers invited listeners to participate equally in the process. According to a record I kept, of the twenty-four students who attended this class in person, eighteen regularly participated in discussions. They listened to one another and took turns speaking their own minds or validating what their classmates had just said. Foss and Griffin note that "individual perspectives are articulated in invitational rhetoric as carefully, completely and passionately as possible to full expression and invite their careful considerations by the participants in the interaction" (367). To illustrate such invitational rhetoric, I include here a section of dialogue among a few students after I asked them to define feminism:

Olivia: I just wanted to go back to what Stacy was saying (who spoke previously) I really liked when she talked about equality in the workplace because it made me think of an experience that I had last September. I was in a math class and after the first class, the professor said I noticed there was only one other girl in class, so I just wanted to let you know that you can stay after class if you have any questions. One time, he made a comment that right now was a good time for a woman to be a math major because it was easy to get a job. They wanted diversity.

Denise: I agree a lot with what Olivia said. But I also want to add on that I feel like there is a disconnect of how some men think they can speak to women. They might mean well, but it comes out like, I know you are a girl. You are not as good as the rest of the class.

Lauren: Just going off what Olivia and Denise's experience. I wish you had that hind-

sight, [saying], hold on, why do you think I am not up to it. It is everyday feminist ideas to point out to those who say such things to you.

The students supported, expanded, and validated their classmates, acting like what Nina Lozano-Reich and Dana Cloud refer to as “materials equals” (222). Dialogue and mutual respect are the precondition of an invitational rhetoric. Students respected one another as they sought common ground, validated one another’s thoughts, and fully explored a topic they deemed important. The classroom culture of sharing and communityreinforced students’ outlook on feminism. Furthermore, the invitational mode of speaking encouraged by feminist pedagogy allowed students to “contemplate their standpoints as speaking subjects not just in the classroom but beyond: in society writ large” (Gold 169).

The multilateral relationships between the teacher and students and among students facilitated the metamorphosis of their self-knowledge. Kathleen Yancey notes, “We learn to understand ourselves through explaining to others. To do this, we rely on a reflection that involves a checking against, a confirmation, and a being of self with others” (11, emphasis in orig.). Sally Chandler describes the organic relationship between self and others: we are “observing the responses of other selves to one’s own words to gain a greater insight into one’s own identity” (19). Consider a student, Maria’s view on intergenerational feminism:

Before taking this class, I viewed older feminists as exclusionary and unwilling to accept new ideas. Through our discussions, I now understand that intergenerational feminism is an inherent and important critique of both past and present feminism.

Discussions enabled Maria to develop insight that the younger generation of feminists carried on the baton of feminists of previous generations. When feminist issues were examined in diverse angles, Maria reorganized her own framework. In the ecology of a feminist rhetorical classroom, students internalized feminist values and beliefs through multilateral learning, intellectual and emotional connection on their own and distinct path to a feminist orientation.

Feminist theorists further see nonverbal gestures as part of transformative process. Head nodding and body language also register as participation (Chandler 22). Listeners do not need to participate in audible conversations for silence to become increasingly “full, not void, of meaning” (Summers-Bremmer 652). Extending beyond physiological descriptions, feminist rhetorical scholars argue that listening is a conscious and radical performance. In his eloquent analysis of Audre Lorde, Lester Olson argues that listening is “active.” As a “complicit,” “a listener momentarily uses a speaker’s term for communication” (447). To illustrate Olson’s argument, take a listen to when two students exchanged their thoughts on gender equality:

Stacey: I feel like the goal of feminism is making sure that the sexes are equally valued. Female sex is less valued, and people just look down on it.

Denise: Some people view women as not equal to men. The biological women can bear children, but biological men cannot. I think women should be celebrated for (bearing children) and not getting punished for taking time off.

The exchange between Stacey and Denise validates the notion of rhetorical listening. Their communication was enthymemic: They shared the same premise that women and men ought to be equal. When Stacey made the claim that they were not viewed equal, Denise acknowledged her premise, supplied an example, and proposed a course of action. Stacey and Denise's tacit understanding of each other validates Krista Ratcliffe's notion of rhetorical listening as speakers and hearers "acknowledge both claims and cultural logics" (33).

The interplay of affective proof, invitational rhetoric and rhetoric listening sheds lights on the dynamic of a feminist rhetorical classroom. Identification occurs not only through narrative hauling—the project of traditional rhetorical theory—but also an ecology of dialogue, community building and emotional connections, the hallmarks of feminist rhetorical praxis. In this regard, feminist rhetorical theory reframes the traditional rhetorical theory.

## Locus of Change

In an identification process, the locus of change is the goal. Charland notes, the subject "must be true to the motives through which the narratives constitute them, and thus which presents characters as freely acting toward a predetermined and fixed ending" (141). I argue, however, that in a feminist rhetorical classroom, Charland's designation of a path from a textual subject to a social agent was not a straightforward and clear-cut path for all subjects. For some students who self-identified with the ideological causes, the interpellation process enabled them to reassert their personality. Alice, a Chinese American student, who claimed herself as a staunch feminist, asserted that feminism was not a one-size-fits-all movement and should represent all women's voices. She noted:

It is crucial for us to address racist tendencies. Minorities lack representation in feminism because of its white centric ideologies. Feminism can contradict minorities in intersectionality, class, and culture. In the twenty-first century, where America is the most demographically diverse country, we must do a better job of spreading awareness to recognize different disparities and giving minorities a platform in the feminist movement.

The classroom culture of collective thinking and learning gave a minority student such as Alice a

public space to air her opinion. Her voice contributed to the diversity and complexity of critical reading of feminism. It was a teachable moment for other students—the majority of whom were white—to learn about a different first-hand perspective. When students were white and from the middle and upper middle class, they demonstrated a yearning for “universality” and “oneness.” Learning about the lived experiences of students on the margin opens alternative approaches to critical reading of feminist text (Lu 444).

For students such as Alice, this class solidified their feminist positionality. For other students, however, the transformation was more subtle—a perspective shift resulting in receptivity and openness. Jack, a male student, reflected on the impact of this class on him:

As the only man in the class, I often found myself having to put myself in others’ shoes or having to work to see alternative perspectives. In doing so, I found myself understanding issues that I had never understood before. Furthermore, I found myself flung into issues that I did not even know existed or had never taken up the time to research. Some of the most interesting topics to me in the class were the topics of women and men, the relationship that plays out between the sexes. As a man, and as someone with a strong group of diverse male friends, seeing both of their perspectives and women’s perspectives on some of the same issue fascinated me.

As a cisgender white male, discussions, community, and affect dislodged Jack from his privileged position of gender and power by reframing his conception of gender equity—seeing other genders and sexualities as occupying an inseparable space in his previous males only network. On feminist agendas to seek a united front, how do we define Jack’s new ideological orientation: is he a feminist coalition or an alliance? Why does the temporal distinction matter? Lisa Albrecht and Rose Brewer give an answer: while a coalition refers to “groups or individuals that have come together around a particular issue to achieve a particular goal,” alliances function through a “new level of commitment that is long-standing, deeper and built upon more trusting political relationships” (3-4). As a feminist “alliance,” Jack no longer feels a disconnect but an affinity to feminist causes. Furthermore, by making a commitment to attune to gender and sexuality issues, he underwent a paradigm shift. Jack’s story signifies how the rhetorical appeals of a feminist rhetorical classroom—dialogue, community, and affect—result in a conceptual realignment to feminist stances. On the notion of self-development, as envisioned by feminist teachers, students such as Jack emerged as “fully conscious, fully speaking, unique, fixed and coherent self... the voices of students can be continually negotiated and developed” (Gold, 170).

While Jack’s positioning to feminist orientation is evidential of a preconceived learning outcome, it tells a story about what feminism on some college campuses is about: it is not a lone battle fought by stalwart feminists but one that includes all those who are inclined to be alliances. As our students envision it, feminism should be open to all genders and sexes, including men:

dialogues are important, and seeking common ground and forming alliances are crucial. If some men have become open minded, receptive, and willing to listen to and engage in conversations, it is a substantive gain for a feminist cause. A feminist movement lifts women and all other genders and sexes, men included.

## Conclusion

Charland's model of constitutive rhetoric signals identification as the key element to interpellation. Identification occurs when subjects step away from textuality to become social agents, as imagined by ideologues. Once becoming social agents, subjects act upon doctrines ascribed in the narratives. Constitutive rhetoric inherently points to reason, logic, linearity and causality, as predicates of hegemonic rhetorical practices.

In contrast, in a feminist rhetorical classroom, the identification process is more complex and nuanced. Reconceptualized rhetorical appeals— affective proof, invitational rhetoric, rhetorical listening—positioned students to feminist stances. Moreover, the path to interpellation was multidirectional: For feminist-minded students, the learning process is one of solidification of their identity. For other students, however, it is a perspective shift—becoming more open to feminism and feeling a desire to engage in conversation with different viewpoints. Rhetorical appeals of a feminist rhetorical classroom— affect, dialogue, community, and solidarity—result in interpellation of subjects in complex and multivariant ways.

## For Other Faculty

I have the following thoughts for faculty who plan to teach a similar course. First, early in the semester, I encouraged students to define what constituted a feminist. Most students envisioned themselves as an everyday feminist—either staunch or in performing a single act. Building such a referential point unified students in different spectrums in their shared outlook on feminism, creating a community of positive learners. Students believed they had a stake in learning. Second, I focused on connecting readings with students' lived experiences so that they were both learners and teaching resources. For example, students read about and discussed hashtag activism and realized they engaged in feminist acts when they retweeted hashtag activism. Thirdly, I endeavored to create trust between the teacher and students, and among students, created a positive feedback loop in which students spoke, listened, and validated one another resulting in active and collective participation and engagement. Next, I strove to engage all students—female students, the one male student, students with global roots, and international students. I encouraged all of them to speak. Such an inclusion made conversations rich and interesting. Finally, when I found out about the ideological leaning of students—staunch feminists, sympathizers, and non-femi-



nists—I focused my energy on and made a commitment to motivate the middle of the road students, those who were willing to listen and participate in discussions. This pedagogical approach resulted in transitioning those students to feminist alliances.

I will offer this course in the spring semester of 2023. I intend to make the following changes: first, I will use inclusive languages when addressing the diverse gender orientations of college students in contemporary times. Second, I plan to add sequenced writing assignments, a decision informed by feminist pedagogical theories. Elspeth Probyn argues for “experiential” and “analytical” learning so that students theorize self as a double entity (21). Experience can testify to an “immediate facticity of being in the society” (21). But experience can be used to analyze the material conditions and posit ways to change those conditions (21). By incorporating analytical learning, students will elevate from experiential to analytical learning to theorize and conceptualize their understanding, as Charlotte Bunch envisions, to determine what should exist and hypothesize about how to change what is to what should be.

As more communication departments and other programs offer courses on women and gender topics, feminist teachers will face challenges on how to impact those students who have not yet taken a feminist stance and are middle of the road students. Therefore, these teachers need to engage that group of students and strive to move them to a feminist orientation. I hope my research serves as a touch stone to initiate further discussions on this important topic.

## Acknowledgements

Weiming Gorman would like to thank Dr. Rebecca Dingo for her unwavering support for this project. She would like to extend appreciation to Dr. Nancy Small. Under her guidance, the essay showed significant improvement. She wishes to thank Drs. Brent Malin and Lester Olson for their suggestions on an earlier draft. She also received extensive feedback from and wishes to thank Dr. David Marshall and the participants in his graduate writing seminar, Piper Corp, Reed Schenck, Tim Barr, and Max Dosser.

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