

# Dear Young Feminist Me

**By the WRTC 420 class with Dr. Jen  
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## Hey, Young Feminists!

We are a group of college students in a Feminist Rhetorics class, reaching out to share our stories and to tell you about some pretty cool feminists. We take up this work as an act of feminist rhetoric, guided by the feminist ideals of giving voice to fellow rhetoricians and challenging norms when sharing this work. Images shared here lead back to official websites or spaces for further information about feminist stars, and we hope you take some time to learn more about them all.

## Feminist Work

*This is a space for you to learn, find encouragement, and feel validated in your experience as a feminist.*

## Dear Young Feminist Me Letters

Check out the letters we wrote to our younger selves about the things we wish others would have shared with us. In this section, we will talk about many topics. Some have heavier content within them, but all topics were selected with intention, as we feel many young people share these experiences.

## Feminist Yearbook

After reading about feminist topics, we invite you to check out some amazing feminists in our Feminist Yearbook! We include singers like Taylor Swift, Boygenius, and Hozier; politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ruth Bader Ginsburg; actresses like Emma Watson and Jennette McCurdy; athletes like Megan Rapinoe; and feminist letter writers like ourselves.

## Rhetoric and Feminism

As we consider feminism and rhetoric together and how they can be transformative, it seems important to begin with a few grounding definitions. **Feminism** is understood as the evolving practice of dismantling socially constructed gender/sex, race, socio-economic, sexuality, and ability-level norms and the redistribution of power to historically marginalized groups using an intersectional lens. The ultimate goal of feminist work is to cultivate unity and human rights for all. We can understand **rhetoric** as communicative acts aimed at persuading an audience.

### Camille

Dear Younger Me,

These are some of the things I wish I knew. I graduate in a little over a month and although I haven't fully processed that, there are some things I've learned on this journey. I've spent time appreciating things that don't hold me back anymore. You'll be happy to know we've grown up with much more joy in who we are. We are so much better at translating our negative thoughts into positive ones and relying on faith to do so.

Give your brain a rest from overthinking about how you look or what you wear. You don't have to dress to fit into a standard or because you're afraid of judgment. Wear what is comfortable to you in any space and for any condition of your body. The beauty standards that you think rule, are not everything. Actually they're nothing and how you portray yourself can't fit into a post on a screen. There's so much more to consider and spend your time thinking about. Being short, not super skinny, with curly hair coils and kinks is beautiful. You don't need to compare yourself to the people you pass in the halls that are deemed pretty and popular. The weight of comparison mentally is showing you a skewed inaccurate version of who you really are. Make space to think about the positive things you've experienced and all the blessings that are to come.

All the anxiety and stress built up is weighing heavy on you and needs to be released. Let yourself release both by talking to the people you love about your feelings. It's okay to be vulnerable and to be afraid of what the future is going to look like, but know that everything works out. You're so independent but that doesn't have to control your mental state in situations either. It's okay to ask for help and be patient with the change that comes from that.

Remind yourself that you are loved and that your identity isn't dependent on how you look, your grades, or how others perceive you. Your performance in school or in sports cannot give you a true identity so keep your eyes up and keep praying. Let things go and find balance in the busyness of school, work, and sports. Take time for yourself to feel re-energized. You're not lazy, your mind and body need the rest so validate and prioritize that time. Don't get so disappointed by lows because there are so many doors opening for you that you can't see.

Be comfortable making decisions without overthinking every outcome. Here are some tips that may be easier to understand if you read them: journaling is cool, talk things out, see yourself as fearfully and wonderfully made, treat yo self, take self care days. Craft, spend more time doing puzzles, and writing music. Remember that you're not wasting time because the work will always be there. Keep going and breathe knowing that life gets lighter.

Love,  
Future You

Rhetoric has been a conduit for feminist thought and work for centuries, characterized by subtle resistance and the malleability of tradition.

In her 1983 critique of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, feminist scholar Alice Walker discussed the way female writers of color can look to their mothers and, despite the lack of overt tradition, still find inspiration in the legacies of love and passion that women throughout history have exhibited through storytelling and craft: "And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on that creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read" ([Walker, 1993, p. 407](#)). Walker exemplifies the necessity of rhetoric's simultaneous subtlety and power to fulfill feminist ends.

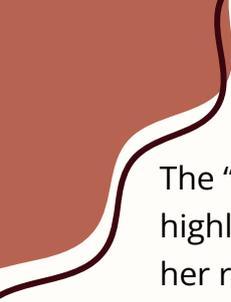
### **Motivations for the Project**

The students of JMU's 2023 Feminist Rhetorics class developed this project to communicate the importance and hallmarks of feminist rhetoric to a younger audience. "Dear Young Feminist Me" aims to educate and entertain young people about important rhetorical acts and contributions of feminist scholars and activists. Feminist rhetorician, Cheryl Glenn, famously took on the project of reclaiming "Our Mother Rhetoric" in her 1997 *Rhetoric Retold*. Like Glenn's work, and the work of other feminist rhetoricians dedicated to creating "new maps" of feminist rhetorical practice and contributions, we hope this project serves as a rhetoric map for writing students and feminists by, "taking us more places, introducing us to more people, [and] complicating our understanding" ([Glenn, 1997 p. 4](#)) of both feminism and rhetoric.

This goal was produced by reflecting on our younger feminist selves by answering these questions: What lessons do we wish we had learned? What advice would we have given to our younger feminist selves? Why is understanding feminism at a young age so important?

With this in mind, each contributor on "Dear Young Feminist Me" wrote a letter to their younger feminist selves with the specific focus to explore topics like mental health, bodies, social media, relationships, leadership, gender, and sexuality.

All letters are written through an embodied voice that educates future feminists and celebrates the many rhetorical approaches to be a feminist — especially in girlhood. Girlhood and adolescence can be one of the most complicated, confusing, and critical times in our lives; our project aims to validate these feelings, combat detrimental societal norms, and encourage self-exploration.



The “Feminist Yearbook” component of the “Dear Young Feminist Me” platform highlights both historical and modern feminist rhetoricians including Bell Hooks and her reclamation of the “Homeplace” (1990), and author, artist, and transfeminine social media activist Alok. The individuals featured in our yearbook have made a variety of contributions to the field of feminist rhetoric that should not go unnoticed.

### **A Discussion of Genres**

Using a digital space allows us to create a project that lives beyond us, doesn't require maintenance, and can be expanded over time. It lets us better organize our feminist letters with categories and add a search bar so young feminists can search for something that will resonate with them the most. “Dear Young Feminist Me” features multiple written components, namely a creative yearbook and personal epistolary pieces. We feared that users would have to jump between different formats because of this. Our best solution was to create a digital space that showcases all of these components in one place. The digital space also expands our reach to young feminists outside our local community at JMU. A physical copy may be better in some aspects, but the point of this project is to share with a wide, young audience.

### **Feminist Socials**

We want to thank all of the feminists who participated in creating our yearbook. It is because of your hard work and dedication that we are able to create such a valuable resource that showcases these powerful feminists. Feminism is more than just a word; it's a movement. We've linked social media accounts and websites so you can support these feminists. There are also various articles and autobiographies that highlight their lives and achievements.

### **And thank you...**

For taking the time to read all of our stories and learn about all the cool feminists in our yearbook! We have all worked extensively on this project as the course has come to its close and are happy it is in good hands with you all! As we all move on in life from James Madison University, this project will stay in our memories here.

It is important to us that viewers take away the idea that feminism is for everyone and should be celebrated as such.

Check out the link to their full website to read through all of the *Dear Young Feminist Me Letters* and the *Feminist Yearbook*!

Website