WHAT A WAY TO MAKE A LIVIN':

WOMEN CONSTRUCTING ETHOS IN CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL MEMOIRS

by

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I expected to write this dissertation in the living rooms, at the kitchen tables, and on the porches of friends across the country. Instead, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I wrote the majority of this dissertation in a corner of my small Fort Worth apartment, with daily runs and regular video calls with loved ones, colleagues, and students as my only outlets. Despite the difficulty of writing a dissertation through a pandemic, I am grateful to have had a safe writing space and a community that supported me from afar.

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ABSTRACT

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Professional memoirs provide a window into cultural understandings of the workplace and workers at a particular sociocultural moment. When professional memoirs are written by those who do not fit standard cultural perceptions of a professional in that field, memoirists use rhetorical strategies to develop their ethos and define themselves as experts to their readers. By rhetorically analyzing contemporary women's professional memoirs—written by public figures and consumed widely by a reading public—through feminist theories of ethos, this study examines how high-profile working women rhetorically construct their professional selves and expertise within the political, economic, and social culture of America in the 2010s.

In three public, rhetorical, and white-male-dominated professional fields—American politics, comedy, and Protestant Christianity—women use best selling memoirs to counter public narratives and professional norms that deem them unable to embody the standard professional of the field. Sonia Sotomayor, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Elizabeth Warren, Condoleezza Rice, and Kamala Harris expand political professionalism to fit their bodies and experiences by incorporating ecological and communal elements into their professional ethos through depictions in their memoirs of the challenges with authenticity, ambition, bodies, and relationships faced by women in politics. In funny memoirs about the precarious profession of comedy, Tina Fey,

Mindy Kaling, Tiffany Haddish, and Ali Wong articulate how they navigate professional beauty norms, environments, and relationships, ultimately crafting woman-centered interpretations of the comedy field and decentralizing the figure of the white male professional comedian. Austin Channing Brown, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and Katie Davis foreground atypical professional characteristics of woman professionals in the field of American Protestant Christianity in their memoirs, and reading communities take up these qualities in their reviews on the social media site Goodreads. These reviews illustrate how memoirs can adapt reader understandings of what constitutes a religious professional. Overall, these best selling memoirists rhetorically present themselves in ways that both satisfy and defy the cultural conception of a professional in their fields, addressing (implicitly or explicitly) the social, political, and cultural professional norms of the 2010s in regard to gender, race, class, and other markers of intersectional positionality.

CHAPTER 1
DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL ETHOS THROUGH WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL MEMOIRS

"This is what I tell young women who ask me for career advice. People are going to try to trick you. To make you feel that you are in competition with one another. 'You're up for a promotion. If they go with a woman, it'll be between you and Barbara.' Don't be fooled. You're not in competition with other women. You're in competition with everyone.
Also, I encourage them to always wear a bra. Even if you don't think you need it, just...you know what? You're never going to regret *it." – Tina Fey,* Bossypants

Tina Fey taught me how to be a professional woman. When her 2011 memoir was published, I was a young professional with my first full-time job at a company in which I deeply believed when I was hired. I endured a nasty corporate "reorganization" during my first months on the job, layoffs in which I was assured I—in my low-level job—was safe, but my boss, the woman who hired me, was not. From my windowless office that I shared with three enormous file cabinets, I watched her clean out her office, slowly putting the accumulation of a decade into a cardboard printer paper box. I quickly realized I had no idea how to survive in a professional world like this.

I was trying to figure out who I wanted to be as a young white woman in the workplace, trying to present myself as knowledgeable and productive rather than relying on the thoughtful and studious image that had served me well as a humanities undergraduate. I did have some models of successful professional women in my life: my mother, who stumbled upon an unexpected new job in teaching or literacy every few years; my beloved professors, who used wry humor to push me to think deeper; a lawyer at my church, who I watched stand up to a committee of old white men; my old boss, now looking for a job; my new boss, who had been promoted in the reorganization. None of these women represented the type of the professional woman I felt I needed to be in my current position, though. Nor could I see myself in the professional women on the television shows I loved. I didn't have Leslie Knope's tireless drive

for improving the parks of Pawnee, Indiana; C. J. Cregg's deft handling of the press in the Bartlett White House briefing room; nor Liz Lemon's marginally capable management of larger-than-life actors and businessmen along with her own neuroses. But then Liz's creator Tina Fey published a memoir, *Bossypants,* in April 2011, and I had found my professional muse.

I undoubtedly picked up Fey's memoir because of name recognition. I had been a fan of Tina Fey since watching her on *Saturday Night Live* as a Weekend Update anchor alongside Amy Poehler and then the Republican vice-president candidate Sarah Palin. However, Fey's memoir resonated with me for other reasons than the fame of its writer. Fey's description of herself as anxious, smart, and funny felt familiar, as did her stories of her childhood in youth theatre, her honesty about the issues with her workplace, and her love for her work. Fey's professional style was something I thought I could be: self-deprecating and sometimes uncertain, strong and hard-working, always looking for others to bring onto the team. She was a woman, she was herself, and she was the boss.

Four years later, on a plane from Texas to the Pacific Northwest after finishing my master's degree, I read another book by a woman who was a boss: Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead.* (These days, when I say I'm writing a dissertation about professional women's memoirs, the response I most frequently receive is, "Oh, like *Lean In*?") Sandberg's book has been both championed and lambasted in the years since its publication in 2013, the title itself becoming a cultural touchstone for (white) professional (corporate) feminism. When I read Sandberg's book, I found it interesting, inspiring, and more personal and funny than I had expected.[1] However, while I learned both from the book and the critiques of it, I

[1] Part of this tone can be attributed to Sandberg's co-writer, Nell Scovell, a prolific comedy writer who wrote a memoir of her own in 2018 called *Just the Funny Parts:...And a Few Hard Truths about Sneaking into the Hollywood Boys' Club*.

didn't connect with Sandberg's presentation of professional womanhood in the way I did Fey's. I can point to two elements underscoring my different responses: genre and ethos.

As a young adult, I had found the memoir genre to be a way to learn about others and, by extension, myself. I discovered the terminology and study of creative nonfiction, life writing, and memoir[2] in college, thanks to Dr. Melanie Mock, a professor I was drawn to because of her dry humor, authenticity, and love for creative nonfiction. Before long, I realized I had been writing personal narratives since my mother reached back from the front seat of the minivan to hand me a red spiral-bound notebook on our annual 31-hour family road trip from South Dakota to Florida. The notebook's cover read, "My Trip to Florida When I was Eight." As a child, I became a voracious chronicler, using writing as a way to make meaning and memories. Memoirist Mary Karr understands; as she writes in her craft book *The Art of Memoir*, "unless you're a doubter and a worrier, a nail-biter, an apologizer, a *re*thinker, then memoir may not be your playpen. That's the quality I've found most consistently in those life-story writers I've met. Truth is not their *enemy*. It's the bannister they grab for when feeling around on the dark cellar stairs. It's the solution" (xviii).

So, memoir became the bannister that helped me navigate my professional world. I read these books by Fey and Sandberg because I hoped they could help me make sense of this new space, not by giving me advice, but rather by telling me their stories. That's a major difference between the books by Sandberg and Fey. While both are considered "memoir" by the category appended to the ISBN barcode on the back cover of each, Sandberg's book has more of a "how to" quality. *Lean In*'s book jacket description describes the text's combination of "personal anecdotes, hard data, and compelling research" with "practical advice" and "specific steps women can take." Likely due to her position as chief operating officer of Facebook, Sandberg

[2] I provide an extensive discussion of terminology in chapter two.

focuses her book on being "an inspiring call to action and a blueprint for individual growth" through anecdotes and research (Sandberg). Fey's book, on the other hand, dispenses the "practical tips on how to make it in a male-dominated workplace" on the first page of the introduction: "No pigtails, no tube tops. Cry sparingly. (Some people say "Never let them see you cry." I say, if you're so mad you could just cry, then cry. It terrifies everyone.)" (3). Fey centers her book on telling stories with humor and purpose about her own experiences and relationships in the workplace. Both could be called memoir, which scholars define as a narrative snapshot of a life in context through a particular lens. However, the focuses of these texts are different, accentuating the differing professional ethos of the memoirists: the businessperson and the comedy writer. Little did I know that my initial reactions to these two memoirs would foreshadow my future rhetorical work in memoir, women writers, ethos and professionalism, and reader uptake.

I read memoirs alongside rhetorical theory in graduate school, though I found out that my chosen field didn't pay as much attention to my favorite genre as I did, especially the memoirs I most loved reading: memoirs by women who are public figures, memoirs also read by my mother and my book group, memoirs that everyone on social media seemed to have opinions about. My peers gravitated toward digital rhetoric or British novels of the long-nineteenth century; my research interests in contemporary women's memoirs fell somewhere in between: not quite rhetoric, not quite literature, not quite creative writing. As I continued to read memoirs about women in public and professional spaces, I also continued to develop my own professional persona as a member of the field of rhetoric and composition, amidst a cultural backdrop that impacted my scholarship and my pedagogy: the voracious sexism of the 2016 election; President Trump's election despite accusations of sexual assault and harassment (and his vicious racist, ableist, sexist rhetoric and eventual incitements to riot); the Women's March; the #MeToo,

#TimesUp, and #BlackLivesMatter movements; and continued violence against Black[3] women, trans women, and other women of color.

All of these moments—personal, literary, cultural, political—have brought me to studying contemporary women's professional memoirs, a subgenre of memoir that I define as a book-length text written by an individual about her life through the lens of her professional experiences, building her ethos as an expert in a particular career or workplace. In crafting her narrative, the professional memoirist tells stories that reveal the norms of her professional field and the expectations of the wider culture for a working woman. Also revelatory is the audience uptake of these professional memoirs, or the "intersections of texts and readers" (Mack and Alexander 55), as provided through reviews and reactions that show how readers take up and circulate professional norms and ethos constructions. Memoir is a genre widely read by the reading public, and as such, a profitable investment by publishers. Best seller lists continue to be populated with memoirs by celebrities, writers, and just ordinary folks who have lived through extraordinary circumstances. The *New York Times* best seller lists for March 7, 2021, has memoirs by writers in all three categories, writers that include a former president, a former First Lady, actors, a comedian, a mommy-blogger-turned-activist, and a journalist with cancer.[4] The current wave of memoir can be traced back to the late 1990s, when personal narratives by previously unknown writers like Mary Karr, Frank McCourt, and Mitch Albom were read by a growing number of American readers. However, this memoir boom is far from the first,

[3] On June 19, 2020, the Associated Press (AP) announced they would begin capitalizing Black "when referring to people in a racial, ethnic or cultural context," conveying "an essential and shared sense of history, identity and community among people who identify as Black, including those in the African diaspora and within Africa." As John Daniszewski, AP's vice president of standards, said, "The lowercase black is a color, not a person." The AP decided not to capitalize white, due to that capitalization being a rhetorical move associated with white supremacists. Around that same time, the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the *Wall Street Journa*l, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *NBC News*, and the *Chicago Tribune* announced they would do the same. Meanwhile, other publications such as CNN, Fox News and the *San Diego Union-Tribune* said they will capitalize white, on advice from the National Association of Black Journalists. I will be following the AP guidelines in this dissertation, capitalizing Black but not white in reference to the racial identity of a person.

[4] See the *New York Times* best seller lists for the week of March 7, 2021.

according to G. Thomas Couser. He points to a previous wave in the 1960s and 1970s, as personal narratives by Black authors became more widely read and acclaimed (Couser 140), but one could look even further back. The popularity of published life writing has risen and fallen through the ages: from spiritual writing of the Middle Ages to apologia and testimonio to the memoirs of generals and public officials to the Enlightened man and bildungsromans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Memoir and autobiography are not new genres; they frequently emerge and re-emerge as cultural calling cards, as indications of how people construct their lives for external audiences within a social milieu that dictates values, priorities, and ways of being in the world. These movements are particularly evident when women write about presenting themselves as professionals within male-dominated spheres.

The question remains: why is memoir so popular in our contemporary moment? No one really knows. Some attribute the rise to narcissism and self-involvement[5] or a culture obsessed with therapy and victimization.[6] However, as Rak notes, narcissism might explain why someone writes a memoir, but does not adequately explain why someone would want to read one...or many (*Boom* 33). Others might say our current culture, obsessed with social media and celebrities, craves disclosure and voyeurism,[7] but Instagram and Twitter make it far easier to pry into someone's life; plus the personal writing on those platforms is shorter and easier to access. Finally, people levy the criticism that memoirs are easy to write, easy to read, and wildly mediocre on average, particularly when it comes to the memoirs of the famous[8] (an argument that, I argue, could apply to all published texts, which exist on a subjective continuum from the excellent to the merely fine to the awfully bad). However, most of these criticisms come from writers and researchers who recognize that memoir is beloved to many readers, sating their

[5] William Gass's 1994 diatribe in *Harper's Magazine* is a prime example.
[6] See Ben Yagoda, Leigh Gilmore.
[7] Sidonie Smith mentions this reason in her 2011 MLA presidential address.
[8] Ben Yagoda says this in his book...on the history of memoir.

"hunger for a different, or at least more interesting, life," giving them "just what [their] unrecorded history lacks (and that the novel used to offer): a narrative through which to make sense of [their] own past[s]" (N. Miller 12).

Regardless of the reasons, if readers are reading memoir, then rhetorical disciplines should be paying attention. As Katherine Mack and Jonathan Alexander argue, "Given their ubiquity, their popularity, and the scholarly questions they generate, memoirs must be taken seriously and rhetoricians must ask about the rhetorical work they do" (50). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson also frame a need for life writing scholarship, based in how it is mediated through context and culture: "In acknowledging the dialogical nature of autobiographical telling, we confront the ways in which autobiographical telling is implicated in the microbial operations of power in contemporary everyday life" (*Getting* 9). Personal writing is a political and social act, including when it is done by high-profile public figures concerning professional spheres and when it is widely read. Writing about work, gender, and culture in particular reveals power dynamics, cultural norms, and accepted ways of being and thinking in the world—all concepts in which rhetoricians are crucially invested.

In answering these rhetorical calls and my own draw toward memoirs, this dissertation explores the rhetorical work of contemporary popular memoirs, written by women in the public eye about their careers in American politics, comedy, and Protestant Christianity. These three professional fields are highly public, rhetorical, and male-dominated, and women have worked to counter public narratives and professional norms in these fields that deem women atypical, unable to embody the standard professional of the field. My focus will be on how diverse authors use and adjust rhetorical strategies to build their professional ethos in widely read memoirs published during the decade of the 2010s. I consider professional memoirs by writers including Sonia Sotomayor and Sarah Palin; Tina Fey and Ali Wong; Nadia Bolz-Weber and Austin

Channing Brown, who all craft their ethos as professional public figures in effective and engaging ways to particular reading communities. Though these writers come with existing prior ethos based on their public personas, they work to present themselves in their memoirs in ways that both satisfy and defy the cultural conception of a professional in their fields—and the cultural conception of them as public figures—while also addressing (implicitly or explicitly) social, political, and cultural norms in regard to gender, race, class, and other markers of intersectional positionality. These presentations of modern professionalism are then taken up by audiences and circulated through reviews and social media sites, ultimately affecting larger cultural conceptions of women, work, and contemporary professional environments.

Through reviews of scholarly conversations and rhetorical and contextual analyses of the ethos construction in these memoirs, the following chapters reveal the cultural and rhetorical work of professional memoir, while deepening our rhetorical understanding of how public women craft their professional ethos. On a larger scale, my study argues that rhetoricians, and particularly scholars of women's rhetoric, should attend to popular and widely read texts such as professional memoir by public figures as a means of engaging with wider cultural contexts and readerships; by knowing what the public is reading and why, our rhetorical work can reflect the world outside the academy, respecting readers' interests and speaking to the cultural ideas they are taking in, passing along, and reacting against. Ultimately, this study answers the following: How do public women craft their ethos in popular professional memoirs in ways that both uphold and challenge the dominant professional and cultural landscapes of their professions? How do their rhetorical strategies change depending on the embodied experiences within particular professional spaces they articulate? How are their professional ethē received by audiences, positively or negatively, and what can the uptake of these professional memoirs

reveal about the rhetorical role of these memoirs in impacting cultural conceptions of professionalism?

Project Exigence

In January 2019, just as I was beginning this project, Katherine Mack and Jonathan Alexander published an article in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* titled "The Ethics of Memoir: *Ethos* in Uptake." Mack and Alexander see the contemporary moment as an "opportunity to analyze the relevance, force, and consequences of the increasing use of the personal as evidence in public debate" (50). Their study examines the ethos construction in two widely read contemporary memoirs, J. D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* and Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*. Mack and Alexander also analyze public response to these texts and their views of agency. The rhetoricians conclude by calling scholars to seize the *kairos* and attend to the rhetorical work of memoir in the public sphere, particularly in regard to ethos and uptake.

The next issue of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* includes a response by Amy E. Robillard to the Mack and Alexander piece and two other recent articles concerning life writing. Robillard's response, "Seeking Adequate Rhetorical Witnesses for Life Writing," argues that personal experience is shaped by ideology and cultural norms, and as such, extends beyond the personal. Furthermore, "a writer works to persuade an audience that this is how things happened, these are events worth paying attention to, my perspective and interpretation are useful and valid, and you may benefit in some way from understanding my experience"; as such, life writing, according to Robillard, is rhetorical (191). Her piece ends with a call to action: "Let's take up Mack and Alexander's challenge to revitalize the study of the genres of the personal. There's so much work to do" (192).

Much of the life writing work in rhetoric and composition has been done on the composition side of the aisle, as instructors debate the role of personal writing in the composition classroom (Elbow, Bishop, Hesse, Spigelman, Robillard, Gray-Rosendale, Newkirk). Professors in rhetoric and composition have also used professional memoir to write about their own experiences in the classroom and the academy (Villanueva, Rose, Young). Women's rhetoric scholars like Cheryl Glenn, Gesa Kirsch, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Coretta Pittman have worked to reclaim personal writing as worthy of rhetorical study. As feminist rhetorics, cultural rhetorics, and rhetoric writ large continue to advocate for nontraditional rhetorical texts, I echo Robillard in saying there is much work yet to do in terms of scholarly attention on the contemporary published life writing of women, and further conceptual and definitional work that distinguishes creative nonfiction genres and their rhetorical purposes from each other. If memoir truly impacts public debate, both in its writing and its reading, then rhetoric should be intensely interested in what memoirs have to tell us about particular cultural conceptions of agency, power, identity, and American life—and in this case, contemporary American professional spheres.

Scholarly attention has been paid to the literary components of memoir, as well as to memoirs in subfields such as disability studies, queer studies, humor studies, and women and gender studies. All of these subdisciplines provide important definitions, context, and tools for analyzing and interpreting memoir. However, most of these texts look at "literary memoirs," memoirs written by writers or scholars, rather than memoirs written by public figures that are taken up by the wider culture as the "book du jour." Much of the scholarship on memoir highlights the aesthetic work of memoir, while often attending less to the rhetorical and culturally situated work of memoir, which greatly depends on context, uptake, and the prior ethos of the memoirist. The lack of attention extends to the middlebrow, a category in which many popular memoirs fall, which demonstrates the continued high art bias of scholarship in the

humanities that is not only elitist but is also sexist.[9] If people are reading these texts, the texts are having a rhetorical impact, and addressing this impact will invite important cultural knowledge about writers' ethos, readers' uptake, and contemporary conceptions of women as professionals. This dissertation jumps headlong into that work, drawing on the rhetorical foundations of Mack and Alexander and other rhetoricians.

Project Frameworks

Alexander and Mack's framework from "The Ethics of Memoir: *Ethos* in Uptake" is a helpful starting point in regard to the relationship between ethos, as both a social construct and an authorial invention, and uptake. However, their analysis examines two male writers (albeit male writers who discuss race and class), and so I seek to expand their rhetorical framework to consider issues of gender along with race and other intersectional identities in professional memoirs. Answering the questions of this dissertation, I read closely and analyze rhetorically the ethos construction in works that roughly fall within three criteria: professional memoir, as defined in chapter three; popularity, as discussed in chapter two; and recency (published between 2010 and 2019), as discussed below. My rhetorical analysis is done within the framework of feminist rhetorical theory, particularly feminist theories of ethos as developed by Nedra Reynolds, Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones.

Aristotle's conception of ethos, as outlined in the *Rhetoric* and the *Nicomachean Ethics,* still has a significant hold on the field of rhetoric. And for good reason; Aristotle's definition has served the field well over the years. Ethos, simply, is authority based in the "practical wisdom and virtue and good will" of the speaker, as perceived by the audience (Aristotle 112). Success in oration is bolstered by a speaker who "seem[s] to be a certain kind of person and [whose] hearers suppose him to be disposed toward them in a certain way" (Aristotle 112). A speaker develops

[9] I further discuss the middlebrow and scholarly disdain for the popular in chapter two.

this disposition through habituation: "a well-formed character will lead one to act in accord with the principles of virtue as a matter of habit; proper habits, and hence character, are formed by performing virtuous actions" (Halloran 61). Ethos is framed as both internal and external, as a rhetor reflects virtues deemed to be a core element of his personal life, yet this reflection must be continually evaluated by a community. The etymology of the term "ethos" displays this tension, as the word can be translated as either "character" or as "custom" or "habit." As James Baumlin notes, the former translation seems to indicate a singular stable self, whereas the latter seems to describe a "social" self (xviii). This idea that ethos lies somewhere between the individual and the community has been explored by a number of scholars, such as Baumlin, Kate Ronald, Nedra Reynolds, and Karen Burke LeFevre. They indicate that this between-ness of ethos makes its calculation difficult, particularly for marginalized rhetors who do not fit into cultural conceptions of goodness and virtue.

Classical conceptions seem to present ethos as equally accessible to everyone, a matter of morality and rhetorical choice. This interpretation of ethos lacks a grounding in the reality of power structures and contextual social norms that deny goodwill or virtue to particular speakers. As Coretta Pittman writes, "The problem with ethos exists because Western culture has appropriated a classical model of ethos to judge the behavior of all of its citizens. However, not all of its citizens can be judged by the same standards. . . . Claims to ethos are after all ascribed by the dominant and imposed on the marginalized" (45, 48). Pittman discusses how Black women are often perceived as less moral than white individuals, particularly white women, and are not always permitted to develop the public habits their audience requires, so rhetors like Harriet Jacobs, Billie Holiday, and Sistah Souljah rewrote common cultural conceptions of virtuous behavior in order to develop ethos within a wider community (38). As such, an advanced understanding of ethos recognizes the different means available to rhetors through

which to build their ethos, and the different communities, contexts, and networks that impact that ethos creation.

Ethos is particularly important, and particularly challenging, in memoir, as the audience members' perception of the memoirist is crucial to their entrance into Lejeune's autobiographical pact. As Nedra Reynolds argues, if ethos is habit and habit is produced by culture, "an individual's ethos cannot be determined outside of the space in which it was created or without a sense of the cultural context" (329). Within that context, Smith and Watson note, "Not all 'experience' is accorded social and cultural recognition or legitimacy" (*Reading* 34); they go on to say, "Readers have expectations about who has the cultural authority to tell a particular kind of life story" (36). This understanding emphasizes that ethos is not a certain status that is attained and maintained. Instead, memoirs and memoirists are judged by a complex system based in a social, political, and cultural context, influenced by time, place, and networks of interpersonal connection. Particularly for women and the intersecting marginalizations they experience, ethos is rhetorically negotiated before the first page of the memoir, and it continues after the final page. A more nuanced view of ethos is needed to encompass the interwoven and enmeshed tensions of being a woman writing with authority about her experiences in memoir.

Ethos as Ecological

A way of addressing these concerns about Aristotelian conceptions of ethos is through Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones's feminist ecological ethē, an imaginary that has feminist and ecological ideas of interrelationality, materiality, and agency at its core. The authors acknowledge that "typical definitions of ethos do not presume difference, the shared yet diverse oppression of women, or contemporary theorizing about the subject as starting points for constructing ethos" (5). To fill this gap, they build on recent etymological scholarship of the term

"ethos" to reclaim its communal and located dimensions and envision a networked conception of multiple relationships that flow into and out of rhetorical authority.

Building on Lorraine Code's feminist ecological model of knowledge, a feminist ecological ethē—plural, not singular— "acknowledge[s] the multiple, nonlinear relations operating among rhetors, audiences, things and contexts (i.e., ideological, metaphorical, geographical). This theorizing recognizes all elements of any rhetorical situation as shifting and morphing in response to others (persons, places, things), generating a variety and plurality of ethos" (Ryan et al. 3). A flexible and located sense of ethos allows for increased emphasis on situated knowledge as identified and created by the subject, which applies directly to the creation of memoir in its subjective and situated form. In emphasizing the ecological aspects of ethos, rhetoricians are able to be "self-critically cognizant" of how writers are "located within a social-physical world that constrains and enables human practices, where knowing and acting always generate consequences," which Code calls "knowing how well" (qtd. in Ryan et al. 10). As such, ethos is "neither solitary nor fixed. Rather, ethos is negotiated and renegotiated, embodied and communal, co-constructed and thoroughly implicated in shifting power dynamics" (Ryan et al. 11). Ethos is a communal creation between a rhetor and her environment, community, and situation. Thus, the text of a memoir cannot be seen in isolation; a memoirist's rhetorical presentation of self cannot be separated from the time and place from which it emerged. Ethos is always multiple, just like the versions of a self across time and space are multiple.[10]

Ethos as Located

Another reconception of ethos involves locating a rhetor's positionality in time and space. In Nedra Reynolds's article "Ethos as Location," she argues for attention to the

[10] Even as I use ecological ethē here in its plural form, I will primarily use the singular form of the term "ethos" throughout the rest of the study for consistency and ease of reading.

multiplicity of texts involved in a speech act (broadly defined), as well as the context that surrounds that act of persuasion and the response to it. According to Reynolds, "Ethos is not measurable traits displayed by an individual; rather, it is a complex set of characteristics constructed by a group, sanctioned by that group, and more readily recognizable to others who belong or who share similar values or experiences" (327). One's ethos is intrinsically tied to group norms, whether the rhetor's orientation toward those norms is one that challenges, upholds, or collapses those norms. Reynolds is careful to emphasize that while a culture might be normative, it is also not a monolith. Women experience a male-dominated culture different from men, "seeing differently—and learning different things" (330), but they also experience it differently from each other, depending on the other identities, expectations, and marginalizations that frame the habits of ethos available to them. Reynolds draws on Adrienne Rich's call to "fight against abstraction and reclaim the material, beginning with the female body" (331) by writers explicitly stating where they stand, which is the basis of what memoir is and does: grounding authority in the personal narrative and location of the memoirist.

However, Reynolds points out that any rhetorical analysis that determines impact and ethos by merely looking at the text's words and structure misses the point. She uses Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* as an example of the historical ethos of composition studies but then outlines other elements that contribute to the developing ethos of composition:

> the New York City student demonstrations of 1969; the resulting Open Admissions policy and its effects on teaching writing, especially in 'worn urban classrooms'; Shaughnessy's combination of literary New Criticism and sociolinguistics; issues of academic discourse and students' rights to their own languages; Shaughnessy's Western heritage and romantic longings; and the enthusiastic, if not worshipful, reception of her book… (334)

And most crucially, the unnamed student writers whose work actually builds the study and the book itself (334). Whether memoirist or scholar, the writer must be located in her world and her text, and her text must be located in the world and the culture's response to her before the impact of the text on readers can be evaluated effectively. This location requires an acknowledgment of the relationships among spaces, people, and ideologies within which the writer and her experiences exist. In memoir, this location often has both explicit and implicit components. While a writer may expound upon the world or culture surrounding her experiences, she may not explicitly note how her ethos is built upon that location and the relationships therein.

Further, we cannot assume that because a rhetor is located somewhere that she feels a sense of belonging, or that there is even one kind of belonging, as Aimee Carillo Rowe argues. Different kinds of belonging emerge from different relationships with spaces, the people within those spaces, and how power is disseminated within those spaces. Again, the idea of belonging, especially its power components, is often implicit in memoir (professional memoir, in particular) but identifying the different ways a rhetor relates within a location—how she builds ethos—and to what end can be more rhetorically productive than merely identifying the location itself. Ultimately, ethos is negotiated, fluid, and wider than a writer and her memoir; it extends to how the writer fits into her social and cultural context, and how readers take up her text, responding to it and the context it comes out of—and the context and ideas it creates.

These updated conceptions of ethos demonstrate the complexity and centrality of ethos to rhetoric, particularly as employed by rhetors with varied access to power and authority within a culture. Ethos is more than the simple practical wisdom, virtue, and goodwill of an individual rhetor. Rather, those traits are negotiated and renegotiated in the space between writers and their readers in a wider context that involves location, relation, and a network of human, material, and ideological elements. Interdependence is key to a consideration of ethos that is both feminist and

ecological. This interdependence and complexity are evident in how women use the memoir genre to build their ethos with their audiences within cultural norms, social contexts, and gendered constraints. They take a snapshot of their lives, showing how their experiences are part of the political, social, and cultural milieu, while also working through every word to craft an ethos that is acceptable to their intended audience. Having a complex conception of both memoir and ethos provides rhetoricians a deeper understanding of women's rhetorical agency at particular times and places.

Feminist Rhetorical Inquiry

Building on these feminist theories of ethos, I approach my research and analysis through thematic frameworks for feminist rhetorical inquiry, particularly grounding analysis and interpretation, as defined by Royster and Kirsch in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices.* With this framework of inquiry, "we face the challenge of gathering data with a consideration of multiple viewpoints, balancing the viewpoints that emerge, and then coming to interpretations of this enriched landscape that are substantive, fair, and respectful" (Royster and Kirsch 139). Part of this work involves interrogating definitions, methodologies, and criteria, and inventing new ways of reading and analyzing depending on genre, context, and rhetorical action. Much of the research around memoir is concerned with whether memoirs can be true or how memoirists craft their subjectivity, but I contend these avenues of reading memoir rhetorically is too limited. We need to reconsider rhetoric's long held beliefs about memoir, and determine what professional memoir can bring to women's rhetorics in particular. Additionally, we need to revise our methods and our criteria to determine what professional memoir does in the world rhetorically in terms of gender and professionalism, why it continues to be popular, and what it demonstrates

about larger social concerns. As I do this rhetorical work, I ground my methods in the texts themselves as I approach these life writings and writers with respect and consideration.

I also resonate with Jacqueline Jones Royster's approach to research as described in *Traces of a Stream*. Given my positionality as a white woman, I do not wish to equate my "ways of doing" with hers, given that Royster's are grounded in her identity and afrafeminism. However, I find the four sites of critical regard she outlines helpful in considering my own personal and scholarly attachments to this work. The first, critical regard, involves being aware of scholarly practices: "to both use the framework and interpret it" (280). Royster specifically cites being careful to note "characteristics that are likely to be specific rather than general, local rather than global" (280). In this study, I wish to avoid essentializing. I do not want to say that the comedians I am studying represent all other women comedians; instead, I contextualize their self-depictions and consider how their intersecting identities affect how and why they construct their ethos in a particular way. I want to show how these writers are expanding their professional fields, demonstrating how different bodies and selves can be considered professionals, not replacing one standardized version of the professional with another.

I also want to highlight Royster's "acknowledgment of passionate attachments" (280), which considers the embodiment of knowledge-producers and their ways of being and doing. As I work to bring memoir into our field as meaningful rhetorical artifacts, I do so as someone who passionately loves reading and writing memoir, as is clear from my opening anecdote. At the same time, I also recognize the damage that can be done through the coercion of personal writing and the commodification of personal stories. Not all self-disclosure is healing, and not all memoir has the same rhetorical impact. I recognize my belief in the power and knowledge of life writing is based in the experiences of a privileged white body, which means my story is not commodified for the sake of diversity or justification for my presence in the academy. I have

used personal narrative as a form of inquiry for most of my life, encouraged by my family and teachers to do so. This experience frames my knowledge-making in this dissertation, and I recognize that it is not shared by all. However, my desire to expand the field to encourage these texts as rhetorical artifacts is born from the value I place on the personal as an inquiry method, and I believe a more robust understanding of memoir as rhetorical will expand our knowledge of how memoir is an avenue for women's professional self-definition.

Royster's final two sites, attention to ethical action and commitment to social responsibility, are crucial when it comes to analyzing personal and professional stories and the accountability I feel when discussing the memoirs of others, even popular figures like the writers of these texts. I want to assess my own research methods and make sure that I am treating these writers with care and critical reflection, considering the text as a constructed conception of the self and not the self itself. I am accountable to these writers, their professional communities, and the other communities of which they are part. Also, as I consider how readers outside of the academic community engage with these texts, I want to be conscious of a tendency toward creating the reading public as a monolith. I want to be aware of how people read, why they read, and the varied interactions they might have with a text, particularly one by a high-profile public figure. I want to consider the social responsibility of my scholarship and the extent to which I can speak to the experiences and communities of which I am unfamiliar.

Project Scope

With these rhetorical frameworks scaffolding my work, the goals of this project are twofold: to demonstrate the need for more robust rhetorical considerations of memoir, and to illustrate the sociocultural rhetorical impact of popular contemporary women's professional memoirs by analyzing ethos construction and uptake. As I move forward into definitional and

analytical work, I recognize the limitations of each measure and concept. No term is neutral; on the contrary, "neutral terms" consistently uphold the hegemony, which is built upon white supremacy, gender inequality, heteronormativity, and Western ideals of knowledge-making. As I move forward with this study within frameworks that are not just to all people, I seek to show the ways memoirists work within (or against or in concert with) similarly unjust systems as evidenced by their embodied experiences in male-dominated workplaces by using rhetorical strategies to build their professional ethos in ways that impact common cultural conceptions of professional figures in particular fields. Additionally, considering the limitations of these frameworks and definitions can be valuable in thinking and evaluating our field's research methods and methodologies and the knowledge they produce.

In order to gauge the rhetorical impact of popular texts, we need to, as Cheryl Glenn says, "see what is familiar in a different way, in many different ways, as well as to see beyond the familiar to the unfamiliar, to the unseen" (7). In this study, I'm not refiguring Aspasia, but rather Hillary Clinton and Tiffany Haddish. Rather than considering these writers to be merely well-known entertainers, politicians, and spiritual leaders, we can use historiography to look at these women as contextualized professionals who use their stories to rhetorically broaden the popular conception of the public servant, the comic, and the religious professional. The writers are rhetorically defining their roles and their spaces within their professional fields through their personal narratives. Due to this definitional, cultural, and rhetorical work, their memoirs must be part of our rhetorical landscape.

Defining Contemporary Memoir and its Popularity

The work of chapter two identifies how and why the term "memoir" can be so confusing. Scholars tend to use "memoir" and "autobiography" interchangeably, even though a

contemporary definition of memoir is narrowly focused life writing that explores experiences grouped around a particular theme or aspect of life. In chapter two, I argue for clarification of the memoir genre in order to fully identify and analyze how memoir "foregrounds historical shifts and intersecting cultural formations," as Smith and Watson articulate (*Reading* 4). Particularly in the work of women's rhetorics, a conception of memoir helps us understand how women write memoirs and how women read them.[11] The reading public is often feminized, as studies show women read more than men. Women also populate book clubs, which greatly affect best sellers lists and determinations of a text's popularity. Scholarly attention tends to overlook most texts deemed mass-market or middlebrow, including the memoir genre, which means widely read books and ideas circulated within the large reading publics often go unstudied. As this chapter argues, this is all the more reason memoir as a rhetorical genre should be studied by women's rhetorics.

While I am inviting memoir to become part of the rhetorical corpus, I am not arguing for these texts' inclusion in the rhetorical canon. Scholars have warned against falling back into old rhetorical habits. K. J. Rawson cautions against recovery's work tendency to reify gender binaries and logics, and Michelle Ballif contends that recovery can further fortify the patriarchal structures of canonization. I move forward with those critiques in mind, trying to trouble how

[11] In this study, I analyze memoirs written by individuals who self-identify as women. I do not wish to present the term "woman" as neutral and unequivocal, given the spectrum of gender identities and experiences, as well as the ways that women's rhetorics, feminist rhetorics, queer rhetorics, and other subsets of these fields have—at various points and in various ways—both essentialized and binarized gender and then pushed back against those essentialisms. Additionally, gender alone does not affect how one is perceived—i.e., no one is seen as simply a woman in the workplace. As K. J. Rawson states, "Isolating 'woman' as a singular category for feminist analysis is only possible when we recover otherwise privileged women, including white, heterosexual, gender-normative, able-bodied people" (46). Much of the history of feminism is marked by racism and heteronormativity, as white women worked for their own rights, silencing and subjugating the voices of women of color, lesbians, and trans women. The centering of the white hetero-cisgender female experience is still highly prevalent in the field of women's rhetorics. Feminist scholars need to "become increasingly aware of the identities we privilege to the exclusion of others" (Rawson 46). However, this tension becomes increasingly challenging when it is combined with the measure of "popularity" within the time period I am exploring—which is also not a neutral idea. I explore the concept of popularity in greater depth in chapter three, but moving forward, I will use the term "woman" cognizant of the challenges inherent in the definition. I also rarely use the term "female" as a descriptor in order to avoid equating "woman" with "female."

we—both as a field and as a culture—evaluate texts' merits and gauge their popularity. Through my rhetorical analysis, I consider the rhetorical, persuasive, intentional moments of these personal narratives and their rhetorical impact on the broader American culture, thus demonstrating the limitations of a rhetorical canon that is hesitant to bestow legitimacy on popular contemporary personal writing.

Readers often respond to popular texts in public forums, a process which Mack and Alexander and scholars of genre call "uptake." Uptake ties ethos with a larger cultural context, and, as such, it is a helpful framework for not only thinking about the interconnectedness of texts and circulation but also the complex web that is the creation of personal and professional ethos in memoir. Looking at uptake also reflects a key feminist methodology of critical engagement, or social circulation, which considers how readers circulate the information they read into their networked communities (Royster and Kirsch 101). Overall, this chapter argues for the rhetorical nature of memoir and the ways it can do what other genres cannot: provide insight into an individual life within a cultural context, revealing the social, cultural, and political impacts on women who create themselves as narrative subjects and the ways readers respond to those ethos creations.

Considering Professional Memoir as a Subgenre

Given the rhetorical nature of memoir and its preponderance of subgenres, chapter three focuses on defining the subgenre of the professional memoir, or memoirs that contextualize an individual career through the lens of their profession. Professional memoirs provide a glimpse into cultural conceptions of the workplace and workers at a particular time and place. Their writers are people who, at the moment of writing the memoir and in the presentation of ethos throughout the book, craft themselves as invested members of a profession. When memoirs are

written by those who do not fit the stereotypical cultural perception of a professional in that field, they use intentional rhetorical strategies to define themselves as experts in the eyes of their audiences. Sometimes memoirists do this by rhetorically adapting their profession; sometimes they do this by rhetorically adapting what it means to be a professional.

The rhetorical nature of work and gender has a scholarly history, as does as the intersections between work and memoir, which this chapter outlines. However, I argue a rhetorical understanding of professional memoir helps scholars see the impact of these writers' individual stories placed in a wider social and political context, as these memoirs circulate women's interpretations of their workplaces and themselves as professionals in ways that often address cultural conceptions of professional women. This impact is even greater when the professional memoir is written by a "somebody," or someone with fame, notoriety, or social clout; "nobody memoirs" also exist and tend to be discussed in scholarly circles, while somebody memoirs are often overlooked. Somebody memoirs are written by those who already have some measure of authority before they publish their memoirs; as such, their memoirs must take into account their writers' prior ethos, as Amossy terms the reader's understanding of the cultural role a public figure inhabits before encountering their text. These memoirists are also writing within a cultural context that frames their work and their popularity. In this chapter, I argue that these memoirs are cultural objects, by which I mean "those symbolic, therefore often artistic, means by which society represents itself to itself, and in the representing comments upon and transforms itself" (Brummett xvi). These popular professional memoirs by high-profile public figures both reflect and impact cultural conceptions of women in the workplace through their writers' construction of professional ethos.

In particular, this dissertation focuses on professional women's memoirs published from 2010 to 2019 (with one exception, as I discuss in chapter four). These memoirs construct

professional worlds of the 2010s that reflect larger social and cultural issues. Some scholars may argue that it is too soon to evaluate these memoirs, that we cannot mark the impact of these memoirs until more time has passed. However, if we are to gauge the rhetorical impact of a text, we need to look at it in the context in which it was written, published, and received by readers. Perhaps Clinton's *What Happened* won't be read by the reading public in 2025 or 2045, but that does not negate what it represented about the culture of American politics when it was published in 2017 and the role of women (one woman in particular) in that culture. Seeing the impact of the recent past can give rhetoricians a basis for which to approach current popular memoirs and current conceptions of the workplace, which will only continue changing as professional women react to current cultural, social, economic, and political situations and use their memoirs to craft their ethos in response to those forces.

Analyzing Women's Professional Ethos in Memoir

The following chapters will focus on professional memoirs that represent three public male-dominated rhetorical fields. Given the long rhetorical pasts of these professions, the standard conception of a professional figure in each is a white man speaking publicly, whether in the Senate chambers, on a comedy club stage, or in a pulpit. These rhetorical traditions have historically not allowed for women's public rhetorical participation, and while strides have been made in each field, particularly in the early twenty-first century, high-profile professional women still encounter difficulty being considered as a professional by their constituents, audiences, or parishioners, and they use rhetorical strategies to develop their professional ethos in the rhetorical work they do. The rhetorical work of their memoirs builds on their prior ethos, as they challenge professional norms that do not allow for their embodied experiences. Articulating this disconnect between norms and experience in their memoirs provides them with professional

ethos, as well as expands audiences' ideas of who can and should be considered a professional in these rhetorical professional fields.

Chapter four considers memoirs by women who have held high-profile political roles over the last two decades, and identifies how these professional women craft their professional ethos to their peers and constituents. Despite having different roles in the political field, the writers of these seven memoirs—Sonia Sotomayor, Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Elizabeth Warren, Condoleezza Rice, and Kamala Harris—all address particular aspects of political professionalism that disallow women from gaining professional ethos. While their memoirs range from campaign memoirs to retrospectives, they each articulate the ways the media, the electorate, and even their fellow politicians reinscribe professional norms that do not match their lived experiences. To expand this professionalism to fit their bodies and experiences, as well as their prior ethos, these women incorporate ecological and communal elements into their professional ethos through talking about the challenges women face with authenticity, ambition, bodies, and relationships. In this chapter I argue that through their professional memoirs, these political women reveal the sexism of political professionalism, extend conceptions of professionalism, and demonstrate the challenges of developing (and maintaining) professional ethos as women in the highly contentious rhetorical landscape of American politics.

Chapter five takes a humorous turn by looking at funny women writing about their jobs in comedy. Comedians make their living in a precarious workplace that requires participation in informal professional networks for support and professional opportunities. This is true whether one is a comedy writer/creator/performer, like Tina Fey (*Bossypants*) and Mindy Kaling (*Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*), or a stand-up/actor, like Tiffany Haddish (*The Last Black Unicorn*) and Ali Wong (*Dear Girls*). As such, criticizing the field often comes at a cost, particularly for those whose embodied experiences do not match the standard white-male

conception of "the Comedian." Therefore, high-profile public women use their memoirs to articulate how they navigate the professional norms of their white-male-dominated profession, particularly the beauty norms, professional environments, and professional relationships. The writers have to balance their commitment to their field with their critiques of it, and as such, sometimes their memoirs demonstrate how to manage, rather than dismantle, the sexism of the profession, or avoid giving consideration to the forms of privilege that provide them relative security in a precarious professional field. Ultimately, I argue these texts provide insight into the rhetorically deft ways high-profile women comedians use their embodied experiences to reveal woman-centered interpretations of the field and critique the sexism of their chosen profession, decentralizing the standard white male professional comedian and creating space for women to craft their ethos and professionalism.

Chapter six explores Goodreads reviews as evidence of how readers take up the professional qualities presented in the professional memoirs of contemporary women who work in the field of Protestant Christianity. It is an understatement to say that the religious institution and professional environment of Christianity has traditionally been male-dominated. While each denomination differs, the Church as a whole has historically supported men in their work as religious professionals while putting boundaries around women who feel called to the work of Christian ministry. Women still find ways to serve the Church in professional capacities; however, they have to make rhetorically savvy moves to build their professional ethos, whether they work in nonprofit organizations, churches, or the mission field. In this chapter, I analyze how three Christian women craft their professional ethos in their memoirs by foregrounding particular qualities: the embodied forthrightness of church/nonprofit organization diversity consultant Austin Channing Brown's *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness,* the qualified edginess of Lutheran pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber's *Pastrix*, and the young

willingness of missionary Katie Davis's *Kisses from Katie: A Story of Relentless Love and Redemption*. Different reading communities react to these professional qualities in different ways through their book reviews on the free social media site Goodreads. These reviews illustrate the ways in which communities of readers take up or react against constructions of professional qualities; either reaction involves an adaptation of the readers' understandings of what constitutes a professional in this field. This chapter argues that by studying reader uptake, rhetoricians can examine how the intervention of a professional memoir can shift readers' conceptions of what a professional in the American Protestant Christian workplace might look and act like.

The final chapter of this study brings together conclusions regarding ethos and uptake in professional women's memoirs, reflecting the arguments of the previous chapters to identify patterns that indicate larger social and cultural movements regarding women's memoirs, women's ethos, and women in professional fields. I explore limitations of this project and future avenues for this work, including analyzing the professional memoirs of additional male-dominated fields (such as technology and sports), assessing uptake in multiple mediums, and considering what professional memoir might teach us about the professional field within which we as rhetoricians work. Overall, I demonstrate the importance of considering professional memoir as a valuable rhetorical genre for women's rhetoric, reaffirming how professional memoir shows us not only how working women conceptualize themselves and their professional careers, but also how the wider culture perpetuates or pushes against those conceptualizations. More broadly, due to the important social, cultural, and political dimensions of memoir and its enormous popularity, women's rhetoric must consider memoir a crucial rhetorical genre that reveals perceptions of gender, race, class, and other markers of difference. This perspective will more fully develop our understanding of how memoir functions circulates cultural conceptions of

women as narrative subjects within multiple reading communities, as well as the ways women use memoir to develop their personal and professional ethos.

CHAPTER 2
MORE THAN THE BLACK SHEEP: MEMOIR, WOMEN'S RHETORICS, AND UPTAKE

"Memoir, for much of its modern history, has been the black sheep of the literary family. Like a drunken guest at a wedding, it is constantly mortifying its soberer relatives (philosophy, history, literary fiction)—spilling family secrets, embarrassing old friends—motivated, it would seem, by an overpowering need to be the center of attention." – Daniel Mendelsohn, The New Yorker

In a 1982 article in the journal *Biography*, Beverly Seaton coins the term "popular topical autobiography." She uses this term to refer to books written for the middle-class reading public "in which a writer tells of his personal experiences by emphasizing the topic, often at the expense of factual personal details" (Seaton 253). In this category, Seaton places books about childhoods on the farm, accounts of medical trauma, and autobiographies of lives with animals. She contends that because these books appeal to a popular audience, they reveal the interests and attitudes of this public. Seaton ends her article by noting current trends toward the humorous, nostalgic, and "serious problems in life" (264). Looking to the future, Seaton says, "In fact, if this paper were to be written twenty years from now, it is entirely possible that the author would find that books about problems were more popular than other sorts in the eighties and nineties, which would signal an interesting shift in popular reading tastes" (264). Little did she know the memoir boom of the 1990s and all of its personal writing about "serious problems in life" was right around the corner, leading memoir to become the messy "black sheep of the literary family," in Daniel Mendelsohn's words.

Despite Mendelsohn's characterization—or perhaps because of it—the reading public is still into "popular topical autobiography," or memoir. Yet most scholarship on memoir has tended toward literary and theoretical conversations about the subjectivity of the author, what constitutes "truth" in life writing, and the aesthetics of the craft, without much consideration of what rhetorical work the genre does in reflecting audiences and cultures, as well as making those

audiences and cultures. Additionally, cultural and women's rhetorics have continued to challenge who counts as rhetors by reclaiming and remapping the rhetorical landscape; in doing so, more attention has been focused on who, how, and why a rhetor should be reclaimed rather than how their rhetorical moves and positionality dovetail with the genre they are utilizing and how people are reading their works. An advanced rhetorical understanding of memoir has yet to be fully realized, and as such, the rhetorical power of the memoir has been undertheorized.

Despite this lack of focused scholarly attention, memoir provides important rhetorical fodder for analysis, as it provides a snapshot of a life at a moment in time: a singular life that is connected through relationships and locations to wider social and cultural conversations. Memoir both responds to the exigence of rhetorical situations and reflects this exigence in how the texts construct the subject and the surrounding culture. This connection between the personal and the public is particularly noticeable in popular memoirs written by high-profile women who have a rhetorical challenge in building the appropriate ethos to tell their life stories. Examining the rhetorical challenge of ethos in memoir as demonstrated by contemporary female memoirists provides insight for the field of women's rhetoric into the gendered rhetorical and cultural landscape these memoirs exist within. Ultimately, understanding memoir as a rhetorical genre is necessary to understand how women memoirists rhetorically construct themselves and their lives for an audience, as their memoirs are used to build and maintain ethos and circulate ideas to reading publics—often composed of women—about women's roles within a particular time and place. Such understanding is the work of this chapter.

Thus, this chapter covers a lot of rhetorical ground. First, I discuss the complicated definition of memoir as a rhetorical genre, the genre's cultural work, and conversations about women's memoir, demonstrating how memoir as a genre is a valuable way for women's rhetorics to assess the ways women move through culture and rhetorically build their ethos.

Second, I talk about how ethos, uptake and circulation, and mass-market popularity influence the rhetoricity of the memoir genre. Finally, I articulate what a more robust understanding of memoir and its associated terms would provide for the field of rhetoric: a connection between the reading publics and the ivory tower, and an increased focus on the self-construction of women's ethos and the ensuing social circulation of sociocultural ideas about women at a cultural moment.

The Rhetoric of Memoir

Literary scholars termed creative nonfiction the fourth genre, alongside fiction, drama, and poetry, when arguing for the literary merit of narrative journalism, essays, and memoirs alongside novels, plays, and poems. However, creative nonfiction is a broad tent under which could fall any number of pieces of writing that combine facts with narrative strategies. Life writing is a slightly smaller term that encompasses creative nonfiction of the personal variety, writing with the author using the self as the subject, though life writing could include social media posts and other forms of mediated self-representation that arguably have less narrative and "creative" aspects for them to be considered creative nonfiction. Identifying the boundaries of definitions may seem like a lost cause, particularly when the genre is broad and the rhetorical actions among different forms are distinctive, and yet, differentiating between more specific genres like memoir and autobiography that fall under the larger tent of creative nonfiction provides insight into the significance each might bring to rhetorical studies.

Before diving into the genre differences between memoir, autobiography, and other forms of life writing, it is helpful to consider different views of genre itself, particularly since creative nonfiction lies at the intersection between literature and rhetoric. Often in literary studies, genre conventions have been considered constraints from which to break free in order to do innovative literary work. Additionally, genre literature such as romance and fantasy has been

more frequently associated with lowbrow audiences and with commercially rather than artistically valued texts, as Julie Rak points out (*Boom* 52). However, this view of genre operates in an ideology of aesthetics that align the worth of a text with its literary features, rather than one that focuses on texts' rhetorical impacts, or how they do things in the world.

As a counterpoint to the aesthetic definition of genre, Carolyn R. Miller's well-known rhetorical definition calls genres "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (159). Genre arises as responses to particular situations that require a response, over and over again. Miller often uses letters or eulogies as examples, which are less traditionally literary genres but have a strong central speaker similar to memoir. She goes on to call genre "a kind of meta-information," which instructs and disposes an audience "to anticipate, to be gratified, to respond in a certain way" to particular forms in a particular context (C. Miller 159). Ultimately, she argues that genre is a "rhetorical means for mediating private intentions and social exigence; it motivates by connecting the private with the public, the singular with the recurrent" (C. Miller 163). In this way, genres are rhetorical when they represent patterns of individual actions in reactions to particular sociocultural environments. These patterns and situations then result in particular repeated forms and conventions that become expected by participants, whether readers or writers. As genres that present the writer's personal and public experiences in cultural contexts, autobiography and memoir especially reflect the world and remake it.

Considering the characteristics and conventions of life writing genres is both challenging and important, because common conceptions of a personal narrative as fundamentally true and based in memory can elide the constructed nature of the story, as well as the ways that cultural interpretations of the self and society affect how those stories are constructed. As autobiography scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson say, "Conventions that are culturally and historically specific govern storytelling options, narrative plotting, and the uses of remembering. And those

conventions have histories: that is, at certain historical moments and in specific milieu, certain stories become intelligible and normative" (*Reading* 91). Genres affect how individuals tell their stories and how audiences understand that a story is being told and what kind. To reframe this from a rhetorical standpoint, individuals come to interpret particular rhetorical situations as requiring a particular generic response, built from patterns developed over years that also shift over time according to new rhetorical situations, new exigences, and new rhetors. As such, the never-settled debates about whether creative nonfiction is "true" are less rhetorically productive than considering how the formats of autobiography and memoir are "contextually marked, collaboratively mediated, provisional" (Smith and Watson, *Getting* 9); this rhetorical move changes the conversation to focusing on how an individual's story reflects larger cultural stories about the individual's place in the world and society, and how audiences take up and circulate these ideas as true or untrue. In considering texts in genres that lie at the intersections between literary and rhetorical studies, rhetorical scholars must also ask how those fulfillments or subversions of conventions display reader expectations for texts and their actions in the world, how they reflect larger cultural and social movements within which the genres circulate, and how marginalized rhetors use, modify, challenge, or approximate common cultural forms.

Memoir Delineations and Definitions

The terms "memoir" and "autobiography" are known to audiences both inside and outside the academy, but how they are employed in these rhetorical spaces varies greatly. Even scholars of life writing occasionally treat the terms as synonyms rather than distinct genres. For instance, in *Reading Autobiography,* Smith and Watson decide to use the term "autobiography" to refer to Western conceptions of the traditional life narratives rather than what they articulate is "the more common term *memoir*" (4), though just two pages earlier, they say that

"autobiography [is] now the most commonly used term for life writing" (2). Seemingly they do so in order to easily convert the term into an adjective; however, regardless of their reasoning, this rhetorical choice indicates that these scholars, who have published widely on autobiographical discourse, consider little difference between autobiography and memoir. Journalism and language professor Ben Yagoda also uses the terms interchangeably in his book *Memoir: A History*. Other scholars expand the term *memoir* to encompass literally anything that "conveys a discrete life experience" (Taylor 709). Sociologist Judith Taylor, for instance, writes that memoir can include "expository essay, historical narrative, blog, poem, photograph, painting, fiction, song lyrics, traditional autobiography, journalism, literary reportage, and social research, to name just some" (709). Similarly, creative writer Lee Gutkind argues in his craft book that memoirs, informal essays, and personal essays are all "very close in content and can be referred to indiscriminately" (*You Can't Make* 60). This broadening of scope allows for interesting scholarly interventions that reclaim or reinterpret particular forms as part of the memoir/autobiographical impulse; however, ignoring distinctions between these genres can elide their specific cultural work in the world.

The enduring challenge of distinguishing memoir from autobiography has a long history. When scholar Julie Rak refers to the "memoir boom" of the 1990s and early 2000s, readers can infer that memoirs have only recently become the term of choice for popular life writing. Actually, the term "memoirs" predates "autobiography" by over 100 years, according to the Oxford English Dictionary.[12] Memoir was first associated with the "social accomplishments" of prominent cultural individuals (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 3), usually white men who had become conventionally successful in their societies. These memoirs were part of a life writing

[12] The term memoir or memoirs in regard to either "autobiographical observations; reminiscences" or "records of events or history written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer" dates back to the mid-seventeenth century, according to the OED. The first use of "autobiography" recorded by the OED was in 1797.

landscape that included a long history of spiritual writing and confessions by individuals like Augustine and Julian of Norwich. In the eighteenth century, "scandalous memoirs" became highly popular, written by non-professional authors who outlined their liaisons and escapades with the French upper class (Rak, *Boom* 5). Julie Rak marks the switch to "autobiography" with Jean Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions*, published in 1782 and 1789. The new term that came as a response to Rousseau's work distinguished autobiography as works of literary merit by real writers from the exploits of figures merely famous or infamous. Autobiography enjoyed a long tenure as the life writing term of choice until the end of the twentieth century.

The current trend of defining most autobiographical texts as memoirs can be traced back to the most recent memoir boom in the 1990s and early 2000s, in which memoir became the preferred term for publishing houses to stamp on a work of creative nonfiction that contextualized the personal within larger social issues.[13] These memoirs countered many traditional conceptions of published life writing: frequently they were written by unknown or non-professional writers, and they often just covered an aspect of a writer's (sometimes young) life. The next decade saw numerous texts that used memoir as either a subtitle or descriptor in book copy or marketing. Ultimately, G. Thomas Couser attributes the rise of the term "memoir" to the word seeming "more literary, more *writerly*. After all, the term has a continental ring to it" (51). Autobiography's meaning is right there in the Greek—literally, *self life writing*—but memoir seems more complex, adapting the French word for memory. Regardless of the reasons, the term autobiography has fallen out of popularity in contemporary publishing, though it is still widely used as a categorical term.

[13] Yagoda traces the history of the term "memoir" from 1960 until the early '90s, showing how the understanding of "memoir" changed even within those few decades. He quotes Roy Pascal's 1960 book *Design and Truth in Autobiography* as saying that in autobiographies, the writers focus on themselves and in memoirs, they focus on others (2). However, in 1996, Gore Vidal states, "A memoir is how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts, double-checked" (qtd. in Yagoda 3).

Given the ubiquity of both terms, some scholars have worked to determine distinctions between them. The main differentiation scholars use is memoir's focus on a life in context, which brings the genre out of simple abstraction and aesthetic quality to a groundedness in society and culture. For instance, in her book analyzing Hong Kong Eurasian memoirs, Vicky Lee differentiates between memoir and autobiography by referencing the interiority of autobiography, the use of self-inquiry to explore or create a coherent self. She states, "Temporal references to sociopolitical occurrences have relatively little significance and are often relegated to the background" in autobiography (V. Lee 38). She defines memoir, on the other hand, as less sophisticated, more fragmented, and more focused on the external context rather than an inner life (V. Lee 39). In this view, the memoirist is not "searching for some authentic inner self" but rather "relates how the writer arrived at the point where he or she is standing at the time of writing. The memoir is more interested in giving a record of its times than in discovering the essence of a spirit or personality" (V. Lee 39). Perhaps this is why the term shot to popularity in the 1990s and continues through the early decades of the 2000s; in the time of poststructuralism, when the very idea of a unified self was out of vogue, memoir's often fragmented and temporally contingent presentation of the author, couched in the murkiness of memory, was more appealing to an audience used to compiling a sense of an author's persona and ethos from presentations in varied situations and mediums.

If, as Leigh Gilmore says, "every autobiography is the fragment of a theory," asking larger questions about "how selves and milieus ought to be understood *in relation to each other*" (*The Limits of Autobiography* 12), then memoir allows us to focus on a specific version of the self in a specific milieu. Memoirs are more focused than autobiography. Erich Goode indicates that a memoir provides a "stand-alone *dimension* of reality," constructed and mediated (1). Similarly, Gutkind says memoirs are organized by theme, whereas autobiographies are more

linear and temporal (*Keep it Real* 139); memoirist Mary Karr echoes that memoir is tied together by theme (xiii). On the whole, many scholars and writers agree that memoirs are focused on a single experience, a singular timeframe, or a particular dimension of an individual's life (Couser 23, Yagoda 1, Smith and Watson 3). As Gutkind says, memoirists view life through a zoom lens, whereas autobiographers look at life as a landscape with a panoramic lens (*You Can't Make* 59). The narrowness of memoirs allows the writers to dive deeply into a particular aspect of cultural life, framing the personal through a focused lens that incorporates elements beyond the memoirist's interior life.

Because of this narrowness, memoir is well-suited to respond to particular exigences and present the self in particular ways that reflect the author's purpose for the text. If life writing is a response to "some widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self," as Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd indicate in their assessment of the rise of the blog in 2004 (14), then memoirs participate in this cultivation and validation by "invit[ing] readers into the interiority of the self," as Mack and Alexander say. They go on to note that "the rhetorical designs of memoir are directed internally, with the aim of constructing the memoirist's identity, and also externally, with the aim of helping readers to understand, if not accept, the memoirist's admittedly subjective experience" in a particular aspect of life (52). Jane Danielewicz says that memoir in particular is not only personal and expressive but also public and political as **"***the* quintessential genre suited to public debate. Its form is democratic, reality-based, identity-based, and open-ended, including and often merging topics that are private and personal as well as political and public" (3). Memoir as an accessible but political form through which individuals can enter into public conversations is what provides the genre its cultural and rhetorical purpose. It has social currency, both in terms of speaking to a particular sociocultural context but also having economic and market influence due to its wide readership and popularity.

Even so, memoir continues to be defined in a variety of ways—or not defined at all. Rak provides a succinct summary of the challenges with defining memoir: "Therefore, 'memoir' describes private and public, official and unofficial writing, writing as process and writing as product, all at once" ("Are Memoirs Autobiography" 495). On some level, the mutability and expansiveness of memoir provides it with greater opportunities for effect. Because of this, analyzing the memoir genre—and women's memoir, in particular—means exploring the various ways memoir does what other genres cannot or what other genres do differently. Memoir responds to the desire of both audience and authors for self-definitions through ethos construction, and self-definitions both build upon and modify conceptions of gender, race, and professional roles held in the wider culture. While definitions are always contingent, they have rhetorical power, and they allow rhetorical patterns to be identified when discussing the rhetorical impacts of particular texts, as scholars have begun to do in the past few decades.

Memoir Conversations and Critiques

Journalist and novelist Lorraine Adams ends her 2001 *Washington Monthly* article about the rise of memoir by saying, "Memoir hasn't even approached the novel's mature abundance in which all conventions of storytelling are viable, all kinds of ordering of the chaos are acceptable. Memoir is a toddler of a genre." Memoir has grown up in the past twenty years**,** though memoir scholarship still lags behind. If memoir has at least grown past toddlerdom and reached young adulthood since 2001, memoir scholarship is still in its teens, particularly in the realm of rhetoric.

Much of the scholarship on memoir and life writing more broadly has been done by literature scholars either exploring the self and subjectivity or discussing the concept of "truth" in creative nonfiction. Evaluations of memoir often reference French scholar Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact, the contract the author makes with the reader, a "contract of identity that

is sealed by the proper name" (19).[14] Most readers would summarize the contract in this way: for a text to be considered life writing (whether memoir, autobiography, or other), the story must have actually happened to the writer, and the writer recorded it faithfully. To go further into this contract, Julia Watson draws on Walter Fisher's work in narrative to describe how life narratives provide "good reasons" for actions and decisions, because "the narrator can explain the motivation and rationale behind her activities" (*Lives* 8). Then, the readers look at these narratives and assess the good reasons on the basis of "probability," or coherence, and "fidelity." While the author has her role in presenting the narrative with a consideration of these two criteria, the evaluation of truthfulness is dependent on how the reader interprets the narrative and fits it into their organizational and epistemological schema.

A tension around the expectation of truth is clear in much of the scholarship about life writing. Many feel that memoir must be factually accurate in order to count as memoir, citing James Frey as proof. The 2006 James Frey debacle, in which Frey's memoir *A Million Little Pieces* was proven to be significantly fictionalized after Oprah had selected his book for her book club, appeared to sum up all that was wrong with the memoir boom: deceit, narcissism, the role of the author, and hunger for fame, all based in struggles over what is true in memoir. Because of the autobiographical pact, Leigh Gilmore notes, "'Bad' autobiographers are rarely aesthetic criminals. They are more usually represented as 'bad' persons" (*Autobiographics* 80). Life writers are held to a high standard, and debates over truth—and the reading public's expectations and perceptions of truth—have only intensified in this post-James Frey world and "post-truth" era, one in which autobiographical narratives continue to multiply. However, Katherine Mack and Jonathan Alexander argue our response as scholars and teachers to

[14] While Lejeune wrote his essay in 1975, it was not circulated widely in American scholarly communities until the mid-1980s. It was translated and included in Leary and Eakin's 1989 edited collection *On Autobiography*.

controversies in life writing over authorial intent, the unreliability of memory, and ghostwriting in life writing[15] should not be to reject these ethos-heavy texts but rather to consider how "we can ethically engage and understand the rhetorical work" of memoirs and other texts like them (50). Rather, we should look at how these texts function in a historical moment by reflecting and interacting with larger social, cultural, and political contexts in their rhetorical work.

Some scholars have analyzed bestselling memoirs as rhetorical artifacts. Studies have addressed cultural conceptions of empathy in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (Kulbaga) and consideration of epideictic in the memorialization of *Tuesdays with Morrie* (Hyde, "Acknowledgment"); others have looked at identity and authenticity in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (Hamilton), self-presentation in the life writing of Judy Garland (Janangelo), and agency in memoirs by J. D. Vance and Ta-Nehisi Coates (Mack and Alexander). Scholars have also looked at presentations of trauma in the memoir (Gilmore) and the self-justification in so-called deviance memoirs (Goode). Much of this rhetorical work looks at the ways memoir facilitates the interaction between individuals and their audiences, considering how rhetorics of praise and blame, empathy, and identity perpetuate cultural ideas of agency and authenticity. However, even some scholars who understand the worth of the memoir genre as rhetorical still feel the need to qualify their scholarship. For instance, David L. Wallace's 2011 chapter on David Sedaris's "rhetoric of indirection" analyzes how Sedaris crafts his positionality and ethos in his nonfiction work, but Wallace includes a caveat: "I admit it makes more sense to call Sedaris a memoirist and humorist than it does to call him a rhetorician," before going on to explore Sedaris's use of epideictic in the "context of a number of rhetorical theorists who have questioned the continuing neo-Aristotelian distinction between rhetoric that explicitly seeks to

[15] I will discuss ghostwriting further when considering the definition of professional memoir in chapter three and the rhetorical work of political memoirs in chapter four.

persuade and rhetoric that seeks to praise, blame, or entertain" (163). While I understand Wallace is anticipating resistance from more traditional rhetorical scholars, admitting the "sense" of this sort of exclusivity and delineation (i.e., a humorist is not naturally a rhetorician) is what keeps memoirs, particularly popular memoirs by popular writers, out of the pages of scholarly journals and monographs.

Other scholars approach the study of life writing with caution for other reasons, particularly when it comes to students interacting with personal narratives in composition classrooms. One strain of this conversation is the famous Elbow and Bartholomae debate, which began in the early 1990s at about the time the memoir boom did: should composition instructors be teaching personal expressivist writing or academic writing? Those who say instructors should be cautious with assigning creative nonfiction assignments point to the potential of a "colonizing impulse" when students encounter life writing. In a 2001 symposium about personal writing, Anne Ruggles Gere worries that "students who seize the opportunity to become protagonists in their own stories may find themselves slotted into a particular category or expected to speak for an entire class of persons" (216). Other scholars are concerned about the commodification of personal writing. Ellen Cushman notes that the drive toward and effect of self-disclosure differ among individuals, "press[ing] certain individuals to 'bare all' and press[ing] other individuals to closet themselves, all because their stories are or are not valued as consumable 'goods'" (qtd. in Brandt et al. 57). Megan Brown calls this "confession as cultural capital" ("The Memoir as Provocation" 126). These concerns, particularly combined with concerns about the evaluation and assessment of personal writing, tie into issues with power and prestige not just in the composition classroom but also in the wider rhetorical sphere, particularly regarding best sellers, book clubs, and publishing markets, as I will discuss later in this chapter. While the framing of these conversations in relation to the hierarchies of the composition classroom are important, so

are the conversations about these very real power differentials outside of the classroom. These concerns about how students and readers engage with others' life stories further demonstrate the need for theory and pedagogical strategies that can better equip readers to engage with life writing from a rhetorical standpoint. In a post-truth era, students and citizens need training on how to be rhetorically savvy about the ways ethos-drive stories can supplement or counter logic-based arguments, as well as how the genre makes knowledge and circulates ideas within reading publics.

In her 2004 book *Personally Speaking*, Candice Spigelman demonstrates that the personal can be an argument in and of itself. "The personal is rhetorical," she argues, and what life writing scholars should be focusing on, when it comes to both student-produced and published personal writing, is not what a personal text is about (or how true it is) but rather "how it functions to affect change and why it succeeds as political work" (34). Spigelman broadens the definition of argument to include the personal, asserts that the narrating "I" is always constructed, and shows how blending academic discourse with personal writing leads to a more complex and developed understanding than could be achieved by either discourse alone. She proposes that the personal could and should be part of academic work, and, in doing so, she opens the field further to consider life writing as rhetorically significant.

Clearly, rhetoricians have done important work on memoir and life writing, but much remains to be done. Over fifteen years after Spigelman's monograph was published, rhetoricians are still making the case for the personal as rhetorical. As Amy E. Robillard argues in a 2019 article, life writing, "with its foregrounding of ethics, experience, and truth claims, has been seeking an adequate witness in rhetoric and composition for a good while now" (185). She references Leigh Gilmore's conception of an "adequate witness," or one who actively resists judgment when approaching testimony and also interrogates the process of judgment itself, to

ask rhetoricians to approach life writing as an object of rhetorical study with openness to what it can tell us about culture, ideology, society, and resistance. She ends by saying, "I, too, have learned that there are things we need to work hard to tell ourselves again and again. Personal experience is rhetorical. Life writing accomplishes rhetorical work" (Robillard 192). It's time to acknowledge and study that work.

Memoir's Cultural Work

Life writing is inherently tied to reality and its social, cultural, and political complexity, which can include tensions about truth, agency, representation, and subjectivity. The fact that memoir is dependent on lived reality can be cited (usually by novelists and poets) as a troubling and hindering aspect of the genre. However, Couser specifically disagrees: "The very limitation of memoir—its being tethered to the real world, so to speak—is the source of its distinctive power" (176). He goes on to say memoir "works on the world in a more direct way. And it thus can *do* things fiction cannot" (176). Couser traces this emphasis on what memoir *does* in the world back to why one might have the impulse to write memoirs over novels, but it could also be argued this limitation may be the reason readers engage with memoirs at such a high rate.

Many readers choose memoirs because the texts are grounded in reality. Readers expect and believe these texts to be true, however one chooses to define that concept, and the reader is a central actor in Lejeune's autobiographical pact. As Rak notes, "Lejeune pictured the pact as a way for a reader to look at any text and decide how it might be read, or even if it should be read at all" (*Boom* 24). As such, the evaluation of a book as memoir happens before the book is even opened, especially when the writer is a public figure, her face on the cover of the book to entice a particular audience. The audience, as much as it can be imagined, and its cultural frameworks are an integral component to the valuation of all literature but particularly the widely read world of

the memoir. Readers decide what is true, who can be trusted, and what stories gain purchase in the competitive world of publishing. However, they do not do so in a vacuum: they do so based on their understandings of how stories are told and who authors are and should be, which has much to do with culture, experience, expectation, and societal norms.

The ways that readers interpret and consume memoirs is undertheorized. As Smith and Watson note, "The complexity of autobiographical texts requires reading practices that engage the narrative tropes, sociocultural contexts, rhetorical aims, and narrative shifts within the historical or chronological trajectory of the text" (*Reading* 13). As such, this study specifically concerns what authors do rhetorically to convince their readers they are honest, how the memoir is constructed using rhetorical strategies, and how the audience receives and circulates the memoir's cultural ideas, particularly of the central women memoirists and their professional ethos. All of these elements coalesce to determine what memoir does in the world.

The cultural work of memoir can vary. Sometimes, as noted by John D'Agata, memoir can "shill for national policy" and serve as cultural propaganda, such as in Indian captivity narratives (71). However, Jane Danielewicz says, **"**Memoirs have the potential to be radical and disruptive to cultural master narratives, depending on what stories are being told, which authors are telling them, and who they are addressing" (8). She goes on to say the form's expansiveness allows writers to use it to turn toward social work and justice. Danielewicz is looking primarily at the intent of the author, but how memoir performs radical and disruptive cultural work in the world is, in many ways, dependent on how the readers take up the ideas carried within the memoir, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Whether memoir is propaganda or works toward justice, it reveals cultural norms that must be navigated. As Amy E. Robillard remarks, "Any analysis of memoir ought to begin with the extent to which the author conforms to or challenges cultural norms" (188). Similarly, Mack

and Alexander say, "Memoirists' choices in relation to norms determine what personal material they mine and how they rhetorically stage that material in their memoir" (54). Transgressing a norm or cultural expectation can make that (often subtle and unquestioned, at least by the dominant party) norm obvious, perhaps more so than when one fulfills the norm by participating in the traditional cultural scripts. However memoirists position themselves within their cultural context, their work will be picked up by readers, reacted to, and then circulated in readers' communities. Reception of these texts depends on many things, not the least the ethos and identity of the author, as interpreted by the audience. As such, women and those with marginalized identities engage in various rhetorical maneuvers to build their ethos and tell their stories to an audience that likely already has conceptions of who the writers are. While the rhetorical work of memoir has begun to be recognized, to reiterate and revise Robillard's call to action: There's so much work (still) to do, and particularly in regard to women's memoir.

Women's Rhetorics and Women's Memoir

When women write memoirs, as they often do, they put their personal experiences and their constructed ethos in social and political contexts, demonstrating the lived experiences of women in particular cultures and at particular times. Beyond simply being a genre frequently available to women, the distinctness of memoir's focus on particular aspects of (women's) lives, its combination of public and private dimensions, and its situatedness in social and historical contexts make memoir worth exploring as a rhetorical genre for the ways it 1) provides women and other marginalized individuals a way to express their personal stories amidst larger social stories, and 2) compels audiences to accept and reflect these depictions of realities, despite all parties and the narrative itself being constrained by the publishing marketplace. Our

understanding of these women as rhetors could only be bolstered by increased understanding of the genres they work within, either by choice or by necessity.

In recent decades, women's rhetorics has expanded the definition of rhetoric in order to extend the mantle of rhetor to those engaged in a variety of persuasive acts, whether the rhetor spoke from a podium or in a parlor, or was published in a newspaper or sent personal letters. Scholars have reclaimed diverse women as speakers: ancient figures like Aspasia, spiritual writers like Margery Kempe, suffragettes like the Grimké sisters, and educators like Anna Julia Cooper. This work of remapping the rhetorical landscape has been done in archival and historiographic research by scholars like Cheryl Glenn, Shirley Wilson Logan, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Andrea Lunsford, and Krista Ratcliffe, as well as through anthologies like Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her* and Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald's *Available Means: An Anthology of Women's Rhetoric(s)* that compile a long history of women's nonfiction prose, only some of which is autobiographical. Additionally, more recent anthologies, such as Shari J. Stenberg and Charlotte Hogg's recently published *Persuasive Acts: Women's Rhetorics in the Twenty-First Century*, address the varied ways women write, updating and complicating the landscape of women's rhetorics by showing the diversity among style and medium of women's composing in the early twenty-first century. However, while many of these rhetorical reclamations have been built on women's personal writings, a gap exists between this rhetorical work and an expansive rhetorical discussion of how these personal writings function as genres, as women's memoirs reveal how social norms of their times allow them to construct themselves as speakers, whether they present themselves as pious women of God, devoted mothers, or champions of morality and sobriety.

Explorations of memoir as a genre have been lacking in women's rhetorics, with most scholars analyzing rhetorical aspects of the text without considering the use of the memoir genre

itself. While Cheryl Glenn's crucial text of feminist historiography, *Rhetoric Retold*, has a chapter on Margery Kempe's rhetoric of autobiography, the focus of the analysis is on Kempe's dialogism and her construction of multiple selves and narrators within the text; Glenn's conclusions concern the text's novelistic qualities and its use of characterization within the public discourse of religion (115), with little said about the genre of spiritual autobiography and its rhetorical situation. Additional examples abound. For instance, in the editorial note for the selection from Dorothy Allison's "Two of Three Things I Know for Sure" in the *Available Means* anthology, Richie and Ronald justify why they chose this excerpt—a selection from a memoir with accompanying photos—for a collection of women's rhetoric. They explain how Allison is "speculating about epistemology—always a foundation for rhetorical theory" in her work (435). They emphasize, "This is not consciousness-raising, but a strategic method" (435-6). A reader could interpret this explanation as educational about the work of memoir or an anticipation of pushback from those who would argue memoir is not rhetoric. The focus in this note is less on the capabilities of memoir as persuasive for readers and more of an editorial justification. Similarly, the Afterword of the recent book *Remembering Women Differently: Refiguring Rhetorical Work* notes different ways the edited collection could be organized, one being by the type of archival work the chapters employ. It notes that seven of the articles fall under the "letters and memoir" category, though the majority of the articles are focused on archival work through letters and little analysis is done of the actual genre of the archival materials and their contextualized purposes at the time of writing (Gaillet and Bailey 258). While all of these studies make incredibly meaningful rhetorical contributions to women's rhetorics, and they include excerpts of autobiography and memoir as part of the rhetorical oeuvre, they rarely if ever explore how the genres themselves function. The place of memoir within women's

rhetoric is under-explored, and as such, the analytical frameworks that could create a robust understanding of memoir's rhetorical work are underdeveloped.

Histories and poetics of women's autobiography and memoirs have been published by scholars in the field of literature since the 1970s, with the first collection of essays on autobiography compiled by Estelle Jelinek in 1980—the idea for which, she notes, came from her own experience in 1976 of writing her dissertation on women's autobiography and struggling to find any criticism on women's autobiographies except for analyses of Gertrude Stein (*Women's Autobiography* ix). Jelinek's collection was soon followed by texts like Leigh Gilmore's *Autobiographics,* Sidonie Smith's *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, Domna C. Stanton's *The Female Autograph,* Shari Benstock's *The Private Self*, Joanne M. Braxton's *Black Women Writing Autobiography,* and Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck's *Life/Lines*.[16] These works trace a primarily Western conception of literary autobiography, reclaiming women's writings as part of this autobiographical tradition.[17] More recent texts like Johnnie M. Stover's *Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women's Autobiography* and Martha Watson's *Lives of Their Own* also explore the overtly political and rhetorical aspects of autobiography. This collection of scholarship has discussed the role of language and gender, along with conceptions of the authorial self for women writing autobiographical discourse in centuries past; however, many of these books are at least two decades old. As life writing continues to be popular with the reading public, updated scholarship and theory—both in literature and in rhetoric—that builds upon the work of these scholars can provide frameworks to understand and interpret contemporary memoir by women.

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[16] For an extensive tracing of the first two decades of women's autobiographical literary theory, see Smith and Watson's introduction to *Women, Autobiography, Theory.*

[17] Some of these texts include an article or chapter on Eastern conceptions of autobiography—for example, *Life/Lines* has a chapter by Leila Ahmed about Egyptian feminists, and Stanton's edited collection has a chapter by Richard Bowring on a Japanese text—but the bulk of the scholarship in these texts are focused on the Western autobiographical tradition, as is most of women's autobiographical scholarship in general.

These literary histories provide glimpses into women's navigation of the private/public divide, revealing the cultural dichotomy of women being allowed to write about their work in the domestic sphere but disallowed from speaking in public or gaining the public authority needed to provide them with rhetorical credibility in mixed-gender spaces. The challenge was compounded for women of color and women with other marginalized identities**,** for "memoir is a way of thinking and perhaps even of being public, as it remains a way to construct, package, and market identity so that others will want to buy it" (Rak, *Boom* 7). While memoir is about personal experiences, the fact that the texts are composed for an external audience changes the experiences: the experiences are no longer memory; they are narrative.[18] Furthermore, memoirs as narratives meant to be read by an audience separates them from other frequently used genres like women's letters or women's journals.[19] Ultimately, women's life writings depict a woman's particular life in a particular social context for varied rhetorical purposes: education, entertainment, empathy/sympathy, enticement to join a particular cause. As T. L. Broughton writes, "We read autobiographies to hear from, learn from, specific historical figures about how they found their own voice... [which] entails a set of interconnected histories: how the author acquired or came to do without a room of her own; how she came to command an audience rhetorically, ideologically and socio-economically" (79).

Current scholarship about women's memoir looks at the challenges of empathy tied to individual stories and transnational narratives (Kulbaga), as well as the rise of the self-help memoir (Rak, Gilmore, M. Brown) and the breast cancer narrative (Rasmussen). Many of these

[18] Scholars like Joan W. Scott, Leigh Gilmore, and Smith and Watson have troubled the ideas of "experience," "witness," and "memory," and so while I present these ideas as stable concepts, they are always in flux and open for scholarly critique and discussion.

[19] There are many instances in which women have purposefully used what are often considered personal genres to communicate to an audience, particularly in cultures where books of letters were published or letters were read aloud and/or circulated to wider communities, or when a woman's journal or diary was published with her knowledge. See scholars such as Rebecca Earle, Marlene Kadar, Elizabeth Goldsmith, and Cherewatuk and Wiethaus on the epistolary genre; and Effie Botonaki, Karen Lipsedge, Christina Sjödblad, and Felicity Nussbaum on women's diaries and journals.

articles are justifiably critical of the role of memoir in the reading public and the ways memoir can both function as a way to **"**personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard" while also being used as a "a 'soft' weapon because it is easily co-opted into propaganda...a careful manipulation of opinion and emotion in the public sphere and a management of information in the engineering of consent" (Whitlock 3). The frequency with which memoir and autobiographical writing are used as propaganda speaks to their rhetorical impact, the ways personal stories are used for ideological purposes, both in terms of social justice and social control.[20] Additionally, despite its democratic ideals, autobiographical writing is not truly democratic; as Smith and Watson say, "its politics is one of exclusion" (*Reading* 3). While everyone has a life, not everyone has a life that is marketable and that has much more to do with a writer's relationship with a presumed readership, the prior ethos they bring to the page that is affected by conceptions of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, and other identity markers. Gillian Whitlock articulates the questions that are prompted by life writing: "Who is getting to speak autobiographically, how and why? To what effect? What becomes a bestseller, and what is remaindered or republished? How do these elicit our attention?" (14). Rak expands on the politics of life writing by saying that popular memoir reveals who is considered "capable of self-reflection," a distinction which is "often correlated with class and cultural capital" ("Are Memoirs Autobiography" 491) —two social and political elements also correlated with gender.

With a large percentage of Americans writing autobiographically in some way, even by posting on Twitter or Instagram, the question of attention remains. The question of who is allowed to write about their lives—and who is commended for it—becomes even more pointed

[20] Whitlock's 2006 book *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* looks at the life narratives of those who identify as Muslims, who write from war zones in Afghanistan and Iraq, and those who belong to communities in the Middle East and South Asia, particularly looking at these narratives' impact on America's "War on Terror."

when we consider our limited views as scholars, as well as how memoir provides a snapshot of an individual life within a cultural moment. Women's rhetorics have worked to reclaim women's voices and value the writing they have done, but still scholarly attention is frequently directed to particular women's voices. While writers like Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Margery Kempe are extremely valuable to the study of autobiography and rhetoric, others are being left out, and the genres they are writing within are going underexamined. Because of this, whose perceptions of reality are being left out of our scholarly attentions? Whose perceptions of reality are gaining the attention of the reading public, but being disregarded by the ivory tower? And how can we learn more about the ways women are using the memoir genre, given its ties to personal experience, cultural context, and ethos construction? Once rhetorical scholars begin to pay closer attention to how gender interacts with genre, how genre enhances audience engagement, and how gender impacts ethos in personal writing, the field will uncover a wealth of knowledge about how women memoirists—much read and loved by the reading public but often unseen by scholars—are constructing themselves as rhetors through their personal experiences in context.

Memoir, Popularity, and Uptake

During the week of March 1, 2020, seven of the fifteen books on the *New York Times* nonfiction best seller list were memoirs: one by recently deceased basketball legend Kobe Bryant, another by singer and actress Jessica Simpson, and another by civil rights law professor Bryan Stevenson, whose 2014 memoir had recently been made into a high-profile movie. Former First Lady Michelle Obama's *Becoming* celebrated its 63rd week on the best seller list, while Tara Westover's memoir *Educated* clocked in at 104 weeks on the list—two full years.[21] While the *New York Times* list cannot fully encapsulate the desires of the reading public, it does give an

[21] See the *New York Times* best seller list (Combined Print & E-Book Nonfiction) for the week of March 1, 2020.

indication of what people are reading—or at least what books and cultural messages they are buying. And people like memoirs.

Other measures indicate a similar level of memoir popularity, like Ben Yagoda's oft-cited statistic that according to the proprietary (and thus frustratingly inaccessible) service Nielsen BookScan, the sales of memoirs increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008 (7); there are no indications that memoir sales have slowed in the ensuing years. To show another side of memoir readership, Mack and Alexander noted that in 2016-2017, memoirs in college required reading programs "accounted for 28% of the total nonfiction selections...following general nonfiction at 40% of the total but out-pacing biography at 18.5%, a statistic that suggests the contemporary resonance of the genre" (49). By many accounts, large swaths of people are reading memoir, either for fun or because someone thinks it is good for them. So, if so many readers are picking up memoirs, why aren't rhetoricians doing the same in similar numbers?

In her book on the mass-market manufacturing of memoir, Rak notes that one vein of the reclamation of memoir has been an attempt by scholars to create a life writing canon based on literary and aesthetic qualities, which serves to reinscribe a hierarchy of value based in normative conceptions of literary worth. Further, Rak contends that scholars who reject the aesthetic argument for the canon because it often excludes texts by marginalized writers have "championed texts that are marginal *politically* but not in other ways. Arguments for the poetics of these texts are usually about bringing these texts into academic purview of the classroom because they are worth reading for ideological reasons and because they seem to exceed the generic terms of autobiography itself" (*Boom* 158). In other words, these texts are often praised by NPR and the *New York Times Book Review*, academics and the literati, for being something more than a memoir, for transcending the literary genre. Despite the problematic nature of this approach to memoir and genre in general, as I addressed earlier in this chapter, this logic means

that scholars still tend to "examine texts that are avowedly unpopular with many readers or that many readers, particularly those who read books produced by mainstream presses, would not have heard about" (Rak, *Boom* 158). While scholarly work on this type of memoir is still valuable, it misses the importance of popular texts read by a wide readership. If memoir reflects a cultural moment as seen from a particular perspective, and rhetorical significance lies in its timeliness and its popularity, the literary aesthetic argument is shortsighted to most rhetoricians. Ultimately, if readers like memoirs, rhetorical scholars should find out why. We should take seriously the reading proclivities of the contemporary public, because they are shaping culture. As Rak says, memoir's social meaning is in its rhetorical impact (*Boom* 28).

Additionally, denigrating the popular by extension denigrates women as readers and consumers of mass-market publishing and the rise of the middlebrow reading culture, as evidenced in the rise of book clubs. These readers enjoy reading memoirs, particularly by non-elite, non-literary public figures. These readers are also circulating texts to their friends and colleagues, talking about popular writers and the memoirs they have produced. These readers review those memoirs on Goodreads, demonstrating how the books have rhetorically impacted their ideas of individuals in public life. As such, these readers are a crucial part of the rhetorical impact of memoir. Mack and Alexander explain, "Memoir accomplishes the foregrounding of the personal and political through authorial ethos, which becomes a powerful dimension of contemporary rhetorical engagement as readers debate both the reliability and value of the experiences documented as well as the memoirist's interpretation of them" (67). Memoirs are big business for the publishing world, and how they are taken up by readers as cultural calling cards—as indications of how people construct their lives for external audiences within a social milieu that dictates values, priorities, and ways of being in the world—can tell us much about cultural perceptions of work, women's abilities and bodies, and rhetorical strategies of ethos.

Gauging Popularity

While addressing the popular in rhetorical scholarship is important, determining what is popular with readers can be challenging. The *New York Times* best seller list is still looked to as a standard, at least by the reading public, as authors boast being *New York Times* best sellers in marketing copy and on the covers of their books. However, the list is not without controversy. The *New York Times* list relies on booksellers to report their unit sales for the previous week to compile their list ("About the Best Sellers"). A 2017 report by Constance Grady at *Vox* says:

> What we don't know is how many bookstores the *New York Times* talks to, how it weights different kinds of sales, or how it interprets its data. It's widely rumored that independent bookstore sales are weighted more heavily than Walmart sales, for instance, but the *Times* has never confirmed this. Some observers have also suggested that it weights print sales from traditional publishers more heavily than it does digital sales from digital publishers or self-publishers.

Tucker Max, co-founder of Scribe Writing, writes, "Make no mistake about it: [the process] is all just as elitist and snobbish as it sounds" —even as he puts "4x NYT Bestselling Author" under his name at the top of the article.[22] Grady puts it another way: "All best-seller lists are compromises and guesses and interpretations of fuzzy data, including the *New York Times* best-seller list. They're just very important, very prestigious, hotly debated compromises." Therein lies the challenge with measuring popularity. The twin questions of who is counting and who counts are real, and they have real-world consequences in terms of what is considered "popular," worth reading, and worth buying.[23]

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[22] Tucker Max co-wrote Tiffany Haddish's memoir, which is discussed in chapter five. He also wrote various "dude-bro" memoirs, including a 2006 memoir called *I Hope They Serve Beer In Hell* and a 2010 memoir called *Assholes Finish First.* Both were *New York Times* best sellers.

[23] Two major proprietary services gather most book sales information. Nielsen BookScan relies on the sales data from major booksellers but does not count eBook or library sales (Charman-Anderson). Another service, Bookstat,

One major impact on best seller lists is the book club. The book club as a feminized space of middlebrow readers holds little power—except on the best seller list. The most popular book club of recent years has been Oprah's, though now a number of other celebrity women have their own reading groups, from the *Today Show*'s Jenna Bush Hager to Florence Welch, lead singer of the band Florence and the Machine. The commercial aspect of these book clubs cannot be ignored. Oprah's book club could result in books selling 500,000 to one million copies and boosted 75% of her selections to the best sellers list (Driscoll 59). Similarly, in summer 2020, Reese Witherspoon selected Austin Channing Brown's memoir *I'm Still Here* for her book club (a text discussed further in chapter four), propelling it to best seller lists two years after its publication (Reese's).[24]

Evidence shows that women like reading, and they like reading in groups. A 2019 Pew Research Survey found that 78% of women surveyed had read a book in the previous twelve months, as compared to 68% of men (Perrin). More white respondents had read a book in the past year (78%) than Black (67%) and Latinx (60%) respondents (Perrin). It follows, then, that the typical American reader (and book club member) is often coded as a white woman. Hartley found in a 1999 survey that 69% of surveyed book club groups were all female (Driscoll 54); a 2018 survey by BookBrowse found that 88% of private book clubs were all women (Morgan-Witts). However, despite these statistics (or perhaps because of them), book club selections and literature marketed to women—like romantic comedies, romances, or the general category "women's fiction," which often centers female friendships—have often been considered unimpressive by elite literary culture.

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measures all eBook sales, online print book sales, and digital audiobook sales; however, it does not seem to measure any book sales not online. Both of these services are cost prohibitive, however, as Julie Rak notes; for her book, she uses figures that have been published by others who have access to the service (*Boom* 36), and in this study, I do the same.

[24] See the *New York Times* best seller list (Combined Print & E-Book Nonfiction) for the week of June 21, 2020.

Beth Driscoll connects this disdain with the idea of the middlebrow. Neither highbrow or lowbrow culture, the middlebrow is "personalized book recommendations on Amazon, or a cafe in the middle of an independent bookstore. It is a literary prize's Twitter feed or a movie star's sold-out appearance at a writer's festival. It is online cultural magazines such as Salon.com and Slate.com, or a book club that watches Austen TV adaptations" (Driscoll 5).[25] The middlebrow is inherently feminized, as well as middle class, emotional, and recreational (among other qualities). Driscoll points to Oprah's book club as a classic example of a middlebrow reading public. However, the feminized nature of book clubs combined with Oprah's self-appointed role as "national librarian" (J. Collins 83), who usurps the role of cultural gatekeeper usually held by academics and publishers (Driscoll 68), makes her book club suspect, particularly by those who consider themselves purveyors of high culture. Such was the case with Jonathan Franzen's response to his novel *The Corrections* being chosen as an Oprah's book club pick. He took issue with some of Oprah's previous picks which he deemed "schmaltzy" and "one-dimensional," and he proclaimed he did not want that "corporate logo" of the book club on his book (J. Collins 105). Franzen's response reveals the divide between the literary and the popular, the highbrow and the middle/lowbrow, and the (white) masculine elite versus the feminine mass-market reading culture. As Rak says, this reading public is frequently characterized as "hungry for dirty details, as star-struck, as voyeurs, as people who are prone to being swayed by cultural authorities like Oprah Winfrey and—most sadly of all—as ignorant and uncultured, bad readers who do not know or care about good writing" (*Boom* 7), which is the ultimate sin.

This disdain for the popular best seller is often tied to the idea of literary merit. Best sellers are fun. They are beach reads. They are book club picks. But they aren't impressive, nor

[25] A note to say that if these qualities are the main measures of the middlebrow, I personally am located smack dab in the center of middlebrow culture, and I am happy to be there.

are they often worth examining at a deeper level, nor are they award-winning.[26] In James F. English's 2005 book *The Economy of Prestige*, he found that of the three most prestigious American literary prizes (Pulitzer, National Book Award, National Book Critic Circle Award), "not a single number-one bestseller has...won any of the major awards" since 1980 (331). This is a shift from earlier in the twentieth century, when a third of number-one best sellers between 1925 and 1940 won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.[27] This shows that literariness is not tied with popularity, and the reading public is not too concerned with what prize committees consider "literary" and "award winning." A disconnect exists between literary merit and mass-market culture, and the roots of that disconnect can be linked to gendered discrimination in elite culture.

The highbrow distrust of the middle-class feminized middlebrow also extends to mass-market appeal, a charge levied against the memoir genre as well. However, all signs point to these reading publics being arbiters of change in the wider culture. Ideas are being discussed and circulated within these extracurricular reading spaces by people outside of the ivory tower. They are looking for guidance for what to read from somebody; sometimes that guidance comes from national book club selections, and sometimes it comes from name recognition on a book cover. Many of the reasons memoirs by high-profile, public women are purchased by a reading public are the same reasons these memoirs are not frequently considered worthy of our rhetorical study, when I argue the opposite should be true. These texts are circulating widely, and in so doing, their authors' constructions of themselves as professionals are upholding and challenging

[26] Several scholarly works break down the sexism of literary elitism, particularly in regard to genre fiction that is often coded as "chick lit" or "women's fiction." See Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young's edited collection on *Chick Lit* and Erin Hurt's *Theorizing Ethnicity and Nationality in the Chick Lit Genre.* Also, the study of romance novels is a growing area of scholarship, particularly concerning sexuality, race, and LGBTQ+ representation. Of particular note are theses about the rhetoric of romance novels by Kathryn M. O'Neil and Kimber Leigh Harlan, as well as this 2013 article by Christine Cabrera and Amy Dana Menard called "'She Exploded into a Million Pieces': A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Orgasms in Contemporary Romance Novels."

[27] This study, while surprising, does have some gaps. English was only looking at fiction prizes, and he was seemingly only charting if books were best sellers before receiving the prize, rather than looking at if the reading public picked up the book afterwards. I am also not certain which best seller lists English was referring to.

popular social conceptions of women and work and identity in a cultural moment. We need to be paying attention to the texts and to the readers. One of the ways we can attend to the latter is through the uptake of a particular genre and particular ideas by those in a reading audience.

Uptake and Social Circulation

Uptake concerns the interaction between the reader and the genre. As Mack and Alexander say, "Uptake and circulation—how memoirs are taken up, affirmed, challenged, and refuted—make apparent the choices the memoirist has made. This movement away from the memoirist's own interiority allows for perspectives that complicate the voice and norms that the memoir produces (and reproduces)" (55). By looking at the ways audiences react to texts and circulate the ideas they take from those texts, we see how audiences have an active role in expanding, pushing against, or shifting both personal and cultural conceptualizations of the memoirist, her identity, and women's identities writ large. Particularly when considering memoir by public figures, each reader brings an understanding of the memoirist to the book and brings another understanding away. This new understanding, though, is not isolated; it is both impacted by and impacts wider understandings about cultural moments and who women can (and should) be within that culture. These understandings are then brought into conversation with others, circulated in venues like book clubs and social media sites.

The term "uptake" comes from genre studies, though Mack and Alexander do not cite it as such in their article. According to Anne Freadman, uptake occurs when one text prompts an appropriate response that, by the nature of the response, confirms the genre of the original text (39-40). The uptake depends on a relationship between the two texts, but it is also dependent upon the context, which informs the nature of the relationship between a writer and her audience. For instance, an example Anis Bawarshi gives is that the uptake from a syllabus and assignment

prompt is a particular student essay (117). Mack and Alexander, however, do not delve into the specific genre elements that feed one text into the other, but rather use the term to refer to the social and relational connection between writer and reader, ethos and response. As Dara Rossman Regaignon states, "'Uptake' thus names the role genre plays in the social, rhetorical, intertextual, and intergeneric circulation of utterances; it offers a category for the analysis of discourse and culture located between individual utterances (texts) and larger ideological formations" (143). Uptake brings the text into a larger web of utterances and ideologies that give it meaning and shape readers' responses to it.[28]

In Mack and Alexander's broad conception, uptake can be positive or negative, explicit or implicit. Uptake can be as simple as a reader making a comment to a friend about a book they read; it can also be that reader giving their friend a copy of the book. Uptake can be a critical review in a blog, on Twitter, or on Goodreads or Amazon. Uptake can even be a book club making a text its next selection. Regaignon points out that uptake often has an affective component as well (143), based in the experiences and ideologies of the reader. However, the use of uptake goes beyond simply an individual reaction, or an intersection between a reader and a text. We need to look at responses in cultural context alongside the original text for a more complete view of what these two texts say about each other and about the context they are produced within. In terms of memoir, uptake closely ties readers' culture and context with ethos. As Mack and Alexander say, "Uptake places a memoirist's ethos—her vision, language, modes of rationality, and ideology—which is predicated on the memoirist's personal experiences and interpretations thereof, under a critical spotlight and also situates it within larger social, cultural,

[28] In this study (particularly in chapter six), I focus more on the content of the response and what that response tells us about the uptake and social circulation of cultural ideas of women as professionals than I do with the genre of the response itself, which is a review on the social media site Goodreads. As such, I rely more on Mack and Alexander's broad conception of uptake, rather than the specifics outlined by Freadman, Bawarshi, and others more deeply rooted in rhetorical genre studies.

and political debates" (55). In order for a reader to take up the ideas within a memoir, the memoirist's ethos must be determined to be sound and relevant in a particular time and place. Uptake considers the cultural context and rhetoric that already exists—both within the memoir and surrounding it.

Similarly, uptake is connected to social circulation, or the feminist rhetorical practice defined by Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch as how rhetorical "performances ebb, flow, travel, gain substance and integrity, acquire traction, and not" in the social environments that women live and work within (23). This framework helps researchers in "reimagining the dynamic functioning of women's work in domains of discourse, re-envisioning its various impacts and consequences within these localities, and linking these analyses in an informative and compelling way to forward a larger understanding of rhetoric as a cultural phenomenon and very much a human enterprise" (23). An emphasis on social circulation not only widens the possibility of what is worthy of rhetorical study, tearing down ideas of public versus private space and valuing social networks as a rhetorical resource; it also allows for the consideration of how cultural ideas move among people and within networks, showing that a reader's ideas about women's ethos can impact those around her and thus have a ripple effect on larger conceptions of women's authority. Ultimately, viewing texts through social circulation helps emphasize how "ideas resonate, divide, and are expressed" throughout time, space, and culture (101). Social circulation expands our views of how ethos is developed, particularly among professional women: "it moves us away from a focus on individual achievement—a singular figure who overcomes obstacles against all odds—and toward a sense of community, collaboration, and collective ethos" (Kirsch and Fancher 27). These memoirists aren't just telling their own stories in a singular place and time. Their memoirs espouse the network of influences on them as they build their ethos, and as they do so, they are impacting readers who will take up their ideas and

their ethos, distributing them through their own social circles. As such, the social circulation and uptake are helpful in understanding the rhetorical significance of memoirs, particularly by high-profile professional women. In women's professional memoirs, we can see how readers conceive of a professional woman embodying (or adapting) a male-dominated field's professionalism; how readers address these ideas and circulate them impacts wider cultural conceptions of public working women, both within a particular workplace and also in a more generalized societal workspace.

The Rhetorical Significance of Memoir

Once again, we can turn to Lorraine Adams's 2001 article to provide a compelling summary of the debate over memoir:

> It is fashionable, a bid for superiority, to denigrate memoir and explain its causes in derogatory terms. The reasons have calcified. Memoir is Jerry Springer. Memoir is narcissistic. Memoir is easy. Memoir is made-up. Memoir is ubiquitous. Memoir is self-help disguised. The counter-argument also has hardened. Memoir is a genre—some practitioners are good, some not. Memoir is not new—vide Augustine. Fiction is exhausted, memoir is vital.

Memoir is all of these things and more—including its role as the "black sheep" of the literary world—and because of this, it requires rhetorical attention. As I argue in this chapter, memoir's long history and its current cultural cache make it a valuable method for analyzing and interrogating how writers create themselves within a culture and how that culture reacts to those creations. Particularly when it comes to women composing themselves and their ethos, rhetoricians have the skill set necessary to make determinations about how knowledge about these writers and their communities are being framed, presented, consumed, and circulated

through the memoir genre—and to help memoir readers interpret the cultural messages they are receiving through these texts.

Women, in particular, have used the memoir genre to great acclaim by the reading public. Rhetoricians would do well to listen to the book clubs and the best seller lists, for though they reinforce cultural norms of popularity and value, they are key indicators of what people are reading and how ideas are circulating. When these ideas are about women's networked and located ethos, women's rhetorics must adapt the robust frameworks scholars have developed to look at other genres and ethos in other contexts in order to address popular memoirs. Once the field starts paying attention, memoir can provide us with important knowledge regarding how lived experiences are communicated and how those narratives demonstrate the priorities and values of a cultural moment and particular audiences. Ultimately, this work reclaims the rhetorical value of the reading public's relationship with memoir by looking at uptake and social circulation, and questioning why the reading public enjoys these texts, what knowledge they receive from them, and how they circulate the knowledge further into their networks.

CHAPTER 3
FIGHTING GHOSTS: PROFESSIONAL MEMOIR AND WOMEN'S WORK

"The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful—and yet they are very difficult to define. Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. And if this is so in literature, the freest of all professions for women, how is it in the new professions which you are now for the first time entering?" – Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women"

Virginia Woolf's essay "Professions for Women" was adapted from a 1931 speech she gave to the London and National Society for Women's Service, a group which, after accomplishing their goal of suffrage for white women, shifted their focus to "concentrate on obtaining economic equality for [white] women with [white] men" (London and National 82). A summary of Woolf's talk by the Junior Council of the Society notes that Woolf "charmed them by her personality and account of her literary career" before she "expressed her admiration for the young women who had been the first to enter the many occupations hitherto confined exclusively to men" (Junior Council 52). This summary does not mention the undercurrent of struggle in Woolf's talk, the acknowledgment of the forces that work against women in the workplace. These forces, as Woolf says, are hard to define yet always present. She goes on to say, "Even when the path is nominally open—when there is nothing to prevent a woman from being a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant—there are many phantoms and obstacles, as I believe, looming in her way" (Woolf 62). Nearly a century later, the path has opened even further for women in the workplace, and yet the pitfalls remain. Women can "have it all," but many women, particularly multiply marginalized women, have found that "having it all" frequently means unbearable pressure, impossible balancing acts, institutionalized and informal sexism, and the challenge of intersecting discriminations in a system built on white, straight, abled maleness that labels "unprofessional" anyone who does not embody that identity.

Woolf was not our most hopeful literary foremother, but she does provide a sort of solution to these "phantoms and obstacles" in the way of young women's professional success: "To discuss and define them is I think of great value and importance; for thus only can the labour be shared, the difficulties be solved" (62). Woolf advocates for the sharing of information, of naming and defining the obstacles, of laying bare the often invisible or taboo subjects of workplace barriers. Women then realize the burdens are not theirs alone. This sharing of stories and recognition of solidarity remains important today, as evidenced in the very terminology of the #MeToo movement. One way that women speak about their experiences is through a subgenre that I call "the professional memoir," in which women use stories of their professional advancement to define themselves as members of a profession and describe the obstacles or challenges that stood, and still stand, in the way of their successes. Despite the form the professional memoir takes—whether a collection of themed essays or a single narrative, spanning a few years or a lifetime—it focuses on the author's working life, and the other aspects of the memoirist's life are framed through a professional lens. Through professional memoir, writers contextualize their professional lives by exploring how their embodied experiences as racialized and gendered beings reflect wider cultural forces in and around their specific workplaces, such as broader political, social, and religious movements, and cultural mechanisms, including television, movies, and music.

As I discussed in chapter two, memoirs are rhetorical due to the ways they portray to audiences an individual life in a network of relationships within a particular cultural context. As such, memoir is both personally self-reflexive (interior) and also publicly culturally aware (exterior). When public women write narratives about their professional lives, they craft themselves and their ethos in ways that make themselves legible to audiences as experts in their particular professional field. Contending with male-centered standards that mark them as non-

normative in their workplaces, these professionals use memoirs to explore how they got to their position, explain the hurdles they overcame, and provide alternative conceptions of professionalism and interpretations of their workplaces that are woman-centered, ecological, and located. Professional memoirs show the strides that women have taken to become high-profile professionals in their fields, as well as the rhetorical strategies of self-fashioning and ethos-building they employ to solidify their places among male professionals. As Woolf said at the end of her 1931 speech to professional women, "The room is your own, but it is still bare" (63). Since then, public working women have worked to make their professional rooms habitable to themselves and other women, work they articulate in their professional memoirs.

As such, the professional memoir—particularly the contemporary "somebody" professional memoir—provides important rhetorical insight into the intersections between individual experiences and cultural conceptions of gender and discrimination in the workplace. To this end, this chapter first explores the rhetorical dimensions of women's work. Then, it defines the professional memoir as a subgenre, articulating what it provides scholars of rhetoric and life writing. Finally, the chapter discusses how consideration of professional memoirs by "somebodies," who address their prior ethos in a cultural context, can enhance our understanding of professional memoirs' rhetoricity through their interpretations of their workplace, its professional norms, and the cultural ideas that impact reader understandings of gender, professionalism, and authority in the workplace. Overall, the professional memoir adds a necessary dimension to the rhetorical conversation around women and work through its reflection of how women construct professional ethos by describing how they live and work and battle unseen forces, the ghosts to which Woolf referred. Professional memoirs help us see, analyze, and understand those ghosts.

The Rhetoric of Women's Work in Memoir

To see the ghosts of particular professional fields in memoir requires a rhetorical understanding of work itself. How individuals in a particular time and place communicate the nature and value of work reveals much about their culture and how it functions. These cultural frameworks can be revealed in discourses about labor and the workplace, as scholars like Xiomara Santamarina, Sarah Hallenbeck, and Michelle Smith have said. Discourses around work are inherently tied to discourses of gender, race, and privilege. In our rhetorical rush to reclaim marginalized rhetors and place them into cultural context, we can easily divest them from the framework of labor and economics that surround them, whether they are clear participants, not allowed to participate, or invisible within that framework. Additionally, their rhetorics can be valorized as transcending these frameworks and speaking to larger ideas and systems, which can separate their messages from both the genres being used and the economic frameworks within which they were produced. As Hallenbeck and Smith say, we must remember that "the most traditional rhetorical venues—the platform, the pulpit, the classroom, the press—are also workspaces" (202), and as such, professional norms for these spaces based in cultural and economic ideas of work and gender are embedded in the forms of rhetoric that emerge from them. As such, a rhetorical understanding of women's work must take into account all of these contextualized factors and explore the recursive relationships between them.

A strain of scholarship in English studies explores the connections between labor and women's participation in the public sphere. For example, Santamarina's book about the narratives of African American working womanhood calls for "analyses of labor that can trace the meanings produced, evoked, and shaped by historically situated agents and work practices" (24). She argues antebellum autobiographical writing by Sojourner Truth, Harriet Wilson, Eliza Potter, and Elizabeth Keckley "recast their authors' often-disparaged labor as socially and

culturally valuable to the nation" (x), framing their work as a basis for social legitimacy, civic recognition, and citizenship. Similarly, Hallenbeck and Smith called in 2015 for increased attention on the rhetoric of work, particularly in regard to gender, given that "workplaces, work tasks, and work arrangements are ... sites where gender and work themselves are rhetorically contested and constructed" (201). They go on to argue that "unearthing 'work' as a historically situated, rhetorically constructed, materially contingent concept is an important project, as workplaces and professions are often key axes in the maintenance or disruption of gendered, raced, classed, and ability-based differences" (201). Like Santamarina, Hallenbeck and Smith argue women's work is a "useful alternative to political citizenship as the primary lens for understanding women's rights and rhetoric" (205).

Recent book collections have examined women and work, examples being Jessica Enoch's *Domestic Occupations: Spacial Rhetorics and Women's Work*, Lynée Lewis Gaillet and Helen Gaillet Bailey's *Remembering Women Differently: Refiguring Rhetorical Work*, and David Gold and Enoch's *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor*. Scholars such as Applegarth, Heather Branstetter, Gold and Catherine Hobbes, Jordynn Jack, Roxanne Mountford, and Carolyn Skinner (among others), have discussed women's labor in particular professional fields, arguing for an increased understanding of how gender, work, and culture are revealed in rhetorical forms like scientific discourse, gossip, and sermons. Most of these scholars' work is historical, which shows that women—whether famous, infamous, or invisible—have always written about their life's work in diaries, letters, and other personal life writing. Even in eras when respectable women were not allowed professional careers or where they were rarely considered capable of meaningful contribution to the workforce, they wrote

about their abolition, missionary, or educational callings.[29] However, women had no pattern to follow, no bildungsroman, in which they could authoritatively recount a political narrative or the advancement of a career; "these women had no models on which to form their lives" (Heilbrun 25). Women could not look to the examples of "great men doing great things" like Augustine, Rousseau, Montaigne, and Franklin for models; instead, many women explained their professional trajectories through the lens of a sacred calling or an accident of Providence.

However, Estelle C. Jelinek notes a change in how women wrote about their careers in nineteenth-century England, particularly those in careers other than writing: "These women were more independent in their activities and less apologetic in their life studies. A number of these autobiographies were by women in working-class occupations," such as governesses, missionaries, domestic servants, and pickpockets (*Tradition* 46-47). Jelinek calls these "developmental autobiographies." An example of similar life writing in America was women's memoirs about their roles as nurses in the Civil War (*Tradition* 87). In the early twentieth century, women wrote about their occupations in new social movements, such as settlement house work, the birth control movement, and suffrage, or their work in traditionally male occupations (*Tradition* 149). These texts were primarily written by white women, though Black women occasionally wrote life narratives for the cause of abolition. In the mid-twentieth century, women writers wrote about their careers in a variety of settings, and Black women had some increased opportunities to publish. Black women activists, actors, writers, and opera singers all wrote memoirs about their lives and occupations during this time, as did white women playwrights, writers, actresses, and singers. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, popular

[29] It is important to note that the term "respectable" throughout history means largely white, upper class, and wealthy. Most minoritized women have worked throughout history, whether out of necessity or by force, as did many lower-class women. They would have been employed in jobs from factory work to domestic work to sex work. Middle-class single women were often employed as teachers. However, few of these women would have been considered respectable "professionals," or career women.

autobiographies came from those in public professions such as sportswomen, politicians, journalists, singers, activists, and actors (Jelinek, *Tradition* 185). Finally came the memoir boom of the mid-1990s, in which women found greater opportunities to write about their work, whether they had a public following or not.

Since the 1990s, women have crafted their professional ethos and depicted their professional fields, though cultural and social norms still impact both production and reception in ways both obvious and subtle. All of the professional fields—politics, comedy, and public Protestant Christianity—examined in this study are historically male-dominated and highly rhetorical. While all work is rhetorical, these fields are rhetorical in traditional ways: professionals in them frequently make public verbal and visual arguments. The politician makes speeches in a court or senate; the religious leader preaches or teaches from a pulpit; the comic performs comedy in some venue. In order to be considered professionals in these fields, women have had to make strategic rhetorical moves in order to gain ethos and audiences. For some, writing a professional memoir is one of those professional rhetorical moves.

Even as women have used life writing to build their professional ethos, any gains by working women are not absolute; history, in this regard, is not a straight line. Rather, as Ann George, M. Elizabeth Weiser, and Janet Zepernick note, women have had a cyclical relationship with the broader workforce, where gains are quickly followed by losses; thus, "women in contemporary politics, corporate and union leadership, the sciences, and academia continue to face all the obstacles and hardships of the true pioneer, in spite of the many generations of women who have pioneered much of this same territory in the past" (2). This sentiment echoes what Gesa E. Kirsch and Patricia Fancher say about women's professional progress during World War II: "progress was rarely revolutionary; rather, it functioned as a gradual, messy, and recursive evolution" (36). Women's work, paid and unpaid, is always buffeted by the winds of

political, economic, and social forces literally beyond their control, as women are underrepresented in government, high-level corporate positions, research positions, and other decision-making forces, and as such, are often less considered when relief packages, policy, or social aid is debated in these spheres.[30] However, like Woolf says, one of the solutions is to share stories, to reveal the ghosts and the obstacles, to make the professional room a little more habitable for the next woman entering the career. In doing so through a genre like professional memoir, women can place their stories in a larger social context, re-interpret their professional fields through their own embodied experience, and hopefully impact cultural conceptions and conversations about women, work, and professional norms. The subgenre of professional memoir can facilitate that important rhetorical work.

The Professional Memoir Subgenre

A byproduct of memoir's singular attention to one aspect of an individual's life is the tendency of scholars to manifest a glut of memoir subgenres, as they create ad hoc categories to suit their scholarly needs. For example, in his 2012 book *Memoir: An Introduction*, G. Thomas Couser highlights what he sees as new developments in contemporary American memoir, including disability or illness memoirs, filial narratives and patriography, erotic memoirs, graphic memoirs, stunt memoirs, animal-centered memoirs, and postmodern memoirs. In addition to some of Couser's categories, Ben Yagoda's *Memoir: A History* mentions dad memoirs, memoirs about dogs, and "shtick lit," in which authors do a lifestyle experiment, like A. J. Jacobs's memoir of his attempt to read the Encyclopedia Britannica from beginning to

[30] Caroline Criado Perez's book *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* explores this gender (and race) disparity in representation at length.

end.[31] In a chronicle verging on encyclopedic, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson list sixty genres of life narrative in an appendix to *Reading Autobiography*; from biomythography to testimonio, their litany outlines ways that life writing can work on the self (as in scriptotherapy), on others (as in witnessing), or on the culture as a whole (as in ecobiography). These lists might lead us to conclude that the scholarly enthusiasm for coining new terminology may have gone too far, creating too many subgenres for any of them to be useful.

However, rather than thinking of these subgenres as discrete, we should consider them different organizational schemas that reflect cultural needs. As Couser says, genre distinctions are made "not to *classify* but to *clarify*" (19); autobiographical subgenres are best used to describe what texts do, how they work, and what they reveal, rather than what they are, an extension of Carolyn Miller's rhetorical definition of genre from chapter two. For instance, an increase in animal memoir may relate to a rising commercial pet culture or advances in understandings of the psychological and social benefits of animals. Ecobiographies may emerge from a groundswell concern about climate change or increased scientific research about the interdependency of ecosystems. As Smith and Watson note, "established generic templates mutate and new generic possibilities emerge" when authors and subjects locate themselves in various ways in various cultures and times (*Reading* 253). Therefore, genres, and subgenres in particular, respond to audience needs and cultural moments, though the reverse may also be true: the genres may at some point influence the culture and the audience to perceive themselves and their culture a particular way. Naming a subgenre has value, not just in scholarly conversations but in any conversations about memoirs, because names and definitions note what a particular type of life writing does in the world and what its existence says about the world itself.

[31] A. J. Jacobs's *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* was published in 2004. He followed it up with *The Year of Living Biblically* in 2007. His most recent book is *Thanks a Thousand* (2018), in which he attempts to thank every person involved in making his morning cup of coffee.

As such, I propose an addition to the list of autobiographical subgenres: the *professional memoir.* These book-length texts, written by individuals focused on their personal experiences in specific professional fields or workplaces, are revelatory about the intersections of gender, work, memoir, and culture. In these texts, the writers discuss their development in and commitment to work in a particular professional field. They do not present themselves as gig workers, part-timers, or writers trying a new job in order to write about it, nor are they volunteers or hobbyists. Writers of professional memoirs are people who, at the moment of writing the memoir, present themselves as invested members of a profession with a networked ethos evident throughout the book and often a prior ethos based in the cultural context. The writers' commitment to their field and profession does not preclude critique or frustration with that field, particularly in the case of multiply marginalized professionals. In many cases, they build ethos with an audience beyond their colleagues by demonstrating how they learned the professional norms of their workplaces, how they function within those norms, and frequently, how they adapt and/or challenge them. Ultimately, these memoirs reveal interpretations of particular types of work and workplaces by those within the fields themselves. These portrayals also make a cultural impact as the reading public takes up the professional memoir's ideas.

Some overlap exists between the professional memoir and the bildungsroman, a narrative popular in the nineteenth century that articulated how a young man develops socially, generally culminating in him understanding and accepting his role in society and giving up young passions (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 262). Many bildungsromans were novels, but this model had—and continues to have—an influence on memoirs, given that this genre "narrates the formation of a young life as gendered, classed, and raced within a social network" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 120). However, the bildungsroman is not a perfect fit for subjects other than privileged white men, though some contemporary autobiographies by marginalized individuals follow this model

to demonstrate "a sense of emerging identity or an increased role in public life" or "an awakening to gender-based limitations," both elements which can be found in professional memoirs (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 263). The bildungsroman does parallel the professional memoir's focus on the development of the subject through education, mentorship, life experiences, and other events that impact the individual's selection of profession. The bildungsroman, though, often focuses on the internal maturation of an individual that leads him to accept his social role, whereas the professional memoir explores both the internal shifts and the external cultural expectations that frame an individual's rhetorical construction of themselves as professionals and their interpretation of their professional field. Additionally, generally professional memoirs continue past the moment of attainment, demonstrating how a career is built through years of experience, passion, skill, luck—and understanding of the social and professional norms within a field and culture.

Other scholars have noted a pattern of individuals crafting personal writing about one's work. In "Personal Writing in Professional Spaces: Contesting Exceptionalism in Interwar Women's Vocational Autobiographies," Risa Applegarth uses the term "vocational autobiography" to categorize "first-person narratives focused on a writer's vocational training, career choices, educational experiences, relationships with mentors and colleagues, and excitement about and commitment to her work" (531). She looks at vocational autobiographies published in the 1920s and 1930s that depict women in powerful professional spaces: **"**behind news desks, in surgical wards, laboratories, station houses, and so on" (533). Applegarth sees the rise of these autobiographies as a rhetorical response to the discourse of exceptionalism swirling around woman professionals; the autobiographies function as a powerful "collective endeavor—one that links professional women across fields with one another, and suggests the power of (gendered, embodied) presence to shift norms, including norms governing women's disruptive

presence in professional workplaces and the strict separation of personal from professional identities" (538). As such, these autobiographies demonstrate how women professionals are normative rather than exceptional, an important shift in the discourse about working women at that time.

Applegarth's research demonstrates the value of vocational autobiographies and other professional life writing to the field of rhetoric, particularly their gender ramifications, and her use of "vocational autobiography," which she coins due to "the persistence with which these narratives frame and constitute the writer's self in relation to her working life," overlaps with my own conception of professional memoir. However, my decision to forego using Applegarth's term is largely based on how memoir differs from autobiography. As I discuss in chapter two, my purposeful use of the term memoir highlights the crucial focusing effect of the genre and precludes the inclusion of other texts sometimes subsumed into the term "autobiography," such as blogs, social media posts, and videos. Memoir is also the common publishing parlance of the contemporary period I am studying, so my use of the term reflects current usage.

Additionally, using "professional" rather than "vocational" alludes to the norms and frameworks of particular careers, particularly in regard to professionalism, that restrict bodies that are not male, white, straight, and abled from being easily considered professional. Applegarth uses "vocational" and "professional" interchangeably; however, she appears to use "vocation" to refer to a particular professional field, as in "vocational training" (531) and "vocational guides" (532), whereas she uses "professional" often to refer to the identities of the writers, as in "professional women's autobiographical writing works against a strict separation between personal and professional identities" (532). From my reading of Applegarth, I can see an overlap but a distinction between the vocation itself and the professionalism of particular fields as reflected in the members of that field and articulated in their memoirs. My study

emphasizes the constructed idea of a professional contextualized and built on professional norms, an idea that is presented, fulfilled, rejected, and/or expanded within these memoirs, and how that idea reveals cultural expectations for professionals within that field at a particular time and place. However, my study and Applegarth's study are in tandem, further confirming the value of increasing our rhetorical understanding of gender in the workplace as reflected in life writing.

I am also not the first to place the words "professional" and "memoir" in proximity, though the term's use elsewhere is limited. Some professional fields like education and social work use the phrase "professional memoir" to describe personal narratives, often done as part of training or graduate coursework, that are meant either for reflective or evaluative purposes. In these narratives, the professionals demonstrate, either to themselves or to others in the same field, what they have learned through their professional experiences in a particular context. The insular nature of this professional writing means the cultural work of these professional memoirs is limited, functioning more as a tool for educational purposes and propagation of professional norms for those within the community rather than a narrative meant for a wider audience that considers this professional's place in a larger context.

The phrase "professional memoir" has also been occasionally used by the media and publishing world to describe the memoirs of public figures. For instance, the term emerges in the subtitle to publisher Lionel Leventhal's 2006 memoir *On Publishing: A Professional Memoir,* which *Publishers Weekly* emphasizes is "a professional, not personal, memoir" as Leventhal begins his narrative with himself at age fifteen. Other memoirs have used the phrase as a subtitle, including news commentator Raymond Swing's 1964 *"Good Evening!"* and academic John Howard Stanford's 2011 *Making Sense of Management*. Other times, the phrase has been used in reviews of memoirs, such as chef Anthony Bourdain's 2001 *Kitchen Confidential* being called a

"professional memoir-expose" by the *New York Times*.[32] Still others have identified their own memoirs as "professional memoirs"; for instance, director William Friedkin self-described his 2013 memoir *The Friedkin Connection* as a professional memoir, given that he focuses on his career, "omitting intimate details of his personal life, including his marriage to former Paramount head Sherry Lansing" (Desowitz). So, while not widely used, the term has some traction in that it describes a particular type of memoir with particular authorial goals.

The "professional memoir" also could encompass the rise of the personal business memoir/advice book in the early twenty-first century. These popular books often toe the line between self-help and memoir, though Sheryl Sandberg declares in the introduction to *Lean In* that her book is neither (9). They also tend to valorize the individual while effacing any structural or social constraints that impact their success or failure, as Megan Brown notes.[33] These texts also function as "biopolitical management, controlling a potentially unruly population of employees by creating and perpetuating norms of character and behavior in the workplace and beyond" (Brown, *American Autobiography* 87). These professional memoirs can read as a "I did it this way; you can too!" narrative, with a focus on gleaned life lessons from experiences rather than the experiences themselves. To use Lee Gutkind's metaphor, if autobiography is a life viewed through a panoramic and memoir is a life through a zoom lens, then the difference between the professional memoirs of Sandberg and Hillary Clinton are matters of focus within the lens, a different priority within the professional frame. The professional memoirs I consider in this study are largely constructed life narratives that may contain advice rather than memoirs organized around explicit suggestions or advice for the workplace that use life experience to support that advice. Both types of professional memoir

[32] See the *New York Times* best seller list (Paperback Business) for the week of July 8, 2001.
[33] Sandberg does anticipate this critique in the introduction to *Lean In*, along with many other critiques (11); however, she articulates a need to work at both the individual and instiutional levels (9).

demonstrate cultural conceptions of work and gender in the workplace, albeit in different ways, and as such, both are worthy of study. However, this particular study will focus more on narrative memoirs, given the insight provided by how the writers craft their professional ethos as subjects and how their narrative patterns reflect larger cultural concerns.

A scholarly understanding of professional memoir will help us to attend to the patterns of depictions of women's work in male-dominated rhetorical professions within a culture and time period. We can build on rhetorical studies of women and work to determine how women's professional memoirs reveal rhetorical constructions of women as professionals and their experiences in workplaces, and what their rhetorical constructions reveal about larger cultural understandings of gender and work. As Sidonie Smith argued in her 2011 Modern Language Association presidential address in regard to the professional stories of the humanities,

> An archive of stories of this professional life would enable us to look beyond a singular I with a singular career model to the transformation of an imaginary—that is, to the collective story of a profession, to generational stories about scholar-teachers, and to the structural story of the new economy of higher education as it affects humanists and academic institutions across the globe. (572)

Smith identifies how collecting and studying "stories of this professional life" —professional memoir—moves our attention beyond the individual to the collective and structural. She is advocating for those in the field to create this archive, but these professional memoirs already exist in other fields, though we are not considering them as such. Looking at a corpus of professional memoirs, particularly by high-profile public women that are widely read by a reading public, will reveal the collective and transformative work of this subgenre, demonstrating how women choose to (or feel they must) rhetorically construct themselves to be legible to their audiences as professionals within particular careers in a particular time and place.

Professional Somebodies

Once we start considering the subgenre of the professional memoir, various differences within that subgenre start to emerge. One distinction involves who is telling their life/work story The distinction between a somebody memoir and a nobody memoir matters in the world of professional memoirs, because it affects how the writers construct themselves as professionals, the stories they tell, and the ways their audiences pick up their interpretations of their professional fields. Having name-recognition, whether within professional fields or in the wider culture, means that professional memoirs by somebodies tend to be popular, often ranking high on best seller lists. Readers engage with these professional memoirs because they want to know the behind-the-scenes story. They want to see how these women gained their professional status, as well as the obstacles they overcame to become who they have rhetorically constructed themselves to be.

However, as discussed in chapter two, memoirs by high-profile figures are often deemed less literary and less worthy of critical analysis by scholars and critics, often for aesthetic reasons. From a rhetorical perspective, the popularity of these memoirs means they widely circulate cultural messages about women at work to large reading publics. Beyond just informing readers how a public figure interprets her contemporary workplaces and her role within those workplace, the memoir also functions as an element in the canon of the public figure's professional life, among speeches, jokes, and sermons. To incorporate memoir into their professional canons, they must consider the ethos that has already been constructed by audiences based on their other rhetorical acts. Because these women are in public careers, they have ethos that precedes them, and their memoirs reinforce, modify, or, at times, counter their public image. Popular memoirs written by "somebodies" must contend with celebrity, prior ethos, and the contemporary context of their rhetorical professions, and the ways they do this provide insight

into what rhetorical moves are available to high-profile professional women as they construct themselves in their memoirs.

Somebody Memoirs

Professional memoirs can fall into one of two categories: *somebody* or *nobody* memoirs. In Lorraine Adams's 2001 *Washington Monthly* article, "Almost Famous," she coins the two subcategories, which are what they sound like: memoirs written by someone who is known or recognized by a significant audience, versus memoirs written by largely unknown authors who build their ethos within their memoirs. Adams was particularly interested in the rise of the nobody memoir during the memoir boom of the 1990s and 2000s. For hundreds of years, autobiographical writing had been primarily done by people of cultural note, people with prior ethos based in their public works and/or notoriety. Generals, philosophers, activists, and religious leaders all used their public names to catch readers' attention, promising to tell the real story of a life in the public sphere. As Julie Rak notes, these texts about impressive lives were meant to sell based on their gossip about public figures or historical moments. However, in the late eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Confessions* "united the private life of the self to its public persona" (Rak, *Boom* 5). This new type of memoir was not just a romp through stories of a famous life, but also literary, serious, and introspective. After *The Confessions,* it was not enough for an autobiographical text to simply have interesting stories to tell; the writer had to provide personal insight into those stories. This shift in style opened up the possibility of a memoir to be written by someone unknown, as long as they had a good story to tell and showed they were a good person to tell it.

In the decades since the memoir boom of the 1990s, two strains of nobody memoirs have emerged. One strain of nobody memoir is authored by the "regular Jo(e)" with a sensational

story. Books like Tara Westover's *Educated* or Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* fall into this category, their writers being relative "nobodies" who experienced trauma and lived to tell the tale. The second strain is written by the serial memoirist, writers like Mary Karr, Frank McCourt, and David Sedaris, who have gained popularity through writing multiple memoirs. The blogger or social media star could be considered part of this second strain of serial memoirist, as many of them gained a following through online personal writing before publishing a memoir through traditional means.[34] The writers of these two strains of memoirs largely build their ethos through their writing, whether online or through their published work. They were "nobodies" until their personal writing made them "somebodies."

In contemporary life writing scholarship, nobody memoirs are often analyzed as literary objects, or at least considered worthy of scholarly discussion. For example, rhetorical and literary scholarship has looked at the work of Frank McCourt, David Sedaris, Azar Nafisi, J. D. Vance, and Ta-Nehisi Coates.[35] Perhaps more scholarly attention has focused on these memoirs because they are considered to be more linked to the everyday lived experience of individual "nobodies" in a culture. Perhaps these nobody memoirs are considered less mediated by other public forces, or they are thought to have been written without an ulterior motive or bias, given the writer's lack of prior ethos. Perhaps the literary quality is assumed to be better, given that unknown writers often must prove their mettle to be published; publishers anticipate a built-in audience for somebody memoirs, an audience that (the argument goes) may care less about "quality" and more about gossip. These conscious or unconscious assumptions about memoirs and their writers

[34] The blogger or social media influencer could be argued to be a "somebody" instead, as they often have built prior ethos with an audience. However, their memoirs do not always have the same widespread popularity as others. An interesting case is Glennon Doyle, who began as a mommy blogger and became a serial memoirist. Her latest memoir, *Untamed*, has been on the *New York Times* best seller list for nearly a year as of March 7, 2021, and it has been read by celebrities and public figures alike; it was even featured briefly on the sitcom *Black-ish.* Doyle's status as a nobody/somebody could (and should) be investigated further, particularly in regard to her memoirs' rhetorical impacts.

[35] See Mack and Alexander, Wallace, Kulbaga, Whitlock, and Mitchell.

reveal the values and conceptions the scholarly community holds about the rhetorical work of memoir. While nobody memoirs of literary merit are prime examples of the genre and worth scholarly exploration, they are not always the memoirs most consumed by the reading public, at least not contemporary audiences outside the purview of required reading lists. At the very least, nobody memoirs are not the *only* memoirs being read and talked about in the larger cultural environment, which is what the scholarly community of rhetoric would have us think, based in many of the scholarly articles written and published on memoir. Much of the reading public is seeking out texts by public figures they recognize from television shows, Instagram, or Twitter. People are interested in "somebodies," whether comedians, politicians, or religious figures.

The counterpoint to the nobody memoir is the somebody memoir, which G. Thomas Couser defines as a memoir that has, at its center, a person with fame or notoriety based on either "consistent prominence of excellence (in athletics or public service, for example) or on the basis of one unusual exploit" (144). Somebody memoirs are big business. Yagoda indicates that the memoirs by entertainers accounted for only 1.1 percent of American autobiographies in 1900-1909, but increased to 14 percent by the 1960s, at which point they were the largest subcategory of autobiographical writing (181).[36] Smith and Watson's *Reading Autobiography* blames the "veritable barrage" of musician memoirs in 2017 on "contemporary commodification of culture," saying celebrity memoirs fulfill a number of roles for readers:

> Some satisfy readerly desires for gossip and vicarious immersion in a fantasy world of drugs, sex, and rock and roll. Many are written only to capitalize on fleeting fame and

[36] Yagoda's measure primarily considers those in entertainment, and so it does not include memoirs by religious or political figures, which I would include as popular figures and celebrities in particular circles.

possibly rejuvenate it. Others, especially in life writing by sports figures, seek to project positive role models for young people, particularly boys and girls of color (163).[37]

Similarly, scholars like Dana D. Nelson, Michelle Smith, Sidonie Smith, and others tie an increase in political memoir's popularity to the rise in celebrity culture. As A. Fletcher Cole argues about Hillary Clinton's memoir *Hard Choices*, "The reaction to Clinton's memoir reflects the importance of the political persona as it operates in a modern, celebrity-obsessed environment" (101). This celebrity-obsessed environment has only been propelled by the rise of social media, reality television, and viral videos; now there are multiple ways that a fan can "interact" with their favorite celebrity. Yet "somebodies" still write memoirs, which shows that public figures and readers believe memoirs have a unique rhetorical and cultural power in how they reveal interpretations of well-known people and events, both providing a personal perspective on them and putting them in a broader context. While somebody memoirs can range from "tell-alls" to childhood reminiscences, a good portion of them would fall into the category of professional memoir, given that they focus on a public individual's engagement with their field of work, and the successes and failures that mark their rise to fame and fortune—or their loss of both.

Some scholars have delved into the memoirs of high-profile public figures—such as Cole and Sidonie Smith's attention to political memoirs and Suzanne Ferriss's use of "chick non-fic" to explore memoirs by female comedians—but the amount of scholarship does not keep pace with the hunger the reading public has for these memoirs and, as such, the ways these popular texts are circulating ideas in the wider reading public. As I discuss in chapter two, scholars have traditionally derided texts written by popular public figures, holding up a code of aesthetics to

[37] Julie Rak counters this idea of a barrage; she says that "there is not a glut of celebrity memoirs/biographies; they just have higher profiles and louder platforms" (*Boom* 133).

build a literary memoir canon that frequently ignores what the wider public spends time reading. However, the issue of collaborating and ghostwriting might be another reason for scholars' hesitation. As Katja Lee summarizes, "This skepticism that attends celebrity authorship is derived in equal parts from media coverage of the celebrity's intelligence, vanity, and integrity; an awareness of the rising profile and profitability of the ghost-writing industry; and a lingering distrust of the authenticity and value of popular culture and mass-produced products" (1259). Life writing by high-profile individuals is produced in a variety of ways, spanning from the subject writing her memoir with the same editorial assistance that a nobody memoirist would receive, all the way to the subject telling material to an uncredited ghostwriter, who shapes that material into a narrative. The tension regarding the layers of help a writer may receive emerges from the autobiographical pact, a concept articulated by Philippe Lejeune. Generally, this pact refers to the trust readers have that everything in the memoir happened to the subject as explained, but it can also extend to the assumption that the person named on the book cover as author is the one who actually wrote the text (unless the text states otherwise). Because of this, often readers' default position while reading celebrity memoir can be either an uncritical acceptance of the text as purely produced by the public figure, or a sleuth-like stance, wondering what parts of the text were done by whom. However, scholars such as Couser, Lee, and Buchanan indicate that neither stance actually provides insight into the memoirs themselves and their rhetorical impact; rather, readers and scholars should understand that different forms of labor are always part of the composition process, and collaboration is inherent to a project, particularly when the subject is a less experienced writer. Still, the conversation often makes scholars uncomfortable, which may lead to a disavowing of the genre—or at least the genre as performed by public figures—altogether.[38] While conversations around authenticity and

[38] The ongoing conversation about ghost-writing and collaboration is a valuable one; however, reconciling all of the

collaboration are valuable, they can overwhelm other important veins of scholarly argument and leave best selling memoirs unstudied.

A different line of argument for the field of women's rhetorics is to consider the rhetorical value of highly popular somebody memoirs as cultural objects, by which I mean "those symbolic, therefore often artistic, means by which society represents itself to itself, and in the representing comments upon and transforms itself" (Brummett xvi). To go further, as Barry Brummett observes, "If *culture* means those objects and events that nurture, shape, and sustain people, then *popular culture* must be those artifacts that are most actively involved in winning the favor of the public and thus in shaping the public in particular ways" (xxi). Brummett later argues that readers' engagement with popular culture constitutes "*rhetorical* struggles over who they are and how the world will be made" (xxi). When considered as cultural objects, somebody memoirs invite us to explore how they both shape the public and reflect the public's shaping. Professional memoir, in particular, then becomes vital to understanding how both public figures and private citizens are making and remaking the cultural world of work, which becomes especially crucial in considering cultural understandings of work alongside issues of gender, race, sexuality, and class. To that end, professional memoirs by women are artifacts of a rhetorical struggle over power, ambition, and professional roles experienced by high-profile working women in a particular context. However, for public women writing memoir, this rhetorical struggle precedes their memoirs, involving prior ethos that has been constructed through other means.

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differing positions is outside the bounds of this dissertation. I do explore this issue briefly in chapter three and then further in chapter four, in regard to political memoir. However, moving forward, I work under the assumption that the subject is the author, and the professional image is approved and endorsed by the subject. As such, I will be discussing professional ethos as constructed by these public figures in their memoirs, regardless of the collaborators they may or may not have had.

Prior Ethos

Memoirs by public figures are largely published because of their prior ethos. Somebody memoirs have a built-in authority with a segment of a readership, particularly when it comes to professional memoirs about the writer's craft and work in the public eye. As Jonathan D'Amore says, "The author looms over an autobiographical text as both an artist and a subject, the creator and the content of the narrative. As such, the author can be seen as the primary motivating factor for a potential audience to buy and to read a book" (3). However, this looming is not neutral; it is based in prior ethos and a culture that requires subjects to be constructed a particular way. In professional memoirs, this construction has to do with the public's sense of the writers' professionalism and status in their field of work, which lends their memoir (and their writers) credibility.

This credibility is a large component of public figures' "prior ethos," as Ruth Amossy calls it. Prior ethos is the ethos of a speaker that the audience brings to a rhetorical situation, an ethos based in previous rhetorical situations and experiences. In the case of high-profile public figures, "the celebrity proper name is read referentially with a preconceived notion of who they are and of what they might be capable" (K. Lee 1258). Prior ethos is part of the environment in which the discourse is received; however, if ethos built in a text is a networked construction that differs from person to person, as outlined in chapter one, so is prior ethos. Each reader comes into a professional memoir by a public figure with a different image of that person, based on past interpretations of that individual's ethos and understandings of what a professional in their role should embody. Public figures must ask themselves not only how they wish to build their ethos through their memoir, but also how they will contend with their prior ethos throughout their narrative: building on the positive components, addressing (by countering or admitting) the

negative, and constructing an image of themselves as a professional that will be incorporated into the public's cultural understanding of them and other professionals in their field.

Amossy describes how prior ethos causes orators to "evaluate the impact of the prior ethos on the current subject matter and operate to confirm their images, to rework or transform them so as to produce an impression which is in keeping with the demands of the projected argumentation" (7). As such, the ethos construction in a professional memoir is interacting with genre conventions, audience expectations, and rhetorical purpose, all which are impacted by cultural context and ideas about gender and work. Public figures must contend with the prior ethos developed through social media, public appearances, and career choices, as well as the prior ethos presented by the media, through interviews, photos, reviews, articles, and social media reactions. This is particularly true when a public figure writes about her work in a public rhetorical workplace. Prior ethos is a helpful consideration when approaching professional memoirs by well-known individuals, as ethos construction is not merely contained within the covers of the memoir itself. The professional memoir becomes part of a rhetorical corpus involved in the professional presentation of a public figure, all of which contribute to ideas of this individual and their work in contemporary pop culture, political arenas, or religious institutions. As such, prior ethos also impacts the cultural impact of the professional memoir, affecting who picks up the memoir and how widely its professional ideas are circulated among readers in particular contexts.

Cultural Context

Professional memoir is released in a cultural context that impacts its reception by audience, and the context and its impact on ethos requires special consideration when examining professional memoirs by high-profile figures. Some professional memoirs experience "a brief

flowering in the attention of the public and the popular media; then they wither and die, finding resurrection, if ever, only as sources in the hands of curious historians" (Egerton 239). Others have significant staying power, such as Michelle Obama's *Becoming*, which, in early April 2021, had been on *New York Times* best seller lists for 111 weeks.[39] The ones that do stay on the lists or in the cultural consciousness do so either because they strike a chord with a readership or because their narrative is particularly timely. As Smith and Watson say, readers' participation with narratives is "multiply mediated," impacted by other cultural, political, and economic forces, which "help determine how audiences cluster at a particular historical moment around particular kinds of narrative" (*Reading* 101). So, a memoir's popularity is not just about the author; it's about the author and the narrative in a context.

Cultural contexts are always changing. For instance, scholar Megan Brown looks at how autobiographical writing was shaped by the new normal of America after the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001. She notes how issues of subjectivity came to the forefront as political and social entities increased their management and tracking of citizens. The United States as a culture "was marked by intense anxieties about identity. Americans wondered who they were individually and collectively" (Brown, *American Autobiography* 4). America in the early twenty-first century was also marked by continual war and two economic recessions in one decade, plus "a series of traumas, disasters both manmade and natural: Hurricane Katrina, the Newtown/ Sandy Hook massacre, the Boston Marathon bombing, the BP oil spill" (*American Autobiography* 6). Many Americans dealt with these national traumas by engaging with varying forms of representation, such as reality television, social media, and memoir that was increasingly used in combination with other forms of self-presentation as a way of gaining fame

[39] The hardcover edition of Michelle Obama's memoir spent 107 weeks on the best seller list, and the week it dropped off the list, the paperback edition emerged. See the *New York Times* best seller lists for the weeks of March 14, 2021 (Hardcover Nonfiction) and April 11, 2021 (Paperback Nonfiction).

in a society concerned about the role of the individual and the collective. Brown sees American memoir during this time as "circulating norms of self-presentation and self-actualization" through "guides or models for living" (*American Autobiography* 5, 13). The context of post-9/11 and continued national traumas impacted the American culture of the following decade, which produced the professional memoirs of this study and context women were working within.

These larger cultural contexts impact what narratives audiences find important and when, and the impact can be seen in book purchasing. Sometimes readers' choices are impacted by media appearances and book club selections; other times, they are a reaction to wider social movements or cultural events. For example, Ruth Bader Ginsburg's collection of writings, *My Own Words*, was originally published in hardcover in 2016, then in paperback in 2018. After Ginsburg's death on September 18, the paperback re-emerged on the October 4, 2020, *New York Times* paperback nonfiction best seller list, which compiles sales for the week ending on September 19, 2020. The book was still on the paperback nonfiction best seller list fifteen weeks later. A political figure and cultural icon, Ginsburg's death clearly prompted an interest in revisiting her professional writing, particularly in the midst of a tempestuous election cycle. This cultural moment propelled her book back onto the best seller list, though it was bolstered by years of Ginsburg's rise to cultural prominence as a feminist icon.

Cultural context is inherently tied to the ethos of the writer, as cultural legitimacy depends on who is writing and how the audience interacts with the text. In the case of memoirs written by celebrities or public figures, when and how they are published impact the memoirs' reception, and as such, have rhetorical significance. Publishers try to anticipate the reception of a particular moment of publication. For instance, it is difficult to consider it coincidence that the paperback version of Kamala Harris's *The Truths We Hold* was released one week before she was announced as running for vice-president on the Biden Democratic ticket in fall 2020. Her

professional memoir was on the *New York Times* paperback nonfiction best seller list for two weeks, then returned to the list as the election drew closer.[40] As of the week before inauguration day in January 2021, the paperback book had spent fifteen weeks on the best seller list. Harris's memoir was a best seller in its first edition, published in 2019, but clearly the political context of the 2020 election, perhaps aided by a new paperback edition, helped boost sales. Professional memoirs by public figures reflect both modern workplaces and cultural contexts, seeking to take advantage of their writers' prior ethos and catch the reading public in a cultural moment conducive to the publication of the text.

The most successful professional memoirs have a grounding in the lived experience of work in a particular time and place, which means readers and scholars need to be aware of that context and how contexts change. For instance, Mindy Kaling mentions Louie C. K. as a comedian who would be on her list of notable stand-ups in her memoir, published in 2011 (135). Since the publication of Kaling's book, C. K. has fallen from grace due to alleged sexual harassment; I doubt many high profile woman comedians would point to him as one of their favorites now, at least not without caveats and consideration of what that statement would do to their own ethos. Wong's 2019 memoir, on the other hand, has references to #MeToo and trying to avoid male comedians who have been accused of sexual misdeeds.[41] Cultural movements, moments, and contexts change professional narratives, whether by adjusting people's understandings of their workplaces, adjusting reader understanding and expectations for interpretations of that context, or allowing (or disallowing) particular interpretations of a workplace or experiences to gain cultural cache. Famous figures were harassing others before the #MeToo movement came to prominence in 2017, and while those stories were being told, they

[40] See the *New York Times* best seller list (Paperback Nonfiction) for the week of August 30 and October 11.
[41] The professional context of comedy is the focus of chapter five.

were not gaining much cultural traction. After 2017, addressing this movement in a professional memoir about the field of comedy or entertainment is reasonable, perhaps even expected.

This study looks at professional memoirs published in the years 2010 through 2019, during which there were innumerable cultural shifts and changes. This was a decade that included the following: most of the Obama years, the contentious election of 2016, Trump's presidential term, the appointment of 127 women to Congress in 2018; the Women's March, widespread exposure of sexual misconduct, the rise of the #MeToo movement; increased national attention on violence against black and brown and trans bodies, the founding and spread of the Black Lives Matter movement, mass shootings at music festivals and elementary schools and high schools; increasing concern about climate change; and many other widespread political, economic, and social changes. Many white women may have believed America was post-racial and post-feminist in 2010, but in the ensuing decade, the reality of pervasive discrimination against nonwhite, non-male bodies drew increased national attention. Simultaneously, the alt-right movement became more mainstream as conspiracy theories were touted by high-profile political figures, including President Trump. The decade of the 2010s also saw the rise of original diverse content from streaming sites like Netflix and Amazon, as well as many women becoming showrunners and creating television shows and media empires that reflect their own voices. All of these elements are part of the milieu reflected in professional memoirs from this decade.

The Value of Women's Professional Memoir

Professional memoirs by women do significant rhetorical work: they address the prior ethos developed by readers based in cultural knowledge, demonstrating the ways professionals attempt to gain or keep authority in light of previous conceptions of them and their professional

work. They address and reflect cultural contexts, as they are published and read within a context that amplifies the professional experiences of their writers. Most importantly, they reflect cultural conceptions of professionalism within a specific field of work, particularly in regard to gender. Writers of professional memoirs often seek to adapt those conceptions, hoping to affect standard conceptions of professionals in their fields, which—more often than not—are the image of a generic white man. Through their professional memoirs, high-profile women work to create culturally legible versions of professionals that fit them and their embodied experiences as multi-faceted women who are committed to their workplaces. Studying this rhetorical work provides rhetoricians important insight into the cultural ideas that surround gender, professionalism, and authority in the workplace, and the ways professional standards both reflect and create these cultural ideas. Professional memoirs demonstrate how professional women, in all of their intersecting oppressions, continue to fight the ghosts and slay the phantoms that keep them from full equality in their workplaces, building their professional ethos and convincing readers, viewers, congregants, and constituents that they, too, are professionals.

CHAPTER 4
THE POLITICS OF PROFESSIONALISM: PROFESSIONAL MEMOIRS OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN POLITICS

"*One-half of recent and soon-to-be graduating vascular surgery trainees had an identifiable social media account, with nearly one-quarter of these containing either clearly unprofessional or potentially unprofessional content. Account holders who self-identified as vascular surgeons were more likely to be associated with unprofessional social media behavior. Young surgeons should be aware of the permanent public exposure of unprofessional content that can be accessed by peers, patients, and current/future employers." – Hardouin et al.,* The Journal of Vascular Surgery

Professionalism in the medical field made headlines in 2020, when a study about the personal social media content of young surgeons was released online by the *Journal of Vascular Surgery* in advance of its publication in the journal's August print issue. This study coded particular posts of these burgeoning professionals as "unprofessional," including "photos showing doctors with alcohol or in 'inappropriate/offensive attire,' including 'underwear, provocative Halloween costumes, and provocative posting in bikinis/swimwear.' They also viewed controversial political comments, particularly 'stances on abortion and gun control,' as unprofessional" (Goldberg). A social media backlash followed, and the study was eventually retracted by the journal. The reason given by editors for the retraction was the study's methodology being based in "antiquated norms" and a lack of identification of biases (Editors).[42] The journal retraction continues, "The goal of professionalism in medicine is to help ensure trust among patients, colleagues and hospital staff. However, professionalism has historically been defined by and for white, heterosexual men and does not always speak to the diversity of our workforce or our patients" (Editors).

Therein lies the tension of professionalism: the idea is that consistency among professional norms makes individuals, both inside and outside of the profession, feel secure in the quality of services and characteristics of the professionals with whom they are interacting.

[42] Of the study's seven authors, six were men and one was a woman. The study was reviewed by an all-male editorial board, according to Emma Goldberg of the *New York Times*.

However, these professional norms are based in cultural ideas of what competency should look, sound, and act like, and those cultural ideas are propagated by cultural gatekeepers, those with power in an organization or professional field. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these gatekeepers seek to demonstrate they themselves are the pinnacle of the profession, and so they frequently use themselves as the template. As such, white men in suits—or lab coats or a clerical collar—are the default, and everyone else has to prove their professionalism.

Professionalism is a way of defining the norms of a career, its constituents, and its workplaces. A definition of professionalism developed by organizational theorist Georges Romme considers the alignment between "1) the shared purpose of the profession, 2) the body of knowledge these professionals have access to, 3) their actual behavior in terms of actions and decisions, and 4) the expectations of a variety of internal and external stakeholders" (5). Given these measures, professionalism can be a way to create community, shared direction, and communal identity. It can also work as a shorthand for identifying other career-driven individuals committed to a professional field. However, the term is often weaponized against those who do not instantly fit the mold of a professional in the field, generally for reasons relating to identity rather than knowledge or capability. The idea of the "professional" has inherent limitations when describing a standardized code of conduct or a professional identity in a society built on multiple unjust structures, such as racism, classism, ableism, sexism, heteronormativity, and other -isms. Certain people are, because of their bodies and self-presentation as well as their backgrounds and experiences, more readily accepted as professionals by those who hold more cultural capital. The metaphor used by Karen Lee Ashcraft is that of a "glass slipper": "how occupations come to appear, by nature, possessed of central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics that make them suited to certain people and implausible for others," creating collective identities that are inherently related to particular embodied social

identities (7). This manufactured glass slipper privileges certain bodies for reasons unrelated to the work of the actual profession, and those who naturally fit within the bounds of this constructed professionalism are granted authority and ease of access that must be earned and/or granted to those who do not naturally fit.

In many professional fields, a non-standard or non-normative body is one that is not white and male. Caroline Criado Perez talks about the "generic masculine," a phenomenon in which "using words like 'he' in a gender-neutral way" leads to situations where "people are more likely to recall famous men than famous women; to estimate a profession as male-dominated; to suggest male candidates for jobs and political appointments" (5). An example of the generic masculine's impact is that when individuals are asked to picture a doctor, most individuals' first thought will likely be an older white man in a white coat, not a young Black woman with twists and a stethoscope. Criado Perez's identification of the "generic masculine" parallels Deborah Tannen's conception of the "marked woman." In linguistics, "the unmarked form of a word carries the meaning that goes without saying, what you think of when you're not thinking anything special" (80). Tannen expands this concept to identities and embodiments. She argues all women in professional male-dominated workplaces are marked; they are never the default, and they often require a shift in meaning and understanding, a bit more thought. So, any marked bodies—for instance, a female body of color, or a female disabled body, or a female queer body—needs to address and often adapt professional codes of conduct in order to present themselves as members of a particular profession. While young white males have to do this to some extent, their bodies are unmarked; they look like a professional, and they merely have to learn the skills to back up that assumption. Women and other marginalized individuals start out at a disadvantage.

A place that women address their professionalism is in their professional memoirs, as they work to rhetorically craft their ethos for their audiences by demonstrating their contributions and commitment to a particular field. This rhetorical work is particularly evident in the professional memoirs of women in the highly rhetorical, ethos-driven, and male-dominated field of politics. As women politicians gain more prominence, so do their memoirs. Between the years of 2010 and 2019, in an increasingly partisan political climate, political memoirs were published by a number of high-profile women from Supreme Court Justices to presidential candidates. By surveying elements of professional memoirs such as Sarah Palin's *Going Rogue* (2009), Condoleezza Rice's *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (2011), Sonia Sotomayor's *My Beloved World* (2013), Elizabeth Warren's *A Fighting Chance* (2014), Kamala Harris's *The Truths We Hold* (2019), and Hillary Rodham Clinton's *Hard Choices* (2014) and *What Happened* (2017), women's rhetorics scholars can see how women in politics navigate, build upon, and attempt to modify public conceptions of themselves as professional women and how they employ ethos to craft themselves as capable and patriotic individuals who have made a career of serving the American people. They work to present themselves as "viable candidates and effective politicians, despite the obstacles placed in their way. These subjects, too, claim their lives as embodiments of the modernizing nation" (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 131).

While these texts are all professional memoirs written by career politicians, they vary in many ways—including length, as the shortest is 318 pages and the longest is 766 pages. Sotomayor's memoir is focused on the culmination of early experiences that led her into a long-awaited professional role considered to be the pinnacle of her political career: Justice of the Supreme Court.[43] Harris's memoir clearly serves as a campaign memoir, which I will discuss

[43] Supreme Court justices, and judges in general, are considered nonpartisan, and as such, some may argue the position is not political. However, the role of a judge is an inherent part of the political sphere. In a similar way, secretary of state is often held by a diplomat rather than a traditional politician. It is an appointed role, like others in

later in this chapter; her book was published approximately two weeks before she announced her bid for the presidency in 2019. The two memoirs Clinton published are quite different, as one talks about her time as Secretary of State in the Obama administration and the other articulates *What Happened* during her failed presidential bid in 2016. Palin's memoir was also written after a failed campaign, as she was the vice-presidential nominee on John McCain's ticket in 2008.[44] Warren's memoir follows other books she has written that center around economic policy and the middle class. Rice's memoir specifically focuses on her time in Washington, a counterpoint to a previously published memoir about her childhood. While these texts are not the only political professional memoirs published by women between 2010 and 2019,[45] they provide a span of different ages, ethnicities, and political leanings that can demonstrate how contemporary political women construct their professional ethos, specifically in regard to political professionalism.

I argue that these women craft a professionalism that adapts the traditional (white male) professionalism of politics to one that is both more ecological and communal, in tune with the standards of the professional field and the expectations readers and constituents have of them while also addressing ways that the glass slipper of political professionalism does not fit perfectly. As I outline in chapter one, a feminist ecological approach to ethos, as articulated by Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, goes beyond acknowledging the various

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the presidential cabinet. I doubt Sotomayor and Rice would consider themselves "politicians" in the same way that Clinton and others would; however, I use the term to encompass all professional governmental positions, while I am cognizant of the many differences between these roles.

[44] Palin's book was published on November 17, 2009, which is slightly outside of the 2010 to 2019 parameters I have set up for my study. However, her book was a significant topic of conversation at the time, given her role in the 2008 election and her cultural impact as seen in political satire. Additionally, I sought to include both Democratic and Republican women in my study, and of the few professional memoirs published by Republican women in politics during this time, Palin and her book were the most prominent.

[45] I want to note the omission of Michelle Obama's highly popular memoir from the corpus of this chapter. As discussed later, very few First Ladies consider themselves career politicians. While Obama has spoken at Democratic rallies and voiced support for particular candidates, she has been careful to note she has no political aspirations herself; as such, her perspective on the White House in her memoirs is personal rather than professional.

aspects of a rhetorical situation to consider how authority given to the rhetor, or even just the willingness to listen to a rhetor, is based in individual—but also social, political, and cultural—relationships between ideas, people, locations, and ideologies. Whereas traditional conceptions of ethos consider ethos to be stable and consistent, this framework identifies that ethos is "negotiated and renegotiated, embodied and communal, co-constructed and thoroughly implicated in shifting power dynamics" (Ryan et al. 11). In considering the ethos expressed in professional memoirs, an ecological perspective frames the complex rhetorical choices made by the writers as they seek to demonstrate their professionalism: what to include and what to leave out, how to narrow the lens onto one's professional life when one's professional life can never be truly isolated from other aspects of life, and what cultural and political ideologies may have impacted writers in their attempt to align themselves with (and sometimes against and sometimes above) others from their professional field. This final point emphasizes the communal component of these women's professional ethos, as they create a version of the professional whose authority is "always collective, shared, performed, and shifting depending on shifting cultural and political power dynamics" (Kirsch and Fancher 22). Rather than a conception of ethos that is won by an individual based in his virtue and goodwill, the emphasis on a collective ethos demonstrates that women have frequently bonded together to enhance their rhetorical standing. These women are aware of the power dynamics in the political hierarchy, and so they seek to locate themselves in those dynamics through emphasizing the ecological and communal aspects to their ethos.

Analyzing the ways contemporary women in politics create their professionalism through their professional memoirs provides two interconnected venues of knowledge. Firstly, the analysis serves to reinforce the different ways that professionalism functions as a gendered and racial phenomenon, rooted in cultural ideas of power and authority, by looking at public

women's articulation of how they build their professional profile in those particular fields. Secondly, professional memoirs show how public women continue the development of their ethos with their audiences in ecological and communal ways by rhetorically crafting themselves as professionals. In the case of women in politics, we see how these public figures, who are already defined by their role in the field, create a definition of their professional role to fit them, their experiences, and their skills—as well as their gender, race, and sexuality, among many other identity markers. In seeing how women's rhetorical crafting on the page builds on their prior ethos, scholars can see how professional women create and reinforce themselves, while also participating in both reinforcing and modifying the professional field of which they consider themselves part.

Political Professional Memoirs

Politicians frequently use narratives of their professional lives to build their ethos. In the nineteenth century, campaign biographies were common, but campaign autobiographies became more popular in the twentieth century (Couser 144). Now politicians tend to write memoirs, and, given the genre's narrow focus, politicians can write multiple memoirs depending on the positions they've held—and the positions they would like to hold. G. Thomas Couser notes that it is now standard for former presidents to write their memoirs, a "handy medium for burnishing (or restoring) a reputation" (144-45). Bill Clinton received a $10 million advance to write his memoir (Yagoda 17), but this was dwarfed by the $65 million advance that Barack and Michelle Obama received to write their memoirs (E. Harris). As of September 2020, Michelle Obama's memoir had sold over 8.1 million units in the United States and Canada since its fall 2018 publication (E. Harris). Couser notes that the memoirs of former First Ladies tend to outsell their spouses, "perhaps because they are expected to offer a more intimate glimpse of the life in the

White House" (145).[46] First Ladies are not elected officials and most would not consider themselves to be career politicians, yet their memoirs provide a glimpse into a woman's experience of politics at the highest level.

While First Lady memoirs are not professional memoirs, women do write professional memoirs about their experiences in the field of politics. These memoirs generally fall into two categories. The first is a forward-looking memoir, often called a campaign memoir. This sub-subgenre of the political professional memoir is often maligned by reviewers, but its purpose is to familiarize a national audience with a politician who may have designs on a more visible national political role, such as presidential candidate. As Ryan Neville-Shepard and Kirsten Theye observe, politicians use the campaign memoir to "humanize themselves, prove their qualifications to be president, identify the theme and policy positions of their potential campaign, assign blame for the country's woes, and address their potential weaknesses" (1707). Those goals are vast, particularly given that the intended readership is just as vast. This dilution of purpose and audience can make these texts bland and toothless, as candidates try to reveal just enough about themselves and their policies to help grow their national impact without harming it. Critic Ezra Klein states his opinion more bluntly, blaming the genre rather than the writers: "Campaign books are terrible. … It's just a bad genre. These books are autohagiography: they have to appeal to everyone, exalt the author (or supposed author), and offend no one. That's basically impossible." Rather than reading these books as "good" memoir, scholars can look at campaign memoirs as located texts within a cultural context that defines some professionals easily as authentic "candidates" —if they are male, white, straight, abled—and others as less authentically available for the job. Rather than looking beyond the autohagiography (or getting

[46] This pattern may be disrupted by the Obamas, as the first volume of former President Barack Obama's memoir sold more than 3.3 million copies in the month after its publication, making it the top-selling book of 2020, according to the Associated Press and *Publishers Weekly* (Maher). The Associated Press reports that the memoirs of former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have sold between 3.5 and 4 million copies.

stuck on it), scholars can look within it to determine how candidates construct themselves as ready for public office.

Not all political memoirs are campaign memoirs. Some are traditional retrospective memoirs, written at the end of a career (or at least at the end of a phase of a career). If considering the larger landscape of professional memoirs, retrospective memoirs are written by professionals in a field who have reached a pinnacle within the profession and seek not to advance their career but explain it. And some memoirs are somewhere on the spectrum between the two poles of retrospective and campaign memoirs. Of the memoirs surveyed for this chapter, four of them could be considered campaign memoirs (Harris, Warren, Clinton's *Hard Choices*, and Palin), and three career retrospectives (Sotomayor, Rice, Clinton's *What Happened*). The four campaign memoirs tend to be more focused on soundbites, campaign jargon, and partisan politics, as the writers try to demonstrate their experience, explain their choices, and articulate their positions on contemporary issues. The career retrospectives are more focused on events, as Rice's 766-page memoir chronicles the vast number of diplomatic trips she took and agreements she negotiated, as well as her domestic experience during the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Hurricane Katrina. The differences between the two categories can be seen by comparing Rice and Clinton's memoirs of their times as secretary of state. Their memoirs show that Clinton clearly has designs on future political office in some way, and Rice seems to see her time in a high-profile federal political office to be at an end.

Some of these politicians have written multiple books. Harris and Warren both have policy and idea-driven nonfiction books that were published before their memoirs. Rice has a previous memoir that covers her childhood years, which explains why *No Higher Honor* dives right into Rice's time as a diplomat, leaving out the bildungsroman elements of childhood, education, and pre-White House experience. Palin has no previous published books, nor does

Sotomayor. The case of Clinton is unique. Her first memoir, *Living History*, was published in 2006, and it has elements of both a First Lady memoir and a campaign memoir. *Hard Choices* is somewhere between the career retrospective and the campaign memoir. *What Happened* is a retrospective, but only about the 2016 election. The publishing experiences of each writer and how each political figure frames her experiences all contribute to their prior ethos and their framing of themselves as professionals in their memoirs.

Prior Ethos

Political figures, especially presidential candidates, have personas that are "deftly and promiscuously imaged, voiced, choreographed, and networked" (S. Smith, "America's" 525). In this tight network of performances, a memoir often plays a key role, along with other personal writing. In the crafting of their professional memoir, political candidates and other public figures must contend with the network of prior ethos their readers will bring to the text. Ruth Amossy describes how prior ethos causes orators to "evaluate the impact of the prior ethos on the current subject matter and operate to confirm their images, to rework or transform them so as to produce an impression which is in keeping with the demands of the projected argumentation" (7). As such, the ethos construction in any given rhetorical situation is interacting with genre conventions, audience expectations, and rhetorical purpose, all which are impacted by cultural context and ideas about women as subjects, professionals, and politicians.

In their memoirs, politicians must contend with the prior ethos they have developed through social media, public appearances, and career choices, as well as the prior ethos developed by the media through interviews, photos, reviews, articles, and social media reactions. The audience expects Hillary Clinton to talk about her relationship with President Barack Obama in *Hard Choices*. They expect Sarah Palin to discuss Tina Fey's impression of her (just as they

expect Tina Fey to discuss her impression of Sarah Palin in Fey's memoir *Bossypants*). As the audience's understanding of the author's ethos is built on public rhetorical moments, the author must decide how to fulfill, modify, or expand that ethos in her memoir by addressing those moments and also providing the audience with something new. Because of this, public figures who write autobiographically do so in tension, needing to find balance between acknowledging their public identity but also "humanizing it by writing *against* their roles as public figures, revealing their private, 'inner' selves" (D'Amore 1). When it comes to political professional memoirs, readers want to see the "authentic" inner workings inside the high-profile person that has prompted them to take on the role of public servant.

Overall, prior ethos has a large impact on how a book by a political figure is read, and public figures are addressing what they interpret as their prior ethos in their ethos construction within the book. For female politicians writing memoirs, in particular, the prior ethos connects with ideas of authenticity, authority, and ambition in ways their male counterparts feel less acutely. The ways in which prior ethos, fame, and politics interact to frame these memoirs reveal how much—and how little—has changed in American politics in regard to gender since the country's inception and how much further we still have to go. However, prior ethos is not all that impacts how a political professional memoirs is received and what it says about cultural conceptions of female politicians. The contemporary political environment also plays a role in how women professionals frame their experiences in the American political workplace.

The Contemporary American Political Workplace

The professional field of American politics has always been an uneven and unequal place. While the number of elected women in national positions has risen since the 1990s, women—and especially women of color—continued to be outnumbered by their male

counterparts in the 2010s. The decade began with elections for the 112th Congress, and 90 women in total were elected to either the House of Representatives and the Senate, while 465 men were elected. In the 2018 election, after two years of the Trump Administration, there was a groundswell of activism and campaigning among women. When the 116th Congress was sworn in during the spring of 2019, 127 women were elected members of Congress, which included 26 senators (17 Democrats and 9 Republicans) and 101 representatives (88 Democrats and 13 Republicans). While the number of elected women has risen, the fact still remains that the 116th Congress only included 23.7% women when women were 50.8% of the United States population, according to 2010 census data (CAWP). At that time, in the House of Representatives, women represented 34 states, which meant 16 states had no female representation in the House at all. Beyond Congress, there still remained only three women on the Supreme Court. However, 2016 was the first year in American history where women competed for both major party presidential nominations, with Carly Fiorina unsuccessfully attempting to become the Republican nominee (Presidential Gender Watch 2).

These numbers demonstrate a state of gender affairs in American politics that can be summed up as "better but not quite good" and an electorate still torn about the role of women in public life. An August 2016 Associated Press survey found "nearly 30% of those surveyed reported a woman president would not be tough enough to handle a military crisis or keep the country safe from terrorism, and just over 20% were skeptical about a woman president's ability to make hard decisions" (Presidential Gender Watch 2). Despite major gains of women in politics, women still face skepticism at every turn, including from their constituents. As they lack the generic masculine body of a political professional, they must work harder to build their professionalism and their ethos.

Political women's memoirs show this tension of "better but not quite good," as many of their writers were the first woman to hold a particular political position. Clinton was the first presidential nominee of a major party. Harris was the first woman elected as district attorney of San Francisco in 2003 and the first female attorney general of California in 2010; she was also the first Black woman Senator from California in 2016 (and only the second in the nation). Warren was the first woman elected as a senator in Massachusetts in 2012. Rice was the first Black woman secretary of state, though she does not mention this in her memoir, other than a reflection on seeing a portrait of Benjamin Franklin, asking, "What would *he* have thought of this great-granddaughter of slaves and child of Jim Crow Birmingham pledging to defend the Constitution of the United States, which had infamously counted her ancestors 'three-fifths' of a man?" (302). Sotomayor's memoir ends with her appointment as the first Hispanic federal judge in New York state in 1992, long before her appointment to the Supreme Court in 2009. The fact that so many firsts are still being accomplished demonstrates both the progress being made and how much American politics still has to do before gender and racial equity is a professional norm.

All of these memoirs address the challenges of being a woman in contemporary politics, mentioning troubling moments in their professional experiences in which their gender became the issue at hand. Many of the women talk about issues with coverage in the media, as well as the public abuse they received for being a woman in politics. Hillary Clinton particularly covers that in *What Happened*, though all of the memoirs have at least some reference to the challenges of interacting with both the press and the public, particularly as a woman. Studies have shown political abuse is a distinctly gendered phenomenon, as seen during the 2016 election. A 2016 *Guardian* article showed that Clinton received about two times the abusive tweets as did Bernie Sanders during the 2016 Democratic primary, and she was most frequently called a "bitch"

(Criado Perez 279). Other studies have shown the gendered nature of headlines associated with public women, particularly in regard to their bodies, clothing, and public status. The memoirs of these female politicians craft a collective narrative of how public women deal with and frame these moments.

While the number of explicit references to the impact of gender on their political experiences varies from memoir to memoir—with Rice and Harris on one end of the continuum, Clinton on the other—all of these public figures use their professional memoirs to discuss the professionalism of politics and the ways it affects their work. These politicians give a behind-the-scenes perspective on the functioning of various offices, departments, and campaigns, as well as point to particular professional challenges that many women have to address, overcome, or muddle through in their political aspirations. For instance, Sotomayor talks about the salary of a judge, much lower than that of many advanced lawyers, which keeps many women and underrepresented groups away from the job (366). Similarly, Warren talks about the lack of women in financial conversations, both academic and political (123), and Rice mentions the lack of racial diversity in the State Department (659). All of these references show how women must analyze and navigate the workplace cultures that they are entering, devising ways to be seen as professionals while noting the ways the current conceptions of professionalism do not match their lived experiences or bodies.

Whether these political figures reference discrimination and sexism that happened decades ago or in the 2010s, their memoirs demonstrate current concerns of women in the political climate. The historical references show the sexist and racist foundations that current conceptions of the political workplace are built upon, even if those foundations are less explicit. The more recent instances of gendered and racial discrimination show that the problems continue, even as women are making great strides. While the political roles of these women span

from governors to judgeships to senators to cabinet members to candidates, collectively their professional memoirs demonstrate the ways that women develop an ecological and communal political professionalism, as they seek to reinforce their professional statuses by framing their bodies, authenticity, ambition, and connections as crucial parts of their professional ethos.

Political Women's Ecological and Communal Professionalism

Through their memoirs, these women are able to address the sexism at work in politics, while also building their own ethos by foregrounding an ecological and communal professionalism that is flexible and networked. Crafting a communal professionalism also complicates ideas of "the professional" as a default white male by demonstrating the roles of professional women who may be less prominent but are central to the functioning of workspaces. In Risa Applegarth's study of vocational autobiographies, she notes how women writers caused workplace norms to shift through discussions of their female predecessors and colleagues that demonstrated that the writers were both typically skilled and part of a collective lineage. Their autobiographies served to demonstrate "compelling and cumulative evidence of the power of women's bodies to occupy space in public and professional life" (533). The ethos built was not based in exceptionalism but rather the normalization of the women's work in public spaces. This collective ethos-building can be difficult in a rhetorical profession where elected officials can feel as if they are constantly competing for votes and attention; however, all women—and all people—benefit from expanding ideas of who counts as a professional and why.

While ethos is frequently developed communally by marginalized rhetors in dominant spaces, the danger is that differences among the rhetors can be erased by those who experience more privilege than their colleagues. Time and again, white women have co-opted movements, centering themselves at the expense of BIPOC and queer women, assuming they can speak for

all women. However, Adrienne Rich's work makes clear that privileged women must take responsibility for the ethos they are simply awarded based on their embodied presence and previous relationships with particular spaces and audiences. Collective ethos must take into account all of the varying dynamics within which women work, attempting to counter the tendency for any group to reinscribe discriminatory norms. This is why professional memoirs are valuable examples of how professional women adapt professionalism and craft professional ethos, as they foreground their own stories and locations but also place them within a community and cultural context that provides the opportunity for connections between women with differing identities.

The varying dynamics involved in the work of women in politics make moving toward an adapted ecological and communal professionalism difficult. Any blanket statement about "female politicians" is inherently flawed from the start. However, the ways these memoirs advance the normativity of the diverse professional political woman frames the rhetorical moves of these memoirs while also showing both how traditional forms of political professionalism do not easily fit women and what adaptations women have made to modify and reinforce their professional status. As such, the professional memoirs of political women demonstrate how ecological and communal ways of developing professional ethos that counter male-centered forms of professionalism and ethos-building can be derived from the ways women public figures talk about their bodies, their authenticity, their ambition, and their relationships in their memoirs.

Professional Authenticity

The idea of authenticity is a key professional trait for both memoirists and candidates for any office, and it can be a particular challenge for women. In analyzing the gender dynamics of the 2016 presidential election, Presidential Gender Watch found that the assumption persists that

"women, as political outsiders, have to 'act' the part of candidate and officeholder in order to meet both the masculine credentials for the job and the feminine credentials of being a 'real' woman, while being authentically male also means meeting the expectations of executive office" (12-13). Balancing these two constructs makes it difficult for a woman to seem authentic in her presentation of herself as the best candidate. Similarly, authenticity is key in political memoir, as the subject "promises to draw the reader into the zone of familiarity, identification, and affective attachment, thereby overcoming, if only for a moment and illusorily, the sense of remoteness between voter and candidate" (S. Smith, "America's" 525). One of the ways this is done is through what Sidonie Smith calls "generic intelligibility." She notes that "a species or template of storytelling that is recognizable to an audience is certainly one of the most important in producing the aura of authenticity. Modes of autobiographical narration reproduce intelligible subject positions, plots, tropes, and rhetorics of self-representation" (S. Smith, "America's" 525). For women in particular, this means writing about themselves as mothers, wives, and women in often inhospitable white male-dominated spaces. However, difficulty emerges when the authenticity bred by generic intelligibility conflicts with the authenticity created through embodying the role of candidate and required by professionalism. How does a woman create authenticity by describing her life experience as a woman, when a woman does not fit the authentic version of a candidate? This challenge is compounded for women of color and other minoritized groups, as the route to authenticity is narrowed even further. While the standard conception of a "candidate" is becoming more diverse—and it hopefully will continue to do so after the inauguration of Kamala Harris, a Black and South Asian woman, to the vice-presidency—the need for woman politicians to consider this tension in their memoirs demonstrates challenges woman candidates continue to face.

An additional challenge concerning authenticity relates to collaboration and ghostwriting. Katja Lee says, "This skepticism that attends celebrity authorship is derived in equal parts from media coverage of the celebrity's intelligence, vanity, and integrity; an awareness of the rising profile and profitability of the ghost-writing industry; and a lingering distrust of the authenticity and value of popular culture and mass-produced products" (1259). This tension between ghostwriting and authenticity is particularly germane to books written by politicians, as journalist Karen Heller notes: "While historians and professional writers can devote years to a book, most politicians spend mere months. Their volumes are often produced while they work full-time jobs as elected officials—and second full-time jobs running for reelection—which can make the reader wonder how much time they actually devoted to writing." This subject recently entered the public consciousness again after former President Barack Obama commented that the first volume of his book took so much longer than his wife Michelle's memoir, because "she has a ghostwriter" while he wrote each word of his quite long memoir himself (Thrush and Plott). Michelle Obama is not the only one who received help with her memoirs, though the extent of assistance she and the other memoirists in this chapter received is impossible to gauge from the text itself. Each of the memoirs surveyed in this chapter have reference to a collaborator or collaborators in its acknowledgments. For example, Elizabeth Warren references working with her daughter on her memoir, and Condoleezza Rice thanks collaborators, researchers, and archivists. In both of Hillary Clinton's memoirs from this decade, she thanks Dan Schwerin and a team of writers.[47] Sarah Palin's reference to her collaborator is buried among thanks to friends, family, and former co-workers. A 2012 *New Yorker* article by Ariel Levy profiled Palin's

[47] Clinton may have learned from controversy over her earlier book *It Takes a Village,* in which she did not note any co-writers and collaborators, though ghostwriter and professor Barbara Feinman had been connected with the project from the start and repeatedly objected about the lack of acknowledgment. Feinman (now Todd) wrote about the situation in a 2007 article in *The Writer's Chronicle* and her own 2017 memoir, *Pretend I'm Not Here*. See article by Kevin Canfield for more.

ghostwriter, Lynn Vincent. In the profile, Vincent explains the different kinds of credit an author can receive: "There's 'by,' there's 'with'… Or, with Sarah Palin, it was, like, 'Thanks, Lynn Vincent, for taking out the trash'" (Levy).

As I discuss in the previous chapter, often discussions about collaboration and ghostwriting overwhelm other discussions about memoirs by public figures. However, I will note that professional politicians routinely employ at least one speech writer, as anyone who has watched the television show *The West Wing* or other political dramas—fictional or otherwise—knows. A politician's rhetoric is often crafted only in part by the public figure herself; she is aided by a team of writers who help her craft policy and public statements, and the extent of this help differs among political figures and types of rhetoric. As such, I approach these memoirs as rhetoric that has been approved by the political figures as part of their professional rhetorical canon. The version of themselves in their memoirs is the version of themselves as authentic professionals that they wished to put out in the world, and this study explores what that version of professionalism can tell us about women in contemporary politics.

The conventions of the memoir genre inherently require a balance between the personal and the social, which can be particularly fraught for public figures whose lives are already on display. Women in political careers have to navigate gender roles that indicate that political professionalism and womanhood (or motherhood, or wifehood) are inherently at odds. Additionally, women in politics are often deemed bossy, shrill, unlikable, cold, among other qualities not frequently attributed to men. These gendered labels become part of their prior ethos, as journalists and other politicians raise questions about their capabilities as mothers and wives. This could be seen in recent questioning of Supreme Court justice Amy Coney Barrett, who was asked during her confirmation hearing, "How do you and your husband manage two full-time professional careers and, at the same time, take care of your large family?" Miller and Gupta

note that the previous appointee, Brett Kavanaugh, was not asked this question during his confirmation hearing. However, women must address these questions, according to the Barbara Lee Family Foundation: "When questions arise about a woman's family life and her ability to manage her personal life and professional responsibilities, she must respond. If voters' doubts and concerns go unaddressed it negatively impacts the candidate's perceived likability and effectiveness" (2). And likability is important for women seeking public office. This points to the long-experienced truth that "social power (being seen as warm and caring) is women's 'consolation prize for renouncing competition with men,' write psychology professors Susan Fiske and Mina Cikara. Social power for women is therefore intrinsically incompatible with professional power: if a woman wants to be seen as competent she has to give up being seen as warm" (Criado Perez 268). As such, in their memoirs, female political figures use the genre—which inherently depends on contextualizing the personal within a cultural moment—to address their prior ethos and the social/professional power continuum, attempting to demonstrate being both competent and warm can be aspects of political professionalism.

Some female politicians address this tension head on by articulating the need to balance both "[her] head and [her] heart," as Clinton discusses in *Hard Choices* (ix). These memoirists understand that readers want to see their personal side amid the politics. Warren says that her memoir "tells a very public story about fraud and bailouts and elections. It also tells a very personal story about mothers and daughters, day care and dogs, aging parents and cranky toddlers" (3). In putting these sentences side-by-side, she indicates that these two categories of subjects are inextricable from each other in her conception of her professionalism, while perhaps not always considered together by constituents. Others simply intertwine the two aspects of life. For instance, Harris combines her story of meeting her husband Doug in the same chapter as her description of performing same-sex marriages as California state attorney general (109).

Sotomayor takes a different approach, using the majority of her memoir to describe her relationships with her extended family as a young woman in New York City, but also near the end of her memoir, discusses dating after divorce and not pursuing motherhood (289, 295), two topics which a male politician likely would not feel the need to address. Rice places (often clunky) references to playing piano and attending sporting events among stories of global negotiations and diplomatic missions. And Sarah Palin's memoir focuses on her as a mother since she had young children with her on the vice-presidential campaign trail. All of these memoirs attempt to find the balance between addressing the public aspects of a professional life in politics on the national stage, including references to historical events that would be familiar to readers, with the private glimpses into family and home life that are both necessary to the generic intelligibility of memoir (particularly by a woman) and the social/professional power continuum, showing their warmth and their competency. To that end, they anticipate the prior ethos of them as wives/mothers/politicians that their audience brings to the memoir, demonstrating how an ecological and communal sense of professionalism considers the private and personal alongside the public and political.

Hillary Clinton's memoirs are especially interesting when discussing prior ethos and authenticity, not the least due to how many pages, scholarly and not, have been written about public conceptions of her as unlikable. Her prior ethos has accumulated over more than thirty years in the public eye, as her roles have spanned from First Lady, to Senator, to Secretary of State, to Presidential candidate, nominee, and electoral college loser (while popular vote winner). Throughout it all, Clinton has been described as an inauthentic figure, cold and not personable. Her ambition makes some people uncomfortable (which I will discuss further), and she has struggled to communicate her personal and political passion in a way that draws in skeptical voters, probably because those voters cannot see her in the role of president. Clinton addresses

these difficulties head on in *What Happened*, the memoir following her failed 2016 presidential bid. She discusses how "in politics, the personal narrative is vital" (111), before talking about her own "perfectly ordinary" story (112). She goes on to say that though she was part of "the story of a revolution," the women's movement toward equality, she "never figured out how to tell this story right," saying, "Partly that's because I'm not great at talking about myself" (113); she says this after writing two memoirs and giving countless speeches. Later, she says, "The biggest reason I shied away from embracing this narrative [of being part of the women's movement] is that storytelling requires a receptive audience, and I've never felt like the American electorate was receptive to this one" (114). In these few pages, Clinton identifies the challenge facing political women in their fight to be seen as a professional. She takes personal responsibility for not communicating her story effectively but also places blame on an electorate that struggles to see women as authentically professional if they seek political office. Clinton places her personal story within the story of American culture and society in the 2010s, tying her professional ethos to a persistent culture of sexism and misogyny.

The professional idea of authenticity also relates to prior ethos. While prior ethos can be a boon to an author through increasing readership, it can also work against the subject of the memoir. The public figure often sees their memoir as a chance to clarify their professional image. As such, "the construction of an ethos in the discourse often aims to displace or modify the prior image of the speaker" (Amossy 20). While sometimes political memoir does this by attempting to add to the prior ethos of a politician, perhaps crafting a warm side along with the competent side, other times these memoirs address mistakes or frustrating moments with the media that the subjects feel were misconstrued or problematic. As Joseph Janangelo writes, "Because online discourse both lingers and evolves (readers can use various media to refer and respond to, interact with, cross-reference, comment on, and tag it), life writers will need to

contend with what they originally said, what has been said about their discourse, and the ongoing commentaries and events that have transpired since their latest inscriptions" (177). All of the memoirs include partial transcriptions of notable speeches, testimonies, or interviews given by the subjects of the memoirs, which then the writers interpret or contextualize for their readers. Many of the memoirs also include interactions with the media in which the writers feel they were treated unfairly or their words—or some of their words—were circulated without context. Sarah Palin spends many pages recounting her interactions with Katie Couric, framing Couric as a "gotcha" journalist who asked the same questions dozens of times and purposefully edited out substantive answers. Similarly, in *What Happened*, Clinton discusses a forum moderated by Matt Lauer: accusing him of "soft-pedal[ing]" his interview with Trump, addressing rumors that she shattered a glass in rage after the event, and even writing out the answer she should have given to one of Lauer's questions (221). The memoirists use these moments to tell readers what "really happened" in ways that might reframe elements of their prior ethos. These writers make this rhetorical move in other ways, as well; Clinton and Rice both discuss international incidents during which they admit making mistakes, and Sotomayor and Harris discuss their jobs as public defense attorneys (a role of which some are critical). However, it is difficult to determine how much these rhetorical moves change readers' perceptions of the subject's professionalism. Their critics are not likely to read these memoirs, and if they do, they would deem these writers' interpretations to be biased. Regardless, these writers address the darker side of their prior ethos and attempt to shift perceptions to a more favorable light in rhetorically interesting ways, in hopes that future conceptions of their professionalism and ethos will be impacted for the better among readers and constituents. This rhetorical move is particularly important in campaign memoirs, written with future political ambitions in mind.

Professional Ambition

An insidious and common critique of campaign memoirs—and professional memoirs in general—has less to do with their tedium and more to do with the ambition of their writers. Ambition may be part of traditional conceptions of political professionalism, but ambition in professional women is distasteful. As such, women in politics have the challenge of persuading potential constituents that they are both qualified for the job but also do not necessarily want it or the power that comes with it. Criado Perez reports that a 2010 study found that "both male and female politicians are seen as power-seeking, but that this is only a problem for female politicians" (268). She provides a litany of examples of individuals who publicly referenced Clinton's perceived ambition, from Anne Applebaum to David Geffen to Colin Powell to Julian Assange (Criado Perez 267). Clinton's desire to become president, even as she became the Democratic nominee for president, was often considered … unseemly. The satirical news site *The Onion* even ran a fake op-ed titled, "Hillary Clinton Is Too Ambitious To Be The First Female President" (G. Collins). This article was published in 2006, ten full years before Clinton lost the presidential election.[48] Recognizing the negative ways that perception of ambition becomes part of a professional woman's prior ethos, the writers attempt to use their professional memoirs to mitigate that ethos damage by negotiating a delicate balance that shows them to be well-prepared professionals, ready for the role without seeking it out.

Some political memoirists address this ambition problem by averring they "never expected to go to Washington" —or, in Warren's case, that they even wanted to (3). However, she crafts a narrative of being conscripted into a political fight she believes in. Palin also talks about being persuaded to run for a local city council seat, and she confirms she had "no political

[48] The *Onion* article was published in reference to Clinton's 2008 attempt to gain the Democratic presidential nomination, which she lost to Barack Obama (a story she tells in *Hard Choices)*.

aspirations beyond local public service," only changing that position when "hard work, life, and Providence" required her to do so (68). Clinton indicates she was not interested in serving in Obama's cabinet, given her work as New York senator. Despite this and her assertions that it would be "ridiculous" for Obama to offer her a position, that he wouldn't do so for "a million reasons" (12), Clinton does end up being offered and taking the secretary of state position after refusing it many times. The reason she gives is, "When your President asks you to serve, you should say yes" (18). This sense of service and obligation rather than ambition is a recurring theme in *Hard Choices* and other political memoirs by women, and it can be read as an attempt to reframe ambitiousness as public service, which is an element of professionalism acceptable for women to hold.

Sotomayor's professional ethos is different, as she holds a lifelong appointment on the Supreme Court; she has reached the top of her profession, and, like it or not, she is one of the nine clearest examples of the professionalism of "an American judge" one could find. Revealing her ambition to become a judge from an early age cannot harm her political prospects, but she does note that she considered her dream of becoming a judge "pure fantasy," given the "relative scarcity of women on the bench and the practical nonexistence of Latinas" (237-38). Later, she begins to see her dream as possible and starts shaping her professional experiences to improve her professional profile. However, even in her ambitious dreaming, she does not verbalize the ambition, and when a mentor at her law firm mentions that he believes she is bound for the Supreme Court, she finds it "awkward to hear such a naïve thought from someone I respected so deeply…. I also felt strangely exposed standing there as colleagues alluded casually to my secret pipe dream" (348). From a retrospective position of attaining the pinnacle of her career, Sotomayor can craft a narrative that demonstrates both her desire for the role and the multitude

of factors—including luck, "a rare alignment of political forces," and preparation (347) —that work against and for potential judges, particularly women and people of color.

As already stated, Clinton's ambitions have been well-documented in her two unsuccessful campaigns for the presidency, and while *Hard Choices* ended with noncommittal remarks about how Clinton had not decided if she would run for president in 2016, *What Happened* both shows her ambitions and explains them. She talks at length about why she decided to run for president, stating outright, "I ran for President because I thought I'd be good at the job. I thought that of all the people who might run, I had the most relevant experience, meaningful accomplishments, and ambitious but achievable proposals, as well as the temperament to get things done in Washington" (39). Here is the ambition Clinton tried to couch in earlier memoirs on full display. She talks about how she and Bill bought the house next to their home in New York, in order to have space for their growing extended family but also because they were "thinking about how to accommodate the large team that travels with a President" (28). Clinton also calls out what she sees as a double standard, stating that this fixation on women's ambitions is based in an "implication … that there must be something else going on, some dark ambition and craving for power" (40) that her male colleagues did not have to address. She articulates that people assumed her campaign was both inevitable and abnormal (40). In this, Clinton addresses the issue with ambition head-on. However, after pointing out this double standard, she then goes on to explain her reasons for running for president over the next seventeen pages (and the rest of the memoir). Whether for reasons of prior ethos (wanting to address statements made about her ambition by others that affected public opinion of her) or for reasons of generic intelligibility (readers of memoir expect revelations like this), Clinton still feels prompted to answer the question and explain herself.

As public figures interpret and anticipate their prior ethos, they try to address the burning questions in their readers' minds, questions born out of culture, genre, and professional expectations. The memoirs are a chance to modify their prior ethos and craft a new understanding of professional ambition as a professional woman. However, at times it seems as if they are fighting a losing battle, as many conceptions of the political professional struggle to see women as both authentic and ambitious in their quest for career advancement.

Professional Bodies

One of the most common elements of professionalism, as evidenced in the aforementioned retracted research article about unprofessional surgeons, is the physical presence of the professional. A professional has a particular presence, which involves physicality, demeanor, vocal timbre, facial expressions, and clothing choices. In the political profession, this professionalism manifests in the image of a well-tailored suit, red or blue tie, flag pin on the lapel, clean-shaven masculine face,[49] and a middle-aged abled body. Glasses are fine, perhaps even recommended. Other professions have their own generic masculine ideal, though some professions tend to be more coded as female, such as elementary school teacher or nurse—though principals and doctors are generally considered to be male.

The generic masculine can lead to dangerous physical outcomes in some professions such as the emergency services and the military, leading to physical ailments in women and the potential that they are unable to do their jobs effectively due to ill-fitting personal protective equipment (Criado Perez 126). In professional fields such as politics, the physical ramifications are less dire, but the constant monitoring of women's bodies is ultra-present. For instance, a Path

[49] A comprehensive survey of facial hair in Congress was last completed by Vox in 2015, which noted about 12% of male congressmen had facial hair (Edwards). However, even if there had been a more recent study, it would likely become quickly outdated, for, as Lyons reports on the site *Roll Call*, COVID-19 has prompted many lawmakers to grow "quarantine beards."

to Parity report found that "media criticism is often harsh, no matter what [women] look like": "Media coverage of women candidates may call their voices 'high-pitched' or 'lacking in authority'" (Kidd). Women's shorter height, particularly relative to many men, may be counted against them in being taken seriously. Yet being too tall seems problematic as well; one tall, blond elected official noted that she gets "'Barbie' jokes, which subtly undermine her professional credibility" (Kidd 33). Women in the political public eye are constantly assessed both for what they wear, from Michelle Obama's sleeveless dresses to Kamala Harris's Chuck Taylors, and how they wear it. The perception of women's bodies and clothing choices continues to impact the conception of them as professionals. It shouldn't, given the four measures of professionalism: clothing doesn't impact shared purpose, shared knowledge, or shared decisions and actions; it only really relates to stakeholder expectations of how a woman and how a professional should dress, and those two expectations do not always align. How public women address their bodies and their clothing in their professional memoirs—and the fact that they feel they must address those things at all—reveals the lengths to which women go to create their ethos, given their non-generic, non-masculine bodies.[50] They also reveal, however, how they are supported by other women in addressing this element of professionalism, again emphasizing a sense of community and connection in their professional ethos.

For instance, Sotomayor talks early in her memoir about how her fashion sense, or lack thereof, created some tension between her and her mother, tension she continues to feel as an adult. She describes how her stylish mother frequently criticized her daughter for her "sloppy" appearance (84). As an adult well into her professional life, Sotomayor gets shopping lessons

[50] I want to emphasize that not all women have non-masculine bodies. Additionally, all of the memoirists covered here benefit from cisgender privilege, as transgender bodies receive even more attention and abuse. While there are no transgender Congresspeople at the national level, five transwomen were elected to state legislatures in 2020 (Aviles), and as such, the conversation around gender and embodied professionalism in politics must continue to evolve to consider the intersecting challenges experienced by transgender politicians.

from her friend Elaine, down to age-appropriate undergarments. She reflects, "Dressing badly has been a refuge much of my life, a way of compelling others to engage with my mind, not my physical presence" (361). She does not specifically define what constituted dressing "badly," other than noting that Elaine gave her the "precious gift" of understanding, accepting, and enjoying her feminine side. Sotomayor does not connect this realization to her profession in this narrative moment, but her personal reflection—which comes after she recounts the challenges she faced as a Puerto Rican woman in the competitive (male, white) environments of law school, the district attorney's office, and a law firm with high-level corporate clients—demonstrates the mental patterns she crafted to thrive in those environments. While Sotomayor does not indicate her changes in apparel led to increased respect from colleagues, her recounting both reveals the necessity for women to discuss how their bodies are received in public spaces, as well as connects this element of professionalism to the impact of other women have had in her life.

In her retrospective of her presidential campaign, Clinton bemoans how much work it takes to look the part of a female public figure. She indicates that even though she spent about 600 hours in hair and makeup, she knew not wearing makeup would become a news event (87-8). She also talks about her pantsuits, which "make [her] feel professional and ready to go," as well as forestall any issues with photos being taken up her skirt, which she recalls happening to her as First Lady. She hoped wearing pantsuits would make her outfits non-newsworthy, as wearing basically the same outfit for all events is similar to what a male politician does. Clinton says, "I liked the visual cue that I was different from the men but also familiar" (88). Clinton's engagement with fashion and style as a public woman is focused on not being a distraction and attempting to be not newsworthy, given that the media focuses on the appearance of woman politicians. However, Clinton also approaches style as a way to demonstrate to her male colleagues that she is a professional, mimicking their standard issue wear. This is similar to the

rhetorical clothing choices of professional women who worked at Bletchley Park during World War II and started to wear pants, ties, and comfortable shoes, "link[ing] their own identities with visual cues of authority, professionalism, and masculinity" (Kirsch and Fancher 33). By adding this conversation in her memoir, Clinton demonstrates the depth to which she considers her clothing as a measure of professionalism. However, now, nearing the end of her political career, she is revealing her secrets and also the reasons for those secrets, based in her understanding of a sexist workplace and the expectations of the public. She shows her interpretation of political professionalism and how she has tried to use it to her professional advantage.

Palin focuses on the clothing she wore—or was asked to wear—as an emblem of privilege and sign of government overspending and overreach. She recounts being shocked by the price of clothes the stylist picked out for her as she was being prepared for the campaign trail. Similarly, she reports her family, also being dressed for campaigning, often asking, "Who is paying for all of this?" A repeated mantra throughout Palin's memoir is fiscal responsibility and misplaced government priorities, and so she uses this element of professionalism to represent how the whole political system is corrupt, fiscally irresponsible, and unethical. She also notes her unfamiliarity with "campaign professionals," describing herself as uncomfortable with and eventually unwilling to be "packaged" as an acceptable and legible vice-presidential candidate to the political party; however, she also states, "Nothing had apparently prepared [these professionals] for the unprecedented onslaught of rumors, lies, and innuendo that 'packaging' would have on my candidacy" (232). These rumors and lies are in media reports that she is a "big-spending clotheshorse," and since Palin recounts the campaign does little to correct them, she "goes rogue" by wearing her own clothes from her favorite consignment shop in Alaska and telling the crowd about it, in order to "defend [her] ethics and [her] family" (316-7). Palin focuses the blame for the situation on the campaign operatives and their "packaging" of clothing,

makeup, and hair, rather than the sexist political system that focuses on physical image and disallows women measures of authority. However, she points out the challenges involved in trying to meet the sexist professional expectations of candidacy for a woman on the campaign trail.

The public figures also use the experience of motherhood as part of their embodied ethos, doing so in ways that reflect the complicated feelings that American voters have about women and mothers in politics. As mentioned earlier, motherhood is a complex aspect of professional women's lives, both in relation to authenticity and also embodied experiences as a woman and professional. While motherhood and the family are often considered elements of private rather than professional life, an ecological view of both ethos and professionalism considers the connections between all elements of life when considering the authority of an individual. Research also shows these connections to exist in the minds of audiences and constituents. As Brittany Stalsberg found, "Voters rate childless female candidates substantially lower than childless male candidates, mother candidates, and father candidates" (1). However, voters are also concerned about "the ability of women candidates and elected officials to balance the competing priorities of their families and their constituents," worrying about the impact of a political campaign on the candidate's children (Barbara Lee Family Foundation). The question of balance is one that women public figures commonly get asked, but men rarely do. The foundation's research also suggests voters are aware of this double standard, yet they continue to consistently express concern about the ability of candidates to balance family and profession, especially those with young children.

For conservative candidates like Sarah Palin, motherhood is an especially pressing issue. Throughout her memoir, she paints herself as a mother first, particularly since her small children campaigned with her. She also defines herself as a military mom, proud of her eldest son joining

the Army, and a mom of a disabled child, as her youngest son was born with Down syndrome. She frequently paints lawmakers as hostile to her desire to be present as a mother, such as when she recounts how, when she was governor of Alaska, her State of the State address was moved at the last minute to conflict with her son's boot camp graduation; she prioritized the graduation over the speech, though she was ultimately able to do both (182). She also tells stories of how her children were harmed by her campaign—or, rather, harmed by the media—and argues that her children were scrutinized more heavily than other candidate's children (233). However, she balances that with stories of her daughter Piper accompanying her on the campaign trail, chatting and eating candy with the press on the plane (258). Palin strikes a careful balance, painting herself as a mother first who approached her job serving her state and constituents like a "mama grizzly protects her cubs" (182). She works to paint herself as prioritizing her presence with her children, which she indicates makes her a better person and, thus, a better politician.

Other candidates also use their experience as mothers to demonstrate their ethos. Both Warren's and Clinton's children were older in the majority of the professional experiences they cover in their books, which reflects how women who have campaigned or held political office reported "slightly more than half [of them]...waited until their children were teenagers or adults to run their first campaign" (Parity 23). Both politicians also refer to the challenges of balancing time with children and grandchildren with a political career, as well as their children being targeted by verbal attacks from the opposition (Warren 250; Clinton, *What Happened* 154). They also recount the joys of weddings and being visited in person by grandchildren at key moments when they needed to be grounded (Warren 245; Clinton, *What Happened* 377). In contrast, Harris talks about missing her stepdaughter's high school graduation, which conflicted with former FBI director James Comey's testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee. She was soothed by a female colleague who told her, "Our kids love us for who we are and the

sacrifices we make. They get it" (Harris 149). In contrast to Palin's story, Harris crafts this moment as one where the job and service to the country trumped the graduation celebration—though she made it in time for family dinner that evening. In this way, Harris's choice demonstrates her professionalism in the more traditional male sense—country over family—but also demonstrates the worry Harris had over this decision and the way she was soothed by another woman, who understood the dilemma and indicates that the support of her children further reinforces her professional ethos.

Two writers, Rice and Sotomayor, do not have children; they are also not in the position of seeking elected office. Against a background of understanding the challenges of balancing motherhood and work, they also express the flip side of the issue, articulating that many do not understand a woman without children. For instance, Rice talks about being present with her father in the final days of his life, rather than being in Washington as Bush's national security advisor. She articulates to a colleague that "people would understand if I said I can't do it because of the children," but they do not understand the obligations she feels to her father (Rice 11). Rice expresses the tensions involved in perceptions of familial relations, particularly in the broader American culture where obligations to children are both valorized and also a concern, whereas obligations to elders are less considered. She also recounts California Barbara Boxer suggesting that Rice "could not understand the sacrifices of those lost in conflict because [Rice] had no children" (548). Similarly, Sotomayor's memoir talks about her decision to be childless, partially because she is a lifelong Type 1 diabetic, but also because she indicates that it would have felt "incompatible" to have "another life utterly dependent on me" alongside "this culture [of masculinity in the law profession] as well as the crushing caseload" (298). She speaks of the price paid by those who try to balance working a high-level position and parenting wholeheartedly: "a life of perpetual internal compromise that leaves you always feeling torn,

neglectful by turns of one or the other" (Sotomayor 296). This perspective by a woman who has reached the pinnacle of her career would be difficult to voice as a woman politician wishing to seek reelection, because even as the idea of "having it all" is exposed more and more as a cultural myth, it is still one many working women are expected to pursue. However, both Rice and Sotomayor articulate the general incompatibility of such an all-encompassing political career and being physically present with family.

These public figures discussing their clothing choices and embodied experiences as mothers (or non-mothers) in the male-dominated field of politics all work toward a conception of professionalism, an ethos that is connected to many cultural and political ideas of who women are and can be as candidates. They also point to conversations with other women in the field, some who understand their challenges and seek to help them develop an adapted sense of professionalism that allows for women's embodied experiences and relationships, and others who challenge them to fit a more traditional male-centered idea of professionalism. In all of these ways, professional political women address their physical presence in the profession, noting how they work to fit in through their appearance and their physical presence in the workplace, even when their bodies or their familial relationships make that a difficult task.

Professional Relationships

Especially crucial for an ecological and communal professionalism is the relationships between political figures, particularly between women. A networked communal ethos demonstrates the normativity of women in the professional field, expanding readers' conceptions of professionalism, and also ties professional ethos together, enhancing one's ethos by connecting it to the ethos of others. In the latter case, professional women might highlight their

connections to powerful men, or they may discuss powerful women, past or present, as inspirations or colleagues in their professional memoirs.

The former secretaries of state work toward a type of communal ethos by connecting their work with each other. While they both reference past prominent (male) holders of the office, mainly Dean Acheson and William H. Steward, as inspirations, both Rice and Clinton also talk about their relationship with the other, since Clinton followed Rice in the position. Clinton calls the group of living secretaries of state, to which she reached out before her appointment, "a fascinating club that transcends partisan differences" (31). Rice talks about how there is a kind of "fraternity" of secretaries of state, but then corrects herself: "Perhaps now it would be better to call it a 'sorority' since three of the four most recent secretaries...have been women. Indeed, when Secretary Clinton finishes her term it will have been at least sixteen years since a white male held the office of secretary of state" (718).[51] Having three women hold the position in a span of sixteen years after 216 years of white men dominating the position is a step in a more egalitarian direction, according to both Rice and Clinton. Even calling the cohort of recent secretaries of state a "sorority" adjusts the conceptions of the position and the professionalism involved in holding this office. Rather than identifying themselves as exceptional, Clinton and Rice build their ethos and the ethos of others who may consider the position by noting the heritage and working to maintain it through an affirming transfer of power. Picturing a woman as secretary of state along other global leaders is no longer difficult after the tenure of these two women and Madeleine Albright.

Other writers reference women political figures from the past, tying their professionalism to these other women and demonstrating the normativity of women working in the political

[51] Unfortunately, that trend ended after Clinton left the role. John Kerry took over in Obama's second term, followed by Rex Tillerson and Mike Pompeo during the Trump era. In early 2021, President Joe Biden appointed Antony Blinken to the role.

sphere. For instance, Clinton brings up Eleanor Roosevelt numerous times, praising Roosevelt for being a fearless First Lady who never stopped speaking her mind (*Hard Choices* 564, *What Happened* 77).[52] After the 2016 election, Clinton makes a pilgrimage with some friends to Roosevelt's cottage in New York and reflects on her own legacy, saying she "can only hope to come close to the example Eleanor had set" (*What Happened* 448). Clinton also refers to other women from American history: Abigail Adams, Sojourner Truth, Ida Tarbell, Margaret Chase Smith, Barbara Jordan, and Geraldine Ferraro, among others (*What Happened* 142). Palin also refers to Geraldine Ferraro, recalling how she often spoke of Ferraro, the first female vice-presidential candidate, on the campaign trail; Palin indicates that Ferraro told her that it was the "first time, in all those years, she had been so publicly acknowledged for her historic step" (295). Palin adds that she "[doesn't] believe in voting according to gender or color of skin, but Ferraro's vision and efforts helped a lot of women reach higher than they'd reached before" (295). This wasn't the first time Palin had spoken publicly about Ferraro; she had answered a question at a beauty pageant in the 1980s about Ferraro and whether Palin believed a woman could be vice-president. Palin answered in the affirmative, though she states she'd never vote for someone just because they were a woman (43). Clinton uses her references to Roosevelt to demonstrate the route a former First Lady could take, becoming involved in the political sphere on her own terms; Clinton states outright that she wishes to follow in Roosevelt's footsteps, tying her ethos and professionalism to Roosevelt's. Palin, on the other hand, sees her connections to Ferraro as indications of Providence, rather than Ferraro providing inspiration to her specifically; perhaps this could be due to the fact that the politicians were in different parties and likely had significant ideological differences. In both cases, these contemporary professional women look

[52] Clinton also clears up the rumor that she held seances to communicate with Eleanor Roosevelt in the White House during the 1990s: "I wasn't, though it would have been nice to talk with her now and then" (77).

to women of the past to help bolster their professionalism, drawing strength from those connections.

All of the memoirists are eager to show they can work along bipartisan lines, while also holding to their own ideals. This rhetorical move is especially crucial in the campaign memoirs, as public figures eventually seeking election toe the line between taking a stand and showing they can compromise. Warren, for example, discusses a ban on attack ads paid for by outsiders that she and her (male) opponent both signed during her first hotly contested Massachusetts Senate race. While she reports this "People's Pledge" did not really change much in terms of how the race was run, media outlets said it was a "groundbreaking attempt" and "bless their hearts for trying" (Warren 232). The People's Pledge and other rhetorical shows of bipartisanship are to be expected. While it can be telling to see which politicians worked together in the past, the rhetorical move in these memoirs can seem fairly, well, political. On the other hand, Sotomayor describes her friendship with a courtroom opponent. While she was a district attorney, she got to know a public defender, Dawn Cardi. Despite the "unofficial rule against fraternization between prosecutors and defense attorneys," they would meet for lunch and talk about their cases, the workplace, and the "routine sexism that was an occupational hazard" (Sotomayor 259). Sotomayor describes their personalities and positions on the law as being on the opposite ends of the spectrum, but she also expresses how interesting and fruitful their discussions were. This relationship provides her a greater sense of communal professional ethos, in how she explains how people with different orientations to the justice system can work together and learn from each other.

Another interesting instance of rivals treating each other with civility in ways that boost communal ethos is between Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin. As key players in the 2008 election, both refer to the other in their memoirs with a grudging respect, which builds a professional

communal ethos between the two without creating a sense of false camaraderie. Palin's memoir was published first, and her discussion of Clinton reiterates a common theme in Palin's memoir: the unfair treatment by the media during the 2008 campaign. Palin indicates that Obama "got a free pass" from the media compared to how "Bill's wife, Hillary Clinton" was treated (287). Palin includes some criticisms she made of Clinton when Clinton pointed out this disparity in media coverage, and writes, "Before criticizing her on this point, I should have walked a mile in her shoes. I can see now that she had every right to call the media on biased treatment that ended up affecting her candidacy. In fact, I should have applauded her because she was right" (287). While Palin emphasizes they fundamentally disagree on many issues, she ultimately says, "My hat is off to her hard work on the 2008 campaign trail" (287). Similarly, in *Hard Choices,* Clinton recalls that after Palin was announced as John McCain's running mate, Obama's campaign put out a "dismissive statement" and asked Clinton's team to follow suit. Clinton refused: "I was not going to attack Palin just for being a woman appealing for support from other women" (11). Soon after, the Obama campaign reversed its original statement. In both stories, the writers demonstrate what support for a fellow woman and public figure experiencing discrimination might look like. Neither Palin nor Clinton espoused support for the other's ideas, or even her candidacy, but rather each denounced what they felt was unfair treatment by traditional political systems, whether other candidates or the media. Both references support a communal sense of professional solidarity by rejecting what each saw as inequity in hopes of normalizing and improving the experiences of female candidates for high-level political positions.

Finally, many professional political women look to the lineage of strong and powerful women who came before them. Harris and Sotomayor were both raised by single mothers who worked and prioritized education, and both women grew up in a web of family and friends,

particularly women, who raised and supported them. Their memoirs include many reflections on what their female relatives taught them as people, which they indicate impacts who they are as professional women, improving their abilities to lead and make decisions for their constituents. Warren also points to a female relative who assisted her career. When her children were small and she was teaching full time, Warren was running out of child care options and felt like she would have to quit. When Warren's aunt heard of the situation, Warren says, she "just walked away from her life so she could come fix mine" (23). Including this story provides another dimension to a communal professionalism: the help and support women need in order to make it as professionals. They not only need role models to demonstrate how to pursue dreams and work hard; they also need tangible support in order to develop professionally. For many women, this means assistance with their children, whether from a spouse, a nanny, or another family member. While these relationships do not provide the same type of communal ethos as a high-profile political figure whose accepted ethos can buttress the writer's, they provide a different type of ethos, one based in connections to family, history, and the support of women. In doing so, the writers indicate to readers that they care about their pasts, their families, and the ties that made them into the political figures they now are.

Even with this sense of solidarity between women, politics is a male-dominated environment. This gender disparity was even more so when these women came up in their careers and remains particularly true at the highest levels. As such, it cannot go unnoticed that many of the colleagues and mentors referenced in these memoirs are male. All of these memoirs record interactions and relationships with men at the top of the political food chain, whether they are presidents, international leaders, presidential candidates, or Senate leaders. However, more interesting are the ways these political women connect themselves with other women through their professional memoirs, given that in those connections we see alternate forms of

professionalism. Numerous connections exist in these texts between the memoirists themselves, as many of the writers reference the experiences of the other political women and writers to support their own experiences. In that way, these memoirs contribute to the adapted professionalism of politics in how they normalize the existence of many different professional political women, relay the multiple and varied connections between professional political women, and exist alongside each other as a corpus that reflects a different perspective on the political workplace and the professionals within it.

The Rhetoric of Political Professionalism and Memoir

Using political memoirs as demonstrations of adapted professionalism was a specific choice. Not only is politics one of the oldest rhetorical professions; it is deeply entrenched in cultural and ideological ideas of authority attached to whiteness and maleness. The professional field has also produced countless memoirs, as political autobiography has been produced for hundreds of years and continues to be present on best seller lists in the contemporary moment. However, political memoirs are often disparaged by reviewers and scholars alike, who call the memoirs dull and pointless at best, potentially dangerous at worst. British journalist Fiona Sturges complains:

> If you want the lowdown on a political era, you generally can't take the word of those at the centre of it. Memoirs can be fascinating, poignant and offer insight into the minds of their authors, but, like memory itself, they are easily influenced, one-sided and generally unreliable. … Even if we are to accept that such books are highly subjective in their version of events, that doesn't deal with the tedium of hearing about endless overseas summits, state banquets and cabinet meetings.

Scholars Neville-Shepard and Theye take the critique further, pointing out what they see as "the alarming merger of politics and entertainment," for "the line between public servant and opportunist is increasingly fuzzy" (1713). Journalist Sophie Haigney makes a different criticism: "It seems to me there is no reason to continue to buy the fundamental premise of [political memoirs]: That these politicians are sitting down and writing from anywhere close to their heart about their experience. Or that this experience can tell us something novel or meaningful about American political life."

Clearly, I disagree. Perhaps reading political memoirs to find the facts of what happened during a political era may not provide the most insight or accuracy, but that holds for reading any memoir as a purely historical document. Rather, political memoirs can tell us "something novel or meaningful about American political life": how those at the center of it interpret it and interpret themselves as part of it through professionalism. Particularly when it comes to women in government attempting to combat hundreds of years of exclusion from the inner sanctums, rhetorical scholars and regular readers can gain much from looking at how they craft themselves, their professionalism, and the work—and workplaces—to which they are deeply committed and with which they are often frustrated.

Professional memoirs by women in the male-dominated rhetorical field of politics provide a deeper understanding of the rhetorical maneuvers women must make to craft themselves as professionals, women of ambition and prior ethos. They address their authenticity, their bodies, and their relationships, all to convince readers that they can be capable and effective leaders in the courthouse, Senate chambers, or Situation Room. They work to bind their professionalism and their ethos with that of other professional political women, all to propel an expanded conception of political professionalism, one that is ecological and communal at its core. They also seek to normalize women in the political sphere by confronting the idea of

exceptionalism. Through communal ethos, these public women in the political sphere are working to "make individual experiences count—not as exceptions to a norm of women's absence, but as compelling and cumulative evidence of the power of women's bodies to occupy space in public and professional life" (Applegarth 533). All of these rhetorical moves provide insight into what it looks like to be a professional woman in a particular field in a particular decade, specifically the American political arena in the 2010s.

In Sidonie Smith's 2012 article analyzing Clinton's first memoir *Living History* and its genres of authenticity, Smith ends her research by saying that if Clinton runs for president again in 2016, Clinton "most likely will have written another book by then. The narrator of this next book, the (perhaps former) secretary of state in the Obama administration, will also be a corporately produced persona of a would-be president. But what will that 'Hillary' be? And how will we read the book?" (S. Smith, "America's" 539). Therein lies the important twin questions of the political memoir, and professional memoirs in general, and a fascinating scholarly opportunity for those of us in women's rhetoric: to work to understand who the writers of these memoirs are constructing themselves to be as professionals and how we, as scholars and as readers, can understand them and their professional ethos.

CHAPTER 5
PROFESSIONAL FUNNY BUSINESS: THE PROFESSIONAL MEMOIRS OF WOMEN IN COMEDY

"Why are women, who have the whole male world at their mercy, not funny? Please do not pretend to not know what I am talking about." – Christopher Hitchens, Vanity Fair

In Lindy West's memoir *Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman*, she chronicles her love affair with comedy: "More than any other art form, [comedy] forces you to interact with it; it forces you to feel not alone. Because you can't be alone when someone's making you laugh, physically reaching into your body and eliciting a response" (155). West articulates the embodied, located, and communal aspects of comedy that are key to its impact. Comedy involves bodies moving about in space, sharing with other bodies the physical and mental experience of laughter; it creates community in dingy dark basements, sold-out auditoriums, Twitter mentions, and wherever else jokes are being told. However, West and other women who love comedy, including the ones who make it their profession, often pay an emotional price for this communal experience. As West says:

> For years, I assumed it was a given that, at any comedy show I attended, I had to grin through a number of brutal jokes about my gender: about beating us, about raping us, about why we deserve it, about ranking us, about fucking us, about not fucking us, about reducing our already dehumanized existence to a handful of insulting stereotypes. (166)

After comedian Daniel Tosh targets a female audience member in 2012 by saying how funny it would be if she were gang raped right then in the comedy venue, West writes publicly about the misogyny and ubiquity of rape jokes, and then begins to receive her own abuse, both from trolls online, who threaten her with rape,[53] and from male comedians, who scoff that she can't take a

[53] More disturbing, West notes, were the multiple comments that said West wishes she would be raped but would never be because she is too fat and ugly.

joke. Both the jokes that West critiques and the threats she receives in return have physical, embodied components. They revolve around women's embodied experiences in the world, especially the ways women anticipate sexual and physical danger lurking around any corner—particularly in "dark basements full of angry men," as West jokingly characterized the comedy scene (186).

The professional environment of comedy, whether comedy clubs or writers' rooms, is frequently hostile to women: whether in its jokes or its snide comments, its crowd work or its plot lines, in ways explicit or implicit. The professionals within that field can also be highly sensitive to critique, as West found out, or at least certain kinds of critique by certain types of people. Comedians pride themselves on challenging social norms and shocking audiences with their audacious rhetoric, but they work in a precarious environment that relies on networking and community for any sort of stability, with most of the power concentrated among male comedians. People who speak out against that community risk losing professional status. Like in many other male-dominated professional environments, women comedians walk a careful line between sharing their lived experiences and critiquing the professional field they—and their audiences—rely on for professional purpose and the embodied experience of communal laughter. Some comedians have found memoir to be a place for that critique, as they use the genre to communicate their interpretations of the workplaces they inhabit and show how the workplaces of comedy have professional norms that do not support the intersectional lived experiences of women performing within them.

The four professional comedians and memoirists analyzed in this chapter—Tina Fey, Mindy Kaling, Tiffany Haddish, and Ali Wong—each spent the decade of the 2010s working in American comedy, whether they performed in stand-up specials, network sitcoms, or blockbuster movies (or all three). Building on their prior ethos and increasing popularity, they also all wrote

memoirs that highlighted both their rise to fame and their experiences as women in the professional workplace of comedy. Of the four, Fey's book, *Bossypants,* was published first in 2011, followed a few months later by Mindy Kaling's book *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (And Other Concerns)*. Tiffany Haddish's *The Last Black Unicorn* was published in 2017, and the most recent memoir, Ali Wong's *Dear Girls: Intimate Tales, Untold Secrets, and Advice for Living Your Best Life,* was published in 2019. The writers come from different comedy backgrounds and styles. Haddish and Wong consider themselves stand-up comedians primarily, and Fey and Kaling are company comedians, which I define as comedians who work with others in the performing arts sense (rather than the business sense) of the term "company."[54] However, all four writers have experience in multiple aspects of the comedy scene, and all would consider themselves professionals in comedy entertainment.

In the following chapter, I explore the ways women in comedy use their professional memoirs to build their professional ethos by articulating how they navigate the professional norms of their white-male-dominated profession in a woman's body. First, I explore how the concepts of embodiment and location in regard to ethos help frame a rhetorical reading of these texts. Next, I discuss the precarious nature of the comedy profession, as well as the cultural context of the 2010s for women in comedy. Then, I discuss how high-profile public women use the memoir genre to address and enhance their prior ethos in ways difficult to do in the other genres they work in. Finally, I explore how these four memoirs develop an embodied professional ethos by articulating 1) experiences with the professional beauty norms only applied

[54] These two avenues of comedy performers may benefit from further articulation. A definition of the stand-up comedian comes from British comedy academic and practitioner Oliver Double: "a single performer standing in front of an audience, talking to them with the specific intention of making them laugh" (4). The stand-up relies on personality, direct communication between the comic and the audience, and a live quality to their performance. A different track is what I'm calling the "company comedian," a broad category that contains those performing in improv teams, sketch comedy shows, sitcoms, comedy films, and other collective ventures. I also place in this category those who work in writers' rooms at sitcoms and late night shows (while many television comedy writers do not perform, my focus in this study is on those who both write and perform). The category of the company comedian involves the work of multiple people toward the same end, collaborating to create a finished product.

to women, 2) the challenges women experience when their embodied experiences are at odds with their professional environments, and 3) the differing benefits women receive from professional relationships with successful men and women in their field. However, in discussing how they navigate these professional norms, sometimes these writers simply demonstrate how to manage, not dismantle, the disparities women experience, or they do not consider forms of privilege that provide them relative security in a precarious professional field. Ultimately, I argue these texts provide insight into the rhetorically deft ways high-profile women comedians use their embodied experiences to provide an alternative woman-centered interpretation of their professional field and critique the sexism of their chosen profession.

Embodiment and Location

Comedy is a profession based in embodiment. Comedians use their bodies—their voices, their faces, their gestures, their movement—to support, enhance, and propel their rhetoric. In comedy and entertainment, one's ideas and one's body are often inextricable. Politicians and religious figures also use their bodies to convey their message, but they often do not want their bodies to distract from the ideas within their messages. For comedians and performers, their body *is* the message. As such, the experiences those bodies—particularly women's bodies,[55] queer bodies, and bodies of color—have in a white-male-dominated space is not just about the physical, but also the cultural and ideological. Professional ethos is often based in how these embodied professionals navigate those spaces, how they are perceived in those spaces, and, in the case of these writers, how they rhetorically interpret the spaces in which they work in their memoirs.

[55] As I state in previous chapters, I do not want to present the embodiment of women as an uncontested term, particularly as cisgender women experience greater privilege than non-binary individuals and transwomen, who frequently experience violence and discrimination. However, here and throughout the chapter, when I refer to "women's bodies," I am referring to bodies that are perceived as female and inhabited by individuals who identify as women, deviations from the standard white male norm of the professional field.

Embodiment has been recognized as a key part of ethos in women's rhetorics. A woman's body cannot be divorced from her rhetoric, particularly when she is delivering it orally in front of an audience. Historically, women were disallowed from public rhetoric, because they lacked the necessary prerequisite: a male body. As such, women's rhetorics has both reclaimed women rhetors who persuaded in less public ways, as well as women who found ways to speak up and out in the public sphere. They always did so from a body marked by deviation from the standard by virtue of being female and often embodying other intersecting identities that made an ethical and authoritative public ethos highly difficult to achieve.

The connection between ethos and the body in rhetorical scholarship has been considered through a variety of frameworks. For instance, Debra Hawhee has looked at the impact of the body on classical Greek conceptions of virtue and wisdom, tracing ideas of habit and action based in bodily movements to ideas of ethos and virtue. As her book *Bodily Arts* focuses on Greek training in both rhetoric and athletic endeavors, her work connects ideas of ethos and general conceptions of bodies as ideas in the ancient past. A different line of rhetorical scholarship explores ethos as located in the relationship between rhetor and audience, which includes expectations and assumptions of both. These conceptions of ethos as a dwelling place (Hyde, "Introduction") or the space in between (Ronald, LeFevre) focus on these rhetorical spaces as ontological and philosophical rather than physical. Similarly, as Lorin Shellenberger describes in her dissertation on the performed ethos of contemporary sportswomen, many scholars often focus on "the body" as a generalized or ideological form, rather than specific bodies in specific spaces. Shellenberger points to Debra Hawhee as saying that rhetorical theory "has a tendency to freeze bodies, to analyze them for their symbolic properties, thereby evacuating and ignoring their capacity to sense and to move through time" (qtd. in Shellenberger

29). This freezing can divorce particular bodies from their particular social and cultural contexts, which is crucial for the examination of ethos in a genre like memoir.

More scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between rhetors and communities. As Nedra Reynolds argues, "An individual's ethos cannot be determined outside of the space in which it was created or without a sense of the cultural context" (329). Furthermore, one's locations affect the type of knowledge one experiences and constructs. Reynolds notes that being located as a marginalized individual in a dominant culture causes one to "see differently and learn different things" (330). This knowledge is tied to the cultural position one's body holds, as well as the ethos one inhabits because of that position.[56] Reynolds takes these conceptions of ethos as tied to location and combines them with ideas of positionality in her article with Susan C. Jarratt, in which they talk about ethos as being "formed in places where one is accustomed to being" (48), pointing to the sophists as being particularly good at adapting rhetoric to local customs and moralities (50). In this way, Reynolds and Jarratt point to ethos as being intrinsically connected to particular communities.

Other scholars have considered how bodies can or cannot gain ethos. In Coretta Pittman's analysis of the ethos construction in the personal writing by three Black women across American history, she identifies how traditionally Black women's construction of ethos has been highly difficult, due to "lack[ing] the social and cultural situations to habitually acquire and maintain good moral character" as evaluated by the white dominant culture (48). Because of their race, gender, and occupations, they could not fulfill the necessary requirements for ethos levied by white audiences, so they modified those requirements to create their own forms of virtue that reflect their "lived realities and experiences" (Pittman 51). Similarly, disability studies has done important work in examining how a culture's social values interact with normative conceptions

[56] See an expanded discussion of Reynolds's framework in chapter one.

of the body, impacting the multitude of ways an embodied rhetoric—particularly by a non-normative disabled body—is received by audiences. As Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson identify, any "normate" culture "continuously reinscribes the centrality, naturality, neutrality, and unquestionality" of the central figure (24), who is frequently a straight white abled man. As such, they argue for not just a reclamation of the body; "we also must examine the ways that this body shapes possibilities for expression by disciplining bodily difference or enforcing bodily norms" (Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson 28). Pittman, Dolmage and Lewiecki-Wilson take intersectional feminist approaches to ethos and community; a rhetor's embodiment is never simply related to her gender. She is also marked by her race, class, and ability status as well, and all of these embodied identities impact how she can build ethos, professional or otherwise, with a particular community in a context.

These discussions of embodiment all relate to the professional memoirs of comedy, as women in this professional field seek to both describe professional locations through a woman-centered lens and articulate their embodied experiences as rhetors within those spaces. In this way, they are developing a professional ethos in these memoirs that is intrinsically tied to how they as women interpret spaces and professional norms, particularly when their embodiments do not fit the conception of the white male Comedian standard. In their critiques of their professional fields, they are always describing what it is like to work as a professional comedian with a woman's body located in the often brutal and precarious career of comedy.

The Comedy Profession

While these four comedians have found success in the field of comedy, they all discuss varying experiences of precarity in the early years of their careers. In his examination of the community and inequity in comedy, American studies scholar Michael P. Jeffries describes the

profession in no uncertain terms: “Comedy is a brutal business. Performers are scarcely paid and often treated poorly. A run of good luck and financial rewards is no guarantee that the good times will last. Comedy workers stumble down dimly lit career paths without any assurances that they’re moving in the right direction” (2). As business researchers Nick Butler and Dimitrinka Stoyanova Russell have found, creative fields like comedy are marked by insecurity because “employment tends to be project-based, contracts are short-term, job protection is limited or non-existent, career trajectories are unpredictable, income is often low and unequally distributed, unionization is rare, and social insurance is patchy at best” (1667). Further, the creative fulfillment experienced by workers in these fields can actually make the precarity worse: “the intrinsic rewards provided by creative work obscures—and, at times, justifies—wider structural inequalities such as poor pay, uncertain career prospects, individual risk-taking and a lack of social insurance” (Butler and Russell 1669). The network that assists comedians in surviving a precarious work environment can also reify it, as the informal support system takes the place of formal systems that would provide more stability and security for creative workers.

Additionally, Jeffries notes the comedic workplace is rife with racial and gendered inequalities. He says, “Nonwhite performers cannot expect to achieve superstardom or power in the industry without appealing to white audiences, bookers, producers, and executives” (16). This frequently requires “drastically different material and new ways of relating to coworkers” (16), burdens on time, energy, and creativity that white performers do not have to take on. The majority of the major comedy clubs in America are owned and operated by white men and mostly serve white audiences, and because of this, mentoring and advice for performers of color is less available. The fact is “white performers never have to make a decision to cross over, and they don’t have to play all black, Asian, or Hispanic clubs (‘urban’ or ‘ethnic’ rooms) to prove that they’re versatile and skilled enough to earn a living as a professional” (Jeffries 16);

performers of color often do. These challenges do not necessarily abate when a performer makes it to television; whether on *Saturday Night Live* or a sitcom, the performer of color will likely be one of the few onstage.[57]

The precarious nature and structural inequities of the comedy business make it a challenging professional environment. From comedy clubs to college auditoriums to sound stages, comedians work to be funny amidst professional challenges, which are exacerbated for funny women trying to be heard in this white-male-dominated rhetorical environment. In this sort of work environment in which jobs are often passed along by word of mouth and social support is the only professional support available, challenging the social norms of the community by critiquing its flaws and inequality might result in even more precarity: fewer jobs, less support, and further marginalization for those already on the outskirts of the field. As such, women and others who do not meet the standard white male norm must carefully decide how to position themselves within the field and how they will interpret that field, its professional norms, and their professional experiences and relationships in their rhetoric; this rhetorical decision is particularly germane to contemporary women writing professional memoirs.

Funny Women in the 2010s

Historically, women have been underrepresented in the comedy field, unwelcome in a career based in public rhetoric that is often crass, crude, and obscene in comparison to social norms; however, recent years have seen a groundswell of women writing comedy for wider audiences, using multiple forms of media to develop professional ethē based in their own comedic sensibilities. For instance, women took significant strides in comedy during the decade of the 2010s. Tina Fey was given the Mark Twain Award for American Humor in 2010, the

[57] Take *Saturday Night Live*: in 45 seasons on television, the show has featured only eight Black women and four Asian Americans (Scott, Coleman).

youngest person to be awarded the prestigious prize (Press 3). In April 2011, the movie *Bridesmaids* was released, a female-driven gross-out comedy that would earn more than $288 million worldwide (149). Further, in the fall of 2011, "each of the major broadcast networks launched an edgy chick comedy created by a woman" (149). A year later, *The Mindy Project* premiered, making Mindy Kaling the first woman of color to create, write, and star in her own network show (160). Press considers 2015 a turning point for women in television, noting that "more than a dozen new female-centric series created by women premiered in 2015, as many as had emerged in the three previous years combined" (2). The rise of streaming services provided even more opportunities for women, as these services were desperate for original content and were willing to take more risks with "niche" programming. Martha M. Lauzen from the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film notes that in 2019-2020, "42% of streaming programs had clearly identifiable sole female protagonists, 27% of cable programs and 24% of broadcast programs featured female protagonists." All of these factors led to increased opportunities for women in entertainment, particularly in comedy.

However, despite changes in both professional opportunities and the professional environment, women still had to address the question, the dreaded question: "Are women as funny as men?" Or the worse question, "Why aren't women as funny as men?" Or even, "Can women be funny?" As Jeffries writes in his book, "Performers don't want to talk about this question, and I don't want to write about it, but I have to, because comedy workers told me it has a massive impact on their career" (150). He recounts how audience members will come up to women comedians after shows saying, "I don't really like women comedians, but I thought you were funny," an impressively backhanded compliment. A key person to blame for the ongoing ubiquity of this question, even in the 2010s, is Christopher Hitchens. In a 2007 polemic published by *Vanity Fair,* Hitchens argued that women could not be funny for reasons that

included biological and social roles. I refuse to summarize his arguments, as many other scholars have addressed his tirade in their work.[58] However, Hitchens is by no means the only man to proclaim this viewpoint. As journalist Yael Kohen charts:

> John Belushi said it to Gilda Radner; Johnny Carson said it to *Rolling Stone*; the *National Lampoon*'s founding editor, Henry Beard, said it to his magazine's first female editor, Anne Beatts; Del Close, the Upright Citizen's Brigade guru, listed it as number thirteen on the list of comedy rules he circulated back when he was at Second City; and Jerry Lewis told an audience at the Aspen Comedy Festival that "a woman doing comedy doesn't offend me but sets me back a bit...I think of her as a producing machine that brings babies into the world." (3)

Hitchens is part of a legacy of white men who blame an entire gender for their lack of humor. His diatribe was followed by a 2008 response by Alessandra Stanley, also in *Vanity Fair*, which featured photos of female comedians like Sarah Silverman, Tina Fey, and Amy Poehler glammed up. However, Hitchens responded once again with an even more condescending essay, attacking both the comedians interviewed in the article and Stanley herself. Despite its exhausting and banal nature, the conversation is disappointingly ongoing. Most of the women's memoirs analyzed in this chapter addressed this question, whether explicitly or implicitly; even Lindy West's *The Witches are Coming*, her 2019 follow-up to *Shrill,* makes reference to the conversation. The professional field of comedy is still a contended rhetorical space for those who do not fit the white-male standard conception of the comedian, and because of this, women still have to consider this question and their place in the professional norms of the field.

[58] Rebecca Krefting excellently analyzes Hitchens's argument and what it reveals about the world of comedy and gender in chapter four of her 2014 book *All Joking Aside: American Humor and its Discontents*.

Despite these ongoing conversations about women and humor, funny women have used whatever rhetorical means available to become publicly known for their humor, writing, and comic personas, building their professional ethos in a male-dominated rhetorical field. One of the means available for these popular public figures is writing a memoir about their work in comedy, articulating the background that brought them to this creative profession, the early years of their career, behind-the-scenes moments, and reflections on their lives as public figures, comedians, and women. These memoirs become part of their rhetorical corpus, enhancing their work in other genres, highlighting their place in the field, and providing a space for comedians to both critique and assert their commitment to the profession they have chosen.

Funny Women Writing Memoirs

Many comedians have made a living talking about their lives. Or, at least, talking about a version of their lives, a version that may be caustic, grotesque, witty, or silly, depending on the brand of humor preferred by the one delivering the jokes. Using one's life as material is a more recent development in the field; histories of comedy note that the 1960s and the 1990s were points when stand-up routines became more connected with the personality and persona of the comedian. During certain time periods, comedy routines were, well, routine, as comedians melded standardized jokes they purchased from writers with their own style of delivery. However, the work delivered by comedians like Lenny Bruce in the 1960s and Jeanine Garofalo in the 1990s was crafted from their own lived experiences, a pattern that has continued in stand-up sets of the 2010s. For example, Ali Wong and Amy Schumer made jokes about motherhood and pregnancy while visibly pregnant onstage, as their embodiment became an even more obvious component of their comedy.

Similarly, television sitcoms have had a history of featuring well-known comedians in a starring role that drew on their previous ethos as a comedian and placed it in a fictional context. For example, the titular character of Roseanne Barr's *Roseanne* had many elements of Barr's signature comedic persona: loud and brassy delivery, blue-collar jokes. In the 2010s, sitcoms continued this pattern. While Liz Lemon of *30 Rock* does not share Tina Fey's name, she does share a job with the woman who created and embodied her: head writer at an NBC sketch comedy show. Mindy Lahiri of *The Mindy Project* shares Mindy Kaling's first name and love of fashion, but makes her living as a hilarious OB-GYN. Both Kaling and Fey used these sitcoms to add to their rhetorical corpus and professional ethos, utilizing their embodied experiences as material for the fictional contexts of their comedy.

Given the amount of personal material adapted or fictionalized for stage or screen, one might ask why these four comedians felt compelled to write memoirs, especially given the variety of other projects they were working on during the 2010s. When her book was published in 2011, Fey was writing and starring in *30 Rock*; she would soon host the Golden Globes, produce one of Netflix's first original hits, and write the book of a Broadway musical. Mindy Kaling's memoir built on her success writing for the American version of *The Office*, and soon after her memoir, she would become the showrunner and star of her own network sitcom, *The Mindy Project*. Tiffany Haddish's memoir was published in 2017 after Haddish starred in a number of comedy specials, television shows, and hit movies, including the high-profile movie *Girls Trip,* released the same year as Haddish's memoir. Ali Wong's *Dear Girls* was published after Wong became known nationally for her well-received stand-up specials. In 2019, the same year Wong's memoir was published, Netflix released *Always Be My Maybe,* a romantic comedy she co-wrote and starred in. Despite these numerous projects, all four of these comedians took time out of their busy schedules to write memoirs. This begs the question: why?

The genre of the professional memoir allows the comedians the chance to impact their ethos in two interconnected ways. One, memoir's focus on individual life within a cultural context provides these comedians with the opportunity to discuss their professional experiences and prior ethos. As public figures, their experiences are already on record. Fey's audience has probably watched *30 Rock*. Haddish's audience has probably seen her appearance on *The Arsenio Hall Show.* The comedians can reference these cultural moments and provide their explanations of them, which allows them to address their prior ethos head-on. Second, as the comedians explore the ways they have built their professional ethos—or how it has been built for them by fans and other creators—they are adding to it. Their framing of their own ethos in their memoirs enhances their professional ethos further, especially to an audience already primed to consider them professionals in the field. This doubling back and doubling up of ethos is an example of how ethos is networked and ecological, dependent on the factors in and around rhetorical acts that compound each other in innumerable ways. However, in exploring their own ethos, the memoirists also reveal the ways that women have to contort themselves to gain authority in the comedy workplace. Even as they articulate their successes, they demonstrate how traditional methods of gaining authority are not always available for women in comedy, especially given their female bodies that often have compounding marginalized identities that keep them on the margins of a professional field that relies on community.

The writers themselves provide reasons they are writing these memoirs that echo the ways memoirs provide them with rhetorical options that their other work cannot. Wong has a reason built into the structure of her book; *Dear Girls* is written to her two young daughters. However, she also says she is writing to a larger audience of young people who ask her questions like, "What is it like to be an Asian American woman in entertainment? How do you balance family and career?" (xiii). Wong addresses her prior ethos, the reasons that this book was

published, but she also points to the professional nature of her memoir, indicating that through memoir, she can answer questions she cannot address during her stand-up sets. Similarly, Fey's memoir addresses potential audiences from parents to Sarah Palin supporters to survivors in the dystopian future. However, the first audience she considers are those who come for the professional content: "If you are a woman and you bought this book for practical tips on how to make it in a male-dominated workplace, here they are," tips that include no pigtails or tube tops and no eating diet foods in meetings (3). The first page sets the tone for Fey's memoir, which provides insights into how she approaches being a woman in a male-centered profession.

These memoirs are an opportunity for these comedians to define themselves as professionals in explicit ways, part of a professional field which they are interpreting throughout their memoirs. As Jeffries says, "The comedy creator sells an identity, a sensibility, and a worldview, not just a collection of jokes" (19). These comedians' professional memoirs contribute to that identity and ethos, as well as conceptions of the field itself. By exploring the field's professional norms through their memoirs and the ways women have to navigate sexist beauty standards, inhospitable work conditions, and varied professional relationships, these memoirs provide embodied and intersectional interpretations of places they work within. However, their consideration of their embodied experiences does not always analyze the privileges they have that have led to their successes or how the field might change to become more supportive of nonwhite, non-male bodies. Ultimately, these memoirs demonstrate a careful rhetorical balance between critique and commitment, given how important professional connections and regular work is to maintaining and developing one's comedic professional ethos.

An Embodied Professional Ethos in a Precarious Workplace

The professional norm of "The Comedian" as a white male standing in front of a crowd with a microphone has been built over decades of sexism and racism in the field and buttressed by the profession's reliance on community and referral networks. As such, women, particularly women of color, will never meet that standard. However, not everyone considers being multiply marginalized a challenge. In her memoir, Wong describes how frequently she has to handle jealousy and resentment from white male comics who believe she has an unfair advantage because she is a woman of color. Wong says, "I hear that line a lot: *Me, I'm just another white guy*" (72). She says the real problem is the complainer is just not funny enough. Her rationale:

> There are plenty of white guys out there, like Jimmy Kimmel, John Mulaney, Nick Kroll, Bill Hader, Sebastian Maniscalco, Joe Rogan, Jimmy Fallon, Stephen Colbert, James Corden, Neal Brennan, Jeff Ross, Moshe Kasher, John Cena, Ike Barinholtz, Judd Apatow, Seth Rogen, Chris D'Elia, Dave Attell, Jeff Ross, Brian Regan, Ron White, Marc Maron, Jerry Seinfeld, Ricky Gervais, Conan O'Brien, Jim Gaffigan, Jeff Dunham, Patton Oswalt, Steve Martin, Bill Burr, Steven Wright, Jon Stewart, David Letterman, John Oliver, Ben Stiller, Bo Burnham, Mike Myers, and Will Ferrell, to name thirty-eight out of eight million, who all seem to be doing just fine. (72-73)

In this litany of names, Wong demonstrates the ways comedy field centers performers who are white and male. Her examples include stand-ups, actors, hosts, podcasters, writers, and performers, spanning from older—like Letterman and Martin, both in their seventies—to younger, like Burnham, who is thirty. Wong shifts the blame back onto the complaining men themselves, indicating she is not the problem; their lack of talent is the problem. She also implies that they would be hard-pressed to provide thirty-eight names of Asian comedians who are

women, or even women comedians of color.[59] Wong uses the names of these comedians to show her knowledge of the field, its central figures, and its professional norms while also demonstrating how tied the profession is to a history of maleness and whiteness. If these white men can do it, so can other white men, if they were just funnier. However, the same equation does not apply to women, especially women of color.

Similarly, Tina Fey addresses the (white) maleness of writers' rooms professional norms in her memoir. In a chapter about the workplace culture at *Saturday Night Live* in the late '90s, Fey says the major difference between male and female comedy writers is "the men urinate in cups. And sometimes jars" (136). Fey finds out from a fellow woman writer that a lone paper cup on a shelf in an office will have urine in it. In Fey's investigation into the practice, a male colleague tells her "it was just something guys did when they were too lazy to go to the bathroom" (137). She started noticing the cups in other places, and while she saw it as a test—ignore the cups and you're in the club—she concludes that no one actually cared, or, rather, no men actually cared whether she ignored them or not (138). The men did not think about the cups, or women's comfort with them, at all. In another example, Fey talks about the commercial parody *Saturday Night Live* did for Kotex Classic, which featured women doing normal activities wearing giant sanitary napkins. The male writers were repeatedly hesitant until two of them asked Fey and another woman writer to explain how it would work. Fey realized the men just literally did not understand the concept, based in their lack of personal experience. Fey concludes, "It was the moment I realized that there was no 'institutionalized sexism' at that place. Sometimes [men] just literally didn't know what we [women] were talking about" (141). In these two examples, Fey identifies a lack of awareness and consideration that is often a

[59] West makes this argument as well: "I can name hundreds of white male comedians. But how about this: Name twenty female comics. Name twenty black comics. Name twenty gay comics. If you're a comedy nerd, you probably can. That's cool. Now ask your mom to do it" (168).

byproduct of white male privilege. While Fey brushes off any claims of "institutional sexism," these two anecdotes and others point to workplace norms that assume writers are male. Writers pee in cups. Writers don't understand menstrual supplies. Logically, it follows that writers are men, and the embodied experiences of men are given centrality in the professional norms of the workplace. All of these examples point to a culture that Fey critiques but also downplays, as she carefully walks the line between demonstrating how formative her time at *Saturday Night Live* was and also pointing out the environmental sexism in one of comedy's most revered sketch shows. Both Wong's and Fey's examples provide an ideological basis for the professional norms of comedy workplaces. These norms are so centered on the male experience that the embodied challenges of women—particularly in regard to professional beauty norms, professional environments, and professional experiences—are not even on the radar of their male colleagues. These memoirs, however, clearly reveal the existence of these challenges, as well as the ways women navigate and manage them while maintaining their commitment to their field and colleagues.

Professional Beauty

All four memoirs demonstrate male-centered professional norms of the comedy field by discussing beauty standards experienced by women, for which there is no parallel for male comedians. The stand-up comedians discuss their onstage presentation, which is sometimes in conflict with others' expectations. Tiffany Haddish says she feels like she can wear whatever she wants when she does stand-up: "When I go onstage to do comedy, it's about me. I feel accepted for who I am. I can go onstage with my hair fucked up, no makeup, ugly-ass clothes I've been wearing for three days, and people still appreciate me. They still laugh" (274). This quote echoes Haddish's theme throughout her memoir of feeling at home onstage; however, in some ways, this

sentiment is countered by the frequency with which Haddish reports being told she's beautiful by (male) comedians, which they assert means she should perform a particular way. For instance, she recounts an experience she had with Charles Fleischer, a (white male) comedian, at a comedy camp she attended as a teenager. Fleischer disliked that Haddish had "bathroom humor" in her set, which was literally a joke about bathroom noises. Fleischer told Haddish she was "too pretty to do bathroom humor" (28). Fleischer communicates his expectations of Haddish as a comedian, which are based in how she looks; in doing so, he is ignoring the lineage of other stereotypically beautiful women who do crass bodily humor in their comedy, which Kohen traces to the rise of Sarah Silverman and Chelsea Handler in the 2000s.[60] Years later, Haddish talks about actress Jada Pinkett Smith's advice to her about expensive clothing and makeup. As Smith says, "If you want to be considered top notch, you need to wear top notch type things" (263). Haddish reflects on her difficulty with that philosophy, given her past experiences being unhoused and in foster care, but ultimately concedes. Haddish's consideration of her embodied professional presence demonstrates the differing standards for men and women within the field of comedy. The schlubby no-makeup, dirty clothes image is familiar to comedy, but generally one that is embodied in the white male standard Comedian. Haddish says she feels comfortable embodying this image, but as others indicate, this image is read differently by the audience of a young Black woman comedian. As a high-profile Black woman, Smith provides Haddish with insight into how to advance in Hollywood, and while Haddish argues with Smith, ultimately, she bows to Smith's wisdom—to her professional ethos—in ways she did not acquiesce to Fleischer's critiques. Smith knows from experience that a Black woman moving up in the world

[60] Many of the women discussed as being traditionally beautiful but raunchy are white, which adds another embodied dimension to audiences'—and fellow comedians'—perceptions of what they should or should not be joking about. See Mizejewski's *Pretty/Funny: Women Comedians and Body Politics* for more.

is required to look a particular way in order to gain professional ethos. By showing her audience how she learned this lesson and from whom, Haddish builds her professional ethos.

Wong also addresses the question of female comedians' appearance, saying that the question of what to wear while performing has always been challenging for women. She acknowledges that men often wear comfortable familiar clothes in their HBO or Netflix specials (70), and women performing in and around Los Angeles generally wear a similar outfit—plus, in Wong's case, "a pantyliner," which makes her feel "safe and confident" (70). This small aside about a pantyliner deftly differentiates the embodied experiences of men and women comedians, as Wong articulates a necessary addition that she as a woman needs for an extra dose of confidence. Wong also says initially she felt she needed to "utterly de-sexualize [herself] for the stage and the whole scene of stand-up comedy" (68); however, she relaxed once she gained more confidence that the audience was always going to laugh, regardless of how she looked. In this line, she indicates that her initial thought was to downplay elements of her look that could be read as feminine, as she felt it was a detriment to her relationship with the audience. While she has changed that stance, as evidenced in the tight dresses that emphasize her pregnant belly she wears for her Netflix specials, she still recommends that women not wear heels onstage. She recounts her first two televised stand-up sets, for which she wore high-heeled shoes; in both cases, her sets were stiff, as she was "mentally occupied with how [her] body was going to handle all of these things [she] put on it and, as a result, came off like a sedated circus bear on camera" (71). Wong identifies that professional—and beauty—cultural norms for women often involve high-heeled shoes; however, these shoes make easy movement difficult, which is a hindrance while performing. The embodied experience of women onstage conflicts with the social norms of professional womanhood, the latter which many women would consider necessary to gain authority in professional contexts. However, Wong's conclusion is that "stand-

up is not about being pretty or looking your best, it's about being yourself and being funny, period" (71).

While Wong says it is enough to simply be oneself, both she and Haddish imply that being oneself isn't really enough for women comedians to gain professional ethos, particularly women comedians of color. They are constantly being judged along the Pretty/Funny binary, as Linda Mizejewski calls it, with audiences and comedians alike locating women's humor in opposition to their looks. While Mizejewski analyzes the transgressive humor produced from this binary, I consider the framework more in terms of the comedians' presentation of themselves, in which case I see the binary more as a continuum; professional comedian women locate themselves in between the two poles, and how they justify that positioning reveals professional norms of the comedy field that can punish women for whatever position they choose. Even when it comes to two stand-ups who discuss their professional ethos as grounded in comfort and security onstage, both acknowledge there can be a social pressure to be both more and less "pretty" in the hopes of gaining more professional opportunities. They also acknowledge a tension between the professional standards in entertainment of conventional beauty and the goals and values of a comedian. This issue is even more fraught for comedians of color, particularly Black women due to racist stereotypes and assumptions based in historical entertainment tropes.[61]

The two company comedians also articulate embodied professional experiences that include beauty standards. Fey and Kaling fall into the category of non-stand-up performers who found themselves in writers' rooms and eventually starring in the sitcoms they created. Their work in front of the camera leads them to discuss the experience of photo shoots, which are a

[61] Mizejewski discusses the ways racist entertainment tropes continue to impact contemporary comedians in her chapter on Wanda Sykes in *Pretty/Funny*.

common element of promotional materials for actors in television shows and often necessary to advertise oneself and one's show, making them a necessary element of professional life for many comedic actors. How these two women approach the process differs, based in their embodied experiences. Fey starts by saying photo shoots are just part of the job: "Your work is what you really care about because your work is your craft and your craft is your art and photo shoots are THE FUNNEST!" (147). She maintains an enthused tone as she explains the whole process, including the stylist who "has been given your sizes ahead of time and has chosen to ignore them" (148). Fey says the subject is inevitably forced into a too-small garment. Fey mentions that she can sometimes fit into one of these sample sizes (which are generally between size zero and four) to the delight of the stylist, because "at five foot four I have the waist size of a seven-foot model," though Fey makes clear that the garment will not actually fit in any other way (149). Eventually, the subject will put on clothing that cannot even close in the back, but Fey assures us everyone wearing a glamorous outfit on the cover of a magazine has a bra and underwear hanging out a gaping hole in the back of the garment (151). After the whole photo shoot experience is done, she states, "you may sink into a slight depression over the next thirty-six hours" due to the lack of compliments and attention (156). Overall, Fey highlights the bizarre and constructed world of high fashion, demonstrating its lack of connection with the realities of lived experiences or of a woman's body, and its enforcement of social and professional norms for women in entertainment. Fey presents the tensions about sample sizes and lack of fit as ubiquitous and ridiculous, an inherent part of the photo shoot process that should be just suffered through. However, Fey's ability to fit into sample sizes (to some extent) is also a moment of privilege that Fey does not address in her celebration of this process for an "average woman" who is conventionally slim and attractive, perhaps not compared to models but compared to the size of the average American woman. In doing so, Fey once again shows a challenge in the

rhetorical construction of embodied professional ethos for women: she recognizes the unhealthy body norms that public women in entertainment are held to, norms that have no parallel for men in the industry; however, her characterization of this experience as fun and ridiculous belies the painful experiences of other women who do not fit these embodied professional norms.

In Kaling's chapter, "When You're Not Skinny, This is What People Want You to Wear," she is more reflective than Fey about her body's location on the spectrum of womanhood, saying she is "not model skinny but also not super fat and fabulously owning my hugeness," instead in that middle category of "normal American woman" (192). She states outright she's a "size eight (this week, anyway)," which is atypical for women in the entertainment industry but also atypical for the average American woman.[62] Kaling says that while she loves being made up by professionals for an event or a photo shoot, she does not enjoy someone choosing clothes for her. She recounts a photo shoot with *People* magazine where every garment brought was a sample size, despite the stylist knowing Kaling was one of the subjects in the shoot (195). Only one dress was close to fitting, a bland navy shift that stood in stark contrast to the glamor of the other gowns. Kaling recalls going into the bathroom and crying until she decided to simply choose the gown she wanted; she forced the stylist to cut open the back of the garment so it would fit her—just like Fey said happens for every cover photo shoot (197). Kaling frames this anecdote as a time when she owned her power, demanded what she wanted, and realized the lack of importance of photo shoots. However, the story also shows the assumption by those in the industry that Kaling would accept what she was given. As a curvy woman of color, Kaling was forced to stand up for herself in a way that a man likely would not have to, given the differences in menswear tailoring and male professional norms, but also that Fey and other thin (white) women also do not have to do. In her articulation of this embodied

[62] A study in 2016 found that the average size for an American woman was size sixteen (Fratello).

experience, Kaling builds her ethos as a powerful woman, but also shows how professional beauty standards and professional assumptions make the field of comedy and entertainment inhospitable for those who do not fit the standard conception of a comedian or leading lady. Ultimately, the differences between Fey's and Kaling's experiences show how building professional ethos in their memoirs also changes based on privileges that often go unstated by the one holding those privileges. However, all four comedians tell anecdotes that reveal the ways women must manage the sexist professional norms concerning women's appearances onstage and in front of the camera. In their rhetorical recounting of this management, they show the tension between feeling the need to consider these norms for the sake of professional opportunities and also defy them for the sake of their art and personal well-being.

Professional Environments

These writers' embodied professional ethos goes beyond what their bodies wear to their multiple woman-centered interpretations of precarious workplaces built on professional norms that are experienced differently by each comedian, due to their backgrounds and personal lives. As seen in these memoirs, the professional environment of comedy is especially precarious for those who do not fit the standard conception of the white male comedian. Haddish particularly notes how difficult it was for her to pursue stand-up comedy, as she has been without housing and in abusive relationships in the past. Her initial experiences with stand-up were as a hobby in high school: "I was too young to go real late, but they would let me go up on the eight o'clock show and get like five minutes.…And they would give me like ten or fifteen dollars. That was just enough to cover bus fare, but it was cool. I was getting paid to tell jokes" (34). However, she had to quit comedy when she was eighteen, as she was emancipated, without a home, and in need of a way to support herself. Haddish's articulation of professional structural inequities highlights

the challenges in making it as a professional in comedy, particularly if one is, like Haddish, a young Black woman without a support system. The lack of regular and fair compensation built into the stand-up comedy system keeps particular people from being able to participate, as scholars have articulated, ensuring that the same type of (white male) person with the same privileges continues to "make it" as a comedian, thus upholding standard conceptions of "the Comedian." However, the way the field is constructed can also make one's inability to succeed seem like a personal, professional, and creative failing. Haddish says, after she returns to the stage years later, "I had known this at fifteen, that [stand-up comedy] was my calling, and I had quit. And now here I was, telling my stories and hearing people laugh at them and feeling that rush again" (139). Haddish seems to indicate that she made the choice to quit when, from her storytelling, the decision seems made for her given her circumstances. In this section, Haddish presents herself as committed to the profession, despite challenges; however, she does not criticize the structure, beyond talking about how she personally was not paid enough to be able to continue doing it. In doing so, she demonstrates that tension that women, especially women of color, in comedy have to consider in the stories of their professional trajectories: they note the inequities, the ways the field alienates those who do not fit the standard or have access to the same resources, but they also pull back from critiquing the system too harshly, as they depend on it for their careers and community.

Another precarious aspect of the professional comedy environment involves travel and safety. To Ali Wong, performing as a stand-up comedian means putting her female body into various (often unfamiliar) places. She says, "Stand-up is extremely personal and requires you to leave your home and actually be on location. And the location is usually the back room of a Mexican restaurant in Carson. Or somebody's dog-poop-covered backyard in Silver Lake" (50). Wong says stand-up itself isn't hard; "it's everything else surrounding it that's so difficult" from

the travel to the preparation to "fending off creepy-ass men" and "steering clear of your idols and funny colleagues who you've learned tend to sexually harass women" (49). The difficulties and dangers she describes come from her embodied experience of stand-up comedy, one rooted in who she is as an Asian-American woman and comedian. Wong's theory about why there are not more female stand-up comedians is the lack of safety. For example, Wong points to the fact that traveling stand-ups ride in cars with strangers no fewer than four times per day. As Wong says, "For a man that's considered an adventure…. For a woman, though, it's four opportunities to get raped and/or killed" (51). The experience of new places and strange people comes with an overriding aspect of danger for women, which most male comedians would not generally have to consider. Wong's consideration of the actual material experience of stand-up—late nights, strange places, unfamiliar hosts—is inherently tied to her embodied experience, like many other women, of concern when alone and/or with a stranger, especially after dark. Her explanation of this to an audience of women, especially considering her identified audience of her two daughters, provides her with greater professional ethos, as she articulates the danger that she indicates likely contributes to the gender disparities in the profession but then does stand-up anyway. As she says, "You have to really love stand-up and embrace every shitty thing that comes along with it" (51).

The working hours of comedy are taxing, as evident in these memoirs. Kaling offhandedly refers to waiting backstage for someone to approve an outfit for a television episode until 11:00 PM (58), and Fey has an extensive chapter about the taxing schedule of a week when she played Sarah Palin on *Saturday Night Live*, an episode of *30 Rock* with Oprah, and planned her daughter's birthday party. Fey says, "Each of these events was equally important in my life" (202). Stand-up performances go late into the evenings, as Wong and Haddish relate. Haddish talks about how she attempted to keep normal business hours when she was in an abusive

relationship, only answering calls about her career between nine and five o'clock (188). She says this decision lost her some opportunities and was a sign of the controlling behaviors of her husband; however, her story also shows how survival in the comedy lifestyle relies on last-minute, late-night calls from friends in the community. Women who want to be successful in the field must become part of that system, though they often are dealing with other compounding challenges, such as fewer opportunities, abusive relationships, or balancing career and family.

Two of the comedians have children and talk about the challenge of being mothers and comedians. Fey talks about writing for *30 Rock* at night after shooting all day. She and the other show writers would work in her home until one or two in the morning, and Fey would watch her daughter sleep via video baby monitor. In one instance, the writers were present when her daughter went to bed, and they were still there when the child woke up in the morning.[63] While this process sounds exhausting, Fey notes, "These will definitely be my happiest memories of this time, because everything I cared about was within ten feet of me" (189). Fey focuses here on the communal process of writing. While this seems like a challenging setup for a young mother and a fledgling showrunner/writer/actor, Fey emphasizes the positives of the situation, presenting a professional ethos centered on acceptance of how the process works despite its conflicts with the embodied experiences of women, particularly mothers. A later chapter shows more uncertainty about her responsibilities to her work and her family, as Fey considers having a second child during what she considers to be the final years of her career, given her assessment of the sexism of the entertainment industry and the dearth of work for women over forty. Fey's decision is professional and communal as well as personal; she feels responsible for the people who work on her show, and she knows "the math is impossible. No matter how you add up the

[63] This story, mentioned in Fey's *Bossypants*, was confirmed by Kay Cannon, one of the writers of *30 Rock*, in Press's book *Stealing the Show* (142).

months, [having a baby] means derailing the TV show where two hundred people depend on me for their income" (274). She also feels responsible as a woman in comedy to leverage her power for others: "I feel obligated to stay in the business and try hard to get to a place where I can create opportunities for others, and that's why I can't possibly take time off for a second baby, unless I *do*, in which case that is nobody's business and I'll never regret it for a moment unless it ruins my life and now it's four o'clock in the morning" (272). This ambivalence is a woman-centered problem, as few men (if any) would have to make a similar calculation, in terms of both fertility and their professional opportunities. Interestingly, Fey chooses to end her book with this chapter, leaving her readers with a sense of equivocation and tension. In describing her embodied concerns in regard to her fertility and her career, Fey builds her professional ethos: she demonstrates her deep commitment to her career, while also showing how advancement in her career is at odds with her own biological functioning. The decision, ultimately, is hers, as the precarity of the field provides no assistance or support in making that decision for women and mothers.[64]

Wong also notes the professional challenge of having children as a stand-up comedian. She originally dreamed of being a stay-at-home mom, but changed her mind after the birth of her first daughter when she realized that staying at home makes a woman "entirely unqualified to do stand-up" because "when you take more than five evenings in a row off from doing stand-up sets, you risk becoming unfunny and out of touch" (45). Here she notes how the life of a stay-at-home mom is incompatible with being a comedian. Comedy requires time commitment and material, neither of which is easily accessible as a full-time mother. So, Wong addresses this tension between her family and her career by bringing her family with her on the road. She talks about how difficult and important it is for her. As she says to her daughters, "It's very uncommon

[64] Fey's second daughter was born four months after the publication of *Bossypants*.

for female comedians to tour with their children. But I wanted to bring both of you plus Daddy on the road because I didn't want to spend any nights apart" (118-119). Her husband eventually quits his job to support Wong's career and their children full-time. As she says, "Some days he comes first. Some days stand-up comes first. But you two girls *always* come first for both of us" (121). Wong's book, directed to an audience of her daughters, continues to confirm that for Wong, her family is of equal importance to her work, which means her husband stays with her children while Wong prioritizes her career. Wong indicates how this is atypical for a heterosexual couple and also how the profession itself does not easily allow for this type of lifestyle; however, as a woman and mother, she builds her professional ethos by indicating how she always puts her children first while also remaining committed to her profession, a rhetorical move that a male comedian would likely not feel the need to make in his memoir. However, in her assertion that her family is her top priority—though her career is also her top priority—Wong states that balancing the two lived experiences is worth it, though this balancing act adds challenges to her professional life and compounds the difficulties she experiences as a multiply marginalized individual in the field.

Overall, these women express their embodied challenges of working in the field of comedy, due to its professional structure that is often at odds with the lived experiences of women. However, while these women articulate the challenges they experience, they also demonstrate the ways they manage these challenges in order to fully participate in the career path they've chosen. They balance their critiques with their own solutions to the issues, solutions they had to develop themselves without formal, institutionalized professional assistance due to the comedy field's precarity and reliance on personal and professional connections for support.

Professional Relationships

Entertainment is an industry that relies less on a formal hiring application process and more on word-of-mouth and one-on-one relationships (Butler and Russell 1668). This practice results in a need for social connections and community, which can result in getting on the set list for a stand-up night to getting a job in the writers' room of a sitcom—the latter which is, for some, the Holy Grail due to its relative stability. However, these connections and ensuing acceptance into the community do not work the same for everyone. As Jeffries notes, "Building social capital and community is vital for getting the most out of the job, both emotionally and professionally. But the accumulation of social capital does not impact the careers of all comedy workers equally, and a social scene that privileges connections among men is damaging for women" (165). This (white) male privilege often manifests in a "hiring process [that] often relie[s] on current (white male) writers recommending their (white male) funny friends to be future (white male) writers" (Scovell 240). Changing this pattern is not an easy process, as it involves "dissolving cozy networks," as Joy Press says. She quotes Joey Soloway, the creator of the television show *Transparent*, "You are asking men to not hire the people they know and trust, people that make it easy for them because they have a shorthand. That is a pretty big ask for a lot of men who don't consider themselves racist or sexist but have comfortable systems in place for their professional and personal relationships" (qtd. in Press 285).[65] The ease and comfort of hiring one's friends—who frequently look, talk, and think the same—upholds a system of inequity for those who do not fit the white male mold, because who wants to take a chance on someone new and unfamiliar when a professional opportunity is at stake?

[65] In Press's book, Soloway is referred to by their previous name. Soloway announced their name to be Joey Soloway on June 27, 2020, and so I use their preferred name and pronouns here.

The precarity of the field can be both offset and reinforced by the networks of relationships involved within the field. However, for women in comedy, professional relationships, particularly with men, can be manipulative or abusive. Most of these memoirs indicate that at some point, most women in the field are provided with the option to exchange sexual acts for professional opportunities, whether this exchange is implicit or explicit. Haddish provides specific examples of men in the field—to whom she gives pseudonyms—who propositioned her. Fey reminds her readers that "talent is not sexually transmittable" on the first page of her memoir. And Wong tells her daughters, "I don't care how funny or beloved someone is. Take his ass down if he fucks with you. Don't let anyone pressure you into hooking up for fear that if you don't fuck them, he'll be angry and blackball you" (75). These women are clearly drawing from their own embodied experiences and knowledge in the field, a place where male comedians can be back onstage mere months after admitting to masturbating in front of women. Regardless, the writers indicate this issue within the field has yet to be eliminated, and so a professional woman comedian must be prepared for how to deal with it. Wong, however, is the one who encourages a public approach, indicating that women can take down powerful men. Given that her memoir was published after the #MeToo movement came to be, her response is more aggressive than the others', showing a belief in women's collective power—though how much that power has really shifted can still be debated.

The memoirs highlight specific connections and relationships that help build their writers' ethos. An obvious form of professional connections is with friends and mentors who are public figures in their own way, whether part of comedy or the entertainment business more broadly. These professional relationships are with both men and women, particularly given the time period these women were coming to prominence. Even though women's power in the entertainment industry was rising, women in high-powered positions were still few and far

between. Jenny Bicks, who was a television showrunner in the early 2000s, states, "Very few of us had female mentors. If you are a showrunner who started when I did, there were a few women...but it was pretty much all men" (qtd. in Press 289). As such, women point to powerful men as friends and mentors. However, strong female bosses can make a huge difference in women's conceptions of their professional fields. For instance, Wong talks about the maternity leave she received working as a writer on the sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat,* where the showrunner Nahnatchka Khan told her to take as much time off as she needed. Wong says maternity leave is only accessible for a woman "if she has the right boss" and not an option for stand-up comedians (43). However, this anecdote is an example of how having a woman in charge can change the embodied experience one has in a professional field, given the boss's understanding of navigating the comedy environment as a woman.

While all four memoirists have examples of friends and mentors they highlight in their memoirs, Fey and Haddish make particular references to famous individuals who have shaped their work, both men and women, and they highlight the different types of support they receive. Two examples Fey focuses on are not surprising for anyone familiar with her work. First is Lorne Michaels, creator and producer of *Saturday Night Live* and other late night talk shows. Michaels is one of the key nodes in the web of late night comedy, and he frequently promotes from within, as Fey notes (197). For instance, he moved her from the writers' room to the Weekend Update desk, executive produced her television show, and asked her to play Sarah Palin. At one point, Fey outlines the transitions in her relationship with Michaels:

> During my nine years at *Saturday Night Live*, my relationship with Lorne transitioned from "Terrified Pupil and Reluctant Teacher" to "Small-Town Girl and Streetwise Madame Showing Her the Ropes" to "Annie and Daddy Warbucks (touring company)" to one of mutual respect and friendship. Then it transitioned to "Sullen Teenage Girl and

> Generous Stepfather,“ then to “Mr. and Mrs. Michael Jackson,“ then, for a brief period, to “Boy Who Doesn’t Believe in Christmas and Recluse Neighbor Who Proves that Miracles Are Possible,“ then back to mutual respect and friendship again. (121)

Fey does not explore these different transitions, but her litany outlines the various ways that professional relationships grow and change. She also has a chapter discussing the various lessons she learned from Michaels, everything from “producing is about discouraging creativity” to “never cut to a closed door” (121, 127). In her explanation of her relationship with a key figure in North American televised comedy, she does more than articulate their connection; she demonstrates that she learned from him and applied those lessons in other situations, while also expressing the professional opportunities his support provided for her. However, she does not critique the idea that Michaels promotes from within, given that she has benefited from this professional relationship. As stated earlier, *Saturday Night Live* has had few people of color in its cast, and as such, Michaels’s ways of operating has led to his support of many white comedians and fewer comedians of color, and many male comedians and fewer female comedians (though the gender ratio has changed somewhat since the early 2000s). Fey’s professional ethos is assisted by her connection with Michaels and the opportunities he has provided to her, though this connection has its limitations. In her reflections on the workplace of *Saturday Night Live*, which is Michaels’s largest legacy in American comedy, Fey implies that his mentorship cannot help her navigate all elements of comedy culture, given her embodiment as a (white) woman.

In contrast to her mentoring relationship with Michaels is Fey’s relationship with fellow comedian Amy Poehler, who Fey met at Second City in Chicago before either of them were the public figures they are today. At that time, she recalls Poehler being frustrated with “being handed dated old blonde girl roles,” an anecdote which foreshadows the chapter that is “one in a series of love letters to Amy Poehler” (144). In this love letter, Fey recounts Jimmy Fallon,

"arguably the star of [*Saturday Night Live*] at the time," responding to something vulgar Poehler had done by saying, "Stop that! It's not cute! I don't like it" (143). Poehler is new to *Saturday Night Live*, but she immediately shoots back, "I don't fucking care if you like it" (143). While Fey notes that Poehler and Fallon remain good friends, she also says, "with that exchange, a cosmic shift took place" (144). Fey instantly felt less alone. While Poehler had no professional capital to share with Fey, as Michaels did, she instead provides emotional and mental support to Fey when she speaks against male monitoring of her speech and actions, despite being new to a workplace, and critiques a famous comedian whose main draw is his playful likability. In sharing this story, Fey crafts a version of Poehler that speaks to the embodied challenges of the comedic workplace and the ways that community may sublimate some people's experiences to create order and the appearance of unity. Fey also identifies how the speaking out of a colleague can result in a greater sense of camaraderie among marginalized individuals, a different kind of support than she receives from Michaels. However, it is worth noting that Poehler's response did not seem to result in any lost professional opportunities, as she went on to be highly successful at *Saturday Night Live*; this might make a reader wonder if a multiply marginalized individual would experience greater consequences from speaking in this particular way. Regardless, Fey shows the differing support she received through professional relationships, while again showing the tension between identifying herself as part of a flagship comedic property and also reflecting it as an often unwelcoming workplace.

Haddish's examples are also familiar to anyone who has paid attention to American pop culture in the 2010s, and they also show the different support she has received from professional relationships. One relationship is with actor and comedian Kevin Hart, who she calls her "comedy guardian angel" for helping her find an apartment when she was living in her car (221). However, the story itself demonstrates interesting aspects of Hart's help. First of all, in

Haddish's recollection of the conversation, Hart's initial comment is that she's too beautiful to be living in her car, for "any dude will be happy to let you live in his house" (221). Haddish replies that she's "not fucking for a roof" (221). Hart gives her $300 for a hotel room for the week, which Haddish informs him is not enough money for a week at a hotel. Then he tells her to write out a list of goals, and the first thing she writes is her own apartment. Hart finds one for her, and even though it's in a terrible neighborhood, Haddish has "this weird feeling—this place is secure. It's safe" (222). She takes the apartment and still has it; "the neighborhood is actually really nice now" (222). While Hart provides Haddish with necessary support so she can continue her professional work, the type of support he provides reveals a disconnect between the embodied experiences of Hart and Haddish. Though both are Black comedians, Haddish has a set of experiences that Hart cannot draw upon. Haddish clearly is grateful for Hart's support, but she articulates how far Hart is from the material realities of being a young stand-up comedian—especially a woman—without a support system. The solutions he has are professionally inappropriate, temporary at best, and fiscally inadequate. Hart, as a key figure in comedy, could use his influence to shape the system that keeps Black woman comedians like Haddish from being able to support themselves; however, instead, he supports an individual Black woman comedian in (arguably) less than supportive ways. However, Haddish still uses this connection to build her ethos, both in relaying her connection with Hart but also in how she advocated for herself at a time when other comedians might have just taken his advice and initial offers as enough. Haddish's story emphasizes how the comedy community can rally around those in need when necessary, but this does not fix the ways the inequities in stand-up comedy are felt more acutely by those with intersecting embodied identities and oppressions.

Haddish also explores her friendship with Jada Pinkett Smith, who she met on the set of the 2017 movie *Girls Trip.* Smith frequently seems delighted with Haddish's unfamiliarity with

expensive wines and labels, and she tells Haddish to wear better clothing and makeup. Smith seems to be attempting to teach Haddish the ways of Hollywood, providing the insights she's gained over her decades in the spotlight to help Haddish's star rise. Haddish says that "what Jada is teaching [her] is that how you look in Hollywood can often make you money. Opportunities in Hollywood will open up if you are sending the right signals about yourself" (265). In a different way from Hart, Smith provides Haddish with necessary lessons to make it in the professional field, particularly as a Black woman. Her advice counters much of what Haddish has learned and experienced given her upbringing, but Haddish points to Smith as a highly successful woman in the entertainment business who is in possession of a valuable professional ethos.[66] As such, Haddish's rhetorical moves of pointing to specific advice from Smith, along with repeated references to the differences between how Smith and Haddish see the world, once again demonstrate the challenges of developing a professional ethos for a woman comedian, particularly one with embodied economic and racial experiences of discrimination. Haddish presents herself as a Hollywood novice who is willing to learn and grateful for the professional support of Smith, but in her learning—and the ways she pushes back in incredulity against Smith's advice before acquiescing—she reveals how the heights of the entertainment profession, specifically Hollywood stardom, are difficult to attain for those with particular backgrounds, identities, and embodiments.

Professional Funny Women

Lindy West argues in her chapter on rape jokes and comedy culture, "Art isn't indiscriminate shit-flinging. It's pure communication, crafted with intention and care. Every comedian on every stage is saying what he's saying on purpose. So shouldn't we be welcome to

[66] While Smith would likely not consider herself a professional comedian, her career does run parallel to that of comedy. She has acted in a number of comedy movies, and she is married to an actor who was on a popular comedy sitcom in the 1990s. She herself acted in the sitcom *In Living Color* in the early 1990s.

examine that purpose, contextualize it within our culture at large, and critique what we find?" (166). The scholarly community of women's rhetoric should answer that with a resounding "yes." And jokes are not the only element of a comedian's rhetorical corpus through which to understand how the comedy world functions, as evidenced in the memoirs of women comedians who use memoir to contextualize their embodied experiences within a culture. By examining their articulations of themselves as professionals, we see the field through their eyes—eyes that are part of bodies that move through the world and garner authority, or not, in specific ways.

In their memoirs, Tina Fey, Mindy Kaling, Tiffany Haddish, and Ali Wong all develop embodied professional ethē that carefully walk the tightrope between demonstrating their commitment to the community of the profession and critiquing it for not creating space for their intersectional embodied experiences. For all four professionals, the knowledge they have of the stage is an intersectional woman's knowledge, with the understanding of the danger inherent to being a woman in the world. White male comedians would likely make no mention in their memoirs of safety and danger, or how relationships both help and harm them, or the impact that having another child might have on their careers. They might not even see the value in writing a memoir at all. However, for many women, and these four comedians in particular, these issues are at the forefront of their minds, and the memoir genre invites them to describe their embodied experiences in their chosen professional field, as well as discuss what those experiences mean for their careers. In their critiques, though, occasionally they lack an awareness of their own privileges that make the comedy field easier to navigate, and often they focus more on their personal management of the inequities, rather than advocating for large-scale changes to their professional fields.

Ultimately, women's rhetorics can gain insight from the rhetorical maneuvers performed by these women to develop their professional ethos by balancing critique with commitment.

These memoirs demonstrate how a woman's rhetorical interpretation of her profession comes from her embodied experience, both within that field and outside of it. They show how carefully comedians must articulate their relationships with the people in the field and the field itself, not wanting to seem too critical, but also not wanting to ignore the issues that are omnipresent and increasingly public. As such, their memoirs demonstrate a rhetorical tension through which these comedians articulate their professional successes alongside the aspects of the field that work against women and their intersectional identities.

Scholars and readers can understand the field of comedy through memoir in a way that they cannot by watching stand-up specials or episodes of *Saturday Night Live*. In their memoirs, women share how they perceive the field and how they see themselves fitting into that field. Both stand-up comedians and company comedians alike relate how difficult it is to be women in comedy, but also articulate their deep commitment to and love for the form and the field. It is a place of safety and comfort, challenge and joy for these women, even while being a place of frustration, danger, and microaggressions. Through their often funny stories of community and frustrating stories of inequality, these comedians present themselves as members of the comedy profession who plan to continue their work. And, to quote Amy Poehler, these women don't fucking care if men like it.

CHAPTER 6
NOT GOING HOME:
THE UPTAKE OF PROFESSIONAL CHRISTIAN WOMEN'S ETHOS

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be submissive, as also says the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is shameful for women to speak in the church." – 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, KJV

"Go home." This brief response was given by noted evangelical pastor John MacArthur at a 2019 conference when, as part of an onstage word association game, he was asked to provide his gut reaction to the name "Beth Moore." The majority of the audience got it right away; they knew exactly who Beth Moore was and why he gave that response. Beth Moore is an evangelist, writer, and teacher who is no stranger to controversy. As one of the most famous Christian women in America, she has always struck a delicate balance in her work. Her ministry focuses on speaking to and teaching women, which is all she can do as a woman in a conservative evangelical denomination like the Southern Baptist Convention, which traditionally interprets sacred Christian text as denying women the ability to teach men. Despite these limitations, Moore was the first woman to publish a Bible study through LifeWay, a large Christian retailer and publishing house, and her Bible studies, conferences, and television appearances became extremely popular, meaning that she has reached millions of women—and probably a few men, too (Green). Moore also became increasingly vocal about the damage of evangelical leaders' support of then-candidate Donald Trump after the 2016 *Access Hollywood* tapes revelation. However, what really seemed to frustrate MacArthur in 2019 was that the previous summer, Moore had spoken (some might say preached) to a mixed-gender crowd at a megachurch on a Sunday morning in May—Mother's Day, to be precise (Smietana, "Accusing"). While Moore had mostly tread the line required of professional evangelical women for thirty years, this public rhetorical action pushed MacArthur over the edge.

MacArthur's terse response— "Go home" —has dual shades of meaning, ones that would have been caught by his evangelical audience. Not only should Moore leave the professional sphere of MacArthur and his peers, but she should return to the home, long considered the rightful place of the Christian woman. MacArthur perpetuated traditional conservative viewpoints of the woman's role in the family, the church, and society, asserting that the profession of ministry remains inaccessible to women. The blowback on social media was intense, and J. D. Greear, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, responded on Twitter by saying that Moore was "welcome in our home any time." However, Greear's tweeted support of Moore invites her to his home—not to speak at his church. His statement implies that MacArthur's response was offensive in its rudeness but says nothing about its theological and social implications.[67]

The tensions between interpretations of Christian scripture and the capabilities of women are at the center of discussions about women as professionals in Protestant Christian ministry.[68] To oversimplify, there are generally two theological perspectives concerning women in ministry that spawn a multitude of practices that vary between denominations, congregations, and individuals. A complementarian theology prescribes separate gendered spheres for men and women that complement each other, based in a literalist interpretation of Christian scripture, and thus women are primarily allowed to teach other women or young children; this perspective is a hallmark of traditional evangelical denominations.[69] In contrast, mainline denominations, such as

[67] On March 5, 2021, Beth Moore revealed in an interview that she feels she "can no longer identify with Southern Baptists." She also dissolved her partnership with LifeWay Christian Resources (Smietana, "Bible").
[68] In this chapter, I focus on the Protestant church. The Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have more prescribed church hierarchies and thus require women who feel called to the ministry to take on different roles than in the Protestant church.
[69] The term "evangelicalism" is also contended. For their definition, Cope and Ringer use David Bebbington's quadrilateral: conversionism, biblicism, activism, and crucicentrism (107). Kate Bowler focuses on scripture, conversion, revivalism, and subculture in her book's definition of evangelical (xv). Sharon Crowley differentiates between fundamentalists and evangelicals by asserting fundamentalists insist on uniformity of belief in their congregations and clear separation from secular culture (103); many evangelicals are fundamentalists, but not all.

the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the Episcopalian Church, tend toward a more egalitarian theology, arguing particular scriptures disallowing women in ministry have been misinterpreted and taken out of context; capable women, therefore, should have the same leadership opportunities as men.[70] As such, mainline denominations have been more open, in theory, to the ordination of women into ministerial roles, though research shows they have been less supportive in practice. For instance, a 2012 survey about the composition of religious congregations across the nation showed that while 57.7% of congregations indicated that they felt a qualified woman could be a church's primary religious leader, 88.6% of congregations were still led by men (National Congregations Study). While professional roles for women in mainstream Christianity differ from subculture to subculture, women still find themselves professionally limited in most of these subcultures for religious, social, and cultural reasons.

Despite these constraints, women have developed professional ethos as leaders, even in Christian cultures in which women are not allowed to lead. As historian Kate C. Bowler notes in her book *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities,* women have gained prominence as pastor's wives, co-founders of churches (in name primarily), and leaders of women's ministries in communities in which they are not allowed to hold professional leadership positions. These women often function outside of the bounds of traditional religious institutions, branding their sermons as "biblical teaching" and their biblical exegesis as "women's devotionals." In doing so, they avoid defining themselves as professionals in institutional Christianity; instead, they locate their ministry or their experiences outside of the

[70] For a brief primer on the differing views, see Alyssa Roat's article "What Are Complementarianism and Egalitarianism?" More scholarly treatments can be found in Kirk McGregor's *Contemporary Theology: An Introduction* and Mikee C. Delony's chapter on "Separate Spheres and Complementarianism in American Christianity" in *Sex, Gender, and Christianity.*

sanctuary walls in megachurch or parachurch ministries. They are writers, speakers, or teachers; they are not pastors. This (rhetorical) move avoids the theological and hierarchical debates, for "the reasoning goes: she is not a pastor if her audience is not a church" (Bowler 17-18)—and if her audience is primarily women. This redefinition has been common for hundreds of years; as Roxanne Mountford notes, many early American women preached as "evangelists or itinerant preachers (sometimes to avoid the prejudices against women preaching, they called themselves 'exhorters')" (12). Christian women frequently use rhetorical creativity to make their audiences comfortable with the religious work they do.

One way professional Christian women justified their authority during the decade of the 2010s was by explaining their professional roles through rhetorical genres that focus on personal experience, like the memoir, in order to invite their audiences to take up expanded conceptions of women's professional roles in Christian organizations.[71] Through professional memoirs, writers work to reveal and adapt generalized professional qualities in order to make space for the embodied experiences of professional women in the field of Protestant Christianity. These memoirs show how women "take this understanding of 'subordinate status,' relative to knowledge of the entire communicative landscape, and use it to craft a viable ethos for participation in a dominant public," as Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones articulate in their explanation of ecological ethos (4). By recognizing and working within their tenuous positions, these writers demonstrate how their professional ethē are highly entangled in the ecological network of evangelical Christianity, which is both public and private, inclusive and exclusive, in the world and sometimes of the world (to misquote a Christian scripture).[72] This adaptation of professional ethos is then taken up by audiences, both Christian and non-

[71] I am defining a "Christian organization" as one that has values, mission, or practice explicitly based on Christian scriptures and/or praxis, examples being churches, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations.
[72] The original "Christianese" phrase is "in, not of, the world," and that, too, is an adaption of Christian scripture, specifically John 17:14-17, but also John 15:19 and John 18:36.

Christian, as reflected in reader reviews. These memoirs provide women's rhetoric scholars with knowledge of how women rhetorically construct their professional selves within a culture often suspicious of their authority, and how readers respond both positively and negatively.

The writers of the three professional memoirs analyzed in this chapter—Austin Channing Brown, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and Katie Davis—occupy common professional roles for religious figures in institutional Christianity: the nonprofit leader/consultant, the pastor, and the missionary. However, as women, they craft their ethos to convince their audiences that they can and should hold these professional roles. Austin Channing Brown explicitly addresses the overwhelming whiteness of Protestant Christian culture in her 2018 memoir *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*. As a Black[73] woman who worked as a diversity consultant in primarily white organizations, churches, and schools, Channing Brown refers to her experiences as examples of how diversity in white spaces, especially churches, often means assimilation into whiteness and continued macro and microaggressions toward Black women and other people of color. Nadia Bolz-Weber is a white, tattooed Lutheran pastor leading a congregation that is LGBTQ+ affirming,[74] which—at the time *Pastrix* was published in 2013—was fairly uncommon among public Christians.[75] She writes about her calling to minister to "her

[73] In Austin Channing Brown's memoir, she capitalizes Black but not white, and so I will follow her lead. See footnote in chapter one.

[74] The term "affirming" as it relates to faith communities and LGBTQ+ persons has been used since at least 1985, when the United Church of Christ's general synod drafted a resolution that urged UCC congregations to "Declare Themselves Open and Affirming." In opposition, many non-affirming churches use the language of being "welcoming" and tolerant, though many in the LGBTQ+ community have pushed back against that rhetoric as hiding the violence done when an individual's whole self is not accepted (or affirmed) within a faith community. The website openandaffirming.org has more information about terminology. There are varying levels of affirmation by churches, including inviting LGBTQ+ individuals to become members, lay leaders, or pastors; performing gay marriages; and having specific policies of non-discrimination; different churches in the same denomination may hold different official or unofficial positions on the issue, regardless of the denominational stance. Networks have emerged within and across denominations for affirming congregations to pool resources. For example, the Baptist church of which I am a member is part of the Alliance of Baptists. See more about affirming denominations and networks at https://www.gaychurch.org/affirming-denominations/.

[75] In the years since Bolz-Weber's memoir was published, more public progressive Christians have come out as allies of the LGBTQ+ community. See more at Jonathan Parks-Ramage's 2018 *Medium* article "Can You Be Queer and Christian?"

people" after a history of addiction and rejection of Christianity, and she describes how a cranky, sarcastic, often misanthropic woman pastor leads a congregation full of outcasts. Katie Davis holds a more traditionally feminized professional role in the church, that of the single, white, female missionary.[76] Davis's 2011 memoir, *Kisses from Katie*, details how Davis became a full-time missionary and adoptive mother to fourteen young girls before she turned twenty-two. These three memoirs are quite different in tone, content, and purpose, yet they all function as professional memoirs within Protestant Christian workplaces.

In this chapter, I argue that women working in Protestant Christianity use their professional memoirs to advocate for expanded and alternative conceptions of the Christian professional through specific qualities they present as key components of their professional ethē: Brown as forthright and embodied, Bolz-Weber as edgy and qualified, and Davis as young and willing. Examining the uptake of these qualities through Goodreads reviews by audiences shows how professional memoirs can prompt different reading communities to adapt their understanding of what constitutes a professional in a religious workplace. To examine these memoirs' rhetorical constructions of professional ethos and ensuing uptake, I first explore the history of spiritual memoir and the Christian Industrial Complex, as these two histories frame the reception of these memoirs. Next, I define uptake and circulation in regard to cultural ideas about professional women, and I explain my methods of data collection through Goodreads. Then, I look at each writer's ethos construction in her professional memoir and the uptake of her traditional and non-traditional professional qualities as reflected in readers' Goodreads reviews. As these women craft their professional ethos, drawing on their intersectional identities as a source of power in their professional lives, the reviews demonstrate how different audiences take

[76] Davis got married in 2015, changing her name to Katie Davis Majors. Recent reprints of the book have had her married name on the cover, along with an updated biography in which she notes her marital status.

up these writers' professional qualities—and expand conceptions of the professional in the often white-male-dominated public sphere of Protestant Christianity.

Spiritual Memoir in the Christian Industrial Complex

Spiritual memoir was one of the earliest forms of life writing, and women have participated in that rhetorical tradition for hundreds of years. Early incarnations of the subgenre by female mystics like Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen told the stories of their religious encounters and spiritual journeys, and Margery Kempe's Book, dictated in 1431, is considered "the earliest extant autobiography in English" (Glenn 104).[77] As Cheryl Glenn says, "Women's visionary or mystical writings were an acceptable avenue of literacy and communication in a medieval world that otherwise discouraged women's academic literacy" (93). These women paved the way for Teresa of Avila and Madame Guyon, who wrote about their spiritual lives a century later using "autobiographical practice [as] an alternative form of education," valuing self-knowledge when the church did not allow women to gain formal education (Smith and Watson, *Reading* 108). In the nineteenth century, women used spiritual autobiography in a "passive, nonthreatening way" to justify their call to preach; despite their unconventional arguments, their use of the genre was an "expected and acceptable discursive practice" for women (Zimmerelli 187). These women are examples of religious Christian women writing about their lives through a spiritual lens, presenting a God-given ethos that gave them the right to speak. This tradition continues in contemporary women writing spiritual memoirs, such as writers Sarah Bessey and Jen Hatmaker who "destabilize" traditional evangelical rhetoric in both their memoirs and blog writing (Mannon 143). These women build on a legacy of using familiar genres to make arguments about their abilities. Women have authored devotionals, self-

[77] Kempe dictated her autobiography twice: once around 1431 and again around 1436. See Cheryl Glenn's "Medieval Rhetoric" chapter in *Rhetoric Retold.*

help books, exhortations, Bible studies, and general spiritual memoirs, and these women-authored texts reflect the complexity of the woman's place in the Christian church writ large.

However, few of these writers would consider themselves a professional in a religious institution, and as such, professional memoirs written by women are rather few, especially in comparison to the professional fields of politics and comedy I explore in earlier chapters. Many women who write spiritual memoirs serve the church in non-professional roles, as most churches rely on the labor of laypeople and volunteers. However, many churches also need professionals in order to remain in operation, professionals who schedule rooms and events, decide which ministries get funds, and manage teams of employees and laypeople, all with layers of theology and spirituality to maneuver. Except in particular circumstances, historically women have not been called or permitted to do this professional work, as dictated by a complementarian reading of the Bible and the church's traditional patriarchal structure. As such, there are few published memoirs by women who write about being religious professionals in established ministries.

In her book *The Preacher's Wife,* historian (and memoirist)[78] Kate C. Bowler charts a different sort of "professional woman," chronicling the evolution and adaptation of women's influence and celebrity in Protestant Christian spaces, including historically Black denominations, churches affiliated with the prosperity gospel, white evangelicalism, mainline denominations, and megachurches/megaministries. Bowler demonstrates how women have impacted wider Christian culture despite being barred from traditional influential (and rhetorical) participation within the church, namely preaching and pastoring. She focuses on the largest names, the biggest draws, and the most popular celebrities in evangelical Christian culture, charting how the roles of women have changed over the past century in five roles with different

[78] Bowler is herself a memoirist, penning an excellent memoir in 2018, *Everything Happens for a Reason (and Other Lies I've Loved),* that chronicles her diagnosis with stage IV colon cancer.

professional qualities: the Preacher, the Homemaker, the Talent, the Counselor, and the Beauty. As is often the case, these parachurch roles have both provided women opportunities and constrained them. Bowler notes:

> Celebrity Christian women must live in the ambiguity of competing claims on their lives. Spiritually, they are called to transcend worldly concerns and even their own desires to clothe themselves with divine knowledge, paradigmatic virtue, and the gospel's story of the redemption of the world. But with their feet planted on this side of heaven, they are also products of institutional and cultural expectations with long-standing customs and prescriptions as well as a marketplace propelled by an exacting pragmatism that presses them toward results-driven metrics and messages. (xii-xiii)

This tension between spiritual and market concerns contextualizes what well-known Christian women can and attempt to do in their ministry work. These concerns are doubly present for women who hold established professional roles in the field of Christianity, as these forces impact both the women's actual work and how they present that work—and themselves—in the rhetoric they produce. The concerns compound further for women who are multiply marginalized.

Progressive Christian writer Shane Claiborne ties economic market concerns to "the Christian Industrial Complex" in a Christmas 2011 blog post about commercialism and Christian bookstores. Claiborne notes how these small businesses tap into an American militarism in order to survive the recession but then points to a bigger problem: a religious consumerism, which scholars have noted emerged out of post-WWII consumer culture and is marked by products, virtue-signaling, and a focus on whiteness, despite the racial diversity in American Christianity (Bowler xvi, Cope and Ringer 118). Bowler identifies this consumer culture as part of the rise of "megaministry" — "a tangled series of networks of the largest evangelical and pentecostal churches, denominations, parachurch organizations, Christian publishing companies, record

labels, and television and radio networks" (2). The Christian Industrial Complex and the professional world associated with it exist within a framework of white evangelicalism, also privileging maleness, heterosexuality, and the middle-upper class; this is the framework within which these professional memoirs are published and these writers present themselves as professionals.

I am well acquainted with the white evangelical Christian Industrial Complex. I grew up as a white, Midwestern, evangelical pastor's kid, listening to the Christian boyband Plus One when my classmates were listening to *NSYNC and the Backstreet Boys. I recall rushing into Crossroads, the small Christian bookstore in my hometown of Sioux Falls, South Dakota,[79] with birthday money to buy the latest Christian rock CD and a new Christian romance novel (no bodices ripped in these texts). I know from experience that Christianity—particularly white evangelicalism—is big business, especially in terms of publishing. While Christian rock and romance rarely win industry awards, faith-based nonfiction books regularly make the *New York Times* best seller lists, whether they are books on prayer or memoirs by Christians,[80] and they have thousands of reader reviews on Goodreads and Amazon.

All three of the memoirs analyzed in this chapter have some connection to the Christian Industrial Complex. They were all national best sellers, and they were all released by publishing houses with some connection to an evangelical mass-market culture, either as smaller Christian publishing companies (Jericho Books) or faith-affiliated imprints of larger companies (Howard Books, part of Simon and Schuster, and Convergent, part of Penguin Random House).

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[79] A recent Google search indicates that Crossroads is still serving the Sioux Falls community, as it has for over 40 years. However, other large Christian bookstore chains, such as LifeWay and Family Christian, have struggled, and some have gone out of business. For more information, see the *Christianity Today* podcast episode "The Christian Bookstore Chain is Dead. What Comes Next?" (M. Lee).

[80] For the week of Feb. 21, 2021, half of the nonfiction books on the Advice, How-To and Miscellaneous Nonfiction *New York Times* best seller list were affiliated in some way with Christian culture, from the classic *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman to the brand new *That Sounds Fun* by Annie F. Downs and *Learning to Pray* by James Martin, S.J.

Considering the larger Christian Industrial Complex and its ties to patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy helps to frame how these women craft themselves, their professional qualities, and their professional workplaces through their memoirs. Additionally, looking at uptake of particular audiences who self-select these memoirs as part of their reading lists provides insight into the ways readers consume and circulate particular qualities of the professional woman in the Protestant Christian workplace, prompting them to consider alternative conceptions of what a high-profile Christian leader might look or act like.

The Rhetorical Use of Uptake

When looking at women's spiritual memoirs, scholars tend to focus on the words on the page; however, scholars can evaluate the impact of a writer's ethos construction by examining the uptake of a writer's ethos among actual readers, whether they are professional reviewers or amateur reading publics. As Mack and Alexander say, "Uptake and circulation—how memoirs are taken up, affirmed, challenged, and refuted—make apparent the choices the memoirist has made. This movement away from the memoirist's own interiority allows for perspectives that complicate the voice and norms that the memoir produces (and reproduces)" (55). Uptake analyzes how reader responses to particular texts reflect cultural conceptions of gender, race, and other constructs that impact how ethos is built between readers and authors. As I discuss in chapter two, these ideas of genre and ethos uptake are connected to the feminist rhetorical practice of social circulation, which explores "how ideas resonate, divide, and are expressed" throughout time, space, and culture (Royster and Kirsch 101). Both uptake and social circulation consider how a text works in the world among readers and how readers speak back to the text, allowing scholars to consider the text's impacts within a culture. For a genre like professional memoir, which contextualizes individual working lives within a larger cultural context,

analyzing uptake can provide a greater rhetorical understanding of the culture within which the memoir was produced.

However uptake is measured, it's never comprehensive. As Peter Medway writes, "'Apprehension of uptake' is always an imaginative and constructive act" (145). Uptake can only show part of the overall impact of a text on its readers; we can never hear from every single reader, and reviews and reactions are also rhetorically constructed, subject to cultural norms in similar ways that the original text was. However, examining examples of uptake can provide insight that can be extrapolated into an understanding of how these texts are read or what is deemed an appropriate response to the text in that cultural moment, based in patterns of responses and context. In the case of women's professional memoirs, we can see how readers respond to the qualities of the woman professional as presented in these memoirs and how readers' affirmation or challenging of these professional constructions reflects wider cultural conceptions of public working women within both a particular and a generalized societal workspace. The picture of the uptake will only ever be partial, but even in its partial state, it can help rhetoricians examine how the reading public is taking up the ideas and rhetorical choices within memoir.

To look at this cultural uptake in the case of professional women in the professional Christian workplace, I examine reviews composed and posted by the reading public on Goodreads, a free social media site on which users can catalogue and review books, as well as track what their "friends" are reading and reviewing. An easily accessible site like Goodreads provides data from the reading public, broadly construed, who have a variety of ideological and theological perspectives on these memoirs and their writers. This information provides a broader understanding of the different communities that select these books to read and, further, feel

compelled to write reviews about them. Both processes provide insight into the professional values of different reading communities.

Goodreads, which was launched in 2007 and purchased by Amazon in 2013, boasts over 90 million members and 90 million book reviews (Goodreads, "About"). Users can post reviews, comment on others' reviews, and rate books on a five-star system. The Goodreads site is open about how its reviews are not entirely democratic. For instance, the site allows "harsh critical statements that apply to the book or the writing in it" but not any reviews of the author and their behavior or personal life. Any abuse, Goodreads says, "might cause your review to receive a lower priority in our internal ranking system, which may affect whether or not your review appears on the book page" (Goodreads, "Review"). These guidelines are meant to prevent harassment, but they also give a clue to the site's internal logic. The reviews that appear on the top of a book's page are more likely to be read, liked, and commented upon, therefore solidifying their spot at the top of the page.

In this study, I examined the first twenty Goodreads reviews for each book I discuss, which are located on the front page of the book's Goodreads site due to likes and comments on the reviews by other readers. These comments may have been published shortly after the book was published, or they may be more recent. In these twenty reviews, I looked for strong responses to the ethos presented in each book. These reviews are not necessarily representative of all readers and their uptake; rather, these reviews display how these memoirs function as rhetorical texts through which professional women craft their ethos, affecting readers and the culture at large as they do. By examining reader uptake on Goodreads, we can see how reading communities rhetorically respond to the professional qualities presented by these three women in their professional memoirs, demonstrating readers' understanding of what constitutes a religious professional in Protestant Christianity.

The Uptake of Women's Professional Christian Roles

In their memoirs, Austin Channing Brown, Nadia Bolz-Weber, and Katie Davis locate themselves as professionals within the larger Protestant Christian church, addressing the tensions between gender, work, and Christian faith. The writers define their own version of their professional role by emphasizing qualities they present as professional. Channing Brown emphasizes being forthright and professionally embodied; Bolz-Weber highlights being edgy and qualified; and Davis foregrounds being young and willing. The ways the authors embody these qualities are tied to their intersectional identities as Christian professionals and women. The qualities of these memoirists' professional ethē may be atypical for a Christian professional but assist them in broadening and challenging traditional white male conceptions of the role of religious professional and the religious profession itself. Audiences pick up and circulate these writers' professional ethē in their reviews, both in how they react to these professional constructions and how they respond to others' critiques of the book. Overall, attending to both the ethos construction of these high-profile professional women in Protestant Christianity and their reader reviews on Goodreads shows how readers take up the professional qualities presented by writers, adapting their conception of what constitutes a religious professional as they do.

Austin Channing Brown: Forthright and Embodied

> *White people can be exhausting.* (Channing Brown 11)

Austin Channing Brown begins her 2018 memoir, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness,* with these words, only needing five to articulate her experiences in

the world of (white) Christian organizations in which she is often the only Black individual.[81] In this well-received professional memoir, Channing Brown presents herself as professionally forthright and embodied in ways that may be less common for women professionals, particularly those who are multiply marginalized and particularly those in faith-based Christian workplaces. She does this by explaining the patterns of micro and macro aggressions she experiences as a Black woman in a white workspace. In doing so, she prompts BIPOC readers to share how they identify with her experiences and white readers to indicate how she has revealed new conceptions of the workplace they had not considered before. She also centers the Black embodied experiences in those spaces, and in response, she receives criticism through Goodreads that re-centers the white experience or challenges her authority. Her professional memoir demonstrates a professional ethos based in being forthright and clearly embodied in the workplace, which for some readers—primarily Black readers—prompts solidarity and for other readers prompts an expanded understanding of both the discriminations of the workplace and possibilities for religious professionals. Overall, Channing Brown's memoir and her audiences' responses demonstrate that forthright and embodied Black women can and should be religious professionals in Protestant Christian environments.

Channing Brown's memoir begins with her early experiences in a predominantly white Ohio suburb, her education in predominantly white religious institutions, and her experiences working in predominantly white religious organizations. She also describes formative experiences in the Black church, college courses, and a bus tour of the deep South's racist heritage, during which she noted vastly different reactions between her white classmates and classmates of color. These experiences are foundational for her time working in religiously

[81] In an interview, Channing Brown revealed that she "take[s] great delight in how much that first sentence resonates with people of color and makes white people smile. I didn't really know if that first sentence would kill sales, you know?" (Guyton).

affiliated organizations, and she recounts experiences of discrimination and racism she has in white-centered workplaces. Her memoir was released to wide acclaim in 2018, resulting in a position on the Amazon best seller list and recognition from Chelsea Clinton, Brené Brown, and progressive Christian writers such as Rachel Held Evans and Jen Hatmaker. With about 9,500 ratings and 1,257 reviews on Goodreads in the first 18 months of its publication, the memoir struck a chord with many readers, particularly readers associated with progressive Christianity. In summer 2020, protests over the murder of George Floyd erupted across America, and actress Reese Witherspoon selected Channing Brown's book as one of her June book club picks; one week later, Channing Brown's book was on the *New York Times* best seller list, where it remained for the next five weeks. On Goodreads, the book's responses skyrocketed to over 50,000 ratings and nearly 5,000 reviews. Channing Brown's book was propelled into the spotlight, reaching a broader demographic than perhaps originally considered by her publisher Convergent, an imprint of Penguin Random House that publishes Christian nonfiction.

Channing Brown's faith and work are central to her professional memoir, as she communicates her experiences in the professional world of Christian organizations filled with individuals struggling to engage with diversity. Channing Brown's experiences are not unique, as both reader response and research shows us. A 2012 survey of national congregations, which surveyed "over 3,800 participating congregations representing 70+ Christian denominations, plus Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and other religious groups," reported that 87.8% of congregations were composed of either more than 80% white people or less than 20% (National Congregations Study).[82] For churches that were diverse or multi-ethnic, sociologists Brad Christerson and Michael Emerson found that psychological and relational costs, such as weaker relational ties

[82] Of the 386 Christian congregations with a composition of less than 20% of white people, 75% of those churches were in Black Protestant denominations (National Congregations Study).

and greater sense of conflict, landed disproportionately on minority members.[83] In Channing Brown's memoir, the conversations about racial diversity dovetail with those about gender diversity. A study in 2012 called the Women in Leadership National Survey compared the rate of female leaders (both CEOs and board positions) in national nonprofits to those in Christian evangelical nonprofits and educational institutions. They found that "women in the nonprofit sector generally comprise close to half of all board members, and over a third of all CEOs. Evangelical organizations are at best doing half as well" (Curry and Reynolds 4). This is all while "94% of the 674 female and male respondents affirmed that women and men should equally serve in leadership positions within society" (5). The numbers for women of color were even more dismal: approximately 3% of board members were women of color, with about 2% and 1% being in leadership or CEO positions respectively (Reynolds et al. 8). This is the professional world that Austin Channing Brown writes about in her memoir.

In her memoir, Channing Brown describes herself as having "learned about whiteness up close" (23), after spending "more than three decades of living, studying, and working in places where I'm often the only Black woman in sight" in predominantly white neighborhoods, educational spaces, and nonprofit organizations (11). Her professional experiences cannot be separated from her intersectional and embodied experiences of race and gender. Even her name is tied to her professional and embodied experiences; her parents named her Austin, knowing that she would be assumed to be a white man at job interviews. Channing Brown describes what happens after the job interview, patterns she has experienced many times: the initial promises and hope, the ensuing revelation of organizational biases, and the inevitable descent into her

[83] This 2003 study only looked at one multiracial congregation, in which the majority of congregants were Filipino and the minority of congregants were termed Anglo-American. I believe the cost of membership would perhaps flux if the study considered an organization where the minority of congregants were not white and thus benefiting from a culture of white supremacy in other institutions and larger society. How it would flux, I'm not sure; that is for the study to determine.

being considered divisive, negative, and toxic (17-19). Channing Brown describes patterns she has experienced so frequently as to be commonplace. She also discusses what statistics have already revealed: when she is hired, she is often the first Black woman in an authority position that a white person has encountered (85).

Channing Brown honestly and specifically articulates the embodied experience of being a professional woman of color in a white Christian organization, "bearing the weight of all your white co-workers' questions about Blackness" (20). She highlights the emotional labor and the invisible work of being hypervisible. In the chapter "Whiteness at Work," Channing Brown talks about her career in "the professional world of majority-white nonprofit ministries" (67). Once again, she speaks in specific hypotheticals, describing a routine day as "a Black woman trying to survive in a culture of professional whiteness" (71). This chapter shows that a typical day is marked by patterns of discrimination that are unquestioned and often unaddressed. From having her hair touched, to being confused for another Black woman, to having to respond to white co-workers' questions about racial experiences, Channing Brown demonstrates that this problem is not solely at one particular faith-related organization but rather in all organizations that have white Christianity at their center. Channing Brown shows that conceptions of diversity will never be truly inclusive without a complete restructuring and relearning—including reimagining conceptions of Christian leadership to center around Black women and other women of color as leaders in organizations and churches.[84] Channing Brown's embodied experiences give her ethos

[84] A number of Black liberation and womanist theologians have been doing just that for decades. From James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* to Wilda Gafney's *Womanist Midrash*, Black theologians have been reshaping Christian thought, history, and theology by de-centering whiteness and privileging marginalized conceptions of the faith.

with her audience, particularly Black women, to and for whom Channing Brown has said she wrote the book.[85]

Many Goodreads reviewers who identify themselves as Black indicate that Channing Brown's experiences are familiar. Raymond says, "Many of [Channing] Brown's experiences being black in a white world have echoed my own. However, they are more visceral because she lives with the double bind of being a black female." April affirms this by saying, "It was just empowering to read stories that spoke directly to my own experiences and to have this book to point to as a reference point for white friends/allies/acquaintances looking to me to explain things to them." Shayla Mays says, "So grateful for Austin's willingness to share her perspective and a part of her story which so many of us black women can Amen to." These reactions could be attributed to Channing Brown's ethos-building strategy of pointing out the patterns in her own experience and speaking about them generally enough for them to resonate with her readers of color who work in workplaces marked by white supremacy. They also reveal that Channing Brown's depiction of herself as a Black female prompted both Black and white readers to tie their own perspective on the book to their experiences as racialized individuals in a white-centered culture.

A number of readers, both readers of color and white readers,[86] point out Channing Brown's discussions of professional spaces. Brandice centers her review on Channing Brown's discussion of the workplace, saying, "An overhaul of workplace culture is necessary, particularly in the corporate world." Brandice focuses her critique on corporate professional spaces, whereas

[85] As Channing Brown said in an interview, "I definitely wrote this book with black woman at the forefront of my mind. Every sentence I wrote asking myself—how will this read to other black women like me? I wanted those who have a similar experience to mine to feel seen and heard, to know they are not alone. But I certainly knew that white people would be reading the book. And I hoped that those who were ready—those who care about black women, black friends, black co-workers, black family members would gain much from the words" (Guynton).

[86] Many readers self-identified as white or Black in their reviews. Others had profile photos through which I could gauge an assumed gender or race; however, I am hesitant to draw too many conclusions about reviewers' identities through these thumbnails, and so I primarily use readers' own words to define themselves when appropriate.

Leigh notes that Channing Brown is talking about an "average workday at a Christian organization." She notes the litany of aggressions was "staggering," and MissBecka Gee calls that same section "insane," adding, "It's not something I have ever thought about...which is exactly what white privilege means." MissBecka Gee does not articulate whether she is an employee in a professional Christian environment, but her review implies that she has experience in workplaces like the ones Channing Brown has described, and as a white individual, she has not noticed what Brown describes as daily occurrences. In this way, Channing Brown's book seems to be adjusting some white reviewers' conceptions of professional workspaces they had considered benign in the past but Channing Brown reveals as fraught and exhausting for BIPOC.

Channing Brown clearly speaks through her memoir to an audience of Black women and other BIPOC individuals—who are very familiar with the stories she is telling—but recognizes that white individuals will also pick up her book. White readers are used to being the center of the Christian Industrial Complex but also may think of themselves as progressive and champions of diversity. As ethos is built in the "between" of intersections between rhetors and communities (Reynolds, LeFevre), Channing Brown anticipates a diverse audience and so focuses on her embodied experience. She says, "I am not interested in getting anyone in trouble; I am trying to clarify what it's like to exist in a Black body in an organization that doesn't understand it is not only Christian but also white" (20). She refocuses attention on Blackness within a white culture, rather than centering whiteness. She recognizes that the bulk of the Christian Industrial Complex has been focused on whiteness; however, the "we"s in her book refer to Black women. Further, Channing Brown has chapters on "how to survive racism in an organization that claims to be antiracist" (128) and an interlude about the reasons she loves being "a Black girl," both clearly directed at a BIPOC audience (81). All throughout her memoir, Channing Brown speaks clearly

from her own embodied Blackness and womanhood in her articulation of Christian professional culture.

As such, the Goodreads reviews that push back against Channing Brown's memoir are often written by non-Black readers, and these reviews often center their own experiences. One reader, Dale, uses his experiences as a "white man who teaches at a majority minority school" to relate to Channing Brown's exhaustion. He also draws on his experiences shopping while being overweight. While his extended review (posted on his blog) indicates a reader grappling with the memoir's ideas—he ends up giving the memoir five stars—Dale's review is also an example of a white reader placing themselves and their experiences at the center of the book, which is what Channing Brown's book claims white people frequently do. Another reviewer, Raven, describes the memoir as "a good one" but questioned Channing Brown's frustration with a lack of change within white settings and argues that the answer is not "to be racist against whites." The comments in response to her review reiterate Channing Brown's tenets and focus on the need for white individuals to listen and not speak on these issues. Raven's review is indicative of the perspective Channing Brown often refers to in her memoir, that of a white individual unopposed to conversations about diversity and racial justice but who easily gets defensive and feels attacked in conversations on this issue. These two reviews demonstrate how different people interact differently with the professional ethos Channing Brown is building through her forthrightness and her discussions of her embodied experience.

A different side of critique relates more to Channing Brown's professional authority, though in oblique ways. For instance, Goodreads reviewer Elizabeth Green says Channing Brown does not provide data in her book to support her claims about racial discrimination,

saying, "I know that there is [sic] I just wish she would have provided it."[87] Elizabeth Green questions Channing Brown's authority to speak on this subject, requiring Channing Brown to use a different form and genre in order to gain credibility, despite the fact that Channing Brown largely (and purposefully) spoke from her own experience as a Black woman. Another critique can be found in both a Goodreads review from Whitney and a *Publishers Weekly* review: the descriptor "preachy." Neither reviewer explores what that term means in this particular book; they do not provide examples. However, it cannot be overlooked that a "preacher" is a professional role in Christianity traditionally held by a man. While Channing Brown herself never frames herself as a pastor, the idea that readers read her memoir as "preachy" may indicate that they feel she overstepped her prescribed role as a woman and a Christian.

Other commenters, such as Whitney and Mehrsa, bemoan the lack of suggestions for change in the memoir, indicating that they wanted this book to provide more hope and opportunities for change; this comment was also made by *Kirkus Reviews,* which called the memoir "a powerful and necessarily uncomfortable text lacking suggestions for a path forward." These types of comments indicate a lack of understanding of narrative memoir's purpose, or, at least, they indicate (white) readers' expectation for a memoir about race in America: that it provide solutions, education, and hope for well-meaning, non-Black individuals. This disappointment could point to Channing Brown's successful ethos construction, as readers trusted her ethos construction as a social justice professional and Black woman, and so they hoped she would provide potential "how-tos." At the same time, the readers misunderstand the rhetorical purpose of memoir, which is to provide a glimpse into a particular time and place through a particular lens on a particular life rather than solve the problems of white supremacy

[87] This reviewer also charges Channing Brown with thinking Black individuals are superior to white individuals, based in Channing Brown's capitalization choices (choices which I have adopted for this dissertation, as explained in earlier footnotes).

presented through Channing Brown's experience. This perspective is also again a misreading of the intended audience of the book, an assumption that the text should center on what white people can do to solve the problem rather than the experience of Black women. As Shayla Mays says in her Goodreads review: "[The book] was not meant to comfort white people. It's written to share a black experience."

Different readers find Channing Brown's Christianity more or less central to the professional narrative. While it is true that Channing Brown speaks generally about workplaces, she specifically notes her experience in faith-based organizations and frequently references her Christian faith. One reviewer in particular, Chanequa Walker-Barnes, sees Channing Brown's Christianity as central to the memoir: "This is a memoir, to be sure, but it is every bit a work of theology, in which [Channing] Brown makes bold claims about who God is and who God intends for us to be to one another." Walker-Barnes implies that Channing Brown is able to make these theological claims, based on her writing and embodied experiences. Other reviewers like Mina and Holly find Channing Brown's faith less central; [88] these reviews are more recent, posted after Witherspoon's book club selection in 2020. Another reviewer, chantel nouseforaname, saw the Christian focus as a detriment to her at the beginning of the memoir, but eventually she was able to look past it. This reviewer refers to a more general concept of professionalism in her Goodreads review, saying, "I really felt like this is an employment book rooted in navigating microaggressions as a black person in predominantly white, pretend-to-be-inclusive places of employment." This divide between considering Channing Brown's faith as a significant component of her professional memoir or a side note that did not distract but did not

[88] *Kirkus Reviews* also echoes this, saying that "faith plays only a minor role in this book." Strangely, a few lines later, the review says: "Discussing whites who, after her presentations on racism, confess to her their own racist opinions and actions, [Channing Brown] points out that she cannot 'offer absolution....I am not a priest for the white soul.'" For faith not playing a major role in the book, the quote the reviewer chose from the memoir centers around a key religious practice of confession and absolution.

necessarily frame her narrative demonstrates the differing perspectives and expectations brought to the book by different audiences. The different readings of Channing Brown indicate the ways audiences take up this book and circulate its ideas, depending on how they come to it and what they expect to find in it.

Ultimately, readers seem to consider Channing Brown's text less as a professional memoir about religious spaces and more as a memoir of racial experience, despite the two being closely tied together in the narrative and despite Channing Brown's focus on "whiteness at work" in predominantly white institutions. However, in their reviews, the readers react—sometimes subtly, sometimes more overtly—to her building of these white professional Christian spaces and her own professional embodied ethos to critique those spaces. In doing so, Channing Brown invites her readers to take up an image of a religious professional who is a Black woman, tired of being overlooked, undervalued, and constantly exhausted by the surrounding whiteness of these professional spaces. Readers feel she speaks with clarity and honesty, being forthright about an issue that some may consider divisive. In the church, unity and peace are often buzzwords for "harmony that [doesn't] challenge the status quo," as Channing Brown says (168). She identifies how often racial reconciliation can stand in the way of true change; she desires "justice, then reconciliation" (165). This quality of being so forthright as to challenge much-adored buzzwords of the Christian church is not necessarily one that is associated with being a Christian professional, particularly a woman professional who would feel the need to keep her constituents, whether parishioners or donors, content. However, Channing Brown's readers identify this aspect of Channing Brown's professional ethos as providing her with extra authenticity, particularly as Channing Brown ties this often painful honesty with a true commitment to the Christian church writ large. She says herself, "I can't let go of my belief in Church—in a universal body of belonging, in a community that reaches toward love in a world

so often filled with hate" (21-22). She shows that to love a religious context is to engage with it and ultimately work to change it in positive ways, making it a more equitable and just space for all. This continued resistance and revelation builds Channing Brown's professional ethos in powerful ways, showing how different audiences, particularly along racial lines, react to her ethos in varied ways, depending on their own positionalities. Overall, through her demonstration of her ethos in her professional memoir, Channing Brown shows audiences that a Black woman can and should be a central religious professional in the larger Christian sphere, while also being forthright about the burdens and challenges that come with embodying that role.

Nadia Bolz-Weber: Edgy and Qualified

> *"Shit," I thought to myself. "I'm going to be late to New Testament class."* (Bolz-Weber xv)

The first line of Nadia Bolz-Weber's 2013 memoir *Pastrix* foreshadows how Bolz-Weber builds her ethos as a professional woman in the most common leadership role in the Christian church—and the role least commonly associated with women. "Pastrix," as defined in the early pages of Bolz-Weber's memoir, is "a term of insult used by unimaginative sections of the church to define female pastors" (xiii). The edge to the term also fits Bolz-Weber: throughout her memoir, she discusses her many tattoos (in full display on the front cover), uses profane language, and discloses her past as an addict and comedian. However, elements of her path to the pulpit are traditional: she attended seminary, became ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and became "a pastor to [her] people" (10), which includes addicts, academics, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. In her professional memoir, Bolz-Weber crafts her ethos as a pastor whose edginess balances her qualifications, qualities which are reiterated in reviews. Readers on Goodreads address her language, her nontraditional presentation of being a pastor, and her connection to the church in primarily positive ways. Some criticize her for minor moments in her memoir, which suggests they may have a larger issue with

how Bolz-Weber is working to expand conceptions of the pastoral role and Christianity in general. However, the uptake of her text as shown on Goodreads is largely positive, indicating an audience ready and willing to take up both Bolz-Weber's widening of the potential for who a Christian pastor might be and her invitation to readers to find their own balance between the sacred and the profane.

Christian denominations remain divided on issues of women's ordination. Bowler found that more denominations ordain women than do not, but the ones that do not ordain have a larger membership (282). In 1970, Elizabeth Platz was the first woman to be ordained by the Lutheran Church in America (Bowler 279),[89] and as of 2015, there were 4,552 women pastors in the ELCA (ELCA). This history of ordination, however, does not equal a history of support. Bowler says though mainline denominations like the ELCA are willing to ordain women, research found "they were less likely to encourage them to seek leadership, provide them a supportive seminary experience, place them in charge of thriving churches, or pay them as well as their male counterparts" (41). Additionally, congregations are less willing to hire a woman to lead churches; the ELCA itself admits this, saying men are more likely to be senior pastors, and women associate pastors. Beyond issues involved with gender and clergy, Bolz-Weber's memoir emerges out of a particularly fraught time in the ELCA. In 2009, the ELCA voted to ordain gay partnered clergy members, which prompted a conservative faction of the denomination to split from the larger body (Duin). A little over a year before the vote, Bolz-Weber had planted her church, House for All Saints and Sinners (HFASS), in Denver, Colorado, a congregation open and affirming to LGBTQ+ persons. Bolz-Weber became "the fresh face of the denomination … cast[ing] her liturgical tradition as edgy and relevant" (Bowler 55), a prior ethos which Bolz-

[89] The Lutheran Church of America merged with two other strands of Lutheranism in 1988 to form the ELCA. These churches stand in contrast with the older and more conservative Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran church, both of which do not allow women to be ordained in the church. The ELCA is the largest Lutheran denomination and the fifth-largest American Protestant denomination (Bowler 55).

Weber builds upon in her memoir through her perspectives on the bible, language, and relationship with the church.

Bolz-Weber locates herself as part of a church denomination in a way that neither of the other two memoirists in this chapter do. However, given the declining numbers of mainline denominations over the past decade and the fact that her writing and public speaking take her outside of denominational circles, Bolz-Weber is speaking to a larger audience than Lutherans. Though she espouses views that many within a larger Christian audience may not fully agree with—or may not have agreed with in 2013, or may not have articulated in such a curse-laden way—her audience is bigger than the ECLA; however, most of the individuals who read and responded to her memoir seemed to be on the progressive side of contemporary Christianity, given the way they react to her atypical presentation of pastoring in their reviews. With about 11,800 ratings and 1,456 reviews, the top comments are overwhelmingly positive, with many speaking to the memoir's compelling readability and authenticity. Some readers indicate they came to this book with some knowledge of Bolz-Weber, having heard her speak in person (Todd Buelger, Pam, Abby) or on a podcast (Carol). They indicated that the book did not disappoint, which implies that the ethos constructed in the text matched or enhanced their conception of Bolz-Weber's prior ethos. One reader, Carol said that the very day she finished the book, Bolz-Weber came to her town to speak. Carol decided she didn't need to go hear Bolz-Weber, because this book and its overall impact "[is] not about [Bolz-Weber] - but rather about God's grace." For this reader, all that Bolz-Weber wrote and constructed in her text was in service to a higher power. Given Bolz-Weber's profession as a pastor and her goals to advance the cause of her faith, Carol's reading points to a type of rhetorical professional success.

In the early pages of her memoir, Bolz-Weber presents herself as a doubting, self-deprecating, cursing seminarian. In her introduction, set three years before she became pastor of

HFASS, she frames her professional ethos: "*What the hell am I doing? Seminary? Seriously? With a universe this vast and unknowable, what are the odds that this story of Jesus is true? Come on, Nadia. It's a fucking fairy tale.* And in the very next moment I thought this: *Except that throughout my life I've experienced it to be true" (*xvi). This memoir is about those experiences: her childhood in a conservative Christian denomination, her struggles with addiction, her time in Alcoholics Anonymous, and her discovery of the Lutheran church and its liturgy. She also discusses founding HFASS, the support and joy she's found being part of that community, and the eclectic group of parishioners who call HFASS home. Bolz-Weber articulates many times she has failed as a pastor, a friend, and an advocate, along with the spiritual insights she gleaned from those failures. She tells these stories with a sardonic humor and a deep reverence, atypical qualities for a high-profile Christian pastor.

For Bolz-Weber, the experiential aspect of her faith is central, a faith which tends to be nontraditional given her past, her gender, and the demographics of her congregation. However, her education and ordination, as well as the ways she participates in liturgical church life, are traditional. This combination provides her with ethos, as more moderate readers may feel soothed enough by the biblical references to feel secure in Bolz-Weber's religious commitment, whereas more progressive readers may be warmed by her experiences with atypical religious communities. Through this rhetorical maneuver, she continues to create a professional ethos that broadens the view of what a pastor might be. As Bolz-Weber says, she is in the "messy business" of talking about death and resurrection (xviii) —she is a professional, despite what readers might assume based on her look and language. She fluctuates between demonstrating her expertise in running an unconventional church while affirming her inadequacies to be a good pastor, the job of which is to "find some kind of good news for people" (56) or, more colorfully, to be "God's bitch" (41) —a gendered way of referring to one's pastoral profession.

One of the more noticeable aspects of this memoir is Bolz-Weber's colorful language. It has become somewhat in vogue for progressive Christian writers to pepper swear words throughout their memoirs.[90] However, Bolz-Weber goes beyond a simple smattering of "hell" or "damn" to include a pattern of profanity, often in conjunction with talking about her faith. The first "fuck" of the memoir comes on the second page, when she refers to Christian belief as "a fucking fairytale" (xvi). The second comes a page later, when Bolz-Weber is summarizing the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, in which she describes Jesus having a final dinner with "real fuck-ups," or those who many pastors would refer to as Jesus' disciples (xvii). Bolz-Weber talks about grace being "fucking offensive" (56); she also considers how it's easy to see God as a "heartless bastard" after the disaster in Haiti but realizes she "can't hardly say it from the pulpit" (126). Within her language lies a tension between the sacred and the profane: Bolz-Weber expresses her devotion for her profession and her faith through words many Christians would consider unacceptable, particularly from a religious leader. This level of colorful language sets her apart from how others write about Christianity, particularly women who are crafting themselves as professionals, and contributes to her professional ethos. While she runs a risk tying her ethos to such language, she is pushing the balance between sacred and profane, between traditions and progression, which she embodies in her tattooed woman's body.

Unsurprisingly, most of the top Goodreads reviews note Bolz-Weber's language in some way. Often, it is referred to as a stumbling block: not to the reviewers themselves but to other potential (Christian) readers. Some say that the opening line is "fabulous," and "if it happens to scare off those who think such a project ought to be some kind of ode to middle class table manners, then all the better" (Carolyn Francis), whereas others see the line as a potential stopping point for some (Tim). Mike Young, in particular, says that many of his friends would be

[90] For instance, Channing Brown's memoir included minor profanities.

offended by "Nadia Bolz-Weber's application of sailor language to godly topics," as well as "her welcoming and affirming stance on LGBTQ issues" —two crucial components of her ethos— and his assessment is: "I've come to a place that it's ok if they are offended. I can't control that." Reviewer 7jane takes a slightly difference stance, assessing the language as "not really *that* harsh (though that depends a bit on the reader)." Most reviewers mention the language as a consideration, either positive or negative, which further confirms how Bolz-Weber is crafting a different sort of professional and pastoral ethos that might appeal to some but not to others. These readers also acknowledge the role of the audience in assigning ethos; to them, Bolz-Weber gained their respect, but they recognize that others in their community may not feel the same. They also allude to the fact that Christendom is not monolithic, and neither are its participants.[91] As Goodreads reviewer Chris Wolak says about the language, "If you're a delicate flower, buckle the fuck up."

Bolz-Weber talks about her look, language, and personality as factors that make her different from her colleagues, rather than her gender. She says of pastoring, "I'm a lousy candidate. I swear like a truck driver, I'm covered in tattoos, and I'm kind of selfish. Nothing about me says, 'Lutheran pastor'" (16). However, she doesn't note her gender as a reason she is a lousy candidate—or even a reason that others would consider her such. Despite the challenges those of her gender have experienced gaining authority within the walls of the church, even within denominations like the ECLA, Bolz-Weber says she never struggled with her gender in regard to her calling despite growing up in a conservative church with no place for a "strong, smart and smart-mouthed girl...even though they loved me" (13). Throughout her memoir, she

[91] In a blog post on the *Patheos* website, Bolz-Weber speaks directly to those who might be offended by her language: "If you are a Christian who takes offense at swear words or believes for some reason that clergy should never be cranky or irritated, then I am not the person for you to follow. It's ok. You don't actually need me....No need to leave me comments about how disappointed you are in my use of language because out there in cultural Christendom you will find niceness in abundance, super-duper positive thinking, and lots of inspiration with (best of all!) no swear words! The Christian world is your oyster. You are not my audience."

centers her femaleness as part of the self she brings to the profession, and she refers to Mary Magdalene (her patroness who is tattooed on her forearm) and other biblical women as her role models and foremothers. She does deal with others who might struggle with it, such as her more conservative parents, who are mostly supportive of her career. When Bolz-Weber's father shared a sermon she wrote at a men's prayer breakfast, he did not tell the men that his daughter wrote it. She originally feels betrayed but ultimately frames the experience as one of gratitude that the men were able to hear the message. Her gender may have kept them from being able to hear it (117). In this and other anecdotes, Bolz-Weber frames her gender as an issue with which others may take issue regarding her profession, but one she has moved past. Her professional and pastoral ethos fits her particular experiences and ways of expressing herself, based in who she is as an edgy and qualified woman.

Perhaps because of Bolz-Weber's stance, fewer top Goodreads comments mention Bolz-Weber's role as a woman pastor, and some do not talk much about her position as pastor at all. However, the commenters who do focus on her role in church are prompted to think further about the professional role of a pastor. Pam, for one, says, "I'm not sure I've ever thought of my pastors as real people, but Nadia insists that readers see her this way." Lee Harmon wonders, "Is there really a place in the clergy for this kind of pastor?" before determining that, "Yep, Nadia's Christianity has its niche." Kari and Abby both talk about how valuable it was to hear a woman pastor talk about a love for the gospel. Amy talks about how she and Bolz-Weber differ theologically, yet Amy feels Bolz-Weber "gets the Gospel, though, and that is a beautiful thing." Readers seem to accept her role as pastor, perhaps based on her prior ethos and the title of the book; perhaps those who would be affronted by a woman pastor would be turned away by the external elements of the book and not engage with the text at all.

Clearly Bolz-Weber values the Lutheran liturgy, the lectionary, and her formal seminary education, the latter of which is necessary to be ordained in the Lutheran church—though at one point, she describes the Lutheran tenets in such a way that the reader can "write out these bullet points out, memorize them, and…save a lot of money not going to Lutheran seminary" (49). She talks with reverence and love about the liturgy, which she calls "choreographed sacredness" in which individualism is subverted (47). This reverence is in sharp contrast to the irreverence with which she treats herself and her qualifications for the ministry, but in highlighting her love for the faith practices of her church and denominational tradition, she demonstrates how traditionally qualified she is, despite her assertions otherwise. She locates her professional ethos in the Lutheran church writ large; even as she reveals her frustrations and conflicts with Christianity as a whole, she considers herself a Lutheran pastor who respects the traditions and scriptures of the church, even if her pastoring and the demographics of her church are atypical.

As she demonstrates her Lutheran qualifications, Bolz-Weber aligns herself with outsiders, though she has particular privileges that contribute to her professional ethos. Her church HFASS is founded with the LGBTQ+ community at the center, and Bolz-Weber talks about gay and transgender church leaders. She also shares stories of parishioners who are addicts, compulsive liars, and mentally ill. She discusses how the church has traditionally excluded these individuals, and she adapts the liturgy and the practices of the church to be more expansive, to encompass those generally left out. However, for a church marked as being inclusive when it comes to sexuality, she does not dwell on the whiteness of her church. She briefly mentions HFASS is "still 95 percent white" but goes no further in regard to the church's relationship to race (90). Consequently, Bolz-Weber's memoir spends little time and space grappling with the privilege she has that allows her to frame herself as an outcast and a screw-up

who has found hope, acceptance, and, ultimately, professional opportunities.[92] As a white woman in a fairly white region in a heterosexual marriage,[93] she is provided special dispensation to craft herself as she does Jesus' disciples: a fuck-up, but a well-meaning one. Her edginess can be read as quirky rather than dangerous, as it would be on a Black woman or man. She can craft her ethos without centering her race, given the professional culture she works within. Her audience, too, does not mention race in their reviews, which speaks to how white Christian audiences often overlook race as a component of professional ethos and an element of American Christianity, particularly in 2013.

Audiences address in their Goodreads reviews Bolz-Weber's connection and devotion to the Christian church, particularly the ECLA. Many of her readers indicate they have complicated relationships with the Christian church, ranging from those who are in ministry themselves (Bethany Judd, Art) to those with an "on-again/off-again relationship" with church (Chris Wolnak). These individuals' reviews share that Bolz-Weber's description of her professional context gives them hope. As Bethany Judd says, "Reading this book was like a breath of fresh air." Art speaks to his own professional position in a church and says, "A lot of what I read here is in line with what I've seen and heard first hand, no blemishes, no glory and some days lots of tears, others lots of laughter." Todd Buegler implies he is part of an ECLA church when he refers to the types of conversations Bolz-Weber has with parishioners and thinks about his own church, saying, "It makes me wonder…if we'd had those conversations with people, if the fallout from 2009 would have been different;" I believe Todd Buegler is referring here to the 2009 decision by the ECLA to ordain gay clergy. He goes on to say, "I'm glad Nadia is a pastor within our church." Todd Buegler's review and others demonstrate an understanding of the professional

[92] Bolz-Weber's writing and work since this book has more carefully considered issues of race in the Church.
[93] She has since gotten divorced.

Christian world that Bolz-Weber is painting, and they accept her as an expert within that world and seemingly expand their views of Christian professionals to include her and her edgy professional qualities.

Some critiques exist among the glowing reviews. For example, Josh said he thought Bolz-Weber could tell a good story and that she loved people; however, he took issue with "her understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ," saying, "Mrs. Bolz-Weber seems to recognize no ultimate authority to which men and women are held accountable." He picks a line from a brief anecdote in the memoir to support his claim, a comment made by one of Bolz-Weber's former pastors that explains how the Lutheran church functions; Josh instead attributes the statement to Bolz-Weber. Josh says, "That definition leaves no standard by which 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' can be defined. So Jesus ends up looking and talking like a 21st century post-modern American liberal." Josh is respectful in his disagreement but limited in his response to the text. He indicates this one line ruined Bolz-Weber's memoir for him, destroying her professional ethos: not the cursing, the sarcasm, the cynicism, or even the ordination of a woman. However, Josh's discomfort might be indicative of a larger concern about Bolz-Weber's language and/or theological position. What Josh sees as an issue with her expansiveness regarding this theological issue may actually be an issue with her expansiveness in general: how she expands conceptions of appropriate speech, action, and even embodied professionalism. Similarly, in a review of *Pastrix* in the Christian publication *First Things,* Dennis De Mauro indicates that a dealbreaker for him was that Bolz-Weber "refuses to disavow her Wiccan past, as many Christians expected her to do" in this memoir. Bolz-Weber frames her experience with Wiccans as providing an important spiritual community of women at a particular moment in her life, but it is only briefly mentioned as part of her religious searching before she lands back in Christianity. These two reviews indicate how readers' uptake of Christian women's professional ethos is

ecologically and often implicitly tied to ideological and spiritual histories, understandings, and theologies that may not appear extensively in the memoirs but are underlying reader response. As such, these memoirists can only rhetorically do so much to build their ethos in their texts, as their audiences bring their religious backgrounds and histories to the text and attempt to place the writers' professional ethos within that web.

Given her gender and her denomination, the role of megachurch pastor would never fit Bolz-Weber, and so she created the role of a swearing and liturgy-loving pastrix to fit her tattooed frame. Her professional ethos that toes the line between traditional and nontraditional allows her to demonstrate a new professional role, one as atypical as her embodied experience pastoring a liturgical church of outsiders. As made clear by the various Goodreads comments, Bolz-Weber may not be for everyone, but she is definitely for some. For people who would find their vocabularies and identities on the margins of mass-market, white evangelical Christianity, Bolz-Weber, a vocal and well-known spiritual leader who is edgy yet qualified, might widen the culture enough to allow them in. As Bolz-Weber says, "Maybe the kingdom of heaven is found in the unclean and surprising and even the profane" (161). Maybe for some readers the kingdom of heaven is found through pastors like Bolz-Weber, a woman who builds professional ethos on being God's bitch.

Katie Davis: Young and Willing

I never meant to be a mother. (Davis xvii)

While the first sentence of Katie Davis's 2011 memoir is not provocative in and of itself for a young woman in the 2010s, it contradicts Davis's prior ethos: the fact that she became known within the Christian blogosphere for becoming a mother to thirteen Ugandan children before she turned 21. However, Davis quickly follows up: "I mean, I guess I did; not right now, though. Not before I was married. Not when I was nineteen. Not to so, so many little people.

Thankfully, God's plans do not seem to be affected much by my own" (xvii). In doing so, Davis quickly constructs herself as her audience already knows her to be: a young (white) single mother, called by God despite her own plans. Davis rhetorically constructs a professional role that combines the qualities of youth and willingness into a professional ethos that reflects traditional conceptions of the missionary: the individual story at the expense of larger cultural context. Her audience largely reiterates her professional qualities in their Goodreads reviews, using her youth as both a form of inspiration and a defense against critiques of Davis's story. Davis also highlights her role as an adoptive mother; however, critics of this element of her professional memoir do not doubt her role as a mother but rather her choices within that role that are atypical for traditional conceptions of motherhood.

Notably, Davis pays little attention to the racial and class privileges that undergird her missionary experience, privileges which her audience also largely ignores in their reviews. When critiques of Davis's lack of sensitivity and ignorance do emerge on Goodreads, responses to these critiques reiterate professional qualities Davis embodies in her text: primacy of personal experience and willingness over larger social and cultural considerations. Overall, Davis's professional narrative reinscribes traditional conceptions of motherhood and missionary work in ways that ask audiences to adjust their conceptions of what a religious professional might be. The response on Goodreads indicates that many are willing to take up and circulate her story and professional qualities, while others push back, reflecting their discomfort with Davis's particular type of ministry and how the memoir perpetuates harmful understandings of missionary work.

The tie between missionary work and women is a historical one, as evangelical missions were largely the domain of women in the nineteenth century. Supporting the provision of "education, medicine, and evangelism to women and children" was considered a "natural demonstration of [women's] motherly concern and sense of Christian duty" (Bowler 33). While

initially women entered the missionary field as wives, soon organizations became willing to send unmarried women into missions, and by 1900 about two-thirds of Protestant missionaries were women (Bowler 34). They ran schools, hospitals, and dispensaries, and one in ten were doctors at a time when women were not hired in that role stateside. However, not long after 1909, women lost much of the leadership positions they had gained through the missions movement, due to increased focus on domestic suffrage, the rise of the new professional class, and the continuing debate over the public role of women (37). Women continued to hold positions as missionaries in the field without the institutional power.

However, in recent decades, the traditional model of Western missionaries going into majority world communities to spread the gospel of Christ (and colonialism) has been adapted in some Christian contexts. As Saba Imtiaz writes in *The Atlantic,* the current model of Christian missions tends to be less outright evangelism and more work-based, as missionaries demonstrate their faith commitments through social and communal projects. Progressive Christian circles, in particular, have considered the "white savior complex" and the colonial nature of missions work in regard to culture, education, and customs, as well as the unethical proselytizing to vulnerable groups in places like refugee camps. Books like Jamie Wright's *The Very Worst Missionary* (which, like Davis's memoir, began as a blog) combine memoir and critique from those who were actually in the mission field. To address some of these concerns, newer movements in missions partner Western churches with specific communities and indigenous projects directed by locals with financial support coming from the American church and a future goal of the organization becoming self-sufficient.

However, *Kisses from Katie* shows few of those updated ideas, instead focusing on the story of Katie Davis, who, at nineteen years old, moved to Jinja, Uganda, to live in an orphanage and teach young children. Within a few months, she starts a nonprofit organization called

Amazima, which supports children in the community with school fees, medical assistance, and Christian training. Davis rents a large home soon after, and it becomes the central hub for her ministry: serving lunch to children, helping them with homework, serving them dinner, playing with them, holding worship services, and feeding them breakfast in the morning. She also begins taking in young girls who have been abandoned or orphaned; six children come to live with her before she had been in Uganda a year, and seven more come soon after. These girls all call Davis "Mommy," and while she has not officially adopted them, she considers them her daughters, though she is only twenty-two and just a few years older than some of her "adopted" children.[94] Near the end of her narrative, Davis also becomes involved in a community outside of a landfill largely populated by a semi-nomadic tribe called Karimojon, providing them with medical attention and economic opportunities.

Davis's book was published in 2011, and her book was widely read. According to a press release, the book spent more than 30 weeks on the *New York Times* best seller list and sold over 423,500 copies. [95] It was translated into eleven languages. Davis was also voted as the Reader's Choice Award Winner for *Glamour Magazine*'s Women of the Year 2012 (Robbins). The book has over 28,000 ratings and 2,599 reviews on Goodreads, and the top reviews—most of which were written in the first half of the 2010s—reflect an audience that is mostly impressed and inspired by Davis's professional ethos centered in the calling of God without need for education, training, awareness of privilege, or any institutional oversight; however, a few reviews push back against Davis's memoir and her foregrounding of youth and willingness as professional qualities.

[94] Ugandan law states that an individual must be twenty-five to adopt, and they must have fostered a child for three years (Davis 61). Additionally, as a single woman, Davis can only foster and adopt young girls (205).
[95] I was unable to find this book on the NYT best seller list archive; however, the book itself has a *New York Times* best seller banner on the cover, and the statistic is from a 2016 press release from the Crown Publishing Group announcing a new book from Davis (FrontGate Media).

Woven throughout her memoir, Davis's professional ethos relies on her own admitted lack of professionalism: her inadequacy, unpreparedness, and youth, balanced by the calling of God. Her articulation of her growth—as she repeatedly portrays her lack of education and preparation as an opportunity for spiritual impact—is in many ways a traditional bildungsroman.[96] Initially, Davis does not define herself as a professional in the religious workplace, particularly since at the beginning of her narrative she is a teenager, simply taking a gap year before college. Davis first goes to Uganda with her mother for a short-term trip during her senior year of high school. She recounts deciding what country to go to by "search[ing] the Internet for the word *orphanage* so I could investigate volunteer opportunities" (Davis 2). She states, "I never had Uganda specifically in mind" (2). She transitions this statement, which some may read as a red flag in her lack of preparedness to encounter the culture of this country, into a spiritual lesson about how God had been "preparing a longing in [her] heart for Uganda many years before [she] could even find this country on a map" (4-5). Her feelings upon arrival are sufficient to confirm her calling to the place. When Davis meets a pastor who runs an orphanage outside the town of Jinja and plans to open a kindergarten, and he asks her to be the teacher, she says yes. She does note the ask "seemed a bit preposterous, as I had little experience teaching anything other than Sunday school, but he insisted I was the one for the job" (5). Davis arrives back in the country without a degree in education or nursing or any training in missionary work. She says, "I was in no way qualified, but I was available….God began doing things in me, around me, and through me as I offered myself to him" (43). As such, she builds her professional ethos on being willing and obedient, not knowledgeable, as she describes her transition from high school class president and homecoming queen (xvii) to founder of a nonprofit ministry—all

[96] I talk more about the bildungsroman narrative in chapter three, when discussing its parallels to the professional memoir.

between arriving in Uganda in September 2007 and opening her home to the community in January 2008 (49).

Many of the Goodreads reviews of Davis's memoir are positive. Readers note that the book was inspirational and challenged them to consider their own lives and choices through the lens of Davis's experiences. Some reference how this story inspired them to support another child through a child sponsorship program (Rissa) or do their part to raise their children well (Dickson), both uptakes which relate specifically to Davis's work with children. However, some of the more critical responses relate to her youth and inexperience (Tammy). Tammy says she likes the story in her review but also says, "America doesn't need any more Christian missonary [sic] super stars.....or books with un-realistic [sic] unhealthy methods being modeled. We already have God-complexes as it is." Bethany's response to this critique, however, talks about "how God choses [sic] the unqualified, the young, and the 'uneducated'"; the view of this commenter reflects Davis's perspective in the memoir with its emphasis on God's calling without the need for further training. Thus, in Bethany's eyes, Davis is fulfilling the professional role of missionary by taking this position through her meager education, not despite it.

Many of the defensive responses to critiques of Davis in the comments reiterate the professional qualities of youth and willingness that Davis presents in her memoir, often in one of two ways. The first is the assertion that "we all are imperfect human beings" (Jessica, Shantelle, Audrey, Anna Emerson, Itdont) and should not judge others, despite Davis's role as a professional within the Christian workplace. Davis cannot be judged for any of her missteps because humans are fallible; however, these reviewers do not explore the consequences of those missteps. Davis's willingness is what matters. Similarly, other commenters note Davis's age, indicating that her youth means that she cannot be held accountable in the same way we would an adult (AbbieJ, Irene, Jennifer, Kimberly Snyder). As Jennifer says, "Give her time to grow up.

I'm sure her perspective will change as she grows and matures. :)" Anne says, "She is extremely naïve and lacks deep cultural understanding. But she is a sweet girl and [I] wish her the best." Audiences choose to see her as a young "girl," which reflects how Davis crafts her professional ethos in this book. Rather than be held to a level of professionalism (which, as discussed previously, would be based on a white-male-dominated standard), Davis is allowed grace for circulating potentially damaging ideas because of her age, which shows that her professional ethos as a young but willing instrument of God is successful; audiences are inspired by her because of her youth and inexperience, not despite it.

Davis does discuss a traditionally professional move she makes shortly after arriving in Uganda: starting a nonprofit organization that her parents help her set up; however, this organization is eclipsed by her discussion of becoming a mother. Her professional ethos continues in this theme of unprepared willingness by combining the fumbling beginnings of her nonprofit work with becoming a mother to the young girls she begins to bring into her home. This ethos can be seen as an adaptation of the traditional role of the Homemaker that Bowler describes in *The Preacher's Wife*. Women's ministries and an arm of the Christian publishing market dedicated to women's issues of the 1970s and 80s led into the "mommy blogging" phenomenon of the 2000s, in which Christian women presented their homemaking prowess: "the family was her primary advertisement, her expertise, and, often, the reason for her start in ministry, all disguised in three simple words: 'Wife and Mom'" (Bowler 116). Davis takes this role to a new level, saying her family, not biological but created by God, was indeed a significant part of her missions work. Despite presenting herself as a young and inexperienced woman, Davis presents herself as a mother much like any other. She begins chapter five by ruminating on the name "mother," describing how the name is associated with laughter, dependability, crying, cuddling, fixing boo-boos, comfort, and safety (57). These are traditional conceptions of the role,

ones that likely would be both familiar to and celebrated by her audience. Davis then describes how her daughters came to her after being orphaned or abandoned. In her retelling, each situation is orchestrated by God; she feels "something special in [her] heart when he intends for the children to be [her] own" (94). For example, Davis recounts God telling her in a dream that her twelfth daughter would be named Sarah, and a girl named Sarah indeed came to Davis's front step…with a sister (157). Each story Davis paints as so miraculous and God-endowed that despite her better judgment she could not resist, further adding to her professional ethos of an innocent who is merely ready to say "yes" when presented with an opportunity—and without questioning how and why her white Western privilege both brings these girls to her doorstep and makes her believe she is the best person to raise them, despite her age and lack of familiarity with their cultures, traditions, or even languages. Her audience largely does not ask these questions either, simply celebrating Davis's work and citing her as an inspiration. From a white evangelical perspective, Davis is the best person to educate and support these girls.

One reviewer's critique focuses on Davis's depiction of mothering, which provides an example of the perspective on motherhood with which some readers approach Davis's text. Davis leaves Uganda after she had been there for about a year, because she made a promise to her parents to come back to America and go to college (111). Davis articulates how difficult it was to leave behind the six little girls she had started to consider her daughters, though they stayed in Davis's home with her Ugandan colleagues. Davis articulates how out of place she felt being back in the United States, how pointless college courses seemed to her, and how much waste and consumerism she saw; she also says how much she missed her children. Goodreads reviewer Missy has trouble with this part of Davis's memoir, as she says in her Goodreads review: "I had a hard [time] with her leaving her 'children' for several months to come back to the United States and attend college. That part seemed a little strange to me because being a

mother, I would never dream of leaving my kids for that long." Missy clearly equates motherhood with being present. As such, if Davis is crafting herself as a mother to these girls, then by leaving them, her ethos is damaged, as her audience would prioritize keeping a family together above all else. However, Davis also demonstrates part of her ethos is being a young woman who considers it godly to obey her parents (111). As such, her ethos is in conflict, even within herself. However, she soon returns to Uganda, having further confirmed her desire to continue her work, and her parents have been convinced this is the right path for her. While some like Missy might struggle with her leaving her children, others see this experience as fitting into their understanding of her as young but willing.

Ultimately, Davis says, "By God's grace, even in the hard moments, I knew that the job of being a mother was what God had created my heart for" (63). This was her ultimate purpose in Uganda: to not just support these children, but adopt them into her life and family. Elsewhere, she says, "Here in my home, I am not a missionary or an aid worker; I am just a mom. I am like most other mommies—wholeheartedly dedicated and devoted to the children God has given me" (64). Here she implies that she is a professional in other places, but at home, she is just a mom. She depicts herself as clueless but confident in her role as mother to these young girls, despite the cultural differences between her and her daughters and her daughters with each other, much like she presented herself as clueless and confident in coming to Uganda. Her professional ethos is based in this tension, which she describes as God-given, but others might describe as endowed by her white, Western, upper-class privilege.

At no point does Davis consider race, gender, and nationality as factors in why she was asked to move to Uganda without any training. She instead critiques those in the country of her birth for having so much compared to those in her adopted country, indicating that her target audience for her memoir is those who have plenty of wealth and privilege and would likely feel

challenged and awed by the sacrifices she made at such a young age, not considering the privilege that allowed her to make those sacrifices (without the potential for extreme failure and poverty). Even the fact that she can build her ethos on her inexperience is a form of privilege, as she is commended merely for her intent in numerous Goodreads reviews. Davis's lack of attention to her own positionality within Uganda reflects an assumed tendency in her audience to valorize the sacrifices of a privileged few who give up wealth for the sake of evangelism. Professional ethos, in this case, is enhanced by willingness and sacrifice, not readiness or preparation.[97]

An interesting conversation began on Goodreads in 2013, when one commenter, Samuel, gave the book one star because the book lacks "cultural awareness or sensitivity." He goes on:

> Katie Davis would benefit from reading more, from educating herself on colonialism, and from stopping and thinking if going in as the all benevolent white savior is a positive influence on a country that has a history of being pillaged and undergoing social upheaval because of the benevolent European colonizers is positive in the long term for Uganda. The book was not terrible, and if you want to read about why it was good, stop and read some of the other reviews.

In Samuel's mind, Davis's lack of cultural sensitivity and education is a problem, particularly in how she interacts with Ugandans given the history of the country. Even so, he does not go so far as to condemn the book and its content. A few others chime in to support his comment, including Itdont, who says, "I also strongly see the Saviour complex. Another reviewer said she was happy to read that the children in Uganda love our God. There is a lot of that kind of ignorance in this

[97] This lack of preparation may even be considered biblical by some evangelicals, as a reviewer of this chapter pointed out: Jesus called the disciples from fishing boats to follow him, and they eventually spread the gospel to various Middle Eastern regions and communities despite having no training. These and other biblical stories like it are often distilled down to "God can use anyone," which can lead to Western (white) Christians taking on roles they are not trained for in order to save the souls of people in cultures they do not know, understand, or respect.

book." These critiques point to many critiques of Western missionary work based in evangelism as damaging local cultures, perpetuating white supremacy, and participating in a long history of colonialism.

However, the responses to these critiques reflect the authority Davis's audience has given her due to her experiences, looking past her initial ignorance and focusing on her gained knowledge. Alex draws on his experience living and working in Uganda to say that "a lot of the scenarios pictured in the book REALLY DO happen, on a daily basis, in Uganda....[S]he has explained what Uganda is." Here, Alex says that Davis's experience in Uganda trumps her lack of education on the culture of the country, as well as the potential negative impact her work could do within the community. The most recent comment in this conversation, as of 2019, is from Kate: "Samuel, and everyone else like-minded, I'd love to hear how you're doing a better job serving orphans, widows, the sick and dying, in a way that's also more culturally appropriate. In order to be so critical, you must have a world of experience! Wow! I can't wait to read your books and be inspired—please let me know where I can find them!!" The sarcasm is readily apparent, as is the idea that one must have personal and professional experience in a culture, doing something even better and more impressive (to Kate and others like her) than Davis in her book, in order to make a critique of it. In so doing, Kate and the other commenters prioritize speaking from gained experience and simply doing *something* to help others, regardless of whether that *something* causes harm. This perspective perpetuates Davis's professional ethos of inexperience but willingness, without thinking about the social and cultural ramifications.

One final commenter, Kimberly Snyder, said the value and impact of the memoir depends on the age of the reader, "Because it was *just* what I needed at 14, but I probably wouldn't like it at all (for the same reasons you didn't), today. It really is going to depend on the heart it's given to, how much it will be appreciated." Kimberly Snyder's comment indicates that

different audiences will approach this book differently, depending on their orientation to Davis's professional ethos construction as a mother and young woman. Her memoir articulates conservative and traditional perception of what ministry does and what women can do within ministry: white women mothering black children into salvation, with little analysis of cultural and social contexts. Davis focuses her audience's attention on her singular experience and the intensive spiritual gifts involved in being a mother and missionary who is young and dependent on her understanding of God's calling in her life. In doing so, she trumpets a common evangelical perspective that not everyone needs to be global missionaries; "In fact, [she] believe[s] anyone can be a missionary right where they are" (101). Ultimately, this is the takeaway from her book. Davis demonstrates a professional ethos that reflects an individualized perspective on faith common to evangelicals and glorifies a lack of expertise, an abundance of traditional motherhood, and a culture of white Western supremacy. On Goodreads, we see how different audiences interpret that professional ethos. Some are warmed by her self-sacrifice and willingness to follow God; others are concerned by her lack of cultural consideration and perpetuation of traditional evangelical ideas about missionary work and colonialism. As such, Davis's professional qualities of youth and willingness are taken up by many readers, but others challenge her ethos construction, showing how uptake reveals the extent to which professional ethos is contingent on audience reception.

The Role of Women's Professional Spiritual Memoirs

In Roxanne Mountford's examination of *The Gendered Pulpit*, she identifies how the eighteenth-century (male) preacher was "a distant, benevolent speaker, speaking to a generic congregation of sinners, with the general goal of teaching and applying scriptural truths" (49). However, her analysis of women preachers in the 1990s found professionals who were focused

on the regeneration of their communities, "engag[ing] in a different rhetorical task: creating intimacy and affirming the divinity in everyday spaces" (149). They did this by embodying their theology. We see that in all three of the professional memoirs of this chapter, as Channing Brown speaks from her position as a forthright Black woman, Bolz-Weber from her position as a tattooed white woman, and Davis from her position as a young, white woman. They are examples of how women facing intersectional marginalization in sacred spaces discover ways to develop their ethos through stories of the ways they experience—and want to experience—faith and community.

In analyzing readers' responses to professional women's construction of their ethos in their professional memoirs, scholars can see examples of reading communities reacting to these texts by adapting their understanding of what constitutes a professional in a particular field—even if readers approach memoirs as an inspirational or enlightening personal story without considering the writers' ties to the professionalism of a particular religiously affiliated field. These reviews demonstrate that even among audiences who are primed to accept writers' claims of ethos, they frequently negotiate in their reviews between the professional qualities the readers expect a religious professional to have and the atypical professional qualities—forthrightness, edginess, youth—that contribute to the ethos of these woman writers. Many of these responses were positive (even many of the negative reviews noted positive qualities of the text), demonstrating how readers often band together to reaffirm and reassert the professional qualities and ethos articulated in these memoirs. Collectively, through reading these memoirs and responding to them, the readers are expanding and adjusting their individual views of who can be a professional in the wide world of Christianity—not just what jobs they can hold, but how they embody those roles, particularly as women.

The uptake of these three professional memoirs by women about their work in the predominantly white-male-centered professional field of contemporary Protestant Christianity demonstrates that audiences for these memoirs are not monolithic. Not only will readers beyond the Christian community engage with these books; those within that community also hold widely differing perspectives, based in theological and embodied differences. As such, it is becoming clear that the Christian Industrial Complex of my youth holds less power, or rather holds power over a smaller percentage of the Protestant Christian community. Christian writers must consider broader audiences who might come to their memoirs through social media and celebrity book clubs and consider them in their ethos construction; however, identifying the ways that publishing companies interact with the Christian Industrial Complex—and its ties to patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy—provides greater insight into the context around particular rhetorical choices these women make to craft themselves as professionals.

The professional ethos of these three writers asks readers to consider their conceptions of what religious professionals look and act like, in terms of both gender and race, and we can see readers do that work through their Goodreads reviews. We see them considering how valuing forthrightness over unity might be a quality for a religious professional woman, like in Channing Brown's memoir; or how profane edginess can lead to a more sacred authenticity, as in Bolz-Weber's memoir; or how youth can affect ministry, as in Davis's memoir. Readers use these professional constructions to both adapt and fortify their understandings of what constitutes a professional woman in the Christian sphere; they also reflect these professional qualities in their criticisms and responses to those criticisms. We also see how white Christian professionals' lack of attention to their own privilege can reinforce that same lack of attention in their (often white) readers, until a writer and professional like Austin Channing Brown asks readers to consider their racial privilege or lack thereof within sacred spaces. In reviews for all three memoirs, we

see how readers address the embodied, professional authority constructed by these writers and how this authority shifts perceptions of women as professionals, even by smallest amounts. Regardless of their differences, all three of these women demonstrate the power that comes from confidence in one's professional calling. These are women who cannot "go home"; they have made professional homes for themselves in the church—and readers are noticing.

CHAPTER 7
EVOLVING A PROFESSIONAL ETHOS THROUGH THE RHETORIC OF WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL MEMOIRS

"Lead her away from Acting but not all the way to Finance.
Something where she can make her own hours but still
feel intellectually fulfilled and get outside sometimes
And not have to wear high heels.

What would that be, Lord? Architecture? Midwifery?
Golf course design? I'm asking You, because if I knew,
I'd be doing it, Youdammit."
– Tina Fey, "The Mother's Prayer for Its Daughter," Bossypants

Some two-hundred-plus pages ago, I recounted how Tina Fey taught me to be a professional when I struggled to find my footing in my first job after college. Eight hours a day, five days a week, over the course of three years, I crafted a professional version of myself who worked so effectively and efficiently that the next person who held my position did so with a better title and a raise (I have since learned the importance of advocating for oneself and negotiating for pay increases). When I left that job, I headed to a different state for graduate school, and now—a few years, a few apartments, a few grey hairs, and many, many more shelves of books later—I find myself considering again who I am and will be as a professional as I craft my CV, draft application letters, and apply for jobs. In a depressed job market in the midst of a global pandemic, no less.

But I have Tina. Tina and Mindy and Ali and Tiffany. Austin and Nadia and Katie. Hillary and Sonia and Condi and Elizabeth and Sarah and Kamala (with her own new job!) and Hillary again. I have spent the last two years arguing for the rhetoricity of memoir, the cultural significance of women writing about their work, and the creative ways that women craft their professional ethos through writing about their successes (and failures) in often-hostile workplaces. I don't know what workplace I may encounter next or how hostile or welcoming it

might be to me and my professional identity, but I have models for how to write about my experiences, how to craft tales of resilience and strength that center my authority and abilities.

Such is the power of women's professional memoir. These memoirs depict individual stories of high-profile public women and their work in their chosen rhetorical careers, despite the ways their embodied experiences do not match the white, male standard of professionalism in their fields. As scholars like Risa Applegarth, Gesa E. Kirsch, and Patricia Fancher discuss, historically women have formed ethos collectively, combating ideas of exceptionalism to make their own experiences the norm. In this tradition, these contemporary memoirs create a networked, ecological collective ethos for working women in the 2010s, not just within professional fields but also across them. In these memoirs, we see women drafting and adapting generic cultural scripts, making their stories legible to their audiences who take up their ethos in reviews and on social media. We see them discussing the bounds of professionalism in their work, and by their very embodied existence, showing how those bounds—whether regarding clothing, profanity, or safety in the workplace—need to be expanded to welcome more voices and identities. They draw on the women who came before them and alongside them, showing how ethos is built out of community, connection, and relationship, particularly for women. We also see how, even though they have reached high levels of their professions—the Supreme Court, their own television show, their own congregation—they still get asked whether women are funny, qualified to lead, or called by God. The 2010s provided great opportunities for women in professional spaces, but these memoirs show the mental and emotional burden of professionalism. Regardless, these writers work to change their fields' professionalism to include their embodied experiences, building ethos in ways that shift their audience's conceptions of what a professional woman is and can be.

This study builds on the work of rhetorical and literary scholars to argue that memoir as a genre is rhetorical and deserves more attention from scholars, particularly in women's rhetorics. We need to work not only to reclaim women's writing of the past, but also to consider what genres and rhetorical actions are still being overlooked by scholars yet eagerly read by audiences. Memoir does rhetorical work in the world through its depictions of individual lives in cultural contexts, and women's memoir, in particular, is crucial to understanding how women rhetorically construct themselves and their ethos within personal narratives. By studying professional memoir, we can explore what cultural forms of professionalism are legible to audiences through discussions of how and why high-profile public figures craft narratives of their professional lives as they address and reflect wider cultural conceptions of professional women in public rhetorical fields.

Considering professional memoir, then, as a subgenre provides scholars and readers with another rhetorical lens through which to examine memoirs and how they reveal the continued challenges women encounter, especially as public figures in high-profile, rhetorical, professional fields like politics, comedy, and Protestant Christianity. These writers' use of rhetorical strategies to build their professional ethos shows how contemporary women must contort themselves to fit their fields' versions of professionalism, standards that were not made to fit a non-male and non-white body, much less a body with other intersecting oppressions. Women's rhetorics will benefit from a broader discussion of the memoirs of contemporary professional women who seem to "have it all," as their memoirs engage in the circulation of ideas among wide reading publics about the state of the working woman today. A focus on reader uptake provides rhetoricians with information about how readers are ingesting these ideas, sending them to others, and finding in them inspiration, entertainment, and support in crafting their own professional identities, which ultimately impacts who is culturally considered "professional" and

awarded ethos in these fields by constituents, congregants, and viewers. This rhetorical work reveals the ghosts and obstacles, to use Virginia Woolf's terminology, as well as the ways women rhetorically construct those ghosts, their own professional capabilities, and their professional workplaces and reveal the constraints they work within as professionals, writers, and women in a particular cultural context.

As I argue throughout my study, combining the work of researchers like Jessica Enoch, David Gold, Lynée Lewis Gaillet, and Helen Gaillet Bailey with the ways work is constituted rhetorically through creative nonfiction texts provides an important venue for how professional women employ rhetoric and conceive of themselves as professionals. However, contemporary women express their relationship with work in a multitude of rhetorical forms and genres, and so while this study isolated the memoir as a key genre, looking at women's depictions of their professional ethos in their memoirs only examines one way they construct their authority. Particularly for women in highly rhetorical professions, we could gain insight about the rhetorical maneuvers of public professional individuals by looking at their ethos construction across genres, comparing different rhetorical strategies to gain a fuller picture of how women use memoir with other forms to craft consistent yet shifting versions of the professional self, depending on intended audience and genre form.

In this study, I focused on three professions that require public rhetoric, so other male-dominated professions were beyond the scope of my project. However, memoirs from those in other male-dominated fields, such as technology and other STEM fields, would provide greater insight into a diversity of women's professional experience. For example, the analysis of memoirs such as *Uncanny Valley* by Anna Weiner and *Whistleblower: My Journey to Silicon Valley and Fight for Justice at Uber* by Susan Fowler would show how memoirs work rhetorically in exposing the gender dynamics and discrimination experienced by women in

technology. The field of professional sports would be another interesting venue for exploring how women craft their professional ethos. Lorin Shellenberger's dissertation on the performances of ethos by contemporary sportswomen does some of that work. However, analyzing memoirs by professional athletes would help rhetoricians understand how women conceptualize professional norms and embodiment in a profession based in the physical. Additionally, as allegations of sexual harassment and abuse have emerged, particularly in relation to women Olympians, discussion of the rhetorical construction of professional relationships and training could reveal information about the professional norms of the field in which these inequities and traumas persist. These memoirs also reflect broader conceptions of both professional branding (as Lisa Shaver explores with historical sportswoman Babe Didrikson Zaharias) and professionalism, in regard to women's health, bodies, and performances.

One of the parameters I set for my study was popularity, which I defined as best selling memoirs by high-profile individuals. As I argue, these widely read memoirs participate in the creation of public understandings of professional women in public rhetorical fields. However, not all memoirs by public figures are about their professional lives, and not all memoirs by individuals about their professional lives are best sellers or written by public figures. As such, there is rhetorical space for memoir with other focuses and professional memoirs by "nobodies," as both would expand our understanding of women constructing themselves rhetorically as a reflection of larger cultural ideas of working women. As discussed in earlier chapters, popularity is an important measure of how readers take up ideas, but given that popularity so often reflects who has the power in a culture, I sometimes chose diversity over popularity for the sake of my study. I sought to make the writers I studied here racially diverse; seven of the thirteen writers I examine are women of color. This meant leaving out other popular books that, to varying degrees, fit the parameters I set up, mostly books by white women. This is particularly relevant

in the comedy chapter, where I do not analyze popular memoirs written by women like Amy Schumer, Chelsea Handler, Amy Poehler, and Lena Dunham. In particular, the many memoirs of Handler would be an interesting study, as she has written six best-selling memoirs so far, four of which were published between 2010-2019; she has also spoken up in recent years about her work toward antiracism, making her an interesting cultural figure given her work and positionality.

The memoirs I explore in this study are more diverse in terms of race than other identities. Perhaps most notably, none of the writers of these memoirs identifies as queer; the majority of the subjects are in heterosexual partnerships or famously single (and identify as straight in their memoirs). Professional memoirs by women in the LGBTQ+ community were not prominent in the fields I examine during this particular time period. While memoirs by comedians Tig Notaro and Ellen Degeneres came out during this time period, their books did not consider their professional careers to the same extent as these other memoirs. Other LGBTQ+ comedians, such as Wanda Sykes and Margaret Cho, have written memoirs but not within this time period. An analysis of these older memoirs would provide a broader historical and rhetorical survey of queer women in comedy, particularly what different rhetorical constructions over time show about the rhetorical maneuvers of professionalism for those in the LGBTQ+ community.

To examine the rhetorical significance of these diverse stories, robust rhetorical frameworks need to be developed and applied to the memoir genre, frameworks that come from the texts themselves and the changing nature of life narratives in a culture where identity and subjectivity is multiply mediated. Exploring the cultural changes engendered by these texts is crucial to affirming their rhetoricity, and that can be done through increased understanding of reader uptake. Uptake happens in many different places and spaces, and further analysis can provide us with insight about the rhetorical environments of different uptake relationships. For

instance, uptake on Goodreads is different from uptake on Facebook book club pages, which is also different from the uptake on websites set up for the purpose of facilitating celebrity book clubs. As those who study the diverse genres of online communication assert, different social media sites and forms have different rhetorical purposes and participants. Combining that research with uptake can provide a better understanding of the cultural impact of popular texts and the construction of ethos therein. Identifying multiple audiences, as well as multiple tools for communication, can differentiate types of uptake; as Peter Medway says, we can only use our imagination to construct what readers' uptake will be (145), but having a complex picture of different responses to texts provides a better understanding of both readers and the contexts in which they circulate information. We can also examine what happens when an author gets involved and talks back to this uptake. With social media sites like Twitter and Goodreads, a reader and author can have a dialogue—productive or not—about the reader's response to the text; examining how that dialogue changes the rhetorical impact of personal writing would help us understand the ways audiences construct (or deconstruct) authors' ethos in public venues.

The growing number of online celebrity reading groups and book clubs provides an opportunity to consider the impact of public figures on reading publics. The feminization of both the reading public and the book club continues, even with greater access through the internet to celebrity-helmed reading communities. Oprah's book club remains a significant force, and other book clubs, such as the one headed by Reese Witherspoon discussed in chapter six, demonstrate that women are still looking for reading communities and often they participate in them online. Analyzing how book selections reflect the rhetorical situation these book club facilitators are speaking into and out of could further scholarship on the reading public and cultural patterns produced by these selections and the ensuing uptake. Women's rhetorics, in particular, would benefit from breaking down the binary between scholarly and popular writing, gaining a stronger

idea of how popular genres and online communities participate in circulating cultural constructions of women and gender roles by simply talking about a book with others.

Further work also can be done in educating the reading public about memoir and its rhetoric, both to help readers understand the ways memoirs, and narratives more broadly, adjust their understanding of public women and their lives, and to ask them to think about the ways they rhetorically construct their own lives through social media, anecdotes, and other forms of communication. Addressing issues around ghostwriting, cultural consumption of life stories, and the legible scripts through which individuals craft their ethos is valuable for the many readers of memoir who discuss these books in their book clubs, online, and among friends. Additionally, considering how we can engage students with the study of popular memoirs by public individuals provides a way to connect with students' interests while challenging them to analyze how they and others read these texts and the rhetorical impact these texts have on cultural conceptions of celebrities, women in the workplace, and the public nature of life writing. Especially for students who already engage in life writing/composing through social media sites like Instagram and TikTok, exploring these forms as rhetorical genres and comparing them with the work of the memoir can provide a greater understanding of how we compose ourselves as authorities and citizens in a mediated world.

A final way that the field of rhetoric would benefit from further studies on professional memoir is in looking at the professional norms and expectations of our profession itself. Scholars and teachers have used narrative to explore and analyze their experiences in the academy, such as Mike Rose's 1989 memoir *Lives on the Boundary*, *Bootstraps* by Victor Villanueva (1993), *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks (1994), and *When Students Have Power* by Ira Shor (1996). Other more recent examples range from Morris Young's literacy narrative in 2004, Sondra Perl's reflection on teaching abroad in 2005, Vershawn Ashanti Young's book on

masculinity, race and performance in 2007, Eli Goldblatt's literacy narrative in 2012, and Elizabeth Boquet's brief reflections on violence and teaching in 2016. These teaching narratives make plain the subjectivity of teachers as humans dealing with issues of power, privilege, and knowledge along with other humans in classrooms. Little attention has been paid to teaching narratives as a corpus that provides important information about the work of teaching in a particular place and time that not only informs the field but also communicates with the world outside of academia about the work done inside. Sidonie Smith made a similar argument in her 2011 MLA Presidential Address, in which she articulates the need for professional memoirs of academics, given that "an archive of our narrated lives would provide an invaluable resource for analyzing and historicizing what it was and what it is now to be a teacher and scholar of languages and literatures ... in all its complexities and contradictions" (571), placing the work of instructors and researchers within context. So, the field of rhetoric could itself benefit from increased scholarship into the professional memoir as a genre.

All of these venues of potential scholarship will more fully develop our understanding of how memoir functions as a rhetorical genre and circulates cultural conceptions of women as narrative subjects within multiple reading communities, as well as the ways women use memoir to develop their personal and professional ethos. Professional memoirs, in particular, allow for a variety of rhetorical maneuvers, combining facts with creativity and lived experience with narrative structure, so that women can focus on their professional lives within a context, enticing audiences through humor and inspiration even as they persuade readers to evaluate the professional norms maintained by fields that constrain particular people, backgrounds, and identities. As people continue to read memoir, women's rhetorics needs to provide both scholars and readers with rhetorical tools for gaining cultural knowledge from this genre, as we analyze how people use rhetorical strategies to construct themselves, their work, their lives, and their

cultures through their memoirs and circulate sociocultural ideas of what constitutes a subject and a professional in a particular time and place as they craft their lives.

As for me, I will continue to participate in that scholarly work, regardless of the professional environment in which I find myself in the ensuing years. As I build on what Tina and Hillary and Austin and Ali and others have taught me through their memoirs about being a professional woman in professional spaces, I will continue to learn from the life narratives of high-profile smart and funny women who construct narratives of professional progress in contexts that often do not know what to do with ambitious women. For me and other readers like me, memoir and the truths it holds about engaging with the world is often "the bannister [we] grab for when feeling around on the dark cellar stairs" (Karr xviii). In developing a healthy rhetorical understanding, we light up that bannister just a bit. We show how it works, how it makes us grab hold, how it helps us bolster ourselves in times of uncertainty and confusion. Readers look to memoir for a reason, and now, rhetoric should look to memoir to discover those reasons. What better way to understand that so many of us are just crafting ourselves as professionals, women, and people the best we can, with the rhetorical tools we have, in a culture we are making and remaking all the time?

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