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Review Essay

Pieces of the Puzzle: Feminist Rhetorical Studies and the Material Conditions of Women’s Work

Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing
Rebecca Dingo

Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Women’s Tradition, 1600–1900
Jane Donawerth

Feminist Rhetorical Resilience
Elizabeth A. Flynn, Patricia Sotirin, and Ann Brady, editors

Writing a Progressive Past: Women Teaching and Writing in the Progressive Era
Lisa Mastrangelo

Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies
Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch
Almost every Christmas, I go home to Missouri, and there is a new jigsaw puzzle waiting. My mother, who loved puzzles, started this tradition when I was a child, and my sister has continued it. The puzzle’s construction is a communal effort, done while we visit, prepare meals, and watch television—while we are together and sometimes alone. We applaud the large finished sections, fret over the next area, continually discuss the framing. Each piece and its accompanying discussion bring us together as an ever-expanding and changing family puzzle. In the same way, these five books operate as puzzle pieces of feminist rhetorical studies, first, because they represent the communal and social concerns over the well-being of women and, second, because they draw attention to the material conditions, the positive and negative social forces at play on women, from the past, the present, and the possible future. In that women’s work of scholarship, the authors make their own claims about what feminist rhetorical studies is and needs to be. A puzzle to be sure. One that is dynamic and moving forward in instructive ways.

What is feminist rhetorical studies, and what might it be? Two texts in 2010 begin to address this very question. In *Walking and Talking Feminist Rhetorics*, Lindal Buchanan and Kathleen J. Ryan outline five trajectories of inquiry: 1) recovery of women rhetors and rhetoricians, 2) analyses of the contextual network of forces in women’s rhetorics, 3) examinations of “gender bias” in rhetorical traditions, 4) critiques of “foundational disciplinary concepts,” and 5) interrogations of established epistemologies and “research practices” (xviii–xix). While acknowledging the importance of the historical element of feminist rhetorical studies, Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Boyster in “Feminist Rhetorical Practices” argue that this relatively new field has expanded beyond just “rescue, recovery, and re(inscription)” within Western traditions into “better informed perspectives of rhetoric and writing as a global enterprise” (647, emphasis in original; 646). What these descriptions highlight is that women’s work reflects both the endeavors and effects of the women represented in these texts and the work of the authors’ research, methods, and rhetorical strategies presented through these texts. The five books in this review essay operate as puzzle pieces of feminist rhetorical studies in that they are illustrations of those means of inquiry yet expand on them by answering David Gold’s challenge to integrate the concepts and strategies explored in women’s work by “building on previous scholarship, demonstrating ideological flexibility, and connecting the local to larger conversations” inside and outside the discipline (26).
What strikes me as a common aspect of these seemingly disparate books is that feminist rhetorical studies circulates around and critically engages with the material conditions of all women’s work, no matter the time or place. It is about all of us—then, now, and coming. Women’s work is physical, verbal, analytical, critical, pedagogical, historical, methodological, and epistemological. As Bruce Horner reminds us, work is “simultaneously an activity, the product of that activity, and the place of its practice” (xvii). Thus, women’s, and men’s, work is always situated and filtered through material conditions, the social forces that enable and restrict agency. These feminist rhetorical texts puzzle out different aspects of those material conditions of women’s work and the rhetorical ways women respond: they address transnational documents’ effects on women’s lives, livelihoods, and well-being in Third World countries; women in difficult and dire situations; social censure of women not to be seen or heard; the historical invisibility of women’s teaching; and the academy’s devaluing of women’s scholarship on women.

By examining texts interacting with texts to observe “how rhetoric travels,” Rebecca Dingo’s *Networking Arguments: Rhetoric, Transnational Feminism, and Public Policy Writing* clearly illustrates the material condition of transnational public policy documents’ effects on women (2). Focusing on the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* that was the result of the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Dingo traces through transnational texts three terms, “mainstreaming, fitness, and empowerment,” in the *Beijing Declaration* to show how these meanings shift and are redefined as they are incorporated into various contexts (7). She contrasts the Beijing platform’s intent through multiple national and international documents and policies to demonstrate how the declaration calling for women to be totally invested by all societies, communities, and cultures becomes a material body with the responsibility of mainstreaming, physically enabling, and empowering herself. As a material condition of Third World women’s work, these shifts in meaning reinforce the social and economic status quo and characterize a woman’s economic stability and sustainability as a factor of self-reliance rather than as a network of social and economic support that is needed for gaining that stability. Dingo traces local effects, particularly of the poor and Third World, via global manipulations of text and meaning. In moving from global policy to local examples, she ends with a call to analyze rhetoric as a series of interacting texts as a means to “lay bare these power relationships” and to “imagine new possibilities for addressing wider contexts” (154). As she claims, “*Networking*
Arguments also shows how the dissemination of these arguments can constrain and enable women to speak, be heard, and have agency” (144). It is a cautionary tale both in what Dingo claims and how she makes the argument.

Comprised of four chapters and an afterword, Networking Arguments systematically sets out strategies for tracing terminology and meaning modifications across texts. Chapter 1 establishes her argument, defines her terms of engagement, and outlines the stakes of those terms. Championing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as her starting point, she argues that this agenda goes beyond dealing with announcing inequalities and impact to focusing on transnational agreements and relationships that constrain women: “[T]he Beijing Platform reflects transnational feminist goals and approaches by networking and linking the definition of gender mainstreaming to local and global structures that exacerbate inequalities, such as international trade agreements, (neo)colonial power relationships, changing local practices, political unrest, and environmental degradation” (3). To support her tracing of terms across documents, Dingo establishes a “transnational feminist rhetorical methodology” to analyze these shifts in meaning (7). The next fourteen pages cogently relate methodology to studies of theory, clearly situating the argument and analysis within feminist rhetorical studies. She concludes by explaining her focus on public policy as it argues for the need to rhetorically analyze through a feminist lens what is often addressed through statistical data: “I argue that a transnational feminist rhetorical analysis of public policy can demonstrate the ways in which history and local and global contexts impact why and how a policy is written, consider how policy makers’ history, culture, and conceptual framework informs policy writing, and reveal the multiple motives behind policy making” (22).

Across the next three chapters, Dingo contends that mainstreaming, fitness, and empowerment become “neoliberal policy topoi,” and she employs and redefines three terms from transnational feminist theory—transcoding, ideological traffic, and interarticulation—as lenses to analyze the shifts in meaning of the topoi (25). Working from Inderpal Grewal’s concept of transcoding that explains how ideologies appear to keep a common dogma from one text to another, in chapter 2 Dingo redefines transcoding to highlight “the fact that as rhetorics move they do not always carry the same ideological assumptions” (31). Focusing on neoliberalism, as theories tied to “free market capitalism” in global markets, and after analyzing the rhetorical and material intricacies and complexities of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Dingo scrutinizes its championing by association, its appropriation, and its re-interpretation by
policies of the United States and the World Bank tied to relieving poverty (9). Through the lens of transcoding, she claims that both entities redefine gender mainstreaming by “fitting’ women into a global capitalist economy” in the first instance as heterosexual women in two-parent homes and in the second as entrepreneurs (67). While incorporating women into economic and public policies, these definitions belie the thrust of the original declaration calling for “a radical transformation of the relationship between women and men to one of full and equal partnership” (qtd. in Dingo 43). Examining the term fitness, chapter 3 analyzes three World Bank texts on disability: a pamphlet and two films, From Exclusion to Inclusion and A World Enabled. Drawing from M. Jacqui Alexander’s concept of “ideological trafficking” as a misuse or reuse of commonplace so accepted that no one questions its meaning, Dingo concludes that using this lens to analyze these World Bank texts “exposes the contradictions” and the “limitations of neoliberal notions of work and autonomy” (69, 71). Tracing the concept and phrase women’s empowerment through American feminism, chapter 4 contrasts the Cairo Programme of Action’s productive use of empowerment that enables women to the World Bank’s Engendering Development through Rights, Resources, and Voice and Advancing Gender Equality, a shift in meaning that not only subverts women’s agency but also reinforces a conservative neoliberal agenda that often subjugates women.

Contextualized with the world financial dilemma and with other world catastrophes tied to the environment and war, the afterword critiques the U.S. “uncritical reception” and attention to the 2010 publication of Half the Sky: Turning Women’s Oppression into Opportunity, narratives of violence to women around the globe. Dingo commends the writers for their focus on the often unreported, and thus unnoticed, violence toward women in developing countries, but she is critical that while they bring forward the problem at a quite specific local level, they do nothing to address it globally, not even by acknowledging the women’s and other organizations and institutions that are. They do not “network arguments” to show how “the local and global are completely intertwined and have distinct material effects on women” (151). In analyzing one of the stories, Dingo acknowledges that the woman’s life is changed for the better, but it is an individual instance, one where she must, as the material body, be responsible for herself; nothing has been done about the international problem of human trafficking (151–53).

This valuable logical and systematic rhetoric and analysis remind me of the Platonic impulse to highlight the intricacies and nuances of Sophistic rhetoric. As a puzzle piece Networking Arguments focuses on public policy
documents that directly impact women through its intersections of rhetorical and transnational feminist theory and its method of analysis. Dingo’s goal is to establish and demonstrate a “new method of feminist rhetorical analysis” that focuses on textual interaction and the slippage and redirection of meaning in order to highlight what is at stake in “arguments about women and how arguments about women travel” (7, 145, emphasis in original). It is this method, her cross-disciplinary approach—intersecting rhetoric with transnational feminism—and her focus on public policy that undergird her claim that by networking these arguments and by calling attention to these shifts in meaning, we can better understand how public policy affects women, and men, globally. It builds on the scholarly work in Wendy S. Hesford and Wendy Kozol’s 2005 *Just Advocacy?* and Hesford and Eileen E. Schell’s 2008 special issue of *College English* on transnational feminist rhetorics. Dingo’s text adds to the important work of this subfield of feminist rhetorical studies in its critical and sustained account of the effect of textual meaning on women’s material condition of livelihood and well-being. In addition, it is in dialogue with the 2012 collection, *The Megarhetorics of Global Development*, edited by Dingo and J. Blake Scott, and offers rhetoric and composition another means by which to rhetorically understand how meaning matters in the daily lives of both women and men transnationally and transculturally.

A puzzle piece that fits with *Networking Arguments* in its concern for the well-being of women, *Feminist Rhetorical Resilience* engages in a different process of networking. Elizabeth A. Flynn, Patricia Sotirin, and Ann Brady’s collection of seven essays, each with a response by established scholars and an author rejoinder, is a dialogic, scholarly, and often personal conversation on the means to conceive of, represent, and argue for the material conditions of women’s work, sometimes “resulting in improved situations” and offering “new models for leading fulfilling, healthy lives” (1). However, most of these conditions are dire examples of subjugation, oppression, and hardship, so feminist rhetorical resilience does not necessarily operate in all rhetorical situations, not even all difficult rhetorical situations, but specifically within “pernicious circumstances,” which require “ongoing refashionings of identity and possibility, not just maintaining but recreating meaningfulness” (8). Dealing directly with the social and political forces operating in these destructive situations, enactments of feminist rhetorical resilience suggest a type of embodied rhetorical process that “entails an ongoing responsiveness, never complete nor predetermined,” allowing a woman the creative means to engage “with material circumstances and situational exigencies” (7). By coupling feminist goals with
rhetorical practices, the editors separate motive and rhetoric. Like a glove on a
hand, rhetorical resilience may reveal or conceal motive. Even though limited
in actually changing those oppressive material conditions, feminist rhetorical
resilience “places greater emphasis on agency, change, and hope” in dealing
with impossible situations (1).

In the introduction, the editors examine critically the scholarly and popu-
lar meanings of the term resilience and argue that in addressing this concept
the collection fills a gap in feminist rhetorical studies. They claim that through
their feminist convictions concerning “social justice, equity, care, and gender,”
they complicate disciplinary concepts “such as context, engagement, audience,
production, and exigency” (7, emphasis in original). As a process and in its
persistence, feminist rhetorical resilience draws from three concepts—agency,
métis, and relationality—which combined radically and continually signal
possibilities “for recirculating, recreating, reforming, reshaping, and engaging”
challenging situations (12). Rejecting notions of patriarchal rhetorical agency
as the available means to the rhetor because they are not workable, the editors
redefine agency as based on “dynamic creativity” that is relational, reflexive,
“pragmatic, situational, and kinetic” (8). Due to the constraints of the ongoing
situation, creative agency becomes a series of discontinuous rhetorical enact-
ments always shifting and changing. Pulling from Classical Greek mythology,
métis is “inductive, conjectural knowledge, resisting coherence and reshaping
itself to remain in motion” (8–9). This adaptability manifests in “situational
intelligence and innovative resourcefulness” as a means of responding to con-
tinually changing rhetorical situations (9). Employing Judith Jordan’s definition,
the editors describe relationality as the dynamic of an ethical engagement with
others, one that is bi-directional and that can lead to “mutual empathy and
empowerment” (11).

The seven chapters range in topics, genres, and research methods and
materials, providing a demonstration of the rhetorical resilience of women’s
scholarly work in the range of artifacts needed and the research tools employed
to better make their claims. In the arrangement of the collection, this process of
feminist rhetorical resilience is enacted through the responses and rejoinders
that accompany each essay, as scholarly women engage in this evolving intel-
lectual relationship of being open to alternative perspectives in order to reshape
and refine their own. The responses by seasoned scholars act as a counterpoint
to the chapters: some offer the other side of the argument, creating dissoi
logoi for the reader, and some provide a harmonic parallel, critiquing through
questioning of the approach or conclusion. The first three dialogues engage in
transnational contexts and research sites to explore women's painful and difficult circumstances because of biopiracy, diaspora, and highly gendered social codes. Eileen E. Schell argues that the scientist and public intellectual Vandana Shiva works with others via a transnational platform to engage “multiple publics in a process of rhetorical identification” as a means to lessen Indian poverty, stop biopiracy, and support the economic and environmental rights of women (33). Schell demonstrates this claim with “words, signs, images” and draws from institutional and organizational documents and websites, popular press magazines and newspapers, interviews and unpublished letters, and Shiva’s own writings, as well as scholarship in transnational feminisms and rhetorical theory (32). In their response, Arabella Lyon and Banu Özel acknowledge the “richness” in both Shiva’s and Schell’s work but caution researchers against examining transnational issues and actions only through a Western lens. Exploring the transnational diaspora on ethnic American identity and using her own family’s history and experience as example, Kate Vieira traces the fado, a nostalgic genre of Portuguese folk song, to contend that immigrant Azorean women adapt and change the songs to foster belonging and community ethnically, where they migrated from, and nationally, where they now live, bridging two worlds, cultures, and languages for their descendants. This interdisciplinary study that incorporates musical, autobiographical, and experiential examples synthesizes postcolonial, transnational, ethnicity, identity, feminist, and rhetorical theories to contextualize and theorize her grandmother’s family history. As an example of dissoi logoi, Janet Carey Eldred’s response offers a counter-narrative of another form of assimilation via her mother—a closing off of the past in order to better integrate into the immediacy of the present culture and language. Iklim Goksel argues that for poor illiterate Turkish women, hymen reconstruction is a form of literacy that is enacted through connecting with other women as information sources, thus creating a network of information and possibility. She employs Freire’s notion to critically read the world, which “involves critical perception, interpretation, and rewriting what is read” (92). Based in ethnographic research and women’s human rights research, she also supports her claims through feminist, postcolonial, literacy, and rhetorical theory. Resulting in a different conclusion, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater’s response reminds us that when doing ethnographic research, we need to locate ourselves as researchers in that work and writing and to beware of generalized claims based solely on our own research experiences.

The next four dialogic groupings use the lens of rhetorical resilience to examine the educational sites of institutional practices and teaching, compli-
cating the rhetorical ability to create change, and rhetorical sites of American women's activism and poverty, demonstrating the resilience in co-opting social ideology. Amy Koerber looks at the troubled history of spousal/partner hires in American higher education to maintain that this unresolved tension inflects the ways, and on what terms, spouses and partners enter into an institution, thus highlighting questions of “agency and responsibility” (117). Circulating through theories and practices of flexibility as an ideal for both institution and employee, she draws attention to the contradictions in dual-hire policies and their ripple effect on other institutional policies through her research into academic disciplinary assessment outside of English and communication studies such as science, sociology, and business, and organizational and institutional statements related to women’s hiring and academic situations. Noting that “both equity and autonomy” may not be possible, Shirley K Rose in her response observes that fortunately or unfortunately these tensions are situational and local to each institution, so it becomes a question of what is reasonable (141). Incorporating their qualitative study findings and classroom observations along with theoretical and pedagogical work in queer studies and rhetoric and composition, Jennifer DiGrazia and Lauren Rosenberg assert that “engaging with queer texts, recognizing queer moments, and seeking to destabilize conventions of normalcy” provide the site for critically examining beliefs about personal, cultural, and institutional sexual assumptions (213). In this process of developing critical awareness and critique, identity becomes fluid, thus allowing teachers and students “to recognize, to rethink, and to assert our understandings of what is ‘normal’” (238). Operating as a harmonic parallel and arguing for the “impossibility of queerness for composition,” Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander’s response outlines what they see as the institutional limitations imposed on pedagogy (241). Incorporating archival materials, Frances J. Ranney documents how Fontia R., finding herself in poverty at the age of seventy-one, employs rhetoric as a means not only to procure and secure aid from the Luella M. Hannan Foundation between 1929 and 1945 but also to use that aid and the system to create a fashionable identity in her Detroit community, thus appearing financially independent. Complicating this view of charity in one woman’s material conditions, Ranney draws on scholarship from science, sociology, economics, fashion, and rhetoric to contextualize Fontia R.’s rhetorical practices through the time period's standards of fashion, economy, and eugenics. Invoking the work of Jane Addams, Kate Ronald draws on rhetorical resilience’s relationality to counter Ranney’s “charity” focus with a “civic housekeeping” model in which women’s work moved beyond the home to “the
neighborhood, community, nation, and planet” (175). Wendy Hayden traces
the inclusion of eugenics discourse in the rhetoric of Frances Willard, Anna
Julia Cooper, Adella Hunt Logan, Juliet Severance, and Lois Waisbrooker at the
end of the nineteenth century. Although critical of this employment, Hayden
argues that this appropriation of eugenics principles operates as rhetorical
appeals to connect the individual female activists’ and their social agendas
“to a larger collective agency” (201). In her response, Nan Johnson questions
whether women activists’ collusion with subjugating and oppressive theories
and movements matters if historians can discern the association as a rhetorical
strategy rather than a firmly held belief and whether women today deal with
the “collusion’ dilemma” (207).

As a puzzle piece to feminist rhetorical studies, the unique multilayered
voices and perspectives in Feminist Rhetorical Resilience converses with
Dingo’s Networking Arguments by providing illustrations of not only individual
women’s circumstances but also an alternative means of networking through
its respondent-rejoinder component. Read together, these two books demon-
strate in different ways the importance of what is at stake for women writers
and women written about in representing women’s material conditions within
the historical, social, and scholarly contexts that support communal practices
and an ethics of understanding and change. Alternatively, Feminist Rhetorical
Resilience extends Jane Donawerth’s Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and
Fall of a Women’s Tradition, 1600-1900 in that it extends our understandings of
rhetorics in Western genres and pushes beyond Western examples of recovery
“by looking at the details of each woman’s life and each moment’s era, regis-
tering the differences as well as similarities between women” (Donawerth 10).
The seven essays in the collection with Western and non-Western examples
show women’s abilities to adapt and transform genres through their rhetorical
resilience as a means to further a life, a cause, or a lifestyle.

The material conditions restricting women’s ability to be seen and heard
is at the heart of Conversational Rhetoric as Donawerth argues for a women’s
theory of rhetoric based on conversation, a tradition beginning and ending in
three centuries. It is the theoretical and historical companion to her earlier
collection of excerpts, Rhetorical Theory by Women before 1900. Conversa-
tional Rhetoric demonstrates the ways in which Anglo-American women living
between 1600 and 1900, mostly restricted to domestic roles, and functioning
in societies that censured women’s voices and bodies rely on conversation as
“the model for all public discourse” (xii). Not afforded the usual avenues of
public rhetorics, women engage in conversation, write about its importance for women, and address it as a topic within texts of other genres such as conduct manuals, elocution handbooks, letters, and defenses of women’s education and preaching. Directly and indirectly, discussions on conversation develop theories of communication and rhetoric. In the introduction, Donawerth establishes her interrelating terms needed to outline a theory of women’s conversational rhetoric: gender operates as “a social construction of women’s possible physical and social roles and activities” (10); rhetoric is “the art of communication through oral, written, or visual discourse” (10–11, emphasis in original); and conversation covers “small-group communication, from any private, informal verbal communication, to artful verbal dialogue used in informal leisure and social activities” (11, emphasis in original). Understanding the gendered nature of rhetoric, women across these centuries endorse a rhetorical theory of conversation “as a model for all discourse, urging speaking and writing that is collaborative, not antagonistic in relation to the audience, seeking consensus, not domination as the goal of communication, advising best practices for domestic rhetoric, developing an art of listening” (16).

Focused on a specific genre, each chapter brings together the writings of multiple women to create a dialogic and layered exchange on a rhetorical theory of conversation both within each chapter and across them. In the first three chapters, the material condition of social restrictions on women’s speaking is the backdrop, for they demonstrate how women make public their ideas and arguments by writing and publishing anonymously and by supporting women’s rhetorical agency through the rhetoric of conversation. Joining the principles, practices, and sites of polite conversation with the humanist tradition of “speech as civilizing,” chapter 1 establishes the relationship of women’s conversation to written rhetoric across four women’s writings in the seventeenth century (17). Publishing works on letter writing, woman’s education, and conversation, Madeleine de Scudéry anonymously establishes practices and models for women’s writing and speaking on French social issues and regenders patriarchal rhetoric by redefining writing as “a conversation between absent persons” (21). Her texts were quickly translated into English and well circulated in England. While she also wrote a manual on letters, orations, and dialogues, Margaret Cavendish adopts the encyclopedia genre to theoretically discuss rhetoric and condemns women’s silence because it does not fulfill the conversation’s social purpose. Arguing that women need to be well educated, Bathsua Makin’s pamphlet adds women in her rewriting of rhetorical history by redefining rhetoric
to include women's conversation with men in the domestic sphere. Because women's polite conversation was socially sanctioned, Mary Astell argues that private conversation is the best means for developing intellectual, social, and religious knowledge, which is her justification for women's education. Defining conduct book rhetoric “as initiating the reader into a discourse community” and establishing the importance of instruction in conversation and letter writing for women, chapter 2 explores the role of conversation in conduct treatises of Hannah More, Lydia Sigourney, Eliza Farrar, Florence Hartley, and Jennie Willing during the nineteenth century (43). In contrast to men's treatises on conduct and conversation, the common thread across the five is the articulation of “reading and writing as social activities rather than individual activities” and of conversation as a collaborative exchange (72). Individually, they extend the dimensions of women's conversation through different rhetorical purposes to promote intelligence and talent (More), to support nationalism (Sigourney), to break down or stabilize social class systems (Farrar and Hartley), and to reform societal norms (Willing).

Women's work slowly shifts in the next three chapters, moving from the rhetorical influence of conversation in the home and social settings to public venues and rhetorics of advocacy and activism. To counter the material condition of social constraints toward public performance and display, women rhetors combined their rhetorical speaking strategies with body rhetoric. They actively worked to be seen as well as heard in public by publishing under their names, by preaching, and through elocution. Drawing on corresponding traditions of women's rhetorical theory, the next three chapters deal with the role of conversation in the defense of women's preaching, in elocution handbooks, and in textbooks. Chapter 3 focuses on women's treatises on preaching from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries with the works of Margaret Fell, Jarena Lee, Lucretia Mott, Ellen Stewart, Catherine Booth, and Frances Willard. In the genres of private and public letters, pamphlets, orations/sermons, narratives, autobiography, and often multigenre texts, they defend women's right to preach and adapted preaching to include “testimony or holy conversation” (75). The rhetoric of these treatises echo with elements of women's conversation through their textual incorporation of scripture as a type of collaboration by “fusing their arguments with scriptural quotations and gaining authority from biblical language” and through their awareness of, citation of, and reference to other women's preaching defenses (104). Accounting for women's bodies and their regulation as a rhetorical element of conversation, chapter 4 follows the
shifting material conditions of women’s elocution from “parlor entertainment” to “public speaking” across the nineteenth century (124). By examining the elocution manuals’ discussions of conversation by Anna Morgan, Genevieve Stebbins, Emily Bishop, and Hallie Quinn Brown, Donawerth demonstrates the tension between regulation of the genteel female body and the liberation from restrictive clothing. Thus, women’s elocutionary performances become sites of rhetorical agency and action, including activism. The conclusion argues that by the end of the nineteenth century, the tradition of conversational rhetoric weakened as Anglo-American women gained access to education and to public speaking venues. Briefly considering composition textbooks by eleven women writers and covering a range of approaches—classical rhetoric, rhetorical grammar, belle lettres, and empiricism—Donawerth underscores that women textbook writers were writing to both girls and boys, yet another example of women no longer conversing with just women. Mary Augusta Jordan’s 1904 Correct Writing and Speaking is the anomaly and in that uniqueness undercuts the “exclusivity” of “elite male education,” thus furthering women’s entry and voice in public domains (133).

Throughout this rich history and analysis covering three centuries, Conversational Rhetoric examines women doing the work of writing for women who learn from these texts to better engage in their work. Women writers’ material conditions that confine their venues for being seen and heard require that they adopt and adapt the genres afforded them, opening up options and opportunities for themselves, each other, and the next generation of women. Generating a women’s rhetorical tradition, their statements and theories about conversation operate as productive counterpoint to the patriarchal one. In its connections between conversation and preaching and elocution, Conversational Rhetoric extends, links, and enriches our understanding of Western women’s rhetorical theory. Neatly fitting into the women’s historical rhetoric section of the puzzle, it adds historically and chronologically to Cheryl Glenn’s Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance.

While Donawerth develops a three-century tradition through a heteroglos-sia of women’s rhetorical statements, Lisa Mastrangelo distills, complicates, and revises the discipline’s understanding of American women’s writing instruction during the Progressive Era. A pivotal piece of a somewhat neglected puzzle section on early twentieth-century American women’s work in education, activism, and writing, Writing a Progressive Past: Women Teaching and Writing in the Progressive Era adds to and extends the work on John Dewey,
Fred Newton Scott, and Gertrude Buck and complements important studies that deal with women in this period (see Adams; Sharer). Situating women’s rhetorical education and teaching from the late 1880s to the 1920s within the progressive tradition, Mastrangelo draws attention to women’s academic work through teaching, pedagogy, and curriculum with the careers and legacy of Clara Stevens at Mount Holyoke and Sophie Chantal Hart at Wellesley College. The book’s juxtaposition of John Dewey and Fred Newton Scott with Stevens and Hart demonstrates the material condition of historical invisibility in women’s teaching and curriculum development and emphasizes the importance of contextualized recovery work for establishing traditions in pedagogy.

Across the history, Mastrangelo frames and reframes her discussion and analysis of Scott, Stevens, and Hart with a detailing of the archival materials that are available on them and on the writing instruction and curriculum at their respective colleges. Scott’s materials are numerous because he was prolific and well published and because the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library houses three boxes of his correspondence. However, for Stevens and Hart the materials are partial and fragmented. They published little; as with most pedagogical investigations, their classroom practices were not recorded; and a fire at Wellesley in 1914 destroyed English Department records and documents. This contrast of available materials for male and female professors during the Progressive Era is not unusual because of postsecondary’s culture for male faculty at prestigious institutions to research and publish. It does, however, underscore how teaching and instructional practices quickly become invisible. Thus, to piece together Stevens’s and Hart’s puzzles that illuminate “the first generation of [women] college professors to teach,” Mastrangelo re-visions “the history of composition using a feminist lens of critical imagining” to argue how each woman engaged in progressive pedagogy (65, 128). Her feminist lens goes beyond a focus on women and women’s teaching to acknowledge the parallels between feminist pedagogy and progressive pedagogy and to establish women alongside men in the progressive movement.

Articulating the differences among three educational theories circulating during the Progressive Era, chapter 1 outlines administrative progressivism, current-traditionalism, and what Mastrangelo refers to as “Deweyian progressivism” (7). Becoming the “dominant model” of education, administrative progressivism worked to raise the nation’s literacy rate and to socially norm all students by endeavoring to teach more students at a higher standard of learning through standardized curriculum and testing and discrete disciplinary knowledge (9). Current-traditionalism, primarily based on learning to write
through knowing discrete skills such as grammar and mechanics and promoted through the prestige of Harvard, companionsed easily with administrative progressives’ curricular approach. Deweyian progressivism emphasized a pedagogy that focused on “transaction rather than transmission,” guidance instead of correction, individuality in preference to homogeneity (24). While articulating the limitations, Mastrangelo establishes common elements between Deweyian progressivism and feminist theory: “connected experience,” engaged critical thinking and learning through participation, and “privileging of experience and voice” (29, 30). Using Scott’s pedagogical application of Dewey’s educational theories as the focal point, chapter 2 details the educational network of influence that supported the transfer of Deweyian progressivism as manifested in rhetorical education to the Seven Sisters Colleges via the women graduate students working with Scott.

Located at two of the Seven Sisters Colleges, Stevens at Mount Holyoke and Hart at Wellesley between the mid-1880s and 1920s, both women engaged in long careers of forty or more years at their institutions, were department chairs, interrupted their teaching careers to earn masters’ degrees at the University of Michigan during the 1890s, studied with Scott, and implemented the philosophies of Dewey and Scott in their teaching and course development. Due to lack of finances, Stevens taught high school for four years before attending Mount Holyoke in her early twenties. After graduating in 1881, she taught Latin there and then became a full-time faculty member in 1884. With Mount Holyoke’s institutional shift from seminary to college in 1888 and its increasing student enrollment, Stevens designed and taught courses on topics including journalism, playwriting, and structure of the novel and drama, expanded the writing courses to include argument and debates, and established an undergraduate major in rhetoric. Her rhetorical pedagogy was student-centered, contextualized learning, supported inquiry and exploration, valued student writing and expression, integrated literature and writing, and promoted the power of speaking and writing well. Traveling from her home in California, Hart entered Radcliffe in 1884 at the age of sixteen. Engaged in stints of study abroad, she graduated in 1892 and then went to teach at Wellesley until 1937. As chair of the English Composition Department from 1897 until 1935, she oversaw the revision and expansion of rhetoric course offerings, adding such topics as exposition and criticism, argumentation, theme writing, principles of rhetoric and composition, and debate. She taught writing to develop thinking with an emphasis on experiential connectedness and believed in writing practice and revision; her exams included questions about rhetorical and composing
concepts, and she encouraged students to write on social and cultural issues. Her progressive ideals also manifest in her advocacy and support of student participation in civic enterprises such as student government and social reform movements. Through their teaching, their modeling, their curriculum development, and their focus on social engagement and activism in education and in social movements, Stevens and Hart enact feminist progressive pedagogy in that they apply progressive tenets and practices to help female students and other women be aware of their abilities to generate and transform knowledge and to use rhetoric to change society.

As Mastrangelo notes in her conclusion, just as with Scott’s work, the influence of Stevens and Hart diminished with their retirements. The material conditions that surround that demise of progressive pedagogy and women’s rhetoric at the Seven Sisters Colleges are tied to social forces such as World War I, educational factors such as the increasing use of standardized tests, and institutional shifts such as consolidating departments and programs. In addition, women educators were not welcome as doctoral students, much less as faculty, in prestigious institutions, so they had no opportunity to develop graduate programs or educate women at the graduate level, no means by which to pass on pedagogical traditions. Thus, as with all educational shifts, Deweyian progressive pedagogy and Stevens’s and Hart’s work disappeared. The material condition of historical invisibility to women’s academic work, particularly as it concerns teaching, is constrained by partial and fragmented research materials for individual women and on classroom practices, by educational conventions that denied access to or devalued women, and social and cultural attitudes about women’s education. Mastrangelo’s historical study is a useful and instructive puzzle piece to women’s rhetorical education during the Progressive Era, and it shows us the continued need “to revise and rewrite our own historical accounts” through our ongoing search to more clearly make visible this section of the puzzle (136).

Collectively these four texts with their distinct aims and means add pieces to the feminist rhetorical studies puzzle and construct a rich multifaceted picture of the material conditions of women’s work. Thus, they enact the scholarly “qualities of excellence” that Royster and Kirsch argue for in Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies (19, emphasis in original). Building on and extending their 2010 CCC article, Royster and Kirsch accomplish four related goals: they capture the past thirty years of scholarship intersecting women and rhetoric as means to establish a corpus for feminist rhetorical studies within rhetoric and composition; they
describe the changes and differences in research, method, and arguments that are currently operating within this scholarship; they argue for an ethical framework across the scholarship that involves critical imagination, strategic contemplation, social circulation, and globalization; and they offer, via this inquiry paradigm, strategies for and sites of needed research and study “to work that is more transformative for the field” (18). This dialogic, metadiscursive, and locational stance is a “comprehensive and forward-looking account of what feminist research has accomplished over the last three decades,” as Patricia Bizzell astutely notes in the foreword (ix). In describing the emerging field of feminist rhetorical studies, Royster and Kirsch employ the geological metaphor of “tectonic shift” to argue that it has “broken through habitual expectations for rhetorical studies to be overwhelmingly about men and male-dominated arenas, with the consequence of creating volatility in research and practice, tectonic shifts on the rhetorical landscape” (17). This place-based metaphor relating women’s rhetoric, and its accompanying scholarly inquiry, to cracks in the core, the foundation, reverberates across the shifts in feminist rhetorical research, which entails unique methodologies and adopts concepts, terms, theories, and methods adapted from other fields. In the feminist rhetorical studies puzzle, Feminist Rhetorical Practices is a border piece, capturing what the field is and suggesting what its future puzzle pieces might be.

Centered on scholarly inquiry into women’s material conditions, Feminist Rhetorical Practices speaks back to the confining, restricting, and devaluing of women’s scholarship on women by the academy and the discipline. To that end, it analyzes, categorizes, critiques, and projects academic women’s work across four sections and nine chapters. As Royster and Kirsch so aptly explain of their work: “The general challenge is not to create a new system for research, scholarship, and practice in the field but to bring visibility and animation to what teachers and scholars are currently doing deliberately and self-consciously but not always paradigmatically” (17). Parts 1 and 2 make the coauthors’ case for their argument for the emergence and legitimacy of feminist rhetorical studies as a field of rhetoric and composition and for their taxonomy presented in part 3. Enacting their concern for an ethical inquiry model, the authors begin with their motivations and gendered locations through their individual scholarly histories acknowledging the difficulties and rewards of their work. To continually remind us that rhetoric is “a multidimensional human enterprise” and that the words on the page are written by breathing, thinking, caring bodies, they occasionally offer individual pedagogical reflections (42). Furthermore, their feminist inclusive and collaborative agenda toward scholarly women’s work
is evidenced in their coauthorship, in their support of interdisciplinarity and multiple lines of inquiry, in detailed support and analysis of what has come before as a means to offer possibility for future women’s work in feminist rhetorical studies. Chapter 4 contextualizes and details their understanding and arrangement of the previous thirty years of women’s scholarly work in history, theory, criticism, and pedagogy by clustering the various research avenues under the categories of gender, race and ethnicity, status, geographical sites, rhetorical domains, genres, and modes of expression.

Outlining the work of feminist rhetorical research and practice, part 3 defines and explicates the four “qualities of excellence” that operate interactively and dynamically (19, emphasis in original). Invoking the meanings of quality as specific characteristics and values, these concepts describe scholarly practices as concrete and tangible as well as significant and subtle. Critical imagination requires assembling and arranging a full range of evidence in order to “think between, above, around, and beyond this evidence to speculate methodically about probabilities” (71). Strategic contemplation compels researchers to engage in “processes of meditation, introspection, and reflection” (84). By suspending closure, “creativity, wonder, and inspiration” is possible through the added dimensions of emotion and physicality (85). Social circulation necessitates exploration into women’s social networks, where “women connect and interact with others and use language with intention” (101). This practice works to associate isolated rhetorical acts and sites thus breaking away from divisions in space and time and offers a way to see circulation “across generations” and “across places and regions in local, global, and transnational contexts” (101).

Like the undercutting of binaries in social circulation, globalization entails breaking the West-East divide through its ever-broadening expansion and engagement in transnational rhetorical concerns. As both characteristic and value, globalization is a shift in perspective, one that accounts for feminist rhetorical studies as “a transnational, global phenomenon rather than a Western one” and expects an evolving set of practices to both recover and network rhetorical acts across geography (25). The conclusion offers a call for increasing “symphonic and polylogical patterns of inquiry,” continuing to textually and contextually situate analysis and interpretation, striving to connect the local to the global, and enacting these practices within an ethical framework (145). Feminist Rhetorical Practices illuminates and elucidates the work of women’s scholarship.

Emblematic of puzzle pieces, each of the five books takes the topics, methods, concepts, and theories in unique directions for feminist rhetorical studies. As five distinct models of women’s scholarly work, these books, including their
own, exemplify Royster and Kirsch’s call for an “ethics of hope and care” that promotes productive change in the discipline, academe, and society (145). As a reminder that political representation affects life conditions and that words are always multivalent, thus affecting each life differently, Dingó’s Networking Arguments offers an enlightening account of the importance of not assuming we understand the implications of meaning because we know the terms in use or because we believe in the institutions and agencies that produced the texts that used them. Flynn, Sotirin, and Brady’s Feminist Rhetorical Resilience stresses that, in extraordinary situations when traditional forms of rhetoric are not possible, an alternative creative means may function to effectively instill a belief in an audience, whether to maintain the status quo or to shift it. Donawerth’s Conversational Rhetoric articulates a women’s rhetorical theory based on conversation that counters with patriarchal agonistic traditions, thus revising the history of rhetorical theory, and that layers women’s voices across a range of genres complicating and enriching the oft-employed one-woman-as-exemplar model of rhetorical history. Conveying an ethical feminist positioning, Mastrangelo’s Writing a Progressive Past establishes three important correlations on rhetorical education during the Progressive Era: the theories and history of Deweyian progressive pedagogy to women’s rhetorical education, the innovative role of women educators in relocating, transmitting, and circulating pedagogical and theoretical knowledge with women, and the parallels between progressive pedagogy then and feminist pedagogy now. Royster and Kirsch’s Feminist Rhetorical Practices provides a far-reaching and ethical vision of and justification for feminist rhetorical studies within rhetoric and composition with its timely historical scholarly retrospective, its argument for an original taxonomy paradigm for inquiry, and its detailing of neglected and needed areas of research. Because all of these books carry 2012 publication dates, meaning they were in press at the same time, they demonstrate the synergy and trajectory of scholarship that Feminist Rhetorical Practices necessitates.

Each book illuminates different aspects of the material conditions of women’s work, yet the writers and editors research and write within their own material conditions of women’s scholarly production. Acknowledgments hint at the tensions within those conditions. Mastrangelo reminds us that a book is not written in isolation; thus, she thanks the members of her dissertation committee, fellow female scholars, her colleagues at the College of Saint Elizabeth, the archivists at various libraries, and her associates at Parlor Press. This is her work—her teaching, her research, her historical vision, her writing. But those various acts compete with each other and with time for her family.
The material conditions of the work of an academic and scholar and the work of wife and mother operate as a symbiotic exchange of ideas, motivation, and rejuvenation, for a mother’s work to “go and play” is equal to the female academic’s work to sit and write (x). Dingo too draws on personal support from her mother and mother-in-law as they took up household and childcare chores so that she could focus on her scholarly work. These references to home and workplace show how women, and men, communally support women within their material conditions. In acknowledging the professional organizations that provided scholarly engagement, institutions that supported her research and writing through grants and fellowships, and the presses and journals that provided permissions for her earlier research and writing, Donawerth highlights the avenues and larger academic communities that can constrain agency or support it. In addition, she details how her students offered her conversations over the years that aided her research and thinking. The Feminist Rhetorical Resilience authors and editors demonstrate the material conditions of their feminist rhetorical resilience for this collection as it began with papers from the 2005 Feminism(s) and Rhetoric(s) Conference and finalized in a 2012 publication, seven years of commitment and work in order to see their endeavors and their vision in print. In their individual stories and reflections within Feminist Rhetorical Practices, Kirsch and Royster underscore the early difficulties of focusing research on women. Kirsch recounts about her research and writing for her earlier Women Writing the Academy that she was regularly asked: “Why study women? Why only women?” (6). Royster notes about the seventeen years that her Traces of a Stream was in process, “how very far we had to go in this field in order to reset frameworks and make better room for women’s rhetorical practices” (11). Each of these examples reinforces that feminist rhetorical studies repeatedly contends with the tensions within the material conditions of women’s scholarly and academic work. What these writers reveal is that the communal doing through the research and writing of feminist rhetorical studies critically reclaims, builds on, and breaks away from historical traditions, continually reexamining the material conditions of women’s work, while enacting it themselves.

Last Christmas, I arrived at my sister’s home to yet another puzzle. The family as we are configured now in its next generation carries on that tradition of older with younger, of women with men, of laughter with serious conversation, of life’s struggles and aspirations. A puzzle’s construction relies on the community that is engaged in a common goal and the individual intelligences and visions that can see the puzzle pieces differently. Feminist rhetorical studies is both a
field of research and scholarship and a community of academic women, and
men, ethically concerned with the material conditions that restrict or enable
the well-being of all women in their work, in their ability to communicate, in
their ability to live with dignity whether in the past, the present, or future. The
puzzle pieces will continue to be added, altering and shaping the puzzle's picture
of who we are in our research and in our ethical rhetorical action.

Works Cited


