

Hillary Rodham Clinton's Rhetorical Shifts in *What Happened*: Pluralist Feminist Credibility Post-2016

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Abstract: Hillary Rodham Clinton's 2016 election campaign memoir, *What Happened*, marks a significant turning point in the politician's credibility due to the ways the text can direct readers to some pluralist feminist rhetorical practices. Through analyzing three brief significant shifts in Clinton's ethos, this writer suggests the politician begins to reflect the shifts in identification necessary to direct readers to an anti-violence and anti-racist coalition more forward looking than a national election cycle.

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While twentieth century US women's rights advocates have a wealth of knowledge of the ways to establish coalitions across racial differences (Cole and Luna 96), feminist rhetorical scholars urge careful attention to how such strategies should not exclusively establish an individual's virtues but motivate audiences' long-term participation (Howell; Busch). Such knowledge emphasizes descriptions of joint decision making across social locations, the boundaries of allyship, and how leaders may use moments of failure to call in allies to continue resistance efforts. Feminist rhetorical scholars, Gwen Pough and Rebecca Jones open *Peitho's* "On Race, Feminism, and Rhetoric" special issue with the reminder to "hold space for tension and nuance" because "ongoing protests and unrest around police brutality and murders have forced us to come to terms with the meaning of solidarity and coalition" (n.p.). To study the rhetoric of feminist coalitions, scholars are challenged to understand both traditional political movements such as political election campaigns and more "leaderful" grassroots collectives such as the 2018 Women's March ("Women's March on Washington Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles"). Hillary Rodham Clinton is a representative figure for this crucial line of inquiry, as someone Susan Bordo notes "for better or worse has represented a particular generation of feminists for decades," whose rhetoric shows a remarkable shift regarding gender and race following her 2016 Presidential election loss among the Electoral College (187).

It is tempting to interpret Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC)'s rhetoric as representative of white feminism. As a recent example, the sociologist Ashley Noel Mack interprets one of HRC's tweets from her 2016 election campaign as an indication of the pattern of white women referencing inter-

sectionality in ways that fail to acknowledge the term's history connected to Black women. Following the 2016 election, HRC's rhetoric is more complicated. Such shifts are worthwhile to examine because Clinton's image—more so than her positions, policies, or history—has functioned as a rhetorical straw woman with media coverage focused on the pseudo scandal of her email server and far right conspiracies of her connections to QAnon (Bordo). Clinton's sixth memoir *What Happened* is an especially interesting case study due to the ways book reviewers note the politician's open feminist commitments, a remarkable observation given the book's primary focus on correcting misperceptions surrounding Donald Trump's election. In some moments, HRC employs the rhetorical practices coalition-oriented feminists call on for white allies to adopt. What is especially striking is a moment in the middle of the book in which the former Secretary of State describes her shared caregiver identity with Black women who lost children to police violence in ways that acknowledges structural racism. Clinton describes the Mothers of the Movement in ways that emphasize the life and death stakes compelling a group of Black women to trust her, despite significant risks of tokenization, denial, and unaltered conditions.

In this article, I examine brief moments in HRC's memoir *What Happened* where she deviates from the forms of credibility rhetoric scholars have noted throughout her political career. Through decades in national politics, HRC has represented herself as a detail-oriented "policy wonk" or as a Christian "Madonna" (Kaufer and Parry-Giles; Anderson; Campbell) In brief moments in *What Happened*, HRC uses a "rhetorical feminism" experience-based form of authority (Glenn). Through employing rhetorical feminism, HRC makes rhetorical space for the Black women-led advocacy group The Mothers of the Movement by emphasizing the "unruly" force of bodies at risk, and coalitions with those most at risk, as more central to a healthy democracy than partisan politics, and political press coverage (Alexander et al. 13) While HRC has received important critiques for representing white feminism, I attend to brief moments in her memoir that enabled book reviewers to label the book a feminist text due to shifts from expected presidential rhetoric into embodied knowledge, consciousness of sexism, recognition of shared caregiving responsibilities, and an acknowledgement of race and unequally shared risks among Black and white women. Attending to these shifts in HRC's ethos can create the symbolic disruptions necessary to allow for the recognition of the Mothers of the Movement anti-racist, poverty, and gun violence coalition.

A central challenge for feminist rhetorical scholars has been to focus on ways to resist appeals to a shared sisterhood that ignore racial differences or create false equivalencies among sexism and racism. Such post-second wave projects take on increased urgency in the context surrounding the 2016 US presidential election. As readers of this journal are aware, coalitions remain central actionable networks sustaining commitments to end sexist oppression in daily life and scholarly practices. Anti-racist feminists name the responsibilities white allies have to "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" that include reflexive engagement, embodied knowledge, interracial friendship, and scholarly practices that resist tokenization (hooks 1; Lugones). These commitments and corresponding rhetorical practices take on heightened urgency in

the context of the 2016 election, which saw open displays of white supremacist rhetoric, increased racial violence, and massive protests. Within such a context, how can anti-racist feminist credibility strategies extend knowledge of coalition rhetoric and rhetorical scholars' responsibilities?

Feminist rhetorical analyses often focus on liberal and progressive causes. Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald note questions of how to include the rhetoric of women who supported conservative causes, such as temperance, present a significant challenge for scholars concerned with inclusive histories of rhetoric: to notice not all women have advocated for women's rights. Examining uncomfortable appearing coalitions may create new knowledge of inclusive rhetoric, which Karma Chávez models through examining the shared pursuit of migrant rights among a Catholic Church and queer rights organization (133). HRC's memoir is one such text that may provide opportunities to "strategically contemplate" our stances (Kirsch and Royster 656-9), as individuals and parts of this collective, in relationship to the rhetoric of those it is easy to dis-identify with, or distrust.

Cheryl Glenn presents a useful differentiation among feminist rhetoric and rhetorical feminism. These conceptual labels provide a way to recognize different definitions of feminism and their corresponding purposes, such as a liberal concern with inclusion into workplaces or public life. In this liberal tradition, HRC's rhetoric has gained recognition especially for her "Remarks to the U.N. 4th World Conference on Women" with the oft-cited "women's rights are human rights" phrase (*American Rhetoric*). The politician's rhetoric has often functioned as an exigency for conversations surrounding shifting gender norms and feminist responsibilities. Younger generations have engaged key critiques of HRC's generation. The author and cultural critic Roxane Gay describes herself as a "bad feminist" to acknowledge a historical emphasis on elite white women's concerns but suggests those with fewer privileges should not disassociate from expansive efforts to "believe in equal opportunities for women and men" that "can be pluralistic so long as we respect the different feminisms we carry with us" (n.p.). It can be noteworthy to attend to Clinton's text for the ways it contains some pluralistic possibilities not exclusively concerned with formal inclusion, smashing glass ceilings, or blindness to the significance of racism within women's lives. Johnathan Alexander, Susan C. Jarratt, and Nancy Welch urge more attention to the "unruly" force of bodies at risk as a crucial element of recent social movement rhetoric. Cheryl Glenn notes in the conclusion of *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope* the feminine counterparts of masculine rhetorical traditions may alleviate persuasion efforts that spread conspiracy theories, violence, and many pressing social inequalities.

Rhetoric scholars identify a crucial shift following feminism's second wave involves attempts to form connections among women's rights and other social movements. Krista Ratcliffe in *Rhetorical Listening* observes speakers often do not want their various and overlapping social differences to prevent them from addressing issues that do not focus on their social differences (2; see also 25-6). Ritchie and Ronald highlight in their introduction to *Available Means* that due to the millennia of practices denying women access to education and public spaces, a throughline

in women's rhetoric is that women advocate for their presence as a prerequisite to address other issues (xvii). This requirement to justify one's presence, can, at times, become an invitation to use one's status and embodied presence as an asset. In the late twentieth century, Shari J. Stenberg and Charlotte Hogg emphasize the exclusion of women from powerful domains is perhaps more insidious because in many nations it is no longer formally written into laws (4) but prevalent in practices such as interpersonal violence, workplace sexual harassment, online doxxing, and economic inequalities.

Some women may be able to act as if their gender is irrelevant to their lives or perhaps only prevalent once they attempt to ascend to leadership positions. Such a post-feminist position is often individually focused and ignorant, or in denial, of the pervasive inequalities shaping the practices of organizations and governments. It is tempting to place HRC and her rhetoric into such a position. Interdisciplinary scholars spend significant time developing a useful definition of coalitions as embodied human entities and ethical commitments among different groups. As embodied entities, scholars in political science note paying attention to coalitions is a useful way to read American politics, such as understanding the impact of the Democrats and the New Deal Coalition in the early twentieth century (Genovese and Han). Scholars in sociology often examine coalitions as alliances among multiple stakeholders often within government entities and nonprofit networks, as seen in Elizabeth R. Cole and Zakiya T. Luna's qualitative research into the insights of US women in different grassroots activist organizations or Karama Chávez's ethnographic description of shifting rhetoric among the queer-rights oriented Wingspan and the migrant-focused Coalición de Derechos Humanos nonprofit groups. Within these conversations, scholars offer definitions of coalitions as functional alliances among two or more groups working together on a common goal, often in pursuit of political, or otherwise institutional, change. However, these scholars often note such entities are often short term, more theoretical than functional, and often fail to alter the conditions that brought the group together.

Feminists of color are key voices who point to the ways mid-twentieth century feminist and anti-racist movements had a tendency to overlook the specific needs of women of color. Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Mapping the Margins" points out the limited resources of domestic violence shelters resulted in turning away women of color (1245). Coalitional political goals can encompass everyday acts, which María Lugones notes can include asking a woman how she's doing as her partner is arrested (2; see also "Hablando Cara a Cara"), and calls to resist racially exclusive practices within progressive organizations (see also Audre Lorde's "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House"). Collectively, these conversations challenge a single identity-political focus.

HRC's rhetoric following the 2016 election is worthwhile to analyze due to her status as the first US woman to win the popular vote for president and because her image featured predominantly in election coverage in ways that represent, at least in part, public perceptions of

feminism. I find it worth attending to how, following the 2016 election, HRC's rhetoric is more complicated than a straightforward read of whitewashing, or white supremacist feminism, due to the moments in which HRC's feminist consciousness includes established pluralist features that acknowledge cultural influences, draw upon embodied knowledge, and listen to Black women. In this article, I focus on three chapters in HRC's *What Happened* that center credibility and gender: "Get Caught Trying," "On Being a Woman in Politics," and "Turning Mourning into a Movement." I conclude through considering textual moments of regrets and credibility earned through failure as potential central features of the rhetoric of coalition leaders. Studying these textual moments may contribute to knowledge of ethos as a central persuasive feature in contemporary memoirs and the study of feminist coalition rhetoric that requires alliances with unevenly shared risks and controversial allies (Mack and Alexander; Kelm).

"This is a Story of What Happened." (Clinton xv)

Although Clinton notes her memoir "isn't a comprehensive account of the 2016 race," readers see many versions of the author throughout the book's 500 pages that devote significant attention to the features that made the election depart from run of the mill partisan politicking (xv). The book fits well within the expectations of a failed presidential candidate's tell-all with chapters devoted to thanking running mates, staffers, and voters; descriptions of policy proposals; a political origin story connected to family and faith; corrections of political press coverage; and a call for readers to engage within the institutions of public and community life. The text is also notable for the "Those Damn Emails" chapter addressing the pseudo scandal that dominated election coverage and the "Trolls, Bots, Fake News, and Real Russians" chapter on electoral interference. Throughout, HRC names regrets that include her endorsement of the 1994 Crime Bill (204), her "put coal miners out of work" quip (263), and the "political piñata" of her email server (322).¹ Throughout, HRC relies on her established forms of credibility. In policy wonk mode, HRC names multiple advisors and cites from public opinion polls. HRC also makes multiple religious references to her Methodist background, the Bible, and conversations with pastors. The memoir also presents a different type of credibility, which HRC's writes as "now I'm letting down my guard" (xviii) to ponder: "You've read my emails for heaven's sake. What more do you need? What could I do to be 'more real'? Dance on a table? Swear a blue streak? Break down sobbing? That's not me. And if I *had* done any of those things, what would have happened? I'd have been ripped to pieces" (122, emphasis in orig.).

What Happened has several chapters that examine the person who has been a politician to resist the caricature constructed by media coverage, political rivals, and disinformation campaigns. HRC responds to the frequent criticism that she has been a career woman without significant family attachments as she makes frequent references to her husband Bill, daughter and grandchildren, and mother. Clinton provides additional context and regrets for some of her well-circulated

1 Clinton explains, "It was a dumb mistake. But an even dumber scandal" (292).

quotations, such as the 1992 “I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was pursue my profession,” in this case writing, “I hadn’t tamed my tongue” (118). Clinton complicates readings of her life as an establishment partisan career politician focused on identity politics and neoliberal economics out of touch with citizens’ needs to reverse unaffordable health care, preventable gun deaths, and unequally resourced schools. It is likely this combination of well-timed political insider knowledge and nothing left to lose reflexive moments landed the book accolades, such as *Time* magazine’s book of the year and a spot on *The New York Times* bestseller list. Reviewers praised the book’s exploration of gender, such as the reviewer Jennifer Senior who calls it a “feminist manifesto” (n.p) and *National Public Radio*’s Danielle Kurtzleben who calls the book “the embattled cry of the hyper-competent woman who desperately wishes the world were a meritocracy” (n.p).

“Why do you want to be President? Why? But, really—why?” (Clinton 40)

Throughout her text, Clinton is self-effacing about her gender, while subsequently describing consciousness of the challenges women face in politics. Clinton places herself in association with men. In an especially interesting comparison, Clinton names her husband Bill Clinton’s rags to riches story of growing up in poverty and Barack Obama’s immigrant background (111-2), two experiences that work well within an American dream cultural narrative of upward mobility. After naming the backgrounds of the two former Democratic party presidents, Clinton then describes her own rise from the Midwestern middle class to become the first woman presidential candidate for a major political party (see 111-112). As others have pointed out, Clinton has situated her political rise in relationship to Bill Clinton and Obama throughout her career (see Kaufer and Parry-Giles), which connects to the traditional strategy women cultivating authority through associations with men. In this tradition, Clinton’s strategic choice mitigates the risks associated with deviating from the tradition equating political authority exclusively with men.

While Clinton establishes her credibility through connections to former Presidents Clinton and Obama, she dismisses her own lived experiences. HRC writes, “Few people would say that my story was quite so dazzling” and “We yearn for that showstopping tale—that one-sentence pitch that captures something magical about America; that hooks you and won’t let go. Mine wasn’t it” (112). And yet this self-effacing gesture then allows Clinton to include her own political personal narrative. Through writing her memoir outside of the purpose to win an election, HRC establishes an opening to name the contextual reasoning informing her actions.

Early in *What Happened*, Clinton devotes a chapter, “Get Caught Trying,” to explain her decision to enter the 2016 presidential race, a decision connected to critiques the politician received during the campaign, as well as what Ritchie and Ronald consider perhaps the unifying feature of women’s rhetoric (xxiv-v). Clinton adopts a position of reluctance to write “probably the most compelling reason *not* to run—was being a grandmother” (47, emphasis in the original).

However, she continues to describe how after receiving encouragement from other politicians, including her husband Bill Clinton and then-President Barack Obama, she decided:

In short, I thought I'd be a damn good president. Still, I never stopped getting asked, 'Why do you want to be President? Why? But, really—why?' The implication was that there must be something else going on, some dark ambition and craving for power. Nobody psychoanalyzed Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz, or Bernie Sanders about why they ran. It was just accepted as normal. But for me, it was regarded as inevitable—people assumed I'd run no matter what—yet somehow abnormal, demanding a profound explanation. (40)

While readers can interpret Clinton's question regarding why she ran as one requiring an answer, in this context it can also function rhetorically, without a genuine and logical answer. Further, media and voter questioning of Clinton's motivations reflects a deep tension between Clinton's role as a family caregiver and politician. This tension extends to the historical requirement that women justify their right to speak or have political ambitions in ways that are not required for men, or the Democratic politicians Clinton names (see Ritchie and Ronald xxii). An impossible set of choices—campaigning but going against established political and gender norms in doing so—is one paradox Clinton continues to expand upon as she describes her decision not to foreground her gender in her campaign rhetoric.

Clinton continues to position her political rise as the result of good timing rather than ambition. But Clinton does so in a way that momentarily breaks from the universal or culture-less assumptions María Lugones notes characterize exclusionary practices of "ethnocentric racist" feminists (43-4). Clinton provides readers with her origins as someone who grew up in a white middle class Park Ridge, IL community during a prominent point in history with changing norms enabling women to participate in a greater range of paid employment (113-114). Clinton writes:

I never figured out how to tell this story right. Partly that's because I'm not great at talking about myself. Also, I didn't want people to see me as the 'woman candidate,' which I find limiting, but rather as the best candidate whose experience as a woman in a male-dominated culture made her sharper, tougher, and more competent. [...] But the biggest reason I shied away from embracing this narrative is that storytelling requires a receptive audience, and I've never felt like the American electorate was receptive to this one. (113-114)

As in other moments in *What Happened*, Clinton desires to claim her experiences as a woman as a valuable rhetorical resource. At the same time, she resists claiming such a perspective due to her perception that her audience was not ready to vote for a presidential candidate who openly addressed her gender as a strength, a feeling conformed by political research (Bauer; The

Pew Research Center). In the context of the 2016 election, naming one's experiences as a woman would likely create a liability. Yet, despite Clinton's rational decision to carefully represent herself in an acceptable way to her audience, during her campaign some voters still dismissed her as untrustworthy, unlikable, and unworthy of a vote.

Clinton adds an additional complication to gendered logic through comparing the criticism she received to criticism of Barack Obama in such a way that begins to illustrate a shift in vision María Lugones notes is necessary for white feminist allies. As Clinton describes her response to criticism of her reserved oratory during her campaign, she observes:

People say I'm guarded, and they have a point. I think before I speak. I don't just blurt out whatever comes to mind. It's a combination of my natural inclination, plus my training as a lawyer, plus decades in the public eye where every word I say is scrutinized. But why is this a bad thing? Don't we want our Senators and Secretaries of State—and especially our Presidents—to speak thoughtfully, to respect the impact of our words? President Obama is just as controlled as I am, maybe even more so. [...] This is generally and correctly taken as evidence of his intellectual heft and rigor. (122)

In this reflection, Clinton considers the ways her speaking style is not a deviation from American presidential norms. She answers her own question pondering why leaders cannot be respected for their planned-out speaking style. Clinton continues to justify her style through describing her professional background as a lawyer and public figure, and she considers this style may even be highly valued among political leaders. In an especially interesting twist, Clinton makes a direct comparison to President Obama to note a reserved style is far from a liability for him, but an asset. In doing so, Clinton accurately acknowledges the many racist attacks he endured, such as false claims of his lack of citizenship (see p. 6-7, 366-7, 414-5). However, Clinton does not explicitly consider Obama's race in the above quotation, although her descriptions may indicate her awareness of the ways gender norms are different than racial norms, where Barack Obama, a Black man, did not receive the same criticism as Clinton, a white woman. It is through this implicit description of the different, yet related, effects of sexism and racism that HRC positions herself as capable of adopting a position as an ally for intersectional feminist efforts.

“Well, what would *you* do?” (Clinton 136, emphasis in the original)

Although for most of the book Clinton separates her personal and political lives, in her “Sisterhood” chapters she describes how Clinton the presidential nominee and Clinton the woman blend. In a pattern fitting the second wave mantra the personal is political, I find Clinton resists a separation among her roles as a politician and citizen through naming her embodied experiences in a male-dominated profession that directs readers to challenges more significant than glass ceilings and salary negotiations.

Clinton describes the significance of her gender within her political life through her embodied experiences. Through doing so, she begins to establish an ethos able to direct reader attention to gender-based violence at the core of many feminist movements. Ritchie and Ronald note women cultivate authority through describing their gendered bodies (xxi; xxvi-ii)—such as Sojourner Truth’s identification with her audience’s awareness of her skin color and the physical impacts of slave labor that made her body challenge Antebellum assumptions of women’s fragility. This is not to suggest Clinton engages a similar repurposing of embodied gender and racial norms from her standpoint as a twenty-first century white woman. However, I find Clinton establishes agency through resisting an easy understanding of language divorced from speaking bodies.

In the “Sisterhood” chapter, Clinton describes brief moments she experienced to show the stakes of pervasive sexual harassment. One key illustration takes place during Clinton’s description of the second national presidential candidate debate. Trump stood behind Clinton as she spoke. In response to this physical form of intimidation, Clinton describes her embodied reaction. She writes, “He was literally breathing down my neck. My skin crawled” (136). This resulted in pondering two choices.

It was one of those moments where you wish you could hit Pause and ask everyone watching, ‘Well? What would *you* do?’ Do you stay calm, keep smiling, and carry on as if he weren’t repeatedly invading your space? Or do you turn, look him in the eye, and say loudly and clearly, ‘Back up, you creep, get away from me, I know you love to intimidate women but you can’t intimidate me, so *back up*.’ (136, emphasis in orig.)

Clinton continues to explain why she chose the first option. “Maybe I have overlearned the lesson of staying calm—biting my tongue, digging my fingernails into a clenched fist, smiling while, determined to present a composed face to the world” (136-7). In these statements, Clinton refutes the critique that she didn’t react to Trump’s physical presence on stage. The rhetorical questions direct readers to consider the ways a calm reaction is not a natural one given the situation, and one Clinton herself considered resisting. In addition, Clinton names her embodied reaction to Trump’s breath. Clinton’s description of overlearning how to stay clam points out the ways her reaction is not natural in response to a physically threatening figure. Instead, Clinton’s statement highlights the intentionality around maintaining a calm exterior. Clinton’s descriptions of biting her tongue and digging her fingernails into her fist continue to show a schism between her calm facial appearance and her more expressive physical reactions. Her body tensed up, but she continued to present a composed face of rationality and politeness, one traditionally expected of politicians.

The politician provides a further justification of her actions during the debate through connecting her embodied experiences to sexist and racist stereotypes. Clinton writes if she directly confronted Trump’s behavior, “he would have surely capitalized on it gleefully. A lot of people recoil from an angry woman, or even just a direct one” (137). Clinton’s decision to resist the public

association of an angry woman to her observations of the public punishments faced by other high profile women including Coretta Scott King, Kamala Harris, and Arianna Huffington (137). Unlike earlier moments in Clinton's text, here she establishes herself through associations with other women, a crucial shift in her identification. Through naming the connections among the negative public reception of women considered angry to white and Black women, Clinton implicitly directs reader attention to the ways Black women face additional barriers to their participation in politics.

“[B]ut are we going to see any change? Are we going to see some action” (McSpadden qtd. in Clinton 180).

While HRC seeks to enhance her public image as someone whose gender could be a political asset, by itself this does not challenge racism among women. I find a third form of HRC's revised ethos illustrates the possibilities of a more complicated understanding of the politician as she writes of her association with the group the Mothers of the Movement, comprised of Sybrina Fulton (mother of Trayvon Martin), Gwen Carr (mother of Eric Garner) Lezley McSpadden (mother of Michael Brown), Lucia McBath (mother of Jordan Davis), and other primarily Black women who lost unarmed children to gun and police violence, many of whom spoke in support of Clinton during the 2016 Democratic National Convention. In this section, I find HRC positions herself within a more “leader-full” system (“Women's March on Washington Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles”), one where Clinton's election loss has a deeper significance than her career. Instead, the memoir can direct readers beyond the Clinton 2016 presidential campaign to the pressing needs to address the epidemic of gun violence as it intersects with violence against communities of color through a movement led by Black women.

Throughout the chapter “Turning Mourning into a Movement,” HRC returns to the experiences of the activist group the Mothers of the Movement to illustrate the pressing needs for legislative reform to curb the United States' high rates of gun violence that especially impact communities of color. Clinton opens the chapter with a description of the meeting she organized at a Chicago diner with some of the women who would later campaign for her at the Democratic National Convention as the Mothers of the Movement. Clinton mediates the experiences of the activists within her own bestselling memoir through quoting their words and using their experiences to illustrate the stakes of her failed gun reform policies. As the chapter continues, Clinton attempts to further situate herself for wide reader appeal through naming the support she won from police chiefs (177), her support for law abiding gun owners (187), and her recognition of the importance of guns within American culture (181). The Mothers activist group sought justice for their children, and in Fulton's words, “We don't want to be community activists, we don't want to be the mothers of senseless gun violence, we don't want to be in this position—we were forced into this position. None of us would have signed up for this” (qtd. Clinton 174). Clinton's stakes were much more political than personal. Clinton describes the political power of the National Rifle Association lobbying campaigns as significant liabilities for Democratic politicians. However, these significantly differ-

ent stakes reflect a key feature of feminist coalitions. As Bernice Johnson Reagon notes, matters of survival, life and death, are the most compelling reasons motivating women to find ways to work together across racial differences (357). In a similar way that a feminist ethos can reveal the rhetor's context (Reynolds; Schmertz), the Mothers of the Movement's engagement with the controversial white politician can direct readers toward the intersecting histories of US gun and racial violence. These textual moments can indicate the rhetorical and political failures directing HRC, and her readers, to coalitional movements, especially the Black women-led Mothers of the Movement.

After Clinton describes the initial Chicago meeting, the politician positions her family within larger political structures. Clinton briefly names her racial subject position. She writes, "My daughter and grandchildren are white. They won't know what it's like to be watched with suspicion when they play in the park or enter a store" (176). This moment relies on a complex identification, one requiring Clinton share an identity as a parent and recognize the crucial racial differences among herself and her guests that significantly inform interactions in public spaces. Yet, perhaps more powerful than modeling her own racial subject position, Clinton directs readers to a more expansive form of accountability through implicating herself in the failure to implement gun and police reform legislation. Clinton notes the Mothers "had come to talk about what had happened to their kids and to see if I would do something about it—or if I was just another politician after their votes" (173). This self-recognition breaks from a white feminine position of assumed innocence or naivety about the reasons the Mothers would be inclined to distrust a white liberal politician. In the context of a political memoir from an unsuccessful presidential candidate, Clinton's reflection takes on additional weight as a form of acknowledgement of the ongoing preventable tragedies she was unable to stop.

This awareness becomes the starting place of a coalitional anti-racist feminist ethos as Clinton attributes a question she does not attempt to answer to Lezley McSpadden, a shift that demonstrates Clinton's knowledge of the interconnections among Washington politics, the lives of the Mothers and other families, and her own failure to prevent future gun deaths. According to Clinton, McSpadden asked her, "Once again we're around a table, we're pouring our hearts out, we're getting emotional, we tell you what we feel—but are we going to see any change? Are we going to see some action?" (180). While in majority of this chapter Clinton describes the recent history of gun policies and lobbies within national politics, Clinton provides no textual explanation to McSpadden's call for accountability. Within the text, McSpadden's question is visually set off by a double paragraph break functioning as an intentional pause for readers. While it may be possible to answer McSpadden with a yes or no, McSpadden's question demands an answer in more than words and implicates Clinton as an unsuccessful presidential candidate. Through Clinton's inclusion of this moment, there is the possibility of authority gained because of self-implicating failure with consequences beyond a single election.

McSpadden's questions emerge from her lived experiences as she forms an appeal directed to the influential white politician. McSpadden's challenge to Clinton to produce meaningful change for parents who lost children to unprovoked violence shows a level of rhetorical complexity Clinton herself rarely employs in her text. In keeping with a coalition's focus on action, McSpadden's rhetorical questions aim for more than awareness of violence but form a call to accountability from lawmakers. By including McSpadden's words, Clinton connects readers to the ways women of color may creatively appeal to potential allies through shared identities as a way to point out significant social differences, a move Clinton demonstrates is possible as her inclusion of McSpadden's words in the best-selling memoir may reach audiences who may not read the activist's work (see McSpadden; McSpadden and LeFlore), or see the Mothers' media coverage.

Clinton's choice to include such a complex call for accountability forms the starting place of an ethos in vulnerability or failure. While earlier in *What Happened*, Clinton establishes her authority in association with former Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, here she establishes her authority in association with McSpadden. This brief, yet significant, moment illustrates a central finding from the social scientists Cole and Luna's interviews with activists in the *Global Feminisms Archive* – that a crucial aspect of studying feminist coalitions centers on if or how identities should be forged through the alliance (75–76), which in this case required Clinton write of herself as someone who became committed to gun reform legislation due to devastating human consequences that disproportionately impact Black communities. Through this uncomfortable association with McSpadden's unanswerable question of accountability, I suggest Clinton forms the starting place of a form of credibility calling for readers to cross racial divisions to end gun deaths.

This credibility is perhaps most important to attend to due to what its inclusion suggests of the Mothers' of the Movement. Clinton establishing her authority alongside Lezley McSpadden's call for accountability can be read as appropriation or amplification. In either interpretation, the moment's inclusion shows McSpadden trusted Clinton enough to meet with her, to speak rather than assume her words would not be heard, and that the epidemic of gun violence and need for police reform were significant enough to risk engaging with the politician despite risks of denial, appropriation, or further harm. Clinton's controversial reputation did not lead this group of Black women to disengage with her and may have required she alter her consciousness of state sanctioned harm and mass incarceration following the 1994 Crime Bill. Clinton's inclusion of the Mothers of the Movement's can provide a reminder of the necessity to risk allyship with those who show a willingness to listen to act on a hope that future tragedies can be prevented (see Taylor 189).

Conclusion

Throughout *What Happened*, Clinton seeks to revise her controversial reputation in an attempt to offer readers avenues to influence politics following her 2016 election loss among the Electoral College. Clinton is a complex figure, which she acknowledges in the text through noting her regrets, frustrations, and many privileges due to her wealth and status. In the “Get Caught Trying” chapter, Clinton situates her presidential campaign as emerging after receiving encouragement from the previous two Democratic presidents. The “On Being a Woman in Politics” section may help readers recognize patterns of assumed distrust, and embodied vulnerability for women in US politics. In the “Turning Mourning into a Movement” chapter, Clinton describes the Mothers of the Movement group that endorsed her, and required she recognize shared family caregiving responsibilities with crucial racial differences. These humanizing features are worthwhile to direct readers to of the moment political tensions, and, from a feminist perspective, shifts in Clinton’s rhetoric that include some anti-racist consciousness.

Other rhetoricians who engage *What Happened* may find it beneficial to focus on Clinton’s frequent use of rhetorical questions or calls for readers to participate in formal institutions and grassroots movements to shape civic life. Throughout the text, Clinton uses questions to ponder the causes and aftereffects of the Trump election, with questions such as: “But what more could we do?” (351) and “How can we build the trust that holds a democracy together?” (431). In one trend, Clinton points out the US’ geopolitical divisions to ask, “How many shrinking small towns and aging Rust Belt cities did I visit over the past two years where people felt abandoned, disrespected, invisible? How many young men and women in neglected urban neighborhoods told me they felt like strangers in their own land because of the color of their skin?” (431). Further examining the function of HRC’s rhetorical questions may contribute to knowledge of the books’ “up-take” and circulation (Mack and Alexander). A related project may track the strategic shifts among the ways Clinton writes of her enduring faith in the US federal government in ways that consider the intersection among political deliberative norms and the “unruly” presence of bodies at risk in physical places and online spaces (Alexander et al.). There are also potential projects that consider HRC’s *What Happened* in relationship to potential shifts in the rhetoric of other contemporary high-profile women’s rights advocates.

The members of The Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric recognize the many contested definitions of feminism in theory and practice along with responsibilities to ensure rhetorical knowledge is not applied in situations that justify poverty, violence, or debunked conspiracies. This organization attends to the complexity of the contexts surrounding rhetorical situations that may involve acknowledging important moments of revision because of alliances formed across differences in race, social location, and political power. A careful negotiation among trust and skepticism is crucial to study feminist coalitions and their rhetoric. As we examine deeply uncomfortable rhetoric that initially appears as straightforward appropriation, we may more fully

understand the central issues that have compelled individuals to trust each other, persuade those who appear immune to change, and hold onto trust in the benefits of solidarity.

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