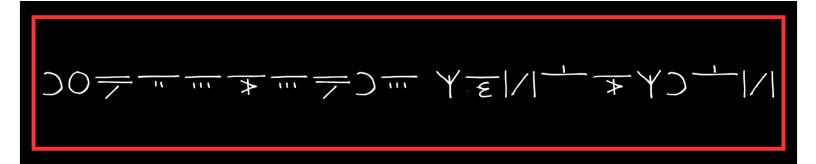# Conference Abstracts

Abstracts by Presenter Name

Ahmed, Ayesha: "The Rhetorics of the Hijab: The Angles of Islamophobia and Fear"
Politics of Fear and "Otherness"
University of Tennessee Knoxville

The information from my thesis navigates how the intersection of religious and cultural rhetorics and geographical location influences how Muslim women present themselves. After collecting interviews from a diverse background of Muslim women in Knoxville, Tennessee, my findings indicated a common theme: fear. Fear of being perceived as a Muslim in a hostile environment to the fear of judgment from fellow Muslims were concerns noted by many Muslim women regardless if they wore the Hijab or not. My panel presentation attempts to distinguish the types of fears Muslim women exhibit. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks twenty years later, Islamophobia still remains rampant. The negative associations with Muslims as a result of harmful reporting have demonized the Hijab in the process. Hate crimes are not unheard of, especially targeting Muslim women who bear the burden of representing Islam so visually. At the same time, some Muslims have certain interpretations of how a Muslim woman should present herself. If she falls outside these expectations, she could face judgment from her fellow Muslims. From Islamophobia to fear embedded within their communities, it is important to not only acknowledge but be aware of the reasons why Muslim women find themselves fearing both the in-group and out-group. Phenomenological interview data from Muslim women who have always worn the Hijab, taken off the Hijab, recently wore the Hijab and never wore the Hijab present a humanized version of a group that is often grouped into a monolith. Sharing their stories alongside the causes of their fear will better illustrate the struggles Muslim women have to encounter. At the same time, many participants expressed emotions such as bravery and empowerment from how they presented themselves. Learning how they face these common fears can also shed light on why Muslim women may wear the Hijab amidst these fears from all sides.

Alston, AD: "'You're Practically One of Us!': Incorporating a Womanist Horror Framework in African American Literature"
Representations of Horror in Media
Roundtable Participant: "Is Rhetoric a Dying Discipline? Fear, Disciplinary Tensions, and the Future of Rhetorical Studies"
University of Memphis

My proposed work, womanist horror, takes a fear-based approach to womanist studies and literary theory. This theory is explicated using media analyses (e.g., film, TV), but is ripe for traditional texts and transdisciplinary studies. Womanist Horror is a framework that that provides Black audiences with an avenue to engage with societal ills that juxtapose communal, traditional understandings of Black womanhood. Womanist horror creates cognitive dissonance with dominant connotations of self-love, freedom, justice, and centering of the Black woman's physical, spiritual, and emotional self. Womanist horror contains the following:

1. A text that has a Black female lead – can include (and not limited to) any transgender female, cisgender female, femme, or non-binary feminine presenting identity – that grapples with, suppresses, masks, others, silences, passes, and rejects her Blackness to free herself; an absence of self-love.
2. A rememory that haunts, taunts, teases, or gives a Black woman anguish or anxiety.
3. Contains a validation of whiteness and white womanhood through the placement of the main character as closely proximate to whiteness.
4. Contains an exorcising of fears that are 1) individualized to Black female character(s); 2) speaks to fears significant to common experiences of Black womanhood; 3) a perpetual state of coping rather than healing.

Alston, Gabrielle: "Digital and Technical Communication: The Rhetoric of Fear in the Digital Age," Interactive Exhibit
University of Memphis

The concept of fear is often more subtle and more commonly present than people consciously acknowledge. Prejudice is born out of fear. Opinions are swayed by fear. Actions are motivated by fear. However, fear that sways people to change their beliefs or behavior is typically subtle and subversive. The saturation of digital content has created a space in which attention is limited and responses are instant. The immediacy of social media means that content creators need to create targeted materials that engage the audience and prompt them to respond in a specific manner. One of the most reliable ways to provoke an audience response is to trigger the latent fears that underlie their beliefs and behaviors. The purpose of this research is to dissect select social media posts that use specific words in order to provoke their audience into a specific response using fear and determine efficacy. The proposed research would include both a paper and an interactive exhibit. The paper will analyze the example content from social media to

determine fear-mongering words/phrases and their effectiveness. The demonstration will engage the audience with the research by inviting them to interact with the content. Using examples that have been dissected in the written research, audience members will be invited to make decisions based on the content in order to measure which words or phrases are more effective at evoking fear and/or prompting an engagement. The goal of this research is to become more aware of the fear that is being used to manipulate us as we participate in digital spaces and how technical writers can use that fear to their advantage in their content.

Awopetu, Ifeoluwa: "Hate Speech and the Fear of 'Otherness'"
Politics of Fear and "Otherness"
University of Memphis

Hate speech policies on social media platforms are not merely regulatory mechanisms but may also be reflections of broader societal anxieties about difference. This study examines how Meta (Facebook) and X (formerly Twitter) frame the concept of 'hate speech' in their policies and the extent to which these policies implicitly construct 'otherness.' Using a frame-semantic approach, this analysis investigates the language, categorizations, and justifications embedded in these policies to reveal how they delineate acceptable and unacceptable discourse. The study explores whether these platforms reinforce dominant societal fears by subtly framing certain marginalized groups as perpetual targets while positioning others as potential threats. By interrogating the ways in which platform governance mediates the boundaries of social inclusion and exclusion, this research contributes to the understanding of digital policies as both a response to and a reinforcement of societal attitudes toward 'otherness.' The findings highlight the role of social media in shaping public discourse on hate speech and the persistent tensions surrounding diversity, power, and fear in online communication.

Berry, Rachell: "The Hyperobject out of Space: Materializing the Rhetoric of AI Fear"
Representations of Horror in Media
University of Memphis

Brown, Natalie: "You Don't Scare Me: Fear as a Pedagogical Tool in Picture Books"
Fear & Pedagogy
Mississippi State University

Many scholars know that children's books play a huge part in a child's development and education, especially picture books, and that picture books use fear as a teaching tool in many different ways. Many earlier picture books and fairy tales, such as Henrich Hoffman's 1845 picture book *Der Struwwelpeter*, used fear, such as the fear of a monster or of a grim fate awaiting misbehaving children, as a way to teach children to avoid bad habits or behaviors, while more modern picture books, such as Ed Emberley's *Go Away Big Green Monster,* which was published in 1992, tend to teach children to face their fears and not be afraid of monsters. However, we still do not know how the use of fear as a pedagogical tool in picture books

evolved over the years or what factors influenced this evolution. To answer this question of how fear as a teaching tool evolved over the years, I will analyze various themes and ideas in picture books and fairy tales in both the distant past and more modern picture books as well as research on childhood development and literature as a teaching tool for children. While I am still in the early stages of my research, I hypothesize while many picture books taught children right from wrong using fear, many modern picture books teach children to face and cope with their fears instead of using fear due to more modern ideas of child development, such as an emphasis on teaching children through positive reinforcement instead of punishment. This question is important in the study of children's literature and early childhood development because it will analyze the role of fear in a child's education and development and the evolution of children's literature over time.

Byrd, Jennifer: "Modeling Risk: Why Teachers Shouldn't Be Afraid of Failing in Front of Their Students"
Fear & Pedagogy
 University of Memphis

My session will address attitudes that faculty often have toward modeling risk (including taking risks that scare them) in front of their students. We often ask our students to take risks in their writing and research, but we are unable or unwilling to take similar risks in front of a classroom full of students. What are potential reasons for this? Is it pride or a fear of looking foolish? Is it because we fear students will question our credibility or authority if the risk backfires? Drawing on my own 20 years of experience as a classroom teacher, as well as research from respected sources in both education and composition, I will address these questions and propose some ways that faculty (and those who hope to teach someday) can embrace the fear that comes with risk and learn from it, along with their students.

Chitwood, Kyle, roundtable participant: "Is Rhetoric a Dying Discipline? Fear, Disciplinary Tensions, and the Future of Rhetorical Studies"
University of Memphis

Rhetoric has long existed in a state of disciplinary uncertainty, evolving alongside shifting academic priorities, institutional restructuring, and broader cultural anxieties about the humanities. In an era of academic polarization and artificial intelligence, rhetoric continues to face scrutiny: Is it a dying discipline? This roundtable invites scholars to engage in a discussion about the challenges and possibilities shaping rhetoric's future. A central tension is rhetoric's dual presence in both English and Communication Studies, where competing methodological and theoretical frameworks often blur the discipline's identity. As universities increasingly prioritize STEM and market-driven education, rhetoric's place in higher education is at risk of dissipating. Participants will explore four key challenges shaping rhetoric's trajectory: (1) institutional decline, as rhetoric programs are consolidated, deprioritized, or eliminated; (2) disciplinary

erosion, as rhetoric is absorbed into broader academic categories without maintaining a distinct identity; (3) perceived irrelevance, as rhetorical education struggles to assert its importance amid technological and educational shifts; and (4) public distrust, as rhetoric continues to be mischaracterized as deception rather than a tool for civic engagement and critical inquiry.

Ghosh, Suparna: "'Beauty that Kills': Tomie, the Male Thirst, and the Horrors of Desire" The Aesthetics of Fear
English University of Calcutta, India

The femme fatale is an iconic trope in literature and media that often deals with beautiful, seductive women leading men to the paths of their death. In Junji Ito's *Tomie*, the titular character is someone far more than just a man-eater. She leaves her victims with their "mind gone" and insane. Tomie is not just an attractive girl who seduces her classmates and her teachers; she is an immortal, supernatural force whose beauty is both captivating and deadly. Unlike the typical femme fatales whose motives are to manipulate men, Tomie's attraction is entirely uncontrollable – her very existence drives the people around her to obsession, violence and eventually self-destruction. Tomie, as a haunted epitome of sexuality, does not haunt from the shadows or seek revenge in the obvious ways; she takes advantage of her mere existence – by simply being an unlikable character often envied by those surrounding her, a reminder of malevolent allure. Her powerful existence becomes her weapon. The manga doesn't provide a solution to this monstrous existence with the usual trope of punishing women; Tomie refuses to be destroyed. Each time she is killed, she regenerates, coming back even stronger. This cycle of horror represents a profound existential terror: a life that is never at peace, constantly feeding on obsession that leads to self-destruction. Tomie becomes a living nightmare, where death is not an escape but a perverse return to an even more horrifying reality from which there is no escape. This paper dives into how Tomie challenges and plays with the male gaze in horror, drawing from Laura Mulvey's Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1975). Tomie's ethereal beauty and hyper-sexualised appearance make her the perfect object of male desire. By examining key moments in Tomie, this paper will explore how Tomie's combination of beauty and terror invokes both lust and fear. The paper will also investigate whether Tomie critiques the male gaze, turning the lust of men into their own destruction, or if she simply reinforces the idea of female sexuality as inherently dangerous. In the end, Tomie emerges not just as a figure of horror but as one that blurs the line between victim and predator, demonstrating the chilling consequences of unchecked male fantasy.

Guajardo, Samantha: "Surveilling Borders: Rhetoric, Fear, and Immigrant Criminalization during the Trump Administration," Poster Presentation
Roundtable Chair: "Is Rhetoric a Dying Discipline? Fear, Disciplinary Tensions, and the Future of Rhetorical Studies"
University of Memphis

Rhetoric has long existed in a state of disciplinary uncertainty, evolving alongside shifting academic priorities, institutional restructuring, and broader cultural anxieties about the humanities. In an era of academic polarization and artificial intelligence, rhetoric continues to face scrutiny: Is it a dying discipline? This roundtable invites scholars to engage in a discussion about the challenges and possibilities shaping rhetoric's future. A central tension is rhetoric's dual presence in both English and Communication Studies, where competing methodological and theoretical frameworks often blur the discipline's identity. As universities increasingly prioritize STEM and market-driven education, rhetoric's place in higher education is at risk of dissipating. Participants will explore four key challenges shaping rhetoric's trajectory: (1) institutional decline, as rhetoric programs are consolidated, deprioritized, or eliminated; (2) disciplinary erosion, as rhetoric is absorbed into broader academic categories without maintaining a distinct identity; (3) perceived irrelevance, as rhetorical education struggles to assert its importance amid technological and educational shifts; and (4) public distrust, as rhetoric continues to be mischaracterized as deception rather than a tool for civic engagement and critical inquiry.

Johnston, Mak: "Crown Pig"
Horrors of the Body
University of North Florida

My creative writing piece titled "Crown Pig" centers around the way the fat body makes people uncomfortable. I find that the most effective wielding of fear comes from things that we don't know, understand, or make us uncomfortable. The piece is gross as it is about someone who has been kidnapped and force-fed to albeit unrealistic proportions. The narrator is a cop coming across the unsolved case and works as someone to bounce these uncomfortable feelings off of while he has thoughts like "what if I became like that?" when forced to come to terms with the fat body. It also plays with that element of "this could happen to me" as a form of fear as the victim is very clearly held captive and forced into this position though in the real world, anyone could be fat. It also ignores the victim's personhood in favor of grotesque imagery and observations like "who could do something like this?" to confront the reader with their own biases when observing or interacting with a fat person.

LaRoque, Cheyenne: "Say it Well: Combatting Engfish and AI's Artificial Engfish by Embracing Translingualism in the FYW Classroom"
Fear & Pedagogy
University of North Texas

As a First Year Writing (FYW) instructor, I've found that the greatest obstacle for students when it comes to writing is fear. Our students are afraid to express themselves, to be people on the page. I've seen that a majority of students do not enjoy writing. When asked, there is one common answer they've given: that they're not very good at it. When asked to explain, the answers always start the same way. "Well, in high school…" Because of high school hangups,

convincing students that a personal narrative, for example, could indeed be written in the first person was not easy. The academic and dry third person was all they'd previously been permitted; they feared the alternative. The anxiety of writing correctly, as opposed to writing well, is palpable. Students either employee the old adage that they can "fake it 'til they make it" as an academic, mimicking the language they think professors demand, or worse: they run from the supposed demands. That's when AI comes in. AI systems like ChatGPT provide students with an easy way out of learning to express themselves, out of learning to "say it well," in writing by providing them with a means to produce correct, but not good, written material. It is our job, then, to offer our students another solution. Every student walks into their FYW classroom with a voice of their own, a translingual identity built by years of existing and communicating. Why not embrace that? Why push for correct when well said will do? Thus, I propose that students' unique translingual identities should be encouraged and utilized in the FYW classroom, rather than set aside in favor of correctness and the AI generative software that offers it when student attempts to mimic it and assimilate into academia fail.

McAndrew, Mercy: "Flicker and Fade: The Fears of Forgotten Bodies"
Horrors of the Body
University of Wyoming

Fear has embodied my life and body after being hit by a truck at 60 mph as a pedestrian 3 years ago. Physical ailments, scars, and partial paralysis have left my body marred, imprinting the fear and trauma on my anatomy forever. I've seen the increase of debt from medical bills become a seemingly impossible force that took shape as a force to be feared. The fear I live with daily knowing that there are upcoming procedures, knowing a wrong step could re-break my leg, and knowing growing my family is no longer a natural possibility is a feeling I have come to terms with. Though there is no avoiding the fear, I have learned to live with the fear that embodies my life. In fact, fear has been a vehicle I've used to preserve myself. It's an intuition I've used to my advantage in many scenarios. I no longer see fear as a hindrance but as a tool that can and should be utilized. Though my story is such a unique incident, I hope to shed light on my approach to addressing fear and the work it takes to be vulnerable.

O'Malley, Elizabeth: "A Bad Taste in your Mouth: Fear of Identification in
Mouthwashing"
The Aesthetics of Fear
University of North Florida

Mouthwashing (2024) is a psychological horror game from indie developer Wrong Organ that takes place on a long-haul space freighter called the Tulpar. The crew are stuck adrift in space after a crash and, after a series of unfortunate events, only one character survives. But this isn't Alien (1979) and there's no monster, the horror is ordinary people. The first screen reveals the name of the ship, the crew of five, the shipment duration that exceeds a year in length, and the

phrase "I hope this hurts." Despite its compelling narrative, what is perhaps the most intriguing element of the game is its rhetorical appeals in the face of a horrifying truth. You crashed the ship, you fed your friend his own leg, and you need to "take responsibility." What's more horrifying is that the game is set in a deterministic narrative that challenges what Christopher Bartel (2015) calls a "freedom to will" and compels you to see parts of yourself in the morally gray point of view characters. However, ongoing online discussion about the game seems to focus on the narrative, divorced of the ludic elements, and with a strong condemnation of Jimmy, one of the point of view characters. This paper explores players' fear of identification to a character that assaults, kills, disregards, and still can't acknowledge the extent of his moral failings by the end of the game, not unlike many players once the affective link is no longer active.

Ravitch, Sasha: "Body Betrays Itself: Fear, Grief, and Chronic Illness Represented Through the Posthumanist Gothic in Film"
Horrors of the Body
Sarah Lawrence College

The aim of this talk is to explore the symbiotic nature of fear, grief, and chronic illness through the lens of the posthumanist gothic and imagination in two horror films exploring these motifs but resulting in vastly different resolutions. For the purpose of this presentation, David Cronenberg's Crimes of the Future and Jonathan Cuartas' My Heart Can't Beat Unless You Tell It To are used as parallel explorations of the abject, aberrant, ongoingly ill and monstrous body – a body which desires and requires that which abjures normality and societal convention, and diminishes its participation in biopower. The presentation will explore complementary motifs of fear, dread, and anxiety as cultivated via grief circulating the horror of the body which disavows homogeneity, and also distinguish the nuance of grief and fear as differentiated in these two horror-genre films. Ultimately the presentation will convene around an exploration of filmic outcome, and how this speaks to the posthumanist gothic and imagination: acceptance of monstrosity and difference, both for the individual and those who love and are in relationship to them.

Robertson, Chloe: "Trump's Counterpublic: A Study of (D/M)isinformation on Twitter/X and the Abuse of Rhetorical Velocity and Genre to Generate Fear"
Politics of Fear and "Otherness"
University of Memphis

In 2025, Donald Trump was sworn in for his second non-consecutive term as President of the United States. Prior to and during the 2016 and 2024 elections, Trump used the social media site X (formerly known as Twitter) to publicize his platform and, I posit, to craft a narrative of his voters as a supposed counterpublic. In doing so, he created a story that had them believe they were ideologically oppressed in contemporary American society. One of the ways he did this

was by crafting binaries between a "good" American public and the "bad" immigrants living in the United States. Therefore, I argue that by amplifying carefully selected events and using harmful language to do so, Trump spread disinformation to create a fearful and misinformed public that he framed as a counterpublic by abusing what Ridolfo and DeVoss call rhetorical velocity. Rhetorical velocity is a way of considering how information is delivered and the speed with which that information can be appropriated in positive, neutral, or negative ways. By analyzing the genre-markers of a selection of Trump's tweets regarding immigrants in 2017 and 2024, and viewing those results through a rhetorical velocity framework, I conclude that the tweets functioned as an illicit genre that abused the function(s) of rhetorical velocity to spread disinformation designed to misinform the public about a group deemed the "illegal other."

Rosenberg, David: "From High Places to Sunken Places: Transplanting the Jamesonian Text"
Representations of Horror in Media
University of Memphis

I aim to investigate the embodiment of fear in Jordan Peele's Get Out as a cultural meta-commentary on our current "postmodern age." With help from Fredric Jameson's magisterial 1981 essay "Historicism in The Shining", I locate the hotel and Jack Torrance as the twin embodiments of an "emprisonment to the high culture of the American past." I then attempt to provide an intervention into Jameson's understanding of History, through the employment of Black Studies and Black Marxist thought, while discussing the paths of linkage and demarcation between Kubrick's and Peele's own projects of envisioning this past. I then locate the site of fear in the film's "sunken place", before closing with an attempt to answer Jameson's appeal in the final sentences of his Shining essay. To paraphrase Jameson's conclusion: "It remains to be seen whether [Get Out] has succeeded in exorcising [the American enthrallment to the narrative of slavery] for [Peele], or for any of the rest of us."

Usumezgezer, Cicek: "Don't be Afraid of the Dark: The Entanglement of Horror and Sociology in the Classroom, the Screen, and the Anthropocene"
The Aesthetics of Fear
Kirklareli University, Turkey

Anthropocene's scenery consists largely of disorder, disorientation, unpredictability, incomprehensibility, and the extinction of more-than-human worlds, showing that it's no longer safe to lean on the old habits of any disciplines and we're all -although not equally- becoming refugees who are left homeless, insecure, and fragile. As such, Anthropocene speaks directly to the worlds that horror cinema has created. These cinematic worlds, which aren't at peace with absolute knowing, certainty, ordering, and being out of trouble, can multiply stories of being-with as well as create other possible stories, alliances, shelters, and futures. Doing so could open an alternative channel for addressing our current experience/engagement with the world, and the

obligations of being-with, as it can generate responses that are intensely affective and embodied. If these responses that horror cinema evokes could guide us away from the comfort of the anthropocentrism that we've come to realize we can no longer take refuge in, maybe sociology should also be willing to learn from such cinema. Unlike sociology which has an established tradition to lean on very neat, and linear arguments and thus often overlooks other forms of knowing, horror cinema is an embodiment of an embodied form of knowing, mostly based on negative affect and the insistence on thinking the unthinkable. Therefore, I will consider how horror cinema that centers on eschatological fears to trouble sociology courses and sociological imagination and could lead to more responsible ways of entangling with the world that doesn't seem all-too-human, thinkable, secure, and ordered.

Williams, Jacob: "Neighborhood Games: A Workshop on Writing Fear from the Places You Call Home"
University of Memphis

The cautionary tale is a classic archetype of fiction and one that uses fear as its primary focus. While that term is not commonly used by contemporary authors, fear is still a necessary proponent of many stories, an innate piece of the learning experience. In my work with short fiction, I deal regularly with how human beings grow and develop, specifically discussing how fear can work as both a motivator and obstacle towards growth. All fiction, but especially short fiction because of its more digestible size and complete narrative, allows us a space to practice how we deal with and understand certain emotions like fear. Fiction can be a safe place to grow in our ability to process what we are afraid of and how to move past those fears. To discuss and demonstrate this, there is a piece in my upcoming thesis project called "Neighborhood Games", where a group of characters specifically fall victim to their own fears and the ways they have been creating fear in their community. Pieces of this short story can be seen as examples of how fiction both displays for discussion and dissects for analysis, our relationship with fear. In this piece we see fear as both a natural way that the characters react to the world and a manufactured way that the characters attempt to control their world. A discussion and a writing exercise following these examples can then allow an audience to think deeper about the role of fiction and fear in their growth as an individual. The more time and energy we spend practicing how we deal with strong emotions like fear, the more comfortable and reasoning we can then be when presented with them in life. That is my hope for this presentation and for this work.