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Complaint as ‘Sticky Data’ for the Woman WPA: The Intellectual Work of a WPA’s Emotional and Embodied Labor

Anna Sicari

Abstract: *There is rich scholarship on emotions in writing program administration, and the labor this work requires from WPAs (Holt; Micciche; McKinney et. al; Ratcliffe and Rickley; Vidali) and on the feminized nature of writing programs and the way gender informs this type of emotional work (Enos; Flynn; Miller; Schell). Many WPA scholars advocate that our administrative work is intellectual work, yet little attention has been given to the emotional and embodied labor of WPA work as intellectual and as defining components of WPA work. Drawing from Sara Ahmed’s recent work on complaint and data I collected from thirty interviews with women WPAs in a two-year IRB approved qualitative study, I bring attention to the emotional and embodied knowledge of WPAs and the need to take more seriously this issue of complaint as a scholarly topic and source of knowledge. Through insight from this archive of complaint stemming from the institutional stories told by the participants, I will explore how critical attention to the embodied experiences of the people doing the work (WPAs) is necessary scholarly work, particularly for feminist scholars and activists who wish to work toward institutional change.*

Introduction

A body of rich scholarship exists on emotions in writing program administration, the labor this work requires from WPAs (Holt; Micciche; McKinney, Caswell, and Jackson; Ratcliffe and Rickley; Vidali), and on the feminized nature of writing programs and the way gender informs this type of emotional work (Enos; Flynn; Miller; Schell). In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed writes, “Thought and reason are identified with the masculine and the Western subject, emotions and bodies are associated with femininity and racial others” (141). She goes on to argue that this type of projection works to “conceal the emotional and embodied aspects of thought and reason.” Knowledge cannot be separated from our bodily and emotional experiences, and in fact, these bodily and emotional experiences make up our knowledge in ways that have not yet been properly documented in the field of writing studies. Many WPA scholars advocate that our administrative work is intellectual work (“Evaluating the Intellectual Work of Writing Program Administration”), yet little attention has been given to this intellectual work as emotional and embodied labor that defines components of WPA work.

One reason for this failure to acknowledge that embodied and emotional knowledge is intellectual labor is that this type of knowledge stems from the personal; and discussing the personal experiences of working within the institution often reads as “whiny” or, rather, as “complaint.” Marginalized identities, including and perhaps specifically

women, often hear that they are “making it personal” when discussing issues of sexism, racism, ableism (as well as other isms). Drawing from Sara Ahmed’s recent work on complaint and data I collected from thirty interviews with women WPAs in a two-year IRB approved qualitative study, I bring attention to the emotional and embodied knowledge of WPAs and the need to take more seriously this issue of complaint as a scholarly topic in which knowledge and reason can be generated. I argue that if we are to not acknowledge complaint as a scholarly endeavor, and the emotions and bodies that draw from this work, we will fail at making any type of institutional change, as emotional and embodied work is exhausting and can be all-consuming (and I will discuss exhaustion as a certain type of emotion that is used to curtail any activist work in academia). Because embodied and emotional knowledge stems from lived experience, and complaint allows us to understand power dynamics, this type of knowledge is especially important for feminist scholars and researchers. Through insight generated from the archive of complaint I created from the data, I will explore how critical attention to the embodied experiences of the people doing the work (WPAs) is necessary scholarly work, particularly for feminist scholars and activists who wish to work toward institutional change.

Emotional and Embodied WPA Work

In *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, and Teaching*, Laura Micciche explores embodied emotion and advocates that emotion is a skill to be taught in the writing classroom. Micciche writes, “To understand emotion as embodied is to know that it is not static or fixed or predictably available for analysis...Making explicit that emotion and bodies merge enables students to work with ‘the appeal to pathos’ differently” (57). Micciche argues that embodied emotional work can serve as a basis for critical thought, that our strong feelings (often stemming from bodily reactions and understandings) on topics can serve as a resource for analysis—and that writing instructors can and should teach embodied emotions in our writing classrooms to create better writers and rhetors. While Micciche argues for teaching emotional literacy, many feminist scholars and pedagogues argue that good teachers themselves are affective, and that the identity and performance of the instructor must be embodied and emotional. bell hooks writes, “Teaching is a performative act...To embrace the performative aspect of teaching we are compelled to engage ‘audiences,’ to consider issues of reciprocity” (11). This type of performance requires an awareness and acknowledgement of the body, of both the instructor’s body and the students’ bodies, in order to fully engage and produce emotions and feelings, to create the type of engaged pedagogy that critical pedagogues such as bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Ira Shor advocate. Other scholars such as Beverly Moss, Eileen Schell, and Andrea Lunsford have discussed their own emotional experiences of the shame they experienced in graduate school and as educators in academia, and how their intersectional identities stemming from gender, race and class informed those experiences and the ways in which emotion both worked with and for them as they navigated the institution. These embodied experiences, and the emotions that generate both from the experiences and the physical emotions connected to such experiences, inform how the WPA and writing instructor operate and perform—and how they are responded to. In *Living A Feminist Life*, Sara Ahmed writes, “Think with bodies. Bodies think” (48). WPA bodies think,

and we must learn to recognize and learn from this embodied thinking for the field to be sustainable; I argue that to learn from the bodies of WPAs, we must be attuned to complaint and the emotional knowledge it brings.

Emotional and embodied labor is difficult to teach and prepare graduate students for, which is a topic that has been explored in WPA scholarship. In their book, *The Working Lives of New Writing Center Directors*, Jackie Grutsch McKinney, Nikki Caswell, and Rebecca Jackson reveal that emotional labor was not only a significant component of a writing center director's job but was also the aspect of the job for which these directors were least prepared. In "Writing Center Administration and/as Emotional Labor," these same authors discuss how surprisingly little has been written on emotional and affective labor in writing center scholarship; in their empirical study, in which they followed nine writing center directors, these authors found that it is important for directors to be "prepared to expect it [emotional labor] and negotiate it." They state towards the end of this brief essay, "We pay attention to how the emotional labor of each of the nine directors intersects with their everyday and disciplinary labor.... [L]ong days of putting on a friendly face, mentoring, and negotiating leave little time and energy for our participants to do disciplinary labor." As they address, writing center work is driven by the relational, and the one-to-one context of teaching is centered on establishing connections with the writers we meet through the use of embodied emotions. Micciche's foundational chapter on emotions and WPA work, "Disappointment and WPA Work," also suggests that we are not teaching or training graduate students and junior faculty for the emotional component of WPA work and of academia more broadly. The central emotion she focuses on is disappointment: "To deny the negative emotional realities of the academy does a disservice to faculty and graduate students we train, for it leaves all of us unprepared to navigate our way through the material, including the affective realities of academic life" (85).

The emotional and relational aspect of writing program work is perhaps, as I suggest, the most important aspect of WPA work, and as I argue, this type of emotional and embodied work is intellectual work: analyzing how WPAs situate themselves, learning to read and understand multiple audiences, recognizing the importance of purpose and context in different situations as you work with and for people in all aspects of the job. Amy Vidali writes of the importance of incorporating emotional labor into job descriptions, promotion and tenure files, and any documentation in which WPAs describe, and perhaps justify, the work that they do. In "Disabling Writing Program Administration," Vidali discusses the extensive literature on mental illness, anxiety, and depression in WPA narratives, specifically as effects of the job itself, and as obstacles to overcome, and how this excludes WPAs with disabilities, as many of the narratives suggest a WPA needs to be of heroic strength (both physically and mentally). She writes, "If disability is only ever something bad that happens to WPAs...there is scarce space for the disabled WPA to articulate her value...but more than this, there is no space to articulate an interdependent model of WPA work where we care for ourselves, and each other, in the ways disability studies teaches" (40-41). Vidali is specifically bridging embodied and emotional work and the ways in which WPA models continue to exclude through a patriarchal lens of ability and strength. Vidali explores the way her disability shaped her as a scholar, thinker, teacher, and administrator. Although not enjoyable, the experience

was fruitful and productive for her scholarship and the writing program. My work here extends Vidali's argument that embodied and emotional labor is intellectual, and that specifically complaint, while unpleasant and often a catalyst for eye rolls and audible sighs from others, is a generative site for WPAs.

The Importance of Complaint in WPA and Feminist Work

Complaint is gendered, and this is an important topic that Ahmed is currently researching as she explores how complaint is feminist work. Complaint, according to Ahmed, is necessary in revealing power dynamics embedded in our institutional positions and policies, particularly for marginalized bodies. In many ways, complaint is gendered because it is women who are put into positions that require complaint; or, when women are pointing out issues with problems and policies that other people do not want to address, their concerns are easily dismissed as "complaint." In a recent blog post, "Why Complain?" Ahmed writes, "Discrediting is often performed by giving the complainer motives.... She is assumed to complain because she has a will to power or because she wishes to deprive others of a power they enjoy." This essay examines the embedded power dynamics grounded in complaint and the bodies of those who complain, and ways in which complaint is both easily dismissed and yet has the potential to be subversive precisely because of the emotions connected to this type of work.

In our analysis of WPA work as emotional and embodied labor, it is necessary to think about gender and the gendered history of the field, and the bodies of those who primarily do the work. WPA work and the teaching of writing is gendered, as advanced by scholars such as Susan Miller, Sue Ellen Holbrook, Therese Enos, Eileen Schell, and Deidre McMahon and Ann Green, and these women have connected the feminized aspect of the profession (i.e., heavily female dominated) to the feminized construction of the work that we do, often utilizing Donna Haraway's concept of feminization. As Haraway writes in her foundational text "A Cyborg Manifesto," to be feminized is to "be made extremely vulnerable...leading an existence that always borders on being obscene, out of place, and reducible to sex" (449). This feminization is often linked to the contingent issues the field faces and the labor issues that come with contingent and administrative positions. In "Gender, Contingent Labor, and Writing Studies," McMahon and Green write, "If we seek more equitable and thus sustainable solutions to academic supply and demand, we must recognize that gender and labor concerns are one and the same" (19). Many WPAs, particularly those who identify as rhetorical feminists (Glenn; Micchiche; Ratcliffe and Rickley) and those who see writing programs as activist sites (Adler-Kassner; Charlton, Charlton, Graban, Ryan, and Ferdinandt; Müller and Ruiz), believe that the field can and should respond to systemic issues of contingent labor, racism and academic exclusion, and the growing corporatization of higher education, in order to foster democratic education and accessibility for all writers.

Very often, however, feminist and activist principles seem to be in direct contradiction to successful administrative work, as explored by WPA scholars such as Jeanne Gunner, Hildy Miller, and Krista Ratcliffe and Rebecca Rickly, particularly with regard to large writing programs that include required first-year writing. Because of this mandatory component, the very creation of writing programs is built on the corporatized

principles such programs try to address in their curriculum. Ahmed (*Living*) speaks similarly of her work in building women's studies programs: "The point of women's studies is to transform the very ground on which women's studies is built. We have to shake the foundations. But when we shake the foundations, it is harder to stay up.... If we cannot sustain the labor required for some things to be, they cannot be" (112-113). In many ways, Ahmed's analysis and exploration of women's studies programs applies to FY and other writing programs and the issues that WPAs, particularly feminist WPAs, face. How do WPAs transform the ground on which they were built? And how can we sustain the labor in ways that do not compromise the ethos many of us wish to create in our programs, when we know the multiple and serious issues those doing the work face? A more in-depth exploration of complaint, as a scholarly endeavor, and an interrogation of the emotional and embodied work of those complaining, is necessary for us to understand and learn from in order to seriously think about institutional change.

Institutional Ethnography: A Methodology for Complaint

"A complaint is sticky data," Ahmed writes ("Warnings").

To conduct my research into complaint, I utilized institutional ethnography as my methodology to organize and analyze data I collected from thirty interviews with women¹ WPAs. Institutional ethnography is a methodology developed by Dorothy Smith in 1987 which started as a "sociology for women" in the workplace, although this methodology has a much wider application. As Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy write of institutional ethnographers, "the aim is to explore particular corners or strands within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action" (17) and to explore the everyday activities of people. "The researcher's purpose in an IE investigation is not to generalize about the group of people interviewed, but to find and describe social processes that have generalizing effects" (193). Institutional ethnography takes the standpoint of those who are being ruled, and as Michelle LaFrance and Melissa Nicolas discuss in "Institutional Ethnography as Materialist Framework for Writing Program Administration," IE explores "how our institutional locations situate, compel, and organize our bodies" (131). Nicolas and LaFrance advocate for the field of writing studies to utilize institutional ethnography as a research methodology "because it takes into account situated variability of experience within institutions, casting individuals as active and interested, mindfully negotiating the competing priorities and material conditions of their work day" (133). Along with these authors, I argue that the field of writing studies is often concerned with issues of institutional politics and the role of the everyday in the workplace, and therefore IE is a good research methodology for those invested in understanding the dynamics by which such programs constitute themselves. Institutional ethnography asks researchers

1. I must acknowledge that I use the categories woman or women in this article; however, I am mindful of the way these categories fail to acknowledge the broad spectrum of gender identity and expression. The women I interviewed all identified as cis-gender women, as do I, and I believe more work is needed to be done to explore the complexities of gender expression and WPA work.

to identify an experience, identify some of the processes and practices that shape that experience, and investigate those processes to describe analytically how they operate. As this work starts with individuals and what they are doing in and with their actual bodily being, this methodology is particularly useful for researchers invested in studying embodied experiences and the emotional labor of institutional work. Smith writes, “People are the expert practitioners of their own lives, and the ethnographer’s work is to learn from them, to assemble what is learned from different perspectives, and to investigate how their activities are coordinated” (41). In this article, I use IE as the methodology to look to the discourse of complaint made by women WPAs in order to analyze and theorize the institutional politics that inform such complaint and theorize the knowledge to be gained from such relations.

By analyzing the “sticky data” collected in a two-year qualitative study, I highlight the importance of learning from the embodied and emotional work of complaint. Institutional ethnography is very much an embodied methodology, particularly in the way this methodology asks researchers to approach and analyze interviews. IE asks us to consider the embodied actuality of the research question, as we are always in our bodies. People’s descriptions of their work activities and lived experiences are often produced “gesturally as well as verbally” (Devault and McCoy 24). Our understanding of that work and their expertise arises for us, in part, through our bodily responses to their gestures. In this way, the bodies of the research participants are part of the actual data, as the data takes into account both their experiences as bodies, as well as their bodies in the actual conversations (Devault and McCoy 24-25). I argue that this is especially important in thinking about complaint—the ways our bodies respond when complaining, the physical gestures we make and the responses we have when we are complaining, the emotional responses that come with it (anger, sadness, laughter, embarrassment). It’s not just the words but how the words live in an embodied experience. The participants in this project, a group of thirty women WPAs ranging widely in their institutional rank from senior to junior WPA and the type of institutions they came from (R-1s, SLACs, public regionals, HBCUs, and community colleges), all experienced this type of embodied and emotional response when discussing their positions and the ways in which gender informs the everyday work that they do, in particular, how their leadership is institutionally recognized (or not). Institutional ethnography in these cases helps make visible the social relations in institutions and brings to the forefront the actions and emotional responses of those working within professional standards.

The interviews lasted forty-five minutes to an hour and were conducted either in person or through Skype and the phone. Data was collected over a duration of two years. The women interviewed were also in charge of different writing units: many were WPAs and at some point WC Directors, some were WAC directors, and some were the only “writing expert” on campus. Utilizing the standpoint of woman WPAs, I sorted through and coded the data to identify repeated experiences of complaint, repeated institutional processes that are shaping those experiences of complaint, and investigated those processes in order to describe analytically how they operate as the grounds of experience. Through these embodied and emotional responses on complaint, I argue that these experiences speak to the gendered responses these women receive on a regular basis at work as WPAs and that when voicing these experiences, they are often met with gen-

dered responses, such as, "Well, you are just complaining," or small head nods, or justifications as to why they were treated the way that they were. Not only does this speak to the way women are continually treated by the institution (and we can argue other marginalized bodies although my data cannot verify that) but also to the way the field is viewed, as these women are in leadership positions; the data shows how complaint about real issues, such as contingent labor being a problematic practice, can get tossed aside as mere venting, as a woman who is upset, as trivial and non-important.

The data that I will highlight in the next section will be a data of complaint, more specifically, of women complaining, and is therefore highlighting the emotional, relational, and embodied work of a WPA. I will then analyze, through IE, the institutional politics that shape these complaints, and how these institutional politics operate in order to control, and further exhaust, these bodies, as a way to maintain practices and policies that keep bodies in check. However, I will show how complaint, when viewed in light of exposing a problem, or posing a problem, can be generative when we do not view complaint itself as a problem but rather as experiences pointing to a generalized issue to be explored. As I coded the data, in the aim of proposing a theory grounded in people's experiences, three different and equally important themes of complaint arose: women WPA's expertise dismissed as complaint, colleagues' responses to complaint, and what I am defining as affective complaint, complaint that stems from bodily experiences in the academy. In this particular article, I will argue that through the complaint gathered, a case can be made that better and stronger support and mentorship for junior faculty is needed, particularly junior faculty who are otherwise marginalized in the academy through race, class, or gender. This complaint archive speaks to the need for a greater network of leadership in WPA work and supports an argument that the most effective leadership stems from emotional and embodied knowledge of experience. I argue that we need to think about who is in leadership and that marginalized bodies need to be in leadership positions, not merely because we need greater representation but because the lived experiences of these bodies offer unique perspectives on the issues at the root of complaint; these embodied experiences can help in stopping cycles of harassment and abuse, so long as those in leadership recognize these are experiences to stop and not merely to suffer through.

Many of the women that I interviewed discussed their concerns about how they sounded throughout the interview. One woman, following the interview, said, "I feel like all I did was complain." Another woman was concerned that she got too emotional at a certain point when she was discussing harassment she experienced from colleagues, and yet another said that the interview was a good venting session to get her anger out. Many women discussed with me that this interview was cathartic, a chance to discuss these experiences and possibly theorize them, and yet at work they subscribe to a more professional approach to these experiences. This is not surprising, nor can I say that I am any different, for as Jane Detweiler, Margaret Laware, and Patti Wojahn argue in "Academic Leadership and Advocacy: On Not Leaning In," the current leadership models we operate under are Western, male, and individualized (463). However, I do believe there is power in complaint: complaint directly speaks into power, the way complaint is handled addresses power, and the potential of what complaint—collective complaint—can do is particularly powerful, which may be one reason why complaint often becomes

individualized and invisible and difficult to capture. This essay suggests that a complaint archive made by and for women can have significant impact for institutional change, as “complaint can point to those who come after, who can receive something from you because of what you tried to do, even though all you seemed to have done was scratch the surface” (Ahmed, “Why Complain”). This complaint archive, and the power of collective complaint, requires a new rhetorical advocacy that WPAs, particularly marginalized ones, must take up: an advocacy grounded in the personal, in authentic dialogue, and deep listening as we learn from the emotional, and intellectual, insight gained from complaint.

The Complexities with Complaint and the Daily Lives of a Woman WPA

Expertise Dismissed as Complaint

Many women discussed the issues of complaint and how voicing their opinions based on their writing expertise was often viewed by others as “complaining.” One woman, both the WC and WAC director at a SLAC, had just come back from a rather frustrating meeting when I interviewed her. This meeting was a discussion of the need for writing intensive courses at the college level, and she went in thinking she would be the point person in this conversation. However, it soon became clear to her that she was merely supposed to be present and that her input was not welcome. She explains, “*It is so frustrating—I am the writing expert, they know nothing about writing, and yet every suggestion I made was shot down—I got shot down three times in that one meeting, ‘Yeah, well, we don’t have the funding to do this.’*” When we discussed her responses and reactions to being shot down, she told me she remained silent throughout the rest of the meeting. “*It feels like a losing battle. Why should I speak up? Oh, [participant name withheld], she always complains.*” Many women in this study complained about this very issue: that their expertise and opinions were not valued but rather, as this participant succinctly puts it, seen as complaint. These experiences, and this particular individualized experience, says quite a lot about the discourses that shape our field: how expertise gets viewed as complaint. It is important to note how much gender influences views of expertise and how women attempting to take leadership positions, or voice their expertise, get easily dismissed in meetings. The women often felt their gender to be a factor in the reception of their opinions and that their requests for additional funding and labor to create sustainable programs with long-term success were relegated to mere complaint. “Shooting down” ideas at a meeting is one way to ensure that an opinion is seen as complaint, not to be taken seriously by others, and it is a way to ensure that the woman “complaining” is silenced. As this participant went on to say, after being shot down by the upper administrators in the room, she remained silent—and this was not a new experience for her, nor was she an outlier in the data set. She herself recognized that her expertise was being interpreted and read as complaint and no longer saw the importance in voicing her opinions, as people just see her as a “whiny woman” (this in quotations as I am borrowing language from another participant speaking on this topic). In this way, she is silenced and so is the complaint silenced. Ahmed writes, “When a complaint has been made,

silence can sometimes be achieved by *silencing*, you have to silence someone because they are talking, or because they are talking in the wrong way, perhaps in a way that has too many implications for the organization" ("Damage Limitation"). Complaint often addresses very real issues and inequities, or in this case, issues involving the lack of writing instruction across the disciplines and lack of support for helping those teach writing.

However, because complaint often challenges the status quo of academic institutions, it is often deemed trivial, whiny, and emotional—and therefore unprofessional and out of place in academic settings that value *logic* and *reasoning*. This distinction and divide is particularly important when we analyze *who* is doing the complaining and the type of work that is being valued (or not valued). Another interview participant told me, "I remember saying things at [English] departmental meetings and having that outer body experience where nobody listens, or they think you're just whining or complaining, and you know, a man says the same thing—then everybody listens. It really was happening to me." I find it important to highlight here how this one participant described this experience as an "outer body" one, and how this one woman remembers these experiences through the body, even if she was explicitly describing them as disassociated from her body. From this transcript, we see how a woman experiences the invalidation of her opinion as a gendered experience, in which masculine voices are invested with more authority than her own. This participant however is now an upper administrator at an R-1 institution, as well as directing a large academic success and writing center, and has, in her own admission, "a considerable amount of power." Throughout the interview, however, it was clear this woman consistently reflected on complaint: complaints made by her or complaints made about her, and recognized the embedded institutional politics within complaint and gender. This particular participant felt that she was not valued in her English department, where she was housed as an assistant professor in Rhetoric, while directing a writing program, and felt she was deemed as a "complainer." Instead of becoming isolated, or feeling devalued, she made it a priority to utilize complaint in order to break from the English department; after tenure, this participant worked with her now supervisor, an associate provost at the institution, to create a proposal for the writing program to be separate from the English department. Much of the proposal was based on the years of ideas she had from her experience and expertise, which were ignored or deemed as "complaint" when she brought them up at the faculty meetings she earlier discussed. Ahmed writes, "A complaint is a way of not being crushed. Complaints...can lead you to form new partnerships" ("Why Complain"). This woman's own experience with complaint ultimately led her to a position of institutional authority, as she engaged in the emotional labor of processing complaint.

Responses to Complaint

What I found surprising, and disappointing, in the data was the way that other colleagues, specifically other women, responded to the complaints shared by the women in this study. As mentioned earlier, many of the participants were quick to make visible their complaints, in the form of pushing back at faculty members or more formal complaints of going to HR. Many women expressed to me their disappointment with the HR process, and while a thorough treatment of this important topic lies outside the

scope of my current project, I wish to note briefly that many of the HR responses to the women's concerns were similar to the dismissals enacted by their colleagues. In this section I will be focusing on the responses of female colleagues. The reactions from these women were, in effect, non-responses, or responses that merely shrugged the complaints off, justified the behavior of the person being complained about, or expressed that they experienced similar issues when they first entered the institution and the woman WPA needs to "learn how to deal with it." One woman complained to me about another male colleague in her department:

There is an older male faculty member in my department who literally asks me to make photocopies for him. Sometimes I think he doesn't know who I am, and he confuses me for an administrative assistant, I think because I appear young and am a woman. What is more troubling is the way my colleagues, particularly the female colleagues in my department, respond when I tell them about this, "Oh that is just Jim". 'Oh he's just like that. The women covered his ass!

Again, we know that "social relations don't just happen" (Nicolas and LaFrance 138). They are constructed and shaped and informed by historical discourses; we can certainly view the reactions and responses from the female colleagues in this situation as responses grounded in second-wave feminism about how to deal with emotions and complaints in the workplace, that is to conform to the "norm" of sexist workplace behavior and to focus on how the individual responds to the behavior, as opposed to creating a collective that pushes for institutional change (hooks). In this sense, we see the women justifying the bad behavior of Jim, and placating the complainer with an understanding that the women working with Jim need to adjust their expectations based on how he operates. In many ways, we see these women referring back to being the "pleasing" women (and we know how it is easier for certain women, particularly white women, to perform this task of the pleasing woman) and encouraging their colleague to do the same, albeit in a sympathetic manner. Of placating, Ahmed writes, "To placate is to calm or soothe. Placate derives from the word please, to be agreeable. Being placated is another way complaint is stopped" ("Nodding as a Non-Performative"). Ahmed writes of the danger, particularly for women, and specifically marginalized women, of happiness in many of her works, and in *Living a Feminist Life*, she says, "Happiness as a form of emotional labor can be condensed in the formula: making others happy by appearing happy.... Institutional passing as appearing to fulfil the happiness duty, softening one's own appearance, smiling because or when we are perceived as too harsh" (131). The women in this study certainly felt as if they had to perform the emotional labor of happiness (and smiling) in order to successfully pass in the institution; they especially felt they had to perform their happiness duty when they were complaining about serious issues, as they were not fulfilling their obligatory role of the happy woman WPA. Another participant shared a similar experience of her complaint being dismissed, as she wanted to go to HR regarding colleagues harassing her in the department. "An older senior woman told me, 'Oh, honey, don't let one bad person ruin your time here.'" As many WPA scholars have addressed, there is a narrative of WPAs taking up heroic type performances (Charlton, Charlton, Graban, Ryan, and Ferdinandt; Micciche; Vidali; Schell) despite the realities of the institution and their personal lives in order to institutionally pass; complaining,

voicing concerns about structural issues and problems, does not fit into this type of performance, and especially does not work for a woman WPA. Women responding to their fellow women colleagues in this way further perpetuates the issues we have with complaint as valid, as data, and attempts to placate conceal institutional deficiencies in problematically gendered ways.

Other women discussed the exhaustion that came with voicing complaint and the repercussions they experienced when pushing back. One woman discussed with me an experience that happened to her when she was a junior faculty member and a relatively young woman. This woman was the WAC director and interim WPA at a small, liberal arts college. This is a very similar situation to the previous experience, except in this case the repercussion which came from her voicing her expertise was more damaging and directly connected to her gender; while silence was a tactic used in the previous experience, actual discrediting of this woman was used in this situation, and she expresses her powerlessness:

*A much older male faculty member stood up and said [to me], 'Well that's just your opinion, why should we listen to you' and I said, 'Well I spent six years of graduate coursework studying composition theory and practice...so while it is my opinion, it is grounded in theory and research...you should put a little more weight into my opinions.' I heard back from people—he went around telling people that my office should be in his building because his office needed [pause] **beautification**. He would say things like that repeatedly—he would call me things like, "little girl."*

Once again, the emotional labor and work of complaint is directly connected to intellectual work of a WPA (and we can see how heavily gendered this situation is). In this situation, we see the ruling relations at play. As Nicolas and LaFrance write, "Akin to powerful social or workplace norms, ruling relations draw on complexes of power and authority-expertise, marginality, influence, decision making that coordinates us with particular daily practices. Social relations are not accidental; they do not simply happen to people" (138). The ruling relations of this experience—an older, tenured, male faculty member resisting the authority of a junior, female faculty member—is one steeped in social and historical norms of power; this particular faculty member was also not familiar with the field of rhetoric and composition, and we can see here the historical conditions of the feminized nature of the field, particularly in English departments, at play. And again, we see this woman pushing back, or complaining, to the man that she is an expert in her field, that her opinions are credible, and that she should be listened to. Instead of taking this complaint seriously as one grounded in theory and research, he chose to respond by objectifying her, discrediting her authority, and harassing her. Ahmed writes about discrediting complainers and harassment and claims, "Discrediting a complainer is about damage limitation.... Harassment can be the attempt to stop someone from identifying the harassment that implicates the institution in wrong doing" ("Damage Limitation"). While this junior faculty member professionally called out this man for not listening to her because of both her gender and her expertise, and therefore discrediting his opinion, he used a stronger tactic of harassment, calling her "beautiful" to colleagues and a "little girl," in order to limit the damage her open complaint did, and bully her into silence. Later on in the interview, the woman spoke about the effects this

dismissal had on her as a junior faculty member and how it informed her professional identity as the WPA at that institution, “*So it was hard to establish [pause] any authority there. And I wasn’t tenured...so...I don’t know how much I could have said or done.*” Again, the emotional labor of complaint is directly tied to intellectual labor, both to the disciplinary expertise of the field and the way social relations work, and we see the complicated ways complaint is at play in the life of a woman WPA.

Affective Complaint

Other women discussed with me professional experiences that I categorized as complaint, in that they were sharing memories that were both emotional and affective, and were recognizing the issues that stemmed from these experiences throughout the interview. Ahmed writes in *Living A Feminist Life*, “To share a memory is to put a body into words” (23), and many of the women shared memories in which they were discussing their emotion and embodied experiences in the academy and voicing their complaints to and with me. One of my participants, a senior faculty WC director, recollected of her career,

I got everything from male colleagues telling female colleagues to tell me about how I should be, ‘Make sure she approaches it this way,’ or ‘To always wear hose.’ Truly. The chair of my department was very prone to greeting me, honestly, with a pat on the head...that got very uncomfortable.

As I relisted to the recording, I heard myself asking her how she dealt with the “pats,” especially since they continued despite her vocalized discomfort, or complaint, and again she smiled. Even in the moment I knew it was not a smile of happiness or contentment. It was a knowing smile, a weary smile. A smile that so many of the women participants of my study had on their faces when they answered my questions about their experiences as a woman WPA: the smile that helps them exist in their institutions, the type of emotional and embodied labor that remains invisible, perhaps because it is in an attempt to appease, and yet I argue that attention to this type of work is critical in our intellectual endeavors, particularly for those invested in institutional change. The participant went on to tell me that she started responding to his pats on her head with her pats on his belly. We laughed together again, and while humorous, this personal experience speaks to physical bodies in the space of the academy and what a woman WPA will most likely experience during her career. The pats on the head are condescending to this participant as an individual and as an academic professional. The discussion of her legs and the need for her to cover them, or perhaps even make them look more appealing (as hose can do), objectifies and reduces this WPA to her body. As a woman and as a writing center director, she is not being respected in the academy. Yet, later, I learned how she dealt with this particular situation, how she pushed back at this gesture in her own, somewhat comical way, embodied way, putting a complaint into action through a small gesture. Again, this is one transcription from one participant that is representative of how one’s body, particularly a woman’s body, is read and policed by the institution and the type of emotional and embodied labor that stems from such experiences.

Other participants spoke with me about their own bodily experiences as women WPAs, and it was interesting to note how these experiences were framed by them to me. One woman told me of a personal experience of being pregnant on campus, and how aware she was of her body at that time, how aware she was of other people's hyperawareness of her body, and the ways this impacted her professional work:

I was walking around with big, giant boobs on campus and a growing belly. I had a male colleague, who I always got along with, start to treat me with a fatherly gentleness. He even would place his hand on my stomach during conversations.

Similar to the participant who spoke about pats on her head, this woman laughed with me as she was telling this story, even patting her stomach as she was talking. We both were aware that this invasive gesture made by her male colleague was not funny and was harassment, and yet we also knew this experience was all too common for women. Several other participants discussed their hypervisible bodies during pregnancy, and complained to me about the way they were treated on campus, fearful that people no longer saw them as administrators but rather as vulnerable women needing protection, their bodies inviting pats and rubs. The participants did not, however, express to me that they voiced their complaint to the colleagues participating in these actions. In "On Not Leaning In," Detweiler, Laware, and Wojahn report that "women with children were 38 percent less likely to procure tenure than were their male counterparts with children" (457). While my essay is not addressing issues of tenure and gender, I believe the findings from this archive of complaint point to the affective and emotional component to having children, and the ways in which women WPAs navigate pregnancy in the institution. This participant who shared with me the story of her male colleague treating her as a child later told me, "I don't think he's ever looked at me the same since I had my children. I do not talk about my children at work now. It is so unfair that I need to remove my gender." These are powerful words, and a complaint expressed most explicitly by this particular participant, but also representative of the way women felt as pregnant women, as mothers, in the academy. I believe this shared complaint is one that needs to be vocalized and more present in conversations about emotional labor, gender, and WPA work, as these embodied and affective experiences have impact on how women view their leadership on campus through how they are treated. Ahmed writes, "Not complaining because it would be too costly to complain does not mean it is not costly not to complain. Those costs can be personal- you might find it hard to live with yourself if you had grounds for a complaint.... Costs can also be institutional: the grounds remain" ("Why Complain"). These bodily experiences, if voiced and archived as complaint, can provide insight into how the emotional becomes intellectual; the ways in which the body informs our identity and informs our work, particularly our changing bodies. Institutional forces of sexism, racism, and classism exist and are ever-present, and the academy plays a major role in enforcing exclusionary power systems. I believe that open exchanges, voicing complaints and hearing them, about bodily experiences in the academy enable us to have complex and nuanced conversations about intersectionality and how racism, sexism, classism, and ableism (among other "isms") stem from patriarchal systems of power—in ways we have not quite yet been able to do in the field, as

we do not view these conversations as intellectual and integral to the daily work we do as WPAs.

Complaint as Insight for Institutional Change and Rhetorical Advocacy

While these women often were concerned that their stories were “mere” complaint, this is the very issue that needs to be further explored in documenting and studying complaint. We see in these experiences women attempting to push back and voice their concerns only to be told that they are “complaining” or discredited in some other way. We also see women who have worked around verbal complaint to push back through embodied gestures—as seen with the woman who patted her chair’s belly when he would pat her head. Complaint moves beyond disappointment in our working lives, although I certainly believe that disappointment is a necessary emotion to explore. Micciche asks, “Enroute to hope, can we speak candidly about professional inequities and disappointments without being regarded as doomsayers, as spoilers of the democratic identity that composition studies has constructed of itself?” (98). I argue that the emotional and embodied work of a WPA is directly connected to complaint, or as Micciche writes, disappointment, and that through complaint, we can learn how to get to the hopefulness many writing studies scholars crave as we work to better the lives of the people we work with. Hope, as feminist rhetoric and composition scholars, such as Paula Matthieu and, more recently, Cheryl Glenn, argue can be viewed as a feminist goal, and hope cannot be accomplished without complaint, without listening to a growing archive and collective that we can learn from as we aim to make for more hopeful futures. Through complaint, which is connected to calling out the daily institutional harms and harassments as seen through the data, we can understand how to be better equipped in situations in which we see our colleagues experience microaggressions, assault, and other embodied and emotional experiences that impact and inform our work. Through complaint, we can recognize who is experiencing these situations and what different forces of institutional power are at work, and how we can possibly change the paradigm by rethinking our leadership: who we put in leadership positions, what they have learned from their own personal embodied and emotional experiences, and how we can stop these experiences from happening. Complaint is intellectual work, that stems directly from the embodied and emotional experiences, and it is a topic that needs to be more fully explored by researchers, as complaint will inevitably vary depending on the types of bodies being interviewed. While this article focused on gender, and delineated gender as one aspect of identity that is necessary to explore, more research is needed to be done on WPAs of color, queer and LGBTQIA WPAs, WPAs with disabilities, and complaints connected to their experiences.

Of complaint and feminist work, Sara Ahmed writes, “One of our most important tasks as feminists is to ensure that making a complaint does not mean closing the door. We need to do this work together: a complaint requires a feminist collective” (“Complaint”). In other work on complaint, Ahmed states that, “listening to those who have made or tried to make formal complaints about abuses of power is teaching me about institutional mechanics; how institutions work; how different parts fit together. By insti-

tutional mechanics I am referring to the mechanics of power" ("Damage Limitation"). The act of listening can be understood as a feminist act in and of itself, particularly listening to those with different standpoints and perspectives, and it is an embodied act, and we can draw on the work done by Ratcliffe on rhetorical listening to understand the importance of listening. However, very often complaint—as Ahmed and I both argue—is not listened to (although often there is a performance of listening to complaint through the gestures of nodding and verbal cues of saying, "yes, yes"), and is certainly not seen as a generative site for learning. For Ahmed complaint becomes a way to better understand the operations of institutional power, the important perspectives that those who are complaining offer, and the need for their complaints to be listened to, and learned from. In our field, we can see complaints via the WPA listserv and the need to take such complaints seriously and to understand what they are telling us about the field and the work that we do. For example, when the CCCC 2019 CFP on performativity was announced which included the acronym AAVE, a listserv thread developed that no doubt seemed like complaining to some members. Eric Smith responded, "As a black man, I find the use of code-meshing in the conference a bit gimmicky, cosmetic, and a little offensive...The term 'blaxploitation' comes to mind." This, then, was the start to multiple emails, many from those responders who also took the time to complain about the CFP, many who then decided to complain against those complainers. The issue with complaining is not that it isn't a productive activity (it can be), or a scholarly endeavor (again, it can be), but that people very often do not listen, deeply and rhetorically, to those who are doing the complaining, when such listeners are not, as Ratcliffe describes it,

consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others, while consciously acknowledging all our particular and fluid standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics. Standing under our own discourses means identifying the various discourses embodied in each of us and then listening to hear and imagine how they might affect not only ourselves but others. (205-206)

The complaints on the WPA listserv, and here I am thinking specifically of Smith's initial complaint of the 2019 CFP (it is important to note here that I often disagree with Smith's viewpoints and perspectives), can certainly be starting points to scholarly conversations (as I am using them in an article). However, we are not rhetorically listening to "stand under," particularly when people point out perspectives we disagree with or are not fully attempting to imagine. Smith's critique, as he deliberately points out his own perspective and standpoint as a black man in academia, was certainly not given the attention it warranted. Not enough time was allowed for his own embodied discourse to "wash over" those reading, and to think about ways in which his perspective informs or contradicts the politics and ethics of the field. In fact, perhaps because the WPA is text-based in a way that makes it difficult to imagine a full human being writing and responding, Smith's complaint became both simultaneously disembodied and extremely individualized. The problem with complaints is that we often do not go very deep with them in the way that Ahmed suggests, and this is because we are not

understanding in the way Ratcliffe calls for; while we honor an individual's complaint and what that complaint signifies, we also know that the individual is often voicing an embodied and historical discourse of power that we too often dismiss as just being "one person complaining, one person's viewpoint." I use the example of Smith not because he is an outlier in the field, a black man critiquing AAVE and discussing "blaxploitation," but because of his discussion of needing to perform in a certain way and because of the way many white people view him as a black man. This experience is real and embodied. We must learn to recognize, understand, and learn from these embodied and emotional experiences, as they can teach us and inform our ethics and politics to help us better understand institutional power and oppression in ways that text may not. Complaining, as I briefly mentioned earlier, is often gendered, but it is also raced and classed. Ahmed writes, "Complaints are immanent: they are *about* what we are *in*" ("Nodding as a Non-Performative"). We must learn to recognize and study complaints so that we do not "hear complaints so they can disappear" (and we see this often with the WPA listerv complaints), but rather create an archive of complaints in the field to understand the situations, local, global, historical, contextual, and embodied, that we are in right now.

The complexities of the complaints shared by the woman WPAs, and the gendered experiences directly connected to such complaints, are necessary to listen to and draw from if we are to revise the way we approach working with our colleagues and how we navigate our everyday experiences. The emotional and embodied labor of complaint can teach us how we think about the institutional positioning of our field, the way women leaders are viewed in the academy (and how they are being heard or not heard), and the everyday negotiations women and other marginalized bodies perform and take on in order to survive in the institution. We can also learn from this archive of complaint how this work is being listened to, and how people respond to complaint; that is, very often when the women perform this difficult and emotional work of voicing their concerns and issues, of pushing back, the genre of complaint acts to marginalize the experience of dissatisfaction so that it can be safely ignored by others (in these cases, especially by older men). A feminist collective of complaint, however, can show repeated patterns of bad behavior that occur everyday in the institution and ways in which we can start calling out people on such behavior together, as opposed to an individual, isolated act. I argue that complaint, as it is grounded in lived experience, allows for marginalized bodies to have more authentic dialogue by connecting stories and learning from differences; complaint, too, allows us to see ways in which we are all complicit in participating in bad behavior. Detweiler, Laware, and Wojahn in their discussion of the real need for changes in feminist advocacy, call us to rethink the way we view leadership, as our current models are deeply embedded in patriarchal structures: "Feminist leadership capitalizes on awareness and sensitivity to material, embodied experiences...as marked by social categories, embedded in hierarchical structures, and providing points of connection, of common political cause.... [T]his means reflectively locating our administration at the intersections of our personal...lives" (460). In her article "Is it Worth it to 'Lean In' and Lead? On Being A Woman Department Chair in Rhetoric and Writing Studies," Schell advocates for the need for further research to be done on embodied leadership and administration. Complaint as an archive allows feminists and advocates to understand not just how the personal is political but how emotion is also intellect

and provides insight for the type of rhetorical advocacy needed in the current structures of the institution.

Complaint, as it is stemmed in emotion, is the explosive data that is needed for institutional change; moving from the individual to the collective by collecting and categorizing complaint made by marginalized bodies can be the type of intellectual work for newer generations of WPAs, those who come after the complaint. Complaint is forward-thinking, and points to experiences that can change. Complaint, as Ahmed and I argue, is hopeful, even if it is a "weary hope" ("Why Complain"). As Cheryl Glenn writes in *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope*,

When rhetoric and feminism become allies in contention with the forces troubling us all, our shared goal is to articulate a vision of hope and expectation. Toward such a future, we can support our friends, colleagues, and students as they come to voice; feel empowered in critical discussions; and write, speak, and teach the words that reshape (and repair) the world and pave our future. (212)

The critical discussions that are needed and that we are starting to see in the field derive from our personal, embodied, and emotional experiences in our professional, academic lives (and in the way in which we live in this world). Complaint, as we live in a contentious society with troubling forces, is necessary emotional and explosive data to study and learn from as we think about hope, or what it would mean to get on together a little bit better than we have been. Complaint goes beyond dialogue, which Carmen Kynard critiques as "whitewashing," in that it immediately addresses embodied experiences, as we see from the data, and calls to action. It is "calling out" and voicing problems that need to be addressed. We can see that complaint asks us to "stay with the trouble," as Haraway has suggested ("Staying"), to create sustainability in the currently embattled climate of higher education: "Staying with the trouble, yearning toward resurgence, requires inheriting hard histories for everybody, but not equally and not in the same ways" (114). Complaint reflects the hard histories that we need to reconcile and allows us to understand that histories are different for different bodies. Ahmed writes, "Those who are willing to hear will end up hearing more and more; you are providing those whose sphere of influence has been restricted with a place to go. A feminist ear can be what we are for" ("Complaint"). The emotional and embodied work of a WPA can often lead to complaining, but this complaining is the path towards the hope and resurgence that higher education needs; WPAs, with their highly relational work and the focus on bettering the lives of those we teach, are in prime positions to complain, not only because of their experiences that cause complaint, but because their complaint speaks to the everyday patterns and behaviors of people in academic institutions. We know that gender informs WPA work and complaint, and this is why feminist work is so important to WPA work; through complaint, and a new rhetorical advocacy of authentic dialogue and listening deeply to lived experience, we can form a feminist collective that is necessary, one that requires "inheriting the hard histories" and recognizing our own implications in such histories as we try to carve out a better space through our writing programs/centers.

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