

Helping Everyday Rhetors Challenge Reproductive Injustice(s) in Public

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A school security guard stops a visibly pregnant young woman leaving school grounds to ask, “Do you even know who the father is?” A fellow shopper steps in front of a young mother’s grocery cart to point out, “Well, your life is over before it has even really begun isn’t it?” An Uber driver turns around to inform his passenger, “You look too young to be having a baby! What are you going to do?” In a sociopolitical context that continues to constrain reproductive agency, many organizations, media, and people construct pregnant or parenting teenagers as “things that are other than it should be” (Bitzer 1968, 6), and many young mothers report being talked to as if they were a defect that must be addressed. People who experience dominant discourses of “teenage pregnancy prevention” are prompted to immediately respond to the rhetorical exigence of pregnant and parenting teen bodies. I call these moments when bodies are misinterpreted as urgent problems impelling

commentary, criticism, or other means of human intervention, embodied exigence. Young pregnant and parenting people experience embodied exigence as they are approached in public spaces such as sidewalks, stores, shelters, and church.

I imagine readers who are advocates of feminism are already shaking their heads at these comments, hearing in these strangers' rebukes the ongoing and everyday public scrutiny of women and trans people—of their bodies, of their sexual and reproductive decisions, and of their behaviors and demeanor while carrying a pregnancy or raising a child. I urge us to also consider this: advocates of reproductive justice argue that people should have the “(1) right *not* to have a child; (2) the right to *have* a child [in any circumstance—age and income be damned], and (3) the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments” (Ross and Solinger 2017, 9). Encounters like the ones I am describing obstruct the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments, making them moments of reproductive injustice. When a young pregnant or parenting person goes outside, they are often moving into an unpredictable and potentially hostile rhetorical arena. In this article, I encourage feminist rhetoricians to consider how we are uniquely equipped to help those who embody exigences of reproductive justice, like young parents, to invent effective ways to rhetorically respond. I hope to inspire other scholar-activists to think about how the research they are doing to interrogate and interrupt discourses that pathologize, shame, and blame those who are (already) marginalized can be shared in productive ways with communities beyond the academy.

In the field of rhetoric, we have deconstructed pregnancy and motherhood as discourses that (re)produce unjust power relations and problematic experiences for women (Adams 2017; Koerber 2006; O'Brien Hallstein 2015; Siegel 2014). We have researched how women attempt to balance higher education and mothering work (Cole and Hassel 2017; Cucciare et al. 2011; Marquez 2011). We have also explored how motherhood produces unique constraints and possibilities for women writing, speaking, or doing activist work (Buchanan 2013; Hensley Owens 2015). Yet we are late to the conversation around reproductive justice (RJ)—an intersectional, human rights-based framework created by women of color activists

in the 1990s to bring attention to the structures, social practices, and material realities obscured by the narrow focus on individual reproductive “choice.”¹ As RJ scholars teach us, discourses around choice often focus on resources needed to choose *not* to become or continue pregnancies, overlooking the longstanding battle for women in the U.S. who are poor, young, indigenous, non-English speaking, queer, migrant, institutionalized, living with a disability, single, brown, or black to have healthy and happy pregnancies and/or lives with children. In fact, mainstream public discussions of reproductive politics often presume that some people should not be pregnant or parent; if they do, they are cast as bad choice makers (Kelly 2000, 61; Solinger 2005, 248).

These “bad choice makers” experience unique and upsetting everyday rhetorical encounters that prompt consideration of what, if any, means of persuasion are available to them. What I have been exploring in my research is how the visibly young pregnant or mothering body produces unexpected and unruly rhetorical situations that many may dismiss as interpersonal moments that one really cannot do much about.² I theorize that moments of embodied exigence hold rhetorical opportunity for the one who is seen as embodying the exigence (Vinson 2018, 136). After all, people who are constructed as being urgent, objectified “needs” to deal with are often the same ones who lack a public platform for voicing their perspectives. But how could those who embody exigence speak to dominant (mis)perceptions?

Well, just as activists and rhetors have always done, they would need time and places to play and discuss, to conjure comebacks and create moves for those unpredictable rhetorical moments in which

1 A notable exception is Jessica Enoch’s “Survival Stories: Feminist Historiographic Approaches to Chicana Rhetorics of Sterilization Abuse” published in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* in 2005.

2 A note on terms: I use the phrase “young pregnant and parenting people” throughout this article to refer to those who appear “young” while they are pregnant and parenting (and, thus, may encounter the stigma of teen pregnancy and parenthood). I mean to be inclusive of all genders by doing so. However, my research for *Embodying the Problem* focused on representations of, and rhetorical strategies used by, cisgender pregnant and mothering women so I often use the phrase “young mothers” to describe those findings. Future research could explore the unique everyday rhetorical encounters experienced by trans young pregnant and parenting people.

they are addressed. Jay Dolmage (2014) writes about the importance of developing *mētis*, a “cunning and adaptive intelligence” that uses “embodied strategies” to “transform rhetorical situations” to be what the rhetor needs them to be (17). In this article, I share my reflections on a community-based workshop I designed to do just this—one I have facilitated in Boston since 2015 at an annual event called the Summit for Teen Empowerment and Parenting Success. Inspired by feminist rhetoricians’ belief in being accountable to the communities we write about/with (Royster and Kirsch 2012, 147), as well as the value of marginalized rhetors’ tactics of interruption (Licona 2012; Reynolds 1998; Ryan et al. 2016, 23), I created this workshop to respond to a community-identified need and to prepare young parents with researched information and scripted responses they can use to interrupt and transform everyday moments in public places when strangers read their bodies as problems to criticize or loudly bemoan. I will discuss how I facilitate these workshops with young parents and reflect on what I have learned from post-workshop surveys I distributed at the 2019 STEPS.

BACKGROUND ON STEPS

My research interrupts dominant narratives about teenage pregnancy and investigates counter-narratives written by young mothers seeking to challenge the idea that they are problems. When conducting focus groups for my book project, I found that young pregnant and parenting people—as well as their teachers, parents, and mentors—had no idea that the so-called facts about the consequences of “teenage pregnancy” have been consistently questioned and challenged by researchers since it was constructed as a cause for public concern in the 1970s.³ I also discovered that young pregnant and mothering women appreciated the focus group sessions because these gatherings were opportunities to exchange stories about the everyday comments most receive in public. As one young mother put it, having a support group during which they “just tell what has been

3 I review this research in my recent book (Vinson 2018, 17-20) but highly recommend the following additional recent resources on the myths and misperceptions of teenage pregnancy and parenthood: Young Women United’s research brief on “[Dismantling Teenage Pregnancy Prevention](#)” (Cadena et al. 2016), Clare Daniel’s *Mediating Morality: The Politics of Teen Pregnancy in the Post-Welfare Era* (2017), and Mary P. Erdmans and Timothy Black’s *On Becoming a Teen Mom: Life Before Pregnancy* (2015).

said to us so we can be like ‘Oh yeah? Well this happened to me’ and relate to each other” helps to build confidence (Vinson 2018, 166-7).

With this in mind, when I came across a call for empowering and educational workshops for the Summit for Teen Empowerment and Parenting Success (known as STEPS), I applied to deliver a workshop like this. STEPS is an annual, youth-led, one-day event that takes place at a college located in the city of Boston.⁴ For example, in 2015, the summit took place at Northeastern University, but in subsequent years, we gathered at Simmons College. The event is sponsored by the Center for Community Health and Health Equity at Brigham and Women’s Hospital with the goal of bringing “young families and community agencies together in one space, providing a safe and empowering forum for young parents to expand their knowledge and access resources to help them accomplish their goals” (About Us, n.d.). There are two sessions—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—with four to five workshops running concurrently. The event features a keynote speaker, often a formerly young parent and/or progressive political figure in Boston, who delivers a motivational speech during the buffet-style lunch break. Nonprofit organizations

4 When I moved to the greater Boston area in 2013, I looked for opportunities to engage with young parents in my new community as I had back home in Tucson. There, I had volunteered time and resources at a nonprofit called Teen Outreach Pregnancy Services. It has always been important to me to stay grounded in the material realities of young pregnancy and parenthood, as it was a formative experience in my own life, and I publish about the topic. When I moved Massachusetts, I was also working on my book and hopeful to add another chapter highlighting the rhetorical work young parents do to challenge dominant discourses. As with most community-based research, I began by just getting out there, beyond the university, volunteering at events that focused on the rights of, or resources for, young parents. I discovered that each year, the nonprofit MA Alliance on Teenage Pregnancy would sponsor a “Teen Parent Lobby Day” at the MA State House. This event brought young parents served by schools and nonprofits in the area together to advocate for funding and awareness of their needs, rights, and potentials. As an outsider, I contacted the MA Alliance and asked if I could help. The organizers put me on “check-in” duty in 2014 and 2015, checking in the lawmakers, press, and young parent groups that would attend. Once people were settled, I had the opportunity to hear the stories of young parents who spoke at the podium and lawmakers who spoke in support of their efforts. After the speeches, I would network with young parents and those who worked to support them. It was here I met Ariel Childs and learned about STEPS.

and educational institutions offer free goodies and information about their services throughout the day at booths in the resource fair area. The atmosphere is lively and festive with children, elders, parents, balloons, decorative centerpieces, a photo booth, interactive art stations, social media components, and a raffle. The summit is organized and facilitated by program coordinator Ariel Childs and participants of the Young Parent Ambassador Program—a “leadership development program” comprised of young parents that “focuses on public health outreach, education completion, job readiness, and parenting/life skills” (About Us, n.d.).

To participate in STEPS, potential workshop facilitators and nonprofit organizations have to complete an application. The form prompts applicants to describe the goals, content, and style of their workshops so that the young parent ambassadors can collectively decide whether or not they want that workshop to take place that year. Here is what I wrote on my application for the 2019 STEPS:

People often claim that young parenthood is a “problem” because it leads to negative outcomes like poverty and dropping out of school. But do you know that many researchers do not think this is true? Do you know that some researchers even argue that having babies at a young age actually improves the possibility for healthy outcomes for women born into poverty? Do you know that the highest rate of teen births actually happened in the 1950s when no one really talked about “teenage pregnancy” being a problem? Attend this session to learn myth-busting, empowering information about the so-called problem of teenage pregnancy. Then, participate in a critical discussion of the everyday comments young pregnant and parenting people receive from strangers in public places. Participants will brainstorm creative and effective ways to deal with confrontational strangers in their everyday lives.

The form then prompts applicants to answer the following question: “If you could summarize your message to young parents in one sentence, what would it be?” I answered this question with declarative and emphatic phrases meant to attract those who feel blamed, shamed,

and ready to do something about it: “Don’t let others blame you for societal problems! Voice your truth!”

The young parent ambassadors voted to accept my proposal for the 2015, 2016, and 2019 summits. In 2017, at the request of the program coordinator, I delivered a different version of the workshop designed for allies and other older people who attend the summit to promote local resources during the resource fair portion of the event. Specifically, the organizers sought my help to create something in response to people saying judgmental or insensitive things during the event. As a participant of my 2016 workshop wrote during her freewrite, one of the nasty comments she received was at STEPS when someone told her, “we need more events like this to prevent *that*, ya know,” and gestured to her child.

THE WORKSHOP: GUIDING EVERYDAY RHETORS

The goals of my workshop are to share myth-busting information I have learned about teenage pregnancy and parenthood, to exchange stories with each other about times strangers may have said something negative, and to brainstorm effective ways to respond during these moments while staying mindful of issues of safety and wellbeing. Over the years, varying numbers of people have attended the workshop: from seventeen attendees (plus one baby) in 2016 to six attendees (plus four babies) in 2019. Participants include young mothers, young fathers, and older allies like family members of the parents. Considering the goals and varied attendance, I design the sixty-minute workshop like this:

Workshop “Aren’t you too young to be a parent?” Dealing with confrontational strangers and the myths of teen pregnancy”	
5 minutes	Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review workshop objectives • Distribute materials (writing utensils, handout, and paper)
10 minutes	Participant Freewrite to these Prompts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you ever been confronted by a stranger who said something negative about your pregnancy or the fact that you are a young parent? 2. Where were you? What did you say? 3. Why do you think they said that? 4. Why do many people have such a negative view about “teenage pregnancy” and young parenthood?
20 minutes	Large Group Discussion of Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask “By show of hands, how many of you have been approached by someone you do not know who had something to say about the fact that you were pregnant or parenting?” • Ask volunteers to share their own experiences • Use information on handout to supplement theories
10 minutes	Large Group Brainstorming Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask “How do you usually respond in situations like this?” • Together, brainstorm the “best” responses.
5 minutes	Review possible Counter-point Comebacks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the handout to suggest other comebacks they could use.
10 minutes	Further discussion? Collaborative manifesto-writing?

The first large group discussion makes immediately visible that most of the attendees have had experiences of confrontations with

strangers, a comforting moment for those who have experienced it but an alarming moment for the attendees who are not yet (or cannot be) visibly pregnant. I share my own experiences with public confrontations and then ask volunteers to describe their experiences.

Since they have already written about their experiences, participants are often excited to share what they wrote about and the group builds a sense of community by building on each other's stories. Once everyone who wants to share has had their turn, I ask them to reflect on *why* people tend to say these things. As participants theorize possible explanations, I contribute to the discussion researched information from a handout I provide that phrases the research findings as counterpoints to commonplace comments directed at young parents. For example, one thing young parents often hear is "Children shouldn't be having children! You look too young to be a parent!" Under that statement I list several facts, phrased as quips, meant to challenge that perspective such as, "Did you know that the majority of teenage mothers are 18-19 years old? (75% according to the latest data). This means they are legally adults! Many have already finished high school," and "Many children already help to raise younger family members and friends. Young people are capable of great things." As another example, under the commonplace statement, "Your life is over now! You and your child will be poor and suffer. You are just a statistic," I list several possible responses including:

Did you know that research actually shows that the timing of a woman's first birth does not determine her outcomes in life? In the 1970s and 1980s lobbyists and politicians spread sloppy research that inaccurately presented many negative outcomes as the consequences of teen pregnancy. But people's life outcomes are mostly determined by the socioeconomic status (i.e., money and unearned privileges) they inherited when they were born.⁵

⁵ Next to each counterpoint I include an endnote that explains where I got this information from. I try to use resources the young parents and their allies could get online or check out from the local library, though I do end up citing privileged (that is, not easily accessible) scholarly sources as well since that is where the information hides. Here I directed readers to sociologist Mike Males' (2010) book *Teenage Sex and Pregnancy: Modern Myths, Unsexy Realities* (21), sociologist Kristin Luker's (1996) book *Dubious Conceptions: The Politics of Teenage Pregnancy*, Arline Geronimus' (2003) article "Damned If You Do:

As we discuss potential rationales for stranger comments, I tell them that young pregnancy does not cause poverty, educational failure, incarceration, or other poor outcomes for the parents or children. Connecting their personal experiences and reflections to broader structures and discourses, I share that early researchers did not control for important pre-pregnancy variables, that numerical calculations are subjective, that there is not money or time for the type of studies that would actually get people more valid information about young parents, and that the statistics they read are de-contextualized numbers that don't really tell us *why* these outcomes exist. I emphasize that numbers are often accepted as ultimate truths so that young people even feel compelled to "beat them."

During the portion of the workshop when we brainstorm possible responses to such comments in public, participants typically note that they usually walk away, avoid the stranger, or tell them to mind their business. I compliment these strategies and share what I have learned from other young parents: they, too, walk away, draw attention to infractions on personal privacy, lie or tease in response, or take the opportunity to share counterpoints with the stranger. I explain that

few young parents know about the information that could become counterpoints to strangers' comments, so my goal is to share what I have learned with them. We then review the handout together in further detail, as I read potential ways that they could challenge the

IMPORTANT!

Before responding to a stranger, take time to reflect on the following questions:

- Is it safe to respond? Think about where you are, what time it is, and whether the stranger seems emotionally stable.
- Do you feel emotionally and physically ready to speak back?

Remember, you do not *have* to say anything at all.

Culture, Identity, Privilege, and Teenage Childbearing in the United States" and nursing researcher Lee SmithBattle's (2007) "Legacies of Advantage and Disadvantage: The Case of Teen Mothers." I do provide my email on the handout and encourage them to reach out to me if they want me to send them any of the resources.

strangers' assumptions—usually garnering laughter and smiles as I use dramatic voices and play scenarios out.

Once I review the possible responses, I gesture to a large stop-sign warning I put on the first page of the handout to emphasize the importance of reading the situation before responding; they don't have to respond, and they should trust their intuition. Acutely aware of where the workshop takes place (a busy city) and who the participants are (primarily younger women, many of whom are people of color), I encourage participants to think about the culture of street harassment and white supremacy before engaging the situation at all. Typically, participants nod along with this advice, and, in the past, several female attendees have shared their experiences with harassment in Boston. I say, in chorus with the activists I have interviewed over the years, "There is no wrong way to respond. Do what feels right in the moment. If you still have that adrenaline-pumping 'I wish I would have said' energy, then write! Write to an authority of the space in which you were confronted. Write an article for a supportive blog. Write an op-editorial for the local newspaper. Call a friend and vent."

The ending of the workshop varies depending on the vibe or need. In 2016's workshop, we ended up collaboratively authoring an open letter to the "The Busybody on the Bus Who has Something Mean to Say." We published this on the STEPS blog. In 2019, I did not have time for a group writing activity because I wanted to distribute a survey to formally evaluate what participants get from a workshop like this. Are they leaving with the confidence and comebacks they need for their next encounter? Are they learning things about "teenage pregnancy and parenthood" that they didn't know before and that affirms their right to have a child now and/or whenever they feel ready to?

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS: WHAT DO YOUNG PARENTS GET FROM THIS?

In the survey, I prompted participants to reflect on the main things they took away from the workshop, what they learned from the handout, and how often they received comments about their pregnant

or parenting status (see Appendix). Here is what I learned: All six participants who filled out the survey that summer “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they **would recommend the workshop** to friends, that this workshop provided them with **new information**, and that this workshop helped them **feel more prepared** to deal with hostile strangers and negative comments. Four out of five of the young parents who attended the workshop in 2019 said they experience these encounters “sometimes”—highlighting the unpredictability of these encounters—noting that these moments of confrontation often take place when they go into stores, when they use public transportation, or while they are walking on the street. Thus, I count the workshop as a success in that they report feeling better prepared for such sporadic situations.

While I design the workshop with this major goal in mind, the experience of the workshops and the participants’ responses to my question about the major takeaway of the experience suggest that my rhetorical objectives are not necessarily what matters. In other words, although I titled this article “Helping Everyday Rhetors Challenge Reproductive Injustice(s) in Public,” I am not so sure that is what I am helping them to do. Here are the comments respondents wrote in response to the survey question asking what they got from the workshop:

- People will talk, just let them. Just don’t let it bother you.
- Getting to talk about similar experiences with other young moms.
- Support/knowing I’m not the only one experiencing this (heart symbol).
- Connecting with others who had the same experience.
- I could relate to what my group was talking about.
- I have heard a lot of experience from other young parents.

This, in comparison with the response to the handout I provide—a kind of DIY of rhetorical responses to stigmatizing commonplaces—demonstrates that, while I may set up the session to be a training in how to respond to everyday rhetorical situations, what matters most is setting up a moment to share and relate to one another’s experiences with reproductive injustice. In fact, when I asked how the

participants might use the handout I provided, many were not sure: one respondent said “I don’t know,” another left that question blank, another (a mother of a participant) said she might use it to remind her daughter of important information, and another said it would help her to remain calm during these moments with the knowledge that these comments are just opinions. Only one reported, “Now I know how to deal with negative comments that strangers would say. Like if they say something negative, just ignored them or play it off.”

I think the major takeaways, the diverse responses to the handout, and the way the workshops tend to go demonstrate that something else happens here. These workshops are always unpredictable in that they are participant-centered and involve multiple players: dads, moms, moms-of-moms, babies who cry and eat. Storytelling, or consciousness-raising, is the primary part of it; participants write about and then share the things people have said to them, building a greater understanding that their personal experience is actually shared experience that is politically structured (hooks 2014, 7). But, more often than not, it is not the random stranger they want to talk about but those they *do* know and those in the medical/social institutions that they have to navigate: the social worker, the nurse, the doctor, the judgmental family member.

This was readily apparent during the workshop I ran in the summer of 2019 when the initial discussion about strangers’ comments primarily focused on nurses and doctors at a local hospital who did not listen to what the young mothers wanted or needed because, the participants maintained, the medical staff thought they were young and stupid. Participants told stories of nurses and doctors ignoring or rejecting what the young mothers said about their allergies to medicines, desires to breastfeed, aversions to painkillers, or plans to take the baby home. The group discussed a different hospital in the area that may be a better place to give birth (because one young mother had a positive experience there) and shared knowledge about how to remain firm in requesting the medical procedures they wanted, such as asking for a supervisor if a staff member refuses to do what the young parent wants. During this urgent exchange I remained in the background, bouncing a child of a participant in my arms and jumping into the conversation only to reflect back how

a participant's way of handling the medical staff might be applied by others in the room. I also made a point of praising rhetorical tactics as I heard them. The participants were guiding each other in how to respond to instances of reproductive injustice, after all, as these medical staff were compromising their rights to have access to adequate and respectful care during childbirth and, in the case of the young mother wanting to take her infant home after giving birth, their right to parent the children they give birth to.⁶

I now understand that the handout I have created, including a series of varied and evidence-based comebacks to commonplaces, functions only as a workshop talking point to supplement what the participants already know: these encounters are wrong. But they often do not know that these situations are also wrong because the “facts” about young pregnancy and parenthood are wrong. It is not only that judgmental and nose-y people are “not minding their business,” as participants often theorize, but also that official and powerful people continue to spread misinformation. The handout emphasizes this. There is not enough time during these sixty-minute sessions to review the counterpoints in great detail, so I always feel good about leaving participants with something to read later or to share with a family member. Part of what makes me, as a rhetorician, feel good about this is that I leave a thing—a tangible item—with participants. As Jeff Grabill (2010) reminds us, “rhetoric is always material, and it is most powerful when it makes things that enable others to perform persuasively” (201). While I do not have concrete evidence that this handout or workshop experience enables participants “to perform persuasively” in the everyday rhetorical situations they will have to navigate, my findings and observations demonstrate that they do create a framework for a communal performance of sorts—sharing stories, listening to varied experiences, providing new ideas for how to deal/respond, and laughing together at the possibilities of shooting down pathologizing rhetoric(s).

6 The mistreatment of young pregnant and parenting people by medical professionals is a continuing problem to address (see Breheny and Stephens 2007). In fact, in 2018, the Center for Community Health and Health Equity at Brigham and Women's Hospital asked me to give a professional development seminar for medical personnel focused on how to improve the care they give to young families. This was not the hospital that participants were discussing in the 2019 workshop.

I do not prompt “role-playing” due to time constraints, but people who see the handout typically think that is what it is designed for, and I do wonder if that would be effective. As I wrote in the introduction, I am inspired by Dolmage’s (2014) emphasis on the classical rhetorical concept of *mētis*, that honed ability to “transform rhetorical situations” in the moment (17). I imagine that we could practice these scenarios in a longer workshop or a series of workshops, using the counterpoints as means of transforming the situation with a stranger who reads the young pregnant or parenting body as a problem to prevent—deploying language and information to shift the tone of the encounter, to shift the one-who-embodies-exigence into the one-who-educates-the-misinformed or, perhaps, the one-who-shuts-sexist/ageist/racist/elitist-shit-down. Yet, even Dolmage (2014) acknowledges that *mētis* is not something a teacher necessarily trains a student to “master” but, instead, an openness and “sensitivity” to possible encounters (162).

And role-playing scenarios with strangers is not where the energy needs to be. I feel it every summer when the workshop begins. It needs to be in the venting, in the connecting, in the cackling at the absurdity of people’s comments. That is what people value in the workshop. That is what I feel really gets “done.” Youth participatory action researchers Londie T. Martin and Adela C. Licona (2018) find something similar when reflecting on a summer workshop they helped to facilitate to confront limited and limiting sex education mandates in Arizona. They write participant-led, playful moments of creation are opportunities for relationship building via “a responsive reciprocity of engagement that calls for us to be both recognized and recognizing, loved and loving” (Licona and Martin 2018, 126). The young parents in the STEPS workshop report feeling recognized and appreciative of a moment to recognize the experiences of other young parents—even as those experiences vary from their own.

Finally, I think my role as someone who has researched this, and as someone who knows that the public does not have access to correct information about “consequences” and “teenage pregnancy,” is to provide that information—to circulate it in a world that does not want to.

CONCLUSIONS

While the social, political, and legal changes reproductive justice demands require largescale collective action, I agree with Ellen Cushman's (1996) assertion that social change also includes "the ways in which people use language and literacy to challenge and alter the circumstances of daily life" (12). Social change, she writes, takes "place in daily interactions when the regular flow of events is objectified, reflected upon, and altered" (Cushman 1996, 12). Workshop participants are altering an otherwise regular flow of events when they critically reflect on moments with strangers (as well as family and medical personnel), objectify these events as unnatural or problematic, and strategize new ways to respond. My role as a rhetorician in this workshop is to facilitate discussion, prompt writing, and offer language drawn from my privileged access to researched information (Cushman 1996, 14).

I do these workshops because I agree with those interested in public rhetoric, community literacy, and feminist rhetorics that we are in a field that has prepared us to facilitate discussion on matters of civic importance. I wrote a book about discourses about "these women," which scored me points for tenure and promotion and gains me an audience in my field, but I wrote that book to make a difference in the rhetoric and material realities entwined in it, all the while knowing that this is not how information spreads. Thus, I do the workshop to feed that innermost desire, to open myself to the ones experiencing this now, to be accountable to them, to spread information and help in a small way. I have done it for five years and will continue to do so because these situations are everyday rhetorical encounters, likely shared by others who embody exigence. I do feel that feminist rhetoricians are uniquely equipped to help those who embody rhetorical exigences to invent effective ways to rhetorically respond.

Why feminist rhetoricians? Feminist rhetoricians are scholars who research and write about meaning-making symbols that support and/or resist what bell hooks (2014) calls the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As people who participate in feminist movement(s), we see our scholarship as an opportunity to make visible otherwise insidious means of sexist oppression—often diving into the "damage centered" research that pathologizes precarious communities (Tuck

2009). Critically aware that, as scholars, we most often speak and work with those who are privileged by the current order, we strive to be accountable and responsible to those we write with and about. Moreover, as rhetoricians, we understand that our theories, practices, and concepts stem from civic and everyday uses of language. In other words, the field exists only as it was and is useful to those who must use meaning-making symbols to function—to claim rights, to determine courses of action, to access resources, to heal, to survive.

If this is our origin story and these are our agendas, then I maintain that we are uniquely impelled and equipped to work with everyday people experiencing reproductive injustice, using language and sharing the research that we have privileged access to, in an accessible way and in response to community-identified needs, to ensure that we are marching toward a more just and joyful future. In her book, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics* (2017), historian Laura Briggs makes clear that our current neoliberal political and economic context makes the reproductive labor necessary to continuing human life nearly impossible. She writes that those of us charged with reproductive labor experience “impossible stress storms because only a very few of us any longer have the time or resources to do reproductive labor while also earning the wages it takes to keep us all alive, never mind thriving” (Briggs 2017, 10). In this article, I described my attempt to engage a particular community in a problem-solving and meaning-making discussion of everyday encounters they have with strangers. When considering that the lives of reproductive laborers—particularly those who are young, low-income, people of color—are riddled with impossible stress storms (along with sparkling moments of happiness, for sure) these workshops seem all the more important. Together we may learn how to weather one element of this storm.

APPENDIX: WORKSHOP EVALUATION

The following questions ask you about the workshop you just attended, facilitated by Jenna Vinson, called “Aren’t You Too Young to Be a Parent?’ Dealing with Hostile Strangers and the Myths about Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood”

What was the main thing you got from the experience of this workshop session? Please explain.

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How do you think you might use the information on the “Dealing with Confrontational Strangers: Counter-Points about Young Parents” handout? For example, you could share the information on it with friends or you could use the counter-points to speak back to people who say mean things to you.

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Before today, had you ever been approached by someone you did not know who made negative comments about your pregnancy or parenting status in a public space?

Yes	No
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How frequently do you receive such comments? (Circle One)

A lot	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
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Where do people tend to make these comments? (Check all that apply)

Stores	Buses/Subways	Work
Sidewalks/Streets	Taxis/Ubers	Other
School	Parking lots	

Before this workshop, were you familiar with the research/information provided on the handout (titled “Dealing with Confrontational Strangers: Counter-Points about Young Parents”)?

No	Yes	Some of it
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If you checked “yes” or “some of it,” where had you learned this information?

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 (Place an X in the box)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I would recommend this workshop to others					
This workshop provided me with new information					
This workshop helped me feel more prepared to deal with hostile strangers and negative comments					

The following questions are OPTIONAL but helpful to know:

How would you describe yourself? *Check all that apply.*

Pregnant
A Parent
A Young Parent
An Older Parent
An Ally or Aspiring Ally to young parents
A friend to a particular young parent
A Parent or Guardian of a young pregnant or parenting person

How old are you today?

What is your gender identity?

What is your ethnicity/race?

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