



Strategic Interventions in Mental Health Rhetoric

Lisa Melonçon and Cathryn Molloy, editors. Routledge, 2022. 248 pages.
\$39.16 paperback

Drew Holladay

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BOOK REVIEWS

Lisa Melonçon and Cathryn Molloy, editors. *Strategic Interventions in Mental Health Rhetoric*. Routledge, 2022. 248 pages. \$39.16 paperback.

Developing ways for scholar–activists to apply their work more deliberately inside and outside the academy is an enduring concern common to research in rhetoric, composition, and communication. The collection *Strategic Interventions in Mental Health Rhetoric*, edited by Lisa Melonçon and Cathryn Molloy, aims to offer scholars working in the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM), health communication, and related fields a set of frameworks that enable them to step “into the messy assemblages that constitute day-to-day life with and in mental health concerns by offering concrete ... interventions” (2). As our society continues to expand and transform the meanings and values tied to mental health, the innovative chapters in *Strategic Interventions* present footholds for researchers to design dynamic approaches to studying mental health discourse.

As current (Molloy) and former (Melonçon) co-editors of the journal *Rhetoric of Health and Medicine*, Molloy and Melonçon bring to this project years of critical engagement with RHM’s many disciplinary and methodological facets in addition to their labor connecting and mentoring scholars in the field. *Strategic Interventions* collects scholarship from the recently articulated area of mental health rhetoric research (MHRR), a branch of RHM research and the subject of a 2018 *Rhetoric of Health and Medicine* special issue. Of the collection’s theme, Melonçon and Molloy write that “focusing on intervention ... is a deliberate move to work through the question: How can MHRR understand its role within rhetoric, rhetoric of health and medicine, and other related fields and disciplines?” (4). The editors acknowledge the current strengths of MHRR scholarship—“presenting critical accounts” and “sharing admirable rhetorical moves”—but push the reader to consider “what rhetorical inquiries into mental health might *specifically do* ... out there in the world” (4). The collection is divided into three parts: “Methodological Interventions”; “Legal, Cultural, and Institutional Interventions”; and “Pedagogical and Co-Curricular Interventions.” While these titles mark the dominant theme of each set, a variety of critiques and arguments resonate across the chapters as the authors work to articulate concrete ways to “catalyze *real and specific change*” and “*break down disciplinary silos in the process*” (3).

The first part of the collection focuses on methodological interventions. Lisa Melonçon and Lora Arduser draw from affect theory to formulate the concept of “collective intimacy”: a “theory and methodology” that emerges in “distributed, relational, and affective” interactions (22, 27). They argue that collective intimacy enables MHRR scholars to describe “how online places can enable intimacy, particularly around issues that carry a sense of stigma” (22). In the following chapter, Sean Kamperman argues that by documenting their “*inclusive research tactics*,” MHR researchers can foster more inclusive understandings of rhetorical phenomena and forge more productive relationships with stakeholders” (34). At the end of the chapter, Kamperman models reflective self-assessment by analyzing the consequences of his own methodological choices for study participants in a research project. Next, Lisa DeTora and Tomeka Robinson apply intersectional theory to understand rhetorical forms in discourse around domestic violence, a topic, they argue, that has not yet been fully addressed in scholarship (52). DeTora and Robinson remark that in studying the ways “culture, structure, and agency ... interact with each other,” researchers can support “spaces where those who are in marginalized positions can co-create their theoretical frameworks and develop solutions” (54).

In the second part, authors address a broad array of topics related to mental health in society and the roles rhetoricians might play in institutional or community settings. Nora Augustine's chapter draws from her personal experience as a facilitator to describe the "range of rhetorical strategies" facilitators use to "identify themselves as both givers and, more importantly, receivers of genuine kindness" (82). Such practices are "grounded in serious mutual concern about trauma, mental health, and healing" (82). She asserts that support groups and similar research settings "present an unexpected opportunity for MHRR scholar-citizens to partner with social services organizations" (73). Next, Lori J. Joseph and Stephanie Kelley-Romano analyze stories authored by women included in the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) central text, "The Big Book," to understand "how women in AA sought/seek to conform themselves to the politics of grace and dignity" (95). The stories' authors claim that alcohol causes "argumentative, selfish, or unproductive" behaviors that do not fit the feminine ideal of "dignity and grace" and stem from their inability to "navigate their responsibilities as wives and mothers" (99–100). In the next chapter, Hua Wang details an "embodied identification practice" in which "depressed Chinese new mom Mao Wan used the craft of crocheting to identify with other depressed moms on social media" and build community "by sharing embodied experiences of postpartum depression" (106). Mao Wan's community enabled its members to "rhetorically respond to the dominant narratives of postpartum depression" and the pressure to deny or hide it from others (113). Mark A. Hannah and Susie Salmon imagine a way for rhetoricians to cultivate "an intermediary role with legal stakeholders ... in the mental health support network" by "disrupt[ing] the stigmatization process as it appears in legal contexts" (118). The authors describe a multidimensional process designed to leverage "rhetorical expertise" in strategic litigation by "developing a concerted and coordinated effort with the litigation team" (128).

The last two chapters in the second part of the collection both take up autoethnography to illustrate the limitations of current scholarship in MHRR. Tianna Cobb observes that "people of color, and more specifically the Black community" do not find people like themselves in mental health research, and thus she "aim[s] to defy expectations and push back on hegemonic systems" by sharing her personal experiences (134–135). Cobb argues that MHRR should include more cultural perspectives to "dismantle systems of oppression" and rebuild "more equitable programs" (144). Cynthia Ryan asserts that MHRR must begin to account for "the lived experience of mental illness from the perspective of cosurvivors" whose lives are "imbricated in the rhetorical constructions and material ramifications of another's illness" (163). Using her own traumatic experiences as evidence, Ryan urges MHRR scholars to "[push] out the boundary around what is usually discussed" and account for "cases of severe [mental] illness and attendant serious violence and destruction" (153).

In the final section, "Pedagogical and Co-Curricular Interventions," each chapter takes up a topic embedded in higher education practices. Lynn Reid describes a design for faculty development programs that "foster compassion and empathy for all students," including those with mental health conditions who struggle to meet normative expectations, and thus "shift the paradigm of discussion from accountability to access" (181). Reid identifies some of the central barriers to faculty's understanding of student experience and introduces concepts like "crip time" (drawn from disability studies) to challenge "ableist assumptions that students can all perform equally well if they simply choose to" (171).

Leslie R. Anglesey and Adam Hubrig also apply a disability studies framework to study how university websites describe student mental health, finding that "institutions frequently framed themselves as benevolent arbiters of 'mental health' while distancing themselves from being [recognized as] sites of trauma" (186). Recognizing that "mental health resources are not exceptions to the pervasive ableism of higher education," Anglesey and Hubrig

highlight the need to “articulate mental health needs differently, radically refigured through a disability justice orientation” (196–97). Detailing one university’s mental health tools, Barbara George and Rachael Blasiman argue that “narrative framing and specific definitions of mental health are crucial parts of access and design” (208). Drawing from their interviews with faculty, students, and counseling staff, the authors offer concrete recommendations, such as frequently advertising mental health resources, introducing those resources through instructors and counselors, and including “relatable” mental health narratives rather than personal statements from well-known public figures (224).

Taken together, these two final chapters represent the collection’s productive juxtaposition of research approaches that both address cultural analysis and offer schematics for deliberate action. With essays that concretely identify the affordances and constraints of action-oriented scholarship, *Strategic Interventions in Mental Health Rhetoric* provides a deep well of concepts and strategies for new and veteran scholars to apply in their work for social change.

Drew Holladay
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

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Catalina M. de Onís. ***Energy Islands: Metaphors of Power, Extractivism, and Justice in Puerto Rico***. University of California Press, 2021. 300 pages. \$29.95 paperback.

In *Energy Islands: Metaphors of Power, Extractivism, and Justice in Puerto Rico*, Catalina M. de Onís investigates the rhetorical role of metaphors used in discourses of both energy colonialism and energy justice in Puerto Rico. Conceptualizing the project as an energy ethnography, de Onís utilizes years of fieldwork conducted on the island to examine various historical and contemporary “power” struggles. In doing so, she offers a uniquely rigorous and vulnerable study of energy controversies that scrutinizes the idea of “energy” in both the scientific sense (as kinetic, thermal, chemical, and other forces that provide energy technologies) as well as the human sense (by considering who has physical, mental, and material capacities to organize for/against forces of energy colonialism). Ultimately, de Onís not only reveals how energy discourses have unfolded on the island, but also takes the crucial step of offering theoretical contributions for ongoing mobilizations toward decolonial, just, and equitable transformations of power in Puerto Rico.

Rather than simply studying the metaphors that energize discourses, de Onís organizes the book itself around energy metaphors. After setting the tone for *Energy Islands* with an introduction based on “amplification”—where de Onís calls on readers to “listen to and raise the volume of Puerto Rican voices that resist ... extractivism and expendability”—she begins part one of the book (“Forming Energies”) by detailing the history of energy colonialism that continues to haunt Puerto Rico (5). In chapter one, de Onís turns to the organizing metaphor of “dis/empowerment” to describe how metaphors of containment have been used