

2017

Toward a Networked Feminist Pedagogy for Composition

Leah Vitello

University of South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vitello, L. (2017). *Toward a Networked Feminist Pedagogy for Composition*. (Master's thesis). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/4147>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

TOWARD A NETWORKED FEMINIST PEDAGOGY FOR COMPOSITION

by

Leah Vitello

Bachelor of Arts
Lynchburg College, 2014

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

Accepted by:

Hannah Rule, Director of Thesis

Catherine Keyser, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Leah Vitello 2017
All Rights Reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the director of my thesis, Dr. Hannah Rule, for her assistance as I underwent this challenging process. Her support and encouragement allowed me to pursue a topic I am passionate about, and for that I am grateful. I would also like to thank my second reader, Dr. Catherine Keyser, for her excitement about my project and being my cheerleader throughout my time at University of South Carolina. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for bearing with me as trudged through my many life crises with their words of praise, hugs, and a few tough-love pushes to do better.

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to offer a pedagogy that uses methods inspired by fourth-wave feminism, or what I name Networked Feminist Pedagogy, to address both the highlights and challenges we have seen in the multimodal and public turns in the field. First, I provide an overview of the ongoing relationship between feminist composition and digital and multimodal rhetorics in order to locate the spaces in which Networked Feminist Pedagogy can intervene. Then, based on work by fourth wave feminist writers and teachers, I outline what I see as central principles of a fourth wave pedagogy, including daily practices, assignment ideas, and outcomes. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the implications of fourth-wave pedagogy and consider future directions of feminist composition. This Networked Feminist Pedagogy will not only achieve and further composition's aims, but also confront and attend to today's major issues with cultural and technological literacies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: FEMINIST COMPOSITION & DIGITAL/MULTIMODALITY: AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP	8
FEMINIST COMPOSITION: AN EMERGING FIELD.....	9
ACCESS GRANTED: THE PUBLIC/DIGITAL TURNS AND MULTIMODAL/DIGITAL RHETORIC	13
LAUGH AND CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE: FOURTH WAVE NETWORKED FEMINISM	15
CHAPTER 3: FOURTH WAVE FEMINISM AND PEDAGOGY.....	18
A CALL FOR TEACHING FOURTH WAVE FEMINIST DISCOURSE	18
NETWORKED FEMINIST PEDAGOGY	22
CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS OF NETWORKED FEMINIST PEDAGOGY	27
WORKS CITED.....	30

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In her 2004 CCCC keynote address, Kathleen Blake Yancey marks the moment in which composition studies was witnessing the “proliferation of writings outside the academy” so unlike the writing students were doing in the classroom (298). She spoke to the ways writing technologies “contributed so quickly to the creation of new genres” in addition to a “*writing* public made plural” (298, 300). What shocked Yancey was that no one was forcing students to write outside of the academy—they were doing so of their own accord, interest, or need. Emerging from the Internet and all of its subsequent technologies, a writing public created for and by people had blossomed and continues to grow today, especially thanks to today’s students. These members of current writing publics have learned “to write, to think together, to organize, and to act within online forums—largely without instruction” (Yancey 301). What Yancey finds so hopeful about these writing publics is that “those committed to another vision of globalization see in it the chance for a (newfound) cooperation and communication among peoples, one with the potential to transform the world and its peoples positively” and could possibly usher in “a world peace never known before” (301). More than ten years later we are still seeing the development and perpetuation of writing publics, made possible by our students, increased access to digital technologies, and user-friendly content.

But what is resoundingly clear more than ten years on is we have not yet achieved this world peace Yancey hoped for in 2004. Today’s developing writing publics need

more support to improve critical thinking and reading, organizing, and action. The 2016 Presidential election, for example, certainly brought to surface the need for support, as the Internet played a large role in the results through wide spread dissemination of fake news and creation of online personal “bubbles” in which social media newsfeeds were tailored exactly to each person’s interests and likes. In doing so, the Internet closed people off from others’ multiple and different perspectives, and twenty-first century writing has failed to encourage communication among those who may disagree. Despite being more connected than ever, many people have gotten into the habit of not listening to, reading, and seeing others’ opinions and perceptions. In doing so, Americans in particular have become more divided than ever. Considering the rise in online and personal hate speech, misogyny, and xenophobic language and acts during and after the election, it is obvious something needs to be done to improve relations between people at all levels. College composition is often the first time students become aware of discourse as well as participate in these much-needed conversations about the rhetorical power they have in what they say and write.

In her address, Yancey asks: “if we believe that writing is social, shouldn’t the system of circulation—the paths that the writing takes—extend beyond and around the single path from student to teacher?” (310-311). This is a necessary question to ask again today, as the Internet continues to permeate our lives both in and outside the academy. Yancey proposes a “new model of composing” that asks students to engage with more material than they are used to and participate in today’s ever-changing writing public (311). In doing so, instructors fulfill composition’s goal of introducing students not only to the academy but also the public and social sphere beyond it. Yancey’s model,

combined with the subsequent social and public turns in composition, allows us to see the links between composition and action much more clearly. Because writers now “self-organize into what seem to be overlapping technologically driven writing circles...communities that cross borders of all kinds—nation, state, class, gender, ethnicity” in order to “mobilize for health concerns, for political causes, for research, and for travel advice,” students’ awareness of genre and audience pose a challenge for pedagogues like Yancey, as technology appeared to render them obsolete. Yet, Yancey knew instructors at the time “*already* inhabit[ed] a model of communication practices incorporating multiple genres related to each other, those multiple genres remediated across contexts of time and space, linked one to the next, circulating across and around rhetorical situations both inside and outside school” (308). To make this new model more widespread and effective, Yancey suggested evolving the composition curriculum to better meet the needs of twenty-first century writers as well. In doing so, we as instructors would not only assist students in creating and participating in writing publics, but also “foster the development of citizens who vote...whose civic literacy is global in its sensibility and its communicative potential, and whose commitment to humanity is characterized by consistency and generosity as well as the ability to write for purposes that are unconstrained and audiences that are nearly unlimited” (Yancey 321). It is here, I argue—in Yancey’s call for an composition in a new key fit for twenty-first century writers—that the current feminist wave can intervene to further actualize both her vision for composition and that of the digital and public turns.

Fourth-wave feminist pedagogy can and will push composition studies forward to answer Yancey’s call and address larger issues with cultural literacy (especially at a time

when it is so badly needed). Much feminist composition scholarship offers new strategies for pedagogical practices and assignments to employ in the classroom. Considering the links between digital multimodality, the public turn, and feminism's fourth wave, it makes sense to advance feminist pedagogy to better fulfill today's need for it as well as prepare new instructors for the composition classrooms they are inheriting. Doing so will allow us to go beyond merely fulfilling composition's central aims. Since the time of Yancey's call for more activism and world peace by way of technology, it comes as no surprise we have witnessed a powerful feminist movement that has shifted and strengthened with each wave, with composition trailing right alongside.

Feminist compositionist Laura Micciche describes each feminist wave as having its own focus while calling to attention and linking similar aspects of Yancey's keynote address such as "race, class, age, disability, queer, linguistic, immigrant, global, and other categories of identification that include and exceed women's issues" (Micciche 128-9). Since the 1960s, the movement has "continued to expand struggles for equality as well as objects of analysis and critique" just as composition has pursued these aims (Micciche 128). Like Donna Haraway's situated knowledges approach to paying attention, feminism can teach critical technological literacy and awareness to students (1181). Cynthia Selfe claims in her own CCCC keynote address, six years before Yancey's, that "the critical technological literacy we believe students must develop" will lead them to "become effective social agents and citizens" (1181-2). Selfe's sentiment marks the very beginning of the moment Yancey spoke of in 2004 that has picked up steam thanks to the feminist movement. Since 1998, it has become increasingly obvious to compositionists like Selfe that "our culture will need these activists" (1182), and it could even be said now, as many

still reel from the divisiveness that permeated the 2016 presidential election and face an uncertain future: our culture *still* needs these activists.

Composition pedagogy has always challenged students to become better writers and more critically engaged thinkers, and feminist compositionists continue to promote feminist values such as inclusivity and intersectional pedagogies. Just as Yancey and Selfe foresaw, today's students are even more involved with voicing their opinions on the various platforms available to them, such as social media, activist groups, and the like. But because students often lack the ability to critically parse out the massive amount of information they have access to, they fail to understand the importance of rhetoric and the various ways it can be used to sway people. In November 2016, *NPR*'s Camila Domonoske reported on a Stanford study "that evaluated students' ability to assess information sources" that revealed that students ranging from middle school to college age failed. The researchers were "shocked" at students' "'stunning and dismaying consistency' in their responses...getting duped again and again" (Domonoske). While most people assume today's students know how to use social media effectively, the research claims they, in fact, do not. Today's classrooms are at least in part to blame for not teaching students the skills needed when accessing and assessing information. To resolve this potentially dangerous problem, the researchers call for teaching students "to read like fact checkers" (Domonoske). Considering the kinds of fake news and fringe sources the students in the study deemed legitimate, it is clear more must be done to teach them these necessary skills, especially as students arrive in our first-year composition classrooms with varying degrees of fact-checking skills. Writing teachers can intervene by building upon the knowledge students gained on their own and fill the gaps by

teaching rhetorical strategies that will improve their ability to speak up for themselves and others in an inclusive, welcoming, and engaging way. It is at this moment compositionists must not overlook the ways this current surge of fourth-wave feminist values can apply to the composition classroom in fighting this “threat to democracy” (Wineburg et al. 7). As today’s feminists work to uncover and call out people’s biases and inaccurate perceptions or knowledge of a range of issues, writing teachers can help students develop these skills in providing counterarguments that are well-crafted, logical, and supported by factual evidence.

Some of the challenges that come with digital/multimodal rhetorics involve helping students develop the cognitive skills to interpret intertextual communications that also “may blur traditional lines of genre, author/audience, and linear sequence” (NCTE). This blurring also leads to the challenge of teaching students the ethics of ownership and critically considering the global impacts of digital technology (NCTE). Fourth wave feminist pedagogy can assist in closing these gaps in digital literacy and critical reading through assigning readings on and examinations of Internet feminist texts and writing assignments that explore the rhetorical implications of battling exclusionary natures. In doing so, students will see the value in giving voice to those still marginalized and become more critical engagers of online discourse.

This thesis seeks to offer a pedagogy that uses methods inspired by fourth-wave feminism, or what I name Networked Feminist Pedagogy, to address both the highlights and challenges we have seen in the multimodal and public turns in the field. First, I will provide an overview of the ongoing relationship between feminist composition and digital and multimodal rhetorics in order to locate the spaces in which Networked

Feminist Pedagogy can intervene. Then, I will, based on work by fourth wave feminist writers and teachers, outline what I see as central principles of a fourth wave pedagogy, including daily practices, assignment ideas, and outcomes. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the implications of fourth-wave pedagogy and consider future directions of feminist composition. This Networked Feminist Pedagogy will not only achieve and further composition's aims, but also confront and attend to today's major issues with cultural and technological literacy.

CHAPTER 2

FEMINIST COMPOSITION & DIGITAL/MULTIMODALITY: AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP

Recently, many scholars in composition studies have followed the public turn and examined how writing transpires in today's digital world. These discussions are leading not only to a new branch in composition studies known as multimodal and digital rhetorics, but also to field interdisciplinarity. It is well known that feminism and its values have greatly informed composition studies and impacted many of our pedagogical practices. Today's fourth wave feminist movement can serve as an extension of feminist composition not yet fully articulated in current scholarship in addition to serving as another vehicle for the public and digital turns in composition. Bearing in mind the similar ways both feminism and digital literacy have influenced composition, we need to consider how we can better combine the two branches of the field to enhance our pedagogical practices for teaching students writing and rhetorical strategies in today's increasingly digitally networked world. The focus and values of fourth wave feminism, such as utilizing the Internet and digitality for social justice aims and promoting intersectionality, aligns well with today's composition pedagogical goals. If fourth wave feminism can fuse together feminism and primary interests in composition such as the Internet, sociality, digitality, and self-sponsored writing, then we need to examine the extent to which work in composition previously entangled or missed these connections. To set a foundation for Networked Feminist Pedagogy, we must first build upon and

extend the established connections between feminist, public, and digital scholarship in composition.

Feminist Composition: An Emerging Field

Feminist composition has grown and developed in a number of ways while remaining steadfast in its overall goal of providing strategies for bringing care, inclusivity, argumentation, authority, expressivism, and most importantly, equality, into the composition classroom. Numerous scholars have called for various forms of feminist composition pedagogies and practices such as Sherrie Gradin's feminist social-expressivism, Andrea Greenbaum's argumentative "bitch pedagogy" working toward resistance, Susan Jarratt's call for a more rhetorical composition theory providing a model of political conflict and negotiation, and Joy Richie and Kathleen Boardman's re-reading feminist narratives for more inclusivity. These scholars, along with countless others, have, as Laura Micciche noted, "orbit[ed] around the idea that pedagogy has the potential, even the responsibility, to interrogate and transform social relations" (129). Micciche continues, "feminist pedagogy is not a discrete set of practices, but, much like feminism generally, a flexible basis from which to launch intersectional pedagogical projects" (129).

In the first edition of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, renowned feminist scholar Susan Jarratt attributed feminist composition's emergence to increasing women's college enrollment in the 1960s, as they opened the door for other underrepresented and marginalized groups to access higher education. The exigence for this new field, Jarratt claims, was the need to accommodate the newly diverse student population entering composition classrooms, and feminism in general was emerging as the movement most

focused on fulfilling that need. In the second edition of *The Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Laura Micciche's chapter on feminist pedagogies expands upon Jarratt's 2001 historical outline of the field. Micciche says that while feminism addressed issues of inequality between women and men in higher education in the 70s at a time when women's presence in college classrooms was still new, it was not until the 1980s that the composition field caught up to the feminist movement when feminist compositionists connected "activist pedagogical functions...to writing and literacy practices broadly conceived, making clear that there is no bracketing the world or politics from the classroom" (Micciche 129). In other words, feminist composition pedagogy reflects feminism itself in its flexibility and intersectionality.

In addition to acknowledging women's entrance to higher education in the 1970s, Micciche points to Elizabeth Flynn's essay, "Composing as a Woman," as the spark for feminist pedagogy in Writing Studies. In the essay, Flynn offers a path for feminist researchers to validate their studies through her investigation of narrative essays that revealed the differences in how men and women make connections in their writing (Micciche 130). From there, a new scholarly subfield was born, and feminist compositionists have continued to explore and analyze pedagogical strategies that account for women's experiences and narratives. What followed was more inquiry to the feminist teacher's role, as many scholars noted commonalities such as collaboration, cooperation, and student-centeredness (Micciche 131). Since then, feminist scholarship has become much more fluid and intersectional, with scholars from a variety of fields incorporating theoretical and pedagogical methods including rhetorical theory, expressivism, poststructuralism, and "postmodernist notions of agency, selfhood,

subjectivity, and power” (Micciche 131). Because interdisciplinary researchers informed feminist theory, feminist pedagogy has moved toward its current form as a method for encouraging social justice in the classroom.

Feminist composition’s social justice platform is apparent in Susan Jarratt’s “Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict,” an essential essay in the field. Jarratt emphasizes the need for a historical approach to rhetoric through “overtly confrontational feminist pedagogies as a progressive mode of discourse” (106). She ultimately contends that conflict inspires students to recognize that “the inevitability of conflict is not grounds for despair but the starting point for creating a consciousness in students and teachers through which the inequalities generating those conflicts can be acknowledged and transformed” (119). Since her 1991 essay, scholars have highlighted this need for more argumentation on feminists’ part, and this is becoming more evident today. For example, in her 2015 essay, Andrea Greenbaum offers a more contemporary stance on conflict with what she terms “Bitch Pedagogy,” in which she examines what exactly makes a woman a “bitch,” and posits that women’s authority has permeated the conversation in prominent journals. Greenbaum attempts to reframe the conversation in order to reconstruct a pedagogy of argumentation that will not only produce students with greater competence in communication skills, but also with higher self-esteem. This “bitch pedagogy,” she claims, is a metaphor that shows a woman resisting the stigma against using argumentation strategies to help emancipate women and teach them to speak out and the “rhetorical savvy” to assert themselves, “despite the discomfort of hearing the ultimate epithet leveled against us, at anyone who dares argue persuasively from a position of authority” (Greenbaum 67). Jarratt and Greenbaum’s ideas of conflict and

argumentation for authority largely inform the more intersectional and equitable feminism we are witnessing online today.

Since the 1970s, the feminist movement has gained steam, using popular culture and technology to its advantage. What started in college dorms and young mothers' homes has progressed to widespread online campaigns reaching an audience of not only women of all ages, but also reaches all genders, classes, and races. As feminist composition developed, scholars and pedagogues have adapted their pedagogy to better reflect the aims of both the movement and composition studies. What was effective during the first three waves, such as teaching traditional and academic genres like narrative, no longer reflects today's pedagogical practices or feminism. Today, feminists utilize social media and digital technology to spread their central message of equality and intersectionality on an international scale. Thanks to the Internet, we have access to (and create) a massive amount of content, and instructors can use this access for teaching a variety of genres and assigning readings students are much more likely to come across in their everyday lives as well as write themselves. It is because of the Internet and digital literacy that feminism has become a global movement, with people everywhere communicating with one another to push for equality through campaigns for women's empowerment groups (such as HeForShe) or activism, as we witnessed with the Women's March on Washington that spanned the globe. Digital literacy has been a hot topic in composition studies as scholars have debated what the composition instructor's role is in ensuring students know and understand the ways computers and the Internet inform their writing, and vice versa. This concern with bringing the online and computer world into the writing classroom has led to another branch of composition studies and

pedagogy: multimodality and digital rhetoric.

Access Granted: The Public/Digital Turns and Multimodal/Digital Rhetoric

In 1996, shortly after the Internet became available to the general public, Christina Haas spoke to the “computer revolution” and the unsolved “Technology Question” concerning its impact on how “individuals’ writing experiences with new technologies translate into large-scale, cultural ‘revolutions’” (ix). Haas’s call for better understanding and wisely using technology is still relevant, as social media clearly has a strong influence on nearly all aspects of culture. Because of the political turn we have witnessed in our field, Haas believes we are “moving toward consideration of power relations and cultural ideologies,” a belief that rings true still today (230). However, Haas’ call for more critical study of writing technologies has been answered with the multimodal and digital rhetoric movement.

Composition’s recent turn toward digital and multimodality formed in part in response to the New London Group’s 1996 influential essay, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,” a document which presents a more broad theoretical perspective of students’ ever-changing social environments and offers teachers a pedagogy they call “multiliteracies.” The New London Group’s multiliteracies pedagogy revolutionized the field with its focus on student “access to the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment” (60). The group recognized the ways new media influences language use and therefore calls for “the increasing multiplicity and integration of significant modes of meaning-making, where the textual is also related to the visual, the audio, the spatial, the

behavioral, and so on” (64). This definition of multimodality has stuck, and since then, the digital age has continued to influence the way instructors teach students how to communicate effectively through technology. As composing becomes increasingly entangled with the digital, it is important for instructors to go beyond fostering students’ critical engagement for their personal futures by promoting the kind that works to improve other people’s futures, as the feminist movement has done. While the New London Group’s pedagogy of multiliteracies has done much for composition pedagogy, it has also led to some gaps in assessing and paying attention to the processes that occur in meaning making.

Jody Shipka’s *Toward a Composition Made Whole* attempts to bridge this gap in teaching multimodality and communication in composition studies by asking us to view composition more holistically. In doing so, Shipka alerts us to the overlooked vast boundaries multimodality offers us. In her introduction, she outlines the debate over the particular skills today’s students should develop and the ensuing call for “curricular change” to close “the gap between the numerous and varied communicative practices in which students routinely engage outside of school versus the comparatively narrow repertoire of practices typically associated with the writing classroom” (Shipka 5). While the debate has led to a lot of positive change in academic writing classrooms, Shipka expresses concern that the focus on the digital has limited the definitions of composition itself (8). In narrowly defining technology (and therefore, composition itself), she warns we have also limited our students and overlooked “or undervalu[ed] the meaning-making and learning potentials associated with the uptake and transformation of still other representational systems and technologies” (11). Shipka argues that we should not

discount the changes new technologies have had on how our students and we communicate, nor should we remain fixated on traditional written discourse (17). Shipka's call for hybridization of various modes of communication such as the visual and aural is necessary for engaging the "importance of theoretical, research, and pedagogical frameworks that help to illumine the spatial, temporal, embodied, affective, and material dimensions of writing" (130). Ultimately, Shipka asks us to broaden our understanding of multimodality in order for students to participate in "extremely compelling, purposeful work...that simultaneously challenges and enriches our understanding of the various ways in which, and resources with which, meaning might be made" (135). To continue promoting the New London Group's pedagogy of multiliteracies while also engaging with the hybridization Shipka speaks of, networked feminist discourse can become a path toward engaging students with online discourse that hybridizes modes of communication.

Laugh and Check Your Privilege: Fourth Wave Networked Feminism

In 2014, Micciche noted feminism's percolating fourth wave and its contrast from previous waves, stating that, along with the third wave it "increasingly address[es] a much wider spectrum and entangled set of interests [that] emerge from the material, political, corporeal, and emotional effects of living in a globalized economy characterized by a spectacular disparity between wealthy and impoverished people, corporate interests and workers" (129). She cites feminist writer, filmmaker, and activist Jennifer Baumgardner to define the current wave as "associated with the strategic use of new media to wage politically motivated campaigns for human rights" (Micciche 129). Since 2010, fourth-wave feminism has gained momentum thanks to social networking and has become prevalent in pop culture, the blogosphere, music, fashion, and memes.

Considering the well-established connection between feminism and composition pedagogy and the percolating moments of tectonic change noted in Selfe and Yancey's CCCC keynote addresses, it is time we considered what this new feminist wave has to offer in achieving the hopes previous compositionists envisioned.

Online feminism in particular uses converged new media because communities on the Internet allow for people to form relationships over vast distances and gain access to support networks. These spaces allow for collective writing, thinking, and doing for feminists worldwide. A socially-networked feminism and its various hybridized written products attest to the movement's effective use of rhetoric, such as humor and sarcasm that so completely contrast and yet highlight the seriousness of injustice. Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti say humor is a "weapon" for feminist bloggers to work against the often-preconceived notion and stereotype that feminists are not funny (12). Their term, "culture-jamming," highlights the ways "online activists and bloggers use media like memes to transform popular culture into a tool for social change," which results in young Internet users to move "from passive pop culture consumers to engagers and makers" (12). This new online cultural aspect to feminism has led to a wider spread of its ideology and values on a major scale, in addition to the kinds of writing practices Shipka calls for.

Liz Lane's 2015 article in *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* addresses how historically lost or underrepresented feminist work lend themselves to today's feminist rhetoric in light of hybridized digital/multimodal writing. Looking to Twitter hashtags and feminist grassroots organizing efforts as rhetorical interventions, Lane argues that hybridized writing has shaped this new feminism with efforts to strengthen the presence of feminist rhetoric and challenges to harassment and

attacks in online discourse. The technologies available to women allow for “a more fluid forum for debate and activism,” however, “the conventions of writing, speaking, and interacting in the digital sphere must be challenged and improved” by way of small networked and sustained disruptions that “work to establish a safer, more attentive and respectful forum for voices varying in shape, race, origin, and more.” Lane’s article is just one of many that underscore the percolating shifts in feminist writing and rhetoric that certainly requires more study; however, the conventions she speaks of are ones our students should know. It is these conventions that are worthy of more study, and will be discussed in Chapter 3, which will examine the strategies for Networked Feminist Pedagogy.

Considering the formation and perpetuation of feminist discourse and multimodality, it is clear that fourth wave feminism could greatly inform a composition course focused on multimodality and digital discourse, nontraditional genres, social justice, and intersectionality, especially because—as demonstrated in this section—it engages ongoing concerns and ideas in feminist and digital composition history. By teaching students the conventions of writing, argumentation, and rhetoric through reading “culture jamming” texts and using a pedagogical model similar to Jody Shipka’s, writing pedagogues can successfully complete the objectives of composition while opening our students to appreciating feminist values, all while encouraging them to be more attuned to and participatory in today’s digitally networked writing.

CHAPTER 3

FOURTH WAVE FEMINISM AND PEDAGOGY

The methods and values inspired by fourth wave feminism can help solve the problems and needs of composition and its students today. Implementing fourth wave feminist values and texts in the composition classroom will not only teach students the rhetorical strategies needed for navigating our increasingly digital and technological world, but also encourage collaboration, cooperative learning, reflection, and a redefinition of “argument.” This pedagogical approach is what I am naming a Networked Feminist Pedagogy, so named because of the movement’s hybridized nature existing both online and offline, and because many of the tenets of feminism align well with some of the most effective pedagogical practices. After stating a case for making literacy education advance the cause of fourth wave justice missions, I will envision this Networked Feminist Pedagogy by providing a course rationale as well as its content and assignments. I will then conclude by addressing the challenges and implications of these strategies in the composition classroom.

A Call for Teaching Fourth Wave Feminist Discourse

As outlined in the previous section, fourth wave feminism has brought to surface new aspects to feminist discourse, such as what Elaisaid Munro describes as the rise of a “call-out” and “privilege-checking” culture “indicative of the continuing influence of the third wave, with its focus on micropolitics and challenging sexism and misogyny

insofar as they appear in everyday rhetoric, advertising, film, television and literature, the media, and so on” (23). Munro claims the Internet is a driving force for this likely fourth wave as it has encouraged the formation of a feminist community that spans globally. As young feminists join the ranks, she calls on academics to “consider the effects that new technologies are having on feminist debate and activism” as well as creating a more intersectional feminism free of exclusion (Munro 25). Munro’s essay echoes Courtney Martin and Vanessa Valenti’s work in *#FemFuture: Online Revolution*” in *New Feminist Solutions*, which addresses the implications of fourth wave feminism. Martin and Valenti say that while the explosion of online activism and media helped push feminism further than it ever has gone before, it is not sustainable, and therefore, they argue for “more radical, intentional, and transformative relationships between all of the stakeholders in the feminist movement—the organizers, students, teachers, academics, activists, philanthropists, and online feminists” (4). It seems their 2012 call for stronger relationships between feminists was answered, as the 2017 Women’s March that spanned the globe was successful for that very reason. What remains is establishing transformative relationships between the future potential stakeholders in the feminist movement: our students.

As previously articulated, one of the major aspects of fourth wave feminism that has played a large role in building up the movement is humor. Martin and Valenti argue comedy is a “weapon” feminist bloggers use to work against the often-preconceived notion or stereotype that feminists aren’t funny. The “punchy, sassy writing, tweeting, and memes that online feminists deploy have become the most effective way to engage young people about the seriousness of injustice, using new internet culture to speak back

to pop culture” (13). This “culture jamming” allows online feminists to not only bring about social change but also transform how people engage with and create content (12). One example can be seen in the way feminists took advantage of Mitt Romney’s blunder in the 2012 presidential election to engage in political commentary through memes. Using the “Binders Full of Women” meme as an example for the ways fourth wave feminism “reveals the intimate linkages between feminism, media making, and networked community building in the new media era,” Carrie Rentschler and Samantha Thrift analyze their power to connect people everywhere through humor (330). The meme operates as such “in the form of funny and biting political commentary that is propagated through the channels of social media and in the spaces of online comments” (Rentschler and Thrift 330-331). This is what they call “doing feminism in the network” (331). Their analysis of memes, online comments appearing on sites like Amazon, and posts on Tumblr and Facebook, shows how feminist cultural critique is cultivated. The propagation and production of memes uses humor effectively to open up a seemingly lighthearted, but entirely serious, dialogue about sexism. The humorous writings we see online so often fit in specialized genres aimed at particular audiences, and today’s students can learn from the rhetorical moves its creators employ to become critical engagers of online content as well as writers themselves.

Just as humor has advanced the feminist movement, the desire for intersectionality and inclusion has also become popular and necessary among feminists. These major tenets of feminism are also one and the same as those established in any composition classroom centered on rhetoric, writing, and argumentation. Just as feminists aim to be inclusive and intersectional, so too does composition pedagogy urge students to

read works offering a variety of perspectives, and not merely the often-whitewashed and male-centric canonized literature. By praising writing by those marginalized or ignored, both feminists and compositionists have opened students to perspectives that are not only vastly different from their own, but also better represent the increasingly diverse and connected world they live in.

Reading and listening to marginalized voices is important, as it encourages students to critically think about the structures that welcome or contain them and consider how they can resist them. To examine the ways political blogging and social media have allowed marginalized people to unite, popular Pakistani blogger Mehreen Kasana considers the various ways Palestinian and Pakistani bloggers came together in recent years to lend each other political support after being attacked online. She argues that as lines of communication grow and develop all over the world, political activist groups use it to their benefit. This diversity and alignment of voices led to what Kasana calls a “transnational solidarity” (237). Like the aforementioned scholars, Kasana also agrees that humor and social media are powerful tools for social justice and feminism. Just as other feminist bloggers use humor to fight patriarchal values, bloggers all over Pakistan, Palestine, Afghanistan, and other countries used satire and sarcasm to resist “racist and sexist imagery with actual photos, videos, and news of Muslim women doing wonderful things” on sites such as the blog, *Oppressed Brown Girls Doing Things* (238). Kasana considers humor as a tool of redirection and a way for marginalized people to obtain agency over how they are perceived. Kasana reminds us that social media and the Internet cannot be the sole vehicle for social justice, as “it requires the help of those offline and those with access to academia and other venues where individuals are

informed and educated about these issues” (241). In other words, it requires people like composition instructors and our students.

While a strong feminist online presence is useful for resisting sexism and racism, Kasana reminds us of the “digital gap between online feminists and offline feminists who for political, economic, and social reasons do not have access to the same sphere that we do” and argues for a strengthening of online and offline activism that will connect those who really need this brand of feminism (248). This online “safe space” in which women can speak up highlights “the importance of this online-community-based feminist network that goes all over Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, Wordpress, and more to combat sexism effectively” (247). One example Kasana gives of feminists creating an online safe space is the way they reacted to the Steubenville High School rape case, as they “justifiably attacked and shut down sexists who, bolstered by rape culture, chose to blame the young girl instead of the rapists” (Kasana 247). She continues, “These contributors of moral support and rallying for rape victims and countering other cases of misogyny was vital to diminishing the power of sexists online and offline” (247). Kasana and the aforementioned scholars’ calls for continued work in networked feminism that connects people internationally as well as online and offline reflects intersectionality as one of the major tenets of fourth wave feminism. In addition to responding to feminist digital and public writing concerns, we must also ensure our pedagogical practices answer the needs and challenges of fourth wave feminism itself by promoting inclusivity, intersectionality, and activism.

Networked Feminist Pedagogy

Fourth wave feminism should inform feminist composition because the values it

promotes can inspire students to learn the rhetorical savvy required for making their own voice heard and use it to help others without a voice. Networked feminism has brought with it humor, culture jamming, and the rise and spread of call-out culture and privilege checking, and compositionists have an opportunity to use it in a classroom centered on social justice. Using fourth-wave feminist values, students can experience the importance of social justice in our digital, multimodal world while also attending to the main goals of composition teaching: genre, identification, evaluation, analysis, creation, and audience awareness.

In this kind of classroom, discussions would center on the ways the Internet is used as a space for conversation and activism, and not just by feminists but also all underrepresented groups. What follows is what I imagine Networked Feminist Pedagogy would look like in a composition classroom concentrated on writing tasks that open up a dialogue about effective social and political critique and culminates in final projects in which students choose their own social justice issue. This course would use feminism as a model for the future of composition that aligns the Internet with written communication outside of the network. Analyzing pop culture, fashion, tweets, memes, collective blogs, online feminist portfolios, grants, and other digital and online artifacts will impart upon students the significance of genre and audience awareness. Students can choose an issue or organization they care about early on in the semester which would lead them to completing a final project, such as a research essay about a social justice issue and how people are working to combat it; an online portfolio about an issue or organization; or an online writing project (such as a Wordpress blog or Twitter account) taking cues from current online feminists. Updating and building upon already-established feminist

pedagogy and methodology such as collaboration, power dynamics, listening, and dialogue, a Networked Feminist Pedagogy will help this generation of college students learn skills needed for success beyond the classroom – critical thinking, rhetorical knowledge, audience awareness, multimodality and computer skills, and a strong sense of voice.

At the beginning of a fourth wave feminist course, instructors would need to allow students to have a voice in the way the classroom is set up by asking them what makes for an inclusive, effective, democratic, and positive learning environment. For a long time, feminist compositionists have championed establishing respect in the classroom. Considering the recent rise in hate speech both online and offline, a Networked Feminist class certainly needs to set ground rules for an environment that encourages students to speak freely and view each other (and their instructor) as always-developing scholars. This way, students begin the semester with clear guidelines that promote respect and awareness that the foundation of the course relies on their collaboration with one another. Additionally, the physical environment should reflect feminist values and encourage diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and respect. One way instructors can do this is ask students to change their classroom layout in such a way that ensures all members can see and hear one another, such as arranging themselves in a circle. From this point forward, students understand they need to keep each other in check as well as hold the instructor accountable for perpetuating a safe space in which students can engage in open debate without judgment.

As previously mentioned, readings for a fourth wave course would involve texts that promote feminist values. Students can work together to identify the rhetorical

strategies used to start conversations about sexism through humor in memes, on Twitter, and comic artists' Instagram accounts. Dissecting the growth and development of Facebook event pages for marches and protests such as the Women's March that in turn led to the domino effect of local march event pages will help students see the life cycle of an event. Analyzing feminist artifacts will allow students to witness argumentation in its most popular form – in comments, as it often starts with one person's attempt to counteract an Internet troll's fallacy-riddled comments through statements supported by facts, statistics, and strong logic. Primary source analysis can come in the form of advertisements, grant documents, or court cases that will encourage strong research methods to support students' claims about more public, secondary pieces of composition such as opinion articles, blog posts, PolitiFact articles, Twitter threads reacting to the latest threat against human rights, and memes. In keeping with the course's values, instructors can and should ask for student involvement in course readings. Once students have analyzed a variety of texts of the instructor's choice, then they can begin bringing their own unique examples of strong, effective arguments to analyze together as a class. By breaking down the rhetorical life cycle of a digital artifact, students will cultivate stronger multimodal and digital literacy practices that will benefit them inside and outside the classroom as well as online.

To achieve the substantial amount of writing and participation students must do in a college-level course, instructors can assign tasks that can build toward the culminating project. For example, students can participate in structured in-class debates and peer-writing workshops to change their perceptions of argumentation. By encouraging a variety of perspectives, we can draw students away from the common misconception that

there are only two sides to an argument and teach them to carefully consider all sides rather than the two loudest ones. As a result, they will not only learn the nuances of rhetorical strategy, but also ensure they are being inclusive and intersectional in their own compositions. Another assignment could involve a weeklong writing-tracking journal in which, much like a food diary, students note where, when, and on what media they write. They may be surprised to find their writing comes in a variety of forms, ranging from the academic type such as a paper for History class, to emails to professors about an absence or to fraternity members about an upcoming fundraiser, to the social such as a witty comment on an uncle's shared YouTube video post, to the personal in the form of a to-do list. Tracking their writing and asking them to reflect on the rhetorical strategies they are already using will perhaps shift their thinking about rhetoric as existing only in the classroom or academia to knowing they and everyone else use it all the time. Additionally, assignments such as this one can urge students to reflect on how they could have done a better job convincing their uncle that his post had racist undertones or sounded more formal in their desperate email to professors to achieve a better result.

Networked Feminist Pedagogy would serve as an extension of current feminist composition methodologies and pedagogy all while achieving the aims of the composition course focused on teaching students to critically engage with and create in an increasingly digital world. At the end of the course, students will not only have gained rhetorical and writing skills that will serve them well in their futures, but also a heightened awareness of the power their unique voices can have on the world in big or small ways. Their final project in which students imagine ways to bring about social change or assist an organization currently working for social justice aims will improve

their information literacy and awareness of the ways they can critically contribute to any and all places or spaces lacking information. Their work on listening to the needs of their issue or organization and upending the too often binary perceptions of argument will speak back to Yancey's hopes and those of fourth wave feminist activists. By learning ways they can use their voice to promote change and then applying that knowledge in their final projects, students will learn the great extent to which their roles as informed citizens and community members can benefit society, and this knowledge will serve them well in their own futures and that of others. Injecting more well-informed and critically engaged thinkers into the mainstream will hopefully help usher in the peace Yancey dreams of while also furthering the current feminist movement's desire for inclusion, intersectionality, and activism.

Challenges and Implications of Networked Feminist Pedagogy

As with any course, there will be challenges. One apparent challenge is that students may be resistant to taking a course deemed "feminist." If instructors decide to name the course this way and face resistance to it, then they can and should ask students to discuss why there is disdain for that word in the first place as well as ask them to do research on feminist movements. This first step in learning about the course's values and developing basic research skills will hopefully shift students' thinking about the course and their perceptions of what feminism actually means. From there, they can begin thinking of the course with a wider scope, as the feminist movement has greatly benefited the *human* rights movement. On the other hand, it may even be the instructors themselves who may be uncomfortable with addressing the course's feminist undertones or even naming it as such. If their readings are incredibly diverse throughout the semester,

perhaps students will be surprised when finding out they completed a course classified as feminist at the very end and will reflect back on it feeling less adverse about the word.

Another challenge the course content may pose for instructors is assessment. It is impossible for instructors to grade in a straightforward manner when students address issues that are not black and white and complete multimodal projects that appear to be more creative than academic. To address this, we can return to Jody Shipka's book in which she discusses how she evaluated her students' doll projects. Shipka asked her students to design the packaging for a doll that represented their identities. She was clear in telling them she would not grade based on artistic ability, but rather on whether or not they spent time engaging with the task itself, using the box "wisely and purposefully," and their completed statement outlining their goals for the task (141). Shipka says, "What is most important is, first, that students come away from the experience of the course more mindful of the various ways in which individuals work with, as well as against, the meditational means they employ" and equally important "is that students can articulate for others the purposes and potentials of their work" (145). Shipka's strategy for assessing multimodal projects not only pushes students to set goals for themselves (a skill they will certainly need their entire lives), but also asks them to be more involved in assessment and reflective. Just as students would collaborate with one another throughout this type of course, each student would collaborate with the instructor on how they should be fairly assessed. This involvement in their own assessment of a well-researched, persuasive, aware, and appealing multimodal project will hopefully encourage students to take away much more from the course than just a letter grade on their official transcript.

In bringing a Networked Feminist Pedagogy to composition studies,

compositionists can teach students how to combat intersectionality and exclusion by showing them how to give voice to those still marginalized. Feminism is just one example of many ideologies born out of the social tradition that has paid attention to technology and answered Yancey's call. The feminist movement continues to do so as it moves forth in its public, fourth-wave turn today with a steady stance toward activism and social justice. Composition studies have for years supplied students and pedagogues with the tools necessary for success both in and beyond the classroom. Networked Feminist Pedagogy is just one perspective compositionists can offer to circulate not only the traditional aims of composition in the classroom but also a fresher, more current take on it that will be extremely beneficial to today's tech-savvy, multimodal students. Selfe and Yancey's keynote addresses are still relevant today as the Internet continues to shape our culture, and their calls to action parallels feminism's aims and values. Feminists have, for quite a while now, used this online culture to their benefit – it is high time that compositionists did so as well.

WORKS CITED

- Domonoske, Camila. "Students Have 'Dismaying' Inability to Tell Fake News From Real, Study Finds." *NPR*, 23 Nov 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/23/503129818/study-finds-students-have-dismaying-inability-to-tell-fake-news-from-real>
- Greenbaum, Andrea. "'Bitch' Pedagogy: Agonistic Discourse and the Politics of Resistance." *Emancipatory Movements in Composition: The Rhetoric of Possibility*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, pp. 49-67.
- Haas, Christina. "The Technology Question." *Writing Technology: Studies on the Materiality of Literacy*, Mahwah N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1996, pp. 3-23.
- Jarratt, Susan C. "Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict." *Contending with Words: Composition in Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Eds. Patricia Harkin and John Schib. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1991. pp. 105-123.
- Kasana, Mehreen. "Feminisms and the Social Media Sphere." *Women's Studies Quarterly*. vol. 2, no. 3/4, 2014.
- Lane, Liz. "Feminist Rhetoric in the Digital Sphere: Digital Interventions and the Subversion of Gendered Cultural Scripts" *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, no. 8, 2015.
- Martin, Courtney and Vanessa Valenti. "#FemFuture: Online Revolution." *New Feminist Solutions*. New York: Barnard Center for Research on Women, Columbia University, vol. 8, 2012.
- Micciche, Laura. "Feminist Pedagogies." *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, edited by Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper Taggart, Kurt Schick, and H. Brooke Hessler. 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2014, pp. 128-145.
- Munro, Elasaïd. "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?" *Political Insight* vol. 4, no. 2, 2013, pp. 22-25.
- National Council of Teachers of English*. NCTE.org
- New London Group. "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 66 no.1, 1996, pp. 60-92.

Rentschler, Carrie and Samantha Thrift. "Doing Feminism in the Network: Networked Laughter and the 'Binders Full of Women' Meme." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2015, pp. 329-359.

Selfe, Cynthia L. "Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1999, pp. 411-436.

Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011.

Wineburg, Sam, et al. "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning." *Stanford Digital Repository*. 22 Nov 2016.
<http://purl.stanford.edu/fv751yt5934>

Yancey, Kathleen. "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2004, pp. 297-328. *JSTOR*.