Celeste Michelle Condit, University of Georgia

***Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 2002-2004**

One feminist version of leadership might be described as highly engaged collaboration. Editing a journal is an excellent place for that kind of leadership. Bonnie J. Dow and I co-edited *Women's Studies in Communication (WSIC)* at the close of the twenty-first century (1998-2000) and then, without truly catching our breath, we agreed to co-edit *Critical Studies in Media Communication (CSMC)*.

This co-editing experience entailed engagement with dozens of would-be authors, and it required sustained collaboration with reviewers and successful authors. Taking on this task was, for me, a matter of payback. My first academic essay had been published at *WSIC*. The editors at the time (Karen and Sonja Foss) had solicited the submission from a convention paper. That early encouragement and success made it easier for me to keep plugging away in this career. So when I was asked to consider editing *WSIC,* I owed the "yes" that would commit so much of my time and energy. I decided to try to convince Dr. Dow to co-edit with me, both because I knew it would lighten the load, and because I had been trained in feminist perspectives that emphasized collaboration.

Those feminist perspectives were right. Having a co-editor made managing the emotional toll of editing tremendously easier. Editing was not a lonely job for us. We always had someone with whom to commiserate and with whom to bounce ideas around. And Dow's positive energy kept my morose moments in check.

Co-editing didn't cut the workload in half, because collaboration takes time. But it probably did cut it by a third or so. And I'm sure it made the quality of the journal

better. We had overlapping but also different areas of expertise, so we could draw on a wider pool of reviewers, and we had a broader range of insights and suggestions to offer authors as they revised.

When we had just about polished off the journal with no small sense of relief, I was asked by someone on the NCA Research Board if I would consider editing *CSMC*. I don't think that they had any volunteers, so I was being dragooned to do work that others weren't exactly fighting to do. Bonnie and I were both more hesitant this time. We weren't sure that pouring more of our time into seeking reviewers, writing letters, putting commas into reference lists, and etc. was really what we wanted to do next. We recognized that there was some small prestige in being editors, but we didn't value that tremendously, and if there is any greater symbolic value to editing, we two rhetoricians were oblivious to that. But we talked ourselves into accepting the workload on the theory that we would get ever so many more and better manuscripts at *CSMC* than we had at *WSIC*, and besides, we now knew what we were doing!

The large body of excellent manuscripts never arrived at our door. I came to understand that editing is not about culling. It is about helping authors take good ideas and develop them and present them in a form that is more widely accessible. People debate the peer review process and argue that the lack of "inter-coder reliability" among reviewers means we ought to drop the process. But culling with an even screen is not what needs to happen to make good journals. What happens instead in the review process is that reviewers and editors decide which manuscripts they think are rich enough and interesting enough to invest the time of a collaborative group toward bringing to fruition. We found that even authors who look tremendously accomplished based on

their publication records often submit essays that are riddled with holes or ugly blemishes. Many of the most successful authors are simply those who can take feedback and use it well. Collaboration is at the heart of the process of journal publication for everyone involved.

One of the "credibility" problems we faced in this "leadership" role accurately reflected that character of editing. Not too long after our call for manuscripts went out for *CSMC*, we received a somewhat challenging letter from a female academic asking if we really would be open to "other" perspectives. We still have no idea what perspective this person thought we represented and to what it was "other." We did our best to reassure this challenger that we would try to give a fair hearing to all submissions that fit the journal's (recently changed) title and mission. But perhaps if we really were "other" to this person's academic home turf, she was right to be concerned about whether we would care enough to invest in her manuscript.

I have a nagging feeling that on this second editing tour Dr. Dow did more than her share of the work. We divided up manuscripts and the task of seeking reviewers based on areas of specialty. With *CSMC,* Dr. Dow's mass media interests drew more manuscripts. We believed (and still do) that editors should not merely solicit reviews and then pass them on to authors with a thumbs-up or down. So we read each manuscript and synthesized the reviews for the authors. Especially in the case of "revise and resubmits" (the most common case), we wanted authors to understand what was needed. We both hate receiving editors comments that say "please these two reviewers . . . (who give completely opposite advice!)."

We hoped that our editorship would encourage women academics to feel optimistic enough to submit their manuscripts to *CSMC*. It feels as if we achieved that goal. Over half of the essays we published had female authors (and one issue had a female author or co-author of every essay). Although ethnic diversity was at that time even harder to achieve, we were able to encourage and include a few essays that reflected that additional aspect of diversity, and we pushed a little bit on heteronormativity as well. While those may be modest achievements in the face of broad ideals, they were what we could accomplish at the time.

The life paths that took me and Dr. Dow to this point were surely different in important respects. So I doubt that there is any lesson to be gained from my life about how one gets to be a woman who edits a journal in NCA. But since I was asked a series of questions about these background issues. . . .

I am the oldest of two daughters, raised in a family that loved learning, but perhaps was not fully socialized to the discipline required for higher education. Both my parents were middle children who came from working class families. My mom's dad worked in a foundry until he was seriously injured, and her mom had the classic "Rosie the Riveter" experiences in the World War II factories after coming to the U.S. to work in the silk mills. My father's dad worked building dams until he was run over by a cement truck. Dad's mother worked as a nurse, eventually becoming an LPN. Both my parents earned bachelor's degrees, but not in an orderly fashion. Family legend has it that my father was thrown out of two colleges before he finally finished a degree in physics at his third. My mother proudly finished her B.A. in anthropology when I was in elementary school.

I was no doubt influenced by living in a home chock full of books. We moved a lot, and every time we did so, we packed up dozens of boxes of books and then stacked them not-too-neatly on the wood, metal, and pasteboard bookcases that lined every available wall at the next apartment building. I never read most of those books, but their contents were influential none-the-less. Most importantly, I had an adventuresome aunt who traveled the world and sent my mother a copy of *The Feminine Mystique*. My mother and my father argued loud and long about that (as they argued often and about many things).

I was also influenced by my father's love of bicycles and airplanes. Although I never had any friends in elementary or secondary school, I loved being outdoors and I got to go on long bike rides, sometimes with my dad. Because of his love of airplanes (induced by repeatedly watching WWII flying ace movies when he was a movie projectionist), he guided my sister and I into the Civil Air Patrol. That was a crucial experience because it taught us to be organized, interact with other people to accomplish tasks, and it toughened us physically.

That experience probably also emboldened me enough to participate in debate. After yet another move, I landed in my junior year at Pocatello High School, where 1 credit of "speech" was required. The debate class fit my schedule, and a lively, brilliant teacher--Maxiline Capelle--introduced me to the world of competitive speaking. My dad had already introduced me to argument through his love of arguing down others. But debate was more orderly, and you could triumph not by speaking more vociferously, but by doing more research. I was good at it, I liked it, and it gave me a peer group for the first time in my life.

The next year I went across town to Idaho State University (it was only $250 a semester!) and joined the debate squad there. While working at a department store (and being introduced to collard greens at 12 cents a frozen package by my debate-team roommate), I wandered through each semester picking courses at random. I loved, but dropped, a rock-climbing course (the woman in front of me on the line had a nasty fall, and I wasn't strong enough to get an "A"). I hated the hazing I faced as the only female in a kayaking class, and you had to stand around in a bathing suit, so I got out of there after the second class session. I was surprised and intrigued by macro-economics and by psychology. And I loved all the math and science courses I dared take (against the constant warning of my advisor that I would find them too hard, even though I'd never previously gotten anything but an "A" in science and math). My favorite course was microbiology, but when I asked what kind of career I might be looking at if I pursued that I was told, "you could be a nurse." My grandmother was a very good nurse. I was not nearly as nice as my grandmother, so I didn't think I could pull that one off.

When it came time to sign up for courses my second semester junior year, I was abruptly informed that I would not be allowed to register unless I declared a major. A quick tally showed that, due to debate, and the quirky fact that speech offered a "B.S." degree that would count all my science and math classes, I could graduate "on time" if I declared myself a speech major.

Obviously, I didn't have a plan for my life. When the undergraduate degree was obtained, I faced the "now what" question. The obvious choices were law school or graduate school in speech (communication) and I really didn't have any particular desire to do one or the other. That summer, however, I got my first two dates with young men.

I had pretty much concluded I was going to follow in my "spinster" aunt's footsteps, because I knew I made young men as uncomfortable as they made me. But somehow that year I stumbled into two young men who were smart, fair, decent, and comfortable with me. Within the year I married one of them, and he has been the anchor to my storm ever since, not to mention my favorite playmate.

I took a year off from school. Waiting tables and serving as a police dispatcher soon convinced me that EITHER graduate school OR law school would be fine. They paid you if you went to graduate school and they charged you money if you went to law school. So off I went to the University of Iowa's Speech Communication Ph.D. program.

What a shock. Graduate school was nothing like undergraduate school. I was like a kid in a candy store. I loved this high octane, high thinking, high writing, high teaching environment! I deeply regret that I was not more generous to many of my professors (I've since had my own pay-back on those accounts from my students, though). There was only one female faculty member, and she inhabited an awkward space between the social sciences and humanities (a space I myself have come to occupy). This and her status as a trailing partner delegitimated her in the faculty's eyes, and therefore in the eyes of the graduate students. She fascinated me, as someone who was simultaneously an attractor but also occupied a place of low respect that I did not want to inhabit. I was not mature enough to support her and I now appreciate the cautious support she tried to give to female graduate students.

I didn't expect the faculty to give me much, and with the exception of Michael Calvin McGee, they were fine professors and not much more . . . which is all that should

be expected of any graduate professor. McGee, however, invited the graduate students fully into his life. He coached the "Sophists" (our almost-league winning intramural co-ed softball team). He and his vibrant wife, Gina, held raucous parties featuring produce from their elaborate garden and intricately braided home-made breads. He thundered and pontificated about ideas and academe and the political world. In other words, he made the department a place for a life, rather than an adjunct to it.

I benefited from that richness, because academe has been my life. I regret that my partner and I are both too much the hermits to have replicated that experience for another generation of students. But I have poured myself into creating a rich departmental life for our students in other ways. Those efforts, my teaching, and my writing have been the focus of my professional life. Other than serving as Chair of the Women's Caucus and serving on a few minor committees, I've done little service for national organizations. It is surely a fault, but I tend to get consumed by the needs and wants of those closer to me, so that I don't have time or energy or perspective to envision what might be done at a distance. I can't imagine serving as an academic administrator because I spend so much time consoling people for the pain inflicted by the academic bureaucracy.

Although I'm not particularly nervous standing in front of an audience, I always feel uncomfortable in a committee meeting. Even when I exercise leadership that is successful and appreciated, I feel awful after the meeting. I feel like I shouldn't have spoken so much or so visibly. I suspect those emotions are due at least in part to my parents' radically egalitarian professed beliefs, which vociferously denounced and deprecated managers and that slapped us (verbally) whenever we showed signs of trying to be "bigger" than anyone else.

So instead of taking on formal leadership roles, I've ended up spending a lot of time offering guidance to others, especially other women, one at a time. Repaying the career boosts I received from Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Martha Watson, I've tried to be a champion (not the more challenging task of mentor) to a few of the younger-than-me brilliant women in the field who are trying to advance their careers.

Most especially, I've been fortunate to have many wonderful graduate advisees. For each of them I have spent a dozen times the amount of time that was spent on me as a graduate student. Some of this includes lunches and personal advice, and guidance on teaching, and more career advice than I received, but most of it is time I spend on their research and writing. I don't necessarily believe, as a matter of doctrine, that training individual scholars as researchers is the most productive thing one can do to build the future, especially since so many of my students have gone off to become something other than research scholars. But they come to me in a role that asks me to provide them that training, and so I have given them my best.

I get upset when people claim that they don't want to just have a career, they want to have "a life." My career has been most of my life, and it has been "a life" that has had its riches and its rages, like any other. Perhaps I've been too passive, just responding to the demands and opportunities in front of my face, instead of plotting a set of goals and achieving them (as did the admirable Sally Ride, according to her biographer Lynn Shear). For example, when McGee suggested I study abortion for my dissertation, I studied abortion. When genetics became an indication for abortion, I studied genetics. When I watched people being interviewed about genetics, I saw that it was pathos, not logos, that I needed to understand in order to understand their responses.

So I have lived at the whim of serendipity rather than according to any long-term goals or bucket lists. But I have had the joy of intensely reading, and thinking, and writing out my ideas, and the pleasant illusion that I could, by so doing, contribute to the betterment of the human species (and later, the tempering of our species in relationship to other species). This is to say that it has felt like a very meaningful life as I have been living it, even if a sober post hoc analysis casts some doubt upon the validity of those feelings.

The question of what part of my research I am most proud of is an uncomfortable one. "Pride" is one of those words that I was taught to treat as a product of unworthy status drives. But the research I have done with which I am most happy is, oddly, research that I can't get published, or that has had the least positive response ("citation indices"!). I am most pleased to have articulated, with Bruce Railsback (my life partner and a worldly-webbed natural scientist), an onto-epistemology that I believe solves the problems inherent to absolutist versions of constructivism or positivism. We've put that manuscript on the web at The Transilience Project (http://www.gly.uga.edu/railsback/Transilience/Transilience.html) because we couldn't get a single press to even read this non-disciplinary manuscript.

The joy of thinking and writing that onto-epistemology out was quite substantial, but of course I'd be happier if I could have shared it with some readers. Truly, not because then I'd be more "successful" or "famous" (fame is painful). But because it is the groundwork that, I think, would enable better approaches for governance, for social change, and better trajectories for change.

A key second step from that foundation is my work on pathos. I'm also most happy, in a bittersweet way, to have written an unpublished manuscript about pathos. The understandings I have developed in the last few years of how human emotions structure societies constitute for me one of those major gestalt-shift experiences ("click"! as the 70s feminists put it), which put all kinds of things into perspectives that make new sense. I believe that if I could share that "click" with other people, then we could do much better work at producing a better world.

Pride is about the past, happiness is about the present, and I'd rather focus on the future. I'd like to do more in the world to make others safe and secure and able to enjoy the growth of their minds and their passions as I have been able to do. My work on onto-epistemology and pathos suggests that what I'd best do in the future is convince more academics and activists that we should move away from the Foucauldian assumption that there is one totalistic worldview that dominates the minds of everyone except those wise scholars or noble activists who can see through the veil. Instead, I would be happy if I could encourage our field and others to think of societies as always engaged in agonistic processes that have the capacity to produce change through time, but in which all parties to the debate have a stake in taking seriously (almost) all others. On this view, neither activism nor scholarship merely require adequate passion on a particular side of an issue, but rather the material pursuit of care and passion demand a passion for understanding the *legitimate* reasons that members of the public might be choosing something other than what we are offering. Only when we stop claiming that the public is duped by the Evil Force can we truly attend to the goal of working out (almost) everyone's side of the issue together.

There are a few people and even specific groups who might make my "you don't get to play" list, but that list should be vanishingly small and devoid of vague and melodramatic abstractions such as Neo-liberalism, Capitalists, Socialism, Patriarchy, The West, Whites, Welfare Bums, etc. Such shadowy figures make great villains in an emotionally compelling drama, they beat a drum effectively to sign up affiliates, but real people do not come in such guises and so dealing in a polity requires negotiations with something more concrete than these hastily drawn chimeras.

The other contributions I would like to make are probably equally Quixotic, though I have tilting companions. Along with co-tilters Martha Solomon and Leah Ceccarrelli, I'd like to make more scholars who write about communication, rhetoric, or culture feel the need to account for the perspectives of audiences at least some of the time, instead of simply dismissing these audiences, as one colleague of mine has done, by saying "they don't know what they think," or as most of my favorite critics do by insisting, "I'm just offering a possible reading." Along with co-tilters Jamie Landau and Leah Ceccarrelli and Marita Gronvell, I'd also like to help communication scholars learn how to offer options and constructive contributions to public debates in addition to our highly developed skills at debunking.

Taking this into the classroom, I'd like to encourage us to value teaching students to be creative thinkers instead of just critical thinkers. As Kenneth Burke so aptly wrote, "All living things are critics." Rush Limbaugh is a critic. It isn't that big of an achievement. Creative thinking that constructs plausible new worlds is much harder, and my studies of onto-epistemology make me believe that plausible creativity is much more valuable. Finally, as a backup sally to the tilting efforts of A. Cheree Carlson, Denise

Bostdorff, Kimberly Powell and others, I'd like to further prompt scholars and activists to value and enact what Burke calls the comic frame (or at least the tragi-comic frame) at least as highly and as often as they enact the tragic frame.

Applying that frame to my own life, I have to say its been a bumbling ride, which is par for the human course. I'm glad to have made what I think—from my perspective—to be darn good arguments that my colleagues *should* listen to! But really, listening is not what we homo sapiens sapiens are fundamentally about. We've learned to talk, a lot. But our talking is still driven primarily by our status drives and our tribal affiliations and the dynamic interplays of the structure of language and the biological pathways that enable and enact emotional patterns. Our listening is still highly selective.

Mea culpa. But also, I hope. I agree with Steven Pinker's claims in *Our Better Angels* (though I pretty much laugh at the absolutism of most of his other arguments!) that Western society has gotten better at some crucial things through time, and that we can know what has made us better, which will enable us to keep figuring out how to keep getting better, even at the things we've gotten worse at along the way. I've had the enormous privilege of stumbling into a life that has had the opportunity to try to add my smidgen to those vast and sweeping trends, even if I have no idea whether my personal efforts were to of any avail. At least it has always been interesting. Serendipity has been mostly kind to me. If I have not assumed visible organizational posts, and have no "lasting academic legacy," and so have not been the old-fashioned alpha-style leader, I am fully willing to laugh at the grandeur of holding such expectations. I have been earnest and hard-working, and I've tried to care about those around me and to understand some pieces of some bigger pictures. By the standards of those who asked me to write

this reflection, editing an NCA journal made me a "leader," and perhaps nurturing students is also a kind of leadership, so I guess the gawky hermit-girl from Idaho has collaborated in a leaderly way along her way. But I'd like to do more for the world than whatever little dollop I've done, so I hope the world stays kind to me, so that I can keep trying.