Introduction

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This collection has been a long time in the making. In 2019, the editorial team proposed a panel focused on our experiences with positionality for the 2020 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). At the time, three of us were graduate students, one was working toward tenure, and another was a tenured professor. Our plans were curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. CCCC was postponed, and the succeeding years were marked by disruption and growth. The pandemic changed our teaching realities. We got new jobs. We moved away from other jobs. We lost and regained touch with our colleagues.

In 2021, we came together with a desire for connection. We gave our presentation at the postponed CCCC and began to think we could compile these experiences into an edited collection on positionality. Where some of us had once successfully separated personal from professional, we were all experiencing a more potent interweaving of the many aspects of our lives and imagined others were facing similar complexities. Thus, we arrived at this collection. Other contributors have joined us as we write about the ways our academic personas are impacted by who we are in other contexts.

We offer this collection with three goals: (1) Provide a text focused on reflexivity and storytelling to emerging scholar-teachers[1] as well as to experienced

1. We define "teacher" as capaciously as possible. Beyond classroom spaces, "teaching" happens through coaching, training, mentoring, and other relationships. Teaching can be formal yet also happens in small, everyday interactions. Please think about ways you "teach" by exchanging information and interacting with others in ways that collaboratively build skills, knowledge, and evolving worldviews. Although we resist the view of a "teacher" as an unquestioned authority figure, we also acknowledge the power differentials often emerging from learning environments prone to hierarchy.

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folks rethinking their conception of academic work. (2) Give our contributors an opportunity to express ideas about positionality that may not easily fit in peer-reviewed journals. (3) Deliver a text to the field that will serve as an intersection point from which more scholarship about positionality can grow.

Although we are engaging in knowledge-making practices firmly rooted in narrative-based writing studies methodologies, this kind of text may or may not feel familiar to you. While our introduction provides some scholarly framing, the subsequent chapters are purposefully written almost exclusively in first-person form. If you are expecting a conventional academic text, you will not find it here. However, we believe our story-centered approach offers a wide array of opportunities for teaching and learning.

Our anticipated primary audience is university and community college professors and graduate students in the broad field of writing studies. Most graduate programs require at least an overview course in research methods, and many require several courses. Standard instructional texts focus on the structure of a project starting with research questions and ending with a write-up in a scholarly genre. When positionality comes up, it does so typically in passing, addressed as a question of insider-outsider status and as a reminder to be reflective and reflexive in service of overall rigor. In traditional methods texts, time and space are not available to explore the realities and complexities of what those considerations entail. *Storied Practices: Positionality in Writing Studies* is designed to accompany instructional texts, both affirming and challenging experienced researchers and budding scholars—and teachers—as they work through the implications of positionality within their projects.

Adding a layer to our anticipated readership, we hope beginning professors will find this collection valuable as they embark upon their road to tenure while being asked to conduct and evaluate research in their disciplines. New graduate students might find this book valuable as they strive to understand and ultimately become an active participant both in their fields and in the world. Independent scholars and professionals in broader knowledge-making positions might enjoy seeing their voices represented here and might be inspired to reflect over their own relationships to their work. Gatekeepers such as committee chairs, editors and reviewers, and conference organizers might also consider the stories contained here as insights into the often-invisible complexities facing individuals requesting entrance to privileged academic spaces. Advanced undergraduates and researchers from other disciplines—anyone with a particular interest in inquiry practices and ethics—constitute our secondary audience. Most broadly, we envision our collection to be of potential interest to researchers transversing academic and non-academic spaces, and/or engaging in scholarship centered on social justice, community building, and public humanities.

In sum, the value of these stories lies in what you need as a reader. Are you looking for others who have struggled in ways you have struggled? Are you looking for folks who went out into their communities and, in turn, learned

transformative things about themselves? Are you looking for ways positionality functions and might be taught in classroom contexts? You will find relevant insights and examples throughout the following chapters. Although there is no singular way to use this text, we envision it as a conversation starter in classrooms, in research and community collaborations, and even in internal dialogues as researchers imagine their projects.

While the stories contained in *Storied Practices* speak to a beautiful array of experiences and reflections, they are also drawn together by strong common threads. The following section presents some of the diverse scholarly influences that drew each of us on the editorial team into a united vision to explore positionality in writing studies.

Encounters that Moved Us

Positionality, knowledge making, story/narrative, and disciplinary literacies: previous research in these areas is too broad and too deep to cover in a traditional introductory literature review. Although "positionality" is often defined as a point on the insider/outsider continuum, we find it to be a more multifaceted and powerful concept. Intersectional theory demonstrates the precarity of inhabiting locations of interlocking oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2016). Yet those locations are only a starting point. For example, Donna Haraway (1988) calls "positioning … the key practice in grounding knowledge" in Western systems and the foundation for rationality (p. 587). However, Haraway clarifies that positioning as an embodied perspective "is not about fixed location in a reified body … but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference …" (p. 588). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) reminds us of the power of awareness when she describes the "outsider-within" as a perspective from which to witness and critique systems of domination and as a "distinctively Black and female forms of resistance" (p. 13). Critical educators such as bell hooks (1994) re-locate teaching and learning as an integrated practice, a collaborative and performative experience: "Progressive, holistic education, 'engaged pedagogy'" is a full-body, mind, and spirit process (p. 15). Such active, engaged, and joyful learning is mandatory to address ongoing crises in education (see Acevedo, et. al., 2015). Filling the role of "educator" also asks us to maintain an ongoing mindfulness regarding our positionalities.

Each member of the editorial team encountered perspectives on positionality in different contexts, but the more we read and learned, the more central positionality became to all our daily activities. We also came to realize how, as a concept, positionality was prone to being simultaneously over-simplified and over-complicated, defying a succinct and singular definition. To make our way through sometimes-contradictory conversations about positionality, we turned to our own histories. The following sections share paths we individually took toward deeper engagement with positionality. Here, we discuss the experiences

and the scholarship that sowed the seeds for this collection and pushed us to consider what positionality means to each of us.

Becky: Repositioning My Research/ Repositioning Myself as a Researcher

I had amazing cohorts in my graduate program; I took classes along with now-luminaries Cheryl Glenn, Kris Ratcliffe, Roxanne Mountford, and Pat Sullivan among others. I played softball on a co-rec team with Pat (The Woolfpack), and often she and I would chat, after we played, about her dissertation (and my thesis), both of which used qualitative methods. She interviewed students and professors at different institutions about the qualifying exam procedure, resulting in a series of case studies. I remember being awed by the thorough, artful work she did in her dissertation; the case studies she created inspired, in part, the look and feel of the case studies in my thesis.

Several years later, I remember reading her chapter "Feminism and Methodology in Composition Studies" in her co-edited book *Methods and Methodologies in Composition Research* (Kirsch & Sullivan, 1992) … and I was flabbergasted. I read her dissertation. I recall thinking it was exactly what research should look/feel like. It was rigorous, scholarly, and methodologically well-wrought. But here was Pat rethinking her research, recognizing that she did not analyze her data as a feminist, but rather as someone who Morgan Freeman as Red in *The Shawshank Redemption* might call "institutionalized." She accepted professors' perspectives about students' qualifying exams as truth, thereby minimizing some of the students' perspectives/stories. She didn't dare question the authorities, the process, the authoritative pronouncements of those in authority, those with power.

Reading that chapter was cathartic for me at the time. It helped me to understand how I might see things differently—not just the research I'd completed, but the research I was involved in, the research I was teaching, the research I thought I knew. How the research resonated with the discipline, to the research sites, and to the people doing, participating in, and reading the research. I gave myself permission to rethink research and to reposition myself in relation to my research.

That rethinking and repositioning has continued during my entire career. Early on, I recognized that our representation of research was linear and neat … but my experience with research was often chaotic and messy. I wrote about the "mess" involved in research quite a bit, and in my research methods classes, we frequently discussed how our experience doesn't always align with our representation. I still think it would be great if we talked/wrote more about the mess: the times when things go horribly wrong, the research questions that get totally transformed, figuring out that the theory/premise we started with doesn't work/isn't right, and so forth.

One of the major research projects I began as a professor was a qualitative look at partners who stayed with a spouse who was transitioning from one sex

to another. Having experienced this scenario, I wanted to see how other couples navigated the upheaval. I planned the research, got IRB approval, and began interviewing my participants, trying to invoke a feminist "research-with" model. But my interviews felt … flat. Deflated. Cursory answers to questions asked and no more. I simply wasn't getting the information I knew was there. I tried to make sure I followed IRB protocol by treating everyone the same, and that practice almost seemed to muzzle some of the participants. The whole process felt artificial. Icky.

Then I read Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony* (2008).

Arising from Wilson's doctoral thesis, the book was unlike any academic publication I'd read before. There was foregrounding. And letters to his sons. And stories. And circular, recursive structure.

I loved it: it was clear. Accessible. Honest. In reading Wilson's book, I began to understand what was wrong with my partner study; for even though I was trying to overlay a feminist sensibility on my research, it was still primarily that: research. It centered me as the researcher and others as participants, hearing the same script so that everyone could have a similar experience in an effort to make the research impartial. Anonymous. Rigorous. Replicable.

But Wilson teaches an important lesson from Indigenous research, that we need to think less about the outcome and more about the process. He writes of the three R's in Indigenous research:

- Respect
- Reciprocity
- Relationality (and relational accountability)

I realized that, while I respected my partner/participants, my respect seemed limited to me being grateful that they agreed to be part of my study; my reciprocity wasn't much more than saying a heart-felt "thank you" to my participants. And I never really situated myself or formed a relationship with the people I interviewed. I never shared my own history with a transitioning spouse as a means to honor them by making myself vulnerable and as an invitation for them to share their stories in a safe place with someone who didn't necessarily have the *same* experience but had experiences that would allow me to understand and empathize with what they'd gone through.

In subsequent interviews, I went rogue: I started sharing my own stories at the beginning, allowing the partners to see that I would, in fact, have insight into their own experiences (or at least into their feelings), all in the context of a reciprocal conversation and sharing stories rather than conducting an interview. Suddenly everything changed. Of course, my research was no longer following IRB protocol. But the stories we were telling were important, sacred, and worthy of great respect. I needed to be *part* of the storytelling, sharing my experiences to help others see the power in their own and honoring my own and their experiences collectively. By repositioning how I participated in this research—this

ceremony—and then finding a way to represent it so that all of us felt safe yet heard was perhaps the most important, beautiful thing I've done as a researcher.

> I think that the thing I most want you to remember is that research is a ceremony. And so is life. Everything that we do shares in the ongoing creation of our universe.
>
> – *Shawn Wilson*

Kristine: Writing and Working in Community

One of the first times I truly saw myself reflected in research was through the work of Laura Gonzales. I remember thinking how incredible it was that someone who looked like me and sounded like me was able to publish work that talked about the importance of "encouraging movement across languages and modes" within a writing classroom (Gonzalez, 2015, p. 2). As a Latine scholar, there were not a lot of researchers that I could immediately relate to, but Laura Gonzales was one of them. The ease by which she supported academic claims with personal experiences and research made me immediately feel drawn to her community-oriented approach of highlighting humanity in the culturally important topics she explored.

In her article, "Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies," Gonzalez (2015) explains that "translingualism gives us a framework for understanding the fluidity of modalities and languages, a framework that we can use … to further understand how our students draw on their linguistic experiences to make meaning through their composing practices" (p. 2). I remember first reading this sentence and being overcome with profound sadness as I personally had longed for someone to value my own language throughout my many years of engaging with writing in school. Growing up, I was never able to write in my native Spanish alongside English and often felt that the quality of my work was lacking due to limits on the ways I could express myself. Gonzales helped me not only see that my feelings were valid but also that working across languages is a strength when it comes to writing and communication.

"Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies" taught me about the importance of positionality in writing and research. It showed me the value of meaning-making across contexts and of allowing students to express themselves openly through their native languages and through personal experiences. Gonzales made me see that there is great power that comes from one's unique position in life and that this power should be embraced in order to unbind genres and traditional research methodologies from their rigid forms. It is because of Gonzales' work that I encourage my students to reflect on their diverse backgrounds and experiences as a way of enriching my writing classroom and fostering a community that supports linguistic diversity.

This brings me to Paul Feigenbaum and his work on community literacy. I first encountered Feigenbaum as a student in his Community Writing course.

Through his teachings and research, it became clear to me that writing classrooms should be used as platforms where students can address issues that matter to them. Feigenbaum helped me realize that students should be given support in becoming advocates for their families and communities. Prior to encountering Feigenbaum and his work, I only saw writing as a task to be completed, one that would be evaluated on completion and clarity. But Feigenbaum taught me that writing was a tool and that the way you position yourself through writing can truly make a difference in the lives of others. I remember in his class, my course project centered around censorship taking place in the local community. Feigenbaum allowed me to explore avenues to reduce, and remove, such hurtful practices. It was the first time I was ever able to truly practice writing that could not only positively impact me but also those I cared about.

In *Cultivating the Flow of Community Literacy*, Feigenbaum (2016) argues that it is important to share stories that "recall and reconsider what it is that drives us to [community-based] work" (p. 36). This kind of reflexive practice through storywork is one that I have carried with me throughout my academic and personal life. After completing any community service-learning project, collaborative writing initiative, or semester of teaching, the first thing I do is think back on my experiences and how they have impacted me as a person. Personal stories help us not only make connections but also learn from one another and in many ways help to measure growth and changes. Stories can teach us as much, if not more, about the world around us than traditional scholarship and research.

For me, community is at the heart of what I do professionally and personally. It is intrinsically tied to who I am as a person, but without Feigenbaum's teachings and research, I would have never openly embraced how important this particular positioning in life is to who I am as a person. Without him, I would not have understood the impact research has on others and the importance of reflecting on one's own positionality in research, teaching, and in everyday life. Likewise, without Gonzales, I would not have been able to envision the possibilities of my teaching and research in academic and public spaces.

Michelle: The Vulnerable Researcher

I came to graduate school from a job in industry with the intention of enhancing and certifying my skills in technical communication and usability. My goal was to become more marketable and more competitive for higher-level positions. But as I took courses in rhetoric and communication, I discovered new ideas and developed different goals. I realized that graduate school was a precious time—one of the few that would allow me to study, learn, and write about anything I wanted. I earned my doctorate at the same time I turned 40, and it proved to be a time of immense change and rediscovery.

At first, I thought I needed to do a very practical dissertation. I even started a project looking into multilingual content management that I truly enjoyed,

thinking it would be my dissertation topic. But my body intervened. Faced with a cancer scare (turned out to be precancerous), lumpectomy, multiple joint injuries, and a pelvic floor prolapse, I found myself spending a lot of time reflecting on healthcare experiences. Because of the time and energy required by my doctoral work and my personal health challenges, I gave up a freelance job writing digital marketing copy, one of the few things tethering me to my corporate life. Health concerns, schoolwork, and COVID-19 threw everything into disarray and pushed my mind into a different space than it had been when I had started graduate school.

My body was insisting on its relevance. The medical interventions I was experiencing drew me into a serious interrogation of my previous relationship with my body. I had been in recovery from eating disorders for 15 years at the time, and I began to feel strongly about helping others in eating disorder recovery. I got involved with Texas Tech University's Center for Collegiate Recovery Communities and, through my new friends there, realized that there was a space for research on eating disorder recovery. I started by doing some mini-inquiries into recovery rhetoric in my graduate-level courses and encountered rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) as a legitimate field of study. I felt immediately drawn toward deepening my understanding of the scholarship in that area.

In particular, I encountered a conversation among Cathryn Molloy, Cristy Beemer, Jeffrey Bennett, Ann Green, Jenell Johnson, Molly Kessler, Maria Novotny, and Bryna Siegel-Finer published in the Summer/Fall 2018 issue of *Rhetoric of Health and Medicine*. The scholars were open and honest about their personal connections with the topics they researched. Prior to encountering RHM as a field, I had believed it was essential to maintain objectivity in scholarly study. Reading RHM scholarship, I started to question how objective any researcher really is, regardless of topic.

I was also intrigued by their use of dialogue as the format for a scholarly article. The entire article pushed the boundaries of what I had assumed was acceptable in scholarly study and articulated issues RHM as a field was trying to work out about positionality and how it translates for readers of our scholarship.

At first, I wondered how appropriate it would be for me to conduct research in recovery, since I was so personally imbricated in recovery activities and recovery communities. But as I put together a dissertation proposal and reading list, I ran across a book that changed my outlook on qualitative research: *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996) by Ruth Behar.

Behar is an anthropologist, and *The Vulnerable Observer* is her attempt to break down the idea that anthropology is about the "I" observing the "we." Paraphrasing George Devereux (1967), she insists that, "*what happens within the observer* must be made known" (p. 6, emphasis hers). The researcher's positionality and perspective not only matter but also are essential to understanding the scholarship being created. The book is a collection of essays that explore the phenomena she observed through her fieldwork alongside descriptions of her

personal experiences during the time her research was occurring. She writes about her grandfather dying while she was in Spain following up with study participants. She reflects on breaking her leg as a child in a traumatic automobile accident and then becoming agoraphobic as an adult, trying to complete a book while dealing with the echoes of childhood injury in her body and mind.

The Vulnerable Observer is part of a 1990s feminist research ethos that sought to value qualitative research in a new way, but that ethos was not original to the time. In 1967, Devereux insisted that scientific experimentation could not ignore the impact of the observer on whatever was being observed. In 1996, Behar picked up Devereaux's ideas to help legitimize scholarly writing that forwards the experience of the researcher. And in the context of RHM, Molloy et al.'s 2018 article continues to explore the ways researcher positionality interacts with the phenomena being studied. It seems that qualitative and quantitative researchers alike will never cease having to advocate for the recognition and influence of positionality in scholarly work.

As researchers, teachers, and human beings, our positionality matters and impacts the phenomena we study. It isn't wrong to acknowledge one's positionality, and yet it can still feel revolutionary to do so.

Behar cites Kay Redfield Jamison's exploration of anxiety as research method. Jamison, a clinical psychologist, wrote a memoir revealing her personal struggles with bipolar disorder, reflecting on the ways her own mental health informed her practice, her research, and her teaching. As Jamison is quoted by Behar (1996):

> I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues [mental illness, including mania, depression, psychosis, and medication] so openly will be on my personal and professional life but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of misspent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide. (p. 10)

Many of us in this collection are interested in positionality because we are tired of hiding. We are tired of pretending we are not knotted together with the subjects we study and teach. Fortunately, there is a long history of individuals in many different disciplines who got tired of hiding as well. I hope that other emerging scholars will run across their own *Vulnerable Observer*—a book that shows them what scholarship can look like when researchers lay themselves bare on the page.

Erica: Public Participation > Academic Performance

For about 10 years (roughly 2006-2016), my professional life was defined by happenstance. I stumbled into an art degree and worked as an art educator at a university museum. Earned a master's degree in education because I didn't think I

could earn a living as a working artist. Pivoted to a dual master's degree in English and art education because my professors told me I needed to teach a core subject, not just an elective. Taught middle school for one year—hated it. Then, I taught at the community college level for six years and worked my way into a non-tenure track department chair role. Because of my non-linear path into teaching and Writing Program Administration, I felt like I was missing the praxis-focused training I needed to support my students and fellow faculty members. Starting a PhD was the first intentional choice I made in my professional life. While I saw a PhD as a means to become a more qualified teacher and administrator, it became an opportunity for me to discover and (re)define my positionalities as a student, teacher, community organizer, and scholar.

My student positionality: My first PhD course was focused on community and public rhetorics. I wasn't sure what to expect, but our class discussions, readings, and projects quickly challenged my own positionality and way of moving through the world. I was encouraged to think about the boundaries of teaching, the sharp edges of research, the possibilities of community and institutional service—and most importantly, how they might be woven together to increase their collective impact. When we read Ellen Cushman's (1996) "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change," I began to understand how the privatized research of most academics was failing in its mission to change hearts, minds, and outcomes. While most academics (read: especially rhetoricians) imagine their teaching, research, and service to be "change work," it's colonizing at best and at worst, is a whisper in a room full of louder cultural noises (read: protests, blogs, social media). In conversation with Cushman, we read John Ackerman and David Coogan's (2010) edited collection, *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-Scholars and Civic Engagement*, and I began to consider what it could look like to build a teaching-research-service triad in collaboration with my community, not just written around them or for their consumption. But I had one big problem: My partner and I moved frequently, and we were preparing to relocate for the third time in six years—from Denver to Kansas City—just a few months before the 2016 election.

My teacher and community organizer positionality: With six months of PhD work under my belt, I made my second intentional choice: I accepted two adjunct teaching roles in Kansas City that directly aligned with the teacher-scholar I wanted to become. One was at Rockhurst University, a Jesuit institution with a service-learning mission, and the other was at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, a public university focused on community engagement. My PhD courses grew in complexity, and as the 2016 election neared, so did our world. As I began to invest myself in Kansas City's community organizing groups and nonprofits, a few things began to inform my own positionality: the (sometimes differing) internal stories and external narratives of organizations (Faber, 2002), the rhetorical styles of public intellectuals (Young, 2014), and our collective willingness to ignore systemic inequality in all its forms in the name of prosperity, religion, or

ignorance (Alexander, 2010). My students' lived experiences became a part of my course syllabi; I was no longer interested in *just* covering institutional objectives. Instead, I co-created learning communities that blurred the boundaries between public participation and academic performance (yes, I mean both grades and classroom rituals). Together, we learned what it meant to write to learn; to write in hopes of making change; to build community networks; to raise money for causes and individuals; to engage in embodied rhetoric through public demonstrations; to take up space; to tell our stories; and to inform our own positionalities through engaged empathy and community-building.

My scholar positionality: My dissertation topic grew out of my work in publicly-engaged teaching and community organizing. I interviewed professional organizers and community organizers who were affiliated with a large grassroots organization at the time of its dissolution (mid-2018). I studied the kinds of dissonance (cognitive and cultural) that can occur when historically volunteer activities (e.g., voter engagement) are professionalized by a 501(c)(4) organization whose primary mission is to train citizens to tell a "public story" using various forms of media. As a site of decentralized work by design (not by default), I argued that professionalized community organizing offers the field of technical and professional communication a useful model for working in environments where power structures are not linear and responsibility for action is placed on individuals working within specific communities. This research taught me so much, but most importantly, it gave me a tangible space to begin thinking about the intersections of public and private positionalities and how the work of universities does/does not impact the work of corporations and nonprofits. Because this was a trendy topic when I went on the academic job market in late-2019, I landed 14 campus interviews and four tenure-track offers, including one at Middle Tennessee State University, where I worked from 2020-2022.

In 2022, I made the difficult decision to leave academia. Since starting my PhD in 2016 and accepting my tenure-track job in 2020, this was only my third intentional, professional choice, but this time I was focused on my own needs instead of the needs of others. The choice to forgo my professional identity of "educator" was brought about by classroom burnout, emotional fatigue, and two traumatic experiences. As a teacher and administrator, I often felt hemmed in by university policies, state-level legislation, and a lack of environmental control. I'd also spent a considerable amount of time crafting a public persona that no longer felt authentic or aligned to the person I was in private. Up until this point, I'd worked tirelessly to root my teaching, research, and service in community-based projects and change-work. Now, I longed to unite my internal and external worlds and separate my professional work from my community work. This positionality shift was palpable for everyone in my life—from my mentees, to my mentors, to my friends and family, and especially to my partner. But for me, it revealed something about the nature of positionality itself: it's not a static destination, but an ongoing, fluid negotiation with ourselves and our communities.

Nancy: Integration and Inclusivity

My colleagues above came to questions of positionality through experiences of spaces that didn't make easy sense: spaces that didn't feel right, that gestured towards things missing or unsaid, that revealed tensions in what we have been taught—implicitly and explicitly—about locations of knowledge-making. Similarly, deep reflections over positionality in my own life grow in those liminal, interstitial soils. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa writes about border-crossers experiencing "mental and emotional states of perplexity" (p. 100). Living amid complexity, Anzaldúa argues we must resist traditional divisive thinking as "the enemy within" because such "[r]igidity means death" (p. 101). Standing on a "fulcrum," she seeks a "synthesis … a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts … a mestiza consciousness" for "breaking down paradigms," especially "the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner" (p. 101-102). Because I also am from Anzaldúa's South Texas borderlands, her work resonated with a power I cannot overstate. Growing up on the white, privileged side of grating and bleeding in that liminal space, I was trained as a child by my Mom to avoid my spaces overlapping—via friendships, dating, etc.—with spaces of the Other. Except my Dad's overlapped all the time. He spoke English, Spanish, and Spanglish. He worked with and had deep, lifelong friendships with Mexican and Mexican American men, developed caring for cattle in the expanses of rattlesnake-inhabited and mesquite-filled lands plagued by drought and traversed by immigrants seeking better lives. As a child taught to be seen and not heard, I witnessed privileged segregation existing simultaneously alongside hearty, loving, and authentic cross-cultural relations. I also learned an innate sense of positionality. Anzaldúa was the first teacher to put words to what I had grown up in, and I didn't get to know her work until I was in my early 40's.

Anzaldúa promotes holistic re-integration of body, mind, and spirit. Yet integration extends beyond simple unification of the self. It is also a drawing together of individuals and communities among many dimensions of difference. Land is the substance for that process. Indigenous land in Texas, she points out, "has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again" (p. 112). In other words, she taught me that our ways of relating are holistically tied to places and spaces, located in a temporal arc so long we cannot know its beginning or end. As a result, I cannot position myself only in particularities of a moment or in intricacies of my identity (white, educated, able-bodied, economically stable, straight, cis-female, etc.) because invariably what I perceive as "stable" will be disrupted. Anzaldúa pushes us to seek "new images of identity, new beliefs about ourselves, our humanity and worth no longer in question" (p. 109). Of course, she writes as a queer, Latina/Chicana woman who grew up in borderland poverty. She teaches me to be mindful about my whiteness, my own family and community histories, and how I might contribute a small portion to the border-spanning healing

she envisions. Thank you, Gloria Anzaldúa, for teaching me positioning must be acknowledged yet also might be disrupted.

If Gloria Anzaldúa encourages me to eschew oppositional thinking and carefully pursue inclusive communities, then Aimee Carillo Rowe's feminist alliances puts positionality in transcendent motion. In *Power Lines: On the Subject of Feminist Alliances* (2008), she urges us to attend to yet move beyond individual subjectivities: "I seek an alternative to a notion of identity that begins with 'I'... which announces itself through its fixity: 'I am … '" Instead, she turns to "positionality," a word whose multiply placed 'i's'" point us toward "differential belonging," relations that are always "multiple, shifting, and even contradictory" (p. 27-28). In this perspective, positionality exceeds a metaphor of *location* to become a *function* of belonging or who you long to be with (p. 35). Whereas Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness moves from the violence of displacement toward a re-cognition of the self as empowered in liminal spaces, Rowe's differential belonging is multiple and dynamic, found in coalitions via complementary ideologies. In simplified terms, Rowe first links positionality to community and belonging, then urges us to shift gears among different coalitional relations. In recognizing our longings for and the possibilities of community, she asks us to re-view our exquisite agency, the power to decide, undecide, learn, unlearn, identify, unidentify, non-identify, and otherwise connect across sameness and difference. Rowe amplifies the ongoing motion of my positionality, including risks and opportunities of negotiating relations. Thanks to her, *I* am now a *we*, and we—a beautiful range of different we's—are interwoven in our sharing, collaborating, conspiring, correcting, re-storying, and resisting.

A third-layer lesson about positionality I've learned comes to me through Indigenous scholars: relational accountability. Jo-Ann Archibald/Q'um Q'um Xiiem (Stó:lō) teaches about oral culture and values it conveys in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit* (2008). Similarly to Anzaldúa and Rowe, Archibald points to a pathway towards unification and healing through practices grounded in listening, respecting others, and a rethinking of the self in relation to community. "Holism," an underlying value in Indigenous worldviews, "refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual … ,emotional, and physical … realms to form a whole healthy person" (p. 11). The whole person always lives in relation to (and therefore, respectful of and reciprocal to) the larger world. Through this outlook, we should strive for "a mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature, and the Spirit World" enacted through mindful "ways of acquiring knowledge and codes of behaviour … embedded in cultural practice" (p. 11). Shawn Wilson (2008) also names this "relational accountability" as an encompassing ethic describing the respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance Archibald teaches. Relational accountability reminds me I am enmeshed in layers of relationships to systems, pasts and presents and futures, land and environments, people (from family and elders to global communities), intellectual and disciplinary traditions and

innovations, stories and narratives, my own mind-body-spirit holism, the holism of others, and more. In fact, all knowledge-making and teaching are always collaborative (and ideally, coalitional). Relational accountability and positionality overlap, forming an imperative to consider myself in ongoing material, discursive, and holistic relations. With gratitude to Archibald and Wilson, I recognize my positioning as an I and a we (what Anzaldúa terms *nos-otros*), in a larger embodied attunement to the worlds in the midst of their own becoming around me. I/we am/are called to account for what I/we bring to and take from all kinds of interactions. Recognizing that we are all in relation affects everything I do, from teaching to research to community projects to mundane interactions in office hallways.

Our stories cover a wide range of themes yet coalesce around key moments when we each were inspired to rethink what we were being taught because of our own embodied experiences. You may notice that we resist an authoritative definition of the word "positionality" itself. Instead, we each take it up with nuanced differences of meaning. Positionality is identity, is embodiment, is standpoint, is history, is present, is future, is complex, and—most of all—is always in flux. Scholars who study rhetoric and empathy point to listening, contemplating, self-critique, and consideration of difference as characteristics of how we develop dispositions promoting intersubjective spaces (Blankenship, 2019; Leake, 2016). While we agree positionality *can* generate feelings of empathetic insight, as a concept it is much more than that. Positionality reveals we are simultaneously inhabiting a location *and* a dis-location as we learn and unlearn, and as contexts change. Such liminality reveals how what we might perceive as a "positioning" might also be a mirage of stability, a merely temporary footing.

Telling Positionality Stories to Move the Field Forward

The constraints of academic publishing can make it difficult to disseminate our stories and the upcoming stories of our contributors, but positionality stories have a way of making their way into research, even when we are following the most conventional of research paths (see for example, Deutsch, 2004; Shope, 2006). Graduate programs in Writing Studies and in Communication Studies value research; research, after all, is how we make knowledge. If we aren't careful, though, research can be a dehumanizing and colonizing process (Agboka, 2014; Smith, 2012; Walton, 2016). In our teaching, practices, and publication processes, we often provide only a cursory nod or even ignore the researcher's positionality, the embodied and contextualized forms influencing (and possibly biasing) what they hear/see/do when conducting research and teaching students (Rowe, 2014). Positionality is rarely discussed in research publications themselves, let alone in our graduate programs, and we'd like to shift that paradigm, encouraging our field to include positionality as something we focus on in research and teaching via what Sullivan and Porter (1997) call "critical reflexiveness," the act of

intentionally making "explicit the biases, intrusions, doubts, and mistakes that characterize any research activity, as much as we are ourselves aware of them" (p. 69). Not only should we be mindful of our positionality, we are also accountable for our privilege and power (Walton, Moore, & Jones, 2019, p. 70-103), and through this collection, we invite others to practice and demonstrate that same reflexive awareness as an amplified aspect of their research and teaching.

Although the field has been turning towards more critical consideration of these issues (e.g., Lockett, Ruiz, Sanchez, and Carter's 2021 *Race, Rhetoric, and Research Methods*), analysis trends more toward revisiting the work of others rather than the authors speaking to their own projects. As a result, writing studies has lacked a text that purposefully examines and provides insider-narrated models for how positionality operates. We need what Kirsch and Ritchie (1995)—drawing on the work of Sandra Harding—call a "rigorously reflexive examination of ourselves as researchers" (p. 9). As previously noted, most MA- and PhD-granting institutions require at least one course in research methods. This course tends to be an overview, mainly of traditional research methods in composition studies or, more broadly, social science. Simply learning about the tools doesn't prepare students (and others) to actually engage in the critical reflexivity necessary to acknowledge the researcher's positionality. We have envisioned this collection as a valuable supplemental text in Writing Studies methods courses, encouraging the reflexivity necessary for rigorous research.

Another important feature of our collection is its reliance on "storywork" as a compelling means of communicating knowledge and shaping disciplinary ethics. Storytelling has been making a notable re-emergence in contemporary scholarship as experts—often from Indigenous communities—continue to share theories and practices in support of it as a way of being in and seeking to learn about the world (see, for example, Archibald, 2008; Archibald, Lee-Morgan, & De Santolo, 2019; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). While Indigenous scholars feature as a resource in support of stories and the work they do, these efforts extend much more broadly through our disciplines. For example, Jo-Anne Kerr and Ann N. Amicucci's *Stories from First-Year Composition: Pedagogies that Foster Student Agency and Writing Identity* (2020) affirms the field's commitment to narrative modes. Another collection, Nancy Small and Bernadette Longo's *Transnational Research in Technical Communication: Stories, Realities, and Reflections* (2022), demonstrates the complexity of navigating intercultural research through scholars' first-hand accounts of their own project adaptations, faulterings, and even failures. That collection's approach, dubbed "storied case studies," invites readers to consider each chapter through multiple lenses/positions, to open up discussion rather than narrowly prescribing a (mistakenly assumed) universal way of proceeding through a project. Similarly, our collection pushes back against the tradition of research as being disembodied. In the spirit of Aja Martinez's *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* (2020), we celebrate disrupting majoritarian stories, including master narratives

of "objectivity" and rigid standards of "rigor," while modeling a range of ways that positionality—and its attendant ethics of relational accountability—can be taught and experienced.

Recent scholarship affirms the importance of sharing how we narrate our embodied experiences in relation to other people, to our communities, to our institutions, to our own histories and identities, to our disciplines, and more. In "Relating Our Experiences: The Practices of Positionality Stories in Student-Centered Pedagogy," Christina V. Cedillo and Phil Bratta (2019) describe a critical methodology pushing back against a binary view of a classroom as "student-centered" or "instructor-centered." They propose that story sharing—via instructor's positionality stories—offers "counternarratives that contest educational conditions and assumptions while opening space for students to consider their own positionality within the academy" (p. 216). In other words, when instructors carefully and reflexively share tellings of their own embodied experiences, they reveal the complexities of their own existences with students. Such reciprocity does more than gesture towards empathy and relationship-building: it offers students a means for seeing academic spaces as complicated, fraught, and politically entangled. Such sharing helps students see that educational spaces require navigation and perhaps mentoring. And that they are not alone in these struggles.

We also believe sharing positionality stories across a wide spectrum of academic identities opens conversations about subjectivity, intersubjectivity, community, orientations, authority, belonging, estrangement, and more. For our authors, writing about positionality promotes self-reflection and articulation of important lessons learned about themselves and their surroundings. It also means being heard and seen through the publication process, through their presence in this text. In this collection of essays, contributors address the real complexities of positionality as a theory, describe their own experiences with researcher positionality, share praxes for teaching positionality, and problematize the representation of research that leaves the researcher's position out. Like Cedillo and Bratta, they offer stories of vulnerability and strength, knowing and not knowing, failing and succeeding. We hope you find this volume a source of encountering and embracing resonances and dissonances as well as motivation to recall, speak, and write your own positionality stories.

Methodology and Commitments

In June 2023, we circulated the call for proposals that would become this collection. In it, we encouraged "chapters written in a first-person narrative and/or reflexive style" with a focus on "lived experience and positionalities rather than on literature reviews and/or theory-building." We asked potential authors to offer stories illustrating their understandings and lived experiences of positionality: how it's defined, how it grows and changes over times and spaces, and how it shapes our understanding of the world and ourselves. We were humbled

to receive just under one hundred proposals, far too many for the planned scope of this book. To be as inclusive as possible, we amended our plans to include two different kinds of contributions: a full chapter (2,750 words) and a snapshot story (600 words). This change allowed us to increase our number of acceptances to include over 50 contributions written by almost 70 authors representing a greater diversity of roles and identities. While we were thrilled with our coalition of contributors, we pushed ourselves further to be even more inclusive and offered authors who were not in the collection an opportunity to post on the public-facing blog we developed alongside this text: *Positionality Stories* (https://medium.com/positionality-stories). Launched in spring 2024, it is a living and growing sibling to what you are now reading, motivated by the same goals and expressing the same kinds of questions and transformation you'll read here. Many contributors generously took us up on our offer to participate, and as a result, we were able to share the stories of over a dozen other researcher-teacher-scholars. That project is continuing and remains a source of great joy to us as an editorial team. Please use it—in your teaching and in your own meditations—similarly. And when you visit, hit the "applause" button so authors can feel the impact of their storytelling.

As we worked with this wonderful community of storytellers, our review process was committed to an anti-racist approach. Following the "Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Heuristic" (Cagle et al., 2021), we prioritized humanity over production and communicated with transparency in each step of the process. Respecting a praxis promoted by Indigenous scholars all over the world, we believe in the value of "storywork" as introduced above. In a radical act of trusting our authors in their own lived experiences, we asked them to limit scholarly citations and instead use the space available to tell their stories in richer detail. While we respect disciplinary practices and the tradition of enacting "rigor" through citational practices, we also assert the efficacy found in other ways of making and sharing knowledge. To address anxious feelings over mindfully reducing and removing literature review content in our contributions, we offered everyone the chance to add to our "Bibliography of Related Work" appearing at the end of this text.

In light of our authors' sharing, we also were mindful of the physical and emotional labor required to be vulnerable about positionality and to write in public spaces about personal, transformative lived experiences. As a result, we sought channels of communication to support authors throughout the process, an attempt to operationalize Cagle et. al.'s (2021) heuristic in this edited collection space. Towards that end, we provided a set of "Editorial Commitments" expressly listing the values and processes directing the project. Additionally, we consulted more deeply with authors whose local political situations—particularly those facing new restrictions due to the demise of diversity, inclusion, and equity programs—introduced a new layer of complication and risk to telling their stories. Finally, we sought to be transparent about our limitations as editors and how we actively sought to hold ourselves accountable to the spirit and practice of the

heuristic. While we believe enacting the heuristic through our commitments and editorial practices made us more mindful and introduced a better level of care to our practices, we also acknowledge that we are all continually learning and growing throughout activities such as this collection's development. We are grateful for what our contributors have taught us and accept responsibility for our imperfections.

The Organization of this Collection

The authors in this collection reflect on their teaching and research, telling stories about their experiences in their own unique and diverse voices. Each section contains shorter snapshots as well as longer chapters that describe more fully concepts that many writers throughout the collection touch on. We asked all authors—to the best of their ability—to trust their own stories and, therefore, to limit their citational practices. You might find one or more stories useful because they resonate with your experiences and/or challenge you to reflect over how we story ourselves. If you are a teacher, you might assign a range of chapters and reflect with your students over what our contributors share. Although we have grouped stories into themes, any attempt at such categorization is neither neat nor final. We hope you find plenty of space for your own engagements as readers.

Our themes overlap and interweave. We've attempted to lightly group them in ways that make sense to us, but, as is the wonderful nature of storywork, your sensemaking can (and should) amplify messages that are particular and in relation to your own interests, contexts, and positionings. The first three themes emphasize relations among people and disciplinary identities. Writers under *Community Engagement* reflect on the intersections between community, research, and writing. They discuss the intricacies of shifting positions and complex interactions with participants. The *Collaborations* section offers stories of friendship, mentoring, editing, and writing together to consider how these relationships revealed both individual and interpersonal positionings. Contributors in *Between Disciplines* work in liminal spaces bridging writing studies and filmmaking and writing studies and history. Their stories gesture towards negotiations happening when time and spaces become complicated.

Because we were interested in reaching an audience of graduate students, the next two themes speak directly to their experiences. The *Dissertation Writing* section highlights the voices of individuals who recently responded to the idiosyncratic requirements of academia's threshold genre, dealing with the institutional norms it represents and the pressure it places on a scholar's personal life. The contributions in the *Teacher Practice* section talk about what it means to take up space, the power of counterstory, and the (sometimes painful) processes of developing a teacherly and scholarly identity.

Digging deeper into what it means for academic production to be grounded in the realities of lived experience, the next four themes grapple with questions

of presence, absence, and in-betweenness. The *Insider/Outsider* section provides insight into authors' experiences dealing with positional differences and their impact on research practices. The *Marginalized Perspectives* section highlights voices and stories not often acknowledged in academia. Authors share important insights surrounding the navigation of tensions and marginalization within the multiple roles they occupy. Authors of the *Bridging Cultures* section offer stories that take into account varied perspectives that question privilege, space, and place while highlighting the impact of positionality on research and the roles they embody. Writers in the *Embodiment* section remind us that tensions around positionality are felt in the body, discussing how feelings, bodies, neurodivergence, and race interact with scholarly identity.

Honest, thoughtful reflection often leads to complicated entanglements. Writers in the *Queering Binaries* section disrupt black-and-white thinking about the affiliations and identities sometimes bound up in discussions of positionality. In *Tensions of Disclosure*, authors wrestle with the complications of positionality when it is pressured to the forefront of their roles and productions. While these authors offer some of their own contextualized answers, their contributions establish generative questions that must extend beyond the confines of this book. *Troubled Times* authors offer perspectives on failure narratives, managing emotions and balancing perspectives during research, and reckoning with positionality in academic spaces.

Finally, we close with the *Pedagogy* section, in which contributors tell stories about what it means (and feels like) to teach about positionality and reflexivity in the undergraduate classroom. These ending contributions also offer specific classroom activities and resources offered as ideas encouraging readers to begin or continue discussing positionality in their own learning spaces.

As we edited this collection, we saw ourselves in the sentences our contributors wrote, and we anticipate many of you will see yourselves reflected here also. Our experiences do not encompass all experiences and understandings of positionality, but we hope they inspire you to think more deeply about who you are, where you've been, the plans you have, and the positions you hold and release.

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