Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 35 – NCA Book Award Winners: Highlight of *Terrorizing Gender* and *Homeland Maternity*

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Introduction:
This is *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Hello, I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association and I'm your host on *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast*. Thanks for joining us for today's episode.

Every year at the NCA Annual Convention, dozens of communication scholars receive awards for their teaching and research. Today's episode of *Communication Matters* highlights two books that received awards at last year's convention. Mia Fischer discusses *Terrorizing Gender: Transgender Visibility and the Surveillance Practices of the U.S. Security State* which won the NCA's 2020 Diamond Anniversary Book Award, and Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz addresses *Homeland Maternity: U.S. Security Culture and the New Reproductive Regime* which was the winner of NCA's 2020 James A. Winans-Herbert A. Wichelns Memorial Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address which parenthetically is the longest award title that we give at NCA.

First, let me tell you a little bit more about today's guests. Mia Fischer is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Colorado at Denver. Dr. Fischer's work is in the area of critical media, sports, queer, trans, and surveillance studies. Fischer's 2019 book, *Terrorizing Gender*, argues that the heightened visibility of transgender people in national discourse has caused a conservative backlash that is characterized by the increased surveillance of trans people by the security state. This is evident in debates over "bathroom" laws, the trans military ban, and the rescission of federal protections for transgender students and workers. Hi, Mia. Welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Mia Fischer:
Hi, Trevor. Thanks for having me. Great to be here.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz is an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Iowa. Dr. Fixmer-Oraiz researches in the area of rhetorical theory and criticism, with an emphasis on gender and sexuality. Fixmer-Oraiz's 2019 book, *Homeland Maternity*, examines the recent history of U.S. reproductive politics and the rhetorical challenges confronting advocates for reproductive justice. The book explores the culture and norms around motherhood and the relationship between motherhood and the nation within U.S. security culture. Hi, Natalie. Welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Thank, Trevor. It's a pleasure to be here.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
So congratulations first of all to both of you for winning these prestigious book awards from NCA. Mia, I'd be interested in talking a bit about your book first. As I mentioned briefly, your book addresses the conservative backlash to increased visibility of trans people in U.S. media and culture. Can you talk a little bit more about the ways in which trans people have been portrayed in media in recent years?

Mia Fischer:
Yeah. So I start in the book sort of in this time period around 2014 when some of you might remember that we had figures like Laverne Cox all of a sudden gracing the cover of *Time Magazine* under the headline "The Transgender Tipping Point." There was a lot of excitement that this increase in trans visibility, also in TV shows with trans parent news stories, news coverage, that this all sort of seemed like a very optimistic moment where trans people were suddenly sort of becoming really fully integrated, having a sense of belonging, also getting increasingly legal protection sort of towards the end of the Obama administration. And then however, as I trace in the book, this really resulted also in a very vicious cultural conservative backlash. So just because all of a sudden, trans people were being visible more in mainstream culture didn't necessarily also mean that they were being safer and that their actual living conditions were improving. There's still rampant discrimination, harassment. Trans women of color are getting killed at unprecedented rates. And so the book really takes a very kind of critical look at visibility and what this media visibility actually achieved or did not achieve.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
You focus on particular case studies in the book, Chelsea Manning, CeCe McDonald, and Monica Jones in particular. Now I'm interested in talking about all of those in turn. But many of our listeners might be very familiar or at least somewhat familiar with Chelsea Manning and the high profile case that was the visibility if you will of Chelsea Manning. Could you give us a bit of a background on that case and some of the conclusions and problematic ways in which newsrooms covered the Manning's transition?

Mia Fischer:
Yeah. So I kind of stumbled on this case back in 2011, 2012 when, as you mentioned, I think some of the listeners probably remember Wikileaks and the hundreds and thousands of documents that Wikileaks released on U.S. foreign policy, on a lot of wrongdoing that the U.S. military was engaging in in Iraq and also in Afghanistan with civilians getting killed, war crimes, etc. And there was a lot of attention on who was doing the leaking or who was responsible for leaking these documents. And so it turned out it was this army private Manning who had served in Iraq who had out of at least from her own standpoint and convictions released those documents because she wanted the American public to be aware of what's going on because she felt there was a lot of injustice being done. And so news media coverage really started excessively focusing on her, on her childhood, on her upbringing, on her experiences in the military. And in the beginning, she was identified as a gay man who had sort of grown up in the military under don't ask, don't tell. There was a lot of focus on her allegedly dysfunctional family life and that she was mentally unstable.

And then this whole story even blew up more once she also announced during pre-trial proceedings a couple of years later that she identifies as trans. And so this is really when I sort of started closely watching what was happening in media and this is really the probably most high profile trans story we had until this point. And the media coverage was largely pretty terrible and horrendous in terms of misgendering her, in terms of again sort of blaming her alleged mental instabilities, painting her as a traitor to the state. And that really sort of worked hand in hand with the treatment that she then also received at the hands of the military during the military trial. And so I really take a very close look at this media coverage and argue that the media here actively colluded basically with various state and military forces in painting her as a traitor, as un-American, as unpatriotic, etc. And that also as probably some listeners remember resulted in her getting sentenced to 35 years in prison until Obama commuted her sentence towards the end of his term. But so it's a very fascinating and complex story that really also illustrates a lot about how newsrooms cover trans people, the pronoun choices that are made or not being made. And so it's a very complex, complex story.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
On a more local level and a case that many listeners may not be as familiar with happened tragically in Minnesota in 2011 when CeCe McDonald, a black trans woman was attacked outside of a bar in Minneapolis. How was that case covered by the local media? How did it end up resolving itself? And you talk about what's the role of activists in supporting and advocating on behalf of CeCe McDonald?

Mia Fischer:
Yeah. Thanks for pointing to CeCe McDonald's story. So I also have a bit of a local connection or personal connection to this case because I had just gotten to Minneapolis in that summer of 2011 to start grad school at the University of Minnesota and start my PhD program. So I got there and the story was happening and it was getting a lot of attention in local media coverage. And again, it was looking at how local news talked about the case. She was consistently misgendered. She was described as a black man. She was portrayed as being inherently violent which we know are lots of long-standing racist stereotypes that the media deploys about alleged black criminality. And instead, what happened in this case was that she and a group of friends were walking down the street in a neighborhood not very far from my own, passing a bar, and patrons of that bar were basically accosting this group with racial, transphobic, homophobic slurs. And then a physical altercation ensued in which one of the patrons died. Transcripts, interviews, witness statements, etc. all said that CeCe McDonald was defending herself as this guy was chasing after her. But this is not the stance that the prosecution believed and took. And so they actually prosecuted and charged her with murder. She ended up taking a plea deal. She served time in prison. And what happened in the media coverage really was again that she was basically already convicted before even the case went to pre-trial. The guy whom she killed had a swastika tattoo on his chest. Both witness statements repeatedly showed that he was yelling racist transphobic slurs at them. But again, none of these things really mattered in the criminal justice system. So she was charged. She ultimately agreed to take a plea deal which as I also talked a little bit in the book is sort of what a lot of folks are forced to do when they're low income, when they can't afford good legal representation.

And so as you mentioned, what was also though happening on the ground which I think is really also a credit to grassroots organizing that we've also again seen springing up over the events with last summer is that really folks, local activists organizers rallied around her case. They deliberately used social media to push back against some of these local news media stories to correct the record so to speak, to really emphasize and highlight CeCe's story, to let her tell her story. And so one chapter really takes a close look at the role that social media played here in terms of challenging some of the state-sanctioned violence that she was encountering and also really bringing the story to national and international attention so that celebrities like Laverne Cox became involved. There was later a documentary that Laverne Cox co-produced about CeCe

McDonald and to really also just connect her story to the larger injustices and discrimination that many trans people of color are facing in this country.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I'm struck here as we talk about each of these cases that they all seem to be involving criminalization of some kind. And the third case that you talk about, Monica Jones is an instance where she was accused and arrested for manifesting prostitution—it's an interesting crime—while a student at Arizona State. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that charge means and what it meant for Monica and this larger theme of the criminalization of trans people? It just seems really unseemly.

Mia Fischer:
Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Trevor. Yeah. So Monica Jones was living in Phoenix at the time and a social work student at ASU who's also engaged in a lot of sex work activism. And so Phoenix like actually many countries, municipalities across the country have manifesting prostitution statues on their records which basically criminalizes sex work. And so in Phoenix, manifesting prostitution can be anything that you're repeatedly stopping on the sidewalk, that you might be waving to someone who's passing by in a car. So it's very arbitrary potentially, right? And so she was charged with the statue for supposedly accepting a ride from an undercover cop and that was seen as her eliciting sex work. And this case then went to trial. It ultimately was dismissed. It was a mistrial declared because they tried to bring in prior convictions that she had. And so I really used this story to show how a lot of trans people, trans women, trans women of color specifically are often clocked or read as walking while trans. And that as you point out is often already explicitly tied to questions of criminalization. So trans women of color can't walk down the street or can't stand at the bus stop without potentially catching the attention of police because she might be or might not be eliciting quote-unquote prostitution. And so I really also point out in the chapter this is sort of a long history or tied to a long history of specifically criminalizing sex work in the United States. A lot of trans women are forced into underground economies because they really don't have a lot of employment opportunities because again, rampant discrimination, harassment. So this is survival work for many folks, right? And because we criminalize it, it then also again just feeds sort of into the prison pipeline. And so this chapter really tries to untangle why walking wild trans is so intimately connected to questions of criminalization and how also we really can't separate race out from all of this too because it is disproportionately trans women of color that are being charged with prostitution when we look at the statistics nationwide.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I'm thinking now of the last few years since your book was published. There has been an increased visibility of trans individuals outside of the criminalization process to some degree. There is somebody in the Department of Health and Human Services appointed by the Biden

administration and there was a fair amount of visibility especially when she was attacked so inappropriately by a senator during her confirmation hearings. Caitlyn Jenner is running for governor of California. I'm thinking here in a sort of wrap up of how visibility is working and how it's developing vis-a-vis the conservative backlash and now again, Caitlyn Jenner, here we go, with she's talking about building the wall in order to be elected governor of California. So could you tease out I guess a little bit more of the conclusions you reach about visibility, about conservative backlash, and where we might be going on this.

Mia Fischer:
Yes, thank you, Trevor, for bringing this up. So as I talk about in the book too, I think what visibility has produced is sort of a very narrow and acceptable form of trans visibility. So there are certain trans people who are acceptable and who sort of fulfill like Caitlyn Jenner ideas about what it means to be a good American and what it means to be a good patriot. And so they become incorporated frankly into white supremacist frameworks. And as I tease out in the book though, that is really only a very narrow subsequent of what the breadth of the trans community looks like and it is not actually benefiting the trans folks that are hurting the most. And so as you point out, we now have representation, for example, in the political system by trans people increasingly, right? Which is certainly important and I don't want to dismiss that. But it doesn't mean, for example, that someone like Caitlyn Jenner also isn't advocating for racist immigration policies, right? We also are currently witnessing an unprecedented amount of anti-transgender bills in various state legislatures specifically targeting trans youth in sports as well as undermining and criminalizing transgender affirming healthcare so that both doctors and parents are criminalized if they are trying to provide gender affirming care to trans youth. So there are really horrendous things also happening in states across the country right now. And so I really think we need to be very cautious that visibility isn't the end-all-be-all in solution as I try to point out in the book. We really need to be carefully looking at various legal processes, political processes, and yes, also the cultural narratives and how we generally value and treat trans people in our country. So yes, on the one hand, it's great that we have representation but simultaneously, right now there are trans kids literally fighting for survival in many states. So it is a double-edged sword to put it mildly. Some would argue that it is exclusively causing much more harm and surveillance than what it actually does good.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Yeah. It's interesting. The argument is always that with all civil rights movements that have come, that the more the dominant group knows people in those or the people in those underrepresented groups are made visible that that will solve all the problems. I'm not certain that's necessarily the lesson that we draw from your book. That's great. And I'm interested if we could turn to your book now, Natalie. The book begins in a post-9/11 period with an uptick in interest that you chart or chronicle in motherhood among professional women. Talk about some of the narratives that

circulated at this time and how they related to the real-time data and about family formation and that sort of thing.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Sure. Thanks, Trevor. And I really enjoy being in conversation with Mia and hearing about some of the overlaps between our work in terms of gender and surveillance in recent history.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
We will certainly get to that overlap later on.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Great. My book is about the recent history of motherhood and nation and I argue that motherhood and nation are intimately entangled, they're mutually constitutive of one another, and they're shaped in the 21st century by the logic of homeland security culture. And this isn't anything, this relationship between motherhood and nation isn't new. It's very long-standing, it's a very disturbing history, and it's worth mentioning a little bit of that history before diving into the present which is that at the founding of the U.S. republic, wealthy white women were urged to perform citizenship not through voting or civic engagement but rather through domesticity. And Linda Kerber refers to this as republican motherhood. So wealthy white women were instructed to birth sons and instruct them in leadership and that kind of was in order to establish white wealth across generations. And in this same era, enslaved women of color were legally denied recognition as mothers and early colonial laws established the legal status of a child as contingent on the status of the mother. So in effect, biracial children born to white women contributed to growing populations of free people of color and this fueled the establishment of anti-miscegenation laws and a really strict enforcement of white women's fidelity within marriage. And any child born to an enslaved woman became the property of the slaveholder. And so white men's rape of black and indigenous enslaved women was a really common weapon of racial domination and a key component in perpetuating slavery and reinforcing white supremacy and racializing the nation with motherhood as a kind of vehicle for that, right? And so in my book, I traced that relationship briefly throughout the 20th century as well and into the 21st century.

And so in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, we saw this real resurgence in conservativism. This included a silencing of political dissent and a conflation of patriotism with like nationalist loyalty as well as this return to a mythic past. Like Stephanie Cruz refers to this as the way we never were, this nostalgic domesticity that gets tethered to whiteness and heteronuclear family formation and traditional gender divisions of labor. And in this context, one of the dominant stories that really took root centered on the maternal aspirations of elite professional women in what was referred to as the opt-out revolution. And the basic premise was that highly educated successful women, the beneficiaries of second wave feminism if you will, were opting out. They were opting for full-

time motherhood by choice and there was this reconfiguration of domesticity as actually the new feminism. And this was despite a lack of empirical evidence. It turns out that research demonstrated that elite women were actually not exiting the workforce in droves, that the workforce participation of women with children has considerably risen since the mid-80s up until 2020 when COVID really destroyed a generation of gains for mothers in particular. And so moreover, professional mothers research shows are more likely to remain in the workforce than their working class peers in part because of the luxuries of the professional class, things like vacation and sick days and bargaining power and access to benefits and affordable child care. And so low-wage mothers are much more likely to cycle in and out of the labor force to meet family needs. And yet working-class mothers were really absent from these discussions of work and motherhood except that the opt-out motherhood narrative stands in stark contrast to some of the dominant discourses that have long surrounded working and poverty-class mothers who are frequently berated for their mothering. They're shamed for relying on public assistance and they're punished for anything less than full-time employment. So in those examples, you can see how narrowly quote-unquote good motherhood is defined or legitimate motherhood is defined.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I was listening to CNN's wrap up this morning of the headlines from the week and one of the headlines was that some person had given birth to nine children. And yeah, it reminded me of the Nadya Suleman case which was a much more widely covered I suspect case back in 2009. This was the woman who gave birth to octuplets via in vitro fertilization or IVF back then. It was a media sensation. And you argue that she was positioned in the media coverage as between this nexus of stereotypes of deserving and undeserving. How was she simultaneously seen as both deserving and undeserving? And it seems to me it relates back to what you were just saying about the racial dynamics of the constructions of motherhood and privilege and whiteness and all of that. How did that all play into the way the Suleman case was covered?

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Yeah. When Nadya Suleman gave birth to octuplets as a single mother of six children already, the Gosselin's of *Jon and Kate Plus Eight* was one of the most popular and beloved reality television programs and *19 and Counting* was in its second season and I think it ran for like 10 seasons. And it was wildly successful. So the birth of high order multiples to married middle class couples really typically resulted in really warm public reception included sometimes large-scale donations like houses and cars and media opportunities. And Jon and Kate were both unemployed when they brought home the sextuplets. That didn't even register in the court of public opinion. But the treatment of Nadya Suleman was really distinct and quite vile. She appeared in a few high-profile televised interviews and tried to frame her story in a way that would really resonate sympathetically, right? She tried to talk about how she really wanted children. She desperately wanted to be a mother and she had struggled with infertility for years. But she didn't

embody the cultural norms and expectations of quote unquote deserving motherhood or the sympathetic infertile woman which is like a trope steeped in whiteness and wealth. And Suleman was a single mother of six. She was a working student. She received public benefit. She was a child of immigrants. Her mother is Lithuanian and her father Iraqi. And try as she would to try and reframe her story, the dominant narrative was really written through the trope of the welfare queen which is a racist trope that has really long been used to pathologize and punish the childbearing and the parenting of poor women and black, indigenous, and other women of color. So Suleman was rhetorically figured in public discourse as mentally unfit, as abusive criminal, and a host of other misogynist epithets. But in my book, I kind of I look at how the rhetoric of risk really masked a lot of that or tried to sanitize some of the racism and the xenophobia and the misogyny of that public malice. And then I scale up to kind of consider the stakes of marking some people as risky reproducers as Suleman was and how that contributes to really troubling trends in the criminalization of pregnancy.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
One of the more interesting things is the contrast, right? Between the risky motherhood, right? And the conservative attempts to restrict important policy issues related to reproductive health that in many ways would go towards some of these concerns one would think. But they get particularly, as you indicate and in your study you explore the public discourse and the rhetoric surrounding the morning after pill and how conservatives responded to the increased availability of this contraception in the 1990s and 2000s. What does it say about our societal judgments about teen sex, about contraception, about all of these issues surrounding maternity that we have this backlash to the morning after pill?

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Yeah. Originally the introduction of a pill that was specifically designed for originally three and then eventually five days after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy didn't register in the realm of public discourse with any degree of alarm. And it was only at the request of for over-the-counter approval by FDA and this was in the early 2000s that EC was kind of assigned weight in what was then becoming like the culture wars over so-called family values in the early naughts. And one of the points of contention over EC that really fueled this dimension of the so-called culture wars was how it functioned. There were a number of misconceptions over how EC actually worked which feels bizarrely, I don't know, prescient in the context of a pandemic when anti-vaxxers are making wildly inaccurate claims about vaccines and science. But I digress. EC, emergency contraception was regularly conflated in dominant discourses with the abortion pill. And both medications entered the U.S. market around the same time and both are taken obviously after unprotected sex. But the big difference is that EC is simply a concentrated form of birth control and it can't actually harm or terminate an existing pregnancy and this is why there's that really narrow window of time within which you have to take emergency contraception. Otherwise, it won't

work. But advocates for EC had to work so hard to justify the use of this particular form of birth control that they and—well, maybe I should say we, I was working as a community organizer for Planned Parenthood in the U.S. South at the time. So advocates for EC positioned EC as an exception to the rule, as this form of birth control to be used under quote unquote exceptional or emergency circumstances, not an everyday form of birth control. So advocates claiming this kind of, on the one hand, EC was regular birth control, on the other, it's not regular at all. And so in this messy discursive terrain, debates over the circumstances under which this form of birth control might be permissible or justifiable or necessary led to struggles over normative versus excessive expressions of sexuality. And so moving to get EC over the counter and initially for seven, eight years it went behind the counter. It had age and ID requirements. But this became a mess of kind of respectability politics that was mired in what constitutes an emergency that would justify this form of birth control. And within that, young women were particularly under the microscope and mythic norms around white women's purity was a real cultural pressure point. And these debates are happening at the same time that purity balls and promise rings are soaring in popularity and they're being endorsed by icons like Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
Your book also examines some popular culture depictions of teen pregnancy in particular and teen motherhood, *Juno, Glee, 16 and Pregnant*, and *Teen Mom* are some of the narratives that you've looked at. What do they tell us about the perceptions and depictions of teen parents in the United States? And there's a tie-in here to Mia's work on trans visibility as well, right? Because the teen mother in Juno is now a trans actor. So yeah, what do those narratives tell us about teen parenting?

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Thanks for this question. I would love actually if my work could help to dispel some really harmful myths around young motherhood and young parenting. And I prefer those terms, I use the terms kind of interchangeably in my book but I do prefer the term young as opposed to teen in part because the vast majority of teen parents are legal adults. They're 18 and 19 years old. But also because the term is a semi-recent invention. It emerged in the public lexicon in the 1970s and there was kind of a constellation of forces at work in that moment which included, for example, the fact that Title IX made it illegal to expel pregnant students from school for their pregnancy and that happened very, very frequently prior to that moment. And then also the series of Supreme Court decisions that included *Roe V. Wade* but there were others that overturned abortion restrictions, guaranteed access to birth control, and so on. And so those cultural forces impacted young women, young people's child bearing in at least two ways. First, when young people got pregnant, they felt empowered to determine for themselves whether or not they would carry their pregnancy to term. But also, when young women decided to carry an unintended pregnancy to term, they were far less likely to give up their baby for adoption and far more likely to embrace

single motherhood. And this is the so-called problem of teen pregnancy emerges in the wake of these seismic cultural shifts. And interestingly at the same moment in the late 70s, the birth rate for young people under the age of 20 was plummeting but what was rising was the proportion of unmarried women within that population. And so the problem wasn't the fact of teen pregnancy so much as it was the audacity of single young motherhood.

And so the term teen pregnancy also became a convenient index for race and class. Young parenting, young motherhood remains deeply stigmatized in our culture. It's racialized and positioned as the root of all kinds of problems, poor health outcomes, poverty, educational curtailment, state dependency. There's a lot of research that correlates these things with one another but a lot of this literature assumes or reverses cause and effect. Young motherhood, in fact, is preceded by structural disadvantage and poverty is far more likely to lead to young pregnancy as well as poor health outcomes and limited employment prospects than the other way around. And there's a growing body of research that suggests that young motherhood functions as an adaptive response to poverty that allows young people to focus on parenting when they're most likely to have good health and strong family networks. And so blaming and shaming young women, young mothers obscures the conditions of socioeconomic hardship that really incentivize motherhood for young people and also, at the same time, it deprives them of the critical resources and support that they need to thrive. And they do thrive when they're given those resources and support. Motherhood can actually be very motivating for young people to seek out opportunities and a better life for themselves. So anyway, that's the background on kind of teen pregnancy. But the explosion of pop representations of young mothers and teen pregnancy in 2007, 2008, 2009 followed immediately on the heels of a very brief and anomalous spike in the teen pregnancy rate which had been on the decline for years. And these representations I talked about in my book framed the very notion of young motherhood as a crisis and kind of fueled dominant myths about young people in pregnancy and how those things intersect with race and class. And there's an overwhelming whiteness to the genre that I discuss at length in the book. But for now I can just say that whiteness renders young pregnancy a crisis that contains a kind of tidy resolution through adoption or in leveraging race privilege alongside other forms of cultural capital in order to kind of mitigate crisis somewhat. In other words, like whiteness lends itself to the makeover genre in this context. But also centering whiteness obscures the structural dimensions of young people and pregnancy and it substitutes individual work ethic for systemic challenge and critique.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
As I listen to both of you talk about this work and the books that you've written, it seems to me that there is a place here where the books speak to one another in different ways which is ultimately very productive about surveillance and about the relationship between surveillance and visibility, the state and the individual questions about trans rights, reproductive rights, reproductive freedom, reproductive justice. Can you talk about that? Am I seeing something that's not there or

are you both hearing echoes in what you're both doing of say a different take at a very similar sort of set of concerns or issues?

Mia Fischer:
I definitely see lots of connections. And even moving beyond my book, like I'm working right now on a piece that is looking at this onslaught of anti-trans youth bills right now and it is really interesting that it is a lot of white women who are mothers to cisgender athletes who are pushing for these anti-trans bills. And so I see direct connections to Natalie's work in terms of who gets to reproduce and maintain the white supremacist heteronuclear nation, right? That these white women feel inherently threatened by trans children because they blow up our conceptions of reproduction and who gets to reproduce or who doesn't get to reproduce. There are some organizations like the Alliance for Defending Freedom who have a long history of family values and the culture wars. And for them, the idea, for example, that trans kids can take hormone blockers to delay their puberty is a direct threat to the reproduction of the white supremacist nation. And so I really see lots of immediate connections to Natalie's work, particularly in this very current moment that we're in.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Yeah. I love that. And I agree. And one of the other connections that I was thinking about as you were speaking earlier is just the uneven distribution of surveillance and policing. And in the United States, we have the very intense surveillance and policing of pregnancy and the criminalization of pregnancy and particularly like the criminalization of, for example, pregnancy loss. And the people who tend to be incarcerated and arrested and interrogated for pregnancy loss are not wealthy white straight married women. They are single women. They are women of color. They are recent immigrants. Some of them struggle with substance abuse. They live in poverty. There are a number of documentaries actually coming out about this right now and Lynn Paltrow has done and The National Advocates for Pregnant Women is doing a lot of work on this. But as we've seen a kind of uptick in laws that kind of define and codify legal personhood, what we've seen is the erosion of the fundamental human rights of pregnant people and people who bear children and the people who have borne the brunt of those laws are the most vulnerable pregnant people in our culture.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
I study political communication, political rhetoric. And as you were talking about the unevenness of surveillance, I'm thinking there's also an unevenness in legislation. We have massive problems in this country and yet there's these whack job state legislators all over the country who seem most concerned that a single trans athlete might be on a softball team or something. That unevenness thing is really an important insight. And as we all sit here as rhetorical communication critics, critical scholars, humanists basically, and here's the big communication matters question,

right? Because you're tackling such important issues, trans rights, reproductive justice, trans justice, you name it. What can our background as critical communication scholars, how do you think that that works well to advance that notion of justice and rights and seeking to address these societal problems? How does communication matter in those big fights?

Mia Fischer:
So I think you brought something up earlier that who actually knows someone who's trans in their lives, right? You have a community member, a family member, a friend who identifies as trans. And when we look at statistics and surveys, a lot of Americans, the majority of them doesn't actually have a trans person in their lives. So all they know about trans people is still through the media and through media representations. And so I think we really can't underestimate how important these media representations still are and the types of narratives that they tell about trans people especially right now. Again, there's so much fear-mongering. There's so much misinformation, outrageous information out there that is really fueling sort of this public debate, this alleged crisis. And so a lot of people still rely on media to tell them about trans folks. And so this onslaught of bills that we're encountering right now really can't be separated from some of these long-standing tropes that have been told over and over about trans people, that they're just, especially trans women are allegedly just masquerading as men to infiltrate women's spaces and to take over women's sports. And so we need to protect women's sports. And these are all these narratives that are really circulating right now. So I see my role as a critical communication and media study scholar or the importance of my work is really dissecting and analyzing this media coverage and bringing to light that what we see there isn't always really the best representation. The information isn't always accurate. You can't just rely and watch Tucker Carlson on *Fox News* and what's happening there in terms of stigmatizing and characterizing trans people as rapists and as again, taking over women's sports. So it's really my role as a scholar to dissect these narratives and these stories that are being told and to really also advocate for change, right? And so I don't see my role as a scholar separate from my activism in that regard because I really thoroughly believe that it is my duty and it is my job to make sure that we work towards more accurate and just representations when we look at the media landscape.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
That's great.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
That really resonates with me too. In my book, part of what I wanted to kind of highlight is simply that reproductive violence exists on a spectrum and there are a lot of overt, like kind of we can see in the world where reproductive injustice exists. For example, I talk a little bit in the book briefly in the conclusion about the Trump administration's routine separation of parents and families at the U.S.-Mexico border. And those overt material forms of violence are also

undergirded by discursive forms of violence. And that part of what I fell in love with in terms of when I started studying critical, cultural, rhetorical studies as an undergrad was its deeply imaginative impulse and the way it's engaged with the world that we live in and it offers necessary critique but also possibility. And so not to completely nerd out, but Kenneth Burke talked about criticism as equipment for living and there's a really rich tradition in our field of invention and productive criticism and criticism as world making. And so what can we use our scholarship, how can we use our scholarship to make certain kinds of things visible and then create possibilities for intervention? I feel like that's where I locate myself as a scholar and like Mia, kind of immerse myself also in activist and advocacy efforts as well.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
And I think our listeners from the foregoing discussion should realize very, very quickly why these books were so significantly honored in very competitive I will add competitions for both the Diamond Anniversary Book Award and the Winans Wichelns Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Rhetoric and Public Address. They're wonderful works that make a real difference and I want to thank you both for joining us today on *Communication Matters*.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Thank you so much.

Mia Fischer:
Yeah, thanks. And thank you, Natalie, too. It's really great to be in conversation with you all.

Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz:
Yeah.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
So listeners, be sure to look for Mia Fischer's *Terrorizing Gender: Transgender Visibility and the Surveillance Practices of the U.S. Security State* and Natalie Fixmer-Oraiz's *Homeland Maternity: U.S. Security Culture and the New Reproductive Regime* at a hopefully independent bookstore near you. Thanks for joining us again on *Communication Matters, The NCA Podcast* and we'll see you next time.

Listeners, if you would like to learn more about *Terrorizing Gender*, *Homeland Maternity*, or other award-winning book by communication scholars, be sure to check out the NCA Bookshelf on the NCA website. Whether you're interested in health comm or organizational communication, rhetoric or the latest in media studies, the NCA bookshelf can point you to some of the best scholarship in the field. Visit natcom.org/nca-bookshelf today.

In NCA News, the NCA Executive Committee recently approved the creation of three awards focused on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, or IDEA. NCA is now accepting nominations for the first-ever IDEA Engagement Award, IDEA Scholarship Award, and Shawn D. Long IDEA Program Award. You can learn more about these awards by visiting natcom.org/2021-idea-award-calls. The nomination deadline for all IDEA awards is August 2nd, 2021. Nominate yourself or someone else today.

And, listeners, I hope you'll tune in for the June 17 episode of *Communication Matters* which will focus on communication research related to bullying. Professors Christie Beck, Stacy Tye-Williams, and Garry Bailey will join the podcast to discuss bullying at school, in the workplace, and elsewhere. Join me for this important conversation about how communication research can help us understand and to combat bullying as it occurs across a variety of contexts.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Trevor Parry-Giles:
The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Conclusion:
Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles. The podcast, organized at the national office in downtown Washington DC, is produced by Assistant Director of External Affairs and Publications Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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