

THE QUEER ART & RHETORIC OF CONSENT: THEORIES, PRACTICES,
PEDAGOGIES

By

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

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The Queer Art & Rhetoric of Consent is a collection of nonfiction essays on consent in feminist and LGBTQ culture and communities. Through storytelling, grounded in LGBTQ and feminist rhetorics, this project examines the elements of consent across contexts (personal, professional, political). This inquiry into consent uses many of the possible voices in nonfiction essays—theoretical, personal, lyric, place-based—attempting to get at the heart of the matter of consent. I draw on community-based theories and histories of consent to position consent as a set of teachable practices for creating more respectful, reciprocal, and accountable relationships. I use scholarship, archival research, and literature (essays, memoir, poetry, zines) to develop ideas about consent (which I call the elements of consent). Queer theories of consent extend popular theories of sexual consent as “no means no” or “yes means yes,” even extending beyond sexual contexts. I explore the tensions between pleasure and danger, which have confounded feminist and LGBTQ communities, causing conflict over differing ideas about the potential of consent. To do so, I trace consent through cultural histories, reflect on the elements of consent in my personal life, and weigh in on debates about consent in higher education and LGBTQ community spaces. Out of these stories and this research, I develop “Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop.”

ABSTRACT

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The Queer Art & Rhetoric of Consent is a multi-genre collection of nonfiction essays on consent in feminist and queer culture and communities. Through storytelling, grounded in LGBTQ and feminist rhetorics, this project examines the elements of consent across contexts (personal, professional, political). This inquiry into consent makes use of many of the possible voices in nonfiction essays—theoretical, personal, lyric, place-based—attempting to get at the heart of the matter of consent. I draw on community-based theories and histories of consent to position consent as a set of teachable practices for creating more respectful, reciprocal, and accountable relationships. My theoretical framework for understanding consent includes LGBTQ and feminist rhetorics, and community-based theories and pedagogies. I use scholarship, archival research, and literature (essays, memoir, poetry) to develop rhetorical theories of consent that extend popular theories of sexual consent as “no means no” or “yes means yes,” even extending beyond sexual contexts. I explore the tensions between pleasure and danger, which have confounded feminist and LGBTQ communities, causing conflict over differing ideas about the potential of consent. To do so, I trace consent through cultural histories, reflect on the elements of consent in my personal life, and weigh in on debates about consent in higher education and LGBTQ community spaces. Out of these theoretical essays, I develop “Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop.”

Consent has most often been theorized in terms of its relationship to the element of danger (as in sexual assault policies, or the processes of institutional review and

informed consent in research). However, consent actually has a multitude of elements, each of which deserve consideration in developing theories and histories of consent. Some of the elements of consent examined in this collection include: boundaries, desire, being present, power, pleasure, danger, disclosure, risk, and access. My findings introduce complexities to community-based theories and histories of consent, developing consent beyond the sexual elements, and inviting people to understand consent as a set of practices we can be doing all the time. Examining consent across multiple contexts reveals consent to be more than a negotiation among individuals being aware of their power, privilege, and desires, and deciding to say yes or no to sex. This project also has implications for community-based research and teaching, in terms of how academics approach consent in research and teaching relationships. Examining consent in feminist and LGBTQ community spaces means tracing theories and histories of consent in the Sex Wars, which are largely unfamiliar to scholars in Rhetoric and Writing Studies. This project invites Rhetoric and Writing Studies to take queer theories and histories of consent into account, respecting and valuing them as central.

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Let’s put our heads together on a project soon.

Kathleen Ann Livingston

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INTRODUCTION:

Consent is Queer Community-based Rhetoric

Consent has often been talked about in terms of its relationship to pleasure and danger,¹ to sex and violence, “yes” and “no.” In their 2008 collection *Yes Means Yes*, feminist bloggers Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti suggest existing understandings of consent focus too much on sexual danger². Calling affirmative consent (or “yes means yes”) “a hole that needed to be filled in feminist discourse about violence against women,” Friedman and Valenti play with the tendency of contemporary feminists in the U.S. to focus on sexual danger, instead seeking to transform feminist discourse on rape from a paradigm where “no means no” to one where “yes means yes³.”

Affirmative consent has been woven into public policy—as in, California’s recent law, which says only “yes means yes” when it comes to sex⁴, as in sexual assault and sexual harassment policies on campus⁵, or the processes of institutional review and informed consent in research⁶. The guiding premise of this essay collection is there are elements of consent beyond sexual pleasure and danger. Consent also has to do with boundaries and limits, power, desire, vulnerability, disclosure, risk, access, shame, histories.

After leaving downriver, a group of suburbs south of Detroit, after coming out into LGBTQ community spaces, first as gay, then as a lesbian, then as a dyke, and finally, as a queer femme, I started to get the sense life in feminist and queer culture involves a lot of arguments⁷. The Sex Wars, a period of intense conflict over issues of sexuality in U.S. feminist and queer communities were supposedly over, but it was pretty clear no one had won.⁸ Even as students in Women’s Studies, we didn’t unpack what the Sex Wars meant for feminist discourse on sex,⁹ so we kept on having the same

arguments over and over again. In *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex*, Lynne Huffer calls for an acknowledgement of the “oft-noted, aegis-creating, persistently repeated splitting of queers away from feminists” and a “restored queer feminism.”¹⁰ I also have an issue with accepting as essential the rift among feminists and queers, rooted in the Sex Wars and seemingly irreconcilable. What would it take to mend the conflicts between feminists and queer people, I asked at the beginning of this project on consent. It’s quite amazing to think I once hoped practicing consent could do that. Through researching the Sex Wars, I learned consent is at the crux of many of the arguments between feminists and queer people. So, a better question would be, *what is the radical potential of consent?*

If nothing else, answering this question reveals information about where one stands. What attracted me to the topic of consent was realizing different understandings of consent are at the root of conflicts over sexuality in feminist and queer culture and communities. Throughout, my purpose has been to offer stories, theories, and histories on the rhetoric of consent, developing a conceptual framework for queer feminist theories of consent beyond sexual pleasure and danger. What I think of as *the elements of consent* are a conceptual framework, by no means exhaustive, some of the ways in which consent comes up in practice. It is not so much that I want to “move beyond” affirmative consent, which is only now being slowly taken up in U.S. public policy and education in any widespread way, but more that I want to explore unexamined angles in the conversations on consent; and I will do so by telling stories, grounded in queer and feminist communities, theories, histories, and rhetorics. Positioning consent as rhetorical, this work examines the elements of consent across contexts—personal, professional, and political—without leaving the sexual elements behind.

When I talk about consent as rhetorical, what I mean to point out is how people use our available languages, our bodies, our power, privilege, and desires in negotiations about relationships, whether we are conscious of it or not. When I talk about consent in LGBTQ communities, or consent as queer community-based rhetoric, I mean to say my understanding of consent draws not only on academic queer theory, but also on personal experiences and stories, practices I learned in LGBTQ community spaces and relationships, archival research, literature, and public discourse (often community-based arguments) about sexuality and consent. From the women's bookstore where I bought my first sex toy, to the LGBT community center where I began to understand how race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability pile into one messy, contentious, ugly-beautiful place, to MichFest, a site of contentious arguments on trans inclusion, and a piece of land where those of a certain lesbian feminist persuasion used to go to play and find respite, these stories about consent are located in ongoing conversations LGBTQ people and feminists have been having in community spaces.

This essay will lay out a framework for thinking about consent as queer community-based rhetoric. Throughout the process of writing this collection, it has seemed clear to me that the arguments of the Sex Wars have important things to teach rhetoric and composition about consent. Consider, for example, the moment at the Barnard Sex Conference, where anti-porn and pro-sex feminists intellectually battled over whose version of sex we're talking about, when we talk about feminist sexualities.¹¹ That moment is ripe with information about power, desire, boundaries, risk, shame... and ultimately reveals different understandings of the radical potential of consent. In order to show you what's at stake in learning about consent, I will first locate the issue of consent in queer rhetorics, or what Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace (2009) have called "the queer turn" in rhetoric and composition¹², answering

the question what do sex and consent have to do with rhetoric? Then, I will discuss my methodologies in terms of theories of ethical relationships among community-based scholars in the discipline (Monberg, 2009; Reynolds, 2007; Powell, 2002). Finally, I'd like to briefly discuss "Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop," which is one of the practical results of this project, and other implications for writing teachers.

What if the "Queer Turn" in Rhetoric and Composition was a Turn Toward Queer Sex?

The question I often get, when talking about what we have to learn from theories and histories of consent, is what does sex have to do with rhetoric and writing? What Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace (2009) mean to describe when they talk about "the queer turn" in rhetoric and composition is how LGBTQ people's lives, histories, and theories have slowly begun to be taken up in the discipline.¹³ Consent is a queer theory of sexuality, the idea that there is no play without power, but people can learn to negotiate our power, desires, needs, boundaries, limits, disclosure, risk, access (and so on) by negotiating the terms of relationships openly.

Power, especially, is relevant to rhetoric and writing studies. In "Stolen from Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic" Qwo-Li Driskill critiques colonial power, the power of violence and oppression¹⁴. In other instances, disciplinary scholars have acknowledged the difficulties of negotiating power related to their identities, with those of their students. In "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, and Sexuality" Gibson, Marinara, and Meem (2000) detail the experiences of three writing teachers, each writing from their own unique positions¹⁵. Gibson, Marinara, and Meem argue for fluidity and multiplicity of identities among writing teachers, suggesting we must "stay conscious of the way those identities interact with the identities our students bring."¹⁶ The essays in this

collection, especially the cultural history of consent in the Sex Wars, contribute understandings of the element of power, as it relates to practicing consent. These queer community-based understandings of power come from queer and sex-positive feminist communities.

Jonathan Alexander's (2008) work in *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies* positions sex and sexuality as valid sites of inquiry among compositionists, alongside race, class, gender, and disability¹⁷. The theory of "sexual literacy" both makes queer theory and, more importantly, LGBTQ people's lives relevant to writing students, and means LGBTQ people don't have to shut parts of ourselves off in order to teach. This theory brought me into the discipline, offering new ways of being both a queer person and a writing teacher, beyond the important question of whether to come out in the classroom (a question I see as related to consent, of how to use the power of our position as writing teachers to invoke queer responses, questions of identity, and connections to communities (see Elliott 1996; Gibson, Marinara, and Meem, 2000). Given Alexander's idea that "sex itself is a complex literacy event," educating oneself about consent can be thought of as part of sexual literacy.¹⁸ What if, fantasized, the "queer turn" was a turn toward queer sex?

As I've said before, consent has to do with how people consciously use our languages, bodies, power, privilege, and desires to negotiate relationships. Sex is rhetorical because it involves the art of persuading other people of the urgency of one's desire (pleasures, needs). Consent is what happens when we find our desires (pleasures, needs) respected and reciprocated, acknowledging that persuasion, or sexual ethos¹⁹, is different than manipulation, and consciously working to know our own power and use it well. The radical potential of consent, of course, depends on one's context.

Theories of Ethical Relationships among Community-based Scholars in Rhet/Comp

One summer at the LGBT community center, one of the places where I grew up as a baby dyke, some of us made our money by taking surveys and being interviewed, mostly by intrepid and well-meaning social scientists. We called this being “gay for pay.” It was a way for LGBTQ youth to make a little bit of quick money by telling our stories. I’m not trying to say those empirical research projects were exploitative. What I will say is they were largely irrelevant to changing the material conditions of queer youth’s lives. After the researchers left, they rarely or never checked in. If I ever saw what they wrote, or learned how the information was used, I don’t remember it²⁰.

When academic researchers talk about consent, it tends to be in the dry, institutional language of institutional review and informed consent. Traditional understandings of consent in academic research mandate only a brief bit of self-education about histories of violence and a brief negotiation with participants, laying out the benefits and risks of research (see *The Belmont Report*). This negotiation is mediated by documents, written agreements between researchers and community members, or participants. The problem with traditional understandings of consent in research, and how they tend to translate into research practices, is not that some kinds of research are inherently exploitative, or oppressive, and some are less so; the problem with traditional understandings of consent in research (as a brief negotiation over documents) is: flattening out the bodies (people) who practice consent by limiting consent to a brief presentation of the benefits and risks limits a robust set of theoretical and practical elements in unnecessary, and potentially risky ways.

Community-based scholars in rhetoric and composition have already focused significant attention on building ethical relationships. These relationships include respectful relationships to our histories, ancestors, and the land we’re on (Powell 2012), relationships built on reciprocity (Cushman 1996; Cushman, Powell, Takayoshi, 2004;

Riley Mukavetz, 2014), on listening (Powell 2002; Royster 2000; Glenn 2004; Monberg 2008; Ratcliffe 2005), and on dwelling (Reynolds 2004). When Malea Powell writes, “this is a story,” in “Listening to Ghosts: An Alternative (Non) Argument” she reminds us all histories (and herstories) are rhetorical (2002, 11). The understanding from the discipline that histories are always partial, and depend on who is telling the story, informed how I approached this project. Theorizing consent was never about developing a complete theory; it is about calling for conversations on consent, which will hopefully invoke more theories and histories. This project on consent began when I had read the community-based work on building ethical relationships, and we had not talked explicitly about consent.

Disciplinary theories of rhetorical listening made my work on queer community-based theories of consent possible by revealing how much community scholars in rhetoric and writing value the role of consent in university-community relationships. When Terese Guinsatao Monberg describes listening in terms of using the words a community member used to describe herself, rather than words that might more seamlessly help to make an academic argument, I believe she does so out of knowing the power of representation (2008, 89). In listening to a community member, Monberg respects the integrity of their relationship by using the language Dorothy Laigo Cordova uses to define her experience. In LGBTQ communities where I am from, we consider listening (in this case, respecting a community member’s power to define themselves through language) a matter of consent.

Nedra Reynolds’ theory of “dwelling” in communities, reflexively developing trust in relationships with people and places / spaces over time, also helped locate the theories and histories of consent I lay out here in rhetoric and writing studies. One of

my critiques of traditional understandings of consent in academic research has been how the processes of institutional review and informed consent, meant to protect historically marginalized communities in particular from exploitative, unethical research, violence, or harm, actually tend to privilege researchers. Once a participant has signed the informed consent documents and, if the researcher is operating under the purview of an institutional review board, discussed the benefits and risks, it can be difficult to take participation back. Putting into practice Reynolds' theory of dwelling, which invites researchers to spend more time in the communities where we do our work, could also encourage what feminist anti-violence activists call affirmative consent (2007; Friedman and Valenti 2008).

There is more work to be done on how queer understandings of consent can revise standard practices of informed consent, especially in community-based research. As feminist and queer public discourse on consent makes clear, consent is more than a momentary negotiation over access (to a site, a community space, people's lives). What I want is for community-based and queer rhetorics scholarship to take queer theories and histories of consent into account.

Queer Community-based Methodologies and Pedagogies

As queer rhetorics scholars, one of our challenges is to connect across geographical distances. The internet, when I've had access to it, and books, especially literature given to me in community spaces, have helped me to negotiate the distance. Doing queer work requires making what may seem to be strange connections across contexts, fields, and disciplines. I believe these frameworks for understanding complex topics are fluid, even if the academic job market tells us otherwise. That's why you might find me reading queer rhetorics and community-based scholarship in rhetoric and composition, in one moment,

and public discourse on sexual assault policies on college campuses the next. These are stories (and there are many more) about how I came to understand consent as queer rhetorics, which became a multi-genre collection of essays on the topic of consent.

By queer rhetorics, what I mean is LGBTQ people and communities are part of rhetorical traditions, and our stories and lives need to be valued and respected, not as peripheral, but as central. Queer rhetorics, or what Cox and Faris (2015) recently called LGBTQ studies in the discipline of rhetoric and composition focus on situating inquiries on queerness in the material conditions of LGBTQ people's lives. Much of our foundational work as queer rhetoricians has been careful to try and avoid the perils of identity politics, and attentive in mentioning the place of queer theory among straight rhetoricians, and in hetero-normative institutions and discursive spaces (Morrison 1992; Kopelson 2002; Gibson, Marinara, and Meem 2000; Alexander 2008; Alexander and Rhodes 2012). That is, much of it discusses queer rhetorics through what Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes describe in their influential, multi-modal webtext, "Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive," as "the regimes of discursive control through which bodies are disciplined and subjectivities reified as 'straight' and others 'bent'" (2012). True, most people are a little queer.

Yet, while I appreciate the understanding of queer rhetorics as it relates to the normative discourses we are all doused in, you will not often see me focusing on hetero-normative discourse as the central frame for analysis. When I talk about consent as queer community-based pedagogy, I mean to talk about methods of teaching and learning that come from LGBTQ community-based contexts. Zan Meyer Gonçalves' work in *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom* (2005) for example, offers a

study on a how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students established ethos through telling their stories as part of a Speakers' Bureau. Here, Gonçalves examines the rhetorical practices these students used to craft identity performances:

When we as teachers acknowledge that our students inhabit multiple identities, we can invite them to become conscious and aware of these multiple identities and the social forces that shape their performances of ethos. By doing so, student writers are in a better position to choose how to best perform their ethos in order to connect with and move audiences (4).

Making community-based pedagogies, such as peer education practices like the Speakers' Bureau available and relevant to rhetoric and writing studies, Gonçalves invites writing instructors in to how LGBT students use identity performances to persuade their peers to work to counter discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation (see also Blackburn, 2003; Cavallaro, 2015).

"Fighting Biblical 'Textual harassment': Queer Rhetorical Pedagogies in the Extracurriculum," Alexandra Cavallaro's 2015 case study of a workshop at a local Pride event, describes a workshop done by a straight ally as "part of a long, rich history of rhetorical education in the LGBTQ community" (n.p.). In the workshop, participants learned strategies to combat biblical "textual harassment" from an LGBTQ-friendly and affirming pastor. Cavallaro positions the workshop as *taking place* (my emphasis) in "extra-curricular sites" (see Gere, Nystrand and Duffy) and constituting what Enoch talks about as "alternative sites of rhetorical education" (n.p., see Royster, 2000; Logan, 2008; Gonçalves, 2005). For LGBTQ people these "alternative sites of rhetorical education," or what I call in these essays, *community spaces*²¹, include any place where LGBTQ people go to learn how to negotiate who we are, and how to survive in a homophobic, transphobic, racist, sexist, ableist world. Cavallaro notes, "historically,

these sites of rhetorical education have taken many forms, ranging from clandestine bars to support groups, community centers, archives, websites, online discussion forums, and social media pages” (n.p.). This collection begins with personal essays examining how I learned queer consent theories, histories, and pedagogies in community spaces. Then, I get into the cultural histories of the Sex Wars, and what they have to do with consent. And finally, I spiral into talking about consent in public discourse and in the writing classroom.

Consent happens in community spaces. Examining the ways consent discourse runs through these places, and brings up ethical questions about relationships, led me to insights on consent that would not have been possible if I didn’t locate these inquiries in particular places/spaces. Garrett W. Nichols also uses personal and place-based experiences to guide his theories in “The Quiet Country Closet: Reconstructing a Discourse for Closeted Rural Experiences,” in which he uses multiple voices and modes, drawing on his own experiences, pop culture, critical theory, and visual elements to examine his relationship with his rural community. Nichols’ work makes rhetorical theory that emerges from particular places (his rural Idaho town, pop culture of the time, the closet) reminding me once again, as Malea Powell has written, *stories take place* (2012). Stories and discourses organize our relationships with each other in community spaces. For this reason, it was critical for me to locate attempts to understand consent in feminist and queer community spaces, as I do in each of these essays on consent in LGBTQ community spaces.

Part of the reason I chose to focus the essay in this way is context—I understand queer theory as emerging out of LGBTQ culture and communities, bringing with it queer languages, histories, theories, practices. For many queer people, queerness doesn’t come from Queer Theory, but is deeply grounded in particular places. For me,

these are the community spaces I came out into—an LGBT community center, a women’s bookstore, the internet, a working class bar. Consent is part of queer community-based pedagogy—the kind of schooling you can only get in community spaces. I learned about consent through sex and relationships, in workshops, as part of peer sex education, in support groups, in books and ‘zines, online. This is why I want to understand consent across contexts. This specificity is what I am talking about when I call this a queer community-based project on consent.

Throughout the project, it was important for me not to take consent out of context, to acknowledge where these theories and histories of consent come from because I learned them in LGBTQ communities through peer mentoring and practice. This project embraces queer theory’s multiplicity—both the belief in queer theory’s potential to provide counter-normative discourses, and the understanding that queer culture takes place and is grounded in LGBTQ communities. (TLDR: It’s not really queer people’s full-time job to provide counter-discourses for straight people).

The work of people like E. Patrick Johnson (2001), Will Banks (2003), Eric Darnell Pritchard (2008; 2013; 2014), Qwo-Li Driskill (2004), Elizabeth Galewski (2005; 2008), Jordynn Jack (2012), Garret W. Nichols (2013), Karma R. Chávez (2013) and José Andrés Araiza (2014) among others, operates from particular locations (as we all do) and is conscious of itself doing so. When E. Patrick Johnson draws on African American vernacular English (AAVE) in “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from my Grandmother,” it is a way to theorize race and class-based knowledge and locate a place for black queer theorists (3). Johnson does so through literature and documentary film. As queer community-based scholars in rhetoric and composition, we often desire and need to draw not only on academic queer theory, but also on literature, film, performance, and popular culture. I also found the

need to draw on literature and public discourse on sexuality and consent in order to remember queer and feminist community-based pedagogies, theories, and histories of consent. This collection draws from scholarship in queer rhetorics and community-based methodologies and pedagogies, LGBTQ literature, academic blogs, archival documents from community spaces, and personal experience to make its theories and trace its histories.

This move is part of what community-based scholar Terese Guinsatao Monberg has called “writing as the community” (2009). Rather than writing about the community, for the community, or with the community, as community scholars in rhetoric and composition have historically positioned university-community partnerships, Monberg calls for pedagogies of “recursive spatial movement for students of color” (2009, 28). Building on Nedra Reynolds’ work on dwelling, Monberg says “an approach that asks students to dwell, to move through a place recursively over time, might enable a more effective lens on difference than one that merely juxtaposes what seems different with what feels familiar” (28). Part of what Monberg’s theories on community-based pedagogies for students of color offer is permission to put historically underrepresented students, including QTPOC²² students, at the center of our pedagogies. Queer community-based methodologies and pedagogies put LGBTQ people’s lives at the center of queer rhetorics.

These essays tell stories about consent in relationships with people and LGBTQ community spaces. They also address consent in public discourse, including historical and contemporary arguments in feminist and LGBTQ communities. I learned about consent in community spaces, through peer mentoring and practice, after leaving home²³. I discuss contemporary conversations on consent, including: arguments over trigger warnings (TWs) in higher education, affirmative consent in sexual assault

politics on campus, as well as conversations in what some might consider niche communities—an LGBT community center, a women’s bookstore, a working class lesbian bar, in the much-contested lesbian feminist cultural institution, the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. Examining what rhetoric and composition scholars have called “alternative sites of rhetorical education”²⁴ reveals consent is more than a negotiation over permission for access (sometimes mediated by documents) among individuals deciding to say yes or no to sex (research, etc.). Consent is a queer community-based discourse on sex and relationships, concerned with how to negotiate relationships with people in the community spaces where we play.

A Note on Representation: Why Nonfiction Essays?

These essays come from traditions of the essay as “an attempt” to get at the heart of a matter. I make no claims about speaking on consent for LGBTQ communities as a whole. Drawn from personal experiences, community-based theories, and archival research on long-standing arguments in feminist and queer communities about the potential of consent, these essays represent a white, queer femme survivor who still calls herself a feminist, even though the word is fraught, trying to make sense of consent. As such, these essays are not intended to be an exhaustive catalogue of queer consent practices. Instead, they use essays (lyric, narrative, theoretical) to examine consent from a variety of angles—beginning with stories on developing languages for talking about our desires, and being present; then, tracing consent through the feminist Sex Wars; and finally, circling around the ways the rhetoric of consent shows up in public arguments in higher education, in a lesbian separatist community, and in the writing classroom.

A Note on Language

What I need you to know is I was careful with how I used language. One way language came up was whenever possible, I use the language people use to identify themselves. This is part of a practice of consent. For example, I use the pronouns people currently use (whether they're in my life, or authors I'm writing about). This is an example of an LGBTQ community-based practice—respecting self-identification. Self-identification became particularly important in the chapters on TWS and on MichFest, where different sides of the conflict have particular language they use to describe each other and themselves. I did my best to trace the language to its root, offering context and histories for unfamiliar audiences, while remaining respectful of differing perspectives. At times, I discussed language I felt might be unfamiliar to some audiences. Oftentimes, I explained in the essays the origins of certain words, or what I mean by particular terms. Other times, I used language from LGBTQ communities I am part of, without explanation, to speak to members of those communities. These decisions have to do with audience and purpose and remain my own.

The Queer Art and Rhetoric of Consent: Implications

Pleasure and danger, as I discuss throughout the collection, are the theoretical frames feminists and LGBTQ people have used to make sense of the conflicts over sex and gender, known as the Sex Wars. I suggest consent is rhetorical, has many more elements than “no means no” or “yes means yes,” and extends beyond sexual contexts. What I've also come to understand is many of the arguments among feminist and queer communities are laced with power and desire, which I think about as elements of consent. By examining the rhetoric of consent across contexts—telling stories about queer and sex-positive culture, learning my histories, engaging in public debates—I've come to find out there are elements of consent far beyond sexual pleasure and danger,

but they're rarely explored or talked about. Rhetoric and composition could also stand to take into account queer and sex-positive theories related to power, desire, boundaries, limits, shame, risk, loss (what I call the elements of consent). Doing so reveals new relationships between sexuality, consent, and rhetoric, and new ways of thinking about negotiating teaching and learning relationships.

I'd like for these theories and histories of consent to stimulate conversations on consent in our teaching and research, which many rhetoric and composition scholars tend to think about as taking place in communities (Cavallaro, 2015; Monberg 2009; Logan 2008; Goncalves 2005; Royster 2000). Consent can be understood in relationship to rhetoric and composition's commitment to ethical teaching and research (see Grabill 2001; Powell 2012; Powell 2002; Monberg 2008; Reynolds 2007). In order for rhetoric and composition scholars to understand the potential of consent to negotiate relationships (sexual relationships and relationships in other contexts) we need to understand the histories of the Sex Wars. Through studying the rhetoric of arguments in these community-based histories, I will show you consent has a multitude of elements. Consent is queer community-based rhetoric, and has the potential to provide queer frameworks for writing teachers and rhetoric scholars to think about ethical relationships.

Queer rhetorics invite us to know consent as a collaborative, self-reflexive process, not simply a fleeting conversation about the benefits and risks of relationships that happens at the beginning of play.²⁵ What I want to suggest is: consent also a set of practical elements, which are part of ongoing, rhetorical negotiations where people can come to know their own power, privilege, and desires, and use them well. When I talk about consent as how we come to know our own power and use it well, I mean to acknowledge one of my assumptions: there is no play without power. Drawing on

theories of power from beyond the discipline, I develop pedagogies, theories, and histories of consent out of some of the arguments that affect queer people's lives. In queer and sex radical culture, consent is one of the stories we tell ourselves—the idea that we can build more pleasurable and accountable relationships through conscious action, as a form of self-care and community care.

When I talk about consent as queer community-based rhetorics, what I mean to describe are the ongoing arguments queer and sex-positive feminists have on the terms of sex and relationships in a racist, classist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist world. How we understand these conflicts depends on who is speaking and how they understand their relationship to power, a topic I explore more in the cultural history, “Consent in the Feminist Sex Wars.” Listening to how queer and pro-sex / sex-positive communities and feminist anti-violence movements talk about consent and community accountability²⁶ has also been tremendously instructive in how I approach consent. Miriam Zoila Pérez’ important work “When Sexual Autonomy Isn’t Enough: Sexual Violence Against Immigrant Women in the United States” addresses consent beyond being an interpersonal negotiation when it discusses the ways in which consent is fraught at community borders²⁷, a topic I will discuss in “Consent, Boundaries, and Access at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival.”

Queer community-based theories and histories of consent contribute a more flexible and nuanced sense of power and desire that have the potential to make doing community-based research more satisfying, accountable, and sustainable for everyone involved. In these community conversations, practicing queer community-based understandings of consent might mean asking questions like: *How would that feel? How is power moving? What are the pleasures and the risks? Where is my investment? Who am I accountable to?* Asking these questions early, openly, and often (persistently across the

time span of a project and within the rhythms of relationships) and listening to the answers, are consistent both with practices of community-based research in the discipline²⁸ and with how queer and pro-sex / self-positive feminist communities practice consent.

Consent is the rhetorical process by which we learn to play carefully with power and each other, to articulate our boundaries and desires and ask for what we need. Queer theories and histories of consent offer a practical set of elements. These practical elements of consent include: negotiating boundaries and limits, pleasure and danger, power and privilege, disclosure and risk. They also involve considering how doing so contributes to the community's pleasure and desire to be together. I believe we can learn the skill of practicing consent through paying attention to how feminist and queer communities theorize consent. By taking queer consent into account, as part of building ethical relationships with people in community spaces, we will come to think about consent as self-care and community care, a set of practices—cultural and situational, embodied and deeply emotional—to aid in our resilience.

This multi-genre collection of nonfiction essays on consent in feminist and queer culture and communities positions consent as queer community-based rhetoric, an ongoing negotiation of our power, bodies, languages, and desires. These are queer essays in the sense of making use of many voices—personal, lyrical, theoretical—and in the sense of taking place in LGBTQ community spaces. These are essays in the sense of being attempts to get at the heart of the matter of consent.

Through personal and lyrical essays, I tell stories, situating consent as a set of practical elements for negotiating intimate spaces and relationships. I learned the language for these practical elements of consent in LGBTQ communities through peer

mentoring and practice, which is why I call this community-based work. “Developing an Erotic Vocabulary for Consent,” is a personal essay addressing how queer people learn—through peer mentoring and practice—to talk about our desires and practice consent. The story focuses on learning the languages to talk about my desires as a baby dyke at the LGBT community center in metro-Detroit where I grew up as a young queer person.

“Be Here Now,” is a lyric personal essay meditating on learning to be present in my body by wearing boots and through relationships with other people at the Center and the community space.

“On Being Present: Consent in Community Spaces” is a place-based essay addressing the element of being present in LGBT community spaces. This piece contributes being present as one of the elements of queer community-based theories of consent. As a queer methodology, practicing consent means being present, or what I sometimes think of as negotiating disclosure and risk.

In “Preface to the Sex Wars” I discuss what’s at stake for rhetoric and composition scholars in learning feminist theories and histories of consent. Through listening to arguments over pleasure and danger in the Sex Wars, I came to understand these conflicts in feminist and queer communities as being about consent.

“Consent in the Feminist Sex Wars” traces consent through the LGBTQ and feminist histories of the Sex Wars, discussing the rhetoric anti-porn, pro-sex, and queer communities use when talking about consent. What I intend to do is offer historical context for talking about consent. Part of what I suggest in the piece on the Sex Wars is for LGBTQ histories of consent to be valued and taken into account. I chose to begin the collection in this way because as a queer person, and not just a queer theorist, or someone who finds use in queer theory, but a sexual minority, I do not have the luxury

of assuming those who read this work will know what the Sex Wars is, or know what is at stake for LGBTQ communities in these histories.

“Beyond Trigger Warnings: Consent and Trauma-Informed Pedagogy” analyzes the debate on trigger warnings in higher education. The essay shows how the commentary on trigger warnings reveals thorny ethical questions about consent, including the elements of disclosure and risk, suggesting the ethical practice of negotiating these matters of consent openly in collaboration with students.

“What MichFest Teaches us about Consent, Boundaries, and Access” discusses what the long-term conflict over the presence of transsexual women at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival. The purpose of the essay on MichFest is to elaborate on two more of the elements of consent—boundaries and access—tracing how they show up in lesbian feminist and queer and trans rhetorics at a place that I once considered home. Talking about consent in a situated way will show the potential of using consent to negotiate boundaries and access in community spaces.

“Community-based Pedagogy for Consent Education” includes personal narratives and public discourse on consent. The essays tell stories about teaching consent in the first-year writing classroom in the context of Title IX investigations on campus sexual assault.

“Consent is Self-care and Community Care,” speaks to conversations in activist communities over self-care and community care, re-framing consent as more than interpersonal negotiation, or a momentary negotiation over documents, suggesting consent can also build more respectful, accountable, and sustainable relationships in communities.

The appendix includes “Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop,” an essay and workshop that offer practical ways for you, your colleagues, or your students to learn about consent.

CHAPTER 1: **Developing an Erotic Vocabulary for Consent**

Desire begins with language. Not having a way to talk about queer desires, because they are expressly or implicitly forbidden, is a real challenge to practicing consent. I know this because I remember the head-space before knowing there were languages to talk about queer desires. I remember realizing my attraction to queer women and some rare queer men, but not knowing how to say what it was I needed. Languages are created in community, in the delicate play of kinship, recognition, and conflict²⁹. Learning to talk about our desires, or what I think of as developing an erotic vocabulary, is necessary for practicing consent. For LGBTQ people, this process happens in community spaces through peer mentoring and practice³⁰.

These are stories about how I came to know my own queer desires, through the process of leaving home, developing an erotic vocabulary in community spaces. Finding creative ways to express our desires in an uninhabitable culture for LGBTQ people is a project that has mesmerized queer communities. This project on consent contributes an understanding of consent as rhetorical, or having to do with language and desire. We could begin elsewhere, with physical sensation or acts, but for now we'll begin with language and, later on, begin again.

Coming out as a dyke—I just wanted to play, didn't bother to think about risk or regret. At a feminist political group, I fell in unreciprocated lust with the first queer woman who identified by name. She called herself a boi³¹, all baggy jeans and dimples,

seeking same. She would come home back from the club, a little drunk, and say sweet things to me at my night shift job.

I was a tomboy femme in tight jeans and boots, versatile sexually³², if by versatile we mean willing to try and be just what she needed. I didn't have enough practice to be in my body, inhabit sexual spaces, or negotiate desire back then³³. I honestly had no clue what I was doing sexually and would have done just about anything she asked. Instead, we lay in her twin size bed, atop the sheets, awkwardly making small talk for what felt like a long time. We entangled our feet, propping ourselves up on one elbow each to gaze at each other. She reached over and tucked the curtain of my hair behind my ear. What else were we supposed to do? Neither of us had any idea. Figuring out the many answers to the question, what can queer women do together sexually is not a bad job. Consent is learned through peer mentoring and practice.

In terms of practicing consent, it's important not only to know what we want and need, but to also be able to communicate that. It is common to develop relationships haphazardly, without taking the opportunity to learn what each person wants and needs. How often in a relationship have you wanted to give or receive love, support, or affection, but could not ask? How long in a new relationship do you inhabit the tenuous space between knowing a personal boundary exists and speaking that boundary into existence? We set aside our needs to please a partner, step over limits without knowing they were there, trip triggers setting off unexpected storms of images or feelings in another's mind, lock ourselves away from vulnerability, miss possibilities that fall outside our imagined norm. Hetero-normative culture exerts certain pulls on our desires, making the process of imagining what queer possibilities exist into acts of creativity and invention.

Downriver Detroit was a bad scene to be queer in the sexy 90s and it doesn't strike me as more habitable now. Queer, meaning anything outside the norm of working class and middle class, white, heterosexual families, especially LGBTQ families, which I was never aware of in all my time downriver. Queer people got out of downriver as soon as possible.

There were few mentors. There was not a single woman I knew who would admit to the kind of affection and desire I felt for women, let alone one who identified herself by name or made herself easily identifiable. There were occasionally delicate men, with their long, slim features and Broadway longings, who I would befriend, but they never lasted in our town for long. There were no Pride parades downriver. No talk of gender-neutral bathrooms or controversies about taking same-sex dates to Prom. There were few positive representations of queerness, or gayness even, that I can recall. There was the AIDS crisis in the mainstream media, and when my family had cable one summer, "Come to my Window" on MTV. There were Brandon Teena and Matthew Shepherd's murders, but I don't remember that anyone felt their lives relevant enough to speak to them. News of homophobic and transphobic violence and stigma fed the roots of cultural prejudice and discrimination, and in my small town, valuable conversations about queer desire and relationships went unspoken, or were pushed underground.

Queer Rhetorical Education on Consent

Because of the cultural climate for LGBTQ people, learning to talk about our desires is often a process that happens in community spaces. Scholars in rhetoric and composition have referred to this as alternative sites of rhetorical education (Cavallaro, Enoch, Logan, Royster, Monberg, Powell). Alexandra Cavallaro's essay "Fighting Biblical 'Textual harassment': Queer Rhetorical Pedagogies in the Extracurriculum"

speaks to this, in a case study of a workshop at Pride, where participants learned strategies to combat biblical ‘textual harassment’ from a pastor who is an ally to the LGBTQ community. Cavallaro positions the workshop as *taking place* (my emphasis) in “extra-curricular sites” (see Gere, Nystrand and Duffy) and constituting what Enoch talks about as “alternative” sites of rhetorical education (see Logan, Royster, Goncalvez).

For LGBTQ people these “alternative” sites of rhetorical education, or what I call in this collection community spaces, include anyplace where LGBTQ people go to learn how to negotiate who we are, and how to survive in a homophobic, transphobic, racist, sexist, ableist world. Cavallaro notes, “historically, these sites of rhetorical education have taken many forms, ranging from clandestine bars to support groups, community centers, archives, websites, online discussion forums, and social media pages.”

Consent is a set of teachable practices that can be learned as part of sex education in community spaces. For LGBTQ people, this is part of learning languages to talk about queer desires. Consent is a sexual theory, based in LGBTQ communities, rooted in the belief that people can come to know our own power, privilege, and desires, and use them well. Not only applicable to sexual relationships, consent has to do with how people use language and our bodies to negotiate relationships with care. Consent is part of the odd process of coming to know our own desires so we can make decisions about how to act in relationships. When we learn how to openly negotiate pleasure and danger, power and desire, boundaries and limits, disclosure and risk, we are practicing consent.

Femme seeking family and home

Affirmations rented the Pioneer Apartment Building in Ferndale. The old building, as the originals call it, is a two-story, brown brick converted apartment building just a block west of Woodward, with a front door on 9 Mile and a back door

with a big green awning on Troy St. Rather than typical offices and meeting rooms, each designated for a single purpose, the old building's floors each held multi-purpose meeting rooms along a long, slim hallway that ran from front to back and sagged in the middle. Each of the building's rooms, originally designed as small, family apartments, had a single door that opened to the hall. Once inside a room, you might find additional doors that once led from living room to kitchen to bedroom to bath, rooms nested in rooms. The joke was: there are no closets here. A handy volunteer had taken off all the doors.

Even though the organization didn't house people overnight, for some of us the Center was a home, a sanctuary away from homophobic and transphobic bullies, away from the constant battle against violence toward our bodies and spirits at home and at school. No matter what floor, there were rotted floorboards underneath age-old carpeting, which was covered in tread and filth, and bordered by thick, crown molding painted forest green. All the furniture was borrowed and threadbare and could have used a good wash. The building itself was not ideal—structurally inaccessible to community members with certain physical disabilities—doorways too narrow, several flights of steep stairs. There was a lending library, categorized loosely by topic, which functioned based on the principle of trust: take a book and bring it back when you're done.

There were two rooms in the basement on the 9 Mile side reserved for youth on the weekends. The dance room was painted deep mauve, and occasionally we would create a mural on one wall, then paint over it and start again. The game room had pool and a foosball table, cupboards full of donated craft supplies, and places to sit and talk. The foundation of the building was admittedly crooked, with conversations around racism and classism common. Upstairs there was a dentist's office, loudly drilling, and

a hippie musician who drummed late into the night, which gave the place a peculiar ambiance from the time the org rented its first room in 1991. There was comfort and ugliness in that place, and there was beauty, too.

How can I explain the need for the comfort and conflict of family? Terrified, speechless, and deeply ashamed, I blew into the Center with one of those bitter, wretched February winds. Because of limited resources and internalized rage and shame, I was surviving by barely sustaining a number of unhealthy relationships with women who didn't treat me well, who left me feeling used.

The brick wall of a dyke bar called Stilettos rasps against my skin and I'm being held there, suspended in the dusky light by the hand of a woman with a cheetah print tattoo. Depending on audience, it may or may not be redundant to say the dyke bar is a dive, and Inkster, Michigan just a rough dream. Does it matter to you more to know about those pock-marked streets and neon signs, to see Henry the VIII's next door, where a man can still get a lap dance for a measly \$20? Or, would you rather know that it will be years before the woman I was then will know how to accept the kind of love I deserve. The kind of love that will learn how to dig the fist-sized knots from beneath the ridge of my shoulder blades, while I wail like a wounded animal, and stop when I say stop, the first time.

Have you ever been at a place like that, not knowing what you deserve?

Cruel women who only knew how to run, who just disappeared, or who had no sense of where they ended and I began, our histories always nipping at our heels, threatening to take us both down. The one who held me down by my hair, mean as any man. The women I chased who didn't want me back. I needed a place to go. One woman's girlfriend had threatened—it's either me, or that stray—so she dropped me off.

I slipped in the Troy St. door after business hours, climbed the stairs to the first floor, and slunk down the long hall to the Resource Room, heart pounding in my throat.

A multitude of multi-color flyers plastered the walls, business cards tacked to the dinky bulletin board and overflowing and I thought, what in the fuck am I going to do with a flyer? A stack of Pride Source LGBT-friendly business directories filled a wire basket, and next to them, *Between the Lines* LGBT news, with the questionable tagline: we've got issues, so do you! There was information for LGBT-friendly organizations, doctors, lawyers, counselors, all these separate services "people like us" might need. I remember thinking, it must be really hard to be gay. . . it just seems like life will be really hard for us. I moved like a ghost through that place for months, slinking along the walls, disappearing into another room at the slightest sound, speaking to no one.

The Youth Empowerment Program, or YEP Night, was the Center's pulse. During weekly business hours, Affirmations was filled with adult support groups and programs—coming out over coffee and other old school rap groups, a raucous womyn's film club, AA—but on the weekend, the Center was ours. The drop-in program was for youth ages 14-21, and drew young people from Detroit proper and the surrounding suburbs. House music pounded from the dance room speakers and talented competitors of all expressions from Detroit's ball scene would be voguing, j-setting, or walking runway.

I was an introverted baby dyke in flannel and fishnets and the dance room was a sparkly, flamboyant world, extravagance created from scratch, from what people had and a bit of imagination. High heels in a large size can be hid in a backpack and shared among friends. A lampshade is also a dress. The fact of being a white lady, while common in the Center's adult programming, meant the ball scene wasn't meant for me.

But I would be amiss not to mention how the balls, organized around houses where gay families compete for prizes and notoriety, offered a glimpse of possibilities for kinship beyond biological relation. I longed for a gay family and a home.

Mentoring relationships in LGBTQ community spaces

A common conversation at the Center was around the need for mentors. Adult Center staff and board members often expressed a need for committed people willing to support, teach, and learn from younger people at the Center and there were a number of people in the local community who did and continue to do so. The institutional context, however, made relationships between people of different ages difficult. The Center's institutional structure separated youth from adults for funding purposes—certain grants and donations were meant to fund programs for people of particular ages, often youth.

Separating youth from adults served a protective function as well. If programs were either for youth or adults, then Center staff and volunteers could keep a handle on who had access to building relationships with young people, and how, through background checks and New Volunteer Orientations. Many of us felt young people didn't need protection so much as supportive peers and mentors to foster our own strength and resilience. The institutional hierarchy imposed strict assumptions about who has knowledge and experiences to draw from, assumptions about who was fit to mentor or teach whom, which did not hold up in practice. Restrictive institutional practices do not protect us. They draw on a belief that young people need protection, and for me they walk a line close to homo- and kink-phobic stereotypes of LGBTQ people as sexual perverts and predators. Rather than fostering supportive mentoring relationships between youth and adults, the Center constructed youth and adults as separate, which lives out in institutional structures that separate LGBTQ people from

what could be mentors. More common at the Center than inter-generational mentoring was peer mentoring.

Even peer mentoring got complicated because what was considered youth, institutionally, included people who were legally adults. One strategy youth activists at the Center came up with is to share power by inviting younger people to take the lead in relationships, configuring the relationship so that adult allies listen and lend resources when asked, or in times of crisis, but otherwise acknowledging that younger people are capable, knowledgeable, and resilient.

REC Boyz was a peer-to-peer mentoring program out of AIDS Partnership Michigan, by and for men who sleep with men (MSMs), and trans women, in Detroit that made safer sex sexy and accessible. The group was created predominantly by and for young African American MSMs and trans women, but REC Boyz would facilitate peer education with any group that asked. The group taught free workshops and gave demonstrations on how to protect your pink parts³⁴ at bars and clubs, and once at the Center, where I took their workshop.

Access to detailed, comprehensive sex education through the peer mentoring relationships, including those between the ball scene and Affirmations taught me how to have safer sex. None of the lesbians I knew practiced safer sex. Maybe I was sleeping with the wrong people. Many of us were just coming out, un-informed, and sometimes deeply ashamed. Some of the women I encountered also seemed to subscribe to a fantasy of cultural purity, which assumed lesbians abstaining from sex with men meant we were at a lower risk—a dangerous belief considering sexual identity does not necessarily correspond directly with sexual practice, and gender does not necessarily correspond with the particularities of bodies.

Gay families are also a form of peer mentoring and support in LGBTQ communities. In “Constructing Home and Family: How the Ballroom Community Supports African American GLBTQ Youth in the Face of HIV / AIDS,” sociologist Marlon Bailey and community worker Emily Arnold write about HIV / AIDs prevention in the ball scene. Examining the role gay families play in peer-to-peer education, they conclude for participants in the ballroom community, gay families provide “a constellation of support.”³⁵ Bailey and Arnold suggest these family relationships have less to do with age and biological sex, and more to do with familiarity with the scene. “These organic forms of support, information, love, and acceptance often go unnoticed by health and social service professionals, who tend to define family and home in terms of biology.”³⁶ At the Center, at times existing peer mentoring relationships and gay families were overlooked by those in positions of institutional power, as they sought out mentors for youth.

Resisting Academic Mentoring Narratives

Many of the commonly accepted metaphors for mentoring in academic contexts make me decidedly uneasy, coming to the process of being mentored with queer femme desires and understandings of relationships. Talk among graduate students of mentors as academic parents and of needing to leave our home institutions to “spread our seed” at other institutions is saturated with assumptions about the reproductive *nature* of mentoring relationships. Considering the parenting language used to talk about traditional mentoring relationships, such relationships make a number of assumptions about how ideas are transmitted and reproduced. These assumptions are especially troublesome for LGBTQ academics because heterosexual nuclear families are almost always used as the model.

Scholarship on feminist mentoring suggests that women who mentor often get pushed into the mother role, even when it's not one they would choose for themselves. In an article about problems with the parenting model of mentoring, feminist scholar Meryl Altman warns in her article "Mentors and Tormentors" against "'the compulsion to repeat' experiences that were wounding and damaging."³⁷ For instance, a parenting model might assume learning is a one-way exchange in which more experienced mentors transmit their knowledge to less experienced students, with the purpose of getting their ideas reproduced, or taken up by others. This mentoring model would not work for me because the understandings of the way knowledge and power are transmitted forget those for whom mentoring relationships are more about the pleasure of community and creative exchange.

Not only are there dangers of replicating harmful or unwanted parenting models, but also the risk of what Altman calls "role confusion," a problem academic mentors may face if they act both as academic parents and institutional gate keepers. In struggling to articulate what roles I need mentors to play, I've often questioned whether the parenting model for mentoring may be comfortable for so many because it is one of the few models available in heteronormative culture for 'institutionally appropriate' inter-generational relationships (whether between people of different ages or different generations of scholars). Regardless of the framework used to understand mentoring relationships, roles and expectations need to be negotiated explicitly, and participants need to be prepared to re-negotiate.

Feminist scholars Áine Humble, et. al speak in "Feminism and Mentoring of Graduate Students" about how mentors and students negotiate power and take up feminist pedagogical approaches in order to manage the tenuous balance between personal and professional desires and needs. What does feminist mentoring mean, they

ask, in institutions built around upholding the status quo?³⁸ As institutional gatekeepers, academic mentors often feel a certain responsibility to use their power and position to further students' intellectual and emotional work through what feminist scholars call "role modeling" and to provide support and guidance as students move through the institutional processes of annual review, coursework, exams, proposals, dissertation, job placement, and beyond.

Feminist teacher Katherine Allen advocates using the materials at hand to connect with students and handle their complex needs. For Allen, this means using her "humanity, spirituality, and commitment to social justice" as well as "reflexive methods" such as storytelling, intuition, metaphor, and serendipity.³⁹ Her student, Karen Blaisure, recalls feminist mentoring relationships as safe and empowering space "the space where I did not have to fight for my right to talk."⁴⁰

I would add that having ongoing conversations about what participants in any relationship want and need out of the relationship is part of a process of consent that can potentially serve mentoring relationships. One contribution of consent to queer / feminist mentoring relationships is that it opens safer spaces for students to negotiate issues of disclosure and risk. These issues are relevant when participants are playing multiple roles, especially when one of those roles is constructed out of an institutional hierarchy. Despite careful negotiation, there is no way to do the work of a teaching-learning relationship without some risk and some loss⁴¹.

Negotiating Mentoring Relationships

A mentoring relationship based on a queer / feminist understanding of consent would embrace the potential to negotiate relationships with purpose, while also acknowledging institutional power and position and systemic / historical inequalities. I prefer mentoring relationships based on an exchange of creativity, resources, and

power – telling stories, sharing what we’re working on, practicing self-care, skill share, and support. It is important to me to be able to trust that a mentor be able to take constructive feedback and adjust accordingly. Being able to communicate likes and dislikes, and having them respected, has the potential to strengthen relationships based on consent.

One of the mentoring issues that emerges out of the process of getting a graduate education is how to find mentors, people you will allow to shape your work. I have been fortunate to find mentors, peer and otherwise, who are generous and also know their limits. Being familiar with your likes and dislikes, using them to set clear expectations, can go a long way in smoothing out mentoring relationships. In queer youth organizing, there is a belief that each participant has experiences and resources to draw from, which I carry forward into how I understand mentoring relationships.

The search for a way to feel at home in my body began with a search for information and the language to express queer desires. I wanted to know how to survive in a culture that tried to repress or kill off our desires, a culture that seemed to me to be full of sexual shame and violence. Talking about sex is what brought me back to my body. This includes talking about how to talk to each other about sex, or practice consent.

Consent involves being present, listening, negotiating desire and need, sharing fantasies, doing research, playing with willing partners, checking in, practicing aftercare. These were not skills that I, or many people, learned at home or at school. Feeling at home in my body has meant finding ways to talk about the words I want to use for my body, to listen to the words lovers and friends want to use. It has meant learning to talk about style and pace, power and position, likes and dislikes – in other words, the particularities of bodies, histories, and acts. I left home and learned elsewhere to talk

about consent, the embodied, emotional art of relationships so often left out of mainstream education. Learning to practice consent is part of a peer mentoring process that often happens in queer families and communities because so many of us need to leave home.

How do queer people learn to feel at home in our bodies? Finding a home can be as practical as having a safe place to go, getting a stable roof over one's head, taking a warm shower, having some certainty of where the next meal is coming from, or a change of clothes. Feeling at home can be a lingering problem. Feeling at home means making spaces where expressing what we truly want and need is welcomed, not just places without fear of harm. Safety doesn't have to mean searching for some imagined, idealistic place free of conflict. Feeling at home in our bodies can be as simple as acknowledging our inherent worth. Feeling at home happens when families and communities find the words needed to express and negotiate love or conflict.

Developing an erotic vocabulary for consent means learning to articulate—Here is my body. These are my boundaries. Here are my histories, gnarled up in my hips and spine. What's your style? Here are the pleasures and the dangers. Here are my desires and needs. Here are my limits. These are the risks.

Even though most of us from the old building don't go to Affirmations anymore, I still remember the cadences of certain voices echoing down those familiar halls. That place was a dance hall, a meeting space, a grounds for organizing, and a school that we got to go to for free and there weren't any textbooks to buy, just the comfort and conflict of community. There, a certain short-short clad volunteer librarian brought books of Robert Mapplethorpe's erotic photography to my office to gauge my response, and incited a conversation about the Culture Wars that lasted for hours, until the Center

grew dim and closed for the night. There, I read an essay aloud for the first time at a community writing group, and had it recognized as such. There, I learned social critique in a community context, where people know you should know better, and they'll tell you about it.

Whenever I'm missing home, language is the thing that brings me back—I hold the words lovers have preferred to use or not use for their bodies between my teeth, find the easy rhythms of negotiating power and desire with those who know the occasional need for processing. One of the risks no one tells you about is once you've left home, reinvented yourself through ideas, it's difficult to return. No one tells you that families and communities will have changed while you're gone. When I go home, which these days happens more often, we slip into easy conversation or struggle for a bit through silences and distance. There are some words I rarely say anymore, rarely hear, even though I relish their double meanings, like *shade* and *clock*⁴²—this language comes from a specific context. These words require a certain audience, yet they still remind me of home.

Sometimes I am afraid writing personally means marking myself professionally in ways I'll later come to regret. Having the languages to talk about desire and need means managing disclosure and risk—when I sit with my students in an unmarried female body; when being a white, English-speaking person allows me to pass more easily across borders and through institutions; when LGBTQ relationships and families are rendered socially and legally illegible, and therefore, unmanageable; when I struggle, even now with all this formal education, to find the words to be explicit about queer desires.

CHAPTER 2: **Be Here Now**

This is how I spent my youth. At the drop-in center, the Youth Empowerment Program, a weekend drop-in center at the LGBT community center, *Affirmations*. In the old community center building, a two-story, brown brick, converted apartment building at 195 W. 9 Mile in Ferndale, Michigan. On the brick patio at the back door on Troy St., our bodies crowded underneath the forest green awning, waiting to be let in. In the basement rooms, B1 and B2, reserved for youth on weekends.

YEP Night would draw 70 or 80 youth a night back then. I was the baby dyke from the south suburbs with the shaggy, DIY haircut and the worn-in boots.

Black Boots

They were 8-holes with inch-thick soles. Those round laces that grip tight when you tie them and stay put. I feel some sort of way when laced up. Not safe, exactly, which anyone who has survived trauma knows is largely a fantasy⁴³. I feel secure when laced up, when double knotted. I feel supported.

Lacing a boot is a process, a ritual I use to keep the rising terror of being queer and femme in this mean world at bay. This is how I lace a boot. Slip the left one on first. Wiggle your toes. Grasp the laces at the second hole and pull them snug. Not tight, snug. Wiggle your foot. Tap your heel on the ground. Hook your forefinger underneath each lace. X marks the spot. Pull gently with a 'come here' motion. I do it by feel—lace my boots, find the erotic in the everyday.

Wearing boots is one of the pleasures of queer femme life, one of the ways I read as femme. The act puts me in a particular, euphoric head-space, makes my body feel

present and grounded. I like the way boots make me walk—half shuffle, half stomp. That, and you never know when you might need to run.

“You could get a lot for those boots,” a significantly more street smart acquaintance challenged once when cash was tight. A suggestion ripe with meaning: *you soft thing, what do you know about struggling?* I’d try to sell the high heels that hurt to walk in anyhow. Sell the thick winter coat. Sell the ponytail I chopped off as a kind of farewell to straight life. I’d sell a lot of things, but not those boots.

The Feminist Bookstore

The feminist bookstore was called *A Woman’s Prerogative*. I’d come in the back door, past the wall of slogan stickers and rainbow gear, stroll nonchalant past the fat femme behind the counter with the short bangs and the rad chest tattoos, who looked like she stepped right out of a Riot Grrrl zine. The bookstore had built-in shelves painted purple along each wall and a semi-private nook with sex toys that I had to touch, breath like a butterfly caught in my throat. I’d sit on the floor cross-legged and read the stories I couldn’t afford to buy, cover-to-cover, like it was the Queer Public Library.

The message board was tacked with posters of loud-mouthed women with finely muscled shoulders and guitars. There weren’t classifieds like at *Just 4 Us*, the men’s bookstore down the street—“seeking straight-acting gay males. No fats, no fems”—but if there had been, mine would have read: “seeking women with strong hands and an open mind.” Just out, I was trying to take everything in. I took to being a dyke like I take to everything else—obsessively, fully, with a kind of stubborn, fearless vulnerability perhaps available only in youth. I opened myself to women who didn’t deserve to know me like that. I chased women who didn’t want me back. I thought it was love every time.

A Woman's Prerogative is gone now, like so many of our cultural institutions, but their sign is still there, across the alleyway with the mural of a neighborly street scene, next door to the old community center building, that two-story, brown brick converted apartment building where so many LGBTQ youth in the Detroit area grew up. Every once in awhile, the feeling of refuge will return to my body and remind me of that place. The memories of what it felt like to be there, in community space, come flooding back. I like to think of this feeling of refuge, or shelter, as a resource, accessible even though the space no longer is.

Coming Home

When I return to my body, after the trauma of coming out, it will feel ill-fitting, but I won't dwell on unanswerable questions or invent a seamless history from what I felt. Imagine I go back to a shelf in my body-memories and take down a box, neglected or forgotten, and dust it off. Inside, there is no Aha! moment, no linear narrative, no connecting the dots. There is only my body, fully present in this moment and awash with feelings strong enough to trigger body memories—feelings of grief, rage, shame, sure, but also feelings of pleasure, desire, and boundless joy.

I will read everything I can about trauma and everything I read will say the same thing: when faced with surviving the un-survivable, the body will either fight, flee, or freeze.

Fight

The community center trafficked in stories. Donors needed a reason to part with their money for the cause and that reason often had the human face of a down-and-out LGBTQ youth. They wanted to hear the gritty details of what had happened to us, but

most of all, they wanted to hear how we'd gotten our lives together by coming to the center and finding community. They wanted to know how we'd survived.

I have used my story as currency. Some would say that's what it is to be a writer. We trade what we know, our stories, because we believe what we know might be of use. Because we know deep down what stories are worth. Because we are stubborn and fearless in our vulnerability. Because we are resilient and unashamed.

The pamphlet for the community center said, "People Building Community" and around the tagline were squares filled with photographs of diverse faces. There, in one of the squares, was my face. "No way. Take it off," I said a clear no to those in charge, and they ultimately respected. Yeah, I'd been in the community center space. I'd consented to having my picture taken without asking how it would be used. But I was standing there in that moment, in the office of someone powerful enough to have an office, with a body full of raw fear and a mouth full of fighting words. *I'm not your success story. I'm not your poster child. I may be in your space, but my story is not yours.*

Flee

Justice and I met at YEP Night and became friends because we were both on the run. I'd been in limbo ever since my family didn't take the whole queer thing so well, didn't feel safe anywhere. Justice would disappear for months at a time, hitching rides around the country, chasing warmer weather. We had the kind of relationship common in drop-in center culture—unlikely, but it worked because of the shared community space. We shared radical politics, a mutual adoration of 90s folk-punk music, and an explosive reaction to being touched without being asked first. We shared poetry, September birthdays, and sometimes dinner.

We would meet at the drop-in center on Friday and Saturday nights in the basement of the old building. Sit near each other in the folding chairs on the perimeter

of the dance room, avoiding eye contact and tuning out the noise until one of us got up the nerve. Justice wore baggy army pants, neon candy kid bracelets, and a studded belt. I wore my hair short and my boy jeans baggy, though my walk betrayed my femmeness, and a tight t-shirt with a DYKE patch on the front, just in case my signal wasn't clear. We did not talk about our pasts or our scars. We did not cry or touch.

We told stories. We tried to take each other in, believing we could make a difference like that, person to person. We talked in the clipped sentences of drop-in center relationships and tried not to reveal too much because revealing too much was making yourself vulnerable, and who knows who you can really trust. I am so far from the kid I was then. So far from the home the drop-in center became that looking back at her there, sitting cross-legged on that folding chair in the basement of the LGBT community center, round-faced and terrified, feels like looking at someone else.

One night in the old building, when Justice came back from travelling, we drove down Woodward to Detroit's westside in a borrowed car. Neither of us had slept in a long time. Justice's forehead rested on the cool car window. Blowing smoke rings and looking out at the stars, Justice said, "Do you know what it's like to be a traveller?" I watched the streetlights down Woodward pass and disappear. I thought about the word traveller for a long time, how that word implies a choice, while homeless, or runaway or at-risk suggest a lack. "Nah," I said, fully inhabiting the sorrow of someone who has lived in Michigan her whole life, yet can no longer go home. "I don't know what that feels like."

Freeze

When I remember the drop-in center, it is frozen in time. Summer. You can almost see the steam rising from the basement windows of B1 and B2. The repetitive sound of house music pounds from too-small speakers in the dance room. People from

the ball scene are voguing, j-setting, or walking runway, dancing hard, soaked clear through with sweat. There is a glorious drag rendition of Lady Marmalade. The attitude in here is strong tonight. A group of straight people tries to peer in from street-level to see what the party is about, but someone snaps the curtains shut with a flick of their wrist and a curt admonishment: "The zoo is down the road!"

A group of Gay-Straight Alliance kids are gossiping about school. People in the game room are playing an endless game of pool or watching a movie on a donated VCR. Youth activists are designing and facilitating programs. The artsy ones are making a collage. There are too many people to breathe comfortably inside. People step outside the back door on the Troy St. side periodically, cooling off under blue-white streetlights.

When I write about the center as home, which these days, happens more often, I slip into a familiar frozen feeling. When I pick up my pen, I am back there on Woodward, a major vein connecting Detroit with the northern suburbs. I watch the streetlights pass and disappear. I think: fight or flee, kid. Except this time I freeze. Because that community center space whose rhythms were once so familiar no longer exists.

The old building is re-done with a new paint job and wood floors, and B1 and B2 are home to a psychic and a candle shop. The exterior is the same, but the community space inside is gone. The Youth Empowerment Program is still there, in the new community center building down the street. It has new carpet, new cupboards, doors that lock, and a flat screen TV. The drop-in center meets on Friday and Saturday nights in the basement rooms, but now that we've aged out and moved on, few people remember our names.

Leaving home is a hard thing. How do I stay in the present and not keep myself frozen in that place? When I try, I am back there, on that folding chair with Justice, looking down at boot-clad feet on well-tread, berber carpet. I am not here, but there. I am trying to be here now. When it is time to move on, I will lace each eight-holed boot tight, plant my feet square on the ground, and feel supported. Because I didn't know this then, but in my thirties, I will have a little rented house in Lansing with locks on the doors and a flower garden outside. I'll paint the fence purple in the side-yard and make an altar there. And every year in August I'll dig a path back through the raspberry plants that have spread. I'll leave a memory there, on the mossy ground, and let the air curl its edges.

I'll stop sleeping with my boots on, always on the ready to run.

When the tears come, I'll let them come. I will find at least one resting place, at least one sanctuary. Find at least one thing to believe in bigger than myself, whether it's god, or the temporary certainty of my feet on the earth and my hands in the dirt, or the stars. People will disappoint me sometimes, including myself. I will find a community and a chosen family, or make one out of the scraps that other people throw away, and when the world tries to tell us it's not real, we'll ignore them. We know what's real because it feels real.

CHAPTER 3:

On Being Present: Consent in Community Spaces

Joan Nestle, fem cultural worker and co-founder of the *Lesbian Herstory Archives* in Park Slope, Brooklyn, invokes the idea of the fem body as archives in her forward to the 2011 collection *Persistence: All Ways Butch Femme*.⁴⁴ Locating her femness in 1950s bar culture, in gay and lesbian liberation, and in the first lesbian feminist groups in New York City, Nestle echoes an earlier claim in *A Persistent Desire* (1992) that butch-fem is a form of lesbian erotic identity and language, “flamboyance and fortitude, femme and butch –not poses, not stereotypes, but a dance between two different kinds of women, one beckoning the other into a full blaze of color, the other strengthening the fragility behind the exuberance. We who love this way are poetry and history, action and theory, flesh and spirit.”⁴⁵

I respect Nestle’s desire for the term to remain connected to histories of butch-fem in 1950s bar culture, in gay and lesbian liberation, and in lesbian feminism. I appreciate her insistence—future work on fem embodiment needs to remember its histories. I agree that bodies are archives and that when we use certain terms, like fem/me, we need to respect their histories. Recalling the cover image from her earlier collection, Nestle writes:

I look upon this foreword, as a way to look backward, to fix a more permanent (though life just laughs at such endeavors) form, the journey behind that pink-and-grey book cover showing a fem’s large thigh sheathed in seamed stockings pushing its way between the legs of her butch lover; my black slip riding high and Deb’s urban boots holding their own, both of us cradled in rich New

Hampshire meadow grass, and all captured in the lens of Morgan Gwenwald, that fine photographer of all things lesbian. My fem body, scarred in ways I had not imagined then, looks upon its younger self with gratitude for the kindness of that 1992 gay publisher who did not flinch at such an image. Even one's thighs are historical documents.⁴⁶

Well, hot damn, I thought, when I first saw the cover of A Persistent Desire (1992), that's where I come from. That's what I am: femme.

Cultural rhetorics scholar and feminist cultural worker Madhu Narayan interviewed Joan Nestle on her work starting the *Lesbian Herstory Archives* and how the LHA functions as a community-based archives⁴⁷. In "At Home With the Lesbian Herstory Archives," Narayan recounts a history of the LHA, forwarding the archives' purpose of promoting the idea that "lesbian communities are alive and flourishing." From her interview with Nestle, Narayan concludes that the LHA is a "community-based archives that works on the belief that 'every woman who has had the courage to touch another woman deserves to be remembered here...'"⁴⁸ Keeping its purpose open in this way allows the LHA to collect materials that better sustain contradictions and represent conflict within lesbian and feminist communities over identity and cultural politics.

If the body is an archive, as those doing work at the intersections of LGBTQ Studies, Trauma Studies, and Archival Studies believe that it is, then in the archives of my femme body is wearing boots as a cultural practice invoking strong feelings. This is the story of how wearing boots makes me feel present and grounded in my queer femme body. It meditates on boots, following my path as I move through LGBTQ community spaces. Embodied rhetorics take place in communities, whether that is

acknowledged or not. It was my queer femme body moving through community spaces—the LGBT community center, the feminist bookstore—that I first learned the histories of the term fem/me. It was in community spaces that I came to know my own gender identity and expression as femme, to understand the beauty and diversity of what that might mean.

Queer Femme Boots

When I look at the iconic image on the cover of *A Persistent Desire*, I am grateful for that representation of butch-femme because I remember lying in the grass, in the Arb in Ann Arbor, my leg slung between my lover's thighs in a gesture of open intimacy. Two photographs of me: a portrait of my face, eyes closed, open palm casually cast overhead; a close-up of my hand.

If you could scroll down my body, you would see I have just acquired a new-to-me pair of boots from the free box. I am sprawled on my back on a soft, floral sheet behind a drift of tall perennials. We will have fast and frantic sex there in the grass, unconcerned with being quiet or concealed, but first, this gender-bending sweetheart with the half-bald head is going to read to me from *Boys Like Her*, by the Canadian performance collaborative Taste This, Anna Camilleri's poem "Sly Boots"⁴⁹:

She looks like sly boots

strong-eyed and cocksure.

She looks like borrowed diamonds

in the rough and she is

rough and raggedy, but never ragged

rough and tumble, but never falls

rough around the edges, always sharp

rough housed, never caged

rough and ready always late.

Thinking back now, there is a chance my lover is trying to tell me he is not a masculine woman, but a femme man. Listening to the words then, I imagined the poem was about femmes. I haven't met Camilleri to ask about her inspiration for "Sly Boots," but I read that into the poem in that moment, and I learn about being femme: sly and cock-sure.

Wearing boots is one of the pleasures of queer femme life, one of the ways I read as femme. The act puts me in a particular, euphoric head-space, makes my body feel present and grounded. I like the way boots make me walk—half shuffle, half stomp, leaned forward always aching for momentum.

A stride is like stance, a signature, a lyric, evidence of how we move through the world. Examine the bottom of my boots and you might see the patterns of repeated movement. You might hear the ball of my foot strike first, scuffle stomp, a three-beat pattern. You might feel the patterns of wear and tear, each smooth, worn groove, each sharp, stark ridge. The tongue of my boot curled at the ready. You might learn to recognize me as femme.

You might learn to recognize different versions of femme. For me, femme is my older sister, also a lesbian, in her skin tight jeans and heels, the tools she uses to install custom car dashes and airbrush the caustic chemicals for gold plating cars. Femme is the girls at the Center walking runway, the old school feminist who drops pamphlets on my front porch in Dyke Heights, and every beautiful, long-lashed boy I've ever known.

I tell you this to ask you not to assume when I say femme I mean cisgender,⁵⁰ female, middle class, EuroAmerican, able-bodied, young. I came out in the late 90's and early 00's, after the emergence of queer theory, after pomo gender play became a thing,

into an LGBT community center made possible by gay and lesbian liberation, where femme included cis- and transgender women, bisexual women, drag queens, and gay men, a community space where being femme happened by self-identification. Where, as Elizabeth Ruth writes in “Quantum Femme,” “...it doesn’t matter what name you call her by, it’s the one she answers to that counts.”⁵¹

Wearing boots can be read as an intentional cue, a way of signaling we are of a certain persuasion, a bit of queer cultural rhetorics, much in the way Joan Nestle talks about expressions of butch-femme lesbian desire in “Flamboyance and Fortitude” (*A Persistent Desire*).

...lesbian life in America from at least the thirties through the sixties was organized around a highly developed sense of sexual ceremony and dialogue ... because of the surrounding oppression, ritual and code were often all we had to make public erotic connections. Dress, stance, gestures, even jewelry and hairstyles had to carry the weight of the sexual communications.⁵²

The codes have changed over time, but are still there. In their hypertext, “Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive,” Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes argue that queer practice is *robustly rhetorical* because “it sees discourse as densely persuasive—a set of textual, visual, and auditory tools through which bodies and psyches are shaped and cast in particular identity formations and through which such bodies and psyches might potentially be recast and reformed”⁵³

This is how I reconcile the image of a working class fem with black stocking seams from the cover of *A Persistent Desire*, black silk slip and thigh high seamed stockings, with my embodied reality in the present moment—my butch lover sports

jeans and sneaks and I wear the boots. Femme boots, for a queer femme stance: present and grounded—a way of putting ourselves in the necessary presence of mind for the tasks at hand.

Femmeness, in other words, is not only femme visibility, which has been an important focus of work in LGBTQ Studies. Femme visibility is a useful metaphor in that a commonality among femmes seems to be feeling unseen, or being perceived incorrectly as straight, or posing as straight. Femmeness is not only a look. Femmeness also seems to be a way of embodiment or presence. And wearing boots, as a queer femme cultural practice, is not only a look, but part of a stance of fierce vulnerability and toughness.

Lesbian cultural texts, Ann Cvetkovich reminds us in *An Archive of Feelings*, are not only texts but “repositories of feelings and emotions . . . encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the *practices* that surround their production and reception.”⁵⁴ Boots carry feelings and emotions, whether the pleasure of putting them on, or the relief of taking them off after a day’s work. Wearing boots tags back to memories, both unique to particular bodies / archival spaces and tied to shared cultural and community narratives about what the practice means.

A woman wears boots, what might otherwise be seen as a masculine signifier, and names herself femme. A femme rejects wearing heels, not out of political principle, but out of a physical necessity to feel present and grounded, and names herself queer. That woman flagging femme is me. Those boots connecting us to a history of queer femmes are ours.

The Truth About My Body

An acrobat's body, 5'1 with boots on. Strong and nimble, except for a slight hitch in my left hip where history lives. When I travel long distances. When I first wake up. When I am stressed or fatigued or remembering. No longer an injury, but a body memory: what remains when the wound is gone. A hitch so slight you wouldn't notice unless you knew. A hip so ripe with information about my past that if you were to touch that hip—and I'd rather you ask first—stories would come out.

I didn't used to think about my body at all. Like many survivors of trauma, I left the body for the higher ground of the mind. This was back before I went to rhetoric and writing school and learned the body and mind are one and the same, the split between them invented by men of the privileged classes, who did not have historically marginalized people in mind. Whenever life got too intense or death too present, I would go away to a quiet place in my chest, and wait there for safety. I thought my way through life, but couldn't feel.

Spaced out. Checked out. Gone away. "Come back," my lover would say in her gentle, soft butch voice, when I started to return to my body. "When you can, come back to our life. Your bulldog is here and I've made us some dinner."

Perhaps it is because I know the feeling of being gone that I relish being present in my writing, putting my body and voice on the page rather than hidden beneath academic language, wrapped up in ideas. Oh, I love a good idea, the way a certain word can reveal a piece of reality that would otherwise be unspoken, the way a theory can make people feel less alone, like our stories matter.

It was only recently, when I heard Dorothy Allison's keynote address at the *Feminisms & Rhetorics* conference at Stanford, that I considered the relevance of being present in terms of writing⁵⁵. At the conference, I read some stories about how growing up at the LGBT community center taught me to talk about queer desires, and the

response was largely positive. One audience member, though, seemed distressed: How do I expect to get a job, telling nasty stories like that? Queer people, they said, need to protect ourselves.

I thought then about Sappho, fragment 137, translated by Anne Carson: I want to say something but shame prevents me.⁵⁶

Later, when Dorothy Allison spoke, she said academic language can be a kind of code, one scholars hide behind because we're afraid of being vulnerable. We can use academic language to give us the illusion we're safe, Allison said, because no one knows what the hell we're talking about. Academic language boosts us up, tells us we know things. It separates us from them, those who traffic in ideas from those with bodies and desires.⁵⁷ The separation between ideas, bodies, and desires is a fantasy, of course. The idea that being an acceptable queer, clothed in appropriate language, will keep us safe arises from a community's legitimate, bodily fear of vulnerability. The problem with desiring safety, in this context, is the desire to be safe gets tangled up with practices of academic writing and publishing that keep certain bodies and desires, deemed less acceptable and appropriate, on the margins. Queer scholars must constantly negotiate how much of our bodies and desires to put in our work, if our work is to be understood as legitimate, significant, real.

I don't want LGBTQ people to have to choose between being safe/ gone, and being here/ in danger, and I don't think we have to. And yet, the ability to manage our level of vulnerability and risk, choosing where and how and to whom to be present is also necessary. I do it by feel—lace my boots, try to put myself in the necessary presence

of body and mind to negotiate the risks. Being present matters because it means being here for other femmes, so our brilliance can be acknowledged within queer communities and elsewhere. Being present matters because it is one of the elements of consent. Consent, being a commitment to building more responsible and accountable relationships in community spaces.⁵⁸ Consent, being the notion that people ought to be able to decide how desire gets played out with our bodies. Consent, being an attempt at carefully negotiate power in relationships in a world that is often profoundly unsafe, an attempt to be self-possessed but community-minded in a world where the choices available to different bodies differ widely, a world where power and privilege multiplies our choices, and marginalization, especially when multiple, may limit them.⁵⁹

On Being Present

Cvetkovich's idea in *An Archive of Feelings* that cultural texts hold feelings—not only in what is present or can be spoken/shared, but also and especially in what can not or will not be remembered because of trauma or dissociation—has stayed with me. The ways in which places/spaces and people/bodies remember is a problem I return to often in my work on consent. Dissociation begs the question: is consent an accessible practice for trauma survivors, as LGBTQ people so often are, if practicing consent requires being present? How can LGBTQ people, so often survivors, practice consent if we're not fully there? Or better yet, how can we learn to be present.

This question of presence is how I came to be at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Park Slope, Brooklyn this past summer, holding a stranger's dildo in my hands. Six inches long, slim, without a discernible curve, though somewhat pliant. I held the toy at its flared base with my left hand and touched it with my right. We could imagine I whispered, "Where are you from?" Or, "to whom do you belong?" Even, "I remember you." We could invent a story for that toy: Dyke drama. One woman left and the shared

toys went in the donation box, bound for the archives. Or, the sex is still hot and they decide to upgrade from jelly rubber (which is often full of toxic phthalates) to a toy made of cyberskin (which is more realistic) or silicone (which can be more easily cleaned).

But I didn't dwell on unanswerable questions or invent a seamless history from what I felt. Imagine I went back to a shelf in my body / memories and took down a box, neglected or forgotten, and dusted it off. Inside there is no Aha! moment, no linear narrative, no connecting the dots. There is only my body, fully present in this moment and awash with feelings strong enough to trigger body memories—violence, rage, shame, sure, but also pleasure, desire, and boundless joy.

When I try to write about community spaces, which these days, happens more often, it would be easy to slip into the familiar frozen feeling—to be back there at the Center, in the office of a person powerful enough to have an office, with a body full of raw fear and a mouth full of fighting words. Except now, I am the one with an office. I picked up my pen and tapped out some stories on the keys of a borrowed laptop. Now I have to consider how to reconcile the ethical imperatives of academic life with the even more intensive pulls of community responsibility and accountability. I have to ask myself those hard questions about the risks of telling stories about community spaces to those who were not, and could not possibly be there.

CHAPTER 4: **Preface to the Sex Wars**

LGBTQ people's lives have depended on learning how to talk about and negotiate sex and relationships in the context of the sexual silences, stigma, and shame⁶⁰ associated with being queer, particularly in relation to the Sex Wars and the HIV / AIDs epidemic. For queer people, negotiating sex and relationships has often meant negotiating our safety in a dominant culture that can be hostile to us, often withholding critical information and resources, as well as negotiating hostility from within our communities (see Allison, 1994; Hollibaugh and Moraga, 1992).

It felt critical to understand what people at the LGBT community center were really arguing about, when we fought about the appropriateness of a nude photography exhibit, and how it would represent "the community" in the public art gallery during Pride (just to name one example). Is it porn? Is it art? LGBTQ people are still fighting about it amongst ourselves. There were several moments of awareness like this, where I became aware of having a queer sense of propriety and taste.

Learning about the Sex Wars meant coming to understand (often) painful histories in feminist and queer culture, such as the idea common among some contemporary feminists that butch-femme relationships are inherently heteronormative copies of heterosexual relationships⁶¹. Or, the fact that many of my favorite LGBTQ books were once seen to contain 'pornographic' themes by so-called community standards, while some of their themes (S/M, butch-fem, penetrative sex) were seen as 'anti-feminist' by some feminists. As a baby dyke, I learned these discourses of sexuality like many LGBTQ people do, in queer and feminist community

spaces outside of home or school⁶². Learning about the Sex Wars was a community matter—it meant learning about the histories running underneath the language and arguments in feminist and LGBTQ communities we came out into. Learning about the Sex Wars meant understanding sexuality in a larger context, beginning to fully understand why Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga’s call to resist sexual silences in “What We’re Rollin’ Around in Bed With” is still relevant, why consent is such a contentious but important topic.

Only through learning about the Sex Wars did I fully understand the crucial “sexual literacies”⁶³ LGBTQ youth were teaching each other when we participated in peer education through safer sex workshops. Only through learning about the Sex Wars did I begin to acknowledge the brilliance of the teaching and learning practices that happened in community spaces, at an LGBT community center, a women’s bookstore, and in public debates on queer and feminist issues.

This is why I initially put the essay “Consent in the Feminist Sex Wars” first in the collection—because I need for you to understand consent in these cultural and historical contexts to know how the elements of pleasure and danger became the focus of queer and feminist arguments. So, if you are unfamiliar with the cultural histories of the Sex Wars, you may want to start here. By teaching you how language and arguments of the Sex Wars reveal very different understandings of the radical potential of consent, I am showing you where I stand in relationship to queer community-based discourses on consent. I believe in the radical potential of consent to negotiate relationships, sexual and otherwise. Having witnessed the ways sexual silences, stigma, shame, and violence have ravaged LGBTQ communities, I know having critical information on sex and consent has been fundamental to the survival of LGBTQ people and communities.

CHAPTER 5: Consent in the Feminist Sex Wars

The Sex Wars are over, I've been told, and it always makes me want to ask who won. But my sense of humor may be a little obscure to women who have never felt threatened by the way most lesbians use and mean the words *pervert* and *queer*.

- Dorothy Allison, "A Question of Class"

When Dorothy Allison made those wry observations in her 1994 essay "A Question of Class," she was recalling the bitter and irreconcilable differences over feminist sexualities in the late 80s and early 90s. As the movement sparred over issues like pornography, penetrative sex, S/M, and butch-fem, pleasure and danger were used to make sense of contentious arguments about what constitutes acceptable feminist sexualities, and what kinds of practices are compatible with feminist spaces (Vance, 1984; Duggan and Hunter, 1995). I understand the feminist Sex wars as arguments about different understandings of the radical potential of consent, and also, about establishing the terms of feminist sexualities around the elements of pleasure and danger. Arguments that seem on the surface to be about pornography, penetrative sex, S/M, butch-fem, became about what constitutes feminist sexualities and about what kinds of practices belong in feminist spaces. Tracing the rhetoric of consent through these arguments reveals how consent is rhetorical—that is, how theories of theories of consent depend on who is speaking, whose pleasure we're talking about, and who is imagined to be in danger.

This cultural and rhetorical history⁶⁴ of consent traces consent as feminist and queer rhetorical theory through the Sex Wars era, suggesting different understandings of consent are at the crux of ongoing arguments in contemporary queer and feminist movements. This essay takes another look at consent, tracing how feminists and queer people have talked about it, especially the elements of pleasure and danger, now that we are supposedly ‘past’ the Sex Wars era. Pleasure and danger may seem like contradictory, even binary terms, but in a system where systemic and institutional inequalities and violence against LGBTQ communities, especially QTPOC communities⁶⁵, is commonplace, they are also inseparable. Pleasure and danger came to frame the topic of sexuality during the Sex Wars, but they are only two of what I like to think of as the elements of consent. These practical and rhetorical elements have the potential to extend how we think about consent. This cultural history of consent analyzes consent in feminist anti-violence discourse, including U.S. radical feminist critiques of consent and pro-sex and sex-positive concepts of consent. I show how the rhetorics anti-porn feminists and pro-sex feminists used to make public arguments for/against pornography (penetrative sex, S/M, butch-fem) call on particular understandings of consent. Then, I will discuss how exploring LGBTQ community discourses on pleasure and danger reveal other elements of consent deserving consideration.

The Conflict at Barnard College

As U.S. feminist anti-violence movements worked to combat rape, sexual harassment, and violence against women in all its forms, anti-pornography activists, a small but vocal arm of anti-violence movements, claimed pornography, dildos, butch-fem, and S/M were patriarchal and violent (Brownmiller 1975; 1976; Dworkin 1981,

1987, 1990; MacKinnon 1983, 1996). The conflict exploded at *The Scholar and the Feminist* IX conference at Barnard (Ferguson 1984; Vance 1984).

In study groups, political organizations, academic institutions, and elsewhere, women composed responses to the conference call, exploring female sexuality. The academic coordinator of the conference, Carole Vance, compiled and planned to publish *Diary of a Conference on Sexuality*, a zine-like conference program that includes archival documents of conference planning—Vance’s letter to presenters, a concept paper co-authored by conference organizers, the conference’s purposes and guiding questions, meeting minutes from the organizing process, images, suggested readings—along with pages of workshop descriptions, a schedule of papers and events (Heather Love, “Diary of a Conference On Sexuality, 1982” *GLQ* 2010, 50).

Carole Vance tells the story of the Barnard sex conference in the epilogue of her collection of papers from the Conference, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (1984). When members of anti-pornography groups learned the conference would include panels on pornography, penetrative sex, butch-femme, and S/M, they notified members of Barnard College’s administration, decrying the topics “anti-feminist” and the participants “sexual deviants” (431). In response to calls from anti-pornography feminist groups, Barnard College’s administrators confiscated 1,500 copies of *Diary of a Conference on Sexuality* for examination, igniting a controversy about the institutionalized censorship of sexual desire and need, among the program’s writers, artists, and organizers. Ultimately, the college’s president agreed to re-print the conference program, on the condition that organizers remove any associations with Barnard College (Vance, 1984).

At the conference, anti-pornography groups staged a protest wearing t-shirts reading, “For a Feminist Sexuality” on the front, and “Against S/M” on the back (Vance

1984, 433). They distributed leaflets calling out particular conference presenters by name —Dorothy Allison, Pat Califia, Gayle Rubin, among others. Vance explains,

Because the conference was designed to open up feminist dialogue about sex, these women characterized it as dominated by sexual nonconformists, who were in fact only part of the wide spectrum of opinion represented there. Anti-pornography critics rightly perceived the planning committee's attempt to redress the balance between sexual pleasure and sexual danger as an intellectual and political intervention in the discussion, which they had recently dominated. But they wrongly concluded that an analysis of sexual danger had been excluded from the conference. They objected, in truth, to their loss of control over the discourse (431).

The conflict at the Barnard sexuality conference gives us pleasure and danger as a theoretical frame that continues to shape feminist discourses of gender and sexuality. Far from being distinct and binary categories, pleasure and danger are interrelated discourses of sexuality. Arguments over the terms of pleasure and danger, like those at *The Scholar and the Feminist IX*, reveal theoretical differences on the meaning and potential of consent.

In the late 80s and early 90s, as political conservatives and the religious right attacked freedom of sexual expression, feminist anti-violence activists developed critiques of violence against women and children in the media, especially in pornography. Radical feminists framed consent as what happens when to women when they have been living so long oppressed that they have little choice but acquiescence. In a male supremacist, patriarchal culture, radical feminists believed consent could be dangerous. Certain sexual styles and practices were understood as feminist (erotica, political lesbianism, love-making) and others “anti-feminist” (pornography, penetrative sex, S/M, butch-fem).

Ellen Willis and other pro-sex feminists have written about how political conservatives, the religious right, and radical feminists made awkward bedfellow, each working for different goals but using the same kinds of moralizing rhetoric about sex (1981). At the same time, Willis thought the problem with the kinds of sexual relativism advocated by the sexual libertarians was the question of boundaries and limits, or where to draw the line. Willis claimed the question feminists need to ask ourselves, when we have and theorize sex, is not what a singular version of feminist sexuality looks like, but “Why do we choose what we choose? What would we choose if we had a real choice” (1981, 14).

Pro-sex / sex-positive feminists understood consent as a set of practices people can use to negotiate pleasure and danger, power and desire. LGBTQ communities also contribute alternatives to the radical feminist line on consent, which is that consent is what happens to women when there is no choice but to acquiesce. The presence of LGBTQ people in feminist spaces may have prompted some radical feminists to critically examine the ways in which theories of consent can be heterosexist, homo-, bi-, and transphobic. Yet, contemporary conversations on sexual and gender politics reveal the ways in which consent is still fraught and common assumptions about pleasure and danger still linger on.

Theories of Consent: How Consent Became a Feminist Issue

When force is a normalized part of sex, when no is taken to mean yes, when fear and despair produce acquiescence and acquiescence is taken to mean consent, consent is not a meaningful concept.

- “Liberalism and the Death of Feminism,”
Catharine MacKinnon, 1980

Radical feminist Critiques of Consent

Consent emerged as a contentious issue as radical feminist critiques of the sexual revolution claimed it had fallen short of its liberatory possibilities, simply giving men easier access to exploit women's bodies through sex, relationships, and the labor of motherhood.⁶⁶ In 1969, Kate Millett, an artist and activist in the students' rights and anti-war movements, published *Sexual Politics*, a work of feminist literary theory arguing sex is political by analyzing the roles power and domination have played in descriptions of sex in contemporary literature. Millet's work defined politics as "power-structured relationships whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" and argued sex has historically been used as a power relationship to subjugate and degrade women (23).

In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone, who co-founded the radical feminist group Redstockings⁶⁷ with Ellen Willis, agreed with Millet on sex as a gendered power relationship, but Firestone located the root of the problem in romantic love and the biological imperative to have children (1970). Rather than trying to shift power relationships by initiating reforms giving women more agency to experiment with sex, Firestone imagined a world where women could be free from the labor of procreation through ex utero reproduction, replacing the traditional family unit with intentional families where people chose one another, rather than being linked by biology and genetics (Tong 2013, 55).

Alongside critiques of male dominance in all areas of women's lives, a vocal arm of the Women's Liberation movement focused on violence against women in all its forms (see Morgan, 1970; Brownmiller, 1975; Frye 1978; Davis, 1983). In "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," lesbian feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye elaborated a theoretical argument for lesbian separatism, connecting the dynamics of power and access. Conscious separation from male institutions, relationships, roles, and

activities, Frye said, through the creation of womyn-only spaces, destabilizes male privilege and male supremacy (406). On consent, or the relationship between power and access, Frye writes, “total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access” (Frye 1983, 103).

If, as Millet argued earlier, sex is a relationship of power and dominance, with men historically holding the power, then men’s unconditional access to women’s bodies through sex is a fundamental part of a larger system of power—male supremacy and patriarchy (Frye, 1970). It is not only sex through which men gain access to women, Frye explains. In a male-dominated world, men act as parasites feeding off women’s energy, attention, and nurturance, so withdrawing consent for unconditional access to that labor is also a step towards destabilizing male supremacy (101). Womyn-only spaces tend to offend people, she explains, because of the ways in which they involve women taking back power through taking back access (103).

Consent also emerged as a way of talking about the parallels between sexual violence and what Angela Y. Davis describes in “We Do Not Consent: Violence Against Women in a Racist Society” as “neocolonial violence against people and nations” (1983, 37). Davis offers us a cultural history of feminist anti-violence movement that attends both to the pernicious problem of rape, which she acknowledges happens to women of all ages, races, classes, and sexual orientations. Critiquing common myths about rape, Davis argues that rape is situated “on a larger continuum of socially inflicted violence, which includes concerted, systematic violations of women’s economic and political rights” and that these attacks “most gravely affect women of color and their white working-class sisters” (38).

Shutting down the myth of the Black rapist, Davis gives a history of how rape

has been used by white men against Black women as a political weapon of terror, and how false rape charges have been used to incarcerate Black men (44). If we want to get at the root of the problem of violence against women, then we need to examine the cultural issues around rape and acknowledge rape as just one element of larger problems of militarism, war, and the violence of the state against women globally, particularly women, queer and trans people, and QTPOC (44).

When Catharine MacKinnon writes in “Liberalism and the Death of Feminism,” “consent is not a meaningful concept” she means to critique male supremacy:

There was a women's movement that criticized as socially based—not natural or God-given or even descended from Congress—acts like rape as male violence against women, as a form of sexual terrorism. It criticized war as male ejaculation. It criticized marriage and the family as institutional crucibles of male privilege, and the vaginal orgasm as a mass hysterical survival response. It criticized definitions of merit as implicitly sex biased, class biased, and race biased. It even criticized fairy tales.

When this movement criticized rape, it meant rapists and the point of view that saw rape as sex. When it criticized prostitution, it meant pimps and johns and the point of view that women are born to sell sex. When it criticized incest, it meant those who did it to us, and the point of view that made our vulnerability and enforced silence sexy. When it criticized battery, it meant batterers, and the point of view that violence expressed the intensity of love. Nobody thought that in criticizing these practices, the movement was criticizing their victims.

It also criticized sacred concepts from the standpoints of women's material existence, our reality, concepts like choice. It was a movement that knew when material conditions preclude 99 percent of your options, it is not meaningful to call the remaining 1 percent—what you are doing—your choice(4, 1990).

Consent and choice get snarled here. In the process of codifying radical feminist critiques of violence against women in laws and policy, radical feminists like MacKinnon (1983; Dworkin, 1981, 1987; Morgan, 1975) claimed women, under the conditions of male supremacy and patriarchy, don't really have many choices when it

comes to sex. In other words, women don't consent to sexual harassment and rape, and can't possibly consent to particular sexual styles and acts.

The Porn Wars, 1969

When a 1969 Supreme Court decision, *Stanley v. Georgia*, ruled for the right to privacy in the possession of "obscene materials," President Lyndon B. Johnson established The President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. By the next year, the commission had concluded exposure to explicit materials does not increase sex crimes (*Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*, 1970). As more explicit sexual imagery became readily available in the early '70s, U.S. radical feminists launched an anti-pornography movement, creating slideshows critiquing sexually explicit materials, doing zap actions against popular porn mags, and organizing large-scale demonstrations and marches that focus on violence against women in pornography (see Brownmiller 1999, 296; Jay 2000; Bronstein 2011).

Susan Brownmiller tells the story of her involvement in the anti-porn movement in "The Pornography Wars":

By a miserable coincidence of historic timing, an aboveground, billion-dollar industry of hard- and soft-core porn began to flourish during the seventies simultaneously with the rise of Women's Liberation. The door through which the purveyors of pornography raced was opened by a 1970 presidential commission report declaring the effects of porn to be harmless and inconsequential; the subsequent avalanche derived its legality from a 1973 Supreme Court ruling, *Miller v. California*, which replaced existing obscenity guidelines with a vague and selective approach called 'community standards' (1999, 295).

What is interesting about these cases is how they codified the state's consent to pornography in documents. Later on in the Porn Wars, anti-porn feminists would

attempt to use similar strategies to codify their non-consent to pornographic representations of women through local ordinances. Ironically the same strategy had been used decades prior to keep women from teaching each other about birth control.

In 1975, the NOW Media Task Force launched a campaign to monitor images of women in the media, using legal means to challenge employment and programming policies the organization found to be sexist and misogynistic (NOW “Highlights”). The backlash against feminist critiques of the media was strong. Brownmiller’s memoir, *In Our Time*, tells the story what happened after a NOW chapter printed her anti-pornography missive “Women Fight Back,” a pamphlet where she defined porn as “anti-female propaganda, one of the forces contributing to the prevalence of rape. *Hustler* and *Screw* magazines printed sexual fantasies about her and her home address (1999, 297). “Women Fight Back” challenged the ACLU to recognize porn as dehumanizing and objectifying women, making them into objects to be “used, abused, broken, and discarded” (Brownmiller 1999, 297).

In *Heresies* 12 (the Sex issue) Paula Webster paraphrases anti-porn feminist theories: “Pornography caused violence against women. Moreover, not only did pornography *cause* violence against women, it *was* violence against women (see also Bronstein 2011). Pornography made women victims, for it depicted women as subject to men’s sexual lusts” (“Pornography and Pleasure” 1981, 48). As porn started to filter into the mainstream, the radical feminist news mag *Off Our Backs* began providing radical feminist voices in opposition: “Women must become aware that there would be no oppressor without the oppressed,” OOB editors wrote, in a statement from the first issue, published February 1970, “...we carry the responsibility for withdrawing the consent to be oppressed” (“History”).

The idea that women have been living so long in patriarchal culture that they must (or even could) withdraw consent for oppression was considered part of a process of consciousness raising, a collaborative and self-reflective process where women would re-consider their attachments to male supremacy and patriarchy, including: motherhood and the traditional family unit, heterosexual sex, and their relationships to men, their own bodies, and other women (Sarachild, "Program for Feminist Consciousness Raising," 1968; Firestone, 1970; Koedt, 1970; Dworkin 1987). One of the problems with the consciousness raising model, and with radical feminist critiques of porn, was they assumed all women were oppressed by virtue of being women (often flattening out different levels of power and privilege among women) and they assumed women were unaware of this oppression.

As anti-porn activists organized Take Back the Night marches and tried to take down male pornographers through direct action, early sex worker's rights groups like COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics) founded in San Francisco in 1973, advocated decriminalization—making the labor of sex work real work in the eyes of the law and opposing male control over sexuality and sexual images, but not sex and sexual images themselves (walnet.org/csis/groups.coyote.html).

One of the problems with anti-porn arguments is evident at the level of language—calling porn "anti-female propaganda" sets up a dichotomy where porn is positioned as violence against women, and understood as anti-female and anti-feminist. Despite pro-sex feminist critiques of the anti-porn movement, anti-porn feminists held onto the idea that no woman could possibly consent to porn. They believed any woman who claimed to like porn, participating in the sex industry, having penetrative sex, or practicing consensual S/M, was suffering from what Jennifer Gardner described as "false consciousness" (1969). They all have one thing in common, Dorchon Leidholdt,

one of the leaders of Women Against Pornography, an anti-porn activist group, wrote, “a power relationship that replicates in miniature the power relations of society” (1990, 127).

Legislating Sexual Morality: The Dworkin-MacKinnon Model Anti-Pornography Ordinance, 1983

One of the strategies for fighting pornography as violence against women was to codify feminist non-consent (saying no) to pornography through local ordinances. Co-authored by two of the feminist anti-violence movement’s most vocal supporters, Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, the Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance sought to combat pornography through legal means through zoning laws. Rather than arguing against pornography using traditional obscenity laws, Dworkin and MacKinnon argued pornography was part of sex discrimination and a violation of civil rights that disproportionately harms women (MacKinnon 1989).

The Model Anti-pornography Civil Rights Ordinance defined pornography, named its specific harms, and detailed a course of action women who work in the pornography industry could take if they have been coerced or otherwise abused (MacKinnon 1989). The ordinance claimed pornography promotes contempt for, and aggression against women, diminishing opportunities for equal rights in employment, education, housing, and public service, and creating the conditions for harassment, causing rape, battery, and the sexual abuse of children (“Appendix D: The Model Ordinance”). “The harm of pornography includes dehumanization, psychic assault, sexual exploitation, forced sex, forced prostitution, physical injury, and social and sexual terrorism and inferiority presented as entertainment” (“Model Anti-pornography Civil Rights Ordinance”).

When real women are treated as objects, dehumanized, subjugated, and used, The Model Anti-pornography Ordinance suggests, there is no potential for choice, or consent. Taking up a class-based argument against pornography, the ordinance assumed all women working in the porn industry were coerced, or did so out of necessity. As radical feminists sought to define pornography and name its specific harms against real women⁶⁸, it became clear not all feminists agreed on what pornography is, or whether it is unquestionably harmful.⁶⁹

While the ordinance was ultimately ruled unconstitutional, it continues to be used as a model for similar legislation against pornography⁷⁰. By attempting to codify anti-porn rhetoric in legal documents, anti-porn feminists put their personal boundaries onto the community's boundaries, claiming not only that porn is "anti-woman" and "anti-feminist," but that it shouldn't be allowed within the boundaries of respectable communities. As a result, establishments that purportedly "sell sex" got pushed to the fringe, often to working class and poor neighborhoods, and into communities of color, a trend that continues to this day. Rather than supporting sex workers, the displacement of establishments related to the sex industry helps sustain the cycle of poverty and violence, supplying the porn industry with women who may have significantly fewer economic choices.

Leave Linda Lovelace Alone

The impetus for the Dworkin-MacKinnon Anti-Pornography Ordinance in Minneapolis was Linda Boreman, a former porn actress known as Linda Lovelace in the movie *Deep Throat*. Boreman had published the memoir *Ordeal* in 1980, in which she wrote (TW) about being raped and coerced into making the film by her ex husband and manager, Chuck Traynor. Anti-porn feminists, including Gloria Steinem, Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, and the group Women Against Pornography took up

Boreman's cause (Duggan, Hunter, Vance, "False Promises" from *Sex Wars*). Steinem published the article "The Real Linda Lovelace" in Ms. Magazine, where she argued Traynor had created the fantasy that Boreman enjoyed being sexually used and humiliated to sell porn, using violence and the threat of it to coerce her into participating.

MacKinnon agreed to represent Boreman in a lawsuit, but when they learned the statute of limitations for a suit had passed, Dworkin and MacKinnon proposed the idea of civil rights laws to fight pornography at the local level (Brownmiller, 1999, 337). Because the statute of limitations was up for Linda Boreman's case, the strategy became to expunge pornographic material from community spaces. In crafting anti-porn rhetoric for the local ordinance, Dworkin and MacKinnon used Linda Lovelace's story to make their argument⁷¹.

The Porn vs. Erotica Debate

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feelings.

- Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic:
The Erotic as Power" (53, 1984)

Audre Lorde's essay comes to mind when tracing how feminists began to parse what they meant by pornography. When Lorde wrote, "the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative force to the woman who does not succumb to the belief that sensation is enough," what I believe she meant to do was draw a distinction between the pornographic, which she felt steals women's precious energy (power) without devaluing the erotic, which she calls "a source of information and power" (54). Lorde spoke against sexual representations that try and take away women's power by

“emphasiz[ing] sensation without feeling” without devaluing the erotic, a life force giving women power (53-4).

When I say I mean to trace consent through the Sex Wars, what I mean to point out is how the elements of consent show up in feminist arguments. Pleasure and danger turn out to be just two of the elements of consent. Power is another element, which shows up in debates on pornography. Theories of power informed how feminists came to understand our relationship with pleasure and danger. Regardless of their position in the Sex Wars, when building anti-violence movements, feminists theorized power, connecting power and access (Frye 1978) power and the erotic (Lorde 1984) power and non-consent to state violence (Davis 1990) power and male supremacy (MacKinnon 1996) power and sexual subordination (Dworkin 1987) power, pleasure, and desire (Allison 1994; Califia 1981, 1988, 2000, 2001) power and language (Chrystos 1993), power and the sex-gender system (Rubin 1984), and the potential to negotiate power (Califia 2000, 2001; Dodson 2013). One of the ways conceptions of power came up during the Sex Wars is in debates on the differences between pornography and erotica. LGBTQ women played a prominent role in refiguring how feminists understood power, as it relates to pleasure and danger, during the conflict over porn in the late 80s in the U.S.

Chrystos, a poet and writer of Menominee and Lithuanian/ Alsace-Lorraine descent, also touches on the differences between the pornographic and the erotic in her collection of erotic poetry *In Her, I Am*:

I call you flying your tongue lifts me radiant
fills lost places
I swallow you
staining my mouth sweet

with your blackberry nipples
I raise you over my house proclaim you
Clasp your head burrowing between my legs...

I paint you watch you like mountains at dusk
Let you
whenever you want with a rush of blue violet spring
I name you darkness which heals
moving over my weariness in stars
I guard you (13, 1993).

The poem "I Give You a Love Name" uses erotic imagery in a way that is not comparable to how women are treated in mainstream porn. The way Chrystos maintains contradictions in her writings on relationships with women is important because it doesn't take up the false belief that relationships between women are inherently non-violent. This was a common assumption among many feminists, critiqued by queer and pro-sex feminists, including Dorothy Allison (1994, 135-42).

I am not so sure anymore of the difference.
I do not believe anymore in the natural superiority
of the lesbian, the difference between my sisters and me.
Fact is, for all I tell my sisters
I turned out terrific at it myself:
sucking cunt, stroking ego, provoking,
manipulating, comforting, keeping.
plotting my life around mothering
other women's desperation (Allison, 1991, 29).

Despite the perspectives LGBTQ feminists brought into the conversations on sexual representation (Lorde 1984; Allison 1991, 1994; Chrystos 1993) some radical lesbian feminists, like Andrea Dworkin took a hard line. Dworkin claimed erotica was simply classier porn, “better produced, better conceived, better executed, better packaged, designed for a better class of consumer” (1981). Dworkin’s hard line on porn positioned sexual images as a vile symptom of male supremacy (1981).

President Reagan’s Reign, Washington, D.C., 1981-1989

The Sex Wars were only a small part of what Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter call “a decade of sex panics” (1995). The cultural climate for LGBTQ people was such at the time that our desires got lumped into the pornographic or “obscene” category, and marginalized, or subsumed into heteronormative culture to be made more acceptable (Rubin 1984; Chrystos 1993). The Christian right had launched moralistic attacks on abortion rights, protections for lesbian and gay people, access to contraception and sex education materials, and women’s economic independence from men (Vance, “Toward a Politics of Sexuality” 2). President Ronald Reagan and his conservative political cronies were publicly silent about AIDS (Shilts 2007; Shephard and Hayduk 2002). Groups like ACT UP showed they did not consent to the silence around AIDs (which was a form of state violence against LGBTQ communities and communities of color) with the slogan “Silence = Death.” It won’t be until the end of his second term, May 31, 1987, at the Third International Conference on AIDS in Washington that Reagan will address the issue (“Ignoring AIDS: The Reagan Years” *Democracy Now* 2004). By that time, 40,849 people will have died from complications of the disease (AMFAR “Thirty Years” 2015).

In a sex panic, like the Anti-Pornography Ordinance, the conflict at the Barnard Conference on Sexuality, arguments among lesbian communities about erotica and S/M, the AIDs crisis, "...irrational fears about sexuality are mobilized by the effective use of alarming symbols" (1984, 434). The way a sex panic operates is to:

... mobilize fears of pollution in an attempt to draw firm boundaries between legitimate and deviant forms of sexuality and individuals. The polluting elements, drawn from the 'sexual lower orders,' are given enormous power: present in even small quantities, they threaten to engulf and contaminate all (Vance, 1984, 434-5).

The fear, in a sex panic, is the desires of the sexual lower orders (lower and working class people, queer people, etc.) are tremendously powerful and threaten to rush in, contaminating respectable lesbians with their queer sex and relationships.

However, it wasn't the boundaries of respectable feminist sexualities that were really in danger. At the Barnard Conference on Sexuality, for example, anti-porn feminist groups were the ones playing non-consensually with dominance and submission, when they used social stigma, humiliation, and shame, outing⁷² certain presenters' sexual desires and labeled certain sexual practices "abnormal" "unnatural" "obscene" and "anti-feminist." This was a move toward consolidating the borders of feminist communities, in favor of developing a stable community identity. It resulted in certain sexualities being seen as marginal and on the outside, which we can see in moments (like the one at Barnard) where anti-porn feminists called out certain sexual practices as "anti-feminist," pushing those they considered 'sex radicals' to the fringe of the community.

Queer and 'Sex Radical' Concepts of Consent

Opposition to radical feminists' focus on sexual danger coalesced in the early 80s, after a series of conflicts over feminist sexual propriety and taste, women's agency, and what constitutes a feminist sexuality.⁷³ Pro-sex feminists, sometimes known as libertarian feminists, or sex-positive feminists, advocated for freedom of sexual expression among consenting adults. Many pro-sex feminists understood consent in terms of personal agency, or a woman's ability to make whatever choices she has at the time, given the privileges and constraints on her power created by her position. Pro-sex feminists were 'sex radicals' in the sense that they did not understand consent as acquiescence (what women agree to sexually when our options under male supremacy and patriarchy are so limited as to make the concept of choice irrelevant).

"Pro-sex" came into popular use when Ellen Willis coined the term in her 1981 article for *The Village Voice*, "Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?" Bitter arguments over whether women can really consent to pornography (penetrative sex, S/M, butch-fem) were dividing the movement. A regular political commentator for *The Village Voice*, and a founding member of early radical feminist organizations like New York Radical Women, Redstockings, and later the performance-based abortion rights group No More Nice Girls, Willis became critical of anti-pornography feminism for sexual puritanism, moral authoritarianism, and as a threat to free speech, especially the "neo-Victorian idea that men want sex and women endure it" (Willis 2005).

Willis characterized anti-porn feminists as "sexual puritans who opposed porn and sometimes sex, at least until after the revolution" and pro-sex feminists as "sexual libertarians" who advocate sexual freedom (1981, 6). However, positions on the issue of sexual representation were more complicated than pro-sex or anti-porn. There were anti-porn feminists who opposed porn altogether as part of the male supremacist and patriarchal institution of sexual violence (Dworkin 1981, 1987, 1990; MacKinnon 1983,

1996; Leidholdt, 1981). There were feminists against porn, but opposed to regulating it through legal means on the basis of free speech (Brownmiller 1999). There were feminists who drew distinctions between porn and erotica (*Heresies* 1981; Lorde 1984; Chrystos 1993).

S/M got wrapped up in the debate when anti-porn feminists used images of scenes to illustrate their slideshows on porn as violence against women. A history of Samois written by Gayle Rubin describes “several acrimonious battles over the relationship of S/M and feminism [which] enhanced the process of nascent [S/M] community formation,” including the lesbian S/M group Samois in the San Francisco Bay area, in June of 1978 (2004, 3-4). In a statement from Samois early on, the group outlined a code of ethics, including consent:

We believe that S/M must be consensual, mutual, and safe. S/M can exist as part of a healthy and positive lifestyle. We believe that sadomasochists are an oppressed sexual minority. Our struggle deserves the recognition and support of other minorities and oppressed groups. We believe that S/M can and should be consistent with the principles of feminism. As feminists, we oppose all forms of social hierarchy based on gender. As radical perverts, we oppose all social hierarchies based on sexual preference (Samois, 1979, 2; Rubin 2004, 4).

In Samois’ understanding of consent—consent was a conscious, ongoing negotiation of power and desire that needed to be mutual and safe. This bit of queer rhetoric on consent is important to the formation of contemporary feminist understandings of ‘affirmative consent’ (for more on affirmative consent, see *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Empowerment and a World Without Rape*). For example, when Rachel Kramer Bussel describes consent as “a sexual process” it echoes theories and histories of consent in BDSM communities (2008). Bussel develops the idea of consent as a process and a set

of practices, not simply a fleeting conversation about the benefits and risks of relationships that happens at the beginning of play (2008, 43). She describes how the Antioch College sexual assault code (1993) rocked the school, requiring consent to be: 1) verbal; 2) mutual; and 3) reiterated for every new level (Burrow and Hall 1998).

The conflict over whether women, and marginalized people, can consent to S/M has not been easily resolved in feminist communities. Chrystos takes S/M up directly, saying: "I claim this land I celebrate our outlaw lust There are no weeds – only plants whose flowers or taste we dislike" (1993, 81). She also discusses her code of personal ethics, which she calls essential to enjoying her desires (1993, 83) and says even though she doesn't enjoy S/M, she knows her "real enemies are colonization, warfare, exploitation, racism and greed" (1993, 80). Chrystos invokes an understanding of consent, which is both about personal ethics and community responsibility. This theory of consent goes beyond 'affirmative' theories of consent, which Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti have described as women being empowered to say yes (2008) to address the cultural reasons why we might say yes (or no) to certain forms of sexual expression.

While anti-porn feminists did not tend to believe in the radical potential of consent, pro-sex feminists did. They did so in arguments about S/M, on the grounds of anti-censorship and because many admitted to liking porn. Dorothy Allison calls the debates "A Question of Class," recalling being hated and held in contempt as a lesbian "both by 'society' and by the intimate world of my extended family" (1994, 23). The matter of taste, Allison reminds us, is classed, and so were the conflicts about whether porn, penetrative sex, S/M, butch-fem belong within respectable feminist communities (see also Nestle 1981; Hollibaugh and Moraga 1992). So, when people like Sheila Jeffries suggested that women who claim to like porn or S/M are "eroticizing their own

subordination,” (1990) and question their feminist principles, those are class-based judgments (Allison, 1994).

Sex-positive feminism also sprung out of the Sex Wars—feminists advocating not to get rid of sexual representation, or police sexual expression, but to make “better” porn, feminist and queer porn (Dodson 2013; *On Our Backs* 1984-1994; Queen 1997; Fricker and Adler 2007-2013; Taormino, Parrenas Shimizu, Penley, Miller-Young 2013; *Salacious* 2010). Betty Dodson, who created the BodySex Workshops in the 70s, designed to teach women about sex and orgasms through masturbation, is known for seeing the potential of porn as radical sex education (2013, 29). In “Porn Wars,” Dodson illuminates one of the ways pro-sex / self-positive feminists understand power, and therefore, consent:

Gradually I began to understand that all forms of sex were an exchange of power, whether it was conscious or unconscious. My focus had been on the pleasure in sex, not the power. The basic principle of S/M was that all sexual activity between one or more adults had to be consensual and required a verbal negotiation, followed by an agreement between the players. All my years of romantic sex, when we tried to read each others’ minds, were basically nonconsensual sex (2013, 26).

Dodson’s position is: what feminists need is to enrich our sexual imaginations through more explicit writing and thinking on sex—“If society treated sex with any dignity or respect, both pornographers and prostitutes would have status, which they obviously had at one time. The sexual women of antiquity were the artists and writers of sexual love” (2013, 24). In Dodson’s theory of consent, there was a verbal negotiation and agreement among the players. Mind reading does not count as consent. All sex is an exchange of power.

The arguments of the Sex Wars were over different understandings of consent that came from different understanding of power. These different understandings of power come from assumptions about whose pleasure we are talking about, when feminists talk about consent, and who is imagined to be in danger.

Sex workers, and Sex Workers' Rights groups were also part of the discourse on consent in the feminist Sex Wars. The SWAAY website (Sex Work Activists, Allies, and You) gives a history of sex workers' rights, including political groups and more informal networks on the organization's website (SWAAY.org). Scarlott Harlot, or Carol Leigh, is credited with coining the term in *Unrepentant Whore: The Collected Writings of Scarlott Harlot* (2004). Sex work is a political turn from the term 'prostitute,' aligned with efforts to decriminalize the sex trade (and sexual representation, sexual expression) understanding it as labor.

Theories of consent in Sex Workers' Rights discourse focus on changing the culture of shame around sex and making use of organizing strategies to push back against state violence, as a form of non-consent⁷⁴. In San Francisco, Margo St. James formed COYOTE (call off your old tired ethics) launching a national media campaign calling for "the right to pursue sexual pleasure without shame." According to SWAAY, a sex workers rights group, St. James organized locally to picket hotels that cooperate with law enforcement efforts to entrap sex workers, persuading the San Francisco jail to stop non-consensually testing and quarantining women charged with prostitution, setting up a bail fund for sex workers, and providing legal assistance to women whose cases could argue against prostitution laws (2011).

Sex Workers' Rights discourse also talks about the right of sex workers to represent themselves, rather than being positioned as helpless, victims, trafficked, or needing to be rescued. For examples of this discourse, see Ariel Wolf's post on the 2014

Toledo Human Trafficking Conference for the Red Umbrella Project on the blog “Tits and Sass” (2014). What Sex Workers’ Rights discourse contributes to pro-sex theories of consent is: state violence fosters stigma and shame, and to fight back against violence requires work at the personal and cultural level (through saying no, through protest, through advocacy, and through resources). As there is no play without power, power must be negotiated at both interpersonal and cultural levels. Also, theories of consent depend on who is speaking, and sex workers have their own perspectives on power and consent that deserve to be heard above discourse *about* sex work, or trafficking (Hollibaugh 2000; Dawn, 2013; Milwaukee Bad Date Sheet). Representation has to do with consent because it has to do with who gets to tell the stories of our own lives, and of other people’s lives.

On the Queer Art and Rhetoric of Consent

What is needed are queer rhetorical theories of consent, which will take into account both feminist histories of anti-violence activism and queer / pro-sex feminist insistence on the radical potential of pleasure in the face of sexual dangers like HIV / AIDS, using them to imagine a future where consent is possible. That is the purpose of this feminist cultural history of the Sex Wars, to discuss the rhetoric anti-violence and pro-sex feminists have used to voice their positions on consent, arguing for the queer art of consent to be taken into account.

The cultural moment of the Sex Wars may be ‘over,’ but the political quagmire of these conversations on consent draw us in, again and again, as feminists and queers return to familiar ground, rehashing the bitter arguments of each side over sexuality and gender. At times, it seems we do so with little understanding of the histories of the Sex Wars, which is why I have traced consent through these histories. It is not enough to attempt to get beyond the issue of sexual danger by replacing old “no means no”

theories of consent with affirmative “yes means yes” theories of consent, although I do believe teaching about consent is so important (Friedman and Valenti 2008).

Unfortunately, the vision of a world without violence has not yet materialized, and plenty of us younger queers still know a thing or two about how it feels to be hated and held in contempt in our own communities for what we desire. What theories of consent need is an understanding of the elements of consent.

Queer interest in consent can be traced (among other places) to the histories of the Sex Wars, cultural trauma around the AIDs crisis, and ongoing violence and betrayals, large and small, of mainstream society against LGBTQ communities. This is not to say queer people are somehow more skilled at having consensual relationships. Chrystos (1993) and Dorothy Allison (1994) show us, each in their own way, how relationships between women, too, have the potential to enact non-consensual imbalances of power, to be violent. As a queer activist and scholar, I didn’t always have the language for consent, or know what the word meant. The lexicon I have learned and theorized for consent is drawn from queer experiences because queer culture has had to get comfortable talking about sex and consent. Let me propose five things that queer culture and communities can teach us about consent—or consent as queer rhetoric:

1. *Consent Has a Multitude of Elements.* Consent is more than negotiating pleasure and danger. Negotiating consent also means negotiating the practical elements of: boundaries, limits, power, privilege, presence, disclosure, risk, respect, reciprocity, representation, community responsibility, and community accountability...
2. *Consent is Community-based.* Consent is part of the erotic vocabulary we learn in our communities, what queer rhetorics scholar Jonathan Alexander has called “sexual literacy” (2008). Histories of consent in the feminist Sex Wars teach us

that how one approaches consent has to do with who is speaking. There is more language for consent out there, and I want to know it.

3. *Consent is Taught Through Peer Mentoring and Practice.* There are many theories of consent in LGBTQ communities, some of which I have described here. The ways I understand consent were taught to me in LGBTQ community spaces. They deserve to be acknowledged and valued as central to how activists and academics both understand consent.
4. *Consent is Rhetorical.* This queer rhetorical theory and history of consent suggests consent is than interpersonal communication. Consent is rhetorical because it has to do with how people use our bodies, languages, desires, as we move through community spaces and relate to each other.
5. **There is No Play Without Power.** Consent is how people can come to know our own power and use it well. Feminist and queer approaches to power have informed how we think about consent. I understand power in terms of position, in terms of our ability to act in a particular moment, being who we are. I also understand power in terms of systems and histories, many of which are nasty, and still, this queer rhetorical history of consent believes power is negotiated.

A theory is a fantasy about the way the world works. Consent is a good fantasy, if you ask me—the queer idea that people can learn to consciously negotiate relationships, understand our power and relate to each other in consensual ways. Queer theories of consent acknowledge this potential—the potential for people to negotiate power and privilege in communities, speak to our desires and needs, and use our languages, bodies, and power to mobilize our desires for a more just world.

CHAPTER 6:

Beyond Trigger Warnings: Consent is Trauma-informed Pedagogy

An earlier version of this essay called “On Rage, Shame, ‘Realness,’ and Accountability to Survivors” was published in *Harlot: A Revealing Look at the Arts of Persuasion* 12.

Feminists had already been arguing online about trigger warnings (TWs) when *The New York Times* took up the story of a resolution at UC Santa Barbara to make it mandatory to use trigger warnings on course syllabi.⁷⁵ The resolution happened in the context of news that “55 Colleges Face Sexual Assault Investigations” related to compliance with Title IX, a gender equity law requiring certain policies and procedures be followed in relation to campus safety and sexual violence⁷⁶. Whenever new arguments on trigger warnings emerged, I read them diligently, fully. The commentators were university professors, community activists, survivors, respected writers, queer theorists, and on and on. When the commentators were disrespectful of survivors, or when the lyrical narratives on trauma were too real, my body would fill with rage and remembering, and I would be speechless.

Oh, I said plenty to my partner, mentor, and friends, raged about the wrongness of so many of the arguments, which seemed to be the same sexist,⁷⁷ ableist⁷⁸, and ageist⁷⁹ rhetoric re-packaged for a left-leaning, liberal academic audience. I wished to somehow sharpen a shame-filled memory to carve right to the heart of the issue. I hesitated to write on trigger warnings because the figure of the over-emotional woman haunts the conversation on trigger warnings. This is what much of the commentary boiled down to: women and their feelings.

As cultural theorist Sara Ahmed reminds us in her recent post “Feminist Hurt/Feminism Hurts” the trope of the hurt student has long been used against those in Women’s Studies to claim the discipline is anti-intellectual⁸⁰. “This widely circulating figure of the too-easily-hurt student thus has a longer history, one that might also relate back to the figure of the feminist killjoy” Ahmed notes, “the hurt of some gets in the way of the happiness of others.”⁸¹ Pointing out the tendency to degrade emotions by associating them with women is critical to understanding what we’re really talking about when we talk about trigger warnings. In doing so, Ahmed teaches us how to trace the rhetoric of the recent debate on trigger warnings to the histories underneath.

What is a trigger warning?

Trigger warnings have always seemed to me to be common courtesy for trauma survivors. If you’re going to show something graphic, giving a head’s up might help trauma survivors not be surprised and viscerally taken back to their trauma. It might open space for survivors take care of themselves and be present. Baffled by the backlash over trigger warnings, I set out to understand their rhetorical purposes by unpacking the rhetoric of the public debate on TWs in educational settings. To understand trigger warnings, it is important to understand triggers and PTSD, a condition where (among other things neuroscientists can tell us) certain environmental factors become triggering, reminding the survivor of their trauma in a visceral way.

A request for a trigger warning is a disclosure. English Studies professor and trauma scholar Ann Cvetkovich writes in *An Archive of Feeling*, “because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all.”⁸² I’d like commentators on education and university professors to entertain the idea that students who request

trigger warnings are making a disclosure about what triggers them, speaking about trauma as a way to resist forgetting and dissociation, and making violence known as a cultural issue.

A request for a trigger warning is an issue of access. University of Michigan professor Melanie Yergeau's well-received keynote at the Computers & Writing conference in 2015, "Disable All the Things," addressed how such disclosures are also a request for accommodations and an issue of access for people with invisible disabilities⁸³. Yergeau's work gets at part of what is underneath the arguments on trigger warnings: the language used to talk about trigger warnings, she argues, reveals cultural attitudes toward students with invisible disabilities, including PTSD and complex trauma, and it dismisses the lived experiences of whole communities of people—sexual assault survivors and veterans, to name two.⁸⁴ Requesting a trigger warning could be understood as a way of regaining a sense of power over one's own body after an experience of trauma or violence.

Reading indigenous feminist writer Andrea Smith on histories of trigger warnings, I remember why disclosures that function to transform experiences of violence are important.⁸⁵ Smith explains, "What is missing is the larger context from which trigger warnings emerged. In particular, this intervention emerged from recommendations of many of us in the anti-violence movement that we were building a movement that continued to marginalize survivors by privatizing healing."⁸⁶ What I'd like to suggest is, although they might seem like a highly individualized form of healing, trigger warnings are useful for what they teach us about consent, especially the elements of disclosure and risk.

Requesting a trigger warning is a disclosure that may come with a request for accommodations or accountability. We could think of a trigger warning as a queer gesture, an attempt to leave behind a record of trauma through disclosure. When a student asks for a trigger warning, they may be ‘outing’ themselves as having a trauma history, in order to be able to access a particular space, such as a college classroom. Trigger warnings are one way some trauma survivors use to make their communities accountable to survivors. It is hard in this culture to be believed, but survivors are in our classrooms and we need to be accountable to them.

Rhetorical Appeals in the Conversation on Trigger Warnings

The focus of arguments on TWs has been the question of whether trigger warnings can effectively be brought into institutional policy or classroom pedagogy. I will talk about those topics in a moment. Right now, I want to talk about the language and rhetorical moves in the argument, especially how pathos has organized arguments all along the spectrum. Holding the requests for trigger warnings by survivors in tension with fears about censorship in academic contexts, I suggest TWs are only a small part of larger practices of consent and trauma-informed pedagogy. I hold survivors in high regard, unpacking three rhetorical appeals in the conversation on trigger warnings.

1. Appeals to Common Sense, in Which There Is Mansplaining about Trauma

As the convo on TWs got heated, and many commentators slung around insults about survivors, many of us were taken aback by the attitudes their language revealed. Those who appealed to common sense about handling trauma in education appeared to have little to no understanding of trauma. Even the fairly balanced critique of trigger warnings by Conor Friedersdorf for *The Atlantic* seemed to misunderstand the purpose

of TWs: “most confounding is the notion of students pushing to be warned about classroom material more tame than much of what they encounter in daily life.”⁸⁷

Here is what’s confounding to me: many students encounter so much violence in everyday life—rape, murder, suicide, misogyny, racism, homophobia, ableism, and on and on—that Friedersdorf and others seem to believe it should be normalized by now. Violence may be common, but violence should not be considered normal or natural. Trigger warnings, imperfect as they may be in practice, are an attempt to call attention to the epidemic of violence and the ways violence gets normalized and naturalized culturally. They may not be able to protect survivors, but asking for a trigger warning does rhetorical work to express a desire for a more just and habitable world.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* article by Zimmerman, mentioned above, appeals to common sense in a way that suggests anyone who needs a trigger warning can’t handle real life.⁸⁸ History is violent and students need to deal with it.⁸⁹ There is no doubt that one of the dangers of trigger warnings is that TWs could be misused to avoid dealing with hard topics by those misinformed about the histories and intended uses of them. The issue I take with arguments like the ones made in Zimmerman’s syllabus is the language used, which signals how he regards survivors: “If the topic threatens to provoke feelings of trauma or panic in you, let me know beforehand.”⁹⁰ Through his tone, Zimmerman dismisses trigger warnings by diminishing those who need them. The word “threatens” signals a power dynamic and “provoke feelings” is condescending and inflammatory, conjuring an image of a cowering, over-emotional mess. The implication is only a threatened, unstable, “crazy” person would need a trigger warning.

“The Peculiar Madness of Trigger Warnings,” for *The LA Times* is an even more extreme example of this sexist and ableist language.⁹¹ When Jonah Goldberg jokes, “Trigger Warning: I am going to make fun of trigger warnings,” I know the offensive rhetoric around violence is deeply engrained.⁹² “Peculiar” signals the otherness of trigger warnings, in the commentator’s mind, and “madness” signals the “craziness” of those who need them. Goldberg asks, “We live in a culture in which it is considered bigotry to question whether women should join combat units, but it is also apparently outrageous to subject women of the same age to realistic books and films about war without a warning?”⁹³ The fact of the matter is, no one is trying to take away Goldberg’s war movies. “Women of the same age” is loaded with assumptions about who requests TWs and manages to be offensive to women, young people, and veterans of any gender. Worse, his problem seems to be not with a violent culture, but with people (women, and “woman-like” people) who can’t handle it.

One of the assumptions at play here is trigger warnings only benefit the most privileged students. Political blogger Kevin Drum claims in “What’s the Endgame for the Trigger Warning Movement?” for *Mother Jones* all trigger warnings do is “semi-protect sensitive students for a few more years of their lives instead of teaching them how to deal with upsetting material.”⁹⁴ I am not entirely sure who Drum imagines the students are in college classrooms. What I do know is violence in all forms is a part of the lives of college students. So when Drum uses language like “protect” “sensitive” and “teaching them to deal with upsetting material” this rhetorical choice functions to diminish the call for TWs on the grounds of age and experience. Invoking the image of a (white, middle class, female) millennial student, sheltered and special, does nothing to

illuminate the realities of contemporary university students, who may have had more than their share of trauma.

Megan Milks critiques the tendency to assume who students are in part 2 of “Trigger Warnings: A Roundtable” on “Generational Tensions” for *Entropy*. How much of the backlash against TWs is about generational tensions, she asks,⁹⁵ and I would add: what’s with assumptions about who survivors are? Even if the students requesting trigger warnings are primarily younger people, what’s with the fear of young people knowing what they want and need? If a student does need mental health services because of trauma, do they still belong in academia? If a student does request a trigger warning before graphic material, who gets to decide if that request for accommodations is legitimate? How is it that we are still talking about legitimacy and belonging in academic culture?

The characterization of who trigger warnings are for—young, white, female, heavily protected, over-sensitive, possibly crazy—is a red herring, meant to distract from the purposes of trigger warnings—to provide accommodations and accountability for trauma survivors. The image of the over-sensitive woman denies both the complexities of who students are and the embodied experiences of being a survivor.

The assumption embedded in these appeals is triggers and being triggered are not real. Questioning the realness of a practice like trigger warnings is a classic tool of derailment. Take a look at the language of many of the arguments on trigger warnings and notice how it invokes questions about the realness of triggers. When history professor Jonathan Zimmerman writes in his *Chronicle of Higher Education* article “My Syllabus, With Trigger Warnings,” anyone who needs a trigger warning can’t handle real life,⁹⁶ what he’s questioning is question whether trigger warnings are real, or are

just a ploy of the over-protected to get out of learning about history. What Zimmerman and other commentators miss is that triggers are real. TWs are being talked about with sexist and ableist rhetoric, which disrespects survivors' histories by claiming triggered responses aren't real.

The same rhetoric is being used in arguments about trigger warnings to discredit the practice based on the requester's perceived mental health status. Appeals to common sense imply anyone who needs a trigger warning must be "crazy" (read: unreasonable, irrational, unstable). Disability studies scholar Margaret Price's work in the book *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability in Academic Life* offers a critique of academic culture for being un-inhabitable for students with mental disabilities (mental illnesses) pointing to the ways these students get shut out on the basis of their "madness."⁹⁷ Characterizations of who trigger warnings are for are over-simplified, and many of the assumptions about TWs blame and shame survivors. The purpose of this sexist and ableist rhetoric is to diminish people who request the accommodation of a trigger warning. It also signals who commentators think belongs in academia. *Hint*: not people triggered by violence; trauma survivors, women, and "woman-like" people are probably too emotionally fragile.

2. Appeals to Empathy, or, Let Me Show You How It Feels

Empathy has been an important counter-point to assumptions about the purposes of trigger warnings and the students who stand to benefit from them. Writer Soraya Chemaly reminds us in "What's Really Important about 'Trigger Warnings'" to be aware of the embodied experiences of being triggered. "'Squirm,' and 'discomfort,'" she writes, "do not accurately capture the sensation of white heat, rapid heartbeat, the feeling that you are about to die or vivid flashbacks of assault."⁹⁸ Her call to empathy

functions to expose how critics minimize the need for trigger warnings by unpacking their language and comparing it to what it feels like to be triggered.

It was obvious to me, in the public debate on trigger warnings, that some people highly valued empathy and some thought it was touchy feely nonsense. This is why the use of personal narratives in the debate is so interesting. Regardless of whether their intended purpose is to bear witness, to testify, to unburden oneself from shame and silence, or something else, personal narratives have served another purpose in the conversation on trigger warnings: to provoke empathy. However, there were a couple of unanticipated problems with using empathy to further arguments on TWs:

1. Personal narratives about trauma intending to provoke empathy tend to be triggering.
2. Perhaps by invoking particular sense memories, getting the audience to feel what they felt, trauma narratives are most persuasive to those they trigger, other trauma survivors who may understand the desire for a TW, even if they question their use.

In a lyrical litany of her own triggers, Roxane Gay does a critique of trigger warnings on the privilege of those who still have the illusion safety could be real.⁹⁹ “I don’t believe in safety. I wish I did,” she writes in a piece for *The Rumpus*. “I am not brave. I simply know what to be scared of; I know to be scared of everything.”¹⁰⁰ After reading her position against trigger warnings, my stomach hurt for a week. She’s right—none of us are safe from violence. Historically underrepresented communities are particularly vulnerable, but I don’t want us to accept that as normal.

“These were my first memories,” Angela Shaw-Thornburg writes for her piece for trigger warnings in *The Chronicle*.¹⁰¹ “This is a Trigger Warning” breaks you a bit,

tracing the embodied experiences of one survivor of sexual violence from her abuse to her experience of being triggered in a college classroom:

I am curled up in my bed reading, so when I blank out this time, there is no danger of my falling ... I do remember feeling as if some blunt force had struck the front part of my brain. In the weeks that follow, I am all animal. I eat infrequently and refuse to bathe because I cannot bear to touch my own body.¹⁰²

Yeah, I thought, it's like that, as she put that familiar feeling of spacing out, or dissociation, into words.

I also appreciated the perspective of Jos Charles in part 1 of the roundtable for *Entropy*, that TWs aren't censorship, or a hassle, but a way to give trauma survivors options, noting, "it seems like a small risk to me though to miss out on one poem versus reliving a traumatic experience, having a public panic attack, at worst mocked and at best fetishized as victim, be unable to drive for hours, take medication (when I can afford medication), find people who can care for me, etc."¹⁰³

One strategy in the use of personal experiences is to patiently explain the very real, material ways being triggered effects some survivors' everyday lives. But rather than being met with empathy, honest and explicit trauma narratives have been met with skepticism about the "realness" of triggers. Gaslighting may be one explanation for why—a word for a type of manipulation where an aggressor makes victims question their memories, feelings, and sanity when they try and act in their own defense. Say, for instance, speaking out against the culturally sanctioned violence of rape or war, against people's bodies and spirits, by disclosing one's survivor status and requesting a trigger warning on syllabi and readings in a college classroom.

3. Appeals to Histories and the Fear of Misuse, in Which the Left Seems to Agree With the Right That Trigger Warnings are Dangerous

A third emotional appeal in the argument on trigger warnings has to do with fears of how trigger warnings might be co-opted, taken up against their purposes and used to victimize people who did not actually do violence. In theory, trigger warnings are meant to give students who are trauma survivors options, but might they be used by some students to avoid dealing with controversial topics, these writers ask. Might TWs be used by some institutions to censor what can be taught and thought?

Sarah Schulman has been one of the people speaking out strongly against the potential for TWs to be used for censorship.¹⁰⁴ There are echoes of the Sex Wars in her logic, of cultural conflict in the late 80s and early 90s, where feminists argued over issues of morality and taste, boundaries and desire, pleasure and danger.¹⁰⁵ To support her argument, Schulman offers the example of the criminalization of people with HIV. People living with HIV have been stigmatized and criminalized for non-disclosure, while being denied life-saving health care, education, and prevention materials by the federal government.¹⁰⁶

TWs are meant to offer accommodations and accountability, not to be used to reduce access. These histories bring up practical questions: for instance, what happens when students have conflicting accessibility needs? When one survivor's need to write about trauma conflicts with another survivor's need to not hear about it without consent? There is always the danger of co-optation, of people using "triggering" as an excuse to avoid dealing with material that makes them uncomfortable, but there is a difference between being uncomfortable and being triggered. Whose role is it to decide what is an accessibility need?

Who cares about trauma survivors? That seems to be the underlying question of Jack Halberstam's *Bully Bloggers* piece, "You're Triggering Me!" The Neoliberal Rhetoric of Harm, Danger and Trauma."¹⁰⁷ Recalling the cultural feminism and lesbian

separatism of the 70s and 80s, Halberstam frames trigger warnings as a rhetoric of harm and trauma that “casts all social difference in terms of hurt feelings that divides up politically allied subjects into hierarchies of woundedness.”¹⁰⁸ The way Halberstam is able to understand TWs is to recall a sort of “Oppression Olympics”:

People with various kinds of fatigue, easily activated allergies, poorly managed trauma were constantly holding up proceedings to shout in loud voices about how bad they felt because someone had said, smoked, or sprayed something near them that had fouled up their breathing room. Others made adjustments, curbed their use of deodorant, tried to avoid patriarchal language, thought before they spoke, held each other, cried, moped, and ultimately disintegrated into a messy, unappealing morass of weepy, hypo-allergic, psychosomatic, anti-sex, anti-fun, anti-porn, pro-drama, pro-processing post-political subjects. As people “call each other out” to a chorus of finger snapping, we seem to be rapidly losing all sense of perspective and instead of building alliances, we are dismantling hard fought for coalitions.¹⁰⁹

I was so mad at Halberstam’s ableist rant. I tended my wounds by indulging in the JockHalberslam twitter (@halberslam) for about a week. It is important to pay attention to histories of how trigger warnings, and similarly, content warnings, or ratings, have been taken up in the past—there is no arguing with histories of censorship. Many of those who can recall the histories of the Sex Wars are understandably wary of any practice that seems like censorship. The position against TWs on the basis of censorship is not the issue I have with Halberstam’s approach. Focusing on only one version of who survivors are has been a long-standing problem in anti-violence movements, one that is used quite purposefully here to distract from the purpose of trigger warnings.

Creating a version of survivors that is this “morass of weepy, hypo-allergic, psychosomatic, anti-sex, anti-fun, anti-porn, pro-drama, pro-processing post-political subjects”¹¹⁰ is offensive and a caricature.

Embedded in the rhetorical appeals on trigger warnings is the assumption that institutions know what’s best for survivors. Many of the people who have spoken on trigger warnings seem intent to position them as either an over-reaction by a sensitive few, or the be-all, end-all of supporting trauma survivors in education. One recommendation I would have is for institutions to listen to survivors and ask what they need. Far from being a monolithic group, the writing of survivors on TWs has voiced conflicting accessibility needs. In a searing essay for *The Rumpus*, “*The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion*” Roxane Gay points out one of the assumptions being made about what survivors need: “When I see trigger warnings, I think, ‘How dare you presume what I need to be protected from?’”¹¹¹ Trigger warnings can’t protect us, she says, because “there is nothing words on the screen can do that has not already been done.”¹¹²

Tracy Strauss’ position in “Twitter, Why the ‘Trigger Warning’ for Dylan Farrow’s Open Letter”? for *The Huffington Post*, reminds us of the work feminists have done to fight for the space to talk openly about healing from or transforming ourselves after violence. Strauss wants readers to know that we CAN handle knowing the truth about violence:

Let us not believe the warnings that say we can’t handle the truth, because we can... For certain, coming to terms with sexual abuse – with anything unspeakable – is difficult terrain, but it is one that is worth traversing. Knowing

about terrible things, and grappling with them, gives us the ability to mobilize, to change our world.¹¹³

Juxtapose that with Angela Shaw-Thornburg's work in "This is a Trigger Warning" for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, which also details a visceral response to being triggered in a college classroom, but is for trigger warnings. Comparing just these few perspectives from survivors, it's clear that we need to talk about the difficulties of handling trauma and disclosures in the context of education. Trauma is emotional, and educational institutions are often very invested in appearing rational and stable. But even the commentators who argued that those who require TWs are irrational, over-emotional, possibly crazy, did so by appealing to the emotions of their audiences.

Consent is Trauma-informed Pedagogy

What to do about trigger warnings. I'd like for higher education and its commentators to drop the victim-blaming rhetoric, which is mis-informed about trauma and offensive. Trauma-informed pedagogies require us to respect the varied ways survivors have said they could use support. I understand trauma-informed pedagogies as listening to, respecting, and doing our best to honor disclosures about trauma, and make reasonable accommodations whenever possible.

Many survivors have already spoken on what they need, throughout the public debate. Some, like Tracy Strauss in *The Huffington Post*, have pointed to the power of telling survival stories. Survival stories hold us up, help us connect the dots, offer language when before there was none. We can handle the truth, and we will together.¹¹⁴ Or, Roxane Gay, in "The Safety of Illusion/The Illusion of Safety," who says she doesn't believe in TWs because she doesn't like to be told what she can and can't handle.¹¹⁵ Or, Angela Shaw-Thornburg, who writes for *The Chronicle* on the material consequences of

being triggered; she explains feeling broken open by another person's account of sexual violence as an undergraduate, when the topic came up in a course text.¹¹⁶ If we could just drown out some of the rhetoric on whether triggers are real, the assumptions regarding who TWs are for, and the belief that institutions know what's best for survivors, we could focus on what survivors say they need. When we do, it becomes evident that survivors have conflicting accessibility needs.

Whether or not you believe in TWs, we're in a cultural moment where some students who are survivors are requesting them for course syllabi, media, and texts consumed in class. These requests bring up important questions: How do we handle challenging material in the classroom? I am thinking of hard conversations about race, class, gender, ability, conversations about histories, including violence, and forbidden topics like sexuality. How do we introduce this material in a way that honors the experiences of those whose communities it comes from? Are there boundaries and limits of what the classroom can hold, and who decides where they are? How do we handle personal disclosures in the classroom? How do we negotiate vulnerability and risk?

In survivor circles, it's long been a common practice to give a head's up about disclosures that might be triggering. People might say something like, "I need to talk about sexual assault, and I'm wondering if it's okay for you to hear about that right now." The audience for this carefulness is other survivors, the assumption of the gesture that there are other survivors in the audience. This approach respects the need to disclose and potential limits the audience might have. Borrowing the practice of giving a heads up before potentially triggering content from a survivor-supportive context could be understood as a practice of respecting the needs of survivors. If nothing else, the conversation on trigger warnings brings up the fact that students are

going to disclose and instructors may want to be thinking about how to compassionately handle disclosures of violence in the classroom, as well as requests for accommodations and accountability. A trauma-informed pedagogy that practices consent would suggest instructors deal with student disclosures of trauma histories by: first, believing them; and second, asking, *what do you need?*

TWs are just one practice of consent. Beyond honoring requests for trigger warnings, becoming more comfortable with student disclosures is a step toward having a more trauma-informed classroom. Of course, there are caveats: we need to honor requests for TWs, as long as they respect the needs of the survivor, as well as the right of fellow students to learn about hard topics. We need to honor requests for TWs, as long as they do not censor media or enable us to avoid talking about hard topics altogether. I want to make these distinctions between being triggered and being upset, or angered, because there are ways in which trigger warnings could be mis-used for the purpose of censoring content deemed unacceptable, especially the voices of historically marginalized communities.

There are some student evaluation from a first-year writing courses I will never forget. It said, “Don’t take this class unless you’re sympathetic to LGBTQ issues” and “Do not ever make a class watch ‘Pussy Manifesto’ again.” We had spent the semester studying how LGBTQ communities use writing and media to survive, thrive, and get our work done. Our work had included analyzing the rhetoric of all kinds of media, from anti-violence rhetorics in the videos and images of protests when Trayvon Martin was killed to the very silly feminist puppet show and spoken word piece ‘Pussy Manifesto.’ The latter struck a chord with one student, which got me thinking about boundaries and limits in the classroom. I knew from the student’s other comments that

they objected to the queer and feminist content of the course. I continue to teach queer and feminist material because I have a responsibility to expose students to ideas they may be unfamiliar with. Objecting to content is different from being triggered.

There are a number of ways to make challenging and unfamiliar material more accessible and I'd like instructors to start thinking about them as practicing consent in the classroom. One is to introduce the material in a way that gives students a heads up about the content: Pussy Manifesto is a feminist, body positive song. It includes puppet vulvas and a poem about them. As with all the material in this course, I welcome you to step out at any time, should you find you need to take a break. This kind of communication is like a trigger warning, but doesn't presuppose what might be triggering. Another way to practice consent in the classroom is by checking in afterwards. This might go like: Now that you've watched the video, let's unpack the kinds of queer and feminist rhetoric (assumptions, beliefs, values, practices, histories) embedded in it. Again, you do not need to agree with the rhetoric, but it is important to be able to identify what's at play here. Students will respond with what they notice, learning to be savvy at rhetorical analysis. Instructors can use consent to negotiate the tensions between respecting a range of emotional responses to course materials and honoring the commitment to expose students to intellectually challenging material.

Negotiating the often-conflicting accessibility needs of students with the needs of students more broadly, the demands of curriculum with the mandates of institutional policy is a pedagogical challenge. This is why I believe trigger warnings are best practiced at the level of pedagogy, instead of codified in institutional policy. Trigger warnings could be considered part of a larger practice of consent as trauma-informed pedagogy. This means educating educators about the traumas students face before

coming to our classrooms and developing consent as an ethical practice of teaching and learning relationships. A trigger warning is a disclosure about a student's histories that might involve a request for accommodations and/or accountability. What I mean is students who disclose being triggered are disclosing a trauma history. This may mean they are also going to ask for accommodations, which might include trigger warnings, not participating in certain classroom discussions, or having modified participation, resources available on campus, or a number of other things.

Requesting a TW may also mean they need accountability, including participation in a grievance process on campus, a community of peers to bear witness to their trauma, or a variety of other things. A trigger warning is a way to say: I'm a survivor. We are here. We are real. We need accommodations. We need our communities to be accountable to survivors. We want consent and the autonomy to make decisions about our own transformation and healing after violence.

CHAPTER 7: **What MichFest Teaches Us about Consent, Boundaries, and Access**

The Land is six hundred fifty secluded acres in northern Michigan. By the time the Festies arrive in August, the long crew has re-built the space from the ground up with painstaking care—raised the shelters, tuned the tractors, paced out the location of hidden transformers, built three stages with the lay of The Land for optimal acoustics.

On move-in day, the line of cars stretches for miles down an unmarked county road. Women in compact cars plastered with liberal bumper stickers, and campers with pop-up awnings and tan-weathered drivers park under an overgrowth of trees. A worker sashays around wearing knee-high boots, a delicate, red lace parasol perched in one hand, and in the other, raffle tickets on a thick, mauve roll. Women are willing to wait as long as it takes to get in—and it could be several hours.

Billed as a feminist utopia, and a safe space for lesbians specifically, the festival is the fantasy of womyn-only spaces that '70s-era radical lesbian feminism and separatism (wo)manifested.¹¹⁷ To say the festival is an intentional community would be an understatement. What makes MichFest so unique is the exquisite level of attention to detail put toward creating a necessary space of respite for womyn (with a y, as in, womyn-centered, womyn-focused, womyn-only) living in patriarchal culture.

Supporters of MichFest talk about the festival with reverence—as a utopian space lesbian feminist elders made to insure women would have community space to gather. A space where women's culture and lives would be supported and valued as central.

Need to get your fill of old-school feminist consciousness-raising? Sit in a circle and process an issue with an international community of women. Practice naked, full-body acceptance by sharing an affirming head-nod with completely unclothed strangers on the woodchip path. Perhaps a quiet, early-morning Land Walk to learn the land's ecology is more your style? Build a beaver out of clay! Get consensually flogged in a fern grove in the Zone, if you like, or spend all day frolicking shirtless in an open field to feminist folksongs and return to camp with sun-kissed breasts and a suspender tan.

"We had absolutely no idea what we were doing when we produced the first festival. None," Festival founder Lisa Vogel writes in a 2014 blog called *Voices from the Land*:

I personally had produced nothing more than a few major keggers, and though we were swimming in the exciting energy of lesbian feminism that we found in books and on trips to cities like Chicago, Boston, Lansing, and Cleveland – creating a space on our home turf bigger than what our living room could hold, and doing it with zero money, meant creative and old-school working class sketchy skills had to come into play.¹¹⁸

With that DIY-ethos and a good dose of lesbian feminism, Vogel, her then-partner Barbara Boo Price, and a small group of womyn set out to bring lesbians and friendly fans of women's music—early on this was rock and roll, folk, R&B, roots, soul—to Michigan.¹¹⁹

Full disclosure: I grew up in Michigan and read about the Festival online at the library as a baby dyke, but it was years before I could afford even a fraction of the \$400+ ticket for an all-inclusive "glamping"¹²⁰ trip to the pinkie's woodlands. How marvelous though, to realize such a rare haven was there all along, nestled among the second-

growth forests and fern gullies of lower Michigan, the place for me that has always felt closest to home.

One of the oldest and longest-running festivals of its kind—organized, built, entertained, run, and attended by womyn—the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival is both a community ritual beloved by those who attend and a site of bitter conflict around who womyn-only spaces include. A conflict over the presence of transgender womyn has filtered from feminist theory to feminist practice, erupting at the Festival every few of years —1976, 1991, 1995, 2006, 2011. The conflict is over MichFest’s “womyn-born womyn” policy, or what Julia Serano explains as “a fancy way of saying transsexual women like myself are not welcome.”¹²¹

Since transgender women have offered critiques of the “womyn-born womyn” policy at Fest since its inception, I want to respect their perspectives and labor toward trying to persuade the womyn of MichFest to change the de facto policy of trans exclusion by listening to trans women (see Kalafarski, “Just Another Woman at MichFest,” 2011; “Rethinking Sexism: How Trans Women Challenge Feminism,” 2008; Serano, “Not Quite There Yet . . .” 2006; Wilchins, “The Menace at MichFest,” 1997; Burkholder, “A Kinder Gentler Festival?” 1991). This attempt at getting at the heart of the issue is not about getting Lisa Vogel, or WWTMC, or the workers, or Festigoers to change the intention, although (full disclosure) I not only long for trans women to be included in this community space, but for feminist communities to respect and value trans women as central to our understandings of womanhood. What I intend to do is lay out the values of MichFest, as a site where these arguments take place. To understand the conflict at MichFest, I want to show how particular languages, practices,

and orientations toward bodies¹²² organize Festival space. Particularly, I want to talk about how consent is a value of the space and can be used to negotiate the conflict.

A desire to understand how consent organizes Festival space is why I traveled from my home in Lansing, Michigan to *The Lesbian Herstory Archives* in Park Slope, Brooklyn to carefully page through nine folders and one box of MichFest programs and ephemera, looking for answers as to how feminist, queer, and trans communities might learn again to forge power through our differences and negotiate them in community spaces with careful attention to consent.

Through reading MichFest programs and ephemera (including letters to the community by the Festival's founder, Lisa Vogel, scholarship and activism around the "womyn-born womyn" policy (also called "the intention") and the conflict over trans-inclusion) I want to describe to you how consent already operates in this community space. Taking a closer look at the theories of consent at play in arguments over trans-inclusion, I forward what Kaitlin Noss called, in her 2012 article about the Festival, an "alchemy" of radical feminist, lesbian separatist, queer and trans theories (and I would also say, sex-positive and sex-critical theories).¹²³

Through radical listening, I will examine the rhetoric of "the intention" and surrounding arguments, showing how these are really arguments about consent and discussing how consent can be used to mediate long-term conflicts related to the presence of trans people, especially trans womyn, in womyn-only spaces (see Climbing Poetree "Statement" 2013) for more discussion of radical listening). Given how much there is to learn about consent and anti-violence rhetoric in how womyn's communities negotiate conflict, I hesitate to limit the audience of this essay to the women's, queer, and trans communities where these conflicts take place. Keeping with the practices in

these communities, I do ask those who don't identify as being part of the communities MichFest concerns to first, listen and remember you are in community space.

The Intention

Creating separate spaces was political in 1976, when the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival began, and womyn were said by MichFest lore to have defended The Land from local men who resented the presence of womyn-only space in their county. Womyn-only spaces are still fraught today. Conflicts over what makes a woman (in body, mind, and spirit) have plagued MichFest for much of its going on 40 years because of a de facto policy of trans-exclusion, what those who have spent the last decade arguing over call "the intention."¹²⁴

A description in the 1980 Program for the 5th Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival called "What and Where It Is" explains the culture on Hesperia (the first site of MichFest) and is the first reference I could find to the Festival's intention:

Nestled in the palm of Michigan is a little town called Hesperia. Seven miles from town, on 200 acres of partially wooded land, is where this annual event is held. With the exception of a number of large tents which are constructed to canopy the stage and house other facilities, the activities are held completely under the sun and stars.

We call the festival "a gathering of mothers and daughters" because it is intended as a four-day retreat into an exclusively female, woman-identified and self-defined environment. We know this experience to be a profoundly enlightening one and one hell of a good time to boot.

Because of the rarity, and what we feel to be the importance of this environment, we struggle to maintain the festival as a woman-only space while being sensitive to the issues this raises. To make this experience available to womyn raising young ones, we organize childcare for both sons and daughters.¹²⁵

When MichFest founder Lisa Vogel and her production company WWTMC (We Want the Music Corporation) wrote they “struggle to maintain the festival as a woman-only space while being sensitive to the issues this raises,”¹²⁶ they were alluding to the ongoing conflicts at MichFest over the intentions of the space being by women, for women. Because MichFest grew out of contemporary women’s movements, the conflict mirrors larger ones in feminist culture, including arguments over pornography, dildos, and BDSM (known as the Sex Wars). These arguments are about what practices and people belong in womyn-only spaces and what these spaces are for.

The conflict at MichFest over the presence of trans womyn offers an opportunity to think about consent, boundaries, and access. These arguments are rhetorical because they are about bodies (who is considered a woman) and languages (what words we use to identify ourselves and each other). Conflicts over the presence of trans womyn on The Land are really about what happens when community members disagree about personal boundaries and members of the community are denied access. By understanding the conflict at Fest as an issue of consent, I believe we can understand how “the intention” of the Festival became warped, move through the conflict, and find out what comes next.

Herstories of the Conflict over Trans-inclusion at MichFest

Nancy Burkholder’s Story

Community-based herstories of the conflict at MichFest tell the story of an incident in 1991, when Nancy Jean Burkholder was escorted out of the Festival gates after security workers suspected she was transgender (Burkholder, "A kinder and gentler festival?" 1991; see also Serano, "Bending Over Backwards," 2007; Tea, "Transmissions from Camp Trans," 2003). In a September 1991 editorial for *Gay Community News* 19.8 (later reprinted in the feminist news mag *Off Our Backs* 21.9) Burkholder describes the incident that sparked the controversy over the presence of transgender women at MichFest:

I was expelled from the 16th Michigan Womyn's Music Festival by two festival security women on Tuesday morning at approximately 12:45 a.m. While waiting at the main gate for a friend arriving on the chartered bus, I was approached by the security women who questioned me about whether I was a man. I answered that I was a woman and I showed them my picture ID driver's license. Then one of the women asked if I was transsexual. I asked her what was the point of her questioning. She replied that transsexuals were not permitted at the festival, that the festival was for 'natural, women-born women' only...

When I asked to speak to the producers directly, she said that they would not speak to me, that she was their designated contact person. Then she asked me if I had a sex-change operation. I replied that my medical history was none of her business but that I was willing to submit to genital examination if that would satisfy her concerns regarding my sex. She declined, saying she would not feel comfortable doing that. I asked her to produce proof to substantiate her insinuations that I was a transsexual. Then she quoted more festival policy saying, 'We are empowered to expel any woman from the land for any reason

that we feel appropriate.’ She said that I had to leave the festival at once and that I would not even be allowed to return to my campsite to retrieve my equipment. Once I was outside the front gate, I was on my own to find transportation home.”¹²⁷

In response to her eviction from the 1991 festival, Burkholder and her supporters planned to do community-based research at the 1992 Festival. Her supporters set up a table and distributed a survey to gauge Festie responses to the presence of trans womyn on The Land.¹²⁸

The results of this survey were 73.1% in favor of male-to-female transsexuals being welcomed at Michigan; 22.6% against the idea; and 4.3% undecided. Following the survey, community activists, including Nancy Burkholder, suggested the results signal the culture of MichFest would be amenable to transsexual women attending, aside from a small minority.¹²⁹ Nancy Burkholder’s 1992 survey at the festival reveals Festie attitudes toward the presence of transsexual women like herself at MichFest and several reasons participants gave for wanting to exclude transsexual womyn. In her essays in *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity and Excluded*, Julia Serano will later identify a lot of these reasons not only as transphobic, but as trans-misogynistic (see “Skirt Chasers: Why the Media Depicts the Trans Revolution in Lipstick and Heels” and “Bending Over Backwards: Traditional Sexism and Trans-Woman-Exclusion Policies”).¹³⁰

WBW Draw the Line at Trans-inclusion

Reasons womyn-born womyn gave in Burkholder’s 1992 survey for excluding transsexual womyn:

They are not women (23)

They are not women-born women (16)
They make others uncomfortable (15)
They have been socialized as males (12)
They have had male privilege (10)
They think like men (8)
They have male energy (7)
They have penises (6)
They have different life experiences (6)
They are biologically men (5)
People shouldn't change their sex (5)
They have not been girls in the patriarchy (4)
They are oppressors (4)
They behave like men (4)
They have not been oppressed as women (4)
They are too feminine (3)¹³¹

A high number of participants denied transsexual womyn are womyn, and continue to do so to this day, excluding transgender women, especially transsexual women from Festival space. Exclusionary practices against TS women, through questioning the realness of trans women, continue to this day, even though large, LGBTQ Rights organizations like Equality Michigan and the National LGBTQ Task Force (the Task Force) have spoken against it.

The language of the conflict, especially the language different sides of the conflict use to identify themselves, and each other, reveals their underlying beliefs and values.

Womyn-born womyn (WBW) is a phrase used by those who desire to keep womyn-only spaces for those womyn who were assigned female at birth (AFAB), raised as girls, and identify as womyn. The festival's founder, Lisa Vogel, uses this language herself, in several letters to the community, including this one, dated May 9, 2014, Vogel writes:

We have said that this space, for this week, is intended to be for womyn who were born female, raised as girls and who continue to identify as womyn. This is an intention for the spirit of our gathering, rather than the focus of the festival.¹³²

When people talk about the Festival's intention, what they are referring to is language used by Lisa Vogel and self-identified¹³³ WBW, who say womyn who were born, raised, and continue to identify as female have unique experiences, different from those of transgender and transsexual women.

If we follow the womyn-born womyn line of thinking back to its root, there is the radical feminist Janice Raymond's 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, a critique of the medical-psychiatric model of treating "transsexualism" with surgery and hormones.¹³⁴ Raymond used anti-rape rhetoric to positioning trans womyn as male interlopers invading womyn's spaces. Raymond's work was persuasive to a subset of radical feminists, allowing them to claim the surgical and hormonal interventions sometimes sought by transsexual people are inherently patriarchal and uphold patriarchal versions of what it means to be a "real" woman.

WBW often use biological, and some would say gender essentialist arguments to differentiate between women (AFAB)¹³⁵ and transsexual women, modifying ideas about the realness of transsexual women with "they are not women-born women," "they have male energy," or "they have penises." From 2006 on, a resurgence of conversation on

“the intention” happened on the boards (MichFest’s online discussion forum, which has since been frozen due to an overwhelming amount of posts on the conflict). WBW discussed wearing red t-shirts and other apparel to bathe Michfest in a “sea of red” to signify and amplify the real experiences of women who bleed (menstruate) and birth children. This language objectifies trans womyn’s bodies and makes assumptions about cisgender womyn’s capabilities and desires to bleed and birth children.

Queer and Trans Activism—Transforming the Festival

These days, most radical queer and trans people living in queer and trans coastal enclaves eschew the festival as an unfortunate throwback to a time when feminist culture was less aware of transgender issues. So, *Autostraddle* sends a couple of intrepid people from NYC to report on what it’s like on The Land,¹³⁶ and most contemporary queers write the space off completely: womyn-only spaces, are those even still a thing? Why spend the cash to sit in the woods with a bunch of uptight feminist gender essentialists, discussing eco-friendly mosquito remedies and carefully negotiating space with scent-sensitive neighbors? MichFest is so Midwestern. So lesbian. So backwoods.

Trans people’s feelings about the conflict over their presence in community spaces are valid, given the conflict has been going on for so many years. Throughout the herstory of the conflict, trans people and those acting as allies have used the strategy of being present to persuade Festival founder Lisa Vogel and WWTMC and WBW festes that the presence of trans womyn at the Festival needs to be respected and valued as part of the diversity of women’s communities, rather than seen as a violation of the sacred womyn-only space.¹³⁷

Community-based histories tell of a moment in 1994, where self-described “gender-trash rejects” Riki Anne Wilchins, and a group of self-identified “gender

queers” called The Transsexual Menace attended the Festival, with support from the Boston and Chicago-area Lesbian Avengers, Leslie Feinberg, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and S/M sex outlaws from the ‘80s.¹³⁸ By entering the Festival space and including themselves in the space’s intention, these self-described gender queers challenged predominant ideas about who MichFest is for by being present. Throughout the herstory of the Festival, trans people being there has been framed in several different ways.

On Entering

Riki Wilchins tells the story of the moment of entering the Festival, in her essay “The Menace in Michigan” from *Read My Lips*:

Coming around a bend, I see an opening about the size of a football field with, I don’t know, eight hundred, a thousand, who knows how many women in it. For a moment it looks like the entire lesbian nation is spread out, eating, carrying food, leading children, or serving dinner...

You think people’s mouths only drop open in cartoons or sitcoms, but I assure you their jaws actually do go slack in real life. As we’re walking, festiegoers see us, momentarily freeze, then just as abruptly spring back to life, trying to grok who and what we are. Applause breaks out, the odd fist raised, a few waves, and finally lots and lots of smiles. Almost without exception, these women support our cause.¹³⁹

By entering the Festival space, The Transsexual Menace included themselves in Michfest’s intention challenging ideas of who MichFest is for by being there. Unfortunately, the moment in 1994 is one where trans people entered the space and

were mostly supported or left alone, but the presence of the Transsexual Menace at Michigan doesn't mean transsexual women have been accepted and the conflict is over.

On the Outside

Emi Koyama's MichFest archive tells the story of Camp Trans, "an annual gathering of transgender people and their allies in Michigan with the intent of protesting the exclusion of trans women from womyn-only spaces."¹⁴⁰ Camp Trans began in 1994, after Nancy Burkholder and several other trans womyn returned to the Festival, planning to conduct workshops on trans-inclusion, and were again escorted out by Festival security.¹⁴¹

After that first year, Camp Trans happened again from 1999 – 2011, until conflicts over the shifting purpose and demographics of the alternative to MichFest caused the protest to dissolve.¹⁴² Julia Serano talks about Camp Trans as a place where it was hard to fit in, as a transsexual woman who identifies as female and believes she belongs at MichFest, among the genderqueer-centric crowd at Camp Trans, which seemed "hell-bent on deconstructing their genders out of existence."¹⁴³

Trans activist Red Durkin's controversial Change(dot)org petition, calling for a boycott of MichFest is another example of work from the outside on MichFest.¹⁴⁴

On the Inside

On the inside, Trans Womyn Belong Here (TWBH) a grassroots organization of trans womyn and their allies which started in 2007, sell t-shirts and patches proclaiming "Trans Womyn Belong Here," do direct action, and raise money for trans womyn to attend. These strategies are meant to disrupt the "sea of red" worn by the womyn-born womyn, signaling an alternate perspective to the conflict. TWBH's work also suggests another strategy, a shift in language from talking about trans-inclusion to talking about the presence of trans womyn at MichFest. In other words, a shift in how we understand

the orientation of trans womyns' bodies in relation to the space (see Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* 2006; Serano 2007; 2013). Instead of understanding trans womyn as always on the outside, TWBH assumes trans womyn are present at the festival and has found ways to signal where their allies are.

On presence

In "Just Another Woman at MichFest," Alice Kalafarski details what it was like to be there for her. She gives us a taste of the culture of the space and her reasons for being there, which have to do with sexuality:

If you asked me why I was there, I'd have told you a friend of mine was involved with Trans Womyn Belong Here (TWBH), and I was interested in all the stuff they were doing this year. That's certainly part of the truth, but I'm not enough of a trans activist to go all the way from Massachusetts to Michigan to just be part of a protest. The real reason I was at Michfest was that I was still trying to figure out if I really was attracted to women.

Of course, I knew that Michfest wasn't the end-all-be-all of sapphic desire, but it seemed like a good fit for me. I liked camping, I liked folk music, I liked vegan food, and I liked being naked in the woods. Michfest was made for queer women to celebrate their shared sisterhood and give each other lots of orgasms, so why not try tiptoeing into that community and see if it felt right?¹⁴⁵

Overall, Kalafarski's story details a mostly positive experience, until a workshop where the language of rape got used to make assumptions about trans womyn's bodies and desires. Dealing with micro-aggressions on the Land wasn't really in the plan, but there she was.

How Consent, Boundaries, and Access Organize the Festival Space

Consent is a set of teachable practices that invite people to form respectful, reciprocal, and accountable relationships. Far more than the negotiation of yes or no, the elements of consent include: setting boundaries and limits, listening to each others' desires and needs, and negotiating power, pleasure, safety, risk, access, and disclosure, among other things. These practices have to do with how we treat each other in community spaces. MichFest as a whole, and community spaces inside the festival, function based upon shared agreements about consent.

On Consent and Personal Boundaries, or Where to Draw the Line

The line has been an important concept for lesbian feminists. We process, set boundaries, draw the line. We learn to respect limits in relationships, the line between what we can handle and what we will not tolerate. We learn what we deserve and open ourselves to let fruitful relationships in. We practice consent, becoming aware of the ways in which we give or receive pleasure, experience desire, and grant or deny access to our bodies.

When the feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye wrote in her 1977 essay "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," first published in *Sinister Wisdom* "Total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access,"¹⁴⁶ she articulated the relationship between gender, power, and access, making what remains to me one of the most persuasive arguments for regular periods of womyn's intentional separation from men, for the purpose of rest.

Frye is talking about personal boundaries and consent, arguing that men have long held most of the power, and women need to begin to take back their power by

taking back access to their bodies through relationships with men. For Frye, lesbian separatism is a form of saying no:

When we start from a position of total accessibility there *must* be an aspect of no-saying (which is the beginning of control) in *every effective* act and strategy, the effective ones being precisely those which *shift power, i.e.,* ones which involve manipulation and control of access. Second: Whether or not one says "no," or withholds or closes out or rejects, on this occasion or that, the capacity and ability to say "no" (with effect) is logically necessary to control. When we are in control of access to ourselves there will be some no-saying, and when we are more accustomed to it, when it is more common, an ordinary part of living, it will not seem so prominent, obvious, or strained... we will not strike ourselves or others as being particularly negative.¹⁴⁷

"No means no" became a framework for feminist anti-violence movements to understanding consent in the late '70s, and it persists as a way of thinking about consent among many feminists today. "No means no" represents the hard boundaries set by feminists as they worked to name and denounce violence against women in all its forms.

Personal boundaries, or where we draw the line when it comes to our own bodies, are an element of consent. They require both self-awareness and a willingness to practice radical listening with other people, especially when their personal boundaries conflict with ours and we are sharing community space.

A letter to the community from Lisa Vogel and her then partner Barbara Boo Price, dated November 30, 1990, is an example of how consent and personal boundaries have played out in this community space.¹⁴⁸ The letter was published in the feminist

new mag *Off Our Backs*, during a public conversation about the presence of womyn practicing S/M sex at Michfest. While the issue of S/M may seem tangential to the issue of trans-inclusion, as I mentioned earlier, trans womyn's ability to access the Festival space is only one part of a constellation of conflicts at MichFest, and in feminist communities at large, around negotiating difference in community spaces. On S/M sex at MichFest, Vogel and Price write:

... the reality that 8000 womyn living together on one square mile does not provide truly private space for anyone. One of the basic premises of S/M sex in the feminist community is that it be safe, sane, and consensual, yet the Festival environment does not allow for private space or separation of sound and sight, making consent a serious issue among neighbors.¹⁴⁹

In other words, Vogel and Price caution against festies taking their personal boundaries, desires, needs (in terms of their sexual style) and assuming the entire community has the same boundaries, desires, needs. I would agree—when we assume the community shares our personal boundaries, there are problems with consent.

When “no means no” theories of consent are used in the project of creating lesbian separatist spaces, personal boundaries get conflated with community boundaries. This is what I see happening in the conflict over the presence of trans women at MichFest. How to negotiate consent within the community space with a small, but vocal minority of WBW community members against including trans women in their definition of womyn-only has become the topic of conversation that persists in interpersonal conversations, discussion forums, workshops, and direct action.

This is why it is so important to openly discuss boundaries and limits in relationships with people in community spaces. There is no way to negotiate personal

boundaries (which are different than borders) without talking about them. More often than not though, the Festival manages to create a space where women seek to practice consent, out of a deep respect for other women, except in the case of trans women. Respect for women often comes from personal and cultural histories of violence; in other words, from bodily experiences of knowing what it means to survive as a woman.

We are at a critical moment once again in feminist culture, of re-negotiating the ways we (trans* and cisgender women) understand our relationship to power, privilege, and each other. Consent is the thing that both traps us and frees us, requiring us to take responsibility for our own desires, untangle where they come from, and learn to act from a place that is careful and aware. In this many-years-long feminist process, those who believe in the concept of consent have taken somewhat unsuccessfully to trying to negotiate consent for trans* inclusion with Festival gatekeepers, especially the Festival's founder Lisa Vogel. Activists have worked to make safer spaces on the land for trans* women by showing up, marking our bodies and our campsites with yellow ribbon, or a banner that says Trans Womyn Belong Here. They have raised awareness through workshop after workshop, processed about the intention 1-1 in conversation with Festie-goers, and invested time and energy in this space as workers. They have chosen when to say so long Michigan, when to let go of the idea that the Festival's boundaries will ever change.

On Access

Part of what is so unique about MichFest is the care festival organizers, workers, and Festies have taken to value and respect the cultural diversity inherent in women's communities, in almost every case besides gender. MichFest programs throughout the festival's almost 40 years address the issue of access—how womyn of various

backgrounds can access the community space, and how the space and its resources can be made more accessible to as many womyn as possible.

The Disabled Area Resource Tent (DART) and Dottie, the DART shuttle, exist because womyn expressed the need to respect the access needs of disabled women. A sliding scale and reduced ticket rates exist for fixed or low-income womyn because financial access is a value of the space. Sprouts and Gaia Girls exist as childcare options for mothers who want or need the support of other women in caring for their children on The Land, as does Brother Son, a camp for boys just outside the Festival grounds. Bread and Roses exists as a chem-free space for women who are sober or working toward sobriety. The Womyn of Color tent and patio exist because of organizing by women of color who acknowledge the need for dedicated spaces for healing and rest around issues of racism and colonialism within womyn's communities. The Twilight Zone, a "loud and rowdy" camping area exists because leather dykes persisted in creating a space for BDSM on The Land.

As Alice Kalafarski put it in her 2011 account of attending MichFest posted on Prettyqueer(dot)com: "Even the live and in-person fisting demonstration in the Twilight Zine had a sign language interpreter."¹⁵⁰

Each of the community spaces within the festival was created by womyn who self-identified as needing to be there and voiced a desire to experience the Festival space. An able-bodied womyn could use Dottie, the DART shuttle, rather than waiting for the less frequent and fuller Crosstown shuttle. A womyn who can afford to pay full price could take advantage of the sliding scale fee, and pay less. A drunk or stoned womyn could stroll into Bread & Roses sober campground and trigger those working on sobriety. An entitled white womyn could enter the WOC-only tent.

These boundary crossings, or breaches of consent, are possible. There is no way to form relationships in community spaces without some risk and some loss. But, the Festival has an ethos of respecting personal boundaries, as well as the need for dedicated space as part of coalitional politics, or understanding and intervening in our privilege and using our power well. On most issues aside from gender, the Festival has managed to create a space where consent is valued, out of a deeply felt sense of empathy and mutual respect for other womyn. When boundaries have needed to be re-negotiated, and space made for “more women, less gear,” community members have used consent to get that done.

Mia Mingus, a writer, community educator, and organizer working for disability justice and transformative justice talks about the tenuous relationship between access and relationships in “Feeling the Weight: Some Beginning Notes on Disability, Access, and Love”:

The weight of inaccessibility is not logistical. It is not just about ramps, ASL interpreters, straws and elevators. It is a shifting, changing wall—an ocean—between you and I. It is just as much feeling and trauma as it is material and concrete. It is something felt, not just talked about...¹⁵¹

Access requires a shift in culture. I am not at all suggesting we can simply transpose the language disability justice movements use to understand access onto trans women’s struggles.

I am suggesting if inaccessibility is not just logistical, but is “a shifting, changing wall—an ocean—between you and I,” as Mia Mingus writes,¹⁵² then conflicts about access have a lot to teach us about intimacy, or the close relationships between bodies. Understanding intimacy is central to understanding how to build relationships based

on consent as we move through community spaces, with the purpose of respecting and valuing differences. A shift in how MichFest community members understand the conflict over the presence of trans womyn—from one about inclusion, or entry, to one about presence and access—would be more in line with the Festival’s values.

Beyond the Language of Inclusion

The language of inclusion has been used to try and argue for the inclusion of transgender women, especially transsexual women, in the festival’s intention. The grassroots activist group Trans Womyn Belong Here is one example of this kind of rhetoric in action. Julia Serano points out in the essay “On the Outside Looking In” how the language of inclusion centers the experiences of non-trans women, assuming trans women are always on the outside.¹⁵³ When people compare trans-inclusion to other controversies at the festival that have since become accepted practices (dildos, BDSM) Serano says the difference is, people representing those sexual desires or styles were present at the table.¹⁵⁴ When it comes to gender at Michfest, trans womyn have not always been welcomed in discussions on their own interests. What this means rhetorically is non-trans womyn are positioned as “real” and having the power to validate trans womyn’s identities or place at the event.

As I’ve mentioned before, I support trans womyn being openly welcomed at MichFest and valued as part of the diversity of women’s communities and histories. Queer and trans women are present already and always have been. While I may not understand the vitriol slung around in the course of this many-years-long feminist process at Fest, I hear the hard personal boundaries of the WBW around bodies and do not think these women should have to get rid of those boundaries. Consent could be used in feminist spaces to openly negotiate the terms of relationships between WBW

and trans women, keeping with the ways of being and acting that are already consistently thought and talked about at MichFest. Finding ways to negotiate personal boundaries in community spaces has been done in the past through consent. Understanding trans women as already present means removing the tendency of WBW to theories the Land as the body, and trans women's "entry" an unwelcome violation. Queer and trans women are already there and it is our community's responsibility to treat them right. Listening to the stories of trans women, I have come to belief this conflict has been an opportunity to re-negotiate the ways in which feminists understand our relationships to power and each other.

If, as Sara Ahmed writes in *Queer Phenomenology*, "a queer object is that which tends toward other queer objects,"¹⁵⁵ then I have always tended toward other queers—the bearded lady, the long lashed boy, the gender variant, the butch or femme, the fat lady, the swish, the trans woman in public, presenting the way she likes to be read for the first time, the moment when someone tells you their pronouns or name.

"What does it mean for a sexuality to be lived as oriented?" Ahmed asks. "What difference does it make what or who we are oriented toward in the very direction of our desire? If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with."¹⁵⁶

At home among the queer, the odd, that which is in transition, the "in between," I long for the fantasy of queer women's community. Long for a moment where the forests part to fields and there we all are—women born as women, transsexuals, gender trash rejects, leather dykes, pornographers, sex workers, survivors, and all the other women in all our glory—playing among the ferns and forests of lower Michigan.

CHAPTER 8: **Community-based Pedagogy for Consent Education**

Recently I attended a Town Hall meeting at the large, Midwestern, public university where I teach writing. After a 10-year, empirical research study, which ended in 2014, an interdisciplinary committee of campus anti-violence experts—the Task Force—has compiled a report.¹⁵⁷ The “2014 Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Policies and Programs Task Force Report” details the state of the university’s existing sexual assault and relationship violence (SARV) policies and programs. Existing policies and programs are being evaluated in the context of U.S. Department of Education Title IX investigations on how federally funded colleges and universities handle sexual assault and relationship violence.¹⁵⁸ The Town Hall began, as is customary at these sorts of events, with a description of who the Task Force is and a summary of the four charges.¹⁵⁹

The University Task Force on Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence sat at a long, slim table at the front. There was a podium, a power point presentation, and a person transcribing the event. Members of the campus activist group Community Leaders in Transformation (CLIT) handed out teal squares to symbolize solidarity with survivors. The purpose of the public forum was for the Task Force, including members of the Administration, to hear the campus community’s feedback. Once the room understood why we were there, representatives from the Task Force opened up the floor.

I attended the Town Hall for pedagogical reasons. As a faculty member, I have a commitment to queer feminist anti-violence activism and bringing relevant issues into the classroom. Given the way the revised federal guidelines impact writing instruction, it felt important to hear about the Task Force's research and listen to the perspectives of students, including campus activists. I am one of those writing teachers Haivan V. Hoang writes about in "Campus Racial Politics and a Rhetoric of Injury,"¹⁶⁰ following James Berlin's concept of rhetorical education,¹⁶¹ who believes "teaching writing is about preparing students to express their thoughts in public forums, including universities" (see also Pough, 2002). When I began teaching community-based writing courses, I did so in the tradition of Hoang, Pough, Berlin, and others who work to bring public rhetoric into conversations with writing studies, as a way to invite students to engage with the social issues affecting their lives by listening to how activists are doing so on campus (see also Bickford & Reynolds, 2002). The scholarship I'm doing on consent also led me to question how I might teach to what has come to be recognized among consent researchers and sex educators as a gap in public discourse on consent between theory and practice.¹⁶²

In "Empowering Rhetoric: Black Students Writing Black Panthers" (2002) Gwendolyn D. Pough provides a model from black public sphere theory for bringing public discourse into the writing classroom,¹⁶³ which is familiar to the way I approach bringing public discourse on sex and consent into my courses. Pough asks her Black Studies students to read Black Panther Party documents, tracing how it radicalizes their thinking and prompts them to speak for social justice and social change.¹⁶⁴ When I began designing a course around sex and consent, I did so with community-based pedagogies like Pough's in mind. Community-based courses often invite students to analyze public conversations, do community-based research, make and distribute

public writing projects. A queer community-based pedagogy for consent education involves: 1) Inviting writing students to engage with public conversations on consent; 2) Naming and theorizing what I call *the elements of consent*; and 3) Teaching how to negotiate consent in community-based projects and peer mentoring relationships with their writing groups.

This essay uses the current context of campus sexual politics as an occasion to discuss consent as queer community-based pedagogy, a kind of “extra-curricular” learning that happens in LGBTQ community spaces outside of school (Cavallaro, 2015; Gonçalves, 2005; Gere, 1994); but which can also happen in school when instructors bring community-based perspectives and public discourse on relevant social issues into the classroom, drawing on ongoing activism that is already taking place. Alexandra Cavallaro’s 2015 essay “Fighting Biblical ‘Textual Harassment’: Queer Rhetorical Pedagogies in the Extracurriculum” describes a workshop at Pride as one such site of rhetorical education outside of school.¹⁶⁵ Campus activism could also be considered a site of “extra curricular learning,” one that is ripe with information about how to get graduate and undergraduate students engaged with social issues.¹⁶⁶

This piece positions consent education as queer community-based pedagogy. I will tell stories about how I learned to practice consent, framing consent education as part of what Jonathan Alexander (2008) has called “sexual literacy.”¹⁶⁷ Then, I’ll focus on consent in the writing classroom, tracing across several teaching situations how consent illuminates power. I’ll end by returning to the Task Force Town Hall meeting, offering a context for why conversations on consent are particularly relevant now because of revised federal guidelines. The conclusion will include my thoughts on why first-year writing classrooms are ideal places to discuss issues of sex, including sexual violence, and consent. Specifically, I want to explain why, as federally funded colleges and

universities shift their policies to focus on affirmative consent, institutions have a responsibility to teach students what consent means in practice.

Consent Education is Queer Community-based Pedagogy

Consent education is a critical aspect of “sexual literacy.” Alexander’s concept of sexual literacy is the idea that “sexuality—or the varied ways in which narratives of intimacy, the body, gender, and identity become constructed and disseminated personally, socially, and politically—is itself a complex literacy event.”¹⁶⁸ In listening to how students talk about consent, I think Alexander is right—students bring their own ideologies into the classroom, “language, discourse, and literacy are always already political,”¹⁶⁹ so part of the work we take on is unpacking our beliefs, assumptions, and values. Alexander suggests, and I would agree, many of our students are already searching for information and engaged in conversations about sexual identity and also “sex, discourse, culture, and politics online.”¹⁷⁰ As I came to understand consent education as part of sexual literacy, I began thinking about how examining public discourse on sex might teach writing students to speak to social issues in rhetorically savvy ways (see Pough 2002; Gonçalves 2005; Alexander, 2008; Hoang 2009; Cavallaro 2015). Not only that, but focusing on consent education in a first-year writing class comes at a critical moment for many freshmen students, who may be away from home for the first time.

I learned about sex and consent in community spaces, through peer mentoring and practice—at the LGBT community center, on the toll-free helpline, at feminist bookstores and events, at gay bars, in parks, in sex shops, and in other informal, or “extra-curricular” sites of learning on sexuality (see Cavallaro 2015; Gonçalves 2005; Gere 1994). Having access to detailed, comprehensive sex education through peer mentoring relationships in LGBTQ community spaces was critical for me, and continues

to be critical to the survival of our communities. Though the particularities of our stories differ, for many LGBTQ people, our early sexual experiences are often marked by the failure of language to describe our desires; barriers to accessing accurate information & resources on sex and consent; isolation, shame; unprotected or otherwise high-risk sex; and violence. Some of the women I encountered when I first came out seemed to subscribe to the fantasy that since we were both ostensibly women, we were automatically at lower risk—a myth, considering sexual identity doesn't necessarily correspond with sexual practice, and gender doesn't necessarily correspond with the particularities of bodies. This was not information many of us got at home, or at school, but it is critical for negotiating sex and practicing consent.

The ACT UP slogan “Silence = Death” could just as easily have read “Access = Power.” Not all students have access to information on sex and consent in community spaces like I did. Bringing the topics of sex and consent into the writing classroom gives students access to information and resources they may have been denied at home or at school. I do this by inviting students to engage in self-education and peer education in community-based projects relevant to communities they belong to. Or as Terese Guinsatao Monberg has written about in her work teaching students of color in service-learning courses, to “write as the community¹⁷¹” ... to move recursively through community spaces over time. After teaching courses on consent with queer community-based pedagogies, I've learned students need time to work through the ideologies they bring with them from home and school. Offering students language for the *elements of consent*, and inviting them to bring their own languages for negotiating consent into classroom inquiries, gives students access to accurate information & resources on sex, and access to theories of consent that resist isolation, shame, and violence.

The Task Force Town Hall happened in January 2015. There, I met Elle Abeles-Allison, one of the members of the campus activist group CLIT. Abeles-Allison and Zoe Jackson are co-authors of the 'zine, "Why Haven't We Talked About Consent Yet?" and co-facilitators of a grassroots workshop on consent. Their consent workshop began as university students filling a gap in consent education offered on campus. In fact, campuses across the U.S. are struggling with how to transition their policies and programs on sexual assault & relationship violence to focus more on consent and community accountability¹⁷².

Try talking about sexual consent without talking about sexual violence. As a conceptual framework drawn out of lived experiences of violence, sexual danger has historically framed many of the arguments of U.S. feminist anti-violence movements¹⁷³. This is the same reason campuses are now struggling with how to transition policies & programs on sexual assault & relationship violence to focus on affirmative consent. Just as Carol Vance says in the epilogue to the 1984 collection *Pleasure and Danger*, which historicizes the Sex Wars, anti-porn feminists (those who theorize the concept of consent as "no means no") "object to losing control over the discourse."¹⁷⁴ Pro-sex, or "sex-positive" theories of consent are the idea that people can come to know their own power and desires, and use them well. Consent, in this sense, has to do with more than sexual pleasure or danger. Consent also acknowledges there is no play without power. A community-based pedagogy for consent education illuminates power by inviting community members to learn to openly negotiate power through the elements of consent.

Drawing on histories of queer rhetorical education in LGBTQ communities (Gonçalves 2005; Cavallaro 2015), especially community-based methods of self-

education and peer education (Alexander 2008), I suggest consent education is a form of queer community-based pedagogy. Rhetoric & Composition Studies has histories of involving communities in our writing courses and thinking about communities in our theories and histories. Among these approaches to community work are theories of community-based pedagogy (Royster, 2000; Pough 2002; Gonçalves, 2005; Logan, 2008; Monberg 2009; Cavallaro, 2015). Terese Guinsatao Monberg's (2009) work suggests a turn away from models of service-learning where students write with the community, or for the community, toward what she calls "writing *as* the community."¹⁷⁵ It is this form of community-based pedagogy I am most drawn to because it most closely resembles how I was taught in LGBTQ community spaces—writing instructors bring public issues into the classroom, assuming students also bring their histories and ideologies (politics) with them.

Yet, I'm not trying to suggest students will be able to un-problematically engage in public debates and make arguments to intervene in them amongst their peers. Julie Lindquist (2001) critiques this idea in "Hoods in the Polis," drawing on her study at a working class bar to suggest stories play a critical role for working class students in being able to access the language and rhetorical strategies needed to make their arguments on relevant issues heard in public spaces.¹⁷⁶ This is why I teach nonfiction writing—social commentary and reportage, personal narratives, lyric essays—because of the power of storytelling to access voice, style, audience awareness, context, all of these rhetorical issues.

This essay, then, is really the story of tensions related to power—it is about the mostly invisible ways the Sex Wars have shaped higher education policies on sexual assault & relationship violence; how the rhetoric of consent, especially the deeply engrained concept of sexual danger, gets taken up by student activists; how language,

access, and disclosure—which are three of what I think of as the elements of consent—come up when we invite students to talk about consent; how talking about consent through campus sexual politics, public policy, and literature, especially stories, teaches everyone involved about power; and especially how embracing affirmative consent in policy opens up spaces to connect sexual consent in theory with sexual consent in practice through consent education¹⁷⁷.

Consent in the Writing Classroom—A Reading on Power Across 3 Themes

Even at institutions without consent education, public discourse on sex and consent can be woven into the curriculum. In this section, I draw on my own practice of consent education as community-based pedagogy in the first-year writing course, *The Art & Practice of Consent*. When undergraduate students focus on researching relevant social and cultural issues related to sex and consent, through self-education, peer education, and community-based projects, it illuminates the realities of power for all involved.

What does it take to create consent culture? We begin with this question and work our way through various frameworks for understanding the art and practice of consent as part of anti-oppression work. Analyzing popular and scholarly discourse on consent, we study how to practice consent in various contexts and kinds of relationships. By theorizing the elements of consent together, then practicing consent in low-stakes contexts—informal writing and writing groups they stay with throughout the semester—writing students develop a recursive understanding¹⁷⁸ of consent over time. Reading widely from: queer and feminist nonfiction, art, blogs, and zines; peer sex education materials online; campus sexual assault and relationship violence policies, programs, and activism; the work of community organizations; and understandings of informed consent in research brings up what Jonathan Alexander talked about in his

2008 work on sexual literacies and how they bring up the ideologies of students.¹⁷⁹ By the end of the semester, what I hope is writing students will be able to speak to where they stand in terms of public discourse on sex and consent.

Consent Has to Do with Language. One writing prompt asks first-year writing students to investigate a sexual consent campaign, policy, or program (federal, local, or grassroots) and analyze the language it uses to talk about consent. What students often find out, in analyzing sexual consent discourse is: there are various theories and histories of sexual consent, each with their own language and orientation to power. For context, we read the introduction and selected essays from Jaclyn Friedman & Jessica Valenti's 2008 collection *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Power & a World Without Rape*. Students learn to identify "no means no" theories of consent and "yes means yes" theories of consent. At the beginning of the semester, I open up the conversation, wanting students to discuss where they stand in relationship to relevant social issues, like comprehensive sex education, sexual representation, and public policy, but not everyone is ready yet.

During the process of writing their analysis of a sexual consent discourse, I invited Elle Abeles-Allison and Zoe Jackson, the two community facilitators who began thinking about consent as university students, and designed their own grassroots consent workshop, to class to give their workshop. Although I have my own consent workshop, "Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop," I chose to invite community facilitators in because of my role as their writing instructor, the person who has power by virtue of my role as the faculty of record.

In reflective writing after the consent workshop, students discuss what they learned about sexual consent. We make a Google doc of their post-consent workshop reflections to keep track of how their thinking on consent has changed over time. Here

is a summary of the 10 most common responses to the question on what students learned about consent from the consent workshop:

1. Boundaries: Consent is important because we learned what it feels like when we violate someone's boundaries.
2. Power over: By having both partners give consent, it eliminates the entitlement that one partner might feel over the other.
3. Respecting no: Consent shows that you have respect for yourself and your partner. [Consent has to do with] how to act when someone says no to you. You should respect their decision and try not to make them feel bad about saying no to you.
4. Revoking consent: Consent can be given or taken away at any time.
5. Gender & sexuality: I learned it doesn't matter what sex or sexual preferences a person has, everyone can give or take away consent.
6. Reciprocity: When something is consensual, there is a benefit for both parties involved.
7. Consent as process: Consent is a process that must be asked every step of the way.
8. Intoxication: A person who is intoxicated cannot legally give consent.
9. Non-sexual forms of consent: Consent should exist in all aspects of our lives.
10. Communication: The process of consent is asking, answering, discussing, rather

than just going for it and having to fend off and go over boundaries again later.

By examining public discourse on consent, and reflecting on our participation in a community-based consent workshop, we build theories of consent. I think of what students learned about consent from the workshop as *the elements of consent*. By developing the language to talk about consent beyond sexual pleasure and danger, we are able to identify and peel back different layers of consent. In “no means no” theories of consent, who has the power to say no? In “yes means yes” theories of consent, what is the role of language in knowing what you’re saying yes to? What are the elements of consent beyond “yes” and “no,” beyond even Rachel Kramer Bussel’s idea of “consent as a sexual process.”¹⁸⁰

We read essays from *Best Sex Writing of the Year* (2015) like Epiphora’s “What Should We Call Sex Toys,” Alok Vaid-Menon’s “The White Kind of Body,” and Lynne Comella’s “Sex, Lies, & Public Education,” and talked about the relationship between language and power.¹⁸¹ If this was a community-based workshop or a Women & Gender Studies class, we would have brainstormed a big list on the board of all the euphemisms for sex and body parts we could recall, identifying their connotations and relationship to power. But these are first-year writing students, and ever since one student wrote “Don’t ever have students listen to ‘Pussy Manifesto’ again” on my student evaluations, I’ve been holding my tongue.

Consent Has to Do with Access to Information and Resources. By the time I ask students to do community-based research and a public project on a topic related to sex or consent, we’ve already done some work together on understanding the different histories of consent and how they lead to different understandings of the potential of

consent. Front loading self-education, a strategy recommended to me by my mentors, seems to be the key to having productive conversations on risky topics. Doing this work means remembering students bring their histories and ideologies with them to the classroom, so part of our work together is unpacking where these ideas and language come from.

When I teach this class again this fall, we will listen to Tristan Taormino's podcast "Sex Out Loud," the one where she interviews Matie Fricker about Pornotopia.¹⁸² We will interview Matie, asking why she started the erotic film festival, the controversy behind it, and why she chose to organize her life around teaching adults about sexual pleasure and consent. In the interest of balance, we'll read alternative perspectives. Radical feminist Catherine MacKinnon's take on consent in patriarchal culture, for example, is: "When force is a normalized part of sex, when no is taken to mean yes, when fear and despair produce acquiescence and acquiescence is taken to mean consent, consent is not a meaningful concept."¹⁸³ What does MacKinnon mean about consent? Is she saying all sex is rape? We'll look at the Dworkin-MacKinnon anti-pornography ordinance, the 1984 ordinance that became a model for similar public policies in places beyond Minneapolis. These ordinances ended up making it difficult for sex shops to stay open because of zoning laws. We'll consider what we think about the relationship between culture, power, sex, and space.

The purpose of their community-based research projects is not to exert my power by telling them what to think about consent. We talk and write about sexual consent in the writing classroom to find out where they stand on relevant issues. Part of me hopes learning from community members who are working on activism and education related to consent will get first-year writing students to engage deeply with conversations on consent on campus. I also think of consent education as part of my responsibility—

making sure the university community educates itself on consent, especially given that affirmative consent is written into campus policies.

Consent Has an Element of Disclosure. The first time a student disclosed to me that they were a survivor of sexual violence, they asked to meet after class. The disclosure came on fast—I was thrust backwards to nights spent working on the toll-free helpline, where I'd become accustomed to people telling me all sorts of stories about their lives, and also returned to my own survivor stories. I responded by doing what I had been taught to do in community spaces—practicing empathy, active listening, and offering resources¹⁸⁴. Still, I left the encounter shaken, wondering how to best support this student without overstepping my boundaries as their teacher.

Understanding how to respond when a student discloses is important, especially now, as schools across the U.S. release revised sexual assault policies & programming to get in compliance with federal guidelines. College writing instructors, who are in the position to read students' stories, are often on the receiving end of student disclosures. Consent is particularly relevant to writing instructors because students bring their histories with them to our writing classes, including, at times, their trauma histories.

As I've said before, I tend to agree with Julie Lindquist (2001) that stories can help working class students enter into public conversations in ways other kinds of public discourse might not. And yet, I have also experienced the effects of storytelling, one of which is: stories elicit stories. Knowing how to manage student disclosures, and being up front about the risks of such disclosures, is an element of consent, especially in the context of revised mandated reporting policies at many U.S. schools.

The question survivor advocates are asking is, how do we handle situations where a student discloses, but doesn't want to report? According an "Open Letter to Elected Leaders of the 50 United States" by NASPA, student affairs administrators in higher education, mandated reporting policies in many institutions, created to response to bills in the State legislature of many states, may actually be in conflict with federal law:

The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 ("VAWA") amendments to the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act ("Clery"). 20 U.S.C. §1092(f)(8)(B)(iii)(III) states that IHEs that receive federal funds must inform student victims of sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking of their rights to "decline to notify" law enforcement about being victimized, as well as of students' rights to notify and to receive help from the IHE in making that notification.¹⁸⁵

As writing instructors, disclosure, or the moment where someone shares a story and you have to decide what to do with that information, is relevant because it happens all the time. When students disclose, it is the responsibility of those in positions of power (graduate instructors, research assistants, residence halls staff, faculty members, administrators) to follow institutional policy without putting the survivor, who already may be in an academically precarious position, given what we know about the effects of sexual assault & relationship violence, at risk.¹⁸⁶

I don't take the complexities of language, access, and disclosure to mean higher education needs to shy away from teaching risky topics, those where students are likely to disclose personal stories—quite the opposite. Teaching consent through public discourse and LGBTQ community-based methods like self-education and peer education has important implications for public policy on higher education and the way

we teach writing. Community-based pedagogies for consent education respond directly to the U.S. Department of Education's call for federally funded schools to provide age-appropriate training on sexual violence.¹⁸⁷

Consent in Campus Sexual Politics

Who would have thought the uproar over Antioch's sexual consent policy in the early 90s would take two decades to subside. Feminists at Antioch College, a small private school in Ohio created what we now think of as an affirmative consent policy, which defined sexual consent as "the act of willingly and verbally agreeing to engage in specific sexual conduct," which the policy specified has to be: verbal, mutual, discuss safer sex, and be re-negotiated for every new level.¹⁸⁸ Affirmative consent discourse only now being taken up in recent revisions to public policy in light of revised federal guidelines¹⁸⁹. Yet, the new federal guidelines leave it up to each school to revise prevention programs to focus on comprehensive sex education and affirmative consent¹⁹⁰.

"Affirmative, Conscious, and Voluntary Agreement": SB 967, California's Consent Law

California became the first state to adopt an affirmative consent law, requiring a yes in all sexual encounters, which applies to all public and private colleges and universities receiving federal funding.¹⁹¹ Section d of the bill states comprehensive prevention & education programs must address "sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking..." At minimum, giving students information about: "the university sexual assault policy, the *practical implications* of an affirmative consent standard, and the rights and responsibilities of students under the policy" emphasis mine).¹⁹² What the bill does is define affirmative consent, giving examples of non-consent (lack of protest or resistance, silence, past relationship), and supporting the idea

of institutional responsibility to educate students not just on sexual consent policy, but also on practicing consent.

At minimum, what the revised federal guidelines say needs to be taught in prevention & education programs on consent is (see “*U.S. Department of Education, 2014* for the full revised federal guidelines):¹⁹³

- The school’s definition of consent applicable to sexual conduct, including examples;
- How the school analyzes whether conduct was unwelcome under Title IX;
- How the school analyzes whether unwelcome sexual conduct creates a hostile environment;
- The persons on campus to whom they can confidentially report incidents of sexual violence;

The 2014 federal guidelines support a shift toward consent education—they require institutions to provide information about *what sexual consent means in practice, what constitutes unwelcome sexual contact* (sexual assault or relationship violence), and *where people can confidentially report*.¹⁹⁴

Consent Education on Campus

At the Task Force Town Hall meeting, campus activists called for comprehensive consent education,¹⁹⁵ but the rhetoric of sexual danger is so pervasive many speakers focused on violence, and what campus activists call “institutional betrayal,” or what I think about as a lack of community accountability.¹⁹⁶ The freshmen I teach in first-year writing courses listen to me explain the Task Force Town Hall meeting. Students say the current sexual assault & relationship violence programs are not enough because they do not talk about how to practice consent. This is not surprising, given consent is not often

taught in schools or at home. Consent might go completely unspoken, unless one has the privilege of comprehensive sex education, or was taught consent like I was in community spaces,¹⁹⁷ like LGBT community centers, bookstores, bars, sex shops, and in LGBTQ spaces online, or in consent workshops.

Despite the call of grassroots activists to teach college students about practicing consent by talking explicitly about sex, as well as consent in other kinds of relationships, it can be difficult to support consent education with evidence that will be heard by the administration. Empirical research on consent is unfortunately limited (short-term, small sample size, focusing on heterosexual participants). Nevertheless, I looked at research across disciplines—especially sociology, psychology, and women & gender studies. Even among empirical research that came to different conclusions on the potential of consent education for violence prevention, the studies I found agreed consent education is most effective when it is ongoing¹⁹⁸. Rachel Kramer Bussel talks about consent as a sexual process.¹⁹⁹ I would agree consent is a process and it is also a set of practical elements, embodied and deeply rhetorical. Given the revised federal guidelines, which apply to all federally funded schools, and directly address sexual consent, this is an important moment for institutions to talk about what consent researchers have described as a gap between consent theory and practice (Beres, 2014; 2010; 2007; Jozkowski, Peters, Sander, Dennis, & Reece 2014; Borges, Banyard, & Monyihan, 2008; Powell, 2010).

Sociologist Melanie Ann Beres (2014) speaks to this gap in “Rethinking the Concept of Consent for Sexual Violence Activism and Education.”²⁰⁰ Beres examines the discrepancy between how young people understand consent in their own practice, and theoretical understandings of consent. She studied two groups of adults: one group of young adults 18-30 who stayed for a time in a resort community known for casual sex;

and another group of 19 heterosexual couples. Participants talked about consent in several ways:

1. As a minimum requirement for consensual sex;
2. As an event;
3. As not applying in the same way in ongoing relationships²⁰¹.

Beres' findings suggest, "how people describe their practices around negotiating sex is different from how they understand the word consent."²⁰² While Beres proposes a turn away from the language of consent in sexual assault policy, because her research suggests young people don't know what the word means in practice, I propose the opposite.²⁰³ Rather than dismissing the concept of consent altogether, because students live in a world where they don't know what it means, institutions have a responsibility to teach what consent means in practice.

By the middle of the course, I've begun introducing students to policies, peer education materials, activism, and stories on sexual assault, relationship violence, and consent. By the time students are preparing to make public projects on consent, we are asking ourselves questions like, what beliefs (values, practices) about sex and consent are at play in these sexual representations? Where do I come from on this topic? We ask what are the social, cultural, historical contexts that effect sex education? Community-based pedagogies for consent education ask students to understand the various ideologies at play in different theories of sex education and consent. They invite students to actively seek out information about sex and consent, learning to identify the beliefs, values, and practices underneath, which lets students decide where they stand in relationship to public issues. Consent education is a grassroots practice, so drawing on the workshops, zines, and blogs already happening is a way to bring consent

education into the classroom, and having students write and make media on consent is a way to feed ongoing projects.

One of the things that comes up in a community-based approach to consent education are conflicts where students grapple with beliefs, values, and practices they have learned at home, or in other places, in light of their research. As far as I can tell, this is the work higher education is meant to do. Opening up a conversation with first-year writing students about issues like consent reaches many students at a critical moment of identity re-negotiation and play. For working class students, students of color, queer students, the tensions I'm talking about might be literal or metaphorical distance from families of origin and home communities, and for international students, the particular culture shocks of studying abroad. Given the revised federal guidelines, published in 2014, institutions across the country have revised their SARV policies to focus on affirmative consent, but are still negotiating their responsibility for teaching campus communities how to practice consent. Asking writing students to write and do research on consent from their standpoint, to learn languages to talk about consent, and to negotiate consent in community-based projects contributes to the level of consent education on campus.

Conclusion

Once participants in the Task Force Town Hall knew why we were there, the organizers opened up the floor. Campus activists brought up a number of issues, too many to address here:

1. Access to mental health services for all students (especially LGBTQ students, transfer, and international students);
2. More transparency and accountability in grievance processes to lessen what campus activists call institutional betrayal;

3. Revisions to the Sexual Assault & Relationship Violence prevention program that focus on consent, for all freshmen and transfer students.²⁰⁴

It is this last matter, a pedagogical matter, which seems most relevant to our work as writing instructors. As I've said before, if institutions are going to hold students accountable for practicing affirmative consent, we have a responsibility to teach them how—a community-based pedagogy for consent education does that.

I went to the Task Force Town Hall meeting and listened to the arguments campus activists made to advocate for accountability to survivors and resources on campus. Even though I study queer community-based theories and histories of consent, when it came my turn to speak, I couldn't get my thoughts together fast enough. Maybe I was afraid of my own un-rehearsed stories tumbling out, too aware of the potential risks. I wanted to say LGBTQ communities have long histories of talking about sex and consent. We've had to develop the languages to talk about the elements of consent—boundaries, desire, language, access, disclosure, risk, and on and on. Let us show you how different understandings of consent got woven into public policy, how fruitful it can be to engage students in teaching and learning queer community-based approaches to consent.

CHAPTER 9: Consent is Self-Care and Community Care

Practicing consent requires love. A radical love that acknowledges how we act on our desires has an impact—both on our survival and thriving, and on the sustainability of our communities. I am for consent as self- and community care as a foundation of forming ethical relationships. Consent is a set of practices—cultural and situational, embodied and deeply emotional—that aid in our resilience.

Roots in Activist Communities

Yashna Maya Padamsee re-invigorated an ongoing conversation about self-care and community care in activist communities in late 2011. An organizer with the National Domestic Workers' Alliance, Padamsee called those doing Healing Justice work (HJ) to get beyond self-care as a personal responsibility and move toward sustainable models for community care.²⁰⁵ I agree that self-care is more than a personal responsibility. In "Communities of Care, Organizations for Liberation," Padamsee argues that self-care as an individual responsibility "leaves us in danger of being isolated in our struggle and our healing ... A liberatory care practice is one in which we move beyond self-care into caring for each other."²⁰⁶ Sexual consent, too, has been critiqued on the grounds that an individual, or interpersonal, approach to consent is not enough. Essays by Miriam Zoila Pérez, Kimberly Springer, and Susan Lopez, Mariko Passion, and Saundra in the collection *Yes Means Yes: Visions of a World Without Rape*, ask those proposing consent as a process that has the potential to end sexual violence to pay attention to the ways in which consent is not just interpersonal, but also cultural and situational, embodied and historical.²⁰⁷ Healing justice has been described by The

Bay Area Healing Justice collective as “work to lift up and politicize the role of health and healing in our movements as a critical part of the new world we are building”²⁰⁸ (also see the work of Kindred Southern Healing Justice collective). Consent is both self-care and community care because it has to do with how we come to know our own power and use it well, how we treat ourselves and act in our communities toward a more habitable world.

When labor organizer B. Loewe responded to Padamsee’s post on *Organizing Upgrade*, calling for “An End to Self-Care,”²⁰⁹ his post incited critiques and questions. Rather than an end to self-care, queer Nigerian Afrofeminist writer Spectra called for an end to the *martyr complex*.²¹⁰ Positioning the self-care and community care conversation as being, among other things, an argument about activist work, Spectra pointed out how Loewe’s post seemed to suggest that if one is invested ‘properly’ in activist work, organizing is all one needs. Her work points to the necessity of self-care: “self care, for me, isn’t a luxury by any means; it is a basic need, a necessary part of my being.”²¹¹ At the root of her critique of “An End to Self-Care,” is the problematic tendency of ‘transformational spaces’ to use unsustainable practices that promote “a culture of overwork, guilt, and inaccessibility toward people who need to take time.”²¹²

“We can’t knit our way to revolution,” Loewe claims, pointing to the tendency of self-care projects to focus on individual practices.²¹³ “Oh yeah?” Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha challenges him in “For disability justice, working class, and poor-led models of sustainable hustling for liberation”:

Wow, what a femmephobic and classist statement. Many, many people have organized politically through cultural work – which includes knitting and quilting bees – for a very long time ... I think conversation and mutual support is

a particular form of organizing that is often a femme organizing skill (not that other genders can't also do this) that isn't valued or witnessed enough in organizing due to sexism and femmephobia and trans misogyny.²¹⁴

Perhaps it is not a question of whether self-care is 'too individual.' It may be more of a question of the purpose of those seemingly 'individual,' or shall we say *personal* practices. Part of Piepzna-Samarasinha's point, and I agree with her, is all too often practices coded as femme are seen as less valid and that is pretty much bullshit, since practices like knitting and quilting bees have often been a form of community-building for women and other feminine spectrum people.²¹⁵

Adrienne Maree Brown suggested a turn instead toward *self-determined care*: "The messages we receive are that our lives don't matter, that we don't deserve love, or even to exist. To choose instead to value ourselves, our health, and the health of our communities – all as one, not at odds with each other, is radical, is self-determination..."²¹⁶ To Brown, self-care and community care are about self-worth as families and communities: "I love the idea of community care ... community supporting each other in our self-determined efforts to care for ourselves and our families."²¹⁷

The Politics of 'Personal' Work

I listened with interest as those in activist communities elaborated various understandings of self-care and community care. The conversation reminded me a lot of those who want to extend understandings of consent beyond an interpersonal negotiation over access to one's body. When Rachel Kramer Bussell described consent as "a sexual process"²¹⁸ I agreed because too often consent is thought about as a yes/no conversation, a set of negotiations at the moment of a relationship about granting or denying access. What about when an individual wants to change their mind mid-way

through? What about moments where you think a particular sexual partner / experience / act will feel good, but it doesn't? What about consent beyond interpersonal relationships? Framing consent as a sexual process leaves room for all the elements of consent—play and checking in, all those subtle re-negotiations that happen when real people's bodies and desires are involved.

Some essays in *Yes Means Yes*, such as Miriam Zoila Pérez's work in "When Sexual Autonomy isn't Enough: Sexual Violence Against Immigrant Women in the United States," remind us consent is not just an interpersonal negotiation over permission for access, and has to do with more than personal power.²¹⁹ When I say consent is how we can come to know our own power and use it well, this takes into account how the ability to play with power carefully and consciously is not only about individual choices, but is always wrapped up with larger systems of power and the way they act on actual people's bodies. I have written elsewhere about how consent becomes fraught when personal boundaries become borders, playing out in relationships between people, and have given thought to how to negotiate personal boundaries in community spaces.

It does bother me though, that consent, as a form of self-care, or what I take to be the politics of personal work, is somehow seen as less radical or valuable, coded as self-serving or solipsistic. Piepzna-Samarasinha's response to the self-care and community care conversation, in particular, got me thinking about the ways in which self-care is coded as being for white, middle class people. About the ways in which coding self-care as a white, middle class invention is dangerous.²²⁰ "There's something deep I want to tease out here," Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, "about working class and poor folks and work..."

Some of us, we work so hard. We work so much. We don't sleep. We don't stop. We have a somatics, a way of being in our bodies, sometimes, of toughness and sucking it up and making it happen. We do it because we have to, because we love it, because it's a way of saying fuck you to everyone who's ever said we were lazy and it's our fault we don't have money. And this can be a gift. And it can also kill us.²²¹

Like many of the responses to B. Loewe, I took issue with his claim that all movement workers need is "a politics and practice of desire that could actually ignite our hearts with a fuel to work endlessly."²²² His claim that we *should* want to work endlessly left me feeling mad and ashamed. Mad, because at 30-something years old, I have lived long enough to watch my family, queer and otherwise, grind themselves down through overwork, out of desire for more, or a need for social justice and social change. Shame, because as a queer femme survivor, I need to set boundaries and limits with my work on consent, being careful to use this work not as a way to check out, but as a way to be present and check in. As for consent, I work to practice consent both as a way to protect my body and spirit, and a way to take care of my community.

Trauma and Burnout

Oh, I know about desire. I know the desire for healing and for justice that burns in your belly. That keeps you up at night. Desire that walks a fine line with need. Rewind several years. Deep into the process of surviving and healing from violence, I had thrown myself headlong into a helping profession. I got a job as a direct service worker at the LGBT community center where I had come up as a young queer person. All day we tended to our community's legitimate needs and worked to honor people's scars, their lives uncorked.

I answered the Helpline when the phone rang, offering empathy, active listening, crisis intervention, and resources for any number of community concerns: racism, poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, rejection from families of origin, and on and on. When I went home at night, I was too numb to sleep or cry.

Hard as it was, I loved that job. At the center, there were always people to share joys and struggles with. I learned to listen there. Learned that empathy means: *I feel you*. I learned about all the different shapes trauma can take, about how fierce and resilient people can be when there is little choice but to keep on.

I turned to direct service work, within the limited framework of a nonprofit, situated on the fault lines of race and class conflict between Detroit and its northern suburbs because I was trying to become that more experienced person I had needed back then, trying to own my responsibility to be present for the people coming after me. Most days, it was more than I could stand.

I left direct service work because I needed to get my spirit right. Because my then-belief that community work was the only self-care I needed, was a lie. Because I needed to learn how to be present with my own trauma in order to act with integrity.

In *Trauma Stewardship*, Laura van Dernoot Lipsky describes the toll trauma exposure takes on people working in a range of professions.²²³ “The 16 Warning Signs of Trauma Exposure Response” describes common, unrecognized symptoms of exposure to trauma. Weaving together personal anecdotes of trauma workers describing symptoms that reflect those seen in people with PTSD, Lipsky argues for a series of self-care and community care practices that may assist trauma workers in coming into the present moment.²²⁴ Being present is often a persistent challenge among survivors and trauma workers alike. I have mentioned elsewhere how being in our bodies is part of

practicing consent. Now I am pulled back to think about how being in our bodies is also a foundation for self-care and community care. Only by knowing what it feels like to be gone, am I able to address what it feels like to be here, in the present moment, in my body. What would it be like if community members who were burned out / traumatized did not have to leave community work to receive care?

The Culture of Overwork Among Academics

Problems of burnout and trauma are not unique to activists and community organizers. Late one night, logged onto Facebook against my better judgment, I read an article from *Inside Higher Ed*, called “In Search of Lost Time.” Philip Nel’s article illuminates some of the reasons academics obsess over work. Among them: habit, financial need, and our “thin-boundaried [work and personal] lives.”²²⁵ I am interested in Nel’s idea that many academics’ inability to turn off has to do with thin boundaries because I see my colleagues and mentors at the coffee shop. We feel guilt and shame about needing a break. We make jokes that Spring Break is a lie. I believe many academics have thin boundaries between our work and personal lives, but acknowledging thin boundaries doesn’t teach us enough about how to understand our desires enough to set boundaries and limits with work. Consent can teach workers to know our own desires and use them in the service of self-care and community care.

I am for consent as self-care and community care because working toward embodied and emotional well-being should not have to be a luxury. When we are present in our bodies and aware of our desires, we are less likely to harm ourselves, or people in our communities. When we set boundaries and limits – that is self-care. When we honor each others’ boundaries and limits – that is community care. I am for consent as self-care and community care because queer people’s contributions to our culture are real, and our lives are valuable. Practicing consent as self-care and community care is

one way to take care of ourselves, and each other, as we work toward a more habitable world.

Consent as Self-care and Community Care

So that is the context from which I come to self-care and community care. Now I want to offer several brief snapshots, practical advice I tell myself about consent as self-care and community care.

Being in Your Body is Self-care and Community Care

Being in our bodies means accepting them as they are in this moment: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This is what I tell myself when I am trying to come back to my body: your body is your own. That is a fact. Learn to accept your body as soon as you can. Your body is more than a container to carry your thoughts around in. Learn to respect it – strength and softness, abilities and limits. Your body is your only home. You will carry it like a turtle carries its shell. You will learn to be hard when you need to, use your body to protect your tender belly.

Being in our bodies means taking responsibility for our boundaries and limits, whether in our political or professional lives. When we set boundaries and limits, that is self-care. When we honor each others' boundaries and limits, that is community care. If we always say yes, to the point of over-commitment ... if we end up feeling hurt, embarrassed, or ashamed by things students or colleagues say ... if we feel numb, glazed, out of it, or checked out ... that's a sign of trauma exposure or burnout. That can be a moment to check in with ourselves and take time for self-care and community care activities that bring us back to our bodies.

Logging Off is Self-care and Community Care

This is what I tell myself: When you wake up at 5am, the endless To Do list running through your head, do not turn on the computer, log onto Facebook against

your better judgment, and scroll obsessively through pages of other people's lives, with their seemingly endless parade of weddings, new houses, and family photos with two parents and matching kids and think: *I am going to be working until the day I die –or- I will never have a home –or– no one will ever see my queer family as real.*

Do not waste time railing against every instance that has proven these thoughts may be true. There is a name for that kind of self-destruction. Tag it #unproductive and move on.

When I am present in my body, I notice things like the tension I sometimes feel in my shoulders after spending too much time on Facebook, the longing, or the regret, or the pain of feeling displaced, different, or not good enough. Logging off can be self-care and community care, whether it's for an hour, or a day, or a week or more. If I find myself tense, agitated, angry, lonely, or tired after being on social media, it may be time to take a social media break. When we refuse to allow ourselves to be inundated with all that information, even for a short time, we make space for other kinds of relationships and experiences. When I log off, I write in a journal for self-care and community care, or crochet a blanket for a family member or close friend. I practice acrobatics or make zines.

Logging On is Self-care and Community Care

Imagine for a moment being me. Let's say you are going about your regular everyday queer life. Your friend you have known since you were both five had a baby. You go downriver to hold him when he is just a few days old, nothing more than a little sprout. The neighbor from your childhood is there, too. She coos over the baby, then looks at you and says, "Oh, hi. I didn't see you there. I thought you were a 12-year-old boy." Your face gets a little red, but you laugh it off. Micro-aggressions like this one are commonplace.

When you come home, to the home you have build with your partner in Lansing, you will need to be held in community. So, you will log onto Tumblr and scroll through the images and quotes and friendships you have curated of queer culture, communities, and home. What if real life was like this, you will think. What if it could be?

When I am plugged into a community that speaks to me, such as queer bloggers on Tumblr, or the people I have met through doing zines, or my circus community, I feel present and grounded. Like we could take on any challenge. Like I have support in the fight for a more habitable world where queer people actually want to live. Scrolling through Tumblr, making zines, practicing circus arts—these things make me feel plugged into the energy and action of community. If you find yourself feeling isolated in your work, it may help to plug into a community of interest, identification, or location. You will know community by the way it makes you feel less alone, or by the way you become invested in what happens there.

Gratitude is Self-care and Community Care

Perhaps you come from a background where people think therapy, like grad school, is for rich people. If so, you may think: self-care is pointless, navel-gazing, pseudo-political bullshit for people who have nothing better to do than say nice things to themselves. You may think: I can't believe I'm saying positive affirmations out loud. Tag that #unproductive and move on. If you can't yet move on, give that voice a limit. Say, alright cynical voice, you've got 1 hour. You are loved and you are full. You are here and you are real. You are fierce and irreducible.

When it is 6 am, and I still am not sleeping, I don't bother getting pissed off at the universe, which seems like a vague thing to be pissed at, or my mentors, who definitely did not get me into this mess. I go outside and breathe some cool air and am grateful I have what I need to survive. Not too long ago, I would've called bullshit on that, but

right now, in this moment, it's more or less true. Gratitude teaches us to make something out of what we have, out of what we can salvage.

One of the pleasures of practicing consent as self-care and community care is being there for other people's lives. One of the challenges is how to be there, how to do the work of community care without absorbing traumatic stress to an overwhelming degree. In some ways, Phillip Nel is right—we do come to our work from a personal place.²²⁶ I turned to community work because my life had come uncorked and I had survived. Many of us doing the cultural work of healing from trauma can probably relate.

How? That is what people wanted to know when they called the Helpline, or came to the rooms reserved for youth on weekends, tucked away in the community center basement. The answer is complicated. LGBT and queer people often do not survive. Violence, overt and covert, against our bodies and spirits profoundly affects queer communities, especially QTPOC communities. Even though many people in LGBTQ communities would like to pretend that as a society we're past all that, plenty of people still think being gay means dying young from complications of AIDS. So many of the people I love were positive before we hit 21. The loss hurts deep and desperate and frantic like: *there's not enough time. There's not enough time.*

Most days, it seems like being queer and surviving doesn't make us invincible it just makes us lucky. To survive, we can take responsibility for treating ourselves with care and acknowledge we cannot make it alone. Caring for ourselves, through consent and other means, is part of sustaining communities that are more habitable and less violent. Time spent at the local community center as a young person taught me strategies for surviving and thriving as someone *in community*. Often, our failures to do so taught us just as much as the ways in which we cared for our communities well. The

failures of consent as self-care and community care could be their own piece. Here is some of what I have learned about consent as community care.

1. Sharing embodied survival skills is community care.

At the community center, back when I was young in the program, we shared our embodied knowledge about survival. We would meet at the drop-in center on Friday and Saturday nights, in the basement rooms of the community center reserved for youth on weekends. We'd sit near each other on folding chairs, avoiding eye contact and tuning out the noise. Being around other queer young people taught me how to ask for what you need while acting like you need nothing. How to let go of your possessions to make some money. How to share meals, and how to keep a little something for myself.

In the dance room, A, T, and M.B. said, here's how to laugh. Here's how to pose. Here's how to act hard when you're soft inside. Here's how to talk shit. Here's how to stand up for yourself in a world that's not going to do it for you. Here's how to juggle multiple jobs. Here's how to stay in school. Here's how to acknowledge you had your whole childhood to think an education was a right, not a privilege.

2. Peer mentoring and advocacy are community care.

I have written about the topics of peer mentoring as a way to develop the languages to talk about our desires. Supportive mentors, mostly peer mentors, also taught me how to advocate for myself to be held in community. How to push away the shame of not being able to do it all alone and say: I need empathy, medical care, an extension on an assignment, an extension on this whole damn semester, a place to stay for the night, help applying for a scholarship, a ride. My point is this: I did not survive alone. None of us can.

3. Assisting with each others' recovery is community care.

When we have enough, it is easier to think we can do it all, do it alone.

The other morning, my partner made delicious buttermilk biscuits with veggie sausage, even though she isn't vegetarian. She topped them with wildflower honey to help soothe my allergic reaction to everything in nature. Then I set a limit with my second job at the circus: *I can only teach three classes this week*. In that blissful, borrowed time, I got hours of undistracted writing time in. I am learning to accept just how much more precious our bodies are than any currency. Later on, I will go dangle upside down with my circus community. When we practice together, they will ask, "How does that feel?" and "Do you want to take it farther?" In our practice, I will remember that ideas come from people's bodies. *Our* bodies that feel pleasure and pain. Bodies that need a rest sometimes. Bodies that, if we listen, will tell us how they feel and what they need.

And maybe we will come back to ourselves a little at a time. When we hang onto sustainable relationships and work at them. When we support our own desires. When we successfully negotiate safety and risk. When we refuse to harm ourselves. When we refuse to harm our communities, and if we do, how we learn to apologize and change. When we practice consent. When we accept the power to create the culture we want.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop

At the LGBT community center where I grew up, peer education was common practice. LGBT and queer youth taught each other about sex and relationships. I am grateful to have learned skills for communicating about these matters in community space. Being able to talk about sex and consent is a matter of survival.

This iteration of the consent workshop was designed for the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition's New Work Showcase at the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The workshop + zine format is LGBTQ community-based pedagogy in the sense that it grows out of community-based traditions of peer education. Peer education is a method used in feminist, queer, and trans communities to transform heterosexist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, sexist, classist, and ableist attitudes and actions.

This mini-consent workshop invites a small number of participants at a time (3-5 people) to entertain one or two workshop prompts. Participants in the mini-consent workshop receive "Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop" zine as a takeaway. The purpose of this workshop + zine is to open up a conversation about consent and give people practices they can carry into their work and play.

How Context Changes the Shape of the Workshop

I pitched "Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop" to the Coalition of Women Scholars in Rhetoric & Composition as a 5-10 minute, mini-workshop on consent. What I knew was participants in the New Work Showcase would be filtering

around a room to various stations, representing new feminist scholarship at CCCC, the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

This rhetorical situation was different than a full-length workshop because in a longer workshop, people would come expecting to be in a workshop space. There would be plenty of time built in to open the space, set ground rules, get a bit of background information on approaches to consent, practice new skills, debrief or do aftercare.

The choice to do a mini-workshop was risky because I wasn't sure the people who attended the New Work Showcase would be prepared to talk about consent. What I've learned in researching the cultural histories of the Sex Wars is consent tends to be at the crux of a lot of feminist arguments. There is a certain level of vulnerability and risk when engaging with the topic of consent. As the facilitator of the consent workshop, I wanted to mediate some of the risks for participants by setting the scene for our work together ahead of time.

Setting Up the Consent Workshop

I arrived early to the ballroom of the conference center in Tampa to set up chairs around a small, square table, creating a shared space in a wide-open room. I arranged our props for the workshop on the table. Laying out the props ahead of time was important so those passing by could get a sense of whether they wanted to participate.

Prop list

Workshop prompts, handwritten on playing cards

Corkboard, pins, and string for mapping activities

Scratch paper and pens

Signage

Zines as takeaways

People would filter up and fill the chairs, and once I'd gathered 3-5 people, we would begin with the ground rules. This moment requires a pause for people to reflect on whether they're willing to play by those rules.

Ground Rules

1. What happens in the consent workshop stays in the consent workshop — even if what someone else discloses seems like no big deal to you, discuss with them before you share with anyone else.
2. Use I statements—don't try to speak for a whole group of people.
3. This is your consent workshop—if you don't want to respond to a prompt, don't. You are also invited to get up and wander away, or come back later.
4. There is no play without power—throughout the workshop, seek to practice consent by knowing your own power and using it well.
5. We are all responsible for fulfilling our own needs—if you need something, ask.

After ground rules, we discussed the workshop process and what was going to happen.

Script for the Consent Workshop

Welcome to “Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop.” This consent workshop focuses on consent across personal and professional contexts. The reason for the broad focus is, in my understanding of consent, for consent to become habitual, especially in high-stakes sexual contexts like sex, we need to be doing it all the time.

I have these cards. On the back of the cards, there are three ways participants can interact with the material on consent: reflect, make, and connect. Each of these ways to engage involves different levels of investment.

A **reflect** card asks participants to look at yourself and reflect on one of the elements of consent with the option to share / not share their results.

A **make** card asks participants to create something to facilitate thinking through an element of consent.

A **connect** card asks participants to interact with other people on the material.

On the front of the cards, are different elements of consent (boundaries, desire, risk, listening, vulnerability, self-identification, checking in, and so on). There are also prompts asking you to engage with the elements of consent in the ways I described above.

We will place the cards face down. I will ask one of you to choose a card based on how you want to interact with the material. Then, I will read the workshop prompt to the group and facilitate the prompt.

Reflections on “Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop”

What I’ve come to understand from facilitating this and previous workshops is: participants will come with their own stories and understandings about the topic, but it’s the workshop facilitator’s role to create an experience for them, with outcomes participants might feel empowered to take action on.

Going into the workshop for the CWSHRC New Work Showcase, I imagined a couple of things about participants. First, participants would be adults who would mediate their own level of vulnerability and risk. Second, participants were not likely to want to disclose sexual stories in a public setting at a professional conference. (**Note:** if you do want to disclose sexual stories at a professional conference, I want to hang out with you).

The format of the New Work Showcase, and what I imagined about the space and the participants guided the purpose and design of the workshop—to talk about

consent beyond sexual consent without leaving the sexual element behind. The intro of the zine “Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop” enacts this, calling on the essay for which the workshop is named, “Her Body, Mine, and His” by Dorothy Allison.²²⁷

When I read that essay, which is about queer pleasures in the midst of the AIDs crisis, I remember why it is so important for people to learn how to practice consent. Why it is so important for those who want to have sex to be able to talk about sex, to have language for our bodies and know how to talk about our histories and desires, about power, pleasure, danger, disclosure, risk. For LGBTQ communities especially, being able to talk about these matters is necessary for our survival.

“Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop” Zine

keywords: consent, boundaries, desire, pleasure, power, risk, accountability, explicit writing, language for bodies, poorly photocopied images of fruit

Accessibility statement: If there is any way I can make this information more accessible to you, please let me know. A transcript of the zine is available upon request.

Cindy Crabb, longtime editor of the zine *Doris*, explains zines as short form, self-published magazines, a form of radical literature used to transmit information and resources left out of mainstream culture.²²⁸ Zines are collectible ephemera, meant to be stuck in a back pocket, and shared among friends. They are a medium for having conversations that get distributed through DIY publishing.

When everyone I knew at the LGBT community center had aged out and moved on, I did self-education on consent. I read zines like “Support” and “Learning Good Consent,” edited by Cindy Crabb,²²⁹ *Ask First!* by Cheyenne,²³⁰ and the literature on

community accountability and consent, like INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence's "Community Accountability Working Document",²³¹ *The Color of Violence: INCITE! Anthology*,²³² and *The Revolution Starts at Home*.²³³ I read the edited collection *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Empowerment & a World Without Rape*.²³⁴

Doing self-education through zines and in online spaces is a way for LGBTQIA²³⁵ people who don't have immediate access to community spaces offline to get access to information. By self-education, I mean seeking out information on a topic, or doing research. I understand self-education as part of what queer rhetorics scholar Jonathan Alexander has called "sexual literacy."²³⁶ In his book, Alexander talks about how students did digital research projects, making use of / learning sexual literacies online. This is relevant to those of us who teach writing because LGBTQIA people are in our courses and because it is powerful to watch students thrive when taught skills to understand community-based issues, and potentially connect to people all over the world.

I designed "Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop" the way I did because this is the way I was taught in LGBTQ and feminist communities, through peer education. When I talk about the zine + workshop format as LGBTQ community-based pedagogies, that's what I'm talking about. The prompts represent a culture of sharing critical information (in this case, about consent). In the back of the zine, I invite participants to feel free to adapt the prompts for their context. I would encourage you to do the same, as long as you use the consent workshop to create a more habitable world.

Flip through the consent workshop below, and you will notice many of the prompts focus on the contexts of teaching, research, communities, and histories, as well as sex and personal relationships. This choice was a function of the space. Because I

knew we would be set up in an open space, I decided to focus on the elements of consent across contexts, so participants didn't feel like I was eliciting personal disclosures in a public space. While a longer workshop might create a space for personal disclosures, the short format and open framework of the event didn't call for that level of investment.

A link to the zine is here: <https://www.yumpu.com/s/dU9lyB62zATAMHHI>. It is also attached at the end of this document.

Notes on Queer Contexts

In other contexts, "Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop" might take on different focuses. In one undergraduate *Queer Studies* course, I was explicit about sex and various sex acts because one of the moments consent fails is in not having conversations about sex. Undergraduate students may be having sex, and a consent workshop dealing with sex directly could give them a critical moment to pause and reflect on the risks, and how to talk about their desires.

When I returned to the consent workshop material from the zine at *Queer Conversations*, a graduate student led symposium at Michigan State University, one participant didn't feel the workshop focused enough about sex and pointed out the different levels of risk in sexual contexts than in situations of lower risk. I agree it's so important to talk directly about sexual consent, especially in the context of reports from the U.S. Department of Education showing high levels of non-compliance in how federally funded colleges and universities handle sexual assault.²³⁷ At the same time, professional contexts often have very high stakes, and talking about consent across contexts means more spaces in which to practice.

All this to say, I was careful in how I facilitated the workshop, drawing on empathy, radical listening, openness, ways of being I learned in community spaces.

Teaching consent across contexts, beyond sexual consent, without leaving the sexual element behind has the potential to transform the culture of institutions for historically marginalized students, one cohort of community educators at a time.

APPENDIX B:
Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop Zine

Figure 1 Doing it All the Time: A Queer Consent Workshop cover

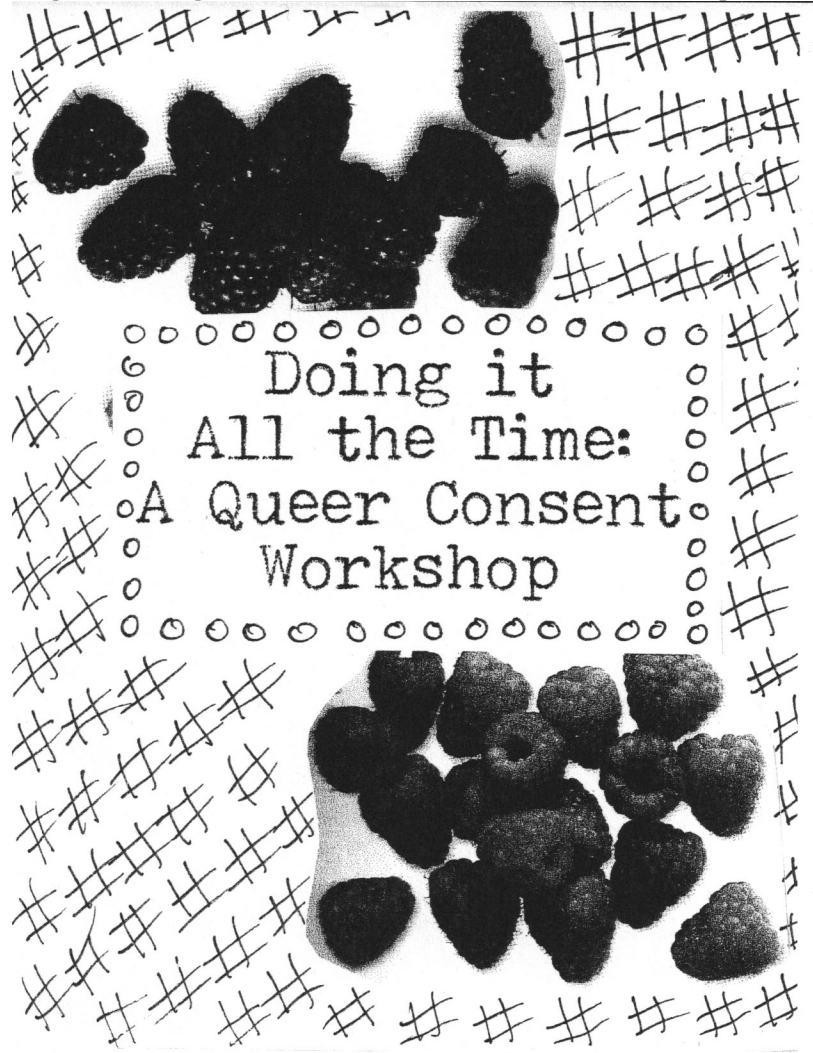


Figure 2 Context, Dorothy Allison, "Her Body, Mine, and His"



I didn't always have the language
for consent, or know what the word
meant.

Consent is part of the erotic
vocabulary I learned as a baby dyke,
thanks to peer mentoring and
practice.

I drank too much wine at a party last fall, found myself quot-
ing Muriel Rukeyser to Geoff Maines, all about the backside, the
body's ghetto, singing her words, "Never to go despising the ass-
hole nor the useful shit that is our clean clue to what we need."

The lexicon I have for consent is
drawn out of queer experiences.
That's why I call this a QUEER
consent workshop.

"The clitoris in her least speech,"* he sang back, and I loved
him for that with all my soul. We fed each other fat baby carrots and
beamed at our own enjoyment.

Figure 3 Context 2

I'm not at all saying queer people are more skilled at having consensual relationships, only that our cultures have had to get comfortable talking about sex and consent.

I am angry all the time lately, and being angry makes me horny, makes me itchy, makes me want to shock strangers and surprise the girls who ask me, please, out for coffee and to talk. I don't want to talk. I want to wrestle in silence. It isn't sex I want when I am like this. It's the intimacy of their bodies, the inside of them, what they are afraid I might see if I look too close. I look too close. I write it all down.

I feel like queer interest in consent can be traced to the histories of the Sex Wars, cultural trauma around the AIDs crisis, and ongoing violence and betrayals, large and small, of mainstream society against LGBTQA communities.

I intend that things shall be different in my lifetime, if not
in theirs.

Figure 4 Context 3

A theory is a fantasy about the way
the world works.

Consent is a good fantasy, if you ask
me—the idea that we can learn to
negotiate boundaries & limits, power
& pleasure, disclosure & risk.

Paul, Geoff—I am doing it as much as I can, as fast as I can.
This holy act.

How do we fight homophobia and
transphobia? How do we survive and
thrive in a racist, sexist, classist,
ableist world?

I am licking their necks on Market Street, fisting them
in the second floor bathroom at Amelia's, in a booth under a dim
wall lamp at the Box—coming up from her cunt a moment before
the spotlight shifts to her greedy features.

How do we learn to love? To form
relationships? How do we learn to
respect, reciprocate, hold each other
accountable?

I wanted to show consent beyond
sexual consent without leaving the
sexual element behind.

Figure 5 Boundaries

BOUNDARIES

Here's how to know

if someone

would make a good lover:

set a hard boundary.

Figure 6 Desire

DESIRE

There's so much

about desire

I don't understand,

like my fear of

vulnerability

and my craving for it.

Figure 7 Pleasure

PLEASURE

None of that

"when I touch you,

I touch myself" bullshit.

When I touch you, I am
touching you.

There is a queer eroticism
in being close.

Figure 8 Power

POWER

There is no play
without power.

Consent is how

we come to know

our own power

and use it well.

Figure 9 Risk

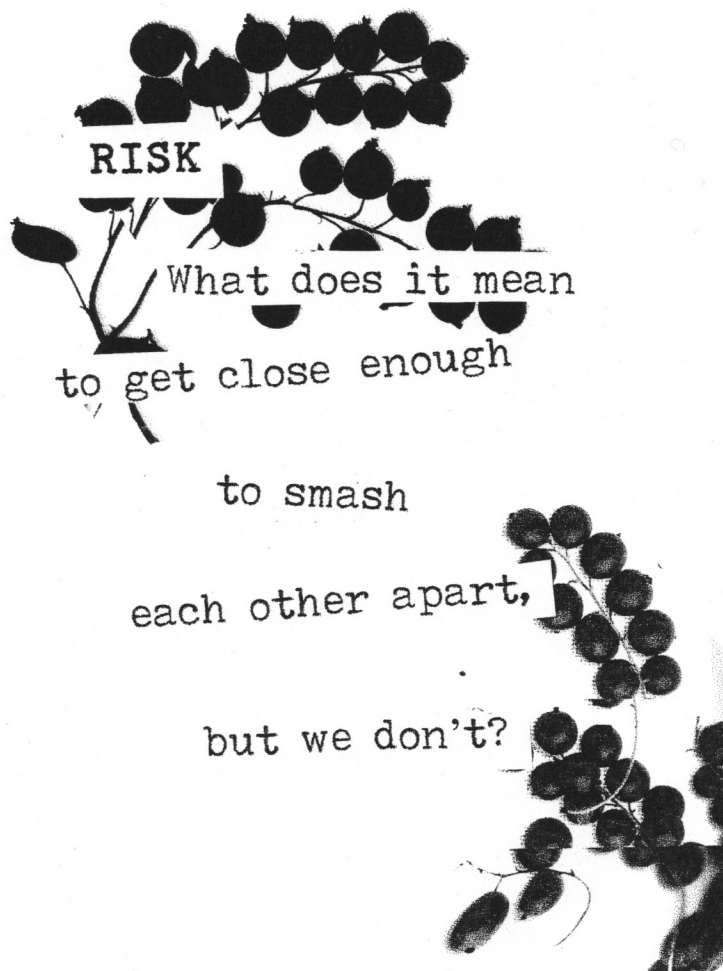


Figure 10 Consent is Rhetorical

When academics talk about consent, it tends to be in the dry language of institutional review and informed consent, a one-time process negotiated through documents.

These workshop prompts were created for the Coalition of Women Scholars in Rhetoric & Composition event at the 4Cs conference in 2015.

Consent is rhetorical because it has to do with how people use language and our bodies as we move through community spaces and relate to each other.

Consent is an ongoing negotiation of power, privilege, & desire. Consent is a process and a set of teachable practices where we can come to know our own power and use it well.

I am doing it, boys and girls, I am doing it, doing it
all the time.

excerpts from "Her Body Mine #His"
by Dorothy Allison

Figure 11 Listening, Reflect

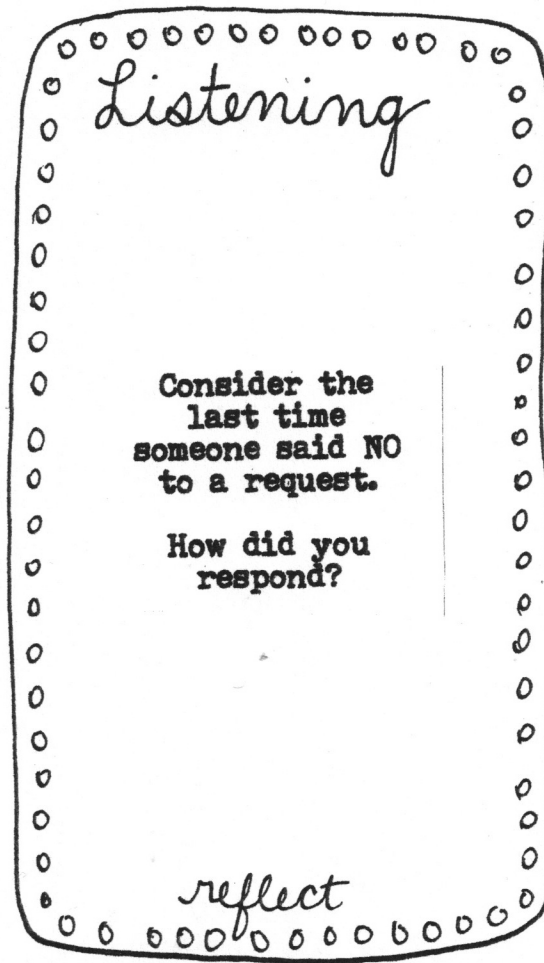


Figure 12 Boundaries, Reflect

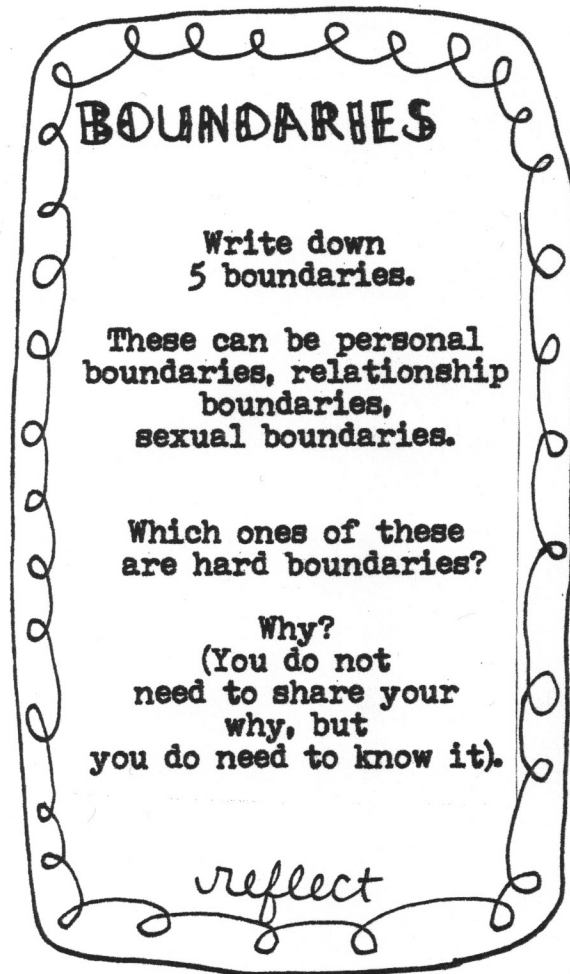


Figure 13 Disclosure, Reflect

DISCLOSURE

A student discloses
they are a
survivor of violence
in the past.

3 pieces of information:

1. the student
does not
feel in danger.
2. they are already
in therapy.
3. they do not want
police involvement

You are a
mandated reporter
at your institution.
How do you
negotiate consent
with the student?

reflect

Figure 14 Vulnerability and Risk, Reflect

vulnerability
& risk

How do you understand
Vulnerability & risk?
Write it down.

How does your
theory of vulnerability
& risk change
how you teach
or do research?

reflect

Figure 15 Desire, Make

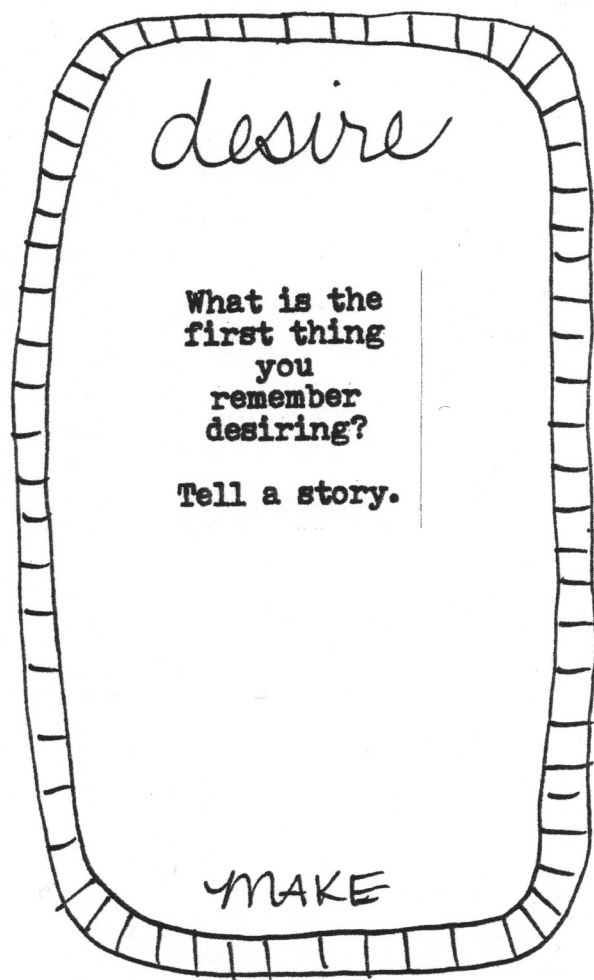


Figure 16 Self-identification, Make



Figure 17 Self-education, Make

self-education

**Define
consent
for
yourself.**

MAKE

Figure 18 Support, Connect

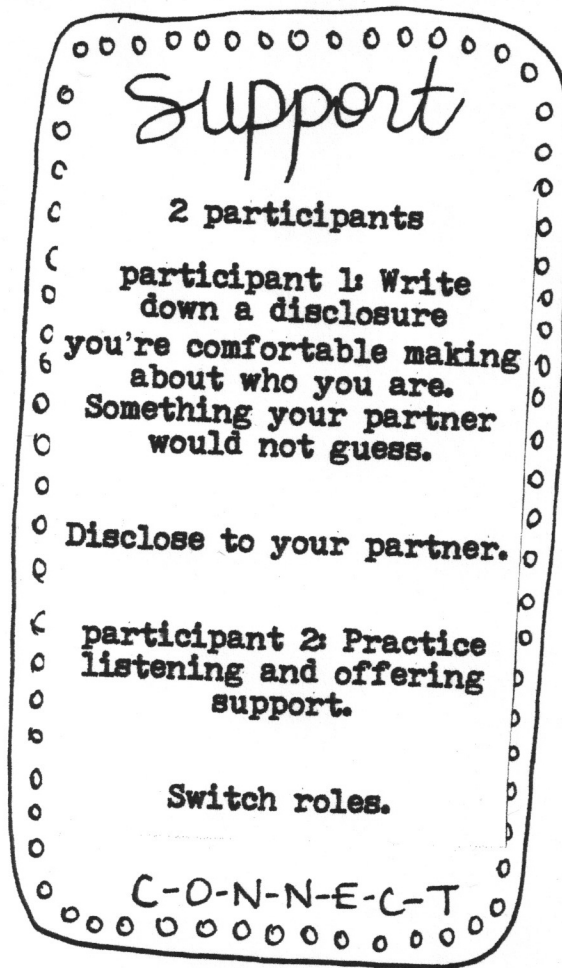


Figure 19 Checking in, Connect

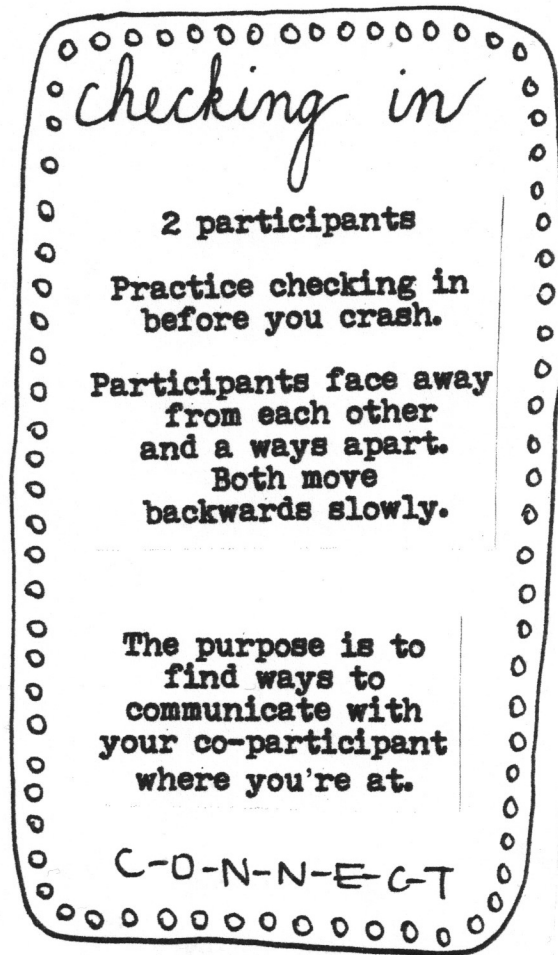


Figure 20 Communication, Connect

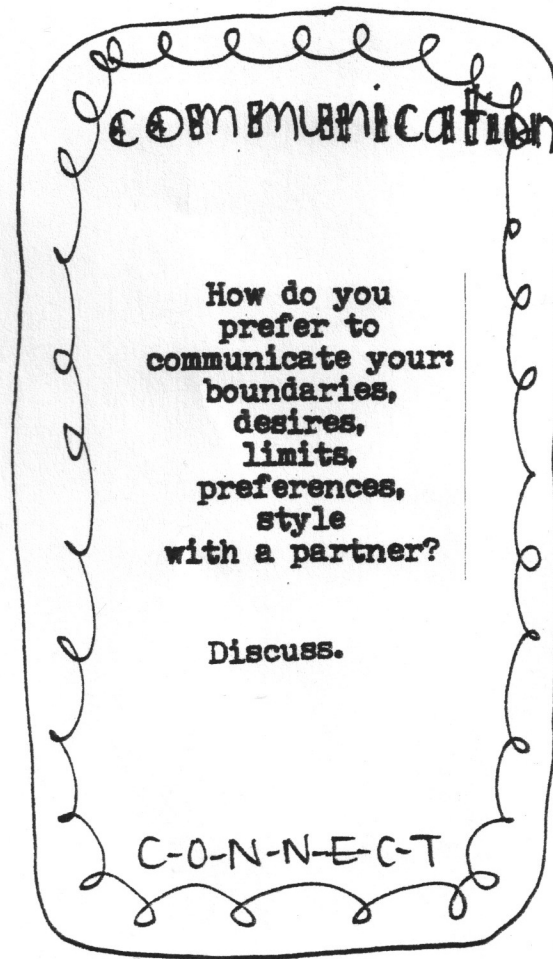


Figure 21 Reciprocity, Reflect

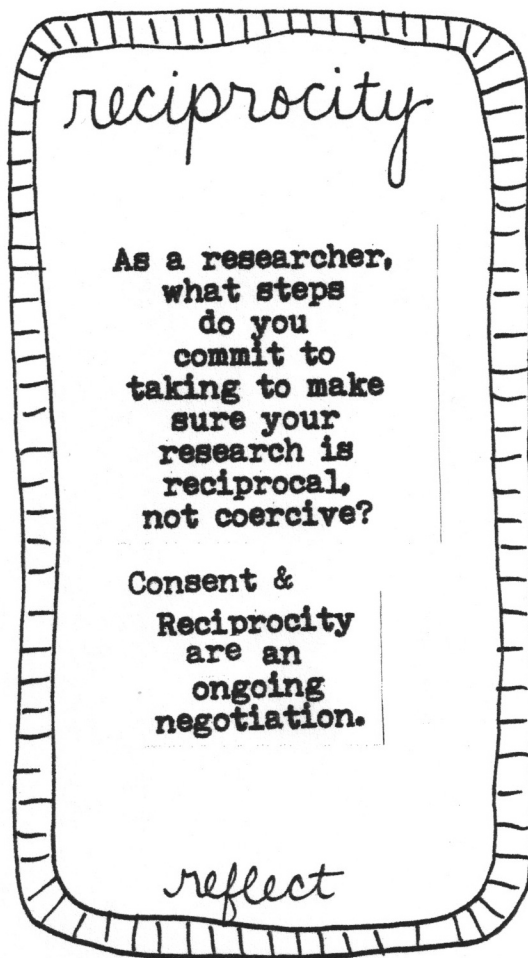


Figure 22 Respect, Reflect

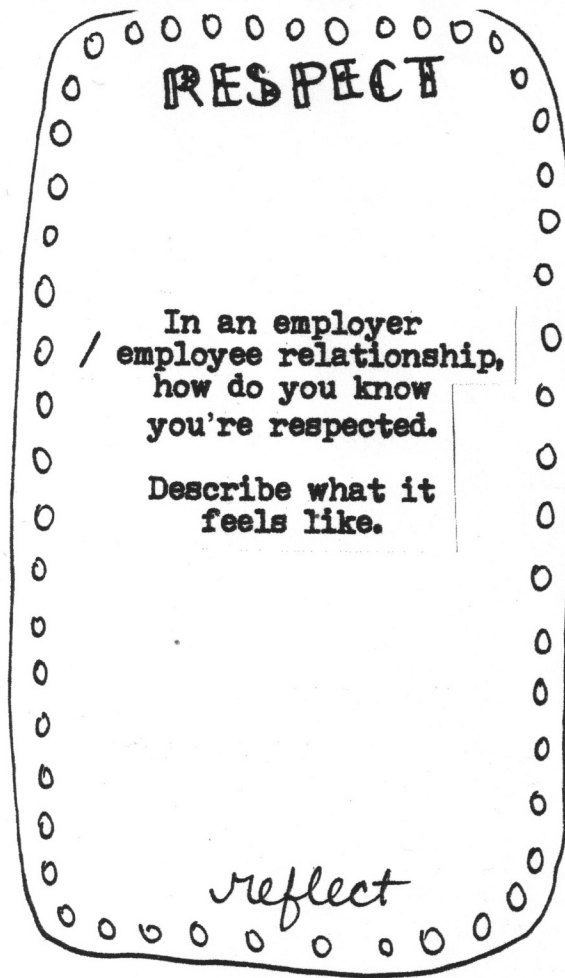


Figure 23 Risk, Connect

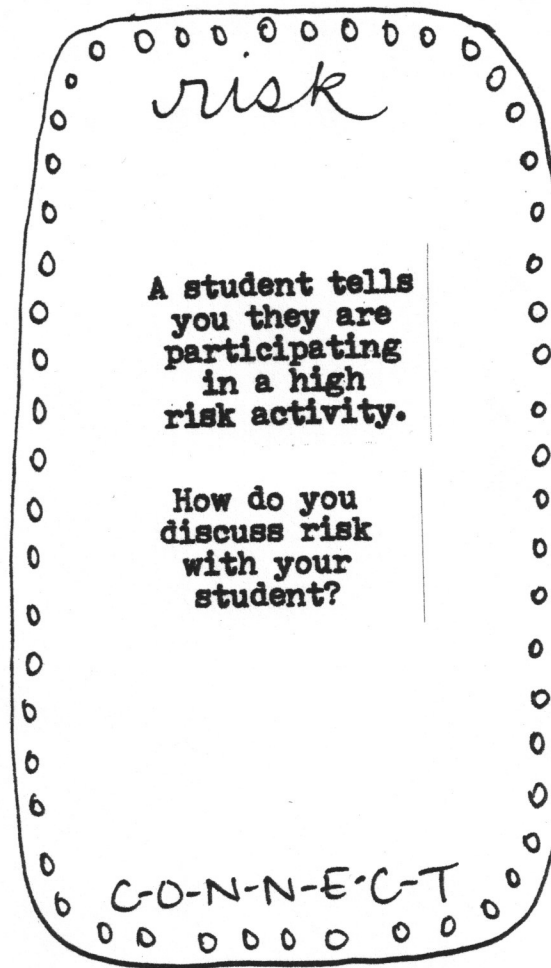


Figure 24 Access, Reflect

Access

**Write down 1
thing you will
commit to
doing
to improve
access
for historically
marginalized
students
at your
institution.**

reflect

Figure 25 Being Present, Connect

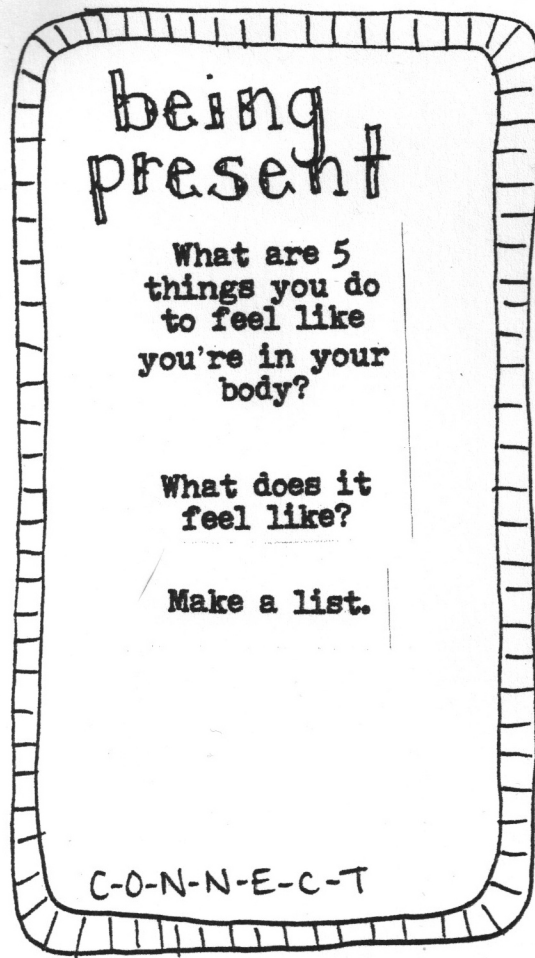


Figure 26 Risk, Reflect

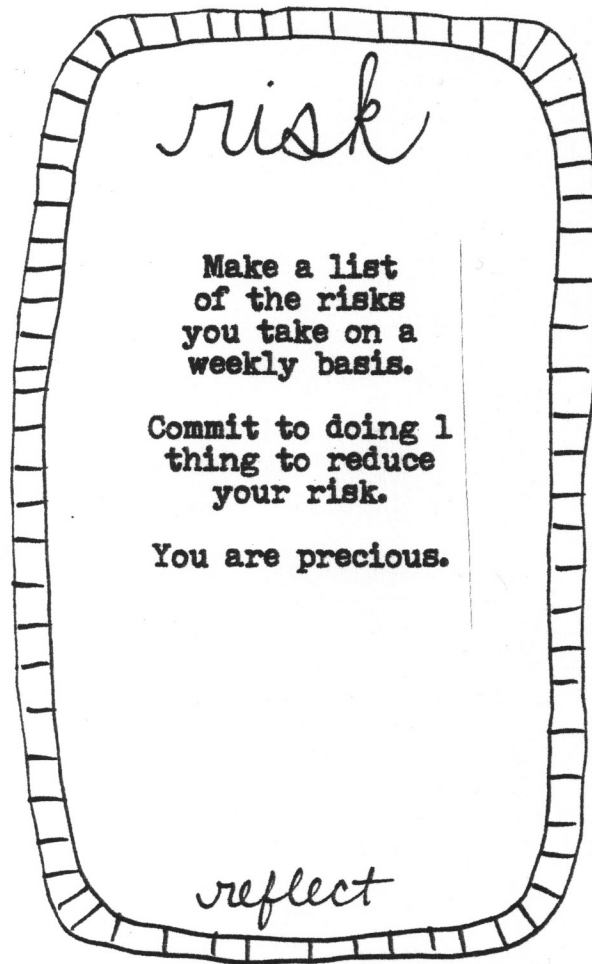


Figure 27 Triggers, Connect

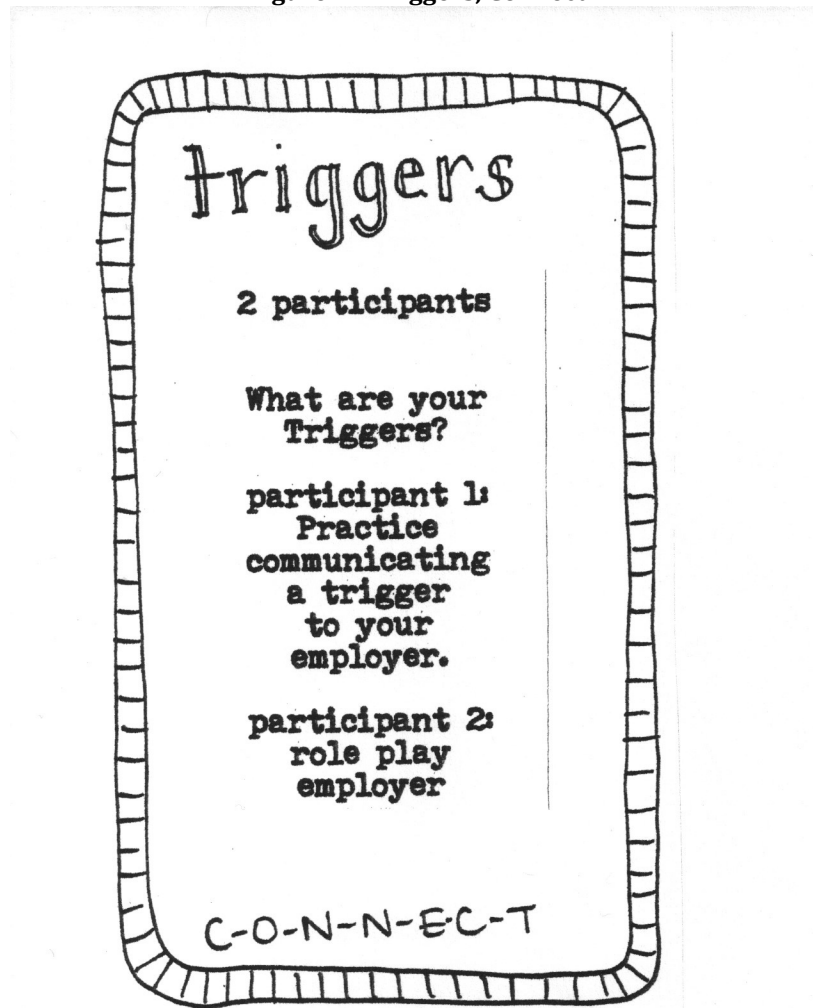


Figure 28 Desire, Make

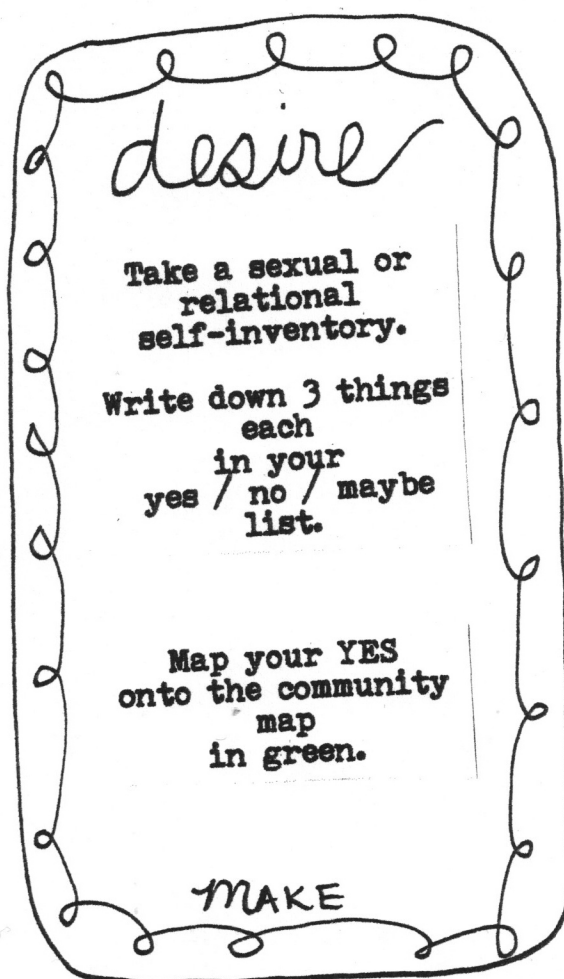


Figure 29 Limits, Make

Limits

Take a sexual or
relational
self-inventory.

Write down 3 things
each
in your
yes / no / maybe
list.

Map your MAYBE
onto the community
map
in yellow.

MAKE

Figure 30 Boundaries, Make

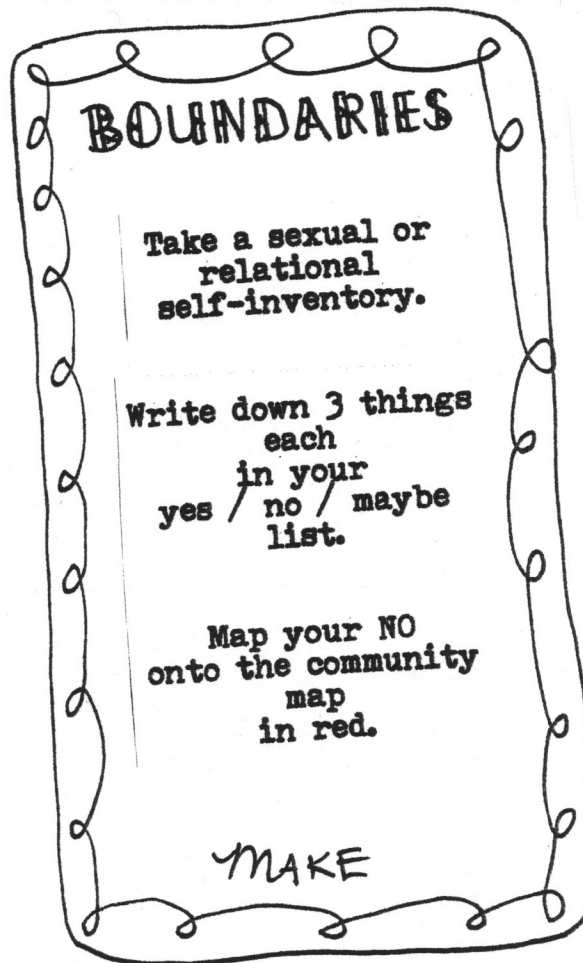


Figure 31 Accountability, Connect

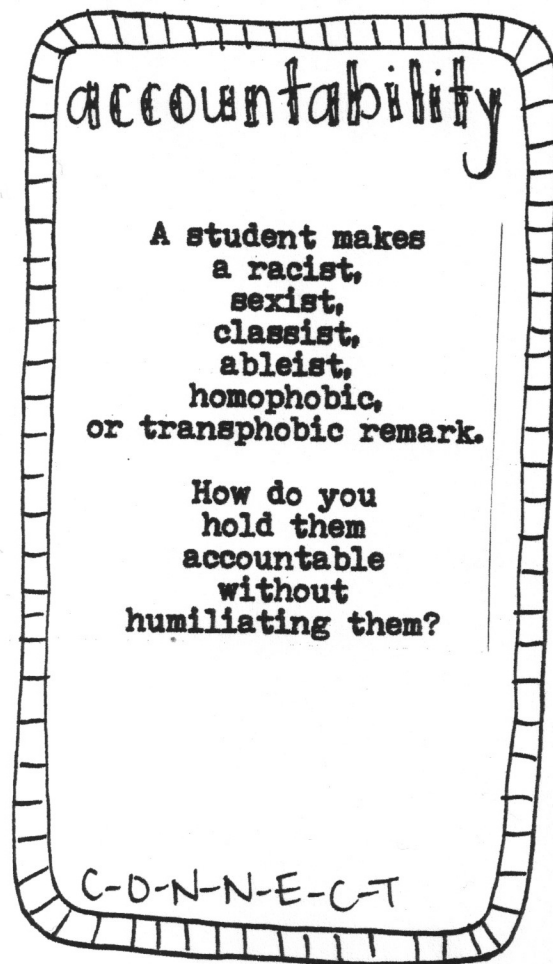


Figure 32 Accountability, Connect

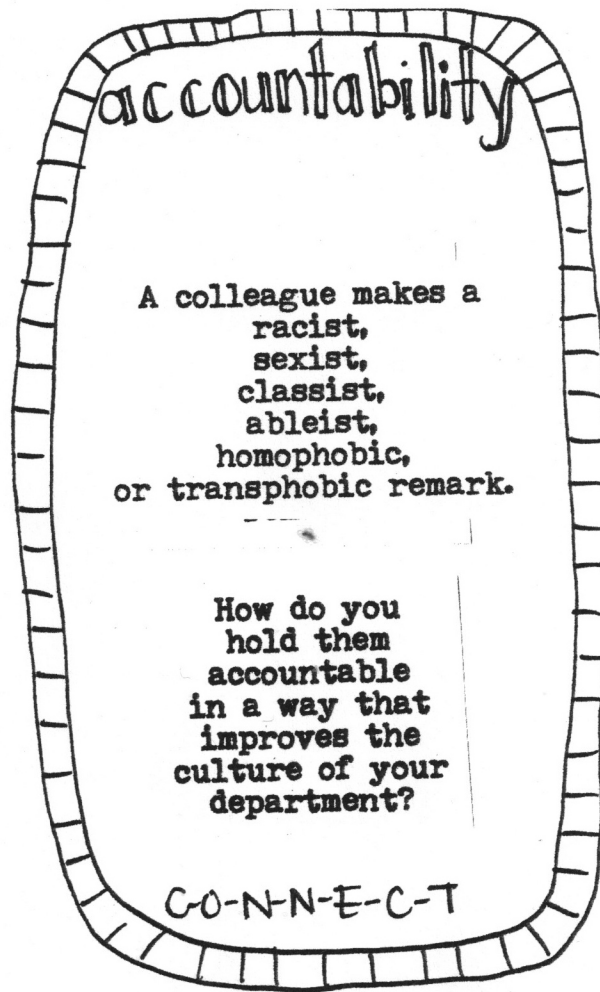
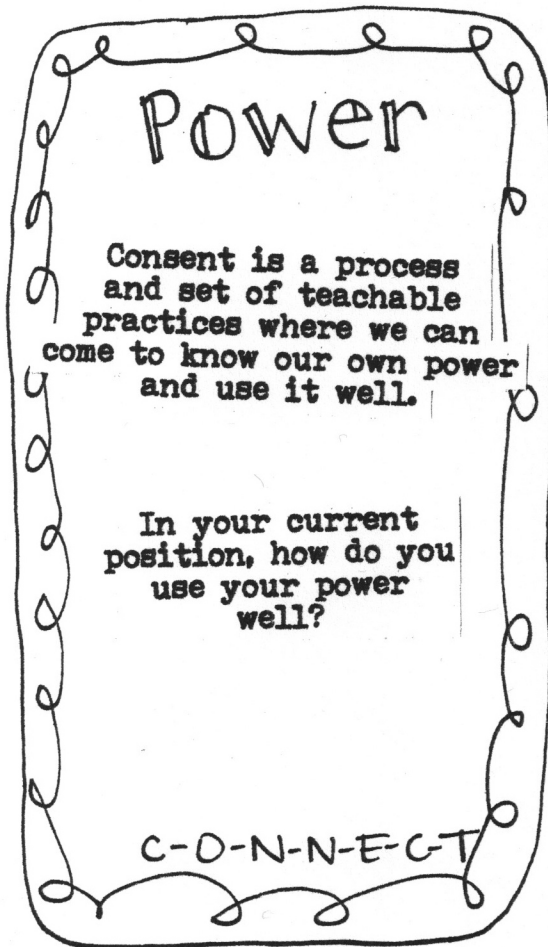


Figure 33 Power, Connect



• Notes •

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Figure 35 Notes

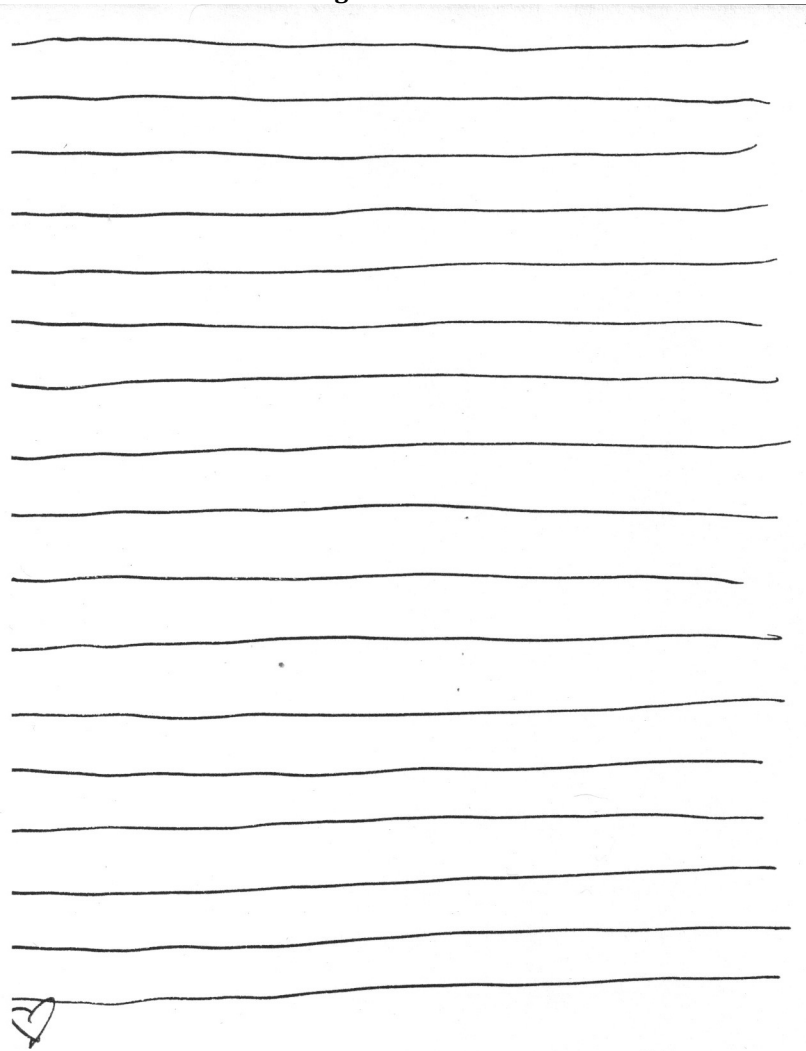


Figure 36 Notes



A series of 18 horizontal lines for taking notes, arranged in a column below the title.

Figure 37 Notes

A series of 18 horizontal lines, evenly spaced, intended for handwritten notes. The lines are black and span most of the width of the page.

Figure 38 Notes

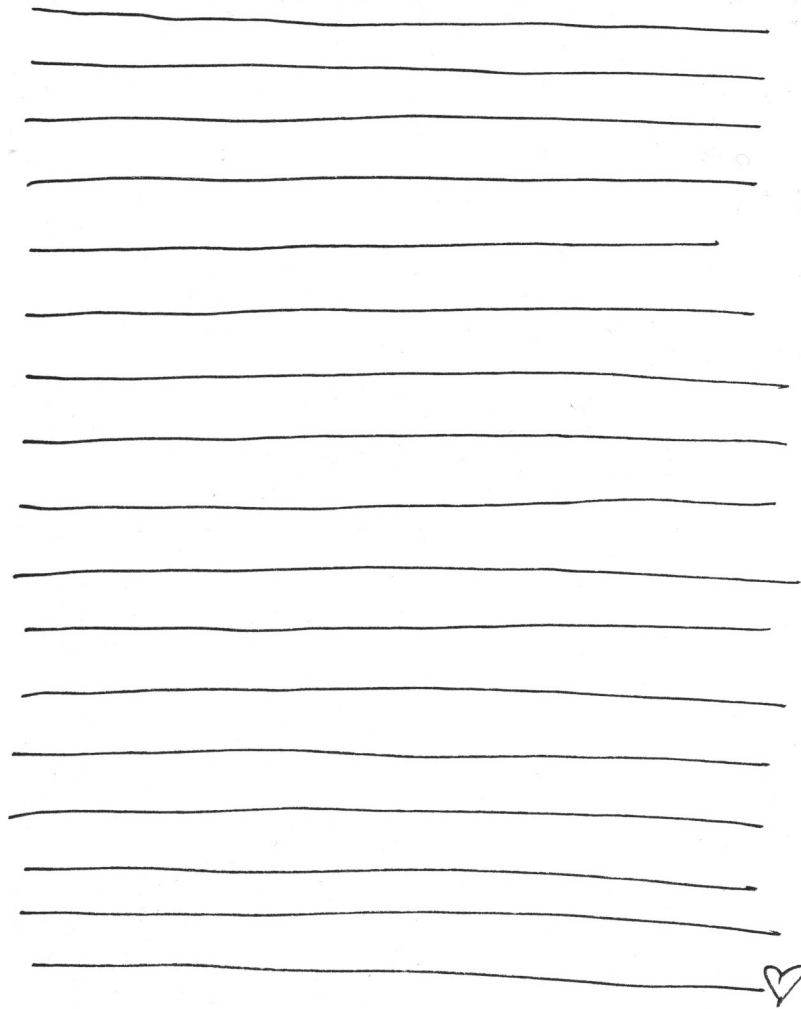


Figure 39 Notes

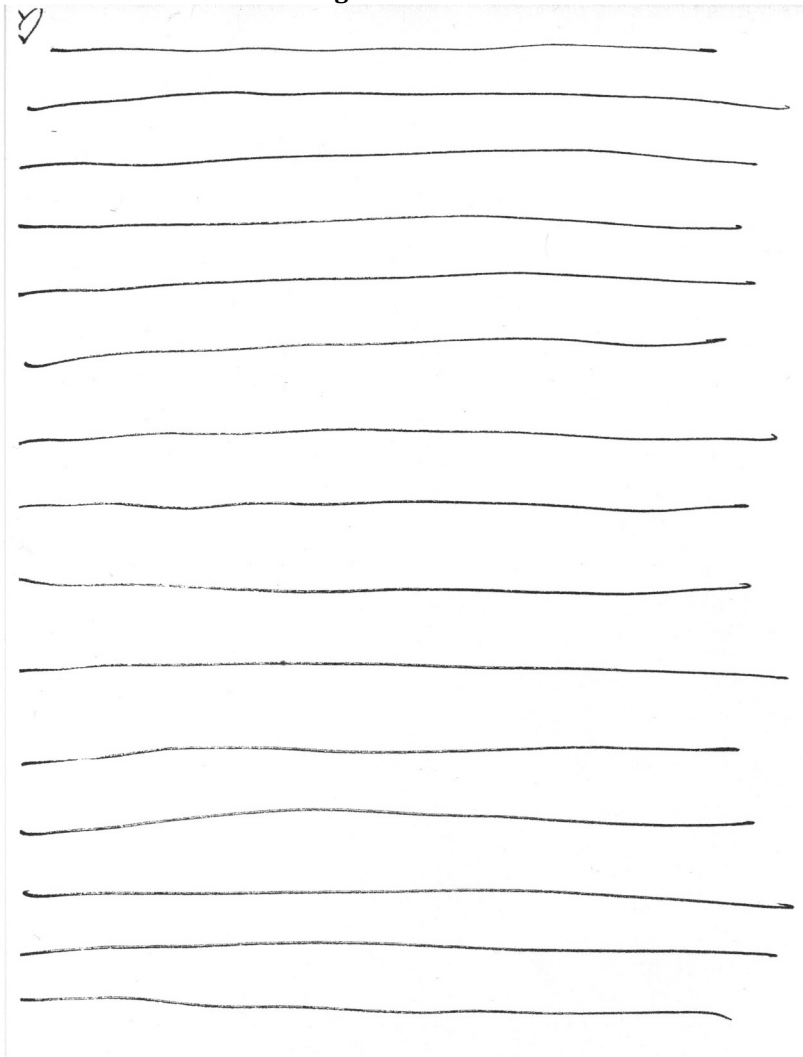


Figure 40 Notes

A series of 15 horizontal lines, evenly spaced, intended for handwritten notes. The lines are slightly wavy and extend across the width of the page.

Figure 41 Resources

!*. RESOURCES .*!

Ask First! by Cheyenne.
www.zinelibrary.info/ask-first

Community Accountability working
document. by INCITE! Women of Color
Against Violence.
[http://www.incite-
national.org/page/community-
accountability-working-document](http://www.incite-national.org/page/community-accountability-working-document)

"Her Body, Mine, and His" in Skin:
Talking about Sex, Class, & Literature
by Dorothy Allison.

Learning Good Consent. by Cindy
Crabb + friends.

The Revolution Starts at Home:
Confronting Intimate Partner
Violence in Activist Communities.
Edited by Ching-in Chen, Jai Dulani,
and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-
Samarasinha.

Figure 42 Resources 2

Support. by Cindy Crabb.
<http://www.phillyspissed.net/node/18>

The Survivor's Guide to Sex. Staci
Haines.

Why haven't we talked about Consent
yet? by Elle Abeles-Allison + Zoe
Jackson.

Yes Means Yes by Jaclyn Friedman &
Jessica Valenti.



Feel free to adapt them for your
context -or- bring me to your town
to do a consent workshop!

Figure 43 You are here. You are real. You are fierce and irreducible.



FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES

¹ When I talk about pleasure and danger, I am talking about the theoretical framework Carol Vance and the organizers of the Barnard Sex Conference set up to understand the Sex Wars, a set of ongoing arguments among feminists over issues of sexual propriety, taste, and ethical sex. The tendency of U.S. feminists to focus on sexual danger has been critiqued by several pro-sex / sex-positive writers, as in "Sex Issue," *Heresies* 12, 1981; Heather Love, "Diary of a Conference On Sexuality, 1982," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 1 (2011): 49-78; Carol S. Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. (Ontario, CA: Pandora Press, 1993); Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006).

² Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti, eds., *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Empowerment and a World Without Rape* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008).

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ California's affirmative consent law holds people accountable to getting a clear, enthusiastic "yes" in sexual relationships. California Senate, Senate Bill No. 967, "Student Safety: Sexual Assault," Sept. 28, 2014, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB967.

Teri Okita's 2014 article on CBS News online briefly frames how affirmative consent is coming to be understood in sexual assault prevention and awareness efforts on college campuses. To learn more about the U.S. Department of Education's recent Title IX investigations of sexual violence on campus, see <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-list-higher-education-institutions-open-title-ix-sexual-violence-investigations>.

⁵ You can read the Relationship Violence & Sexual Misconduct Policy at Michigan State University here: Michigan State University. "Relationship Violence & Sexual Misconduct Policy," *Michigan State University*, last modified January 1, 2015, <http://inclusion.msu.edu/equity/SexualHarassmentAssault.html>.

⁶ *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Protecting Human Subjects of Research*, 1979, accessed Aug. 5, 2015, http://www.videocast.nih.gov/pdf/ohrp_belmont_report.pdf. The *Belmont Report* is a summary of ethical principles and guidelines for conducting research with human subjects. The report is significant to understanding consent because it deals directly with the elements of boundaries, vulnerability, and risk in terms of informed consent in research.

⁷ Kovick, Kris, *What I Love About Lesbian Politics Is Arguing With People I Agree With* (Boston: Alyson Books, 1991). My first clue being a queer feminist involved a lot of arguments happened when I found Kris Kovick's book in the free library on the second floor of the old LGBT community center building. Kovick's cartoons and essays

addressed lesbian politics around the Sex Wars. One of the cartoons from that book I will always remember showed some dykes on bikes, one of them on a walkie talkie, with the caption, "I'm up at camp lubricant ... you better send security. The militant vanillas just challenged the S/M dykes to a game of ultimate mother may I" (Kovick, 22). This was so clearly commentary on consent, and I found it hilarious. Cartoons and essays on lesbian culture offered access to community-based histories in ways academic theories never could. By collecting little bits and pieces of these "alternative" histories I pieced together a sense of where I fit in feminist and queer culture—in other words, I knew I was gay, but it has taken awhile to figure out what kind of gay person I am. For more on "alternative" histories, see Shirley Wilson Logan, *Liberating Language: Sites of Rhetorical Education in Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2008); Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Jessica Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865-1911* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2008).

⁸ Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1994).

⁹ It makes sense that the feminists in my Women's Studies courses in Michigan didn't talk about the histories of the Sex Wars—what Amber Hollibaugh and Cherríe Moraga call "sexual silences in feminism" were a matter of place, and of politics. Amber Hollibaugh and Cherríe Moraga, "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle (Boston: Alyson Books, 1992).

In "Lost in Space: Queer Geography and the Politics of Location," Sherri Inness writes it may be a mistake to let queer studies be shaped by queer geography, if queer geography is focused only on urban centers on the coast, like San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York City, Northampton, Provincetown, Fire Island, Key West. At the same time, one's understanding of geography shapes our understandings of our homosexuality. Sherrie Inness, "Lost in Space: Queer Geography and the Politics of Location," in *Queer Cultures*, ed. Deborah Carlin and Jennifer DiGrazia (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2004): 255.

For empirical research on place and regional variations in feminist politics, see Jo Reger, "Drawing Identity Boundaries: The Creation of Contemporary Feminism," in *Identity Work in Social Movements*, ed. Jo Reger, Daniel J. Myers, and Rachel L. Einwohner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Reger's essay is based on two case studies of feminist activism on university campuses, one in the Midwest and one on the east coast, meant to study regional variations in feminism (Reger, 102). Reger found Woodview, the Midwest campus, formed a collective feminist identity based on its differences from the largely wealthy, conservative campus. What's interesting to me about these case studies is thinking about whether feminist and LGBTQ curriculum in these respective places, with different cultural climates, is also different.

¹⁰ Lynn Huffer, *Are the Lips a Grave?: A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex* (New York: Columbia UP, 2013).

¹¹ Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*.

¹² Jonathan Alexander and David Wallace, "The Queer Turn in Composition Studies: Reviewing and Assessing an Emerging Scholarship," *College Composition and Communication* 61, no. 1 (2009): 300-320.

¹³ Ibid. See also Matthew B. Cox and Michael J. Faris, "An Annotated Bibliography of LGBTQ Rhetorics," *Present Tense: A Journal of Rhetoric in Society* 4, no. 2 (2015), accessed Aug. 5, 2015. <http://www.presenttensejournal.org/volume-4/an-annotated-bibliography-of-lgbtq-rhetorics>; Jonathan Alexander and Michelle Gibson, "Special Cluster: Queer Theory," *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 24, no. 1: (2004).

¹⁴ Qwo-Li Driskill, "Stolen From Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 16, no. 2 (2004): 50-64.

¹⁵ Michelle Gibson, Martha Marinara, Deborah Meem, "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, & Sexuality," *College Composition and Communication* 52, no. 1 (2000): 69-95.

¹⁶ Ibid., 486.

¹⁷ Jonathan Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy: Theory and Practice for Composition Studies* (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2008).

¹⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹ Sexual ethos is somewhat different from, but related to what Zan Meyer Gonçalves talks about in Zan Meyer Gonçalves, *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2005). She is writing about the rhetorical strategies LGBT students on a Speakers' Bureau make as they establish a complex ethos around their sexualities. I am talking about how people use rhetorical strategies in the process of finding and negotiating with sexual partners.

²⁰ This story describes what community-based scholar Ellen Cushman has critiqued as a "hit it and quit it" style of academic research on communities. Ellen Cushman, "Sustainable Service Learning Programs," *College Composition & Communication* 54, no. 2 (2002): 40-65.

²¹ I use the term community spaces to talk about what scholars in rhetoric and composition have called alternative sites of rhetorical education because it is closer to the language LGBTQ people in the community spaces I'm writing about would use. See (Logan, *Liberating Language*; Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*; Alexandra J. Cavallaro, "Fighting Biblical 'Textual harassment': Queer Rhetorical Pedagogies in the Extracurriculum," *Enculturation* 18, last modified February 13, 2015. <http://enculturation.net/fighting-biblical-textual-harassment>. A bit later in this essay, when I talk about Terese Guinsatao Monberg's ideas about listening to the language community members use to describe themselves and their work, I will explain why choices about language and respecting self-identification are

so important to work with LGBTQ communities, in terms of practicing consent. Terese Guinsatao Monberg, "Listening for Legacies: Or, How I Began to Hear the Pinay Behind the Podium Known as FANHS," *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, ed. LuMing Mao and Morris Young. (Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2008): 83-105.

²² QTPOC means Queer and Trans People of Color. Terese Guinsatao Monberg's concept of "recursive spatial movement for students of color" (Monberg, 35) speaks to QTPOC students and scholars in the discipline, as well as being relevant to LGBTQ students and scholars, as we work to do community-based work and get it to be respected and valued. Terese Guinsatao Monberg, "Writing Home or Writing as the Community: Toward a Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service-Learning Courses," *Reflections* 8, no. 3 (2009): 21-51.

²³ I discuss the role LGBTQ peer mentoring and gay families play in community-based teaching and learning in the essay "Developing an Erotic Vocabulary for Consent." What I haven't yet said about consent in community-based pedagogy is that the discourses of consent learned in LGBTQ communities are not a static set of rules about how to practice consent. They are practices, learned and refined through use, in the play of sex and other kinds of relationships, including teaching and research relationships.

²⁴ In this collection, I move between multiple communities/terminologies—one is LGBTQ communities and community spaces outside out school; the other is rhetoric and composition scholars. What I talk about in this collection as queer community-based rhetoric, or queer community-based pedagogy, is talked about in the discipline as "alternative sites of rhetorical education." I understand "alternative sites of rhetorical education" as teaching and learning relationships that take place in community spaces. Anne Ruggles Gere writes about contemporary and historical literacy pursuits that take place outside of traditional classroom settings. Anne Ruggles Gere, "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extra Curriculum of Composition," *College Composition and Communication* 45, no. 1 (1994): 75-92. For more on alternative sites of rhetorical education, see Cavallaro, "Fighting Biblical 'Textual Harassment'"; Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*; Gonçalves, *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos*; Logan, *Liberating Language*; Royster, *Traces of a Stream*; Monberg, "Listening for Legacies"; Malea Powell, "Listening to Ghosts: An Alternative (Non)Argument," in *ALT DIS: Alternatives to Academic Discourse*, ed. Helen Fox and Christopher Schroeder (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 2002).

²⁵ Rachel Kramer Bussel, "Beyond Yes or No: Consent as a Sexual Process," in Friedman and Valenti, 43.

²⁶ See Cliff Pervocracy, "Consent Culture," *The Pervocracy* (blog), last modified Jan. 18, 2012, <http://pervocracy.blogspot.com/2012/01/consent-culture.html>; Friedman and Valenti, *Yes Means Yes*; Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Partner Violence in Activist Communities* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011).

²⁷ Miriam Zoila Pérez, "When Sexual Autonomy Isn't Enough: Sexual Violence Against Immigrant Women in the United States," in *Yes Means Yes: Visions of Female Sexual Empowerment and a World Without Rape*, edited by Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti. (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008); 141.

²⁸ Monberg, "Listening for Legacies"; Powell, "Listening to Ghosts"; Nedra Reynolds, *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2007).

²⁹ By languages are create in community, I mean to say LGBTQ people learn the languages to talk about queer desires in community spaces. In rhetoric & composition, people have talked about this learning that happens outside of home or school as literacy performances (see Molly Blackburn, "Exploring Literacy Performances and Power Dynamics at the Loft: Queer Youth Reading the World and the Word," *Research in the Teaching of English* 37, no. 4 (2003): 467-91), as queer rhetorical pedagogy (Cavallaro, "Fighting Biblical 'Textual Harassment'"), or as an ethos of sexuality (Gonçalves, *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos*). Consent has been one of those discourses for me, part of queer community-based education, a set of elements I learned to talk about in community spaces.

³⁰ What I call community spaces in the collection, some scholars have called "alternative sites of rhetorical education" (Cavallaro, "Fighting Biblical 'Textual Harassment'"; Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*; Logan, *Liberating Language*; Royster, *Traces of a Stream*; Monberg, "Listening for Legacies"; Malea Powell, "Listening to Ghosts."

³¹ Signifier for a masculine or trans-masculine person of color.

³² Among women, I've heard the term versatile used as being willing to switch in terms of who is dominant and submissive. It can also be about who is willing to be a top or bottom. It can also signal sexual fluidity. The best way to know what an individual means by the term is to ask.

³³ Hollibaugh and Moraga's conversation, "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With," comes to mind when I think about needing to develop the language to talk about sexual desire. Hollibaugh and Moraga, "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With." First published in Heresies Collective "Sex Issue," *Heresies* 12 (1981), and later in Nestle's *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*; and in Hollibaugh, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming her Way Home*, Durham: Duke UP, 2000. 253-269. Hollibaugh and Moraga critique sexual silences in feminism, especially in terms of anything outside of heteronormative desires. Their conversation talks explicitly about sexual fantasies, butch/femme desires and their relationship to power, seduction, and sexual dynamics. In the end, they suggest women "go back to consciousness raising groups and develop sexual theory in the same way we created feminist theory" (Hollibaugh and Moraga, *My Dangerous Desires*, 82). What I take this to mean is that sexual theory is developed in community spaces through peer mentoring and practice.

³⁴ Your pink parts are your mouth, tongue, gums, penis, vulva, anus, any permeable membrane where blood and other body fluids pass in or out of the body.

³⁵ This quote appears in Marlon Bailey and Emily Arnold, "Constructing Home and Family: How the Ballroom Community Supports African American GLBTQ Youth in the Face of HIV / AIDS," *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 21, no. 2-3 (2009): 186. Accessed Jan. 27, 2013. doi: 10.1080/10538720902772006. If you'd like to know more about the ball scene, see Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013) which offers a lexicon and a first-person ethnography of the ballroom community in Detroit.

³⁶ Bailey and Arnold, "Constructing Home and Family," 186.

³⁷ Meryl Altman, "Mentors and Tormentors," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 19, no. 3 (2007): 182-189, accessed Jan. 27, 2013: 186.

³⁸ Áine Humble, Catherine Richards Solomon, Katherine R. Allen, Karen R. Blaisure, and Michael P. Johnson, "Feminism and Mentoring of Graduate Students," *Family Relations* 55, no. 1 (2006): 2-15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴¹ The way I came to the concept that "all learning is loss," is from Gerald Graff cited in Julie Lindquist "Hoods in the Polis," *Pedagogy* 1, no. 2 (2001): 261-74. Teaching is tied to consent because in some ways, teachers have to practice consent with students, especially working class students and students from historically marginalized communities. Writing instructors especially are in a position to give these students space to negotiate multiple identities.

⁴² See E. Patrick Johnson *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*, Durham: Duke UP, 2003; Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queen Up in Pumps*, and Seth Davis' forthcoming work for community-based writing on rhetoric, black masculinities and sexualities, and the ball scene.

⁴³ Roxane Gay, "The Illusion of Safety / The Safety of Illusion," *The Rumpus*, last modified Aug. 28, 2012, <http://therumpus.net/2012/08/the-illusion-of-safetythe-safety-of-illusion>.

⁴⁴ Coyote and Sharman, *Persistence*: 11.

⁴⁵ Nestle, ed. *The Persistent Desire*: 14.

⁴⁶ Nestle, ed. *The Persistent Desire*, 10-11.

⁴⁷ Madhu Narayan, "At Home with the Lesbian Herstory Archives," *Enculturation* 15 (2013) accessed Aug. 7, 2015.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Anna Camilleri, "Sly Boots," in *Boys Like Her: Tranfictions*, ed. Taste This (Vancouver: Rain Coast Books, Press Gang Publishers, 2002).

⁵⁰ Cisgender means not transgender.

⁵¹ Anna Camilleri, *Brazen Femme: Queering Femininity* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003): 18.

⁵² Joan Nestle, "Flamboyance and Fortitude," in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (Boston: Alyson Books, 1992): 15.

⁵³ Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, "Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive," *Enculturation* 13: (2012), <http://www.enculturation.net/queer-rhetoric-and-the-pleasures-of-the-archive>.

⁵⁴ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003): 7, emphasis mine.

⁵⁵ Dorothy Allison, Keynote at the biennial Feminisms & Rhetorics Conference. Stanford, CA, Sept. 27, 2013.

⁵⁶ Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Vintage, 2003): 278-9.

⁵⁷ Allison, Keynote at the biennial Feminisms & Rhetorics Conference.

⁵⁸ When I talk about community accountability, I mean to talk about a set of community-based understandings about ethical relationships. This is different from, but related to, community accountability processes as they're discussed in texts like *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Partner Violence Within Activist Communities*, ed. Chen, Dulani, and Piepzna-Samarasinha (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011).

⁵⁹ For further discussion of consent, self-determination, and agency, see *Yes Means Yes*, ed. Friedman and Valenti. For understandings of consent in a racist culture, see Angela Davis, "We Do Not Consent: Violence Against Women in a Racist Society," *Women, Culture, & Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 35-52.

⁶⁰ Michael Warner writes, "again and again, we have seen that people want to put sex in its place, both for themselves and for others. And the consequence, as we have seen, is not only that they create contradictions for themselves, but also that they create damaging hierarchies of shame and elaborate mechanisms to enforce those hierarchies"

Michael Warner, "The Politics of Shame in HIV Prevention." *The Trouble with Normal*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000): 195.

⁶¹ For a critique of the idea that lesbian butch-femme relationships are (often inadequate) copies of heterosexual relationships, see Joan Nestle's iconic collection *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, (Boston: Alyson Books, 1992) which I discuss in the essay "On Being Present: Consent in Community Spaces." See also Ivan E. Coyote and Zena Sharman, *Persistence: All Ways Butch Femme* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011), which theorizes butch and femme as companions in struggle, as well as Burke, Jennifer Clare and Maria Carbone, *Femmethology* (Ann Arbor, MI: Homofactus Press, 2009), which uncouples butch and femme.

⁶² For an example of how rhetoric and composition has talked about student learning that happens in "extra-curricular" sites, see Gere "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms." For examples of what I'm calling queer community-based pedagogies, see Cavallaro, "Fighting Biblical 'Textual Harassment'" for her discussion of queer rhetorical pedagogies in a workshop given by a straight ally at Pride and Gonçalves, *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos* for her understanding of how LGBT students establish a complex ethos in telling stories about sexuality and negotiating multiple identities on an LGBT Speakers' Bureau.

⁶³ Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*.

⁶⁴ For other cultural and rhetorical histories, see Malea Powell "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 3 (2002): 396-434; and Monberg, "Listening for Legacies." Scholars in rhetoric & composition have often written about communities, written for communities, and written with communities. I consider these essays community-based rhetoric, or part of what Monberg has called "writing *as* the community" (Monberg, "Writing as," 35). While Monberg is talking about this concept in terms of teaching writing, it also applies to doing research. Queer people are here (we're queer, get used to it!) and we want to learn the histories that we didn't learn at home or at school. Consent was one of those histories for me, growing up with few representations of sexuality and relationships not saturated in hetero-normativity.

⁶⁵ Qwo-Li Driskil, *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Two-Spirit Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ There are multiple examples of how radical feminists conceptualized sex, heterosexual relationships, and the labor of motherhood. Radical feminists considered these institutions to be tangled up with cultural expectations put on women without their consent. See Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power" in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin, (New York: Routledge, 1993): 91-8 ; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

⁶⁷ Firestone and Willis positioned Redstockings as a more militant alternative to New York Radical Women, which had organized the Miss America protest a year prior, gaining national media attention. See Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989): 140. With evidence generated from women's experiences in consciousness-raising groups, the radical feminist group Redstockings developed a political critique of women as an oppressed class.

A July 7, 1969 Redstockings manifesto outlines the group's platform, called the "pro-woman line." Carol Hanish describes the pro-woman line in "The Personal is Political":

The groups that I have been in have also not gotten into "alternative lifestyles" or what it means to be a "liberated" woman. We came early to the conclusion that all alternatives are bad under present conditions. Whether we live with or without a man, communally or in couples or alone, are married or unmarried, live with other women, go for free love, celibacy or lesbianism, or any combination, there are only good and bad things about each bad situation. There is no "more liberated" way; there are only bad alternatives. ...

This is part of one of the most important theories we are beginning to articulate. We call it "the pro-woman line." What it says basically is that women are really neat people. The bad things that are said about us as women are either myths (women are stupid), tactics women use to struggle individually (women are bitches), or are actually things that we want to carry into the new society and want men to share too (women are sensitive, emotional). Women as oppressed people act out of necessity (act dumb in the presence of men), not out of choice. Women have developed great shuffling techniques for their own survival (look pretty and giggle to get or keep a job or man) which should be used when necessary until such time as the power of unity can take its place. Women are smart not to struggle alone (as are blacks and workers). It is no worse to be in the home than in the rat race of the job world. They are both bad. Women, like blacks, workers, must stop blaming ourselves for our "failures." Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, edited by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York City: New York Radical Women, 1969): 4.

⁶⁸ While it began with the intention of drawing attention to violence against women in all its forms, the idea of harms against "real" women comes back in insidious ways as transgender and transsexual politics come into the public conversation and some feminists try to shore up what it means to be a woman, a topic I discuss on the essay "Boundaries and Access at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. See Julia Serano, *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2013); Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2007).

⁶⁹ Kate Ellis, Barbara O'Dair, & Abby Tallmer. "Feminism & Pornography." *Feminist Review* 36, 15-18 (Autumn 1990): 4.

⁷⁰ Dworkin testified in 1985 before the Meese Commission, an investigation of porn by Ronald Reagan, which resulted in the publication of the Meese Commission Report, a document that created difficulties for businesses related to sex (sex shops, adult movie theaters, strip clubs). One problem with this trend is sex shops often provide information and resources those with historically marginalized sexualities and gender identities and expressions need. Meese, Edwin. "Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Full Report," Washington DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1986.

⁷¹ Anti-pornography activism still takes up the stories of women understood to be oppressed or in danger, a pattern that has only seemed to intensify since the Western turn toward global feminism. See Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Global Woman* (New York: Henry Holt, 2002).

⁷² Outing was a political tactic used by LGBTQ activist groups of the time, such as ACT UP, outing closeted gay politicians and others in positions of power who did not openly back the movement by calling to fund research and treatment for AIDS. See Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 2nd ed. New York: St. Martins Griffin, 2007. During the conference at Barnard, anti-porn feminists call out particular sexual practices and desires as anti-thetical to the feminist movement as they understood it. See Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*.

⁷³ See Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter. *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006); "Sex Issue," *Heresies* 12, 1981; Ellen Willis, "Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?" *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); "Women: Sex and Sexuality," special issue, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 4, 1980: 569-856; "Women: Sex and Sexuality: part 2," special issue, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 1, 1980: 1-186; Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*.

⁷⁴ For non-sex work related examples of pushing back against state violence as non-consent, see Angela Y. Davis, "We Do Not Consent: Violence against Women in a Racist Society" speech Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1985 and Chen, Dulani, Piepzna-Samarasinha, *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Partner Violence in Activist Communities* (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2011).

⁷⁵ Jennifer Medina, "Warning: The Literary Canon Could Make Students Squirm," *The New York Times*, last modified May 17, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/us/warning-the-literary-canon-could-make-students-squirm.html?_r&_r=2.

⁷⁶ Tyler Kingkade, "55 Colleges Face Sexual Assault Investigations," *The Huffington Post*, last modified July 1, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/05/01/college-sexual-assault_n_5247267.html.

⁷⁷ Soraya Chemaly, "What's Really Important about 'Trigger Warnings'," *The Huffington Post*, May 20, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/trigger-warnings-college-new-york-times_b_5359276.html.

⁷⁸ Melanie Yergeau, "Disable All The Things," Keynote at *Computers & Writing*, Pullman, WA, June 6, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/97721996>.

⁷⁹ Megan Milks, "On Trigger Warnings: Part 2: Generational Tensions," *Entropy*, last modified April 14, 2014, <http://entropymag.org/on-trigger-warnings-part-ii-generational-tensions/>.

⁸⁰ Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Hurt/Feminism Hurts," *Feminist Killjoys* (blog), July 21, 2014, <http://feministkilljoys.com/2014/07/21/feminist-hurtfeminism-hurts>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 7.

⁸³ Yergeau, "Disable All The Things," 2:45; 17:15.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 11:11.

⁸⁵ Andrea Smith, "Beyond the Pros and Cons of Trigger Warnings: Collectivized Healing," *Andrea366* (blog), last modified July 13, 2014, <http://andrea366.wordpress.com/2014/07/13/beyond-the-pros-and-cons-of-trigger-warnings-collectivizing-healing>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Conor Friedersdorf, "What HBO Can Teach Colleges about 'Trigger Warnings'," *The Atlantic*, May 20, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/05/what-trigger-warning-activists-and-critics-can-learn-from-hbo/371137>.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Zimmerman, "My Syllabus, With Trigger Warnings," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, last modified May 20, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/conversation/2014/05/20/my-syllabus-with-trigger-warnings/>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Jonah Goldberg, "The peculiar madness of 'trigger warnings,'" *LA Times*, last modified May 19 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-goldberg-trigger-warnings-20140520-column.html>.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Kevin Drum, "What's the Endgame for the Trigger Warnings Movement?" *Mother Jones*, last modified May 19, 2014, <http://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2014/05/whats-end-game-trigger-warning-movement>.

⁹⁵ Megan Milks, "On Trigger Warnings: Part 2: Generational Tensions."

⁹⁶ Zimmerman, "My Syllabus, With Trigger Warnings."

⁹⁷ Margaret Price, *Mad at School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability in Academic Life* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

⁹⁸ Chemaly, "What's Really Important about 'Trigger Warnings'."

⁹⁹ Roxane Gay, "The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion," *The Rumpus*, last modified Aug. 28, 2012, <http://therumpus.net/2012/08/the-illusion-of-safetythe-safety-of-illusion>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Angela Shaw-Thornburg, "This Is a Trigger Warning," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Last modified June 16, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/This-Is-a-Trigger-Warning/147031>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Megan, Milks, "On Trigger Warnings, Part 1: In the Creative Writing Classroom," *Entropy*, last modified April 14, 2014, <http://entropymag.org/on-trigger-warnings-part-i-in-the-creative-writing-classroom>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*.

¹⁰⁶ Milks, "On Trigger Warnings, Part 1."

¹⁰⁷ Jack Halberstam, "'You're Triggering Me!' The Neoliberal Rhetoric of Harm, Danger and Trauma," *Bully Bloggers*, last modified July 5 2014, <http://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2014/07/05/you-are-triggering-me-the-neo-liberal-rhetoric-of-harm-danger-and-trauma>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Gay, "The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion."

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Tracy Strauss, "Twitter, Why the 'Trigger Warning' for Dylan Farrow's Open Letter?" *HuffPost Media*, last modified April 15, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tracy-strauss/twitter-why-the-trigger-w_b_4769135.html.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Gay, "The Illusion of Safety/The Safety of Illusion."

¹¹⁶ Shaw-Thornburg, Angela. "This Is a Trigger Warning."

¹¹⁷ Language is a very important way for festigoers, or MichFest attendees, who use it to identify themselves as certain strands of feminists. Radical lesbian feminists and separatists tend to try and separate womyn's language and culture from men's, as part of fighting patriarchy and male supremacy and creating womyn's culture.

¹¹⁸ Lisa Vogel, "My First Festival," *Voices from the Land*, October 16, 2014, <http://www.michfestmatters.com/my-first-festival-by-lisa-vogel/>, accessed Aug 7, 2015.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Glamping, as in, glamorous camping.

¹²¹ Julia Serano, *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013): 23.

¹²² Academics: please go read Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006). Go ahead. I will wait.

¹²³ Kaitlin Noss, "Queering Utopia: Deep Lez and the Future of Hope," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 40, no.3 (2012), 130.

¹²⁴ Queer and trans activists tend to call the intention the "womyn-born womyn" policy, but the Festival's founder, Lisa Vogel, and WWTMC (We Want the Music Corporation) have refuted the claim there has ever been a formal policy in place. Vogel talks about it as the intention for the space.

¹²⁵ 5th *Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Program*, August 1980, accessed at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, September 21, 2013.

¹²⁶ 5th *Annual Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Program*, August 1980.

¹²⁷ Nancy Burkholder, "A Kinder and Gentler Festival?" *Gay Community News* 19, no. 8 (1991): 5.

¹²⁸ Nancy Burkholder, "Results of 1992 Gender Survey at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," April 28, 1993, *Eminism.org*, accessed Aug. 6, 2015, <http://eminism.org/michigan/documents.html>.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2007.

¹³¹ Nancy Burkholder, "Results of 1992 Gender Survey at Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," April 28, 1993, *Eminism.org*, accessed Aug. 6, 2015, <http://eminism.org/michigan/documents.html>.

¹³² Lisa Vogel, "Letter to the Community," *TransAdvocate*, May 9, 2014, http://www.transadvocate.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/MichiganWomynsMusicFestival_LisaVogel_LetterToTheCommunity_050914.pdf. Accessed 7 August 2015.

¹³³ Self-identification is a value of LGBTQ community spaces, which is part of the reason trans-exclusive radical feminism is so puzzling. "Womyn-born womyn" is what those who believe transsexual womyn are inherently different because they have taken a different path to becoming a womyn call themselves.

¹³⁴ Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, New York: Teachers College Press, 1979.

¹³⁵ AFAB means "assigned female at birth."

¹³⁶ Julie and Brandy, "Julie and Brandy at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," *Autostraddle*, January 24, 2011, accessed 7 August 2015, <http://www.autostraddle.com/video-julie-brandy-at-the-michigan-womyns-music-festival-the-lost-footage-74205/>.

¹³⁷ In WBW festive conceptions of space, The Land becomes synonymous with the body, and violating The Land is violating the body.

¹³⁸ Riki Wilchins, *Read My Lips: Sexual Subversions and the End of Gender* (Ann Arbor, MI: Firebrand Books, 1997: 111).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁴⁰ Emi Koyama, "Michigan/Trans Controversy Archive," *Eminism.org*, accessed Aug. 6, 2015, <http://eminism.org/michigan/documents.html>.

¹⁴¹ Michelle Tea, "Transmissions from Camp Trans," *The Believer*, November 2003. http://www.believermag.com/issues/200311/?read=article_tea.

¹⁴² Julia Serano, *Excluded: Making Feminist and Queer Movements More Inclusive*

(Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2013).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 23-5. In "On the Outside Looking In," Julia Serano also gets at an important nuance of the herstory of gender politics at MichFest—the way trans men are accepted in Festival culture, but trans womyn are not.

¹⁴⁴ Red Durkin, "Boycott MWMF and until the organizers fully include trans women," Change.org, 11 August 2015, <https://www.change.org/p/indigo-girls-and-other-michfest-2013-performers-boycott-mwmf-until-the-organizers-fully-include-trans-women>.

¹⁴⁵ Alice Kalafarski, "Just Another Woman at MichFest," Prettyqueer blog, accessed September 1, 2011, <http://prettyqueer.com/2011/09/01/just-another-woman-at-michfest/>.

¹⁴⁶ Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993): 96.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴⁸ Lisa Vogel and Barbara Price, "Michigan Festival Responds," *Off Our Backs* 20.10 November 1990: 14.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁰ Alice Kalafarski, "Just Another Woman at MichFest."

¹⁵¹ Mia Mingus, "Feeling the Weight: Some Beginning Notes on Disability, Access, and Love," *Leaving Evidence*, March 31, 2015.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Julia Serano, *Excluded*.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 543.

¹⁵⁷ NiCole Buchanan, et al. "2014 Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Policies and Programs Task Force Report," *Michigan State University*, last modified April 6, 2015, <http://inclusion.msu.edu/equity/2014%20Sexual%20Assault%20and%20Relationship%20Violence%20Policies%20and%20Programs%20Task%20Force.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Education: Office of Civil Rights, "Q and A on Title IX and Sexual Violence," last modified April 29, 2014, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ NiCole Buchanan, et al., "2014 Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Policies and Programs Task Force Report," 7-25.

¹⁶⁰ Haivan V. Hoang, "Campus Racial Politics and a 'Rhetoric of Injury'," *College Composition and Communication* 61, no. 1 (2009): 386.

¹⁶¹ James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges 1900 – 1985* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1987).

¹⁶² Despite the fact that queer and feminist understandings of affirmative consent have been taken up in federal policy, there is still a gap between policies and programs, theory and practice. I will speak to this gap more later, using empirical research from Sociology, Psychology, and Women's Studies.

For more examples of what I mean by affirmative consent, see Tristan Taormino, *Sex Out Loud* podcast audio, "Rachel Kramer Bussel on the Big Book of Orgasms and Baby Got Back; Matie Fricker of Self-Serve Toys on Winning the Pornotopia Lawsuit." October 11, 2013, tristantaormino.com/tag/erotic-films; Jaclyn Friedman, *Yes Means Yes Show*, Podcast audio, <http://www.jaclynfriedman.com/archives/category/podcast>; Cliff Pervocracy, "Consent Culture"; Friedman and Valenti, *Yes Means Yes*.

The gap between consent theory and practice is a pattern empirical researchers, like sociologist Anastasia Powell, have studied: Anastasia Powell, *Sex, Power and Consent: Youth Culture and the Unwritten Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010). Powell examines young people's experiences of sexual violence and negotiations of sexual consent. By studying 'millennials' in Australia, Powell claims, "Tighter laws, teaching young women refusal skills and running campaigns that 'no means no,' have not changed the old rules of negotiating sex and consent" (Powell, 3). Powell also calls for a pedagogical intervention: "We need to engage both young women and young men in challenging a culture that continues to allow sexual violence to occur" (Powell, 3). The gap between consent theory and practice, often cited in empirical studies like this one points to opportunities for consent education, which sex educators believe needs to begin early and be ongoing (Bussel, "Consent as Sexual Process," 43).

¹⁶³ Gwendolyn D. Pough, "Empowering Rhetoric: Black Students Reading Black Panthers," *College Composition and Communication* 53, no. 3 (2002): 466-486.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 467.

¹⁶⁵ Cavallaro, "Fighting Biblical 'Textual Harassment.'"

¹⁶⁶ I think about consent education as queer community-based pedagogy because the language feels closer to what members of the communities I came out into might use. What the discipline of rhetoric and composition calls rhetorical education (see note 24) is a different way to talk about all the informal mentoring relationships in LGBTQ communities to academics, but the sex educators I know would talk about what they do

as peer education or community education. “Extra-curricular” learning is an effective way to think about learning that happens in community spaces outside of home or school (Gere, “Kitchen Tables”) but I rarely use the term because for those of us living marginalized gender identities & expressions and /or sexualities because I don’t like to think about sex and consent as “extra-curricular.” Sexuality, as Alexander (*Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*) has pointed out in his work on sexual literacy, is deeply intertwined with literacy and public discourse.

¹⁶⁷ Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 206.

¹⁷¹ Monberg, “Writing Home,” 35.

¹⁷² I am talking about community accountability in the way Chen, Dulani, and Piepzna-Samarasinha describe it in *The Revolution Starts at Home*, as “any strategy to address violence, abuse or harm that creates safety, justice, reparations, and healing, without relying on police, prisons, childhood protective services, or any other state systems” (xxiii).

¹⁷³ “Pro-sex” (sex-positive) critiques of framing conversations on sex around the element of sexual danger suggest this strategy has limits. (Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars*; Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*, 431; Heresies Collective, “Sex Issue”; Willis, “Lust Horizons.” In her introduction to *Pleasure and Danger*, Vance discusses how feminist discourse came to focus on sexual danger. These are essays from the Barnard conference on feminist sexualities, which was one of the sites where the conflicts of the Sex Wars took place. While cultural historians have written extensively about these conflicts, few have traced the rhetoric of the arguments and how they continue to play out today. In particular, I am interested in how to use what we know from the Sex Wars about the rhetoric of sex in public discourse to move along conversations in institutions, so students get comprehensive sex education, especially information on consent.

¹⁷⁴ Vance, *Pleasure and Danger*, 431.

¹⁷⁵ Monberg, “Writing Home,” 35.

¹⁷⁶ Lindquist, “Hoods in the Polis.”

¹⁷⁷ For community-based sex education on consent, see Tristan Taormino’s *Sex Out Loud* podcast and Cliff Pervocracy’s blog on “Consent Culture.”

¹⁷⁸ Monberg, “Writing Home.” 35.

¹⁷⁹ Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Rachel Kramer Bussel, "Consent as Sexual Process."

¹⁸¹ *Best Sex Writing of the Year (Volume 1)* ed. Jon Pressick (New York: Cleis Press, 2015).

¹⁸² Taormino, "Rachel Kramer Bussel on the Big Book of Orgasms."

¹⁸³ Catherine MacKinnon, "Liberalism and the Death of Feminism," in *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism*, edited by Dorchon Leidholdt and Janice G Raymond (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990): 3.

¹⁸⁴ Shout out to Rachel Crandall, LMSW, who trained me to work on the toll-free helpline at the LGBT community center.

¹⁸⁵ NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, "Open Letter to Elected Leaders of the 50 United States," accessed Aug. 7, 2015. http://www.naspa.org/images/uploads/main/Joint_omnibus_bill_statement_letterhead.pdf: 1.

¹⁸⁶ Apryl Pooley's comments at the Task Force Town Hall, on behalf of CLIT, point to the dangers of the university ignoring survivors' calls for campus resources and services—namely, the danger of lowered academic performance, and recruitment and retention issues, especially among women students ("Town Hall transcript," 9). Following this logic, in institutions where there are these kinds of climate issues, it may be more difficult to recruit and retain students who are survivors, and women students may be particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and its effects, and to dropping out ("Town Hall transcript" 8).

¹⁸⁷ U.S. Department of Education: Office of Civil Rights, "Q and A on Title IX and Sexual Violence," last modified April 29, 2014. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201404-title-ix.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ Bussel, "Consent as Sexual Process": 43.

¹⁸⁹ The Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence Policy at one large, Midwestern, public university defines consent as "the voluntary, willful, and unambiguous agreement to engage in a specific sexual activity during a sexual encounter ... Consent must be clear and communicated by mutually understandable words or actions" (9). Michigan State University, "Relationship Violence & Sexual Misconduct Policy," *Michigan State University*, last modified January 1, 2015, <http://inclusion.msu.edu/equity/SexualHarassmentAssault.html>. Like other examples of sexual consent policies, this one clarifies, giving examples of non-consent: "consent cannot be given by someone who is: sleeping, unconscious, unaware, or otherwise mentally or physically helpless because of drugs, alcohol, or other contributing factor ("incapacitated"), unable to understand the nature of the sexual activity due to a mental disease or condition ("mentally incapable"), under duress, threat, deception, coercion,

or force... The following are examples of situations that do not imply consent: silence, the absence of a verbal “no” or “stop,” the absence of resistance, the existence of a prior or current relationship or sexual activity” (Michigan State University, 9).

¹⁹⁰ Robin Wilson, “How ‘Yes Means Yes’ Already Works on One Campus,” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, last modified Sept. 29, 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Yes-Means-Yes-Already/149055>, discusses the sexual consent policy at Grinnell College, a private liberal arts college in Iowa. The policy requires affirmative consent among sexual partners, offering prevention and education workshops for freshmen. Grinnell’s workshops involve role-playing scenarios and practicing consent phrases. According to Grinnell College’s Sexual Harassment & Misconduct Policy, the student body voted overwhelmingly in spring 2012 to revise the policy to be based on affirmative consent (Wilson, “How ‘Yes Means Yes’ Already Works”) The school understands affirmative consent “must be given knowingly, voluntarily, and affirmatively ... must exist from the beginning to end of each instance of sexual activity, and for each form of sexual contact. Consent is active, not passive” (Wilson, “How ‘Yes Means Yes’ Already Works”).

¹⁹¹ California Senate, Senate Bill No. 967, “Student Safety: Sexual Assault.” Sept. 28, 2014, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB967.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of Education, “U.S. Department of Education Releases List of Higher Education Institutions with Open Title IX Sexual Violence Investigations,” last modified May 1, 2014, <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-list-higher-education-institutions-open-title-ix-sexual-violence-investigations>.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Graduate Employee President Silvia Marques called for comprehensive consent education. See Community Leaders in Transformation, “Town Hall Transcript,” last modified January 29, 2015, 19.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 19.

¹⁹⁷ As I’ve talked about before, what I’m calling queer community-based pedagogy is related to what has been talked about as queer rhetorical education. The term often refers to community-based teaching and learning that happens in informal spaces (community spaces) (Gonçalves, *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos*; Cavallaro, “Fighting Biblical ‘Textual Harassment’”). Informal sex education is part of what we examine in writing courses that talk about consent.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Angela M. Borges, Victoria L. Banyard, and Mary M. Monyihan “Clarifying Consent: Primary Prevention of Sexual Assault on a College Campus,”

Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community 36, no. 1-2 (2008): 75-88, doi: 10.1080/10852350802022324. Borges, Banyard, & Monyihan found college students are unaware of what consent means about their sexual behavior. In their study of two, short-term prevention and education programs focused on consent, they found the educational program to produce changes in knowledge about consent. It was especially effective for “participants who engaged in a discussion of the policy and participated in an activity dealing with its real-world implications, rather than simply listening as it is read aloud” (86). These evidence-based findings support consent education that begins early and is ongoing throughout college. What I’d like to suggest is consent education is community-based pedagogy, part of “sexual literacy” (Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*) often learned by LGBTQ people in community spaces, (Cavallaro, “Fighting Biblical ‘Textual Harassment’”) but that which might only reach non-queer students, or students who’ve not had access to such spaces, in college. For more examples of more studies on consent, see Melanie Ann Beres, “Rethinking the Concept of Consent for Sexual Violence Activism and Education,” *Feminism & Psychology* 24.3 (August 2014): 373-389; Anastasia Powell, *Sex, Power and Consent: Youth Culture and the Unwritten Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010).

¹⁹⁹ Bussel. “Consent as Sexual Process.”

²⁰⁰ Beres, “Rethinking the Concept of Consent.”

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰³ A study of gender difference in understandings of consent among heterosexual college students claims we need a better understanding of consent because heterosexual men in the study tended to understand consent as non-verbal, and heterosexual women in the study tended to understand it as verbal. See Kristen N. Jozkowski, et al, “Gender Differences in Heterosexual College Students’ Conceptualizations and Indicators of Sexual Consent: Implications for Contemporary Sexual Assault Prevention Education,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 51, no. 8 (2014): 904-916.

In other words, consent is rhetorical because it has to do with how we use language and our bodies to negotiate relationships. Despite its limitations (small sample size, heterosexual participants) the study suggests accurate and comprehensive education on practicing consent is needed on college campuses.

²⁰⁴ Community Leaders in Transformation. “Town Hall Transcript.”

²⁰⁵ Yashna Maya Padamsee, “Communities of Care, Organizations for Liberation,” *Organizing Upgrade*, last modified July 1, 2011, <http://organizingupgrade.com/index.php/modules-menu/community-care/item/88-yashna-communities-of-care>.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Friedman and Valenti, *Yes Means Yes*.

²⁰⁸ Bay Area Healing Justice Collective, "Healing Justice Principles: Some of What We Believe," *Bad Ass Visionary Healers*, June 2010, accessed Aug. 5, 2015, <http://badassvisionaryhealers.wordpress.com/healing-justice-principles>.

²⁰⁹ B. Loewe, "An End to Self-Care." *Organizing Upgrade: Engaging Left Organizers in Strategic Dialogue* (blog), last modified Oct. 15, 2012, <http://www.organizingupgrade.com/index.php/blogs/b-loewe/item/729-end-to-self-care>.

²¹⁰ Spectra, "Response to 'An End to Self-Care: How About an End to the Activist Martyr Complex,'" last modified October 17, 2012, <http://www.spectraspeaks.com/2012/10/response-to-an-end-to-self-care-community-care-how-about-an-end-to-the-martyr-complex>.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ B. Loewe, "An End to Self-Care."

²¹⁴ Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "For Badass Disability Justice, Working-class and Poor Models of Hustling for Liberation," *Brownstargirl.org* (blog), last modified October 16, 2012, <http://www.brownstargirl.org/blog/for-badass-disability-justice-working-class-and-poor-lead-models-of-sustainable-hustling-for-liberation>.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Adrienne Maree Brown, "How About a Beginning of Self-determined Care?" October 15, 2012, <http://adriennemareebrown.net/blog/2012/10/15/how-about-a-beginning-of-self-determined-care/>.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Bussel, "Consent as a Sexual Process."

²¹⁹ Pérez, "When Sexual Autonomy Isn't Enough."

²²⁰ Piepzna-Samarasinha, "For Badass Disability Justice."

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Loewe, "An End to Self-Care."

²²³ Laura VanDernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk, *Trauma Stewardship* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Philip Nel, "In Search of Lost Time," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 3, 2014.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Dorothy Allison, "Her Body, Mine, and His," in *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1994): 121-126.

²²⁸ Cindy Crabb, Doris zine, Athens, OH: 1991-2001, <http://www.dorisdorisdoris.com>.

²²⁹ Cindy Crabb, "Support" Zine, (Athens, OH); Cindy Crabb and Friends, "Learning Good Consent," Zine, (Athens, OH).

²³⁰ Cheyenne Neckmonster, "Ask First!" Zine, (Louisville, KY, 2009).

²³¹ INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, "Community Accountability Working Document," *INCITE!* accessed Aug. 7, 2015, <http://www.incite-national.org/page/community-accountability-working-document>

²³² INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Brooklyn: South End Press, 2006).

²³³ Chen, Dulani, and Piepzna-Samarasinha, *The Revolution Starts at Home*.

²³⁴ Friedman and Valenti, *Yes Means Yes*.

²³⁵ LGBTQIA refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual.

²³⁶ Alexander, *Literacy, Sexuality, Pedagogy*.

²³⁷ U.S. Department of Education, "U.S. Department of Education Releases List of Higher Education Institutions with Open Title IX Sexual Violence Investigations," last modified May 1, 2014, <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-list-higher-education-institutions-open-title-ix-sexual-violence-investigations>.

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