different thread of the conversation, demonstrating the complexities and challenges of the work that the book takes on. Because of these interesting conversations, the anthology would work especially well as a text in a range of courses, including surveys of the history of rhetoric, methods courses, and courses on composition pedagogy.


Review by William P. Banks, East Carolina University

If I want to know what's going on in the United States or abroad, I rarely pick up the newspaper, nor do I spend much time watching television news. Like our students, I jump on the Internet and begin prowling around various news sites and blogs; this move is more for convenience than because I think all American news is inherently bad or any more biased than other news sources. However, if I want to know what's going on with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people or issues, I open my FeedReader program, a dynamic content news aggregator, and see what's happening in the blogosphere. I do this because I know I won't learn anything much from mainstream news about queer people or politics. What I get from these various blogs are the stories my colleagues and friends will most likely never read: stories of queer youths verbally or physically assaulted at schools or in their own neighborhoods, stories of these same youths kicked out of schools by principals for various nonsensical reasons, stories of gay couples beaten up while on vacation, stories of child custody battles for lesbian and gay parents, stories of local—and simultaneously pervasive—legislation to deny queer people access to marriage or spousal
benefits and protections. Fortunately, I also read "success" stories: queer-inclusive proms that went off without a hitch, 5,000-and-counting gay and lesbian marriages in Massachusetts, a widow who finally received the insurance benefits her recently deceased partner had extended to her but that had been denied by laws and insurance company greed, queer studies programs developing at colleges and universities around the country.

But I know that most of our students do not get this information; my own students often tell me that gay marriage is legal in lots of states where it's not or that gay students may be "picked on" infrequently, but they're not physically abused or killed—that happens in other countries, maybe. In fact, aside from watching Will & Grace reruns or infrequent movie releases such as Brokeback Mountain, our college students may have very little interaction with LGBT people outside of social stereotypes and jokes told over greasy food in cafeterias. Except, perhaps, on campuses that have LGBT Speaker's Bureaus or similar campus-sanctioned diversity training initiatives. Speaker's Bureaus, which individual teachers may contact to arrange for speakers to attend their classes, are variously configured; however, they are typically composed of five or six students from the campus who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (as well as occasional "straight allies") and who are willing to discuss their experiences with "coming out" and what life is like for them on campus. In Speaker's Bureau engagements, students—both gay and straight—come face to face with the Other, creating a rare space for a Levinasian ethical development to occur. In this space, as Suzanne Holland has noted in "Levinas and Otherwise-than-Being (Tolerant): Homosexuality and the Discourse of Tolerance" [JAC 23 (2003): 165–89], students "expos[e] themselves to the encounter with the other" (165), one that can move them beyond tolerance alone as a "sufficient basis for ethics" (166). As Holland and Levinas note, tolerance can be an empty intellectual exercise, one easily forgotten or ignored when our physical selves come into actual contact with the Other.
Fortunately, Zan Meyer Gonçalves has taken up the task of understanding the work of Speaker’s Bureaus in order to explore how these sites of rhetorical (and ethical) development might speak to an urgent need in our classrooms to have students explore their various identities and those of others, given that these sites provide an opportunity to investigate how the identities we compose in texts (ethos) produce genuine—and different—effects in various audiences at different times. In *Sexuality and the Politics of Ethos in the Writing Classroom*, Gonçalves seeks “to provide examples of how we can adapt the functions that the [Speaker’s] Bureau performs for students to our own classrooms and use the experiences of the student speakers to guide us” (7). Here, Gonçalves takes as her project the bridging of the extracurriculum with the curriculum, even as she simultaneously answers recent calls in our field to explore non-classroom uses of rhetoric and writing as “other” spaces of rhetorical activity that might yield important insights into revising our teaching practices. And it is a laudable project, even if it is one that may ultimately be problematic for classroom transfer.

The Speaker’s Bureau that Gonçalves studies yields some fascinating and powerful knowledge about rhetoric, often reminding us of what we may have lost in forgetting our connections to speech departments and the rich tradition of oratorical societies on U.S. campuses in the nineteenth century. The training that Speaker’s Bureau participants go through looks much like talk therapy, and they are being trained, after all, to work as *speakers* before an audience immediately (and perhaps even menacingly) present in ways that audiences of written texts may not be. While the focus in these training spaces is not on writing, as Gonçalves notes throughout her analysis, the discussions focus primarily on both invention (helping students think in various ways about their experiences with their sexuality development, as well as their identity formation) and on delivery (helping students organize and construct an ethos for various speaking engagements). Much of her analysis of the rhetoric of the Speaker’s Bureau likewise relies on Shane Phelan’s theories of specificity and the need to speak
"outlaw truths" to power. Students who choose to get involved with Speaker's Bureaus tend to go through some fairly intense training wherein they explore their own experiences with "coming out"—or, in the case of straight allies, "coming into" an allied position with the politics or issues of LGBT peoples—as well as experiences with the "not-me," that nebulous audience of people out there who are not me but who may share some of the same values I share or who may experience some of the same basic human needs that I do. Such rhetorical and ethical training, although neither the students nor trainers may realize it, represents exactly the sort of work most writing teachers would like to see their student-writers master.

The majority of the book, then, focuses on case studies of different students from different cultural backgrounds who attempt to perform their various identities in ways that encourage listeners to accept the speakers' "outlaw truths" of sexuality (and its intersections with various cultures) and to reconsider the "truths" they have brought to class. Central to this work, as Gonçalves notes, is recognizing "how speakers performed their identities among competing social discourses, creating a complex ethos that redefines 'gay people'" for the audiences (31). This work involves reclaiming various tropes or concepts (such as what it means to be "human" and who gets to be part of this category), which happens in part because the speakers learn how to position themselves as "experts" on their own identities and experiences. In claiming this expertise, which Gonçalves tracks through various spoken and written texts she collected from research participants, the speakers "reposition themselves from passive recipients of alienation and violence to active agents able to address and challenge the oppression perpetuated by heterosexist and other stereotyping discourses" (40). Such a position does much for hostile audiences who tend to hear "minority discourses" as complaints from the powerless, people who may deserve the treatment they receive because of this (seemingly inherent) weakness. (After all, weakness does not resonate with most American commonplaces, except to signify objects deserving of pity.)
When Gonçalves moves from observing and researching these extracurricular practices to suggesting how her findings might transform current pedagogical practices in writing classes, her text becomes more problematic. While I cannot disagree with her assessments of the contemporary writing classroom and what it needs—including increased attention to discourses of self-formation and how selves function as centrally persuasive in rhetorical texts (beyond simplistic, expressivist discourses)—Gonçalves does not address sufficiently the massive disparities between the two rhetorical spaces of “Speaker’s Bureau” and “Writing Classroom” in ways that help me bridge the divide. For example, the author notes that “gay students have the experience of crafting and performing multiple identities in ways students who are positioned by the dominant discourses as central rather than marginal simply do not” (60), and I would agree with her assessment. I would, in fact, agree that one way to get both normative and non-normative students to entertain the conflicts between dominant and marginal discourses involves having students identify and work through various ethical perspectives in their writing. (See, for example, my article “The Values of Queer Jacketing” [MEAT: A Journal of Writing and Materiality 1.2 (2005–2006)], where I discuss an essay I assigned that involved having heterosexually-identified students produce fictional “coming out” narratives to engage in ethical refiguring.)

However, Gonçalves’ reliance on a personal expertise model of ethos seems somewhat problematic in its transfer to classrooms. While I agree with Gonçalves that LGBT students on Speaker’s Bureaus may indeed both perceive themselves and be perceived by their audiences as “experts” on their experiences with identity and sexuality, this perception of expertise creates rhetorical problems. It seems to me that we live in a culture highly respectful of anyone who can claim to be “personally” affected by something, while simultaneously suspicious of those without direct experience and their ability to explore or explain a topic or issue with which they do not have such experience. However, this sort of identity-based politics and rhetoric ultimately invalidates the speaker
because he/she is caught in an epistemological trap: he/she is simultaneously both expert and biased because he/she cannot help but read the situation subjectively. This rhetorical trap, unfortunately, is one that we've not found our way out of yet, even in well-reasoned texts such as Gonçalves'. Beyond this dilemma, however, is the problem of students and authority in our classrooms. What steps must we take as teachers both to invest students with expertise in a space that aggressively mitigates against their having agency or rhetorical power and to empower students to recognize in themselves this (illusory) authority? More specifically, the LGBT student does indeed know personal experiences of sexuality and can see such experiences as yielding expertise in a non-classroom setting, but the same cannot be said for writing students who may choose to write about topics they are only beginning to explore (a task which, I think, should be lauded and encouraged).

Gonçalves' desire for students in her writing classes to be as "empowered" as students in Speaker's Bureaus strikes me as an important pedagogical imperative; however, the expertise she seeks to mimic comes from the student speakers having tremendous control over when they speak, how they speak, and what they speak. They can choose not to participate in certain speaking engagements and can say what they want without concern for grades or their classmates' reactions. Can such "freedom" enter the writing classroom? I like to think that the student-writers I work with would say yes, but I'm not so certain. To enter a room filled with people who most likely know very little beyond stereotypes of sexuality and identity empowers the Speaker's Bureau participants because they know they have more "knowledge" than the audience, at least more of a certain kind of knowledge. While the essays the Speaker's Bureau students might produce would challenge cultural assumptions and disrupt heteronormative discourses, we have no assurances that the stories of the other students would do anything more than buttress the very cultural foundations our courses might seek to critique. I would certainly have appreciated Gonçalves' exploration of this marked distinction.
between the self-selecting freedoms of rhetors on the Speaker's Bureau and students in a writing course.

Likewise, as someone who considers ethos one of the most important rhetorical concepts for those engaged in the rhetorics of identity, I find tremendous value in Gonçalves' attempt to rethink identity in terms of ethos and performance/performativity. Throughout her book, Gonçalves notes that conscious awareness of multiple identities allows students to see ethos as a choice-based, context-driven option. The author develops this notion from some of the work on performativity and postmodern calls that have moved subject-discourses away from the essentialism of "identity" and toward more polyvalent and performative spaces that terms such as subjectivity supposedly invoke. Gonçalves attempts to move away from subjectivity toward ethos as the space that is socially constructed, even as she recognizes, I believe, that ethos also embodies notions of the psychological self in performance. A concern arises for me, however, in that Gonçalves reduces "performance" to a series of overtly conscious choices that a writer/speaker can make, options for self that are easily stored in a treasure chest and available when the situation demands. Gonçalves offers a problematic reading of Judith Butler to assert such a claim, particularly when she describes "Judith Butler's idea that we construct and perform our various rhetorical identities intentionally as a survival strategy within social discourses that essentially determine and govern that performance" (64). Performance theories, however, do not lead us to this place. Judith Butler, who has done much of the work on discursive performativity, has argued repeatedly that the subject does not simply choose a performance; rather, performances, which are linguistic and discourse-oriented, actively make and unmake the subject of discourse. The writer/speaker may be attempting rhetorical action, developing a functioning self (ethos), but the writer may not be aware of how the self is being actively re/de/constructed by language itself, as well as the audience and the culture at large, in a complex matrix of linguistic performativity. Butler suggests we are far from certain in knowing that our performances have the effects we intend; in fact, they may
be actively working against our intentions. Gonçalves reduces Butler's theories to a series of masquerades. What would have been more interesting for this reader would have been for Gonçalves to engage Butler's theories of performativity more accurately and thus sharpen her own conceptions of ethos as a per/formative act.

None of this, of course, should be seen as dismissing what amounts to an important new book in our field, one of two currently published books that take seriously the intersections of sexuality and the composition classroom (the other being Harriet Malinowitz's Textual Orientations). Central to Gonçalves’ work, it seems to me, is the power in recognizing “outlaw truths” (5) and creating spaces for speaking them so that they counter the normative truths that govern our writing and thinking. In many ways, Gonçalves’ book speaks an “outlaw truth” to our field, suggesting problems and possibilities that we have yet to consider in any sustained intellectual way. This work is important for writing teachers and rhetorical theorists alike to investigate further. How writing and writing classrooms construct “truths” and counter-truths, and what role ethos plays in this activity, strikes me as being centrally important to our discipline and worthy of significant further study. If Gonçalves’ monograph contains faulty assumptions or problematic transfers to the writing classroom, I’m rather disinclined to blame the author. The reality is that hers is one of the early voices out there, and the real problem that all scholars working in this area of rhetoric and composition face is that we lack a sufficiently established discourse within which to think through our work. As teacher-scholars, we owe it to ourselves, our discipline, and our students to engage with projects like those Gonçalves’ outlines in her monograph and to begin suggesting more complex or at least other “outlaw truths” for consideration. In such a rich field of research, we may begin to find ways to work for greater social justice, both in and outside our classrooms.