
Reviewed by Wendy Sharer, East Carolina University

This is an ambitious collection, and its breadth makes it an excellent resource for those new to feminist rhetorical studies. I was not surprised to learn, as Eileen Schell explains in her introduction, that the book grew out of a graduate seminar. While the essays span a variety of topics, several common goals hold them together: challenging the coercive forces of “normality”; recognizing and celebrating the embodied nature of experience; and prioritizing ethical engagement with the subjects of research. As the title of the collection suggests, the majority of the chapters address research issues in rhetorical studies and thus do not offer direct insights for the writing classroom; however, many of the methods and methodologies discussed draw on the kinds of critical reading and writing practices many of us foster in our composition classrooms. In fact, the final chapter of the collection is a “Pedagogical Postscript” that, as elaborated below, provides excellent insights and practical suggestions for how feminist research methods and methodologies can enrich writing instruction.

The first part of the collection, “Theoretical and Methodological Challenges,” includes four pieces that explore ways to expand the work that feminist scholars have already done in rhetorical studies. Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson identify parallels between feminism and disability studies. As feminist historians of Rhetoric and Composition have challenged models that position male bodies at the heart of the rhetorical tradition, so too have scholars in disability studies undermined the assumption that one type of body is normal or naturally superior to others. As feminist theorists have questioned the passive positioning of female research subjects, so too have disability theorists challenged the passive positioning of disabled bodies in research. Feminists and disability studies scholars also share the goal of critiquing normative terminology. Feminists have exposed the essentializing potential of the category “woman,” just as scholars of disability studies have worked to reveal the complex identities traditionally lumped together within the category of the “disabled.” Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson urge further collaboration between feminists and scholars of disability studies within Rhetoric as both groups seek to “read against the practices that produce normalizing categories of all kinds” (38).

In “Queering Feminist Rhetorical Canonization,” K.J. Rawson continues the discussion of feminist challenges to normative categories by calling for
work that complicates the male/female binary that has informed much feminist historical work in Rhetoric. To trouble this persistent binary, Rawson uses “transgender critique,” an application of queer theory. Rather than using the categories “female” or “woman,” Rawson recommends that feminist scholars explore rhetorical history through the lens—and the multiple, shifting meanings—of gender.

Concerns about unquestioned privilege also inform Wendy Hesford’s critique of Western bias in feminist rhetorical scholarship. Because Western feminists tend to be the ones who have the freedom and capital to travel, they tend to be the ones who represent the conditions of other women’s lives around the globe. To counter the tradition of Western bias in international feminism, Hesford calls for the development of “a transnational feminist analytic” that “reads across contexts and focuses particular attention on how arguments travel across cultural and national borders” (62). Such an analytical framework would keep feminist scholars attuned to conditions that might allow for only certain viewpoints to circulate.

Ilene Crawford’s study of literacy practices among contemporary Vietnamese women illustrates the importance of the kind of “transnational feminist analytic” that Hesford calls for. While Western views of Vietnam lead to readings of that society through the legacy of the Vietnam War, Crawford’s research suggests that the rhetorical practices of Vietnamese women are much more influenced by technologies and economies of the twenty-first century than they are by Vietnam’s turbulent past. Crawford’s work aims to displace the “codified images and terms” that mass media and popular discourse have placed in the forefront of Western approaches to Vietnam (72).

The second part of the collection, “Reflective Applications,” provides what its name promises: detailed examples of applied feminist rhetorical methods. Kathleen Ryan describes a “feminist pragmatic rhetoric”—a collection of research practices emphasizing “situated knowledge making and acting in the world to better the world” (90)—that she has used in her previous work, and, later in the section, Joanne Addison explores ways that feminist empirical researchers can practice “strong objectivity”—a concept drawn from feminist standpoint theory that suggests that a researcher should gather various perspectives on a problem in order to put those perspectives into conversation to reach rich, although never definitive or truly objective, conclusions. One method to employ in the service of strong objectivity, Addison explains, is “experience sampling,” “a technique that allows researchers to gather real-time data about what a specified group of people is doing and how those people feel about what they are doing within everyday settings” (145).

In a chapter that blends discussion of methodology and method, clearly echoing some of the conversations in Part 1 of the collection, Bernadette
Calafell explains how she has created what she calls “a homeplace” within the academy by actively engaging her identity in her research methods. Drawing on Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, bell hooks, and others, Calafell explains the importance of feminist methods that embrace the identity struggles women of color face when attempting to enter academic conversations, conversations that have long privileged distance and disengagement from embodied experience. Effacing the body in research practices, Calafell emphasizes, leaves unexplored the dominant position of the white, male, heterosexual body in academic research.

Ethical issues surrounding feminist research methods also receive significant attention in Part 2. Frances Ranney’s chapter, for example, details a dilemma she faced when researching an organization that assisted once-wealthy women who found themselves in need of financial assistance during the Great Depression. In exploring the organization’s archives, Ranney and her co-researchers discovered files detailing the case of “Fontia R.” Although the discourses of conspicuous consumption and eugenics that inform Fontia R.’s situation are fascinating, Ranney hesitates to tell Fontia R.’s story because doing so does not seem to be in keeping with a feminist “ethic of care” for the research subject (124). To address this dilemma, Ranney puts forth a research method she calls “imagin-activation,” a way of reading archival materials that, as Gwen Gorzelsky explains in a lucid response to Ranney’s rather complex chapter, puts those materials and the people who produced them into conversation with “culturally constructed images, perceptions, beliefs, and investments,” so that archival research becomes less about discussing the actions and beliefs of individuals and more about analyzing how those actions and beliefs come to be and come to be known through cultural constructs.

Heidi McKee and James Porter also address ethical concerns of feminist researchers. More specifically, they examine the work of three researchers who study interactions in online groups. Drawing on the research practices of these scholars, McKee and Porter identify six characteristics of ethical feminist research: a commitment to social justice and improvement of the circumstances for the participants; careful and respectful treatment of research participants; critically reflexive use of research methods; flexibility in identifying and carrying out research projects; dialogic approaches, such as inviting participants to “join in the decision-making process” of the research; and transparency, or a willingness “to acknowledge and make visible the complexities of the process of research” (170).

McKee and Porter note that, in interviewing two of the three researchers they studied, “neither researcher explicitly mentioned their views as informed by ‘feminist research.’ Rather, both researchers articulated their positions in terms of the criteria for good research in general” (166). Indeed, this articulation seems to be true about the methods and methodologies discussed.
throughout the collection—these are feminist research practices, but they are also good research practices in general because they address some of the troubling aspects of “traditional” research methods. Feminist research methods, like the feminist methodologies they grow out of, challenge the norms of research practice so that privilege and omissions performed within those norms of practice might be exposed and undermined.

The collection concludes with a “Pedagogical Postscript,” an engaging exploration of how feminist rhetorical methods and methodologies might influence the teaching of writing. Laura Micciche explains how the concept of play, as constructed in the work of Donna Haraway, might inform a feminist writing pedagogy. Play has immense potential for writing instruction because it is a means by which writers foster “intentional ambiguity,” or spaces where meanings are troubled, unsettled, created, and recreated (175). Interestingly, “play,” as Micciche describes it, is reminiscent of the feminist rhetorical methods and methodologies discussed earlier in the collection, methods and methodologies aimed at problematizing the “normal” and troubling binaries. When the “normal” is undermined and when the spaces between the dichotomous poles are inhabited through play, feminist researchers can discover new and important meanings. Micciche asks readers to consider the benefits of asking students to try similar strategies. She suggests that writing instructors integrate more opportunities for students to, as feminists do, use interruption as a political tool, employ fiction strategically in critical writing and engage the affective, embodied aspects of writing. The chapter closes with sample assignments designed to promote play in the writing classroom, and fulfills Micciche’s goal of “describing ways of doing feminist rhetorics in writing courses” (184).

_Rhetorica in Motion_ covers an incredible span of methods and methodologies, but it does so in a way that allows the reader to make connections across them all and to envision an ethical but productively troubling journey for feminist rhetorical studies in the future.

*Greenville, NC*


Reviewed by Keith Rhodes, Grand Valley State University

_Vision, Rhetoric, and Social Action in the Composition Classroom_ (Vision) is a compelling work, both in content and approach. The title plainly describes the content, even if the richness with which Kristie Fleckenstein connects