

Twenty Years of Community Building: *Reflections on/and* Rhetorical Ecologies

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This article is an experimental collaboration that blends qualitative data, archival research, and rhetorical theory with autoethnographic writing. Utilizing Jenny Edbauer's (2005) conceptualization of rhetorical ecologies, we engage strategic contemplation and critical imagination (Royster and Kirsch 2012) to explore Reflections' past, present, and future rhetorical landscapes. We designed, distributed, coded, and analyzed a fifteen-item questionnaire to discover the journal's readership demographics, its archival contents, and its reverberating effects/affects on issues of public rhetoric, civic writing, service learning, and community literacy. We identified four themes—inclusivity, advocacy, pedagogy, and discovery—as the most salient features of Reflections' twenty-year legacy. Amplifying our participants' voices, we discuss the ways in which these four themes work to cultivate an affirming space of theoretical inquiry and ethical intervention—a networked community of mutual reciprocity that continues to transform the field of rhetorical studies today. Altogether, this article offers unique insight into Reflections' rhetorical ecology, including its professional legacy and the ways in which the journal has innovated the genre of writing scholarship.

In “Unframing Models of Public Distribution,” Jenny Edbauer (2005) brilliantly proposes an analytic shift from rhetorical situations toward “*affective ecologies* that recontextualize rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes” (9). Unlike Bitzer’s original conception of the rhetorical situation, a rhetorical ecology is not bound by the “terministic lens of conglomerated elements” (9) but instead navigates the in-between en/action of events and encounters. Since Edbauer’s article appeared on the pages of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* in 2005, our personal and professional lives have borne witness to tremendous political turbulence and collective social uprising, forever affecting the ways we locate and navigate our rhetorical environments. We no longer reduce rhetoric to its textual fragments; rather, we *encounter* rhetoric as a generative continuity, “distributed, embodied, emergent” (Syverson 1999, 23)—a transformative network of processes and products that ebb and flow as they are engaged.

Embracing Edbauer’s (2005) ecological frameworks and vocabularies is central to our article here. As *Reflections* commemorates its twentieth anniversary with this special issue, we embark on an experimental collaboration that blends qualitative survey data, archival research, and auto-ethnographic writing to explore the rhetorical ecology in which *Reflections* finds itself: the journal’s past and present contents, its sustained commitments to resisting and resolving planetary inequities, and its reverberating effects on today’s writing community. The amalgamation of these rhetorical methods represents our deliberate attempt to (more) fluidly navigate *Reflections*’ material and symbolic landscape and its interconnected community members.

We do so in the spirit of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s (2012) articulation of *strategic contemplation*—a meditative approach to rhetorical research that builds upon introspective reflection and critical imagination in a recursive practice of thinking and writing. Strategic contemplation, as Royster and Kirsch explain, involves both an outward and inward research journey that provides multidirectional texture to a rhetorical moment—in this instance, the journal’s commemorative special issue. Our outward journey invited *Reflections* readers to partake in an open-ended, fifteen-question survey on memorable theories, methodologies, and perspectives

and their impact on readers' institutional and community roles (n=63). Collecting these responses helped us to, first, contextualize *Reflections* as its own rhetorical figure and, second, map the movement of the journal's effects through its community's voices. Our inward journey—one that creatively “process[es], imagine[s], and work[s] with materials” (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 85)—is represented by this theoretically reflexive article. We use this space as an introspective blackboard to narrate the survey's responses beyond their textual codes; as equal parts analytical and visceral; as embodied perspectives that animate not just the pages of the journal but the fabric of our collective rhetorical lives.

This commitment extends beyond mere data synthesis, however. In line with Royster and Kirsch's (2012) emphasis on collaborative dialogue, this article features auto-ethnographic narratives (marked in italics) which call forth our “dialogical viewpoints and dialectical thinking as active rhetorical practices” (86). Our hope is that these moments of contemplative pause will add an additional layer of intellectual discovery and continue to legitimize the many ways in which knowledge creation is communally constructed as its own ecological mechanism. As a whole, our mixed-method approach becomes a compass not simply to locate but rather to thoughtfully navigate the *Reflections*' archives and its readers' voices. Through this process, we uncovered the critical function that rhetorical ecologies play in *Reflections*' production, circulation, and sustained value.

Thus, this essay takes a somewhat nontraditional form. In the section that follows, we outline our approach to questionnaire design and survey analysis. We then unpack the immediate question of readership—who exactly comprises the journal's audience and how long they have been part of the community. Next, we zoom into the *Reflections* archive, thematizing the content that readers found to be most memorable or meaningful throughout its twenty-year history. We discuss our participants' visions for *Reflections*' next twenty years, including editorial strategies for increased impact and recommendations for future special issues that continue to promote marginalized and minoritized topics and voices. We conclude by positioning this data (our participants' voices) in a critical dialogue with Edbauer's (2005) rhetorical ecologies. As we

discovered throughout this research journey, *Reflections* readers are multidimensional, multidirectional community members whose past and present roles as graduate students, teachers, and researchers fold organically into each other. Discovering and narrating this rhetorical network provides nuanced (and oft-overlooked) insight into our disciplinary conventions, tensions, and commitments, as well as *Reflections*' revolutionary approach to centering public rhetoric and civic writing as a deeply ethical endeavor.

DISCOVERING THE *REFLECTIONS* COMMUNITY

The unconventional origins of this project began in April when we individually responded to *Reflections*' "Anniversary Issue" call for proposals. Deborah Mutnick and Laurie Grobman, the current co-editors, replied with an idea to generate a questionnaire gauging how *Reflections*' readers engage the journal in their personal and professional lives. When we both enthusiastically voiced our interest in the project, we digitally connected, and a new research partnership was formed. Throughout each stage of the research journey, our conversations have centered wholly on the concept of community—discovering the voices of the journal's readers and integrating their perspectives in a reflexive, data-informed narrative. Thus, this project's approach to community as both *product* and *process* takes an intrinsically meta form: we designed a fifteen-item open-ended Qualtrics questionnaire to identify *Reflections*' immediate community (demographic base) in order to explore how the journal serves the secondary communities in which its readers are located (applied reach).

We recruited participants using network and snowball sampling procedures (Lindlof and Taylor 2019) and distributed our questionnaire on professional listservs and social media platforms, collecting responses from April 27 to May 11. During this time, sixty-three participants responded; however, only thirty of those completed the entire questionnaire. As such, we incorporated all sixty-three responses to analyze questions pertaining to demographics and relied upon the thirty completed responses to locate and analyze emergent themes. Our data indicates that *Reflections*' readers are centered primarily within academia, with forty-one participants (65%) on a tenured or tenure-track line (see Figure 1). Perhaps

more interestingly, the journal's readership patterns demonstrate increasing rates of traction (see Figure 2). While an impressive twelve participants have followed *Reflections* for fifteen or more years, readers who joined the journal's community in 2015 and beyond represent more than 45% of surveyed participants, signaling the vitality of the journal's contemporary *ethos* in the field.

Figure 1. Professional Demographics

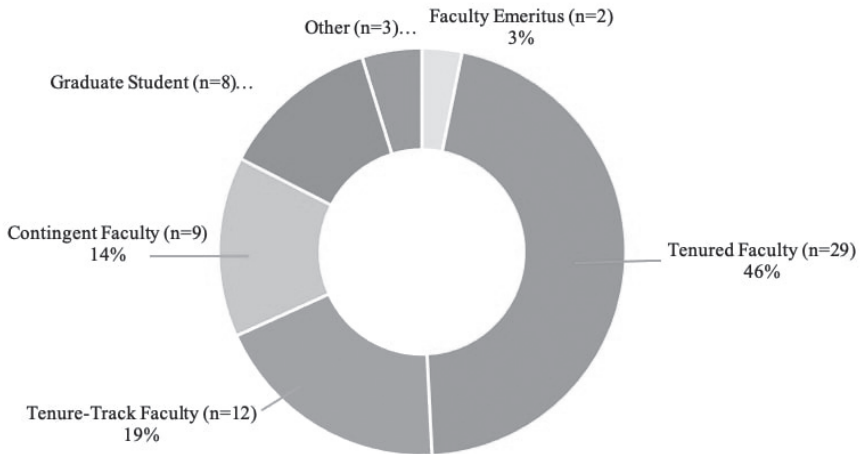
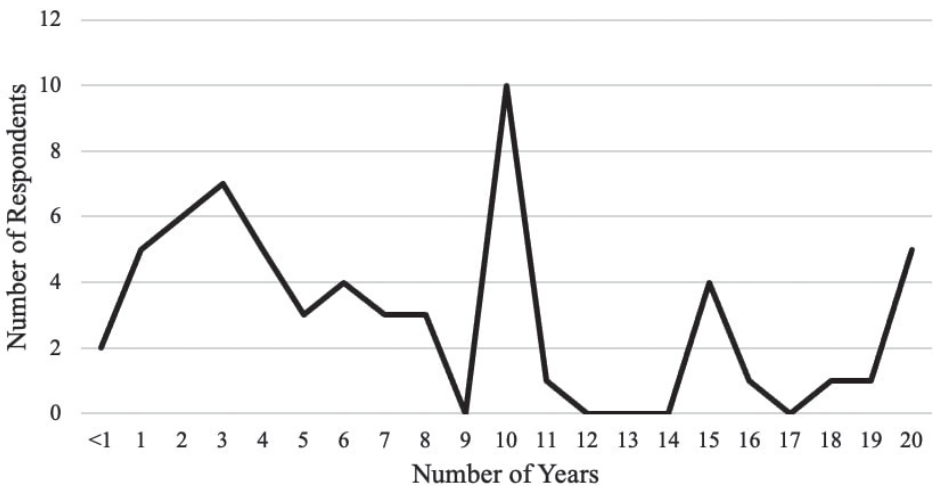


Figure 2. Years of Readership



As part of the *Reflections* community, we thought it only natural to situate ourselves amongst these datapoints by contemplating our own rhetorical positionalities and the ways in which our unique vantage points may coalesce or converge with other readers’.

Noah: When Reflections debuted in 2000, I was only a toddler, so my perspective on this journal (and the field of rhetoric and writing it calls home) is a fresh and admittedly inexperienced one. One of the graduate seminars I took this spring was about community literacy, and our final project asked us to analyze a journal in the field. I picked Reflections and began my way down the archival rabbit hole. What I learned during my deep dive was that Reflections answered a lot of the questions I had about academia—about listening to traditionally silenced people; about improving as a researcher, teacher and citizen without burning out; about writing things that matter but still have merit in a publish-or-perish world. Serendipitously, during this seminar project, I made contact with Deborah and Laurie about the anniversary edition and started working with Rachel on this article. Turns out, a lot of you had the same questions I did, and in our own time, each of us has found Reflections to be a source of answers about what it means to do community-engaged writing.

Rachel: I am an Assistant Professor of Rhetorical Theory at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, which is located on the unceded, ancestral homelands of the Wahpekute and Anishinaabe peoples. I hold a joint appointment in the Department of Writing Studies and the Department of Communication Studies, so much of my research and pedagogy is concerned with the formation and circulation of Indigenous resistance rhetorics. I am deeply committed to an intersectional ethos and the tenets of anti-racist and decolonial praxis, and many of my projects are situated at the intersection of indigeneity, space/place, and social justice, with a secondary interest in sound studies. As someone who straddles the rhetorical worlds between communication and composition, Reflections has provided me with a richly theoretical vocabulary and activist sensibilities that translate seamlessly across disciplinary enclaves—a journalistic “home” of sorts that I have enjoyed for about five years.

LOCATING *REFLECTIONS* MEANINGFUL AND MEMORABLE MOMENTS

We both found inspiration in Michele Eodice, Anne Geller, and Neal Lerner's (2016) *The Meaningful Writing Project: Learning, Teaching, and Writing in Higher Education*, which asks students to share, in their own words, encounters with meaningful writing and learning experiences. As Eodice, Geller, and Lerner explain, meaningfulness invites "an opportunity to reflect on its significance to us or to make meaning through reflection" (5). As a project of historiographic enquiry, we modeled our questionnaire in a similar vein, asking participants to recount archival content that stands out as meaningful and with memorable affective impact. In line with Royster and Kirsch's (2012) advancement of strategic contemplation-and/as-critical imagination, our process of coding and thematizing utilizes a con/textually grounded rhetorical analysis; or, one that functions "dialectically (referring to the gathering of multiple viewpoints); dialogically (referring to the commitment to balance multiple interpretations); reflectively (considering the intersections of internal and external effects); and reflexively (deliberately unsettling observations and conclusions in order to resist coming to conclusions too quickly)" (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 134).

In the thirty completed questionnaires, participants offered thoughtful input regarding which issues, articles, topics, theories, methodologies, and/or types of writings characterize *Reflections*' rhetorical persona and represent its collective commitments to public rhetoric, civic writing, service learning, and community literacy. We do not claim that thirty people—nor even sixty-three people—fully represent the kaleidoscope of views within the *Reflections* community. We do, however, strategically contemplate our participants' narratives and our own experiences to critically imagine *Reflections*' impact across circulating ecologies of rhetoric and composition. Thus, the themes narrated below holistically represent our participants' perceptions of *Reflections* as a space of theoretical and pedagogical inquiry as well as an ethical and political intervention. For additional personal and professional exploration, we also include tables that feature our participants' most-cited meaningful and memorable issues (n=5), as well as representative articles. Our hope is that these readings will continue to inspire diversified course syllabi, expansive research questions, and engaged community projects. We conclude this section

with a look toward *Reflections'* future and amplify our participants' suggestions to further advance *Reflections'* principles of inclusivity, advocacy, pedagogy, and discovery.

“UNFLINCHING, UNCONDITIONAL INCLUSIVITY”

Perhaps the most salient feature of *Reflections* is its resolute recognition of marginalized and minoritized groups; or, as one respondent noted, “inclusivity in the broadest possible sense, unflinching and unconditional.” When asked to locate specific topics, theories, and methods from the journal's archives, participants commended the range of diverse voices that were “invited” and “centered” in *Reflections'* pages. Most notably, readers recalled intersectional subjects like prison writings, Indigenous narratives, queer theories, dis/ability platforms, and raced and gendered literacies and languages (particularly from Latinx communities). Table 1 provides a robust list of our participants' recommended journal issues and articles that prioritize “a diversity of viewpoints and positions.”

Noah: The first thing I noticed about the Reflections archive was how many editions and articles centered marginalized communities as writers—not subjects to observe and essentialize, but fellow writers. My passion project is to work with American Indian first-year writing students, and when I imagine how that project will develop, I see it modeled after many of the articles I've read in the archive. It's exciting to know that when I have questions about respectful, ethical research involving marginalized writers, I can turn to Reflections for twenty years' worth of models and theoretical support. In particular, the Fall 2013 edition is one I will read over and over again.

| Table 1. “Unflinching, Unconditional Inclusivity” Readings |
|---|
| <i>Meaningful or Memorable Issues</i> |
| Latin@s in Public Rhetoric: Vol. 13, No. 1 (2013) |
| Engaging the Possibilities of Disability Studies: Vol. 14, No. 1 (2014) |
| Veterans’ Writing: Vol. 16, No. 2 (2016) |
| Prison Writing: Vol. 19, No. 1 (2019) |
| <i>Meaningful or Memorable Articles</i> |
| Tom Deans, “Review of Who Says? Working-Class Rhetoric. Class Consciousness. and Community edited by William DeGenaro,” Vol. 7, Nos. 1&2 (2008) |
| Terese Guinsatao Monberg, “Writing Home or Writing as the Community: Toward a Theory of Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service-Learning Courses,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009) |
| Ronisha Browdy, “Strong, Black, and Woman: Black Women’s Perspectives on Naming and Claiming Their Strength as Everyday Rhetorical Practices,” Special Winter Issue (2018) |

“CHALLENGING HEGEMONY AND POWER DIFFERENTIALS”

Theoretical commitments to inclusive writing naturally beckon towards actionable commitments to advocacy and activism. One participant shared that *Reflections* “provides a professionalization of advocacy and activism that I have found empowering,” while another applauded the journal’s myriad “approaches to challenging hegemony and power differentials in their design.” A number of intersecting topics, theories, and methods emerged within this theme, with respondents commenting on general areas of civic discourse, social change, and racial justice, as well as specific areas of interest, such as environmental action, digital activism, and non-violent protests. Table 2 provides generative suggestions for journal issues and articles that center this “commitment to dissent.”

Rachel: I think many rhetoricians (myself included) face an existential crisis in trying to extend our work beyond the pages of disciplinary journals and into the lives of our students and fellow community members. As I type this reflection, my city of Minneapolis is grieving the murder of George Floyd and courageously protesting for a world free from police brutality. For the past few weeks, I have joined in this resistance, returning home at night to reflect upon the (in)visible politics

of coalitional movements and the ways in which I may harness my privilege as a White accomplice to protect and support my BIPOC neighbors. I am not alone in these moments, however. I am in dialogue with other Reflections' readers who share in these intellectual and ethical commitments to liberation politics.

| Table 2. "Challenging Hegemony and Power Differentials" |
|---|
| Readings |
| <i>Meaningful or Memorable Issues</i> |
| Public Rhetoric & Activist Documentary: Vol. 12, No. 1 (2012) |
| Sustainable Communities and Environmental Communication: Vol. 16, No. 1 (2016) |
| Community Resistance, Justice, and Sustainability in the Face of Political Adversity: Special Winter Issue (2018) |
| <i>Meaningful or Memorable Articles</i> |
| Lehua Ledbetter, "Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework," Special Winter Issue (2018) |
| Octavio Pimental, "An Invitation to a Too-Long Postponed Conversation: Race and Composition," Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013) |

"RADICALLY TRANSFORMATIVE TEACHING"

As Rachel's reflection suggests, rhetorical studies often occupy a blended state of research-and/as-pedagogy in order to breathe theory into our material and embodied lives. Many of our participants commented as such. In fact, one reader praised *Reflections'* meaningful role in the classroom as having "radical transformative potential for students, instructors, and community members," while another added that the journal "has helped me rethink teaching as service and my students and community partners as co-learners." Service learning, in particular, was a common topic that participants readily identified with many celebrating the movement toward co-constructed meaning-making: being "in partnership with the community instead of doing it 'to' the community" and "exploring democratic principles together." While none of *Reflections'* past issues are designated as wholly or solely pedagogical, rhetoric is, by nature, always attuned to the argumentative capacities of our surroundings which inevitably include our classroom spaces. Table 3 thus identifies a number of

important articles that creatively tie rhetorical theories and writing strategies to a range of pedagogical sensibilities.

Rachel: Johanna Phelps-Hillen’s 2017 article, “Inception to Implementation: Feminist Community Engagement via Service-Learning” is a standout piece for me. At the time, I was a graduate student at Ohio University teaching a Group Communication course and had designed a multi-tiered final project that depended upon successfully forging a campus or community partnership. I spent three class sessions with my students working through Phelps-Hillen’s article as a prerequisite to completing their first project milestone. Instead of privileging a traditional, top-down approach to service learning that “bridges” the divide between campus and community, we interrogated what it means to speak with, not for, a group whose differences sustain its very existence. It was a particularly productive conversation that reiterated the ethical commitments of collaborative decision-making and community engagement work. Johanna—if you’re reading this—thank you.

| Table 3. “Radically Transformative Teaching” Readings |
|---|
| Meaningful or Memorable Articles |
| Thomas Deans, “Genre Analysis and the Community Writing Course,” Vol. 5, No. 1 (2005) |
| Guiseppe Getto, Kendall Leon, and Jessica Getto-Rivait, “Helping to Build Better Networks: Service-Learning Partnerships as Distributed Knowledge Work,” Vol. 13, No. 2 (2014) |
| Lehua Ledbetter, “Understanding Intersectional Resistance Practices in Online Spaces: A Pedagogical Framework,” Special Winter Issue (2018) |
| Terese Guinsatao Monberg, “Writing Home or Writing as the Community: Toward a Theory of Recursive Spatial Movement for Students of Color in Service-Learning Courses,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009) |
| Laurie A. Pinkert & Kendall Leon, “Heuristic Tracing and Habits for Learning: Developing Generative Strategies for Understanding Service Learning,” Vol. 19, No. 2 (2020) |

“NEW AND UNKNOWN TERRITORY”

The final pattern that emerged from our survey data was a distinct appreciation for *Reflections’* boundary-pushing approach to writing

and rhetoric. One participant hinted at this theme, noting that “[t]he prison literacy issue (v4) was interesting to me because it was new and unknown territory.” Multiple other participants mentioned that the journal’s inclusion of author and community-driven narratives and voices were especially meaningful and a unique deviation from other publishing outlets. Additional responses noted a conscientious attunement to societal exigencies, non-traditional methodologies, and radical possibilities for “dialogues across difference.” Table 4 provides suggested readings for those interested in rhetorical innovations and “expanding notions of legitimate knowledge outside of the university.”

Noah: As a young scholar, I am constantly navigating the elusive status of “good writing.” My methodological interests lean more toward the social science genre (I did talk Rachel into adding charts to this article, after all), so concepts like auto-ethnographic research and critical imagination were “new and unknown territory” for me. Now that I have finished my Master’s degree, I feel like I have a better understanding of the conventions and expectations of writing in composition and rhetoric, but it’s exciting that Reflections has spent twenty years pushing back on those very conventions and expectations. I hope that the journal continues to be a publication platform for writers who choose to write without boundaries.

| Table 4. “New and Unknown Territory” Readings |
|--|
| <i>Meaningful or Memorable Issues</i> |
| Writing Theories: Changing Communities: Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009) |
| Public/Sex: Connecting Sexuality and Service Learning: Vol. 9, No. 2 (2010) |
| <i>Meaningful or Memorable Articles</i> |
| Ellen Cushman and Jeffrey T. Grabill, “Writing Theories/Changing Communities: Introduction,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (2009) |
| Maria Novotny and John T. Gagnon, “Research as Care: A Shared Ownership Approach to Rhetorical Research in Trauma Communities,” by Vol. 18, No. 1 (2018) |

A LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS

Here, we harness a critical imagination to move beyond *Reflections*' past and present impact toward its future interventions within and beyond the discipline. Imagination in this sense represents a commitment to "making connections and seeing possibilities" (Royster 2000, 83), or a tool of inquiry to envision and support radical change in our research agendas, classroom pedagogies, and community organizations. In our questionnaire, we asked participants to contemplate future meaningful and memorable moments—political, ethical, and cultural values that deserve amplified attention. Many echoed the call for sustained social justice efforts, especially in the wake of an increasingly turbulent global climate and exclusionary politics across the academy. For example, readers proposed the journal continue to educate those with privilege about confronting (White) fragility and to step ever more fully into emancipating and empowering language diversity. Further, in recognizing the *kairotic* exigencies of 2020 politics, one participant astutely noted a special interest in the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, writing, "[c]learly there's a need to address the way that COVID-19 has exposed health, economic, and political inequity in the U.S." Other readers identified religious community writing to trouble our understandings of secularity; grassroots activist campaigns and the recognition of third party or alternative forms of governance; and environmental rhetorics that center the devastating impact of climate change on public policy.

Rachel and Noah: At this point, we believe it is critical to highlight the urgent call for radical anti-racist action that unapologetically confronts and dismantles the Whiteness of rhetorical studies. One participant's note to engage the work of Robin DiAngelo and to cultivate "dialogues across differences" serves as a haunting reminder that this work is quite literally a matter of life or death. When Rachel penned her response to "Challenging Hegemony and Power Differentials," George Floyd had been ruthlessly murdered just a few days prior. Now, as we type this reflection, we grieve the additional deaths of Rayshard Brooks, Dominique Fells, James Floyd, Riah Milton, Chantel Moore, Sean Monterrosa, Elijah McClain, Carlos Ingram Lopez, and countless more Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies whose names and lives are buried underneath the crippling weight of racist hatred. A look ahead to the next twenty years is one in which anti-racism is not a fleeting

lens of inquiry—a mere keyword in a special topics issue—but rather a defining ethos of the discipline. #SayTheirNames should not be an endless rollcall of state-sponsored murder. It is a deafening demand to do better.

Finally, we asked *Reflections* readers to consider the ways in which the journal, and its editorial team in particular, may carve out additional space for disciplinary growth and mentorship. Readers appreciated the sustained commitment to community-building, such as “the small events at conferences, the conversations. The new CCW is a wonderful home for scholars in our field to make connections.” Yet, a few folks also noted an opportunity for increased visibility and circulation, questioning whether the journal’s lack of indexing in common databases like JSTOR or Project Muse results in decreased readership and circulation. This latter point is particularly noteworthy, especially with regard to ongoing issues of citational politics across academia, many of which disproportionately affect scholars of color. The journal’s origins as the first publishing outlet to center community-based writing and rhetoric clearly indicates its disciplinary *ethos*, and thus raises an important conversation regarding publishing metrics, journal paywalls, and digital access.

COMPOSING *REFLECTIONS*’ RHETORICAL ECOLOGY

Thus far we have prioritized a thematic approach to *Reflections*’ historical contents and present effects, but as Edbauer (2005) notes, rhetorical ecologies encompass active and lived fluxes, or a “view towards the processes and events that extend beyond the limited boundaries of elements” (20). Rather than confining our analysis to the archive, we sought to discover how readers encountered and interpreted *Reflections* as a mutually-constituted site of flux and transformation. Our questionnaire asked participants to consider how the journal informs or influences different aspects of their lives—as students, as educators, as researchers, and as community citizens. An overwhelming number of responses beckoned toward readers’ sincere commitment to critical reflexivity and continued growth in each of these domains. Participants cited the journal as a “motivation to continue work in the discipline post-dissertation;” “a resource to inspire lessons for students;” and a venue “to keep me grounded/not be such a tight ass.” (*We couldn’t have said this better*

ourselves). Many readers found that *Reflections* offered them a safe place to critically reflect on their positionality in order to better support the communities and organizations they serve. For example, one participant admitted the journal “[h]elped me to become more conscious of my privileges and such,” while another stated that it “developed a better sense of ethics for engagement.” A third noted that the journal’s inspiring of “new and alternative perspectives . . . challenge[d] my habits of mind.”

This articulation of continued transformation across participants’ personal and professional lives beckons toward a second interrelated data discovery—that many readers do not neatly differentiate their responsibilities, but instead embrace an ecological fluidity where titles and boundaries collapse and organically fold into one another: the “blend[ing] of the personal with the academic” in a “community I could learn from and with.” In other words, research becomes inseparable from teaching, and both are consistently informed by a reader’s civic commitments. One participant explained, “*Reflections* encouraged and reinforced my desire to have my research contribute to social justice change on my campus and in the broader community. Specifically, we worked on changing attitudes about the importance of interracial dialogue, as well as building a beginning infrastructure of action against dating and partner violence.” Another echoed, “[m]ost of my research is classroom- and community-based, so I naturally applied what I learned in the journal to my own praxis.” The coherence of these roles symbolizes an intricately connected and circulating ecology—a rhetorical landscape in constant motion, informed by its members’ actions, effects, and affects.

In fact, it is this very environment—one that encourages and supports research-as-teaching-as-activism—that underscores *Reflections*’ most vital contribution to the discipline: cultivating a space of inquiry that legitimizes and validates community-based writing in a multiplicity of forms. Of the thirty open-ended responses we coded, twenty-six participants shared stories of affirmation by the journal: graduate students who felt *Reflections* “invited legitimacy into the kinds of work I want to pursue” and the “legitimacy of service learning and community-engaged scholarship;” teachers who found pedagogical validation and feelings of “legitimization in doing community

research and engaging my students in service to the community that was integrated with their learning;" and scholars who discovered new ranges of "acceptable research" that "demonstrate variety in scholarship and approaches." We found one reader's narrative to be especially powerful in this regard. They shared:

As an untenured faculty member, *Reflections* invited legitimacy into the kinds of work I wanted to pursue and provided a needed community of scholars to engage with. It provided ways to advance the argument to my chair, a very traditional literature professor. As a now full professor, it creates a place where I can send emerging scholars to find the same kinds of support.

This is a defining feature of *Reflections* and perhaps the most tremendous aspect of its twenty-year legacy. Community engagement is not merely a subject of theory and praxis confined to the pages of the archive; rather, community building is woven into the very fabric of the journal's readership.

Noah and Rachel: While writing this article, we struggled to articulate the relationships we identified in our survey data: among readers, community partners, authors, and Reflections staff; between each of these peoples' different roles and interests; and between these individuals and the archive. Using one-dimensional terms like "reader" and "participant" felt lacking. Inadequate. It simply did not/ does not do justice to the complex, multidirectional relationships woven into Reflections' rhetorical ecology—one built upon mutual validation and accountability. In the end, we settled on "rhetorical symbiosis" and "rhetorical symbionts" as terms for future theoretical exploration. Scientifically, symbiosis is a state of mutual benefit between different organisms; while not all organisms appear, function, or contribute in the same way, each one is vital to the collective ecology's wellbeing. We could not think of a better way to describe the community that Reflections has cultivated over the past two decades.

JOURNEYING THROUGH OUR RHETORICAL ECOLOGIES

In this article, we sought to navigate *Reflections'* rhetorical ecology by blurring methodological boundaries and incorporating archival,

participatory, and theoretical lenses of inquiry. We spanned these rhetorical domains in a deliberate attempt to immerse ourselves in the two-part journey of strategic contemplation: interacting dynamically with the journal and its readers and harnessing a critical imagination to expand our understanding of ecological networks. In a sense, we ventured on a nature walk to discover the landscape of the *Reflections* community—the archive’s textual remnants that circulate within and beyond disciplinary (b)orders and its effects on the personal and professional lives of the journal’s dedicated readers. Our journey throughout this project—much like the journey many of you all narrated—excited our rhetorical sensibilities. It brought to life new theoretical and pedagogical capabilities; new possibilities for community engagements committed to unwavering activism. Yet, rhetorical ecologies are not entirely mappable. While we may be able to locate points of its composition, we must also engage with its unknowable circulations. Just as *Reflections* has legitimized community-engaged writing, we hope that this article legitimizes your own rhetorical journeys into unexplored ecologies; to think multi-directionally, “from the outside in and inside out” (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 86), about networks, publics, and their unexpected pathways.

Rachel and Noah: Under the guidance of Deborah and Laurie, we found ourselves partaking in the very type of community building we attempted to narrate: two young scholars with no prior introduction who discovered a mutual interest in Indigenous politics and decolonial theory and who are already working on our next collaborative piece. Locating and partaking in this vibrant ecology—both separately and communally—we also found ways to support one another as co-authors, as teachers, as protestors, as friends. May we all continue to push forward into “new and unknown territory” together for the next twenty years.

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