

WCC

WRITERS: CRAFT & CONTEXT

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Editors' Introduction

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The words of a reviewer for this, the third issue of *Writers: Craft & Context*, perfectly capture the spirit of the writing gathered here; this collection “advances our understanding of how personal, embodied reality always bears down on our ‘work.’” While most of us know this, of course, the pieces in this issue “remin[d] us that writing is a tool for making sense and coping, not just for keeping our jobs.” We, too, are so grateful for this message, “especially now during this cultural moment shaped by so much loss and grief.” As editors working with the writers and reviewers involved in this issue, we marveled at the power of writing to comfort, inspire, connect, heal, and transform. As many of the contributors attest, traditional academic spaces do not always invite or even allow writing that works in these ways. We can almost hear in the submissions a big sigh of relief for the opportunity to write something more authentic or creative or cathartic than a traditional research article. Indeed, the work published in these pages seems to be a friendly near neighbor to the kinds of writing many academics or professional writers are required to do. That this type of writing is not required for our institutionally ascribed benchmarks does not make it any less essential. In fact, we might argue this writing—the mash-up, the genre-bending review, the memorialization, the epistolary, the queer autoethnography and, yet again, the ever present personal narrative and critical self-reflection—is what we need to get us through these trying times. In a world where so much has changed, from professional and social interactions to grocery shopping, writing remains a constant. Writing is happening. The manuscripts in this issue represent an anchoring message for our readership that *WCC* continues to hold space for that writing, the writing that matters most. Below we share our thoughts on the contents of this current issue.

In her essay about moving forward and memorializing, author Rita Malenczyk expresses, “It’s hard for me to talk in any kind of brief, definitive way about what this essay is. If pressed (which I sort of am now) I’d say that it’s a reflection on coming to terms with what is possibly the most terrible thing that can happen to a parent, and doing so while one is a teacher, scholar, and writer.” The piece is a testament to the power of writing to move us along in the face of the inconceivable. The message is particularly poignant as we writers, teachers, and scholars begin yet another semester shaped by overlapping pandemics. As a reviewer remarked, “We need stories like



Our Open Journal System (OJS) platform is maintained at the University of Oklahoma. We’d like to acknowledge that site as supportive, but also troubling. Oklahoma is home to 39 tribal nations, each of which has a distinctive culture, history, and government. We acknowledge that the history of the university and the state represents settler colonialism and remains in tension with what we now understand about the lands proclaimed “unassigned” and opened for white settlement in 1889.



Cover Photo Credit

Cedar Marie is an Assistant Professor of Art and a Faculty Fellow at the Center for Writing Excellence at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. Her experience of writing is as much a sculptural process as it is an intellectual one. There is a physicality with writing—she physically cuts up sentences and paragraphs and assembles them on the floor or curates a storyboard. In the cover photograph, text and images of a manuscript are arranged on a wall in her studio as she develops her book-length study of the women who fish in Sitka, Alaska.

this as we go about the ordinariness of academic life: deadlines, teaching assignments, committee meetings, publishing goals and deferments. We need to better account for how all of this stuff gets tangled up with grief, becomes background to grief, saves us from our thoughts when grief is too much.”

Lisa Lebduška contributes a lovely and disruptive reconsideration of the kinds of writing advice many of us have received from our professors in her essay “Refusing to Kill My Darlings.” We think her caution is important to hear: the clichéd expressions we pass along to writers must be examined for the ways they reproduce epistemic injustice. We must take care, as teachers and editors, when calling for revision that erases rather than reveals identities; revision can be the power tool of elite English rather than a way for writers to learn more about why they want to say what they want to say. One reviewer remarked, “[This essay] helped me make connections we don’t often make between ‘creative writing’ (however we define that), academic writing, craft, and whiteness.”

Paula Schumacher’s “On Becoming a Research Geek” reveals the infrastructure necessary to develop a novel that includes historically reliable material and characters. Anyone who thinks a fantasy or science-fiction novel is made up of whatever cleverness a writer simply pulls from their imagination may be surprised at the level of intentionality and detail needed in constructing such tales. This piece is not just a reflection on an individual writing process but is also a helpful example that budding fiction writers might appreciate as they go about world building. One reviewer told us, “I really enjoyed reading about an actual writer’s actual research process,” and we hope you will too.

In “Exploring the Diversity of Everyday Experiences through the Humans of the University of Wisconsin-Stout Facebook Assignment,” Genesee M. Carter reflects on an assignment she developed to teach predominantly white students about “the diversity of everyday experiences.” Written in the form of a “mash-up genre” that blends the personal essay and research writing, Carter critically considers how her transformation from an evangelical Christian Republican to a non-Christian liberal progressive shaped assignment design and pedagogy. Carter’s piece is an invigorating call to double down on our efforts as educators at all levels to attend to the role of “difference” in teaching and learning. Carter’s willingness to be vulnerable and transparent about her personal journey compels ongoing individual and collective consideration of how political and religious beliefs shape curriculum and to what effect.

Through critical personal narrative, Sarah Keeton explores how identity is negotiated at the site of their Black, queer body. They use autoethnography as a method to record their lived experiences in the context of the social, cultural, and political world, as this writing explores their experiences with the education system and how their identities and experiences have influenced how they interact with the world, their perception of self, and their relationship

with writing. Through critical self-reflection, Keeton describes how embodying an ethic of love and experiencing supportive role models within the education system allows students to resist racist indoctrination and find their way to embodying healing and Black self-love. We, as editors, believe this essay is a gift.

Continuing in the spirit of Pauline Baird’s genre-bending book review published in *WCCJ* V2 n1, Shenita Denson takes a creative approach to her review of Louis M. Maraj’s (2020) *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*, crafting her reflections on the book in relation to her experiences as a Black doctoral student, college lecturer, and former student affairs professional in predominantly white spaces. In the words of one reviewer, Denson’s “voice is present and powerful,” but not as a pompous critic, which is often the case in book reviews. Instead, Denson falls in step with Maraj as a fellow runner (to continue a metaphor from the review), passing the baton, forwarding the progress of a swelling movement, demonstrating and amplifying the insights and intentions at the heart of a collective transformative effort.

As we begin a new academic year, the uncertainty associated with the delta variant of COVID prompts us to assess our personal and individual commitments to community.

How might trauma and grief be processed differently if we truly worked in community and cared about the collective? How does an individual decision to not be vaccinated (in cases where someone could be) change the spaces where we meet—both in person and online? How can our writing bring a renewed sense of acting for the greater good?

Perhaps getting involved with us, with this journal, is one way to work in community to support the kinds of healing and meaning making writing can foster. Let us know if you’d like to be a writing mentor, reviewer, or author—or all three. We welcome more heads, hearts, and hands around the project of publishing work about writers and their writing.

**Thank you -
Reviewers V2.2**

Cedric Burrows
Tamika Carey
Caroline Dadas
Maria Chaves Daza
Laura Gibbs
Mara Lee Grayson
Tammie Kennedy
Carmen Kynard
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Five Pictures of My Son

Rita Malenczyk

This essay addresses suicide and family grief and may be emotionally upsetting to some readers.

Rita Malenczyk is professor of English and director of the writing program and writing center at Eastern Connecticut State University. Her scholarship and other writing has appeared in numerous journals and edited collections. She has edited or co-edited three books, including *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators* (Parlor Press, 2016) and, with Susan Miller-Cochran, Elizabeth Wardle, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, *Composition, Rhetoric, and Disciplinarity* (Utah State University Press, 2018).

In the photo my son Pete lifts the red racing bike above his head, face toward the sky, strength in his muscles, victory in his pose. The photo closes the story the Key West TV station ran about his bike ride: he pedaled 200 miles in 24 hours from Boca Raton to the southernmost point of the Keys to raise money for mental health, suicide prevention, and youth hockey. You can see, on his right arm, the tattoo he got in memory of a friend who died unexpectedly after a seizure. A tattoo for his brother Nick is on his left wrist—the number 20, along with the time shown on the clock when Nick scored the winning goal in the state championship game. Pete also sports the number 20 on the back of his bike jersey. That does not show up in the picture.

“What do we need it for?” my husband, Bruce, asked the funeral director when she said the death certificate was included in the price of the package. Apparently you need it for all sorts of things: taking someone off your cell-phone contract, for instance. Or off your health insurance—though the person in human resources eventually said, after I’d faxed it to her, that it was okay, she’d found the obituary and would use that instead. I had gone to great lengths to avoid looking at the certificate, copying it face down on the English Department copier, turning my head away while the machine did its work. I made sure to keep it folded up when I brought it to the cell phone company to turn in Nick’s phone and ask that he be taken off our plan. It was Bruce who brought the laptop to donate to the high school, giving it directly to the superintendent, asking that it be wiped clean and refurbished so another student could use it. The laptop was a recent model; Nick had graduated less than two years earlier.

I hadn’t taught first-year students in a while; my department chair and dean reassigned the writing class I was supposed to teach that January, and after that I happened to have other courses assigned: a sophomore-level course, my senior seminar. But I wanted to return to teaching first-years, so there I was in fall 2020, trying to resume my life as it had been before. The class was socially distanced because of the pandemic; my students were separated, six feet apart, in a cavernous computer lab that made



Abstract

It’s hard for me to talk in any kind of brief, definitive way about what this essay is. If pressed (which I sort of am now) I’d say that it’s a reflection on coming to terms with what is possibly the most terrible thing that can happen to a parent, and doing so while one is a teacher, scholar, and writer. It is also, for me, a way of moving forward, of memorializing my son while trying to find meaning in the things I’ve always done but which have changed in their significance now, in ways I’m not yet sure I can name.

Keywords

suicide, teaching, writing

discussion pretty much impossible. There was no way I could set up small-group discussion, walk around the classroom, comment on students' writing and answer questions as they composed at the computers. Yet I needed them to know that I was available, that I wanted them to be writers just as I wanted to go back to writing. So in the spring I switched to a fully online format where at least I could see them face to face on Zoom, schedule individual chats and talk to them about their plans for their essays before they began to write—give them the kind of feedback I'd always liked as a writer. Because ever since Nick, I've been afraid all these kids will die.

In the prom-night photo, Banzai sits on the floor and looks up at Nick adoringly as only dogs can do, probably hoping for food. (The photo was taken in the kitchen.) Nick's a senior, so it's his last prom. He smiles with both his mouth and his eyes; he wears a close-fitting black tux. He hadn't yet grown the beard. Shortly after the photo was taken he would go to the green, our New England town's gathering place, for more photos. He went with his friends. I followed later to take my own pictures, but when I got there, one of those friends said he had left without telling them where he was going. Frightened—because by this time I was alarmed by odd behavior from Nick—I headed back home, but he wasn't there. I drove frantically back to the green hoping he had returned; a state trooper was nasty to me for disrupting the flow of traffic. But Nick was in fact there, and I managed to get another photo of him: this time with his date, a lovely girl named Rachel, whose long blonde hair was swept up in a bun and who was wearing a real stunner of a dress—not the brightly colored sequin-y things so common now among prom-going youth but rather an elegant black dress with delicate white trim. She and Nick look like movie stars. There's a soft breeze, and Nick is brushing his hair back to keep it out of his face.

I had been working on an edited collection during 2018. I don't remember now what phase it was in when the new year came around, but I emailed the acquisitions editor, explained what had happened, told her I needed more time and that I honestly didn't know how much time that would be. She understood. So did the contributors. I did have to write a few letters for those contributors up for promotion or tenure, telling department chairs the collection was delayed "because of a tragic death in my immediate family" but that a university press had expressed strong interest in it and had asked to see the manuscript.

With some exceptions, amateur hockey rinks are fairly predictable places: dads stand along the boards, often in groups, analyzing past and current games. They often have unrealistic expectations of their own and others' kids, which are expressed in comments during the games. Moms have those expectations too (I knew one who was thrown out of numerous rinks), yet they typically sit in or

patrol the stands, sometimes watching smaller children and making sure they don't wreak too much havoc. Some, both moms and dads, took photos at high school games; some were really good, professional quality. In one of them, Nick—number 20—shoots at the net, and the photo captures the impossible convex bend of his stick as he fires. He practiced almost every day in the driveway; he made all state twice. Between the two of them, Pete and Nick helped win a state championship for the high-school team, Pete scoring four of the five goals, Nick scoring the other and assisting three of Pete's. The bend of his stick demonstrates Nick's power, his grace, the beauty of how he could weave and move the puck and finish the goal, sometimes the game.

On January 8, I had called his therapists because I was concerned about his state of mind; they had, however, already done a suicide evaluation and deemed him safe. When I talked to Nick later that afternoon, he told me he planned to volunteer at the institute where he was being treated, doing various types of work. This was something the therapists had been trying to get him to do, to be more active. I was thrilled. The next morning I woke up to the sound of our oldest son, Sam, screaming for Bruce: "Dad, Dad," and Bruce ran to the basement and began screaming too. I had never heard men scream before.

Calling Pete later that morning was, up until that point, the hardest thing I had ever done.

Sometimes I teach a course in rhetorics and narratives of crime. When the call for abstracts came out for the next volume of a new journal out of Edinburgh University Press, *Crime Fiction Studies*, I sent an abstract of one of my recent conference papers. I thought I should get back to some kind of normal. This was in early 2020. The abstract was accepted, a full essay was requested. I banged out the essay, forced myself to sit at the computer for an hour each day until it was finished. It came back in July from peer review with requests for major revision. I told the editors I couldn't do it, that I didn't have the head space, and I told them why. I figured I would never write that essay; which was a shame, as it was a pretty good idea.

Not all the dreams are bad. In the one I had about two weeks ago, Nick walked in from somewhere looking just like himself, smiling, happy like I hadn't seen him happy since he was a little boy. I hugged him and said something like "Nick, you're here, it's really you," and he said yeah, and my husband came into the dream and I think I said something like "Bruce, Nick is back." And he was, he was back. And he was okay. And I wanted to prove he was real, not just a figment of Bruce's and my imagination, so when my friends John and Melissa showed up in the dream, I said, "Go look. Tell me if you see Nick." They agreed he was back, he was real. "He

looks like an angel,” Bruce said, though we both knew there were no such things as angels, and I think we knew he wouldn’t stay but it was good to know he was there, that he wasn’t *gone* gone. Eventually he became himself as a child—it was something that happened gradually. I don’t remember anything else. I woke up without being able to say goodbye to either the adult or the child.

John, the town fire chief, took the dog to the pound for a day until everyone official—the cops, the medical examiner, the chaplain—had done their duty. Banzai is a herding dog and couldn’t handle the heavy black boots walking in and out the door, the sirens outside, the ME coming up from the basement wiping tears from her eyes. Or the neighbors on their way to work who kept stopping at the end of the driveway to ask what had happened. John also took our son Sam to his girlfriend’s house so he could be with her, called Sam’s employers to explain the situation, called Sam the next morning to see if he needed anything. Later that day he brought some food and a cyclamen plant. The plant still thrives on our bedroom windowsill. John also took care of selling Nick’s car for us; for weeks afterward he would sometimes stop by to see how we were doing. I would usually just cry.

The same week the very good reviews of the edited collection came back, I got an email from one of the *Crime Fiction Studies* editors asking if I’d thought further about revising that essay? They were preparing for two new open issues and wondered if I’d had the chance to work on it. I wrote back. We agreed I could have until late August to make revisions if I wanted it in one of the upcoming issues—which, the editor said, should certainly be doable because the essay was “pretty darn good already.” I’ve been toying with ideas, making notes, thinking about how I might handle this a little at a time, wondering if I can.

Jeff, the chaplain who came to the house that morning, was the pastor of the local Congregational church. I hadn’t wanted to talk with him because after an upbringing in the Catholic church, I was done with religion, but all he did was sit, and listen, and eventually I started talking about what I wanted to do in Nick’s memory. We held the funeral at Jeff’s church, with him officiating, telling the gathered crowd he couldn’t say any easy words that would take away their pain or persuade them Nick’s death was God’s will—because, he said, “No God I believe in would willingly wrest a 19-year-old man from this earth.” There were two other suicides of young men in our town the same year Nick died. Afterward—several months afterward—I joined the church and, together with Jeff and others, started holding a reading group to raise awareness of mental-health issues. One has to start somewhere. Or move forward, somehow.

Sometimes I go into Nick’s old room and look at the stuff we collected before, during, and after the funeral. The sympathy cards people sent us; the tags from the flowers people sent to the wake; the big old stuffed dog Nick slept with when he was little; his leather wallet; his car keys; the tiny jacket he wore when he started playing youth hockey. His senior photo: dressed in a light blue polo shirt and (probably) khakis, hair neatly trimmed, he sports the crooked smile he inherited from my Aunt Mae. I have that smile too, as does Pete. We don’t know what to call that room now.

We got a lot of food when the police and the ambulance left, when the word got out through social media, when Nick’s old high-school hockey team played a tribute game for him that was all over Twitter. People brought casseroles to our house, sent sympathy boxes full of snacks: peanuts, cheese sticks, sausage. Coffee cake, and coffee. One of my friends made marinated pork tenderloin and squash soup. I still think about what we would’ve done if it hadn’t been cold outside, since there was way too much to fit in our refrigerator, and we had to put most of it in the garage. We also got some other tokens: a religious pamphlet about how to survive a suicide loss; several candles; a white woolen pillow in the shape of a heart. A book called *Tear Soup* that I didn’t even bother to crack open. One family gave us a set of wind chimes, and we hung them on the pergola on our deck. I wait now for the warm weather so I can sit outside where they are—because if I look and listen really hard, I can see them dance, hear them call his name.

(for Nick, 3/4/99-1/9/19)



(PHOTO BY RITA MALENCZYK)

Refusing to Kill My Darlings

Lisa Lebduska

Lisa Lebduska directs the College Writing Program at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, where she also teaches courses in expository writing. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming in such journals as *College Composition and Communication*; *Writing on the Edge*; *Present Tense*, *Harlot* and *The Forge*, among others. She lives in Salem, Connecticut, near Devil's Hopyard, where she and her husband enjoy hiking with other people's pets.

During my first graduate seminar, ever, Professor Smith advises, "Kill all your darlings." He leans on the squeaking conference table, making it sway, just as it does whenever someone replaces the matchbook shoved under one of its legs for balance, and we all sway with it, watching him, the captain of our rollicking ship. His gravitas withstands the rumpled weariness of his plaid shirt, the spattered lenses of his aviator glasses. He has published fiction and criticism and a slender volume about revision, chaired English departments in two different states, and talks about Robert Frost and Ezra Pound as soulmates. Before I graduate, he will reach for my hand while I am eating a turkey sandwich, as if to comfort me, but I see the leer in his eyes and pull back, knowing he is married and that I have a boyfriend. Later, I will hate myself for wondering if I would have left my hand exactly where it was had his nose been a little less smashed, had his cheeks been chiseled and high instead of pockmarked and sagged, his eyes bright with life and not rheumy with regret.

But he is a deep-voiced, tall White man, just like all the other authorities in my life: my father, my older brother, every school principal and politician, including every president, I have ever seen. And I am White, too. I want to join the club completely, to press my advantage. So I drink down his advice without question, the price of admission to Valhalla, pledging never to become too attached to any wording or idea that stands between my readers and me, no matter how much I love it, no matter how hard I have worked on it. If it has to go, it has to go. What I care about does not matter if it doesn't appeal to the audience I assume are "general readers," unable to see Professor Smith, the White male reader whispering, an insistent ghoul, over my shoulder.

Alone at my desk, I strike: ~~The fanfare of face~~ that accompanied a woman narrator as she boarded a Greyhound. I hunt sentimentality and glib asides, hacking away at marble and lard, searching for muscle. Words, phrases, and paragraphs lie mutilated and abandoned, and a rush of pride fills me. Once I kill a darling, I move on, never asking "What did I mean?," which I do not realize holds the hand of a "Who am I?" I do not yet see that when a writer changes their answer to either one of these questions, it pulls the other along with it. It will take me decades to understand that these two questions sit side by side, along for the same ride, with an undying loyalty to one another. I will



Keywords

race, racism, writing advice, feedback, violence

mean what someone else wants me to mean, and in doing so, I will become who they say I am and who I should be. At that moment, the ability to annihilate my darlings without remorse simply emboldens me when courage is in shorter supply than money. My family loves me despite their view of graduate degrees in English as pointless self-indulgence. At their jobs in healthcare, they risk contagion, mop blood. I read stories, type words. I want to offer my ruthless self-editing as proof of my tough pragmatism. I murder to create the tidy surface of a barely frozen pond that crackles prettily as long as I don't try to cross it with anything heavy. I avoid discussions that might smash the chilled smoothness and plunge me into dark, frigid waters. Killing my darlings allows me to continue, so when I walk into my first first-year writing classroom (known then by the gendered title Freshman Composition), it makes sense that I channel Professor Smith.

"William Faulkner said, 'Kill your darlings. They are only holding you back.'"

I sound so cool to myself. I fantasize that the students see me as the brash, hip instructor who will lead them to fresh, dangerous heights of literate accomplishment. From the safety of my *sang-froid* seat I can also preempt complaints about grades, which I worry about, having heard stories from new instructors struggling to confer anything but As. Seasoned faculty talk about "managing student expectations," meaning we must teach students not to expect high grades; I extend this advice to include embracing the principle of "kill your darlings." I will get them to accept, without question, what I advise them to eliminate. Faculty can be so masterful at this. I want to manage student expectations about the amount of revision required to improve their work so they are prepared for considerable work and sacrifice. I imagine that if students accept the "darlings" mantra, I can help them excise and chop with impunity and without objection. If they understand revision as an act of courage and honor, they will never complain about what I have said about their writing. I decide I am just there to help them clean up their prose and teach them to accept the brutality that is the revising process. That is my responsibility, I think. I never dream that is my privilege. My White privilege.

My privilege allows me to avoid thinking about what revising takes *out* of all writers. Or, more precisely, it especially allows me not to think about what revising takes out of writers who do not share my background, who are not me. I don't stop to think about how the comment contributes to the dehumanization and marginalization Black students endure as a result of their education in the United States from the time they are very young. Throughout their schooling, as researcher April Baker-Bell has documented, Black students perpetually negotiate their linguistic and racial identities, traversing multiple contexts that often threaten their sense of self-worth. Too often, Baker-Bell notes, Black students internalize their educational marginalization. A comment such as "kill your darlings" serves only to further marginalize students, as it says

what they care most about (their "darlings") must die by their own hands if they wish to succeed.

All revision involves a certain level of savagery: something that seemed logical or pertinent or funny or beautiful at some point gets moved or altered or maimed or exiled. At its gentlest, most fecund, the act comes from within, guided by an inner editor or even an outside reader whose insight we value and trust. But the process nevertheless demands fortitude, strengthened by the confidence (perhaps even past knowledge) that we are creating, discovering, excavating towards a better result. When I decree "kill your darlings" to another writer—particularly to a novice writer—I am rendering myself insensate to the ferocity of revision and pretending my reading of a student work is context free. I am using context, but it is the context of my White life, drowning out the contexts of my students' lives. Such tone deafness ignores the sage advice of scholars such as Ira E. Murray and Adam Alvarez, who explain the importance of tending to identity in student development, which includes the need for "educators [to] deepen their knowledge of sociopolitical histories of their students' communities and the people who make up those communities" (17). "Kill your darlings" prevents students both from saying who they are and from growing into the fullness of their own humanity. By making their essays more suitable for "the academy," I am insisting that students make their essays palatable to a White academy.

Comments such as "kill your darlings" lurk within the writing assessment "ecology" that Asao Inoue describes, reproducing a "political, cultural, linguistic, and economic dominance for White people" (8). This restrictive ecology is a calcified network that does not expand to embrace or celebrate that which is not already present, that which does not fit into a preordained idea about acceptable expression. It rejects anything that does not help it reproduce itself. In order to "kill their darlings" based on my assessment, students suffocate parts of themselves, whether it is a word, phrase, or sentence; a claim or an image. Under the guise of rigor, "kill your darlings" burrows into the contemporary racism Baker-Bell, Tamara Butler and Lamar Johnson describe as "covertly etched within the American fabric [that has supplanted] black bodies hanging from trees and bearing the brunt of fire hoses" (117). Wielded over and over, handed down from generation of White professor to generation of White professor, the phrase becomes a cultural practice that normalizes White privilege. There are two problematic moves with "kill your darlings," then: one concerns what material we advise students to excise; the other involves the language of the message itself—everything that lies behind this violent aphorism of creative writing lore.

Writing instructors often take comfort in the restorative and affirming potential of writing, yet when they use the dismissive cliché "kill your darlings," they extinguish parts of student experience and identity. Regardless of intention, when White instructors adjure writers to "kill their darlings," they participate in a form of cultural violence known as "spirit murdering," a phrase writer Bettina

L. Love, borrowing from legal scholar Patricia Williams, uses to explain the ways racialized trauma extends beyond physical violence to attack the psyche and psychological well-being of people of color. “Spirit murdering,” Love explains, deprives students of color of the potential safety and sanctity of the classroom space. Even if they are not under physical attack, their psyches are under assault from messages telling them they are not right, not enough, not visible. This threat quakes the psychic house all writers must inhabit in order to write. Imagine knocking on the door of a room that will open itself to you only if you can transform yourself into someone else, if you can enter masked, as someone who is not completely and entirely you—an admission ticket with the highest of all possible costs. Without asking and really listening to what students are trying to say, instead insisting on my own ideas of what would create an ideal (read: White) text, I am denying them their humanity. Rather than urging them to murder anything, I should be asking, “What do you think?” or “What do you mean?” and “Can you please tell me more?” I need to tap the curiosity that is the wellspring of writing—my own, as well as my students’.

At that earlier “killing my darlings” stage in my career, the internet was not yet the ubiquitous presence it is today, and so I did not Google the phrase. Had I been able to, I would have learned Eudora Welty and Steven King had also been credited with advising writers to murder any writing that blocks the doorway to the reader. I would have discovered journalist Forrest Wickman, who tracked the aphorism to “On the Art of Writing,” a 1914 lecture by Arthur Quiller-Couch that counsels, “If you here require a practical rule of me, I will present you with this: ‘Whenever you feel an impulse to perpetrate a piece of exceptionally fine writing, obey it—whole-heartedly—and delete it before sending my manuscript to press. *Murder your darlings.*’” But even if I had taken a steam-punk journey into the Web, I would not have changed my approach. At that point, I did not care who said “Kill your darlings”; I wanted only a bold affect. I would cling to that language of killing, to the unearned bliss of not questioning for too long.

I had never heard of Columbine. Or Blacksburg. Or Sandy Hook. In the 1980s they existed as towns and not as eternal markers of tragedy. My students were the children whose parents fretted about packing enough Granny apples with lunch. My students had never crouched in closets during active-shooter drills or walked through metal detectors, their backpacks weighted with bulletproof plates. Their elementary school teachers did not know how to weaponize a classroom, and their desks stood vulnerable only to being carved with *Christopher loves Heather*. I said to those college students, “Kill your darlings” because my best friend, a guidance counselor, didn’t yet lie awake at night, wondering if she would ever have to choose between protecting students and leaving her own children without a mother. I had never sat through Run, Hide, Fight assemblies doubting my ability to do any of these things.

In the wake of these school killings, researchers began to consider the effects of trauma on students’ ability to learn, but this

research, too, was inflected by a blinding Whiteness that enacted its own version of killing its darlings. Adam Alvarez’s examination of this research demonstrates that students of color experience more violent trauma than White students and that much of this violence is rooted in White supremacy. Unfortunately, much of the trauma research—in other words, how we understand the effect of trauma on students—fails to take into account racism’s role in inflicting trauma. This failure is itself a form of racism that reproduces oppressive structures. The same can be said about writing instructors who invoke “kill your darlings,” a metaphor linked to White supremacy through violence. Our students of color have been subjected to physical and spiritual violence at greater rates than our White students; a White professor like me who repeats a violent metaphor during the process of revision—which is itself already a brutal undertaking—is taking up the lash of White supremacy, regardless of intention.

In the 1980s, I did not think about the cocoon of my own Whiteness. I never experienced the daily, racialized violence that confronts my African American students, even when it does not burst through the door with a gun. It is the killing that assaults Black bodies every moment of every day, a racism Ta-Nehisi Coates describes as “a visceral experience, that . . . dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth” (1). I learn, over time, that that violence forces itself into the conversations, The Talk, that African Americans have with their children, that I have had the unearned ease to forego.

I am learning to know. I think about Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice and Eric Garner, and Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and Robert Fuller and all the other sons and daughters who have been murdered because of racism. I can no longer tell my students, “Kill your darlings.” Who said it does not matter. How dared I repeat such a thing? I do not claim to have become an antiracist because I see that undertaking as a lifelong project that can never be finished. But I can no longer invoke metaphors connected to murder, regardless of their thrust, regardless of their pedigree, as I try to coax writers to the screen. Eliminate the dross, I say to myself and to them, but never run from finding out what you meant in the first place. We stand at our podiums. Words live, we say. Words matter, we say. Words pump blood and exhale breath. They can carry us. My students’ words matter. So do mine.

When I started this essay, the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol, which resulted in murder, suicide, and national trauma—had not yet occurred. Fomented by the language of violence, the attack was an expression of White supremacy, couched in all its wretched symbols, part of a long trajectory contorting language into a noose of hatred. It is inconceivable to me now more than ever that the language of violence has any place in the writing classroom.

As a writer, I move between shooing away the ego that clings to the ankles of my prose and remembering to ask what I wanted to

say, even when I fear the answer. There's a difference between stubbornness—a refusal to relinquish that which holds me back—and persistence, a nimble loyalty to what matters. As a teacher, I cringe at what I did not know, what I did and did not say, and strive to be open to all I have yet to learn. I want to revise my teaching. Most of all, I want to silence the privilege that prevents me from listening to the creators before me so that I ask about their darlings and hear the response.

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On Becoming a Research Geek

Paula Schumacher

Paula Schumacher has been writing since she was taught to hold a crayon. First she learned her name (which is how her father knew who was writing on the walls in the closet upstairs), then sentences, short stories laden with angst, and poems filled with the quiet wonder of winter in Northern Michigan (the UP). In college, Paula studied engineering, journalism and languages. After she earned an MBA, she found her best fit (IT business analysis) and settled into a work/life balance that included a semidisciplined writing routine. Today she is finishing up a speculative historical bildungsroman novel set in ancient Mesopotamia, listening to music and enjoying art more, and spending a wondrous amount of time with her partner, Linda, and extended family.

After I had written my first novel, *Hero's Quest Betrayed* (a fantasy) in 2001, two events sowed the seeds for a transformation of my writing habit. The first was going to WisCon (a science-fiction convention with a feminist/social justice focus held in Madison, WI) and not only hearing Ursula Le Guin speak on writing but also having her answer my question “Was so much research really necessary?” with an emphatic yes.

The second event was being given Diana Wynne Jones' *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* by my dear friend Virginia Ashlock (avid book reader, science editor, gardener, near miss on becoming my mother-in-law, and direct hit on being a great mentor in all areas). The book was an easy read and provided me feedback on writing fantasy in a nonthreatening, sarcastic yet humorous, manner.

Before these events, I relied solely on my own creativity and memory for world building. I didn't want to take the time for research I didn't believe was needed for a world I made up all by myself. As the *Tough Guide* indicated, I, like many fantasy writers, subconsciously relied on having read J. R. R. Tolkien's *Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as the research for my worlds without figuring out much of the cultural, economic, or even environmental elements needed to bring a world to life.

As far as my memory, I was forever flipping back through my manuscript to find out how many gold pieces I said a tankard of ale, a bowl of stew, or a room at the inn cost. I also had a hard time keeping track of what I actually called things (because nothing tells a reader they're in a different world like calling boots “striders”). I wasn't consistent with terms and had to do a lot of cleanup. Virginia had drilled into me the need to be consistent. She often quoted Emerson's “Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” She was an editor—so consistency in writing was never foolish to her way of thinking. (The full quote is “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.”)



ABSTRACT

This article describes the research process involved in writing novels that provide historical contexts, materials, and characters. Writers will find this piece both humorous and helpful when considering all the planning needed to map out a novel.

KEYWORDS

research, beat sheet, novel writing

My second book, *Beginner's Guide to Office Boxing*, was a foray into the realm of self-help. I did an extraordinary amount of research for it, mostly because psychology was not a world known to me—and also because I needed to be accurate.

The Glass Road, my third novel, was on its way to being a lawless mess when I remembered Le Guin's comment—and Virginia was giving me a hard time about flying by the seat of my pants. So, I dug in. That is what saved me from catastrophe.

This novel was going to be different, I told myself. To begin with, instead of writing what I wanted, I decided to take into consideration what the market wanted. I was playing a lot of bridge at the time, and I wanted to have card play as an element. There are many books on how to play bridge, but few have bridge as a plot device. I'm not an expert at the game; therefore, nobody would take seriously any book I wrote on playing bridge (and rightly so): I would write fiction. Genre wise, romance is not a good fit for serious bridge players. Neither, really, is science fiction, fantasy, or horror.

Mystery seemed to make the most sense—especially since bridge players like to work things out (like how to win nine tricks when only seven seem possible). I know bridge players don't make for a huge market, but they are dedicated (and, I hoped, starved for light reading).

Once I decided on a mystery, I began to research requirements (such as word count). I learned that both the mystery and romance genres have set formulas. If you don't follow the formula, the odds of an agent or publisher accepting your manuscript are reduced. Obviously I wanted to be published, sell millions of copies, have a movie made, and maybe even get cool bling like coffee mugs with my sleuth on them. I searched the internet and found a great spreadsheet: *Mystery Story Planning for Pantsers*.

This breakdown of the mystery made everything possible! All I had to do was stuff all my ideas for the story into twelve chapters and edit to sixty-five thousand—like writing a sonnet (which I had tried my third year of college and have not wrestled into completion to this day).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Mystery Story Planning for Pantsers						
2	Working Project Title:		Story Title here				
3	Basic Logline or Premise:		Logline goes here				
4	Word Count (update this & rest will auto-calculate):		65,000				
5	Page Count (assumes Times New Roman):		236				
6	ACTS & BEATS	DESCRIPTION	PAGE (approx.)		WORD COUNT		
7	Act 1	Introduce murder and sleuth. Hook the reader.	1	59	1	16,250	
8	Chapter 1	Start with drama. Provide crime. Introduce sleuth. Start dropping clues. Ground reader in time & place.	1	20	1	5,417	
9	Chapter 2	Put sleuth on path to solve murder. Introduce suspects. Add something that indicates this has complexities.	21	41	5,418	10,835	
10	Chapter 3	Introduce subplot: sleuth's life issue (growth could be related to theme of the crime).	42	59	10,836	16,250	
11	Act 2	Investigation follows a Red Herring.	60	118	16,250	32,500	
12	Chapter 4	Interview suspects and reveal facts. A suspect flees or disappears. Sense of urgency (terrible consequences if not solved soon).	60.1	79	16,250	21,667	
13	Chapter 5	Find more suspects. Clues seem to point to a solution, but their relevance is not clear.	80	100	21,668	27,084	
14	Chapter 6	Subplot: what haunts or is lacking for the sleuth? Sleuth's personal stake in outcome. Something life threatening, revelation strikes a personal chord or is emotionally disturbing to sleuth.	101	118	27,085	32,500	
15	Act 3	Investigation gets back on the right path.	119	177	32,500	48,750	
16	Chapter 7	Reveal suspects' hidden motives and secrets. Expose what was hinted at before. Clarify the significance of clues.	119	139	32,500	37,917	
17	Chapter 8	Sleuth reveals results of investigation for all to ponder. Solving seems impossible. Consider past stymied and wrong turns. Use logic to see things in new light.	140	159	37,918	43,334	
18	Chapter 9	Sleuth review to see what went wrong. Reveal chain of events that provoked the crime. Realize crucial significance of clue sleuth has. Sleuth realizes error from before, but doesn't disclose it.	160	177	43,335	48,750	
19	Act 4	Mystery is solved.	178	236	48,750	65,000	
20	Chapter 10	Sleuth weighs all evidence. Based on error only Sleuth knows, seek positive evidence to back up still undisclosed conclusion.	178	198	48,750	54,167	
21	Chapter 11	Resolve subplot. Protagonist, having been tested or having grown, is stronger for it and ready for final action.	199	218	54,168	59,584	
22	Chapter 12	Climax. Dramatic confrontation sleuth/perpetrator. Resolution: explain clues and deductive process to the solution. Case solved. Justice served.	219	236	59,585	65,000	

Next, I discovered NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) and improved my writing habit. A spreadsheet and headphones pumping club music over my internal critic's voice helped me write every day for a month.

Personal Information and Goals			Current Status					Quick Stats				
1	Title of Novel	Table Talk						Word Count Reached	57,418			
2	Your Name	Paula Schumacher						Total Hours Spent Writing	16.0			
3	Total Word Count Goal	71000						Avg Words Per Hour	3,589			
4	Daily Word Count Goal	500						Avg Words Per Day	1,980			
5	NaNoWriMo Word Goal	71000						Avg Hours Spent Writing Per Day	0.6			
6	Your NaNoWriMo Health							Words Remaining To Goal	13,582			
7	You're doing great - at this rate, you should finish ahead of schedule!		Days Remaining	4				Avg Time Per Writing Session	1.1			
8	Total Word Count		Hours You Wrote Today	Number of Writing Sessions	Primary Writing Location	Your Morale (optional)	Comments (optional)	Number of Scenes Complete (optional)	Number of Words Written Today	Words Per Hour	Words You Have Left to Reach Your Goal	
9	Count	Date	Enter Your Answers Here									
10	52,012											
11	52,182	Thu 8/21/2014	170	0.50	1.0	Den	6 Getting into Marie's thoughts.	1	170	340	18,818	
12	52,417	Fri 8/22/2014	405	0.75	1	Den	6 Langham, Robert Wilson	1	235	540	18,583	
13	52,843	Sat 8/23/2014	831	1.00	1	Den	7 Robert Wilson	1	426	831	18,157	
14	53,430	Sun 8/24/2014	1,418	2.00	1	Den	6 Smythe siblings	3	587	709	17,570	
15	53,691	Mon 8/25/2014	1,679	1.00	1	Den	5 Smythe, Houghton	2	261	1679	17,309	
16	53,833	Tue 8/26/2014	1,821	1.00	1	Den	5 Smythe, Houghton	2	142	1821	17,167	
17	54,565	Wed 8/27/2014	2,553	2.00	2	Den/HyVee	7 Smythe, Houghton	2	732	1276.5	16,435	
18	54,713	Thu 8/28/2014	2,701	0.50	1	Den	6 Houghton, mom/xmas	1	148	5402	16,287	

The beauty of NaNoWriMo for me is that there are no rules besides *count every word*. I gave myself permission to use the month to brainstorm characters and plot lines, to discover backstory, and to document all my research—everything. It's all one hot mess at the end of the month, but it's all there, and there is nothing several rounds of edits and rewrites won't fix.

Here's a sample from an early draft. I often lay down dialogue first, then come back in with tags, punctuation, the rest of the scene, etc., later. I also put in "notes to self" and highlight them. In the navigation pane you can see I created ad hoc chapters depending on what I wanted to write about that day.

Another change I made was to include friends and experts in my process. They helped me with ideas for character development, problems with plot, etc.

Once I decided to make my Sunday bridge group my card-playing plot device, I asked the Sunday players if they wanted to be portrayed as themselves or have a different life. The housewife wanted to be an international concert pianist but still have all her kids. The retired teacher wanted to be a piano bar/lounge performer. The gay scientist wanted a husband. The fourth player became the sleuth, so she didn't get to change her life but instead

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document titled "Bridge Sleuth v8 Nanowrimo - Compatibilit...". The navigation pane on the left lists several headings: "Roland (Rolly) Bascu...", "X Broderick (Buddy)...", "X Robert Johnson, Su...", "X JoAnne Johnson, Vi...", "X Ryan Miller, GA, Su...", "X Mina Thompson, G...", "Shupar, King of King...", "Wu, Emporer in Jin D...", "Shupar's servant: Raz...", "Shupar's trade amba...", "Walter: worker at Cor...", "Victim's House", "Victim & Killer's Alm...", "Where Buddy got his...", "Climate, time of year...", "Senses: hearing, smel...", "Persian Glassware", "X Buddy's safe", "Things that must happen", "Timeline", "Outline", and "Table Talk". The main text area contains several paragraphs of text, including dialogue and narrative descriptions. Some text is highlighted in yellow, such as "<Barb Watkin's Desk>" and "<LISA'S DRAWER>".

got peppered with my questions about her elegant style, etiquette, and eating habits. This made extra work for me, but the excitement it generated was worth it.

At a friend’s afternoon party, I complained about defects in sleuths (all crime solvers must have inner demons). Alcoholism was overdone. OCD was getting to that point. Did anyone have an idea? We started brainstorming, and as soon as I heard about CAIS (complete androgen insensitivity syndrome), I knew it fit. Briefly, CAIS is where a person is male but his body is insensitive to testosterone, so his body develops with an outwardly female appearance. The condition is rare and is not usually figured out until either the “girl” doesn’t start her menses or has severe pain thought to be a hernia (which is actually the testicles trying to descend). Historically, doctors performed an operation and told parents their little girl’s ovaries were cancerous and had to be removed. As a writer, I thought, “What a tormented person this would be if they ever found out the truth!” I researched the medical condition, contacted a CAIS support group, and watched documentaries.

Worried about writing a story in today’s world (circa 2013), I started interviewing subject-matter experts like a museum curator, a detective, and a person with CAIS. Although I have a journalism degree and have interviewed people for news articles, I was worried that interviewing someone for a novel might seem frivolous. What I found is that if you are polite and explain yourself well, people are very willing to talk to you. The museum curator was hesitant to discuss theft, but once I explained the theft in my story occurred forty years ago and the items were being returned, she let go the fear that I was secretly casing the joint and shared her knowledge. Of course I had to keep track of my interviews in a spreadsheet.

POLICE Q&A EXCERPT

	A	B
10	1. original theft	
11	If the art is in a warehouse in the basement of a dorm, who all do the police interview? Warehouse workers? Dorm staff? Students who live in the dorm?	Goes out from center. Keep adding to list, prioritize who to interview, then keep interviewing if no leads are uncovered.
12	How much of a report would you expect on the art theft?	A full box. Especially if was big news.
13	Will delaware let insurance company or KS police see the report?	Yes. Will be paper.
14	Will it most probably be a paper copy? Maybe PDF?	
15	Would university or local police handle the investigation?	University would have the lead, but would welcome help.
16	Museum needs police report for insurance?	Yes.
17	What kind of rap sheet would you expect for a small time bully like Rolly? Disorderly conduct? Intimidation. Possible small theft.	
18	Who has jurisdiction? Art from China, on loan from NY. Stolen from Delaware university museum (on campus). Even if it isn't your jurisdiction, do you lend manpower to the entity that does?	Would FBI lend support? Staff? Labs? Do you readily accept help? Yes, accept help.
19	How do you determine jurisdiction? (Laws) Can another police entity come in and take over? Why? (because it's international issue? Level of the crime?)	Where it occurs. And how (crosses country, etc.)
20	2. murder of Gus	
21	If the killer travels from AZ to KS to confront the victim, then tempers rise during the confrontation and the killer kills the victim in rage (hit with statue, then suffocates), will that be voluntary manslaughter or murder?	one or the other.
22	Call comes in around 0900 Monday morning in October. Grad student has found professor dead in house. Deceased is face up in den, pillow over face. Some signs on struggle (things in disarray). Possibly cuts, blood, on victim. Who responds?	Police respond. Call in report. Do initial interview. Get control of the house. Detectives show up. Police proceed.
23	Interview neighbors, co-workers, G.A.s, family?	Yes.
24	Verify these suspects are valid: family (siblings, brother in law), finder, grad student, odd ICE?	Yes.
25	How do Lawrence Police interview a suspect in another state?	Call. Or go there. Going there is ok.
26	What does it take to get extradition? How long?	depends on urgency. 0-3 days?
27	What does it take to get a warrant for arrest? How long?	depends on urgency. 0-3 days?

The mystery quickly got out of hand. Whereas with fantasies I worried about names and costs of things, now I had clues and answers and timelines and many, many more people. I had to get organized.

I tracked my clues: who found the clue, who gave the information to the sleuth (directly or indirectly), how the clue implicated someone or shed light on something, and where it was found (since I would probably have to refer to it later).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Number	Day	Clue	Finder	Xfer to Sleuth	Suspect	Comment
2	c001		2 Gus found murdered	Mina	Adel (mom)	NA	Adel calls Marie: murder at work
3	c002		2 <i>Mina a suspect</i>	Adel	Adel (mom)	Mina	Adel tells Marie over dinner
4	c003		3 Gus is from money	John	John	NA	Elevator conversation
5	c004		3 Police determined it is murder	John	John	NA	Elevator conversation
6	c005		7 JoAnne from middle class	Ruby	Ruby	NA	Bridge Game 1
7	c006		7 <i>Safe in basement</i>	Renato	Renato	Rolly	Bridge Game 1
8	c007		7 JoAnne died of cancer	Heather	Heather	Robert	Bridge Game 1
9	c008		7 Gus said safe was for guns, but he didn't hunt	Renato	Renato	Rolly	Bridge Game 1
10	c009		7 Gus & JoAnne had a dog	Renato	Renato	Mina	Bridge Game 1
11	c010		7 JoAnne was a master gardener	Heather	Heather	Rolly	Bridge Game 1
12	c011		10 <i>JoAnne's gardening area in the basement</i>	Marie	Marie	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
13	c012		10 <i>Safe in basement</i>	Marie	Marie	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
14	c013		10 Gus had red 1965 Jaguar in mint condition	John	John	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
15	c014		10 <i>Wood fragment and straw in safe</i>	Marie	Marie	Rolly	Smythe house visit 1
16	c015		10 <i>Police suspect killer is family member</i>	Police	John	Robert	Smythe house visit 1
17	c016		11 <i>Rolly listed as Gus' ICE</i>	Police	John	Rolly	Phone call at work
18	c017		11 <i>Rolly knew Gus in college (undergrad)</i>	Police	John	Rolly	Phone call at work
19	c018		12 Attack started in the living room	Police	John	NA	Smythe house visit 2
20	c019		12 Smythe house has security system	Police	John	NA	Smythe house visit 2
21	c020		12 <i>Victim knew the killer</i>	Police	John		Smythe house visit 2
22	c021		12 Killer hit victim several times: weak person	Police	John		Smythe house visit 2
23	c022		12 <i>Kill: passionate argument gone awry</i>	Police	John	Robert	Smythe house visit 2
24	c023		13 <i>Suspect Mina. Low possibility. Love relationship?</i>	Police	Police report	Mina	Report in case file
25	c024		13 <i>Suspect Ryan. Low possibility. Old break in.</i>	Police	Police report	Ryan	Report in case file

I had a "to do" list for my sleuth. Each item had a start (question is first asked) and stop (answer found). This helped me minimize "loose ends." The spreadsheet record helped me make sure my sleuth didn't complete a task before it actually started in the manuscript.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	#	Item	Start	Stop	Comments			
2	0	<i>Who killed Professor Smythe?</i>	Day 00					
3	1	Find safe	Day 07	Day 10	Works with John Tyler			
4	2	<i>What was in the safe?</i>	Day 07		d20 google Art returned.			
5	3	Get financials: Mina	Day 14	Day 16				
6	4	Get financials: Ryan	Day 14	Day 18				
7	5	Get financials: Rolly	Day 14	Day 18				
8	6	Get financials: Robert	Day 14	Day 17				
9	7	Get financials: Smythe family	Day 14	Day 17				
10	8	Find out if JoAnne's cancer treatment was top of the line or budget	Day 12	Day 16				
11	9	Get police report on Ryan's break in attempt	Day 14	Day 18	what was he looking to steal?			
12	10	ask KU History staff and Mina Thompson what happened in February that might have changed Professor Smythe's regard toward Thompson from normal to preferential	Day 16	Day 16				
13	11	Ask Ann to find out from Grad Asst's what kind of taskmaster Smythe was.	Day 16	Day 16				
14	12	Ask if Mina taking care of Gus' dog was reason for romantic rumor at KU	Day 16	Day 16				
15	13	Thank Smythe family for hotel recommendation: Langham Hotel	Day 17	Day 17				
16	14	<i>In the will, letter to Rolly. What does it say?</i>	Day 17	d22 partial	17:ask trimble for copy. Trimble says get a warrant. 19:police trying.			
17	15	Financial packets from William, Noble, and Annie.	Day 17	Day 18				
18	16	William's schedule, was he invited to Gus & JoAnne's wedding? Funeral?	Day 17	Day 18				
19	17	Ask Mina about the gargoyles.	Day 17	Day 18	find out during Smythe interviews. Ask Ann to ask police to ask Mina			
20	18	Get Annie Anheuser's alibi info (newspaper clipping) forwarded from Trimble. Verify.	Day 17	Day 18				
21	19	Get William Smythe's alibi contacts from Trimble. Verify	Day 17	Day 18	d18:Marie gives Ann List. Verified			
22	20	Get Noble Smythe's alibi contacts from Trimble. Verify.	Day 17	Day 18	d18:Marie gives Ann List. Verified			
23	21	Ask Robert if he knows anything about the gargoyles	Day 18	Day 20	d18:Marie asks lawyers.			
24	22	Ask Robert if he (JoAnne) knew Rolly was listed as the ICE.	Day 18	Day 20				
25	23	Ask Annie what her coming of age gift was. Ask Trimble	Day 18	Day 18				

All of these tools were helpful, but I found I was still not organized enough. My story covered about forty years and five states. I purchased Aeon Timeline software to help sort things out, but in the end it was easier for me to stick to spreadsheets than learn new software. (I do really want to learn Aeon sometime . . .) Later, I found having a timeline was helpful during rewrites. This was my timeline spreadsheet.

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q		
1	Murder Time Line (Oct/Nov 2013)											Primary	Museums	Police	Sleuth	Secondary	CAIS	
2	Weekday +/- DAY											State	Area	Event				
3	10/16/13	Wed	-4	KS	actors	Gus goes to Chicago, mails box (next day air), returns.												
4	10/16/13	Wed	-4	KS	actors	Gus sends letter to Rolly: it is over, I returned it.												
5	10/17/13	Thu	-3	KS	actors	Gus google search for art return story												
6	10/17/13	Thu	-3	DE	Museum	UD-Museum opens box												
7	10/17/13	Thu	-3	DE	Museum	UD-Museum contacts NY-Met. Insurance company contacted.												
8	10/18/13	Fri	-2	KS	actors	Gus calls lawyer to set meeting to change will.												
9	10/18/13	Fri	-2	KS	actors	Gus calls security to set meeting to change security level.												
10	10/18/13	Fri	-2	KS	actors	Gus google search for art return story.												
11	10/18/13	Fri	-2	AZ	actors	Rolly gets letter from Gus												
12	10/18/13	Fri	-2	NY	Museum	NYMet contacts China about box												
13	10/18/13	Fri	-2	DE	Museum	Delaware story of art returned.												
14	10/19/13	Sat	-1	AZ	actors	Rolly takes trip to Gus												
15	10/20/13	Sun	0	KS	actors	Rolly kills Gus												
16	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	actors	Smythe ask insurance to get involved.												
17	10/21/13	Mon	1	DE-NY	Museum	Museums closed												
18	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	actors	Mina finds Gus' body												
19	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Police	Police begin murder investigation												
20	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Police	Police suspect: Mina, Smythe family												
21	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Police	Police contact Smythe family, notify of the death												
22	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Am Heritage sends agent to house												
23	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Adel tells Marie of murder												
24	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie asks at work if there is a case. NO WORD.												
25	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie at mom's house, is an imperfect copy of her mother.												
26	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie at mom's house, Trying not to think what she got from her father												
27	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie talking to mom, sees her own angular features												
28	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	Sleuth	Marie tells Marie of murder												
29	10/21/13	Mon	1	KS	bridge	JC dies the murder weapon												
30	10/21/13	Mon	1	IL	actors	Smythe family contacts Gus' Executor, Trimble, about death.												
31	10/22/13	Tue	2	DE-NY	Museum	UDM & NY-met discuss plan of verification												
32	10/22/13	Tue	2	DE-NY	Museum	Museums contact insurance company, it looks for policy												
33	10/22/13	Tue	2	DE-NY	Museum	NYMet contacts China about box												
34	10/22/13	Tue	2	KS	Police	Police gather clues												
35	10/22/13	Tue	2	KS	Police	Police suspect: Mina, Smythe family, Ryan.												

Maybe I should have said this earlier, but I'm not anal retentive. I was just drowning in data and didn't want to get anything wrong (mystery readers have a high standard). And, I work with spreadsheets in my day job. For me, they are a great tool.

After I had a good draft (version 14), I sent it to the chief of police (I played bridge with his mother) for review. He put a tremendous amount of energy into the review, but his feedback was difficult to take. He said my story was more like TV mysteries (where police share information with people) than real-world crime solving (where everyone gives information to the police and they never share what they know). I made myself think of his feedback as research—how the detective process really works. I decided to rewrite the story to make it more realistic.

Another piece of beta-reader feedback that threw me for a loop was the fact that the museum pieces my thieves had stolen were from a China exhibit touring the United States during Mao's cultural revolution. There is no way Mao would have allowed valuable artifacts to leave the country—especially to go to the United States. It took a day for my subconscious to grind out the solution: the exhibit was touring in other countries, and when the Cultural Revolution hit, the world protected the art by keeping it on tour.

Oh. I forgot about ZimWiki. You see, I *am* scatterbrained. ZimWiki is software that lets you create your own version of *Wikipedia* (a very basic version). I first used it for *Glass Road* and now I use it for each book. After NaNoWriMo, I copied all backstory and research to ZimWiki and then added content as needed. Both word documents and spreadsheets seemed clumsy for the task. Here are a couple screenshots of controlled chaos.

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

The screenshot shows a ZimWiki interface with a sidebar on the left containing a navigation menu. The main content area displays the title 'Questioning techniques' in green, followed by the creation date 'Created Wednesday 01 July 2015'. Below the title is a section header 'Psychologist tips' in green, followed by a bulleted list of interview techniques:

- Build rapport. Think of it as just "good cop." Researchers have found that coming across as empathetic causes interrogation targets to open up more than when the interrogator is cold and accusatory. Many of the other techniques described in the journal depend on having a cooperative target, making this step all the more important. "The first thing you have to do is develop cooperation, rapport," Meissner says. "Once you have a cooperative person, the question is, How do I get all the info from them that I can?"
- Fill in the blank. To get that info, instead of asking direct questions, tell your target a story about what he or she did, leading the person to believe you already know what happened. As you provide the narrative, the guilty party will then supply details and corrections. This is called the Scharff technique, named for its developer, Hanns Scharff, a German interrogator during World War II. The technique was shown to elicit more information than direct questioning in a 2014 study. People interrogated using this method also tend to underestimate how much they are sharing.
- Surprise them. People who are interrogated often know they are under suspicion, so they practice their answers ahead of time. In addition, liars are under high cognitive strain as they try to keep their story straight and at the same time act calm and collected. If you ask them something unexpected, they often stumble when put on the spot—enabling you to catch them in a lie.
- Ask for the story backward. In contrast to what most people believe, truth tellers are more likely to add details and revise their stories over time, whereas liars tend to keep their stories the same. "Inconsistency is really just a fundamental

The Origin of Things, Such as How the Items That Were Stolen Fit into Persia/China Relations and the History of the Silk Road:

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a document titled "Persia". The browser's address bar shows the URL http://www.ancient.eu.com/Silk_Road/. The document content is as follows:

Persia
Created Wednesday 23 April 2014

The history of the Silk Road pre-dates the Han Dynasty in practice, however, as the Persian Royal Road, which would come to serve as one of the main arteries of the Silk Road, was established during the **Achaemenid Empire (500-330 BCE)**. The **Persian Royal Road** ran from Susa, in north Persia (modern day Iran) to the Mediterranean Sea in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey) and featured postal stations along the route with fresh horses for envoys to quickly deliver messages throughout the empire. Herodotus, writing of the speed and efficiency of the Persian messengers, stated that "There is nothing in the world that travels faster than these Persian couriers. Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor darkness of night prevents these couriers from completing their designated stages with utmost speed" (these lines, from his Histories, 8.98, would centuries later form the creed of the United States of America's post office). The Persians maintained the Royal Road carefully and, in time, expanded it through smaller side roads. These paths eventually crossed down into the Indian sub-continent, across Mesopotamia, and over into Egypt.

After Alexander the Great conquered the Persians, he established the city of Alexandria Eschate in 339 BCE in the Fergana Valley of Neb (modern Tajikistan). Leaving behind his wounded veterans in the city, Alexander moved on. In time, these Macedonian warriors intermarried with the indigenous populace creating the Greco-Bactrian culture which flourished under the Seleucid Empire following Alexander's death. Under the Greco-Bactrian king Euthydemus I (260-195 BCE) the Greco-Bactrians had extended their holdings. According to the Greek historian Strabo (63-24 CE) the Greeks "extended their empire as far as the Seres" (xi.ii.i). "Seres" was the name by which the Greeks and Romans knew China, meaning "the land where silk came from". It is thought, then, that the first contact between China and the west came around the year 200 BCE.

The Han Dynasty of China (202 BCE – 220 CE) was regularly harassed by the nomadic tribes of the Xiongnu on their northern and western borders. In 138 BCE, **Emperor Wu sent his emissary Zhang Qian to the west to negotiate with the Yuezhi people for help in defeating the Xiongnu**. Zhang Qian's expedition led him into contact with many different cultures and civilizations in central Asia and, among them, those whom he designated the 'Dayuan', the 'Great Ionians', who were the Greco-Bactrians descended from Alexander the Great's army. The Dayuan had mighty horses, Zhang Qian reported back to Wu, and these could be employed effectively against the marauding Xiongnu. **The consequences of Zhang Qian's journey was not only further contact between China and the west but an organized and efficient horse breeding program** throughout the land in order to equip a cavalry. The horse had long been known in China and had been used in warfare for cavalry and chariots as early as the Shang Dynasty (1600 – 1046 BCE) but the Chinese admired the western horse for its size and speed. With the western horse of the Dayuan, the Han Dynasty defeated the Xiongnu. This success inspired the Emperor Wu to speculate on what else might be gained through trade with the west and the Silk Road was opened in 130 BCE.

While many different kinds of merchandise traveled along the Silk Road, the name comes from the popularity of Chinese silk with the west, especially with Rome. The Silk Road routes stretched from China through India, Asia Minor, up throughout Mesopotamia, to Egypt, the African continent, Greece, Rome, and Britain. **The northern Mesopotamian region (present day Iran) became China's closest partner in trade, as part of the Parthian Empire, initiating important cultural exchanges**. Paper, which had been invented by the Chinese during the Han Dynasty, and gunpowder, also a Chinese invention, had a much greater impact on culture than did silk. The rich spices of the east, also, contributed more than the fashion which grew up from the silk industry. Even so, by the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 BCE – 14 CE) trade between China and the west was firmly established and silk was the most sought after commodity in Egypt, Greece, and,

The extra time researching and organizing has added to my writing process has been worth it. I'm much more confident in the consistency and accuracy of my writing. I've also found I can create more depth. In *The Glass Road*, I didn't default to "some guys stole some art glass and it changed their lives." No. I knew that one-percenter beef baron's boy and the opportunistic bully stole Persia's marketing sampler—glass as it had never been worked before—and took it to China in 200 BCE to entice her emperors to establish the Silk Road that Persia's economy desperately needed. The theft of the glass changed the murder victim's course of study, his treatment of his graduate assistants, added millions of dollars in donations to universities, and returned artifacts to their rightful owners.

These days, people in my writing group accuse me of being a research junkie. I think I'd get no complaints from Ursula or Virginia.

Resources:

Aeon Timeline software. <https://www.aeontimeline.com/users/creative-writers/>.

Mystery Planning for Pantsers. My source is this link <http://ticket2write.tripod.com/mysplot.html>, but the original spreadsheet is from Jami Gold (www.jamigold.com).

NaNoWriMo Template. Simplified version: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OqvsamQzjVPfyzHW51QCgcYnto84nsn8/view>.

ZimWiki. <https://zim-wiki.org/>.

Exploring the Diversity of Everyday Experiences through the Humans of the University of Wisconsin-Stout Facebook Assignment

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I have learned a lot from this project. At first when you said that we would be doing this I thought it was pointless, but the more I did it the more I realized that you were helping us learn to talk to people. Communication is a huge skill in becoming successful. People who run businesses like people who can communicate well, and people who are good at speaking to others. Another thing I learned was people like to talk about the hard times they have had in their lives. To me, it seemed like they just like knowing that someone was actually listening to what they had to say.

—James, first-semester student, English 101

According to James, the [Humans of the University of Wisconsin-Stout \(HOUWS\) Facebook](#) assignment, an assignment I created and taught from 2015 to 2017 across my lower- and upper-division composition courses and based on Brandon Stanton's Humans of New York (HONY) storytelling and photography project, was to teach my students how to communicate and listen to people. And he's right—that was one of my goals. The HOUWS assignment (Appendix A) was the first assignment of the semester in my English 101 course, the first course in a two-course first-year composition (FYC) sequence, that I taught as a newly hired assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout). In the assignment, students collect six stories and representative photographs of campus members, including students, visitors, faculty, and staff, and share them on the public HOUWS Facebook page. I created this assignment to encourage my students to listen to, to be curious about, and to experience what I call "the diversity of everyday experiences." I define the diversity of everyday experiences as the diversity people experience all day, every day, through ways of thought, ways of communicating, ways of living, ways

Abstract

In this personal essay and research article mash-up genre, I reflect on my Humans of the University of Wisconsin-Stout first-year composition Facebook assignment, which was developed to teach my predominately white students about the diversity of everyday experiences. I share with readers how my positionality, as a former evangelical Christian Republican who left Christianity and became a liberal progressive a few years before this assignment, and the context of my university, a predominately white, midwestern polytechnic university, shaped my assignment design. I include Humans of UW-Stout Facebook stories, corresponding student reflections and homework, and my own personal reflection on the curriculum to empower instructors to teach diversity-focused FYC assignments and to inspire instructors to reflect upon how their own political and religious beliefs shape their curriculum.

Keywords

First-year composition, diversity, positionality, Facebook, curriculum

of experiencing intersectionality and positionality, ways of being in the world, among other diverse lived experiences (see Duyvendak, Foner, and Kasinitz; Rymes; Wise and Velayutham). Diversity of everyday experiences also includes race, ethnicity, and identity, as ways of living, ways of experiencing intersectionality and positionality, and ways of being in the world are different for marginalized people than for white, dominant, cisgender, heterosexual people.

The genre of this article is a mash-up of a personal essay and research article.¹ I blend personal narrative, theory, student writing, and reflection to examine what I and my students learned from the HOUWS assignment and how my positionality shaped my curriculum and pedagogy. Having lived most of my life as an evangelical Christian Republican, I was keenly aware of the conversations that were not happening among white, conservative students in conservative cities and states. While at UW-Stout, I saw firsthand the conservatism on campus and in the small community of Menomonie, Wisconsin. My own experiences as a former white evangelical Christian Republican who did not learn about white privilege and structural racism until my early thirties compelled me to think critically and reflectively about my own (former) evangelicalism and Republicanism, while grappling with newfound progressive truths I felt I could no longer ignore. My ideological shifts paired with the predominately conservative culture of UW-Stout caused me to want to make significant changes in my FYC course design, particularly curriculum shifts around teaching about the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and identity. But I was really scared: I was scared I would fail, make a mess of it all, cause a revolt, and/or get terrible student evaluations in my new tenure-track job. Nevertheless, I could not shake these questions:

- How do I facilitate meaningful conversations about diversity, social justice, identity, intersectionality, positionality, and so forth, with my students?
- How do I talk and teach about the lived experiences of US citizens who are people of color in a meaningful way?
- How do I impress upon my students that diversity is good and necessary?
- How do I encourage my students to seek out diversity of thought, belief, experience, background, and so on?
- How do I use my own personal growth to inform my curriculum and pedagogy?

As you read this article, I hope you will consider one or more of these questions, perhaps with a journal by your side, to guide your own reflection about how your identities, positionalities, intersectionalities, and personal growth inform your teaching—or hold you back from making much-needed changes to your pedagogy and course design.

I designed the HOUWS assignment as a first attempt to answer the reflection questions above, and I share with readers the HOUWS stories, photographs, and student reflections of three students

from one fall 2015 section of English 101,² the first course in a two-course sequence. These examples show students create content with very clear and meaningful rhetorical purposes in mind, namely building campus community and camaraderie, with an emphasis on belonging and not feeling alone. While most students were reticent to approach strangers on campus, at the end of the assignment all their reflections showed they were passionate about this assignment and felt it had changed their perspectives in some way. Students' reflections and process work indicate they want to work on their active listening skills and open-mindedness and stop making assumptions or judgments about people.

FROM EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN TO LIBERAL, DECONSTRUCTED CHRISTIAN

My positionality is important to share because it informed and shaped my HOUWS assignment and course design. I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual woman who grew up in Paso Robles, California, an evangelical, Republican, white-dominant, California ranching and tourist town of thirty thousand residents. I was home-schooled kindergarten through high school by evangelical parents, and evangelicalism totally defined our identity and worldview. My parents raised my two siblings and me with the beliefs that God gave us an identity through Him, which was the only identity that mattered, and that evangelical Christianity was the only correct and spiritually accurate worldview.³ Even though we talked about racism and the history of racism in the United States, we never talked about whiteness, white identity, or white privilege.

I remained an evangelical Christian Republican through the early years of my doctoral program at the University of New Mexico, a Hispanic-serving institution, even though the cracks in my religious and political beliefs began forming during my undergraduate education. Towards the end of my master's degree and at the beginning of my doctoral program, I began seriously questioning my evangelical beliefs and Republican ideology, largely due to my graduate coursework, research, and local discourse. Albuquerque, New Mexico, has robust National Public Radio affiliate stations, unlike the local programming in my part of California, which introduced me to extensive conversations and research about New Mexico's political, social, and economic stories that challenged my Republican-centric assumptions and beliefs about poverty, linguistic diversity, immigration, and colonization, among other topics. As a result of the new-found information, I actively sought answers to my questions about social justice, systemic oppression, structural racism, white privilege, positionality and intersectionality, diversity, and equity and inclusion, among other topics and lived experiences. Midway through my doctoral program, I began to realize how woefully inadequate my understanding of diversity, identity, equality, and equity truly was, and I put in the effort to listen, learn, and change. As I continued to educate myself on social justice issues, political policy, and systemic racism, I also began educating myself about the literal interpretations of the

Bible, the historical and scientific accuracy of the Bible, the beliefs of the early church, and progressive Christian interpretations of the Bible. I went through what ex-evangelical and ex-Christians call “deconstruction.” Deconstruction is not a destruction of beliefs but a tearing down of beliefs to reassemble them into something new.⁴ In my case, my deconstruction from Republicanism caused me to deconstruct from evangelicalism and Christianity, more broadly. Without Republicanism, my evangelical, literal reading of the Bible no longer made sense. In truth, my worldview and identity were unraveling one day at a time, and I felt helpless to stop it.

Deconstructing politically and religiously was incredibly painful—too painful to write about here. I felt absolutely unmoored. I became depressed. I woke up crying and went to bed crying almost every day for a year. My physical and mental health suffered, and I sought out therapy. Rather than drifting aimlessly in my spiritual and political confusion, I sought out anchors, such as theory, research, and pedagogy, that would stabilize me. Two of these anchors were developing curriculum and pedagogy committed to exploring diversity and identity in the composition classroom. I hoped by focusing on what I knew—teaching and research—I would find my new, reassembled self.

THE WHY AND HOW: STORYTELLING AND LISTENING TO TEACH DIVERSITY

The Why: HOUWS and Course Design

UW-Stout, about sixty miles east of the Twin Cities, is a teaching-intensive institution drawing middle-class and working-class students from mostly rural regions of Wisconsin or Minnesota. Students are attracted to the close proximity of campus to their home communities, usually within a few hours’ drive, as well as the smaller campus (ten thousand students) in Menomonie (population sixteen thousand). Local industries are predominantly small- and large-scale farms, technology, factories, and manufacturing, such as 3M, Walmart distribution centers, Anderson Windows and Doors, and Conagra Brands. 86% of students are white, 2% are African American, and less than 1% of students are Hispanic/Latinx or American Indian. In fall of 2016, 3% of students were international, but that number has declined by 50% (University of Wisconsin-Stout).

For the first two years, I observed campus culture and came to realize there needed to be more conversations with my students about the diversity of everyday experiences. The prejudice and racism on campus and in Menomonie, such as Halloween black-face incidents, community forums to discuss racial bias, and noose images (see Lyon, “Forum,” “Stout”; “On-Campus Racial Hate”; Stetzer; “UW-Stout Students Upset”), were annual topics of discussion. As I came to recognize, the campus and community culture frequently stifled meaningful conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion despite the hunger for these conversations

among many faculty, citizens, and students. It is within this context I created and taught the HOUWS curriculum.

Given my own journey from evangelical Republican to deconstructed Christian liberal, I felt extremely underprepared and intimidated to teach the importance of diversity. Like many graduate students and faculty, I was not trained to develop curriculum on identity, diversity, equity, inclusion, or social justice and was not trained in how to create a classroom community that welcomed such conversations (see Gurin, Nagda, and Zúñiga). I was afraid of getting it wrong and saying the wrong thing; I was afraid of creating classroom-management issues (see Hurlbert; Sheets). I was also afraid of negatively affecting my students’ learning, especially my working-class students, who often struggled in academia (see Carter and Thelin). Furthermore, I knew my conservative student audience well, including the conservative rhetoric about diversity, social justice, and identity.⁵ In the summer of 2015, I landed on an approach to teaching diversity that made sense to me pedagogically: I came up with the phrase “the diversity of everyday experiences” to frame diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity as well as diversity of thought and experience, not as a liberal or progressive talking point but as integral to understanding the human experience. I also chose the language of “the diversity of everyday experiences” as an accessible way to talk about the lived experiences of people who were not white, cisgender, and/or heterosexual.

Because people’s stories were so impactful to me in my own growth, particularly through venues including the *Native America Calling* radio show, the *This American Life* radio show, Brandon Stanton’s HONY, and Minnesota Public Radio, I decided to approach my first-year composition curriculum with a semester-long focus on listening to campus community members’ stories to introduce students to the diversity of everyday experiences. I designed the semester around the HOUWS assignment, which came first, and in subsequent assignments students wrote a profile of three HOUWS stories and corresponding photographs, wrote a rhetorical analysis of the HOUWS Facebook site itself, and finished the semester with a portfolio of revised work and a culminating reflection. I also hoped this semester-long focus on HOUWS would create a crack in the veneer of homogeneity that seemed to pervade UW-Stout: I wanted my students to see that not everyone was the same—with similar life experiences, similar beliefs, similar identities, and so forth—to encourage students to lift up the voices of others and to name their own diverse experiences. Taking stories public, through HOUWS and other similar assignments, validates and destigmatizes people’s lived experiences. It also creates venues for more open, diverse conversations that might have previously been silenced or relegated to pockets of students or faculty. Dario Gamboni writes, “One way of ‘making things public’ is to make them appear publicly, to *represent* them in public” (162; italics in original). Similarly, Robert Coles explains, “[A]s active listeners we give shape to what we hear” (19). Publicly representing the lived experiences of campus community members can also

create a chain reaction in which other people feel comfortable to claim and name their own lived experiences.

The How: The First Six Weeks

We spent the first six weeks of the semester on the HOUWS assignment. I placed the HOUWS assignment first for four reasons: first, I knew my first-semester students would be naturally curious about their new campus, and an assignment like this one would capitalize upon their curiosity. Second, first-semester students often feel like outsiders, and the assignment gave them the opportunity to assume some leadership and agency, which are vital to middle-class and working-class college students' persistence and retention (see Ballantyne; Collier and Morgan; Mitra). Third, I wanted students to practice actively listening as a means for developing understanding and empathy, which would serve them well as students and as citizens (Ratcliffe 19; see Frey). Finally, as a first assignment, HOUWS would help my students make friends and develop a sense of belonging, both for both student empowerment and academic success (Stephens, Brannon, Markus, and Nelson 3).

In the first two weeks, we listened to *This American Life's* "Harper High School-Part 1" and "Harper High School-Part 2" in class, which tell the story of Black students growing up in the south side of Chicago and their efforts to navigate family, work, dating, and school while living in the midst of gang violence. I chose the Harper High School series for several reasons. First, my students were recent high school graduates. Second, UW-Stout is a five-hour drive to Chicago, and students are familiar with the local and national rhetoric about the south side of Chicago. Third, I wanted to highlight how *This American Life* uses storytelling to confront pervasive, sweeping, false narratives about gangs, gang membership, and gang violence. I played twenty to thirty minutes of each episode over the course of two weeks, and while we listened to the episodes, I asked students to take notes of similarities, large or small, they shared with the students being interviewed. At the end of each segment, I asked students to share what similarities they wrote down. Similarities included being on the football team, living in a single-parent household, and a friend dying due to an accidental gunshot wound. The rest of the class period included students researching the history of Harper High School, discussing the importance of telling and listening to the stories of Harper High School students, analyzing the rhetorical situation of the series, and tracking local and national news stories about the south side of Chicago.

The narrative is a powerful genre for confronting the single story because narrative "emphasizes the active, self-shaping quality of human thought, the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity" (Hinchman and Hinchman xiv). Towards the end of week 2, I introduced students to Stanton's HONY Facebook page and Web site. To see how active, self-shaping of identity happens in real time, I had students immerse themselves in the HONY page and Web site. Students read the stories that were

interesting to them, and we talked about what they were learning about how the participants shaped their experiences and identities. We also watched behind-the-scenes interviews with Stanton, such as Mashable's YouTube video "This Is the Human behind 'Humans of New York,'" to better understand Stanton's process, experiences, advocacy, and rhetorical purpose.

In week 3, I showed Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The Danger of the Single Story" to frame the *This American Life* episodes within the context of challenging the single stories about Harper High School students and the south side of Chicago. Adichie defines "the danger of the single story" as "show[ing] a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. . . . The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" (9:22; 13:41). I wanted students to understand how single stories—about the south side of Chicago, about Menomonee, or about themselves—falsely define people and places in harmful, reductive ways. By the end of week 3, I wanted my students to understand storytelling helps people "understand what they ha[ve] experienced by getting them to tell their stories" (Coles 19) and "reaffirm[s] the plurality of stories that different cultures and subcultures may tell about themselves" (Hinchman and Hinchman xiv).

For the last twenty minutes of class at the end of week 3, I partnered students and sent them out to practice getting their first story and photograph of a HOUWS. Before students left the classroom, I gave them instructions to use Stanton's consent process: (1) first, tell people about the HOUWS Facebook page and see if they are willing to share a story, (2) ask the participants how much of their face they want visible on Facebook before taking the photograph, and (3) if at any time participants wanted their stories and pictures removed from Facebook, they could e-mail me through my university e-mail address, which was listed on the Facebook page. Then off they went. Twenty minutes later, students returned buzzing with energy and fascinated by the openness of complete strangers. One group spoke with department staff celebrating the birthday of a colleague; another group talked with a vice provost eating lunch; another group spoke with a janitor cleaning a bathroom; other groups spoke with students waiting for classes to begin. In all cases, my students were gleefully surprised that strangers would be willing to share their stories with them. The class period ended with student energy at an all-time high.

In weeks 4 through 6, students, either individually or in pairs, collected six stories and corresponding photographs of campus community members and uploaded them to the Facebook page. In almost every class period, I devoted the first ten minutes of class to talk with students about the people they were meeting, to discuss challenges that arose, and to foster community and learning by giving students time to read the stories their peers

had uploaded. At the end of week 6, students submitted their final HOUWS story and wrote an out-of-class reflection (Appendix B).

The following three HOUWS stories, accompanying student reflections, and class process work, confirm, as James points out, HOUWS is not simply a “pointless assignment” but creates a transformative experience for students to learn about the diversity of everyday experiences.

CELEBRATING THE HUMANS OF UW-STOUT IN ENGLISH 101

Sara and Clarissa: Telling Stories to Create Community

Sara and Clarissa, two white students who teamed up to complete this assignment, collected stories and photographs that reveal a clear rhetorical purpose: to build community among UW-Stout students. Sara and Clarissa were already familiar with HONY and were very excited—and felt a huge sense of responsibility—to mirror Stanton’s rhetorical purpose in their HOUWS stories and photographs. As I learned after the fact, they met this student early in the semester and were so moved by their story they wanted to share it to give other students on campus hope (see fig. 1).



Figure 1. Sara and Clarissa’s Story

Sara and Clarissa wanted to change the lives of those reading our *Facebook* page by creating a sense of community among readers. In particular, they wanted readers to know of the importance of supporting and accepting each other, especially in difficult times. As Sara writes in her reflection, she wanted to develop “a sense of community” through her posts because “people need people.” Sara writes,

I know from personal experience that when things are difficult it is so helpful when there are other people that had similar experiences. It is for those reasons I shared my friend’s coming out story. I want people to feel less alone. I also shared some stories because I wanted the readers to know there’s more than meets the eye. I would like people to be more aware that what we see every day from people is just a scratch on the surface, people are incredibly and undeniably complex. You can’t tell from a first encounter exactly what kind of things a person has experience.

Similarly, Clarissa writes in her reflection,

My goal for this project was originally to just do what I had to do so I could get a good grade, but after the practice run, I realized that there’s a lot of people at Stout with interesting stories to tell. Then my main focus shifted to wanting to share people’s stories. I wanted to be able to give *Facebook*

“When I came out to my parents I left a letter on their bed before I left for school. I was super nervous all day. My mom picked me up from school that day and she didn’t talk at all, the entire ride home was silent. That night my parents confronted me and basically told me it wasn’t real. They ostracized me and I just instead started going into myself and not really having anything to do with any people. I would try to have conversations with them and try to bring up normal conversations and they didn’t want to talk about anything so I just finally stopped talking to them after a while. Every day when I would come home from school I would just go outside and walk around and cry and cry and cry for like two hours. After my 17th birthday I started getting depressed and I wouldn’t talk to anybody at school and my grades started slipping and my parents started yelling at me, which was the only thing they would talk about and I lost a friend because she moved away. She was the main support I had and without her I felt even more lonely. Then I hit rock bottom, I couldn’t do anything and I didn’t want to go to school and I was absolutely emotionally unstable and so one night I thought that I would just kill myself. I saw a bottle with a bunch of painkillers in the medicine cabinet and I got them down and went to my room and my friend started texting me frantically and she said if I stopped texting her she was going to call the police and tell them that something had happened to me. So I guess in that way she saved me. When I got to school she made me talk to her about it and talk to a counselor about it and after that things started getting better. Four months after I came out my parents started talking to me again, they started realizing I was miserable. They actually didn’t know I was going to commit suicide. They actually still don’t know. We never really talked about me being gay. Even to this day they still think it’s a phase, it doesn’t exist to them.”

readers and who ever visit the Humans of UW-Stout page an insight into people lives. I want readers to be able to possibly connect with the individual stories that they read. One girl that Sara and I interview talked about losing her grandma who was really close to her. Other people who have loss someone close could read her story and feel connected. We also had stories about going through hardships as a way to let other people know they aren't alone. We also wanted to share stories about good things that are going on in someone's life to possibly lift someone else's spirit.

Throughout the HOUWS assignment, Sara and Clarissa's stories focused on developing community support and the need for connection while highlighting the diverse lived experiences of UW-Stout students. Krista Ratcliffe writes, "[W]e also have to listen to other people, not so that they will do the work for us but, as Morrison reminds us in *Beloved*, so that *we* and *they* may lay *our* stories alongside one another's" (8; italics in original). Sara and Clarissa wanted readers to lay their painful stories alongside the story of this student coming out to their family to carry the shared load of the pain but also to be reminded that the Facebook page readers and those who bravely share their stories, like this student, are not alone. Also, Sara and Clarissa's posts shake up the assumptions students make about each other. On a campus where many of my students told me they felt compelled to fit in, not make waves, and not ask questions, it was important to many of my students to acknowledge each other's lived experiences.

I want to pause for a second and focus on Sara and Clarissa's approach to sharing their stories because it was very different from the majority of my English 101 students. Sara and Clarissa sought to tell very detailed stories closely modeled on Stanton's storytelling style. While most of my first-year students truncated their stories because, as one student told me in class, they "don't like reading long posts online," Sara and Clarissa shared in class they wanted to model their level of detail on Stanton's HONY stories because they found detailed stories more compelling than shorter ones. Even though I did teach about the importance of telling a story—and how description and detail were important to creating reader engagement—Sara and Clarissa had a sophisticated and mature understanding of the rhetorical and emotional power of detailed stories to elicit readers' action, empathy, and compassion. They seemed to already understand that "people who read longer networked narratives [on Facebook] were more likely to be narratively engaged, thus, they were more likely to share the post" (Wang, Kim, Xiao, and Jung 153). This is just one example of how FYC students take ownership of an assignment by internalizing the responsibilities and making decisions to match their vision.

Claire and Joleen: Design Choices for Greatest Audience Impact

Claire and Joleen, another team of two white students, took a different approach than Sara and Clarissa: they stylized their

photographs and truncated their stories for the greatest possible impact for their intended audience, college students (see fig. 2).

"I was in an abusive relationship for four years. What I thought was his way of showing me love was actually abuse."

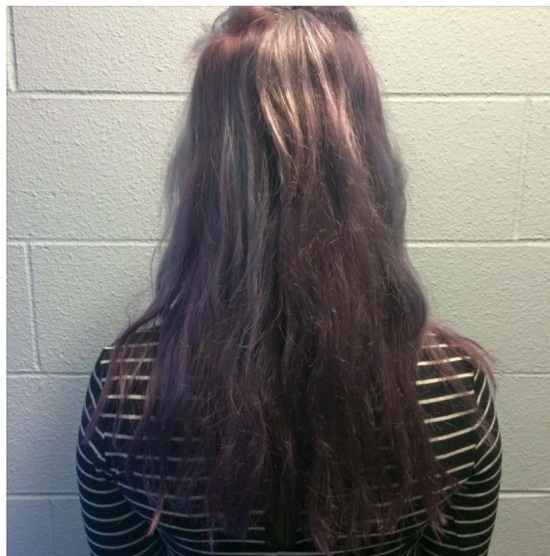


Figure 2. Claire and Joleen's Story

As we talked about this specific post in our class discussion, Claire and Joleen explained they spent about an hour talking with this student, but they chose to pick the most salient quote to capture the crux of this student's experience. Furthermore, they chose to stylize the student in the photograph: they asked her to turn her back to the camera because they wanted to capture the facelessness of this student to visually represent how she felt in her abusive relationship. They also asked her to stand against a concrete interior wall to evoke feelings of "impassability" and "confinement," which were feelings the student experienced while in her abusive relationship. Even though I originally asked students to not truncate stories or overly stylize photographs, Claire and Joleen seized their rhetorical agency as audience-aware content creators who understood the discourse moves necessary to capture their audience's attention (Gee 4).

Claire and Joleen did not write about this student's story in their reflections, but they did write about their own rhetorical purposes, which clearly informed their decisions. Claire writes,

I wanted something raw, something interesting, but to get it the person must truly be willing. What I did find not only was exactly what I feared, but also the complete opposite. I found that no matter how comfortable I tried to make some feel they simply didn't like the fact that others would be able to know the story correlated to them, or simply just weren't comfortable sharing something deep. So they would give me small things, things I still enjoyed posting, but nothing close

to the depth I was hoping to get. Yet, on the opposite side I found those that were willing to share their stories, truly wanted others to hear them.

Joleen, a self-described introvert who rarely spoke in class, was very nervous about this assignment. She wrote in her reflection it was “kind of scary” to walk up to strangers and say “hi.” But the more she “put herself out there,” the easier it got to meet and talk with people. Even though Joleen was nervous about this assignment, she appreciated the opportunity to meet different people and listen to their stories. She writes,

When other students and staff read our stories I would like them to think that they are not alone in what they believe in or what they think. I also think that it would be awesome to see new friendships start because of these posts. All of the stories that Claire and I posted were of people that I didn't know, and some of them had pretty cool stories. For example, one girl that we talked to came from a big family with many brothers and sisters. She fluently speaks four languages and she says that learning new languages comes pretty easy to her. She was very nice and open to talking to us as well. I am glad that I had the chance to talk to all of them because it gave me the opportunity to meet a few new people on campus.

This partnership was not smooth sailing for Claire and Joleen, however. Claire and Joleen had different approaches to this assignment, which created a bit of tension. Claire wanted to tell raw stories for a very specific audience, and Joleen seemed to be more interested in meeting fellow students, perhaps to help her feel more comfortable and connected to those around her. Towards the end, Claire started collecting photographs on her own, which hurt Joleen's feelings.

Claire was so invested in this assignment she became frustrated with how her classmates were approaching the assignment. Unprompted by me, she writes in her reflection,

Though one thing that I found a bit irritating or frustrating was the fact that some kids posted the most ridiculous things. Maybe it's the fact that we are on different maturity levels, or possibly it may be that I took the assignment a bit too seriously. Now don't get me wrong, I feel everyone should be given the same chance to post what they felt was their story, but for a few of them I found myself thinking why the heck would someone post this. Maybe they were trying to be funny, or get a rise out of the audience, but I do feel the students should have done a better job on picking picture and quotes that represented our overall goal of the page.

I understood where Claire was coming from. I admit some of the stories and photographs made me wonder if students truly understood the purpose of the assignment—or if the assignment took

them too far out of their comfort zones and would be better suited for an upper-division class—but then I decided to shift my perspective away from worrying I somehow failed at my curriculum design to believing each story and photograph represented what each student understood about the diversity of everyday experiences. Some of those interpretations focused on sports, career choices, missing home, video games, tragedy, and tattoos. If anything, this assignment taught me students' interpretations of the diversity of everyday experiences would be . . . diverse.

Joe: Telling Black Student Stories to a White Campus

Even though I have focused this essay on what I wanted to teach my white students about the diversity of lived experiences, I want to share the story and reflection from Joe, a football player and the only Black student in my English 101 section, to draw attention to the double-consciousness Black students experience on a daily basis on a predominately white campus. W. E. B. Du Bois calls “double-consciousness” a consciousness that makes Black Americans explicitly aware of their “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals” within white America (5).

In class Joe told me he wanted to tell the stories of Black students and how their experiences differ from white students. He explained many Black student athletes were coming to UW-Stout from the Chicagoland area and were facing various challenges with the adjustment—but there were positive experiences as well that should be shared (see fig. 3). In this story, Joe shares with the HOUWS readers how some Black students' dating and friendship experiences might be very different from white students' experiences.

"Back home I didn't mess with white girls, but Stout has changed me for the better."



Figure 3. Joe's Story

During a small group discussion, I asked Joe what he meant by “mess with.” I was not sure if it meant dating white girls, talking to white girls, or developing friendships with white girls. Joe explained this athlete went to a high school with very few white students, and he never dated or became friends with white girls in high school. Being at UW-Stout gave him the opportunity to interact and get to know white students in a way he had not had the opportunity to previously. When Joe shared this story with a predominately white campus audience, he named the double-consciousness Black students experience as a part of everyday life. He also named the segregated schooling and segregated friendships many students of color still experience. Michael Awkwward explains Black Americans’ “attempt to resolve double-consciousness” by being “initiated into the larger American society . . . to seek both the origin and an understanding of the often self-aggrandizing myths of the ‘more prestigious group’” (67). They “must seek to understand the origins of myths, ‘how things came to be what they are’” (67). Dating white students might be one way Black students seek to understand and resolve double-consciousness. Interracial relationships, sociologist René D. Flores explains, “are a form of boundary crossing” and “uncover the existence of interaction across group boundaries and also signal that members of different groups accept each other as social equals” (271). Moreover, it is possible some Black students attend regional universities like UW-Stout for the affordable education but also to attempt to resolve their own double-consciousness and/or to learn how to navigate white America.

Dispelling the single story of lived experience was very important to Joe. In his short reflection, he writes,

There are to many single stories about individuals, I hope that this will help the followers gain a different perspective and with that not be so quick to judge. If the followers don’t relate to any of the post and can’t find anything to take away from them, I hope that they can find happiness in the post or at least get a break during their day to visit the page and view the new post.

Joe’s purpose, much like the rest of my students, was to teach readers about the diversity of everyday experiences and to combat assumptions and judgment. While I want to be careful about making assumptions about his purpose and whether or not he saw HOUWS as an opportunity to dispel the single stories about Black students, it may not be a stretch to assume Joe saw the HOUWS page as an opportunity at a “counter-space” to “establish a positive racial climate” and “provide informal safe havens” for students of color within a campus and community that struggled with the hard work of examining white privilege and white fragility (Jackson and Hui 464).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: MY STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE WITH THE HOUWS ASSIGNMENT

Because this was a new assignment, I wanted to gather as much information as possible about what students learned from it. Almost every class period included a metacognitive exercise or direct questions about what students were learning. Overall, students did not naturally write about diversity, the diversity of everyday experiences, or the danger of the single story unless they were specifically prompted. Rather, students wrote about the importance of not judging others based on what they look like, not making assumptions about a person’s experiences, the importance of listening, and the challenges of being a college student. In the following section I share the voices of my other students to highlight their learning in their own words.

Are the Stories Going to Make a Difference?

In week 4, I asked students in a homework discussion thread post, “Do you think that the Humans of UW-Stout stories might help people feel more connected on campus? Why or why not?” and “What are our obligations as storytellers, knowing that people can get something—or nothing—out of the stories we share?” Tim responded, “Yes, I do think that the Humans of UW-Stout stories will help people feel more connected on campus because they will be able to relate to people they never thought they would.” In answering the second question, he writes, “To not be biased and share stories as they are told. The way people are able to feel of the person sharing and feel more connected to them.” McKenzie writes, “Yes, it gives you a chance to get to know the people that you may pass by on the sidewalk or even in your classes without being able to make any prior judgments” and “the presentation of the story is more important than the story itself. our lives are made up of stories that usually aren’t interesting or entertaining but they’re what makes up [us] unique and different.” And Melanie writes, “Yes, I think this page will give insight to the students that we all do more than just homework, go to class and eat food. This page will show that we are individuals and enjoy different things.” To the second prompt she adds, “I believe our duty is to tell raw stories. We should be real, we shouldn’t filter the stories. If a student does tell you their life story choose to share the parts that you believe are the most impactful.” Overall, students agreed the page would be impactful, particularly to help other students find friends with common interests, to teach students not to judge each other, and to show college student life is more than parties and homework.

Does Listening Matter?

In a week 5 homework discussion thread post, I asked students, “What do you need to practice in your own listening skills of ways that you listen?” Most students responded they need to do a better job actively listening and agreed it was beneficial to listen to others. Chelsea writes, “I need to learn to ask more questions about others around me to get to know them better.” Julia writes, “One phrase I’m trying to live by is ‘Listen to others, don’t just wait for your turn to speak.’ I know that I need to pay more attention to

other people, especially people that annoy me sometimes.” In that same homework post, I asked students to respond to whether or not they agreed “listening to others’ might make us better people.” Ryan writes, “Yes, I think it is true that we gain certain things from listening to other people such as patience and knowledge.” Erik admits in his post, “I can be very stubborn when it comes to views that are different than mine, I will do less listening because in my mind I know I’m right.” And Jeremy explains, “Yes, it makes us a better person in the aspect of allowing us to gather information and also it lets other people feel that they are welcome.” Whether students are open to listening to others who are not like them, I do not know. But I do hope that by impressing upon students the importance of active listening they will be more inclined to listen to all sorts of people.

What’s the Importance of the Danger of the Single Story?

In weeks 4 and 5, I returned students to reflecting upon and writing about the danger of the single story. I was not sure if they were making the connection between HOUWS and how HOUWS can dispel single stories through their own acts of storytelling. In responding to my week 4 prompt about Adichie’s rhetorical purpose, all students understood her rhetorical purpose. Billy writes, “She is trying to tell you that people are more than one thing. There are different people, that live their lives differently in every culture.” Similarly, Mike writes, “She is telling people that all people are victims of telling and hearing a single story and it could cause a negative effect on people.” In week 5, I wanted to see what students were internalizing about the danger of the single story. I asked in a homework assignment, “What are the dangers of a single story?” Billy writes, “It categorizes everyone into a single person. Doesn’t make anyone original.” Mike writes, “That they create stereotypes that are not bad for being untrue but they are also not the full truth.” While Billy and Mike are not wrong, they do not fully understand or are not sure how to articulate Adichie’s point. Nick does, though: “It makes room for biases and it makes you much more close-minded and blind to the world.” And Mary does: “Single stories form stereotypes and allows people to make assumptions on things they are not too familiar with.” All of my students’ responses were one sentence except Kelly’s:

The dangers of a single story are many. One is that someone assigns a face value to a person, place, or thing without assessing other factors. Stereotypes and misaligned perceptions come into play when judging a book by its cover. Single stories hold us back as a culture. Opening ourselves up to new perspectives allows us to foster creativity and growth.

Beyond students’ reflections, which were sometimes vague, I do not have as many meaty and satisfying answers as I would like from students about their growth or experiences with this assignment. The majority of students’ responses to homework and reflection questions were one sentence. This was a pretty consistent trend I saw across my FYC sections. I do not know if students did not think they needed to write more, if they did not

have something to say, if this was an indication of their unfamiliarity with academic expectations, if it was a sign of my failing to teach students to explain and develop their ideas, if it was the midwestern politeness, or what the reasons might have been.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

When I reflect on this assignment and who I was at the time, it is clear my own apprehensions and fears impacted my teaching of the curriculum. Because of my apprehensions and fears, I made assumptions about students’ beliefs and experiences—and developed curriculum based on those assumptions—simply because I did not know how to ask them about their beliefs, experiences, and identities. If I were to teach this assignment again, I would do a pretest at the beginning of the unit and a posttest at the end to better gauge students’ understanding of diversity and the danger of the single story. I would ask them more direct questions, such as,

- How do you define diversity?
- How does diversity show up in your own life?
- Do you believe diversity is important? Why or why not?
- What single stories do you believe?
- Where do you see single stories happening on campus?
- What single stories can you help dispel?
- What are your identities?
- How do your identities shape your understanding or perspective of the world?
- How do your identities shape your daily life?

I would also dive into diversity and intergroup relations curricula, such as the curriculum available through the University of Michigan’s Program on Intergroup Relations (which I received training in), particularly curriculum teaching white students to examine and reflect upon (1) their identities, (2) how their identities shape how they see and experience life, and (3) how the identities of students of color shape how they see and experience life. I truly wish I had been taught, as a teenager and young adult, to reflect on my own identities beyond evangelical Christianity and Republicanism. Having gone through my own identity deconstruction, I see how important it is to teach white students about their own complex, nuanced identities beyond the single story they might believe about themselves—from Wisconsin, a hockey player, a Christian, a math major, and so forth. We often tell single stories about ourselves, just as I did, and I want my students to know they are more than one or two stories.

The Humans of UW-Stout Facebook page has over five hundred stories. And those stories unequivocally capture the diversity of everyday experiences: the experiences of ROTC students, international students, resident advisors, department staff, athletes, custodians, student employees, classmates, and friends. More than anything, the stories capture university life in a way that

helps students feel they belong, they matter, and they are not alone. And each of my English 101 students took ownership of this assignment and made it meaningful for themselves in some way. Honestly, in spite of my self-critiques, I am so proud of my FYC students and the stories they told. My students were curious changemakers and conduits. One human at a time.

Notes

1 I chose to create a mash-up genre because the traditional research essay is too formal for the story I want to tell, and a personal essay does not allow for the classroom research I want to share with *Writers: Craft & Context* readers. Therefore, a blend of both the personal essay and the traditional research essay allows me the flexibility to coherently incorporate my personal journey and my research findings.

2 All data collected has been IRB-approved. Students' names are pseudonyms, their writing style is unedited, and reflections are excerpted

3 For those interested in reading more about Christian evangelical identity construction, faith, and politics, I recommend Lydia Bean's *The Politics of Evangelical Identity: Local Churches and Partisan Divides in the United States and Canada* and Sally K. Gallagher's *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life*.

4 In many former-conservative and evangelical circles, people talk about themselves as "deconstructed evangelicals" or "deconstructed Christians" as a way to define their current stage of assemblage: they are trying to make sense of what they used to believe while also trying to figure out what to throw away and what to keep, if anything at all. In all cases I have seen online and elsewhere, "deconstruction" always means a leaving behind of political or religious conservatism for more inclusive, spiritual, agnostic, and/or progressive beliefs. To read more about Christian deconstruction, I recommend Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel's *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity*.

5 This is one example of such rhetoric: Michelle Malkin's "Readin', Writin', and Social-Justice Agitatin'".

APPENDIX A

HUMANS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT ASSIGNMENT PROMPT

For this assignment, you can work alone or with a partner.

Using the Humans of New York Facebook page as inspiration, you will venture out into the UW-Stout community and become an amateur street photographer. You will upload peoples' pictures and stories to the Humans of UW-Stout Facebook page.

Assignment Task

You are asked to find six people, couples, or families whom you do not know and who are willing to allow you to take their picture and ask them a few questions. The objective is to share people's stories, to make their voices heard, and to challenge the single story. It is also meant to get you connected to the Stout community and to become a contributing member of that community. People want to be heard, and people want to know they aren't alone.

Guidelines for Stories

When approaching a stranger, you might want to open like this: "I'm working on a class project called 'Humans of UW-Stout' and I am collecting people's stories to share on Facebook. Would you mind if I told your story?" I also recommend you giving them your (or my) email address, so that if they want to change their mind later, they can email you. Remember: we want happy participants!

The stories don't need to always be serious or deep. But what you want to get are *real parts* of people. You can let them say what they want to share, or you might ask these questions:

- "Why are you studying at X?"
- "What is the meaning of life?"
- "When was the saddest moment of your life?"
- "What are you doing?"
- "What is the biggest struggle you face?"
- "If you could give one piece of advice to a large group of people, what would it be?"

When listening to people's stories, either record their responses on your phone, or write their responses down in a notebook. You want to make sure that you are accurately recording their stories. If, at any time, the participant changes their mind, always thank the participant and move on.

When typing out the story on the Facebook page, make sure that you spell check and use correct grammar. This improves our credibility and helps others take our page seriously.

Guidelines for the Photographs

There are no specific guidelines for the photographs, except that they must be original photographs taken by you for purposes of the assignment, and the subject can't be someone you know. You should not "model" the participant, but you can ask that they pose in an interesting way. Emphasize that pictures should be natural and interesting, not overly staged or selfie-like.

You can always offer to keep the participant anonymous, by taking a picture of part of their body, or allowing them to obstruct their face in some way.

Posting Content to the Facebook Page

When posting content to the Facebook page, you are responsible for uploading the picture and the participant's stories. When you are quoting your participants, make sure to use quotation marks. Your stories can be as short as a sentence or as long as a paragraph. Longer stories do not mean better stories.

APPENDIX B

HUMANS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT FACEBOOK ASSIGNMENT REFLECTION

The Task

In this assignment, you will be reflecting upon the Humans of UW-Stout Facebook project. You will write your reflection in the form of a memorandum, and I've included instructions for what you should write about in each paragraph.

I. Reflection Memo, 1+ pages, single-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 point font, 1" margins

Follow the memorandum example uploaded to the course management site. Your memo should include, in this order:

Section 1. A two-to-three sentence purpose statement in which you summarize the purpose of the memo (your reflection on the assignment to me, Dr. X).

Section 2. In one paragraph, tell me what you hope Facebook readers and Humans of UW-Stout followers gain from your pictures and stories. Describe your purpose(s) for sharing the stories and pictures that you did and the effect(s) you want your stories and pictures to have on the readers.

Section 3. In one paragraph, compare your biggest fear or challenge to what actually happened: Did your fears or challenges come true? Or were you pleasantly surprised about your experiences?

Section 4. In one paragraph explain what have you learned from this project. You can write about what you've learned about yourself

or what you've learned about others. You might want to focus on if you feel like you're more connected to the Stout community.

Section 5. In one paragraph reflect upon the three most impactful readings that we read and discussed. Write about how you were impacted by the readings and if they impacted how you approach storytelling, others' stories, the people you encounter, or your approach to the Facebook project. You will need to format your citations or paraphrase in APA formatting.

Section 6. Tell me anything else related to this assignment. You might want to focus on what was difficult, or about a problem that arose, what you really liked—anything you think I should know and/or like to read about.

Section 7. A brief conclusion in which you summarize your important points. Thank the reader and include your email and phone number.

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Writing While Black: a Journey of Self-Love

Sarah Keeton

Sarah Keeton is a Black, Queer, Poly, Trans, Fat, Neuro-divergent, and college educated person. They are a black witch, an Aries, and a truth-teller. Sarah views writing as a liberatory, lifesaving practice. They are passionate about people, learning, and healing. Sarah grounds their purpose and pursuit for justice in love and community. Sarah was born and raised in the Midwest and has briefly lived abroad and in the Pacific Northwest. They received their undergrad in Sociology & Gender Studies. They recently finished their Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with an emphasis in Critical Pedagogy and Communication. In the fall they are excited to pursue their PhD at Arizona State University in Communication.

*[This] writing saves me from this complacency, I fear. Because I have no choice. Because I must keep the spirit of my revolt and myself alive. Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me. By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. **I write to record what others erase when I speak [emphasis added], to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy . . . to convince myself I am worthy [emphasis added] and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit** (Anzaldúa, 2005, p. 169).*

I am black, queer, transfemme, fat, and light skinned. I am a sibling, advocate, educator, learner, friend, and auntie. These are my ways of knowing, of being, of feeling, of living, of breathing, of surviving. And they are all at once created, negotiated, dismantled, and transformed at the site of my body. These identities and commitments shape how I interact with the world and how the world interacts with me.

somehow the stars aligned and i found myself signing up for another semester of master-level courses. i am still not sure how i got here, but my friends would tell me it is because of my own hard work and dedication. i still lean on the truth of opportunity. sure, ~~i am smart, but all the odds were stacked against me and my "achievement", my ability to navigate the system, does little for the black bodies who are kept out of the classroom.~~ see above, me relying on sarcasm and self-deprecation to dismiss my accomplishments, to dismiss myself, a tactic i learned from ideological systems of whiteness, patriarchy, colonialism, and hegemony. Systems that mark my body as inferior, illogical, and incompetent; systems that taught me to loathe my body; systems that define radical black self-love as a laughable, impossible concept.



Abstract

In this critical personal narrative Keeton explores how identity is negotiated at the site of their Black, queer body. They use autoethnography as a method to record their lived experiences in the context of the social, cultural, and political world. This writing explores their experiences with the education system and how their identities and experiences have influenced how they interact with the world, their perception of self, and their relationship with writing. Through critical reflection, Keeton describes how embodying an ethic of love and experiencing supportive role models within the education system allowed them to resist racist indoctrination and find their way to embodying healing and black self-love.

KEY WORDS

Black self-love, Black feminist autoethnography, queer, resistance, complex identity

what i really thought was:

“i can’t believe i am here”

“this can’t be real”

“why me?”

“you’re going to fuck this up”

After the year I had, after the life I had, how am I, Sarah Keeton, still in Idaho, still signing up for courses, ~~still pursuing a goal well beyond my means~~ still subjecting myself to dismissal, erasure, and violence? still trying to fit in and ~~feels~~ change an institution that so clearly doesn’t want me. still trying to prove my worth.

my ability to reproduce white academic discourse, in my light-skinned black body, meant i ~~approximated~~ tried on, and wore like a second skin, white-supremacist standards in a way the education system not only embraced but also greatly rewarded. I was rewarded with access to whiteness and white accolades, every “job well done” from Becky, every 4.0 GPA, every acknowledgment and approval of my body. I longed for markers of whiteness and cherished them when they were bestowed upon me. i shifted, and contorted, and abhorred my blackness. i rejected my kinky curls; i longed for straight hair, quite literally burning my scalp to perform “good” hair. i longed to blend, to fit, to be seen as one of. even though i gritted my teeth at “i am almost as dark as you!” even though i clenched my jaw at “but you’re white on the inside!” never quite fitting. never quite seen. somewhere in between.

still.

not.

white.

enough.

and never black enough.

never good enough.

Each identity impacts how I express myself in different ways. The more I move through each identity, the more I accept, celebrate, and cherish the beautiful intersections of me, the more my identities ebb and flow within each other to create the how of my embodied practices, create the how of my movement through the world.

after my first brutal semester at an institution 50 years behind, in a red state, i dreaded signing up for courses. my experience in higher education has been a lot of me going through the motions, learning on my own, and trying to suppress my black rage from

the ignorant white folks around me. suffice to say i was not excited about taking another course, where i would have to bite my tongue and contain my rage at the erasure that was bound to happen in the classroom. but i had a degree to complete and my options were limited. this degree mattered to me. it was my ticket out and up. this is why i left direct service, a never-ending job of offering Band-Aids to people wrecked with bullet holes.

my people.

black,

brown,

poor,

survivors.

i wanted more for them. i wanted more for me.

my indoctrination into an educational system played a major component in erasing me, my identity, and shaping me into a black person who **performs** whiteness well. i have always been intelligent. Reading, writing and theoretical thought excited me, and I often excelled (not only by white standards of straight As and GPA but also as someone who found validation, recognition, and invigoration in these practices). academia was an outlet. it boosted my self-worth and gave me purpose. i had a dysfunctional, chaotic, and trauma-filled upbringing. school, extracurricular activities, the hopes of escaping to college, escaping menial jobs, doing better for myself offered three things:

1. approval—in a world where my self-worth was shit;
2. purpose, distraction—in a world where going home meant violence and lonely nights;
3. a pathway—in a world where i desperately needed to prove to myself and everyone else that i mattered. that i was better than my parents, better than poor, better than black, better than them.

little did i know i was trading one system of violence (family) for another (education). well, not trading exactly, you never can really leave either one. but education gave me a sense of control, a space for approval, consistent rules I could memorize, follow, and chances to hear a “job well done.”

so, i learned the rules.

shrinking myself.

shapeshifting.

putting on a smile (politeness).

straightening my hair (whiteness).

crushing on boys and pretending not to kiss girls (straightness).

sitting still. quiet. swallowing curiosity. performing linear thinking. high heels. dresses. taylor swift. razor cell phones. individualism. work to be the best. no, better. despising rap music. cringing at my large, loud, black dad. dieting. conforming. (colonialness, cisness, femaleness, antiblackness). Abhorring and rejecting

every.

last.

part.

of my identity,

nothing to love here.

As a young, light-skinned, black woman I learned to communicate politely and without question. As a sibling and advocate, I learned to assert myself with intention and interrogation. As a poor child, living in dysfunction, I learned to communicate with vigilance and empathy. As I got older, my queerness taught me to embody joy, fluidity, and fierceness. As an educator and learner, I learned to engage with infinite curiosity and wisdom. Feminism, Womanism, Black fat Instagram models, reading theory, reading myself, (re)finding my voice, and writing myself—with love, with accurate representation, with role models, I found my way to loving my Blackness, to loving my queerness, to loving my fat body, to loving all the parts of me I was taught to abhor.

despite my best judgement, i signed up for a course with a white male professor i already knew to have pompous, white, big-dick energy.

you know the type.

turned on by the sound of his own voice

every word a wonderous gift from his mouth to your ears

“oh, you have lived experience? that’s cute. I have a PhD.”

the higher ed ~~experts~~ folks around me insisted this course would aid in my growth as a student and a scholar. five minutes into class, my gut was screaming at me, my head was screaming at me, my heart was screaming at me, “YOU. WERE. RIGHT.” you can’t trust white folks; you can’t trust higher ed ~~experts~~ folks to understand what it really means to have **your black body erased in front of your very eyes**. the anger, the rage, the betrayal of a ~~well-educated expert~~ teacher avoiding the word “black,” refusing to name “people of color,” evading the “race issue.” i sat in my chair,

baffled, **even though i knew better**, i sat in my chair, devastated, **even though i knew better**, i sat in my chair, enraged, **even though I knew better**. i sat, shaking my head at the willful racism and violence taking place in front of my very eyes. i sat, overcome with shame, as i witnessed the fragile white faces looking around nervously, anticipating my black rage. i paced around my living room, yelling at the top of my lungs to my sister-in-law and brother about the white bullshit before my very eyes. i thought to myself, **there is no way** i am going to tolerate another semester of this violence, this erasure. **there is no way** i am going to go through another semester of having to bring race into the room while the white faces around me look shocked, fragile, and apologetic for their willful ignorance and participation in racist indoctrination. there is no way i am going to tolerate another semester of whiteness tearing down my self-esteem and silencing my loud, black, angry voice.

despite the recommendations from the higher ed folks telling me to stick out the course, telling me that maybe walking through *this* fire will teach me something different—YO I’VE WALKED THROUGH ENOUGH FIRE DON’T YOU THINK—i am covered in third-degree burns. scarring after scarring, still blistering from the fire i just walked through. i don’t need to walk through another fire to know it hurts to get burned.

It’s time for me to heal.

Now as my life experiences come together and I become more sure of who I am and what I value, I am able to express myself in manners that feel authentic to who I am. I am still policed by the hegemonic normativity around me. It still finds ways to chip away at my sense of self. But my scars, my support system, and my intuition always lead me back to my embodied, loving self.

i enrolled in another course. the professor was recommended to me, as an ally. i remember breathing a sigh of relief at the online nature of the course. i remember sitting shocked at the professor stating she was happy to provide an alternative to discussion groups if they wouldn’t work for me. i remember thinking no, i can sit through a discussion group, ~~i can tolerate a little more abuse~~. i am not going to let white folks have proof of another thing my black body cannot do. i remember being pleasantly surprised by the critical nature of the readings, being pleasantly surprised at the nature of the discussion groups. i remember feeling relieved at the eager-to-learn ignorance of my peers, as it was a nice reprieve from willful ignorance and disregard. I remember feeling delightfully surprised i wasn’t being erased (only tokenized and exploited, i later realized). **the bar was on the floor**. There is a nuance here not many will understand. I was relieved; I was eager; I was hopeful. But, once again, I was trading one form of violence for another.

this course took place smack dab in the middle of quarantine. i had left the red state and returned home. i was surrounded by family, and i was seeing a new queer therapist who was also a

person of color. i was reading bell hooks, *All About Love*. I didn't have to leave my house; I wasn't surrounded by whiteness all day, every day. I didn't have to deal with the daily onslaught of micro-aggressions. I felt relief in so many parts of my body I hadn't even realized held tension. My sense of self was being validated in new ways. As my self-esteem grew and I began to trust myself more, my capacity to suffer through, grin and bear it, bite my tongue and accommodate white folks waned.

as the weeks dragged on, i participated less and less in discussion. i began to recognize the subtleties in this new form of violence. i grew weary of the performative reading material, diverse by author but used as ethnographic research to sharpen white "cultural competence" skills. i grew weary of rearranging the discussion and reflection questions designed to propel white racial consciousness. i grew weary from the "white aha moments" that were known truths of my black body. i grew weary of the eager-to-learn faces, waiting to soak up my knowledge, my truths, my lived experiences, reap the benefits of my emotional labor. i logged off after one class and said to my sister-in-law, "dang, i should be getting teaching assistant credit." i grew weary that whiteness was still being centered and we had yet to dive deep into the material in a way that felt new and exciting and thought provoking, to me.

Assigned writing-reflection question:

"How has Whiteness as a discourse circumscribed your experience as a writer?"

The better question would be, how hasn't whiteness circumscribed my experience as a writer? disregarded by yet another course assignment

that.

wasn't.

meant.

for.

me.

as a person living in a black body, my experiences of writing have been completely otherized by whiteness. whiteness has tightened, restricted, stifled, boxed, choked, and violently erased my voice, the very essence of who i am, from my writing.

And although I still encountered harm in this course, and although whiteness was still centered in this course, I still found respite, I still found healing, I still found allyship, and I (re)learned that my voice mattered. one particular, racist-hate-filled thursday, i emailed my teacher:

"I'm too tired to attend class today, it is too white for me."

my professor responded with grace and compassion,

"yes, take care of yourself."

After this exchange my professor reached out to offer me alternative assignments:

"i am genuinely sorry that you have been bearing the weight of mustering energy to engage in class discussions, and I don't want you to expend energy on that which does not nurture your intellect and personhood."

wow. WOW. wow. never had i read such words. never had i been honored in such a way. never had i experienced an educator saying, i am sorry, i haven't been seeing you, i haven't been facilitating a space for your learning. this professor gave me the space to push back, to challenge, to say hey, your reflection questions are not for me. hey, your discussion questions are not for me. and empowered me to ask, **how can i learn?**

because my learning matters too.

my learning matters period.

This professor provided me space to reflect, critique, and question the hegemonic standards that had been cruelly distorting my sense of self. As i am able to reflect back, i am realizing how performing whiteness affected my writing in profound ways. i was taught that writing was a tool:

- a tool to communicate clear, concise, ideas: productive, obedient, regurgitative;
- a tool to regurgitate the information someone more powerful and smarter than you gave you to remember;
- a tool to illustrate you understood your role, your place, and what it was you were supposed to learn;
- a tool to get tasks done, a means to an end.

And the most egregious thing i was taught, the most violent thing, the most devastating heartbreaking thing whiteness taught me about writing was what it did not teach me.

it did not teach me.

whiteness did not teach me writing was a tool of liberation. whiteness took that tool from me. it stole it from me. it violently erased that fact from my memory, from my essence. it made me forget a truth as natural as breathing air. and now. as i am able to center my learning, as i am able to nurture my growth, as i am able to ask

critical questions and utilize writing to record myself, my story, my truth, i find healing. i find empowerment. i find refuge.

am i creating chaos?
 doomed to repeat the ghosts of christmas past?
 what am i avoiding?
 what am i fleeing?
 shedding the inheritance of
 restrict
 produce
 stifle
 shrink
 erase
 deny
 erase
 my body, my essence
 grew weary
 ragged from the angst
 tattered from the torrential downpour of
 white. right. straight. pass. fit. blend. hold your tongue.
 you will find pieces of me scattered around ivory towers
 my blood splattered on classroom walls
 my bone smatterings discarded on classroom floors
 stupefied by ideological complicity
 obliterated by hegemonic expectations
 and still
 i rise
 from the chaos
 from the ashes
 from the debris of what should be
 a fledgling
 clumsy
 ready
 flying towards
 freedom
 possibility
 the promise of
 it is not now or never,
 it is now and always

writing, in all its forms, is a lifeforce.

it gives voice.

it gives power.

it gives room to process.

it holds space.

it doesn't have to be anything more or less than your imagination,

than your wildest dreams,

than your deepest thoughts,

than your biggest fears.

whiteness fucking stole that from me.

but,

i have taken

it back.

and now,

every word is for me, every sentence is for me, every piece of writing is for me.

to return to myself, to love myself, to show to myself and the world

that I am worthy, I am love.

my life matters.

the way I exist in the world matters.

I am black,

I am queer,

I am transfemme,

I am fat

I am light skinned.

I am a sibling,

I am an advocate,

I am an educator,

I am a learner,

I am a friend,

I am an auntie.

These are my ways of knowing, of being, of feeling, of living, of breathing, of surviving, of thriving.

And I am valid. I am true. And I am whole.

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To my smoosh, my niece, my love, Aria. May you grow up to be a kick-ass radical feminist. I love you.

To "The Directors", Adriana and Terrell. Thank you. Thank you for recognizing me, for validating me, and for roasting me. Thank you for sharing your Black and Mexican goodness. Thank you for playing the oppression olympics with me, for laughing with me where others would have cried, and generally just not giving a shit.

To Dr. Whitney Douglas, thank you for encouraging me, for supporting me, and empowering me. Thank you for being an authentic, enthusiastic partner in learning. My relationship with writing will be forever changed.

It Doesn't Have to Protest: A Review of *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*

Shenita Denson

Black PhD student. Servant Leader. Social Scientist. Lecturer. A Creative. I am much more than that but #WordCountMatters. Born and raised in the American south by amazing military parents, I quickly developed a love for diverse cultures, hugs, the arts, storytelling + food for the soul. My research focuses on the stories we hear and tell (and those we wish we heard or told) and how they impact our identities, relationships, and our health/well-being (Koenig-Kellas, 2016). I am committed to eradicating the injustices against Blacks through my belief that communicating and voice is power. To learn more, www.shenitadenson.com.



Abstract

[To predominantly white institutions:] Whose responsibility is it to make our Black community feel like their lives matter here, and what are we purposefully and creatively doing about it [every day] to live up to it?

Reflecting critically on my own intimate experiences as a Black doctoral student, college lecturer, and former student affairs professional in predominantly white spaces, I share an insightful review of Louis M. Maraj's (2020) riveting new book, *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*. Based on the title, I initially expected *Black or Right* to be some sort of a guidebook to help campuses learn how to refrain from using racist language in their marketing, programming, classrooms, and ways of interacting with campus constituents and community partners. I speculated that it would teach these same folk how to make Black faculty, staff, and students feel welcomed and equal instead of anxious and hyperaware. I thought about the white colleagues [and students] I could pass this text on to, with the accompanying note, "You might like this!," which really means, "You need this." Sigh. While *Black or Right* is not a guidebook on how to eliminate racist language on college campuses or an explicit outline for how to embrace the Black members on them, it is a beautiful piece of choreographed words that illustrates, examines, and disrupts how decolonized ways of writing, storytelling, and ways of being, teaching, and communicating on college campuses confronts, strategizes, calls out/in, and proclaims notions of Blackness in anti-Black spaces. I argue that this type of work is far more important than a Black person writing another book to teach white people how to talk to and treat us. *Black or Right* pays homage to and educates readers on the Black academy's social justice pioneers, whose trailblazing paths and research encourage us to keep running in this race and reminds us we are dynamic. Courageously accepting the baton to complete the next leg, Maraj empowers and pushes us to run alongside him through his creative ability to discuss these topics through literary events, discussions, and assignments he has created in his own safe space, in his classroom. Brother Maraj, thank you for bringing your whole self, multiple identities, and diverse lived experiences to this text. In the spirit of your mother who allowed you to leave the islands to come to the US for greater opportunities - this book is a manifestation of her knowing your worth. Thank you for writing this fascinating piece that reminds us to never forget our worth, to demand our respect, and for educating and engaging all people in this necessary dialogue. Black is right. Black is right. Black is right. But Black folk are always protesting. Dear Brothers and Sisters, never forget: We always mattered.

Keywords

campus rhetoric, Black tokenization, institutional racism, counterstory, Blackness

*I*t's another start of a semester and as I enter my assigned classroom with my locs tied in an African-printed headwrap, large gold hoop earrings, and my favorite shirt that reads "Positive Vibes Only," I notice my predominately white students awkwardly tracing my steps, silently, with hesitation and doubt, questioning who I am. Their curiosity [for judgement] is deafening to my ears. It's a familiar feeling of wondering how my Blackness will be perceived as I first enter a new space, especially in a role that commands leadership. I return to my eight-year-old self who lay on the couch every day at 4 o'clock to witness the gregarious Ms. Oprah Winfrey walk on stage surrounded by a standing ovation. In awe, I observed how eloquently she connected with people from diverse backgrounds, employing transparency, dialogue, and heart. What intrigued me most was not that she was Black like me but that she had the ability to ask the right questions and reveal intimate details about her life, that using her voice empowered others to unsilence theirs. After viewing dozens of episodes full of transformative conversations, I learned that when done right, communicating can be life changing. I was convinced that if I also mastered being able to guide challenging conversations while creating brave spaces for them to take place, then [Black] people like me really mattered. This is where my passion for communication began; I plant its seeds wherever I go, anticipating its bloom. As I introduce myself to my new students and avow that my class is sacred, their anxious eyes turn to warmth, and they exhale. Subsequently, I inhale divine affirmation that this is another opportunity for me to be more of what the world needs and in the front of the classroom — a place where many of my ancestors never stood — is where I am supposed to be.

As a former student affairs professional who focused on [what now seem like buzz words] diversity, equity, and inclusion work, and as a current college lecturer, doctoral student, and interpersonal communication scholar, I was immediately captivated by the title of Louis Maraj's book, *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics* (2020). In full transparency, I was a bit hesitant to dive in after discovering he has an English, writing, and Black feminist studies academic background. While I am moderately versed in these topics, some more than others, I am not an expert. Therefore, I wasn't sure if this text would keep my interest. When I saw "writing," I may or may not have been triggered. Consequently, I thought of the many Black folx who have been traumatized in the classroom due to the horrific ways our language and writing style have been marked up and scratched out with the dreaded red pen. Maraj candidly relates,

In the freshman English classroom, I learn about the (white US) middle (?) class "struggle" as we read Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. My white woman instructor dresses like the kids on *Freaks and Geeks* — a TV show a subsequent white roommate exposes me to. . . .Shakespeare's

Othello features the only character of color on the syllabus — one mediated through the author's sixteenth/seventeenth-century imagination through discourses of anti-Blackness. I receive a C- on my first paper — after three pages, a slash across every one after with the message that the instructor stopped reading there. (p. 4)

Luckily, my fears of reading this text were quickly diminished when I discovered the author was Black. In that discovery, however, I also noticed the unpleasant feelings that rose to the surface, as if I wasn't rooting for the home team when I always want us to win. Let me explain. Since starting my doctoral journey, I've found myself approaching texts written by Black scholars with a bit of judgement. I ask, "Will this come off as another inner protest piece with heavy jargon and incomprehensible ideas to prove this Black author is smart and belongs here too? Sis/Brother, who are you *really* writing this for — us or them?" This judgement is hard to confess and a bit hypocritical of me, considering I have been guilty of writing for *them* too. Y'all, being Black can be so exhaustingly performative, and the white academy has made us this way. My unintentional questioning of Black scholars reflects the master narrative of the white academy that has historically questioned and still questions our voice, credentials, role, and place—that still marks up our work with red slashes. I believe this speaks to why so many of us suffer from imposter syndrome. It's not *our* doubts, it's the white systems and spaces we occupy that doubt us, and thus we [unconsciously] start to believe them.

I also made note of Maraj's academic background because I intentionally take note of an author's discipline to see how readers from different contexts will be able to relate. I approach my own writing, research, and praxis similarly. Specifically, if my non-college-educated parents cannot understand my work, then I recraft it; this is important to me. If I can't understand with my multiple degrees and academic experiences, I'm concerned that other Black folx without these things can't. I share this because as Black scholars, if we are truly invested in creating systems of change, it should be our duty to ensure that those who look like us in/outside of the academy can understand our work.

Based on the title, I initially expected *Black or Right* to be some sort of a guidebook to help campuses learn how to refrain from using racist language in their marketing, programming, classrooms, and ways of interacting with campus constituents and community partners. I speculated that it would teach these same folx how to make Black faculty, staff, and students feel welcomed and equal instead of anxious and hyperaware, like my usual first-day-of-class experiences I share in the opening of this review. I instantly thought about the white colleagues [and students] I could pass this text on to, with the accompanying note, "You might like this!" which really means, "You *need* this." White folx need as many antiracist resources as possible, and I applaud texts like *How to Be an Antiracist* (Kendi, 2019) that are making these difficult conversations more intentional and digestible for non-Black folx.

While *Black or Right* is not a guidebook on how to eliminate racist language on college campuses or an explicit outline for how to embrace the Black members on them, I was pleasantly surprised and released a calming sigh when I discovered it is a beautiful piece of choreographed words that illustrates, examines, and disrupts how decolonized ways of writing, storytelling, and ways of being, teaching, and communicating confront, strategize, call out/in, and proclaim notions of Blackness in anti-Black spaces. I argue that this type of work is far more important than a Black person writing another book to teach white people how to talk to and treat us. Like many of the recently hired Black folk in “diversity and inclusion” roles, who were conveniently brought on only *after* companies felt the need (or were forced) to take a public stand regarding the police brutality protests across the nation last summer, I counterprotest that this work is not our [Black people] fatiguing responsibility. We should be relevant beyond trying to fix the problems white folks have created. We have value beyond meeting an institution’s diversity quota or being plastered on the company’s website to prove it is diverse. You will never hear me say “Black lives matter” because we always mattered. I don’t need to, nor will I ever protest that; that’s white folks’ battle. Maraj further illustrates this notion in the beginning of the text when detailing how his former institution frequently tokenized and exploited his Blackness.

On the glossy cover of the summer 2009 issue of Liberal Arts College’s (2009) *Liberal Arts College Magazine*, a publication by its Division of *Institutional Advancement* (emphasis mine) my image stands out like a Black thumb. . . It is telling that the magazine chooses to present my image and narrative first. That choice, along with my tokenization as exceptional and exotic, and positioning with/in the histories of the institution’s name, demonstrates the deep ecological rhetorics of white capitalist heteropatriarchal educational institutions. . . my image delivers to alumni, parents, and fellow students a notion of inclusivity via race and citizenship status. . . and the accounts of my “success” pats the white institution, its appendages, and contributors on the back. *The institution, indeed, advances.* (pp. 24–26)

Black or Right seeks to achieve several interrelated goals. One of the primary goals is to investigate Blackness in white educational spaces and the implicit and explicit messages used to describe it. Maraj aims to make sense of how Black identity functions in the highly politicized, controversial era of “post- Ferguson”/BlackLivesMatter, and using Black autoethnography, Black hashtagging, Black intercontextual reading, and reimagined Black disruption, Maraj focuses on the temporal components of time, space, and place to examine how campus and community members are demonstrating that diversity is racial. In this text, he boldly reveals the impact this work has on Black bodies often at the center of these practices. Finally, Maraj hopes this book will serve the Black community by telling its stories, help to rewrite the white academy’s master and expired narratives, and

create space for non-Black audiences to recognize why this work [always] matters/ed. He is writing this for us *and* them. To support these ambitious goals, the book is organized into four chapters, including a very imaginative preface that gives us insight into Maraj’s Black Caribbean background, an introduction that methodically outlines the scope and objectives of the text, and a conclusion that makes you snap your fingers while saying, “Yasss!” [slang term in the Black community that is used out of excitement; a more vibrant form of yes].

Creatively, all section titles contain familiar phrases prevalent in the Black/Black Caribbean culture, making the reader appreciative of Maraj’s intentionality and ability to bring his full self to this work. Unlike typical preface sections in books, Maraj uses this space to uniquely greet his readers by writing six different renditions of essentially the same message. Reflecting the true nature of a rhetorician and writing studies scholar, he plays around with language, subtly providing a counterstory of how Black folk tell and write their stories in formal, public spaces and how we often feel like we have to code switch or renegotiate how we show up depending on the audience. Counterstories are stories [not often] told by marginalized groups to reimagine/disrupt/interrogate the master narratives that exist about them. These master narratives are told from those at the top [usually white folk] who are trying to maintain their power and corroborate their place as superior (Delgado, 1989). Maraj’s use of counterstories, exhibited throughout this book, provides comfort to the reader who may be carrying traumatic writing and expressive experiences. His words provide hope and he dares his audience to take ownership of their vernacular and have the audacity to just *be*. The preface makes clear he is being deliberate in his selected writing style, utilizing his native tongue to reveal his intersecting identities and making space for Black folk to feel welcomed within his words. Maraj confirms from the very beginning that it’s okay to let our hair down, to kick off our shoes and dive in. He is decolonizing ways of believing and being in writing classrooms and in academia. This narrative is completely contradictory to the white academy that strives to assimilate us by forcing us to write, express ourselves, and navigate its systems in a very specific way. When sharing details about the first C- he received on his English paper in college, Maraj writes,

The lavish prose I was brought up on in the British Caribbean education system wouldn’t work here. *Americans want a thesis.* Panicked by the high grade point average I need to continue holding my scholarship, to stay in the country, I adjust quickly and finish the course with a low A. Assimilative conversion, then, becomes my recourse. (p. 4)

Maraj allows us to readjust, reclaim, and rewrite—and it is quite refreshing. My favorite (and the last shared) rendition of his greeting in the preface, acknowledges that the five preceding versions may have been confusing to the reader. Yes, they were, and this confusion is freeing because Maraj takes ownership of the space

he has created, and he doesn't care if you get it or not. Black folk are forced to assimilate every day, and here, Maraj says nah [no]:

Word Readers,

You might be confused. Embrace It. Or don't. Blackness often obfuscates [confuses], often disorients, often shatters/scatters fungibility but offers much by way of meaning. Take care. That is to say, like poetry, the artful craft of de ting lies in being okay with not knowing in order to not know.

So leh we mash up de place together, nah?

Later,

Louis M. Maraj

Black or Right's introduction lays out the foundation for the book by providing its ontological perspective of how it came to be and what brought Maraj here. Maraj eloquently begins this section by sharing parts of his own story as a Black Caribbean immigrant who came to the United States in hopes of achieving the "American Dream." Throughout this text, I stood in solidarity with Maraj, giving fist pumps and head nods, knowing other Black folk would also see themselves in his many personal accounts. His stories aren't necessarily unique, but they aren't told enough. Interdisciplinary in nature, Maraj's text connects Black studies and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to rhetoric, writing, and literary studies. As he intimately shares many of his own lived experiences, he draws on Black feminist approaches, particularly Black feminist thought, and African Indigenous methodological approaches. Leaning on several academic disciplines [such as sociology, history, political science, women's, gender, and sexuality studies, digital media studies, criminal justice, postcolonial studies, historiography, and others], *Black or Right* confirms that Black folk are dynamic, with intersecting ways of being, doing, and living, and thus show up in multiple ways on predominantly white campuses.

One of the things readers will immediately notice, and what I found to be one of the most invigorating features of this text, is Maraj's commitment to honor Black scholars, who are characteristically excluded from citations, reading lists, and curriculums, while speaking about the foundation and methodology of his research. The first time I read a book by a Black scholar in the classroom was in college, and I am convinced that was only because I minored in African American studies. I only read those texts in those classes. Therefore, it matters that Maraj and other Black authors are intentional about highlighting the work of those who look like us. Long gone are the days when we only read about Black folk in Black classes, in Black spaces, in the footnotes, during Black History Month. Also, we've had enough of the same old and tired slave/struggle narratives. *Black or Right* pays homage to and educates readers on the Black academy's social justice pioneers, whose trailblazing paths and research encourage us to keep running in

this race and reminds us we are dynamic. Courageously accepting the baton to complete the next leg, Maraj empowers and pushes us to run alongside him through his creative ability to discuss these topics through literary events, discussions, and assignments he has created in his own safe space of a classroom.

Chapter 1 purposely utilizes autoethnography to confirm that Black folks are storytellers and that sharing these stories, particularly in anti-Black spaces, matters. Our shared intimate accounts can be the catalyst of critical conversations. Maraj relates his experiences as a Black graduate student and instructor to the reader. He shares stories of being racially profiled and the center of a university's "diversity" marketing campaign. How many Black folk were on their institution's website or "encouraged" to get in the picture because they were Black? Raises hand. For every story Maraj shared, for better or worse, I had an equivalent one. A particularly interesting story he shared in this chapter was from the time he taught at a predominately white institution (PWI). One of his Black students repeatedly questioned whether Maraj was Black. While this eventually annoyed Maraj, what I found most compelling is how Maraj admits to equally stereotyping the student. Maraj expresses,

Like Vershawn Young, in his article, "Your Average Nigga" (2004) and a subsequent monograph by the same name (2007), I stereotyped T based on his clothes, demeanor, and language. And while my initial reaction to T was optimistic, as opposed to Young's reaction to his "ghetto" student Cam. . . that impression does not make my profiling any less harmful. (p. 30)

This narrative brought me back to my earlier "judgey" questions of texts written by my fellow Black scholars. Maraj's account confirms I'm not alone in this [but I still feel guilty]. It confirms that if we aren't careful, these white systems will allow us to sell ourselves and our brothers and sisters short. It also made me reflect on a counterexperience I had while teaching at Coppin State University, an HBCU in Baltimore City, Maryland. My teaching experiences at PWIs compared to HBCUs or predominantly Black spaces are like night and day. On the first day of class, the students at Coppin were elated when I entered the room and even roared when I told them I was pursuing my PhD. They felt honored that someone who looked like them was leading them to success, and they routinely celebrated me. The first question posed to me was, "What makes you keep going?" I knew at that moment that I was in for a treat, and I was right. This has been my best teaching experience to date.

I further reflect on the recent and public controversy around Pulitzer Prize-winning Black journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, who was recruited by one of the top PWIs in the nation, UNC, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, this summer. She was refused tenure [based on the vote of a white man] and then awarded tenure following a public outcry. In the spirit of going where you are celebrated, she

declined the position at UNC and accepted a lucrative offer at one of the top HBCUs in the country, Howard University, in Washington, DC. This same spirit is reflected through Maraj's words. Maraj doesn't just merely tell us stories, he brilliantly reveals the tangled web many white institutions create for Black folk who just want to be unapologetically Black. He shows why we go where we are celebrated. By utilizing Black autoethnography, he demonstrates how this method can be a rhetorical tool to confront/resist antiracist practices in white spaces, places, and contexts. Our stories matter and who contributes to/benefits from them matters too.

Chapter 2 does a phenomenal job in highlighting the research of Black digital and social media scholars and connecting what is traditionally seen in those disciplines to sociolinguistics and writing composition. Specifically, he discusses ways Black cultural hashtags and literacy events can facilitate conversations on race and Blackness and create resistance on white campuses. Many institutions have implemented diversity and inclusion-based courses and/or assignments in their general education requirements. This is an opportunity for Black faculty members in particular to thrive by being able to create nontraditional, innovative, and transformative syllabi that may not normally be offered in their respective departments or on their campuses. Maraj, in great detail, discusses a semester-long assignment he created for one of his classes called the "Tumblr Commonplace Book," which meets his university's general education social change requirement (Maraj, p. 58). Maraj's overview of this assignment can serve as a tangible resource for faculty who wish to add more tools to their toolkit and integrate critical thinking work into their curriculum. Through "marginalized literacy," a term Maraj coined to describe how utilizing hashtags is a literacy practice of oppressed communities striving for social justice, the Tumblr Commonplace Book allows students to intellectualize and create their own hashtags as counterspaces to analyze messages on and make meaning of Black resistance and activism, particularly in a predominately white classroom setting. He then provides a quasi-narrative analysis of the students' work by focusing on shared themes and associations in a very intriguing way. I highlight this particular assignment because faculty who teach social justice-based courses are extremely important, especially when these classes are composed of mostly white students, as they provide a rich opportunity for white students to engage in topics they probably would not normally engage in.

A possible limitation of chapter 2, however, a chapter that could have contributed significantly to one of the book's goals of showing how multiple meanings of Blackness are being played out in the classroom, is not discussing the impact that these types of assignments have on the very few Black students in the class. I wonder if these types of assignments could be unobvious or unintentional acts of oppression, exploitation, and tokenization too? In the cited academic year, out of 41 students from both semesters, only 5 of Maraj's students identified as Black. While I am a Black faculty member, I am also a Black graduate student in a mostly white space. I can attest that these types of assignments and

conversations do impact Black students. Specifically, it can feel like our Black professors—which can feel like another [exhausting] role in Black performativity.

Chapters 3 and 4 ask readers to think broadly about what Blackness means and the visual/material/literary representations of it in the era of "post-Ferguson"/#BlackLivesMatter by providing readers with an analysis of popular Black cultural texts, songs, and other media artifacts situated around this time. Unique to chapter 3 and this text is Maraj's attention to Black women and the daily struggles we face in having to always figure out who we are going to be and how we are going to show up in different spaces, as is also reflected in my opening story. For example, he makes rhetorical connections among Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, religion/spirituality, politics, and history, further illuminating how Blackness is truly interdisciplinary and intercontextual and should be discussed in all spaces, all classrooms, on all campuses (Maraj, p. 98). These chapters examine the overt and implied ways white institutions are cocreating racial meaning through language, and the defensiveness often extant when they are confronted about these messages. Maraj powerfully offers various contexts for connections to be made, including those that are not always addressed such as bodies, intersecting identities, movements, and systems that coconstruct multiple meanings.

This chapter calls out/in the [often ambiguous] words many white institutions use in their "diversity" statements and how Blackness is exhibited (or not) within them. A possible missed opportunity in this chapter is diving into the impact these often-vague diversity statements/rhetorical fallacies have on Black students, faculty, and staff. Sharing these stories could provide a teaching moment to those crafting these statements, identifying why language, intention, and impact differ/matter. Maraj even quotes the US Census Bureau (Maraj, p. 80) in the vague way they describe "Black" and "race," reemphasizing that the obscurity created by society surrounding Blackness goes beyond campus institutions. Chapter 4 confronts white institutions about re/examining why, how, and what they *really* mean when they use the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. Are they making it a temporal moment or movement? Chapter 4 further challenges white institutions to replace being on the defensive with feeling hopeful about answering, *Whose responsibility is it to make our Black community feel like their lives matter here, and what are we purposefully and creatively doing about it [every day] to live up to it?*

The final chapter brings together the goals and literacy events of each previous chapter. Through these rhetorical reclamations, solutions are provided for how white institutions can avoid racist practices and eliminate actions signifying defensiveness—a pattern that ultimately stagnates, limits, and minimizes potential for the transformative change needed on these campuses. Maraj ends the text by reminding both the insider and outsider of the importance of acknowledging, writing, telling, and listening to the stories of what it means to be Black. My own research utilizes

the interpersonal communication theory, *retrospective storytelling*, which posits that the stories we hear and tell can have a lasting impact on our identity, relationships, and health or well-being (Flood-Grady & Koenig Kellas, 2019). Thus, I further challenge readers [of all backgrounds] to consider what happens after the story is written, told, and listened to? How are these stories affecting our identities, our relationships, and our well-being, and how are we collaboratively coming together after telling and listening to these stories to create real change?

At the conclusion of this book, I thought back to my “judgey” questions upon starting the text: “Will this come off as another inner protest piece with heavy jargon and incomprehensible ideas to prove this Black author is smart and belongs here too? Sis/Brother, who are you *really* writing this for—us or them?” I keep revisiting this and am intentionally labeling these thoughts as *judgey* because the implications are important. We must start naming the truth, even when it hurts - especially in academia. I made some discoveries because of this book about why these judgey thoughts make me feel bad. Let me make the connection clear. I don't ask these same questions going into the reading of texts written by non-Black, white scholars, and I wonder if it's because I have been so conditioned in these racist school systems to assume that white is right? Ugh. What other ways have I been conditioned? I reflect on Maraj's goals of writing *Black or Right* and see clearly why this text is so necessary and timely, and how even as a pro-Black person used to operating in white spaces, so much of my mental/public/academic narrative still must be unlearned and rewritten. This white institutional conditioning even has Black people questioning other Black people. We are used to our papers being slashed with red pens. We are used to being the only Black person on our university's homepage. We are used to being the Black voice in our white classrooms. We are used to being told we were “nominated” to serve on the diversity and inclusion committee. We are used to being questioned and critiqued about messages surrounding Blackness. We are used to being the spokesperson whenever something racial happens. Stop using us.

Does this book achieve its goals? I would say that my countless finger snaps, yelled “Yaaaaaasss Maraj?”, fist pumps thrown in the air, and a renewed commitment to prioritize my community [and myself] as a Black scholar, as a result of reading this text, mean a resounding YES! You brought your whole self, multiple identities, and diverse lived experiences to this text, dear brother Maraj, in the spirit of your mother who allowed you to leave the islands to come to the US for greater opportunities — this book is a manifestation of her knowing your worth. Thank you for writing this fascinating piece that reminds us to never forget *our* worth, to demand *our* respect, and for educating and engaging all people in this necessary dialogue.

Black is right. Black is right. Black is right.

*When you know you are of worth,
you don't have to raise your voice,
you don't have to become rude,
you don't have to become vulgar; you just are.*

*And you are like the sky is, as the air is,
the same way water is wet.*

It doesn't have to protest.

-Dr. Maya Angelou

But Black folx are always protesting.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, never forget: We **always** mattered.
We always will.

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