

THE RHETORICITY OF PAIN: MAGNIFYING PROCESSES OF  
COMMUNICATING PAIN IN WOMEN'S RHETORIC

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## **DEDICATION**

For Sarah Rose, Elisa, and Lindsey, I am deeply appreciative of the work we have done together as peers and as friends. This project was inspired by the bond we have created through sharing stories and offering acts of love and compassion to each other. Thank you, my dearest friends.

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## PREFACE

“We all respond to pain and pleasure in similar ways. Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to reimagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our times.” Gloria Anzaldúa Nov. 2001

This project will feature a discussion of emotional pain and how it functions in rhetorical spaces as a multifunctional process of expulsion from the body. One of the major purposes of this project is to acknowledge the need for further analysis of pain in feminist rhetoric; therefore, to call attention to that fact I must recognize where and how my inquiry came to life. My journey as a graduate student has been quite the literal uphill battle since I left my bubble down in the Rio Grande Valley two years ago. When I left home in the RGV and moved 300 miles north to San Marcos, Texas, I was running away from some personal turmoil that I hoped would fade behind the excitement and opportunities of my new journey. The long days of endless reading and all-nighters at the Alkek Library did great at keeping me busy and distracted. Still, it was difficult to separate what I was learning about my identity as a writer, a woman, and a bordertown native from festering wounds that refused to heal without acknowledgment. In my second semester, I signed up for a rhetorical theory course that focused on female voices in the rhetorical landscape. As I read the deeply personal texts created by resilient women over hundreds and hundreds of years, I noticed a theme within the discussions of womens’ socialization, particularly in the context of women of the nineteenth century and beyond,

that has normalized pain as an inherent aspect of womanhood. In response to varying degrees of oppression, Western women have called attention to their pain by sharing raw stories of harm, abuse, loss, and marginalization. At the end of the semester, the final author we discussed as a class was Gloria Anzaldúa, a renowned Latinx scholar of Chicana, feminist and queer theory, whose contributions have revolutionized feminist theory and the understanding of Chicana queer studies. Dr. Nancy Wilson asked the class to analyze the final chapter of *This Bridge We Call Home*, in which Anzaldúa, incorporates decolonial modes of writing such as shadow work and spiritual activism, both of which fall under her holistic theory called *Conocimiento*. Anzaldúa identifies seven stages in the journey of *Conocimiento*, a theory she describes as an opening of the senses to higher consciousness, "causing internal shifts and external changes" (545). *Conocimiento* connects the inner life of the mind and spirit to the outer world that we continuously experience. She describes the stages of *Conocimiento* as a shift away from pain and trauma and toward informed healing. Reading this piece for the first time felt like taking off a really heavy backpack. Anzaldúa gave me names and definitions for experiences and emotions I could not identify in myself. Her words were a means of catharsis for me. Her vulnerability and intimacy with her body and wounds helped me acknowledge my own. I saw myself as I read about the second stage in the path to *Conocimiento* as Anzaldúa introduces a resting place known as "Nepantla". In the wake of a life-altering situation, an individual is left questioning the principles of their previous identity. Nepantla is the "in-between state" that overlaps the spiritual and material world;

it is a place that is neither here nor there. Instead, the lack of a definitive position allows an individual to see through the falsehoods of the monoculture and observe the possibilities of existing elsewhere. Regarding pain, the process of attributing meaning to the unpleasant feelings that follow negative life-changing events begins in Nepantla. When one cannot stand the pain of living according to the terms of their wounded identity, they begin this spiritual journey guided by the light of the Aztec moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui; they are forced out of old ways and opened to the possibilities of new ways. As I previously mentioned, I left the RGV because I was looking to escape the place where my own pain manifested. However, I cannot imagine that I stumbled upon this program, or this course, or this chapter written by a woman who grew up 20 minutes from my childhood home by coincidence. Before I even met her, Coyolxauhqui guided me out of the painful space I was dwelling in toward a path of enlightenment. Although I was introduced to Anzaldúa's work as an undergrad, I had not yet experienced some of the trauma and grief that would consume my ability to fully connect with myself and others as my identity evolved. By the time I found the path to *Conocimiento*, I had recognized my own position within the process of healing Anzaldúa had defined for me. I felt understood and vindicated and that my experiences, my pain, could be transformed into something meaningful. Anzaldúa's own experiences in her discussion of *Conocimiento*, guided me in a conscious shift that transformed my pain from a wound to a point of connection with other women, a point of understanding. The preservation and deep examination of her theories in rhetoric and composition is immensely important for

Chicanx students, like me, who can connect to the transformation of pain she describes. I recognize that my proximity to Anzaldúa played a part in my ability to connect with her; therefore, I began to reevaluate my interpretation of other feminist rhetoricians. Upon re-examination, I found that apart from positioning pain within their rhetorical practices, women were also unfolding their own processes of communicating pain between an individual(s) and an Other, processes that unveils and validates the severity of one's pain and encourages interpersonal relationships through empathetic responses. What follows is an analysis that aims to identify the rhetorical significance of feminist processes of communication used by marginalized individuals to discuss painful experiences. Although these processes are not specific to women only, my project aims to examine feminist text to further legitimize these processes as useful to contemporary writers and speakers who utilize feminist modes of rhetoric.

## **I. A BRIEF HISTORY: FROM EXCLUSION TO EXCAVATION**

Within the discipline of rhetoric, the absence of women, who have contributed to the field, may cause one to believe women were forbidden to speak or write persuasively for much of history, which isn't far from the truth. Rhetoric is not immune to the historical oppression of women; however, their exclusion from the field does not equate to silence. The absence of women from the realm of rhetoric does not exemplify a voluntary lack of participation; rather, it proves that the rhetorical modes, strategies, and narratives of women were often dismissed, ignored, kept away from the world, and forgotten. However, thanks to diligent contemporary scholars, we now know women were not sitting silently at home for the last two millennia of Western culture. Had it not been for the groundbreaking recovery efforts of twenty-first-century feminist rhetoric scholars such as Winifred Horner, Jan Swearingen, Nan Johnson, Marjorie Curry Woods, Robert Connors, and Kathleen Welch and continued by Cheryl Glenn, Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald, we may have never discovered the noncombative modes of rhetoric women created in response to the conventionally agonistic voices that drowned them out (Gaillet & Horner 194). As soon as women gained access into higher education spaces, the discipline of rhetoric let go its competitive edge and began to shift away from the exclusivity that kept women from participating in public discourse.

And what happened to this agonistic educational culture? After over two thousand years as the central element in education, public verbal contest died out almost completely in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Instead of the oral, argument-based, male-dominated education of the pre-1870 period, education post-1870 was much more interiorized, irenic, negotiative,

explanatory. (Connors 27)

As Western academia shifted toward coeducation between 1860 and 1900, the once primarily oral and generally argumentative discipline shifted toward more inclusive composition-based methods (Gender Influences). Once a staple of the college experience, public verbal contests were phased out due to social conventions that frowned upon a man v. woman public debate (Gender Influences 50). Fast forward to the late twentieth century where three significant strides were being made to include women in the field of rhetoric. According to Gaillet and Horner, feminist scholars were "writing women into the history of rhetoric, writing feminist issues into theories of rhetoric, and writing feminist perspectives into rhetorical criticism" (195). For the first time, women of color claimed their space within feminist rhetoric, and an accurate representation of contributors to the field began to emerge within women's rhetoric. This new tradition of feminist scholarship unearthed a history of women navigating the field by not only harnessing and utilizing male modes of rhetoric but creating their own based on the painfully oppressive experience of not being born a property-owning white man. However, by the time contemporary scholarship caught up to their contributions, women were still being analyzed through the lenses of man-made rhetoric.

At its simplest form, classical rhetoric is an oral battle with style and composure; it is, by nature, a combative form of speech or writing, all characteristics which would be unbecoming of a woman. Another important aspect of classical rhetoric is the ethical imperative of the argument, or the speaker's ability to appear socially equal to the audience, which was inconceivable for women of that time. As Aristotle put it in his *Rhetoric*, "Virtues and actions are nobler when they proceed from those who are naturally

worthier, for instance, from a man rather than from a woman" (1367a). Even if women were allowed into this exclusive boy's club, it would take time to shift the social conventions that oppress their literacy and discourage discursive participation. By the time women were being acknowledged in rhetoric, their modes of persuasion did not quite fit into these narrow margins created by the men that came before them. Because women were excluded from recognized areas of power, such as politics and the church, their rhetorical efforts were not recognized. Their novel rhetorical efforts went largely unnoticed. Professor of Rhetoric and Women's Studies Cheryl Glenn states that this issue is the inevitable consequence of excluding women from making their own language (3). Glenn explained it best when she claimed that,

Because women have been excluded from the making of language, they have not been able to contain and then pass on a tradition of women's language. It is no wonder, then, that so few women have ever controlled the linguistic, material, or social means to the making of an intellectual-- let alone rhetorical -- tradition among themselves. And because women have had no opportunity to build their own such base, they have been inhibited from the opportunity to participate on an equal basis in the ongoing dominant discourse, that of males (3)

Once again, I must reiterate that although there is an absence of a documented women's language, women were indeed speaking and writing and creating modes of persuasive communication of their own; they just looked a lot different from their male predecessors and therefore were ignored for the most part. Important female rhetoricians such as Aspasia and Sor Juana Ines De La Cruz found ways to be rhetorically effective outside of traditional rhetorical means and made lasting impressions on the tradition despite their

femininity.

Historically women have had an entirely different socialization experience than that of men, which has affected the way they communicate with the world. Between colonialism and the patriarchy, psychological warfare through oppressive political practices, pain has become a universal experience of the oppressed in Western civilization. Unfortunately, the integration of women in educational spaces did not end the natural and unnatural discomforts of womanhood. Because of such discomforts, women have long been characterized as emotionally charged and overtly hysterical, especially in cases of women expressing their painful experiences. Although there is quite a bit of scholarship detailing the long era in which women were banned from participating in oratory, that research focuses on the man-made rhetorical modes that kept women out of the discipline for thousands of years and does little to recognize the modes of oratory and composition women created. Even if women's pain was magnified in rhetoric, it would likely be categorized as an appeal to emotions. However, pathos does not carry the same rhetorical significance and power as other persuasive appeals within the tradition. In the first chapter of Bk. I of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle places pathos among appeals to logic and credibility; however, he holds reservations on pathos and questions the influence of an individual's emotions on judgment. "The arousing of prejudice, pity, anger, and similar path has nothing to do with the essential facts but is merely a personal appeal to the man who is judging the case... It is not right to pervert the judge by moving him to anger or envy or pity- one might as well warp a carpenter's rule before using it" (1354a). Aristotle could not have imagined how the socialization of women would continue to devolve as civilization progressed in all aspects. In fact, when he speaks

about rhetorical practices, he is not considering women at all. Therefore, it seems unreasonable to analyze speeches and written works by women using modes of rhetoric fit for men.

This project aims to recognize the communication of one's pain as a means of persuasion in accordance with their socialization. To be clear, I do not intend to name this identification of pain as a feminist mode of rhetoric. Instead, I intend to acknowledge the presence of various communication processes within feminist rhetorical practices that involve vulnerability and humanizing oneself through expressions of pain to connect to an Other. Furthermore, it is my hope that acknowledging such processes will bridge the gap that overlooks the rhetorical significance of a woman's pain.

## II. RATIONALE & OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

“To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded” (Anzaldúa 3).

The purpose of this project is to build upon what has been unearthed in women’s rhetoric by highlighting the significance of communicating pain in feminist rhetorical practices. To establish such communications as processes that go beyond personal use, I will implement a rhetorical analysis of a contemporary text by Sybrina Fulton detailing her experiences after losing her son to gun violence. To analyze these texts, I will ground my identifications of rhetorical pain in the feminist practices brought to the field by Gloria Anzaldúa and Lisa Blankenship. In the remainder of this chapter, I will foreground my discussion in a theory of emotional pain informed by the perspective of Sara Ahmed. I will then discuss Anzaldúa and Blankenship’s interpretation of processing pain through stories and identify critical elements of their processes that I will use to examine Fulton. I will begin my analysis in chapter 3 with an overview of the literature that examines how the field of rhetoric has included women in the tradition and how women have transformed rhetorical practices. The literature review will also examine theories of pain and how they function in women’s narratives. Chapter 4 will examine Anzaldúa and Blankenship’s theories further as well as implement a rhetorical analysis of Sybrina Fulton’s narrative in *Rest in Power: the Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin*, a book she co-

authored with her ex-husband Tracy Martin. Once again, I must state that my intention is not to identify these processes as new or undiscovered rhetorical practices, rather to magnify acknowledgments of pain as more than just an appeal to one's emotions. The process of communicating one's pain is an opportunity to cultivate bridges that connect us where our differences divide us.

For the purposes of this project, I will be identifying pain as the unpleasant feelings of discomfort, anguish, or brokenness, where the mind is aware of the mismatch between the desired and actual state. Pain forces the mind to resolve the undesirable feelings, which leaves a lasting impression on that individual and changes their perception of the world moving forward (Meerwijk & Weiss). It comes as no surprise that women have assumed an inferior position to men within the long-standing patriarchal society. Over time, the exclusion of women from oratory, and essentially all other public spaces, has evolved to more persecutory social practices. Along with educational suppression, women, especially women of color, have been consistently targeted, violated, and trespassed due to their traditional position as second-class citizens. When suffering and maltreatment have become innate aspects of womanhood, it is crucial to understand how this feature of life, one most women can relate to at varying degrees depending on race, age, and social class, affects the way women communicate with the world around them.

### **Identifying Pain**

Before expanding my search, I needed to understand how a person identifies pain and how that pain affects them moving forward. In her text titled, *The Cultural Politics of*

*Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed describes the sociality of pain as collisions between an individual's bodily surfaces and the other bodily and object surfaces surrounding it. Individuals have a painful experience and internalize those emotions as inherent qualities of that experience; "I am hurt" becomes "this [object/person] hurts me" (28). When an individual feels undesirable emotion, they associate those feelings with previous experiences of collisions or adverse feelings to attribute meaning to that pain. The interaction of bodily surfaces also allows individuals to witness each other's experiences of plight and authenticate the feelings of psychic pain (31). When an individual presents their pain through narrative or within argumentation, the pain materializes as a site outside the body that allows the audience to connect to the speaker/writer ('body to body contact') not only emotionally but through the shared history of bodily injury. Ahmed states:

So in some sense, as I respond to this other's pain, as I touch her cheek, I come to feel that which I cannot know. It is the ungraspability of her pain, in the face of the bareness of my own, that throws me into disbelief. But it is not her pain that I disbelieve. I believe in it, more and more. I am captured by the intensity of this belief. Rather it is my pain that becomes uncertain. I realized that my pain - it seemed so - there is unbelievable to others, thrown as they are into a different bodily world. The ungraspability of her pain calls me back to my own body even when it is not in pain, to feel it, to explore its surface is, to inhabit it (30-31).

Testimonies of pain bring feelings to life in a way that goes beyond a simple appeal to emotions. Ahmed states that the call of pain is not just for attentive hearing but a "demand for collective politics, as a standard based not on the possibility that one may

understand and fix that pain but on the understanding that its purpose is instead to establish an emotional literacy between those in pain and their audience” (39). It becomes clear why women chose to externalize their pain through narrative as an effort to be understood.

### **Repurposing Pain**

"In every domain where patriarchy reigns, woman is Other: she is objectified and marginalized, defined only by her difference from male norms and values, defined by what she (allegedly) lacks and men (allegedly) have" (Tyson 87).

The integration of women into the field of rhetoric was but a symptom of the constantly progressing world outside of academia. Men had preserved the ritualistic conventions of classical rhetoric for hundreds of years. However, the combative nature of the oral discipline did not quite fit in a world that consistently shifted toward the inclusivity of women and people of color. Countless influential women have entered rhetorical discourse by expressing themselves authentically. One of the most valuable rhetorical maneuvers women utilize is sharing their lived experiences. Their stories have shaken the longstanding Aristotelian interpretation of rhetoric. According to Kenneth Burke, the classical interpretation focuses on the act of persuasion; however, that function has evolved into what he identifies as “identification” (Burke). Identification goes beyond attention to argument design and highlights what connects the speaker or writer to their audience. A tradition that once valued logical arguments as the most effective framework for argumentation and deliberately excluded women from contributing to rhetorical scholarship is now shifting to recognize the rhetorical power of eliciting emotions from

an Other to establish meaningful connections and understanding based on humanistic experiences.

I first observed the presence of a process of communicating pain after reading *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* by Anzaldúa. She uses decolonial modes of writing such as shadow work and spiritual activism to communicate testimonies of anger, injustice, sadness, testimonies of their pain. Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" embodies the deliberate rejection of modes and labels that do not represent her. She uses this term to describe the clash of borders within one's identity. Rather than choosing one culture, one language, one identity, "the mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns how to juggle cultures" (*Borderlands* 101). Anzaldúa utilizes her pain to heal herself and give meaning to her suffering by altering her perspective. In her text, Anzaldúa breaks down seven stages in the journey of *Conocimiento*, a theory she describes as an opening of the senses to a higher consciousness, "causing internal shifts and external changes." *Conocimiento* connects the inner life of the mind and spirit to the outer world that we continuously experience (545). She describes the stages of *Conocimiento* as a shift away from pain and trauma, toward a spiritually informed healing. In the final state of *Conocimiento*, Anzaldúa focuses on shifting realities to develop "ethical, compassionate strategies" with which to negotiate future conflicts within self and between others (545). Pain moves people to acknowledge the factors that induce the pain in their own lives and examine how that relates to Others. Anzaldúa's path to *Conocimiento* provides her audience with a process of knowing, informed by spiritual practices as well as creative acts such as writing. In each phase, Anzaldúa maps out a description of mental, physical,

and spiritual changes being made within the self, allowing the reader to identify their own position within the path to *Conocimiento*.

In her text, *Changing the Subject*, Lisa Blankenship takes a similar approach to Anzaldúa and maps out the connection between the complicated emotion known as empathy and persuasive speech/writing. Her theory of rhetorical empathy is characterized as a “choice and habit of mind that invents and invites discourse informed by deep listening and its resulting emotion, characterized by narratives based on personal experience” (5). Blankenship’s theory is fitting for discussions of pain because the act of communicating pain could, in many cases, be an invitation for empathy; that, of course, depends on the speaker or writer and their purpose. However, according to Blankenship, when a woman talks about her pain to an Other, she invites them to understand what they themselves have not experienced. Blankenship considers this a conscious effort to be vulnerable with the intention of being understood by an Other in her theory of rhetorical empathy. Although Blankenship does not identify pain as a necessary element of her theory, she does base much of her discussion on experiences of plight. Blankenship establishes four recursive practices she associates with rhetorical empathy “yielding to an Other by sharing and listening to personal stories”; “considering motives behind speech acts and actions”; “engaging in reflection and self-critique,” and lastly, “addressing difference, power, and embodiment” (89). Blankenship identifies these as recursive practices, though she does not specify chronology; instead, she acknowledges the subjectivity of this communication process and uses these four elements as basic principles of her theory. She recognizes that empathetic responses may not be immediate; instead, rhetorical empathy requires “a process of learning and understanding grounded in

personal stories,” meaning the changes occur internally and happen over time (98). In this sense, she has established a process that begins with the vulnerable act of sharing pain and moves forward.

Anzaldúa and Blankenship approach pain in two completely different ways; one approaches pain by displaying her own wounds while the other poses a theory that invites analysis of how pain invites empathy. However, their attention to plight and the power of emotionally rich narratives to strengthen interpersonal relationships has highlighted an ability of pain that has not yet been extensively discussed in the discipline of rhetoric and composition. The presence of pain is incredibly prominent in women’s lives; however, research within the discipline has overlooked the rhetorical significance of such pain, even when women speak up or write about it. Whether through personal, autoethnographic, or theoretical writing, women’s pain is present in rhetorical spaces; therefore, it deserves magnification.

### III. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

To say that women cannot or do not use male modes of rhetoric would be false. Within texts such as *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings From Classical Times to the Present* edited by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg and feminist texts like *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, edited by Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald; there are countless examples of women blending seamlessly within classical rhetorical traditions by effectively displaying ethos, pathos, and logos at prime kairotic moments. However, the issue stands that although they may use long standing rhetorical devices, it is the devices they have created that have been long overlooked. Current scholarship on the addition of women in rhetoric highlights that women communicate through non-traditional methods; however, there is little emphasis on their rhetoric outside of the traditions. This literature review will allow for a comprehensive understanding of what is known about the rhetoric women assimilated to and the devices they created in response to their experiences of womanhood. I will begin with a brief description of rhetoric before and after the adoption of coeducation and, ultimately, the inclusion of women into the discipline. I will then examine theories of pain theory and the role it plays in a woman's rhetorical choices.

#### **Locating Women-made Modes of Rhetoric**

The history of rhetoric is male. The traditions of classical rhetoric date back to Ancient Greece, where well-spoken men conceived the conventions of the discipline. At its inception, the uses of rhetoric were for linguistic combat that required skills (thought to be) beyond women's capabilities. From the classical period through the nineteenth

century, women, especially women of color, were denied access to literacy; their jobs were in the home, far away from persuasive speech or writing spaces. In "Gender Influences: Composition-Rhetoric as an Irenic Rhetoric," Robert Connors poses the question, "Who owns rhetoric?" (24). Oratory and persuasion were skills that have long been practiced not only by men but performed only for men. For much of its life, rhetoric did not include women in any sense; men shaped the ideas, rituals, and agendas by independently joining the conversations within the rhetorical discipline and building discourse by agreeing or disagreeing with those before them. In his analysis, Connors examines the shift from older agnostic rhetoric dominated by men to a more inclusive irenic rhetoric after the inclusion of women into the field in the nineteenth century. Connors proceeds to explain how this shift has affected how we understand, utilize, and teach discourse processes. While the emphasis of his analysis is on the outcome of the inclusion of women in the discipline, what lacks is the details of their presence and how their contributions to the conventions of rhetoric differed from the long-practiced traditional methods. Furthermore, there is no indication that women were modifying a practice that has been molded to men's socialization. I was curious to know how scholars analyzed modes outside of the rhetorical tradition; therefore, I shifted my focus to acknowledging women-made modes.

Thomas Farrell's text "Female and Male Modes of Rhetoric" points out the differences in the argument presentations between men and women and offers some analysis on the reason behind his theory. Like Connors, Farrell acknowledges the combative nature of male modes and examines the popular avenue of presenting an antithesis to the audience to establish what the speaker or writer is arguing for and what

they are arguing against. The success of the male mode relies on one's ability to construct an argument for their position and deconstruct the argument of the opposition. The female mode of rhetoric takes a less antagonistic approach and attempts to posit the argument on the basis of narrative or shared experiences. In this way, the speaker takes their listeners or readers through a recreated process of thinking as it typically occurs in life to lead the audience to the same line of reasoning (Farrell 910). Farrell states that the motives behind the usage of rhetoric also differ between the gendered modes. He believes "accepting, dealing with, digesting, working through, or growing beyond process more in accordance with the female mode of rhetoric, while the male mode of rhetoric takes a stand for one thing and against another" (920). Although Farrell's sample of women's rhetoric does include valid examples of influential women successfully using female modes of rhetoric, his analysis does little to explore the reason behind this adaptation. What is it about the experiences of womanhood that forced women to modify combative male modes into more interpersonal female modes?

Without the essential recovery efforts of contemporary scholars, it is unclear how much we would know about the authentic experiences of womanhood. In a twenty-first-century anthology titled, *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)*, Ritchie and Ronald have compiled a comprehensive collection of women's rhetorical works since the birth of rhetoric in Ancient Greece. From Aspasia to Ruth Bader Ginsburg, this collection of texts and speeches acknowledges the rhetorical means women used to be heard in this male-dominated discipline. The editors use multiple tables of contents to map out seventy historical texts by chronology as well as rhetorical strategy and exigency, which allows readers to see recurring expressions of pain in different aspects of

life such as literacy and education rights, conversations about identity and civic inclusion and various other topics. This text is not meant to define a new rhetoric but rather to locate women in the rhetorical spaces in which they existed and open the possibilities of other modes outside the rhetorical tradition. It is their hope that this diverse collection will inspire further scholarship, such as the one I am currently conducting. When this book was published in 2001, the conversations surrounding "the reclamation, recovery and reconceptualization" of women in rhetoric were in their infancy (xvii). It is important to acknowledge once again that scholars would still be receiving an inaccurate account of who contributed to the discipline without these inclusive efforts. Furthermore, it is because of the women represented in this anthology that non-male scholars continue to have a place in the rhetoric.

### **Pain on the Body**

In a 2011 essay titled "Toward a Unifying Definition of Psychological Pain," Esther L. Meerwijk and Sandra J. Weiss developed an understanding of psychological pain, an emotion most would associate with mental pain, psychic pain, emotional pain, suffering, anguish, and torment. To get a better understanding of the general understanding of psychological pain, Meerwijk and Weiss conducted a scholarship of psychological pain across hundreds of psychology journals. They narrowed their analysis down to six major articles that provide a theory or model outlining the definition of pain. Among their findings were significant commonalities, including discrepancies between one's perception of the self and the ideal self; the pain resolves over time, and the pain must be resolved to avoid adverse effects. Based on their analysis, Meerwijk and Weiss

define psychological pain as the unpleasant feelings of internal discomfort, where the mind is aware of the mismatch between the desired and actual state. The unsustainable nature of pain forces the mind to resolve the undesirable feelings, which leaves a lasting negative impact on that individual; however, if resolved properly, psychological pain can become a healing experience, enhancing one's self-perception and ability to grow and create meaning from their experiences.

Before assigning rhetorical significance to the psychological pain experienced by women, one must first understand the experience of pain on the body. In her text titled, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed discusses the way pain is presented and understood by one's body. Her chapter titled "The Contingency of Pain" dissects the ways language is used to convey pain and the way that language affects other bodies around it. For Ahmed, pain goes beyond bodily damage. The unwanted or unpleasant emotion cannot be reduced to a simple sensation, "how we experience pain involves the attribution of meaning through experience, as well as associations between different kinds of negative or aversive feelings" (23). She goes on to say it is through perceived painful encounters between the body and other objects, sometimes other people that we ever acknowledge the presence of our own body (23-24). A person creates the boundaries of their own body by learning from painful experiences. Ahmed then connects the idea of presenting pain within personal narratives and shared experiences. She explains that it is the intensity of pain that causes one to want to expel the sensation from the body. "I want the pain to leave me; it is not a part of me, even though it is in my body that I feel it. So pain can be felt as something 'not me' within 'me': it is the impression of the 'not' that is at stake" (27). It is no coincidence that pain testimonies are often represented in personal

narratives and autoethnographies. The pain no longer lives exclusively within one bodily surface; instead, the pain is shared and impressed upon other bodies. In these contexts, the wound is exposed to the intended audience to be read, understood, empathized with.

### **Pain Out of the Body**

I came to understand the link between women and pain while reading Leslie Jamison's collection *The Empathy Exams*. In the chapter titled "Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain," Jamison asks her friends, all of whom were women, what their understanding of female pain is. Their replies included testimonies of "wounds" they earned through everyday life experiences from heartbreaks and work accidents to attempted sexual assaults and battles with various illnesses. Jamison acknowledges that the conversation about women's pain risks transforming their pain "from an aspect of the female experience to an element of the female constitution" (198), meaning associating concepts of pain to womanhood is a slippery slope to making it an expected phase of a woman's life, which would be devastating for a woman considering society's inclination not to believe women who say they are suffering. Her analysis examined different encounters and expressions of pain. In her analysis, Jamison noticed a longstanding cultural trend that inflicted pain onto women yet policed the way women expressed that same pain. Society acknowledges social practices that oppress women, such as the wage gap, rape culture, impossible beauty standards, etc., while downplaying and reducing a woman's actions, in the wake of that pain, to mere performance. This stems from social trends created by women of the nineteenth century who believed "female suffering made one interesting," whether illness or sadness, the pain was worn on one's sleeve as a

symbol of vulnerability (Jamison 217). Jamison goes on to examine theories of pain that suggest women who expressing feelings of psychic or physical pain are not believed because pain is a natural part of their biological processes, therefore making them more “sensitive” to pain and less likely to be believed by doctors about true sensations of pain (219). She ends her analysis by stating that women are commonly reduced to stereotypes of being oversensitive and melodramatic because of how they chose to communicate sensations of pain; however, that should not take away from the fact that women experience real pain (230). Pain that is performed is real pain. Pain invites action and reaction. When a woman chooses to release that pain from her body and share it with the world, she is inviting empathy, understanding. Furthermore, she is creating a space for conversations that explore theories of women’s pain beyond criticism. Although Jamison does not explicitly link pain, performative or not, to rhetoric she exemplifies the rhetorical qualities of painful narratives throughout her book when she uses intimate moments of pain from her own life to establish this theory of female pain. Lastly, it is important to note the coincidence of this trend appearing during the same period women were allowed into rhetorical spaces.

In an earlier publication titled, *Living A Feminist Life*, Ahmed pulls from personal experience to discuss the aspects of womanhood that expose women to feminism. She opens her book by describing feminism as "sensational," something that provokes the senses, calling the wrong kind of attention (21). She talks about women's introduction into feminism as beginning with a moment of intensity that arouses feelings of injustice or inequality. For many women, feminism is introduced at a young age, from unwanted male attention that will eventually become a staple of their womanhood. She recounts a

personal history filled with unwanted and sometimes dangerous experiences with men while doing normal everyday things like going for a run, falling asleep on an airplane, walking to school (23). Similar to her concept of the body's attention to surfaces, Ahmed explains that the body has a memory of its own. The body uses its memories to learn from the experiences that made it feel vulnerable by keeping it near enough to inform its perspective moving forward. The body collects these painful experiences and alters the course of one's life with every violation (22). To appease the fateful sexual binary, women learn to take up less space and to proceed through life with caution because, as we all know, boys will be boys (25). It is not until a woman can no longer abide by the imbalanced distribution of power, when her body can no longer adjust to the violence, it is then that she turns to feminism. Ahmed explains that a feminist consciousness allows a violated woman to reinhabit her own body and take witness to others who have done the same. Learning about feminism is a path to healing, unlearning, and making sense of one's experiences through the wisdom of others. At the risk of being called a killjoy, a feminist disrupts the natural order by talking about sexism and racism, making those around her uncomfortable (38). No one wants to talk about the effects of sexism and rape culture; no one wants to talk about female pain because if every woman decided to speak up about it.

It is clear there is significance in the consistent presence of pain in womanhood and the way it has made its way into rhetorical spaces. There is plenty of scholarship surrounding the concept of the exclusion of women from the rhetorical tradition; however, there is little conversation linking psychologically painful experiences to the exigencies of female rhetorics. Although this literature review has given us a definitive

understanding of psychological pain, there seems to be much more to female psychological pain than what has been recognized by this research. The theories provided by Ahmed and Jamison have laid out a solid foundation for future studies on female pain and the role it plays in feminism and other public movements. It is the personal narratives within these texts that help to recognize the rhetorical power of female pain.

#### **IV. CONOCIMIENTO, EMPATHY AND PUBLIC NARRATIVES OF PAIN**

To further magnify the significance of pain in women's stories, I will apply a rhetorical analysis to the story of Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, activist, and speaker against gun violence in America. Her narrative is powerful, and her pain has brought attention to critical social issues by forcing the world to bear witness to her wounds. Before beginning the analysis, I will first revisit Anzaldúa and Blankenship's pain processes to further examine how they use pain to connect with those who may not understand their experiences. This deeper examination of their theories will allow me to make connections between the two and identify significant aspects they have in common. After making these connections, I will apply these rhetorical practices to Fulton's text to further legitimize these aspects as present in other communications of pain.

##### **The Seven Stages of *Conocimiento***

In her text, *This Bridge We Call Home*, Gloria Anzaldúa breaks down the seven stages in the journey of *Conocimiento*, a theory she describes as an opening of the senses to a higher consciousness. "Causing internal shifts and external changes," *Conocimiento* connects the inner life of the mind and spirit to the outer world that we continuously experience. Anzaldúa tells her audience they are, at that time, experiencing a cultural shift on the kind of knowledge that is valued (541). Anzaldúa was aware of the relevance of spiritual activism during what was the third-wave feminist movement. During that movement, personal narratives were a popular form of feminist theory and spiritual activism, which provided a weapon of protection for the oppressed, to guide them to an understanding of their place in the world, creating a community of healing (Coronado &

Medina 234). She describes the stages of *Conocimiento* as a shift away from pain and trauma and toward informed healing.

*“el arretrato ... rupture, fragmentation ... an ending, a beginning.”*

The first stage is “*el arretrato*,” or the rapture, the end of days triggered by major life changes such as abuse, loss, illness, subjection to racism, and other life disruptions. For Anzaldúa, that which feels like an is the beginning of a journey. In terms of pain, this is the sudden change of trajectory in one’s life that causes one to feel undesirable emotions. Anzaldúa opens the first phase of *Conocimiento* by illustrating a violent attack from the second-person point of view; however, she calls up personal experiences to instill a personal identification with the victim of the attack. This allows a duality of application, giving the reader a personal account that could also be applied to their own experiences. Anzaldúa commonly uses somatic imagery and graphic metaphors in her works as she crosses back and forth across the borderlands, which, for her, involves the flesh just as much as the mind. In this scene, she sets a scene of a violent attack from an unknown male assailant. She tells her audience that though they have survived the imaginary attack, they are left with fear, vulnerability, a distrust, a “*susto*” or shock that forces one to reanalyze the life that led them there. “Exposed, naked, disoriented, wounded, uncertain, confused, and conflicted, you’re forced to live en la orilla—a razor-sharp edge that fragments you” (546). This is the initial moment of collision between an individual’s bodily surface and the sharp pointy edges of this oppressive world. “...your relationship to the world is irrevocably changed: you are aware of your vulnerability, wary of men, and no longer trust the universe” (546). Anzaldúa uses this faceless male

subject attributing the characteristics of the attack to a male offender. By doing this she is tapping into a specific type of pain. She is connecting to the women who can relate to experiences of physical violation at the hands of a man. The result of the attack is a complete destruction of self, and in this painful moment, she instructs her readers to honor what has ended and commit to embracing a new identity.

*“nepantla...torn between ways” & “the Coatlicue state... deconocimiento and the cost of knowing.*

The second phase in the journey to *Conocimiento* is a resting place known as nepantla. In this section, Anzaldúa introduces a more personal narrative and brings us into the identity conflicts she encountered while pursuing her Ph.D. She explains the constant tug between academia and her cultural identity. When one is struck with a life-altering pain, the individual is left questioning the principles of their previous identity. “You face divisions within your cultures—of class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. You face both entrenched institutions and the oppositional movements of working-class women, people of color, and queers” (548). Nepantla is the “in-between state” that overlaps the spiritual and material world; it is a place that is neither here nor there. Instead, the lack of a definitive position allows an individual to see through the “fiction of the monoculture” and observe the possibilities of existing outside the boundaries they have always known. Regarding pain, the process of attributing meaning to the unpleasant feelings that follow adverse life-changing events begins in nepantla (549) Living in this in-between state allows a person to evaluate the principles they live by from two separate perspectives giving one a split awareness and the ability to control

perception (548). This ability aligns spiritual and physical experiences and centers on the importance of self-identity. The individual experiences reality from a particular perspective informed by a specific time and place; however, those experiences are not a fixed aspect of their identity. Guided by the light of the Aztec moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, they are forced out of an old, fixed identity and into *nepantla*, where they long to learn about the world beyond the boundaries they have always known.

*“the Coatlicue state ... desconocimiento and the cost of knowing”*

In the third phase of *Conocimiento*, Anzaldúa introduces the “*Coatlicue* state” that is brought on by the reminder of her mortality when she was diagnosed with diabetes. *Coatlicue* is the ancient Aztec earth goddess of life and death. Her name means “Serpent skirts” because of her horrific appearance featuring a skirt made of serpents and a necklace of human skulls (Keating 320). The *Coatlicue* state is triggered by an intense inner struggle that represents a resistance to knowledge. The shifting between identities leads to internalized feelings of “self-division, cultural confusion and shame” (Keating 320). *Coatlicue* represents another paradox of learning and becoming, “moving closer to knowing means embracing moments of despair, *deconocimiento*, and failure” (Leon and Pigg 268). Anzaldúa is awoken from her state of fear by the cries of *La Llorona*, the ghost that haunts the dreams and imaginations of children who were told this Venezuelan folklore to keep them in line. *La Llorona*’s cries mourn her children, the ones she drowned in a fit of rage. “*Mis hijos, donde estan mis hijos,*” she weeps. The pain and grief in her cries call attention to Anzaldúa’s own pain and grief and force her to confront them once and for all. In the *Coatlicue* state a person comes to understand that the

negative and painful aspects of life are necessary for the formation of new bodily surfaces as we move away from pain and toward enlightenment. “A paradox: the knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them” (553). This stage is the point in which one disconnects from the consciousness they’ve always known, which feels like a detour off the path of *Conocimiento*. However, the successful shift into the *Coatlicue* is signified by the body’s physical reaction to the shift in consciousness. A person may clean themselves and their home to cleanse the body of remnants of the old self; “sweeping away the pain, grief, and fear of the past that’s been stalking you, severing the cords binding you to it (554). In the *Coatlicue* state, a person feels gratitude for the experiences that brought them closer to knowing; however, some types of pain and fear cannot be so easily forgotten. The importance of this is recognizing that change will occur when one can let go of the attachment to those emotions.

*“the call... el nepantlera...the crossing and conversion”*

“It feels like you’ve giving birth to a huge stone. Something pops out; you fall back onto the mattress in blessed relief. Is this what it feels like to die?”

In the fourth stage on the journey to *Conocimiento*, Anzaldúa illustrates a scene in which she fell out of her own body. In this stage an individual confronts the division of the mind, body and spirit. An out-of-body experience allows Anzaldúa to see that she is not contained by the boundaries of her skin and causes her to reexamine the confines of all of her identities. Removed from the constraints of previous perspectives that had been imposed on her, Anzaldúa describes reentering her body feeling unconstrained by race, class, gender or sexuality in such a spirit that “breaks the mind/body, matter/spirit

dichotomy” (555). In this stage, she is pulled from her depression, breaks free from her coping mechanisms, and becomes reacquainted with her spirituality, “a presence, force, power, and energy within and without” (557). Here Anzaldúa faces a bridge on the path she is on. To cross the bridge, she reaches out for guidance from the written and spoken words of those who have crossed before her (556). Moving forward means reevaluating the truth to identities imposed on her by herself and others. Coming to terms with the fallacies in the identities imposed on her as a woman of color means that she has the power to create a new identity that represents her true self.

*“putting Coyolxauhqui together... new personal and collective “stories.”*

Anzaldúa opens the fifth stage of *Conocimiento* by describing the scene of waking up from a surgery that traumatically reframed her body. After having her uterus and ovaries removed, she is prompted by her desire to make meaning from her pain and document the ongoing circumstances of her life. She begins sorting through her life experiences, in search of a way to arrange them into a narrative that articulates her new reality.

“Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrites the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming, disinheritance and recuperation, stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives” (562). This stage involves putting the pieces back together and reinventing yourself from the destruction. Anzaldúa firmly believes the most powerful stories are those that challenge dominant ideologies and realign an individual’s perception of the world. For Anzaldúa, the urge to heal oneself emerges from losing what was previously connected to oneself. Healing that pain comes when you understand the ability to re-envision a world that is different from

the one you imagined. To overcome adversity, one must write their story, “not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to shifting winds” (578).

*“the blow-up...a clash of realities”*

“When perpetual conflict erodes a sense of connectedness and wholeness la nepantlera calls on the “connectionist” faculty to show the deep common ground and interwoven kinship among all things and people” (567).

In the sixth phase, Anzaldúa conveys a heated moment between feminists of color and white feminists due to the white women’s refusal to acknowledge their role in contributing to racism against WOC. She also acknowledges WOC’s compliance with their own oppression when they “fall into the trap of claiming a moral higher ground” (567). Anzaldúa returns to the state of nepantla to attempt to understand her own dissonance in this situation. Nepantleras offer a neutral ground in which an individual may put aside previous experiences that prevent us from relating and connecting with individuals of opposing groups. In this stage, Anzaldúa proposes that we do not always have to reach into our lived experiences to create meaning. When approaching your own pain from nepantleras, a person can get a much fuller understanding of their pain and what caused that pain.

*“shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism”.*

“Wounds cause you to shift consciousness—they either open you to the greater reality normally blocked by your habitual point of view or else shut you down, pushing you out of your body and into *desconocimiento*” (572).

In the final state of *Conocimiento*, Anzaldúa introduces a scene that illustrates the moment a child reaches for a piece of fruit high up in a tree and experiences bilocation of her arms and hands. This scene captures Anzaldúa's desire, contemplation, and spiritual shifting, which brings her to her final stage of *Conocimiento*. The seventh stage focuses on shifting realities to develop "ethical, compassionate" strategies with which to negotiate future conflicts within self and between others (545). This stage involves shifting attention away from one's customary point of view, ruled by the ego, to a less defensive and more inclusive identity. It is necessary to detach from previous notions of the self and the opened wounds attached to our ego. Instead of dwelling on one's own pain and constantly giving energy to past hurts, an individual should use their pain as a conduit to recognizing another's suffering, even that of the one who inflicted the pain (572). Within this stage, reflective dialogue is encouraged to create holistic alliances and dissolve existing conflicts. Here, the concept of healing pain is not focused on a single entity but larger systems of pain such as racism and systematic discrimination. By inserting oneself into a larger vision of change, a strong sense of personal meaning helps in the formation of identity. In terms of Ahmed's principles of pain, this stage encourages individuals to use their pain for a larger purpose and think beyond personal healing and more toward collective healing.

One of the significant themes that Anzaldúa brings forth in her text is the idea of entering a higher consciousness to do inner work and outer work. She encourages her readers to experience the journey of *Conocimiento* and enact internal transformation and direct that enlightenment externally toward social change (Anzaldúa 568). Within the seven stages of *Conocimiento*, an individual must channel the generational practices,

traditions, and traumas of their ancestors to connect to an unearthed wisdom.

*Conocimiento* promotes egocentrism and individualism, spiritual activism prompts self-reflection and self-growth and encourages the individual to direct the growth outward, beyond the self (Keating 58).

### **Rhetorical Empathy**

Lisa Blankenship's theory of rhetorical empathy examines the rhetorical significance of situations that evoke empathetic emotions between the writer or speaker and an Other. Blankenship explores empathy because it "signified an immersion in an Other's experience through verbal and visual artistic expression." Her theory of rhetorical empathy is characterized as a "choice and habit of mind that invents and invites discourse informed by deep listening and its resulting emotion, characterized by narratives based on personal experience" (5). Blankenship emphasizes the complexity of empathy in terms of the distribution of power; "...empathy shown by those with power can suggest manipulation, and empathy shown by those with less power can lead to acquiescence and potentially reinforce power imbalances" (17). However, empathy relies on the willingness of those in dominant positions to relinquish their power and status and marginalized individuals to once again assume a deeply vulnerable position. In this sense, rhetorical empathy is a conscious attempt to connect to an Other through shared experiences.

When a woman chooses to release that pain from her body and share it with the Other, she is inviting empathy; she is inviting them to understand. Blankenship identifies this as a deliberate effort to be vulnerable with the intention of being understood by an

Other. Blankenship establishes four recursive practices she associates with rhetorical empathy: “yielding to an Other by sharing and listening to personal stories”; “considering motives behind speech acts and actions”; “engaging in reflection and self-critique,” and “addressing difference, power, and embodiment” (Page 89). What, then, is there to gain from utilizing rhetorical empathy to communicate expressions of pain? For Blankenship, empathy relies on the mutual exchange of vulnerability and self-critique and an attempt to understand the Other. She establishes empathy in rhetoric as process-based with a goal of shifting the Other’s consciousness in an effort to humanize experiences out of the realm of their empathetic feelings. Blankenship addresses this question further by applying her recursive practices to an online discussion between gay-rights activist and author Justin Lee and participants on the website of activist, blogger, and popular religious writer Rebecca Held Evans (23). What follows is a brief analysis of Blankenship’s application of rhetorical empathy to Lee’s experiences.

*The Personal within Discourse Systems: Listening to Stories*

Blankenship’s theory heavily centers on the importance of sharing personal stories in evoking empathy from both the author/speaker and the audience. In Lee’s example, Blankenship emphasizes his emphasis on centering his story in previous experiences of being a “former, well-meaning, antigay Christian” to relate to his audience with similar views (89). By placing the focus of his argument in personal experiences that his audience can relate to, he is extending and modeling empathy. Lee disarms his audience by relating to them on core principles of the same religious faith. This act humanizes the experiences of the speaker or writer being Other’d, although their story

may not change their audience's ideas and moral standard right at that moment. The act of vulnerability begins a process of listening and understanding that takes its shape depending on the willingness and openness of both participants; Lee explains: "I frequently hear from people who tell me that a conversation we had months or even years earlier was instrumental in helping them rethink the issues and grow closer to an LGBTQ family member or friend" (92). Like experiences of plight such as anti-gay discrimination, experiences of pain are personal and specific to each individual's socialization. Hence, the communication of that pain through speech and writing is the only true way to understand the personal and interpersonal effects.

#### *Considering Motives behind Speech Acts and Actions*

The second principle of rhetorical empathy requires the speaker or writer to consider the hopes, fears, and social position of their audience to avoid using language that could trigger strong emotional reactions and therefore ruin any chance of empathy taking place (91). Blankenship grounds her this idea in Burke's theory of dramatism in *A Grammar of Motives*, in which he identifies five components of the dramatistic pentad: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, terms that principles for interpreting obscurity within rhetorical situations (Burke xix)

The important element here is agency, which questions how the individual chooses to communicate their ideas and experiences. The attempts to understand the motives of an Other provides a degree of rhetorical agency and guides how the speaker or writer chooses to communicate with their audience (93). Issues of self-identity are deeply woven into an individual's ability to identify, especially with those outside of the groups

they belong to, even engaging with the “other side” can be perceived as a foundational threat to self and group identity in some cases (95). This issue stresses the importance of avoiding language that reminds the audience of the division within the discussion. In Lee’s case, had he approached his audience by calling his old self a close-minded bigot, he may never have attained a positive effect on them. When one does not attempt to imagine the motives of their audience, they set a precedent that fuels the decision of both the author and the audience not to identify. The threat of triggering language is also extended to discussions of pain. Pain alters an individual’s surface in any context; therefore, discussions of pain should be handled with care and respect from both the speaker or writer and the audience.

*Mutual Exchange and Self-Critique: Rhetorical Exchange as an Ongoing Process*

This element of rhetorical empathy centers on the importance of sharing personal stories with an Other in an effort to humanize the experiences the Other may not understand. Rather than displaying one’s argument as a position that threatens or contradicts that of the audience, the speaker or writer models the same introspective search they expect from them though that is not always the immediate reaction. The basis of this idea is that the speaker or writer is mirroring the act of vulnerability, which is, in essence, an emotional investment in the other, in the hope that such vulnerability may be returned. It is important to note that some acts of vulnerability can be dangerous and an unacceptable compromise for some. Lee and Blankenship hold firm on the belief that acts of selfless vulnerability are the catalyst in the process of achieving empathy; “people must learn to crawl before they can walk” (98). In discussions of pain, the mutual

exchange of vulnerability is imperative to reaching empathy. Pain is personal and goes beyond what can be understood by even our closest friends and loved ones. Giving such an indescribable experience of emotion a platform and language allows that pain to materialize outside of the body and, in turn, gives the Other an opportunity to relate to that pain.

*Addressing Difference, Power, and Embodiment: Appeals for Justice*

Blankenship's theory emphasizes the complexity of empathy in terms of the distribution of power; "...empathy shown by those with power can suggest manipulation, and empathy shown by those with less power can lead to acquiescence and potentially reinforce power imbalances." (17). Empathy relies on the willingness of those in dominant positions to relinquish their power and status and marginalized individuals to once again assume a deeply vulnerable position. The goal with this principle is to neutralize hierarchies and indirectly ask the Other to imagine themselves in the opposite position; what would they do if they were marginalized outside of the groups they subscribe to?

**Focusing Narratives of Pain**

This project intends to highlight the importance of narratives that forefront pain, specifically those of women who have emphasized their pain in their speeches and writing. However, before going any further, I must emphasize how women became the focal point of this analysis. To say that women are the only marginalized group that shares expressions of pain would be false; however, women who share their pain within a

society that significantly normalized that pain as ordinary aspects of womanhood. From birth, women are born into a set of systems that will continually devalue their existence; from being sexualized at the onset of puberty (and sometimes even before that) to going into the workforce knowing they will be paid less and harassed more than their male counterparts (Barroso and Brown). Whether due to cultural or religious practices, women, like men, are expected to live by a set of social standards; however, the ones prescribed to women censor and minimize their existence in this world. A patriarchal society where women are expected to assume the role of second-class citizen or object of the male gaze leaves the door wide open for rape, pedophilia, harassment, femicide, and other harmful acts against women that happen every day. Women know these practices have become normalized because rather than instill social practices and legislation that could protect women, society expects them to dress modestly to deflect unwanted attention and advocate for their own safety. However, those precautions do not guarantee exemption from pain, especially for women of color who must also overcome the oppressive cultural, social, and political practices that provoke painful experiences such as racism, homophobia, and toxic masculinity/*machismo*, for example.

When I began this project in the summer of 2021, I was closely following the story of Vanessa Guillén, a U.S. Army soldier who went missing on the Fort Hood, Texas military base that April. She was from Houston, Texas, a big city only a few hours from where I was living at the time. She had been missing for several weeks, and most days before I started my work, I would log on to various social media platforms and watch her mother, Gloria Guillén, and her two sisters, Mayra and Lupe Guillén, bravely address the public week after week desperate for answers. On the ninth week of her disappearance,

her mother spoke at a press conference condemning those overseeing her daughter's case for not searching for her daughter when she was initially reported missing. Her voice was hoarse but powerful and angry as she recounted her daughter's final days and demanded answers for the various holes in the story of Guillén's alleged kidnapping, which had now gained national recognition. I was transfixed by her indignance and fearlessness as she directed her words away from the investigators to higher authorities such as the top-ranking sergeants of the Army, U.S. Congress members, and President Trump, challenging his position as "*lo mero bueno*" and demanding that he take action to stop the corruption happening at Fort Hood within and outside of the investigation of her daughter's disappearance (Homer and White). Several things about the case alluded to corruption from within the military, including complaints Guillén made of sexual harassment by her superiors that went ignored. The details of her final days reminded me of the testimonies from women in a documentary called *The Invisible War* about the concealment of sexual assault and harassment in the United States military. It was paralyzing thought to imagine that even the military had its own culture of violence against women, and the very system whose sole purpose it is to protect and serve the country fails to protect one of their own. I thought about Guillén often, wondering if she would ever be reunited with her mother and sisters; however, a week after the press conference, Guillén's dismembered and burned remains were found in a shallow grave, and her alleged killer committed suicide before being brought to justice.

At her funeral, Lupe Guillén called her sister a "fighter" and a "warrior" (Alexander and Homer). She made me think of my big sister, Vanessa, who not only shares Guillén's name but her love of soccer and overall inclination toward athleticism

that I have always admired; I could never imagine the violence it would take to harm someone so strong. The Guillén women mourned and fought and cried in various press conferences, interviews, social media posts, and eventually in the Oval Office in front of President Trump himself. Their raw and unfiltered expressions of pain were not weak; they ensured that their voices would not be minimized in the narratives surrounding Guillén's death. Over a year later, the Guillén women continue to fight for justice and reform in the military, exemplifying the power of their grief. Much like I came to know and mourn the unjustified deaths of women such as Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor because of the persistence of their loved ones to have their narratives heard, I mourned Vanessa Guillén's death as a loss that felt personal. The efforts of their families to keep their stories tied to their names helped me connect to their pain in a personal way, and I knew there was something significant about that vulnerability and selflessness that needed magnification. I include this consideration of my connection to the Guillén women's pain to demonstrate how an attention to pain in narratives can make a person more aware of their own potential for vulnerability, especially when they can see elements of their own lives reflected in those narratives. To understand the significance of pain within rhetorical discourse, we must revisit Ahmed's explanation of expressions of pain. Because of the vulnerability and plight surrounding one's pain, when one releases their pain, it is not just for the sake of being heard but a "demand for collective politics, as a standard based not on the possibility that one may understand and fix that pain but on the understanding that its purpose is instead to establish an emotional literacy between those in pain and their audience" (39). Those who express their pain do so to humanize

their experiences and emotions and make them comprehensible even for those who have never had similar experiences.

When I began the early stages of brainstorming and attempting to connect theories of pain to feminist rhetoric, I knew that if I intended to highlight the rhetorical significance of expressions of pain in narratives, I needed to be able to apply these theories to contemporary speakers and writers who were effectively influencing social movements through expressions of their pain; speakers and writers like the Guilléns, the Bland sisters, Tamika Palmer, Samaria Rice, Sybrina Fulton, and the countless other women who express their pain in public discourses of social issues. It became clear to me that if I wanted to discuss the rhetorical power of expressions of pain, my research would have to include the narratives of women of color, especially Black women. In my research, I found both individual and collective expressions of pain from mothers who have lost their children through acts of violence to various communities of women such as The Ovarian Psychos, MADD, and *Catrachas*, who share their stories and contribute to various social discourses such as those concerning gun violence, femicide, LGBTQ+ rights, and drug/alcohol addiction. However, upon closer examination, I found that such different genres of pain expression need their own in-depth discussions; therefore, for the purposes of this project, I focus on the application of pain theories such as those brought forth by Anzaldúa and Blankenship on one genre in hopes of opening a discussion about pain within rhetoric that examines individual pain expressions before expanding that research to include collective expressions.

In the section that follows, I analyze the painful narrative of a Black woman who self-identifies as "a public speaker, author, community activist, [and] mother" (Legend).

Once an average person "living an anonymous life," Fulton found herself writing in public rhetorical spaces: however, not by her own accord (xi). The death of Fulton's son, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, who was stalked and murdered by a neighborhood patrolman in 2012, launched the Black Lives Matter Movement, leaving Fulton at the center of a social movement no mother would ever want to be a part of. For analysis, I will apply Anzaldúa's path to *Conocimiento* and Blankenship's theory of rhetorical empathy to expressions of pain in Fulton's co-authored book, *Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin*. Within this text, Fulton displays a deep level of vulnerability by detailing the horrific reality she endured after losing her son. In the wake of every parent's worst nightmare, she transformed her pain into a tool, a movement that made the world listen to her story and acknowledge the cause of her grief. The purpose of this analysis is to examine Fulton's narrative in *Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin* for the rhetorical significance of Fulton's pain and to identify rhetorical strategies of communicating pain such as those proposed by Anzaldúa and Blankenship.

### **The Rhetoricity of Maternal Pain**

“Words can be weak instruments. It is almost impossible to convey the devastation and pain, the bottomless loss, heartbreak, and helplessness—the feeling of being broken into pieces that will never come back together again, not all the way. One piece of me has gone missing, and it will stay missing forever. There is nothing in its place” (Fulton and Martin ix).

In her text, Fulton details her life before becoming a mother up to the point of seeking justice for her son's death. In her chapters, Fulton unfolds a process of pain that

begins with her initial experience of a life-altering pain and follows her journey to activism in honor of her son. Some of the major elements from Anzaldúa and Blankenship's theories that can be applied to Fulton's journey are starting the process of communication with an experience of plight that is specific to certain marginalized groups; evaluating one's sense of identity in a vulnerable discussion that involves questioning how the pain has altered the individual; and sharing personal stories in an attempt to be understood or heard by an Other.

Sybrina Fulton was ripped away from her quiet life as a full-time mother of two boys and coordinator at a housing agency in Miami-Dade County, Florida, on February 26, 2012, when she received the phone call that would forever alter her life. Throughout her narrative, Fulton displays intimate details of the experience of losing her son, allowing her audience to identify with the maternal element of her story; she was a mother that lost her child. Fulton experienced *un arrebatado* the day she learned her son's life had been taken; from there, she began a journey in which she sought justice for his murder. Her story features multiple experiences no parent should have to endure, from burying her son to watching his killer walk away from the crime as a free man. She states, "The hole in my heart will never heal. They say when an adult dies you bury the past; when a child dies, you bury the future" (62). In terms of Anzaldúa's path to *conocimiento*, Fulton identifies this experience as the end of her previous life and identity. Her son's death gave her existence a new purpose and uprooted the life she was living before.

Like Anzaldúa, Blankenship places her theory of rhetorical empathy within feminist practices that center the idea of a process. In the practice of "yielding to an Other by sharing and listening to personal stories, the admission of pain is a large part of

meeting the expectation of vulnerability needed to achieve empathy” (89). In this case, the “Other” may be White Americans or all non-black Americans. Not many people outside of the Black community understand the unique experience of losing a loved one and having the national news media cover every painful detail of the experience, making her first-person narrative vital within the various other narratives circulating on the news and all over social media.

Anzaldúa and Blankenship also establish the evaluation and critique of one’s identity in the process of attempting to connect with the other. Fulton details her life before this pain as a rather simple and normal existence creating a relatable identity as a hard-working and involved mother. However, throughout her journey, she takes on new identities to advocate for her late son. She states, “‘No, nothing is normal anymore,’ I said, and that summed up everything that I felt that day, as a mother, and now as a witness heading into a trial” (214). Here she displays her ability to assume identities beyond those she aligned herself with before losing her son. Fulton holds firm to her identity as a mother. However, in the process of seeking justice for her son, she is forced into an in-between space, a *nepantla*, where she must also assume the role of advocate, public speaker, and now trial witness.

When her son’s death gained national recognition, Fulton became the voice of mothers mourning their children lost to gun violence, as well as Black women grieving the unjustified deaths of their loved ones at the hands of a corrupt and violent system. After learning that her son’s killer would never be held responsible for his death, she states, “It just confirmed the fact that I felt that the justice system was not equal, and the justice system does not work for African Americans. It also sent a message that you can

shoot and kill someone that is unarmed and just trying to get home. And you can get away with it” (317). Here, Fulton distinguishes another element of her identity that reaches out to Black mothers and fathers because of their proximity to gun violence. The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention published a study examining the number of gun-related “homicides, suicides, and unintentional deaths and injuries” among U.S. children from 2002 to 2014. This study found that Black children faced the highest rates of gun-related homicides (Folwer et al.). Fulton assumes yet another role of an advocate. When she includes the implications of her son’s murder on the safety of all Black children, she goes beyond being an advocate for her son—bringing attention to the biased system that allowed her son’s killer to walk free in an act of advocating for the lives of all Black children.

The chronological organization of Fulton’s narrative unfolds a process that takes elements from both Anzaldúa and Blankenship’s theories. Fulton’s process begins with the experience of a life-altering pain, the loss of her son. Her detailed narrative brings her audience into the most devastating moments of her life and allows them to understand her perspective as they walk through the motions of the months and years following Trayvon’s death. She helps her readers understand how she went from mother of two to devoting her life to the Trayvon Martin Foundation, “which aims to create community programming and raise awareness of gun violence and racial profiling on families” (335). Another evident element in Fulton’s process is her shift in consciousness that allows her to assume alternate identities in the process of advocating for justice for her son. Furthermore, her attention to pushing her pain outward to advocate for other victims and potential victims of gun violence is a significant element in the purposes of both

*Conocimiento* and rhetorical empathy. Anzaldúa acknowledges this when she states, “As victims, you do not have to take responsibility for making changes. But the cost of victimhood is that nothing in your life changes, especially not your attitudes, beliefs. Instead, why not use pain as a conduit to recognize another’s suffering, even that of the one who inflicted the pain” (571). Similarly, Blankenship establishes the idea of making a person's experiences of a larger conversation “situates rhetorical empathy as process-based on reflection and mutual exchange rather than a monologue intended to persuade a monolithic, stereotyped audience. Fulton is not only laying out a process of transformation in Anzaldúan form, but through her painfully honest narrative, she is also laying the groundwork for conversations that promote empathetic responses in discussions of gun violence. In this sense, she effectively establishes a process of excavating her pain and using it to promote a mutual understanding that goes beyond the boundaries of the groups in which people belong.

## V. CONCLUSION

One of the goals I made at the onset of this research was to acknowledge the need for additional analysis of pain within women's rhetorical texts. Based on my interpretation of Anzaldúa and Blankenship's theories, it is my belief that further researchers must approach women's rhetoric with the understanding that expressions of pain are more than appeals to one's emotions. Instead, they are intentional acts of vulnerability in hopes of creating an emotional literacy between individuals who cannot understand the deeply personal aspects of another's pain. Furthermore, because experiences of pain among women are so common and vary in how they affect those women, the field of rhetoric must also acknowledge the presence of pain in individuals as well as groups of women who advocate within a collective. It is worth examining how narratives of pain are distributed in collectives and how an established group may affect the audience's ability to connect with personal stories on an individual level. By identifying pain as a driving factor of argumentation as powerful as the appeals within the classical tradition, feminist researchers can uncover other genres of pain communication and in turn help the field understand the functionality of pain in rhetorical spaces.

Another goal of this research was to establish an epistemology of pain communications in rhetorical discourse that also advocates for a comprehensive pedogeological approach to rhetoric and composition courses. Ideally a course this expansive would include feminist modes of communications and other non-traditional modes of rhetoric alongside the classical method of instruction. Exposing students to such modes will facilitate the progress of the discipline as the average modern-day composition course continues to evolve in terms of the students entering the classrooms

and the experiences they will share. Approaching rhetoric with an emphasis on magnifying expressions of pain and injustices provides students who have had painful experiences, and will be potentially writing about their own pain, with various tools that they can use to inspire their own processes of communication according to their socialization and experiences.

Introducing a first-year rhetoric and composition course as a combination of classical and feminist approaches, such as identifying communications of pain in narratives, looks very similar to the traditional method of instruction. However, the inclusion of feminist theorists that break down communications of pain, such as Anzaldúa and Blankenship, along with seminal rhetorical texts like those of Aristotle and Kenneth Burke, is central to helping students express their own pain. In addition, the inclusion of feminist modes of rhetoric will also help students analyze contemporary forms of rhetoric like those exemplified in Fulton's text and Guillén's speech with contemporary tools. Students will typically learn to rhetorically analyze texts in composition courses, making them the perfect space to introduce writers to feminist texts that feature narratives of pain and injustice. In this project, I have presented a rhetorical analysis that features Fulton's book, and although that may be too vast of a text for a freshman-level course to dive into as novice rhetorical analysts, there are ways to apply such theories to more manageable texts. For example, students may analyze a letter written by Fulton for *TIME* to the Brown family, the loved ones of 18-year-old Michael Brown, who, in 2014, was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer that was later acquitted (Fulton). In this letter, Fulton displays elements of ethos, logos, and rhetorical empathy and uses her own pain to model the compassion she is eliciting from the

audience when she discusses the inconsolable nature of their shared pain, personalizes the impersonal, and invites compassion for herself, the Brown family and the children lost to gun-violence across America. The letter is intended for the Brown family; however, *TIME* reaches a much larger audience, giving this open letter a greater purpose. Each student will have their own interpretation of Fulton's message and her intended audience based on their understanding of discourses surrounding gun violence and anti-racism. Assigning a rhetorical analysis of this letter in which students may examine both classical and contemporary modes of rhetoric such as Blankenship's theory of rhetorical empathy may give them a perspective on contemporary social issues they otherwise may have overlooked.

It is also worth noting why strides to include feminist texts, especially those that magnify pain, are important in academia. Beyond providing students with contemporary rhetorical lenses, such efforts would offer representation for experiences outside of a monoculture. Academic spaces are filled with women of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ identities, victims of gun violence, victims of racially motivated violence and their loved ones, and so many people from other walks of life that deserve to have their pain acknowledged. This attention to representation could be particularly meaningful for the culture of harm against women. Including theories of pain communication and emphasizing feminist narratives could transform the composition classroom into a place of opportunity for destabilizing the culture of normalized violence and inequity against women. Teaching students how to identify pain will make them better critical observers of and participants in their cultures and may expose them to practices both social and cultural that could aid in promoting acts of empathy and compassion.

The main goal of this project was to feature a discussion that examines how pain functions in women's rhetorical texts. At their core, *Conocimiento* and rhetorical empathy center the idea of a process that releases pain from the body through narrative and allows one to transform that pain into a tool used to bridge interpersonal relationships. The pain women experience is directly correlated to their socialization as individuals; however, because of society's acceptance of that pain as a natural part of a woman's existence, it has been long overlooked in the discipline as its own rhetorical element. Anzaldúa and Blankenship present two discussions that center experiences of plight as a driving force in internal and external changes. Fulton's text provides a process of transforming pain that begins with the experience and communication of plight from the first-person perspective. Fulton assumes a vulnerable position by using her wounds as a foundation for connection. The horrific details of Trayvon Martin's death and the growing racial tension mounting across the country in response to Black Americans' ill-treatment magnified this case nationally, putting Fulton at the center of one of the most highly debated court cases in recent history. Fulton's socialization as a Black woman raising two Black sons in twenty-first-century America elevated the chances of experiencing loss relating to gun violence; however, that was not a fact she was willing to accept. Her son's death was the catalyst that thrust her into a process that transformed her pain and identity, putting her at the center of gun violence and anti-racist discourse. Fulton's narrative further proves that in rhetoric, women express their pain through a process of communication. Although the expected response of empathy may not come immediately, the act of baring one's wounds for an Other to witness is an incredibly

vulnerable act that invites the Other to listen and understand a person outside of the group in which they belong.

I came to recognize processes of communicating pain in women's narratives when I began to see the elements of such processes in my own experiences. Pain is powerful because it makes people move. It acquaints the self with the surfaces of the body and the world it comes into contact with. Pain demands attention and action no matter what circumstances surround that pain; therefore, it is an excellent space for connection and understanding to take place. A woman may communicate her pain for various reasons; in some cases, to begin a process of healing through a shift in consciousness, in other cases to use the vulnerability of her painful experiences to connect to an Other. In any situation, it is necessary to recognize the prevalence of pain in women's lives and the power of women who use that pain rhetorically to create bridges to help the world understand them.

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