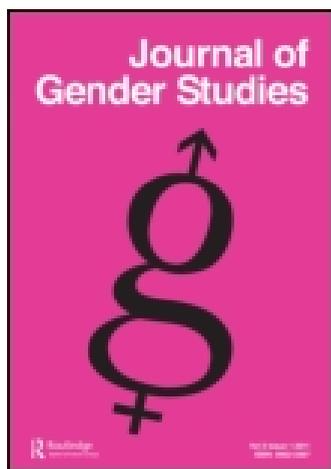


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Anna M. Wiederhold^a & Kimberly Field-Springer^b

^a Department of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, USA

^b Department of Communication Studies, Ashland University, Ashland, OH, USA

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Embodying imperfect unity: womanhood and synchronicity in anti-war protest

Anna M. Wiederhold^{a*} and Kimberly Field-Springer^b

^aDepartment of Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, USA; ^bDepartment of Communication Studies, Ashland University, Ashland, OH, USA

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In March 2003, a contemporary version of the Greek play *Lysistrata* was performed on over 1000 stages across the globe to protest the war in Iraq. This article analyzes the synchronized performances of *Lysistrata* in order to question the role of the lived body in social activism. The lived body, as conceptualized by Young (2005), considers the power and constraint we experience as the material facts of our bodies – skeleton and organs, ligaments and tendons, muscles and fat – move and exist in a particular time in history, a particular geographic space, surrounded by particular other people who are co-constructing ways of being in the world together. In the past several decades, numerous public examples have emerged of women in particular creatively constructing themselves in relation to their given socio-historical conditions. This article engages in a two-part analysis, of a ‘productive misreading’ of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* and of the synchronized performance-protests orchestrated by the *Lysistrata* Project, in order to better understand the ways in which gendered bodies are enabled and constrained by their physical and social environments in performing dissent.

Keywords: rhetoric; anti-war protest; nationalism; lived body; *Lysistrata*

Introduction

In times of war and conflict, it has been well-documented how women’s bodies in particular have been imbued with symbolic significance (Sharoni 1995, Cockburn 2003, 2006, Anderlini 2007, Kaufman and Williams 2007, Hadjipavlou 2010). Defined by their roles as mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters, ‘good’ women in wartime are often portrayed as symbols of virtuous devotion, vessels for preserving nations and perpetrating cultural identities. Described as such, they are objects to be acted upon – protected by sons, fathers, husbands, and brothers, lest they be defiled by other enemies.

Too often, feminist analyses have ended with this argument, concluding that women are oppressed and degraded by the symbolic meanings attributed to their bodies. However, what is neglected in these analyses is consideration of the ways in which the rigidity of socially enforced gender roles can be powerfully manipulated to afford particular rhetorical opportunities for embodied political action. Rather than viewing a female-identified body as an affliction that must be overcome in order to be politically effective, this essay argues that women’s lived bodies – the material facts of their heads and torsos and limbs imbued with the particularities of history, geography, and culture – can be powerful platforms for communicating messages of unified yet complex political dissent.

*Corresponding author. Email: awieder0@gmail.com

We explore the power and constraints of gendered bodies in political activism through a rhetorical analysis of the *Lysistrata* Project, a global theatrical act of dissent against pre-emptive war in Iraq. We argue that the parts of this project worked together to produce a rhetorical effect of unified diversity in dissent through the manipulation of social meanings inscribed on the gendered bodies of protest-performers.

Guided by this thesis, we first provide a brief outline of the events leading up to the US-led invasion in 2003 to establish the rhetorical exigency for the *Lysistrata* Project protest-performance. Second, we describe the organizational efforts of Kathryn Blume and Sharon Bower, the minds behind this synchronized act of dissent. Then, we introduce feminist theories on war and the body in order to analyse the global protest-performance on two levels: (1) we consider the rhetorical value of ‘productively misreading’ the play *Lysistrata* as a protest script for the pre-emptive war in Iraq and (2) we highlight theoretical contributions of the synchronized performance for the interdisciplinary field of gender studies. Specifically, we argue that theorizing synchronicity in dissent extends traditional views of rhetoric’s temporality beyond the timeliness or situatedness of a solitary speaker to conceive of a more relational model of rhetorical action. In this way, this study contributes most directly to feminist rhetorical theory but is also in conversation with scholars working in political science, philosophy, and performance studies. To begin, we set the stage by tracing the escalation of tensions that resulted in the US-led ‘coalition of the willing’ invading Iraq in early 2003.

Mounting tensions between the USA and Iraq

Since the early 1990s, prevailing US foreign policy narratives defined Saddam Hussein’s leadership as a ‘problem,’ and by 1998, debate regarding solutions centered on two options: containment and regime change (Burgos 2008). By the time George W. Bush took office as the 43rd President of the USA in 2001, the dominant policy narrative in the USA had shifted toward supporting democratic regime change in the Middle East. As early as 1 day after G.W. Bush’s inauguration, an article in the neoconservative opinion magazine *The Weekly Standard* (Kagan and Kristol 2001) reported that two of his advisers at the time, Robert Zoellick and Paul Wolfowitz, had already begun to consider what kind of military force the USA would need to apply to ‘bring Saddam down.’ Though policy discussions in early 2001 focused on dethroning Hussein, not on full-fledged war with Iraq, the Bush administration’s willingness to use force to accomplish their goals opened wide debate regarding US military action in the Persian Gulf.

Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, public rhetoric advocating US military action in Iraq only grew stronger. White House aides’ notes, leaked 8 years after the attacks, indicated that at 2:40 p.m. on September 11, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld asked for the best information as quickly as possible in order to judge whether the events of the day could justify US-led military assaults on *both* Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Ladin (Roberts 2009). In a letter to the editor, General Wesley Clark acknowledged that from the moment the Bush administration learned about the September 11 attacks, ‘there were many people, inside and outside the government, who tried to link Saddam Hussein to Sept. 11’ (Clark 2003, n.p.). Even as evidence mounted connecting al-Qaeda, and not Iraq, to the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration continued to interweave references to bin Ladin and Hussein in their public discourse, exploiting the perceived necessity to respond to threats of terrorism to push the USA ever closer to war.

As the events of 9/11 melted into a crucible of nationalistic narratives of retribution and security, more and more arguments mounted from US officials in favor of a pre-emptive attack on Iraq. By February 2003, the Bush administration was beating the war drums loudly, and the US public was getting caught up in the rhythm pushing their country closer to military action. According to a CNN/Time poll in early 2003, 72% of US Americans believed that Saddam Hussein provided direct assistance to al-Qaeda in carrying out the 9/11 attacks and support was growing for war (Morton 2003).

Organizing global protest: the *Lysistrata* Project

As tensions rose on the international stage, playwright/actor Kathryn Blume and her friend Sharon Bower, the casting director of the Mint Theatre in New York City, sought to stage a different kind of international action. Inspired by friends and colleagues belonging to Theatres Against War, an international network of theatre artists responding to escalating global aggression, Blume and Bower imagined the effect a mass protest-performance could have on the world in this tense moment in international affairs. With a few keystrokes, these two women launched a flurry of emails to the actors and directors they had worked with on past projects and, as these friends and colleagues forwarded the idea to their friends and colleagues, the project snowballed into an international event. Blume and Bower found themselves as the lead organizers of a 'theatrical act of dissent' of global proportions. According to the protest organizers' webpage, over 300,000 people in around 60 countries attended at least 1029 performances of myriad versions of the Greek play *Lysistrata* in a collective protest against pre-emptive war in Iraq.¹ These performances ranged from full-fledged artistic productions to a simple retelling of Aristophanes' story in one's own words.

The website that Blume and Bower launched for the project connected interested parties to information to help them participate in the synchronized protest-performance. For people interested in organizing an event in their city, the site offered free publicity materials including fliers, posters, press releases, and programs. In addition, a constantly changing number of translators and adaptors posted various versions of the *Lysistrata* script on the website. The scripts were removed from the site soon after the event, but while they were available all scripts were being offered free of charge.

For event organizers (referred to as 'Spearheads' in an intentionally ironic feminist flourish by Blume and Bower), the website listed 10 steps for arranging a local reading: (1) get a location – listed examples included a living room with friends, on the steps of city hall, in a theatre, and in a gymnasium; (2) pick a time when most people can attend; (3) pick a charity to benefit; (4) get a translation from the event website, a local library or other available sources; (5) cast the roles; (6) get help from volunteers; (7) make the project visible; (8) send the details of your production to be included on the website and in press releases; (9) serve the story that many in this community want peace, not war; and (10) be mindful of resource use – ride bikes, use public transportation, etc.

Recognizing that some protest-performers might be deterred from participation for the fear of political retaliation, Blume and Bower tacked on an addendum to the list regarding publicizing readings (step 7):

Even if your publicity efforts are *minimal or non-existent*, your participation in this event is vital to the international movement. We will include your reading in our press releases. So please don't let 'Fear of PR' stop you from producing a reading! Do a small reading in a living room. The collective energy of tiny readings all over the world will be felt. In other words, even if you are short on free time, if you have an hour on 03/03/03, *you have time to do this*. Okay? Okay.

In order to assist with step 3, pick a charity to benefit, the Lysistrata Project website listed 182 peace-oriented charities, providing direct links to the websites for several of the organizations.

Finally, the Lysistrata Project website provided links to classroom materials for interested teachers, lists of planned performances for interested attendees, as well as postings of articles and interviews from various local, national, and international media sources covering the global act of dissent including network and local news programs, radio stations, and print publications ranging from *The New York Times* to *El Mundo* for interested others (for a summary of media coverage, organized by country, see Appendix B).

Participants in the USA hosted nearly 73% of the performances, but they were joined by protesters in 61 other countries including a troupe of 15 storytellers reciting versions of the play across Israel, a small reading in Patras, Greece held by Greek and Kurdish refugees in an abandoned factory, and even a secret reading in northern Iraq by members of the international press corps. A full list of performances, organized by city, country, and event coordinator name, was made available on the Lysistrata Project website, and a summary of that list is provided in Appendix A.

Falzone (2006) argued that activist art has three potential goals: raising consciousness, reinforcement/emboldening, and persuasion. When viewed with respect to its persuasive effects on preventing the war, the widespread protest was an epic failure. On 20 March 2003, British and US troops launched 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' with attacks on Baghdad and Basra. Although the theatrical performances could not stop the invasion, this protest of global proportions brought people together to speak out against the war, emboldening anti-war efforts and raising awareness of arguments against the US-led invasion through the heightened media attention garnered through these protests (see Appendix B). Finally, these synchronized performances of *Lysistrata* provided feminist scholars with a fruitful opportunity to expand theoretical discussions on the social and political meanings attributed to women's bodies, which we attempt to do in the remainder of this essay.

In the following section, we analyse the synchronized performances of *Lysistrata* in order to better understand the power and constraints of the lived body in political organizing and social activism. We begin with a general discussion on the symbolism and materiality of women's bodies in war and peace as articulated in feminist theories on war and the body. Informed by these theoretical frameworks and supplemented by the event organizers' website and international print media coverage, we conduct a rhetorical criticism of a modern adaptation of *Lysistrata* that was made available online to protest-performers.

Rhetorical criticism 'seek[s] to systematically understand the impact and influence of messages that reach public audiences' (Pierce 2003, p. 30). To this end, we engaged in a close reading of a popular version of the play used in the Lysistrata Project protests and contextualized that analysis within a theoretical discussion of the text's use in the 2003 anti-war protest. In the play *Lysistrata* and in the global protest-performance of the Lysistrata Project, characters and event participants alike celebrated a form of unified diversity as a particularly powerful rhetorical form. In our analysis, then, we seek first, to understand how unity and diversity are constructed in language and performance and second, to argue for the significance of synchronicity in rhetorical theory and protest studies.

In the remainder of this essay, we introduce our theoretical framework, justify the central artifact of our analysis (Greer and Willmott's (2000) adaptation of *Lysistrata*), analyze the claims of unity and diversity presented in this modern adaptation, and then

analyze the claims of unity and diversity presented in the organization of the Lysistrata Project protest-performance. For the latter portion of our analysis, in order to supplement resources provided on the Lysistrata Project website, we collected 162 articles/transcripts from media in 13 countries through a search of English-language and foreign language news in the Lexis Nexis database from 10 January through 10 March 2003. Coverage of the Lysistrata Project protests helped us to reconstruct the global protest-performance and make claims regarding the synchronicity and diversity of the various readings. Following this analysis, we conclude with some words on theoretical implications.

Theoretical framework: women's bodies in war and peace

[W]omen might just have something to contribute to civilization other than their vaginas.

Christopher Buckley, *Florence of Arabia* (2004, p. 102)

Women's bodies are over-determined with social significance; they are inscribed with cultural meanings with long histories that are difficult to overturn overnight. Patriarchal society has long perpetuated myths of womanhood/motherhood as symbols of family values and virtuous patriotism (Cockburn 2003, 2006). According to this common nationalistic narrative, a good little woman gives birth to good little boys and raises them to be good little warriors so they can defend their nation. These nationalistic narratives function to propagate the idea that women need to be protected by their men:

This imagery has a profound impact on both men and women, specifically the role of men as the warriors and protectors of women and the state (the motherland), which inherently imbues them with power and thus reinforces hegemonic masculine power structures. (Kaufman and Williams 2007, p. 16)

Similarly, Cockburn (2003) suggested that militarism threatens women by reinforcing masculine habits of authority. Patriarchy, nationalism and militarism thus belong to what she describes as a *mutual admiration society*:

Nationalism's in love with patriarchy because patriarchy offers it women who'll breed true little patriots. Militarism's in love with patriarchy because its women offer up their sons to be soldiers. Patriarchy's in love with nationalism and militarism because they produce unambiguously masculine men. (Cockburn 2003, p. 8)

Because of this interrelationship, a feminist theory of war must challenge not just patriarchy, but also nationalism and militarism.

Among efforts to resist this oppressive triad, various examples exist of women crossing borders of ethnicity, religion, class, and state to engage in dialogue with the so-called enemy, united by shared membership in what the founder of Save Somali Women and Children, Asha Haji Elmi, called 'the clan of womanhood' (Anderson 2005). Anderlini (2007, p. 55) explained the bond of womanhood as being defined not merely by the confines of patriarchal structures and stereotypical sex roles, but rather, through a shared life experience that transcends borders:

What they find is a shared experience of violence and pain, of being women in societies dominated by men, of fear and mistrust of each other's communities, and of common hopes for a future based on peace, justice, and normalcy.

The clan of womanhood challenges the very idea of social boundaries by engaging women in dialogue with their alleged enemies and using identification with a female lifeworld as the foundation for building these bridges toward a sense of solidarity and connection with one another.

In this way, women can find a powerful platform for unified political activism in the very material conditions that could otherwise oppress them. de Beauvoir (1948/1976, 1953/1989) argued that all people are born into conditions not of their making, which they too often accept as absolute. However, opportunities arise for shaping ourselves relative to these conditions once we begin to realize that the givens of life must be constantly created and recreated through our interactions with each other and with our environments. As such, the world consists of much more ambiguity than we previously realized, and our bodies are important vehicles for the production and reproduction of our particular social world.

The lived body, as conceptualized by Young (2005), exists within this world described by de Beauvoir. According to Young's perspective, we are all born into a *gendered* world not of our own making. The material facts of our bodies – skeleton and organs, ligaments and tendons, muscles and fat – move and exist in a particular time in history, a particular geographic space, surrounded by particular other people who are co-constructing ways of being in the world together. These material facts of our physical and social environments create the facticity (Young 2005, p. 16) of our existence.

Although at first glance the socio-historical meanings inscribed on traditionally less-powerful bodies might seem to create insurmountable obstacles to change, Young argues that people also have agency, ontological freedom, to construct themselves in relation to this facticity. This conceptualization of the lived body acknowledges the limitations one experiences due to particular physical and social <facts>, while simultaneously suggesting remarkable freedom to make yourself in relation to this given world. The framework of the lived body avoids the pitfalls of absolutism on the side of nature (biological determinism) or nurture (cultural relativism).

Within this theoretical framework, then, gender structures exist as part of the historically given world into which we are born. This theoretical approach avoids celebrating androgyny as ideal, raising similar concerns as feminist Daly (1978) who argued that androgyny merely serves to perpetuate the hegemonic structure in place because masculinity and femininity are terms defined and upheld by the patriarchy. The lived body critique goes further in arguing that advocating gender neutrality ignores the important influence our lived conditions within a gendered world have on our day-to-day existence. Socio-historical, political, and cultural definitions of masculine and feminine must not be ignored in efforts to understand being in the world.

Rather than submitting to oppressive interpretations of given definitions of gender, Daly advocated using a feminist rhetorical tool of redefinition to throw off the oppression of the signifier and redefine 'woman' (Foss *et al.* 1999). According to Anderlini (2007, p. 39), many female anti-war activists have successfully used this rhetorical tool of redefinition to strip away the myth of nationalism tied to their identities:

By embracing and strategically using the motherhood identity ... they are simultaneously reaching out widely to women and directly challenging the moral authority of states that typically define themselves through social conservatism heavily dosed with militarism and traditional family values that uphold motherhood as the ultimate virtue.

When women take ownership of their motherhood identities, of their womanhood identities, they strip the patriarchy of power to use them as symbols to perpetuate a militaristic culture.

In the past several decades, numerous public examples have emerged of women in particular, creatively constructing themselves in relation to the facticity of their given socio-historical conditions. In anti-war protest alone, women have integrated their lived

bodies into the performance of dissent by making salient particular role identities such as grandmother, mother, or nurturer. In the USA, a group of senior citizens united in late 2003 to form the protest organization, Grandmothers against the War, in order to vocalize their disapproval of US aggression abroad. Founder Joan Wile wrote that there was something magical about that word, 'grandmother.' She remarked, 'It connotes wisdom, love, nurturing, maturity, good common sense. People will take us seriously. They won't dismiss us as a bunch of drug-infused young radical kooks . . . They'll pay attention' (Wile 2008, p. 2).

Gender-specific familial roles were famously performed in Argentina in 1977 when las Madres de Plaza de Mayo rallied a charge against the repressive military government of General Jorge Rafael Videla by gathering together mothers of 'disappeared' Argentinian men in a weekly vigil (Ackerman and DuVall 2000). In Cyprus, Maria Hadjipavlou used a rootedness in the female lifeworld as a starting point for organizing dialogue about shared interests and struggles between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, long divided by ethnic warfare (see Hadjipavlou 2010). In Liberia, Lehmah Gbowee won the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts in organizing Christian and Muslim women to protest against their country's bloody civil war. In each of these exemplars, women found political power through creative constructions of their gendered identities in relation to the particularities of their socio-historical facticity.

Feminism's role in organizing anti-war protests is neither a mere relic of the past nor a recent fad. US women's groups rallied in 1969 against Richard Nixon's inauguration (Henry 2004), and more recently in 2005 against the G.W. Bush administration (Freeman 2005). Both of these presidencies led the USA into controversial wars. In 1969, New York Radical Women teamed up with the National Mobilization Committee to advance an agenda that concurrently advocated giving back the women's vote and ending the war in Vietnam (Henry 2004). In 2005, women's protests against the Iraq war were led by groups including CodePink, Raging Grannies, and the Keys of Resistance (Freeman 2005).

Each of these demonstrations was designed to be both political and performative. For example, in their 1969 protest, the New York Radical Women burned their voter registration cards, suggesting that their voices were as silent as their votes. According to Freeman (2005), the Keys of Resistance dressed in 1940s vintage clothing and typed and mailed letters of protest to political officials. Both of these demonstrations were accompanied by unique performances where political and personal messages were literally written upon women's bodies. According to Kutz-Flamenbaum (2007),

Feminist performance activists groups that rely on performance elements to create an initial impression that conforms to stereotypical gender norms and then integrate norm-challenging elements into that performance are more successful at growing their organizations and gaining organizational legitimacy. (p. 103)

In this way, these protests functioned by attracting audience members' attention with stereotypical gender performances which were creatively coupled with norm-disrupting political messages.

Of course, not all anti-war protests organized around these inscribed cultural meanings employ female-identified bodies in the same way. The Mochsom Watch, an Israeli women's peace organization, strategically used their bodies as 'passive observers' to cross borders and checkpoints in order to advocate for their cause (Kutz-Flamenbaum 2012). A more conspicuous use of women's bodies employed in feminist anti-war performance occurred during the protest of nuclear weapons in Greenham, Great Britain

from 1981 to 2000. The women of Greenham Common used menstrual symbolism, such as splattering red paint and taping feminine products to fences, as a metaphor for women's hidden strength, creativity, and connection to each other (Laware 2004). All of these examples highlight the rich history of women involved in performance and anti-war activism.

Each of the examples discussed thus far speaks to the unifying power of identification with a shared gender identity. However, for each story celebrating the opportunities for women to build solidarity, dialogue, and peace-making from the foundation of their shared gendered experiences, Sharoni (1995) reminds starry-eyed idealists of the limitations of these visions of global sisterhood. Although shared experiences of being women in patriarchal societies can be useful for establishing a basis for dialogue in conflict-riddled regions of the world, references to universal sisterhood can also ignore meaningful differences. Intersectionality – the idea that sexism is deeply intertwined with other ‘mutually constructing systems of power’ (Collins 2005, p. 11) – informs each woman's experience of war in a way that complicates any monolithic glossing of their collective experience.

Respecting these differences among women united in some version of boundary-crossing sisterhood, we argue, was precisely the strength of the *Lysistrata* Project protests. Returning to feminist theory, Daly argued that women's rhetorical site of action begins with unifying social experiences in the traditionally female private realm, which she called the Background (Daly 1978, p. 3). The rhetorical situation stemming from Daly's radical feminist perspective sought to move women's reality from the Background to the Foreground through a process of redefinition, in which a rhetor – a term widely used in rhetorical studies to specifically describe the speaker or writer of an argument – challenges patriarchal constructions of womanhood in favor of creating female identities inconsistent with socially ascribed gender roles.

We argue that *Lysistrata* functioned as such a powerful rhetorical tool for feminist anti-war protest because this play attempted to collapse the walls separating the Background and the Foreground by bringing the private realm into the public and the public realm into the private. In so doing, the female characters (at the level of the play) and actors (at the level of the performance) creatively constructed public, political identities in relation to their private, gendered identities in a way that maximized the rhetorical effects of consciousness-raising and emboldening anti-war efforts. The differences among these characters and actors attracted attention from the diverse publics to which each claimed membership; and the rhetors' claims of unity as women and/or anti-war activists bridged divides typically separating these publics from one another to demonstrate broad agreement among occasionally unlikely allies.

Therefore, bonding through their shared membership in the clan of womanhood, the physically, culturally, and geographically diverse female characters in *Lysistrata* challenged the mutual admiration society of ancient Greece, where patriarchy, nationalism, and militarism existed in co-constituting relationships with one another. Similarly, in performing various versions of the play on the same day around the world, protesters of the invasion of Iraq challenged the mutual admiration society of the contemporary world. Before discussing the more complicated level of the performance, we analyse the play *Lysistrata* in order to understand how the original Greek text could be ‘productively misread’ as an anti-war protest piece, in which identification with a female lifeworld allows such a diverse collection of women to transcend boundaries in their common commitment to reject traditional sex roles and the nationalistic myths associated with their female identities.

Embodied protests: productive misreadings and synchronized performances

The play *Lysistrata* is a bawdy performance of wartime satire, in which the women of Greece, frustrated with an endless and futile war, take an oath to refrain from sex until their husbands agree to come together to reconcile and make peace. *Lysistrata* is a combination of drama and comedy. The title character is an Athenian woman who organizes a secret meeting with the enemy wives – Spartan, Anagyrus, Corinthian, and Boetian women – to form a protest group called Women for Peace. Lysistrata, as the protagonist, uses her skill in negotiation to demand a peace agreement between the Athenians and Spartans.

Scholars like De Marre (2001) criticize feminist interpretations of the play as ill-conceived due to the fact that Greek comedy is notorious for trivializing attributes of femininity and womanhood. Certainly, the original version of the play was written by Aristophanes as a political commentary, and it was written to be funny. Reverman (2010, pp. 72–73) points out,

One crucial thing to realise is that putting a woman into a position of political authority, control and power in a comedy is an important part of the humour. It is *funny*, straightforwardly ridiculous, because it blatantly (and fantastically) defies the reality of the world of the audience.

Essentially, in the original play Aristophanes offered a biting critique of Athenian statesmen that was anything but feminist. He was saying, ‘Look, even these second-class, non-rational beings can get along! Why can’t you men?’ Culpepper Stroup (2004) further criticizes contemporary feminist readings of the ancient text, claiming that in the end women are domesticated back into their assigned sphere, undermining any feminist interpretation of the performance. Moreover, as Stuttard (2010) argues, a pacifist or anti-war reading of the play might be equally misplaced. Aristophanes originally wrote the play specifically in protest of the Peloponnesian War, which was responsible for the deaths of a sizeable portion of the Athenian male population. Therefore, Aristophanes was not necessarily protesting all war; he was simply protesting *this* war.

Despite all this criticism, however, Reverman (2010, p. 71) argues that contemporary readings that use *Lysistrata* as a tool for feminism or pacifism are engaging in what he calls ‘productive misreading.’ Any reading of *Lysistrata* potentially projects something onto the play never intended by Aristophanes but may engage the text in ways meaningful to a contemporary audience. It is difficult to imagine how any present-day performance of classic Greek dramas might avoid projecting anachronistic layers of interpretation. After all, simply placing the ancient text in a contemporary context changes the meaning.

Justification of artifact

For our analysis of the text, we chose to use a popular modern adaptation of the play by Greer and Willmott (2000). Greer was initially commissioned by Kenneth Tynan to write a new version of Aristophanes’ play during the Vietnam War. Greer performed this version only once, as a solo act at the Public Theatre in New York (Butler 1999). Greer and Willmott’s co-produced adaptation was much more popular, having been performed across the USA and Europe and listed on the *Lysistrata* Project’s website as a potential option for protest-performances. As such, we explore this modern adaptation of *Lysistrata* to consider the ways in which the similarity and diversity of female lived experiences in the play serve as a powerful device of political protest for the female characters.

The lived body performing in *Lysistrata*

According to Greer and Willmott (2000), women have long been compartmentalized into domestic roles since ‘war is men’s business’ (p. 53). Contrary to this misogynistic viewpoint, the character of *Lysistrata* seeks to rename war as a women’s business. Early in the play, Kalonike, one of the Athenian women, feeling trapped in the Foreground definition of womanhood, asks, ‘But what can we do? All we’ve ever done is sit around looking ornamental.’ *Lysistrata* responds, ‘That’s our strategy. Our instruments will be transparent dresses and dainty little shoes, rouge and musk’ (Greer and Willmott 2000, p. 13). The women’s strategy for moving the Background into the Foreground is to use their bodies as rhetorical sites of action by embracing their feminine sexuality. *Lysistrata*’s blunt proclamation lays out the women’s explicit plan for protesting the war, ‘Until our men see sense we simply refuse to fuck’ (p. 17). The rallying cry for the Women for Peace becomes, ‘Peace in return for sex; no peace, no sex’ (p. 19).

Multiple times throughout the play, the female characters provide examples of war being brought into their homes through the brutal behavior men carried back with them from the battlefield, time and again illustrating the inseparability of public and private realms. At the initial meeting of Women for Peace, *Lysistrata* cries out, ‘This isn’t a foreign affair. It’s a war that’s ruining our lives right here and now! What could be closer to home?’ (p. 11). The women take their first step toward tearing down this public/private dichotomy when they vow to bring the art of love from its normal place in the Background into the realm of war, traditionally located in the Foreground. The women proceed to take an oath, swearing their adherence to the ‘no peace, no sex’ policy, and stating exactly how their bodies would be used as a site of resistance:

I will not open my legs for my husband or lover . . . Though he comes to me hard and hurting with desire . . . I shall display myself before him in languid attitudes . . . Disport my polished limbs to provoke his lust . . . In saffron silk as thin as mist and all the spices of the Orient . . . But he shall be so enticed only to be denied my love . . . (Greer and Willmott 2000, pp. 24–25)

This oath between declared enemy women from across Greece is an exemplar of Butler’s (1999) idea of using feminist activism and the female body as a site for communication across arbitrary nationalistic divisions.

In *Lysistrata*, prior to their collective organizing against war, women’s bodies were imbued with the typical nationalistic narrative of virtuous devotion and patriotism. One of the male senators, Phylurgus, criticizes the Women for Peace by saying, ‘Your behaviour is quite incompatible with our ideal of feminine dignity’ (Greer and Willmott 2000, p. 39). He proceeds to blame the lack of military success on the women:

It’s a small wonder that we have had so little success in the Sicilian campaign, when each of our young soldiers has been brought up in an atmosphere of indulgence and neglect. The problem of juvenile delinquency has arisen because women are too busy interfering in men’s business to do the noble work for which they were created . . . as nurturers of life and first teachers of our sons. (p. 39)

As Cockburn (2003, 2006) has suggested in her studies of real-life wartime women, in *Lysistrata* the fictional women of Greece were expected to raise soldiers and patriots, and military failure could be attributed to women acting in an unladylike manner. Therefore, Phylurgus’s rant exemplifies Cockburn’s ‘mutual admiration society’ described above, in which patriarchy, militarism, and nationalism reify and reinforce their companion structures. Women, in their symbolic roles as patriotic supporters and nurturers, were expected to silently perform their nationalistic duty through obedient motherhood.

When the senators confront Lysistrata with the question, ‘What on earth has got you females interested in matters of peace and war?’ (Greer and Willmott 2000, p. 42), Lysistrata defends her position and explains that she speaks on behalf of the voiceless women, even the enemy wives, as they are united through their membership in the clan of womanhood, the cult of sisterhood. Using a rhetorical tool of redefinition, Lysistrata takes back ownership of the female identity, forwarding claims of unity despite the very salient geographical and cultural differences between Spartan, Anagyrous, Corinthian, and Boetian women – differences that the senators heavily relied upon in justifying their war. Speaking, then, on behalf of the Women for Peace, Lysistrata asserts that if the female body must serve as a nationalistic icon, she wants to be an icon for peace, not war. Stripping away the myth of nationalism attached to the female identity, Lysistrata redefines *woman*:

Women for Peace, it is not our intention to destroy femininity or the softness of women’s nature. The war shall cease because men admire and desire us. Our gifts are those that foster life, and in pursuing the cause of peace we do no more than is consistent with women’s nature. To seek a military solution to a political problem is as silly as if we women, when we got our threads caught up in our tapestries were to grab a sword to slash at the knot. (pp. 50–51)

The senator perpetuates Daly’s concept of the Foreground consisting of sex-typed social roles privileging the male in the public sphere as warrior and statesman and relegating the female to the Background, the private sphere as teacher and nurturer. Lysistrata reverses the senator’s assessment, arguing that women are, in fact, *better* equipped to negotiate peace than men. The historically feminine characteristics identified by the senator to support his argument that women have no place in issues of war and peace are the very characteristics Lysistrata claims as central to the act of peace-making.

Addressing the senators, Lysistrata explains that men wage wars against one another without the consideration of other members of the society. As Lysistrata puts forth a new definition of womanhood, she asserts, ‘War is what destroys cities. Peace never destroyed a city yet’ (p. 54). Embracing stereotypical femininity and the allure of female sexuality, Lysistrata throws off the oppression of the nationalistic signifier, emptying ‘mother,’ ‘wife,’ and ‘woman’ of their patriarchal meanings; filling them instead with a new feminist mythology. As a result, the female characters redefine womanhood as a collaborative effort to use the female body as a site of rhetorical exigency to combat violence and promote peace. In the play, Lysistrata’s constant perseverance overcomes the conflict between love and war. The Women for Peace prevail and the war quickly dissipates.

Hoping for similar results, on 3 March 2003, the Lysistrata Project co-opted Aristophanes’ original play in perhaps the most dramatic modern adaptation to date. In a ‘productive misreading’ of Aristophanes’ play, participants in the Lysistrata Project projected pacifist and feminist messages onto the ancient play in order to interact with the text meaningfully, but also, in some ways, to use it for its original purpose: to spark critical thought and action regarding the important political issues of the day. The next section contextualizes the play in its use as an anti-war protest script, and considers the ways in which the mass performance of *Lysistrata* on 3 March 2003 created a productive misreading of Aristophanes’ original that emphasized the agency women have in defining their own bodies through political activism.

Embodying unity and difference through synchronized performances

No two performances of *Lysistrata* on 3 March 2003 could possibly have been the same – participants in different productions performed the play in different languages and

different venues, in front of different audiences, based on different adaptations, within the context of different cultures. And yet they all performed with one overarching goal; to demonstrate their unity with other human beings around the world in opposing the impending Iraq War.

The synchronized performances of 3 March 2003 created a complex rhetorical situation, in that many voices participated in the act of reading the play as a protest piece. Bakhtin (1981, p. 324) described novelistic discourse as *double-voiced*: 'It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author.' When written words are performed, as they were by people around the world participating in the Lysistrata Project, the discourse becomes triple-voiced. That is, Aristophanes wrote the dialogue of the play for a particular purpose: to criticize Greek statesmen responsible for the Peloponnesian War. At a second level, the character Lysistrata has her own reasons for speaking her lines of dialogue: to further the internal plot of the drama. The protester-performer playing the part of Lysistrata adds a third level when she speaks her lines with double-purpose: to further the internal plot of the drama and to criticize states-people responsible for the pre-emptive attacks on Iraq.

The rhetorical power of the Lysistrata Project protests lies in the performance of different voices and different bodies in imperfect unison. The event organizers encouraged diversity through the performance of different versions in different languages, different types of venues, and different geographical locations around the world. As a result of these localized differences, each performance taken on its own created a distinct twist on the broad message that reverberated across the globe as these performers, despite their differences, protested together.

Aristophanes wrote *Lysistrata* to protest a divisive civil war that made all of Greece susceptible to external attack. The protagonist Lysistrata organizes the women of Greece to say, despite our differences we are not each other's enemies; we have a greater enemy to organize ourselves against. As the participants of the Lysistrata Project organized a global protest, they made a similar claim: in organizing people around the world in synchronized performances, the protesters proclaimed again; despite our differences we are not each other's enemies. Nation-states need to unite to fight the greater enemy, terrorism, rather than weakening each other by waging war upon fellow citizens of the world.

Conclusion

Although rigidly enforced gender roles can certainly be oppressive and confining, we have been arguing in this essay for greater scholarly attention to be paid to the possibilities for political activism rooted in the creative manipulation of material conditions. Women's lived bodies – imbued as they may be with nationalistic narratives of purity, devotion, and nurturing love – can be the powerful platforms for communicating messages of unified yet complex political dissent, as demonstrated by the Lysistrata Project's synchronized protest. When women cross boundaries between public and private, Foreground and Background, ethnicity, language, religion, and so on, new opportunities arise for action. The boundaries we build between ourselves and others may be arbitrary, but they are not insignificant. Reiterated performances and pervasive social narratives reify the divides and compartmentalize our lives and our worlds.

The feminine body-in-situation exists in the tension between material constraints and symbolic freedom to create oneself amid the ambiguity of the human social world. Greer and Willmott's modern interpretation of *Lysistrata* challenges societal

constructions of what it means to be feminine. The characters in this play recognize how sex, defined from a biological perspective, can perpetuate the silencing of women during times of political turmoil. Yet, these women also effectively employ sex (their physical bodies) as a rhetorical device for change. Characters defined a new reality through the reinterpretation of what it means to be a woman for peace. The ambiguity surrounding the ways gender was (re)constructed in *Lysistrata* illustrated what **de Beauvoir (1953/1989)** envisioned in a world where nature/nurture is disrupted. As a result, bipolar meanings of femininity and masculinity reinforced by patriarchy were continually challenged.

Conceiving of the lived body as a site of activism opens up the possibilities for challenging notions of patriarchy, militarism, and nationalism. The female characters in *Lysistrata* embraced the ‘art of love’ rather than the ‘art of war,’ by emphasizing their experiential commonalities and using their physical bodies as platforms for protest. In doing so, these characters simultaneously point to the ways that bodies can be used for both creation and deconstruction. By consulting with ‘the enemy,’ the characters demonstrated how the arbitrary lines we create and maintain between nations can be breached. In this way, bodies are not expressed as merely numbers resulting from fatality but people with faces who are our neighbours.

The production of the *Lysistrata* Project protest-performance across various locations afforded a space for both individual differences and similarities to be on display. Each set of protesters embodied a performance unique to their location yet unified with other performers across the world through the synchronicity of bodies functioning as rhetorical vehicles for communicating an anti-war message. As this synchronized protest-performance demonstrated, the lived body is a communicating body, which is capable of integrating both the shared experience of deep systemic problems and the infinitely particular differences of individual positionality and agency.

One goal of this essay has been to issue a call to better understand and embody these processes of bridging commonality and difference, which, we believe, exemplify both the power and challenge of contemporary feminisms. Fixmer and Wood (2005, p. 242) addressed the need to move from identity politics to politics of identification that ‘work with both interlocking facets of identity and the interlocking nature of oppressions.’ In an effort to broadcast a politically unified message, while at the same time remaining sensible to our individual differences, the embodied performance of *Lysistrata* provided a space where these interlocking facets could be imagined and lived differently. So we might all find power and opportunity for creative collaboration through synchronizing our solitary situated performances to build more relational models of feminist rhetorical action together.

Note

1. When the original domain name expired, *Lysistrata* Project collaborator and webpage designer Mark Greene created an archive page at <http://lysistrataprojectarchive.com/lys/> to preserve much of the organizing information for viewing. However, the archive site is somewhat disorganized, and as time passes, more of these archived links lead to defunct webpages. Therefore, we have provided a summary table of readings organized by country in Appendix A at the end of this article. On the archive site, event organizers noted that their list of readings contained more than the 1029 readings in which around 60 countries cited in press releases and media coverages as late reports from the global protest-performers who drove those numbers upward. According to our count, the site listed 1013 distinct readings in 62 countries, so some discrepancies remain regarding the exact number of performances.

Notes on contributors

Anna M. Wiederhold conducted this research while studying for her Ph.D. at Ohio University, USA (now completed). In August 2013, she takes up the position of assistant professor in the Communication Department at the University of Nevada, Reno. She studies public advocacy and civic engagement, and her research interests include communicative negotiations of contested spaces and alternative ways of organizing.

Kimberly Field-Springer was also studying for her Ph.D. at Ohio University while conducting this research (now completed). In 2013 she takes up the position of assistant professor in the Communication Department at Ashland University. She is interested in the intersections of health communication and women and gender studies.

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Appendix A: International readings of *Lysistrata* on 3 March 2003

Country	US state/international city	Number of performances
Argentina	Buenos Aires	2
	Campana	1
Australia	Atherton	1
	Byron Bay	1
	Newcastle	1
	Sydney	2
	Adelaide	1
	Ballarat	1
	Burwood	1
	Southbank Melbourne	1
	Perth	1
Austria	Hard	1
	Vienna	3
Cambodia	Battambang	1
	Phnom Penh	1
Canada	Colonsay	1
	Calgary	1
	Medicine Hat	1
	Burnaby	1
	Kamloops	1
	Kelowna	1
	Nelson	1
	Salmo	1
	Summerland	1
	Vancouver	2
	Victoria	1
	Winnipeg	1
	Renforth	1
	Sackville	1
	Halifax	2
	Wolfville	1
	Kitchener	1
	London	1
	Ottawa	2
	Peterborough	1
Thornhill	1	
Toronto	8	
Montréal	8	
Rouyn-Noranda	1	
Saguenay	1	
Whitehorse	1	
China	Undisclosed	1
Costa Rica	Heredia	2
	San Jose	1
Cuba	Havana	1
Cyprus	Nicosia	1
	Paphos	1
Czech Republic	Prague	1

(Continued)

Appendix A – continued

Country	US state/international city	Number of performances
Denmark	Copenhagen	1
Dominican Republic	Undisclosed	1
Egypt	Cairo	1
England	Cardiff	1
	Durham	1
	Hertfordshire	1
	Hull	1
	Leicester	1
	Lincoln	1
	Liverpool	1
	London	4
	London-Brixton	1
	London-Stoke Newington	1
	London/Clapham	1
	Newcastle-Upon-Tyne	1
	North Yorkshire	1
	Northamptonshire	1
	Nottingham	1
	Oxford	1
	Sheffield	1
	Walton on Thames	1
Warwickshire	1	
Winchester	1	
Estonia	Tartu	1
Finland	Helsinki	1
France	Cote d'Azur	1
	Montpellier	1
	Montreuil	1
	Nice	1
	Paris	8
	Région Lorraine	1
	Buis les Baronnies	1
Germany	Baden-Württemberg	1
	Berlin	1
	Dieburg	1
	Frankfurt	1
	Freiburg	1
	Mainz	1
	Munich	1
Greece	Athens	5
	Kythera	1
	Heraklion	1
	Patras	1
	Thessaloniki	3
	Volos	1
Honduras	El Progreso	1
	Tegucigalpa	1
Hong Kong	Undisclosed	1

(Continued)

Appendix A – continued

Country	US state/international city	Number of performances
Iceland	Reykjavik	2
India	Kochi	1
Indonesia	Ubud	1
Iraq	Arbil	1
Ireland	Cork City	1
	Derry	2
	Dublin	4
	Galway	2
	Newbridge	1
	Waterford	1
Israel	Ein Iron	1
	Holon	1
	Jerusalem	2
	Natanya	1
	Tel Aviv	1
	Undisclosed	14
Italy	Gorizia	1
	Rome	1
	Trieste	1
	Turin	1
Japan	Nagoya	1
	Tokyo	4
Latvia	Radio Latvia	1
Lebanon	Beirut	2
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	1
Malta	Valletta	1
Mexico	Coyoacán	1
	Gomez Palacio	1
	Guanajuato	2
	Mexico City	2
	Tampico	1
	Morelia	1
	Zamora	1
	Quéretaro	1
Netherlands	Hoorn	1
	Amsterdam	1
	Den Haag	1
	Utrecht	1
	Zutphen	1
New Zealand	Dunedin	1
	Gore	1
	Wellington/Christchurch	1
	Wellington/Hari Hari	1
Norway	Bergen	1
	Tromsoe	1
	Trondheim	1
Online	Online	5

(Continued)

Appendix A – continued

Country	US state/international city	Number of performances
Pakistan	Karachi	1
Panama	Panama City	1
Philippines	Manila/Makati City	1
Mindanao	Cagayan de Oro	1
Poland	Warsaw	1
Puerto Rico	Río Piedras	2
	San Juan	1
Russia	Moscow	1
	Sosnovy Bor City	1
Scotland	Dumfries	1
	Edinburgh	1
	Wigtown	1
Serbia and Montenegro	Belgrade	1
	Novi Sad	1
	Pancevo	1
Singapore	Undisclosed	2
Slovenia	Ljubljana	2
South Africa	Kwazulu-Natal	1
Spain	Barcelona	2
	Canary Islands	1
	Madrid	2
	Mallorca	1
	San Ildefonso	1
	Vitoria	1
Sweden	Arvika	1
	Gothenburg	2
	Hellefors	1
	Orebro	1
	Soederhamn	1
	Stockholm	1
	Uppsala	1
	Ystad	1
Switzerland	Bern	1
	Fribourg	1
	Geneva	1
	Lausanne	1
	Meilen	1
	Neuchâtel	1
	Zurich	1
Syria	Damascus	1
Taiwan	Gau-Hsung	1
	Tainan	2
	Taipei	2
Thailand	Chiang Mai	1
Trinidad and Tobago	Undisclosed	1
Turkey	Istanbul	5
Wales	Cardiff	3

(Continued)

Appendix A – *continued*

Country	US state/international city	Number of performances
Venezuela	Merida	1
Uruguay	Montevideo	1
US Virgin Islands	Saint John	1
USA	Alaska	3
	Alabama	5
	Arkansas	3
	Arizona	10
	California	107
	Colorado	12
	Connecticut	15
	District of Columbia	5
	Delaware	2
	Florida	28
	Georgia	13
	Hawaii	4
	Iowa	14
	Idaho	5
	Illinois	37
	Kansas	4
	Kentucky	13
	Louisiana	3
	Massachusetts	44
	Maryland	19
	Maine	6
	Michigan	15
	Minnesota	28
	Missouri	8
	Mississippi	2
	Montana	3
	North Carolina	17
	North Dakota	2
	Nebraska	2
	New Hampshire	9
	New Jersey	12
	New Mexico	8
	Nevada	2
	New York	100
	Ohio	24
	Oklahoma	4
	Oregon	14
	Pennsylvania	30
	Rhode Island	2
	South Carolina	5
	South Dakota	2
	Tennessee	7
	Texas	14
	Utah	2
	Virginia	12
	Vermont	16
Washington	29	
Wisconsin	11	
West Virginia	4	
Wyoming	3	

Appendix B: Summary of media coverage of the Lysistrata Project

Country	News outlet	Stories on LP
Australia	The Age	1
	The Australian	1
	Newcastle Herald	1
Canada	Calgary Herald	1
	Edmonton Journal	1
	The Gazette	5
	The Globe and Mail	2
	Hamilton Spectator	1
	Kamloops Daily News	2
	Nelson Daily News	1
	The Ottawa Citizen	1
	Toronto Star	1
	The Vancouver Sun	1
	Windsor Star	1
Yukon News	1	
Cuba	Cubavision TV News	1
France	Agence France Presse	6
	L'Humanité	1
	Le Point	1
Germany	die Tageszeitung	1
	die Welt	1
	Deutsche Presse-Agentur	1
	Frankfurter Rundschau	1
	Spiegel Online	1
Ireland	The Irish Times	1
Israel	The Jerusalem Post	1
Japan	The Daily Yomiuri	1
	The Japan Times	1
Netherlands	Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau	1
	BN/DeStem	1
	Dagblad Rivierenland	1
	De Stentor	1
	De Volkskrant	1
	Goudsche Courant	1
	Leewarder Courant	1
	NRC Handelsblad	2
	Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant	1
	Utrecht Nieuwsblad	1
	New Zealand	The New Zealand Herald
The Southland Times		1
Switzerland	Le Temps	1
UK	Belfast Telegraph	2
	The Daily Telegraph	1
	The Evening Standard	2
	The Guardian	1
	The Independent	1
	The Journal	1
	Lincolnshire Echo	1
	The Scotsman	1
	South Wales Echo	1
	Time Out	1
	The Times	1
Wales on Sunday	1	

(Continued)

Appendix B – *continued*

Country	News outlet	Stories on LP
USA	Alameda Times-Star (CA)	1
	AP Online	1
	Associated Press Worldstream	1
	Austin American-Statesman (TX)	1
	BackStage	1
	Buffalo News (New York)	1
	Capital Times (Madison, WI)	1
	CBS News	1
	Charleston Gazette (WV)	1
	Chicago Daily Herald	2
	CNN	2
	Contra Costa Times (CA)	2
	Daily News (NY)	2
	Daily Oklahoman	1
	Fort Wayne News Sentinel	1
	Grand Forks Herald	1
	Harvard University Wire	1
	Intelligencer Journal (Lancaster, PA)	1
	IPS-Inter Press Service	1
	Lancaster New Era (PA)	2
	Lincoln Journal Star (NE)	1
	Lowell Sun (MA)	2
	Monterey County Herald (CA)	1
	Morning Star (Wilmington, NC)	1
	National Public Radio	2
	Newsweek	1
	Orange County Register	3
	Palm Beach Post (FL)	1
	Philadelphia Daily News	1
	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette	2
	Princeton University Wire	1
	Providence Journal-Bulletin	1
	Saint Paul Pioneer Press	2
	San Bernardino Sun (CA)	2
	San Jose Mercury News (CA)	1
	Santa Fe New Mexican	1
	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	1
	Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN)	2
	Sunday News (Lancaster, PA)	1
	Tampa Tribune	4
	The Associated Press State & Local Wire	7
	The Atlanta Journal Constitution	2
	The Daily News of Los Angeles	2
	The Denver Post	1
	The Houston Chronicle	1
	The Montclarion (CA)	1

(Continued)

Appendix B – continued

Country	News outlet	Stories on LP
	The New York Post	1
	The New York Times	4
	The Oakland Tribune (CA)	1
	The Pantagraph (Bloomington, IL)	1
	The San Francisco Chronicle	3
	The Seattle Post-Intelligencer	1
	The State Journal-Register (Springfield, IL)	2
	The Times Union (Albany, NY)	2
	The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)	2
	The Washington Post	2
	The Washington Times	2
	University of Michigan University Wire	1
	USA Today	1
	Wayne State University Wire	1
	Wilkes Barre Times Leader (Scranton, PA)	1