

Toward Social Justice Activism Critical Rhetoric Scholarship

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Although critical rhetoric scholarship foregrounds voices of oppressed communities and challenges systemic power imbalances, its doxastic and performative potential to affect social justice has lagged behind its conceptual (and, more recently, methodological and empirical) development. One reason is because that scholarship has privileged rhetoricians performing criticism as the end goal rather than using their criticism to conduct activism scholarship by engaging in and studying critically social justice interventions. This essay articulates a social justice activism approach to critical rhetoric scholarship that involves rhetoricians intervening collaboratively with oppressed communities and activist groups to make unjust discourses more just, and studying and reporting those endeavors.

Keywords: communication activism, critical rhetoric, interventions, social justice

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Date submitted: 2017–12–30

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Although there is conceptual affinity between rhetoric and social justice—“in which people have their human rights and freedoms respected, receive equitable treatment with regard to opportunities and resources, and are not discriminated against because of their class, race, sexual orientation, and similar identity markers” (Frey & Blinne, 2017, p. 17)—historically, rhetoricians have not always explored that connection explicitly in their scholarship.¹ Instead, because Western rhetorical scholars have drawn on the ancient Greek rhetorical tradition as a foundation for their work, they have privileged other values, such as civic engagement, democracy, and virtue (*arête*; see, e.g., Chaput & Hanan, 2016; Hauser, 2004; Palczewski, Ice, & Fritch, 2016).

Since the early 1980s, however, an increasingly vocal movement has developed an account of rhetoric that identifies and critiques dominant ideologies, power relations, and social structures that exclude and marginalize people “categorized according to race, religion, age, gender, sexual preference, and nationality, and acted upon in ways consistent with their status as non-subjects” (Wander, 1984, p. 216). Scholars embracing this “ideological turn in rhetorical studies” have challenged the historical tendency to study rhetoric in relationship to normative social values (e.g., civic engagement, democracy, and virtue), and they have recommended “rhetorical analyses not only of the actions implied but also of the interests represented” (Wander, 1983, p. 18). By exposing material conditions that negate people—and their histories, discourses, and ability to be heard in the public sphere (see McGee, 1980, 1982)—ideological critics have opened up robust and critically informed accounts of rhetoric, domination, oppression, and other concepts that are central to the pursuit of social justice.

Undoubtedly, the scholar of rhetoric who made these dimensions of the ideological turn most explicit is Raymie E. McKerrow. Building on a more general poststructuralist current moving through the humanities, McKerrow (1989) established a critical approach to rhetoric that shows how all claims to knowledge, truth, and rationality operate within a performative economy of power that stifles the very freedoms and liberties that these privileged discursive spaces presume to advance. For McKerrow, reason is not a Kantian “regulative ideal” that is grounded in humans’ innate capacity for freedom and emancipation; it is a rhetorical operation that never can be disentangled from power relations and universalization of particular human interests and values via symbols and language. For this reason, central to critical rhetoric is an attitude of permanent skepticism toward all normative claims about morality and social values, and a critique of power that challenges not only “domination” but also scholars’ “freedom” within discourse to critique domination. From McKerrow’s (1989) perspective, freedom is not a neutral starting point that, consequently, is governed and regulated by the powerful; rather, it is a “constitutive exclusion” (p. 4) that limits how rhetoric and its relationship to, for instance, social justice can be imagined at the societal level

¹ Although rhetoricians have focused on justice and other concepts that relate to social justice (e.g., activism and social movements), or that represent forms of it (e.g., environmental justice; see, e.g., de Onís, 2012; Pezzullo, 2001, 2007), a search of general databases (e.g., Library of Congress and Google Scholar), communication databases (e.g., Communication and Mass Media Complete), and rhetoric journals (e.g., *Quarterly Journal of Speech*) revealed that only four published journal article titles (excluding book reviews) referenced the terms *rhetoric* and *social justice* together. In the Communication and Mass Media Complete database, 12 other journal articles referenced *rhetoric* in the title and *social justice* as a subject term (six articles), word in the abstract (four additional articles), or keyword (two additional articles).

(see Butler, 1993). The best that rhetorical critics can do, in McKerrow's view, is to be reflexive about normative limitations of their criticisms, even as they seek to create transformative spaces to hear voices of those who are oppressed by dominant systems of power and language, and to change those oppressive systemic conditions. By illustrating how any interpretative reality always "takes place in terms of discursive practices" (p. 103), McKerrow (1989) approached rhetorical criticism as a "performance" (p. 108) that generates provisional and situated "doxastic" (p. 103) knowledge that always is vulnerable to further critique and refutation.

Although McKerrow's (1989) critical rhetoric orientation resonates with promoting social justice with and for those who are oppressed, important aspects of his project have limited the accomplishment of that goal.² From failing to endorse explicitly a telos that privileges marginalized communities' discourses (see Ono & Sloop, 1992, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997), to perpetuating a Western citizenship narrative (Chávez, 2015), to downplaying the role of materiality and affect in discursive performances of meaning and identity (see Cloud, 1994; Greene, 1998; Walsh & Boyle, 2017), McKerrow's formulation of critical rhetoric has been challenged for unwittingly reproducing conservative values that have forestalled its commitment to critiquing and, ultimately, transforming dominant, exclusionary ideologies, social structures, and social practices.

The identified limitations of critical rhetoric are important, but this essay considers a related limitation that has received less attention in debates about critical rhetoric and transformative social change: the need for critical rhetoricians to move from permanent critique and skepticism to conducting, studying, reporting, and critiquing their activist, on-the-ground, reconstructive collaborative interventions with oppressed communities and activist groups to make socially unjust systems and practices more just. We refer here not just to critical rhetoricians conducting "partisan" social justice criticism (see, e.g., Swartz, 2005), performing social justice activism per se (which, undoubtedly, many rhetoricians do),³ and/or recommending social justice activism interventions for others to enact but to scholarship that involves critical rhetoricians engaging actively in and studying critically their collaborative social justice activism interventions.⁴

To make the case for our social justice activism approach to critical rhetoric scholarship, we organize this essay into two main sections. The first section explicates the orientation from which we draw to develop our unique approach to critical rhetoric scholarship: communication activism for social justice scholarship—the study of communication researchers working with communities affected by injustices and with activist groups to intervene into and reconstruct those unjust discourses in more just ways. The discussion of that perspective brings to light the importance of scholars (including critical rhetoricians) taking on the positionality of scholar-activists who intervene and study their social justice activism interventions. The second section describes how recent conceptual, methodological, and empirical rhetorical (including some critical rhetoric) scholarship has gestured toward the type of scholarship argued for by the

² McKerrow (2016) used the term *social justice* only once, when quoting another scholar.

³ As just one example, rhetorician Robert J. Cox served three times as national president of the Sierra Club and, in that and other capacities, engaged in substantial environmental justice activism.

⁴ McKerrow (1989) claimed that the goal of critical rhetoric "is to understand the integration of power/knowledge in society—what possibility for change the integration invites or inhibits and what intervention strategies might be considered appropriate to effect social change" (p. 91).

communication activism for social justice perspective. However, as that review shows, although rhetorical scholarship has moved in a field-based, participatory direction, the majority of that work has been characterized by a lack of scholars engaging in and studying concrete interventions, which has prevented the development of a fully performative, activist critical rhetoric that promotes social justice. The essay concludes by reiterating the need for, and identifying some important issues that stand in the way of, social justice activism critical rhetoric scholarship.

Social Justice Communication Activism

The relationship between communication and social justice first was articulated by Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, and Murphy (1996).⁵ Drawing on rhetorical scholarship (especially about social movements and about critical rhetoric), critical-cultural studies (especially about organizational communication and about media), and feminist scholarship (especially about methods), Frey et al. (1996) proposed an approach to applied communication research that foregrounds scholars' "engagement with and advocacy for those in our society who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally underresourced" (p. 110). Pushing beyond description and critique of oppressive ideologies, social structures, and social practices (as demonstrated in rhetorical, critical-cultural, and feminist studies), and contesting and extending the primary focus of applied communication research on, at that time, (for-profit) organizational communication, and as resulting in researchers offering recommendations for others to enact, Frey et al. (1996) argued that communication and social justice scholarship "identifies and foregrounds the grammars that oppress or underwrite relationships of domination and then reconstructs those grammars" (p. 112). From that perspective, communication scholars, first, identify, analyze, and critique how those who are underresourced are excluded from significant discourses that affect them, followed by scholars "employ[ing] their resources (e.g., their theories, methodologies, pedagogies, and other practices) to challenge and change those exclusionary discourses" (Frey, 2009a, p. 908).

Expanding on that initial conceptualization of communication and social justice, and focusing even more explicitly on scholars' reconstructive social justice interventions, Frey and Carragee (2007c) proposed communication activism for social justice scholarship (or communication activism for short). Communication activism research (CAR) involves researchers (and educators and students, in communication activism pedagogy; CAP) becoming scholar-activists who work collaboratively with people who are oppressed, marginalized, and underresourced (hereafter, oppressed communities), and with social justice activist groups (hereafter, activists), to, first, understand those partners' social justice needs and goals. Once those needs and goals are understood thoroughly, researchers design, facilitate, and study communication interventions that are intended to accomplish them.

CAR views studying people's exclusion from significant discourses via description, criticism, and/or offering recommendations, which are engaged in by many research traditions and orientations (including critical rhetoric), as necessary practices for scholarship that seeks to promote social justice writ large. CAR

⁵ Frey et al. (1996) reported that, of the 496 reference citations about social justice they found, "only two of these were cross-listed with communication: one on communication policy and social justice in the Soviet Union and the other on communication, justice, and international development" (p. 113).

scholars, however, go beyond those practices to engage in social justice *activism*, which Broome, Carey, De La Garza, Martin, and Morris (2005) defined as

action that attempts to make a positive difference in situations where people's lives are affected by oppression, domination, discrimination, racism, conflict, and other forms of cultural struggle due to differences in race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation, and other identity markers. (p. 146)

CAR scholars, thus, have "a moral imperative to act as effectively as we can to do something about structurally sustained inequalities" (Frey et al., 1996, p. 111).

Operationally, CAR scholars start by building relationships with oppressed communities to work in solidarity with their quest for social justice. The decision about which communities to engage, of course, is an individual choice, but, usually, CAR scholars work with local communities experiencing injustice (see Rakow's, 2005, argument for doing so). After "gaining access" to those communities, researchers interact with members, listening deeply to them to learn about their social justice needs and goals, and about systemic social structures and practices that stand in the way of accomplishing those goals. That listening and learning process from the ground up can take a significant amount of time, especially when researchers differ from oppressed community members with regard to important subject positions (e.g., ability, class, gender, race, and sexual orientation) and corresponding social injustice experiences. Well aware of the deep history of (White) researchers taking advantage of oppressed communities and reproducing injustice (see, e.g., Belone et al.'s, 2012, CAR conducted in the context of Native Americans' mistrust of White researchers), CAR scholars seek to create a "trusting, collaborative partnership that produces a reflexive research process shaped by both researchers and social actors seeking systemic change" (Carragee & Frey, 2012, p. 24). That collaborative partnership, as Carragee and Frey (2012) explained,

demands humility on the part of researchers, who are partners with social actors, not leaders who, because of their "enlightenment," direct the "intellectually unwashed." In that light, communication activism for social justice scholars need to avoid the too often patronizing view that researchers "give voice to the voiceless" or "empower the powerless." No one gives another person a voice or empowers that person; people, including marginalized individuals, groups, organizations, and communities, have voices . . . and what researchers, especially communication researchers, can do is to create (more) opportunities to hear and listen to those voices. (p. 24)

Whereas most field-based scholarship with and about oppressed communities ends with that learning process, CAR encourages scholars to use knowledge gained from their engaged research, coupled with disciplinary knowledge, to offer aid to oppressed communities in the form of possible collaborative interventions that scholars could design and facilitate, if communities desire scholars to do so. If that offer is welcomed, scholars work with community members (to the extent that members desire to be involved) to design, facilitate, and study communication interventions that assist members in achieving their social justice goals.

Scholars who design, facilitate, study, and report their collaborative interventions, according to Frey and Carragee (2007c), constitute *first-person-perspective studies*. In contrast, *third-person-perspective studies* describe, interpret, critique, and/or offer recommendations for others to enact, but they do not include interventions by scholars. By engaging in activist interventions, first-person-perspective CAR studies attempt to make a difference *through* research, as opposed to hoping that a difference will be made by someone else *from* third-person-perspective studies (see Frey, 2009b).

Scholars studying their communication interventions certainly is not new; applied communication scholars, for instance, have conducted and studied interventions to address a number of pressing societal problems (for an overview, see Frey & SunWolf, 2009). CAR interventions, however, are aimed at promoting social justice, as opposed to other applied purposes,⁶ and, thus, they are particularly compatible with the critical rhetoric orientation. Studying and reporting those social justice interventions combine scholars' activism and research, which stands in contrast to scholars engaging in but not studying their communication activism. To stress that primary goal of scholarship, Carragee and Frey (2012) used the term *scholar-activists* (as opposed to *activist scholars*, *activist-scholars*, or other referents).

Moreover, because CAR, similar to critical rhetoric, is an orientation to research, methods follow as more precise means of conducting social justice activism communication research. Frey and Carragee's (2007a, 2007b, 2012) collections of CAR studies and Frey and Palmer's (2014) compilation of CAP studies highlighted a wide range of methods—quantitative, qualitative, and rhetorical—that scholars employ in such research (for a comprehensive list of communication scholarship on social justice activism, see Frey, Brownlee, & Musselwhite, 2017). As an example of CAR conducted from a rhetorical perspective, Hartnett (2007) documented rhetorical practices that he facilitated (teach-ins, political art, and other forms of public communication) with Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, community members to protest the Iraq War. As another example, Palmer (2007), who was trained as a rhetorician, created, facilitated, and studied an emergent-consensus program that directed the meeting talk of antiglobalization activist group members (which included him) toward their expressed goal of consensus decision making, as they prepared for the 2003 Free Trade Area of the Americas protest in Miami, Florida. As a third, and highly compelling, example, McHale (2007), as a graduate student studying rhetoric, produced a video documentary about Joe Amrine, an innocent man on death row in Missouri. McHale then worked with antideath penalty advocates to distribute the documentary across that state; eventually, the Missouri Supreme Court watched the film, and, according to Amrine and his defense lawyers, it played a significant role in freeing Amrine (see also Asenas, McCann, Feyh, & Cloud's, 2012, successful collaborative intervention to prevent Kenneth Foster's execution).

Finally, as McHale's (2007) scholarship demonstrated, CAR (and CAP) can have significant effects; other documented effects (and their interventions) have included more effective prevention of

⁶ Communication scholars' interventions have sought, for instance, to (a) change individuals' behaviors (e.g., health practices), (b) aid for-profit organizations (e.g., increase team productivity), and (c) promote civic causes (e.g., encourage people to vote, which is not necessarily social justice or stands against social justice if it encourages voting for policies that exclude people based, for instance, on ability, citizenship status, ethnicity, race, and/or sexual orientation).

human trafficking in South Asia because of communication facilitated among stakeholders (Carey, 2012); people living in poverty receiving jobs and accompanying communication skills training (Papa, Papa, & Buerkel, 2012); decreased burning of open fires in Guatemalan homes after village residents watched local theatre performances about benefits of fuel-efficient stoves (which were offered to them at cost; Osnes & Bisping, 2014); and fairer media coverage of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer people because of communication research conducted and used by activist media spokespersons (Cagle, 2007). However, effects should not be overemphasized in evaluating CAR studies, because scholars' interventions may affect individuals but not result in systemic changes (e.g., many states continue to use the death penalty), or those changes may take a long time to occur or may never occur at all. Placing too much emphasis on effects also serves a normative function, which, from the critical rhetoric orientation, can work perniciously in the interests of established powers. From CAR's perspective, irrespective of outcomes, it is important for scholars to intervene and attempt to change unjust discourses, which, as we illustrate in the next section, is an underdeveloped path for critical rhetoric scholarship.

Social Justice Activism Critical Rhetoric Scholarship

Recent scholarship reveals that rhetoricians—working in conversation with the ideological, critical, and decolonial turns in rhetorical studies—are poised to engage in social justice activism research. For example, during the past two decades, rhetoricians have studied oppressed communities' social justice struggles; in part, to "interrogat[e] the underlying impulses of rhetorics that appear to be advocating for freedom" (Hartzell, 2018, p. 13). Using primarily textual methods, that scholarship has offered important insights into intersectional and (neo)colonial workings of power, as well as how discourses of freedom, liberation, and emancipation subtly can reproduce hierarchy and inequality (e.g., DeLaurier & Salvador, 2018; Discenna, 2010; Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Hartzell, 2018; Hasian & Delgado, 1998; Hurt, 2007; Kearl, 2015, 2018; Middleton, 2014b). Another strain of rhetorical scholarship moves even closer to a social justice activism orientation by conducting in situ case studies of communities, including oppressed communities. Given its closer proximity to CAR, we explore that scholarship and find that much of it overlooks a crucial component: the need for rhetoricians to engage actively in, study critically, and report their social justice activism interventions in published scholarship.

In situ case studies reflect the recent turn to field research in rhetorical studies, in general, and critical rhetoric, in particular (see, e.g., Endres, Hess, Senda-Cook, & Middleton, 2016; Endres, Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Hess, 2016; Hess, 2017; McHendry, Middleton, Endres, Senda-Cook, & O'Byrne, 2014; McKinnon, Johnson, Asen, Chávez, & Howard, 2016; Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres, 2011; Pezzullo & de Onís, 2018; Rai & Druschke, 2018; Wilkins & Wolf, 2012). That fieldwork combines rhetorical criticism with (other) qualitative methods, such as ethnography (see, e.g., Britt, 2008; Conquergood, 1991, 1992; Hauser, 2011; Hess, 2015, 2017), autoethnography (Hanan, 2019; Lunceford, 2015), and discourse analysis (see, e.g., Aakhus, 2007; Johnstone & Eisenhart, 2008; Tracy, McDaniel, & Gronbeck, 2007). Combining these methods "provide[s] rhetorical scholars with an *application* of rhetorical theory and concepts through the direct observation of and participation with localized discourse" (Hess, 2011, p. 132, emphasis in original). That scholarship, thus, produces, compared with textual analyses, a richer engagement with the publics and

counterpublics that rhetoricians study, and it fulfills rhetoric's legacy as a practical, situated, and context-specific *techne*.

With critical rhetoric, specifically, and in line with a social justice activism orientation, Hess (2011) suggested combining rhetorical criticism and critical ethnography (which promotes social justice; see, e.g., Conquergood, 1991; Madison, 2019) to conduct "critical-rhetorical ethnography." That approach, Hess (2011) argued, augments rhetoric "with a participatory sensibility and method, through which rhetoricians advocate alongside vernacular organizations, arguing for their causes" (p. 128). As Hess (2011) elaborated:

The method is not mere observation of advocacy but rather an embodiment and enactment of advocacy through direct participation. Critical-rhetorical ethnographers engage in a vernacular organization's ideals and events, traveling with them to picket, to protest, to petition, or to perform. (p. 128)

Critical-rhetorical ethnography, thus, operationalizes Ono and Sloop's (1992, 1995; Sloop & Ono, 1997) call for rhetoricians to privilege vernacular and outlaw communities' discourses, and to reject the view of critics as passive spectators of those voices and social justice causes. Using that method, Hess (2011) argued that "criticism becomes enacted advocacy; speaking and advocating alongside those who seek changes to status quo conditions" (p. 131).

Building on and broadening Hess's (2011) call, Middleton, Hess, Endres, and Senda-Cook (2015) advanced *participatory critical rhetoric* (PCR)—"an umbrella term to describe a range of research practices in which rhetoricians engage . . . in extended forms of interaction, participation, and observation with the rhetorical communities they study" (p. xvi), and, in particular, with oppressed communities, to advocate with and for them (see also Middleton, Senda-Cook, Hess, & Endres, 2016). Criticism via this method promotes social justice by serving "a demystifying and emancipatory purpose by . . . unmasking how the discourse of power sustains inequality" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 35).

Additionally, in line with CAR's call for scholars to engage in social justice interventions, PCR

is closely aligned with a *telos of critical praxis* that informs its approach to rhetorical scholarship. By critical praxis we mean a practice in which critics not only analyze rhetoric, but also seek to intervene in structures of power and engage with communities by doing rhetoric. (Middleton et al., 2015, p. xviii, emphasis in original)

According to Middleton et al. (2015), interventions include "offer[ing] expertise to the rhetorical community hosting the critic's research (p. 44) . . . and productively range from performance ethnography to documentary production" (p. 38). By encouraging critical rhetoricians to be on-the-ground advocates who share their knowledge and competence with oppressed communities, PCR "offers unique opportunities for critics working to integrate an identity as an activist with their identity as a scholar" (Middleton et al., 2015, p. 51).

Several rhetoricians, employing methods that are similar to critical-rhetorical ethnography and/or PCR, have conducted research with oppressed communities. Pezzullo (2007, 2010a, 2010b), for instance, participated in and demonstrated how environmental justice activists' "toxic tours" of places polluted by harmful chemicals constitute rhetorical cultural performances that build communities of resistance. Chávez (2011, 2013) engaged in extensive participant observation to explicate and critique how rhetoric facilitates coalition building between queer rights and migrant rights activist organizations. Middleton's (2014a) interactions with a collectivity of activists revealed how their communication strategies represent a vernacular discourse designed to generate dissensus about homelessness as a social problem. Paliewicz (2019), who attended the 2014 People's Climate March "as both researcher and marcher" (p. 95), offered an aesthetic perspective to PCR for studying consensus and dissensus during social protest. McHendry (2016) used his body to investigate how airport security screenings by the Transportation Security Administration create affective climates that enable travelers' resistant performances. As a final example, Dykstra-DeVette's (2018) participant ethnography showed how an international refugee resettlement agency's "empowerment rhetoric" (p. 179) employed neoliberal discourses of self-sufficiency and the American Dream, which, simultaneously, enabled and limited that rhetoric's scope and social impact.

Although critical-rhetorical ethnography and PCR have much in common with, and are allies of, CAR, they have not pushed forcefully enough for an approach to critical rhetoric scholarship that values rhetoricians' social justice activist interventions that are studied critically and reported in academic publications. That lack of an intervention component results, in part, from the loose way that scholars promoting those methods have viewed rhetoricians' participation in/with communities. Middleton et al. (2015), for example, claimed that "participation may be limited to observation of activities as they occur and by inquiring into the choices made by members of an advocacy group" (pp. 18–19). Additionally, Middleton et al. (2015) argued that observation, such as "bearing witness" (p. 51), is a sufficient form of community engagement that positions

critics to make meaningful contributions to the communities with which they interact because, through witnessing and other critical strategies, it enables critics to develop strong relationships and intense understandings of the rhetorical practices and political stakes at play in the community one researches. (p. 52)

Bearing witness to, and participating in, protests, however, is not the same as Palmer (2007) creating and facilitating consensus-building discussion among activists preparing for a protest; nor is advocating for social justice alongside oppressed communities the same as McHale (2007) making a video documentary that helped to free someone on death row. Thus, whereas scholars conducting critical-rhetorical ethnography and PCR have focused primarily on their participation with communities, such as in the form of bearing witness, CAR scholars have channeled their energies toward designing, facilitating, studying, reflecting critically on, and reporting their collaborative interventions, seeking continually to improve interventions in relation to specific, situated, and unique social justice contexts. Research involving scholars' participatory engagement with oppressed communities, therefore, does not necessarily equal activist intervention scholarship with those communities.

To promote critical rhetoric scholarship that can foster fully the promise of transformative social change, we advocate for a social justice activism critical rhetoric that is committed to scholars intervening in critically reflective ways to promote social justice. We are not arguing that all critical rhetoric research needs to intervene but that interventions are necessary for social justice activism critical rhetoric scholarship. In conversation with ideological, critical, and decolonial turns in rhetorical studies, social justice interventions always must be informed by their unique intersectional, interactional, and intra-actional contexts (Crenshaw, 1989; Chávez, 2013; Gamble & Hanan, 2016). In conversation with CAR, two minimal criteria differentiate our framework from critical-rhetorical ethnography and PCR. First, a social justice activism approach to critical rhetoric scholarship foregrounds critical rhetoricians sharing and putting their knowledge to use by conducting concrete, collaborative interventions with communities experiencing unjust conditions. Such interventions might be similar to the examples offered by Palmer (2007) and McHale (2007), or they could be very different approaches that gravitate toward recent decolonization work in rhetorical studies. Second, in their academic publications about such work, rhetoricians reflect critically on their interventions and consider how their interactions with oppressed communities potentially perpetuate but hopefully transform social injustice. This latter aspect of scholarship draws on the radical skepticism of critical rhetoric and its continual efforts to unmask power in its most banal, insidious, and everyday forms.

With these two criteria in mind, we conclude this section by pointing to two recent rhetorical field studies that embody the social justice activism orientation toward critical rhetoric that we endorse. First, Herbig and Hess (2012) attended the 2010 "Rally to Restore Sanity" in Washington, DC, hosted by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. The rally was held to promote discussion of politics by those not at the political extremes, who, especially recently, have dominated the conversation. In addition to conducting in situ rhetorical research for a journal article about how media were discussed at the rally, these scholars made and posted on YouTube a short film about the rally (Living Text Productions, 2012). Herbig and Hess argued that, by interviewing attendees about their views of the media and by posting the documentary online, their intervention engaged attendees in participatory production of critical public scholarship that spoke (back) to media industries and to the wider public. They also employed their critical rhetorical training to examine limitations of their intervention, such as how cameras promote some people's agency but alienate others.

The second essay by Chávez (2017) discussed intellectual and artistic work that she produced with "Against Equality," a queer activist publishing and arts collective. Chávez (2017) argued that, although she has

a valuable skill as a researcher and a rhetorical critic, . . . I have chosen to shed as much of the jacket of expert as I can in order to share as an equal partner, learn, and use my specific skill set only as needed. (p. 182)

Taking that stance, Chávez (2017) differentiated her activist approach from CAR, which, she asserted, views

academia and academics as the primary site and producer of knowledge (p. 182), . . . [with] the scholar . . . as the most agentic person in the narrative (p. 181) . . . entering this activist space as academic-expert with . . . objectives to accomplish. (p. 182)

Carragee and Frey (2016), however, have explained explicitly that CAR views social justice as resulting from collective, not individual, activism. Moreover, as explicated in the previous section, first, CAR scholars listen to and learn deeply about oppressed communities' social justice goals, before offering aid if they have something meaningful to contribute to those communities' social justice pursuits. If that offer is welcomed, they collaborate with the communities to design, facilitate, and study the interventions employed. Hence, CAR fully supports interventions that are "coalitional" (Chávez, 2017, p. 176). Although CAR scholars would disagree with Chávez's views of CAR, her work productively puts her form of social justice activism in conversation with CAR to grapple with how to accomplish the shared goal of promoting transformative social change.

Conclusion

This essay made the case for a social justice activism approach to critical rhetoric scholarship. We argued that, although critical rhetoric—and its methodological and empirical extensions, such as critical-rhetorical ethnography and participatory critical rhetoric—have moved in the direction of social justice research, that work would benefit by incorporating an important and distinct move that has been articulated by communication activism for social justice scholarship: scholars engaging collaboratively with oppressed communities and with activists in interventions to promote social justice. From that standpoint, participating with oppressed communities, describing their social justice goals, and critiquing systemic structures that maintain social injustice are necessary but not sufficient practices for engaging in critical activist-oriented scholarship; on-the-ground collaborative interventions with oppressed communities that seek to make socially unjust systems and practices more just also must be foregrounded, studied, and reported.

In the spirit of critical rhetoric, social justice activism interventions, we argued, ought to be approached through a critical perspective that is sensitive to rhetoricians (and other scholars) who work with oppressed communities potentially reproducing unjust power dynamics in subtle and pernicious ways. However, the intervention component forms the centerpiece of this orientation toward critical rhetoric and academic publications resulting from that scholarship. The social justice activism form of critical rhetoric scholarship, thus, is a novel approach that accomplishes critical rhetoric's desire to enact social justice in terms that are fully performative and doxastic. By engaging in, studying, critiquing, and reporting their collaborative role in the rhetorical invention of social justice interventions, scholars performing social justice activism critical rhetoric commit actively to a telos that privileges using their critical resources to cultivate transformative social change.

Important constraints, however, stand in the way of conducting and publishing social justice activism critical rhetoric scholarship. One issue is that critical rhetoricians may not have experience engaging in (and studying) the collaborative interventions for which we are calling, and they may be reluctant to do so for a number of reasons (e.g., from not knowing how to design and facilitate rhetorical interventions, even though they do so routinely in their teaching, to fear of affecting adversely oppressed communities). However, to some extent, the same issue applies to critical rhetoricians who conduct participatory fieldwork with oppressed communities, or who are transitioning from studying texts to doing such fieldwork. Engaging in collaborative interventions, thus, represents a significant opportunity for critical rhetoricians to (learn how to) use their scholarly competencies in applied ways to aid oppressed communities' quest for social justice.

A second issue, mentioned previously, is that critical rhetoricians may well have engaged in activism during their participatory research with oppressed communities, but they have decoupled it from their scholarship by not studying their activism systematically and/or by not including it in their essays. As an anonymous reviewer of this manuscript noted:

One issue in rhetoric is that the publication does not necessarily reflect the activist work that . . . rhetorical critic[s] might do because of their research. I know that's certainly true for me—my own activist work isn't reflected in that way in my academic publications, but that doesn't mean my research doesn't influence my activism, and that my activism doesn't influence my research.

We, thus, encourage critical rhetoricians not only to participate in collaborative social justice activism interventions but also to study and report them in their published scholarship. As is the case for any phenomenon that scholars investigate, if, from the get-go, activism is treated as an object of study, scholars will employ conscientious procedures to describe, assess, and analyze critically those endeavors. Publishing that scholarship then produces a body of useful knowledge for (those seeking to be) scholar-activists engaging in and studying critically their present and future social justice interventions. Although the intervention strategies of leading teach-ins (Hartnett, 2007), making video documentaries/films (Herbig & Hess, 2012; McHale, 2007), and facilitating group consensus-building discussion (Palmer, 2007) may not be appropriate or useful for any particular scholar-activist, and alternative interventions may be needed, the fact that they were studied, reflected on critically, and reported in published essays provides evidence that these interventions can be employed in social justice activism scholarship.

A third constraint that operates at a systemic level, often in an insidious way, and that certainly affects rhetoricians who conduct social justice activism interventions concerns the need for journals that feature or include rhetorical work to welcome, respect, and publish that scholarship—which, unfortunately, is not always the case. One of our colleagues, after reading an earlier version of this essay, told us that he or she had included in essays submitted for publication social justice activism interventions that were part of that scholar's critical rhetoric fieldwork, but that journal reviewers and editors criticized the person for working actively with the social movement that was the focus of the research. Ultimately, the person was told explicitly to delete that social justice activism scholarship from the published essays. Given the historical tendency to align scholarship with *episteme* (knowledge) and social unrest with *doxa* (opinion; see, e.g., Neel, 1995), it is not surprising that academic research foregrounding activist interventions would be viewed as suspect by modern institutional powers, such as by publication gatekeepers in the disciplines of rhetoric and communication. Although these disciplines are more critically reflexive than they were in the past, they also are part of a Western tradition that historically has justified and rationalized social injustice (Gehrke, 2009). Moreover, as Hanan (2018), Houdek (2018), and others recently have shown, the academic peer-review publication process (in rhetoric and communication) serves neocolonial and neoliberal functions that exclude nonnormative bodies (e.g., those that are articulated as disabled and/or raced) from participating in academic knowledge creation, in general, and from promoting their social justice agendas, in particular.

These constraints, however, only reiterate the need for a social justice activism approach to critical rhetoric. If one of the aims of critical rhetoric is to show that *episteme* and *doxa* never can be disentangled and


separated fully, central to the effective deployment of critical rhetoric is the need for scholars to bring their social justice activism and, specifically, their social justice activism interventions more squarely into the orbit of academic writing. By designing, implementing, studying, critiquing, and reporting collaborative interventions that bridge “the great divide” between the discipline of rhetoric and the lived experiences, needs, and goals of oppressed communities, publics, and counterpublics (see Frey, 2006), rhetoricians will overcome the entrenched dualism between theory and praxis to develop an orientation toward critical rhetoric that realizes its performative and phronetic potential to promote social justice.

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