

My Mother's Daughter, My Sons' Mother

[artist statement]

Julie-Ann Scott

University of North Carolina, Wilmington



I began writing poetry this year. It enables me to navigate my current landscape, raising three boys with a feminist husband on the once purple, but growing redder by the moment, Carolina coast with deeply engrained racial and socioeconomic divides. The urgency of this cultural moment compels my shift from my familiar medium of creative nonfiction prose to the more concentrated, vivid imagery and emotion of poetry. Poetry produces my Womanifesto. My declaration of who I am, how I see the World, and what I think it should and could be, materializing in metaphors I hope others can access more quickly and easily than my theoretical essays or longer autoethnographies. Perhaps this shift in my creative work marks my shift to the fourth wave of feminism that I've been reading about for the past decade but struggle to intellectually claim in my life, scholarship and art.

Maybe my reluctance to claim participation in a wave stems from my discomfort with the "wave" metaphor. I know waves well. I often go to the beach with my boys, as they nap on the sand after swimming I watch the waves. They swell on top of one another, each dissolving into foam and then disappearing. Feminism's foci don't strike me as waves. The squelching of women's voices in our political process still happens as culture deems female candidates "unlikeable" and therefore "weak." We still have income inequality and a rape culture to dismantle. We still need to combat the White-washing and hetero-norming of women's issues. These are not waves that have crashed. Rather than the waves that disappear they remind me of the shore stretching up and down the beach. Different spaces stay familiar, but reveal new rocks, shells, pools, and creatures. The landscape evolves, is diminished by erosion, becomes covered with debris to sift through after storms, and is momentarily smoothed over by truckloads of sand at the beginning of a new season. The fourth feminist space is a digital, technological, social media transformation of feminist communication and activism that allows the complexities of identities and standpoints to interact in both real time and asynchronously (Solomon, 2009). As I look back, my personal transition to this fourth space began about five years ago.

Julie-Ann Scott is an Associate Professor of Communication and Performance Studies at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. She has published numerous articles focused on narrative performance research and instructional practices. Her book, *Embodied Performance as Research, Art, and Pedagogy* will be out this year. She is the recipient of UNCW's Distinguished Award for Scholarly Engagement and Public Service, Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Award and the National Communication Association's Ethnographic Article of the Year Award. She interweaves personal storytelling, poetry, disability and performance theory confront our fears of mortality in the pursuit of Social Justice.

scottj@uncw.edu

My Mother's Daughter, My Sons' Mother

In the Spring of 2012 I was the mother of a 12-month old baby boy who was transitioning from my adorable personal accessory to his own person, with unique inclinations, desires, and responses to the world. My tenure-track job sent us across the U.S. and social media became a way to share his daily moments with our friends and family. The expected length of Facebook posts had me watching and listening for bits of his encounters with the world. Technology offered a way to connect him to those I loved but who were not near enough to share physical space.

As he grew older we added a second boy, and then a third. As I watch them with their friends I notice how gender boundaries are already porous and flexible. Binaries that I could not problematize without the help of Judith Butler and Judith (currently Jack) Halberstam in graduate school are already blurry in their preschool and grade school classrooms. The boys are as often Elsa from *Frozen* as they are Spider Man in super hero play. The girls are leaving for work when they play House while the boys stay home with the babies. My sons had boys in their class who wore dresses to preschool. The teachers asked parents if they preferred specific gender pronouns and the other children accepted their preferred genders and gender performances without question. Having two mommies or two daddies is normal to my sons. Racism and homophobia are difficult to grasp in their pluralistic worlds, but once they do, they are ready to correct them.

Their comfort with disrupting binaries and embracing complexity gives me hope. As the audience to their daily performances of selves I glimpse a Utopian Performative, a world that is potentially coming through a generation ready to resist and correct injustices I once accepted as natural and inevitable (Dolan, 2005). I share their thoughts on Facebook and others also find hope. The next generation is ready to progress even if we find ourselves in stalled civil rights movements. That said, horror from our acquaintances, friends and families from different times in our lives reminds us that the fights of past generations of feminists are still salient. Misogyny, heterosexism, racism and classism are alive, well and painfully interactive. The snug, educated bubble we may have lived in before the digital space isn't sustainable. Online interactions puncture it daily. Over time, some of our friends and family have softened, slowly becoming more open to our positions as others grow more steadfast and enraged. And we look to the future, with hope that we can extend the intersectional fights of the first three feminist spaces into this fourth digital one. My voice, being able to say my words with technological interpretations widens my reach.

The poetry performance video I created for this piece is set on a minimalist stage, the fiery coral I claim as my color during this movement becomes the deep purple of feminism before transitioning, to the cool, calm blue I associate with my mother. This staged interpretation, like the spaces of the feminist shoreline, fade into one another, all present and open to conversation, with my body able to reach yours through digital communication. Thanks for reading, watching and listening to my work.

References

- Baumgardner, J. (2011). *F 'em!: Goo goo, gaga, and some thoughts on balls*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dolan, J. (2005). *Utopia in performance: Finding hope at the theater*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Solomon, D. (2009, November 13). Fourth-wave feminism. *New York Times*, p. MM24.