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Published online: 22 Sep 2019.

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"Backwards and in High Heels"*: The Invisibility and Underrepresentation of Femme(inist) Administrative Labor in Academia

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This article examines the ways in which embodiments of *femme* within administrative academic settings intervene in dominant discourses that (incorrectly) frame us as being "in service" of male-identified colleagues, supervisors, and institutionalized heteropatriarchies. We posit femme as an important and complex counternarrative to the heterocentric, cissexist, and masculinist discourses that are ubiquitous within academic administration in both historical and present-day contexts. Additionally, we consider femme as a site of resistance to feminized discourses of nurturance and of (re)productivity. In this collaborative project, we study the labor involved in administering an English Department and a Writing Program at a four-year public college, interrogating, through autoethnographic reflections and analyses, the ways in which this service labor often falls to/gets thrust upon those of us who identify as femme faculty members. Our article illustrates how we resist the imposition of care work and assert our own agency while conducting administrative work on our own, femme, terms. We offer a list of usable interventions to common, predictable, yet sometimes disorienting situations, and although we do not advance these responses as easy conclusions to problematic interactions, we consider how this list might aid femme administrators in managing quotidian, misguided, at times hostile scenarios. Our work calls allies and comrades to identify systemic asymmetries and generate collaborative solutions within a paradigm of affirmation: One that places a commitment to "femme witnessing" at its center.

Starting from the premise that femme "is inherently 'queer'" and is "[r]eleased from the strictures of binary models of sexual orientation and gender and sex" (Rose & Camilleri, 2002, p. 12), our project examines the ways in which embodiments of femme in administrative academic settings intervene in dominant discourses that (incorrectly) frame us as being "in service" of male-identified colleagues, supervisors, and institutionalized heteropatriarchies. Edicts of these heteropatriarchal administrative settings include being always available, always visible, and as such, always in "coat and tie," participating in the "continuous improvement" of our academic workspaces, and "motivating faculty to increase scholarship/service" (Helldobler, 2016). Our femme bodies exist in these administrative settings in ways

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*Thaves (1982). The full quotation, from a Frank and Ernest cartoon, is "Sure he was great, but don't forget that Ginger Rogers did everything he did … backwards and in high heels."

that disrupt (while being expected to champion *and* fail at) models of academic "productivity."

The disruption takes place because femme is not synonymous with woman; it is neither affixed to nor the embodiment of a singular gender. Femme is not recognizable or plottable within traditional renderings of femininity that uphold a binaristic relationship to masculinity. Ironically, it is also this unrecognizability which drives the expectation that femme administrators will champion and fail at "productivity" because femmes do not embody or perform the features of masculinity that have historically garnered applause for administrative and academic leadership; rather, it is expected that femmes, often inaccurately perceived as demure or docile, will obediently uphold the methods and metrics of which administrative work is comprised.

This reality is particularly visible within our field, Composition, in which teaching and administration mirrors gendered hierarchies of the chef industry. The labor of writing instruction/administration, when regarded as domestic and quotidian, is devalued as feminized work (e.g., Holbrook, 1991; Miller, 1993; Schell, 1992), but when regarded as prestigious or noteworthy, it is celebrated in the ways that so-called "men's work" is celebrated. The cause and effect is reversible, for what *gets* dismissed as feminized labor is regarded as quotidian, and what gets praised as masculinized labor is regarded as prestigious. These patterns are observable when examining breakdowns of whose writing, voices, and administrative achievements are most rewarded in our field (Enos, 1996; Snyder, 2009).

Although by some accounts, the term *femme* came into the parlance of LGBTQ + communities as a pairing with *butch* among working class lesbians from the 1950s (Faderman, 1991, p. 169), and as such sometimes preserved binary gender identities even among lesbian couples, *femme*, in reality, encompasses a much broader gender identity which is not necessarily attached to any opposite or other. Likewise, and too frequently unacknowledged, is the actuality that *femme* emerged from/circulates within Black and Brown LGBTQ + communities, literatures, and discursive practices (Story, 2017). Shereen's experience of femme follows this Black and Brown centered trajectory; femme is an intrinsic part of her identity but not necessarily attached to her identification with womanhood or she/her/hers pronouns. For Shereen, femme functions along the intersections (Crenshaw, 1991) of her queer, Brown, immigrant identities; it "can be a self-conscious performance, a deliberate masquerade, a costume, a pleasurable, playful outlet, as well as a gut feeling, corporeal experience, an urgent reality and much more" (Inayatulla, 2015). Shereen makes conscious choices to perform femme in and for various rhetorical contexts. For instance, she can choose to hyper-perform femme in particular academic settings that may be somewhat of a departure from her daily embodiments of a femme self.

For Heather, femme plays strategically with gendered expectations of appearance and behavior, and she uses "femme to challenge the notion that artifacts, characteristics, and actions traditionally associated with femininity (and thus, deemed oppressive) are inherently demeaning and sexist" (Inayatulla, 2015). Concurrently, Heather's performance of femme connects with Carter and Noble's (1996) conceptualization:

> [Femme] requires an altogether different thinking . . . torsional, not chiastic. Instead of an either or crossing or swinging, we suggest a trope of torsion, a "twisting, esp. Of one part of the body while the other is held fixed" (OED 1130), a rotating, queering, twisting of feminine subjectivity in, on, through, and around itself, nominally similar—feminine—but radically

discontinuous—femme. Irreducible to neither gender separatism nor transitivity but queering both, torsion allows (both butch and) femme to be thought—(as "and, that is, both")—but thought differently. (1996, p. 29)

In administrative contexts, femme, for Heather, is a site of possibility as it challenges gendered assumptions and presumptions. While connected with Heather's gender identity as a woman, it nonetheless is something that she feels she "puts on" in her workspace in order to enact certain possibilities that would not necessarily be available with, for instance, a more "butch" administrative performance, and can be "taken off" when joylessness is called for or is necessary. Through femme performance, Heather seeks ways to create and inhabit spaces of administrative authority that do not rely on the masculine for validation.

In combining these perspectives, we posit femme as an important and complex counter-narrative to the heterocentric, cissexist, and masculinist discourses that are ubiquitous within academic administration in both historical and present-day contexts. We also posit femme as a site of resistance to feminized discourses of nurturance and of (re)productivity. Crucially, femme resists and provides recourse to historically masculine expectations of feminized labor: it offers a challenge to all gender and sexual binaries, rejecting "the myth of a stable gay/lesbian identity (and community)" and embracing "queer's radical potential" (Rallin, 2008). Specifically applied to administrative theory and practice, we offer femme as a path toward "the queer potential of the administrative position [as it] comes, then, on a daily basis and in unlikely spaces . . . appropriat[ing] the ordinary and reshap[ing] the mundane into tools of activism" (Pauliny, 2011). Femme positionalities thus enable the centralization or showcasing of multiple, intersectional, and often marginalized experiences as the disrupt/dismantle the misreadings and misguided assumptions that are imposed upon femme bodies in administrative roles.

Femme offers a framework and constellations of responses to local conditions in that it forestalls expectations of invisible labor, automatic care work, and investment in futurity, which are often expected of feminine-presenting people. These expectations elicit a kind of soothing in service of others and for the institution, no matter what the personal and professional costs for the person doing the soothing. Alexander and Rhodes (2011) write of queerness, "In our current socio-cultural and political context, queerness is the gesture of the unrepresentable, the call for a space of impossibility, the insistence that not everything be composed. . . . But for us, queerness is most attractive—theoretically, personally, and politically—in its potential illegibility, its inability to be reductively represented, its disruptive potential" (pp. 180–181).

On a macroscopic level, this essay advances queer femme(inists) as agents of disruption in an academic space. "Femme" offers a specific site of resistance to masculinist discourses and the imposition of feminized labor expectations onto feminine-presenting bodies. The term "queer" has been applied to writing program and academic administrations, particularly in Pauliny (2011) and Banks and Alexander (2009), and problematized in that context by Kopelson (2013). While we embrace the disruption that inheres in queer administrative approaches, we use femme to recognize that even as we queer our administrative practices, we still work within a gendered administrative space. Femme posits alternatives to "feminized" teaching (Holbrook, 1991; Schell, 1992) and "motheristic" administration (Crawford & Strickland, 2010), both of which are discursive constructions that pervade

discussions of WPA and composition pedagogy. Furthermore, femme disrupts gendered readings of our work by being itself unreadable in a monolithic way.

Therefore, in this article, we interrogate the ways in which administrative and service labor often falls to/gets thrust upon minoritized faculty members, as is evidenced in the autoethnographic reflections and praxes of our lived material experiences. We approach this research from our intersectional positionalities as two queer, feminist, immigrant, femme, cisgender women—one Brown, one a mother, both faculty administrators within the same department. We acknowledge the ways in which our experiences overlap and diverge in often asymmetrical ways. Our research examines the underrepresented statuses of the communities to which we belong and the labor we undertake in our administrative roles, both of which are rendered invisible because of the ways in which our intersectional identities are erased, conflated, demeaned, or hierarchically positioned. This underrepresentation prevails also in Writing Program Administration (WPA) scholarship; queer administrators and compositionists are a rare presence in the narratives that constitute this literature, let alone queer women or queer feminists.[1] We find ourselves simultaneously over-, under-, and mis-read, and assumptions made about our competence, expertise, intellect, work experience, capacity for institutional knowledge/memory, ability to make fair decisions, and interests in professional advancement can be attributed in part to our lack of representation in the literatures of our field.

Our practice of analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006), as demonstrated in the sections that follow, entails an exploration of the intersections between our multiple identities, how we are read by others, and how these readings confound or enable our administrative practice. We begin here by describing our autoethnographic methodology—what this means in the context of our work—then move into a review of the literature that explores feminist and queer approaches to writing program administration. This literature provides a backdrop for the autoethnographic narratives and the responses to these narratives that follow. We then conclude the article with a list of possible femme-inist interventions for administrators encountering the kinds of challenges to authority and autonomy that routinely plague our work, with a final reflection on the creation of the list.

Of note, the final section of this article in which we offer a list of responses to masculinist and heteropatriarchal readings of and assumptions about our administrative work, is what truly launched this project as a whole. We constructed this list as a point of entry into our collaborative writing process. It is significant that our writing started this way, for it reveals the material realities of our workplace with which we contend on a daily basis. We used these initial responses as a model and impetus for the counternarrative that this article as a whole presents.

METHODOLOGY

In this collaborative project, we study the labor involved in administering an English Department and a Writing Program at a four-year public college with approximately 8,400 students enrolled. At present, the department is comprised of twenty-three full-time and thirty-eight part-time faculty, offering 112 undergraduate course sections from the 100- to

the 400-level, and houses a Writing Program (which oversees the curriculum and instruction for eighty of these courses), an English major, and a Journalism major. The English Department Chairperson position has been held by women for the last twenty years; during 2007–2010, the Department chair was an African American woman; in all other years the role was held by White women. The position of Writing Program Director has been held by White women since it was created in 2011; Shereen is the first woman of color to hold the position and has done so since fall 2017. This demographic information alone suggests why a femme intervention is so important in the dynamics of the Writing Program Administration at our college. As our literature review below suggests is often the case, people who identify as women have occupied these positions for many years yet the structures and procedures that prevail in these two administrative entities have often conformed to the expectations of the masculinist, heteropatriarchal institutional ways of being/doing that are the default for institutions of higher education across the United States. and, indeed, the world. This is specifically observable in the service labor that is expected of minoritized faculty as a way to keep the institution humming (e.g., Hogan, 2010; Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, & Agiomavritis, 2011).

We have chosen to employ autoethnography as a tool for recording and recounting our specific administrative experiences. Stoller (2007) writes that good ethnography engages with "deep issues that connect readers to the people they encounter in ethnographic texts" (p. 180). An ethnographer is a storyteller, evoking the lives of the communities and cultures that they study. Autoethnography, then, is, accordingly ethnography:

> conducted and represented point of view of the self, whether studying one's own experiences or those of one's community. Whereas traditional positivistic research traditions perceive anything based on the self as subjective and distorting valid knowledge claims, autoethnography values the self as a rich repository of experiences and perspectives that are not easily available to traditional approaches. Furthermore, along with postmodern to inquiry, this approach acknowledges that knowledge is based on one's location and identities. It frankly engages with the situatedness of one's experiences, rather than suppressing them. (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260)

In order to construct the autoethnographic narratives below, we identified moments in our professional lives in which we chose a femme positionality to take action/respond/resist, and composed reflections in which we ventured "to describe [our]selves in ways that engage with representations that others have made of [us]" (Pratt, 1991, p. 35), a strategy that Pratt (1991) identifies as being at the heart of autoethnographic research. We seek to bring forth emotional responses from our readers, as compelled by *evocative autoethnography* (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 260, citing Ellis & Bochner, 2006), while simultaneously anchoring our narratives in theory and research, as compelled by *analytic autoethnography* (Canagarajah p. 261, citing Anderson, 2006).

Building on the methodology that Canagarajah describes, we employ vulnerability into our autoethnographic narratives, exposing our "fallibility" as we recount our administrative stories. As Inayatulla (2016) writes, "vulnerability involves exposing the body as a filter of data, our inner and sometimes unknowable cognitive processes or mechanism that take in, store, and release information. Writing vulnerably poses a strategic threat to exclusionary methodologies; to embrace and experiment with vulnerable autoethnographic reflection as a

legitimate form of research is to challenge traditionally approved modes of data collection" (p. 7). The section below details experiences of vulnerability which, in order to understand and incorporate into our own "autotheory" (Nelson, 2015) of administrative practice, we thought compelled if not necessitated a "femme" optic. We embody vulnerable autoethnographic reflection not only in our own narratives, but also in the process of sharing our narratives with each other and then offering (through a kind of dialogue) interpretations and responses. These responses are the result of multilayered revisions; they emerge from live, face-to-face discussions, sustained written correspondence, and private reflection, and in them, we grapple with what each of our narratives can reveal about femme subjectivities and administrative experiences.

A Feminist Lineage of WPA Scholarship

The theories that inform our autoethnographic narratives advocate for and assess feminist interpolations in WPA work. The feminisms driving these analyses place "women" at the center, and although useful insights have emerged from this scholarship, we wish to interrogate the limitations of "woman" as a category/subjectivity meant to *address* gender inequities in administrative practices. At this juncture, where queer, feminist theories have challenged and shaped our understandings of gender, and where elaborations of theories of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) have problematized the limitations of these understandings when they consider gender without also considering race, we wish to interrogate the limitations of the term "woman," particularly in our assessment of the structural transformations still needed in academia. As evidenced in the literature on (gendered) divisions of WPA labor, the classification "woman" or, worse, "female," works to uphold cisgender experiences as the default, reinforce unproblematized binaries/perceptions of femininity and masculinity, and mask the legacies of racial bias that exists in academic administration. We, thus, use this scholarship to identify what previous analyses of "women" in WPA roles have revealed, but also what remains to be examined.

WPA literature has already articulated many of the heteropatriarchal, corporate structures under which universities operate. With many texts focusing specifically on universities' reliance on the contingent labor of part-time faculty and graduate students to teach composition (e.g., Bousquet, Scott, & Parascondola, 2004), it has also been understood for a long time in the field's history that feminist administrative practices are necessary for establishing and/or moving toward humane working conditions for the many marginalized people who work in composition (e.g., Flynn et al., 1995; Miller, 1996; Phelps, 1995; Ratcliffe & Rickly, 2010; Schell, 1997, 1998).

However, feminist administrators and scholars writing on academic service often note the contradictions that inhere in feminism and WPA work, due to the tension between the political commitments inherent in feminism and day-to-day management practice within highly compromised institutional structures. For instance, Micciche and Strickland (2013) write that ". . . it's no surprise that feminism has never really gained momentum in WPA scholarship or practice, both of which have been largely guided by instrumentalist thinking, the sort of pragmatic, outcomes-based decision-making familiar to most WPAs" (p. 171). They then go on to describe feminism's emergence in WPA as "constipated," and its contributions, which

center on relationality and collaboration, as diluted to the point where they are almost unrecognizable (and unrecognized) as being feminist interventions in the management of our corporate institutions.

Indeed, Hogan (2010) and Snyder (2009) separately argue that feminism has been co-opted in our academic institutions to support and maintain academic-capitalist institutional structures and goals. Hogan writes, ". . . faculty members of color and female faculty feel pressed into service labor, and the service ethic that preoccupies many feminist communities and communities of color is cynically tapped and exploited" (p. 59) in order to support the research agendas of the White heterosexual men upon whose lived experience our institutional metrics of "excellence" and "success" are based (e.g., Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002; Williams, 2005). Snyder's critique of the place which feminism has come to occupy within academic institutional structures is still more pointed. She writes, "while feminist scholarship and activism have done much to advance the position of women in our field, the current situation in which feminist WPAs now manage and maintain the feminized labor of contingent composition instruction suggests a debilitating stasis in our feminist methods" (p. 29).

This observation is of particular relevance to our project, as we articulate the ways in which the advancement of some women in the field of Writing Program Administration has not, in fact, changed the landscape *for* women, or indeed, for anyone. Like Micciche and Strickland (2013) and Hogan (2010), Snyder challenges the role that feminism ultimately plays in Writing Program administration when it has been so very useful in perpetuating the inequalities upon which the corporate university is built. She argues that feminist managerial practice which entails "tend[ing] to the interpersonal relationships in the department" functions "with the gendered labour hierarchy" of higher education.

> [B]ecause [feminist WPAs] focus on improving interpersonal relations between masculinized and feminized labour, rather than moving adjuncts out of feminized labour positions, such feminist practice is not capable of truly levelling the hierarchies that inform exploitative university systems. Rather, "by aid[ing] the surface amelioration of the unacceptable," our current feminist practice seems only to "make palatable the human costs of doing more for less." (Ozga & Deem, 2000, p. 152) (p. 36)

It is for reasons such as those articulated by Snyder (2009) and Hogan (2010) that we turn to queer theory for a possible intervention in the administrative practices that feminist theory shows as being so problematic. Incorporating "queer" into considerations of WPA, however, is tricky: several authors have suggested that Composition and its programmatic administration are highly problematic objects for and of "queering." Alexander and Rhodes (2011) argue that queer is inherently in opposition to Composition as a field precisely because queer is "uncomposable." Further, Kopelson (2013) asks whether "the 'key considerations of queer theory' are a 'proper' lens or intellectual apparatus for such tasks, for thinking about 'programming,' 'policy,' and 'institutionalized systems'?" (CWPA CFP, 2013, cited in Kopelson, 2013, p. 202). However, we embrace "queer" for its disruptive potential, as explored in the context of Composition and WPA work by Alexander and Rhodes (2011) and Pauliny (2011). We suggest that the "uncomposability" of queerness, as formulated by Alexander and Rhodes, is, in fact, exactly the interruption that WPA work needs.

Furthermore, the disruption afforded by femme is urgent because it combines the focus on gender-based identities and relationality that inheres feminist theory with queer's impossibility of domestication (Rallin, 2008). Pauliny describes "the persuasive power of a queer ethos; the layering of seemingly disparate positionalities which, when combined, create a space of uncertainty or instability where expectations are shifted and responses altered" ("Reading the Gap," para. 3).

As femme administrators, we continue the feminist theoretical legacy of seeking to "shift expectations" and "alter responses" by disrupting gendered expectations of our labor, even as our colleagues inscribe these expectations onto our bodies. By embracing femme, we seek to enact Pauliny's contention, paraphrasing Honeychurch (1998):

> that bodies have the ability to queer—to challenge—heterosexist and disciplining norms and practices. Placed in an administrative context, this theorization emphasizes the sexual and sexed body as a kind of interruption of institutional discourse. When a subject's body, in addition to their politics, becomes a visible marker of deviation from that which is dominant and expected, it becomes another means by which the institution can be critiqued and potentially altered. (Pauliny 2011, "Reading the Gap," para. 5)

We find that our bodies are simultaneously over- and under-read specifically because we are both women, because Shereen is Brown, because Heather is "middle-aged" and White. Through femme performance, we seek to challenge the expectations that are imposed on us.

Femme is often associated with a joyful performance or embodiment of femininity disconnected from a masculine countervailing presence (McCann, 2017). It is a multitude of positionalities which are "released from the strictures" of "womanhood" while simultaneously claiming and performing varied femininities at their apparent core. As such, femme has the potential to disrupt the structural problematics that feminist WPA scholarship aims to address, specifically as it confounds gendered binaries. However, while in the practices and positionings that we describe in the sections below, we seek to delink "femme" from binary gender and she/her/hers pronouns, we show how, due to the realities of our positions as cisgender women, we are enrolled in cultural and administrative narratives in which we are bound by gendered and racialized expectations of our behaviors and our competences. Harris and Crocker (1997) state that "femme is about chosen rather than assigned femininity" (p. 5, cited in McCann, 2017, p. 164), which may ring true to some, less so to others. Nonetheless, the narrow envisioning and assignment of femininity in our academic workplace is something that we must constantly resist even while we affirm our own identifications with femininity itself. Therefore, through femme performance we embrace and work to enact the Alexander and Rhodes formulation of queerness as "a disruption in the service of nothing, pure in its joyful enraged body, sexed up and inappropriate" ((2011, p. 186), specifically because of its rejection of service to *something*, and particularly because of the ways in which feminized labor has been co-opted to serve the corporate university, in the ways that Snyder (2009) and Hogan (2010) identify.

The application of queer theory to performances and interrogations of femininity is, however, multivalenced. Writers including Fraiman (2003) and Malik and Whittall (2002) discuss the challenges that femme and femininity have posed for queer theory. Fraiman contends that (White) queer theory is anti-feminine and anti-feminist because of unchecked entanglements

of femininity, feminism, and female bodies (and thence reproduction). Fraiman writes, ". . . the 'queer' project, focusing on sexuality and its fluidities, is apt to pose itself against the 'feminist' one, with its attention to the structures of gender. And while the former is articulated through an emphasis on male sexualities, the burden of gender difference (here as in the dominant culture) is typically borne by women and by feminism" (Fraiman, 2003, pp. 128–129). However, it is precisely because of femme's unreadability even within queer theory that we persist: we seek, through femme, a queer theory that helps us understand and set terms for our own futurity as administrators, as well as that of our departments and programs. We claim the disruption that inheres the queerness of femme, particularly as we choose the recipients of and circumstances in which to invest our care work and emotional labor,[2] even (and perhaps especially) if we ourselves are centralized in this choice. The choice we make in this regard does not rely on unproblematized conceptions of feminized "nurturance." As we work toward creating and enacting femme counternarratives, we keep in mind Muñoz's formulation that "queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present . . . queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1).

Informed by the above analyses, we work at a juncture of queer and feminist theories, suggesting femme as a way forward, a possibility for changing the way we are seen and the spaces in which we work. As suggested in our introduction, we understand and experience femme in different ways, though we both build on the articulation of femme offered by Rose and Camilleri (2002), where they "insist on femme identity as distinct from and critical of naturalized notions of femininity" (p. 14), and also seek to "liberate femme from its binary relation with butch" (p. 13). We embrace femme as an administrative counternarrative to the corporate and heteropatriarchal institutional rhetorics we have already described. We do so precisely because of the ways in which femme reorients our administrative practice away from the domestic through simultaneous performances of exaggeration and resistance. For us, femme can hyperbolize appearances and behaviors that have consistently been associated with femininity, and it can turn away from the masculine as its other, more "acceptable" half. With our articulation and application of femme, we attempt to bridge the gap, as identified in WPA work by Reid (2010), between "accepting some responsibility for leadership—not just facilitation or spokespersonship" and the practice of "feminist or mentoring principles" (p. 137). The definitional terms above, thus, rather than offering a unified definition of femme in this section, provide some terms with which we frame the autoethnographic narratives that follow, as we explore instances of our own femme administrative practice and intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991) praxes.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC (COUNTER)NARRATIVES

Heather: Motherized Laborer

Sites and occasions where I feel I am expected to labor as many people's work-mother abound in my life as department chair and writing program administrator; my nurturance

energies are called upon daily, even as I lead our department in its routine activities. Indeed, it is in the routine work of administration that women's time is most egregiously sucked away (Massé & Hogan, 2010 and essays therein; Misra et al., 2011), and as such, it is in addressing the routine time-suckage that femme's intervention is important for me. A recent instance involves the production of the minutes from one of our department meetings. As a mother—a woman caring for children to whom I happen to have given birth, and thus who spends a great deal of her day before and after her "real job" doing domestic care work—I am particularly sensitive to direct and indirect demands to "produce" for my institution, and care for my colleagues within it, while the care work that is a direct consequence of my reproductive activities is something that our institutional and professional discourses demand that I marginalize. In other words, I chafe at situations where I am called on to do mother-work for my colleagues, especially since being my children's mother is something that I must do on my own time, as though our "ideal academic worker" models allow for such a thing to exist. And so I present a narrative of a particular instance of routine care work on the individual and departmental level, which I was called upon to undertake, just as administrators who are women, people of color, or members of other minoritized groups, are called—because our time does not in fact belong to us.[3]

Our department meets once a month. The University bylaws mandate that the Department Chairperson maintain departmental records, which include the minutes. Keeping departmental records is, in fact, listed first among the Chairperson's responsibilities. However, in the month after one particular meeting, the assigned secretary for that meeting submitted minutes that misrepresented the content of the prior meeting's discussion in several ways. The question for me, the department chair, was what to do about it. My choices were:

- Fix the minutes based on my recollection of the meeting myself, then circulate without comment.
- Point out the various inaccuracies to the secretary, asking them to fix the minutes. Wait for the secretary to make the corrections on the already late minutes, check, then circulate.
- Ask the person to fix the minutes, but not tell them how to do it.
- Leave the minutes as they were, and bring them to the department meeting and see what happened.

All of these choices created mothering/serving labor, for me and the other members of the department. My choices expressly involved the visibility of my own labor: as the keeper of department records, I interpreted that requirement in the bylaws to mean that the records that I keep should be accurate ones, and so keeping the minutes in their inaccurate state was not among the options available. So the choice was, as I saw it, whether I should do the work invisibly, in a way that was visible only for the person who caused the problem (if they cared to look) by annotating the minutes and asking for corrections, or publicly, by eliciting corrections in the forum of the department meeting itself, as is part of the process described in Robert's Rules of Order. In order not to do this do-over labor invisibly, and therefore motherize myself this situation while being motherized by this colleague, I decided to write back to the secretary to ask whether this was the final version of the minutes, because there were several errors. The secretary responded by asking whether I was referring to grammatical mistakes.

I responded that there were problems with the content, and then circulated the minutes to the department. We opened the next meeting with discussion of the minutes.

Apart from consulting with the Deputy Chair to ask their advice, nobody in my department knew about this process, and whether I had intervened at all in the production of the minutes. I realized that one consequence of my labor as Department Chair being invisible was that nobody knew what role, if any, I play in the process of presenting the minutes for review: apparently, it is conceivable in my department that the chairperson functions as a channel for the distribution of the minutes, but not a participant in the production of their content. Only one other person—Shereen—wrote to me to point out the content problems with the minutes; another pointed out the grammatical errors. At the meeting, I framed the conversation about the incorrect minutes in terms of my status as keeper of the departmental records, and took detailed notes based on my colleagues' comments. I told my department that we would not vote on the minutes. The secretary, who had come in late to the meeting and so had missed the beginning of the discussion, asked one question about the corrections, and then offered the motion to table the minutes. I went back to my office after the meetings and made the corrections. We approved the minutes at the next department meeting. The secretary thanked me in an email for fixing the minutes.

For me, the fact that I undertook work to enforce the limits of, the boundaries of nurturance, was work undertaken from a femme positionality, wherein I risked sacrificing "futurity" to my own well-being in the present. I declined to act either as an administrative mother, or as an administrative man. I felt myself, in making this series of decisions, pushing back against being "motherized" by my colleague in administrative work by their performance of helplessness and cluelessness, through which I felt challenged to choose between occupying the stance of parental disciplinarian or offering unconditional parental forgiveness and support. In both of these possibilities I felt that the secretary was betting that I would not use shame as a tool for discipline: good mothers, after all, don't shame their children. But part of my femme administrative performance is an attempt to approximate shamelessness: in a culture where women are generally forced to choose between being silent and nice and thus staying in their place, or shamed for leaving their culturally sanctioned spaces (virgin, wife, mother), when the choice fell between being ashamed of myself in my own complicity and anger at being forced to conduct invisible do-over labor, or making public the process of remediation which our department required, so risking, though not ensuring, shame for the secretary, I chose the latter. Munt (1998) describes in detail the relationship that shame has historically played in constructions of "homosexuality." She writes, "Femme shame can occur when her *femme*ininity—Clare Whatling's neologism—collapses into an abjected heterosexual femininity, as when Heather Findlay so poignantly expresses her fear that she had 'been a fucking housewife all along'" (Munt, 1998, p. 5).

SHEREEN'S RESPONSE TO HEATHER'S "MOTHLERIZED LABORER"

The "housewife" role is one that seems specifically targeted at femmes who identify or *get* identified as "women," which is an intersection that keeps coming up in our work. Although we both recognize that femme is not affixed to womanhood, there are many ways in which

our experiences bias us as femme-cis-women, spotlighting the specific privileges and messiness that come with this positionality. Moreover, in this particular situation, you were being cast in a femme-mother role, which demanded strategic navigation.

From my perspective, your response to this situation with the minutes was very effective, and at the same time, I felt enraged and indignant that the layered questions of how to react and proceed (publicly/professionally) fell entirely upon you. You were tacitly asked, if not expected, to play the role of the fixer, and my indignation was rooted in a long history, some of which I witnessed firsthand, of femmes and mothers *having* rather than choosing to play this role. The heaviness of this history is, in part, what informed the email I sent you after reading the minutes. I was frustrated, angry, exasperated partly because it meant the labor of correction was suddenly on you/us (creating yet another task to add to our already overwhelming week), but also because this kind of labor is a palimpsest, an intrusive reminder of how our time and efforts have been exploited and continue to be disregarded. And the other piece was this: The minutes presented a completely inaccurate if not distorted record of a very serious concern I had raised in the meeting. This document characterized my statements in total opposition to what I had actually said. I took this erroneous account as yet another example of how femmes of color in academic settings go unheard, get brushed off, and are egregiously misinterpreted as a matter of course *and* with impunity.

If this had been an isolated incident, I may have had a different response and you might not have included this narrative in this article. It was/is not, however, isolated or anomalous; my lived experience tells me that femme labor is de/undervalued and domesti*cized* in academia and in general. The energy—physical, emotional, psychic—we could spend attempting to be witnessed and understood in professional contexts frequently threatens to deplete us of the energy required to merely do our work. It is an extension of the "double-burden" historically placed on femmes, women, and mothers to unfalteringly take on and succeed at paid and unpaid labor.

Every time it falls upon us to repeat ourselves because we aren't being heard or taken seriously, whenever we must fix another's job done incorrectly or remind a colleague to complete a task, I question the degree to which we are performing a familiar and familial role of femme-wife, femme-mother. I find this complicated and troubling. I, for one, do not consent to the femme-wife and femme-mother positions; I am neither a wife nor mother in any part of my life and do not feel compelled to take on these characterizations in my workplace. At the same time, I bear witness to your experience as a femme, academic, administrator, wife, and mother and find it entirely appropriate that you (and you alone) get to define and compartmentalize these roles as you see fit. But perhaps this is what lies at the center of your narrative: What conditions would best enable you to make these (self) determinations (rather than having them determined or imposed upon you) and how can we demand, foster, and sustain these conditions as a matter of course so that we are not forced to set our humanity aside in the workplace?

SHEREEN: THE CORPOREAL TEXT

As a queer, Brown, femme administrative faculty member, my body is regarded as a text—one that is subject to hostility in the form of incorrect but freely expressed assumptions, uninvited

comments, and a variety of other "microaggressive" behaviors (Nadal, 2014). The biases and beliefs that drive these behaviors are anchored in suspicion, if not dismissal, of my credentials, expertise, and capability to do the work I am tasked to do. The comments I receive take aim at many aspects of my body: my perceived age, my gender performance, reproductive capabilities, the sound of my voice, my size and any changes to it, the shade of my skin and length of my hair, the clothing I wear, and this list is not exhaustive. The intersectional ways in which my body exists in academic spaces makes clear that (White) women's entry into administrative positions prior to my arrival has not significantly changed systemic forms of gender discrimination. There is a simultaneously tacit and blaring message operating in the workplace: Performing/embodying femme, which for me means a queer, self-aware, and affectionately satirized version of femininity, is grounds for dismissiveness and objectification. The preoccupying "fear of not being taken seriously" while "compounded for women of color, for plus-size women" and those who do not exist within a "cis, thin, white body ideal" (Elias, 2018), is further magnified, I would argue, for Black and Brown queer femmes.

Conjuring the energy to describe instances of these microaggressions in and of itself reflects a version of the raced and gendered labor our autoethnographic reflections aim to make visible. It is difficult to determine which narrative stands out the most in my experience. In the 2017–2018 academic year, which was also my first year in the administrative role of Writing Program Director, I was twice told I am "too young" to possess knowledge of institutional and pedagogical practices. The first remark came from a faculty member, who did not agree with a pedagogical assessment I was responsible for conducting; the second comment came from a senior-ranking administrator, who assumed I had not analyzed our institutional history in a way that would prepare me to propose a programmatic development. In both instances, it was presumed that I could not possibly have twenty years of teaching experience (which indeed I do). Both remarks were made during meetings with Heather present, and both times, the comments were made in attempt to dismiss my expertise in the subject at hand, subjects, I might add, on which my doctoral degree, published research, and decades of teaching experience are centered. In both meetings, I was frequently interrupted mid-sentence, to which I responded by talking louder or holding up my hand and saying, "I will finish my thought before you speak." During my administrative term as Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator (2015–2017), I was twice (incorrectly) assumed to be pregnant, asked about a due date (by a campus public safety officer), and touched on my abdomen (by a faculty member) without consent. Between 2011 and 2018, during which time I have held various posts within our college's Writing Program Administration, I have received countless unwarranted comments about my sartorial choices, primarily in the form of unabashed astonishment directed at my footwear (heel height), strands of visibly gray hair, and pants (which, whenever I wear them, seem to disrupt a widely held assumption that I *only* or *should only* wear dresses and skirts).

My point in listing these specific instances is neither to elicit sympathy nor purge myself of mounting rage. I aim, instead, to use the above paragraph, (over)loaded with microaggressions directed at my queer, Brown, femme body in an academic setting, as an object of analysis. And driving the analysis is this question: (How) Is my work as a Writing Program Administrator shaped, marked, valued, assessed through a lens that does not consider or account for the unequal and targeted ways in which my queer, Brown, femme body exists in

this workplace? (How) Can it be? And more to the purpose of this interventional project, how might we refocus the lens through which we examine and measure WPA work in ways that centralize Brown, queer femme identities, interrogate and twist scripted "business as usual" models in our academic spaces, and forge administrative practices that are committed to justice?

In one sense, I am tasked with the impossible: I am asked to serve as a queer, Brown, femme administrator of a Writing Program that does not operate within a paradigm that is affirmative to my identities and personhood. It is noteworthy that the remarks made about my body have come mostly from colleagues who do not identify as people of color, queer, or femme, and never from colleagues identified in all three ways. This is not to say that such remarks could be made or condoned in any other context; I am highlighting the imbalanced and unrepresentative realities of academic personnel. I am in this WPA role because of my training and expertise, yet the credentials I possess do not (as they should) frame the interactions I have described. My presence as a Brown, queer, femme in a WPA role, instead, seems to warrant dismissiveness, buoying false perceptions that I will not or cannot challenge White, heteropatriarchal methods of operation. In direct response, I posit my sharpened multiconsciousness as a way to derail operational conditions, which have enabled the microaggressions I list above to go unchecked. On a very basic level, the ability to anticipate the kinds of aggressive remarks that circulate in administrative contexts works as a kind of arsenal, but more accurately, it affords a reconceptualization of my role as playing/performing offense rather than defense. With the collaborative list of responses included below, I feel equipped to handle a variety of workplace aggressions on surface-level daily interactions. But the more impactful intervention lies in my unyielding awareness, critique, and embodiment of the struggle against insidious forms of injustice within a broader academic scope.

HEATHER'S RESPONSE TO SHEREEN'S "CORPOREAL TEXT"

Your narrative highlights for me how White women have not paved the way for anyone except themselves—and possibly not even for themselves—in academic and other workspaces. Scripts such as Sandberg's (2013) *Lean In* are problematic for femmes, in their requirement that women behave individualistically and like men in order to reap the rewards of their professional lives; the difference that emerges between my experience and yours is that while I have been admonished for not leaning in *enough*—that is, declining to behave as an administrative or academic man—it seems that it is often impossible for our colleagues and supervisors to *imagine* that you, in your Brown femme body, *could* lean in. In other words, while your institutional and professional knowledge are met with disbelief by higher-ranking administrators, I, in my White femme body, am believed to be on the same path as them, albeit at a prior position on it. A framework that helped me understand the source of this failure of imagination is offered by Carby (1992), who explains that only White women are routinely granted femininity, while Black women are denied it, and Brown women (Asian women in Carby, 1992)) are burdened with a "racist mythology of femininity" that denies Brown women agency over their own lives, "based on the assumption that they will not want to stand out or cause trouble but to tip-toe about hoping nobody will notice them" (Parmar

and Mirza, 1981, cited in Carby, 1992, p. 113). This simultaneous assignment, denial and taxonomizing of femininity, intersected with race, is insidious and destructive. For each step that I must take, as a White femme, to gain professional recognition and authority, for each coin I must pay for not being identifiably masculine, you must take more, pay more, because of the place you are assigned in this racialized, gendered hierarchy. If I am asked to leap backward over administrative couches in high heels with Fred Astaire dragging me along, our heteropatriarchal, racist institutional systems leave you out of the dance altogether: they can't imagine a Brown femme body making that backward, high-heeled leap. You have said to me that those who hired you may well be disappointed, shocked at how you "perform" your job even while you move through the institutional hierarchy apace and with success; that the "blank slate" that they employed after you completed your Ph.D. was not so blank after all. I see any failure as theirs. The scripts that they have accessed to understand the performances that Brown and Black femmes must adopt pathologically and simultaneously over- and under-read women and people of color.

You write above that "performing/embodying femme, which for me means a queer, self-aware, and affectionately satirized version of femininity, is grounds for dismissiveness and objectification." Certainly, as I see you at work, I see that your femme performance is often illegible as *femme* to non-femmes: your refusal of pliability might instead be read (because our colleagues *will* seek a definitive reading, rather than tolerating the thought that they do not understand what they are seeing) as a refusal to be helpful; your refusal to put others' demands before your own assessments of the right course of action—or inaction—in a particular situation, is read as intractability. However, as I see it, femme, and the potential for readings of intractability that I believe it entails, is the only choice under the race-gender taxonomy that Carby (1992) describes, and the heteropatriarchal systems in which we work. Femme disrupts the cycle of invisibility and over-, under- and mis-reading by rejecting recourse to masculinity as an antidote to these recurring professional micro- and macro-aggressions, and by taking up space on femme-inine terms.

Recourse and Interventions

From the intersectional subject positions presented in the narratives above, we consider the affordances and limitations of embodying/performing femme, and we conclude with a theoretic of the counternarratives made possible by fem(me)inist administrative practice, specifically as it pertains to academic program and department leadership. To be sure, we have often felt used/exploited in these administrative positions, but we reimagine our agency in terms of how we can exploit our roles to further our agendas and goals for what we want Writing Programs to be, and queer or "femmeinistify" them. Furthermore, we are committed to a paradigm of affirmation, which is intrinsically linked to revolutionary struggle, that is, leading through affirmation and operating in an affirmative (rather than a defensive or subordinated) paradigm. We use our interests and agendas to shape the work that we do, and, it is important to note that we use our tenured faculty positions (which we have worked hard to earn) to push these agendas, advancing our counternarratives to prevailing administrative narratives and conditions. Femme is in many ways an embrace of, rather than denial of or acquiescence to power, and it was from our femme positionalities that we earned tenure and

sharpened our resolve to seek recourse to intersectional, gendered injustices in our workplace.

We posit the list of responses that follows as a way to queer our administrative roles and professional spaces. These responses challenge gendered service expectations: service to the profession, university, department, programs, but also service *within* collegial relationships. We offer these lines as "stock responses" for instances where we might be caught off guard, surprised, or thrust into hostile, *microaggressive* circumstances (Nadal, 2014). This list is not intended to serve merely as a collection of comebacks; it is meant to spotlight the specific assumptions and micro/macroaggressions that prevail in administrative workspaces. We want this list to hold a mirror to the un-or under-addressed forms of racism, sexism, cissexism, and heterosexism that demand attention and action in academic settings. These responses give us language to articulate and understand the specific hostilities we face and their deeper roots; furthermore, the incentive for engaging in these ways, as we see it, is that they save our energy for the interactions that we value.

Useful phrases for fem(me)inist administrators in academia:

(Thank you.) This is not the right time for me to undertake that role. Thank you for/I have noted this nomination/ appointment/request. I am declining at this time.	These lines respond to the apparently infinite requests for service that are imposed upon femmes, women, and people of color in academic work. These responses intervene in the patterns of impolite/threatening requests, demands, and outright bullying that femmes routinely experience as we do our academic jobs. Opening with "thank you" may be viewed as a way to soften the refusal such that the speaker will be heard, rather than dismissed as "rude," an accusation commonly leveled when phrases such as these are uttered by Black women, but we include it on a case-by-case basis.
I am not available right now. Before we agree to meet, please send me/I will await a clear agenda for the meeting. Let's make an appointment for when we can address this. Please acknowledge receipt of this email, and offer a timeframe by which this task will be completed.	The items in this part of the list perform a few, connected functions: Firstly, they curtail assumptions of constant availability that are imposed on femme bodies. Secondly, most of them create paper trails so that responsibility for deficiencies can be clearly defined; they help to shift our administrative labor away from motherly nurturance by establishing nonnegotiable parameters in which engagement can take place. They also remind interlocutors about considerate professional behaviors, the bounds of which, we know, are often violated in interactions in our academic workplaces.
I am going to finish this thought. I am going to continue. I was talking. [She] was talking. Let [her] finish. I agree with what [she] said, that . . .	These responses address the many occasions on which femmes are interrupted or ignored as we speak in meetings. (The "she/her" pronouns can be replaced with whatever pronoun the individual uses.) With the first three items, we offer language whereby one can "counter-interrupt" in a way that is assertive, rather than defensive. The second triad of responses amplifies the voice and ideas of the speaker, adopting a strategy such that femmes support other femmes in their efforts to be heard, so taking up conversational space on others' behalf. These responses highlight the collaborative and communal possibilities that inhere femme identifications and performances.

My appearance is not up for commentary in the workplace.	These responses engage with and serve to shut down a variety of hostile behaviors in our workplaces. The first three remind commenters that bodies are not texts open to scrutiny within academic workplace discourses; the last two remind interlocutors that they are responsible for their own emotional labor, rather than imposing it upon femmes with whom they work. The last item carries forward the idea in the previous section of this table, in which femmes perform the important work of supporting each other as they limit motheristic and/or feminized behaviors in their academic workplaces.
My appearance/age is not under discussion.	
If you don't want to ask for consent to do X, then you should not do it.	
That is a dismissive remark; dismissing my contribution seems like a defense mechanism worth analyzing.	
If you are asking me that, then it means you are not doing your own emotional labor.	
I do not consent to doing care work and emotional labor in this space.	
You're entitled to your opinion, but it is misguided/uniformed.	This response engages with a common experience: that of a White, masculine assumption of authority on all topics, colloquially referred to as "mansplainers" (or men who feel authorized to explain something where explanation is neither invited nor necessary). The need for this response frequently emerges in situations where the offender is assigned reading or preparatory work, but completes neither the reading nor the work and expresses opinions anyway, often dismissing the concerns and ideas of the others involved in the work for which this reading or preparation was required. Typically, in these conversations, the offender assumes that their experience is central and important to all topics, and then claims the authority to dismiss what is "boring" and "unimportant" based on their own singular perspective and their assumption that it is of course representative, generalizable, and correct. The offender may also invite people to "convince" them to "change their mind." The response we contribute here short-circuits the well-established ways in which White, cisgender men's opinions are granted the most credibility in academic contexts, whether or not they are supported by research or knowledge.
Unfortunately, that's not possible.	This response is useful in contexts where a direct "no" will be met with a challenge or dismissal and, thus, elicit more labor from us. While this response obfuscates responsibility for a particular decision, it also shuts down further efforts at coercion by moving the conversation away from the realm of "not wanting" or "not being able" to do something to the depersonalized realm of fortune, possibility, and impossibility. Likewise, this response can acknowledge the ways in which we might prefer not to say no, but are held back by a plethora of institutional constraints that are displeasing if not unjust.

This list has undergone many revisions in casual collaboration with femme colleagues in our offices and at conference presentations, as they suggested refinements and additions to our formulations and analyses. When we began composing these responses, it was difficult to type as quickly as the scenarios leaped to mind. The original list felt cathartic to produce, but each time we returned to it, reread, and reflected, we made revisions to our rhetorical choices. The original list was justifiably reactionary given the countless times we have wanted (but not had) access to language that could help us address and/or redirect these scenarios. Upon reflection, however, we recognized the ways in which our language could be made more rhetorically effective in our

specific administrative contexts. Our revised responses are not necessarily restrained or devoid of emotion; in fact, we rebuke the belief that emotion is "inappropriate" or "unprofessional" and not already freely expressed, especially by individuals who hold institutional power. We are vigilant and critical of the ways in which emotion is vexed by gendered workplace dynamics and is judged using deeply sexist, cissexist, misogynist, raced, and classed metrics. Our revised responses are calculated and strategic, and we have begun to use them in our administrative lives to assert savvy influence over often predictable but sometimes disorienting situations, even as we acknowledge that these responses do not provide an automatic conclusion to the interactions that trigger the use of these responses. Indeed, they may well be, and often are, met with hostility or resistance that, in turn, must be responded to or resisted.[4]

We are aware that this list can help femme administrators manage their day-to-day interactions, but preparing such responses and even understanding why they are necessary does not address the systemic problems that the very need for these responses reveal. Identifying the ubiquity of aggressive, hostile, antifemme behaviors is important on a local/individual basis, but addressing the root of these behaviors is a necessary if not urgent action that needs to be taken. We, thus, put a call out to our allies and comrades. We encourage them to read this list as a tool to help identify systemic problems and generate tangible solutions in consensual consultation and collaboration with us.

In the meantime, we conclude with this section as an effort to establish and build community, to sustain conversations as femmes in practice. As colleagues, the two of us help each other from our femme positionalities within a paradigm of affirmation. One productive strategy, which we have explored in this article as well, is to tell and retell the same story but from our own perspectives in order to understand the metanarratives of what is taking place. This article, anchored within our varied femme experiences, is a starting point; we present a counternarrative to heteropatriarchal and masculinist administrative discourses. We invite readers to advance additional counternarratives as a strategy for revealing and contending with the problematics imbued within these discourses. These acts of sharing autoethnographic narratives is examples of "femme witnessing," a way to acknowledge that we see and affirm the struggles of other femmes whose intersectional experiences may be disparate and/or differently privileged than our own.

NOTES

1. We see these absences in first person accounts of lives lived in Rhetoric and Composition (e.g., George, 1999), of women's lives in Rhetoric and Composition (e.g., Baillif, Davis, & Mountford, 2010; Flynn & Bourelle, 2018; Goodburn, LeCourt, & Leverenz, 2013), and in discussions of the particular challenges and prejudices experienced by women of color in academia (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemanns, González, & Harris, 2012). The few accounts of queers in Composition and WPA include Alexander and Rhodes (2011), Banks and Alexander (2009), Pauliny (2011), and Rhodes (2018). And finally, Hogan (2010, 2017) incorporates queer frameworks into her readings of academic service and administration.
2. We understand that these terms have specific applications beyond the scope of what we are describing in this article, and outside the discourse of our field.
3. For further discussion of the ways in which Western society treats the time of minoritized people in general, and Black people in particular, please see Brittney Cooper's TED talk, "The Racial Politics of Time" (https://www.ted.com/talks/brittney_cooper_the_racial_politics_of_time?language=en)
4. Research on microaggressions by Nadal (2014) outlines many dangers and outcomes the microaggressed individual faces when deciding if/how to respond to the microaggressor.

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