

DISCIPLINING THE FEMININE

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I am reminded of a male colleague, a communication scholar, who has been trying to convince me that I and other feminists lack an internal grace or beauty of character that, once adopted, would allow us to move graciously through the world without anger and confrontation. I have responded that the admonition to "be nice" is precisely what is used to keep us in our places. We will be called crazy. We may be thought churlish and petty. We may be thought unscholarly and unintellectual. If so, we will be joining a long line of honorable women. (Rakow 211)

The ministers of knowledge have always assumed that the whole universe was threatened by the very changes that affected their ideologies and their positions. They transmute the misfortune of their theories into theories of misfortune. (de Certeau 95-6)

ACADEMIC writing of the kind published in this or any other professional journal is regulated by clear norms, usually among them the demand for a refined, ahistorical, smoothly finished univocality. That is, works published in most of our academic journals display as little as possible the circumstances and activities of their production. Notably missing, or at least reduced to virtual silence, is the passion that obviously drives our choices to write about particular topics in particular ways. Our writings suppress our convictions, our enthusiasm, our anger, in the interest of achieving an impersonal, "expert" distance and tone. Similarly, journal articles rarely reveal their own histories. The formative history of an essay is reduced to a notation of an "earlier version," or its history is constituted as a "disciplinary past" by situating the essay in the context of a literature review. Masked also are the mistakes we inevitably make in the process of research and writing. These cannot remain, for we seek a coherent, authoritative, cleanly argued, singular and defensible position, devoid of "extraneous" or "tangential" details. And gone are any overt signs, except perhaps in a note crediting them, of the "extra" voices of those who provided suggestions or sanctions for revision, in particular the voices of journal editors and referees. These voices are accommodated in such a way as to subsume them, to make them inaudible, to render them part and parcel of the unitary, uncomplicated speech of the author. Finally, the scholarly essay that addresses the working conditions or institutional apparatuses situating the professional scholar is rare indeed. "Scholarship," we would prefer to think, is vouchsafed by academic freedom and intellectual ethics. As a result, issues of institutional or professional power are deemed superfluous to the substance and character of our scholarly efforts.¹ These are but a few of the norms that govern our academic writing, but they surely are recognizable as vital rules to most of us who write in the professional academic milieu of speech communication.

Our approach in this essay is to misunderstand purposefully these norms in the interest of our goal: to point to and critique a constellation of practices in our discipline that some of us would prefer to believe were the relics of a time long past. We refer to the particular themes and enabling mechanisms of a masculinist disciplinary ideology, whose professionalized and seemingly liberal thematic motifs

serve as a benign cover for a selectively hostile and exclusionary disciplinary practice.

Our belief that we must break the sacrosanct rules of scholarly writing in order to display these practices is worth examining. In fact, such a move would not be wholly necessary if we were to limit our objective to the one with which we began this project; our goal had been to urge our disciplinary colleagues to eschew any professional/institutional/authoritative use of the findings or rationale of Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary's 1992 report, "Active Prolific Female Scholars in Communication." However, our project took on added dimension as we attempted to pursue that goal along the ordinary paths toward publication. We wrote an essay responding to the Hickson et al. report and submitted our essay to another prominent speech communication journal for editorial consideration. The anonymous reviews we received (attached to a rejection letter) themselves seemed sufficiently important as ideological fragments that we decided to "up the critical ante," to do more than comment on the Hickson et al. report. Those reviews constitute a rare find, tangible and unusually explicit fragments of what is almost certainly a larger, intolerant disciplinary text that typically remains implicit, unreadable, and deniable.² Thus, *in addition to* arguing against use of the Hickson et al. report, which we attempted to do before, we will suggest also that their report is a thematic marker of a masculinist ideology and that the anonymous reviews of our original essay are unusually explicit manifestations of the apparatuses that sustain and enable those ideological themes. We will begin in the next section with a description of our critical stance and with a narrative that chronicles the construction of this manuscript. The sections following are critical readings, in turn, of the Hickson et al. report and of the anonymous referees' reviews of our original response essay. We will conclude by discussing the implications for feminist scholarship of the ideological themes and mechanisms represented by Hickson et al. and by the reviews of our original essay.

FOLLOWING AND BREAKING RULES: PROFESSIONAL PRECEDENTS AND UNPROFESSIONAL WRITING

If the professional disciplinary rules that we have specified were to find absolute adherence, this essay would have been derailed by now, for it already has revealed something of the history of its production, hinted of a motivation grounded in anger, and staked for itself an explicitly politicized position. Worse, perhaps, we have claimed that it is our *own* disciplinary apparatus that is under indictment. That claim entails two unpleasant possibilities, first, that we *all* have helped to perpetuate the undesirable practices of our discipline by reinforcing and accommodating ourselves to its rules, and second, that the rules themselves are in need of scrutiny and possibly of change. We suspect that a great many journal article submissions have been rejected for far less serious breaches of disciplinary etiquette than these.³ However, there are precedents for breaking the rules, and this essay takes its particular stance at a nexus among several of them: a specific iteration of the rhetoric of inquiry project, as well as the general positions of the ideological turn, critical rhetoric, feminist theory, and the recent revelatory narrative project on sexual harassment in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*.

The rhetoric of inquiry project is committed to understand the specific rhetorical constructions of various academic disciplines.⁴ While most self-described adherents

of POROI attend to the rhetorics of other fields, the aim of the project can and should be reflexive. That is, it can be turned back to examine its own professional instantiation.⁵ As Hariman argues, "If rhetorical studies are read into a disciplinary scheme they are read poorly; if they are read sympathetically they subvert the disciplinary reading" (212). He suggests that "the rhetoric of inquiry can itself be aggressively rhetorical—which means more than recognizing that one's own text is as fabricated as any other. The full-blown rhetorical perspective replaces disinterestedness with advocacy, balances specialization with generality, and confronts expertise with an assertion of voice" (213). Hariman's point stands as a precedent, for it suggests that we confront rhetorically the professionalization of university culture, which "has become more a repressive power than a productive power" (212), and it implies that we consider our own field of inquiry in light of that power.

Such an extension of POROI toward a reflection on the professional codes and practices of speech communication is consistent with another set of precedents found in the literature of the "ideological turn," advocated first by Wander and Jenkins, elaborated by Wander ("Ideological Turn"; "Third Persona") and Crowley, and supplemented by discussions of a "critical rhetoric" (McGee, "Text"; McKerrow; Ono and Sloop). The "ideological" project clearly names our discipline's assumptions and apparatuses as targets of critical analysis. What the ideological turn and critical rhetoric literatures highlight and share with Hariman's construction of POROI is the element of the political. All three are explicitly attuned to issues of power as they are inscribed and exercised in all varieties of rhetorical practice, including academic work. They also are committed to understanding the repressive nature of power as it is constructed and acted in discourse. Wander suggests that we attend to the "third persona," a rhetorical excision of the "unacceptable, undesirable, insignificant" elements ("Third Persona" 209), the "audience/s ignored or denounced through the speech, the discourse, the text" ("Politics" 288). And McKerrow specifies a "critique of domination" as a component part of critical rhetoric. Both the ideological turn and critical rhetoric, also like Hariman's position, are animated by poststructuralist thinking, which frequently demands a grounding in practice (rather than in grand theory) and which counts the most "local," everyday life events as legitimate objects of critique (de Certeau; Foucault). The critical writings within the poststructuralist stance often assume extraordinary forms, because the orthodox and prescribed modes of academic writing are unfit or unable to accommodate their positions. Thus, this group of writings also serves as a precedent; it understands the professional as political and academic norms as, in part, repressive. Moreover, it points us to the "local"; it is our position that our own disciplinary practices can and should be counted among the localities we engage critically. Finally, this literature is willing to count as possibly legitimate those writings that would be delegitimized and/or silenced when held to the traditional strictures of professional academic work.

The same is frequently true of feminist theory. Writing is often differentially inscribed and valued in feminist theory; it legitimizes experiential and narrative "evidence," redirection and misappropriation of language, and celebration of *pathos*.⁶ In addition, like ideological critique of the type advocated by Wander, feminist theory works at the focal point of power relations, but it understands them principally (sometimes exclusively) as sexually embodied or gender-normed. Virtu-

ally every iteration of feminist theory, from its most moderate to its most radical construction, claims a transformative or interventionist political stance. That entails changes in academic politics no less than it does alterations in the politics of the public sphere.⁷ We see feminist theory as a precedent, for some of the same reasons that we have named the others, but feminist theory specifies our project further; it situates us within a resistant political stance, but one that recognizes the particularity of repressive academic politics with regard to gender-normed practices.

That gender politics are played out in material ways with material effects is starkly clear in the recent special issue of *JACR*, " 'Telling our Stories': Sexual Harassment in the Communication Discipline." The vivid and poignant narratives about personal experiences of sexual harassment in the discipline must lead, as Taylor and Conrad suggest, away from the comforting but inaccurate characterization of gender politics as "someone else's problem" (402n). They also point out that the university structure is "conditioned by popular images of its pastoral innocence, and of its highly cognitive and theoretical workers—seemingly 'disinterested' intellectuals" (405). Strine recognizes essentially the same image, and she links the disembodied, cognitive realm to material practices in her suggestion that those who engage "their academic work as dispassionate, tough minded 'objectivity' and methodological rigor" may fear "feminine sensibilities and supposedly softer, more experimental and participatory approaches to knowledge" as "contaminants to the rationalistic male-centered academic workplace" (399).

The narrative accounts of sexual harassment ("Our Stories") and the attendant critical analyses by Strine and Taylor and Conrad, thus, serve notice in two ways that our position takes as precedent. First, they confront our discipline's unique twist on the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome. While acknowledging that increasing numbers of women have populated the discipline, they display the manner in which some of them have been mistreated, not somewhere else, but here—in our midst. Second, they display the effects of gender politics concretely; they set the supposedly disembodied neutrality of academic professionals off against the embodied materiality of their persons.

Certainly the story we have to tell is *far* less frightening and grotesque than those told by the survivors of these sexual harassment events. However, in a sense, our story is of a piece with those events. "How things work," the "norms governing the rational operation of the academic sphere," constitute the ideological background (Strine 391). This ideology enables both the episodic sexual harassment described in the narratives as well as the incidents of erasure and devaluation of women represented by the Hickson et al. report and enforced by the journal referees' reviews of our initial response essay.

The Hickson et al. report rank orders women in the field according to the number of articles they have published in journals indexed by Matlon and Ortiz. According to Hickson and his colleagues, the purpose of this ranking project is to "determine a yardstick for active, female researchers in communication" (351). They suggest that such a guideline is important for three reasons: (1) its use in tenure and promotion decisions; (2) its value in the sociology of knowledge, to determine where influence has been located in the discipline; and (3) its value to persons in other disciplines who want to know the comparative status of one individual's scholarly record (351). The report is one of several studies undertaken in recent years by

Hickson and his colleagues to assess scholarly productivity in the discipline.⁸ The research program by Hickson et al. represents but a portion of what Erickson, Fleuriot, and Hosman have recently described as the discipline's growing "cottage industry of counting articles authored by prolific researchers" (329).⁹ However, the Hickson et al. study of active, prolific female researchers is unique in its exclusive focus on a specific demographic/cultural group.

Soon after the report was published, we found ourselves locked in conversations about it. Although the three of us are in most respects professionally dissimilar (in rank, in research and teaching interests, in intellectual assumptions, etc.), we found each other to be equally dismayed by the *idea* of the report and in agreement that we should write an essay responding to it. Our dismay was grounded in both general and particular concerns. At a general level, the Hickson et al. report represented evidence of our discipline's continuing fascination with identifying the most prolific scholars in our midst, a fascination we find misguided. However, because others have recently argued that this fascination is problematic, we will not elaborate here on these general concerns.¹⁰ At a more particular level, we were fearful that Hickson et al.'s analysis of prolific female scholars would be embraced as a positive statement about women and for women in the discipline and that the masculinist ideology that ironically undergirds the analysis might be disregarded. This ideology is pervasive in the academy, including speech communication, and thus may not be immediately apparent to most readers in the absence of explicit discussion. The Hickson et al. report thus constitutes a fruitful "local" target for critique; it is, on one level, a seemingly benign if not positive statement about and for women but which, upon closer scrutiny, functions in precisely the opposite manner. By examining ways in which the masculinist ideology is apparent in the Hickson et al. report, we hoped to enter into the ongoing conversation about speech communication scholarship as gendered.¹¹

Our response essay was, from our point of view, rather modest. In fact, we worried that it might be too moderate, an irony in light of what our referees' reviews would suggest about it and about us. Nonetheless, we submitted the essay and, within a few weeks, received those reviews. After the initial shock of reading the reviews wore off, we realized that what we had received was a gift of sorts—two institutionally-sanctioned documents that displayed the enabling mechanisms that support the kinds of ideological themes Hickson et al. advance.

In the next section, we have reproduced almost the entirety of our original essay that responded to Hickson et al. We have eliminated one set of arguments and incidental markers thereof from the original version. This set of arguments addressed the factual accuracy, stylistic competence, and logical coherence of the Hickson et al. report.¹² Our decision to excise that component of the manuscript here is based on our realization that it probably served as a diversion from the principal point of our essay. We had attempted to link this set of arguments to our general ideological point by suggesting the possibility that such concerns as accuracy, style, and coherence simply might have been too easily disregarded in the case of an essay "merely" about women. However, ultimately the issues of accuracy and logical coherence seemed the only explicit substantive concerns of the initial referees; we had essentially provided them with an alibi for their refusal to address the primary arguments of our response. In the interest of providing the reader with

an accurate rendering of our ideologically-based objections to the Hickson et al. report, we have refrained from revising our original argument, despite the fact that any number of minor changes have occurred to us with the passage of time. However, none of these changes would alter the substance of our reaction to the report. The next section, thus, contains the remainder of our original essay.

SUBJECT OF OR SUBJECT TO RESEARCH? A RESPONSE TO HICKSON, STACKS,
AND AMSBARY'S "ACTIVE PROLIFIC FEMALE SCHOLARS
IN COMMUNICATION"

A number of scholars have described the "chilly climate" that confronts female faculty members in higher education.¹³ We believe that the temperature has dropped even further for females in the speech communication discipline with the publication of Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary's report of "research productivity" among "active prolific" female scholars. The Hickson et al. article constitutes an overt, if unintended, display of insensitivity toward and aggression against women in the discipline. In writing this response, we hope to persuade our female and male colleagues in the field to resist any use of its results.

Our desire to resist the Hickson et al. report is based in one simple observation: Although it is a report about women, it neglects or implicitly denies the fact that it is about women in virtually all of its constituent features—rationale, assumptions, method, and language. That is, Hickson et al. have named "female" as a category and then failed to consider the gendered specificity of the category. Their omission of any hint of the female gender among their "Key Concepts" list is a telling marker of a discourse that *effaces* women even as it specifies them as a group for observation. We submit that a discourse about women must not forget or erase women. But that is, paradoxically, what the Hickson et al. report accomplishes. And it does so by means much more significant and consequential than neglecting to name as a key concept the gendered group it purports to study.

Before exploring our specific concerns with the Hickson et al. article, however, let us be clear about our own stance. First, we do not wish to detract from the many scholarly accomplishments of the particular women listed in Table 1 ("Most Prolific Active Female Scholars in Communication, 1915-1990") of the Hickson et al. report. These women and many more not listed in Table 1 merit our respect for their scholarly contributions. Second, we do not believe or assume that the three *individuals* named Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary, are themselves aggressors against women. Neither do we believe or assume that the "aggressor" label is appropriate to describe the *persons* who reviewed or approved publication of this article. But it is not necessary to assume or make such individual attributions in order to conclude that the Hickson et al. *discourse* functions as an act of aggression against women in the field. We adhere to the general positions taken by a number of contemporary thinkers, that entire groups, institutions, or other power networks are speaking when individuals speak.¹⁴ To put it most simply, a discourse of right, power, and privilege is approved within our (or any) discipline, and that discourse is spoken by individual members of the discipline. In this case, it is being spoken by Hickson, Stacks, and Amsbary. "Their" discourse indicts us all to the degree that we allow it to stand without resistance, because it is also *our* disciplinary discourse. So, when we refer to "Hickson et al.," "the authors," "they," "them," etc., we do not point to the

