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Research Agenda Statement

My goal as a scholar-educator is to contribute to actionable public knowledge about the innovative digital rhetorical strategies that young social visionaries use to change oppressive paradigms as well as the constraints the digital technologies pose. I see my research as part of a broader effort in rhetoric and digital studies to study the connections between multimodal digital discourse and 21st-century social change. My dissertation project, “Wise Angers: Gen-Z Activists and Their Digital Rhetorics of Feminist Rage,” works at the nexus of these concerns by investigating how youth activists attempt to challenge the sexist, racist, ageist, and ableist anger norms that have long prevented girls, women, and femmes from being heard in public.

Each chapter of my dissertation theorizes what I call a “wise anger” strategy that its principal subject deploys via strategic use of the affordances of their chosen social media platform. Greta Thunberg, Thandiwe Abdullah, and Shina Novalinga, my primary subjects, focus their activism around different issues--the climate crisis, racial justice, and Indigenous rights--and use a different primary social media platform to achieve their aims--Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, respectively. Yet, as my dissertation shows, all three activists use their strategies for a shared cause: changing oppressive anger norms so that all activists can use the constructive force of informed anger as a rhetorical resource in making change.

To take up this work, I analyze IRB-approved datasets from the activists’ social media posts surrounding specific exigencies between 2018 and 2022. I use grounded theory to identify and code patterns in the posts and then read these patterns through the lens of Black feminist theories of racialized anger norms (Lorde, hooks, Cooper, Judd, Collins) and feminist rhetorical scholars’ frameworks for understanding youth rhetorics (Applegarth, Hesford, Dingo). Ultimately, I develop a theory of what I call their “digital rhetorics of feminist rage” to help scholars understand this paradigmatic shift in the rhetorical possibilities for anger, spearheaded by young women activists from Generation Z.

Feminists and feminist scholars have long argued that oppressive anger norms exclude women from public speech differently across categories of race, class, and dis/ability. The intersection of oppressive anger norms with age, however, has gone understudied. Nor have rhetorical scholars yet examined how young women activists today use social media to challenge and change oppressive anger norms. My dissertation addresses these lacunae in the scholarship and opens new avenues for urgent academic and popular conversation. Social media platforms are major--arguably dominant--modes of social interaction among today’s publics, representing great if complicated potential for social change. My research examines how young women digital activists invent and deploy innovative digital feminist rhetorics of rage for a new world order. My emphasis on youth, BIPOC activists, and social media intervenes in the underrepresentation of these subjects and subject areas in the study of rhetoric and social change.

As I revise my dissertation into a book manuscript, I have begun examining how activists and social visionaries use social media to compose and circulate anticapitalist ecological rhetorics to confront the climate crisis. I am particularly interested in how social media is used to shift dominant paradigms, as well as how and why it fails. I am currently working on an article about three popular texts that do just this and how they show up in digital activism: Adrienne Maree Brown’s *Emergent Strategy*, Anna Tsoi’s *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, and Merlin Sheldrake’s *Entangled Life*. I am also working on an article that traces male influencers who model non-normative forms of feminist masculinity to counteract the “manosphere.” I see both of these articles contributing to a larger future project on how popular rhetors use digital media to challenge dominant paradigms, whether about gender or human ecology. I hope to compose this cross-disciplinary work for both academic and public audiences in order to bring change-makers and scholars into productive, hope-giving collaboration.