Digital Embodiment: Toward a Cultural Rhetorics Practice of Online Research

Every day, Gina opens up her laptop before bed and browses the internet. She typically has multiple tabs open—an online shopping cart waiting to be checked out, her Facebook feed she uses to keep up to date with her old high school friends, and an online chat she uses to keep in touch with her fellow activist friends. During the day, Gina travels between doctor appointments, disability activist events, and the public library. During a doctor's appointments, Gina's physician recommends a particular treatment or prescription to continue Gina's care. Shortly after those conversations, Gina makes a post in one of her many specialized online groups for disabled people about the suggested treatment, asking if anyone has tried it before. Her post might get a few comments that then shift into a private conversation over direct messages about the treatment. As she exchanges messages with the person, maybe they begin confiding in one another over shared experiences. "God, I hate it when people act that way," Gina types. Her friend responds "Yeah, they act like they've never seen someone use a wheelchair before." As time passes by, the two become fast friends. Gina tells her new friend about the local event her and her fellow activist friends are planning to promote visibility and support for disabled people in their community. Her friend lives several hundreds of miles away, but considers planning a similar event in her own city. Between her day-to-day appointments, Gina uses her online communities to share her everyday experiences with others and plan for events in her local community.

Gina, who doesn't exist individually, experiences online and offline life in a way that represents so many others who operate in online communities. Online technologies provide so much of the world with advanced communication and interaction opportunities. These constantly updating opportunities affect the ways that people are engaging with both these new technologies and the communities and networks they form online. This rise in technology and shift in behaviors is, unsurprisingly, being met with a rise in research opportunity. Current online research methodologies are capable of studying the ways that networks are formed online, the

ways that users choose to interact with specific types of technology, and how offline practices can be translated to online spaces. Because of the ever-shifting online environment, though, researchers of these spaces must be prepared to adapt. Online spaces, environments once touted to allow users to transcend their physical bodies, is now plagued by the same marginalization and oppression that shapes so many users' offline lives. These shared encounters of oppression as connected to identity in online spaces have given rise to the forming of communities through specific embodied identities. As the shift in identities in online spaces are being made, researchers must be prepared to account not just the online behaviors of users but also the ways in which online behaviors are shaped by the embodied identities of their users.

Scholars, such as Tom Boellstroff (2008) and Sherry Turkle (1995; 2010; 2015) have long claimed that online identities are separate from their users' offline identities. This simplicity in online identity, though, overlooks much of the oppression and marginalization that can be found in online spaces. Some scholars have drawn connections between embodied identities and online spaces, such as Lisa Nakamura (2013), Adam Banks (2006), and Leah DiNatale Gutenson and Michelle Bachelor Robinson (2016), particularly around online spaces as they revolve around race. While these scholars pose significant questions pertaining to identity and online spaces, in this essay, I am interested in outlining what an online research endeavor with a cultural rhetorics lens might look like. Cultural rhetorics offers a useful approach in studying embodiment, an approach that could greatly enhance the research of online spaces, specifically as those online spaces include communities formed through embodied identity. Returning to Gina briefly, a cultural rhetorics approach to research would be able to combine online research methodologies with an exploration of her disability to foreground her online experiences. While current online research methodologies are invaluable in the progress of online research, the lens of cultural rhetorics offers a unique way to engage with online research, expanding the current possibilities of such research questions.

Cultural rhetorics refers to the study of cultural practices, beliefs, traditions, and histories that places an emphasis on the epistemology of the people who comprise said culture. In their "Introduction to the Special Issue" in *Enculturation*, Phil Bratta and Malea Powell describe cultural rhetorics as being tied to four separate moves that begin building a cultural rhetorics frame: "decolonization, relations, constellation, and story." Each of these moves are used to orient an understanding of cultural rhetorics that accounts for the components of identit(y/ies) and culture(s) that comprise sources of research. These four interconnected moves, stemming from the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (CRTL), are each connected to one another and the move toward a cultural rhetorics practice. Bratta and Powell, citing the CRTL, write that the move toward decolonial practices within the framework of cultural rhetorics refers to highlighting "stories from the perspective of colonized cultures and communities that are working to delink from the mechanisms of colonialism." Cultural rhetorics, as an attempt to resist colonialism, is then a method by which colonized cultures and communities can produce a story that isn't tied to colonialism. Reliant on the notion of decolonization, though, is a recognition of relations, particularly relations as connected through/by power. Within communities, relations comprise the networks by which culture, power, interactions, and so much more, travel through. These relations reflect the ways that ideas and concepts are conveyed to those within cultures and the ways by which those relations reflect the community where they exist. Constellations, the third move associated with cultural rhetorics, refers to the acknowledgement of those relations and understanding not just that those relations exist, but rather that meaning and meaning-making are tied up with those relations and their constellated networks. In constellating those relations, Bratta and Powell write that cultural rhetorics allows "for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time" ("Introduction to the Special Issue"). Finally, in the move of story, and storying, cultural rhetorics is designed to intentionally value cultures and communities by forwarding the stories that come from those places. Cultural rhetorics, then, aims to draw from these

positions of decolonialism, relations, constellations, and storying, to situate work in the culture and community the work is stems from.

Bratta and Powell's definition, and more specifically described practice, of cultural rhetorics, comes from definition of both culture and rhetoric. Bratta and Powell state "If we proceed from the already-voiced assumption that *all* rhetoric is a product of cultural systems and that *all* cultures are rhetorical (i.e., they have meaning-making systems that are meaningful and that can be traced synchronically, diachronically, and a-chronically), understanding the specificity of the bodies *and* subjectivities engaged in those practices must be central [to cultural rhetorics]" ("Introduction to the Special Issue"). This theory of practice harkens back to the relations and constellations from the four components comprising cultural rhetorics. These relations, and constellations of relations, must be central to a scholars' theoretical practice. Following their four-point explanation of the moves tied to cultural rhetorics, Bratta and Powell then offer a possible definition of cultural rhetorics, saying that scholars who engage in it "must be willing to build meaningful theoretical frames from inside the particular culture in which they are situating their work. To do so means understanding a specific culture's systems, beliefs, relationships to the past, practices of meaning-making, and practices of carrying culture forward to future generations" (Introduction to the Special Issue). At the core of cultural rhetorics are the cultures themselves, meaning that researchers of cultural rhetorics have a huge ethical undertaking in their research. Bratta and Powell continue, writing "In this way, it requires that scholars move beyond simply applying frames derived from one culture/tradition to another culture's rhetorical practices" (Introduction to the Special Issue). With each subject the lens of cultural rhetorics might be applied to, an entirely new framework of meaning-making and understanding must be forwarded while conducting the research. In combining a cultural rhetorics lens with online research by offering a potential methodology, the limits of online research *and* cultural rhetorics might be expanded to consider new research endeavors, subjects, and spaces.

Because there isn't yet a methodology that combines cultural rhetorics with online research practices, online research rarely unwraps the intricate relationships between online life and offline life and the cultures that populate those spaces. As the barriers between online and offline life become more blurred, this impetus to incorporate cultural rhetorics into online research practices grows. Just as identities affect the ways that people move in offline spaces, so too do those identities affect users' movements in online spaces. In this article, I will explore and explain a number of different online research methodologies, define how cultural rhetorics could expand online research methodologies, and finally, give a potential methodology to incorporate cultural rhetorics into online research. While I could write much about online research methodologies, this article can only house a discussion of a handful of methodologies. The methodologies that I will discuss in detail are theories related to social networking sites (SNSs) and Social Network Analysis (SNA). The reason I chose these methods in particular, was because they provide the most potential in framing an online research and cultural rhetorics methodology.

Each of the online research methodologies I am exploring in this article serve a particular function in online research. They each are designed to address specific questions that illuminate certain areas of online activity. The first methodology I want to explore is SNSs theory. SNSs theory serves as a methodology that explores how social networking sites operate and affect the communities and individuals who inhabit those spaces. SNSs theory is valuable in understanding the relationships between online and offline life because of the way that it seriously engages with social networking sites being valuable sites of research itself. SNSs theory is beneficial in understanding the navigation practices of users in social networking-oriented online spaces, and it points to there being an overlap between the online and offline in terms of behavior and navigation. This potential in SNSs theory offers enormous opportunity in adopting cultural rhetorics methodologies because the methodology already questions the divide researchers have formed between online and offline behavior. This questioning is valuable because of the way that it can then be used to forward

questions about the ways that embodied identities are reflected in online spaces and how communities form in online spaces to reflect their own embodied identities. As the barrier between online and offline spaces blurs, SNSs theory can provide an opening wherein online cultures are observed using the frameworks of cultural rhetorics which recognize those cultures' practices as an online extension of offline cultural practices.

      The essay "Social Networking Sites as Virtual Communities" by Parks explores that ways that virtual communities serve as online extensions of offline communities. In this context, virtual communities refer to the networks that are formed online on social networking sites. Facebook groups, for instance, could be considered a form of a virtual community. Parks writes "…virtual communities are often simply the online extension of geographically situated offline communities" (120). This claim, which points to an overlap between online and offline experiences wherein the offline world affects online formations of networks, is significant because of the way that it resituates online spaces as a new space for research potential that can be approached using already established research methodologies. In admitting to the similarities between the two different types of spaces—online and offline—Parks is then providing the potential for additional, non-online oriented methodologies to be applied to research of online spaces. Cultural rhetorics, because of its focus in understanding cultures and communities as rhetorically rich agents, provides a methodology to expand SNSs theory. Instead of merely discussing the ways that virtual communities merely extend offline communities, SNSs researchers, should they combined a cultural rhetorics practice to their research, could learn about the ways that those extensions are shaped by users' cultures and embodied identities. This kind of innovation toward researching online spaces is seen in the article "Social Networking Sites as Networked Public" by Danah Boyd. In this article, Boyd claims that the negotiations users make in online spaces are the same kinds of negotiations that are made by people in offline spaces. Again, this points to an overlap between online and offline behaviors and networks, further supporting a blending between cultural rhetorics and SNSs theory. Boyd writes "In essence, people are learning to work within the constraints and possibilities of

mediated architecture, just as people have always learned to navigate structures as part of their daily lives" (55). While Boyd points to users needing to reorient their navigation of online spaces due to architecture unique to online spaces, this user negotiation is akin to the kind of negotiation needed to, say, drive in an unfamiliar city. By combining cultural rhetorics to SNSs theory, researchers could point to the cultural motivations that drive such online navigation, for instance. In identifying the embodied identities of users, researcher using a SNSs methodology would be able to more specifically discuss the cultural practices of users that are reflected in their online activity. Another research methodology used in online settings, SNA, considers the ways that human behavior forms networks, thereby offering a possibility to explore a cultural rhetorics lens.

SNA explores how networks affect human behavior and connections. SNA is not only used in online environments, but is often used to explore the connections that are formed by and through online spaces. SNA is an important methodology to examine because of the ways that it values networks and groups of users in online environments. Because of this emphasis, cultural rhetorics can easily be implemented into SNA, since both methodologies are concerned with the constellated behaviors and beliefs of communities and groups. SNA provides the opportunity to examine the networks that are formed online and how those social structures affect the online behaviors of the involved users. SNA's emphasis on understanding groups of online users points to a potential for incorporating cultural rhetorics because of the ways that both methodologies prioritize group meaning-making and behavior influence. Cultural rhetorics is not commonly being used alongside SNA, though, which means that the blending of online and offline cultures and embodied identities to understand the behaviors of these groups in those two realms through a proposed methodology could be fruitful.

In the article "Social Network Analysis and Professional Practice" by Frith, networks are examined as modes of influence for user behavior. Frith writes in the article that studying networks using SNA as a methodology means "focus[ing] on the

social connections people make and how those connections both enable and constrain behavior" (289). In this sense, SNA is used to better understand the ways that social networks in online spaces can influence users. Researchers who employ SNA recognize the ways that users affect online networks, but emphasize the larger social movements of networks as a means to illuminate the behaviors of online users. For example, Frith writes "The focus on social structure raises questions about individual agency, and many SNA researchers believe that 'causation is not located in the individual, but rather the social structure' (Marin & Wellman, 2011, p. 13)" (292). Frith's article also explores the ways that networks can explain the social movements of individuals. For instance, Frith writes "SNA views social relationships through the lens of network theory, identifying individual actors as a set of nodes that are tied to other nodes" (290). Because of its priority in understanding groups and connections between members, SNA could prove to be expanded with an addition of a cultural rhetorics methodology. Since both methodology value group cultures, SNA and cultural rhetorics could be enhanced by providing an online research method. Again, referring back to Bratta and Powell's definition, particularly the emphasis on relations and constellations, makes cultural rhetorics a valuable framework alongside an SNA methodology by providing a means to combine the formation of networks and the stories of those who form them.

  While there is room to consider cultural rhetorics alongside online research methodologies, it's important to articulate why online research methodologies could benefit from incorporating a cultural rhetorics practice. To further exemplify the relationship between identity and online treatment, I'd like to present some specific examples of the relationship between cultural identities and online spaces. Leslie Jones, one of the stars of the 2016 *Ghostbusters* movie, faced a slew of online harassment, involving racial and homophobic slurs. This treatment caused Jones to leave Twitter. Kate Conger writes in "Harassment of Ghostbusters' Leslie Jones shows Twitter needs to change" that "Twitter often serves as a platform for large-scale harassment, and yet the company relies on users to report abusive behavior — which leaves victims to manage the deluge alone." In the case of Jones, not only was the

harassment she faced fueled by racism and sexism, but she was also expected to serve as her own advocate in the face of that abuse. For the transgender and/or indigenous Facebook user, sometimes accounts are removed from the community because the accounts are perceived as being fake. Facebook users are often asked to provide proof of legal ID to continue using their accounts to, according to Facebook representative, Andrew Souvall, "prevent bad behavior while creating a safer and more accountable environment" (Grinberg). However, this desire to increase accountability also means that transgender users whose profile name matches their chosen name but not their assigned/dead name could result in account deactivation. For indigenous users, such as Dana Lone Hill, Facebook will temporarily suspend accounts until several forms of legal ID are provided to the site (Holpuch). These users are absolutely being affected by Facebook's real name policy in a way that stems from their embodied identity. Despite the desire to remove the body from conversations of online usage, ignoring the reality that our identities affect our online practices is a dangerous notion, particularly in research areas. Our online practices are affected by our identities just as any other offline practice might be. Because cultural rhetorics accounts for the ways that identities affect encounters, it is a valuable tool in unpacking the relationship between identity and online behavior and networking.

The online realm is typically associated with the same kind of holy perfection that plagues STEM fields. For instance, scientific papers are often published without any trace of a body—there is no first person, only the scientific ramblings that exist in the ether of Truth. Omitting the deeply flawed human body from research perfects our results. We know that gravity rushes an apple to the ground, but we choose to forget the hand it drops from. When our online worlds are manufactured by binary code, our actions in online spaces are easily reduced to systematic HTML and Javascript. In trying to understand these pixelated realms, the emotionality, unpredictability, and neurosis of human behavior aren't accounted for. Often, in online research, users become merely disembodied subjects with little past to explore. Instead, online researchers know what to expect from the machines that line our walls and pockets but that

certainty is lost on the bodies that use them. Because we have been convinced to believe that our bodies dissolve behind the safety of a screen, our online research methodologies mark the body as inconsequential. While, there is a danger not just in conducting research that ignores bodies in online spaces, there is also a danger in operating in online spaces without realizing the bodies that co-operate there. In ignoring the realities of embodied experiences of online users, researchers and users of online spaces ignore the structural oppressions that invariably affect users. Of course this trajectory of ignoring cultures and oppressions could be avoided if researchers and users of online spaces recognized the value of cultural rhetorics in their realm. When the identities of users vanish from the discussion of online practice the fuller picture of influence is lost. When online research tends to value machines over people, our understanding of those people's online practices become clouded. That necessary thread which follows the practice of users is frayed by not incorporating cultural rhetorics into online research.

To better understand the potential pitfalls of conducting online research without a cultural rhetorics approach, I'd like to examine a piece of online research that doesn't include cultural rhetorics. Tom Boellstorff's *Coming of Age in Second Life* is a significant piece of online ethnography that laid out several frameworks for conducting research in online spaces. Boellstorff conducts an ethnographic research study on participants in the virtual reality online gaming network Second Life. In Second Life, users create avatars who navigate the Second Life landscape and interact with other users' avatars. Boellstorff explores the many complexities and nuances that come from conducting research in an online environment, laying out many of the same kinds of frameworks that are still commonly cited in both online and offline research. In his introduction, Boellstorff, citing Nayar, discusses the humanness of online engagement, saying "while the emergence of virtual worlds 'does not necessarily mean the end of the human … we need to see the human as re-configured and organized differently' (Nayar 2004:21)" (29). The need to reconfigure notions of humanness sets up Boellstorff's research as counter to offline human behavior—instead of researching

human subjects who exist in online spaces, Boellstorff is researching avatars in an online environment, requiring him to employ a different set of ethical boundaries than most non-virtual ethnographies. Boellstorff is, then, failing to consider the avatar's connectedness to humans and how their offline culture and identity might impact their online engagement. He continues "in virtual worlds, we are not quite human … Virtual worlds reconfigure selfhood and sociality" (29). This reconfiguration of the self fails to account for the embodied identities that formulate users, valuing the fabricated virtual self over the embodied offline self. While the environment of Second Life might have unique possibilities of ethnographic work because of the ways that avatars can be created and manipulated, a failure to engage with the human operating the avatar results in only a one-sided examination of a subject. In choosing to only conduct research in an online space, Boellstorff does radically shift the notions of culture, saying that this choice points to the assertion that "virtual worlds are legitimate sites of culture" (*Coming of Age in Second Life* 61). While claiming that an online environment operates as a site of culture is valuable in retooling perceptions of online spaces, the claim fails to engage with the question of how offline cultures go into shaping online cultures. As users of online spaces are and always will be connected and influenced by an offline cultures and identities, the online culture that those users operate will in turn also face influence from an offline culture. This ethnographic study provided a highly useful examination of online/virtual worlds and destabilized many of the notions around what constituted as legitimate and illegitimate sites of research. However, I think a more serious engagement with cultural rhetorics could have opened up the possibilities to understand how users' offline cultural influences come to shape their online behaviors.

In adopting a cultural rhetorics approach to online research, scholars would be able to more responsibly address the issues faced by these users and explore how systems of oppression extend beyond the screen to inhabit online environments. Being able to study these online spaces with the lens of cultural rhetorics would mean being able to combine the theoretical discourse that was formed by and explains the

experiences of these communities (such as critical race theory, feminist theory, queer theory, etc) with the online experiences that are imbued with the same racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc that affect offline life. In exploring the blended experiences of online and offline life, I hope to clarify the need to more seriously consider cultural rhetorics in the endeavor of online research because of the relationship between embodied identity and online interactions. Every online interaction and activity can be traced back to their user like a breadcrumb trail. Because of this intimate tie between online and offline life, the cultural rhetorics lens can only elucidate the online experience. The increased blending between online and offline life calls for a closer examination of cultural rhetorics in the context of online research, but what might this blending of research techniques look like?

If an online researcher is interested in incorporating a cultural rhetorics lens to their online research, I'd like to propose a potential model for what such a consideration might look like. For starters, let us return to the definition of cultural rhetorics given above. As described by Bratta and Malea, cultural rhetorics is a practice that stems from the frames of "decolonization, relations, constellation, and story" which aims to "change the traditional narratives, canons, and ways of operating in the discipline in order to explicitly open academia to ideas and intellectual affordances from a much broader range of continental and global cultures" ("Introduction to the Special Issue"). As stated above, a central move needed to be made to engage online research methodologies with cultural rhetorics practices means identifying that embodied cultures and communities exist in online spaces *and* are affected by the same systems of marginalization present in offline systems. Cultural rhetorics provides a practice to acknowledge these online and offline systems and account for the embodied experiences of the users within those systems. Ensuring that the particular research techniques employed in a cultural rhetorics practice are reflective of the community in question is tantamount to conducting cultural rhetorics research. But, before this consideration can be thoughtfully made while conducting online research with a cultural rhetorics lens, researchers must make a few preliminary moves:

1. Determine the exact online population to be researched. Decolonization, one of the frameworks cultural rhetorics is situated on, rests on identifying the systems of power faced by particular communities and cultures. Identifying the population to be researched is the first move in uncovering what that community's/culture's relationship to power looks like, particularly in online systems. In conducting this step early on, researchers will also be able to begin thinking about the specific theoretical lenses to incorporate into their research. Some early questions to ask include:

    a. Is the community formed specifically around users sharing a component of their identity, or are those with particular identities in an online group forming connections with those in their group who share their identity?

    b. Are the identities that are present in these online spaces made apparent in the online community?

2. Once subjects are selected and the identities that will be explored in the project are identified, researchers can begin collecting their necessary data. For conducting such a research endeavor, a significant form of data collection ought to include a series of interviews. Referring back to storying, one of the frameworks connected to cultural rhetorics, interviews provide a space for subjects to articulate their stories, particularly as they relate to their online and offline systems. Conducting interviews accomplishes multiple things: interviews a) provide subjects the opportunity to speak specifically to their relationship to their identity in online spaces, b) can provide the opportunity for researchers to develop a relationships with their subject that would not be possible through simply observing online activity and c) promotes transparency and a reciprocal relationship, two driving forces of cultural rhetorics.

3. Select a theoretical approach that reflects the identities of those being researched. Constellating, another one of the four points of practice for cultural rhetorics, is connected to this step because of the way is connects theory to subjects. In constellating theory to community, researchers can draw on

theoretical approaches stemming directly from the meaning-making happening within those communities/cultures. Researchers, then, must select an approach that prioritizes the identities of the subjects being researched. For instance, critical race theory for black communities, disability theory for disabled communities, indigenous theory for indigenous communities, queer theory for LGBTQ communities, etc. The reason for this prioritization of theoretical approaches that match the identities of those being researched is to effectively incorporate the complicated nuances of those embodied identities alongside the online behaviors of those communities. These theoretical approaches ought to serve as the grounding framework for this research, as it provides a method of understanding the identities that so often shape the communities of online and offline environments.

Of course, each of these preliminary research moves could be used to represent any of the four frameworks tied up in cultural rhetorics—decolonization, relations, constellations, and storying—and are not meant to serve *only* as the aforementioned examples. But, this proposed methodology is designed to reflect those four points of practice as a means to usher forward a cultural rhetorics practice within online research methodologies. After completing these preliminary moves, researchers of online communities can respectfully consider the embodied identities of the communities they would be doing their research in. By incorporating a cultural rhetorics approach to online research, researchers would be able to more effectively questions such as: "How are specific online communities formed around embodied identities?", "How do online communities shape people's offline lives?", and "How does offline life shape online life for users?". As researchers are moving through their research the final, and recurring move that must happen is

4. Ensuring that the population being researched are aware of the ways they are being represented. Connecting back to the notion of relations, this final move of sharing research with those being researched aims to promote transparency between the relations of researcher and subject. This is a particularly important

move to make in a cultural rhetorics practice, since power dynamics of research situate the researcher as holding power in ways that the subjects do not. That means consistently returning to the community and sharing how the research is coming together. This should happen not just at the end of research, but as a recurring move so that participants are involved, active agents in their representation throughout the project. For instance, giving participants the opportunity to read and reread drafts throughout the composing process can ensure that scholars are ethically and properly representing their participants. Each of these moves are prosed as a potential methodology for combining cultural rhetorics practices with online research methodologies. However, these moves are all merely suggestions. Of course, each researcher may have to adjust methods to match the research endeavors and communities in question. As Bratta and Powell write, there is an "impossibility of simply laying out a "universal" (or, an "essential") frame for cultural rhetorics work" (Introduction to the Special Issue). The cultural rhetorics practice, instead, is designed to resituate how stories of colonized and marginalized communities are told. While this methodology is not foolproof, and can ultimately be altered to best suit to needs of research, researchers must still ensure that they are considering the frames of decolonization, relations, constellations, and storying within a cultural rhetorics practice as it relates to online research.

　　With this proposed methodology, let us now return back to Gina, specifically articulating what researching her and her online and offline usage might look like. The researcher would have to determine what community is to be researched. Perhaps Gina would be a singular subject in a larger research question surrounding the ways that activists work conjunctly in online and offline spaces. Perhaps the researcher is interested in looking at the different ways that disability communities form online to communicate about their offline experiences, and Gina is merely a single participant in a larger study of several individual users. This distinction would hugely color the kind of research questions that would arise throughout the project, but both options would rely on a cultural rhetorics approach. After approaching Gina to articulate an interest in

researching her online and offline practices, a researcher might use components of her (and others') identit(y/ies) to select a grounding framework to drive research. In this case, feminist and/or disability theory may be useful. These frameworks would serve as the link between online research practices and a cultural rhetorics practice. Depending on what the researcher finds valuable from these additional theories, that researcher would then incorporate those practices and beliefs into their further research endeavors. Take disability theory, for instance: if using a social model of disability, research questions should center the ways that disability is not connected to an impairment in the body but rather the ways that the world is designed to be navigable for some bodies over others. As interviews, and other forms of data collection, are conducted, the researcher should incorporate that data into their online research methods. However, as that additional data is collected, the researcher ought to stay in touch with their research participants. This could mean bringing up trends noticed in the data collection during interviews, or allowing the participant(s) to describe which of their online practices are most integral to their understanding of the navigation of online and offline spaces. This research move is integral to cultural rhetorics, since it clearly identifies a relationship between researcher and subject that draws on a subject's own knowledge in addition to the theory driving the research. Throughout the entire research process, researchers should stay in open communication with their participants, relaying the data that is being collected in addition to the researcher's interpretation of that data. This reciprocity cannot be understated in a cultural rhetorics approach, simply because of the way that cultural rhetorics values subjects as not just research material but as people with diverse and complicated identities.

Incorporating a cultural rhetorics focus in online research is valuable in the ways that it opens up a swath of research questions that further explore the complexities of online life. Online research methodologies, though, rarely engage with cultural rhetorics, thereby forfeiting the possibilities of an increased and more nuanced examination of how cultures and identities are manifested online. It's clear that identities already and will continue to shape the geography of online interaction, but

without that acknowledgement in online research methodologies, researchers can't parse out the complexities of online engagement. Not only do researchers have an obligation to incorporate cultural rhetorics into their research because of how it would benefit their own research, but also they have an ethical obligation to their subjects to be cognizant of their cultures and identities. This article intends to encourage online researchers to more seriously engage with cultural rhetorics as an integral tool in mapping and understanding online interactions.

Works Cited

Banks, Adam J. Race, Rhetoric, and Technology: Searching for Higher Ground. Urbanna: NCTE, 2006. Print.

Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008. Print.

Boyd, Danah. "Social Networking Sites as Networked Public." *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi. Routledge, New York, 2011, 39-59.

Bratta, Phil, Malea Powell. "Introduction to the Special Issue: Entering the Cultural Rhetorics Conversations." *Enculturation*, issue 21.

Conger, Kate. "Harassment of Ghostbusters' Leslie Jones shows Twitter needs to change." *Tech Crunch*, 19 July 2016.

Cultural Rhetorics Consortium. "Rhetorics for all of us." *Cultrhetconsortium.org*.

Frith, Jordan. "Social Network Analysis and Professional Practice: Exploring New Methods for Researching Technical Communication." *Technical Communication Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2014, pp. 288-302.

Grinberg, Emanuella. "Facebook 'real name' policy stirs questions around identity." *CNN*, 18 September, 2014

Gutenson, Leah DiNatale, Michelle Bachelor Robinson. "Race, Women, Methods, and Access: a Journey through Cyberspace and Back." *Peitho* Vol. 19 issue 1

Holpuch, Amanda. "Facebook still suspending Native Americans over 'real name' policy." *The Guardian*, 16 February 2015

Nakamura, Lisa. *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013. Internet resource.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Turkle, Sherry. *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. Print.

Turkle, Sherry. *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. New York: Penguin Books, 2015.

Parks, Malcolm. "Social Networking Sites as Virtual Communities" *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, edited by Zizi Papacharissi. Routledge, New York, 2011, 105-124pp.