

An Honors Project for the Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies Department
*"We are your wives, sisters, daughters, mothers and friends:" United States' Women's Stories
from the Public to the Archive*

Sadie LoGerfo-Olsen, Class of 2019

I used the funding from this grant to conduct an ethnography at a public hearing for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. This opportunity was essential to my honors thesis, and the research that I conducted at the event constituted the majority of my second chapter, "'We belong here:' An Ethnography of a Public Hearing for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women."

In this thesis, I present a methodological exercise in applying feminist scholarship and critical discourse analysis to three particular avenues, and afterlives, of women's storytelling, using two archives and one public event. Under a feminist scholarship lens, the personal is political, and in sharing these stories, I argue, women are creating a new discourse

I take my evidence from a public hearing in particular, which I had the privilege to conduct research at thanks to this generous award. Within this four hour event, I analyzed the discursive power of the language used to tell women's stories in real time, to a collective of women. This project does not intend to speak on behalf of all women; it does not scratch the surface of adequately representing the scope of women's experiences in America, nor the myriad ways of telling stories. Rather, it examines a slice of lived experiences and returns the conversation to the value of the personal in theorizing a new construction of discourse and knowledge that is strictly woman-centric.

I chose to use ethnography as my method for research because it best addresses the needs of the project and allowed me the greatest proximity to the full scope of the procedures and the lived reality of a public hearing. Ethnography is a useful method of research due to its physical admittance of the researcher to the community which they are curious about. While my time at hearing only lasted several hours, I was still able to achieve a unique understanding of the public hearing structure. I was also able to critically view the actions, and reactions, of individuals attending the hearing: commissioners, women presenting testimony and audience members.

Faculty Mentor: Professor Jay Sosa

Funded by the Peter J. Grua and Mary G. O'Connell Research Award