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Commemorating Sexism: Suffragist Suppression, Partial Memory, and the Women's Titanic Memorial

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Introduction

To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages, and social practices—all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope. – Linda Tuhiwai Smith

It is unseasonably warm for mid-October and I am on a furious trek to the Women's Titanic Memorial in Washington, DC. The messianic statue, until now something I have only seen in pictures, lives at the very edge of the Southwest Waterfront neighborhood – about half an hour from my office if I hustle.

I shed layers of clothing as I shed the high-rises and the taxi cabs of downtown, the part of D.C. that screams haste and modernity. The Waterfront's residents pay handsomely to live removed from it all. The closer I get to the wharf, the more convinced I am that this area exists in some seaside town like Annapolis or Cape May, not the nation's capital, and my pace slows.

A small side road leads me past bikers, joggers, and dog-walkers to the base of the Women's Titanic Memorial, which is melded seamlessly into a three-sided bench overlooking the Potomac (Figure 1). I am unprepared for the statue's majesty, the unapologetic assertion of its form into the sky. I am also surprised by its Christ-like essence: the cloth robe billowing around the statue's legs, the arms outstretched as if on a cross.

The idea behind the memorial was to honor men, who made up the majority of the 1,500 souls lost in the Titanic disaster. The inscription on the base makes this known:

TO THE BRAVE MEN
WHO PERISHED

IN THE WRECK
OF THE TITANIC
APRIL 15 1912
THEY GAVE THEIR
LIVES THAT WOMEN
AND CHILDREN
MIGHT BE SAVED



Figure 1. Photograph of the Women's Titanic Memorial (Author's personal collection). Taken October 16, 2017.

A few women approach the memorial and squint to read these words. "What's going on here?" one asks, running her hand over the speckled red granite. I wonder how these two, who could probably be grandmothers to me, feel about the sentiment from the self-described "Women of America." Are they charmed by its quaintness, which harkens back to a more chivalric time? Or are they curious as to

why the Titanic's women were left out? With a quick nod to them, I put my coat back on. The sun is beginning to set. I walk back in the direction of my gleaming silver office building where I work with mostly female scientists, under a female supervisor. How far we have come.

During the walk back to my office, I realize that I have put myself in conversation with the Women's Titanic Memorial and the other members of its audience in a kind of quiet cultural rhetorics practice. I have begun, as Powell et al. note, to "[work] out a relationship to the...histories of this place" and "[build] a space in which [my] work exists alongside those histories." Additionally, I have landed on Blair, Dickinson, and Ott's collective memory scholarship with the understanding that "remembering takes place in groups" (Blair et al 6). The presence of other spectators allows me to think beyond myself, to consider what women today collectively remember and forget about our own history. The memorial, commissioned by one sex to honor the other, interrupts our present day to nostalgically pine for a time – and a version of history – *when men were men and women were women*. Meanwhile, Cynthia Kaye Fischer resists this rhetoric by calling the statue "an act of appeasement, designed not only to praise the acts of men but to uphold both the longstanding 'contract' between men and women and the conservative social order" (Fischer 32). Do women today identify with this tribute or resist it? And when the Women's Titanic Memorial asks us to remember, what is it simultaneously asking us to forget?

My essay argues that the Women's Titanic Memorial utilizes Lawrence Prelli's *rhetoric of display* to perpetuate institutional and internalized sexism through collective memory. The memorial's history of two competing designs – one vehemently egalitarian, the other vehemently anti-suffrage – charges the rhetoric of the winning anti-suffrage design. Prelli's notion of concealing and revealing informs my analysis of the memorial, as its display deliberately excludes (and thus conceals) the Titanic's female victims. The collective memory that the Women's Titanic Memorial shapes is therefore incomplete, reinforcing a dominant cultural ideal in which women must always center men. I therefore propose that the memorial be treated as a counter-narrative: one insisting that men willingly sacrificed themselves for women instead of being forced to do so by the ship's crew; one where the truth is "forgotten" in the interest of a political agenda, and one that invites criticism and diverging identities for women. I also explore the possibility of *counter-counter-narratives* that draw upon cultural rhetorics approaches, utilizing Linda Tuhiwai Smith's call to transform "spaces of marginalization" for women into "spaces of resistance and hope" (Smith 4).

A Brief Note on Methods

My argument in this essay utilizes cultural rhetorics to argue that the Women's Titanic Memorial is what Powell et al. deem a "[space] in which common belief systems can be made, re-made, negotiated, transmitted, learned, and imagined." Similarly, my essay draws upon public memory as what Jessica Enoch calls a "vernacular presentation of the past composed specifically for the purposes of the present" (Enoch 2). The Women's Titanic Memorial, according to its plaque, serves to commemorate the selflessness and bravery of the male passengers who went down with the ship. This is a re-making, a presentation of the past assembled to reach into the present for political purposes. Namely, the memorial is a negotiation to keep women from achieving political and social progress.

To make an argument that draws from both the past and present, I had to select sources that do the same. The Library of Congress's "Chronicling America" newspaper archives helped me locate articles on prominent figures like Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (designer of the Women's Titanic Memorial) and Evelyn Gurley-Kane (leader of the charge for a different design), as well as interviews with various donors and supporters of the memorial. The scholarship cited in this paper covers a range of areas from cultural rhetorics to memory studies to social psychology in order to establish a link between the rhetoric of the memorial and how its ideas persist in American society today. Lastly, I conducted a site visit to the memorial to observe it myself, take photographs, and gauge my own affective response to its rhetoric.

Dueling Designs and Competing Agendas for the Women's Titanic Memorial

The Women's Titanic Memorial, like all memorials and commemorations, anchors the present to the past. Designed to be viewed and regarded, it demands attention by disrupting the environment in which it is placed. And though its form is physical, it leaves its audience with various lasting impressions that combine and coningle to create collective public memory. Lawrence Prelli describes public memory itself as disruptive, noting that different rhetorical viewpoints, perspectives, and agendas are capable of both soothing and troubling our understanding of history and its connection to the present:

Rhetorical studies of public memory grapple with tensions between revealing and concealing characterized in terms of remembrance and forgetfulness, recollection and amnesia. Rhetorics that constitute public memory are displays that manifest contingent resolutions of those

tensions, whether through speeches, photographs, or films, memorials or monuments, or exhibitions and other public performances. Rhetorical studies of public memory expose these situated rhetorics and their special allures and inducements; they thus reawaken contingently resolved tensions associated with remembering and forgetting and thereby show that public memory always is potentially contestable (Prelli 11)

Prelli's notion of a "reawakening of contingently resolved tensions" within public memory aligns with the Women's Titanic Memorial's particular brand of disruption. The process of constructing the memorial itself was riddled with tension between two organizations: the pro-suffrage National Titanic Memorial Association and the anti-suffrage Women's Titanic Memorial Association. The memorial's controversy, then, was not limited to opposing ideas about the role of women in honoring male victims of the Titanic disaster. It echoed the larger national battle over women's suffrage.

Days after the sinking, a group that included the wives of Andrew Carnegie, Woodrow Wilson, Grover Cleveland, and William Randolph Hearst assembled to form the Women's Titanic Memorial Association, which collected small donations from women all over the country for the planned monument. Helen Taft, widow of William Howard Taft, "symbolically donated the first dollar" to lead by example, and "announced that she was 'glad to do this in gratitude of American manhood'" (Biel 35). The memorial's fundraising efforts were highly publicized in D.C. newspapers, and garnered personal endorsements from prominent donors and leaders. In the May 3, 1912 edition of *The Washington Times*, a letter from Pastor W.T. Russell of St. Patrick's Catholic Church to the WTMA secretary was published as follows: "I am sure every woman in our country will be glad of this opportunity of showing to the world at large, her appreciation of the heroism of the men of the Titanic, and I truly believe that she will need no urging to make this arch worthy of the deed which prompted it" ("Women Will Build"). Pastor Russell's words substitute women's inclusion in the statue with the satisfaction of constructing it.

Meanwhile, a second fundraising group had a different concept in mind. The National Titanic Memorial Association, led by Iowan actress and philanthropist Evelyn Gurley-Kane, advocated strongly for the memorial's inclusion of the Titanic's women and children. Gurley-Kane appeared several times in *The Washington Post* to defend her organization's approach. "I am strongly in favor of a memorial to be erected for the memory of the heroic women, as well as the brave men, who perished in the Titanic disaster," she said in August 1912, declaring that she would

not combine or affiliate with the Women's Titanic Memorial Association unless they supported "the purpose for which we aim" ("Seeks Titanic Fund").

Gurley-Kane's rhetoric differed drastically from other comments of the day because it sought to stir inspiration in women as well as men. "[T]he greatest ideal we can inspire in the heart of man and boy, in girl or woman, is the remembering in the memorial the wonderful bravery and tender devotion of real womanhood evinced by many of those who went down with the ship," she wrote in September 1912. "In real life the bravery of true womanhood, when facing a great crisis, is never found wanting" ("For a Big Hospital"). This concept of bravery could have referred to figures like fellow philanthropist Ida Straus, who famously refused a lifeboat seat and stayed on board the Titanic with her husband Isidor, as well as the female survivors who supported themselves and their children in their husbands' absence after the disaster. And considering a mention later in the same article of the "mother with her babe in her arms, found floating in the icefields," Gurley-Kane could have also been thinking of the steerage women who were actively barred from the lifeboats (Barczewski 284-285).

Gurley-Kane's egalitarian approach to the Women's Titanic Memorial asked women to identify with the commemoration, and by extension to identify with characteristics like "bravery" and "devotion." Her design enforced universal struggle, paying homage to women who made great sacrifices for those they loved (e.g. Ida Straus) as well as the surviving women who carried on without their husbands. "Displays are manifested in anticipation of appearing before some situated audience," Prelli writes, "but those who actually become audience to them bring to the encounter their own orientations or points of view" (12). With audience in mind, Gurley-Kane sought an inclusivity that would increase the chances of women identifying with the memorial.

But Gurley-Kane's vision was up against a powerful tide of anti-suffrage sentiment. Despite her best efforts to sway public opinion on who should be commemorated, hundreds of thousands of dollars poured in from across the nation to build the Women's Titanic Memorial Association's conception of the statue. Sculptor Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was selected to design the memorial in 1914 (Figure 2), and three years later, Congress granted the WTMA permission to build in Washington, DC ("Amendments by Senate"). Whitney was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and eventually designed a sculpture honoring the DAR's four founders in 1929 ("The Four Founders").



Figure 2. Photograph of Women's Titanic Memorial (Author's personal collection). Taken October 16, 2017.

Around the time of the Women's Titanic Memorial's unveiling in 1931, other memorials were being built across the country that asked female spectators to identify with traditional images of women. In 1928 and 1929, the Daughters of the American Revolution commissioned twelve statues called the "Madonna of the Trail" series, which can be found from Maryland to California along U.S. Route 40 ("Madonna of the Trail"). The statues, identical in appearance and inscription, show a pioneer woman in a decidedly masculine stance – holding a rifle and staring straight ahead – while protectively keeping one child close to her skirts and cradling another in the crook of her arm. If women are fierce and courageous, the display argues, these traits must always be tied to their role as caretaker of the children. Charles Grafly's Pioneer Mother statue, erected in 1915 in San Francisco, similarly depicts a woman in a modest dress and bonnet, holding two children close to her. According to Brenda D. Frink, author of "San Francisco's Pioneer Mother

Monument: Maternalism, Racial Order, and the Politics of Memorialization,” the statue’s original designer Ella Sterling Mighels wanted the Pioneer Mother to evoke “nostalgia...back to what she imagined as a simpler, more moral time, when gender, race, and class order had been strictly maintained” (89). Mighels was well known for her use of maternalism – an ideology that reveres women as “natural” caretakers and homemakers – to justify “conservative causes such as antisuffrage, white supremacy, and censorship” (88).

Like the pioneer statues, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s design of the Women’s Titanic Memorial utilizes traditional, domestic tropes to perpetuate women’s oppression. The authors of “Tour Guides as Creators of Empathy: The Role of Affective Inequality in Marginalizing the Enslaved at Plantation House Museums,” define *affective inequality* as the disparity between the actual marginalization of social groups and how that marginalization is “forgotten” in public memory. Modlin, Alderman, and Gentry maintain that “docents shape people’s moods and feelings about the past, directing tourists in deciding what and who from the past should receive emotional investment” (7). Similarly, Whitney’s design dictates who is remembered and who is forgotten. The text of the memorial centers men by addressing them directly, then praising them for actively giving their lives so that women and children could be saved.

Sculptors like Whitney act as gatekeepers of the past. The Women’s Titanic Memorial’s messianic-like aesthetics and reverent inscription direct our attention to the male heroes of this narrative, and female spectators are asked to be grateful for male sacrifice while simultaneously being erased from the inscription’s subject matter. After all, as the next section contends, what is not included in the memorial’s design shapes public memory just as much as what is.

Dismissing Unflattering Realities to Preserve Chivalric Masculinity

“Visual depictions rhetorically constrain our verbal responses,” Prelli notes in regard to visual artifacts, “much as verbal depictions rhetorically constrain what we are prompted to see” (12). In other words, the dominance of one medium shapes how we conceive of its rhetoric. While reading the Women’s Titanic Memorial’s inscription about the “brave men” who “gave their lives,” our visualization of these men is shaped by verbal selections. We would most likely envision a scene within the parameters of this rhetoric: Gentlemen in top hats and tuxedos, gallantly making sure that their lifeboat seats went to the fairer sex.

The reality was somewhat more nuanced. Second Officer Charles Lightoller took his chivalric duties aboard the Titanic so seriously that he often lowered lifeboats into the water with empty seats rather than fill them with men (Barczewski 21). But because other areas of the ship were rumored to let men on lifeboats, some male passengers with a shot at survival “did not behave like gentlemen at all, jumping on top of women in the boats [and] brawling on the decks” (Larabee 9). Sarah Boesveld reports that while over half of all women and children aboard the Titanic survived, “only 19% of men made it to safety, and many of those, including ship company chairman J. Bruce Ismay, were initially reviled for appearing to put their own lives before women and children” (Boesveld). “Women and children first” may have been the governing rule of the Titanic, but it was not without resistance.

The Women’s Titanic Memorial similarly excludes the fragile masculinity and male hubris behind the Titanic disaster itself. In 1906, the largest ship in the world was a Cunard luxury liner called the *Mauretania*. Not to be outdone, the Cunard Line’s rival, the White Star Line, launched the *Olympic* in 1911 and her sister *Titanic* one year later. The advertisements for the *Titanic*’s maiden voyage emphasized her incomparable size, strength, and speed, calling her “The Queen of the Ocean,” the “Latest, Largest, and Finest Steamer Afloat,” and “The World’s Largest Liner” (“These Original Ads”). James Cameron even gave a nod to this hubris in his 1997 *Titanic* script, when Rose (Kate Winslet) playfully asks J. Bruce Ismay, “Do you know of Dr. Freud, Mister Ismay? His ideas about the male preoccupation of size might be of particular interest to you.”

Male conception of ships as “she” illustrates male power over a female object. Before the disaster, the *Titanic* was viewed as a benevolent woman: majestic, powerful, and always obedient to the men who created and operated her. “The *Titanic*, from its beginnings, was a romantic symbol of the technological achievements of the Industrial Revolution,” writes Ann E. Larabee in “The American Hero and His Mechanical Bride: Gender Myths of the *Titanic* Disaster,” noting that prominent papers of the day reported on the vessel being “under absolute control” on the day of her launching. “By enhancing the connection between female and machine,” Larabee continues, “male commentators implied the experienced engineer’s control over his machine, even one as complicated and overwhelming as the *Titanic*” (6).

Of course, once the *Titanic* floundered, the narrative had to change. Love and admiration for the ship quickly turned to scorn in the same way that, as social psychologists Peter Glick and Susan Fiske have outlined, benevolent sexism toward women often turns hostile (491). After the sinking, Office Charles Lightoller wrote in

memoirs that a “unity of feeling...between a ship and her crew” is “not always a feeling of affection...A man can hate a ship worse than he can hate a human being” (Winocour 279). By personifying the Titanic, men turned her into a repository for their feelings of inadequacy and betrayal. The once “big, beautiful, mechanical bride” was now necessarily a “figure of wanton destruction, dragging her self-sacrificing men and their ‘civilization’ down into the icy ocean” (Larabee 6).

Public monuments like the Women’s Titanic Memorial often echo preferred stories rather than objective histories. In their essay “Landscapes of Memory and Socially Just Futures,” Derek H. Alderman and Joshua F.J. Inwood argue that “historical authenticity...is not an inherent condition but a socially constructed experience that relies upon an active preservation and even staging of the landscape and its artifacts” (188). The preservation and commemoration offered by the Women’s Titanic Memorial is incomplete because it was designed by a particular woman – and a particular organization – with an immediate goal of commemorating men and a long-term agenda of hampering women’s progress in America.

Powell et al. note that the cultural rhetorics tradition “values the relation among history, practice, and knowledge,” and the connection between history and practice in particular is certainly exemplified within the memorial. When history honors men exclusively, it establishes subsequent societal practice. In turn, the anti-suffrage practice of excluding women from public and political life became literally engraved into the memorial’s history and legacy. The resulting collective memory of artifacts like these, argues Barbie Zelizer, is partial. “Attempts to make so-called ‘official’ history have come to be seen as little more than the memories adopted by the dominant culture...the fruits of labors on the part of the aristocracy, monarchy, clergy, intelligentsia and upper-middle classes,” she writes (Zelizer 231). Given that the members of the Women’s Titanic Memorial Association were predominantly wives of powerful politicians and businessmen, it comes as little surprise that the design would omit unflattering details like the fist fights breaking out on decks and replace them with man’s unquestioned heroism in the face of disaster. If part of this constructed experience involves, as Alderman and Inwood insist, deliberate remembering and forgetting in the interest of privileging one narrative, then men’s chivalric actions are remembered while their previously publicized power over the ship is forgotten (186). As the next section details, “women and children first” similarly neglected certain truths about the treatment of women during the early 20th century.

The Complicated Sexism of “Women and Children First”

The notion that women should be rescued first in a disaster falls under what Peter Glick and Susan Fiske deem “protective paternalism,” a method of preserving women “as wives, mothers, and romantic objects...to be loved, cherished, and protected” (493). While this attitude may seem complimentary on the surface, it assigns value to women only because of their function as heterosexual partners and bearers of children. Suffrage activists in the early twentieth century opposed “women and children first” on these grounds, arguing that the chivalric code “suggested [women] were a more precious and vulnerable sex with no self-determination at all.” In doing so, notes *National Post* writer Sarah Boesveld, suffrage activists were “ridiculed and told to remember the bastion of male sacrifice that was the Titanic” while rallying for the vote (Boesveld). “Women and children first,” was more than just a sexist principle. It kept women from fighting for real progress.

The hostile underpinnings of “women and children first” became even clearer a few days after the Titanic’s sinking, when journalist Frances Wayne wrote an editorial for *The Denver Post* entitled, “Women must explain why they abandoned mates in death.” Though Wayne acknowledges that many of the Titanic’s female survivors “had no choice” and were “ordered aboard the lifeboats” by male officers, she recommends that the “women and children first” code of conduct be replaced by the Chinese model, which contends that men should be the first group rescued in a disaster. “Men are necessary to the world’s work and human advancement,” Wayne writes. “As for the women—their service in child-bearing accomplished, they may be dispensed with” (5). Wayne’s preference for the Chinese model reflects a deeply internalized sexism that, like the “women and children first” rule, upholds women’s value as strictly tied to reproductive function. Additionally, Wayne’s claim that society cannot advance without men demonstrates what Glick and Fiske call “gender differentiation,” which “presents a social justification for male structural power [in that] only men are perceived as having the traits necessary to govern important social institutions” (493). The Denver women whom Wayne interviewed for her article also exhibit internalized sexism, as they argue that women should make sacrifices to preserve male structural power. “It would not be fair to the men to put man and woman on exactly the same plane of existence and survival,” Mrs. Henry Hersey insisted. “The woman is able to do her share and to get along in the world without acts of chivalry from the men, but think how man’s nature would be degraded if he were released from this burden.” Another, Mrs. J.A. Thatcher, wrote, “We’ve gained some heroes that we needed to set as examples before an indifferent and selfish youth that is growing up in this country. The value of the

sacrifice will be known, not today, but in the future" (Wayne). Going down with the ship was regarded by many of the interviewed women as a necessary sacrifice that proved men's nobility and strength, and a deep debt that women should feel obliged to repay.

To further persuade women to accept their own subjugation, local papers in the early 20th century used the raging sea as a metaphor for suffrage activism. "The independent woman," writes Ann Larabee, "portrayed by her detractors as a lonely, shrieking siren, craving the children she would never have, was conflated with the sea and made monstrous and desperate" (8). Poems, cartoons, and other artistic works called upon men to protect women from a rising tide of progressivism, like "Adieu," a poem that appeared in an April 1912 edition of the *San Francisco Examiner*:

True men, Farewell! True hearts, Adieu,
Thy lifeboats are stilled in the deep, deep blue,
But the children saved with their young eyes fond
From hearts that sob, and lips that quiver
Shall hear the tale of the brave men's death,
And women's tears, with the requiem wave
That folds ye around, above, beneath
Shall shroud ye forever and ever. (Butler 15-22)

Gabriel Furlong Butler describes the Titanic's male victims as "true" and "brave," and in a previous stanza, as having defended the "pride of his race" (8). On the contrary, she identifies women and children with parts of the body ("tears," "hearts that sob, "lips that quiver") and an outpouring of emotion that "shrouds" the heroes for all eternity. The deeply internalized sexism in this poem praises women for their role as mourners of men and starkly contrasts with characterization of suffrage activists as "uncontrollable...ungrateful women" (Larabee 9).

By elevating a depiction of women as gentle, subservient mourners, the poem operates much like the Women's Titanic Memorial. Both the memorial and the poem perform "inherently persuasive" acts given that, to use Lawrence Prelli's interpretation of Kenneth Burke, "language use is a selective process that conceals as it reveals" (12). The language of the memorial differs because it is visual, but the rhetorical impact is quite similar. Because Gabriel Furlong Butler and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney chose to eliminate ideas about women's equality from their work, "Adieu" and the Women's Titanic Memorial both conceal the reality of the fight for suffrage during this era. What they reveal, incidentally, is a set of

unrealistic and outdated expectations for women. The collective memory that reverberates over a century later is thus partial, lacking, and asks women to participate in their own erasure.

Pathways Toward a Narrative By Women, For Women

As I leave the site of the Women's Titanic Memorial, I turn one last time to trace the outline of this unnamed granite man against the darkening sky. In a few hours, the sun will have gone completely down.

I imagine a scene from the night of April 14, 2012: the Titanic disaster's centennial. The night is quiet and still. A limousine comes to a stop on the corner, and out of it pours a stream of men in tuxedos. They are stumbling slightly, laughing at private jokes, "congratulating themselves on being masters of the universe," as Rose DeWitt Bukater would say (*Titanic*). This is the Men's Titanic Society, a group of upper-class white men who have gathered at the memorial for over thirty years to commemorate the anniversary of the disaster. Founded by Jim Silman, a former producer of the show "Washington Odyssey" that explored hidden monuments around D.C., the Men's Titanic Society vows to "remember those brave men even if the women have forgotten them." "My dad and two other producers at NBC were doing a story on little-known sites in Washington," Silman explained in an interview with KPCC radio in Southern California. "[They were] looking for this statue and couldn't find it. This statue was erected by the women to the men that gave up their lives. They decided that the women forgot" (Felde).

After enjoying a late-night dinner "inspired by the cuisine of the Titanic," the Men's Titanic Society members make their way to the waterfront and raise flutes of champagne to chivalry (Shapiro). But this scene plays out only in my mind. I would never be able to see this annual gathering firsthand, because women are not allowed to attend (Figure 3).

The Men's Titanic Society, like the Women of America before it, replicates existing power structures. Its exclusively male members commemorate the disaster's male victims while chastising "forgetful" women for failing to organize current and future commemorative events. And though the society professes to commemorate "not the rich and famous, but those who worked behind the scenes on the ill-fated liner," they dress and dine like their first-class counterparts, indulging in luxuries that the average third-class ticket holder could have never accessed (Felde). As the authors of "Landscapes of Memory and Socially Just Futures" maintain, statues like the Women's Titanic Memorial are "often controlled by social and political elites,"

and create “a story scripted to uphold dominant cultural ideas and values” (Alderman and Inwood 194, 191).



Figure 3. Photograph of Washington Channel Park (Author's personal collection). Taken October 16, 2017.

Marginalized groups often internalize the messages they receive from those in power. For example, a girl who is reassured by her parents, “Not to worry; girls aren’t good at math like boys are,” after failing a test may accept this generalization even if she genuinely enjoys math and had been previously determined to work hard in her class. A young woman whose friends are all getting married and having children may convince herself that this is what she also should be doing, even if she is not personally interested. Through such practices, women eventually learn to view one another in accordance with how much they align with or deviate from established norms. Bearman et al. identify several ways in which these practices dictate assumptions women have about themselves: “feelings of powerlessness and incompetence,” “competition between women,” “objectification,” and “invalidation and derogation” (6-8). As Frances Wayne’s argument that women

should be “dispensed with” in the event of disaster illustrates, women become complicit in their own oppression when these ideas of inadequacy and worthlessness meet patriarchal governments and social norms. “Sexism, though it is built into the institutional structures of a culture, does not persist on its own,” Steve Bearman, Neill Korobov, and Avril Thorne maintain in “The Fabric of Internalized Sexism.” “To persist, it must be practiced” (5).

How, then, can the Women’s Titanic Memorial provide an opportunity for (at least temporarily) suspending the practice of internalized sexism? Thinking of the memorial’s inscription and its solid assertion into D.C.’s Southwest Waterfront landscape, I remember Powell et al.’s call to destabilize, decolonize, and advocate for a fluid, not static, interpretation of rhetoric. “Rather than thinking of Rhetoric (upper-case, intended) as a distant, objectified, fixed identity,” Powell et al. push for “rhetoric (lower case, intended) as a series of stories, none of which can really be heard without listening for other stories, and all of which impact and are impacted by the relationships between them.” I believe there are paths forward in exploring fluid *counter*-counter narratives to this static counter-narrative; specifically, to create and highlight stories that both engage the memorial and shift its focus from anti-suffrage pasts to feminist futures.

One approach would be to design a second memorial to put in conversation with the existing memorial. After all, the Women’s Titanic Memorial was forged from conflict. It is the result of two competing ideas about women’s position both within the context of the Titanic disaster and political life more broadly. A second memorial would mitigate the gender asymmetry in public memory displays that Shersta Chabot pinpoints in her experience at the National Museum of American History. Though Chabot’s focus is on “the public nature of national and historical museums,” her argument that various elements “become enmeshed in a cultural and political power struggle over public voice, public presence, and public representation” holds true for public memorials as well (Chabot). The amount of physical space in Washington Channel Park could likely accommodate a second memorial, ideally influenced by Evelyn Gurley-Kane’s ideas of inclusivity that never solidified. Such a memorial would present an alternative enactment of gender in relation to the Titanic disaster and facilitate conversation about the “cultural and political power struggle” that Chabot describes.

Another approach would be more ephemeral and affective than a second physical sculpture. Just as the Men’s Titanic Society gathers annually to pay their respects, a group of women could utilize the same space in order to share stories of the Titanic’s female victims and survivors. Here I look to Alejandra I. Ramírez and Ruben

Zecena for inspiration, who presented their work-in-progress on “rhetorics of the flesh” at the 2018 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In what Powell et al. describe as a “storying” format, the authors took turns reading paragraphs “exchanging voices, in a kind of literary dance” (Ramírez and Zecena). The presentation disrupted academic conference conventions because of the unconventional delivery, tears, and free-flowing emotions coming from the authors: feminine intervention in a traditionally masculine space. “Visible emotion challenges the objectivist tradition,” Ramírez and Zecena argue, “within which subjectivism and embodiment are not acknowledged as valid epistemologies or ways of knowing.” Similarly, an occasion to tell the stories of the Titanic’s women would alter the tradition of statues of men, for men, and disrupt them with ephemeral narrative.

The Women’s Titanic Memorial, a collective effort of women to commemorate men while deliberately excluding themselves, reinforces the preferred silence of women – unless women are using their voices to praise and amplify men. And in doing so, it problematizes the identification of its contemporary audience. “Opportunities for identification and division arise regardless of who becomes the audience to the display. It is not surprising, then, that we encounter displays nearly on a daily basis that somehow engage with our sense of belonging and identity,” Lawrence Prelli writes. “We might find that a display affirms our identity, magnifies our interests, and celebrates our values, but it also might generate feelings of being ignored, belittled, debased, or diminished. And, as often is the case, it might leave us ambivalent, disengaged, or indifferent” (16). As long as the Women’s Titanic Memorial is standing, women will not identify with its particular brand of womanhood. My suggestion is to approach the memorial as less of a narrowly partial bastion of collective memory and more of what Alderman and Inwood call a “landscape of arena,” which harnesses a public memorial’s power to “facilitate the remembering of past injustices as part of the healing and reconciliation process...conceived [of] as a place of conflict resolution” (194). Ideally, the Men’s Titanic Society would no longer be the only group regarding the statue on a regular basis. Women and other groups marginalized by the memorial’s counter-narrative would use the site as an arena to work through what is being remembered, what is being forgotten, and what work there is left to do.

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