WCC

WRITERS: CRAFT & CONTEXT

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Karina Cunningham is a member of the BLACKMOON artist collective in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Read more about this painter and see her work online: www.blackmoontulsa.com/karinacunningham

CONGRATULATIONS to our co-editor, Aja Y. Martinez, on receiving the prestigious Conference on College Composition and Communication Advancement of Knowledge Award for her scholarly contributions and on winning the CCC Outstanding Book award for 2023 for her book, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*

Editors' Introduction

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WHERE WE'VE BEEN

With V3.n2 we celebrate our third full year publishing this open-access journal. Some folks have asked why we didn't publish earlier this year (although a special guest-edited issue came out in late fall 2022), but we are here, just taking our time. Time is a valuable commodity for most of us. But instead of just wanting more of it, we editors have been intentionally trying to slow it down. Editing this journal is not the only thing we do. Like you, at any given moment any one of us might be taking care of an aging parent; raising a puppy or a teenager; getting married; launching a young adult; recovering from Covid; buying or renovating a home. For us, these life activities are not distractions from work; they are vital parts of who we are as whole humans living integrated lives.

Honoring these life dimensions (our own as well as those of writers, readers, editors, production specialists, and reviewers involved with the journal) could be characterized as resisting the "fast-paced, metric-oriented neoliberal university through a slow-moving conversation" (Mountz et al. 2015, 1236). Conversations with our authors and our peer reviewers have taken the amount of time they needed to take. In other words, we traded time's linear drive toward efficiency for a lazy Sunday drive with our community members. As Riyad A. Shahjahan (2015) tells us, "Slowing down is about focusing on building relationships, not about being fixed on products, but accepting and allowing for uncertainty and being at peace without knowing outcomes" (497). As editors, we never quite know the outcome: Who will send us their work? Who will want to revise with mentors? Who will need time to read and reconsider? We don't think the current complaints by other editors and publishers about not finding peer reviewers is a temporary pandemic-induced problem. We think this is a sign that the colonizing grip on our time needs to give way. Slow scholarship intentionally takes a different direction, a road less traveled, to release us into a less fungible space to work and to be. To that end, we invited our reviewers and writers to determine their own pace of labor, and we offered space and guidance on how to meet their reviewing and writing goals.

COUNTERSTORIES ON THE SCENE: AN INVITATION AND SOME CONSIDERATIONS

One of our intentions, and a natural result of our editor Aja Martinez's work and influence, is to publish counterstories. And we want your counterstories. But we must get it right. In this sociopolitical moment, fraught with disinformation and distortion concerning what critical race theory is and can be (inclusive of its methodology counterstory), our work as counterstory scholars, teachers, and writers must be meticulous

Our Open Journal System (OJS) platform is maintained at the University of Oklahoma, in a state that 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.

and precise. Any work we do with counterstory must be informed by the tenets of CRT:

- permanence of race and racism
- challenge to dominant ideologies
- interest convergence
- race as social construct
- intersectionality and antiessentialism
- interdisciplinarity
- centrality of experiential knowledge and/or unique voices of color
- commitment to social justice
- accessibility

Our work cannot be sloppy work—it cannot be devoid of the interdisciplinary research involved in doing the reading, developing an awareness of the histories and key figures, and knowing the foundations of CRT. A question to consider when surveying various forms of storytelling is: Are *all* marginalized narratives counterstory? While there are indeed many marginal/ized narratives, the measure remains whether the tellers and stories subscribe to CRT's tenets, particularly in their critique of a dominant ideology (e.g., liberalism, whiteness, colorblindness) and their sustained focus on social justice as an objective. In other words, what are folks using counterstory to *do?* Expression of minoritized subjectivity is a good starting point, but it is equally important to include the admission of and critical self-reflection on privilege and to use this privilege toward social justice coalition and solidarity.

Examples of counterstories explicitly crafted by CRT scholars whose narratives subscribe to CRT's tenets include the following:

- Derrick Bell's *And We Are Not Saved* (1987) and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992 1st ed., 2018 2nd ed.)
- Patricia Williams's *Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (1991)
- Richard Delgado's *The Rodrigo Chronicles: Conversations about America and Race* (1995)
- Tara J. Yosso's *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline* (2006)
- Aja Y. Martinez's *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020)

Humanities scholars are in a moment in which we have an opportunity to become leading voices on CRT/counterstory methodology. CRT scholars in the fields of legal studies and education, who have long carried CRT as a movement and area of study, have opened an opportunity for scholars in the humanities to hone and craft a rhetoric and writing of counterstory. We are at a point at which scholars in these fields, along with others, can and will look to those taking up counterstory for guidance on what it is, what it should be, and what it can become; dedicated humanities writers can offer models of their developing expertise at writing counterstories. Increased engagement with counterstory comes with the responsibility to get it right, meaning we must be precise in our engagement with CRT and counterstory.

In this issue we are excited to present shining examples of meticulous and intentional engagement with CRT frameworks and counterstory methodology. So when in doubt, the three counterstories within this issue are representative works to model and reference if you would like to engage this timely and accessible methodology. Send us your stories! But if you are going to call these stories "counterstories," be sure you've done the reading, you're accountable to the tenets of CRT, and you proceed accordingly. And when in doubt, ask! Part of our mission as a journal and as an editorial team is to be accountable to authors. We will mentor you through the process and are actively building our deepening bench of counterstory-specific reviewers. Should you decide to walk this route, we promise your counterstory journey will be a good one with *WCC*.

IN THIS ISSUE

As with our previous issues, we include a mix of genres and intentionalities: narrative, research, epistle, reflection, review, and counterstory, yes, but also often a blending of these approaches. We begin this issue with CRT counterstory as literature review with Martín Alberto Gonzalez's "'Universities ain't what they seem like on TV.'" In this essay, Gonzalez models a genre of counterstory that systematically analyzes books, peer-reviewed articles, and reports related to Students of Colors' experiences with racism and resistance in higher education. Based on a lived experience, Gonzalez engages the CRT tenets of commitment to social justice and centrality of experiential knowledge as he uses cultural intuition to weave the literatures into the tapestry of his counterstory.

Our second contribution is again counterstory, but this time counterstory as vignette with a meditation on grief and mourning. In "What It's Like to Lose Papi: A Counterstory on Grief," Natalie Madruga leans into the comfort of narrating and storytelling her life—a passion she has sustained for fifteen years. As Madruga engages the CRT tenets of centrality of experiential knowledge and intersectionality, this counterstory is a glowing example of an author who took the opportunity to situate her lived experience in an academic conversation that matters to her and to practice a

treasured form of writing, combining argument and storytelling in a beautiful and heart-wrenching piece.

Following Madruga, Michael Spooner's narrative, "Translating Myself," considers the author's experience translating his own scholarship from English into Spanish for a conference of Latin American writing scholars and teachers. As he thinks through the unique positionality of his identity intersections, Spooner explores a set of linguistic paradoxes we think our readers will find fascinating and instructive. Spooner's essay develops themes grounded in personal interest and experience—all explored via first-person narrative and reflection. Though Spooner diverges from our explicitly designated counterstory contributions, which are rooted in the tenets of CRT, his genre-bending piece is still right at home in the pages of *WCC*, merging narrative conventions with those of critical analysis through inclusion of academic citations and references—which readers will note throughout.

Whereas the first three pieces use language to narrate lived experience, Christie Zwahlen and David M. M. Taffet offer a photographic essay, "Foreigner Within," that "stories" their identities in the current US scene. Zwahlen, a multiracial Korean American woman, and Taffet, a Jew who grew up in the South, reflect on their experience moving to a small college town in rural Ohio and into an almost exclusively white community. Drawing from the intersections of their identities and their creative approaches to artistry and activism, they recall routinely noting the number of confederate battle flags hanging outside otherwise innocuous country homes during their commute to the nearest city center and critically consider their dis-ease. Their photographic story speaks to the hypervisibility of Asianness in the rural US, defying expectations and highlighting the alienation of being Other within a white, rural context.

Our third and final CRT counterstory for this issue is by Ayesha Murtza and is titled "A CRT Counterstory: Intersectionality of Caste, Class, and Womanhood in Pakistani Culture." Murtza engages Richard Delgado's framework of counterstory as narrated dialogue to explore issues of the prevailing caste system, gender hierarchy, colorism, and racism in the context of Pakistan. Murtza's use of counterstory methodology invites readers to experience recurring events and ideas, as well as dialogic exchanges among characters in ways that challenge the status quo perspective. Engaging the CRT tenets of centrality of experiential knowledge and intersectionality, Murtza pulls from her own experiences growing up in Pakistan's middle class in addition to her experience teaching within the lower socioeconomic class in a rural part of Punjab, Pakistan. Through counterstory, Murtza not only reflects on her experiences but also inspires readers to analyze the experiential knowledge she offers from their own perspectives.

Kristiana Perleberg puts lived experience to a slightly different use in her composition entitled "Decolonial Work outside the Technical Communication Classroom: A Personal Narrative of My Journey from Scholar to Technical Writer." In a piece that began as a traditional book review and evolved into the critical narrative seen here, Perleberg lovingly critiques the field of technical and professional communication (TPC), a field Perleberg maintains has historically upheld white, patriarchal language practices without interrogation. She describes how Gregory Younging's book *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* inspired her own critical reflection and innovative effort to enact decolonial practices as a technical writer. By interrogating her own understanding of language and rhetoric—especially as a self-identified white, cisgender, able-bodied academic—Perleberg provokes future scholars, rhetoricians, and professional technical writers to do the same. Honoring scholarship that calls for the expansion of the social justice turn in TPC, and a calling for deeper understanding of what it actually means to utilize decolonial methods, Perleberg imagines action steps toward meaningful change. She describes her own sites of intervention at the professional-services firm she works for, modeling how social justice-oriented academic practices can be incorporated into industry, even when that industry doesn't allow for a full overhaul of the status quo.

Rounding out our contributions is Gabriella Wilson's book review of Allison Hitt's *Rhetorics of Overcoming: Narratives of Disability and Accessibility in Writing Studies*. Wilson is a scholar interested in the things, objects, and ideas that compel writing. A graduate student at Syracuse University in the composition and cultural rhetoric (CCR) doctoral program, Wilson researches and writes about embodied rhetorics, new materialism, writing pedagogy, syllabus design, disability, and accessibility. Wilson self-identifies as a person of mixed-ethnicity, who uses she/her pronouns, and has experience with chronic physical and mental-health conditions. The author of the book Wilson reviews, Professor Allison Hitt, is a Syracuse CCR alum; given Wilson's research interests and intersections of identity, we believe her review is an engaging way to demonstrate the throughline of scholarly commitments passing from one generation to the next throughout programs and fields of study.

As many emerge from the constraints of the harshest pandemic-related restrictions and begin to establish what some are calling "a new normal," we editors, along with many of the writers featured here, wonder how critique rooted in lived experience might inspire lasting revisions to the systems, structures, habits, and practices that have defined academic institutions. What have the previous months (years!) revealed about the material implications of our work, productivity, relationships, and time? What insights have we earned about the nature of true resilience—not as individualistic persistence to outlast diversity and return to "normal" rooted in the status quo, but resilience as conceptualized from educational (Gallagher, Minter, and Stenberg 2019; McMahon 2007), race-based (Bachay and Cingel 1999; Griffin 2016), queer (Cover 2016; Malatino 2019; Meyer 2015), disability (Hutcheon and Lashewicz 2015), Indigenous (Kimmerer 2015; Reid 2019), trans (Nicolazzo 2016), and feminist (Bracke 2016; Flynn, Jordan

2004; Sotirin and Brady 2012; McMahon 2007) perspectives as critical, collective, resistant, and transformational? What will it all mean for the scholarship we produce and the ways we go about it?

As always, we honor the labor of the community of folks who made possible this issue of *Writers: Craft & Context* and offer a warm invitation to those who might like to join us in our slow, purposeful move forward. Send us your writing, reach out if you are eager to support and mentor fellow writers through a fulfilling review process, and if you are nurturing fledgling ideas about what you could possibly write or develop, send us a note, we'd love to join you in imagining possibilities.

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Thank you - Reviewers V3.2
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"Universities ain't what they seem like on TV": A Critical Race Counterstory as a Literature Review about Students of Color in Higher Education

Martín Alberto Gonzalez

Dr. Martín Alberto Gonzalez is a first-generation Xicano raised in Oxnard, California. He completed his undergraduate studies at California State University, Northridge, then earned his doctorate from the Cultural Foundations of Education Department at Syracuse University, where he became the first Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellow in the university's history. He is currently an assistant professor in the Chicano/Latino Studies Program at Portland State University. In 2021, his dissertation, which is a collection of stories about racism and resistance in higher education, received two national dissertation awards. Because he personally observed his older siblings and his community's talents and interests be denied and repressed due to a lack of resources and opportunities, he became interested in educational issues related to Latinx students across all grade levels. Aside from teaching in a university setting, he is regularly invited to K-12 schools as a guest speaker, and even has a TEDx talk titled, "Boxnard," which is available on YouTube. As an educator-scholar-activist, he takes pride in telling stories that challenge stereotypes and empower his community and communities alike. He is the author of *21 Miles of Scenic Beauty... and then Oxnard: Counterstories and Testimonies* and *The Key to the City | La Llave de la Ciudad*.

Abstract

As a doctoral student, I was tasked to write a literature review for my dissertation, which focused on the experiences of Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx undergraduate students at a predominantly white university in the Northeast. Rather than writing a traditional literature review, I wrote a critical race theory counterstory to convey my findings. Drawing on a systematic analysis of books, peer-reviewed articles, and reports related to Students of Color in higher education, I wrote a story about a first-generation Xicano student who does a college-going presentation at his former high school about racism and resistance in higher education. Specifically, from my analysis of literature, I created four subthemes addressed in this story: "The Impact of Segregation," "From a Brown Space to a Hella white Space," "Microaggressions in Higher Education," and "Resistance and Counterspaces." Ultimately, I argue that counterstorytelling allowed me to stay true to myself while making my research accessible to nonacademic communities.

Keywords

Counterstorytelling; Racial Microaggressions; Mexican Students; Critical Race Methodology; Racism in Higher Education

BRIEF BACKGROUND ABOUT THIS COUNTERSTORY

Like most doctoral students, I was required to a write dissertation to satisfy the requirements for a doctorate degree. And so, from 2017 to 2020, I collected data via in-depth interviews, participant observations, document analyses, and pláticas *to* document the educational experiences of 20 Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) undergraduate students at a private, predominantly white university in the Northeast. Specifically, these students were part of ¡Poder Xicanx!,[1] an in/formal MMAX-based student organization recently established by a group of students who wanted to educate the university community about the richness and diversity of the MMAX culture through workshops, screenings, lectures, music, and so on. Many of these MMAX students I worked with were first-generation and low-income students, and these shared experiences kept us attuned with one another and allowed us to cocreate spaces of belonging, critical thought, and empowerment.

Still, as a first-generation, low-income Xicano student from Oxnard, California, higher education, and especially the realm of academia, is very foreign to me, and the thought of writing a traditional dissertation did not sound appealing to me for various

1 Pseudonym for name of organization.

reasons. The primary reason was because I knew a traditional dissertation filled with academic jargon would not be accessible to my community and the communities of the MMAX students who participated in my research project. In essence, I would spend six years in a doctoral program just to write a very lengthy paper that would not be read by read my family and community, not necessarily because they cannot read but because a traditional dissertation is structured and written in a way that is uninviting to those who are not in academia. Fortunately, as a doctoral student, I came across and became a student of critical race theory (CRT) counterstorytelling. I was assigned and went out of my way to read the works of academic counterstorytellers such as Richard Delgado, Patricia J. Williams, Derrick Bell, Tara J. Yosso, Daniel G. Solórzano, Aja Y. Martinez, and many more. Their counterstories created an avenue, a foundation, and a possibility for me to write my own stories in academia.

It became obvious to me that CRT research methods would help me better understand the experiences of Latinx students in higher education without undervaluing their voices, ultimately challenging traditional forms of research (Pizarro, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I realized storytelling as a research method is very important because it disrupts harshly misleading, oppressive stories, narratives, conventions, and understandings of People of Color that were established by empowered groups long ago (Delgado, 1993). Specifically, counterstorytelling allowed me to tell stories of people whose experiences are seldom told while also exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege grounded in inaccurate, oppressive notions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this way, storytelling became a useful tool for me as a Xicano because stories "invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story's point, and test it against his or her [or their] own version of reality" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2440).

It is especially important to note that counterstories are not just made-up stories to blow off steam by venting or ranting regarding one's own racial struggle and that these counterstories are grounded in experiential knowledge and other forms of data (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstorytelling as a research method and methodology allows us to humanize People of Color, a humanity too often denied (Martinez, 2020). So, in the tradition of CRT counterstorytelling, I wrote my dissertation through stories, literally. Every single chapter in my dissertation is a counterstory. Similar to traditional dissertations, my dissertation included an introduction, literature review, methods, findings, and conclusion. However, unlike traditional dissertations, every chapter in my dissertation is a counterstory.

Truth be told, I have never seen a dissertation that is solely storytelling in the field of education. Even the dissertations I looked over that utilized CRT counterstorytelling were traditional in the sense that they had conventional introductions, literature reviews, methods, and conclusions sections to justify the usage of CRT counterstorytelling as a research method. There is nothing wrong with that. The point I am making here is *not* that my approach is better than writing a traditional dissertation. I see both as valuable. After all, I rely on traditionally written research articles and dissertations as data for my counterstories. Instead, what I mean is exactly what I say at the beginning of this paragraph, which is that I have simply never seen a dissertation that is solely storytelling in the field of education.

The fact that I never read or heard of a dissertation that was solely storytelling in the field of education was discouraging. By way of carne asadas and other family get-togethers, I am a trained storyteller, and I wanted to use my storytelling ability as my research method for my dissertation because I wanted to make my research accessible to la gente from my community and communities alike. Gente who are not in academia. *Gente* who can follow a story, yet do not have time, interest, and energy to decipher academic jargon. In the same way the renowned law professor and critical race theory scholar Derrick Bell uses storytelling to simplify complicated verbiage in the United States constitution (Martinez, 2020), I needed to write stories to illustrate the racially hostile campus environments Latinx students must navigate. And so, for my dissertation, I wrote stories. I stood on the shoulders of the giants before me like Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Patricia J. Williams, Derrick Bell, Tara J. Yosso, Daniel G. Solórzano, Aja Y. Martinez, and many others and used CRT counterstorytelling throughout my entire dissertation.

It is in this context I would like to introduce the following counterstory. As mentioned earlier, my dissertation focused on the experiences of MMAX students at a predominantly white university in the Northeast. Therefore, this counterstory is a literature review about Students of Color in higher education.[2] For those who are not familiar, a literature review is basically an overview of published work about a specific topic. A literature review is useful for two main reasons: It supplements the author's overall argument, and it demonstrates due diligence on behalf of the author by demonstrating that they have investigated what other scholars in their field have found. In this particular story, my argument is that Latinx students, along with other Students of Color, suffer severely from climate-related minority-status stressors at their respective predominantly white universities and that they resist in unique ways, such as by creating counterspaces. Basically, Students of Color are discriminated against in higher education because of their race or ethnicity, yet they still find a way to complete their studies by relying on one another for support. So, I spent countless hours conducting a systematic analysis of literature (books, peer-reviewed articles, reports, etc.) related to Latinx students in higher education, and I supplemented this literature

2 Throughout this manuscript, I use Students of Color interchangeably with Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) and Latinx students because MMAX and Latinx students fall under the broader category of Students of Color.

with my experiences and cultural intuition as a Xicano (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

From this analysis, I created four subthemes. The first subtheme is titled "The Impact of Segregation," which highlights the detrimental effects of segregation and how Latinxs are disproportionately impacted by segregation. Next, "From a Brown Space to a Hella White Space" underscores how Latinx students' transition into a white mainstream campus is challenging because a white-supremacist culture is engrained in university spaces. Further, the subtheme "Microaggressions in Higher Education" provides insights on the various racial microaggressions and discrimination experienced by Latinx students and Students of Color in higher education. Last, "Resistance and Counterspaces" focuses on the numerous ways Latinx students resist and navigate their racially hostile university campus environments and how these students rely on one another for support, affirmation, and motivation. Taking these themes together, I wrote the counterstory that follows using the literature I found on Latinx students in higher education.[3] You'll randomly see citations throughout this story, and I urge you to look up the readings yourself to learn more about the topic at hand.[4]

This counterstory is based on a real experience. Early in my doctoral studies, I was readily invited by high schools in my hometown (Oxnard, CA) to talk about college, and over time, I made it my responsibility to discuss racism in higher education with Latinx high-school students (Gonzalez, 2022a). My hope was that I would initiate a conversation that went beyond academic preparation, which I felt schools focus exclusively on, and move toward preparation for the culture shock some Latinx students would experience at universities, especially predominantly white universities. It is important to note that this counterstory is not and shouldn't be taken as a step-by-step manual on how to use storytelling for a dissertation or literature review. Sometime in the future, I hope to write a methodological paper in which I discuss in more detail the different steps I took to make this counterstory happen. For this reason, I intentionally did not include a lengthy methodological section to explain why storytelling as a research method is valid and credible. As is, this counterstory is simply for you to read, enjoy, and realize that storytelling matters, and I don't need to justify why I chose a form of communication (stories) most familiar to my community and others alike to write about something I care deeply about (Latinx students).

THE COUNTERSTORY: THE SETTING AND CONTEXT

The past few years have witnessed a huge push by the high-school district to invite home-grown positive role models to Saviors High School in Chiques, California, a predominantly Latinx community in Southern Califas.[5] Without a doubt, college-going rates have been on the rise. School administrators have concluded that more exposure to "positive role models" would directly encourage and inspire Latinx students to do more with their lives and graduate from college. So, Ms. Liberty, a white woman who was not originally from Chiques, took matters into her own hands. She had recently received a promotion to become the director of the college-going program for underrepresented students at Saviors High School.

This college-going program became a superficial platform for Ms. Liberty to seek out opportunities to directly inspire her students to shoot for the stars. In other words, this program became a stage for her to accomplish her *Freedom Writers* Hollywood moment, in which she, as a nice white lady, "saves" Brown kids from their impoverished communities and from the world (Yosso & Gracía, 2008). Yet, many of her efforts were very unsuccessful and fell short of Oscar-nominated endings. Still, she used her position as the director of this college-going program to attempt to replicate her flawed equal-opportunity fantasy.

Using the school district's initiative of inviting guest speakers to her advantage, she established a semiannual College-Going Day and invited a handful of former students who had made it past their first year at their university. In the form of panels and single presentations, successful Brown college students would come back to Saviors High School and detail their academic journeys. The official College-Going Day became a thing, and Ms. Liberty was the proud founder. These conversations and presentations served as basic informational sessions about college. Aware that her students were first-generation with very little awareness about college, Ms. Liberty created prewritten questions for her guests every semester. However, because these questions were written by Ms. Liberty, they did not warrant important conversations or thoughts about the harsh realities of being a, if not the only, Brown person at a predominantly white university—an experience known all too well by her Brown students (Yosso et al., 2009). Very rarely did anyone bring up cultural or social barriers in higher education, such as racism, classism, or sexism.

For years, the college-going panels and discussions remained bland, until Ms. Liberty sought out Alberto, her former student who was eight months away from receiving his doctorate in education. Alberto was the perfect fit as a presenter for the College-Going Day. First, he was a low-income, first-generation Brown college student. Second, he was born and raised in Chiques, California. Third, he was young, funny, and "hip." And last and more important, he was a direct beneficiary of the college-going program Ms.

3 This is a modified, shorter version of the entire counterstory.

4 If you can't find or do not have access to a specific citation or reading, please email me directly and I will investigate the best way to get you the reading without infringing on any copyrights.

5 Both Saviors High School and Chiques, CA, are pseudonyms.

Liberty currently oversaw. To put it simply, Alberto was the primary case-in-point example that her program worked but that students were simply not taking advantage of it.

Undoubtedly, in terms of her students' supposed lack of motivation, Ms. Liberty was extremely confident that Alberto was her missing link. To her, Alberto was a walking definition of the American Dream. You know, a true exemplar of "from rags to riches." He had escaped poverty, made it to college, graduated from college, and gone on to pursue his doctorate. In reality, all Ms. Liberty needed was for Alberto to instill motivation in her students through his mere presence so they would believe they could do more with their lives and one day become a doctor just like him. So, without knowing his mission and newly founded purpose to empower his community, Ms. Liberty naïvely invited Alberto to become the keynote speaker at the fifth semiannual College-Going Day at Saviors High School, and he agreed without hesitation.

Although Alberto was about to receive his doctorate in education, he specifically specialized in human rights, racism, and social justice during his graduate studies. Even at such a young age, he had various experiences of activism and protests under his belt. His work regarding the liberation of his own Brown people made other people feel very uncomfortable. Supposedly, we live in a postracial society where race no longer matters and racism doesn't exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Lopez, 2010; Wise, 2010). However, Alberto preached the exact opposite. Alberto was a firm believer that racism is exactly why his gente from Chiques rarely "make it out." His interests in social justice stemmed from his experiences and the observations he made growing up in Chiques, where he witnessed his own community being persistently excluded from college-going resources and facing lowered expectations because they were Brown (García et al., 2012; García & Yosso, 2013).

Nonetheless, Ms. Liberty naïvely asked Alberto to do his thing, so he did, radically. Unbeknownst to Ms. Liberty, Alberto had prior experience giving presentations about the importance of not only going to a university but also navigating and graduating from one. However, unlike any of the ordinary college-going presentations Ms. Liberty had seen in her professional-development conferences, Alberto's presentation focused on racism in higher education. After all, that was what he experienced personally, studied for years, and what he wrote about extensively in his dissertation. In particular, his presentations were specifically tailored for Students of Color from low-income communities similar to his own. In his presentations, he made it a priority to spread the knowledge about social injustices in higher education. He intentionally shared the side of universities seldom shared—the side of the story that exposes universities' structured flaws and racist institutional norms (Harper, 2012).

Needless to say, Alberto's college presentation was one for the books. Because of his astonishing credentials and successful educational journey, Ms. Liberty had mistakenly assigned Alberto the biggest audience of the day. Over 300 anxious, high-potential high-school students packed into a run-down auditorium—some of whom were already accepted and planned to attend prestigious four-year universities—awaited Alberto's carefully prepared presentation. Given Ms. Liberty's punctuality, the presentation started at exactly at 10:15 AM, 10 minutes after the school bell, giving 40 minutes to spare for the actual presentation. That is, Alberto had 40 minutes to challenge students' expectations about college.

At precisely 10:15 AM, Ms. Liberty quieted the crowd by using the "clap-if-you-can-hear me" exercise. As soon as the crowd quieted, she began by introducing Alberto.

"Hi everyone. You're in luck! We have a very special treat for you. Today we have a very exciting presentation by an extremely successful guest, Alberto," Ms. Liberty welcomed the crowd, which was still chatting quietly without paying attention.

"Alberto is just like you. He was one of our students not too long ago. He graduated from Saviors High School and went straight to a four-year university. Now he lives in New York, where he has been studying for the past four years to become a doctor in education. Look at him. He's young and very successful. He was the first in his family to go college, just like a lot of you. And he came from your 'hood'—Chiques. He wouldn't have gone to college if it wasn't for this college-going program. The same one you're in. There is no excuse. Please help me welcome back the very successful and smart Alberto!" Ms. Liberty stated excitedly while she smiled and showed her pearly white teeth.

Unlike other days, students didn't mumble "Who cares?" underneath their breaths as they had done in the past with more traditional, nerdy, and preppy presenters. Instead, they quickly and quietly gave Alberto their undivided attention. The word "New York," coupled with "Chiques," certainly attracted their attention. But more than anything, they couldn't believe that Alberto, dressed as is, in ripped jeans, rocking clean BRED Jordan 1s shoes, a fresh bald fade, and a black t-shirt with "¡Viva Chiques!" in graffiti text, was successful academically.

Like most of society, the students thought that in order to be successful academically, a person has to give in, that is, assimilate to the academic culture, speak properly, and forget about the "hood" life and their own home culture (Rodriguez, 1974, 1983). Along these lines, they thought that to be successful in school meant you must "act white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Yet, here was Alberto, in front of their very own eyes, swagged out from his head to his toes and about to become a doctor. To them, Alberto's commitment to and pursuit of an education while staying true to himself culturally directly debunked the "acting-white" thesis (Carter, 2005). Rather than allowing the university to define who he was—how he dressed, spoke, acted, and more—and change him entirely, Alberto defined himself through his unapologetic demeanor and sought to change the university culture (Rendón, 1992).

Unsurprisingly, as soon as Alberto was handed the microphone to speak, the students stared at him dumbfounded, in silence. "What's good? What's happening, y'all? How's everybody doing? Y'all chillin'?" Alberto asked the crowd smoothly, as if he was emceeing a hip-hop concert.

The students remained in shock at his swagger until someone abruptly shouted from the back of the auditorium, "Ayeeeee. I'm hella chillin'."

The students laughed aloud while nodding their heads in agreement. Ms. Liberty giggled, not because of laughter, but because she was nervous.

"Coo. I'm glad y'all are chillin'. I've carefully put together a college presentation just for you, specifically for mi gente from Chiques. I have experienced what it means to be university student personally and now I study it for a living. I read books and reports about higher education. For the past five years, I have been part of multiple research projects where I had the opportunity to interview university students to get a better sense of their experiences. Today, I am going to share some those reports, along with some of my experiences and findings," Alberto stated eloquently.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Like many of you, I was the first of my family to go to a university. I didn't know what to expect. Like most first-generation students, I couldn't ask my siblings or parents because they had no idea. Do you? What are some barriers or difficulties you think you will come across as a university students?" Alberto asked, hoping some students had had conversations about this topic.

Immediately, Ms. Liberty stared at her students for responses, knowing she had had this conversation with them.

Without raising her hand, a student in the front row responded, "Well, I am not the best writer, so I am assuming writing papers or just adjusting to college expectations in general. Ms. Liberty has shared with us that she believes that most students do not finish college because of academic and social difficulties (Tinto, 1993). For example, some students don't have good study habits, so they stop going to school because they can't keep up with the school workload."

Ms. Liberty nodded in agreement, confident she was correct in her assumption.

"Ahh. Good. That's exactly the response I expected. Most of the times I ask that question, that's the response I get! Of course, academic and social difficulties are important barriers, but it gets more complicated than that," Alberto responded in encouragement.

THE IMPACT OF SEGREGATION

"Look around you. Look at the person to your left and to your right? Do you see anything fishy? Do you see a pattern?" Alberto said in a suspenseful tone.

Everyone followed Alberto's directions, yet no one had the nerve to answer. They didn't seem to quite understand what Alberto was talking about.

After five silent seconds, Alberto intervened. "It's all good. I didn't notice it either when I was younger. Have y'all noticed that most of your classmates, if not all, are Brown!?"

The students looked around in shock as they finally realized what Alberto was talking about.

He continued, "This isn't a surprise! Educational researchers have found Latino students have been excluded from serious desegregation efforts and are becoming even more segregated than Black students in Southern and Western regions (Orfield & Lee, 2006, p. 4). It's not a coincidence this is happening here in Chiques. In fact, in a more recent report, researchers found that at a national level, exactly 60 years after the *Brown* decision, which was supposed to end racial segregation in schools, students are still segregated by race (Orfield et al., 2014)."

"But why does it matter that there's segregation. So what? Aren't all schools the same?" a student asserted, harmlessly.

Alberto disagreed, "The importance of desegregated schools falls on the foundation that some schools, often predominantly white, offer more opportunities, such as more demanding courses, higher college going and graduation rates, better equipment and facilities, more qualified teachers, and so on (Orfield et al., 2014). On the other hand, the overall environment of particular segregated schools feels completely different in that the conditions contribute to a climate of hopelessness (Du Bois, 1935)."

Before any student could provide input, Alberto continued, "For example, Jonathan Kozol (2005), a former teacher turned researcher, explains this in his book, *The Shame of the Nation*. In this book, he documents how messed up segregated schools are in impoverished Communities of Color. He exposes the ugly truth. Some of the classrooms he taught in were so cold during winter the students had to wear their coats to class. Another school smelled so nasty because of an overflow of sewage the city had to shut it down" (p. 7). Imagine that!"

"That's believable. The schools around here are surrounded by pesticides (California Environmental Health Tracking Program, 2014). How we supposed to stay focused if we slowly dying out here?" a Latina student wearing a "Track & Field" sweatshirt protested.

"Where's the lie?" Alberto paused to make sure students processed and comprehended the severity in this message.

After ten long, thoughtful seconds, he proceeded. "This book made me realize many schools serving mostly Black and Brown students are overcrowded and have less funding and resources, which creates a sense of desperation. White schools are given the money and attention, but Black and Brown schools are not (Kozol, 2005, p. 7). This nation should feel ashamed they allow this to happen!"

"Wow! This whole time I thought Saviors High School was super diverse, but now that I think about, it ain't at all. Look! It's all Brown people. Hispanics. Latinos. Mexican. Mind you, beautiful Brown people. But Brown people nonetheless. Well, except for the teachers. They're mostly white," a student confessed jokingly, looking for affirmation.

Laughter filled the auditorium. Alberto raised his eyebrows and he smiled. "She said it. All jokes aside, across the nation, teachers are mostly white, too (Taie & Goldring, 2017).

"Nonetheless, that's a very good observation," Alberto said in encouragement. "And that's exactly why I am here today. To talk to you about this exact issue." He grabbed the computer clicker from the podium and then clicked to his title page as he read it aloud: "Universities ain't what they seem like on TV: University Preparation for Students of Color."

A few chuckles came from the crowd, but a majority of the students made duck lips in awe.

"That's right. These universities ain't what they seem." Alberto clicked to the next slide.

FROM A BROWN SPACE TO A HELLA WHITE SPACE

"Here's a thought. Imagine going from a predominantly Brown community like Chiques where everyone, for the most part, looks, dresses, and speaks like you, to an almost all-white space where you are immediately alienated simply because of the color of your skin or the minor accent in your English (Jones et al., 2002)," Alberto stated.

He continued without skipping a beat. "Because we don't go to school with or get a chance to interact with white students before we attend university, Students of Color like us Brown students find ourselves navigating a foreign space when attending a predominantly white university. The very little exposure to white people partially explains why efforts to help Latinx students transition into a white mainstream campus culture have been unsuccessful (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Tatum, 2007). The other part of the explanation has to do with the fact that predominantly white universities are culturally hostile places for Latinx students (Harwood et al., 2012; Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Yosso et al., 2009). In other words, this is why I believe Latinx students are not completing their studies at universities."

"That makes sense. Universities don't know what to do with us—our swag, and our brilliance. But I do have a question. What does 'Latinx' mean? Why do you use a the 'x'?" a student with a basketball jersey asked timidly, while everyone else wondered the same thing.

"Ahhh. Good question!" Alberto responded. "The term Latinx is used to replace Latinas/os. It is a gender-neutral label for Latina/o. Things are changing nowadays and not everyone identifies as a boy or girl, so the 'x' begins to disrupt traditional notions of gender and aims to make society more inclusive of all gender identities (Salinas & Lozano, 2019)."

"Does this make sense?" Alberto asked.

The students nodded their heads slowly up and down.

Alberto looked lost. "Okay. So what was I talking about?"

"About how we have too much swag and how we are too beautiful for white universities," a student reminded Alberto, laughing out loud.

"That's right!" Alberto snapped his fingers and then clicked to the next slide. "Things get complicated when you are a beautiful Brown person at a predominantly white university. Why? Look at the screen."

Alberto pointed at the screen with the laser installed in his clicker. "Well because most of these universities were never meant for us. For example, a professor of American history at MIT recently published a book in which he carefully documents that Ivy League schools such as Princeton and Yale were established and have historically remained accessible exclusively for whites only (Wilder, 2014). In this book, the professor argues that these universities were literally built on the backs of Enslaved Black people but were never made for them. This means universities' buildings, structures, practices, and ideologies help reproduce white students' privileged status while reaffirming the subordinate statuses of Students of Color (Cabrera, 2014; González, 2002; Gusa, 2010; Lipsitz, 1995). At universities, Students of Color encounter barriers white students don't (Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso et al., 2009)."

Alberto paused. He knew what he said was very theoretical for high-school students. "Y'all look hella confused," he laughed. "What I'm trying to say is that even though more and more Brown and Black students like y'all are attending universities, your university experience will be drastically different than that of white students. You will perceive and experience the campus climate

differently than your white classmates (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Trust me, this will make more sense throughout the presentation," he assured the students.

He glanced at Ms. Liberty, and she looked extremely anxious. Her arms were firmly crossed, and she had a pouty face, as if she had just dropped her ice cream sandwich.

Ms. Liberty wasn't expecting a presentation about racism in higher education. She thought that, rather than "keeping it real," Alberto was going to preach the good word of meritocracy. You know, the good ol' "I'm from the 'hood and I did it by working hard. So can you. No excuses (Rodriguez, 1974, 1983; Villanueva, 1993)." But it became obvious to her that Alberto had different intentions—he was on a mission to expose what he considered the hypocrisies of higher education and to educate his community about racism at universities.

Alberto continued unapologetically. He clicked to the next slide. "In most university brochures like the one pictured in this slide, college represents a time of unbridled optimism, exciting challenges, and myriad opportunities. Few students would anticipate their university experience might be marked by racism, sexism, and classism. Yet, this is the hardcore reality for Brown students, which results in them questioning their academic merit, cultural knowledge, and physical presence (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 659)."

A student interrupted without raising his hand, "Yo! This is facts! I remember my older prima who went to a fancy university stopped going because she felt like that university was not for her, culturally, socially, and academically. She was constantly questioned about her academic abilities (Smith et al., 2007). She told my tía she felt isolated at the university—like she didn't belong or something. Well, at least that's what she told her mom. We couldn't believe her because she was the smartest in our family, yet she didn't graduate with her degree (Hurtado et al., 1996)."

"Sorry to hear about your prima. But Dang! You beat me to the punch line!" Alberto added while he moved on to his next slide, "Yes, that's exactly what happens! There's an actual word that describes what your prima experienced. Researchers call it 'imposter syndrome,' which is this idea that Students of Color feel isolated or as if they do not belong at the university because they feel they are not qualified, when in reality they are. Students of Color often ask themselves, How is it that I 'arrived' when so many others like me haven't? Will someone discover a mistake was made and I don't really belong here? How long will it take for 'them' to realize I am an imposter, an 'other,' I'm not 'one of them'? (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 485). Imposter syndrome places the blame on Students of Color rather than addressing the hostile and toxic campus environment that makes these students feel as if they are 'imposters' when they are not (Hollingsworth, 2022)."

"Dang! That's cold. It's a Cole World out there," the same student remarked quietly, referencing the rapper J. Cole. "You know, I once heard someone talk about how sometimes student athletes get questioned, too. Like they're only at school for sports and not because they want an education."

"I've heard those conversations, too," Alberto nodded in agreement. "Not just sports, though. But a study documented experiences of Students of Color whose abilities and success have been questioned because of programs such as affirmative action, a policy that gives opportunities to members of groups known to have been discriminated against historically (Solórzano et al., 2000)."

Alberto took a deep breath. "But don't ever let anyone tell you that you don't deserve to be at a university. I believe in you! You're not an imposter! You can't be an imposter, you're from Chiques! We are too real! The streets educate us, so we're ready for anything!"

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

He drank some water and moved on to the next slide. "After all, universities allow for this to happen. Latinx students suffer severely from climate-related minority-status stressors. That is, various forms of racial discrimination, whether overt or covert, have a depressing effect on Latinx students' adjustment in the academic and social arenas, attachment to the institution, and personal-emotional adjustment (Hurtado et al., 1996)."

"Oh!!" Exclaimed another student who was sitting near the closest aisle to Alberto.

"Yes?" Alberto pointed at the student.

"I think I know where you are going with this one!" the student stated with confidence.

"Okay. You tell me," Alberto replied patiently.

"I saw a YouTube video that talked about microaggressions. It said that whenever someone faces discrimination it's called a microaggression, I think. I don't quite remember what exactly microaggressions mean, but that video reminds me of what you're talking about. Am I on to something?" the student asked, unsure if she was correct.

"Have y'all seen this presentation already?" Alberto responded sarcastically.

"No!!!" the students yelled all at once.

"You're definitely on to something," Alberto admitted as he clicked ahead exactly three slides. "Since y'all want to act so advanced, I am going to skip a few slides."

"Ahh. Here it is. They're called 'racial microaggressions.' Can someone please read the definition on the slide loud and clear?" Alberto requested.

Immediately, a student volunteered and read the slide accordingly: "First coined by Pierce in 1970, 'racial microaggressions' refer to subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' (Sue et al., 2007, pp. 272–273)."

"Thank you!" Alberto responded. "Racial microaggressions have also been described as subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward People of Color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solórzano et al., 2000). Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send degrading messages to People of Color because they belong to a racial minority group (Sue et al., 2007)."

"Now, do y'all think Latinx students at universities experience racial microaggressions?" Alberto asked in a suspenseful tone.

A collective "Yup!" came from the students.

"Shoot! We don't gotta go that far. I experience microaggressions here at this high school (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). My teacher doesn't even try to pronounce my birth name. Instead of calling me María, with a heavy accent over the 'í,' she calls me Mary," a student stated loudly as she curled her hair with her index finger and rolled her eyes at Ms. Liberty.

Ms. Liberty remained quiet and ashamed—she was naïvely unaware of her offensive exchanges.

Alberto disrupted the awkwardness. "Latinx students at universities absolutely experience racial microaggressions, which ultimately result in emotional, mental, and physical strain (Yosso et al., 2009). It ain't a joke! These microaggression are so emotionally and physically draining the damage of them has been referred to as 'racial battle fatigue' (Smith, 2004). It's a war zone out there, y'all! The real life Fortnite, but with racism."

Laughter filled the auditorium.

"It's kind of funny, but not really," Alberto quieted the crowd. "There are so many monsters in higher education. I'm not talking about cute monsters like in the movie, *Monsters, Inc.* I am talking about systemic monsters…monsters like white supremacy, settler colonialism, racism, erasure, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism (Tachine, 2022). These monsters will tear you down slowly. These monsters will tell you that you do not belong on campus. That you are an imposter. These monsters will give rise to so many racial microaggressions."

"But like what are some examples of the racial microaggressions that happen at universities? I'm going to one next year, so I want to know," a boy asked innocently while adjusting his reading glasses.

His classmates remained quiet as they wondered the same thing.

"Well," Alberto answered, excited, "A well-known educational researcher from UCLA by the name Dr. Daniel Solórzano (1998) found Latinx students experience a variety of discriminatory occurrences in an academic setting, many of which are downplayed or oftentimes unnoticed by offenders."

"Like what?" a student wondered.

"Well, in particular he discovered three forms of racial and gender microaggressions Latinx students suffer from. One is that Latinx students experience a sense of feeling out of place because of their race or gender or both. This is kind of like what happened to the prima from earlier." Alberto referred to the student who spoke about his older cousin who didn't graduate from her university.

"Another form of microaggressions he discovered was that professors have lower expectations of Latinx students (Solórzano, 1998)," Alberto said.

"Like the professors don't think Brown students are smart enough?" a Latino student suggested.

"Algo así," Alberto responded in Spanish, unapologetically. "I know for a fact professors question whether Students of Color wrote their papers when they use 'fancy' words."

"OMG! I saw that on Instagram," a student interrupted accidently.

Alberto laughed. "Instagram? What you mean?"

"A couple years ago, a blog post called 'Academia, Love Me Back' by Tiffany Martínez (2016) went viral. It was all over social media. Twitter and Instagram, especially!" the student responded.

"It sounds familiar." Alberto squinted his eyes. "Tell us more."

"So, basically a Latina student wrote a paper in college and included the word 'hence' in her paper. When she received her paper back, the instructor circled the word 'hence' and wrote, 'This is not your word,' with 'not' underlined twice!"

Everyone, including Alberto, sighed loudly.

"Shake my head!" Alberto asserted, while literally shaking his head. "Unfortunately, that's a perfect example of lowered expectations. It sucks because I feel the only time expectations are high is when Students of Color are called upon as experts of their own

race and ethnicity to explain why their people are the way they are (Solórzano et al., 2002), which is also problematic AF."

The students in the audience stared at Alberto, silent and intrigued.

"What's the last form of microaggression," someone reminded Alberto.

"Oh! That's right! The last form of microaggression is straight up accounts of both subtle and not-so-subtle sexist and racist incidents (Solórzano, 1998)," Alberto explained.

"Whatchu mean by sub-tle? What's sub-tle mean?" another student stuttered, trying to pronounce "subtle."

"Su-tle," Alberto enunciated slowly to help the student pronounce it correctly. "Su-tle racism basically means it's very hidden or difficult to analyze."

"It's like a backhanded compliment," the student next him explained. "Like when someone tries to compliment you, but it's hella rude. Like bruhhh."

"YES! That's it." Alberto chuckled. "For example, racial microaggressions can result from subtle backhanded compliments, such as 'You speak such good English,' 'You're not like the rest of them,' 'If only there were more of them like you' (Solórzano, 1998). Like, for reals? White people really think these are nice compliments, but in reality they are depressingly offensive."

"Hmmmm hmmm. That's right!" a student agreed while loudly chewing his gum.

"A more recent study also found similar results. In this study, Latinx students experienced the following at their respective university: getting stared at and feeling isolated, online hatred, being ignored at the bus stop and an angry bus driver, stereotyping, and insensitivity and ignorance (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). In my own research, I have interviewed Mexican, Mexican American, and Xicanx (MMAX) university students the past three years. Unfortunately, the findings aren't any different," Alberto confessed.

Alberto clicked his way to the slide with his research findings. "In an in-depth interview I conducted, a Mexican American senior majoring in political science assured me she faces discrimination frequently by classmates on campus: 'Yeah, I mean . . . even just Cinco de Mayo passing around the corner, that was last weekend or something. It's just something . . . people who would just say rude stuff to you here and there. Discrimination just happens.'"[6]

He continued, "Along these lines, another first-year Mexican American student majoring in business management was irate because her white professor butchered, if not entirely neglected, her 'Spanish'-sounding name throughout the semester. At times, her professor referred to her using stereotypical 'Mexican'-sounding names.'"[7]

"That must be extremely exhausting. Students of Color should be focusing on getting their schoolwork done, but they can't even do that because they're stressed out about all this unnecessary nonsense?" a white girl stated in a frustrated tone.

"Exactly," Alberto concurred. "This unnecessary stress has been referred to by experts as 'Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress,' which is defined by 'the stress of living in such an environment where one is subjected to daily microaggressions due to race' (Solórzano et al., 2002, p. 2)."

"But it can't be all that bad," a Latino student added. "I visited my sister's dorm at the university two years ago, and the dining halls and dorms were very nice. There was a lot of diversity, and students from different backgrounds were eating together and talking to one another."

Alberto acknowledged his observation. "Well, you'll be surprised when I tell you that not even the residence halls are safe from microaggressions (Harwood et al., 2012). Not too long ago, I came across a study that interviewed Students of Color at residence halls, and it identified four different types of racial microaggressions that happen in dorms. From what I remember, the Students of Color were victims of racial jokes and verbal comments, racial slurs written in shared spaces, segregated spaces and unequal treatment, and sheer denial and minimization of racism (Harwood et al., 2012). In other words, offenders played it off as if it was just a joke. But racism is nothing to joke about," Alberto stated loud and clear.

Alberto walked over to his laptop to look up the exact study. "Ahh. Here it is." He opened up the document and proceeded to read a paragraph from it. "Here's an example of a 'racial joke.' A Latina undergraduate student stated, 'There was a girl there [in the residence hall on her floor] who was joking around and making nicknames for everybody. Just like little subtle things about them and joking around. And then she named me "Tacos" . . . She's like, "Ha, ha cause you're Mexican" (Harwood et al., 2012, p. 165)."

The Latino student was shocked. He couldn't believe this was happening even in dorms.

"I could see how you didn't catch those dynamics during your visit," Alberto told the student. "Microaggressions don't happen every

6 This response was taken directly from an interview conducted May 18, 2018.

7 This response was taken directly from an interview conducted February 1, 2019.

second. And when they do happen, they could be very subtle, almost unnoticeable, yet serve as a way to keep People of Color 'in their place' (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015)."

"It just doesn't make sense," a student complained. "Higher education, specifically universities, should be sites of openness to learning and should be 'welcoming.'"

"Yup, but that's not necessarily the case. Regardless of how much money their parents make, money can't buy Students of Color freedom from racism at universities (Feagin & Sikes, 1994)," Alberto halfway joked.

Noticing the students and teachers, as a whole, looked discouraged and frustrated about racism at universities, Alberto quickly proceeded to the latter part of his presentation, which concentrated on survival and hope.

RESISTANCE AND COUNTERSPACES

"Hey. But don't get too down. Now let's talk about positivity. About survival. About resistance," Alberto said, optimistically. "Even when we are not given structural support, Latinx students, along with other Students of Color, find ways to cope and manage a hostile campus environment. In fact, it has been carefully documented that Latinx students use knowledge learned at home to help them navigate, survive, and succeed at universities that often silence and exclude us (Delgado Bernal, 2001)."

"How's that?" a student wondered verbally.

"In order to help overcome our status of being treated as less than and succeed in higher education, Latinx students have developed 'critical resistant navigational skills,'" Alberto stated eloquently, which indirectly referenced Solórzano and Villalpando (1998).

"That sounds super fancy. That don't sound like something I can learn," another student joked cynically.

"It's not as difficult as it sounds," Alberto assured the student. "The so-called fancy critical navigational skills Latinx students acquire and display can be something as simple as joining a campus protest, but oftentimes these skills are more covert and subtle. For instance, actions such as changing a major or simply deciding not to complete a degree can be seen as forms of covert resistance (Rodriguez, 2005; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Yeah, in a research study I recently came across, I found that in response to frequent racial microaggressions, Latinx students often sought out Chicana/o or Latina/o studies classes that served as academic counterspaces in which they fostered skills of critical navigation and learned to see themselves as contributing to a legacy of resistance to oppression" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 679).

"Yup! That's exactly why I joined the Mariachi music group here at school. So that my cultura survives and so I'm around people who remind me of who I am," a Latina student said in prideful tone.

"Yasssssssss!" her friend sitting next to her applauded.

"Nice!" Alberto stated. "At white universities, Students of Color join organizations that are made up of people who look and think like them because they feel isolated and disconnected from their campus environment (González, 2002; Hurtado et al., 2007). They join racial-ethnic student organizations as a way to deal with the messed-up campus climate (Museus, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Membership in these organizations increases their sense of belonging to their university (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). At universities, Latinx students rely on peers from similar backgrounds for support (Flores & Garcia, 2009; Villalpando, 2003)."

"And that's exactly why all the Black kids sit together in the cafeteria (Tatum, 2003)," a Black student commented, quick as a flash. "In this circle, we feel accepted. We turn to one another for reaffirmation, encouragement, and support. Because people who are not Black do not know what it feels like to be Black, they are unprepared to respond in supportive ways. So, we turn to each other for the much needed support we are not likely to find anywhere else (Tatum, 2003, p. 60)."

"That's very true." Alberto sided with the student's testimony. "Especially in racially mixed settings, racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism (Tatum, 2003, p. 63)."

Alberto elaborated, "In a university setting, educational researchers found Students of Color created academic and social 'counterspaces' as a response to 'racial microaggressions' and racism on and off campus (Solórzano et al., 2000)."

"How would you define these 'counterspaces?'" someone asked in sincere curiosity.

"Counterspaces can be described as horCHATa (Gonzalez, 2022b)." Alberto half joked.

"Una horchata sounds bomb right now." Someone yelled anonymously from the back of the room.

"It does." Alberto laughed. "I am being serious. Think about it. hor-CHAT-a . . . get it?" He annunciated slowly to ensure everyone heard the "CHAT" part.

"Students of Color get together and chat with one another to help each other navigate the racially hostile spaces at their universities. Students of Color, or other students with marginalized identities, create spaces where they can challenge stereotypes, deal with racism, and empower one another. Creating space with

one another allows for them to create a home away from home, sustain and practice their cultural ties, and collectively build critical consciousness (Gonzalez, 2022b)." Alberto explained.

He continued. "In my own words, I would say they're spaces of empowerment. These counterspaces are dynamic sites where marginalized people engage with one another in critical discourse, bring their whole (and multiple) selves, challenge each other, and make sense of the multitude of contradictions they embody, which are always present, as a means of undergoing moments of transformation (Morales, 2017). They come in all shapes, sizes, and forms, so there's no perfect example."

"But is there a formal definition?" the same student wondered.

Alberto proceeded by looking up the exact definition on his computer and then projected it on the screen. "Technically speaking, 'counterspaces' are defined as 'sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained' (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70)."

"But why are these important?" the same student questioned Alberto again.

Everyone looked at the student as if he was challenging Alberto.

"That's a really good question! Students of Color have expressed that counterspaces are important because they give the students an opportunity to meet others with similar experiences and discuss race-specific issues that are otherwise swept under the rug (Solórzano et al., 2000)," Alberto explained.

"You know," a Latina student intervened, "this reminds me of a conversation I had with my tía about her college experience. She told me some of her friends and her created a 'Latina space,' where Latinas would gather for the purpose of letting out their painful experiences with oppression on campus (Flores & Garcia, 2009). I guess this an example of how a counterspace serves as an adaptive mechanism to oppression and provides security, solidarity, hope, respite, and healing (Case & Hunter, 2012, p. 268)."

"Exactly," Alberto replied as he listened carefully. He was excited that some of these students had had these conversations before.

"But isn't that self-segregation?" a white student complained.

"Is it self-segregation or self-preservation? (Villalpando, 2003)" Alberto responded cleverly. He took a long pause to ensure the students understood his vital question.

He added, "These seemingly 'self-segregated' Latinx student spaces and peer groups have been found to empower and nourish Latinx students' success. These spaces allow for Latinx students to attend a university without feeling the stigma of being considered a foreigner or an outsider (Villalpando, 2003)."

The auditorium was filled with silence.

"Do universities provide counterspaces?" a Latino student wearing a hood over his head asked.

"Kinda, but not really. It's complicated," Alberto replied.

"How so?" someone else inquired.

"Well, universities usually have cultural centers, right?" Alberto asked, rhetorically, assuming students wouldn't know the answer.

"They should," a Latina insisted.

"These cultural centers didn't just magically appear because universities cared so dearly about Students of Color," Alberto stated sarcastically.

"No freaking way! They have to love all their students," a student replied, adding to the sarcasm.

"Hell nah!" Alberto stated in a more serious tone. "Historically, Students of Color protested, fought for, and basically single-handedly created cultural centers and other resources tailored to their needs (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017; Chang, 2002; Patton, 2010). They created these centers and demanded resources as a form of resistance and survival in 'hostile' university settings (Yosso & Lopez, 2010)."

"So," Alberto returned to his main point, "to answer your question as to whether universities provide counterspaces, NO. But cultural centers, which happen to be at universities, develop resilience and resistance and ultimately promote retention and academic achievement well beyond graduation. Furthermore, cultural centers do the work, which, for the most part, historically white universities fail to do (Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 99)."

"Dang! These cultural centers sound important. What exactly happens in them?" a random student wondered aloud.

"Magic!" Alberto joked. "I'm kidding! But seriously, a lot happens at cultural centers. Social justice activism, political education, community outreach, and much more takes place at cultural centers (Lozano, 2010)."

Ms. Liberty raised her "5 Minutes Remaining" flash card to notify Alberto that his time was almost up. At this point, it instantly became obvious that everything was starting to make sense to the students. Alberto saw that rather than texting or scrolling through their social media accounts, a majority of the students were jotting

down studious notes. Truth be told, he even noticed one student had titled her notes "How to survive racism at universities."

Alberto scratched his head, pressured to say more about this topic. "But don't get caught up in thinking counterspaces exist only as cultural centers. Student organizations are very important, tambien."

"Like MEChA?" shouted a student wearing an "Ethnic Studies Now!" t-shirt.

"Yup!" Alberto raised his Brown fist.

"That's right!" The student raised her Brown fist back at Alberto.

"Ethnic and racial students orgs help Students of Color maintain strong ties with their culturas while also helping them adjust to the campus environment (Museus, 2008). These organizations help Students of Color survive, flourish, and more important, exist! Students of Color benefit from both formal/academic AND informal/social counterspaces."

"What's the difference?" a faint voice asked from the audience.

"On one hand, in formal/academic counterspaces such as a student-organization and cultural centers, Students of Color are educated about the importance of ethnic pride and are also given a space to discuss issues affecting their own communities, on and off campus. On the other hand, in informal/social counterspaces such as a social gathering, these Students of Color build strong relationships with one another, which makes them feel like they belong (Carter, 2007, p. 549), Alberto elaborated."

"Oh? Informal. Like a networking group?" someone suggested.

"Yup! Exactly," Alberto agreed. "Networking groups that serve predominantly Students of Color can absolutely function as counterspaces. They provide students with safety, connectedness, validation, resilience, intellectual stimulation, empowerment, and a home base on campus. In addition, they also allow for collective wisdom for helping students cope with and respond to microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Grier-Reed, 2010, p. 187). I know through personal experience. I've been part of such networking groups."

With very little time remaining, Alberto wanted to make sure his overall message was understood.

"Does everything make sense to y'all? Did everyone understand my overall message? I hope my message wasn't discouraging. But I want to make sure you're told universities aren't exactly what they seem like on TV," Alberto stated cleverly, referencing his presentation title.

After three motionless seconds, a Latina student raised her hand: "Honestly, thank you for keeping it real. For students who look like us and come from communities like ours, obstacles such as racial discrimination should become an important factor in determining what universities we enroll in and what we should expect when we get there. The choice of college for Students of Color like us involves serious dilemmas and major struggles not generally faced by white Americans (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 48)."

Students shook their heads in accordance. Another student added, "Facts. You showed us that even though we will face adversity and unfavorable obstacles, we will find ways to excel academically, graduate, and ultimately navigate our future universities. It's inspiring. Thank you so much for this presentation."

"No. Thank you for listening. With that, I will end this presentation." Alberto thanked the students one last time as he bent forward and put his hands together as if he was praying.

All at once, the students, including some teachers, stood up, clapped, and cheered loudly, replicating the excitement and energy in the student section at their school's basketball games.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Take this counterstory as you please. If counterstorytelling is your thing, then let this counterstory be a reminder that storytelling is necessary, especially in academia. If counterstorytelling is a research method you'd like to pursue, then let this counterstory be a source of inspiration. Let it be a citation. Let it be an invitation to initiate your own investigation (or literature review) of what counterstorytelling as a research method entails. Using counterstory as a research method allowed me to stay true to myself and use the storytelling ability I learned from my family and community (Gonzalez, 2017). With this method of communication, I was able to covey the findings of the literature review I conducted on Latinx students in higher education in an accessible manner. For instance, I know from past experiences presenting in K–12 schools that I'll be able to read excerpts from this story to high-school students, and it will spark a very necessary, yet not often-had, conversation about racism in higher education. To this end and as evidenced through the stories of academic and nonacademic counterstorytellers before me, counterstories can be useful teaching tools to simplify very complex topics, shed light on injustices, and make information not only relatable but also understandable (Martinez, 2020).

Further, in synthesizing actual experiences and literature, this counterstory challenges the idea that counterstorytelling is "just a bunch of storytelling" to vent about social injustices (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Rather, it is important to keep in mind that "stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory" and that these stories are "real and legitimate sources of data and

ways of being" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). As such, our stories serve as lessons for our communities (Brayboy, 2005). Truth be told, stories about race and racism have always proved to be powerful engines of social and cultural reproduction and resistance, ultimately serving as revolutionary acts (Baszile, 2015).

Undeniably, counterstorytelling in social science research raises awareness of issues impacting the access, retention, and success of Latinxs in higher education while also motivating a discussion of strategies that more effectively serve students from nontraditional backgrounds in various spaces and practices (Martinez, 2014). Further, through the utilization of counterstorytelling in research, researchers challenge traditional Eurocentric epistemologies imbedded within and perpetuated by notions of white supremacy in higher education (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). We must continue problematizing traditional forms of research methods and methodologies, which have historically suppressed and misrepresented historically marginalized Communities of Color. Instead, we must seek out and utilize research methods and methodologies that allow us to express ourselves in ways we are accustomed to. Research methods and methodologies that allow us to communicate findings to those whom we care deeply about. The same people who have been historically and strategically excluded from knowledge produced in academia. We must engage with research methods and methodologies that allow us to be our whole selves, unapologetically. Counterstorytelling is that for me.

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What It's like to Lose Papi: A Counterstory on Grief

Natalie Madruga

Natalie Madruga (she/her) was born in Key West, Florida where she is considered a "freshwater conch." She now lives in Orlando, Florida and works as an Instructor for The University of Central Florida's (UCF) Department of Writing and Rhetoric. She attended UCF as both an undergraduate and graduate student (go Knights!), graduating with an MA in Rhetoric and Composition. While in her graduate program, she was awarded the Conference on College, Composition and Communication's Scholars for the Dream award. Her research interests include public memory and memorialization, critical race theory, cultural rhetorics, and first-year writing pedagogy, specifically for Hispanic serving institutions. When not at work, you can find Natalie creating playlists for her walks and workouts, re-watching her favorite TV shows, or on her couch promptly at 7 PM EST for Jeopardy! She also likes to cook, dance, decorate, and discover all the local businesses in her area. This essay was a labor of love, sometimes written late at night in bed on her phone, through voice memos on her walks, or in between tears and precious memories. She hopes readers and grievers take away from her words that they are not alone.

Abstract

This essay combines both the genre nuances of a personal essay and academic article. It focuses specifically on the experience of navigating graduate school while the feelings of grief and structural social norms exacerbate the process. In the beginning, the essay first introduces the argument of why grief and mourning are different for minoritized communities through scholarship from Critical Race Theory. Then, the author presents specific scenes from their life that showcase these challenges through three narrative vignettes, followed by a final reflection.

Key Words

grief, grieving, critical race theory, counterstory, mourning, public memory, family death

> One time, my Father and I were driving down the busy streets of residential South Miami. Hunched over in his Toyota Tundra, holding a café con leche in his hand and driving with the other, he pointed out all the things that were different since he had grown up. He pointed to an office building, and a Wendy's, and reminisced about how these streets used to be filled with nothing but strawberry fields that he would work at over the summer. He noted, with a hint of nostalgia, how much things have changed, and how time passes by without you ever knowing it.

This is the opening paragraph of my father's eulogy, which I wrote on the day of his service just hours before it. To give some context, my father died by suicide in 2016, a week before Thanksgiving. It was shortly before my 22nd birthday and the semester before the end of my undergraduate career. The service was eight days after this death. While writing his eulogy, I didn't overthink anything, I didn't edit and reedit myself throughout this writing process. I wasn't thinking of the audience, rhetoric, or any writing strategies. I was writing because I had to. I was writing because I was "the writer" of the family. Throughout those eight days, my mom was giving out all these affirmations, specifically to me, telling me, "*Tienes que hacer fuerte. Tienes que seguir pa'lante.*"

I remember feeling angry about these affirmations. Why am I the one who has to be strong? Why are we already talking about moving forward? I had just lost my father! And now, because of my long-standing identity as the writer of the family, I was writing

about my father before I was ready. Before I wanted to. After the eulogy, I resisted and made excuses to avoid all opportunities to write about him and to write about my feelings, and my grief. I could not bring myself to do this willingly until I was in graduate school.

Throughout my masters' program, I was exposed to scholarship that mesmerized me. I read from scholars who combined their narratives and lived experiences with theoretical considerations, such as articles from Aja Y. Martinez and Jacqueline Jones Royster—scholarship that foregrounded life experiences as the content and reasons for producing new knowledge and ways of thinking, scholarship that so delicately and brilliantly handled discussions on why things in academia, especially for women of color, must change. And the work from writing, rhetoric, and literacy scholars that presented this, as well as the work from scholars in adjacent fields, motivated me to continue arguing for this change.

Towards the middle of my graduate program, I started to put this motivation into practice. I was motivated to do so not only by the scholarship I was reading but because early on in graduate school, it became very apparent how much my grief was a part of my learning and life experience. In my first semester I tried to ignore my grief—and that easily, and very quickly, only made it worse. I started to think about how as a woman of color, in academia, this was a part of my life experience that was greatly affecting me, so I wanted to turn to that life experience and write about it rather than let it fester. It began by including small stories and experiences in my projects for graduate school. By the time I was completing my coursework, I had two projects in which my grief, and my experience of suddenly losing a parent, was the focus. This is the work I am presenting here. I am hoping to accomplish two things when writing this piece. First, I want to answer the charge from other scholars in the field, who argue that scholars should be able to have the opportunity to write and work through their grief, make space for those feelings, and incorporate them as valid experiences in their scholarship (Galliah; Hutchinson; Stewart). And in doing so, I want to push back against the typical narratives and norms associated with loss, and with death. Assumed narratives that exist in our everyday lives often come from what scholars note as "majoritarian stories," defined as "master narratives of white privilege" (Martinez 3).

Since they center on the stories of dominant groups, these narratives place expectations not only on everyday behaviors and practices but also on the way minoritized people navigate important life experiences. This is exceptionally true for women of color going through these experiences since majoritarian narratives often make assumptions about the "inherent" strength and resilience of women of color when working through grief. Pushing back, and disproving this narrative, was another inspiration for my work here.

In this essay, I introduce the scholarship that has inspired me to return to this writing space after quite a few years of resistance—the scholarship that presents the complications that come with grief and mourning. I present my argument by taking a problem/solution approach. First, I introduce how grief and mourning are different for minoritized communities because of majoritarian narratives and some of the strategies those communities have used to complicate those narratives. Then, I present specific scenes from my life—where I could feel my emotions tugging at me the most, where my life was disrupted by assumptions of my resiliency. The organization of my project is modeled after Jacqueline Jones Royster's "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own." Royster stacks three individual stories "one against another against another" to "offer a litany of evidence from which a call for transformation . . . might rightfully begin" (30). I am hoping my experiences with grief have the same effect.

INTERPRETING ACADEMIC CONVERSATIONS: WHAT I UNDERSTAND ABOUT WHO'S MOURNABLE, WHO'S NOT, AND WHAT THAT SAYS ABOUT GRIEF

Throughout this essay, I use the terms *grief/grieving* and *mourn/mourning* to refer to two different situations or experiences when talking about death. I use *grief/grieving* to refer to an individual's feelings of loss or suffering from the death of a loved one, and *mourn/mourning* as a collective set of practices or actions society participates in when people die. I make this distinction because I find there is a difference between the individual feelings of grief one person or family experiences and the action of mourning an entire community might practice.

In both the individual feelings of grief and the collective actions of mourning, race affects how people grieve, how people mourn, who is grieved and mourned, and how those narratives of grief and mourning are represented and told. Scholars who study race, particularly in the United States, do so with certain central tenets as a driving force for their critiques and analysis. These central tenets are informed by critical race theory, a theoretical framework and methodology first introduced by Black legal scholars such as Derrick Bell and Patricia Williams. The first tenet focuses on the "permanence of race and racism," the fact that racism is a permanent and normal part of United States society and that the dominant society typically benefits from the effects of racism (Martinez 10). Its permanence creates a hierarchy of how life is valued in the United States, and structural examples of this include housing discrimination, the school-to-prison pipeline, and wealth disparity. Returning to grief and mourning, racism does not suddenly resolve or disappear when a person dies. Racism extends into how life is memorialized or mourned, as well as who can be mourned, or who is worth mourning.

Considering the first tenet of critical race theory, I argue that there is a hierarchy of mourning in the United States, based on how that life was valued while alive, that is informed by dominant ideologies or white, middle-class ideals. The violence this ideology causes

is that it informs who can be mourned in the United States and is guided by racist, classist, ageist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist ideologies. I challenge this ideology by bringing forward its Eurocentric origin and the violent history it has in the United States.

This hierarchy of mourning can be traced back to the Greek origins of memorialization, as well as to the construction of United States national identity. It is present in early Greek rhetorical tradition with the funeral orations of Demosthenes. Demosthenes eulogizes soldiers killed in battle, beginning his speech with the notion that since these soldiers "preferred to die nobly than live and see Greece suffer misfortune" and goes on to say that because of these actions, properly eulogizing them would be an "impossible task" (Worthington 25). Here, Demosthenes lays out a thought process that society will continue to see when thinking about the dead—that the value of a person's life goes beyond words if they choose to die while protecting the interests of those in power. Based on this oration, Demosthenes shows grieving people that if the death of their loved one did not assist in the bettering of their country, the death is unmournable.

Ersula Ore writes a contrasting argument and presents how violent acts of racism are used to construct the United States' national identity through public lynchings. What Ore presents in her book *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric and American Identity* is how not just the death but also the violent acts inflicted against Black people, "target members of the polity not originally conceived as members of the polity" (26). Ore demonstrates how the intentional decision to celebrate anti-Black violence through public lynchings functioned to construct the United States' national identity through the postcards made of lynched victims, the public lynchings held as if they were afternoon picnics, and the lynched effigies made of our first Black president. The United States' past and present public lynchings show grieving people that if their loved one is considered not a member of the polity, their death is not only unmournable, it is also unmemorable. Overall, Demosthenes's orations and Ore's book show two contrasting arguments that, when placed together in conversation, demonstrate a longstanding presence of a hierarchy of life and the need to challenge that hierarchy.

Outside of scholarship, there are nuances in everyday conversation that support and continue to perpetuate whose life does and does not have value in the United States, and, therefore, whose life is and is not mournable or memorable. My first thought brings me to early discussions on social media about the coronavirus that attempted to comfort people by affirming that "only the elderly and immunocompromised die from the virus" and that there is consistent evidence on how minoritized people are even more so affected by the virus—in terms of transmission, testing, and vaccine distribution—yet the government seems to do little to nothing about it. Additionally, I think about popular culture, how folks always joke that no matter the genre of movie or television show, the person of color, the queer person, the disabled and/or neurodivergent person, the trans person, is always the first to die or to have some sort of villainized narrative. Their story is always the shortest, the most contorted, or filled to the brim with the most trauma.

This is all to say that socially, especially in the United States, there are codes in place that tell us who can be mourned. And these codes affect how grieving people work through the unimaginable loss of their loved ones.

But perhaps what affects grieving people the most in their everyday life are the restrictions that tell us how we can grieve and how our grief can only be perceived from outward actions. Pauline Boss's book *Ambiguous Loss* provides great insight on the consequences unresolved grief[1] can have on individuals and families. Her work focuses on families who have missing loved ones, or loved ones dying from terminal illnesses. The grief these family members feel from losing a loved one who is both absent and present is what Boss identifies as "ambiguous loss": for example, a mother with dementia who is physically present but mentally absent or a soldier missing in action who is physically absent but stays present because they aren't officially pronounced dead. Based on years of case studies with families experiencing ambiguous loss, and in turn unresolved grief, Boss argues that ambiguous loss is a long-term feeling that traumatizes and immobilizes (24).

Additionally, she points out that unresolved grief has a multitude of effects on a person's daily life, such as causing additional stress to other factors of their life, like their jobs and their relationships, disrupting their family dynamic, and creating generational feelings of unresolved grief. Throughout her book, Boss notes that ambiguous loss can apply to a multitude of situations and has developed to be more encompassing since she first started publishing on the topic. Other examples she includes within Ambiguous Loss include generational migration, emotionally absent family members, and divorces.

The hierarchies of mourning that surround loss that can then lead to unresolved grief can be even more constricting when it comes to race. In Aja Y. Martinez's book, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*, she argues for the necessary and foundational position of counterstory as a methodology in the field of rhetoric and composition by critiquing how counterstory has been delegitimized both in this field and in other fields. Her work builds on the previous practitioners of counterstory, who utilize it as a methodology that challenges what scholars call "'majoritarian' stories, or master narratives of white privilege" (3). Majoritarian stories place the lived experiences of white, able-bodied, cishet men as the natural or normal starting point for reference for lived

1 I use grief instead of mourn here because Boss uses the phrase "unresolved grief" and in her book focuses on how the emotions her patients feel affect their everyday life.

experiences. This centering of majoritarian stories "distorts and silences the experiences of people of color and others distanced from the norms" (23). Centering majoritarian stories affects how white, privileged folks perceive the behavior and experiences of those distanced from the norms and creates social codes that perpetuate how people should act and react to life experiences. I argue that there are majoritarian stories present when it comes to grief and loss, and those stories center on privileged experiences of grief and loss, therefore creating additional work for people of color as they attempt to resolve, or at least live with, their grief.

Felicia R. Stewart's article "The Rhetoric of Shared Grief: An Analysis of Letters to the Family of Michael Brown" provides impactful commentary on how majoritarian assumptions affect the grieving process of people of color, and more specifically, how white notions of Black resilience, specifically related to Black women, can deeply affect the lived experiences of grieving mothers. Stewart analyzes letters written by Wanda Johnson, mother of Oscar Grant III, and Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin, to the family of Michael Brown, utilizing a critical analysis that focuses on eulogistic rhetoric. When framing her analysis, Stewart explicitly points out the ramifications of majoritarian assumptions:

> Important to note is the perception of Black mothers in American society as a whole. Black mothers have long been viewed as strong, independent, and fierce. Viewed as positive attributes, these qualities can pose a burden for Black women (Parks, 2010) as the perception places an expectation that Black women are simply built to withstand tribulation and turmoil and can navigate easily through the hardships of life. (Stewart 356)

Stewart's words here address exactly how perceptions of grieving people can be exacerbated by assumptions rooted in white privilege and white supremacy. Historically, science has promoted and rationalized that Black people can endure more physical and emotional trauma than other communities and therefore do not require adequate support for working through traumatic experiences they face from racist actions. Because we live with this notion that Black women are "simply built to withstand tribulation and turmoil," we must contend with how that notion reflects how much work must be done. To begin authentically listening to the lived experiences of Black women, to begin the social change that will be felt, the majoritarian stories created about Black women must be chipped away, and that dominant ideology must be challenged (Stewart 356).

People of color interrupt the majoritarian stories created by white supremacy by using approaches such as counterstory and testimonio when writing about their experiences with loss. Martinez explains that counterstories are not just "marginalized narratives" but narratives that critique a dominant ideology and focus on social justice (17). Martinez also cites Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga, Judith Flores Carmona, who have worked on providing pushback against majoritarian narratives in Latinx critical race theory, or LatCrit. Delgado Bernal et al. discuss testimonio, a methodological strategy "that allows the mind, body, and spirit to be equally valuable sources of knowledge" and focuses on giving a voice to the silenced so they may reclaim the authority to narrate (Martinez 365). Delgado Bernal et al. also specifically note that testimonio can help people "respond to and heal from oppressive experiences" (365).

This is what I hope to accomplish by telling these stories, by revealing the experiences I have had as a Latina woman, as a grad student, and as a person who is grieving a loved one who died in a way that, to some people, would make them ungrievable. I am hoping that by telling these stories, I can provide moments of critique on how majoritarian narratives have affected my grieving process and practices. I hope the stories create a possibility for social change for other women of color who are also experiencing loss, a change that will get people to start listening to the experiences of women of color rather than exploiting them, a change that will get people to think critically about and provide the support women of color need while they grieve, rather than just assume they are too resilient to need it.

SCENE ONE

On the outside, my mom has always looked like she has it all together. I have so many memories of this in my life. I think about how she delicately puts together her appearance, how she pieces together her outfits every day. I think about how she's always pushing her feelings and initial emotions aside—whether it's for a client that's calling her five times in a row while she's trying to get things done, or squinting tears away when an unexpected conversation gets too deep.

I think a lot about that phrase *having it all together*. There are people who have it all together and people who don't. In almost all rhetorical situations. In grief, there are people who "got over it" in an appropriate amount of time and continued with their everyday life. And then there are the ones who didn't.

To the outside world, I guess I'm the former. I always look put together. I get to my classes, both the ones I teach and the ones I take, on time. I do my work on time. I do my dishes, and those of other people, in an appropriate time frame too. There are probably more of these moments I can't think of right now.

But I don't think I have it all together.

There are times when I still feel like I have a hole in my head, even though it's probably in my heart. There are still times when the mildest inconvenience makes me curl up into a ball. There are things I say out loud to my therapist that leave burns in my brain. I know they are thoughts that are common, thoughts I share with a

whole community of people. But they are heavy thoughts. Heavy thoughts that scare me.

I was nine years old the first time I thought about ending my life. I was at a school fair with my mom. That was in 2003. The first time I ever told somebody about that moment, the first time I ever revealed that thought from my head and said it with my voice, was to the first therapist I went to after my father died. That was in 2017. I carried that thought with me and only me for fourteen years.

And I'm still carrying things. Heavy things.

I revealed a detail from the day my father died to a close friend of mine in my graduate program one time. And they were shocked to hear this detail as part of my story. I told them about how on the day my father died, he called 911 so no one would find him dead. It was a detail that I thought everybody knew because when my father's death was fresh, I told anybody who would listen to me the entire story. I couldn't keep it in, I didn't know how. So to me, everybody around me already knew what happened. But since he died, I've moved across the state. Made new friends and colleagues. Introduced people into my life who only know this presentation of me, the presentation I allow them to know.

Reflecting on this moment makes me think of Les Hutchinson's article in which they talk about the loss of their grandmother and best friend. In their conclusion, Hutchison says that writing about their loved ones allowed them to learn about those loved ones' lives "in a different way than I have known them while they were alive." When my father's death was fresh, I think that's what I was trying to do. I was trying to understand the emotions he showed when he took his life. The dark places in his head he never showed to anyone. It was a part of him I didn't know existed until that day. And the only way to make sense of it was to just relive it and rewrite it and retell it to anybody who would listen.

I realize now that what I was doing back then, sharing all of these details with no caution or purpose, wasn't writing about my father's life in any different way. I was writing about his death because, during the first two years after his death, I could not fathom it. I could not convince myself his suicide had actually happened, so I spread those details around to the world as a way to embed the truth in places where I couldn't deny it.

After I shared this detail, there was a dense silence. My friend then said, "Wow . . . that's heavy." It looked like they also wanted to ask me how I did it all, with this luggage wheeling behind me, in front of me, all over me, but then stopped themselves. I said "thank you" to them in my head because honestly? I don't have an answer. And why? Because I don't have ALL of it together, I only have some of it together.

But why, or maybe how, do I even have some of it together, if that's the thing? I thought of my parents when I thought of this question. Because I think, in our three ways, that's how we all are. All were. We all had, or have, some of it together. My parents, in my small town, were community celebrities, award winners, club presidents and governors, and philanthropists. My mom decorates the house for every holiday and always puts things back where they came from once she is done with them. My dad had a folder for each appliance he owned, with its manual, receipt, and warranty information.

So, that's just how I grew up to be. Always look together, always have at least some of it together, no matter the cost.

I think that's why I don't know how to do nothing. I just don't. I tried the other day. I was going to try to do work, but I was just getting over an ear infection. I took the opportunity since I was finally feeling better to try and relax. So I sat on the couch. Watched the news. Patted my cat while he slept next to me, pat pat pat. I was thankful for him at that moment. He reminds me that you can do nothing but sleep for sixteen hours a day and still mean something to somebody. I made strides here. But then, I also did the dishes. Tried to organize the fridge. Booked a hotel for a trip six months in advance.

Check, check, check. Together, together, together.

I can try to "relax," but only for so long is what I've learned. And I think that isn't just a personal burden but also a collective one. What is relaxing? I feel like the main narrative of relaxation is big bubbles in a clawfoot tub, a frozen drink slowly turning into slush by the sand, or a cabin overlooking big trees in the rain. And the minute I paint these pictures, I'm laughing to myself. Who has the time for this as a woman of color, as a grad student? I've been working twice as hard almost all my life—the world isn't going to expect less of me just because my dad is dead. We don't get that time away—we're too "resilient," and the world thinks we just don't need it. There are universal images for relaxing, I feel—but there are also societal undertones that underscore who's allowed to relax and who's not. I argue that those societal undertones are determined by the systems that also mark who and who isn't grievable and mournable. If you're othered in the United States, if you're not a member of the polity, you'll be expected to do triple the amount of work and then go unnoticed when it's all over. And it just makes relaxing more stressful, this idea that I don't even deserve to relax in the first place. If my grief is a wound, all these complications around relaxing infect the wound. While I think everyone deserves to relax how they want to relax, and that it shouldn't be so complicated by capitalism and "girl boss" culture, sometimes all I can muster is laying my head on my cat and feeling his heartbeat. It reminds me that I'm alive.

And while I'm thinking about all this, I also think I work constantly because it makes me feel like I'm at home. That's what both my homes were like. The feeling I get from the vision of my mom sitting on the couch, letting out a sigh, and then getting up to

put something back in a cabinet is a comforting feeling. A feeling distorted by what the world asks of us, but a comforting feeling nonetheless.

So what does this say about my grief? I feel like it says, *I fooled you. You may think you're over it in such an appropriate amount of time. You may think you've picked up the pieces and glued the* bucaro *back together seamlessly, no glue slowly seeping through the cracks. But you're just running your fingers over the broken pieces over and over again because it's all you know, and it's all you have left.*

SCENE TWO

I have been attending HALOS, Healing After a Loved One's Suicide, since April 2017. It's a support group facilitated by our local chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. When I started attending HALOS, the facilitator was Drew. He was the foundation of that group, always providing the intended, necessary silence the group might need, asking questions the group had never thought about and dropping insightful one-liners I hold in my heart, picking them up when I need them most. Drew always used to say that with grief, "If you don't talk it out, you'll act it out." That's why I always go back to HALOS when I'm feeling extremely lost, or weak.

I was attending one of our biweekly meetings close to the holidays because those feelings had started to creep up again. Around this time, Drew was taking a break from facilitating the group. I noticed his absence had been feeding some tension into the room. It felt like the group was feeling lost, a little misguided, without him. I think since Drew's not here, and there are new facilitators with new questions and ways of facilitating, people are dipping into new conversations.

Last night, the focus was Christmas. For obvious reasons. Christmas has this laminated meaning; it's layered with joy and lights and brightness. This one couple in the room talked about how they feel they're in a bubble right now and that everything Christmas is outside of that bubble. They called the outside of the bubble "loud" and "insensitive." And I get it. Christmas is in conjunction with joy. And joy is in opposition to grief.

I struggled with the conversations the group had about the holiday season.

The holiday season, specifically Christmas, has been a coping mechanism for me. I dive head first into the cheer, into the twinkling lights and cooking for my family. During Christmastime, my family celebrates my birthday and my grandmother's birthday. On my grandmother's last birthday with our family, I made *arroz con pollo* for everyone, just like she used to. It's such a soft, delicate memory I hold in my heart.

I did relate to the group's conversation, however, because that's how I feel about Thanksgiving. To me, Thanksgiving is a performative waste. My parents divorced when I was nine, and because of that, I always spent it with my dad. It was his holiday. So if he's not here, why celebrate it in the first place? I'd be happier watching TV until 2 p.m., making lasagna, and drinking a bottle of wine instead of cooking this whole turkey for five people and then throwing it out a week later. Why eat a turkey if it's not his turkey? I guess here, for me, turkey is in opposition to lasagna.

Shortly before this meeting, I found out I had won a Scholar's for the Dream Travel Award to attend the 2020 Conference on College Composition and Communication. When there was a lull in the holiday conversation, I brought up my award. How empty it felt to have something so meaningful happen to me and not have my dad here for it. To have won something so worthy of a celebration and to not have him to celebrate with me, the person who celebrated everything about me. Throughout the conversation about my award, I mainly talked to the couple I mentioned above, who were fighting Christmas from their bubble. They helped me get down to this point: I don't necessarily miss that my dad's not here to know about my award. I miss the conversation we would have had about it. I miss talking back and forth with my dad, I miss our phone calls and our talks while he drove his truck through South Miami. And then Ben, part of the couple, left us with this thought: "When someone dies, the relationship between you and that person doesn't go away. What goes away is the conversations between the two of you."

That night I had a lot of trouble sleeping. My thoughts kept me busy with other thoughts and grades and maybe writing other proposals for future conferences. I ended up in a thinking domino effect. It felt like the top of my brain was trying to distract myself with thoughts about work and school. But the rest of my brain was in so many other places—I was thinking about the conversation from HALOS, thinking about conversations with my dad, with my family, with my dad's friends. I was thinking about my home, thinking about Key West. *Ficha* after *ficha* fell in my head until I was tossing and turning so much my bed felt like it was made of lava.

I thought about how my dad's friends see him in me, how their eyes water when they look at me, and how they can barely stand the sight of my face when I visit home. About how some of my family members refuse to look at his pictures and the things that refusal makes me think about myself. How my body hides from me the feeling of the phrase, "You're just like your father."

Reflecting on that night, I think my body was fighting something—the truth and utter weight of Ben's statement from that one meeting. The main thing that's gone is the conversations with your loved ones. And as a grieving person, you're trying to make up for it yourself. You're talking to yourself in your head to try to reach that person. And whether you believe what you believe, whether there's a ghost of that person somewhere or whatnot, the constant

trying, the looking inward to make outward conversations happen, can be so isolating. It's a lonely process. It makes me feel lonely. As an only child, as a person who grew up with divorced parents, I think a lot about loneliness. For a lot of people, Key West is a temporary place—families come and go, so I did not have a lot of consistent friends when I was younger. I had to teach myself how not to feel lonely when I was alone. At around nine or ten years old, my solution to this was writing fiction. Making up characters based on people I saw while I was out with my mom running errands or trotting behind my dad at Home Depot.

Coming up with storylines and telling them to my English teachers, who would then give me suggestions: "Where's the conflict?" "You've got to have a frozen moment!" To combat this loneliness, I started with stories. I've been doing that for almost fifteen years, and I think I have the hang of it now.

After my father's death, I started to think about loneliness almost in the opposite way—that you don't have to be alone to feel lonely. I feel I do have a solid support system now, but there's always going to be a hole in it because someone is missing.

Conversations are missing. And because of that, I'm not sure if I'll ever feel truly not lonely.

SCENE THREE

On inauguration day in 2021, I was out for an evening walk. I was listening to National Public Radio, and at the time, they were interviewing Micki McElya—a history scholar who focuses on collective and national mourning. The interview focused on the many emotions the world, and more specifically folks in the United States, were feeling due to immense grief from the global pandemic. McElya focused on feelings like trauma, the collective sadness, the emptiness everyone must be dealing with, and how the most effective solution for processing those feelings is to do so together, as a country. On this day, the United States was mourning the approximately 400,000 lives lost to the coronavirus. While on this walk, while listening to this talk, I could feel the wind whipping around me and holding me in gently, like a hug. I'm glad it was there because without it, I don't know how much farther I would have been able to go.

As a researcher interested in public memory and collective mourning, my initial reaction was to be deeply saddened by this interview. I then was curious about McElya's work. I started to do some research on this scholar, looked at some of their books, and found one of their publications. As I was doing this, a thought started to fester. 400,000 lives. That is so many people, that is so many people's loved ones. That is so many families who now have to figure out what to do with the material life of their loved ones. And while on that sidewalk in 2021, I was immediately taken to my hometown in 2017.

My father bought his townhouse in 2009. I think besides his family and maybe his friends, it was one of the things he loved the most. He decorated it with a modern theme, poured in thousands of dollars to fix the foundation, bought the latest and greatest gadgets and appliances, and had paintings and photographs commissioned by his friends that he could use as wall decor. He held birthday parties, Thanksgiving dinners, and pizza-making competitions at his place. He had a map of Key West from the 1800s commissioned, and he hung it above the dining-room table to remind himself of the island he made home. When the house was everything he wanted it to be, he bought a run-down, 1990s Jeep Wrangler he could fix on the weekends as a hobby.

After he died, my mom and I—we couldn't touch any of it. We couldn't bring ourselves to clean his house. Besides me, it was his baby, and it felt so wrong to disrupt the image he made of the place where he was most comfortable. It was as if he was dying all over again.

It took a storm—and this isn't figurative—it took a literal storm to get my mom and I to that point. In 2017, Key West was hit by Hurricane Irma, and my childhood home was left with severe damage. Above the room where I grew up, the roof was down to nothing but plywood. The mold that accumulated while we had evacuated made it unlivable. It would take almost seven months for my mom to get even a fraction of the insurance money to start to fix it. And during that time, we had to find a place to live, so we decided to move into my dad's townhouse.

I remember opening the deadbolt on that day. The Jeep was still in the driveway, with two flat tires. All of the windows were closed and shut. The dust had started to gather in the corners. Tiny spiders had made their homes in the dust. I had half expected him to be sitting on the couch, reading his Kindle and watching *60 Minutes*.

But he wasn't there.

Les Hutchinson, when writing about their grandmother, points to nature. They write,

> Write the map to where you live. Start as close or as far from your home as you wish. The map back home reads like a Joshua Tree. Start from any point, all you see are light green fronds. They pierce your skin if you dare to touch too close. I suggest holding yourself together tight. The fronds will shred into a million little threads if you pull a single one too hard. So don't. Press lightly. Be prepared to move on.

After the first few weeks of tiptoeing around his decorative dreams like mice, we had settled into reality. This would have to be our home now. I think Hutchinson's words emulate what this process was like for my mom and me.

From late 2017 to the summer I left for graduate school in 2018, we sold furniture items and appliances, replaced his paintings with those from my mother's father, held a yard sale, threw away old medicine from cabinets and bathroom sinks, donated some of his tuxedos, sold some of his appliances we didn't know how to use, decorated with paisley rugs and shower curtains, big candles, fluffy throw pillows, and plush blankets. Every step was like following the Joshua Tree—we pressed lightly onto the next frond, as slowly as we could.

Throughout this process, the emotional weight of his stuff started to fade into frustration, and eventually anger. He had so much stuff, and it seemed like every time we had successfully donated something or found another home for it, there was another rack of clothes or a storage bin right behind it. For months, it seemed we were making no progress. It was stressful.

The Jeep was no different. We were literally watching it deteriorate in the driveway—accumulating dust, rain washing off the dust, tires slowly flattening. It was one of those items we never touched on the to-do list because it was simply too big.

One day, one of my dad's friends, whom I worked for at the time, offered to buy it. He even offered to have it towed. Not even a week later, I looked out the window and it was gone. He had had it towed while we were still sleeping. That day, I had four people message me that they noticed the Jeep was gone as they drove past the townhouse.

Edward Casey talks about the four major forms of human memory—individual, social, collective, and public. Individual highlights "the unique rememberer," someone who remembers an event or a tragedy in several particular ways and is also engaged in "remembering how" that tragedy occurred—"remembering how" is understood as having a deep, detailed memory of that event (20). Social memory considers how people with preexisting relationships remember the same details from experiences they share (20-21). Collective and public memories are often connected to a "historical circumstance" that communities remember together, whether they have existing relationships or not (26). Losing my dad brought these nuances forward for me. Losing him is an individual memory I have a hard time sharing with other people. But I was not the only person to lose him, so there are these social memories of his friends and coworkers I carry as well. The Jeep was a stark reminder of that.

McElya's interview brought all of these memories to the surface. And her interview got me thinking, especially in terms of collective and public memory. Oftentimes, I feel those public-memory scholars forget that within collective and public memories, there are also people who are working through individual memories, who are "remembering how" (Casey 20). I thought a lot about those who have lost loved ones to COVID-19. I cannot even fathom what it must be like to lose a loved one to an illness everyone is talking about, whether it's through the Zoom dinner table or in the daily news headline. I cannot fathom what it must be like to lose a loved one to an illness that is a hoax to some people.

Reflecting on the memories of going through my father's house, I thought about the 400,000 communities of loved ones who now had to go through this process, too. Who now had to dismantle and repair the images of their loved ones who are gone, the images of their loved ones that have been made through their material. With all of these emotions coming together, I was lucky to have the wind to hold me at that time.

REFLECTION

Scholars like Hutchinson and Shelly Galliah both argue that when those grieving can share their stories of loss, and work through and reflect on that loss as part of their scholarly experience, a transformation can begin. Hutchinson notes the effect their losses had on their writing, reflecting, "I [Hutchinson] stopped writing entirely for months, feeling my voice had vanished," but "by writing about loss I was able to work again. The act of memorializing allows my voice not to be silenced by overwhelming grief, but to embody that grief, give it a name, honor it, and work with it." Galliah concludes by reflecting, "[R]evisiting my mother's death while drafting, writing, and revising this essay has slowly forced both a recognition and a necessary shift" (30).

What I find most impactful about both of these claims is how both scholars focus on how writing, in particular writing their stories, created a physical change in their lives. When I was able to work through and write through these experiences, I am certain it changed me as a writer. It lifted a weight off of me, even if it was only a little bit.

This transformation through storytelling also has a strong foundation in other scholarly conversations, especially when talking about the experiences of underserved communities in the United States. Scholars like Delgado Bernal et al. and Martinez note the ripple effect counterstories and testimonios can have—that when the lived experiences of people of color are centered, they chip away at the majoritarian stories that are made of us. Martinez highlights the domino effect counterstories can have and how they provide critiques of social oppression informed by an interest in social justice and a possibility of social change (28). Delgado Bernal et al. write about *testimonialistas*—scholarship in which the author is both the researcher and the participant, in which they document their own stories in or out of academia (366). *Testimonialistas* are narrations that challenge dominant and/or majoritarian notions and are written "to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity" (366). Both scholars here bring up such important exigencies for why the telling of counterstories and *testimonialistas* is necessary—it is because when people of color tell their stories, the narrative is

made by us, and we can begin to push back against the narratives that have been made about us by white people.

I choose to integrate these two arguments because I think there is power in people of color sharing their stories about grief. It is a part of our everyday lives in a way that can only be understood from our stories. In the United States, people of color are more affected by diseases, illness, and institutional violence than white people. Additionally, people of color are less often offered mental health resources, putting us at a higher risk for suicide. And most of the time, the narratives of this loss and death are controlled by majoritarian narratives—with this control, there is no room for social change (Martinez 28). That is why I wanted to share my stories—to begin to chip away at notions of resilience surrounding women of color and to show there are Latinx people out here—people like my father and me—who fight our internal battles to live in this country every day. I am hoping that by sharing my stories, I can add to the process of transformation the community before me has already begun.

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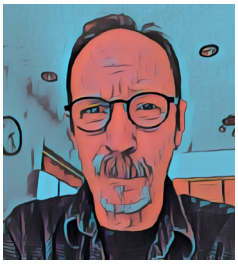
In Others' Words: An Essay on Translating Myself

Michael Spooner



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Abstract

Translating a paper for a conference in Mexico led me to explore translation theory and to search the ethical nuances of presenting in my L2. Moments of cognitive weirdness in the transit from one language to the other illuminated some troubling theoretical problems, such as the invisibility of the traditional translator, the cultural "smoothing" of texts, and the revisionist tendency of translation itself. These in turn led me to query my position as an L1 speaker of English addressing in Spanish an audience in Latin America, and to question even attempting it. Was I an imposter speaking in others' words, or was Spanish gradually becoming my language, too? Along the way, I found myself comparing notes on my emotional relation to Spanish with the writer Jhumpa Lahiri's description of her relation to Italian, her own L2.

Keywords

L2 writing, translation, language teaching, ESL, EFL, translanguage

> I like being at the beginning again as a reader and as a writer. I like that I am limited. I like that I only have a certain vocabulary and certain tools, and that I can only go so far. That appeals to me. It's a sort of poverty, you know; it's a choice to make do with less.
>
> —Jhumpa Lahiri

MEXICO

I opened my email one winter day to find a Call for Proposals (CFP) from the *Congreso Internacional Red Latinoamericana de Programas y Centros de Escritura*[1] announcing a conference in Guadalajara. It would be a bilingual conference on current practice in writing programs and centers, and participants would attend from many countries in Latin America, plus the United States.[2] Keynote addresses would feature Latin American writing scholars, plus three U.S. scholars I knew from my years of directing the Utah State University Press. I was curious to learn what these three writers were doing now, but I wanted even more to learn what was going on in writing studies in Latin America. The discipline was growing there, and having lived for brief periods in several Latin American countries, I wanted to hear about it firsthand.

I asked myself, Why not propose a paper? I had already begun an essay based on a tutoring experience in a community ESL center nearby; maybe I could massage that into a presentable paper. Also: the CFP said *bilingual* conference. My Spanish was good enough for a gringo traveler, but I would present in English, so as not to embarrass anyone. In June, the conference planners accepted my proposal, and I began writing in earnest. By the end of summer, I had a full script, introduction,

1 International Conference of the Latin American Network of Writing Programs and Centers

2 Or "*including* the United States." The self-identified Latino population of the U.S. in 2020 was over 60 million, according to the official U.S. census.

images, slides, and bio. I was good to go. I even practiced aloud. But then, in September, the conference planners sent an email to say, by the way, bilingual conference, but most attendees would not be English speakers, and translators were hired only for the keynotes, so . . .

I had been worried about this. Both the CFP and the conference website were slick and bilingual, but evidently the universe was playing with me—and with my hopes to be part of an international conversation. Very funny. What was even more amusing: My topic was the value of translingualism for tutors and clients who might be, yes, working in their second language. Sadly, my Spanish didn't feel ready for prime time, and anyway I had only a few weeks to make a translation. What to do? Maybe I should withdraw the proposal; I could just attend the conference without presenting.

My friend Maria-Luisa is a linguist and a Mexican national. She brushed off my panic. "Ha! Obviously, you do it in Spanish," she said. "So you are not perfect. So what? *Por respeto a mi tierra,*[3] you should be doing in Spanish already. I'm offended, hahaha." Fair, I thought. Why shouldn't I just embrace my fear and my linguistic poverty? Out of respect, I should leave travel Spanish behind and try building who I am in academic Spanish.

I took a breath and set out to translate myself.

LAHIRI AND ME

It was during an interview about learning Italian as an adult that Jhumpa Lahiri made the remarks I quote in the epigraph above (Wallner, 2016). I was thinking about those comments one day in Ecuador while walking to a Spanish class. Dodging across the street, climbing the *escalinata*, I thought, *Yes. To make do with less—to make do without English—that's good for me. It complicates things, but it brings focus. It's hard and a little lonely. I like that.*

> I feel in some sense linguistically an orphan. There is no language to me that isn't a foreign language in some way. So, I have a relationship now to three languages: the Bengali of my family, the English of my education, and Italian. And I think Italian is the only language I have really loved. (1:08ff)

I had just used this interview and Lahiri's book *In Other Words* (2016) with adult ESL/EFL students to get them talking about their own experience of language learning. Now, turning down the street toward my Spanish school in Ecuador, I thought about how nonplussed my students had been by Lahiri's sensibility. The Polish medical doctor spoke of her own very concrete reasons for learning English—her fourth or fifth language; the Pakistani barley researcher mentioned practical community-oriented needs. The Japanese visiting scholars in atmospheric science, the Russian faculty spouse—all the students in that class—were pragmatic intellectuals. To them, Lahiri's stance seemed romantic and a bit frivolous. After all, she was born an international, was raised bilingual in an affluent home, was educated in the Ivy League. She has a Pulitzer Prize and a National Humanities Medal. In short, she is a wealthy, privileged American woman, choosing "a sort of poverty" from a chair at Princeton—when she isn't in Rome. More fundamentally, the students couldn't see why multilingualism would have become self-alienating for her. And finally, they asked, what does love have to do with it?

But Lahiri has been conjoining language and love for a long time. She did this, for example, in her prize-winning story "Interpreter of Maladies" (1999). Her title character is a translator—a medical translator—in India, who feels apathetic in his marriage. This man becomes infatuated with a tourist, and he reflects on how this new love gives him a joy very much like the elation he feels after successfully translating a passage from a French novel or an Italian sonnet. (An *Italian* sonnet.) Lahiri knows the thrill of connecting through language.

For my students, translating themselves into English was different. Sometimes exciting, sometimes funny, it was never angsty and never an infatuation or a self-assigned "poverty" challenge—like writing an essay without adverbs. Nor were they looking for linguistic monogamy. They were practical and focused adults, amused at themselves and serious, and they would leave *nothing* behind as they added another language. They were cheerfully multilingual.

My life has been different from Lahiri's, too. My childhood was grindingly rustic: woodsmoke, animal skins, snowshoes, axes, and guns. The Arctic Circle was just out the back of the house, and my young parents were poor and religious. I am old now, yet I am still quite marked by this background. My South American friends find me exotic because: Alaska. But in truth I am . . . what is the opposite of exotic? Provincial. I am indelicate and unpolished. I am not ignorant, but I am badly educated. Certainly, I am awake to the advantages I have now, especially in Ecuador as I walk to school in this "lower income" country. I am also awake to where I fall short. Falling short is why I am here, learning a language and a culture and building relationships. My path has made me, like my students, short on patience for mystical one-percenters with first-world problems.

At the same time, I do identify with Lahiri's affection for the language she has learned as an adult. To learn a new language is to choose and build a new identity, and this is a choice most people don't have in childhood—just as we don't choose our family or place. For that reason alone, it's no wonder that Lahiri loves Italian. And I love my L2 for the choice I've made, too. However, I feel

3 "To show respect to my country."

challenged and invited, not impoverished, by the limitations I face. Monolingualism would be the poverty.

Under a narrow stone bridge in a sudden downpour, I share a smoke with a Venezolano refugee, and we chat quietly about the disaster in his home country. I am a descendant of Puritans and Norwegians, so I am not used to being pleased, but it does please me to do the cognitive work that Spanish requires. I love how Spanish opens a window into this man's experience and how that opens me in turn. I feel enriched in some ways, to be sure, but this is not about gratification; I also feel a responsibility "to begin again" (in Lahiri's phrase), to lose the easy monolingualism of my class, country, history, and culture.

Toni Morrison famously said, "white people have a very, very serious problem, and they should start thinking about what they can do about it" (Rose, 1993; 40:33). I wish my people back in the backwoods felt the same. But in my home province, white people, even black sheep like me, sense that to begin again would require ongoing humble work for which we U.S. provincials are not well-equipped. We are isolationists—paranoid, stubborn, prickly, and prideful. "Fiercely independent" is how you will hear it said up north (and said without irony despite our state's utter dependency on industrial capitalism and federal support). While it is true we are prepared to survive some privation, our isolation has marked us, distorted us so that we somehow cannot handle the simple surrender of ego that might reduce our fear of Otherness. To connect with the Other even simply through learning a language would be to *become* an Other, and my provincial peeps are not sure they could survive the process. They can see that "to begin again" would challenge their myth of rugged independence and individual self-reliance.

Thus, paradoxically, it falls to individuals—to me and to other white black sheep of the provinces, to make the move. It is as Frankie Condon (2020) says in the context of antiracist activism: "[Y]ou can't snatch your people without snatching yourself" (p. 48).[4] Engaging with multilingualism is part of this; part of what I can do about it. Part of how I am snatching myself.

SNATCHING ENGLISH

Published translation scholarship doesn't have much to say about translating one's own work. I was surprised at this as I began reflecting on the experience of rendering my Guadalajara paper from English into Spanish. Maybe the issues are too obvious—translating is translating. However, a few scholars from *outside* the field of translation studies have discussed the challenges in translating their field notes written with the aid of an interpreter. L. G. Crane, M. B. Lombard and E. M.Tenz (2009), for example, offer an observation about the language of research and publication in social geography. As in many other fields, social geographers whose L1 is English very seldom submit work for publication in non-English journals, even when that research was done in non-English settings.

> There is an implicit assumption about native English-speaking researchers' willingness to subject themselves to some of the uncomfortable situations described by non-Anglophone colleagues. (p. 40)

The authors are being oblique. As a group, native-English-speaking researchers are rather famously *not* willing to suffer the discomfort of L2-English colleagues who have to submit papers for monolingual English venues.

Just ask Laura Di Ferrante, Katie A. Bernstein, and Elisa Gironzetti (2019), co-editors of an applied linguistics journal. Despite the many recent developments in global communication, they write, most of the colonialist forces that set conditions in place for English language dominance remain today. These editors are concerned that distortions are accumulating in many fields as a consequence of the demographics in published work. "[T]he hegemony of English-language publications over any other language remains a strong influence in scholars' choice of publication venues, topics, and styles of scholarly debate" (p. 106). Which is to say that Anglophone culture in academe, as in economic and political and other realms, generally has not yet snatched itself from colonialist monolingualism, and the resulting losses even in "topics and styles of scholarly debate" are incalculable.

The issue is illustrated in a small set of case studies by my friend Maria-Luisa. Among her participants—bilingual secondary students in Albuquerque—she found 40 percent employing a major discoursal feature associated with English in their narratives written in Spanish (Spicer-Escalante, 2015, p. 26). [5] A laissez-faire version of translingual theory might find this untroubling, even in the more global impact that Di Ferrante et al. describe. That is, translingual theory posits that language contact is constant, that variation is a given, and that the concept of named languages is suspect anyway. From these, one could argue further that there is no sense in lamenting the loss of language-specific rhetorics. In fact, logically, even in well-intentioned reforms in bilingual education lies the risk that programmatic translingualism may aid the erasure of the very wisdom of difference that Di Ferrante et al. want to protect for the sake of broader human knowledge. Jürgen Jaspers (2017) remarks,

4 A friend used to warn her kids, "Child, I will snatch you baldheaded!" I loved it that Condon used this indelicate verb for social correction.

5 To be clear, the focus of her research was not translingual boundary-crossing, but rather contrasting discoursal features between student narratives in Spanish and narratives in English by the same students.

> This is most visible in the way that concerns about minority language maintenance are approached [in bilingual education]. Many minority language activists are worried that the promotion of fluid language practices will threaten their own efforts. (p. 12)

I've seen some of that erasure in my home province, where more than a few Indigenous languages have vanished in my own lifetime from systemic coercion, simple displacement, and other influences, even without the help of translingual educational spaces and fluid language practices recently promoted in bilingual education.

In the context of writing studies—historically a U.S. dominated discipline—one wonders what wisdom in non-English styles of scholarly debate we might have already missed, due to that discipline's tardy movement toward multilingualism. That is why a bilingual conference like the one in Guadalajara is exciting. Especially when they are not-quite-bilingual, we can see better what writing studies globally might learn from the non-English world.

RAREZA

Pilar Mestre de Caro, in a 2013 study, explores issues in L2 pragmatics, but she has her finger on something that is also a central problem for translators, as I would find out in translating my own *ponencia*[6] for Guadalajara. She makes the following comment on what can go wrong when a speaker tries to transfer a verbal formula naively from L1 to L2. The formulation of "certain everyday speech acts," Mestre de Caro writes,

> *no puede obedecer a una transposición de la lengua materna o L1 a la lengua extranjera (L2 o L3), pues en la mayoría de los casos habrá un efecto de "rareza" por parte del hablante nativo que constate dicho uso, afectando la comprensión entre interlocutores, el curso y el equilibrio de la comunicación.*
>
> cannot obey a transposition from the mother tongue or L1 into the foreign tongue (L2 or L3), so, in the majority of cases, there will be an effect of "*rareza*" on the part of the native speaker who observes said usage, affecting the comprehension between interlocutors, the course and the equilibrium of the communication. (p. 409) [my translation]

In translating even these few lines by Mestre de Caro (which I did several years ago for other purposes), I found that a text could not "obey" a simple transposition from Spanish into English.

Rareza is a common noun derived from the root *rar-* (rare, peculiar, odd). One might translate it as "peculiarity" or "oddity"—though probably not "rarity." In colloquial usage, the adjective *raro* appears in ¡*qué raro!*—"how strange." Grammatically, *rareza* the common noun is perfectly conventional as Mestre de Caro has it, but semantically it is an odd choice to describe the relation between interlocutors. It is *un poco raro,* if you will, and she intends it to be so—as she signals with her scare quotes. This problem gave me pause in working out my ephemeral translation, and, as you can see above, I decided to retain *rareza* as a temporary loanword.

Crane and colleagues (2009), in their reflections on social geography, describe a kind of conceptual empty space, a "moment of friction and hesitation," when an interpreter is unsatisfied with a word choice in field notes. In such a moment, the interpreter might offer the researcher a revision immediately, or they might revise later, upon reviewing the transcript. Sometimes, in a *you-just-don't-have-a-word-for-this* situation, conceptual mediation is entirely stalled. But Crane and colleagues see opportunity here: "these ruptures in knowledge have the potential to open up new horizons, and one must allow for these and explore them" (p. 45). Rupture. *Rareza.* These may be other words for the wisdom of difference.

Moments of *rareza* have always challenged translators, as Ali Reza Ghanooni (2012) makes clear in a historical review, and resolving them invokes a set of questions that run from aesthetics to ontology. A common formulation going back to antiquity poses "word-for-word" translation against "sense-for-sense."[7] Later, Schleiermacher offered a more nuanced idea, suggesting that the translator's job is rather to create the "same impression" in the translation reader as the source text would have had on the original reader (Ghanooni, p. 77). But in my little translation of Mestre de Caro (2013), I felt there was truly no English equivalent in either word or sense for her "*rareza*." Plus, there was the matter of wordplay. Scare quotes signal *meaningful* friction and hesitation, and Mestre de Caro rightly uses them to mark the novelty of the connotation she calls up in *rareza*. She's being witty. Per Schleiermacher, I needed the same impression in English, but how does one convey a play on words in a source text without equivalent choices in the target language? Retaining the word *rareza,* I thought, might not be witty, but it might create a meaningful rupture and invite the reader to explore it.

Traditional translation practice would argue I should *not* retain a word foreign to the new reader. Traditional practice tells us 1) that a reader is (assumed to be) monolingual and 2) that a translator should be invisible, to preserve the reader's illusion that the text is unmediated. We have to notice, however, that both of these conventions motivate editorial smoothing by the translator—substitutions that, in effect, suppress *rareza*. In transforming the work

6 Paper or talk presented.

7 Cicero mentions this tension, for example, as does St. Jerome (cf. Yang 2010 or Ghanooni 2012).

into a new language, one might say, a translator substitutes a comfortable counterfeit for what was a meaningful friction in the source text.

Lahiri is on board with this. In her 2021 *New Yorker* essay, she defends a very strong version of translation as substitution. She describes translating an Italian novel into English this way: "Word for word, sentence for sentence, page for page, . . . [m]y version of this book was produced to stand in place of the Italian. . . . It is now an English book instead of—*invece di*—an Italian one." She is not wrong that translating produces a new work, but as an author who has been handled roughly in translation, I am a little concerned by how entitled Lahiri feels to replace—*sostituire*—the source with her own text and then theorize this substitution not as a mediating translation but as a new and non-derivative "English book."

Lawrence Venuti's (2008) term for this approach is *domestication* of the source text. While one legitimate goal of any translation is to make the source text comprehensible in the receiving language, Venuti is naming something deeper, something ethical. Ethical because, in effect, domestication re/forms the source text while occulting the reformer. It is a silent revision, in other words, a form of conquest tacitly authorized by the mandate to be comprehensible. Venuti advocates replacing domestication with *foreignization.* By this, he means that a translator, without sacrificing essential comprehensibility, might choose to candidly signal strategic points of cultural *rareza,* specifically to make the translator visible and thus to remind readers of the revisionist, counterfeiting tendency of translation itself. Although translating cannot deliver a source text unmediated, it can *por respeto* acknowledge that "translation changes everything" (Venuti, 2013). So, to foreignize it, to retain its *rareza*, is a snatching gesture.

My own idea with Mestre de Caro's text above may have been only aesthetic; I just wanted the *rareza* of "rareza." I wanted that momentary estrangement for the way it would dramatize Mestre de Caro's concept, and my aesthetic choice created a foreignizing effect. In theoretical terms, I retained "an ethnodeviant pressure" in my translation, "to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, *sending the reader abroad"* (Venuti 1995 p. 20 quoted in Yang 2010, p. 78, emphasis added).

To be sure, there are other ways to do foreignizing in a translation. I also retained Mestre de Caro's concepts "mother," "foreign," and "tongue," though I did translate them. *Lengua materna* and *lengua extranjera* are standard in contemporary academic Spanish. But US academic culture would be likely to degenderize and decolonize and disembody—i.e., to smooth them—into "first," and "second," and "language." Here, I felt it was useful to preserve the little *rareza* that these cultural concepts might cause for the provincial academic reader—sending them abroad.

MEXICO II

In my *ponencia*, a major pivot point was my report of a tutoring session in which I had worked with a struggling student at our local community English language center. It was the kind of session that many a college or university writing center sees every day. Javier[8] was a novice English speaker, and he had been given a writing assignment by an English-Only sort of ESL teacher. The assignment—more precisely its U.S. cultural context—was incomprehensible to him. As we sat down together, it was clear that Javier was almost completely blocked and unable to produce any English at all that would respond to the assignment. He could produce a response in Spanish, however. *Okay*, I said. *Dime en español lo que quiere decir and I will write it en inglés*.[9] As Javier whispered a draft in Spanish, I scribbled a translation; he then recopied the English and submitted the paper.

We cheated, in other words. Javier's wife, there with us, was a bit scandalized, but there was no pedagogical scandal in my tutoring. Readers of this essay may agree with me, but in ESL curricula, the *solamente inglés*[10] tradition remains strong. That's where the scandal is—in the theory base of English Only (or any target-language only) teaching—and this is what I argued in my *ponencia*. *Solamente inglés* is a pedagogy of immersion, which is not a bad idea in itself, but, because it imagines only a *monolingual*—often a colonialist—immersion, it is misconceived for teaching multilinguals, even emergent ones. This is not a new critique, as I reported in my *ponencia.* What many researchers think would be better, I said, is a pedagogy that we could call an "*inmersión bilingüe, un modelo que podría animar, o usar—o al menos no castigar—la* translanguaging" [11] (Spooner, 2019).

Here I encountered *rareza* in my own source text. How would you say *to translanguage* in Spanish? It sounds *raro* enough to most native speakers of English, including most academics beyond just a few fields.[12] *To language* is already a problem, because we're pushing a noun into a verbal function. We can process it, especially if English is our L1. But still: Verbing weirds other parts of speech. In popular culture, we *text*, we *email*, we *DM* or *Slack* or *post* or *message* or *tweet*, all of which verbed nouns we find more specific than *to write*. Many English speakers might argue that academics are even worse than adolescents for casual neologizing. (See what I did there?) At a convention in the 1980s, I heard a

8 A pseudonym, of course.

9 "Tell me what you want to say, and I will write it in English."

10 "English only," but expressed in Spanish as an ironic resistance—a *rareza,* if you will. Hat tip to Victor Villanueva, from whom I've heisted this wordplay.

11 "bilingual immersion, a model that could encourage, or use—or at least not punish—translanguaging."

12 I should note that it was in Welsh, not English, that the concept and coinage of "translanguage" first appeared (cf. Williams 1994).

politician tease the president of NCTE about academics and their jargon. In reply, the NCTE president quipped, "I see we need to inservice you languagewise." (Ba-da-boom.)

Spanish does this, too, of course, in spite of the Royal Academy of Spanish. A recent example is *textear* (to text), as is the shimmering *mensajear* (to message). But apparently, at least at this writing, Spanish does not "language," let alone "translanguage." I did serious member-checking on this, and I was turned away in no uncertain terms. By normal patterns in Spanish, "to language" would be "idiomar" or "lengüear." However, these neologisms, I was told, *no tienen ningún sentido en español.*[13]

I dithered for a long while in what Laura Gonzales (2018) calls a "translation moment." In some ways, this concept of hers echoes the hesitating moment identified by Crane and coauthors. But where Crane et al. focus on lexicon, Gonzales attends more deeply to the rhetorical dimension. In her description, a translation moment is an audience-focused mini-reflection that occurs when we are working "to negotiate meaning outside the limitations of a single named language. . . . Signaled by a pause, translation moments are instances of rhetorical action embedded in the process of language transformation" (pp. 1–2). *Signaled by a pause*. A moment of friction and hesitation.

Gonzales, who was researching layers of engagement at a small community-based translation/interpretation office, dwells on the rhetorical decisions made by translators in such moments (pp. 87ff). In one example, a participant assigned to medical interpretation found herself beside a woman ready to give birth. How does an interpreter of maladies say that the doctor wants to "break your water to get the labor started"—in Spanish? Well, you don't say "water" and you don't say "labor." *No tienen ningún sentido* in the birthing room (p. 95–96).

The stakes of rhetorical attunement were not so dramatic for me, but, in the long moment of transforming my little 20-minute *ponencia* into Spanish, I began to realize how unique the rhetorical situation is for translation. I had understood Mestre de Caro's *equilibrio de la comunicación* too superficially. To translate *translanguaging*, I would need either 1) to invent a circumlocution—a cumbersome option; or 2) to coin a term in Spanish—maybe *trans-idiomando*—which . . . no; or 3) to foreignize my own text and retain the English portmanteau *translanguaging* in a deliberate *rareza* . . . and jeopardize the rhetorical equilibrium with my audience.

I was getting disoriented.

***

Me: So what about "translanguaging"?

Maria-Luisa: What about it? There is no word *en pinche español*.[14]

Me: So . . .

Maria-Luisa: No, you just say it in English. Make it a loanword. In context, they will get it.

Me: But maybe I should . . .

Maria-Luisa: *No te preocupes.* Don't worry. They will get it.

SNATCHING ENGLISH II

The conundrum reminded me of LuMing Mao's (2006) concept of "togetherness in difference" in the "ethnodeviant" choices available in Chinese American rhetoric. Suresh Canagarajah's (2010) Tamil/English bilinguals "shuttling between languages" also came to mind, of course. However, unlike those examples, I was not protecting an identity under pressure from a dominant language and culture; I was the oppressor. I was coming to Guadalajara from a language with a history of global hegemony and a reputation for unwillingness to experience the regular discomfort of L2 colleagues. A foreigner foreignizing himself gives foreignizing a different look altogether. What ethos would it communicate? Coming from a person like me, wouldn't it be more of the same old Anglo paternalism? I couldn't say *there's-no-word-for-this-en-pinche-español* right there in my *ponencia.*

And what was a person like me, anyway? Crane et al. (2009) point to a responsibility that sounds a lot like snatching yourself.

> [M]ultilingual settings require more intensive, reflective, and careful thinking about the researcher's identity and positionality. . . . [R]esearchers in privileged positions . . . should be encouraged to constantly examine their position in the wider research world, and the implications this has for others. . . . Discussions about language may therefore have potential to provide space for reflexivity for human geography as a discipline, as well as for individual researchers. (p. 44)

For writing studies, the insight is no less germane. Contact between the languages of writer and responder, regardless of which is L2 for whom, marks out a space available for reflection on the part of the writer, responder, researcher, theorist, even publisher, ultimately the field itself. Sociolinguists have fruitfully explored such contact zones for many decades (as have literary writers). This work, in fact, grounds the foundational insight of translingual theory: Languages are dynamic, always in motion, always in contact. Despite valid concerns like those of Jaspers (2017), which

13 They have no meaning—make no sense—in Spanish.

14 "in [expletive] Spanish."

I share, to view languages as separate unbridgeable ontologies is an error.

Still, reflecting on my own grasp of Spanish, I began to wonder if I would truly be speaking from *respeto a la tierra.* I knew my audience in Mexico would be hospitable and might even empathize with me as an L2 speaker and as a tutor of L2 speakers. Even so, might I be overreaching? Maybe I should be trying harder. Maybe I should wait until my Spanish is more mature.

And the "language barrier" aside, other layers of my positionality were just as potentially problematic: white, U.S., academic, older, cis, man. Retired. Maybe it had been an act of gringo paternalism even to propose a paper for this conference. As much as I loved my subject, as much as I loved Spanish, I wondered if I should just let it go. I didn't know whether I was feeling impostor syndrome or imposture itself. Maybe there's no real difference. Maybe I should withdraw.

LAHIRI AND ME II

Throughout *In Other Words*, Lahiri frets. "Can I call myself an author, if I don't feel authoritative? . . . I know that my writing in Italian is something premature, reckless, always approximate. I'd like to apologize," (pp. 83–85). She thinks of her three languages as a triangle, three sides framing her mirror, in which, "Because of my double identity, I saw only fluctuation, distortion, dissimulation. I saw something hybrid, out of focus, always jumbled. I think that not being able to see a specific image in the frame is the torment of my life," (pp. 157–159). She thinks of Daphne, who transforms into a tree. She thinks of Pessoa, who reinvented himself as four separate writers.

> A total metamorphosis isn't possible in my case. I can write in Italian, but I can't become an Italian writer. . . . Maybe what I'm doing, by means of Italian, resembles [Possoa's] tactic. It's not possible to become another writer, but it might be possible to become two. (pp. 171–173)

The interpreter of maladies, at the end of Lahiri's story, settles into disillusionment about his tourist crush and into a kind of grief for the affair never consummated. This made me wonder about my affair with Spanish. I can write in Spanish, but beyond the land of English, I may always be an *extranjero,* a stranger, an Other in that language. Could this be how Lahiri herself—disillusioned, unrequited in Bengali and English—will someday feel about Italian?

***

"You can't be sure," says my wife from the other room. "Maybe Italian will be for Lahiri like I am for you—not the first, but the best." Ha. Third-spouse humor.

RAREZA II

"*No te preocupes,*" said Maria-Luisa. Don't worry.

In Spanish, where the word for wait is "hope," the word for retirement is *jubilación*. While I approached my new status with as much jubilation as my Puritan ancestors would allow, I also prepared several long-term projects, so the transition into freewill would not rattle me. I began to travel in Latin America each year, studying Spanish; I began formal study of L2 teaching; I volunteered at the community ESL center; I contacted my former literary agent to let him know I was writing novels again. (He did not reply—*pinche gringo.*)

(Travel, volunteer, write. Seniors don't really want to do these things, but when you retire, that's the law.)

One thing a rustic upbringing may prepare you for is accommodating realities you cannot change. Even so, I found that *jubilación* required room for more *rareza* than I had expected. In *Latinoamérica*, there is no way for a tall white *extranjero* to blend in. Back home, enrolling in my third master's program in 40 years, I was unprepared for how young graduate students had become. And professors—I had shirts and ties older than some of them. I felt deeply self-conscious and afraid of failure. I don't like being conspicuous, so I contrived a quiet and studious persona. A retiring presence, if you will.

I had spent three decades as an academic publisher and editor and writer, and, although I loved my work, the pressure had been intense. The stakes were always high (unlike the salaries), and I was burned out. Now, as a *jubilado,* I was a free man in the cities of Latin America—I felt unfettered and alive. Yet I hesitated, because although my interests were much the same as before, my lived rhetorical situation was radically different. I don't think I was becoming two—Possoa's trick. My hesitation was not over how to write a new chapter but how to stay legible, how to translate myself while retaining . . . I don't know. I don't know why it felt tricky. Except that maybe *jubilación* is a translation moment; I had rhetorical life decisions to make.

MEXICO III

At some point, I began to wonder if translation was truly what I was doing with my *ponencia*. In the interplay between my rhetorical and discoursal needs and my limitations in Spanish, I found myself reconceiving what I needed to say in terms of what I was *able* to say. I was accustomed to circumlocution, a default strategy for L2 learners, but here something else was going on. The process was triggering changes in how I understood my own content. Not radical changes of direction, but noticeable changes of nuance. I thought of Lahiri's (2016) comment, "Even if I remain half blind, I can see certain things more clearly" (p. 229). As I redrafted,

reconsidered, and refined my translation, my English version (my source text) was losing control of me. That is, what I was able to say was getting me closer to what I wanted to say, and soon I was beyond the bounds of my *lengua materna*, gamely writing in my premature Spanish as if I were on the street in some faraway *país.* I wasn't substituting words for words or sense for sense; rather, language was my *activity*. I had been "languaging," in Merrill Swain's usage (e.g., 2008), employing language to mediate cognition—i.e., not to convey meaning but to *make* meaning. Moreover, ironically, I had been *trans*languaging—I had been mediating cognition in L1 and L2 simultaneously.

Translation changes everything, Venuti says (2013), and here it was changing the translator, too. I was becoming an Other, writing in Others' words.

LAHIRI AND ME III

To Lahiri (2016), named languages are ontological realities, infinitely separate. "The closer I get, the farther away. Even today, the disconnect between me and Italian remains insuperable" (p. 91). She imagines concealed layers of meaning, secret pathways, like the underground streets at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli. "I walk [like Hadrian] on the surface, the accessible part" (p. 93). But she is not happy there; she wants to command the Real, the Invariant, the Heart, "the true life of language" (p. 92) that she imagines below. What she seeks is not there, alas. A literary writer and a multilingual, Lahiri is writing about multilingualism without having read the literature on multilingualism. Possibly, she needs us to inservice her translanguagewise.

That she believes in this ontological divide might seem to conflict with her eagerness to translate others, but I don't think it does; if you see languages as irreducibly different, then translation logically becomes a bald domestication—a creative substitution justly claimed by a different author. I'm not content with this idea, but I can empathize. As I headed for Mexico, Spanish still felt remote, maybe inaccessible. However, I knew that hoping to gain "mastery" of a language is like trying to solve the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, or the dour Puritan idea of God: The more we know of the Infinite, the more we know it is unknowable.

Unlike the drill writing I had done in language school, this translating/revising project was an exercise in making meaning. It was meaning/full. Maybe I could gain on my L2 only by half-lengths, but it was never immeasurably far away. In fact, to work with its unfamiliar possibilities had become a delight, and I loved how my frictions and hesitations were helping me refine my thinking. It felt secretly fabulous to see myself as a beginning L2 writer. It was like noticing the Infinite just out the back of the house—Spanish was not only quite available, I was already drawing on it. Imperial tunnels don't worry me, because when I recognize that I myself am "something premature, reckless, always approximate," I see that learning is as ineffable and full of wonder as mastery would be.

From these paradoxes and these transits between Spanish and English emerged not poverty but a richer, deeper sense of translingual cognition.

***

On the street, I pass a cluster of sidewalk umbrellas, and I glance at the early morning coffee drinkers. Young people inhabit their pressed clothes and coiffures, their messenger bags and bike helmets. The security man nods; we see each other every day. At a table near the wall, three older guys, maybe *jubilados,* tip back in their chairs, sharing a laugh. I am the only gringo in sight, but—*qué raro*—nobody looks up at me. It is as if, when I worry less about translating myself and just compose myself, I almost belong in this scene.

At the end of *In Other Words,* Lahiri feels it too. She now dreads leaving Rome and returning to the States. She writes,

> I wish there were a way of staying in this country, in this language. I'm already afraid of the separation between me and Italian. . . . [and] if I go back to working in English, I expect to feel another type of loss. (p. 229)

I know that feeling. But *No te preocupes*, *Lahiri.* Let's skip school and get a *cafecito.*

EPILOGUE: HOW'D IT GO?

The room was full, the audience engaged and opinionated. Teachers from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Argentina, understood implicitly my tutoring session with Javier. They said their multilingual writing students—often L1 or heritage speakers of Indigenous languages and nonprestige dialects—face a system not very different from what Javier faced in the racist and classist heritage of *solamente inglés*. They had read of translingualism and were pleased to hear a summary of the research. It was a good session.

They made no remarks on my L2 proficiency.

Once home, I spent some time reading works in translation studies, searching article databases, looking for research that might help me theorize self-translation. I wasn't planning to write; I just wanted to understand the experience better. I went back to Lahiri. I went to Eco and to other literary writers who have commented on being translated. I have written only three novels myself, but two of them have been translated, so I pulled them down. And I laughed aloud. As I could see now, my novels had been coercively domesticated for the German market. (*Pinches* translators.)

I began this paper on my experience of composing in Spanish while I was still feeling tentative and self-conscious about everything, including my right to present (let alone write) formally in Spanish. Ironically, just a week after completing a workable draft, I received an email from the *Red Latinoamericana de Programas y Centros de Escritura*. I will translate the first lines here:

Dear presenter,

By this letter we extend an invitation to participate in the collected publication of the works presented at the 4th International Conference of the Latin American Association of Writing Programs and Centers . . .

Acknowledgments

This essay is dedicated to Professor Keiko Wells, in thanks for her kind friendship and for the many years of intellectual conversation and correspondence, during which we have covered so many of the topics that come together here.

For their thoughtful, critical, and encouraging responses to drafts of the paper, my thanks to Professors Elizabeth Boquet, Michele Eodice, and Victor Villanueva noted scholars of writing studies. Gracias también a mi profesora de español, Virginia Abrill Hinojosa, de Arequipa, Perú, quien leyó un borrador temprano, y a la Profesora Maria-Luisa Spicer-Escalante por su inestimable consejo y su crítica de la ponencia original.

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Foreigner Within: A Photo Essay

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David Taffet is a parallel entrepreneur and a turnaround expert with 30-plus years of experience building companies, leading teams, raising capital, and developing cross-sector partnerships for commercial and public gain. His photography promotes connection with people from diverse backgrounds by crafting visual stories that elicit an emotional response. For more visit www.invisibleman.photography

Abstract

Cultural belonging in the U.S. can seem elusive for Asian Americans, whose national belonging has been constantly questioned and legally denied. Growing up as a mixed-race Korean-Euro American, I was an even greater deviation from the norm that often left me feeling marginalized, exposed and vulnerable. "Foreigner Within" is a photographic essay shot in collaboration with my husband, David M. M. Taffet, which disrupts national narratives and gendered expectations of Asian women in the U.S. It exposes the tensions and dismantles the cultural boundaries of Asianness within the U.S. and loudly asserts my national and cultural belonging as a mixed-race Asian American woman.

Keywords

race, gender, racial formation, hapa, Asian American, Korean American, multiracial, immigrant labor, portrait photography

Growing up as a mixed-race Korean Euro-American, people looked at me and asked, "what are you?" or "where are you from?" As I see it now, their curiosity was two-pronged: not only was I of Asian descent (and, thus, foreign), but I clearly wasn't *fully* Asian. With Korean eyes and an Italian nose, I was an even greater deviation from the norm, and people found it remarkable.

In *Margins and Mainstreams*, historian and cultural critic Gary Okihiro pointedly asks "Is yellow black or white?" The binary construction of the question invites an intentional either/or response. Neither black nor white, America's social construct positions Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, rendering yellow both glaringly conspicuous and indecipherable. No matter how far back an Asian American can trace their roots in California or New York, the question of "where they're *really* from" will always linger. Constantly searching for ways to be seen, heard, and accepted within an American system of racial binarism that privileges whiteness, denigrates blackness, and locates yellowness somewhere in a No Man's Land of racial categorization, cultural belonging can seem elusive for Asian Americans, a people whose national belonging has been culturally questioned and legally denied.

The racial ambiguity of my mixed-race heritage, the hint of Asianness that marked me as something else, heightened people's confusion about "what I am." As Michael Omi and Howard Winant noted in their work, *Racial Formation*, "Without a racial identity [in America], one is in danger of having no identity." Racial intermixing or "miscegenation" was illegal in much of the United States from 1661 to the relatively recent 1967 landmark decision in *Loving v. Virginia*, which concluded that laws banning miscegenation were unconstitutional. Thus, within the historical and political context of the United States, multiracial identities have historically been scandalized, denied, and repudiated by both Whites and people of color. Many accounts exist of interracial couples and their children being discriminated against by their own Asian communities. Thus, as a multiracial Korean/White American, I spent much of my life trying to hide a part of myself in order to prove that I did, in fact, belong.

Today, firmly rooted in who I am, I refuse to negotiate my cultural or legal status. I own and embrace my inbetweenness as a

multiracial Asian American, and this photographic essay declares that. Exposing the tensions and juxtapositions of my experience, the photos are meant to disrupt national narratives that have historically denied the inclusion of Asian Americans and multiracial Americans within the body politic. The photos employ racial, national, and gender dissonance to dismantle the cultural boundaries of Asianness within the U.S. and disrupt the gendered expectations of Asian American women that accompany them.

This photographic essay builds on the contributions of artists like Nikki S. Lee, a South Korean-born photographer and filmmaker who strategically appropriates different cultures (e.g. punk, hip hop, Latinx) to raise questions about identity and belonging. In defiance of potential exclusion or the provocation of racial aggression, the photos in *Foreigner Within* act as a visual platform from which my inclusion in the American project is declared. In these culturally iconic heartland settings, I announce my Korean heritage for all to see, and I proudly own my Americanness. Like Asian/Asian Americans from centuries past, my contribution to the physical, economic, and cultural landscape of America cannot be denied. I am the sum of my parts, and that is what I hope these images portray.

My husband, David M. M. Taffet, and I collaborated on this project from start to finish. As an immersive ethnographic photographer, these photos were a departure from David's usual improvisational shooting style. I'm grateful for his willingness to experiment with me throughout this process. We continue to brainstorm new ways of visually communicating my mixed-race experience through photography, and as part of that, we plan to add more photos to this ongoing series.

STRIKER Foreignness becomes legible when set against the visual language of normativity. Wearing a traditional Korean hanbok while engaging in America's pastime defies the racial and gender expectations of onlookers. By taking command of the field, I dictate what happens next. I'm the closer and the opener and everything in between. My game. My rules.

HERITAGE The Chevy Pickup is a cultural icon of the American heartland, where this photo was taken. Here, I proudly own my Americanness as someone whose cultural citizenship is often in question. Though I'm not pictured in the driver's seat, the photo seeks to communicate agency, ownership, and pride. (see next page)

BACKBONE Frequently, the American heartland is referred to as “the backbone of America.” Here, where corn and soybean fields are ubiquitous, the notion of an America built in part by people of Asian descent seems totally fictitious. This photo reasserts the contributions of Asian peoples’ physical labor in the construction of America. Today, Asian/Asian American farmers are almost nonexistent in rural Ohio, where this photo was taken, but Hmong American farmers make up more than 50% of all farmers selling their harvest at Minnesota’s Twin Cities metropolitan farmers markets. In fact, Hmong farmers generate over $250 million annually for the Twin Cities’ economy.

LIBERTY This image explicitly appropriates the classic American symbol of Lady Liberty. The assertion is simple: Asian bodies should be able to stand for and represent America in all contexts. We have been co-constructing America alongside Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and White Americans since its inception, and we can and should take pride in the labor, art, and intellectual contributions that make our country what it is.

To learn more about . . .

Racial Formation Theory	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Racial_formation_theory
David M. M. Taffet, Photographer	www.invisibleman.photography/
Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court Case	www.oyez.org/cases/1966/395
Nikki S. Lee, Artist	nmwa.org/art/artists/nikki-s-lee/
Asian Americans and the Question of Multiethnic Identity	eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ550188
Gary Okihiro	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gary_Okihiro
Hmong American Farmers Association:	www.hmongfarmers.com/about-hafa/

A CRT Counterstory: Intersectionality of Caste, Class, and Womanhood in Pakistani Culture

Ayesha Murtza

Ayesha Murtza is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in the department of English at the University of North Texas. She earned her Master's in English Literature and Linguistics and then moved from Pakistan to the USA for her Ph.D. She studies cultural criticism, climate, intersectionality, women of color feminisms, and post-colonial literature. Her work borders at the intersections of gender, climate, and post-colonial studies. Her book chapters and research articles have been published or are forthcoming with Oxford UP, *Writers: Craft & Context*, and the *International Journal of English Linguistics*.

Abstract

While teaching young girls from the lower socioeconomic class and usually lower castes in a rural part of Punjab, Pakistan, I witnessed not only class-based learning gaps but also the ways in which class impacts their subjecthood and their academic lives. These experiential facts are even more complicated for those who are multiply marginalized based on class, caste, religion, and other discriminatory factors like color, accent, and hair but whose marginalization remains largely invisible. Storytelling, in these situations, serves both as a personal and political tool for marginalized people to have conversations about these challenges. By using the genre of counterstory, this paper highlights the intersectionality of caste system, gender hierarchy, colorism, and racism, particularly in the context of Pakistan. This "new rhetoric" of counterstory enables a storyteller to bring their experiences to a wider audience and talk about various issues with minimized possibility of chastisement. Many scholars offer and employ this methodology, for example, Martinez, Derrick Bell, and Patricia Williams have written dialogues and told stories by using their experiential knowledge of marginalized and underprivileged communities. Building on this previous work, this paper provides its readers the chance to analyze and understand their experiential knowledge because "counterstory or counter perspective is presented to develop the minoritized viewpoints and to critique the viewpoints which are put forth by various characters."

Key Words

Counterstory, Intersectionality, caste, marginalized communities, Pakistan

While teaching young girls from the lower socioeconomic class and usually lower castes in a rural part of Punjab, Pakistan, I witnessed not only class-based learning gaps but also the ways in which class impacts their subjecthood and their academic lives. These experiential facts are even more complicated for those who are multiply marginalized based on class, caste, religion, and other discriminatory factors like color, accent, and hair but whose marginalization remains largely invisible. Storytelling, in these situations, serves both as a personal and political tool for marginalized people to have conversations about these challenges. By using the genre of counterstory, this paper highlights the intersectionality of caste system, gender hierarchy, colorism, and racism, particularly in the context of Pakistan. This "new rhetoric" of counterstory enables a storyteller to bring their experiences to a wider audience and talk about various issues with minimized possibility of chastisement. Many scholars offer and employ this methodology, for example, Martinez,[1] Derrick Bell,[2] and Patricia Williams[3] have written dialogues and told stories by using their experiential knowledge of marginalized and underprivileged communities. Building on this previous work, this paper provides its readers the chance to analyze and understand their experiential knowledge because "counterstory or counter perspective is presented to develop the minoritized viewpoints and to critique the viewpoints which put forth by various characters."[4]

1 See Aja Y. Martinez, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020). https://www.amazon.com/Counterstory-Rhetoric-Writing-Critical-Theory/dp/0814108784

2 Bell, Derrick. *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice. 1987. Print. Faces at the Bottom of the Well. New York: Basic Books, 1992. Print.*

3 Williams, Patricia J. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1991.*

4 See Aja Y. Martinez, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020). https://www.amazon.com/Counterstory-Rhetoric-Writing-Critical-Theory/dp/0814108784

Counterstory politicizes storytelling and turns experiential knowledge into an effective political tool. Thus, it turns a simple event, occurrence, or experience into a strong voice of the marginalized people whose voices are often silenced, or whose stories remain unheard. Aja Y. Martinez writes, "Counterstory challenges privilege and recognizes that experiential knowledge of minoritized and/or vulnerable populations is legitimate and critical to understanding the structural power imbalances and abuses alive and well within our professional lives, organizations, institutions, and mentoring relationships."[5] It is fascinating that any story when told with the intention of "critique[ing]" a dominant ideology and with a focus on social justice can turn into a counterstory. Counterstory is particularly useful in situations where people usually don't have resources and access to a traditional political audience, for example, my young female students in Pakistan.

When it comes to performing gender roles in Pakistan, religious and cultural expectations of gender performativity are inseparable from each other. People deploy religion, caste, class, and various other intersecting elements to question others' identity, their morality, or even their sense of belonging in a community. For instance, I identify as a Muslim woman who grew up in a rural part of Punjab, Pakistan, and is labeled as a Jatt in Muslim culture.[6] These intersecting elements of religion and caste provide the foundation but also the threats to the identities of most people because people form and perform their identities around these constructions. Though I am under the pressure of performing my role as a Muslim, Pakistani, and Punjabi/Jatt woman, this role affords me certain privileges. For example, my Muslim identity or my caste is already taken as a signal of a certain morality, lifestyle, worldview, and access to resources or location. Likewise, others who belong to different caste find other ways to validate their identities in specific contexts, depending upon the hostility or hospitality of the situation. In such contentious situations, counterstory acts as a neutral yet political tool for sharing alternative, different experiences.

Sharing personal stories and engaging in dialogue, when institutional changes to ensure equity remain difficult, transforms people into kind and empathetic human beings, which leads to a greater understanding of the systemic and intersectional nature of these issues. This is what the genre of counterstory does. Robert A. Williams Jr., in his forward to Richard Delgado's *Rodrigo Chronicles,* notes that the "Storyteller" is the one who bears the heavy responsibility for maintaining the various connection of community like "an intricate web of connections: kinship of blood, marriage, and friendship, alliance and solidarity" (xi). Williams specifically brings up the role of ancestors such as grandmothers and grandfathers as storytellers to share their stories so the coming generations could recall their narratives and connect with them. Moreover, Martinez in *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020) defines counterstory as a "method of telling a story by people whose experiences are not often told." She further elaborates that counterstory as a "methodology serves to expose, analyze, and challenge stock stories of racial privilege and help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (34). Furthermore, according to Richard Delgado, counterstories "can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements of reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone."[7]

Speaking methodologically, Delgado highlights several functions of counterstory, for instance, it can be used methodologically and/or rhetorically, as a narrative, parable, chronicle, and as a dialogue (2413). In this paper, I employ "Counterstory as a Narrated Dialogue." This dialogue occurs between a teacher and students in a course, titled "Culture and Gender in Pakistan," and highlights the issues of the predominant caste system, gender hierarchy, colorism, and racism, particularly in Northern Punjab, Pakistan. I found this method of storytelling applicable and effective as it engages both the teacher and students in the dialogue. In doing so, it blurs the hierarchical difference in the classroom and highlights the commonalities of their experiences as women. Additionally, Delgado's method of "Counterstory as Narrated Dialogues" dispenses the chance for the reader to experience the recurring events and ideas which describe through the exchange of dialogues between various characters. This exchange can also be challenged from the status quo perspective. Bruno Bettelheim and Derrick Bell also point out that various stories can easily "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo".[8]

Using counterstory as a dialogue also makes it into a pedagogical strategy and it indicates that educators' role cannot be ignored when it comes to countering imperial or state ideology. "Counterstory as Narrated Dialogues" involves various themes which assist certain learning subjects such as students. Dialogues do so by describing and imagining students' unique experiences. Martinez writes that "this form of counterstory consists of stories written to facilitate classroom discussion, while interweaving research data and creative nonfiction" (35). While writing counterstories, Richard Delgado introduced his much-chronicled characters in student-teacher roles: the professor and Rodrigo.

5 See Aja Y. Martinez, On Cucuys in Bird's Feathers: A Counterstory as Parable, Aug 13, 2020; Writers: Crafts & Context https://journals.shareok.org/writersccjournal/article/view/8

6 It's a name of a caste which further divided into sub-castes and apparently considers higher than other castes in Punjab, Pakistan.

7 Delgado, Richard. "Storrytellling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." *Michigan Law Review* 87. Aug, 1989 (2010): 2411-2441.

8 See B. Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (1975); Kundera, The Novel and Euorpe, N.Y. Rev. Books, July 19, 1984. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1975/12/08/the-uses-of-enchantment

Both characters were presented in such a way that they complement each other. They offer multifarious insights while maintaining the central thematic narrative. Overall, the discussion and interaction between them are enlightening.

In this "Counterstory as Narrated Dialogues," the teacher engages diverse students' narratives who belong to different castes and classes: Kiran (belongs to middle class, has wheatish complexion), Kinza (belongs to a lower class, her parents work in the fields, has dark complexion), Asma (belongs to upper-middle class, has dark complexion), Samra (belongs to a middle class, has fair complexion). Before proceeding, I want to acknowledge that these are imperfect and limited categories of identity and class but due to the limited space and scope of the paper, I rely on these categories here. I would also like to highlight these female students from a wide array of the socioeconomic class would usually go to the same (and mostly the only) school in a village; parents prioritize their sons' education, so they send them to the city for education, but girls aren't usually allowed to go to the city for education in more traditional families. In these dialogues, I serve as a moderator for the conversation, posing questions and directing the answers.

Through this paper, readers will be able to scrutinize their own thinking process by looking at the counter perspectives which will be presented through this counterstory. This genre "invites the reader to suspend judgment, listen for their point or message, and then decide what measure of truth they contain." Moreover, they can "show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help us understand when it is time to reallocate power" (2415).[9] This counterstory also shows that even people who believe in equity are sometimes unable to recognize their own internalized insecurities and biases and unquestioningly believe in their views and performative actions to feel confident enough to announce them in front of other people.

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Teacher: [enters the classroom]

I heard the familiar voices as soon as I enter in the class. It feels just like any other day of June, other than the fact that there are comparatively fewer students in class today. I take a minute to gather my breath as I usually have just ten minutes break between two classes. Looking at the students, I was surprised – presumably, some of them chose not to show up because of today's topic, "Race, Caste, and Pakistani Culture" which could be uncomfortable for some of them. Deep in thought, I grabbed the book and opened page number 56, where the title of chapter five stares at me: "Race, Caste, and Pakistani Culture." I pick the black marker and write the same title on the whiteboard and think about the binary of black and white and its relevance to our discussion topic. I ask the class to open page 56 and request Sadaf to read the text aloud. While she reads, multiple things flash in and out of my mind when I hear her pronounce the words like caste, patriarchy, race, and ethnicity. I tilt my head forward to listen attentively to Sadaf.

Sadaf [reading aloud]: "You may belong to any religion, caste, or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state" (Muhammad Ali Jinnah).[10]

Sadaf stops and looks at me, anxiously, it seems as if she is waiting for my approval to stop reading now. I nod to her. Then I smile and ask the class "what comes to your mind when hearing this quote? What do you think about the separation of the Indian sub-continent?"

Kiran [leaning forward, raising her hand]: Why did we demand a separate homeland for us? What's the purpose of it if we're still following all the norms that we used to follow while living together before separation? What is the point of this "Two Nation Theory"?[11]

While I arrange all these questions in my head, she further adds:

Kiran: It seems our Two-Nation Theory was originally based on the differences of faith, culture, and caste – which now prohibits us from enjoying our lives with people of other cultures, ethnicities, and religions as it did to our ancestors.

I start thinking about the article "India's Caste & Untouchability had a Role in Pakistan's Creation" written by Pervez Mehmood. [12] I clear my throat and mention points in reference to that article and comment, "it seems true, we have failed to counter the ingrained concept of caste and its association with the idea of untouchability in our country. Its failure is glaring since no one could dine in and do intermarriage in this caste system. These were the two main points highlighted by the exponents of The Two-Nation Theory. The staunch followers of this theory avoid any social or physical contact with the lower-caste people other than the fact that lower-caste women are considered fair game for higher-caste men.

9 See Delgado, Richard. "Storrytellling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative." *Michigan Law Review* 87.Aug, 1989 (2010): 2411-2441.

10 See G. Allana, Muhammad Ali Jinnah's first Presidential Address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan (August 11, 1947). http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_jinnah_assembly_1947.html

11 In accordance this theory, Hindu and Muslim are two discrete nations, have their own distinct religion, culture, ethnicity, and tradition, therefore, Muslims should have a separate homeland where they can live their lives according to Islamic values.

12 India's caste & untouchability had a role in Pakistan's creation" Parvez Mahmood, Sep 2019 https://theprint.in/opinion/indias-caste-untouchability-had-a-role-in-pakistans-creation-writes-islamabad-columnist/288057/

I nod to Kinza who had raised her hand. She anxiously starts sharing her own story.

Kinza: Teacher, you all know my family is living in the Haweli[13] of the Bajwa family.[14] After finishing school, I go to their house and work there with my mother and my father and brothers work on their lands. Bajwa's wife never let me or my mother touch their utensils and food. They've separate plates and glasses for us. Once I mistakenly drank water from their glass, Bajwa's youngest daughter started yelling and slapped me on my face.

[Kinza looks down as if this story is too difficult for her to tell. I can feel the pain in her voice and words.]

Kinza [continues]: Once I asked my mother, what did you and Abbu[15] do? Did you steal their gold or food or their beautiful clothes? Did you sit on their clean sofas or drink water from their clean glass? Teacher, my mother didn't answer any of these questions, but I told her how much I love Bajwa's beautiful home.

Asma [jumping right in]: Teacher do you remember the Annual Drama competition we had last year?

I smile and ask for confirmation, "are you talking about A *Doll's House* in which Samra performed as the protagonist?"

Asma [takes a deep breath and continues]: Yes, nobody knows about this incident because I've not shared this with anyone, but I think since we're talking about our own experiences, I should share it too.

I prompt her with curiosity, "go ahead, go ahead, please do."

Asma [further adds]: First I was supposed to perform the role of the protagonist, I was so excited and happy as I always wanted to perform and act on stage. But later the director refused to take me for Nora's role. Instead, she chose Samra for the role because she is beautiful and fair, and I have a dark complexion.

[The class is so quiet that I can even hear myself breathing.]

Asma [continuing]: But the funny thing was, they were looking for someone dark and tall for Krogstad's role [she laughs not only at the absurdity of this situation but also at our sociocultural behaviors.]

[Nods and murmurs in the class]

Shanzay: Have you listened to the famous song, *Goray rang ka zamana kabhi ho ga na purana, gori tujhay dar kiska hai, taira to rang gora hai* (the admiration for fair complexion will never be old; dear, you needn't worry for you've fair skin)[16] by Vital Signs.[17] There are various other songs, advertisements, films, and drama series where fair complexion is portrayed as the beauty standard. This colorism and racism are ingrained in Pakistani society, which is why girls use fairness creams to lighten their complexion. Otherwise, it is harder for them to get a good marriage proposal or even get a good job because of people's inherent biases. There is a huge industry for fairness creams and treatments. Now, even many showbiz celebrities are getting fairness treatments and endorsing them.

Asma [pausing to think for a moment]: It is alarming to see that most fairness creams ads, like *Fair & Lovely,*[18] portray a dark-skinned woman as disconsolate and undesirable. After using the fairness cream and miraculously becoming fair-skinned, she feels confident; while in older ads, she used to get a rich, handsome husband, in the newer ads, she becomes a successful boss or employee.[19] In Pakistan, women's fair complexion is the standard of beauty, social status, and professional success. Whoever is fair-skinned is considered the luckiest and the most desired member of the family. Whenever my grandmother visits our home, she always tells me various methods that she sees on Television or hears from other people to lighten my skin complexion. When I express my disapproval of these things to her, she says she only does this because she cares about me and my future. This colorism is so embedded in society that people care more about fair skin than other persons' feelings and their confidence.

Shanzay [jumping in]: The most infuriating and saddening thing is when celebrities and well-respected people endorse and popularize these ideas. For example, Sarfraz Ahmed (Captain of the Pakistani cricket team) made a racist comment and said *Abbay Kalay* (You, black man) out of anger for Andile Phehlukwayo (South African cricketer) during a recent cricket match since Andile Phehlukwayo was playing very well.[20]

[I, while nodding appreciatively to Shanzay for sharing this, add] "it seems we're still living in the era of colonialism and white supremacy. The British left but our minds are still colonized. It is so ingrained in our society that we assume dark-skinned people

13 A place where people keep their animals and prefer their workers to stay there.

14 A famous sub-caste from the high caste of Jutt. They usually own lands.

15 Urdu word for father.

16 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhrQnw71VqA

17 A popular pop and rock Pakistani band.

18 Most used fairness cream in Pakistan, which has now been renamed and rebranded as Glow and Lovely.

19 See M. Saira ROLE OF MEDIA IN GLORIFYING WHITE COMPLEXION http://www.sci-int.com/pdf/636339925156006351.pdf

20 See Dawn Skipper Sarfaraz makes 'racist' remarks directed at South African batsman, Jan 23, 2019 https://www.dawn.com/news/1459295

as illiterate, inferior, uncivil, and unsophisticated in comparison to those who have a fair complexion. Maybe it is another way to understand white privilege. Morning shows, instill the idea of fairness by introducing various whitening or polishing creams and injections, etc. People's families and even friends are complicit in this. One of my friends recently shared with me that she has always been bullied by her siblings and even by her mother just because of her dark skin color since all her siblings have fair complexion except her. Her family felt ashamed of her and usually tried to avoid taking her to family functions.

[Taking a deep breath, I start reading the next paragraph of the same chapter.]

J.H. Hutton describes the caste system under the following points:

1. "Caste is endogamous.

2. Castes have ranks/grades into the top-ranked and lower-ranked.

3. There are restrictions on commensality among members of various castes.

4. From the context of food, ritual, and sex, a member who belongs to a certain high-ranked caste is expected to be affected and polluted through contact with the low-ranked members of the castes (1963)."[21]

[Considering the importance of the issue, I start talking about the first point.]

"Pakistani society prioritizes heterosexual marriage and family values; these patriarchal and caste phenomena particularly affect girls." [I bring up a recent incident where a 20-year-old woman is killed by three family members for marrying out of her caste for love. This incident happened in Sahiwal in Pakistan.][22] According to the report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 914 women were killed for honor in 2012, which slightly declined to 867 in 2013. In 2014, HRCP reported 1000 honor killings whereas 1096 in 2015.[23] Honor killings have persisted and even increased in some regions, despite new anti-rape and anti-honor killing bills in Pakistan. These numbers are erroneous and likely represent a small fraction of these cases because most of these honor killings go unreported or are passed as natural deaths.

Kiran [starts sharing another comment]: It also reminds me of Nusrat Mochi, who left her parents' house when she was 25 to marry a man against her parents' will since the guy belonged to another caste. Now, Nusrat has two children, but she says she is still facing threats from her family for not marrying within her own caste and for bringing dishonor to the family.

[Nodding affirmatively, I ask the class]: Has anyone read the article by Ahmed Usman?[24]

[silence]

[I continue] in the article, he discusses that marriages between low castes[25] and high castes[26] can lead to honor killing since they are not socially acceptable.[27] It refers to the second point about the asymmetrical situation of the caste system in Pakistan.

Asma [who has been silently listening to the whole conversation, instantly raises her hand and adds]: this reminds me of the concept of intersectionality that we discussed in class. These incidents show that the relationship of resistance and dominance in connection with gender, caste, and race is used as structural violence and social oppression. All these relations between men and women are actually created by society through its hegemonic attitude.[28] This is defined through sexuality, class, age, and race. For eradicating all these relationships, it's mandatory to construct certain intersectionality approaches (Crenshaw, 1991).[29]

[Thinking about the framework of intersectionality coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), I comment]: you're right, it is impossible to talk about oppression without using the lens of intersectionality. Social equity work has become crucial now. But try to not evaluate everyone's experience through one fixed ideology or concept as everyone has their own unique life experiences and conditions.

21 Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon, and Northwest Pakistan, edited by E. R. Leach / Cambridge Papers in socio Anthropology 2/ Cambridge at the university press/ 1971

22 Firstpost, Honor killing: Pak woman murdered over inter-caste marriage, May 2014. https://www.firstpost.com/world/honour-killing-pak-woman-murdered-over-inter-caste-marriage-1525681.html#:~:text=Islamabad%3A%20A%20woman%20was%20brutally,caste%20marriage%20to%20Shabir%2C%2026.

23 Pakistan honor killings on the rise, report reveals, BBC World, April 2016. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35943732

24 A renowned professor at Uni of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

25 People belong to lower castes knowns as "Kammi".

26 People belong to high castes knowns as "Zamindar"

27 Usman, Ahmed. Social Stratification in a Punjabi Village of Pakistan: The Dynamic Between Caste, Gender, and Violence. Doctoral thesis, University of Leeds.2011 [Accessed 21 Dec. 2018] http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/21130/

28 For further reading see, Chandra T. Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* (2003).

29 Crenshaw, K. 1991. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour. Stanford Law Review, 43, pp.1241-1279.

Asma [instantly raises her hand and mentions]: It also reminds me of *Feminism without Borders* by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) that we read last semester. Mohanty writes about how Western feminist writers should stop treating Muslim women as a monolithic category without considering the unique experiences each woman has. They should not talk about their experiences without experiential knowledge.

[I, while appreciating her point, further add]: Jennifer C. Nash also raises these concerns in her book, *Black Feminism Reimaged after Intersectionality* (2018). In her book, Nash presents a series of questions prompted by her observations of the development of conversations on intersectionality in the context of Black women's intellectual output, women's studies, the corporate university, and popular culture. She illustrates the appeal of intersectionality being held as a form of Black Feminist agency. She adds that by determining who owns intersectionality, the idea becomes something that may be claimed as property. This political and intellectual shift separates Black feminism and Black feminist theory from the bodies of Black feminists by broadening the terrain of Black feminist theory to accept claims made from "diverse identities" (05). Her main aim is to include all diverse identities instead of just fixing this framework to black feminist and black identities and experiences. Nobody should feel as if they're ignored and left out in this system of oppression. How can we use intersectionality to understand and eliminate various oppressions around us?

Kiran [redirects the class's attention towards another notorious story]: Women have to suffer a lot as compared to men because of these gendered behaviors and the hegemonic caste system. Even when women report these cases of violence, the justice system further punishes them by prolonging their cases, putting them through emotional torture, and making them re-live their experience of violence and humiliation again and again. Mukhtar Mai's rape incident happened on 22 June 2002, but she's still seeking justice from Pakistani courts.[30] She belongs to a lower caste and did not have enough power to fight with the member of *Jirga*.[31] Their regional justice system, her caste, her family, and Pakistan's legal system have failed together.

[I add] you're right, Kiran. Mai's case received international attention and news coverage. The New York Times reported that Mukhtar Mai's autobiography, *In the Name of Honor: A Memoir (*2006), ranked on number third as a bestseller in France.[32] Pakistan's then-president and the former military dictator, General Pervez Musharraf, had commented that women falsely claimed to be raped to get rich and to avail immigration to the West.[33] Later, Mai is still in Pakistan while Musharaff moved out of the country after his government tenure ended in Pakistan.

Kinza [nodding her head in approval]: Maybe this is the reason these incidents have not stopped. People know they will not face consequences for gender and sexual violence. Remember how Qandeel Baloch was killed by her youngest brother even though she was the sole financial supporter of her family. The Pakistani caste system is also complicit in her murder since her real name was Fozia Azeem, but she adopted Qandeel Baloch as her alias before joining social media. [34] She was killed because of her class, caste, and most importantly her gender. She was murdered because of how people responded to her taking up Baloch as her last name and then performing a socially disrespectful image on social media.[35]

[I add my point of view about the omnipresence of the caste system in society]: Yes, the caste system is most prevalent in rural areas. In an urban setting, the caste system dilutes in its various forms but doesn't fade away. In rural settings, it exists in its most violent and nasty forms. Class or access to financial resources can give one access to a lifestyle, but if one belongs to a lower caste, everyone uses that as the sole marker of their identity.

Asma [adds indignantly]: yes, it reminds me the incident happened to the Asia Bibi[36] who used to work in a field of a Muslim household. While picking up berries she went to get some water for her fellow Muslim who later accused her of touching the glass of water since she objected that the touch of a non-Muslim women made the water haram (impure) for her. Asia Bibi was told to convert to Islam right away to purify her soul upon refusal later she was accused of blasphemy by the Supreme court of Pakistan based on false and inadequate evidence. By the Pakistani court she was sentenced to death and the most drenching part was that Shahbaz

30 F. Natasha BIOGRAPHY: MUKHTAR MAI – SURVIVOR, ACTIVIST, Dec 20, 2017 http://www.theheroinecollective.com/mukhtar-mai/

31 A local council of people belong to high caste named *Mastoi Baloch*. They gather to resolves various disputes and have their own rules and regulation in that certain area which people from lower castes have to follow.

32 Kristof, Nicholas D. "A Heroine Walking in the Shadow of Death", *New York Times*. 4 April 2006. Accessed 29 March 2008. https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/04/opinion/a-heroine-walking-in-the-shadow-of-death.html

33 Randeep, Ramesh. Fury over Musharraf's 'cry rape, get rich' claim. The Guardian, Sep 2005. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/17/pakistan.randeepramesh

34 John Biggs□Davison M.A.(Oxon.), Dera Ghazi Khan: The Baloch tribal area. https://doi.org/10.1080/03068375008731381

35 See in response to @NidaKirmani tweet about Qandeel Baloch murder, Pakistani people response. Jul 15, 2020. https://twitter.com/NidaKirmani/status/1283360774312939526

36 See Graham Harrison. E, Asia Bibi: Pakistani woman jailed for blasphemy releases photos in exile (January 28, 2020). https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/asia-bibi-pakistani-woman-jailed-for-blasphemy-releases-photos-in-exile

Bhatti (Minorities Minister) and later Salman Taseer (Governor of Punjab, Pakistan) both were assassinated for talking on behalf of her. Everything just happened because Asia Bibi belonged to a lower caste and was not a Muslim while living in a Muslim country.

[I, while looking at the clock and realizing I'm left with five minutes, appreciate Asma for sharing this case and further add] "it shows intersectionality of discrimination. Asia Bibi dealt and went through all of this based on her religion, gender, and caste. We must examine all these hierarchies for fully understanding one's situation. It's the dire need of the hour to acknowledge all these existing structural differences at individual level and later at group level. Our todays' class discussion and all these stories and personal experiences you shared shows us existing, ingrained operationalization of intersecting components such as caste, gender, race, and colorism in Pakistani society and how all these intersections are both fixed and fluid in our society. The assigning of occupations, ranks, self-worth, hierarchies, and even certain values are usually based on various arbitrary notions. All this thinking system creates an artificial ranks and belief system which further promulgated by certain fixed beliefs which are deeply ingrained in the societal value system and consciousness."

[I hear a bell ring and realize the class time is over. I thank my students for sharing their experiences while assigning the next chapter of the book "Pakistan, Islam, and peace" for the next class. I leave the classroom while further thinking about the relationship between caste, class, Pakistan, gender, and Islam and hope my students were doing the same].

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Decolonial Work Outside the Technical Communication Classroom: A Personal Narrative of My Journey from Scholar to Technical Writer

Kristiana Perleberg

Kristiana Perleberg is a PhD student in Public Rhetorics and Community Engagement at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and corgi aficionado. She considers herself an aspiring critical-creative scholar, meaning she wants to collaborate and write with folks largely outside of academia in nontraditional ways. While her background is in Technical and Professional Communication, her doctoral research has been focused on reproductive injustices and issues of access in Milwaukee. As the field of technical communication continues on this new wave of social justice and activism, she hopes to continue to be a part of this conversation that prioritizes historically marginalized and silenced voices and language practices.

Author's Note: This piece would not be what it is without the efforts of my reviewers, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. What started out as a book review of *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* by Gregory Younging has morphed into this personal narrative that attempts to articulate how one can enact decolonial practices outside the classroom. The comments from my reviewers helped me not only to create a richer manuscript but also to think specifically about decolonial methods—rather than remaining firmly under the comfort of the social justice umbrella. As the reviewers (and the authors I now cite in this piece based on those comments) showed me, this distinction is both important and necessary. I am appreciative of the work that has been done in this space and of the reviewers who pointed me towards these works in order to help me more fully realize the potential of this piece—and of the responsibilities of my work as a scholar in technical communication.

I want to start this by saying I always have a hard time knowing what to call myself. My degrees are in technical and professional writing, I work at a large tax and accounting firm doing technical writing, and I am currently a doctoral student starting my prelim work in public rhetorics and community engagement. Calling myself a technical writer still feels disingenuous, but I also don't feel I fit the mold of what I always thought a scholar looked like, let alone a rhetorician. Before landing my current job, my career trajectory took me from waitressing and bartending to office life, the majority of which has always had a heavy writing aspect. While I don't always have a clear sense of what I *do want* to do, I know what I *don't want* to do—and that is teach or remain in academia (AFTER this degree . . . which is the last one for real this time!). Most of my

Abstract

The field of technical and professional communication (TPC) has historically upheld white, patriarchal language practices without interrogation. While we are now in the time beyond what many scholars call the social justice turn in the field, which includes prioritizing oppressed voices and working from a decolonial framework, early-career scholars like myself are still left wondering how we go from the classroom to the field. As a TPC scholar and technical writer who often feels out of place in academia, I offer this narrative for future scholars and rhetoricians struggling to transition these ideas from the classroom to their professional industries. By describing my experiences as a technical writer in academia and beyond, I hope to inspire others (especially those newer to the field) to interrogate their own understanding of language and practices—and my own as a white, cisgender, able-bodied academic. It should not fall to oppressed voices to provide step-by-step guides for white folks to get it right, but the guides must especially be read and followed when they *are* written, and there is an ever-growing body of work from which we can draw. By relying on scholarship that calls out the need for both the expansion of the social justice turn in TPC and a deeper understanding of what it actually means to utilize decolonial methods, as well as describing my own sites of intervention at the professional services firm I work for, I hope to show readers how social justice-oriented academic practices can be incorporated into industry, even when that industry doesn't allow for a full overhaul of the status quo.

Keywords

decolonial methods; technical and professional communication; workplace writing; Indigenous style; narrative

experience in academia, especially in rhetoric and writing, is that course readings and work center academic voices. This piece is not necessarily a critique of that centering—after all, many people in graduate English programs do dream of going on to get tenure somewhere. In fact, I can count on one hand, one finger actually, how many other students in my MA program were seeking industry jobs over academia, so it is understandable that these courses are designed with that in mind. However, it does make the experience more isolating for those of us who are seeking nonacademic tracks postgraduation and can leave us questioning how we can put these ideas into practice in the workplace, rather than just the classroom. While I don't mean to minimize the fact that teaching has its own set of challenges, which are ever changing and restricting in many ways, I want to highlight how it can feel daunting to early-career technical communicators to find ways to incorporate these important concepts outside the classroom as well.

When I began my first degree in technical and professional communication (TPC) years ago, I did so because I was always just good at writing and editing. I got As in all my English courses, my instructors always praised my writing, and (forgive me) I was the annoying friend who pointed out grammatical errors in my friends' writings. I thought in those days that I was going to become a book editor, living out my days improving the grammar of manuscripts that crossed my desk (which seemed a lot more romantic at the time)—and I never once stopped to interrogate what it even meant to be a good writer in the US school system. However, the further I got in my studies, the more I started recognizing that there were problems. I can still remember my Survey of Modern English Grammar instructor asking us on the first day of class in the fall of 2014 to raise our hands if we were either self-proclaimed or described by those in our lives as "grammar Nazis"—which, as one reviewer of this publication aptly pointed out, has always been a somewhat flippant way of accurately encompassing the violent function of language. I honestly don't recall if my hand was raised sheepishly or with pride, but I do know that as we held our hands in the air, she told us our understanding of the rules of language was likely rooted in racism and classism, which set me on a new course of understanding what it means to study and do technical communication. I am lucky she was the first of many to raise these critiques of a set of rules and normative practices I had not previously considered or problematized.

As many scholars in the field have rightfully pointed out, TPC is in a new phase—one that addresses and refutes the once-held belief that TPC is a neutral field, sort of like me thinking that being skilled in White Mainstream English (something I had never considered until reading April Baker-Bell's 2020 masterpiece) somehow meant something other than that I was succeeding in a system that was built for me in many ways. Baker-Bell uses "the term White Mainstream English in place of standard English to emphasize how white ways of speaking become the invisible—or better, inaudible—norm" (p.4). Particularly, the field has shifted to address the problem that "our work, our classrooms, and our conferences are indeed problematic sites of injustice" (Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019, p.1), and those sites have long upheld white, patriarchal language practices and ideas. It is important to call out here, though, that social justice and decolonization are not one and the same, an important distinction made by Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq and Breeanne Matheson (2021). They "argue that [dynamic decolonial frameworks] should have boundaries in order to assure that decolonial work retains a meaningful benefit to Indigenous people" so as not to "remarginalize Indigenous peoples" (p. 28)—whether intentionally or not. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) put it, "Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10). So while scholars and technical communicators continue to seek out ways to address the problems within the field, marginalized voices are rightfully being prioritized in a way that can help newcomers to TPC continue the trend of interrogating the long-held practices rooted in racism while actively working not to perpetuate harm.

In this spirit of interrogating White Mainstream English, I have been introduced to various marginalized voices in TPC, including the author of *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples*, Gregory Younging. In fact, this piece itself started in early drafts as a review of that book, which I found to provide useful, formulaic instructions for how technical editors can work with Indigenous writers. The book itself does the work the title sets out to—it is the first major work published that collects largely accepted principles of Indigenous writing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and editors to follow. A member of the Opsakwayak Cree Nation and managing editor of Theytus Books, Younging had a desire to put this work together in order to help decolonialize language practices. However, as Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson caution, "Because there has been such a large and rapid uptick in TPC scholars using a decolonial frame, it is important to trouble the field's working definition of 'decolonial' as it relates to TPC research practices" (p. 20). The authors describe this as an important way to continue moving forward after the social justice turn in TPC in such a way that continues to be more inclusive and respectful within the field (p. 20).

As a working member of the TPC world and an ongoing scholar in rhetoric, I see firsthand how dominant language practices have prevailed and continue to prevail within the field. I think about what kinds of interventions I might make, even as someone with still relatively limited power in my organization. After all, as Natasha Jones, Kristen Moore, and Rebecca Walton (2016) assert, "[A]cross TPC, more effort can and should be made to address inequities—many members of the field can be doing more with their power and privilege from their positions within organizations and situations" (p. 135). I interpret this as, while I might not feel I hold a ton of power within my firm, I still have a duty to use the privilege I do have to call out and push back against the things I see as harmful. They go on to remind us that we must be continually

and actively thinking about our 3Ps—positionality, privilege, and power—throughout the research and writing process, which can extend to storytelling and editing, among other practices.

To that end, I understand I have a good amount of power and privilege ascribed to me simply because of my positionality. Let's face it: as an able-bodied, cisgender, white, college-educated woman, in both academia and my professional services industry job, I have significant access to resources and information that might not be accessible to folks who do not fall into these socially constructed and oppressive categories. I try to apply these 3Ps to everything I write so I can determine if I am the right person to tell the story, and I struggled with revising a seminar book review so it became this publishable personal narrative for a long time. Does the publishing world need more white voices highlighting the marginalized experience? As a PhD student, do I even have the expertise to be talking about this experience if my voice is the right one to tell the story? Rachel Shah (2020) perfectly puts into words how I was feeling about this. She writes,

> As someone who lives in the tension between a decade-long engagement with community-based work inspired by a spiritual commitment to social justice and the haunting suspicion that I am just another white do-gooder carrying the scent of imperialism, I turn to nondominant literatures to wrestle with this tension. . . . Acknowledging my whiteness and wanting to work in an antiracist white frame therefore draws me to work with literatures that emerge not just from the ivory-white tower, but from nondominant locations. (p. 11)

While I don't yet have Shah's experience with community-based work, that is the subject of my PhD, so I do hope to get there one day. I borrow words again here, this time from Aisha Shillingford, to put forth a sort of justification for my story here. Shillingford, quoted in adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*, writes, "[M]y core responsibility is to be a benefit to whatever I'm engaged in. I may not always know HOW that will happen but it has to be my aim. I want peoples' lives to have been better (even in very tiny ways) from having participated with me in this work" (p. 90). And, as Shawn Wilson (2008), Opaskwayak Cree and author of *Research Is Ceremony*, reminds us, "[R]elationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality" (p. 7). What I take from Shah, Shillingford, and Wilson is that we have a duty as technical communicators who are trained and skilled in rhetorical and language practices to do something different (read: better) in order to resist simply continuing the status quo, and we have the knowledge and the tools to do so.

Younging's piece is accessible and originally resonated with me because it is written in a way that allows (and, in fact, invites) non-Indigenous writers to incorporate his practices into various technical editing and writing applications. Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized voices are not to blame for the historical (and still ongoing) lack of diversity in technical communication. This is not some problem for BIPOC to address. It's an issue that must be attended to from the inside out, and non-Indigenous writers must be a large part of that conversation—not to override or silence Indigenous voices, not to "white knight" and save anyone from anything, but to lead by example, to fight alongside those voices who are, and have been, demanding change. While Younging writes the book in a way that calls into question writing and editing practices involving Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous writers and editors in Canada, the principles he sets forth are very easily applicable to the United States (and beyond, I am certain). At the time of publication in 2018, Younging described the pressing need for Indigenous Peoples to have a say in the documentation of their own history because they have long been misrepresented in text, film, and general perception by settler people. He called it timely then, and now only a few years later it feels just as timely to be discussing these practices.

Though recent global events—including worldwide Black Lives Matter protests, the horrific public discovery of reservation school deaths and subsequent cover-ups, and the backlash from Gabby Petito's case highlighting the disparity between how missing and murdered white women's stories are handled versus missing and murdered Indigenous women's stories—have brought BIPOC issues to light in new and more far-reaching ways, there is still uncertainty for technical editors about how to ethically share these stories. Younging expresses the need for further scholarship to be published surrounding the telling of Indigenous stories and welcomes the conversation to continue through this book. For non-Indigenous scholars, it is increasingly important to understand how colonizer language has shaped our understanding of storytelling. As Shah points out, "Because marginalized communities are seen as places of intellectual and material deficiency, inquiry into community engagement concepts or specific programs is often seen as the discovery of knowledge that doesn't exist until the academic finds it, rather than honoring the knowledges that already exist in communities" (p. 171). Wilson also writes on this subject, reminding us that "[i]nstead of diagnosing the person as having a problem and offering a treatment, this way of counselling would normalize what the person was going through" (p. 28)—that is, white folks do not somehow have more legitimate knowledge or research practices, but rather we should be listening to the marginalized voices who are telling us both what the issues are and how to best address them and then taking those actions—no matter how uncomfortable or unconventional they may seem.

We must actively resist this idea that we hold the key to solving problems for people and instead consider how we can work against these ingrained ideas and practices (Lane, 2010), even (and perhaps especially) if we are not intentionally misrepresenting stories or individuals. In his famous quote, anti-apartheid and human rights activist Desmond Tutu reminds us that "[i]f you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your

neutrality" (quoted by Robert McAfee Brown in his 1984 book, *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes*). The same can be said for technical communication. Just because the norm of the field has historically been to use colonizer language without question, that does not make the language itself neutral; similarly, just because a writer doesn't intend to use harmful language to perpetuate stereotypes does not mean the outcome isn't harmful. One way for intent and action to align, though, is to continue to read and put into practice the ideas put forth by Indigenous Peoples, Black writers, and other oppressed voices. The resources are there, the timing is kairotic, and the field is open for the shift.

In my experience reading these stories, Indigenous writing practices seem to prioritize truthfulness, collaboration, and intentionality in writing and editing. This feels especially relevant given all the examples Younging and other scholars provide of completely erroneous Indigenous stereotypes prevalent in mainstream language. Further scholarship exists that calls out these "everyday phrases" actively harmful to Indigenous Peoples (Kapitan, 2021), which makes clear that the conversation Younging's book attempts to cultivate is both possible and necessary. For technical editors who believe equity in storytelling is important (and it is), it can feel overwhelming to know where to start for fear of perpetuating greater harm. This is also a critique of social justice in TPC—Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) point out that "[o]nce we understand the gravity of oppression in an intersectional way, scholars are often paralyzed at the thought of getting it wrong" (p. 5). The problems are massive, the situation is grave, and the solution is not linear or neat. However, that is not a viable excuse for not trying to make the changes, have the uncomfortable conversations, or understand where our biases come from. It should not fall to oppressed voices to provide step-by-step guides for white folks to get it right, but the guides must especially be read and followed when they are written. By offering these guiding principles for Indigenous style practices, Younging (and others) help alleviate some of those fears. Rather than providing some prescriptive how-to guide for exactly how to utilize Indigenous style practices, he instead suggests ideas for how to move forth in what is likely to be unfamiliar terrain for non-Indigenous editors. He achieves this by presenting multiple case studies from varying viewpoints in the writer/editor conversation. By showing real-life examples of the guiding principles, he makes this guide extremely accessible for even the most novice technical editor.

As I read Younging, Wilson, Itchuaqiyaq, Tuck and Yang, and other works by so many impressive scholars in the field and have impassioned discussions with my colleagues, and as I think about how I am going to incorporate this type of work into my dissertation project, I am still sometimes left wondering where I stand professionally. As mentioned earlier, I am currently a technical writer. At the professional services firm I have worked at since receiving my MA in professional and technical communication, I do the kind of work I thought I might in this field. I write proposals for potential clients, write and edit content, and utilize techniques and best practices I learned in document design, technical editing, and other professional writing classes. However, the turn to social justice in TPC moves slowly in academia and even slower in industry. I continually ask myself how I can bring these practices into my work and know I am privileged to have a team that listens to and supports my ideas and questioning of our practices, even though the tax and accounting industry is not adopting anything outside White Mainstream English anytime soon.

Recent scholarship seems to advocate for change, regardless of how seemingly small it may be on the scales of justice. It feels like the professional services field as a whole is becoming more transparent with DEI efforts, especially when it comes to leadership of these firms, but there is still an incredibly long way to go to reach any kind of equitable staff makeup. I was ecstatic when I was asked to be a part of our team's accessibility overhaul of our template material, and I was asked to be a part of it because of how outspoken I am on these issues with my whole team. I now get to put into practice some of what I am learning about, including writing for inclusion across the spectrum. Unfortunately, a lot of industry folks still view inclusive editing as just writing for those with visual impairments, rather than as incorporating an expanded definition of disability in the lens of accessibility, including cognitive issues, physical issues, emotional issues, and age (Pass, 2013, p. 117). And, as Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) assert, "[T]he world is designed for the able-bodied person. Ableism centers the experiences of able-bodied individuals, leaving those with disabilities at the margins. So, in design terms, we might ask, 'Who is this space, place, program, technology designed for? And who simply must make do?'" (p. 137). Being able to bring this expanded definition into our best practices will allow me to have a measurable site of intervention in my position in TPC, which lets me integrate my identities as both a scholar and a writer.

Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson (2020) provide more tips for communication designers, such as recognizing "the potentially competing interests (such as the underlying capitalistic demands of colonial organizations) at play in your project" (p. 28), which absolutely comes up in conversation at work. As an academic, I am able to bring best practices to leadership in terms of content writing, editing, and design, and I know how to back up the claims I make with solid evidence—that is, I can cite (BIPOC) sources and present the information in a well-organized and easy-to-follow document. In this way, I can bring in these TPC practices focused on social justice and decolonial work into my field without having to try to advocate for that specific terminology. Again, as we know the power of language and how the personal is political, scholars of both rhetoric and TPC can toe this line well if we try. In doing so, I am able to balance both my own understanding of the decolonial work in the field and my deep knowledge of my firm and industry, so I am able to combine the two with little pushback because I am still working within the confines of my position.

I turn now once more to my original iteration of this piece, the book review of Younging's work. In chapter 6, "Terminology," he writes, "This chapter and the next are about the words on the page" (p. 50), and he provides a laundry list of offensive and inappropriate terminology, as well as a long list of appropriate terms and the reasoning behind them. It doesn't take a (seemingly lifelong) scholar of rhetoric to know words matter, language choice matters, and the decisions behind those choices matter. Chapter 6 gives many specific examples of words to both avoid and use, while chapter 7, "Specific Editorial Issues," provides more nuanced editorial choices one might face. He provides lists of words that should be capitalized, italicized, and otherwise defined, though he also laments the list of Indigenous words that have been appropriated. He writes:

> I regret that English has swallowed these words. These words bear witness to the history of Indigenous Peoples in contact with Europeans. They often represent technologies and foods that Indigenous Peoples introduced to Europeans. Their presentation as "English" terms fails to acknowledge the contributions Indigenous Peoples have made to mainstream culture and the English language, and fails to educate readers who may not be aware of these contributions. (p. 87)

This passage leads into the heart of what this guide is about: respect. It is about respect on the page as much as it is about respect of the experience and the individual. If readers take nothing else from my writing, my hope is that respect sticks out as a guiding practice for everyone in the field of technical communication, whatever their job may be. Itchuaqiyaq (2020) provides a decolonial framework in her open-access undergrad course, where she points out that "[d]ecoloniality is a practice not a prescription. Decolonial methods require a change in perspective that is incredibly hard to do, something hardly achievable in one semester," so I do not wish to attempt in vain to take up how to put those practices into play here, especially since Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson specifically warn against the misuse or oversimplification of decolonial work in TPC. In fact, Itchuaqiyaq and Matheson (2121) offer specific practices for doing decolonial work and design, which specifically calls for collaboration with Indigenous communities in the work and for respect, as Younging also stresses. It is important to call out the scholarship on decolonial work in TPC in order to allow for further engagement and commitment to the work—both from myself and hopefully from at least some readers.

White supremacy is insidious: it does not always present itself in flagrantly obvious ways. It is "a system or social order that keeps power and resources consolidated among white elites, using an ideology (or way of understanding the world) that upholds whiteness—including white people, white cultural values, and white institutions—as being best or most 'normal'" (Kapitan, 2017). Seemingly nonviolent acts are perpetuated through language use and misuse in ways that cause lasting harm and misinformation, as has historically been the case with Indigenous storytelling. It is for this reason that scholarship surrounding how to appropriately and respectfully write for, and more importantly with, Indigenous Peoples remains important. As Younging reminds us, "Just because it's in a book—or especially if it's in an academic book from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s—doesn't mean the content was appropriate to publish in the first place, or that it has been published with consent, or that it has been published accurately" (p. 40). This argument is even more relevant today as we see many states trying to ban what they erroneously believe to be critical race theory—just because something is or is not published, academically or otherwise, doesn't mean it did or did not happen. It's important to know what is inappropriate or disrespectful when it comes to writing and editing practices, but it's perhaps more important to dig into why they are. While it is true that some people who use offensive language don't mean harm by it, intent does not mean as much as outcome, especially when lives are at stake. For example, using past tense to describe Indigenous Peoples can work to erase their current existence in the world. For technical writers and editors, understanding that even these seemingly small grammatical choices have huge implications for those whose stories we are sharing is of the utmost importance, especially for those who are non-Indigenous. Writing presented as neutral is sometimes the most harmful, and both learning about and incorporating the elements of style presented by Younging and others will allow for a more equitable body of scholarship to be published. While Indigenous stories have always been told and will always be told, ensuring they are being represented in an honest manner, especially when they are told by non-Indigenous writers, must be the goal of the technical editor.

When reading this narrative, you might ask yourself how you previously thought of the neutrality (or nonneutrality) of words, phrasing, capitalization, verb tense, and the like. Where are the sites you can intervene in order to put social justice academic ideologies into practice? What is your responsibility to the field? To your community? To yourself? By continuing to interrogate our own 3Ps and bringing decolonial practices from academia into industry as much as we are able, my hope is that future TPC scholars will continue to turn the social justice wheel even quicker in the field as a whole, and not just in the classroom.

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Coming over and an ethics of accessibility: A review of *Rhetorics of Overcoming: Rewriting Narratives of Disability and Accessibility in Writing Studies*

Gabriella Wilson

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Abstract

This review grapples with the ongoing mental health crisis in higher education to contextualize Allison Hitt's *Rhetorics of Overcoming: Narratives of Disability and Accessibility in Writing Studies*. In her text, Hitt acknowledges institutional barriers to access and accommodations while arguing that to meet the crisis, instructors must employ an ethics of accessibility that enables multiple points of engagement with class content. According to Hitt, to create institutional change, instructors must work with students in a process of coming over. Hitt's process of coming over actively engages the participation of disabled students in facilitating their learning. This review engages with Hitt's text alongside a consideration of a discussion around mental illness and accessibility in higher education.

Keywords

access, accessibility, disability studies, writing studies, writing pedagogy, composition

The New York Times published four articles on what they termed "the inner pandemic" during May of 2022 (Flanagan, 2022). Each of the four articles examined and discussed the growing mental health crisis among teenagers in America. The articles each touched on increasing mental health hospitalizations among teenagers across the country, growing teenage suicide rates, and a healthcare system ill-equipped to handle such a surge in pediatric mental health crises. While I remember being alarmed and startled by the statistics in the *NYT*'s publication, I can't say I was surprised. I've been a college instructor for about five years, and I've frequently listened to other instructors share their struggles over addressing mental health concerns in their classes. Students frequently come to instructors with concerns about their performance in class due to ongoing mental health struggles, and instructors feel ill-equipped to handle these situations. Instructors are correct to acknowledge they are not medical doctors and, therefore, not equipped to process and diagnose mental health conditions and illnesses with students. And yet, writing studies has consistently relied on a medical diagnosis model when it comes to disability. Education models that are dependent on a medical diagnosis emphasize diagnosis, disclosure, and cure to accommodate individual disabled students rather than creating an environment that centers on access in the classroom. Instead of working with students to accommodate their needs, instructors and tutors may take it upon themselves to diagnose students and create accommodations, or they ask students to acquire formal accommodations from the access and disability service on campus before granting a student an accommodation.

All of this aside, my lack of surprise over the *NYT*'s article was more so due to my personal experience with mental health illnesses. Last year, I watched as a family member of mine struggled with mental health illnesses while away at school. When my family member reached out to find psychiatric and psychological services through their university, the university was unable to provide services on-campus beyond three to five appointments. This means that after students have three to five appointments

with psychiatric and psychological services on campus, they are forced to find another therapist or mental health service that they can utilize. This disrupts mental health care in addition to placing a burden on students to find and transport themselves to counseling appointments. Recognizing these institutional barriers forced me to contend with how higher education is wholly unprepared to deal with the mental health crisis currently facing teenagers across the nation. While I've dealt with mental health illnesses for as long as I can remember, narratives about overcoming my anxiety disorder and other illnesses pushed me to mask and render invisible the ways that I've worked to "overcome" the impact of my mental health disorders on my work in the academy. But watching someone close to me attempt to navigate higher education while experiencing mental health illnesses made me consider how I do and don't center access in my classes.

My reading of Allison Hitt's book, *Rhetorics of Overcoming: Rewriting Narratives of Disability and Accessibility in Writing Studies* (2021), was shadowed by the growing teenage mental health crisis. The epidemic cloaked my reading of Hitt's text, especially because Hitt dates the teenage mental health crisis to 2013. In 2013, I was a teenager experiencing mental health issues. It worries me that as a society, we've continually and consistently used terms like "growing" and "increasing" to define a crisis that has exploded in the last nine years. It's concerning that an assessment from 2013, which demonstrated that "one-third of US college students had difficulty functioning due to depression, and 30 percent reported serious considerations of suicide– up from 24 percent in 2010," has not resulted in massive overhauls to psychological and mental health services on university campuses (Hitt 6). In fact, university mental health services are inundated with students seeking mental health services every year, to the point that students are forced to wait weeks and months for an appointment. In 2019, *Vice* published an article that detailed the impact that university shortages of mental health resources had on students across the country (Jancer). Amid an ongoing global pandemic in 2022, mental health concerns are even more prevalent. While universities seem to be making some advances toward providing additional mental health resources for students, it's important to acknowledge that the catalyst behind many proclamations that announce additional mental health resources are because of student suicides on college campuses (Anderson, 2022). Moreover, universities seem to be turning to unorthodox and potentially dangerous methods to try and meet the demand for mental health resources through programs like peer counseling (Carrasco, 2022). While it's fine to encourage students to talk with their peers about their mental health, students should not be asked to act as therapists for other students, especially without proper training and education.

Hitt's text acknowledges these institutional barriers to access and accommodations while arguing that to meet the crisis, instructors must employ an ethics of accessibility that enables multiple points of engagement with class content. In addition to engaging in an ethics of accessibility, which centers on access in the classroom, Hitt argues that instructors must also work with students in a process of coming over. Hitt's process of coming over actively engages the participation of disabled students in facilitating their learning. Drawing on disability studies and writing studies, Hitt argues that writing studies is already primed to construct accessible classroom spaces and center an ethics of accessibility. Coming over decenters normative literacy practices in favor of non-normative literacy practices and offers students multiple points of access and ways of engaging with assignments and course material. Through an articulation of coming over, Hitt's text artfully and carefully avoids and dismantles the idea that an instructor needs to diagnose a student before providing an accommodation.

Coming over works in conjunction with an ethics of accessibility, which Hitt argues "accounts for the material needs of both students and instructors, while recognizing the need for writing curricula to be responsible to and respectful of difference. This ethic connects to classroom practices– in the activities we develop and projects we assign– and to disciplinary scholarship and discourses about the literacies that we privilege" (48). Coming over and an ethics of accessibility already assume that disability and non-normative literacy practices exist in the room and accounts for non-normative engagement by offering multiple access points and by decentering normative literacy practices. Importantly, coming over and an ethics of accessibility do not ask instructors to retrofit their classroom spaces– to retroactively attempt to meet a student's accommodation needs once it has been brought to the attention of the instructor or disability services– but instead asks instructors to utilize already existing pedagogical theories and practices to create classroom spaces and practices that inherently center access.

Hitt sets up a process of coming over and an ethics of accessibility in contrast to what she identifies as rhetorics of overcoming expressed in the ways that disability is discussed in writing classrooms. Rhetorics of overcoming propagate the idea that disabled people/students must overcome their disability to participate in a normative culture. She positions rhetorics of overcoming as a neoliberal individualistic approach to disability that expects and pushes inspirational messages about overcoming disability to engage with inaccessible systems over privileging access and inclusive spaces. Think: "if you just try meditation, your anxiety will go away." Importantly for the context of this review, she argues that writing studies has also engaged in rhetorics of overcoming that rely on cure, diagnosis, disclosure, and retrofitting rather than collaborating alongside disabled students to create "pedagogical spaces that privilege– not just accommodate– non-normative literacy practices" (21). Disclosure, diagnosis, and cure all contribute to rhetorics of overcoming through their insistence on medical diagnosis models and neoliberal values around individual approaches to meeting (and many times not meeting) disabled students' needs.

Hitt begins her text by writing and thinking about disclosure, opening with a series of disclosures; disclosures about her family members who live with a disability, disclosures about her own experiences navigating her family members' disabilities, and disclosures about her disability, she is clear that navigating and negotiating disclosure requires nuance. While Hitt chooses to disclose her disabilities in the book and views disclosure in this form as an ethical responsibility to acknowledge her positionality, she is clear that uneven power dynamics frequently mark disclosure. For instance, uneven power dynamics mark disclosure in the classroom where instructors can mandate students to disclose their disability to receive accommodations. In order to receive accommodations, students typically need to demonstrate that they have a disability that impedes their ability to engage in a course through a formal diagnosis obtained by a medical institution. In this case, access through accommodation depends on disclosure and diagnosis, requiring students to navigate and negotiate with medical institutions and the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure. Problems with disability and mental health resources on university campuses extend beyond just the obstacles associated with obtaining accommodations; Hitt also discusses how accommodation offices often do not necessarily offer accommodations that meet a student's needs. This is especially true in writing classrooms where, as Hitt mentions, accommodations like granting students more time on a test do not necessarily apply.

As I read Hitt's discussion of disclosure, the nuances around disclosure, the concept of betweenity and negotiating the space between disclosure, and the issues associated with university disability and mental health services, I thought back to my encounter with disability and mental health services at my university. Disability has touched my life in different ways. Still, it wasn't until I experienced bouts of disabling chronic health conditions that I critically considered what it means to provide access to folks and the difficulties associated with receiving accommodations. Experiencing physically impairing health conditions that drastically undermined my ability to write, teach, read, and live normally forced me to reconsider how I could show up physically in spaces. The accommodations I was offered for my health conditions didn't help my situation or address my access needs. I also was unsure of how to advocate for my access needs or what would be considered "reasonable." In this instance, while I was lucky that it was relatively easy to navigate accessing the disability and mental health services available at my institution, and a formal diagnosis was not required, I still struggled to work with the office to receive what would be considered reasonable accommodations. My experience, and Hitt's critique, emphasize the centrality of her process of coming over because it speaks to the necessity of collaborating with disabled students to craft accommodations and ensure an ethics of accessibility.

Hitt moves beyond critiquing accommodation services for their inability to meet students' needs to examining the medical diagnosis model that many disability and accommodation services on university campuses utilize. The medical diagnosis model depends on a formal diagnosis to signal an accommodation. Instructors propagate the medical diagnosis model when they require that students file their disability with the access and disability office to receive accommodations in the course. Hitt also mentions specific writing center practices that perpetuate the medical diagnosis model by asking tutors to identify and diagnose disabilities that a student may have prior to tutoring them, arguing that tutors can better aid students when they have an understanding of the disabilities they may have. Identifying two points of concern with the medical diagnosis model, Hitt argues that "accommodations position students as subjects who must be diagnosed and then cured of their deficits in order to succeed within our classrooms." Moreover, Hitt writes that in foisting the responsibility of "seeking and securing the accommodation" on individual students who identify as disabled, universities take an individualized approach to disability that "frame[s] disability as an unexpected failure [on behalf of the student] that does not require systemic change" (Hitt 41). I'll extend Hitt's critique to also consider the systemic ways in which diagnosis is not always possible for some students, such as students who are financially unable to see a doctor to obtain formal medical diagnoses. In effect, the medical diagnosis model relies on neoliberal logic that insists on upholding and lauding the narratives about individuals who pull themselves up by their bootstraps over considering the ways that systems and institutions are built to privilege normative and economically privileged bodies. Hitt asks us to critically reflect on whose needs are left out when instructors and institutions require formal accommodations and attempt to diagnose students before retrofitting accommodations. Disclosure and diagnosis cannot be depended on to ensure that students' access needs are being met in the same way that deficiency narratives and ideas about curing those with disability are ineffective ways of approaching disability and access in the writing studies classroom.

In contrast to rhetorics of overcoming that depends on diagnosis, cure, and disclosure, Hitt offers an ethics of accessibility and process of coming over that actively engages with students and privileges non-normative literacy practices. Engaging with students in a process of coming over requires thoughtful and intentional interaction and collaboration between instructors and students to discuss what access looks like in the writing studies classroom. Moreover, it requires a view of disclosure that acknowledges the ways that it enables the creation of more accessible spaces and "builds accessible support systems" (Hitt 31). For Hitt, a process of coming over "embraces disability, difference, and nonnormative practices– a narrative that informs the crafting of pedagogical practices that welcome a wide range of embodied experiences to *come over* and join the conversation on accessibility" (20). Importantly, as Hitt writes, coming over informs pedagogical practices employed in the classroom and the various modes and ways of accessing assignments and class material. Hitt argues that writing studies already possess ways of creating more accessible classrooms through pedagogical practices and theories such

as multimodal composition and composing practices, universal design practices, and theories and studies on multiliteracy.

While Hitt offers multimodality, universal design, and multiliteracy as indicators that writing studies is already primed to center access in the classroom, she is clear that these practices and theories do not inherently foreground an ethics of accessibility. Rather, she argues that these practices and theories create space for engaging in an ethics of accessibility. Hitt argues that multimodal pedagogies are already designed to incorporate flexible access points for students. By granting students the rhetorical agency to compose their assignments in ways that make sense and work for them, multimodal pedagogies create space to engage non-normative literacy practices. Moreover, multimodal practices specifically engage embodied composing processes that offer ways to make disability visible while offering multiple access points to engage with the course material.

As Hitt argues, multimodal pedagogy and universal design both seek to provide as many avenues to access information as possible. But importantly for engaging in a process of coming over, universal design encourages and "advocates for creation of spaces and channels that invite students to share what they do and don't need, a feedback loop that can usefully inform curriculum design, pedagogical theories and practices, and academic understandings of disability" (Hitt 50). Created alongside disabled students, these feedback loops encourage instructors to revise their courses to meet students' access needs. Hitt stresses the importance of universal design and feedback loops that respond to disabled student needs, in particular, to acknowledge critiques of universal design that argue it has become a depoliticized application that encourages access for all without especially considering disabled folks. While universal design's mission is to encourage flexible access options, it's important that it maintains its political undertones in crafting and constructing accessible spaces, especially for disabled people. Hitt ends her discussion of multimodal pedagogy and universal design by supplying a few different approaches she takes in her own classes, such as mind mapping and decomposition activities that privilege non-normative literacies and bodies.

After addressing the ways that she envisions multimodal pedagogy within a process of coming over, Hitt moves on to discuss multiliteracy and multimodality in writing centers. She stresses the importance of technology usage and offers a variety of literacy practices to use in the writing center to offer multiple points of access for students to engage during appointments. Moreover, she discusses the material and physical spaces that writing centers inhabit and how the writing center's construction can greatly impact disabled students' ability to engage with and receive support from writing center resources. In addition to material and physical spaces in the writing center, Hitt touches on writing center tutor training. Specifically, she considers what universal design offers in contrast to medical diagnosis frameworks often employed in the writing center. Hitt argues that while it may seem counterintuitive to use universal design principles in individualized writing instruction, universal design offers a framework through which to design a "pedagogy that is flexible, collaborative, and accessible" in the writing center. Hitt is clear that this collaborative environment is dependent on writing center tutors receiving the proper training in addition to writing centers intentionally recruiting diverse students; however, she also notes that when tutors adapt and develop "multimodal toolkits," or "collections of flexible and adaptable multimodal practices' they can more easily navigate different communicative interactions and provide student writers with agency to make decisions about what works for them'' (77).

In the last chapter of her book, Hitt grounds the text and her pedagogical philosophy in an ethics of accessibility, especially as it connects with her classroom practices and assignments. Interestingly, at least to me, Hitt labels this section "accessibility as ethical, rhetorical practice." In my own research, I've been considering the ways that accessibility functions as a form of care in the classroom; centering access and encouraging multiple points of engagement is an active and intentional way to establish an ethic of care that intentionally privileges non-normative literacy practices. Choosing to center access is an ethical consideration that instructors must make. What happens when instructors don't center access? What students are left out when we don't center accessibility and instead try to accommodate and retrofit to meet students' needs? Importantly, while considering accessibility as an ethical and rhetorical practice, Hitt argues that accessibility is not accommodation and that "when accessibility is positioned as accommodation, it becomes merely a functional, institutional requirement rather than an opportunity to critically reflect on systemic practices" (89). Accessibility does not ask disabled students to overcome their disability to engage in normative literacy practices; rather, accessibility offers and privileges access without disclosure, diagnoses, and does not center on cure. But most importantly for Hitt in this section, centering access is an intentional ethical and rhetorical practice that instructors must choose to employ.

Hitt extends her discussion of an ethics of accessibility beyond describing how it influences her pedagogical approach and expands her discussion of access to how she discusses and teaches the importance of access to her students. Importantly, teaching accessibility as an ethical and rhetorical practice encourages instructors to have students critically reflect on power dynamics and ableism while exposing students to non-normative literacies. To demonstrate how instructors can engage in this critical reflection with students, Hitt offers various assignments that instructors can utilize to encourage centering access, such as creating image descriptions and creating transcriptions and closed captioning alongside projects like podcasts. Hitt asks her students to think rhetorically about these assignments to consider the kinds of "creative, critical, and rhetorical choices" they can make (Hitt 92). Hitt argues that when students engage in assignments like transcription, closed

captioning, and image descriptions as part of multimodal composing, it shifts the purpose of the task from an "accommodation to a rhetorical and creative act," reinforcing an ethics of accessibility for students (94).

As mentioned previously, Hitt's text and my lived experiences with mental illnesses have shaped how I interrogate and negotiate with disability and access in the writing classroom. While I already try to practice engaging in a process of coming over with disabled students, Hitt's text has expanded my view on accommodations and how I engage alongside students to construct the classroom space. For instance, I already engage in a practice of reaching out to students for whom I receive an accommodation letter to inquire into their needs and how they'd like to see their accommodations fulfilled. If nothing else, the email lets students know I'm open to suggestions and want to invite them to help shape the classroom space. However, as Hitt points out, there are many institutional barriers to receiving a formal accommodation; thus, I need to be more intentional about reaching out to all students to inquire into their access needs and any course revisions I can make that may make the course more accessible for them. Specifically, this fall, I'd like to work to create spaces where students can provide feedback on how to make the course more accessible. I already create space for students to provide feedback on the lesson that day through exit tickets, but creating a specific question on the form that inquires into access needs would create a space to collaborate and ensure the course is accessible and inclusive for all. Considering I ask students to complete an exit ticket form after every class, exit tickets would also serve to create the feedback loops that Hitt argues are necessary for engaging in a process of coming over. Hitt's text pushes me to reconsider how I'm intentionally creating spaces for disabled students to influence the construction of the classroom space.

Hitt's text also challenges me to expand how I approach disability in the classroom beyond considering how I center access in my pedagogical practice to consider how I center access in my pedagogical content as well. Based on Hitt's suggestions, I'd like to be intentional about crafting multimodal assignments that ask students to design their projects and compositions with non-normative literacy practices in mind. In effect, I'd like to stress to students that access should be baked into the design of projects from the beginning. To do this, I'll utilize Hitt's assignment suggestions like asking students to compose a transcription alongside their podcast and reminding them to create captions while designing videos and writing alt text along with their images. However, in working to incorporate access into the construction of assignment prompts, I'll also need to be intentional about demonstrating to students how to fulfill the genre expectations of texts like transcripts, alt text, and captions. To fully interrogate the rhetoricity of each of these genres, it's necessary that instructors analyze examples of accessible texts with students to demonstrate how to create these texts effectively.

This book offers important insights into conversations happening between disability studies and writing studies. As external global events and catastrophes like climate change, mental health crises, pandemics, attacks on civil rights and liberties, racism, and gun violence continue to impact students, addressing disability in the classroom is of central importance. She provides accessible and easily understandable assignments that instructors can use to engage in a process of coming over with students in ways that privilege non-normative literacy practices through multimodal pedagogies and universal design. Most importantly, Hitt does not mince her words in addressing how writing studies has actively contributed to neoliberal rhetorics of overcoming that exacerbate accessibility concerns and often don't help disabled students. In its place, Hitt is right to make the argument that, in many ways, writing studies is already engaging in practices and theories that can easily engage with a disability studies framework. This text should be required reading for students in teacher education programs and graduate writing programs invested in creating equitable and accessible classrooms for students.

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