

RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE

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IWL

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY



IWL AT MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

MISSION AND VISION

The **mission** of the Institute for Women's Leadership at Marquette University is to advance women's leadership locally and globally through pioneering research, innovative programming, and collaborative engagement.

Our **vision** is one of intersectional inclusivity and gender equity. As advocates for justice, we will engage, inspire, and transform students, staff, faculty, and community leaders as we:

- Create an interdisciplinary and vibrant research environment that equitably and inclusively supports faculty and students as they engage in impactful, transformative scholarship.
- Serve as an incubator for innovative leadership initiatives that challenge the barriers to the advancement of women, while embracing intersectionality, as we seek to reduce inequities across institutional structures.
- Cultivate community connections through mentoring and leadership programming that reaches down to high school students, out to university students and faculty, and up to external stakeholders including corporations, nonprofits, and community associations.

RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE

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PREFACE

During our tenure as Fall 2023 IWL Faculty Fellows, our cohort connected as scholar-teachers reading and researching gender-based violence and resistance across multidisciplinary perspectives and methodologies. We learned from each other how stories shape inclusive discourse and help develop deeper understandings of the intersections of narrative, literature, culture, and social systems. We benefited from building a dialogue around how each of us prioritizes addressing narratives—past and present—as ways to both challenge and amplify the experiences of those who have been doubted, denied, or silenced through time. We believe this is foundational to building a community of scientists committed to hearing the often untold. Thus, we will continue to ask ourselves and each other:

Where are our priorities?

How are people and communities resisting structural violence and challenging dominant interpretations of their experiences?

And how do we resist the legacies of being misread as we, too, create archives of knowledge?

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INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has deep roots and long lineages in oral traditions, literature and writing, performance, art, and ritual. It can be an interactive art, oral history and prose, narrative inquiry and analysis, and expressions of experience not just in words, but also the spaces of silence, emotion, and meaning-making.¹ In all forms and functions, stories hold power and possibilities. They are the social and cultural transmission of meaning, knowing, and imagination. Narrative inquiry is also a research practice that draws on the power of experience to counteract or subvert dominant constructions and interpretations.² Simply put, narrative is a story that values experiences at the margins, challenges previously held assumptions, decenters authority in history through an inclusive lens, and focuses on the negotiation of meaning and power in society by focusing on the voices and standpoints of those on the periphery.³

1 Armitage, et al. | *Women's Oral History: The Frontier's Reader*
Cooper | *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*
Lorde | *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing
Madison | *The Woman That I Am: The Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color*
Moraga & Anzaldúa | *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* [4th Edition]

2 Bell | *Storytelling for Social Justice: Connecting Narrative and the Arts in Antiracist Teaching*
Clandinin | *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry* [2nd Edition]
Clandinin | *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*
Hesse-Biber & Leavy | *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*

3 Collins | *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* [2nd Edition]
Colins & Bilge | *Intersectionality*
Crenshaw | "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color"
Davis & Crave | *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*
Haraway | "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective"

Individual and collective stories also serve various purposes be it cultural and historical preservation, research investigation, community connection, agency, resistance, empowerment, and more. Surely, stories and narratives are transformative and are vital to the production of a larger more diverse knowledge base about human experience. They are relational: they make space for us to connect and to bear witness to each other's experiences; they break our silences, hold us accountable, change our ideas, and shape our community.⁴ Feminist scholars recognize the importance of sharing and preserving lived experiences and embrace the power of storytelling as a means of transmitting knowledge, experience, culture, and humanity. Archiving is often a central part of feminist praxis that aims to recover and include stories from the margins in the historical record. Linked to issues of social justice, feminist scholars are keenly aware of the emancipatory possibilities and conditions of empowerment of research practice and collaborative knowledge building that must be preserved.

For Dr. Jennifer Vanderheyden, stories can be multifaceted: intricate and metaphorical literary stories that resist immediate interpretation; stories mediated by gestures and other physiological signs of communication; stories of trauma that often must be facilitated in some manner (as

Petillo | "Unsettling Ourselves: Notes on Reflective Listening Beyond Discomfort"
Simpson | "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship"

4 Ahmed | *Living a Feminist Life*
Birdsong | *How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship, and Community*
Kaba | *We Do This 'til We Free Us: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice*
Moraga & Anzaldúa | *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* [4th Edition]
Petillo & Hlavka | *Researching Gender-based Violence: Embodied and Intersectional Approaches*
Russo | *Feminist Accountability: Disrupting Violence and Transforming Power*

in the case of female survivors of genocide and gender-based violence); or, in the case of Saint Joan of Arc, stories clouded by myth, subjective interpretations, and centuries of storytelling. For this reason, Dr. Vanderheyden's research on Joan of Arc confronts multiple challenges in determining Joan's narrative. It is uncertain whether Joan could read and write (other than her signature), and the only written words attributed to her are letters she allegedly dictated and the records of her interrogations during the trial that eventually led to her condemnation to be burned alive at the stake. Additionally, we can read stories and testimonies by her contemporaries, including poetry from the female poet Christine de Pisan, to discern Joan's truth. The silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* by Carl Theodor Dreyer is considered by many to be the best representation of her person through the superb visual storytelling of actress Renée Falconetti. According to Joan of Arc, her narrative and actions were inspired by saints' voices: if not for this meta-narrative direction of her mission, she most likely would have remained in her native village of Domremy with her family. Finally, Joan of Arc's mystical story has been doubted and denied throughout centuries, resulting in the creation of many alternative stories that have been read, re-read, and interpreted by thousands of readers.

For Dr. Jessica Zemplak, stories serve as a powerful avenue for amplifying and understanding women's voices within marginalized communities. By engaging directly with individuals, her research seeks to provide a platform for the articulation of their unique experiences, challenges, and perspectives. Participants can share their narratives authentically, shedding light on the complexities of their lives that may otherwise remain overlooked or stigmatized. The emphasis on stories fosters a deeper understanding of the nuanced factors influencing women's choices, agency, and well-being. By prioritizing their voices, Dr.

Zemplak's research contributes to a more comprehensive and empathetic comprehension of the social, economic, and cultural dynamics that shape the lives of sex workers and women who use drugs, promoting a more inclusive and informed discourse of their realities. Using this understanding, interventions can be better tailored to improve the health and well-being of often unheard and hidden populations.

For Dr. Heather Hlavka, stories are a way to address interpersonal and structural violence at the intersections of race, gender, science, and bodies. The voices and experiences of the marginalized, including women and young people, have long been silenced, misinterpreted, or erased because they have been deemed untrue, unimportant, or dangerous. Heather's work therefore focuses on multiple sites wherein narratives are shared and produced to understand the controlling images and cultural stories that circulate about gender-based violence. These sites include medical and forensic interviews, science and research, and the criminal-legal system. The construction of personal stories is often embedded in larger structural frameworks. Thus Dr. Hlavka's research, teaching, and advocacy address how survivors of violence are both read and reread through cultural stories and how individuals and communities resist through collective stories that challenge stereotypes and provoke transformation. Through this work, she hopes to inform and support survivor-led and community-centered healing practices that ultimately support transformative justice by privileging the desires and perspectives of violence survivors.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



HEATHER R. HLAVKA, PHD

Professor of Social and Cultural Studies in the Klingler College of Arts & Sciences at Marquette University

Dr. Hlavka is a socio-legal scholar studying intersectional gendered and racialized violence and how medico-legal systems, science, and technology reproduce these violences. She is committed to the transformative possibilities for justice and healing outside of the carceral state.



JENNIFER VANDERHEYDEN, PHD

Associate Professor of French in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at Marquette University

Dr. Vanderheyden's past research publications include two books on the 18th-century philosopher, author, and art critic Denis Diderot. Her most recent research program centers on Gender Studies and her project comparing French heroines Jeanne d'Arc and Olympe de Gouges. She has also published works of creative writing including poetry and Flash Fiction.



JESSICA L. ZEMLAK, PHD, MSN, RN

Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing at Marquette University

Dr. Zemak is a nurse scientist who prioritizes women's well-being through qualitative and mixed methods research, emphasizing trauma-informed approaches. Her program of research focuses on intimate partner violence, sexual/reproductive health, mental health, disparities, technology in healthcare, and social determinants, aiming to advance equity and improve healthcare outcomes.

JESSICA ZEMLAK, PHD, MSN, RN



RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE IN

HEALTHCARE— *Addressing Inequities and Health Disparities Using a Community-Engaged Approach*

Dr. Jessica Zemplak prioritizes improving the mental and physical well-being of marginalized communities in her research by centering her work on addressing inequities and health disparities using a community-engaged approach. Dr. Zemplak's passion for this work is informed by her clinical practice—having worked for over twenty years as a nurse and Family Practice Nurse Practitioner. Through Dr. Zemplak's clinical practice, she works closely with women and members of the LGBTQ+ community who experienced violence, substance abuse, and unmet health needs, where she frequently saw how social determinants of health were closely related to health inequities. In Dr. Zemplak's role as a clinician, she can work individually with her patients to address their health needs. It is through research and clinical work that Dr. Zemplak, RN, can make a broader impact and amplify the often-silenced voices of marginalized communities.

Among many marginalized communities, there are often intertwined issues⁵ such as intimate partner violence, mental health symptoms, substance use, and social determinants of health⁶ (e.g., access to care) that impact health. These complex social and structural issues influence

⁵ Singer *et al.* | "Syndemics and the Biosocial Conception of Health"

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | "Social Determinants of Health at CDC"

health outcomes. To more deeply understand how these issues were impacting the health of women in our Milwaukee community, in 2021-2022, Dr. Zemplak collaborated with the **Benedict Center Sisters Program** by examining unmet health needs among women who sell sex in Milwaukee. Through a quantitative survey and insightful focus groups, the study became a vessel for the unheard stories of a highly marginalized population. This study built a strong foundation, which informs Dr. Zemplak's current work. In this study, key information was learned about this hidden population that helped Dr. Zemplak focus her research on centering participant-voiced priorities. From this research, lessons learned included that transgender women felt underrepresented in tailored health programming, and telehealth was identified as a potential mechanism to improve healthcare access to HIV prevention services.

BENEDICT CENTER SISTERS PROGRAM

Benedict Center Sisters Program helps women in the street-based sex trade using a harm reduction lens through programs such as street outreach and community drop-in centers

The Institute for Women's Leadership Faculty Fellowship in Fall 2023 became a catalyst for expanding the scope of Dr. Zemplak's research among transgender and gender-diverse people who sell sex. She was able to use her time during this fellowship to understand the diverse landscape of sex work. It was clear to Dr. Zemplak from the participants of her Milwaukee-based research as well as through a review of the scholarly literature, that the stories and experiences of transgender and gender-diverse sex workers require more representation. Subsequently during Dr. Zemplak's time as a faculty fellow, she collaborated with scientists at Saint Louis University (SLU) on a study to learn more about

the experiences of transgender and gender-diverse sex workers.

LATENT CLASS ANALYSIS

a statistical approach used to identify groupings in data; through this statistical modelling, individuals are placed in groups based on patterns of answers to different survey questions responses or variables.

The team of Dr. Zemplak and her collaborators from SLU recognized that while sex work is extremely heterogeneous, there is a dearth of research aimed at understanding the different types of sex work, the diversity of populations that participate in it, and their unique needs and circumstances. So in this study the team explored the diverse types of sex work and the settings where sex work occurs among a large, national sample of transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Using **latent class analysis**, the team was able to identify patterns and types of sex work across the diverse sample. This research adds to the state of the science in deepening understanding of the different settings and activities that encompass sex work. The patterns across the classes (*i.e.*, groups of sex work types) uncovered in the current study have the potential to be used to understand how different sex workers have different needs and experiences. Ultimately, this information can be used to most effectively support and advocate for the sex worker community.

Dr. Zemplak's program of research focuses not only on how data can be used, such as a large population-based latent class analysis, to give voice, but also on how access to healthcare can be improved for marginalized populations through community-engaged approaches. In Dr. Zemplak's early research among Milwaukee-based sex workers, telehealth was highlighted as a way some people were

interested in accessing care. However, many women who sell sex did not have the privacy or technology to support accessing telehealth services. Telehealth has expanded in utilization since the pandemic and will continue to grow. As a researcher focused on social determinants of health and health inequities, Dr. Zemlak is concerned that the marginalized communities she works with may be left behind in the evolving telehealth expansion.

To address this need, Dr. Zemlak is currently leading a pilot



study embedding a telehealth service in a community drop-in center serving women in the street-based sex trade. These drop-in centers are areas women frequent for basic needs services, such as meals and warming rooms, and the centers are highly trusted and valued by women. Telehealth services in these drop-in centers are potentially a low-barrier access point to healthcare. Therefore, the goal of this feasibility and acceptability study is to explore if women like receiving telehealth services in the drop-in center. There is great potential to expand and improve how women engage in the healthcare system through bringing this service to them in a way that works best for them. This work was informed by the voices of women in the sex trade.

REFLECTION FROM THE SCHOLAR

During my time as an IWL scholar, I was able to share how, as a nurse scientist, I can tell the stories of an often-hidden population of people who sell sex. Through collaboration and sharing with this multi-disciplinary team of scholars each with a different lens, I saw how we can advocate, empower, and elevate the stories that are not often told. My time as an IWL scholar and member of this interdisciplinary team has deepened my passion and commitment to research that places the stories and priorities of my community at the center.

—**Jessica Zemlak, PhD, MSN, RN**

HEATHER HLAVKA, PHD



RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE IN SOCIOLOGY—*Addressing Interpersonal and Structural Violence at the Intersections of Race, Gender, Science, and Bodies*

As a feminist sociologist and sociolegal scholar, Dr. Heather Hlavka started studying gender-based violence and **carceral systems** as a first-generation college student at the University of Minnesota. There she was confronted with the reality of trauma including numerous disclosures of interpersonal violence from friends and the lack of safe spaces to share those experiences or to seek adequate, survivor-focused healing and redress from institutions and systems. She became interested in learning more about the effects of gender-based violence and exploring the collective meaning of assault among survivors wherein community, healing, and resistance might simultaneously reside. The discipline of sociology gave her the language to better understand the roles of power, knowledge, and subversive voice—especially how, to varying degrees, women and young people have long been silenced, shamed, or their stories erased from dominant history and consciousness. During her college years, Dr. Hlavka began volunteering for crisis-line intervention services and participating in peer education seminars, later leading support groups for survivors and their families and friends during graduate school. At Marquette University, she is also an on-call advocate supporting those impacted by interpersonal violence

and harassment. Her work thus focuses on the lived experiences of gender-based violence to better understand how cultural narratives and stories play a significant role in what we know about sexual violence, how we make sense of trauma, and how we address the needs of survivors. This includes personal and social interpretations of violence as well as institutional biases, myths, and perceptions that can ultimately impact how survivors are treated by the criminal-legal system, the medical system, as well as within research and science.⁷

Dr. Hlavka is interested in amplifying the stories and voices of those who have been most marginalized within systems of power and inequality and therefore prioritizes the experiences of those identifying as BIPOC women, nonbinary persons, and young people who have experienced sexual violence.⁸ There is immense value in privileging the knowledge, voices, and interpretations of those who have experienced violence as authorities and authors of their own stories.⁹ These stories often reveal how survivors make sense of, negotiate, resist, and respond to interpersonal violence through powerful cultural stories and rape myths permeating public discourses, media, and

7 Petillo & Hlavka | *Researching Gender-based Violence: Embodied and Intersectional Approaches*
 8 Hlavka | “Regulating Bodies: Children and Sexual Violence”
 Hlavka | “Normalizing Sexual Violence: Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse”
 Hlavka | “Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization”
 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”
 Hlavka, et al. | *Understanding Domestic Abuse Restraining Order Processes in Milwaukee County’s Courts After COVID-19: When Safer-at-Home Isn’t Safe* [IWL-funded research]
 Schneider, et al. | “Remote Justice and Domestic Violence: Process Pluralism Lessons from the Pandemic” [IWL-funded research]
 9 Hlavka | “Normalizing Sexual Violence: Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse”
 Hlavka | “Speaking of Stigma and the Silence of Shame: Young Men and Sexual Victimization”
 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”

embedded in systems of power like law, police, medical systems, and courtrooms.¹⁰ With her colleague Dr. Sameena Mulla at Emory University, Dr. Hlavka studied sexual assault adjudication in the Milwaukee County Court system. For over a decade, they tracked sexual assault cases through the system with the help of Marquette undergraduate students and research assistants—attending nearly 700 court appearances and interviewing judges, attorneys, forensic scientists, jurors, court advocates, and sexual assault nurse examiners. This research centers on legal storytelling and narrative analysis—or stories told in law and legal practice to make sense of crime and violence. In their book, *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*,¹¹ they used legal storytelling as **counterstorytelling**¹² to address embedded preconceptions and myths to demonstrate how cultural narratives are crucial to understanding trial and legal outcomes for sexual assault, especially in a post-forensic age. Narratives are central to understanding trials because sexual assault often rests on the veracity of the victim’s narrative¹³ and attorneys are tasked with providing legally compelling stories to convince jurors and judges of what happened in a case. Attorneys and expert witnesses in court shape legal stories about everything from witness credibility to forensic evidence – what it means, what it does and does not show. These stories often reproduce historical and cultural rape myths that perpetuate gender and race stereotypes and scripts about women and children residing in Milwaukee County.

For example, Drs. Hlavka and Mulla find that race repeatedly plays into the sexualization of adolescents

10 Hlavka | “Legal Subjectivity among Youth Victims of Sexual Abuse”
 11 Hlavka & Mulla | *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*
 12 Delgado & Stefancic | *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* [3rd Edition]
 13 Estrich | *Real Rape: How the Legal System Victimizes Women Who Say No*
 Flood | *Rape in Chicago: Race, Myth, and the Courts*



in court when attorneys leverage stereotypes about Black and Brown youth as sexually promiscuous, rebellious, and blameworthy for their assaults.¹⁴ Similarly, Black and Brown families and communities were often depicted as “dysfunctional” and Black women as “hypersexual”—a persistent narrative used by attorneys to sexually degrade women of color, imparting racial hierarchies on Black bodies, and reinforcing stigmas of Black families. Therefore, the courts legal practices of storytelling reproduce gender and race stereotypes and scripts about women and children for jurors and observers while they also become cemented in legal archives and case law.

At the heart of the book lies a critique of the use of forensic evidence—often imagined by the public as independent, dispassionate, and objective. Take the quotes below by two Milwaukee County Assistant District Attorneys:¹⁵

“I think jurors are very susceptible to the TV influence and that certain frame of mind. I usually try to do something like, ‘How many folks here watch *CSI*?’ in every [jury selection] especially if I have no forensic evidence. I guess, the less forensic evidence I have, the more I want to attack that head-on. If I have good DNA evidence or other types of forensic evidence, I might play it up a little bit more. Like, ‘You’re not going to see everything you see on *CSI*, but you might see some type of that evidence.’”

“Even if it doesn’t have anything to do with DNA, I’ll be saying, ‘You notice there wasn’t any DNA.’ ... Mostly, again, just talking to them, alerting them that these are going to be issues in this case. I’m going to be arguing about the presence or non-presence of DNA.”

Prosecutors told stories about DNA and forensic evidence in

14 Hlavka & Mulla | *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*
 Hlavka & Mulla | “Thinking Forensically: Law, Medicine, and the Nomos of Sexual Violence”
 Powell, et al. | “Intersectionality and Credibility in Child Sexual Assault Trials.”
 15 Hlavka & Mulla | *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*

court because they often worried that jurors expected it and imagined it was readily available. In the world of sexual assault adjudication, every few cases that reach trial include forensic evidence and when it was present, it functioned primarily as corroborative of victim testimony rather than the “slam dunk” case evidence popularized by media and fictional crime dramas on television. Hlavka and Mulla further show how technologies like social media and text messaging,¹⁶ forensic rape examinations, DNA analyses, and racialized genetic population statistics enter the court of law not as objective legal artifact, but as another piece of a cultural story used in unequal experiences of the law. Forensic evidence does not address individual or systemic biases, and in fact at times, scientific tools work to mask such biases.

With support through the IWL Faculty Fellowship in Fall 2023, Dr. Hlavka was able to expand her work on forensics and expert witnesses in sexual assault trials, examining the role of sexual assault nurse examiners and forensic scientists in cases involving Black women and girls in Milwaukee County. This work developed into a co-authored chapter that compares Patricia Hill Collins’s¹⁷ seminal work on the historical “controlling images” and myths of Black women in the U.S. with present-day legal storytelling in the Milwaukee County Courts. The chapter shows how Black women and girls are pathologized as manipulative, hypersexual, and controlling just as Collins revealed in her images of the Mammy, Matriarch, Welfare Mother, and Jezebel. Each image fixes Black women in specific frameworks related to maternity and sexuality. It is crucial to show how historical stories, images, and cultural narratives circulate within contemporary legal and medical spaces and how they remain embedded in U.S. law as fixed to colonialism and chattel slavery, the history

¹⁶ Hlavka & Mulla | “‘That’s How She Talks’: Animating Text Message Evidence in the Sexual Assault Trial”

¹⁷ Collins | *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* [2nd Edition]

of U.S. gynecology, and the rise of forensic evidence. In this work, Hlavka and Mulla show how controlling images and stories are constructed about Black women and girls who are continually subjected to and policed by long-held racial tropes operating in U.S. jurisprudence.¹⁸ Herein lies the power of storytelling as resistance: to challenge and subvert the dominant narrative that courts act as objective arbiters of law or legal factfinders and to produce a counter archive.¹⁹ Narrative analysis and counterstorytelling reveals how courts reinscribe rape myths with new scientific authority, further reproducing inequality and racial and gender injustice.

REFLECTION FROM THE SCHOLAR

As an IWL scholar in a distinctive interdisciplinary group, we were able to share how stories can be silenced and hidden by public discourse or erased and misinterpreted by institutions. Together, we discussed how the voices and experiences of many at the margins resist through counterstorytelling. Time and time again in my work I have confronted the absence of children and youth’s voices in research and the misreading and misinterpretation of survivor’s stories in legal archives and popular media. As feminist scholars, we are resisting the absence of archives as we seek stories of gendered resistance and thus the transformation of public knowledge.

—Heather Hlavka, PhD

¹⁸ Hlavka & Mulla | *Bodies in Evidence: Race, Gender, and Science in Sexual Assault Adjudication*

Hlavka & Mulla | “Thinking Forensically: Law, Medicine, and the Nomos of Sexual Violence”

Powell, *et al.* | “Intersectionality and Credibility in Child Sexual Assault Trials.”

Hlavka & Mulla | “‘That’s How She Talks’: Animating Text Message Evidence in the Sexual Assault Trial”

¹⁹ Sojoyner | *Against the Carceral Archive: The Art of Black Liberatory Practice*

JENNIFER VANDERHEYDEN, PHD



RESEARCH AND STORYTELLING AS GENDERED RESISTANCE IN HISTORICAL LITERATURE— *Addressing Centuries of Interpretations of Engendered Heroine Saint Joan of Arc*

As a scholar and researcher in 18th-century French literature, Dr. Jennifer Vanderheyden began her career with a study of how the literary body communicates non-verbally through gestures and other theatrical portrayals of the body’s speech, specifically in the works of philosopher, art critic, and writer Denis Diderot.²⁰ Her interest in gender studies developed after researching Diderot’s ‘modern’ views of women, especially as expressed in his work “Sur les femmes” [“About Women”]. This inspired Dr. Vanderheyden to consider women writers in the 18th century, especially **Olympe de Gouges**, whom contemporary psychoanalyst and writer **Julia Kristeva**

²⁰ Vanderheyden | *The Function of the Dream and the Body in Diderot’s Works*

OLYMPE DE GOUGES

Considered by many as the first French feminist because of her political activism and writing during the latter part of the 18 century, Olympe de Gouges countered the Revolutionary text “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen” with her text “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen” (even though women were not allowed to be citizens). She was guillotined in 1793 during the Reign of Terror for her radical activism and writing.

JULIA KRISTEVA

A Bulgarian-French writer, linguist, psychoanalyst, philosopher, and Professor Emerita at the University of Paris-Diderot, Julia Kristeva is the author of many books of feminist criticism, such as *The Feminine and the Sacred* (co-authored with Catherine Clément, 2000), *Le Génie féminin* (1999), *Teresa My Love* (2014), and *Seule une femme* (2019).

refers to as the first French feminist. Additionally, Dr. Vanderheyden's work with female survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda led her to become the faculty advisor of a Marquette chapter of *Step Up!* (American Association for Rwandan Women), for which they organized many events such as a mini-film festival, panel discussions about the prevention of and recovery from such incomprehensible genocide, as well as talks by various female survivors. A visit to Rwanda in 2013 with her colleague Dr. Sarah Gendron, (facilitated by her friend and founder of *Step Up!*, **Dr. Béa Rangira Gallimore**) solidified Dr. Vanderheyden's writing and research about gender-based violence.[2]²¹

RANGIRA BÉA GALLIMORE, PHD

The founder of *Step Up!* (American Association for Rwandan Women), Professor Emerita at the University of Missouri, and an author—among her other publications, she and Gerise Herndon co-edited *Art from Trauma* (2019).

Dr. Vanderheyden has subsequently developed and taught Gender Studies classes at Marquette University, such as *Auto-Insemination: The Evolution of French Feminism*, and *The Image of Women in Francophone Film*. Her

²¹ Vanderheyden | "Extraordinary Forgiveness"
Vanderheyden | "The Resilience of Women in the Face of Trauma"
Vanderheyden | "Consolee's Testimonial Chant,"

CONSOLEE NISHIMWE

A survivor of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Consolee Nishimwe is a motivational speaker, an "advocate for other genocide survivors, and a defender of global women's rights" (consolee.org). She is the author of *Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor's Story of Pain, Resilience, and Hope* (2012).

current research project on Saint Joan of Arc, whom Dr. Vanderheyden considers as one of the first French "feminists" because of Joan's leadership and visionary actions, led Dr. Vanderheyden to apply for the Institute of Women's Leadership Fellowship for the Fall of 2023.

Dr. Vanderheyden is presently conducting research for a book titled *Engendered Heroines: The Trials, Sacrifices, and Legacies of Jeanne d'Arc and Olympe de Gouges*, which considers these two women under the following lenses:

1. As visionary geniuses who understood political struggles as non-binary creative processes whose actions and words surpassed conventional gender boundaries and stereotypes;
2. A comparison of their interrogations and trials, especially the performative and revolutionary nature of their defenses as women, that illuminates the complexities of their fierce patriotism; and
3. The influence of their legacies on France's current civic, social, and political cultures.

Weaving throughout this study are the questions of whether such heroines could exist in today's France, and if so, in what vision and context. Joan of Arc's mission in the 15th century was to deliver the French from British control by restoring the monarchy to Charles VII. That of Olympe de Gouges three centuries later was to liberate women by



advocating for their equal rights and citizenship, to support a just government based on the will of its people, and to call for the elimination of colonial slavery. Although each woman has been discussed regarding their heroic sacrifices as well as their refusal to adhere to gender expectations, to Dr. Vanderheyden's knowledge no scholarship exists that seeks to compare in detail their words and actions. A re-evaluation

of such heroines, maligned in their time, into present-day France requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that encourages relevant inquiry and debate in such areas as social justice, human rights, gender studies, and political science.

During the Fellowship at the Marquette Institute of Women's Leadership, Dr. Vanderheyden continued her research on Joan of Arc by developing a course she will offer in Fall 2024: "Saint Joan of Arc: Truth Behind the Myth." To make the course accessible for all students, Dr. Vanderheyden will teach it in English with the option for French students to do the work in French. The interdisciplinary course will include the historical, theological, and political aspects of Joan's mission to save France from English occupation in addition to the cultural and political impact of her story on present-day France and beyond. This course on Joan of Arc will afford students the opportunity to experience an in-depth examination of the history, faith, myth, legend, and passion of such a saintly French icon, as well as her global legacy. Also during her IWL fellowship, Dr. Vanderheyden worked on an article that analyzes the film *Vivre sa vie* by Jean-Luc Godard and his use of scenes from the silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (Dreyer).

Saint Joan of Arc's legend also touches Marquette, where the Joan of Arc Chapel vibrates at the heart of Marquette's campus. Its inspirational and serene structure and grounds serve as a point of grounding for the Marquette community, both in real-time and long after they depart campus. At the beginning of the pandemic, a live broadcast from the chapel reached out to all who watched as not only a source of comfort, but also as a reminder that our history as human beings demonstrates our fortitude to survive—especially if a teenage girl from Domremy-la-Pucelle could inspire and lead a country to crown a king and fight against British occupation. The Chapel beckons us all to a place of quiet reflection. According to the many myths and legends surrounding Joan, her body was burned three times, then

the ashes were dumped in the nearby Seine River. However her heart supposedly would not burn. To quote Diane Leach in her review of Kathryn Harrison’s book *Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured*, “the heart that refused to burn steadfastly holds its secrets close.”²² Similarly, many Marquette students hold Joan of Arc, her secrets, and the chapel close to their hearts as demonstrated by the following comments from students in Dr. Vanderheyden’s course, “The Evolution of French Feminism,” (quotes translated from French to English):

- *The fact that Joan of Arc was able to convince a king of France proved that women can do the same things as men. Other women were inspired by her actions and decided to fight for what they wanted, too. Joan of Arc wasn’t the only woman uninterested in the traditional role of housewife, and she was one of the first to do something to change that. As the text says, Joan of Arc inspired many feminists, who launched the first wave of feminism in France.*
- *In Michelet’s text, he describes that Joan of Arc’s courage reached a climax when she addressed the uncertain soldiers she commanded. She said “Don’t be afraid...God is showing me my way; this is what I was born for...” ...Even though she was a woman among men who thought she was a witch and heretic, she remained in her faith.*
- *As for Jeanne d’Arc...what can I say? She was judged by men with rules created by men to do work that men thought that only men could do. Her only crime was to dress like a man in order to do what a man could not do.*

REFLECTION FROM THE SCHOLAR

Many aspects of my research during the IWL Fellowship dialogued with my colleagues, Drs. Heather Hlavka and

²² Leach | *The Heart that Refused to Burn Steadfastly Holds its Secrets Close*

Jessica Zemlak. As stated above, Joan of Arc did not physically write any texts, but transcripts of her words during her trial exist. Through her personal story as well as various letters she dictated, Joan of Arc demonstrates a consistent resistance to the attempted dehumanization by others to silence her voice. This targeted manipulation also characterizes survivors of sexual violence as well as marginalized sex workers. Witnessing and discussing colleagues’ research methods and factual analysis, specifically Drs. Hlavka and Zemlak, enabled me to “re-read” communications by or about Joan of Arc in a more scientific manner to decipher legend from factual evidence. We can accept this documented humanity in the midst of Joan’s esoteric divinity that resists exact reading. Others may have disembodied Joan’s voice through their interpretations of her story, but in her life, whether dressed in “men’s” or “women’s” clothes, Joan remained whole with one divine voice whose narrative has remained steadfast. In closing, I would like to re-create Joan’s voice in the following narrative:

The Warrior Girl

Whatever I have done that was good, I have done at the bidding of my voices.²³

I’m just a girl who roams the fields of Domremy, France and surrounding hills. A girl who learns the basics of 15th century daily tasks and survival. Who plays at the fairy trees with friends and hears voices whisper in the swirling wind. Who attends mass every Saturday at the sacred chapel on the hill. Who prays for peace from attacks on our village and for guidance to resist and conquer. Who hears saints Michael, Marguerite and Catherine’s

²³ Trask, Willard | “Joan of Arc: In her Own Words”



voices: “go, Jehanne, God will lead you to save France from the English. God will lead you to restore Charles VII as King of France.” I answer the call, name myself Jehanne La Pucelle to show that I am pure of heart and body. I dress like other soldiers in battle. I carry a banner of leadership and pride. I am a warrior beyond gender.

You have called me many names over the centuries: miraculous, witch, imposter, martyr, cross-dresser, heretic, saint. I answered my calling and only answer to my God. I have always known who I am, even when flames encroached my body. I continue to touch lives. My spirit roams the land of my birth and beyond.

It is said that I touched a stone that now lies in the chapel at Marquette.

Maybe I still do.

It is said that my heart would not burn.

Maybe it didn’t.

Maybe it beats still in the hearts of those who believe.

—Jennifer Vanderheyden, PhD

CLOSING REMARKS

The Institute for Women’s Leadership (IWL) Faculty Fellowship in Fall 2023 brought us, Drs. Heather Hlavka, PhD; Jennifer Vanderheyden, PhD; and Jessica Zemlak, PhD, MSN, RN, together—three women scholars across the humanities, social sciences, and nursing sciences—working on amplifying the voices and stories of those who are often silenced or ignored in public discourse and frequently subject to misinterpretation by others. The IWL Faculty Fellowship generated a collective space to share

our research and create exciting new connections and collaborations. Through our work together, we learned that storytelling cuts across our multidisciplinary approaches to reading, writing, and researching intersectional experiences of gender-based violence and community marginalization. From narrative, interviews, and ethnography to literature, archives, and art, we found that we were asking similar questions in our research and scholarship:

- How are experiences shared, and what can they tell us about social and public life?
- Whose stories are silenced, misread and/or misinterpreted, or altogether erased from public discourse?
- And what effects do stories and narratives have on the lived experiences of survival for many of the individual and collective members in our scholarship?

We also understand our work as bearing witness in our relationships to stories as process, interpretation, and representation. Each data point, interview transcript, or survey response; every photograph or poem, letter, artwork, film, medical chart, or trial record is someone’s life documented in a potential archive of knowledge. These stories shape memory and they make claims about experience. They inform the future by telling us of the past in often new and transformative ways. Stories simultaneously engage in and move beyond text and talk by requiring presence, practice, and engagement. We do not just interpret stories—we live and witness them to amplify the experiences of those who have been silenced, marginalized, or otherwise excluded from public discourses. We believe that building archives of counter stories and reevaluation of existing repositories of knowledge can challenge long-held assumptions, myths, and cultural narratives across gender, race, identity, and bodies and has the potential to transform our understanding of resistance.

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