Alexander, Jonathan, and Jacqueline Rhodes, editors. *Sexual Rhetorics: Methods, Identities, Publics.* New York, NY: Routledge, 2016. 274 pages. ISBN 978-1-138-90687-7.

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Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes are scholars of queer theory in the fields of rhetoric and writing and gender and sexuality studies. Alexander, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, and Rhodes, a professor at Michigan State University, are known for their collaborative works that examine the intersections of queerness, sexuality, rhetoric, and pedagogy. *Sexual Rhetorics: Methods, Identities, Publics* continues the conversation on the rhetorical as "always already sexualized" (1). "Queer" can refer to LGBTQ people and perspectives, but can also refer to valuing diversity and different perspectives, and "queered" as a verb encompasses that which is normative made non-normative or non-traditional. In the spirit of "queering" this review so as to discuss this collection most effectively and move away from the traditional review format, I'd like to take a moment to talk about my personal interactions with Alexander and Rhodes as authors/ editors and scholars in the field. I'm a Ph.D. student pursuing a degree in Rhetoric & Writing and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. As a result, these disciplines often intersect in my studies, and Alexander and Rhodes always seem to be at the forefront of this intersection. I first encountered *Sexual Rhetorics* when developing a reading list for an independent study on Queer Theory in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, and this text proved to be an extremely valuable tool in orienting myself to queer theory and sexuality studies. This text also oriented me to Alexander and Rhodes' other scholarship on queer theory and sexuality studies, including their "queer" multimodal e-book *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self*. *Sexual Rhetorics* served as a starting point for me in this independent study, and it has helped me to think of ways to develop a course curriculum focused on queer theory and writing.

In addition, the text helps me to think of ways to teach my students different perspectives, to appreciate the role that sexuality has in rhetoric and writing, and that "queerness is always already in the making" (*Techne*).

Sexual Rhetorics is Alexander and Rhodes' edited collection of essays which is focused on the complexities of sexuality and the diversity of experiences. Sexuality is often discussed with a heteronormative perspective in mind, but this text discusses "the self-conscious and critical engagement with discourses of sexuality that exposes both their naturalization and their queering, their torqueing to create different or counterdiscourses, giving voice and agency to multiple and complex sexual experiences" (*Sexual Rhetorics* 1). The collection opens with an introduction from the editors discussing sexual rhetorics, including the ways that power contributes to and categorizes sexuality and identity. The introduction itself sets up the ways that sexuality is rhetorical, as the editors ask "What's Sexual about Rhetoric?" and "What's Rhetorical about Sex?" Alexander and Rhodes "assert that the discourses, identities, affects, and embodied practices clustered under the rubric of 'sexuality' are all themselves inherently rhetorical in the sense that they carry and vector the weight of ideological pressures on bodies and minds" (*Sexual Rhetorics* 1). This claim that sexuality is always rhetorical is thoroughly communicated throughout the essays contained in this collection as they focus on the ways that ideologies, social conventions, and expectations speak to and limit "queer" identities or those identities that don't fit within heteronormative or "socially accepted" categories. In this way, the essays in this collection seek to dismantle many of these social conventions by exposing the ways they restrict identity, encourage homophobia, and promote other potentially harmful ideologies while also pointing to the problematic ways that society is making public that which is private. Alexander and Rhodes' introduction works to summarize the three sections of the collection and the individual essays contained in each of those sections. They wrap-up by writing, "Taken together, these chapters speak not only to the diversity of methods and objects of

study available in the study of sexual rhetorics, but also to the saturation of public discourses and sexual appeals" (*Sexual Rhetorics* 12). Ultimately, the essays in this collection work toward embracing difference, encouraging and appreciating diversity, and asking readers to challenge their thinking through an examination of sexuality as a valuable area of study.

"Part I: Sexed Methods" is the first section of this collection, which contains six individual essays. The essays focus on methods for studying and examining sexuality and ways to expand the discipline of sexual rhetorics. The section starts out with an essay by Heather Lee Branstetter, "Promiscuous Approaches to Reorienting Rhetorical Research." This essay focuses on an expansion of the term "queer" to include a study in sexual rhetorics of identities that don't necessarily fit into the LGBTQ category. As Branstetter suggests in the title of her essay, there is value in the study of "promiscuity" and she claims that "our field would benefit from a more sustained engagement with the perspectives, people, and acts often seen as sexually deviant but not necessarily LGBTIA. To be more specific, I'm thinking of slutty women, sex workers, interracial sex, or fetish, kink, or polyamorous orientations" (18). Branstetter's essay challenges what is thought of and what is categorized as "queer"; the term is typically associated with those identities that are not heterosexual, but, however, Branstetter asks for an expansion of that definition to include that which is outside "mainstream sexual values and ideas about what sexuality should be" (18). In this way, "queer" and "queering" seem to take on a different persona, and this essay lends to an increased and expanded understanding of what queer can be and mean, which makes it a good choice as the first essay not only in this section, but in the collection as a whole. A second essay, "Hard-Core Rhetoric: Gender, Genre, and the Image in Neuroscience" by Jordynn Jack, discusses visual rhetoric in reference to neuroscience and argues that some methodologies in science need to change when it comes to studying sexuality. Jack writes that "authors often use neuroscience as factual evidence to support their claims" (58). She goes on to say that this "scientific research

remains uninterrogated…and by failing to examine it more closely, we risk an oversimplified understanding of sexuality, one that glosses over sexual differences and naturalizes culturally specific patterns as universal and biologically determined" (Jack 58). Her essay focuses "on how research on genre and visual rhetoric can help us to better understand the kinds of responses images evoke" (Jack 59). Jack points to the importance of including multiple perspectives in studies on sexuality, including queer individuals, and understanding that sexuality is culturally influenced. Unfortunately, she claims, many scientific studies lack this understanding, and are falling short as a result. According to Jack, sexuality is culturally influenced and humanistic, and studies in neuroscience need to better reflect this diversity.

The second section of the book, "Part II: Troubling Identity," focuses on a diverse array of identities relating to sexuality. Some essays focus on underrepresented LGBTQ identities, while others focus on the ways culture, race, and religion impact one's identity as a sexual being. The first essay in this section, "The Trope of the Closet" by David L. Wallace, talks about "coming out" as an event that is not only experienced by those of the LGBTQ community. Wallace refers to the "secularization" of academia and that someone in academia "coming out" as religious can be just as traumatizing of an experience as a gay or lesbian person coming out to their friends and family. Wallace summarizes the purpose of his essay when he writes,

> The trope of the closet is critical to an exploration of sexual rhetorics most obviously because it is the one of the dominant ways that homosexuality has a different rhetorical function from heterosexuality. However, the trope of the closet is also more generally useful as a tool to bring other aspects of identity to awareness—some of which may be sexual and some of which may not be. Because the trope of the closet exists only when liminality is invoked to some degree, it is a natural tool for exploring anything—but particularly anything sexual—that falls outside usual expectations and

must be actively articulated to have presence in discourse. (96)

Here, Wallace is using "the trope of the closet" as a tool to expose and challenge power dynamics and discusses the "closet" as something that can be negative and harmful because it encourages adherence to societal norms and expectations. Also discussing power dynamics, the fourth essay in this section is G Patterson's "The Unbearable Weight of Pedagogical Neutrality: Religion and LGBTQ Issues in the English Studies Classroom." This essay examines "pedagogical neutrality," and Patterson presents this concept as something that "limits the intellectual and political reach of English Studies, [encourages] uncritical thinking on LGBTQ topics, and unquestioningly centralizes the needs of students from privileged social groups while putting queer and trans students and teachers at risk" (134). This essay focuses on the hegemony that Wallace discusses, as well, and argues that instructors of English need to be aware of dominant groups in a classroom (ex. Christian, cisgender, heterosexual) that may tailor the class to their needs, desires, and beliefs. Ultimately, this section speaks to the many different factors that contribute to a person's whole identity, including gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, disability, etc., and that those with traditionally underrepresented identities deserve an equal voice and platform. Specifically, Patterson's essay points to knowledge construction as something that is possible through listening to and examining multiple voices, backgrounds, and experiences.

"Part III: (Counter)Publics," the final section of the collection, discusses issues that extend beyond individual identity to encompass the public sphere. Erin J. Rand's "'Gay Boys Kill Themselves': The Queer Figuration of the Suicidal Gay Teen" talks about high incidence of suicide among gay teenagers. In the introduction to her essay, Rand cites several tragic examples of young men who have committed suicide, seemingly as a result of their queer identity. However, the focus of Rand's piece is not to draw attention to

these teenagers and their suicides, but what is happening in society to cause tragedies like this to happen. Rand claims that

> we need to consider the ways in which we imagine the gay teen who is at risk for bullying and suicide, for whose benefit these prevention efforts are developed. In the background of the public attention to the gay youth suicides, I want to suggest, hover the 'gay boys [who] kill themselves,' or what I will call the rhetorical and affective figure of the 'suicidal gay teen.' This figure, produced through public discourse, tells us more about the collective affective investments of US culture than it does about queer youth, and demonstrates the underlying cultural violence wrought by heteronormativity. (175)

According to Rand, the issue of the "suicidal gay teen" is not a problem with sexual orientation, but is rather an issue stemming from a society still centered around heteronormativity, the notion that heterosexuality is "normal" and other sexual orientations and identities are "other." This ideology encourages misunderstanding, violence, and aggression toward LGBTQ individuals, and maybe even especially LGBTQ youth. Rand writes that, in order to work toward eliminating "suicidal gay teens," this heteronormative ideology needs to be dismantled.

Another essay in this section that discusses gender performance, Luke Winslow's "Presidential Masculinity: George W. Bush's Rhetorical Conquest," focuses on the ways Bush was able to "outman" and ultimately win against Al Gore and John Kerry in the presidential elections. This essay focuses "on the interconnectedness of gender, sexuality, and style in US political discourse…[and illuminates] the meaning-making and exchange process in traditional, formal corridors of power" (232). Winslow discusses the ways in which Bush's "masculine credentials" appealed to the traditional gender expectations of men in American society and that Bush took on the "image of the ideal American male" (233). This "presidential masculinity," as Winslow refers to it,

helped Bush to dominate Gore and Kerry in presidential elections and come out on top by meeting the "sexualized expectations" of the media and the public (234). This essay seems particularly relevant given our recent presidential election, and it seems Donald J. Trump exhibits this same "presidential masculinity" that Winslow talks about in reference to Bush which, if following Winslow's argument, may have contributed to his win over Hillary Clinton.

I also see Winslow's essay working toward uniting the chapters in this collection as a cohesive whole. Winslow notes, "the primary purpose of this book is to trace the emergence and unacknowledged presence of sexual rhetorical practices into the public sphere in order to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the dense and complicated ways sexuality constitutes nexuses of power, constructs identity, and carries the weight of ideological pressure" (232). He continues by saying that "several of the chapters in this book explore this process by analyzing the meaning-making and exchange process where historically underrepresented and marginalized sexual identities are constructed, affirmed, and struggled over" (232). Here, Winslow narrows down the ways the essays within this collection relate to one another and illuminates the unique focus of his essay as being political discourse. While each of the essays might have a unique focus, they come together under the sexual rhetorics "umbrella" with their shared concentration on the ways power impacts sexuality and sexual identity, as Winslow suggests. In this way, the chapters work together to give the reader valuable insight into sexual rhetorics, especially by bringing in and discussing important and pertinent social issues (like gay teen suicide, gender and politics, HIV/AIDS, etc.), and each essay illuminates different issues while still falling under the broad category of sexual rhetorics (and, more narrowly, the individual section headings). Alexander and Rhodes bring breadth and diversity to the collection with these varied essays and show how sexuality is an integral part of humanity while also revealing the ways that we can study sexuality

and understand queer identities and diverse and underrepresented voices.

This book is unique in that it is relevant to the field of rhetoric while also focusing on sexuality and queering, something that is rare in the discipline and that certainly deserves further attention and work. In their introduction, Alexander and Rhodes point to this by saying that "scholarship on the potent intersections of queer theory and rhetoric/writing 'remains relatively sparse and under-read'" (4). The editors go on to discuss how queer theory has been informing literary studies for some time, but has not "created significant movements in the field of rhetoric and compositions studies" (4-5). In this way, this collection works toward paving the way for LGBTQ studies to have a place in rhetoric and composition and clarifies the ways that queer theory and an understanding of LGBTQ studies can inform writing and writing pedagogy in the composition classroom. This collection of essays is an important and necessary step toward bridging the gap between queer theory and rhetoric and composition studies and can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool for teachers of writing. The text connects sexuality and LGBTQ issues with rhetoric and composition in a way that hasn't been done previously, and the editors write in their introduction that they have hope that the collection will demonstrate "the necessity of considering sexual rhetorics as a fundamental part of understanding rhetorical action in contemporary public spheres" (12). The essays in this collection point to sexuality as an important area of study and an inherent part of humanity as a whole, further highlighting that it deserves greater attention in rhetoric/writing and beyond.

The independent study where I read this text was taking place at the same time I was teaching a first-year writing course, and I've been able to queer several of our classroom practices this semester, including rearranging our classroom space and remixing traditional alphabetic assignments. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to take these experiences and develop a course focused on queer theory and writing where I can continue to queer

traditional practices and incorporate sexuality as a valuable, always rhetorical area of study.

This collection of essays can serve as a valuable resource for graduate students studying rhetoric and writing. The introduction of this book notes that

> queer compositionists have contributed important essays that prod us to think critically about the importance of LGBT content in our writing curricula, to be attentive to the particular literacy and instructional concerns of LGBT students, and even to consider the potential implications of queer theory for the teaching of writing. However, while comparable work in feminist thinking, critical pedagogies, and postmodernity in general have created significant movements within the field of rhetoric and composition studies, queerness and queer theory have not. (*Sexual Rhetorics* 4-5)

While it is important to consider LGBTQ content, students with queer identities, and queer theory in writing, this text moves beyond those concerns to address specifically the place of queer theory and sexuality in rhetoric and composition. This makes this collection a great tool for a graduate rhetorical theory course that is attempting to further the conversation about sexuality and give rhetoric students a foundation for discussing and understanding the importance of sexuality and queering in the discipline. Further, this collection can also serve as a pedagogical tool for teachers of composition. Many of these essays help to outline the ways that our identities impact how we write and interact with the world and how composition teachers can create a classroom environment that fosters diversity and gives students an equal voice to discuss and write about issues that are important to them. In addition, this volume draws attention to issues and concepts that are at the center of many conversations in our culture and society ("coming out," sexual freedom for women, sex trafficking, etc.), making it a poignant collection for classroom use. Ultimately,

Alexander and Rhodes have compiled a collection that is opening doors for further examination of queer and sexuality studies in rhetoric, and can help students and instructors alike develop a more thorough understanding of the rhetorical as "always already sexualized" (1). I recently attended the Cultural Rhetorics Conference at Michigan State University where I had the opportunity to meet Jaqueline Rhodes and talk to her about my research and coursework in queer theory. We talked a bit about accessibility, and she pointed to the medium of *Techne* and said that it was published as an open-access e-book so that anyone, anywhere could use it. This is a failure of the *Sexual Rhetorics* text; it is a valuable source in queer, sexuality, and rhetoric and composition studies, but it's so expensive that I wonder how many people have access to read it and use it. I struggled to find a copy in my library or through Inter-Library Loan, and ultimately had to obtain a review copy directly from the publisher. The text is available online for $160 new, $123.89 on sale, $54.95 on Kindle, and $80.94 used. The unreasonable price makes using the text in a course unrealistic, but the collection as a whole has so much to add to queer theory, sexuality studies, and rhetoric and composition and deserves attention; increasing the accessibility of the collection is an important first step in making it visible and usable in the field.

Works Cited

Rhodes, Jacqueline, and Jonathan Alexander. *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self,* E-book. Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State UP, 2015.