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To cite this article: Will Penman (2018) A field-based rhetorical critique of ethical accountability, Quarterly Journal of Speech, 104:3, 307-328, DOI: [10.1080/00335630.2018.1486032](https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2018.1486032)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2018.1486032>



Published online: 20 Jun 2018.



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A field-based rhetorical critique of ethical accountability

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ABSTRACT

This essay suggests that the concept of interdependence provides a rhetorical telos for research ethics. Current field-based rhetoric work advocates for a postcolonial research ethic. However, this is often articulated with a discourse of ethical accountability. Although it has advantages, accountability limits us by excluding ethical pursuit and reifying people as autonomous individuals. In contrast, interdependence helps complete the liberatory trajectory of postcolonial research ethics. Drawing on work in a recent field site, I argue that interdependence encourages scholars to see dilemmas as an opportunity for rhetorical response and ethical lament, helps scholars take creative action to be shaped by participants directly, and helps scholars explain to others why they pursue ethical actions beyond what is socially required.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 March 2017
Accepted 25 April 2018

KEYWORDS

Accountability; ethics;
fieldwork; interdependence;
postcolonial

[The University] promotes the responsible conduct of research through high standards of ethics and accountability in planning, conducting and reporting research. The responsible conduct of research is demonstrated through behavior that meets generally accepted standards. These standards are set forth by state and federal regulations, institutional policies, professional codes of conduct and personal convictions. The building blocks of responsible conduct of research include:

- Honesty—conveying information truthfully and honoring commitments,
- Accuracy—reporting findings precisely and taking care to avoid errors,
- Efficiency—using resources wisely and avoiding waste, and
- Objectivity—letting the facts speak for themselves and avoiding improper bias
—University webpage, “Responsible Conduct of Research”¹

Taking ethics seriously draws rhetoricians to reflect on and account for the process of what we do when we collect and analyze textual and field data and the politics inherent in that process. Doing this accounting work increases the openness and vulnerability of our scholarship as it allows others access to the methodological process, which provides space for further conversation and critique.

—McKinnon, et al. (2016), “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited”²

These two explanations of ethical research conduct, one from my institution’s website and the other from a recent article in *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, represent very different approaches to research ethics. The university text espouses a conservative view of

research ethics, taking a high view of institutions: it constructs ethical action as a relatively settled matter that responsible people all agree on, which trickles down from the state, to the university, to the discipline, and finally to the individual, and thereby presupposes that universities can be straightforward agents of ethical conduct. In contrast, the rhetorical research text advocates for what is called variously a postcolonial, decolonial, antiracist, or feminist view of research ethics:³ it constructs ethical action as naturally opaque to those with social power, and therefore as being inherently political (i.e., potentially at odds with institutionalized ethics), requiring serious ongoing attention to do well, and necessarily including reshaping who has access to ethical decision-making processes. These different views of ethics lead to different ethical practices being recommended: the university text, making sense of the world through an objectivist lens, recommends that researchers pursue as a moral good what is true, error-free, efficient, and unbiased; while the field-based text recommends that researchers take a quite different stance of openness and vulnerability.

Rhetorical work, especially field-based rhetorical work,⁴ has almost universally sided with the postcolonial approach to ethical action, and has viewed its different recommended actions as a corrective to the conservative stance. But however different the recommended actions are, both explanations above unobtrusively describe a goal of “accountability,” and both use accountability syntactically as a gloss of or equivalent to “ethics” itself. That is, from this small sketch, the endpoint of postcolonial ethical action is articulated as being the same as traditional research ethics. I suggest that this is not an isolated case or poorly worded gaffe, but is a pattern, a discourse of ethical accountability that invites rhetorical attention and critique. This essay, in other words, investigates how we articulate what a postcolonial research ethic is *for*. The stakes of this question are high: if postcolonial ethical actions like “vulnerability” are shoehorned into the goal of holding ourselves “accountable,” I suggest that we lose a more radical and thoroughgoing reordering of our social relationships (i.e., a more radical and thoroughgoing ethics). By approaching the question at the level of naming an ethical end, we can align the goal of postcolonial research ethics with the ethical actions that people and institutions already (haltingly) undertake.

The essay proceeds in five parts. To begin, I examine recent field-based rhetorical scholarship⁵ that theorizes research ethics through a postcolonial lens. According to McKinnon et al., rhetorical field-based scholarship is at the forefront of rhetorically theorizing research ethics.⁶ That is, scholars who work through ethical questions interpersonally in the context of fieldwork are positioned to speak to questions of relevance that rhetoric scholars have about research ethics more broadly. After all, despite the general affirmation that research ethics is a concern of rhetorical scholarship,⁷ ethics is an understudied, almost taboo, area for regular discussion;⁸ research ethics “has not been a central preoccupation”⁹ for rhetoric scholars. This review highlights two recommended ethical practices, of rhetoric scholars reincorporating their own and others’ corporeality in their research texts, and rhetoric scholars carrying out research projects with “reflexivity.” Rhetoric scholars working in the field, then, make a powerful case that research ethics is relevant to all scholars, and explain concrete practices in the field and on the page that correspond to a postcolonial awareness that scholars are embedded within systems of historical oppression based on race, gender, class, and more. At the same time, I show that this same scholarship almost always articulates the goal of such ethical action with a discourse of accountability.

I then move to two critiques of accountability being an ethical end. First, based on a case study from a recent field-based rhetorical research project, I describe an aspect of that project that I experienced as an ethical dilemma, but that is not legible as a dilemma within a discourse of accountability. I then provide a more theoretical critique of a discourse of accountability, arguing that accountability is at odds with postcolonial efforts. One way to view the promise of accountability is as a bargain in which people receive recompense for wrongs, in exchange for allowing colonizers to reclaim a clean conscience. A discourse of ethical accountability, then, relies on a traditional vision of a self-sufficient rhetor, allowing us to critique accountability on rhetorical grounds and identify several areas in which it fails us ethically.

To provide a rhetorically more complete alternative, I turn to Diane Davis, whom I consider rhetoric's foremost scholar of vulnerability. Her concept of rhetoricity, which is often taken up as a purely theoretical claim *that* people are interconnected, can be extended to provide grounds for people to pursue a sense of our interconnectedness. I call this a pursuit of our interdependence, and suggest that it provides a rhetorical telos for research ethics that is rooted in responding to others (an inversion of our usual attention to persuading others).

In the final section, I return to the case study to see how pursuing interdependence as an ethical standard transforms ethical dilemmas. When interdependence is our ethical goal, it leads us to expect that dilemmas will characterize our fieldwork, and that our ethical task is to embrace this interdependence on multiple parties rather than seek to be justified. I introduce the practice of "ethical lament" (an expression of grief before/with others so as to be both present to the moment and open to critique) as a textual way to embrace our interdependence, and describe creative, intentional (i.e., rhetorical) ways to respond in the field to dilemmas we face.

A discourse of ethical accountability

In the epigraph, postcolonial ethical action includes "openness" and "vulnerability." In this section, I give a more thorough account of the ethical actions recommended by postcolonial rhetorical scholars working in the field, and identify how these compelling actions are nevertheless articulated as pursuing the goal of accountability. This prepares the way for a critique of accountability in the next two sections.

Postcolonial approaches to rhetorical fieldwork draw on anthropological research on ethnographic methods and iterate on rhetorical work in critical rhetoric.¹⁰ At their heart, postcolonial approaches seek to displace the neutrality and presumed morality of people who operate with social power. With regard to the history of ethnography, for instance, de la Garza notes that the earliest ethnographers attended explorers like Hernán Cortés, and were sponsored by the state to document colonial conquests and encounters with native peoples. Although these proto-ethnographers did provide detailed facts and cultural insights, their documents generally "were written in order to justify, legitimize, and perpetuate the colonization of those about whom the texts were written."¹¹ That is, we would be mistaken to envision an innocent birth of ethnography, or to think that the researcher's methods, intentions, and scholarly impact can be cleanly separated from the structural inequities that make ethnography possible. Conquer-good adds that when Malinoski and others in the 1920s began formalizing ethnography,

the method naturally participated in the colonialist project; thus, ethnography presents “a particularly sensitive site for registering the aftershocks of critical theory.”¹²

Within rhetorical theory, a postcolonial research approach (which, in light of the ethical implications of colonialism, also embeds a postcolonial research ethic) is often carried out through two moves. First, scholars make a textual move to reincorporate themselves into their research accounts, to subvert an objectivistic view of the world, resist fearful writing that excludes personal commitment to ideas, and in the process, better approach the relationships that research texts represent. Rhetorical field researchers have done this in a variety of ways. Many rhetoricians, for example, argue that observation itself is embodied, and therefore they cannot help but make their bodies-in-the-field more present in their research text.¹³ Middleton et al. use personal anecdotes from when they were in the field to motivate and explain theoretical concepts about fieldwork.¹⁴ McKinnon and colleagues partner to write dialogically, with each section made up of one person’s reflection on their fieldwork and another co-author’s response.¹⁵ And Ewalt, Ohl, and Pfister include themselves into their texts through a bold mix of recorded and invented transcripts, done in collaboration with people with whom they work.¹⁶

A second move rhetorical scholars make to enact a postcolonial research ethic is to reconsider their actions in the field in light of power differences with participants. This is a methodological and analytical move of “reflexivity,” a turning of the analytical gaze back onto the researcher herself. As Middleton et al. put it, reflexivity “prods critics to be as analytical about themselves as they would be of rhetors (and audiences).”¹⁷ Thus, in the same way that we might as scholars ask who benefits and who is harmed from a rhetor’s argument, we can ask who benefits and who is harmed from our own (textual or field-based) research. This, in turn, creates a more nuanced sense of harm, consent, and privacy.¹⁸ For instance, while basic accountability processes assess what harms there might be to possible participants in a research project, a reflexive methodology might additionally assess a deep but difficult-to-locate harm to participants in the research design itself, if benefits to the scholar of a project are direct (career, prestige, knowledge), but benefits to the participant are indirect, “transcendent,” and not supportive of those people’s agency.¹⁹ Reflexivity can also suggest more radical forms of research that are initiated, sustained, and even written up by participants themselves for the sake of their own communities.²⁰ Reflexive research design expresses the researcher’s learned distrust of their own goodwill, a conviction that we should focus on the impacts and consequences of our research, not our intentions, as a stronger starting point for ethical decision-making.²¹

An ethical practice of reflexivity can also be present in the research text. De Onís calls the people she works with in Puerto Rico “compañer@s” (partners, companions, and/or colleagues, where the @ combines -a and -o feminine and masculine endings) to adopt a local, non-English-centered understanding of relationship possibilities, to work against gender exclusivity, and to diminish her power as a researcher.²² And Ralph Cintrón turns the benign practice of assigning pseudonyms into an ethical tribute. By naming the city in his book after one key participant, he not only represents the people as noble, he also hopes to perform “a kind of symbolic conquering of the city itself.”²³ But the institutional strain of this postcolonial ethic is evident; Middleton et al. note that in rhetorical scholarship, researchers’ moves to be reflexive in their texts are often discouraged in subtle and overt ways.²⁴

Rhetorical critics working in the field, then, have acknowledged ethics as fundamental to their research, and have suggested compelling ethical practices that work against colonizing, racist, and/or patriarchal systems. Yet surprisingly, many rhetorical scholars working in the field in a postcolonial way have drawn on a discourse of ethical accountability. This is important to examine because the ethical goals that we identify provide us with criteria for success; conversely, goals are benchmarks for failure. Metaphors that we use for goals often alert us to wider meaning-making systems.²⁵ And ethical endpoints are wrapped up in how we take action: they are a reference point that aligns diverse actors, a point of appeal in times of conflict, and an inventional handrail for new situations. Given the postcolonial critique of academic work itself, it is especially important to ensure that we analyze and evaluate postcolonial ethical efforts within a postcolonial ethical telos.

Accountability is a system of redress for wrongs, a system emerging from both market and legal metaphors.²⁶ Market metaphors for ethical accountability are transposed from a financial context in which organizations guard against incompetence and dishonesty by presenting auditable accounts of their financial activity.²⁷ It is no wonder that when it comes up in field ethics this form of ethical accountability is panned as a neo-liberal cancer that is not relevant to researchers. Rob Asen, in his part of an article on rhetorical field ethics, cites Biesta, who himself cites Epstein for a critique of market-driven accountability.²⁸ They observe that market-driven forms of accountability are: 1) anti-democratic, in that citizens are interpellated as consumers who are not allowed to deliberate over ethical goals, but can only select from the slate of options that are presented; 2) a fantasy of empowerment, in that market systems are predicated on inequality, and consumers in general are captive to multi-national producers, not the other way around; 3) a deliberately ineffective system, in that the state mediates accountability procedures (e.g., between students and their school); and 4) a weak moral recourse, in that they simply seek to *contain* wrong-doing—and only in aggregate and in the long-term—rather than provide specific people with timely recompense. For Asen, talking with lawmakers as part of his rhetorical research created a conflict for him between holding lawmakers accountable for their failings by criticizing them on behalf of other constituents, versus performing the role of interviewer, with its attendant deference. Asen, that is, sees himself as having a moral responsibility to hold the lawmakers accountable through his research, but qualifies market-driven accountability by appealing instead to the “democratic potential of accountability.”²⁹

Thus we come to a set of legal metaphors for ethical accountability that is accepted by most scholars doing qualitative fieldwork. Gilligan explains the features of a legally-driven discourse of accountability: the pursuit of justice and justification in the midst of competing claims to various rights; in which conflicts are mediated impersonally through logic and law and adjudicated in terms of people’s obligations and responsibilities; and in which people define themselves by their moral autonomy.³⁰ The prototypical example of legally-rooted ethical accountability is our federally mandated system of scholarly review boards.³¹ Review boards consider a mix of purportedly universal principles (e.g., “respect persons”) and the likely effects of an action (e.g., “do the benefits of this research intervention outweigh the harms?”) to determine what, if anything, needs to be adjusted before a scholar can ethically carry out a specific research project.

We see a discourse of ethical accountability used nearly without reservation by rhetorical scholars doing postcolonial fieldwork. In the introduction to their collection on rhetorical field methods, for instance, McKinnon et al. explicitly call rhetoric scholars to an “accountability ethic.”³² This is followed by many contributors freely using “accountability” to name their ethical goals.³³ And writing with many of the same contributors in a recent article, McKinnon et al. reiterate their commitment to accountability.³⁴ Similarly, in their book on rhetorical field methods, Middleton et al. regularly recommend that rhetoric scholars “account for themselves” to other academics in their research texts.³⁵ The only hint of suspicion toward a discourse of ethical accountability comes through the commonplace that accountability should contain a narrative component: an “account-ability,” or ability to give an account (i.e., tell a story).³⁶ Account-ability is thus offered as a postcolonial strategy of making the researcher’s judgment visible.

Making dilemmas visible

Before critiquing a discourse of ethical accountability on theoretical grounds, I offer a case study from my own field research that presents a felt difficulty with accountability. This case study is part of what became a three-year participatory critical rhetoric project³⁷ on antiracism. In that project, I worked mostly with people from Second Presbyterian Church of Splitsville³⁸ who are white and who are trying to be more actively against racism. Second Pres is a bridge between evangelical and liberal Christians theologically,³⁹ but is on the border of the mostly black neighborhood of Familyfield, and its members stand out there not only for being white but for being so well-educated—a running joke is that the congregation has more degrees than people. As part of their antiracist learning, people from Second Pres interacted mostly with black people from neighboring First Pres, located in the heart of Familyfield. For white people from Second Pres, then, antiracism is enacted contextually: between partnering churches, within the slowly gentrifying neighborhood of Familyfield, in the highly segregated city of Splitsville.

In 2015, I joined with Aviva (white, from Second Pres) and Ms. Di (black, from First Pres) to help coordinate what ended up being a set of four interchurch, interracial conversations between Second Pres and First Pres, structured around race. Aviva especially wanted to “have a better understanding of, I mean for lack of a better way to say it, the black experience”; Ms. Di thought the conversations might help “not just to have collaborative stuff [between Second Pres and First Pres], but to have cohesiveness between the members and, uh—as it pertains to this community”; and I was interested academically and personally in how white people come into effective antiracist action.

Race was the topic for the interchurch conversations, but we were met by race before we came to it: Splitsville’s history of redlining scarred our city; places that had been marked in red on federally-commissioned maps in the 1930s for having an “undesirable population or an infiltration of it” (and thereby used to deny people home-buying loans) were still visible today in the form of predominately black neighborhoods, including Familyfield. The intellectual white participants were enraced as well, as Ryne, a white university professor of philosophy, summarized in our first conversation:

[...] academia is especially a place where, you know, people who are considered thinkers are all basically dead, white, male, Europeans. And, you know, that we—so we have this long historical tradition of—of what we think is proper thinking and proper reasoning.

As a white researcher I had recognized that I was positioned as a scholar but was a racial learner myself, seeking to undo the impacts of white supremacy in my own life.

In the course of the interchurch conversations, both black and white people articulated a local theory that antigentrification in Familyfield depends on white people embracing “stability,” or chosen rootedness in a place. For instance, in our third meeting, Ms. China, an older African-American woman from First Church who had lived in Familyfield for decades, observed that neighborhoods in Splitsville are often rich *and* white or poor *and* black, and worked to historicize the causes of that as coming out of discriminatory city practices. Then she held up Johanna, who has lived in Familyfield as a white woman with her family for fifteen years, as the exemplar of wisdom (for being able to distinguish people who are “really” part of Familyfield from those who are seeking some kind of “advantage”) and stability: Johanna was “part of the community” regardless of whether Familyfield was profitable. Ms. China, then, set up a nuanced analysis of gentrification in which white people should address macro-level racist forces of black wealth extraction in part by rooting themselves in one place.

Similarly, for Lexi, a young white woman from Second Pres who spoke next, Ms. China’s explanation was helpful for her own thinking, in which she’s stuck regarding anti-racism after buying a house in Oakwood, another gentrifying neighborhood. Even though Oakwood is a mostly white area, Lexi’s housing choices qua social action is the primary way that she relates to the goals of the conversations about race. Lexi acknowledged that, despite buying a house for “arbitrary” reasons, she and her husband were individual instantiations of market pressures, and so “we very much, like, are a part of that—the gentrification that’s happening.” She echoed Ms. China in characterizing gentrification as being not just a one-time housing choice, but also an ongoing choice that a person can “live into” or not; gentrification is an orientation toward the neighborhood where a person “doesn’t care what people are already there.” Stability, then, is a rhetorical practice,⁴⁰ the desire for which grounds Lexi’s response to/relationship with Ms. China.

Theologically, people from Second Pres had done a book study the year before on a then-new book *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus*, by C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison, that added weight to what was being said.⁴¹ Ten or so people from Second Pres came to someone’s house for dinner every week, and after eating, Pastor Robert led the group in conversation about the book chapter that everyone had read. I attended most meetings and considered it a preliminary look at Second Pres’ efforts to enact antiracism rhetorically. One chapter in Smith and Pattison stands out with regard to stability, titled “Stability: Fidelity to people and place.” Smith and Pattison argue that many people in America (including Christians) are living hypermobile, individualistic lives that cause people to lose the motivation and ability to resolve conflict; to participate in a “disembodied” Christianity that commits racial, social, and environmental injustice;⁴² to be “tourists of life”;⁴³ and to miss God’s “leaven” that makes creation rise.⁴⁴ Smith and Pattison find an alternative ideology in the “slow food” movement (riffing on this in its title, *Slow Church*), arguing that Christians should also learn to do church slowly. In order to develop stability, Smith and Pattison recommend, among other things, that people should be part of a church that values the neighborhood;⁴⁵ spend time with neighbors in work and relaxation;⁴⁶ engage in local history;⁴⁷ interact with the neighborhood’s natural world;⁴⁸ and send people out to a new place as an exception rather than the rule, a result of church discernment rather than a person’s pursuit of

individual self-fulfillment,⁴⁹ the effect of all this being that people will “become more sensitive to the work God is doing all around us.”⁵⁰

This working theory that stability is the key to antigentrification efforts relies on and draws out a web of interconnections among people that includes me. On an ethical level, the people in the project implied that as a white person involved in antigentrification work in Familyfield with them, I should also pursue stability. There is the danger, in other words, that if I dropped my involvement with Familyfield suddenly and (from the neighborhood’s perspective) carefreely, I could be participating in “pushing people out,” in “taking advantage,” in giving white people a “stigma,” and in “not caring,” as Ms. China and Lexi put it. My actions in this regard would speak to my whole racial group:⁵¹ my disappearance from Familyfield would not simply have ramifications for how I personally was treated by black people from the neighborhood, but would likely be extended to how white people in general were taken up in the neighborhood. That is, not seeking stability in Familyfield could subvert and undermine the very interracial trust that my project was designed to build, as well as ignore one of the findings of my own research about how people in the project think gentrification should be resisted. Embracing stability would mean that I should only be involved with Familyfield to the extent that I’m willing to commit to it long-term, and should be hesitant to leave, especially for financial reasons. At an extreme, I should view moving from Familyfield as a decision that should be undertaken with community approval. In the field, this dilemma sometimes came to me at a visceral, affective level: as an internal constricting, a squirming need either to throw caution to the wind by planting down in Familyfield, or to cash in on my academic labors and abandon Familyfield with my shoulders bashfully shrugged.

However, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process sees no ethical implications to how stable I am as a researcher, and is unable to affirm Second Pres’ convictions.⁵² Moreover, when a postcolonial approach is bound to the goal of “accounting for” my decisions in my research texts, my available range of options is still limited because my department had an active moral claim on my pace of work. “Mobility,” or temporal and geographic flexibility,⁵³ is a professional value that departments create to be accountable themselves to universities, state legislatures, ranking systems, and more. Individual scholars become acculturated to mobility through accountability measures such as tenure requirements, a tenure clock, an expectation of nationwide job searches, and so on. From my department’s perspective, my prior work to establish an analytic focus and a network of people at Second Pres and First Pres should have been sufficient fieldwork for a dissertation project. Thus, a discourse of accountability was operative around my status as a student “in good standing,” as well as when the sensitivity that I felt to the people in Familyfield was rationalized as me being unrealistic, naïve, fragile, self-important, extravagant, and unfocused.

Thus, rather than a “dilemma,” a discourse of accountability would characterize my situation as simply a challenge related to “exiting the field,” in which I might have an emotional weight to participants in the project, but would only have an ethical weight to the institutions that I was already wrapped up with. Not seeing this situation as an ethical dilemma comes with costs: it inhibits outsiders’ (personal, social, and spiritual) critique of academic mobility; and it denies the felt problem that I had, and the kind of problem that others may have, forcing me to bear my specific dilemma on my own. My

quarrel here is not with the IRB or my department, *per se*—stability is not so global an ethical requirement as to warrant every researcher mentioning it to earn institutional approval, nor would I expect an alternative to a discourse of ethical accountability to spring up immediately. Rather, it shows a longing for ethical endpoints that are more flexible, contingent, and satisfy more directly the ethical demands of the communities with whom scholars work. I suggest that what we need is not more accountability, but a revised conception of the relationships that ethical action cultivates.

A rhetorical critique of ethical accountability

This section extends the felt difficulty described above into a more theoretical critique of a discourse of ethical accountability. It does so by applying postcolonial thinking back onto itself, focusing on how accountability depends on the Enlightenment-era conception of rhetors as independent, isolated beings.

First, it is easy to see why rhetoric scholars would draw on a discourse of ethical accountability. After all, extended activist efforts to increase what people in power are accountable for can gradually improve the landscape for people at risk—civil rights movements on the basis of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and others have often measured their success by this metric. Once in place, a system of legal accountability is public, objective, and (relatively) effective against intransigent colonizers. For people in some civil rights movements, accountability is thus a given ethical goal.⁵⁴

Moreover, a discourse of ethical accountability is treated as innocuous within scholarly circles. Some field-based scholars treat accountability as a synonym for reflexivity: Landau suggests that “accounting for” what the researcher does is the definition of reflexivity;⁵⁵ and Hess joins the two as “self-reflexive accountability” (which, he notes, is an uncontroversial standard, “common to critical-qualitative researchers and ethnographers”⁵⁶).

Institutional accountability procedures also structure any scholar’s understanding of ethics. Fieldwork requires IRB approval, and even scholars who don’t do fieldwork are embedded in a variety of other (market- and legally-infused) university accountability systems: accountability to accreditation bodies, to students, to the university (at public institutions) to the state, and more. Accountability in this sense feels flexible and egalitarian; even IRBs have been called up to account for themselves.⁵⁷

However, accountability is fundamentally a back-up for pursuing right relations. It can be understood as a bargain with colonizers in which people isolate and quantify their harms to receive some kind of recompense, in exchange for allowing colonizers to reclaim a clean conscience. While it may be an appropriate compromise in the face of recalcitrant populations, white people and other colonizers should recognize that our moral endpoint should not simply be paying people back for the harms we cause them.⁵⁸ Legal accountability, that is, operates under the same transactional logic that scholars reject in market-driven accountability. The law is an alternative mechanism for supporting ethical systems than the market, but the same transactional model.

Rhetorically, a discourse of ethical accountability is problematic because it buys into an Enlightenment understanding of rhetors as people who are in their essence self-sufficient and independent. Begin with this independent rhetor and we move straightforwardly to a discourse of ethical accountability. He—if not strictly a man, he or she operates patriarchally⁵⁹—is trained to persuade others without any conception of the mutuality of being

influenced; all persuasion and no being persuaded. This independent rhetor considers himself magnanimous for using words to influence others rather than physical violence.⁶⁰ He is normatively a self-sufficient adult; early- and late-life dependence are embarrassing aberrations for his world, as are disabilities that require ongoing personal assistance.

Still, the independent rhetor is liable to overstep someone else's independence. It is through violating another person's autonomy, then, that unethical behavior emerges as such. Harming someone is an exception to the rule of his conduct and is caused by too close of contact; his default mode of behavior is thus assumed to be distant and ethical. Structures for accountability are then only needed to remediate egregious, malicious conduct. Accountability is thus like the bumpers at a bowling alley: meant for novices, and an embarrassment to touch. When threats of accountability effectively disincentivize wrong conduct, it is because they promise to limit the independent rhetor's autonomy; we talk about him as being "held" accountable, rather than being free to roam in what is metaphorically his natural (autonomous) state.

This independent rhetor is thus the model for a discourse of accountability and also a paragon of colonial conduct. A postcolonial research ethic, then, is limited by speaking of accountability as the endpoint of ethics. First, scholars who draw on a discourse of accountability have few conceptual resources to develop or initiate more accountability practices. One bromide of reflexivity is that "if there ever is a conflict of interest, the people studied *must come first*."⁶¹ This is an inspiring ethical guideline, but seeking additional accountability as an individual is seen as overzealous, appropriate only for lovers of red tape or for pessimistic scholars who want to make everyone out to be unethical.⁶² Advice to instantly resolve dilemmas in favor of participants, then, can easily in practice be a protective tactic, an incentive not to notice dilemmas.⁶³ This qualifies the impact that a narrative focus on accountability can have. It is true that in making our decision-making process more visible to other scholars, we resist a detached and independent persona. Yet being able to give an account for one's actions still yields the heavy lifting to accountability by doing little to put us in a position where our judgments will be challenged, especially by those most directly affected by our actions in the field. When scholars don't give opportunity for the research participants' communities to define, identify, and remediate the researchers' ethical conduct, the research must still be asymmetric (and even paternalistic).

Second, because a discourse of accountability emphasizes formal, independent structures like the court system or university appeal processes to mediate claims to harm, research ethics unnecessarily adheres to a public/private split.⁶⁴ For instance, as a scholar working in the field I am considered "accountable" to funding institutions (for, say, working hard in the field) and review boards (for being beneficent to participants), but it would seem metaphorical to say that I am "accountable" to a private entity like my wife (for, say, working only hours that support our family's well-being). Yet it is unclear how the ethical demand on me is different from that of those "public" parties, leading to fragmented, disjointed ethical considerations.

Finally, a discourse of accountability institutionalizes what a postcolonial perspective can only see as white people's and other colonizers' anemic desire to ethically excel, by making ethical pursuit a nonissue. Scholars cannot "pursue" ethical interactions without acknowledging that they are in some ways insufficient, or at least that their ethical behavior requires ongoing discernment and continuous effort. Yet accountability

structures are relatively static and difficult to modify. Accountability structures make do with our failure of ethical desire and, in the process, fail to cultivate our ethical desire. Accountability, as a system of redress, manages and disincentivizes people's wrongdoing; it doesn't support people's right-doing. Ultimately, a discourse of accountability doesn't hold hope for the possibility of colonizers and other people transforming ethically.

In a promising direction, rhetoricians have begun displacing the discourse of accountability by experimenting with how rhetorical concepts can bear on research ethics.⁶⁵ Middleton et al., for instance, categorize ethical issues according to participants' rhetorical roles.⁶⁶ When a group is acting in the role of advocates for something, they are more likely to require that a researcher be aligned with their goals; and if that group is working on a sensitive issue, they might make the ethical demand that a researcher not publicize their rhetorical strategies. Alternatively, when that group is in focus as dialogue partners, they might be offended if the researcher tries to remain neutral, and they might question whether the researcher is the right person to tell their story. This effort has been insightful and nuanced. However, the concept of rhetorical roles is limited in its ability to generate, mediate, and interrogate ethical questions about how a researcher acts.

Another possibility has been explored by Aaron Hess, who argues that *phronesis*, or judgment, is a skill that researchers develop in the field that might go some way to helping us understand research ethics.⁶⁷ And McKinnon et al. write about responsibility, truth, power, relationships, and representation as "points of tension" to spark consideration of ethical dilemmas.⁶⁸ These rhetorical concepts help us connect the ethical work that field-based rhetoric scholars do to research ethics more generally. In the next section I continue these efforts to bring rhetorical concepts to bear on how we articulate ethical goals.

An alternative discourse of ethical interdependence

I have argued that a postcolonial view of research ethics actions is hobbled by framing the goal as accountability. In this section I argue that the rhetorical concept of interdependence has the potential to more fully complete the postcolonial program by providing a rhetorical telos for research ethics.

Drawing on interdependence theoretically means upending the directionality of our analysis: in addition to examining people's efforts to affect others, it conditions us to be equally attentive to people's ability to *be* affected, persuaded, and shaped. Diane Davis argues that, rhetorically speaking, any person's act to persuade someone else actually depends on a deeper mutuality between those people, on a connection and obligation that people have toward each other in some primordial way. She calls this connectedness "rhetoricity." For Davis, our interdependence allows us to change or be persuaded and not just stonily sit in our own worlds. Interdependence is thus at the heart of rhetorical exchange. Rhetoric in the traditional sense of persuasion, then, doesn't establish an influencing link from one person to another, it relies on a mutual influence and presupposes it. Davis explains this conceptual shift by using the analogy of making a phone call.⁶⁹ In one sense, making a phone call is the initiation of a communicative, connective act. But at a more structural level, making a phone call relies on, and presupposes the existence of, a vast infrastructure of prior networks, phone lines, signals, software, and satellites that already connect people by preparing them to talk. In fact, this goes further: even receiving

a phone call from someone already depends on the same prior openness, so that there is a “yes” involved even before one can say “no” or decline their call.⁷⁰ Response to another (which Davis would have us conceive of as the definition of rhetoric) is primary and unavoidable. This underlying connectedness makes for a powerful understanding of rhetoric, affecting how we theorize hermeneutics, agency, and even the concept of communication itself, which is inverted from the status of an achievement—a triumphant link forged from one independent person to other independent people—to a more collective “communal sensibility, a supplement of responsivity.”⁷¹

I extend Davis’ work to suggest that if people’s influence on others relies on a fundamental interdependence with others, then there must be ways for a person to be attuned to that interdependence or not. Davis goes partway to this when she notes, “Not every communication with an other signals an encounter with the face.”⁷² Encountering the “face,” or becoming attuned to our interdependence, happens when we have an affective, embodied discovery of our infinite obligation to others, whether that is in front of an actual person or not. Thus, I argue that, to the extent that infinite obligation has an ethical edge, ethics can become a rhetorical practice and pursuit. Pursuit, here, should be taken to mean a kind of response to encountering the other: “your capacity (and desire) to effect change is already a function of your inescapable responsibility, and not the other way around.”⁷³ Rather than a punitive accountability that acts when violations occur, research ethics that draw on interdependence can come to look like a set of possibilities: a process of being shaped, being molded, embracing our interdependence. Extending Davis, then, helps recover the relevance of people’s ethical pursuit (into what we might call love), and to cast that within a rhetorical frame.

Extending interdependence as a rhetorical concept to theorize our pursuit of research ethics suggests an alternative to ethical accountability that better articulates postcolonial aims. First, we can revise the goal from “accountability” into something like “actions to tap into our interdependence.” This recharacterizes (and provides opportunities to adjust) the ethical work we already do. Institutional review, when theorized in terms of interdependence, is an ethical and rhetorical practice of acknowledging our prior openness to other scholars, even when being sent out to a different community. It is a way to continue to be shaped by (persuaded by) academics when working with others. Similarly, the “acknowledgments section” of books and articles is a pre-existing, conventional way to disclose to other scholars the funding agencies and personal relationships that have shaped our work. It comes into focus as an ethical move in that it presumes and calls forth our intellectual, relational, and financial interdependence.

This move away from the language of accountability, in turn, gives license and encouragement to pursue ethical action through new, inventive action that is more *kairotic* than it is rigid. Interdependence asks us to “de-center” from academics being the reference point for ethical accountability. As Middleton et al. put it, something like interdependence “decenter[s] the critic’s authority relative to other participants in a rhetorical scene, and privileg[es] the influence of relationships on interpretive, evaluative, and other critical claims.”⁷⁴ We are not interdependent with only academics, departments, review boards, etc.; we are equally formed into people by research participants and other non-scholars. Thus, we should be equally attentive to the actions we take to tap into our interdependence in the presence of research participants as much as we do in the presence of academics.

Scholars already engage in this work with what I will call unsung moral courage. For one scholar, developing interdependence through what I think of as a “research preview” to the people that scholar was working with meant discarding the whole project after it was finished, because adopting a constructivist epistemology in the research write-up was both essential to the project and categorically rejected by the participants as dismissive of their lived reality. For another scholar, a research preview took the form of asking and hearing from a disabled person that they didn’t want to be the focus of a project. From a university perspective, consent was more properly the purview of the person’s parents, whose emails would be the texts analyzed. Although the parents consented (and rationalized this by downplaying their child’s ability to consent), the researcher still decided to shift focus away from that person. These were decision points for those researchers to embrace their interdependence (even interdependence on disabled people, who are too often considered the ones who are dependent) and thereby become more trustworthy rhetors.

It is here, in fact, that the break from an ethical framework aimed at accountability can be helpful. What makes these stories powerful is that they went beyond accepted ethical requirements, and didn’t do it with the goal of trying to stay in the lines, but as a desire to be shaped by the participants directly.⁷⁵ Thus, the value of theorizing research ethics using interdependence is that ethical pursuit isn’t burdensome, but becomes in part a matter of rhetorical sophistication. In other words, our efforts to develop our interdependence are offers to enter more fully into being a rhetor itself: someone who shapes others well, but who also knows how to be shaped with ease. Inverting Aristotle, such a rhetor knows how to be angered, calmed, befriended, made to hate, made to fear, given confidence, shamed, honored, shown kindness, shown unkindness, pitied, made indignant, made envious, and inspired⁷⁶—in short, has learned to be persuaded by people they have participated in marginalizing.

Interdependence in the field

Interdependence as an ethical end doesn’t solve dilemmas, but rather reconfigures them and brings them to the fore. In their impossibility, dilemmas helpfully break down the assumption that a person’s default mode of behavior is ethical. They are thus a fissure in the concept of accountability, threatening the univocalic (i.e., imperialistic) conception of rights. A discourse of ethical interdependence relishes in dilemmas: they remind us of our insufficiency; and they are generative, grist for rhetorical invention. In this final section I explore two ways that the dilemma that I faced over my mobility and/or/versus stability is transformed when we consider the endpoint of moral action to be embracing our interdependence.

First, an ethics that pursues a sense of our rhetorical interdependence encourages us to emphasize how we have *not* been able to fulfill our ethical obligations. Of course, there is joy for me at what I could do in Familyfield, and it is worth rehearsing: as an extension of my learning, fieldwork allowed me to honor and carry forth the rhetorical methodologies of the professors I had studied under; to the extent that it results in publishable work, it will be a boon to our department; it built relationships with people outside of the university; it was a chance for me to listen well to people and learn to listen well, and to record their thoughts and give them feedback and ideas that they wouldn’t have had otherwise (as

Aviva put it once, I was their “momentum guide”). Through the responses called forth from me in these things, I have been shaped more into a scholar and antiracist community worker.

At the same time, dilemmas as such reveal that I have ethical desires that go beyond my capacity to fill them. One way to go about this textually is to develop a practice of ethical lament, an embodied genre in which people individually or collectively hold out their grief before and with others in such a way that they are present to the moment and open to critique.

In that spirit, I lament that I want to work full time on research about how white people can better and more actively renounce colonialistic tendencies, work full time on developing antiracist and postcolonial pedagogy, work full time for churches like Second Pres, and work full time in areas like race and artificial intelligence. I want to be a resource to people in Splitsville, to be an old-timer like Ms. Di who lives through the neighborhood’s shifts with disappointment, laughter, and hope. I also want to move from place to place, comfortable everywhere. I want to take a job wherever I need to so that my department can clear me out quickly and maintain a solid placement rate. In fact, I want to not have a paying job at all, so that if my wife and I have kids, I can take care of them and she won’t feel trapped at home. Depending on how things go, I also want to live in Florida specifically, where my family lives, so we can have more support, and be able to support my parents as they get older. I also definitely don’t want to live in Florida because I don’t like the weather.

At first, this mode of ethical disclosure can seem child-like, undignified, and imprudent in not moderating my ethical obligation in the face of obviously contradictory desires. Yet in the interdependence model, dilemmas are the necessary outcome of having more than one other person; dilemmas make society.⁷⁷ To appeal to interdependence is to acknowledge: I have not fully responded to the ethical obligations before me; I am not the rhetor I ought to be. That isn’t to say I haven’t developed over time, especially relative to earlier projects, or that I won’t continue to develop. Rather, lament is one way to textually highlight my ongoing need to *pursue* ethical action, and a strategy that scholars can employ even if they don’t do fieldwork.

A second way my dilemma has transformed in the process of working to embrace my interdependence has been a result of me feeling license and encouragement to be creative in seeking to be shaped by those around me. Dilemmas allow for contextualized, rhetorical thinking to easily emerge. In my case I considered (and have tried to draw others into this considering): Could I leave Splitsville and come back later? Could I move through the PhD program slowly? Could I publish fast enough that I could get a job here? For that matter, “stability” and “mobility,” when seen as opposite ends of time-in-a-place, depend on each other like any other duality, and thus may not be as opposed in an absolute sense as it appears. Perhaps in following one I could be the exception that structures the rule of the other, or perhaps I could find something on the edge of both stability and mobility. Could I take a year or two off after the PhD to live in the same city? Could I leave academia? What if being a rhetorical consultant for other white antiracist groups was seen as a possible future enabled by being a trusted rhetor during fieldwork? (After all, in developing my interdependence with project participants directly, I was being more truly a rhetor with those people.) What does it mean for our family’s long-term health that my wife’s

parents just moved away? This is rhetorical invention applied ethically, new movement that would appear unintelligible in a discourse of accountability.

In addition to this inventive process to work through one particular dilemma, I have also engaged in several creative methodological practices to embrace my interdependence. In a kind of parallel to academic peer review, I have reported to a Second Pres advisory board twice, and have intentionally undertaken to be under their authority by framing my findings in terms of “recommendations” and my plans in terms of “requests” that could be overridden by their advice. (Incidentally, they received this effort with some amusement.) Their guidance for my internal conduct with them has not simply replicated IRB directives to be respectful, beneficent, and just. In one meeting, for instance, they were concerned about how I planned to describe to others (especially to people from First Pres) our idea to have a small group of white people meet regularly to debrief experiences they had about race. This showed a local concern for interracial transparency that IRB review did not address in my protocol and would only have been able to conceptualize as a possible advertising failure.

I also sought to be directly shaped by participants themselves by writing participant-driven IRB protocols. Protocols are often written in formal, stilted language that reflects the legal environment of the review board, and can mark the consent form as being “from” academia. Within the interdependence model, however, consent is a community-led, ongoing process that takes place natively. Using participants’ language in the IRB consent form can show that even scholarly oversight is being shaped by the participants. The fieldwork related above, for instance, was conducted under a research protocol partly composed by Aviva herself on behalf of Second Pres. I titled the research study with her words, “Truth tellers and active listeners” and used her words to describe the required “risks” section:

These conversations may be difficult, intense, or emotional, at times evoking feelings of fear, guilt, embarrassment, anger, or frustration. We all commit to practicing humility, vulnerability, trust, forgiveness, empathy, and above all love and grace toward each other in the way of Jesus.

Many of the participants expressed surprise and delight that the consent form used language that was so native to the community’s concerns.

Finally, my project’s focus on white people from Second Pres (rather than black people from First Pres) was itself a result of being shaped in my preparatory stages by black voices that caution white people not to co-opt efforts by black people to represent themselves.⁷⁸ The politics here is complicated (as is the history of white people’s actions); in this space I mention this action simply as a way that research ethics spills out beyond the confines of a well-defined project.

Conclusion

Several months after the interracial, interchurch conversations in Familyfield, I had a planning meeting with Aviva and Pastor Robert about our next steps as white people. The theme of stability came up several times. At one point Aviva imagined teasing Ryne, our friend who was a visiting professor of philosophy. He had been perpetually ready for the last three years to leave Splitsville for a tenure-track academic job. She framed

her words as though he was there to hear them: “It’s okay for a career to not be perfectly perfect, but like, stay rooted in a place.” Aviva didn’t intend for her comment to be taken up as a critique of academic ethics in general, but I find it helpful to listen to her admonition and reminder that academic norms—even what feel like necessities—are not the only source of practical, personal, and ethical obligation to others. I have sought in this essay to give us a better grounding for encountering the multiple obligations that we face, especially in research projects. When ethics is defined as accountability, it is at odds with the postcolonial thrust of rhetorical research, especially in field-based rhetorical work. By critiquing accountability rhetorically as fundamentally connected to autonomy, we make space for an alternative: pursuing our interdependence. Interdependence extends the concept of rhetoricity from rhetorical theory into the process of research. It helps us reconceive of ethics as also being about becoming a more trustworthy and sophisticated rhetor,⁷⁹ a person who embraces and is sensitive to our interdependence, even with field participants. This rhetorical understanding revises the goal of ethics so that we are shaped directly by research participants, and in a reciprocal way that de-centers academics’ control. This makes dilemmas visible, and does so in a way that facilitates ethical lament and dialogical, audience-interactive (i.e., rhetorical) responses.

Interdependence doesn’t solve domination and systemic inequity itself. Even if interdependence is a sturdier ethical goal, that doesn’t mean that scholars will automatically apply it, or that its application is transparent; in largely bracketing these in this essay, I don’t want to imply that ethics is simple. More work here is needed. I think in particular of how interdependence might give voice to scholars’ ethical desires when carrying out textual rhetorical criticism, as well as, for field researchers, how IRB protocols might change if embracing our interdependence was the goal. The short list of creative ethical interventions I described can be amended and supplemented by other possibilities. When interdependence is the endpoint of ethics, scholars may be able to imagine new possibilities with the people they work with.

Future work on interdependence can also investigate how rhetoric as an art is impacted when it is conceived in terms of responsiveness. This may call for a new kind of vocabulary, where people’s ethical “practices” affect their “capacities” to see and act ethically. Responsiveness, that is, demands accompanying concepts that mediate between our past and future actions, and between our bodies and the world.

Interdependence may also help us approach ethics in ways that are more integrated into our lives as a whole. For instance, many academics who value independent work (myself included) find it difficult to actually practice openness and vulnerability. Interdependence is particularly appropriate for people who have been brought up in the world into colonial tendencies. We should not let our jobs be winnowed into narrow teaching/researching/servicing buckets, but spill into and mingle with wider opportunities to embrace our interdependence. Contingent faculty call us to rework universities’ work conditions. People injured in various ways by corporate greed call our universities to divest from committedly unjust companies. We can pursue right relations with diverse people on our campuses by making ourselves safe individually and together for people’s sexual and gender vulnerabilities. Expanding in this way to recover a sense of our interdependence in all things reminds us that this essay’s focus on research ethics specifically has been artificial. Interdependence might easily be extended to ground ethics more broadly.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to: my advisor, Linda Flower, for pushing me to clarify my terminology; my dissertation reader, Doug Coulson, for helpful feedback on several drafts; my colleagues, Ana Cooke, Ryan Mitchell, and Alex Helberg, for telling me one iteration of the interdependence model was incomprehensible; participants in the 2015 RSA Summer Institute seminar on Rhetorical Field Methods generally, and Candice Rai specifically, for encouraging me to not get stuck; co-panelists from RSA 2016 Kasi Williamson, Libby Catchings, and attendees of that panel, for being dialogue partners; Mary Glavan for extensive collaborative planning; Aviva, Ryne, Ms. Di, and others at Second Pres and First Pres, for teaching me how to be a rhetor—both shaping and being shaped—in Familyfield; Mary Stuckey and two anonymous reviewers for insightful and encouraging comments; and my wife, Ashley Penman, for teaching me “hopes and dreams” conversations that inspired a scholarly practice of lament.

Notes

1. “Responsible Conduct of Research.” Carnegie Mellon University Office of Research Integrity and Compliance. Accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.cmu.edu/research-compliance/responsible-conduct/index.html>.
2. Sara McKinnon et al., “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited: What Happens When Rhetorical Scholars Go Into the Field,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 6 (2016): 560–570, 560.
3. See, for instance, bell hooks, who characterizes these in relation to the “foundation” of our nation’s politics: “I often use the phrase ‘imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics.” bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Simon and Schuster’s Atria Books, 2004), 17. I use “postcolonial” to refer to these broadly, although I often focus on how a postcolonial research ethic must undermine white supremacy culture specifically. For catalogues of rhetorical strategies that white people use to maintain cultural supremacy, see e.g. Thomas Nakayama and Robert Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 291–309; Kenneth Jones et al., *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups* (Western States Center, 2003), accessed March 2, 2018, <http://www.resource-sharingproject.org/sites/resource-sharingproject.org/files/DismantlingRacismforSocialChangeGroups.pdf>
4. McKinnon et al. define the field as “the nexus where rhetoric is produced, where it is enacted, where it circulates, and, consequently, where it is audienced.” Sara McKinnon, Robert Asen, Karma R. Chávez, and Robert Glenn Howard, “Introduction: Articulating Text and Field in the Nodes of Rhetorical Scholarship,” in *Text + Field: Innovations in Rhetorical Method* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016), 4. Rhetoric observed in the field is also sometimes called “*in situ*” rhetoric, George McHendry, et al., “Rhetorical Critic(ism)’s Body: Affect and Fieldwork on a Plane of Immanence,” *Southern Communication Journal* 79, no. 4 (2014): 293–310.
5. *Text + Field: Innovations in Rhetorical Method*, edited by Sara L. McKinnon, Robert Asen, Karma R. Chávez, and Robert Glenn Howard (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016); Sara McKinnon et al., “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited”; Candice Rai, *Democracy’s Lot: Rhetorics, Publics, and the Places of Invention* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016); Ralph Cintrón, *Angels’ Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and the Rhetorics of Everyday* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); Michael Middleton, Aaron Hess, Danielle Endres, and Samantha Senda-Cook, *Participatory Critical Rhetoric: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric In Situ* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015); Bridie McGreavy, et al., “Communication and Sustainability Science Teams as Complex Systems,” *Ecology and Society* 20, no. 1 (2015) <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-06644-200102>; Aaron Hess, “Critical-Rhetorical Ethnography: Rethinking the Place and Process of Rhetoric,” *Communication Studies* 62, no. 2 (2011): 127–52; Phaedra Pezzullo,

- “Resisting ‘National Breast Cancer Awareness Month’: The Rhetorics of Counterpublics and their Cultural Performances,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (2003): 345–65; Michael K. Middleton, “‘SafeGround Sacramento’ and Rhetorics of Substantive Citizenship,” *Western Journal of Communication* 78, no. 2 (2014): 119–133; Jennifer Lin LeMesurier, “Mobile Bodies: Triggering Bodily Uptake through Movement,” *CCC* 68, no. 2 (2016): 292–316; Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook, “Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (2011): 257–82; Samantha Senda-Cook, “Rugged Practices: Embodying Authenticity in Outdoor Recreation,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 2 (2012): 129–152.
6. McKinnon et al., *Text + Field*, 18.
 7. Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) enjoins rhetoricians/readers to consider their ethical responsibilities to the authors of the texts they analyze, to themselves, and to society, 134–136.
 8. Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 137.
 9. McKinnon et al., *Text + Field*, 197, note 76.
 10. Raymie E. McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56, no. 2 (1989): 91–111; Michael Calvin McGee, “Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture,” *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 274–289; Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, “The Critique of Vernacular Discourse,” *Communication Monographs* 62, no. 1 (1995): 19–46. Recently, Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric* argue that many of the political/ethical aims of critical rhetoric are more easily met through fieldwork, 33–58. For anthropological work, see Maria Cristina Gonzalez [now Sarah Amira de la Garza], “An Ethics for Post-Colonial Ethnography,” in *Expressions of Ethnography: Novel Approaches to Qualitative Methods*, ed. Robin Patric Clair (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), 77–86. Her work is cited approvingly in McKinnon et al., *Text + Field*, 19, and McKinnon et al., “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited,” 562.
 11. *Ibid.*, 78.
 12. Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics,” *Communication Monographs* 58, no. 2 (1991): 179.
 13. Conquergood, “Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78, no. 1 (1992): 80–97; Conquergood, “Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance,” *Literature and Performance* 5, no. 2 (1985): 1–13; Pezzullo, “Resisting ‘National Breast Cancer Awareness Month,’” 350–351; Senda-Cook, “Rugged Practices,” 132–134; Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 59–90.
 14. They use several of these per chapter. For their own explanation of this, see Middleton, et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, xx.
 15. McKinnon, et al., “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited,” 561.
 16. Joseph P. Ewalt, Jessy J. Ohl, and Damien Smith Pfister. “Rhetorical Field Methods in the Tradition of *Imitatio*,” in *Text + Field*, 40–55.
 17. Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 84
 18. Marily Guillemain and Lynn Gillam, “Ethics, Reflexivity, and ‘Ethically Important Moments’ in Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2004): 275
 19. McHendry, et al. “Rhetorical Critic(ism)’s Body,” 297–298.
 20. In this direction, see Roberta Chevrette, “Holographic Rhetoric: De/Colonizing Public Memory at Pueblo Grande,” in *Text + Field*, 148–162. In Chevrette’s examination of a museum in Phoenix for native history, she found that the museum’s exhibits erased native people and knowledge. She reflexively observed that although her study would unveil this, it might perpetuate that erasure, and therefore she added a component to the project of incorporating indigenous voices about the area’s history.
 21. Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 83; Guillemain and Gillam, “Ethically Important Moments,” 277.
 22. Kathleen M. de Onís, “‘Pa’ que tú lo sepas’: Experiences with Co-Presence in Puerto Rico,” in *Text + Field*, 101–116.
 23. Cintrón, *Angels’ Town* xiii.

24. Middleton, et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 174. See also Alina Haliliuc, “Being, Evoking, and Reflecting from the Field: A Case for Critical Ethnography in Audience-Centered Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Text + Field*, 133–147, p. 146, on researchers risking “losing face” by writing self-reflexively.
25. Leah Ceccarelli, “Neither Confusing Cacophony nor Culinary Complements: A Case Study of Mixed Metaphors for Genomic Science,” *Written Communication* 21, no. 1 (2004): 92–105; Michael Osborn, “Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light/Dark Family,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53, no. 2 (1967): 115–26.
26. Gert J. J. Biesta, “Education, Accountability, and the Ethical Demand: Can the Democratic Potential of Accountability be Regained?,” *Educational Theory* 54, no. 3 (2004): 233–50.
27. Biesta, “Education,” 235.
28. Biesta, “Education,” 238, 248; Debbie Epstein, “Defining Accountability in Education,” *British Educational Research Journal* 19, no. 3 (1993): 243–257; Asen in “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited,” 565.
29. Asen in “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited,” 565.
30. Carol Gilligan. In *A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 24–39.
31. The “institutional review board” (IRB) in the US, “human research ethics committee” in Australia, and “local research ethics committee” in the UK. Guillemain and Gillam, “Ethically Important Moments,” 278. In addition to IRBs being legally mandated, Martyn Hammersley and Anna Traianou, *Ethics in Qualitative Research: Controversies and Contexts* (Thousand Oaks, SAGE, 2012), 25–26 note that the Belmont Report, which inspired the IRB system, was also influenced by casuistic (i.e. case-based/analogical) ethical reasoning, which is “the most familiar form of legal reasoning” (Cass R. Sunstein, “On Analogical Reasoning,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 3 (1993): 741–791, 741).
32. McKinnon et al., *Text+Field*, 19
33. Ewalt, Ohl, and Pfister, “Rhetorical Field Methods,” 52: “Transparency about research processes ... aids in accountability.” De Onís, “Experiences with Co-presence in Puerto Rico,” 116 asks: “who would (1) be most helpful in holding me accountable for any colonial or U.S. mainland assumptions I might be perpetuating ... ”
34. McKinnon et al., “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited,” 560.
35. Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 83, 80, 174.
36. McKinnon et al., “Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited,” 562, and McKinnon et al., “Introduction,” 19 give this the most emphasis (via de la Garza), but the same trope is used by Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 150, and even Epstein, “Defining Accountability,” 249.
37. Middleton, et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 1–33.
38. All names are pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves, sometimes with symbolic weight: participants chose “Splitsville,” for instance, to show that a core part of the city was its functional segregation; “First Pres” named themselves from a Biblical reference, and “Second Pres” continued ordinally, self-consciously following the stereotype of white Presbyterians being staid and inexpressive, while also, in a small way, expressing deference to the mostly black First Pres.
39. Second Pres’ innovations are similar to what has been described and analyzed as “new monasticism,” Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *New Monasticism: What It Has to Say to Today’s Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008); Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), or what lasted for a time as the “Emergent” church movement, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), and involve bringing creativity and embodiment to Christian practice. Communion/Eucharist, for instance, is a weekly event at each church service, rather than a monthly duty as at many churches, which affirms how congregants’ senses (taste, touch, smell, physical movement) are also spiritual, and how God’s transforming work is also bodily and ongoing (through tasting God).
40. Senda-Cook, “Rugged Practices,” 131–34.

41. C. Christopher Smith and John Pattison, *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2014).
42. *Ibid.*, 64, 65, and 68.
43. *Ibid.*, 64.
44. *Ibid.*, 62.
45. *Ibid.*, 71.
46. *Ibid.*, 71.
47. *Ibid.*, 72.
48. *Ibid.*, 72.
49. *Ibid.*, 77–8.
50. *Ibid.*, 71.
51. See Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* 3, no. 3 (2011): 54–70. This is the opposite movement from many black people, of course, who critique “respectability” politics of being overly concerned with public perception of black people as a whole.
52. My stability might in some ways relate to “respecting persons” and being “beneficent” (“The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research,” The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, April 18, 1979, <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>), but not in the informed consent and cost/benefit analysis ways that the IRB uses to operationalize those.
53. As with pace of work, geographic flexibility has an internal and self-serving logic to it: individual scholars are not in control of the location of colleges, or an institution’s funding for positions, or the years that positions are available. (Although since universities are both the supplier and the demander of academic labor, the job “market” might be more accurately compared to a guild, yet without the security of placement for graduate students that an apprentice would receive. For a comparison of academics to the financial incentives of workers in drug gangs, see Alexandre Afonso, “How Academia Resembles a Drug Gang,” *The London School of Economics and Political Science Blog* <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/12/11/how-academia-resembles-a-drug-gang/>, Dec 11, 2013, accessed March 2, 2018.) The shadow side to individual scholars’ mobility is smoother and more stable institutional efforts: making individuals contingent supports the institution’s adaptation. This pseudo-stability shares little in common with what Second Pres calls “stability.”
54. For an example of how accountability is used as a standard to critique white antiracists, see DiDi Delgado, “Whites Only: SURJ and the Caucasian Invasion of Racial Justice Spaces,” *The Establishment (on Medium)* <<https://theestablishment.co/whites-only-the-caucasian-invasion-of-racial-justice-spaces-7e2529ec8314>>, Apr 1, 2017 accessed March 2, 2018.
55. Jamie Landau, “Feeling Rhetorical Critics: Another Affective-Emotional Field Method for Rhetorical Studies,” in *Text + Field*, 81.
56. Aaron Hess, “Embodied Judgment: A Call for a Phronetic Orientation in Rhetorical Ethnography,” in *Text + Field*, 98.
57. Lura Abbott and Christine Grady, “A Systematic Review of the Empirical Literature Evaluating IRBs: What We Know and What We Still Need to Learn,” *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics: An International Journal* (2011): 3–20. The IRB was the subject of two federal reviews: by the U.S. Government Accounting Office (1996), and by the Inspector General’s Office of the Department of Health and Human Services (1998), 5.
58. And since colonialism, racism, sexism, etc. are systemic, it is especially important for people to let go of their innocence. We have never finished “paying people back” for the wrong we’ve done; the accountability model is a charade, after all. Research review boards, for instance, historically became federally mandated as a result of embarrassing moral lapses committed by Nazi researchers, and then repeated against African-Americans in the US over several decades in the Tuskegee syphilis experiment. Bruce L. Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 7th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2009), 61–66. These instances

remind us that while review boards may now appear obvious, they are reactionary, incentivized from self-preservation; IRBs fundamentally protect research institution from lawsuits and public outrage.

59. Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal For an Invitational Rhetoric," *Communication Monographs* 62, no. 1 (1995): 2--18, "Embedded in efforts to change others is a desire for control and domination, for the act of changing another establishes the power of the change agent over that other" (3).
60. Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 54–59; and see Megan Foley, "Of Violence and Rhetoric: An Ethical Aporia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 2 (2013): 191–199.
61. D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 129, cited in McKinnon et al., *Text+Field*, 18.
62. Incidentally, I once accidentally offended a senior scholar when I asked what they had done in their project to protect participants beyond the IRB. Whereas I was hoping to hear some ideas for how to *pursue* ethical interactions, I was implying within the logic of accountability that the scholar had *failed* to act ethically.
63. Two notable exceptions to this are McKinnon's article, "Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited," which moves through dilemmas, and to some extent, Gary Alan Fine, "Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas in Field Research," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22 (1993): 267–94.
64. Rhetoricians have pushed against public/private splits in accounts of the public sphere. For instance, Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80 notes that what we think of today as the public crime of domestic abuse was earlier considered to be a private harm. Similarly, Linda Flower, "Difference-Driven Inquiry: A Working Theory of Local Public Deliberation," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2016): 308–330 notes that issues are not by nature public or private but can be brought into public deliberation through rhetorical work: "By the critical-rational norms of the public sphere, such concerns [as those of students who depend financially on working through college] would be intentionally excluded as merely *private* with little likelihood of rising to the status of a compelling *public* problem ... So our challenge was to render the status quo as indeed, not just a problem but a misrepresented, even controversial situation that called for deliberation" (323, emphasis in original).
65. Similar moves to apply disciplinary-specific concepts to understand research ethics have been undertaken in feminist scholarship, i.e. an "ethic of care," Hammersley and Traianou, *Ethics in Qualitative Research*, 29; and in disability research, i.e. an ethic of inclusion and "emancipation", Mike Oliver, "Changing the Social Relations of Research Production?," *Disability, Handicap and Society* 7, no. 2 (1992): 101–14; Hammersley and Traianou, *Ethics in Qualitative Research*, 13.
66. Middleton, et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 138–51.
67. Hess, "Embodied Judgment," in *Text + Field*.
68. McKinnon, "Rhetoric and Ethics Revisited," 561.
69. Diane Davis, *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 121.
70. *Ibid.*, 120.
71. *Ibid.*, 9.
72. *Ibid.*, 12.
73. *Ibid.*, 112.
74. Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 149.
75. For a published account, see also Dwight Conquergood's ("Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance") appreciation of how Smadar Lavie used these and other mechanisms to develop a sense of her interdependence with her participants, 92–95. The two stories I tell are

anonymous to protect the researchers, as well as to illustrate how it is difficult to cite essays not written.

76. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II.2-11, trans. W. Rhys Roberts <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.2.ii.html>.
77. Davis (*Inessential Solidarity*) goes further: seen critically, (legal) justice is a betrayal and an injustice in its impersonalness (122 and 126); at best, it is a concession or let-down from the infinite obligation we have to each specific person. In this light, we do not act ethically by default, as in a discourse of accountability, but rather we enter the public sphere precisely through our reactions to a series of inescapable ethical dilemmas. As Davis summarizes, "I'll never get a clear conscience" (122). With such an emphasis on encountering the face (as opposed to faces, plural), it isn't surprising that scholarship in Davis' vein has a complicated relationship with legal systems. (See Davis, 117-118 for a synthesis of other thinkers, including Rorty, Badiou, Habermas, and Laclau.)
78. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 44; Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991): 5-32. See also Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric*, 146-151. This has, in part, been a source of criticism for Alice Goffman's book, *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
79. Field researchers are especially rhetors twice over: once in the field, and again at their desks. Cintrón gets at this when he separates "the *tekhne* of doing fieldwork and the *tekhne* of writing ethnographies" (*Angel's Town*, xii).