

Bringing a Non-binary Nuance to the Personal & the Academic: A Review of Charlotte Hogg's *White Sororities and The Cultural Work of Belonging*

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In *White Sororities and the Cultural Work of Belonging* (2023), Charlotte Hogg investigates the rhetorical work of belonging as a key motivation for “what drives so much of what humans do” (p. 2) by interrogating Greek Letter Organizations (GLO) utilizing ethnographic methods. Hogg writes from the perspective of a rhetorical scholar who belongs to a GLO, Alpha Delta Pi, sharing personal experience of rituals and traditions during her time at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (p. 15). She writes against the “monolithically” depicted culture of GLOs, yet maintains a level of academic nuance that seeks to move beyond the celebratory and damning binaries her academic and sorority audiences potentially expected (p. 15). Hogg’s (2015) article, “Including Conservative Women’s Rhetoric in an Ethics of Hope and Care,” explored moving past binaries. Similarly, this text asks readers to interrogate the cultural work of belonging among sororities with the openness that she approaches, through Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s (2012) “ethics of hope and care,” recognizing that we must pay attention to women whose values differ from ours. This book is timely for feminist rhetoricians seeking to do feminist work during politically contentious times, as Hogg calls for both accountability and forgiveness among communities working within different institutional systems to create more just spaces for everybody.

In Chapter 2, Hogg illustrates the way the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) has continued to perpetuate “dominant norms of gendered and raced behaviors by invoking sorority founders and histories” to educate the future generation of members (p. 20). In this chapter, Hogg expounds on her use of epideictic rhetoric and why it is so necessary for rhetorical scholars to study: “Epideictic is everywhere...[and] contains features that can work in straightforward or subtle ways, strategically drawing upon the past to shape the present” (p. 32). Hogg shows how NPC sorority belonging happens throughout three key moments of sorority membership—as potential new members [PNMs], as collegians undergoing new member education, and as alumni through commemorative events and celebrations. Hogg utilizes her own lived experience with Alpha Delta Pi and leans into institutional critique by analyzing the sorority’s websites, new members’ education, and the way they create and facilitate events with alumni. Through these methods, Hogg demonstrates the way sororities like Alpha Delta Pi perpetuate gendered and raced norms by constantly referencing heritage and tradition.



Chapter 3 defines and illustrates the way epideictic rhetoric is deployed through embodied performance as well as space and objects (like sorority badges), which work to create homogenized members, as well as who does and does not get to belong (p. 57). Hogg sees the objects and embodiments as being coupled with efforts by women to perpetuate values of propriety and standards (p. 57). These standards and propriety develop a kind of everyday rhetorical performance that reinscribes membership. Hogg draws on her own experience as Rush Chair but also interviews several other members who both followed and broke from membership. In this chapter, Hogg's personal narrative is particularly compelling, as she uses her story to show the power of embodied epideictic, a term she expands on from Risa Appelgarth, which combines the traditional understanding of epideictic with "a feminist focus on embodied performances" (p. 57).

Chapters 4 and 5 map up to the larger NPC at the national level and the way sorority messaging simultaneously attempts to cultivate belonging for members while not appearing to be too exclusive. Through this mapping, Hogg argues that sororities and NPC are mimicking behavior women are all too accustomed to: for example, pleasing all audiences, including those in and outside of sororities (p. 20). Chapter 4 specifically addresses anti-fraternity sentiment in the 1990s and the way NPC publications, like their national magazine, rhetorically address tradition and belonging while trying to appear positive (p. 89). This kind of navigation requires members to maintain a kind of "noblesse oblige," which puts the responsibility of membership portrayal on the members instead of being addressed by the larger system (p. 90). Chapter 5 moves towards a focus on feminism and the way that members of the fraternity evoke certain elements of feminism for "individual gain" as well as empowerment that assuages the collective and maintains "white privilege" (p. 117).

The powerful concluding Chapter 6 addresses how GLOs, as well as the institutions that house them, respond to racist incidents, analyzing the "Samford Shirt Incident," where the Kappa Chapter of ADPI went viral on social media for ordering a shirt with a Vintage Alabama Map containing a racist image of a Black man eating a watermelon (p. 140). Hogg uses epideictic rhetoric to analyze how the NPC is just now attempting to "carefully" reveal their sordid histories and traditions in national magazines and publications in an effort to boost diversity and inclusion efforts (p. 144). Specifically, epideictic rhetoric is useful because it allows her the possibility to "create a new awareness that transcends an immediate knowledge" regarding the tackling efforts of belonging and helps to rethink and revise the lineage, instead of whitewashing or cloaking them (p. 144).

Jo's response:

As a writing studies PhD student, Hogg's use of the personal and her methodological approach of institutional critique were extremely valuable to me in 1) affirming that personal experiences can be valuable as a lens and invaluable as an example of embodied theoretical knowledge for scholarship and 2) illustrating non-binary, nuanced ways of critiquing the institutions we find ourselves in. First, as a nonbinary PhD student in writing studies about to enter dissertation work and taking first steps to enter a field that has traditionally been hostile to queer and trans voices, Hogg's book is imperative in helping me see the value in my own personal experience and the way it can provide an embodied kind of knowledge, which if handled carefully, can offer invaluable knowledge to the field of writing studies as a whole. Additionally, leading with the

personal allows Hogg to address several audiences at once and to make her language accessible to all. Lastly, Hogg strives, in several parts of the piece, to push for a non-binary and more nuanced look at institutions like sororities, which have historically been problematic in many ways. However, Hogg's nuanced perspective is imperative, as her work demonstrates a love ethic that seeks to critique an institution she belonged to—and valued—in an effort to not dismiss it outright, but to make it better, which is what all good scholarship should aim to do.

Anna's response

As a scholar invested in feminist rhetorical practices and research, and an assistant professor who is keenly aware of the institutional systems she works in, Hogg's use of epideictic rhetoric, specifically embodied epideictic rhetoric, is extremely useful to explore and study how people perpetuate dominant norms, such as patriarchal practices, through everyday routines and procedures. Hogg's focus on the epideictic of the everyday—rhetorical identification repeated in private and public rituals and habits (p. 32)—to explore a rhetorical sense of belonging is particularly important for those of us interested in transforming the institutional spaces we work in, as it asks scholars to slow down and examine the practices and performances we all participate in daily, that do not receive the attention they need. Hogg's work specifically on sororities, a community that does not receive scholarly attention due to often conflicting values of academic scholars (especially feminist scholars) and/or being deemed as “trivial,” is of deep interest to me, particularly as I am interested in the ways women, both “regular” and public figures, navigate matrixes of domination and systems of exclusion throughout their everyday embodied experiences.

While we both have our own responses to *White Sororities and the Cultural Work of Belonging*, we believe this text is valuable to multiple audiences: any scholar and/or academic interested and invested in feminist rhetorical practices and research, as well as those wanting to better understand how to cultivate belonging and what it means, to those wanting to approach discourse communities that often go under-looked and not taken seriously, to those looking to examine spaces that continue to privilege white practices and norms. This book can and should be assigned in any rhetorical theory course, as well as any class looking at research methodologies in writing studies. Further, this book is also a compelling text for a more advanced undergraduate to study, especially if they are familiar with the sorority systems. In short, Hogg's seamless blend of qualitative research and narrative inquiry, along with her sophisticated grasp of rhetorical theory, makes this an accessible yet rich read for a wide audience.

Biographies

Jo Christian is a PhD student in writing studies and the assistant director of the writing center at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Jo is also a nonbinary, southern writer, with an MFA in poetry, who has published two poetry chapbooks: *Unerased: Trans Lives in Southern Illinois* (Alien Buddha Press, 2025), which was the winner of the Emma Smith Hughes Library Research Scholarship as well as *Post-eclipse: A queer home* (Bottlecap Press, 2023). Their poetry and nonfiction has also appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Vita Poetica*, *Transom*, and other literary magazines.

Anna Sicari is an Assistant Professor in Writing Studies at Southern Illinois University. She has edited two collections/volumes, *Out in the Center: Private Struggles and Public Controversies* (2019) and *Our Body of Work: Embodied Writing Program Administration* (2022), both with Utah State University. *Out in the Center* won the IWCA Best Book Award and *Our Body of Work* was runner-up for the CWPA Best Book Award. Her work has been published in *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, *Peitho*, *Composition Forum*, *JAEPL*, *Praxis: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship*, *The Writing Center Journal*, *Composition Studies*, as well as several edited collections.

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