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Matters of Mentorship/Mentorship Matters

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With this issue, Fernando begins his work as co-editor of *Rhetoric of Health & Medicine* (*RHM*) with Kim. We (Fernando and Kim) are both so very grateful to Cathryn for her unyielding energy and responsive mentoring throughout her tenure here at the journal. Stepping into this role has allowed me (Fernando) to reflect on how crucial mentorship is in our professional and personal lives; Kim and Cathryn have been kind enough to allow me to break with our issue introductions' common practice of writing with a collective editorial voice to ruminate slightly on this topic from my own recent experiences. Primarily, I would like us to consider the people in our lives who encourage us along the way, providing us with different levels of support both to succeed and when we hit obstacles.

I was reminded of the importance of having close-knit networks of support recently as part of a group of health researchers at a nonprofit who assembled the findings of our study on barriers to care experienced by individuals living with rare disease who come from multiply marginalized backgrounds—queer, BIPOC, Latinx, Spanish-speaking, and/or from rural communities. Based on our results, we noticed that (not surprisingly) the cost of healthcare and communicating with non-specialist providers were two of the most often-cited barriers to receiving care for these individuals, families, and caretakers. As a result, we see a need to create more structures for networking for these groups to talk to one another about the experiences of navigating the confusing terrain of such circumstances as switching insurance, working through a request for pre-authorization, advocating for removing co-pay accumulators, or understanding how clinical trials might work (and what happens once they end, in terms of securing health benefits). All of these instances present new challenges for folks living with a rare disease and cannot be taken on alone. In attending several coalitional meetings and symposia for members with specific rare diseases, I have seen how supportive patients and their caregivers are in helping to build community by sharing stories and resources—the type of support that is sorely needed during a time when we are continually reading about the various medical and health services, programs, and research funding that are being cut at the federal and state level.

Living with a chronic rare disease myself, and yet privileged enough to have had support to manage my own healthcare over the last few decades, I have found it rewarding to dedicate my time as a researcher to develop useful documentation and takeaways that organizations can directly use to advocate for better care with insurance companies and providers. Observing and engaging in these instances of mentoring and resource sharing has helped to underscore (for me) the ways in which colleagues have gone out of their way to include me, support my goals, and encourage a forward-facing outlook, and in turn, how I have attempted to do the same as well. I get great joy out of assisting emerging voices in working on their scholarship to see their piece in print. Sometimes it does not take very long. Other times it takes years.

Kim and Cathryn have previously touched on the importance of patience in these pages (Molloy & Hensley Owens, 2024). However, it can be difficult to extend patience and kindness to oneself, particularly when facing disappointing reviews or unexpected challenges. These moments require persistence, a belief in oneself, and an openness to change—whether that means revising an argument, shifting venues, or reconsidering how one interprets data. Yet, such resilience is rarely self-sustained or self-sustainable. My journey at this journal—from author to assistant editor, and now co-editor—has shown me the power of a supportive scholarly community. I hope to continue fostering that culture of mentorship and generosity. I encourage all of us to be mindful of these acts of support, whether we are offering them or receiving them.

While there are certainly numerous books that discuss mentoring—and specifically, mentoring colleagues and graduate students in higher education (Phillips & Dennison, 2015; Reyes, 2024)—they typically present mentorship as a formal interaction, one that has regular touchpoints, a beginning, and ending. While there are, of course, several benefits to this type of mentoring, it does not take into account the impact that moments or instances of "micromentoring," so to speak, that we might engage in have on us. By micromentoring moments, I'm referring here to those more informal exchanges where trusted colleagues provide us with advice, support, or an invitation to collaborate. Although these moments do not necessarily preclude the possibility of establishing a more formal mentoring relationship, they may also occur spontaneously, in bursts, or without concern for status or hierarchy. That is, I've had the privilege to learn so much from individuals who are established in the field as well as from those who are just beginning their careers as junior faculty members. I believe that, though uncodified and unplanned, moments of micromentoring still demand many of the same responsibilities (and bring forth the same satisfaction) of more formal and structuring mentorship relationships. For example, in *The Elements of Mentoring*, W. Brad Johnson and Charles R. Ridley (2018) stress the importance to mentors of nurturing creativity, providing correction, and giving visibility to their mentees—all aspects I have encountered in my own experiences with informal mentoring exchanges.

I end with an example of what supportive micromentoring and support (can) look like—one that has been on my mind for the last few months. I was invited to give a talk at a university's writing studies department recently and the masters and doctoral students enrolled in the department's graduate program were so very kind to spend their breakfast with me. We went around the room and listened to folks discuss their current research projects and as each spoke about their project and some expressed feeling stuck or confused about the direction of the project, they all began to share technical and analytical resources with one another in this moment of spontaneous community building. Through practice, which Kim and Cathryn have previously mentioned here as consisting of both repetition and reflection (Hensley Owens & Molloy, 2024, p. 256), we can be open to these kinds of humane experiences that involve listening and sharing with one another, particularly during turbulent times such as these. Indeed, 2025 has brought with it many changes, not all pleasant. Thus, we hope that we continue to rely on each other, mentor each other, and support each other in our professional and personal goals in small but impactful ways. With that, we turn to the contents of this issue.

In this Issue

In this issue we present articles, book reviews, and printed versions of our 2023 RHM Symposium keynote speakers' talks. To begin, in "Breaking Character: Disclosing the Methodological Mess of Metarhetorical Attunement and the Kairotic Hinge," Melissa Guadrón puts forth the concept of *kairotic hinge* within the context of a Simulation Training for Raising Interprofessional Aptitude (STRIA) program. In these programs, students professionalizing in several areas of health and medicine collaborate in simulated experience to build their abilities providing patient-centered care. Adapted from Margaret Price's discussion of kairotic moments, Guadrón argues that kairotic hinges are not only invitations to enter a space, but "moment[s] with the capacity to significantly alter a situation depending on a rhetor's response" due to their capacity to widen or narrow an opening. Through observations of patient actors participating in these simulations, Guadrón theorizes that hinges are characterized by real-time interactive space, a situated call for action, and the potential to alter the space and relationships between individuals based on one's response or nonresponse. She argues that by making space for these hinges, students can learn how to respond to unpredictability in acute care settings.

In "Boundaries of Science in an Online Parenting Community," Megan Eatman shows the limitations of pro-science deliberations within the context of an online Reddit community for families who engage in "evidenced-based parenting," wherein parents are encouraged to gather and analyze scientific evidence to make their own parenting decisions. As Eatman notes, while "science" and "evidence" play an important role in this type of community to help distinguish itself from "misinformation-friendly parenting spaces," this approach can alienate users and, ironically, leave very little room for critical engagement to understand the relationship between evidence-based science and its application to parenting.

Stemming from the 2023 RHM Symposium on the topic of "Sustaining a Dwelling Place for RHM" held at the University of Minnesota, our two keynote speakers, Jenell Johnson and Kimberly Harper, offer us the opportunity to engage with their respective talks, adapted for publication in this issue. Johnson importantly makes the case for considering the embeddedness of the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) in multiple aspects of the places where we dwell. This can be seen in terms of how our health is impacted by those beings whom we encounter (both human and nonhuman) and the impacts of climate change, which has been felt most predominantly in BIPOC communities. Johnson invites us to consider the possibilities of what we might call "an eco-centric rhetoric of health and medicine"—particularly in terms of new collaborations that this might open.

Likewise, Harper encourages us to engage in conversations that are "nice and rough" instead of superficially "nice and easy" when it comes to race, class, gender, and other marginalized identity markers. As she notes, "it's nice and easy to talk about race in ways that do not acknowledge how white supremacy and white privilege are baked into American culture." Harper's call asks us to sustain RHM as a place for dwelling by focusing on self-preservation, intentionality, and soul-searching. However, Harper is clear to stress that such emphases should not be aimed merely internally but used to advance communal goals—working out of the academy to engage with a multitude of community partners. Harper's heuristic for examining our motives to create meaningful work with others will be of use to many scholars wanting to contribute their expertise to their local spaces.

We end with two book reviews on recently published monographs that readers may find of interest in their work. Katrina Hinson reviews Brenton Faber's *The End of Genre: Curations and Experiments in Intentional Discourses*, wherein he argues that intentionality is crucial in academic research. Hinson describes how Faber uses his personal medical journey as a case study to emphasize this point. Her review praises Faber's work for its clear argument and relevance to modern academic and practical challenges, calling for a more intentional approach in the humanities to address 21st-century problems effectively.

Leslie R. Anglesey reviews Marissa C. McKinley's *PCOS Discourses, Symbolic Impacts, and Feminist Rhetorical Disruptions of Institutional Hegemonies.* Anglesey discusses McKinley's examination of how Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is represented in mass media and throughout communities that engage within social media platforms. As Anglesey notes, McKinley shows how Western beauty standards depict individuals with PCOS as deviant, which constrains the agency that such individuals have to control the narratives over their identities. McKinley contrasts this with supportive virtual health communities for individuals with PCOS where they can share their experiences, advocate for themselves, and create supportive spaces. Anglesey lauds McKinley's integration of personal experience with scholarly analysis and her call for expanded health advocacy within RHM.

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