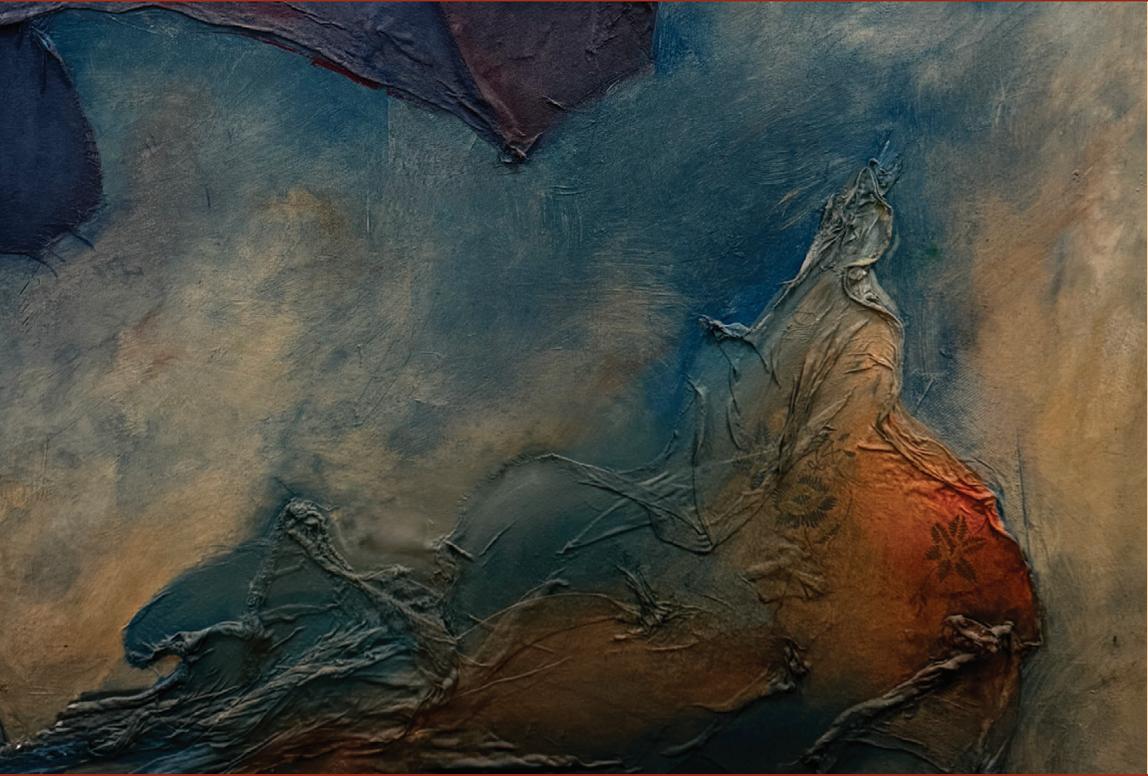


Storied Practices

Positionality in Writing Studies



Edited by
Kristine Acosta, Michelle Cowan
Rebecca Rickly, Nancy Small
and Erica M. Stone



STORIED PRACTICES:
POSITIONALITY IN
WRITING STUDIES

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STORIED PRACTICES:
POSITIONALITY IN
WRITING STUDIES

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' 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.

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 Devereux'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 positionalities: 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 reflexivity,” 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, falterings, 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 sense-making 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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Section I. Community Engagement, Writing, Research

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.

Chapter 1. Positionality Pulls up a Chair at the Kitchen Table

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TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Mouthwatering aromas of my neighbor's famous lasagna should have filled her family's century-old farmhouse, inspiring shared conversation. Instead, the air hung heavy with sorrow and anger as a dozen-plus members of our rural community crowded around the creaky dining table on a humid August night. A hog confinement and breeding facility designed to house 17,000 pigs—the open sewage equivalent of about 80,000 people—was slated for our airspace and watershed. The site was a mile equidistant from each of our homes, meeting the siting criteria imposed by Illinois officials, giving us no legal standing. My positionality as an academic researcher collapsed the distance, making me reflect on how I might leverage expertise for community benefit. Awkward role. High expectations. Higher stakes.

The evening prior, a tense public meeting took place about the proposed site, which was just uphill from a beloved community stream in which generations had fished, kayaked, or played. The few brave souls—me included—who dared question the corporate pork reps promoting this scheme endured mocking jeers. “You just don't understand progress. Don't you people want jobs? You're just a bunch of NIMBYs and libtards.” This became the extractive capitalist refrain spoken by white supremacy well represented within the public meeting. A panel of suited white men seated behind a table with the American flag prominently displayed behind them faced onlookers, some pro-pork; most not.

Interweaving or making space for positionality in community-engaged advocacy and research requires reflexivity, humility, and collaboration among people who may not have much in common other than a shared, specific concern. The latter point has ideological complexity in “flyover” country where academics are not always welcome or are viewed as out of touch or whatever Fox News spews across the countryside. Overcoming that complexity takes time and commitment.

Across four interdependent generations, my community sat across the table and expressed hope for a “breathable future” (Houdek & Ore, 2021). My 70-year-old neighbor quietly admitted he and his family would need to sell their homestead due to health concerns associated with the proposed hog facility. My partner, an expert on environmental hazards, knew the excrement runoff would damage water and air quality in addition to our quality of life. I research olfactory rhetoric and key connections between our sense of smell and its connection to mental and physical health. As experts and community insiders, my partner and

I shared information on the well-documented higher risks of respiratory illness and environmental damage associated with these kinds of facilities. But, more importantly, we worked as “co-conspirators,” connecting communities across various levels of expertise and lived experiences (p. 91).

At the August kitchen table, between bites of lasagna, together we mapped action plans with communal purpose, we collaboratively facilitated door-to-door peer testimonies, developed a public media campaign, formed legal policy research teams, and implemented youth-led social media campaigns. We staged public protests. We still failed.

To give you a sense of the embodied costs of failure, imagine being gagged nearly to the point of asphyxiation by the smell of pig manure on any given day. One neighbor, a Vietnam vet, actually passed out from the fumes one warm summer night. We can no longer trust the air, reliably sit outside, or hang clothes to dry. Cookouts are hostile territory for visitors in an unfavorable wind, a source of embarrassment that further isolates. The hope to breathe freely no longer exists. Big companies leverage local farmers’ complicity in these stinking ventures and ruin communities’ air and watersheds. Lawsuits abound but pork barrel profiteering seldom results in actual relief and lawyers generally pocket any largess, largess that doesn’t provide relief or buyouts for virtually worthless property.

Examining my positionality suggests how (and that) breathable futures might bloom within conspiratorial cultivation of courage and action if more people cared to do something about our damaged planetary lungscape. In my lived experience, most do not. Academia trains us to publish solitary victories and narrate anecdotal stories, but resilience reflexively comes from communal voices lifting up conspiratorial breath despite the exhaust of extractive capitalism. Such a positionality is an ongoing conversation, a speaking with, not for our about, my community partners. Neither innocent nor neutral, the work and affiliated action has rhetorical and political consequences.

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Chapter 2. Flattening Hierarchies in Community-Engaged Writing Studies Research

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Gabrielle

The first meeting of Our Writing Group (OWG) took place in a small back room at the Venture classroom space. As I smiled at the four writers who made their way into the room that evening, I felt nervous. I wasn't sure how to behave. I was the odd one out, the only person in the room who wasn't a Venture graduate. The automatic comfort with one another that their Venture experiences granted did not extend to me. For a brief moment, I wondered if this pilot would work—could we build a writing group while we met as a writing group?

We began with everyone's name and the year they graduated from Venture. As the newbie in the room, I introduced myself more thoroughly and talked about my affiliation with Venture (its dedicated writing center tutor), how I got involved (connecting with one of the co-directors and becoming a grant writing volunteer), my family of “nontraditional” students (mom, dad, both brothers—all except me), and my graduate program and research interests (community literacies, lifespan writing development, writing groups). I explained why I wanted to start OWG—to continue to build on the community around literacies that the credit-bearing two-semester Venture course for income-qualified adults begins—and the benefits of writing groups for developing a writing practice, finding accountability, struggling together, giving and receiving feedback, and dedicating time to writing. After that, we free-wrote on what we hoped to get from OWG and how we imagined it would work. The writers shared they hoped to “learn more about grammar and punctuation,” receive “inspirations” to write, and “gain an understanding of writing and skills to develop to make writing better.” They requested to learn new things and get feedback from me since I was “the expert.” Despite my denial of that title right away, I wondered if my outsider status in the group combined with being a university writing center instructor made it so that

it was the only role I could hold: expert or bust. I hoped that I could find my way into being considered just another member of the group eventually.

I ended up fulfilling their expectations of me as the expert at the very next meeting (and beyond) by bringing an agenda for everyone to follow and take notes on and using a lesson from *Everyday Editing* by Jeff Anderson to teach about the serial comma. Many participants shared one of their biggest writing challenges was punctuation, and while I at least once challenged participants to think beyond punctuation and instead about the messages they want to impart on their readers, I still focused many mini-lessons on punctuation during the pilot writing group. For instance, during this second OWG meeting, we had an intense discussion about the Oxford comma. Most OWG members believed that the last comma before the word ‘and’ in a list was the ‘rule,’ but one participant disagreed. The discussion demonstrated these writers’ belief in the adherence to rules in order to write well and reflected their experience of writing as a site of judgment. In the end, the writers looked to me to provide a definitive answer; instead of reorienting the writers to writing as a site of empowering individuality rather than judgment, I took the bait, sharing that the Oxford comma can reduce confusion, but it’s ultimately a stylistic choice.

Thus, the pilot version of OWG during Spring 2020 operated more as a class than a community writing group, as indicated by members treating me as a “teacher” and writing prompts as “homework.” Additionally, OWG provided opportunities to gain greater awareness and facility with the conventions of White Mainstream English (WME) in the mini-lessons and find inspiration through the writing prompts in a traditional classroom sense: the group was almost entirely centered around me as an expert/ teacher rather than honoring the understandings of writing that the members of the group brought with them. OWG moving to virtual meetings in Fall 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic was an opportunity to revise the structure of our meetings to become guided more deeply by members’ literacy desires, which in turn helped enhance OWG members’ writerly confidence by validating and affirming their literacy desires as important and worthy. Tiffani’s story shares more about the effects of this revision.

Tiffani

2020 was a rough year, especially for Black people. OWG began shortly after the murder of George Floyd. I identify as a white female, and I try to relate to many different kinds of people. I have been an activist for human rights for as long as I can remember, and the events of 2020 got my inner fire burning bright. Nonetheless, I found being the only white person in OWG challenging. While we all came from low-income backgrounds, that was still a stark difference. I could not possibly understand what the BIPOC members of OWG experience on a daily basis.

As we started OWG, as much as I wanted to voice my own opinion about racial division in the US, I kept a lot to myself. I was more interested in how it

was affecting the lives of others in OWG. When Gabbi expressed that she wanted us to facilitate OWG meetings, presenting anything that may interest us, I volunteered first because I wanted to show everyone that we had the skills to do it ourselves. Around that time I had read an article about the US Mint deciding to put Susan B. Anthony on the silver dollar. I honestly didn't know much about Susan B. Anthony, so I looked into her and found that she was one of the harbingers of the Women's Suffrage Movement. I thought that would be a fabulous topic, considering that most OWG members were women. I thought this could be a topic that would encourage us to work across the differences that felt so stark to me. Suffragists fought hard and long to get us the right to vote and have our voices heard, and I thought the other members of OWG might be able to make connections to current activist movements taking place. I was eager to hear what everyone would write with my prompts: I had a picture of the monument of the meeting between Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and asked what they thought the conversation between the women would be. I also posed a prompt about reflecting on the right to vote.

I turned to women's issues for many of the meetings I facilitated because it's an identity I shared with most members of the group. For example, I also facilitated a meeting highlighting Ruth Bader Ginsberg after one of the members used one of her quotes but didn't know much about her. I thought Ginsberg's life was very inspirational, and felt that knowing her struggles as a white Jewish woman would inspire others in the group. Looking back, I know my identity impacted the topics I chose for the meetings I ran. I simply wanted to show that our voices matter, which is one of the key values of OWG, especially as women and low-income folks, regardless of skin color.

Gabrielle

One way I tried to flatten the hierarchy that our positionalities in OWG seemed to impose was through shared leadership of the writing group. Before entering my graduate program, I was a 9th grade composition teacher at a Chicago charter school. My experiences working with Venture alumni provided windows into previous educational experiences similar to those perpetuated at my former workplace that taught these students that they don't belong in academic spaces, they're not enough, they'll fail. Such experiences demonstrated to me the need for increased encouragement and understanding for adult undergraduates like those in OWG to undo that previous harm—harm that I know I unintentionally contributed to as a secondary teacher. OWG afforded an opportunity to build the community around writing I originally entered education to construct.

Thus, I invited and trained OWG members to lead meetings of the group on topics of their choice in an effort to position them as teacher-leader-writers. I wanted to actively work against traditional conceptions of academic literacy, instruction, and power/knowledge relations that positioned me, the credentialed

graduate student, as a sage on the stage and the group members, writers from various generations and with diverse lifetime writing experiences, as blank slates to be filled with knowledge. My interest as a researcher was how this positioning might (positively) impact members' writerly self-efficacy; my interest as a human and a fellow writer was how this might challenge members to think about writing differently—to think about it for themselves and their purposes beyond the academic and professional expectations that had characterized many if not most of their previous writing endeavors.

I was grateful that Tiffani volunteered as the first member-facilitator. Reading her reflection now, I see how I could have also encouraged OWG members to name their differences and similarities—to reflect on their diverse positionalities. Just as I name my experience as a 'successful' student with a 'prestigious' academic pedigree who followed a very traditional path and who self-identifies as a 'good' writer in my interactions with folks who've taken various paths to and through higher education (no matter the lines of difference that this may draw), I wonder how similar hard, reflective identity work might have strengthened the relationships among OWG members. True mutualism and connection is achieved by building bridges across differences, but those bridges can't be built if differences aren't named and acknowledged.

Marisol

My name is Marisol Gonzalez. I am thankful for my last name since it is so popular that almost everyone in the US knows how to pronounce and write it, which is different for my first name.

I don't try to correct people anymore because I know it's hard to make sounds that you've never made before, so when people call me Maryson or Mariposa I don't correct them. I know my name is Marisol and that is what matters.

I am a writer. I found the love for writing thanks to Venture, which taught me that my ideas were valuable and that it was important to write my stories so they would exist forever and not be invisible as I feel in this country, invisible but necessary, as many immigrants are.

When I was part of Venture, I felt very excited when my teacher used my writing as a reference during her lecture or asked me to make specific writings to use for fundraising for the program. Something that I was always aware of since the beginning of this journey was that as English is my second language, my grammar and punctuation weren't perfect and it was okay to give my draft to my professor to fix my mistakes. I was okay with that, until ... I wasn't.

Later, in OWG, I remember talking about the process our work would go through to be published on the prestigious Venture website because even though our work was mostly creative writing, the program needed it to keep some "standards" and make our writings sound white, when most OWG writers were people of color.

I chose to publish a story about discrimination and police profiling with accented words in it as part of my identity, as part of who I am, and as part of the need to be accepted in this country made of immigrants. Unfortunately, they suggested editing some of my accented words. Otherwise, the readers might find it difficult to understand. Also if it was grammatically incorrect, it would make a bad impression so they wanted to fix it and make it perfect. I thought, *Perfect? Like a white person wrote it?*

Our group already had a hard editing process where we chose only a couple of writings, presented them to the group, got suggestions of how to make them better, submitted them for revision by our professional writer, Gabbi, and accepted or denied the suggestions. Not to mention my particular challenge because it is already hard for me to find in my brain the English words every time I write a piece. It is already very hard for me to start writing and try to not pay attention to the “auto corrector” underlining all the words with red telling me that it’s already written wrong. Despite that, I continue writing to not lose the ideas in my head. This is a struggle against the words! As I continue writing, they continue to appear underlined in red, and at the end, I have to review my writing more than three times because even my computer wants me to write in a different way than I want to express myself.

How liberating it was when we decided as a group not to be part of the Venture publication and to create a website that did not put restrictions on our creative writing. How liberating it was to have someone who encouraged us to continue writing what our creative and powerful minds wanted, without the “perfect” accent. Why if I don’t correct people for not knowing how to pronounce my name in a perfect Spanish accent, why do others have to correct me for writing with an accent?

Gabrielle

As Marisol’s reference to me as the “professional writer” shows, I still haven’t quite shaken the role of expert. At the same time I was trying to flatten hierarchies in OWG, I also worked to leverage the greater structural power that my university affiliation afforded. One such way was facilitating community publishing through Venture. However, as Marisol mentions, this process revealed tensions between Venture’s goals to open wider the door to a traditional humanities education for income-qualified adult students and OWG’s goals to decenter WME and transform conceptions of authorship.

It’s important to note that Venture was not intentionally discounting OWG writers’ identities. Instead, the prioritization of WME that Marisol writes about is more likely the product of the push-pull community-university partnerships face in the midst of the competing demands from community members, the non-profit system under capitalism, and the neoliberal university. More specifically, while we no longer engaged with WME in OWG and the editing of the writing in

our publication reflected this, for Venture on the other hand, WME lends legitimacy to their work with low-income, BIPOC community members in the eyes of their donors, the university, and other stakeholders. This legitimacy underpins the use of respectability politics that perpetuate racism. To be fair, Venture's adherence to a carefully managed image that subscribes to WME in student work they publish probably feels necessary: the program doesn't want to lose financial and institutional support for its free credit-bearing courses and resources to low-income adults in the community because the program truly cares about the students it serves. Thus, expectations for publishing student work on Venture's website highlighted how writing is wrapped up in hierarchized power dynamics inherent in the university.

When Marisol writes about making her writing sound white, she speaks to how Venture's administrators did not acknowledge or interrogate their positionalities when they suggested edits to OWG's publication. They did not recognize their positions as white, professional-class, tenured and tenure-track professors of English speaking to low-income, predominantly BIPOC adult writers and a graduate student of color. This was one moment when my status as "the expert" in the group helped legitimize my characterization of the administrators' suggested edits as just that: *suggestions*. As a campus-based advocate for OWG, I strived to, above all else, honor members' ownership of the group and its publication and not allow Venture to exercise undue power or pressure. Some writers chose to edit their work and other writers chose to leave their work as it originally appeared because, in the words of our response to Venture, "they reflect our identities as BIPOC, people who speak languages other than English, and humans who make mistakes. We also feel that our pieces, as they are, reflect our humanity and the rhythm in which we think, speak, and write."

Tiffani, Marisol, and I share our experiences here so that others who occupy similar positions and/or engage in similar community-facing collaborative work have more examples of challenges and successes positionalities can impose on community-engaged writing studies research. We hope this reflection illustrates some ways we strived to enact equitable reciprocal relationships characterized by shared authority and mutual respect. Our positionalities as a mixed-race early career researcher, an immigrant mother-teacher-activist, and a white nature-enthusiast battling houselessness deeply impacted our work to establish and co-lead OWG. The storied practices shared here exemplify successes and tensions that can happen when folks from diverse, complex identity positions attempt to break down, subvert, and overcome the traditional expectations of our various stakeholder positionalities—positionalities that would point to a clear hierarchy—and instead work with one another.

Chapter 3. Re-Living the Stories of Black Women and Girls from a Historic Black Town in Alabama

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In January of 2015, I took an educational trip to the Zora Neale Hurston Festival in Eatonville, Florida with a group of Black women and women of color graduate students and professors from The University of Alabama. The purpose of the trip was to fellowship with my peers and professors, while to also learn more about one of our favorite authors. We arrived at the first event which was a fish fry along a bank that was hosted by the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance (HBTSA). It was there at the fish fry when I met the mayor of the oldest incorporated black town in Alabama. As a native Alabamian, I had never heard of this town and was fascinated by what I had just learned. From that initial encounter grew a lasting relationship with the mayor and other citizens, relationships that helped me to create a dissertation project titled “Hear My Voice: Stories of Black Women and Girls in a Historic Black Town.” I spent the next 2 ½ years deeply involved in the culture and with the residents of the town through a key community project and my dissertation. Through my research, I participated in a PhotoVoice Project, which is a type of research where participants take photographs of something, in this case things and places in their town, and write narratives about why they chose to take a particular photo and any questions and thoughts they had about the artifact in the photograph. The photos are typically artifacts of places and/or spaces that are tied to the community, sometimes with a historical aspect or simply something of interest to the photographer. For this particular project, the ultimate goal was to have the girls “discuss what they liked about the things and places in the pictures they took, what they did not like, and what and how they would change those places and things for the betterment of their community” (Holloway, 44). I used their interviews to learn more about their stories for my dissertation project. The second part to my project was a collection of oral histories that I conducted with five women (2 of whom were residents and the other 3 were closely affiliated with the town in numerous ways).

Throughout the research process of my dissertation project, I struggled with my evolving identity and positionality. I state in my dissertation,

Being a Black woman graduate student and dealing with my own challenges within the academy while simultaneously figuring out my self-identity was a major factor in why I chose to

devote my time in research and writing to understanding Black women and girls. Collecting oral histories from the women and girls in Hobson City simply felt right as I considered countless things I have learned about myself over the years and because of my newfound fearlessness of understanding both Black girlhood and womanhood by participating in scholarly conversations, conversations where I previously felt I was unqualified to speak. Purposefully choosing to engage with Black girls and Black women was a brave move on my behalf, and yet the familiarity of the town of Hobson City made it easier for me to solidify that decision. (44)

As a young 20-something Black woman pursuing a PhD at a Primarily White Institution, I struggled a lot with where and how I fit in because, according to certain statistics, I was not even supposed to be in higher education spaces. I was often the only black person in my classes, and sometimes, I got lucky and there would be two or three of us in class together. So when this project began to develop, I was excited that I had a choice to devote my time, energy, and resources towards a project with people who I looked like and shared similar experiences with.

That was until the research actually began.

I soon became confronted with the struggle of my positionality with the participants. Although we were the same race and gender, I was still considered an outsider to their community and their home. Even when I would visit unofficially such as for the town's Founders' Day weekend, there were times where I still felt the disconnect between me being a graduate student working on a project and them being my "participants." That was hard for me to accept at first, but the more that I learned, the more I figured out that it is okay to experience that feeling. As I continued with my project, I naturally created a healthy distance between myself and the participants. I did not try to force any other shared connections outside of my study. In the long run this helped me to see my research more objectively, to read and code my oral histories objectively, and to ultimately produce an ethical research project.

When I decided what I wanted to research and how (through oral histories), my positionality as a Black woman interacting with other Black women and adolescent girls quickly emerged. I remember feeling like a big sister to the girls as I witnessed the tellings of their town from their young minds and perspectives. The stories that the girls shared through their interviews connected with me in many ways. They were elementary and middle school aged Black girls living in and learning about their historic town. They were so curious, which excited me because I remember being that way at their age. One girl shared her knowledge of a local staple restaurant in the town, "Yea, and I put it because it has the year that it was first made and established. And like it's historic ... I knew that it was

a [restaurant] there before and they remodeled it and made another one so that people will come back to it” (girl 1). Another shared her vision to remodel the gym in the historic school by saying, “I think because like the goal, it can be fixed. It basically seems so empty and it doesn’t get used often. A newer type of goal. The floor would be a little better, instead of the floor it is because it’s a little creaky. The walls can be the same color but they will be painted better” (girl 2). Lastly, another girl shared her thoughts on a picture of a group of mayors from the Black mayors conference by saying, “Umm these people that’s in the picture. They look like very good people and like now people is messing up [the city] and bringing violence back in [the city] and looking at these people ... like what we’re doing now ... Maybe we could be in their place” (girl 3).

As I listened to the girls’ stories over and over, I reflected on weekends and summers from my childhood in Whistler, Alabama (a predominantly black town in Mobile County) and Panola, Alabama (a rural town in the Black Belt territory of West Alabama) spent at my granny and grandma houses and how I remember our family’s cemetery, the local family churches, and what those places meant to me as a child. I saw my own curiosity through those five girls. I shared relatable stories with them and I saw my positionality align and depart many times. I was aware that although I shared some lived experiences with them such as growing up in the Black church, being a young Black girl navigating middle school, etc. I could not relate in other ways. For example, they lived in a town where 90% of the population was Black. I did not share this type of lived experience at their age, although later as a teenager I did. When I was their age I only gained an understanding when I would visit my grandmother or other relatives who lived in similar areas. I felt as though I did not have an authentic relationship of truly living in a predominantly Black environment at such a young age and how that may have impacted them and myself in various ways throughout the project. I did not gain that type of lived experience until I moved to my mother’s hometown as a teenager. There were other times where the overlay of experiences was evident though such as our shared love for certain music artists and food. I would listen to their school day recaps and reminisce on how I had similar experiences at their age. So those times were nostalgic for me and also pure happiness, but the feeling of being the “other” never went away simply because of my positionality as a researcher. I was grateful to gain some level of understanding from their point of view, but I was still aware of my positionality. I also knew that differences in our lived experiences helped me to realize that I had to be extremely careful of how I presented myself and my research to them. I did not want them to perceive me as this young Black woman coming into their space, their town with any type of superiority.

The stories from the women were authentic and beautiful representations of the rich history of the town. As I interviewed them I saw my mother, aunts, and grandmothers in my family. My time with them reminded me of my relationships with the women in my family as the child, niece, and granddaughter. I remember

feeling the responsibility to protect the girls, but not so much with the women and I am sure it was because of our age differences and how my positionality moved from big sister to one of being the young “niece” whenever I was with any of the women participants, listening to their stories, officially for oral histories, and at other times over lunch or dinner. I come from a family of a lot of Black women who were successful in their own rights, as educators, mothers, community figures, and more. I felt the same strong connection I had with my own family with the women who were part of the project. One is a political figure there, and another taught at the only high school for Black people in that county for a number of years. Others have deep familial roots dating back to the town’s inception. One woman reflected on her experience of witnessing the Freedom Riders by saying, “The Freedom Riders came through ... And I’ve met several of these people who were on that bus, I’ve been in meetings with them and coming-togethers with them, and we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Bus Burning and so actually I’ve met people on that bus” (woman 1). Another woman expressed love for her town by sharing, “Now, I love [my town]. One thing that being connected to [my town] is that everybody, if you find a good neighbor, you got a good neighbor. Even when I lived out on my own, now I live with my mom, everybody watched out for everybody” (woman 2). A third woman shared her educational background stating, “I went through life thinking that if I got the highest degree I could, I would be able to make changes in education. My master’s degree is in supervision and curriculum development” and stated “So all of the sudden I realized, “You are so wrong, the only way you gonna make changes or do anything in education or anything else is you’ve gotta be in the political arena (woman 3). These snippets of their narratives provide a rich glimpse into what I experienced interacting with the women participants and how, through their stories, I related in various ways from the shared experiences of loving my hometown, understanding the importance of education and politics, and being aware of Black history in Alabama.

The timeline of my project and the breaks between the interviews helped to reinforce my positionality as a researcher because I had time for critical reflection. I was able to think through how intersectionality played a major role in my experience with the participants. I was able to examine how their unique experiences were shaped by the intersection of race and gender. I had time to reassess my role and motivations to ensure constant ethical research practices. In any research project that involves human participants there are always risks and self-motivation. I risked the chance of not getting what I expected as valuable interviews and the participants risked exposure and exploitation. The latter was a major factor in creating and maintaining a healthy distance because I wanted to make certain that I presented their stories in the most respectful and meaningful way possible and sometimes when those professional and personal lines are blurred it can be more difficult to ensure objectivity, reliability, and validity. To maintain a healthy distance between myself and the participants, I focused on building a positive

rapport with them within the confinements of my role as researcher and I always debriefed with my dissertation chair after each interview session. I rarely interacted with the participants outside of my research time unless it was an activity or event such as the town's Founder's Day weekend. The limited outside involvement kept personal and professional boundaries clear. I feel in the end that I maintained an ethical positionality throughout the entire project from conducting the research to the analysis, and ultimately producing my dissertation.

As a Black woman professor now, I think back on my time spent in that town and how a beautiful project was brought to life because of those Black women and girls. I reflect on how much intersectionality was part of that project including race, gender, age, and privilege. I began my collegiate journey not knowing what career path I wanted to take, yet I ended up as an Assistant Professor of English at one of the top Historically Black Universities in Atlanta, Georgia. I did not end up where I am today by happenstance. My graduate experience helped reveal and shape my complex identity through rich and meaningful relationships, conversations, dinners, game nights, writing sessions, and field trips with a dynamic group of Black women professors and peers from the English Department at The University of Alabama. The love I gave and received from that project came from the lived experiences of my childhood, the women in my family, and the women and girls who graciously shared their stories with me. I went from being one of few Black students in my college classes to teaching, collaborating, researching, and learning with those who look like me, and it continues to be such a fulfilling experience that words can not describe. I advocate tirelessly for my students, I whole-heartedly serve my university, and find joy in doing research as a Black woman scholar. The stories of the Black women and girls who I had the honor of working with for my project, have greatly influenced who I am as a Black woman scholar today. Their narratives live through my pedagogical practices, through what I choose to research and write, through my mentorships, and more. Reflecting on my positionality from that project has unlocked a deeper understanding of the participants and given me a renewed sense of purpose as a professor and scholar.

Chapter 4. Storied Practices in Community-Engaged Work: Expanding Conceptions of Positionality

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In 2023, we were participating in a discussion about practices of and lessons learned with a group of other community-based researchers when Ann mentioned needing to be nimble and adaptable because of how quickly and unexpectedly change occurs. As we continued talking about how such dispositions align with community-engaged work, we began considering how dispositions, or habits of practice, intersect with positionality and also with research stance. We also began considering how attention to positionality, dispositions, and research stance, throughout all stages of a project, inform more inclusive, participatory, and ethical community-engaged work. In this chapter, we use our own experiences, along with stories from our years of engaging in this work, to consider the complex, layered nature of positionality.

It is not one experience that led to these perspectives; it is an accumulation of our own as well as those of others—and not just from one situation, but over time and from a range of privileges and perspectives, which, we have found, may come and go. What we seek to do in this chapter is explain these interconnected concepts and move them from being unique to our own experiences to being useful and portable for others. We offer brief definitions of each of the concepts and an exploration of their interconnectedness. We then share moments from our own experiences that we hope illuminate what an intentional and encompassing approach to positionality in community-engaged work, inclusive of dispositions and research stance, and the intersections among these, might look like.

Community-engaged work can occur in different locations and have many purposes and entry points. While research is often the primary purpose, in some situations it might be a secondary or not a purpose at all. In Ann's case, the initial purpose for YpsiWrites, the community writing resource she founded with colleagues, was to extend writing support into the community. Another purpose was to amplify the voices of community members. For many of us, adding capacity to the community is the goal.

It has been our experience that the communities in which we work are characterized by complex, ever-changing relationships that further complicate

positionality. In response to this complexity, scholars must assess, reflect on, enact commitments to, adapt, authentically show up in, and always be attentive and responsive to the many different stakeholders that make up the communities. Scholars must also be attentive to how they may influence and impact these communities.

Considering Positionality, Research Stance, and Dispositions with Intention

We have come to understand positionality, research stance, and disposition as intrinsically linked, working together to inform aspects of our practices and actions. If we tease them apart, we think of positionality as liminal—changing based on our relationships within and to the communities with which we work, and based on our identity, power, privilege, and expertise within the situation and moment. For us, research stance, while also dynamic, is less liminal because it is based on the methodological, ethical, and theoretical frameworks we rely on to guide our commitments and approaches to community work. For example, we both value inclusivity as an essential aspect to our work no matter the location or issue involved. While we are unlikely to disregard inclusivity over time, we may learn ways to be more inclusive, or how previous practices were not as inclusive as we hoped, and apply these new understandings to our commitment to inclusivity. Dispositions are habitual practices that inform our responses in situations. These may begin as aspirations but over time become deeply ingrained in how we react. For example, if we strive with practice, intention, and reflection throughout our work, to be flexible, open, and ready to adapt or pivot in a given moment, we are more likely to respond this way.

This more deliberate consideration of these concepts provides an opportunity to be more intentional. It allows us to foreground our awareness, authenticity, and attentiveness to a setting, along with our understanding and responsiveness. It also facilitates our honoring the diverse and multi-layered backgrounds and stories of everyone we meet and work with in communities.

Traditionally, we have addressed positionality when we write up our work. The questions we are urging ourselves and others to ask include, Are we actually thinking about positionality from the outset and throughout our work? And, How is our positionality experienced and enacted in each moment? Also, drawing on brown's *Emergent Strategy* (2017), How are we showing up, and how are we present in our work, not just to and within our fields, but to and within the communities in which we are working, and with the members of those communities? We also need to be clear about with and to whom our commitments lie (e.g., our communities, our universities, our profession, and/or our publications). We need to show up, be present, listen, and meet people where they are; we need to prioritize our communities and their members.

Our Own Positionality

We acknowledge our own positionality in writing this chapter. My (Michele's) work in communities began in graduate school where I taught community-based writing projects in courses and studied how publics participated in environmental decisions in their communities. It was here that I began thinking about my relationships to the communities in both settings—very much an outsider in the later but an insider in the former. When I shifted my research from observing public participation to engaging with publics in seeking social change, I became even more aware of how my relationships with community members informed the access I was given to community decisions.

My community-engaged classroom projects often overlapped with communities where I was already working in ways that complicated my positionality with my students and community partners as well as the university and with how I wrote up those projects. Ongoing work across multiple groups in my own town deepened and shifted my connections within the community.

My [Ann's] community-engaged work also began with client projects. After graduate school, I began exploring how they support student learning and what each group (students and clients) found meaningful about them. I did not think about my positionality until my IRB asked that a third party interview my students, pointing out that my authority as their instructor could influence their decisions to participate and their responses. I also became more mindful after graduate school of my positionality with clients, most of whom were former students or members of our local Society for Technical Communication chapter. Although I had formerly worked as a professional writer, I was now a professor and no longer a peer in the same way.

Over time, my involvement with communities changed—as did my interests. After I began directing our university's writing center, my focus shifted from studying workplace writing to working with and alongside organizations, groups, schools, and even individual community members to share and provide writing resources. This commitment to working with and alongside of and valuing the perspectives and voices of community members led me to an even greater consciousness of my positionality, especially in relation to my identity, privileges, and power.

As late-career faculty members at doctoral-granting universities, we now both have the privilege, without worrying about tenure or promotion, to do more of the slow work of establishing relationships and trust, building capacity, and committing to long-term projects that may not result in published research—a privilege we know many community-engaged researchers may not share. While we've noticed our positionality shift depending on our relationships with community partners, members of the communities with which we work, and students—and also in relation to our expertise with the issues within projects—our commitment to participatory, inclusive, intersectional approaches to joint inquiry and decision

making that adds capacity with and in communities has only deepened. These experiences have taught us more about the dispositions that allow us to do the work we hope to do with communities—the readiness to adapt and pivot (not just the ability to do so), the consciousness we strive for—to pause, for example, throughout the process to ask what harm we might be doing or what social, economic, or political realities we might be privileging over others. These experiences have also taught us to be receptive when community members, or others (Ann’s IRB), point out privileges that we might not have recognized.

Stories

One story that I (Michele) believe highlights the intersection of positionality, research stance, and disposition involved working with a city council-appointed citizen group tasked with awarding microgrants from the city to fund neighborhood engagement projects that members of the neighborhoods themselves designed. The citizen group was concerned with being good stewards of the city’s money to sustain the program, and to that end, developed a detailed grant application that unintentionally discouraged community members from completing the grant for their neighborhood engagement projects. In a moment of shared exigency, the citizen group recognized our *positionality* (our power and ability to change the complexity of the grant), our *research stance* in the form of our commitment to adding capacity to communities and our belief that the communities knew what they needed more than we did, and our *disposition* of adaptability to pivot *from* our focus on sustaining the citizen group itself and how the city would react to our grant revision *to* our commitment to support neighborhood engagement.

One application requested \$1500 for a sign for a small park in the North End of the city that they believed would help restore the area as a family gathering place for the neighborhood. The citizen group initially hesitated, wondering if the funds might have a bigger impact on a project other than a sign. Again, we considered our *positionality*, but this time as individuals outside of this neighborhood. Our *research stance of participatory and inclusive practices* reminded us that residents in a neighborhood knew better than us what was best for their neighborhood. Our committee’s disposition toward being open and flexible to this unexpected direction, and our goals of trust and empathy, prompted us to fund the request. Within a year, the city offered to paint a crosswalk from an elementary school to the park and to repair the playground equipment—quick, low-cost fixes that together resulted in a place the residents now frequently gather and that supported the kind of community building we sought but could not have anticipated if we had rigidly stuck to the letter of the application. Our decision also worked toward establishing trust and respect with the community.

My (Ann’s) story that highlights the intersection of positionality, research stance, and disposition is the story of how a colleague and I founded Ypsi-Writes, the community writing resource that “support(s) writers in the Ypsilanti

community through writing-focused workshops, events, resources, and activities.” The inspiration for YpsiWrites came from another university’s community writing center, which operated out of a firehouse and library. We believed our own community would embrace a similar center. Regarding our *research stance*, we were committed, like Michele, to building and adding capacity to the community, especially in relation to writing. We also believed we had the *dispositions*, background and experience to make it work. My colleague, for example, had strong connections with area schools and teachers and had also been on the board of 826michigan (part of the National 826 Youth Writing network), which we enlisted as a collaborator since they were already providing writing support to Ypsilanti youth.

With 826 on board, we reached out to the leadership of the Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) with our idea of supporting teen and adult writers; we believed the library would be a perfect location for a community writing center. It was at this point that we became more aware of our *positionality* as white, female academics who were trying to create a writing resource in a diverse community. Our *dispositions* of adaptability, openness, and responsiveness became especially important; we realized that what we thought we could establish quickly needed greater thought and deliberation—and time for building relationships and trust. We also realized that, in addition to gaining the trust of our collaborators, we would need to earn the trust of and build relationships with community members.

Toward these ends, I started attending weekly meetings at a community center. At one meeting, a black male who directs two non-profits, Mentor2Youth and Fathers for Family, invited me to have coffee. We talked about how we got to where we are and the hopes and aspirations we had for our work. We also shared our stories and dreams, and we laughed about our challenges with parenting and teaching. Darryl helped me realize what we could all accomplish working together—and how embracing and celebrating our differences, rather than allowing them to become roadblocks, could lead us, individually and collectively, to greater success. Because of enduring relationships like these that we have cultivated now with both individuals and organizations, we have been able to create a vibrant community writing resource and to enact our stance of building coalitions that truly benefit the community.

Why and How We Tell These Stories

Stories like the ones we’ve shared, and our moments of attention to the complexities of positionality and to our research stance and dispositions, are generally left out of our write ups. Our hope is that sharing such moments might help other community-engaged scholars draw attention to similar moments, as well as embrace opportunities to reflect on their commitments and positionality in their work. These are moments when an awareness of our ethical and methodological

commitments; of our abilities, power, and privilege; and of our practices of adapting can remind us to be more inclusive, to add more capacity, to build coalitions, and to be respectful of the stories and lived experiences of those with whom we work. Drawing inspiration from Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) and from brown (2017), especially in relation to coalition building and the need for adaptability, interdependence, and aligning our purposes with our values, we hope our write ups are coalition stories about the knowledge making, relationship-building, and change that can result from our work and inquiry.

Thinking and writing about our positionality is difficult. As a heuristic for a more deliberate and intentional approach to considering and writing about positionality—and to consider the intersections of positionality, research stance, and dispositions—we conclude by presenting questions we ourselves find useful to ask, not only as we begin but also as we carry out and write up our community-engaged projects. These include:

1. Why am I doing this work? What purposes do I hope to accomplish? Why am I doing this work with and/or within the community in which I'm doing it? What is my relationship with, and what do I see as my responsibilities to this community?
2. What ethical, methodological, theoretical, and ideological frameworks am I bringing to this work? Where and how did I acquire or develop those frameworks, and how do they connect to the community work I plan to or am doing?
3. In what ways are the frameworks I bring being challenged by the specific context? What dispositions do or might I practice to help me address these challenges?
4. What are my commitments within this context? To which commitment(s) will I give priority?
5. What are my identities? How would I describe myself, and how am I similar to and/or different from those in the community/ies in which I am working?
6. What is my relationship to the individuals with whom I am working? Are there multiple types of relationships within this group or multiple groups where my relationships differ?
7. What privilege or power do I have in relation to the community members, and how am I using that privilege and power? Am I using it in ways that are respectful and that support and align with, and do not usurp, the knowledge, expertise, and experience of community members? Further, am I bringing about positive change in consultation with those affected?
8. How might community participants perceive and experience my privilege, power, and positionality? How do I perceive and experience their positionality?

9. How do I work toward building authentic relationships with community partners that are grounded in trust and reciprocity, rather than being merely performative?

Conclusion

For as complex as positionality is, considering these intersections and dispositions can enable a more intentional and informed approach that is grounded in our principles and values as well as in multi-faceted reflection. This reflection, we contend, can contribute to coalition-building that is more participatory and action-oriented. Our own lived experiences also demonstrate the importance of inclusion, trust, and authenticity. These perspectives and frameworks, we believe, will ultimately lead us toward a more authentic, self-reflexive approach to community-engaged work.

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Chapter 5. My Research Ethics, Myself: Reflecting on Feminist Research Regrets

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While studying women's health advocacy, my co-editors and I invited three public activists to contribute chapters to our collection. One of the women with a dire cancer prognosis wrote a short, well-written chapter. When the book was published, she felt disappointed that our scholarly book was not the type sold at Barnes & Noble and did not reach an audience as widely as imagined. As her health worsened over time, I regretted asking for her time and doubted that the occasion to write her story provided a benefit to her.

During a study of women of retirement age about their post-professional literacy practices, I stumbled into tensions with my participants. I was championing home-making and other non-verbal literacies as progressive and feminist actions that reclaim "rhetorical heirlooms" and "heritage literacy," but the women challenged these notions as setting women back. Although kind to me, the participants scoffed at what current scholarship in feminism was teaching younger women. This sat with me for a long time, and I felt I had let them down.

After a personal experience in my family, I began to study bank robbery as a cultural script, as the scholar Wendy Hesford has studied rape. After completing secondary research in the Criminal Justice literature, I received IRB approval and began recruitment efforts. I only ever interviewed two women, and while cooperative, they disregarded and poo-pooed the research purpose, which chastened me. In an effort to respect the women's lived experience, I stopped recruiting participants and never took up the project again.

I spent many years revisiting and wrestling with the shame these experiences left in me. Finding excuses for why these projects fell—or felt—flat did not help me move forward or learn from them. Over time, I pushed myself to undertake reflection.

I considered whether I had breached ethical frameworks put in place for researchers, such as the Belmont Report, the Nuremberg code, or the Helsinki Declaration. I reviewed and reflected on feminist research principles as the field of Writing & Rhetoric describe them by re-reading them, spending time thinking, and bringing my nascent thoughts to the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference in 2019 for feedback from my peers. I felt pretty confident I had honored women's lived experiences, complicated dominant narratives, and made explicit my own biases and positionality. I believed I understood these well.

I considered my job at a small rural public university that does not value research highly nor offer a teaching load or an infrastructure to support it, such as funding, release time, space, personnel, marketing, etc. The breadth, scale, and reach of my research would be limited, but this was not a surprise.

Most difficult of all was considering my feelings, a block which I came to realize stemmed from avoiding an uncomfortable truth. Earlier, as a student and a striving assistant professor, I put a vision of the perfect research project ahead of true curiosity. My perfect projects cleaved perfectly to research ethics, but did I undertake them responsibly? I had responded to trends, to suggestions, to pressure. But had I asked: what did I want to learn and feel through research? The answer was: no, not yet.

Sheepishly, I began to follow lines of inquiry based on authentic wonderings, even when my research questions seemed small, weird, or only of interest to me. I felt curious, sucked into my reading, and enjoyed the handful of “a-ha!” moments that occurred. I gained confidence slowly in areas I never envisioned writing about or sharing with students: memes, public rhetoric, anti-racism.

I also formed an opinion on feminist research ethics when I mistakenly de-centered and downright ignored my own hopes, desires, and values. My opinion and assertion has since become expressed this way: the ethical schema of our feminist research methodologies must be undergirded by a personal layer of curiosity and feelings that not only matter, but are foundational.

Section 2. Collaborations

The *Collaborations* section offers stories of friendship, mentoring, editing, and writing together to consider how these relationships revealed both individual and interpersonal positionings.

Chapter 6. El Poder de la Amistad: Leaning into Friendship During Shifts in Positionality

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¿Qué hago aquí? Debo de estar ayudando a mi mamá con mi abuelito. Debo de estar ayudando a mi esposo con la casa. Los otros estudiantes no entienden lo muerta que estoy del cansancio después de haber terminado mis dos trabajos para poder pagar los estudios. No pueden entender el sacrificio de nada más estar presente para esta clase.

It was my very first presentation for my first course as a PhD student in Technical Communication and Rhetoric. I remember that in three weeks of classes, I had barely mustered up the courage to contribute to discussions. I felt like an outsider. Completely lost. Completely out of place. No one in my family had completed higher education before. No one understood academia or could offer guidance on what to expect. I was sinking but couldn't allow myself to give up.

¿Qué pensarían mis abuelitos si abandono esta oportunidad? Ellos no sacrificaron todo para que yo no siguiera. No me puedo quedar callada.

Everyone else in class had already presented and the professor had forgotten to call on me. Now was my only chance to speak up. I couldn't lose out on credit for my work. I couldn't let myself down. I couldn't let my family down.

Que desastre. Como me temblaba la voz. No tuve ritmo ni claridad. Ya no puedo más. Esto no es para mí. Lo intente, pero el doctorado no es para mí.

Then, as if the presentation disaster of the century wasn't bad enough, the professor vocalized an even bigger nightmare: a group project. If I wasn't sure before, I was sure now. There was no way I'd be able to complete this.

¿Quién va a querer trabajar conmigo? Ellos ni se acuerdan de que soy parte de la clase.

After trying, and failing, to secure a partner three different times through the Zoom chat, I was defeated. One person hadn't even responded to my direct message. This was a sign that someone like me just wasn't cut out for a PhD. I should just stay in my lane and continue working as a teacher.

Yo sabía que esta gente no iban a querer trabajar conmigo. Yo sabía que todos iban a decir que no.

Fifteen minutes left of class. I remember thinking I'll just tell the professor I plan on leaving the program. That will get me out of this project and get me out of this terrible experiment. Turns out, Manny had different plans. The missing response on the chat finally got back to me and said I could join him and his

partner on a group of three. Finally, another student to connect with. Someone who gave me a chance.

Bueno, no puedo dar marcha atrás ahora. Ya tengo que trabajar con Manny. No lo puedo embarcar. Pa' lante. A hacer el mejor trabajo que pueda y seguir. No me queda de otra.

Manny didn't just split up tasks for the project; although this would have been the easiest way to approach our work. He took the time to get to know me, asked how I was doing, and helped me navigate this strange new world I had come into all at once. He became more than a classmate or groupmate. He became a friend.

Con un nuevo amigo, ya no me siento tan sola. Tengo comunidad. Tengo apoyo. Tengo a alguien con quien puedo hablar.

Manny introduced me to Delphine and Jess. Soon I met Andrew. Then came Kathleen who introduced me to Kim. We became a tight knit circle. The TCR (Technical Communication and Rhetoric) Fam.

Son muy buena gente. Me siento bien en su compañía. Por lo menos puedo tomar clases con personas que me caen bien.

~ ~ ~

Though this doctoral program consisted mostly of online synchronous classes, there was also an in-person residency requirement that had graduate students take courses on-campus while participating in professional development opportunities.

¿Y qué pasa si no nos llevamos igual en persona como nos llevamos virtualmente? ¿Qué pasa si no les caigo bien en persona? ¿Qué pasa si nos sentimos muy extraños después de conocernos?

When heading to campus for the first time, I was nervous about being away from family, in a new state with new people I only really knew online. I wondered again, if this was a mistake. Whether I was in over my head and inconveniencing my family unnecessarily.

¿Soy egoísta por dejar a todos mis seres queridos cuando tanto está pasando en nuestras vidas?

Thankfully, once the TCR Fam picked me up from my hotel for the first time, all my fears went away. We laughed and cracked jokes just like we did over text and video. We comfortably shared stories and experiences. Nothing was forced. Everything was easy. Feeling like I belonged made going to class and participating enjoyable. It gave me the confidence to share who I was and what I knew with others. In time, this academic journey didn't seem so scary anymore. I was so thankful for the opportunity to experience friendships and learning in both online and physical spaces.

Qué bello es poder compartir mi vida real con mi vida académica. Es algo totalmente especial.

~ ~ ~

It was nice to have a group of people to rely on. A group of people with a group chat during class. People I could go to for advice on schoolwork or the dissertation process or what the heck to do post-graduation.

Por lo menos durante el programa, tendré personas en quien confiar.

I thought that this friendship existed in a PhD student bubble where we leaned on each other to get through coursework and requirements. It was not until my grandfather passed away that I realized this was so much more.

¿Y ahora quien va a celebrar los juegos de futbol conmigo? ¿Quién me va a contar historias de Cuba y España? ¿Quién me va a reforzar el valor de nuestra cultura e historia?

I was devastated and left with little strength to go through the motions of getting work done. I couldn't bring myself to go to class. The TCR Fam did more than just send me notes on what I missed; they sent me a handwritten letter:

Dear Kristine,

El amor de la familia es para siempre. So sorry to hear about the loss of your grandfather. We hope you find some comfort in your memories of him, and of the fierce love your family has for him, now and forever. Your TCR fam is here for anything you need from afar.

Love,

The TCR Fam

Que belleza. Estos sí son verdaderos amigos.

~ ~ ~

What started as a friendship during school became a friendship for life. The TCR Fam became a constant for me. There wasn't a day that went by where we weren't talking to one another.

¿Como puedo conseguir experiencia como instructora en una universidad si no me puedo ir de mi trabajo de maestra?

Andrew and Manny let me know when they saw openings for first year writing positions and helped me gain a sense of how to apply to openings in academia. Kathleen, Kim, and Delphine helped me with how to structure assignments and manage my classes once I was hired as an adjunct. Every step of the way, their friendship not only guided me through new beginnings but also reassured me that I could succeed in the opportunities I was given.

La confianza que me creen en migo misma es extraordinaria y me llena de certitud que todo va a salir bien.

~ ~ ~

When I was offered my first full-time position as a professor at a major university, there was no question about who I'd tell first: my TCR Fam. They reassured me I was ready for this role and celebrated every milestone, question, and success I had.

¿Yo sé que ellos me pueden apoyar en todo, pero me podrán ayudar durante este tiempo?

After a year at my dream job at my dream university, my husband and I decided it was time to start having a family. Month after month we waited. Month after month the dreaded two words on the at-home test: *Not Pregnant*. We finally met with a specialist who confirmed what we already knew—we had an uphill battle with infertility.

Me da pena de hablar de esto con mi familia. No sé ni como decírselo a mis amigos. Mi cuerpo me ha fallado y no se ni como seguir en el día a día, en el trabajo, en todo.

My husband and I became enmeshed in a never-ending cycle of IUI protocols and fertility acupuncture. Four times we thought we'd finally do it; we'd finally get our break. Each time our doctor called, we became more devastated than the last.

Me siento un esqueleto. Menos que una persona. Solo yendo por los pasos.

Without me having to say much, my friends knew something was wrong. I wasn't answering text messages like I always did. Wasn't initiating conversations. When I finally shared my infertility struggles, the TCR Fam was there like never before and rooted for me when I started IVF.

No debo de dudar su apoyo. Siempre están aquí y siempre están a mi lado a pesar de la distancia.

Manny and Andrew were great about advice on how to handle the pressures of work-life balance, especially during trying times. Jess sent me a care package of items that would help make the IVF procedure more comfortable. Kathleen made time to visit me during the summer when I really needed a friend. And Kim and Delphine constantly checked in and let me know they were thinking of me and wishing me well.

Nunca sola. Siempre conmigo.

~ ~ ~

Though IVF was unsuccessful, I was reminded of the fact that a lot of life is filled with disappointment. There are lots of lows before you can reach the highs and things hardly ever work out the way we plan. The trick to getting through it all is never taking your support system for granted. The friendship provided to me by the TCR Fam has been my saving grace as not only a scholar and academic but also as a human being.

Ahora conozco el inmenso valor que tiene la amistad y comprendo la fuerza que te dan estas relaciones. Han habido tantas veces cuando dude en migo misma y mis

amistades me han ayudado a superar los momentos más difíciles de la vida. Ellos me conocen como persona y ven lo bueno dentro de mí.

When going to school or pursuing a career in academia, it becomes important to find a group of people you can trust. Leaning into that friendship and being there for others has made me a better person. In life, we will always be faced with shifting positions and circumstances. Friendships stay with us through these shifts and are sounding boards during times of uncertainty.

La fortaleza de la amistad es algo único. Es algo que siempre debemos buscar y regalar para que crezca y siga mejorando el mundo.

~ ~ ~

As an early-career academic navigating professional expectations, making new friendships was not at the top of my list of things to do. I wanted to make sure my courses were well-designed, that I had joined enough committees to fulfill my service requirement, that I was well-informed of university policies and procedures. Plus, I already had the TCR Fam and childhood friends. There was no need, and no time, for any more. Or so I thought.

Tengo que asegurarme que salgue bien en las evaluaciones de los estudiantes y de mis administradores al fin del año. Nada más importa. Lo que tenga que hacer para recibir buen resultado, lo hare. Me quiero quedar en esta universidad para siempre. No quiero que nada afecte mis sueños y objetivos.

A couple months into my first fall semester teaching full-time at the university level, I felt I had great connections with my students but somehow felt out of place in my own department. I never really saw anyone in their offices around campus. Never bumped into anyone outside of mandatory program or department meetings. I just found myself going to class, running office hours, going back to class to finish teaching, and going home. More often than not, I felt isolated. I felt alone.

¿Esto es normal? Le pregunte al TCR Fam. Todos empezaron a reírse y me dijeron que al principio se demora aclimatar a un nuevo departamento y a un nuevo grupo de personas. Me aseguraron que me ofrecieron la posición porque me merecía estar en la universidad. En tiempo encontraras tu grupito del trabajo, me declararon. Solo debería tener un poquito de fe.

With a bit of reassurance from the TCR Fam, I became more vocal at meetings, making sure my insights were shared and valued. The TCR Fam's encouragement was always in the back of my head. I just had to be myself. I'd find a new circle, but I had to put in a little effort first.

Hablando me cuesta muchísimo. No quiero decir algo que me vaya a hacer quedar mal. No sé si voy a sonar suficiente inteligente. ¿Qué pasa si no les caigo bien a los compañeros del trabajo?

I worked on projects and initiatives that were important to me and my research interests. Slowly but surely, I started talking to more people in the department

and started seeing certain faculty more often than others. When I was first invited to coffee outside of a work meeting, I almost jumped for joy.

No lo puedo creer. Alguien del trabajo quiere compartir conmigo fuera de las obligaciones de enseñar o servir al departamento.

That first cup of iced coffee did more than just quench my thirst. It fulfilled my need for community. By talking to my colleague outside of work, I found that while we did discuss work and our departmental roles, we also shared insights about who we were outside of academia. Hobbies, upbringings, favorite foods. We took time to get to know one another.

¿Esto será el inicio de una nueva amistad?

~ ~ ~

Eventually, there were multiple coffee invites and lunches to attend with colleagues. One work friend introduced me to their own work friends and soon, I found my circle at work quickly growing in number. I now had people who I could go to for advice and clarification. I didn't have to text my TCR Fam about every little question I had about teaching or academia. Once again, I'd found my people. It took some time, but I felt that maybe, just maybe, academia was really for me. That I could really have a place here. Maybe I really did fit in after all.

Me siento tan agradecida de sentirme querida en el trabajo. Nunca imaginaria tener tan buenas conexiones en la universidad. Nunca pensaba que necesitaba tener amistades en el trabajo, pero ahora que las tengo, estoy segura de que no podría seguir sin ellas.

In time, conversations and projects with colleagues turned into conference presentations and publications. Faculty I had initially only viewed as representatives of the university I worked for, embraced me and invited me to join them in representing our institution's mission and vision.

Estoy en casa. Aquí puedo ayudar a mis compañeros, estudiantes, y comunidad.

~ ~ ~

While the TCR Fam did not find my work friends for me, they did show me what it meant to be a friend. They taught me what it meant to be there for other human-beings and how it always pays to be kind. They taught me that no one should ever feel alone, and that community is never too far away, if you only know where to look for it.

Ellos me han convertido en mejor persona. Mejor profesora. Mejor compañera. Mejor amiga.

I carry the lessons taught to me by the TCR Fam everywhere I go. Whenever a new colleague comes to the department, I strive to make them feel welcome. I work hard to make my classroom a community for all students—where connections are encouraged and celebrated. At the end of the day, no matter what position we hold, or where we might find ourselves in life, we can always use a friend.

El poder de la amistad nos llena de amor y conexión. Su apoyo, para siempre, nuestra guía.

Chapter 7. Positionality in Crafting Memoirs: Author-Editor Collaboration

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REB & WLJ: Our author-editor partnership is powerful and productive, involving interaction about a long-term project, a memoir.

WLJ: I am the author of this memoir about growing up in the segregated deep South in the 1930s-1940s and finding a way out. How? I joined the US Air Force and used the GI Bill to go to college. I eventually became an optical aerospace engineer, working on the country's first five environmental satellites, eight geostationary weather satellites, and an interplanetary probe to Jupiter.

REB: As a black engineer, Jeff was a trailblazer for black professionals in primarily white organizations—those with black cooks, custodians, maintenance workers, and grounds keepers but few (or no) black professionals.

WLJ: My developmental editor is Rebecca. I have the memories; she asks about them. I am the storyteller; she is the scribe. I am the author; she attends to organization, style, and conventions.

REB: Jeff shifts among modalities: recounting memories, jotting notes, drafting stories, and elaborating details. I shift among tasks: sequencing events, inquiring about context, recording stories, and soliciting details.

WLJ: My stories weave together, forming a memoir of my life, but they also fit into a bigger cultural narrative of a restrictive social, political, and financial infrastructure affecting black families. To illustrate my stories, I create neighborhood maps and family trees and include family letters and photographs. To enrich the cultural narrative, I use census records, newspaper articles, and workplace documents.

REB: In his memoir, Jeff tells stories, separated into chronological sections—each introduced by historical context, a memory of a person or place, and a reflection. Each section is connected to the next by an intertext, a story about a family member whose relationship with Jeff spans decades. The stories are riveting—funny, poignant, wrenching.

WLJ & REB: We use intersectionality and positionality in our collaboration, regularly discussing our roles, which are affected by gender, age, race, family and community backgrounds, education, religion, politics, experiences—and that we've been friends for more than 50 years and are married to each other. For us, *intersectionality* refers to synergistic social categories. By discussing ways in which

these categories influence our perspectives, biases, and interpretations, we reduce misunderstandings. For us, *positionality* includes our relationship to each other, to topics and processes we're using, and to various intersectional categories. Positionality—and the self-examination it encourages—affects our understanding of and engagement with others and the culture around us. The rest of this chapter addresses three concerns: defining what makes our partnership productive, characterizing differences, and identifying strategies other authors and editors might adopt.

What makes us productive writing partners?

WLJ & REB: We listen thoughtfully and curiously. We care—both about each other and the memoir, acknowledging our similarities and differences as well as project processes, technology, and research.

Similarities

WLJ & REB: We work well together, acknowledging each other's skills, experiences, and areas of expertise. We pick up the slack for each other without being asked. We share values and a commitment to facts and details. Frequently, following a common thread together generates something new, something neither of us had previously considered.

REB: We care about appealing to our audiences. We are attuned to each other's ideas and pacing (and each other's idiosyncrasies) as the stories are developed.

WLJ: And not to be underestimated, we like working together. The point is that we know and can articulate positionalities that are held individually, shared partially, and collaboratively embraced. The advantage of similarities is that we share goals and trust each other's strengths, building on each other's ideas.

REB: While the stories are entirely Jeff's, he values my opinions about ways to refine them. For example, Jeff told a story about his little brother coming up the hill toward their house, singing "Blues in the Night" at the top of his 8-year-old voice.

WLJ: I remember this scene so well! Mama wasn't at all attuned to popular music or movies. She didn't know my brother was singing a popular song. As she and I were working at the kitchen sink, with its big sliding windows facing toward the street, she could hear my brother singing.

REB: Jeff described the scene in such detail that I could visualize it, but I suggested we extend the story with lyrics, so I found them and added them to his story.

WLJ: I agreed the lyrics helped the story a lot. We settled on using one stanza:

My mama done told me when I was in knee-pants
 A woman's a two-face, a worrisome thing
 Who'll leave ya to sing the blues in the night.

Adding the lyrics stimulated me to remember her response: “Listen to those lies that boy’s telling on me. I never said anything like that to him.”

REB: Our collaboration (Jeff’s telling the story and me suggesting that he add the lyrics) had a couple of benefits: the lyrics prompted him to recall his mother’s comments and, similarly, these lyrics may connect readers to their own memories.

Differences

WLJ & REB: In a memoir, the content knowledge and historical context of the author and editor are dramatically uneven because of the author’s lived experience. Further, differences (see Table 7.1) have the potential to shape and/or distort meaning.

Table 7.1. Basic Differences between the Memoir’s Author and Editor

	Jeff	Rebecca
DOB	1930	1947
Birthplace	Arkansas	Massachusetts
Childhood	Urban South	Rural New England
Public education	Segregated public school	Integrated public school
Undergraduate college	Public HBCU, Missouri	Public university, Massachusetts
Undergraduate major	physics	English
Military experience	U.S. Air Force in US and Germany	No military service
Profession	Aerospace optical engineer	English teacher/professor

WLJ: While I have content expertise for my memoir, positionality can sometimes interfere with audience understanding.

REB: Throughout the project, I can represent the fictive audience for memoir—addressing gaps in audience knowledge and reflecting potential audience distortions.

WLJ: An uninformed observer might mistakenly presume that Rebecca has the linguistic advantage, having undergraduate and graduate degrees in English and a PhD in rhetoric while I have an undergraduate degree in physics.

REB: But that’s not the case. While I have considerable linguistic fluency, Jeff has greater linguistic flexibility.

WLJ: We grew up in families where parents talked to us, and we were expected to express informed opinions. For Rebecca, Standard American English was her at-home language. For me, Standard American English and African American Vernacular English were both at-home languages; German and Spanish were my travel languages.

REB: Both Jeff and I had careers in which our competence in Standard American English as writers, speakers, collaborators, and designers was important. However, Jeff has the additional advantage of being able to code switch, a competence so ingrained that he does it automatically, without conscious planning or effort.

WLJ: Professional jargon aside, our linguistic differences typically have to do with regional expressions. For example, in my memoir, I tell a story about one of my aunts who was an exceptional cook—both in cooking for her family and working as a live-in cook for other families. In explaining her skill as a cook, I said she always put her foot in it.

REB: I said, “What?” I’d never heard that expression.

WLJ: I was surprised because it’s a normal expression—at least where I grew up. So, I explained it means “excellent,” “fantastic,” and “outstanding.”

REB: Since learning this expression, I’ve started listening more closely ... and, not surprisingly, have heard it used by a number of people.

WLJ: We see our linguistic differences as an advantage, giving us access to more ideas and experiences. However, we agree that some things are simply impossible to fully understand. For example, I’ll never fully understand what it’s like to be white or female or from New England or write with joyful enthusiasm.

REB: And I will never fully understand what it’s like to be black or male or from the deep South or solve physics problems in my head. The advantage of differences? We ask different questions about the text.

Project process

WLJ & REB: Our creative processes are flexible, using various ways to capture memories.

REB: Typically, Jeff tells a story while I listen, ask questions, take notes, and jot quotations. Jeff not only reads the notes and quotes, he adds details and corrects errors.

WLJ: Sometimes, after telling the story aloud, I write alone. Other times, Rebecca takes notes and drafts the story. We both read and edit. We both elaborate and revise.

REB: I tend to invite details and incorporate footnotes.

WLJ: I re-read, correct, and clarify. I’ve learned that my writing stimulates me to recall new stories. Regardless of my approach, my task is to recall stories that will be meaningful to others.

REB: My task is to historicize and contextualize these stories. For example, when Jeff told about his family getting electricity in 1935, I found out how long electricity had been available to Little Rock residents. The more than 50-year difference between electricity coming to Little Rock and it being wired into Jeff’s family home reinforces his family’s financial circumstances.

Project Technology

REB & WLJ: We use and share the same technology: *File folders* for family photos and documents. Individual *notebooks* for jottings, ideas, and reminders. *Texting* when we're not working next to each other. *Google Docs* for outlining, writing, editing, recording notes, questioning, and suggesting/making changes.

WLJ: For us, Google Docs simplifies cycles of editing and rearranging the stories in the memoir's hyperlinked table of contents.

REB: Additionally, we have a record of earlier versions of the text, can insert links to useful sites, and create a list of references.

Project research

REB: We're plumbing Jeff's memory and researching social-cultural records in federal, county, city, and family archives. Tracing the lineage of US black families in the 1700s, 1800s, and early-to-mid-1900s is challenging.

WLJ: We have spent hours searching for details about parents, grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. While the rich and famous get access to professional genealogists on "Finding Our Roots," the rest of us slog through the often indecipherable handwriting on census records available online and birth/marriage/death records available in county courthouses.

REB: Even within a generation, the number of children born to a family is easily lost, since miscarriages, stillbirths, and early infant deaths were often never recorded and seldom talked about. Sometimes, we find information in unusual places. For example, we found a treasured letter from Jeff's grandfather to his mother, carefully folded and placed by her in an envelope of her recipes.

WLJ: We listen to my cousins as they talk about their experiences, turning page after page of reunion yearbooks. We have seen the process take unexpected turns—like the time I realized siblings three generations back were, in fact, twins.

REB: We understand that family stories are part of a network that takes time to weave together.

What characterizes distinctions in positionality?

WLJ & REB: We are interested in ways positionality can make Jeff's memoir both meaningful and accurate. In this chapter, we refer to three stories from the memoir, showing ways positionality influences our attitudes and actions. For each story, we provide a brief synopsis and identify some questions we raised as we wrote and edited the story.

A First Story

WLJ: In "My First White Friend," my four-year-old self introduces my best friend,

a four-year-old white boy, Phillip McNema. Our homes were two blocks apart, at the edges of the black neighborhood in Little Rock where I lived on Fulton Street and the white neighborhood where Phillip lived on IZARD Street. We shared toys, ran in and out of each other's houses, and played cowboys and Indians in our backyards.

REB: My editorial suggestion? Add more information about the equity in the friendship. For example: When you ate at Phillip's house, you both had the *same* lunch, which you ate *together*, prepared for you by the McNema's maid, who Phillip called Claudine and you called Mrs. Parker. Phillip's father bought ice cream cones for both of you when you went to the store with him. None of these things were common practices in the deep South in the early 1930s.

WLJ: Because of Rebecca's suggestions, I elaborated the story to add more details and wrote a commentary about whether my parents and his were at all concerned with our friendship and about the insidious role our early education had in ending our friendship. (See box.)

REB: Your felt sense of cultural context, barely perceived when you were 4, evolved into articulable differences by the time you were an adult.

Excerpt from "My First White Friend": Did our parents worry about our friendship? Probably not. I can only speculate they knew our being best friends would stop without them having to do anything. When? Phillip and I went to first grade: He went to a white school, and I went to a black school. We no longer interacted with each other at all.

A Second Story

WLJ: In "Flood Plains," I explained that my neighborhood elementary school was in the floodplain of Fourche Creek. My school's playground and Crump Park (the adjacent city park and ball field) all flooded during heavy rains.

REB: In many communities, the poorest citizens lived in flood plains, their homes and businesses at risk and often damaged. In some Southern communities, municipal ordinances even dictated where people could live.

WLJ: When I was writing this story, I was also reading Isabel Wilkerson's book, *Caste*, which reinforced my own experiences about neighborhood demographics.

REB: My editorial suggestions for "Flood Plains" included adding a footnote about the current use of the school and the city park, which had been home to Negro League baseball teams.

WLJ: Once I read the footnote that Rebecca added to the memoir about Crump Park, I recalled that the man after whom the park was named owned a pool hall (also called Crump's) across the street from the school. Revising "Flood Plains" generated a new story, "Pool Hall." (Read box.)

Excerpt From “Pool Hall:” Crump’s, at the edge of the flood plain, is where I learned to shoot pool when I was an early teenager. Mama was working as an elevator operator at night and didn’t get off until 11pm. Daddy came home from his store and went to bed very early. After Daddy went to bed and after my little brother went to sleep but before Mama got home, I snuck out to the pool hall, about 4-5 blocks from our house. I concentrated on learning to shoot pool. I became a good pool player but was never great because I didn’t get enough practice. Every game cost a nickel, which was a lot of money to me then.

A Third Story

WLJ: “Racism and Expectations” focuses on an incident from my professional life as an aerospace optical engineer at Santa Barbara Research Center (SBRC).

REB: One of Jeff’s responsibilities included serving as a vendor liaison, which meant being the primary contact between SBRC and vendors, managing all technical details of contracts.

WLJ: When a contract is awarded, any vendor’s first task is to submit an acceptance test procedure (ATP)—a report that provides a detailed description of tests, administered before delivery, to prove the vendor has satisfied SBRC’s specifications.

REB: An excerpt from the story describes this report’s quality and Jeff’s reaction. (Read box.)

WLJ: Rebecca and I discussed possible reasons for the company’s action—a major defense contractor submitting an unacceptable report for an important project. Indifference? Incompetence? Racism?

REB: Jeff said he didn’t see any other black employees when he initially visited this company

Excerpt from “Racism And Expectations”: I read the vendor’s ATP when it arrived. I realized it was unacceptable—simply crap. It did not effectively describe the testing process, the tests themselves were inadequate, and the process was insufficiently justified. Who did I inform that the ATP was unacceptable?

- My boss (responsible for multiple aerospace projects, from weather satellites to interplanetary probes)
- SBRC’s in-house buyer (who wrote the contract)
- SBRC’s in-house quality control inspector

My response? I got on a plane, flying from Santa Barbara to the east coast. The vendor knew I was coming specifically to talk about their unacceptable ATP. I was ready to cancel the contract. My first meeting was with a manager who said, “You’re a quiet guy, but you sure carry a damn big stick.” I had a single question: “Why did you submit such crap?” The answer? “We didn’t think you’d read it.”

nor during 15 to 20 visits during the duration of the contract (odd since approximately 12% of the city's population was black).

WLJ: The likely reasons for the vendor's action? Racism combined with inattention to in-process inspection. First, the company was not accustomed to dealing with black professionals, so perhaps their lack of experience provoked unintended prejudices. Second, the company needed to assign knowledgeable, independent inspectors for our project. And third, they were accustomed to some government inspectors accepting nearly anything the company inspectors told them, without verification. The outcome? The ATP was substantially revised.

What strategies do we use that other authors and editors might adapt?

REB & WLJ: Jeff's memoir illustrates positionality, both in the stories themselves and the framing that contextualizes and historicizes them. Equally important, the memoir helps readers consider the culture around them and engage in reflection. The memoir's stories are shaped by positionality, not just in their content but also in our collaborative strategies of revision. Our strategies became clear to us as we considered our process. We believe our strategies can be adapted by others so misunderstandings due to positionality will not interfere with or threaten understanding.

- *Listen!* As one of our friends says, "Listen louder!" Pay attention to what's being said and how it's being said. The *how* includes attitude, body language, facial expression, linguistic register, vocal tone, and conversational responsiveness. In our 50+ years together, we've found that problems can be addressed by listening to the other person rather than doing more talking. In both professional and personal interactions, we listen especially carefully when we disagree with each other.
- *Identify roles.* Who is doing what? And why. Knowing our own role isn't enough. We each need to know what the other is doing. By identifying roles, we can revise interpersonal actions to take advantage of our strengths and also to support each other beyond our official author/editor responsibilities. As a result of our work together, Jeff is a better editor of his own work, and Rebecca has a better sense of critical historical and biographical details, enabling her to more effectively contribute to the memoir.
- *Acknowledge factors* influencing conversation and writing. We regularly monitor ourselves and each other to determine the ways rhetorical factors (e.g., argument, purpose, audience, design, and conventions) as well as cultural factors (e.g., class, economics, socio-political experience, education, gender, and race) influence our process and our product. We explicitly discuss potential audience reactions, both the collaborator's reactions and imagined reactions of the fictive audience.

- *Participate in conversation*, including equitable turn taking, substantive content, direct responses, and creative contributions. We articulate (and, as necessary, revise) project goals, purposes, and audiences—aloud to ourselves and to each other. In our heads, we keep track of how often and how much each of us talks. We assess how responsive we’ve been to the other person’s approach, how responsive we’ve been to the other’s direct (and indirect) questions, and how affirming we are to the other person.
- *Propose alternatives*—not to be contrary but to stimulate synectic thinking. What are productive ways we develop alternatives? Ask questions. Challenge ideas. Improve core arguments. Seek data to support arguments. Elaborate with details and reasons. We sometimes create two or three variations of the same story in the memoir to determine which one works best. Rather than thinking “Done is good,” instead, think “Good is the goal.”
- *Reflect regularly and frequently* about individual and collaborative processes. We articulate our rationale for our processes, identifying what worked well and what could have been done better by each of us individually and both of us as a team.

WLJ & REB: These strategies are important, providing a strong foundation for interaction, regardless of participants’ backgrounds or the nature of their collaboration. Respecting and building on each other’s perspectives can lead to effective processes and products.

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Chapter 8. Writing My Way into Belonging: Negotiating Positionality and Exposure in Rhetoric and Writing Scholarship

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In 2019, my co-edited collection *Immigrant Scholars in Rhetoric, Composition, and Communication: Memoirs of a First Generation* was published by NCTE, and it was the first time I would claim publicly within the field's scholarship an identity that was, as I describe it, multiply first-generation. I had been working on this project with my friend and colleague Sergio C. Figueiredo and with a wonderful group of contributors since 2015. With each stage of the project, from our call for proposals, to our engagement with contributors' generously shared and insightful narratives, to our proposal to NCTE, to the drafting and revision of my own chapter, and to the looming publication date, I found myself contending with insider-outsider status in my own literacy narrative: as the child of immigrants, as a young student sent to an ESL classroom for speaking two languages and answering in Italian in my English-speaking classroom, as a teacher-scholar of rhetoric and writing studies contending with a lived history in this liminal space, one that had shaped and would continue to shape my professional work. It was after many years in the field as a tenured professor, author, co-author, editor, and co-editor and through a book project that was deeply personal that I finally wrestled fully with my positionality and the facets of lived experience that had profound effects on my identity and my work and yet often remained hidden and undertheorized. As the child of immigrants who identifies as a multiply first-gen feminist teacher-scholar, my own positionality is intimately connected to the content of this chapter, to my teaching and scholarship, and to the ways I perform and theorize positionality.

Editing a collection of scholarly work was not new to me, and it had been, in fact, my way into recognizing my potential contributions to scholarship at the intersection of my broad areas of expertise: rhetoric and writing studies and gender and women's studies. My first edited collection, *MTV and Teen Pregnancy: Critical Essays on 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom*, for example, grew out of a collaborative project with an undergraduate student and from wondering what it would look like to create space for multi-disciplinary conversations among scholars engaged and invested in similar analysis and feminist intervention. Subsequent edited projects explored academic publication and collaboration and misogyny in American

culture, which each amplified the voices and intellectual contributions of undergraduate and graduate students and early- and late-career scholars, including colleagues in contingent positions. Developing and managing projects like these had allowed me to blend what I found to be the very best parts of academic work—collaboration, collective inquiry, mutual mentoring—with scholarly publication and produced intellectual insights that would not have existed without the multi-vocal and often interdisciplinary approach facilitated by edited collections. In each of these projects, as I read drafts of contributors' work, offered feedback, engaged in conversation via email, the larger project goals were shaped as much by my own vision as by the new insights I gained from contributors' work. It was a privilege to develop, manage, and contribute to projects like these, and I took seriously the responsibility of framing and making public contributors' intellectual work in ways that extended and complicated ongoing scholarly conversations and facilitated professional and career goals. Although I often revealed pieces of myself as an editor and as a contributor in those projects—how they came to be, how and why I was invested in the topics and the work, where I entered these conversations, and why I found value in the work and its contributions to scholarship in the field—this sharing of “my way in” did not reveal what I would later identify as a whole self. While I recognized that the act of editing a collection required claiming and making space for the work, for the voices and contributions of each of the collection's authors, it did not always feel like an active process of making space—both physical and rhetorical—for myself, for my identity, for my lived experience.

It was through this process of making and claiming space—in imagining taking up physical space in our published scholarship and rhetorical space in our field—that I began to confront and, simultaneously, to resist the connections between positionality, acknowledging positionality, and inviting readers to question (my) belonging. I wondered, for example,

When I tell this personal story, will readers question if I'm the right person to tell it? If I am “first-gen” enough?

What would it look like or mean to claim positionality or a group membership and identity in this context?

In what ways would that claiming mean my positionality, my identity was fixed?

Can my positionality change? If I claim one key facet of my identity to enter one rhetorical space, am I permitted to enter a different space differently?

How might sharing this personal story invite colleagues to question if I am qualified to be in this field, to enter this space?

I confronted what I came to understand as the double bind of positionality and exposure. In the telling, revealing, making visible, uncovering, stepping

forward we are also inviting the gaze, inquiry, scrutiny, questioning, a potential looking away. What I underestimated in this process, what had not been so viscerally, physically apparent and felt in my previous projects was the emotional labor of this work. The effect of having to articulate—to make meaning from the whole of my lived experience. Although scholars have explored the significance of emotional labor in our field in various facets of our professional work, including administration, the emotional labor of writing when we are the subject of our own theorizing is an entirely different kind of labor. While this negotiation of emotional labor was clear to me in other parts of my work, having served by the time of writing the chapter and working on the collection in various administrative roles, contending with this emotional work in my writing was new. Yet what I was experiencing was not solely about my writing or writing process but rather about whether I should be writing *about* writing and the teaching of writing given what increasingly felt like a tenuous, questionable authority and dissonance about myself and my identity as a writing scholar.

This emotional labor was the product of making my story both public and felt. A feeling of swimming and of being engulfed, of both being inside of and part of, and analyzing while trying to make space. Revisiting my writing process makes this journey of unraveling, of openness and retreating clear, especially in my resistance to finishing a chapter draft for the collection until the final manuscript was due. Instead, reaching for published scholarship helped me to make sense of my experiences and to build connections with other scholars. This liminal space left me wanting to assimilate, fade into the background, become subsumed into someone else's theoretical explanation and not to become the central focus of my own narrative. In the midst of the doubt I was experiencing about what I could truly *know*, it was easier to lean on, to add to, to extend the conversation rather than take it in a radically new direction or to ask what if there is a different way, a different experience, another way of knowing. I found comfort—and, perhaps, a layer of invisibility—in the reading and research process as well as in the reading and rereading and offering feedback on contributors' proposals, then first drafts, then subsequent drafts. As a step toward writing my own story, I began a notes document in November 2015, worked on notes from scholarly sources from September 2015 through April 2018, and then moved to a notes-to-draft document in April 2018, after proposals and drafts had long been accepted from contributors and multiple drafts had been revised. Both aware of this resistance and avoiding confronting or exploring it, I eventually emerged from the liminal space with these opening lines of the first full draft: "Crafting this chapter—similar to my story of literacy and of conscious language development—has been a journey of reflecting and recovering, of questioning and realization, of silencing and coming to voice."

At moments, the process was overwhelming, and then, at once it felt like crossing a threshold into acceptance and belonging. As an editor, this double bind also forced me to confront what felt like gatekeeping practices grounded in privilege. At the level of meta-analysis of the project and of my dual roles as co-editor

and contributor, the issue of gatekeeping was complex and ever present as we explore in the collection's introduction:

As teacher scholars, many of [the] collection's contributors participate in [a] process of gatekeeping in some way by teaching in these fields while also attempting to disrupt policy and conversations concerning literacy and language. Their narratives call us to consider when the authors' own literacy, legitimacy, and citizenship have been questioned [as revealed in the individual narratives shared], when (if ever) they are sanctioned to participate in the gatekeeping that is institutional literacy. (Figueiredo & Guglielmo, 2019, p. 10)

Similarly, what right did I have to ask contributors to tell such personal stories when I was withholding elements of my own. And what responsibility did I have to not only ensure the work was published but also that it was framed with care and intentionality, including with attention to the implications of this work on professional careers and future scholarly contributions? This was one of the moments, perhaps, when I realized how much more of myself I could and should—would have to—reveal in my own narrative. I was, after all, through my feedback, asking contributors to say more, to share more of themselves and the intricate details of their lived experiences. How could I justify not doing the same? How could I authentically share this work with the field while withholding parts of myself, my motivations, my story?

The nature of the project also included the added layer of revealing much more about our family histories—including my own—than we often do in our academic work and what that means about whose story we each get to tell. Although I had written about various parts of my lived experience in previous projects, telling my personal story of finding my way to the work, those rhetorical moves seemed to represent segmented pieces of a complete professional identity that only began to blur the public and private, professional and personal. When our stories of positionality are inevitably grounded in our lived experiences, how do we ethically, compassionately, and authentically represent the experiences of family, friends, mentors, colleagues, students in ways that avoid one-dimensional versions of complex realities? At each turn in the project were “questions of how we know what we know, what is persuasive, and the legitimate status of certain kinds of knowledge,” and in appreciating how “this collection speaks less to a mastery of identity and more to the process of negotiating the encounters and relations through which [we] have attuned themselves to the dynamic unfolding of experience,” I came to understand the dynamic complexity of positionality (Figueiredo & Guglielmo, 2019, p. 4).

Negotiating my own positionality in this project also facilitated my way into belonging because I had acknowledged publicly the multiple positions from which I do this work and how they shape my teaching, scholarship, and mentoring.

Given the focus of my teaching and scholarship, I recognized elements of this process as a feminist rhetorical practice: not only a way of “build[ing] theory from description of where [we are] in the world,” as Sara Ahmed (2017) describes, but also a way of writing myself into the space by identifying a silence or omission on the lived histories of scholars in the field who identify as first generation connected to immigrant status (p. 4). As we share in the introduction, “Collectively, these narratives function as counterstory, disrupting those public and academic conversations in varied and complex ways that resist stereotypes about language and literacy, unsettle mandates for fixed identities, and extend our definitions of first generation in the academy” (Figueredo & Guglielmo, 2019, p. 6). This project was a way of writing us—myself—into the broader growing narrative of first-gen in higher ed, including first-gen faculty, which did not yet fully represent our experiences.

The writing and publishing experience also has facilitated my own more deliberate and open engagement with positionality because, in this project, I felt I had put it all on the table. The project and my individual chapter allowed me to shape and to share a more complete narrative with room to explore the how and why of my work. And having published a collection of first-generation immigrant scholars meant that part of my identity was officially claimed. This claim facilitated how I entered teaching and scholarly space, including the space of my undergraduate and graduate classrooms. Telling my own story allowed me to interrogate my assumptions about teaching, learning, literacy, and the ways that I can show up as my authentic self in teaching and scholarship, ways that create space for marginalized voices and for emerging scholars. My chapter, like many of those shared by the collection’s contributors, reveals the multiple negotiations, the bargains, the naming, sometimes as we name ourselves, our identities, our languages, and more often how we are *named* outside of ourselves, in ways we do not choose. For me, this complex process played out in school settings across my education and career, experiences that would later invite interrogation of “their intersection with systems of power in our classrooms and in our professional work?” (Figueredo & Guglielmo, 2019, p. 11). In this way, theorizing and consistently sharing this counterstory (see Martinez, 2020) has allowed me to consider its role in my teaching and the feminist rhetorical theory and practices that underscore my pedagogy, making room for students to share their own positionalities as a step toward inclusivity. At the same time, however, this project has helped me to articulate more clearly the intersections between this lived experience and imposter syndrome and the complexity of inclusion, urging us as to remain mindful of “the risks we may ask our students to take in [classroom] spaces,” what we ask them to reveal, to name (Figueredo & Guglielmo, 2019, p. 10).

Reflecting on the varied ways that my experience co-editing this project has facilitated intimate and ongoing engagement with positionality, I see potential for generative conversation on how editing can and perhaps should serve as a call—a reflective moment—for us to think deeply and share publicly our own

positionalities as we identify and find connection with topics and figures and theories and ways of doing and of being in this work. To explore what it means to add our voices to conversations on these topics, to move these conversations in new directions, and to create space for new voices and new perspectives in our roles as editor-mentors.

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Chapter 9.A Dialog on Positionality, Mentoring, and Impermanence

Ritika Popli

COLGATE UNIVERSITY

Meg Worley

COLGATE UNIVERSITY

The following is a conversation between Ritika Popli (female, Pre-tenure, international faculty, recent immigrant) and Meg Worley (female, tenured, department chair, US citizen).

mw: Mentorship is rooted in positionality and imbalance: Mentors are seen as older and wiser, mentees as younger and greener. The goal is to lessen that imbalance of knowledge, but too often the assumption is that the mentor will always be wiser than the mentee. Just the suffixes -or (actor) and -ee (acted upon) inscribe the centrality of position on the relationship.

The word “mentor” comes from the *Odyssey*, where Mentor is an older man charged by Odysseus to take care of the household while he is away at the Trojan War. The goddess Athena, however, disguises herself as Mentor to advise Odysseus’ son on his travels to find his father, and negotiates peace in the last line of the epic. The human Mentor is almost a neoliberal functionary, protecting the system, while the goddess-Mentor is concerned for a son in need.

Rp: Meg’s etymological explanation is important. Mentoring relationships are not meant to be permanent. Of course, they could be—but by nature are not meant to be. The insistence on mentoring as a permanent relationship is problematic as it does not consider the evolving nature of positionality. Moreover, if the experience is not a positive one, it can end with despondency, anxiety, guilt, and even hostility.

Our conversations over the last two years reflect awareness of our positions—in terms of race, academic rank, nationality, (im)migrant, disciplinary training. Growing up in Delhi, India, I observed rigid gender, caste, class, and other social hierarchies where transgressions were rare and came at a huge cost. Even the advice my mother gave me when I was at the airport boarding the flight to Chicago was “stay invisible. The more you get noticed you can cause trouble for yourself.” She was only passing down advice she had inherited while leading a patriarchal life—probably not the best advice for American academia. Invisibility is structurally antithetical to academia. In the US, we are advised to contribute in discussions, publish more, go to conferences and be visible, but that advice is not always easy to follow.

As department chair Meg is expected to pass down information which is required to function effectively (and often survive). She does not sieve information and simply pass it on, instead she often elaborates and contextualizes it in the history of the institution. It can be particularly challenging to navigate a space such as Colgate (a small liberal arts college in rural New York). Overwhelming whiteness makes its presence felt in the everyday, and many expectations are only implied. However, I do not feel shut down by the institutional definition of our relationship. In fact, Meg has gently nudged me to develop more confidence in my abilities and judgment.

mw: Ritika is right about the official structure of mentorship in our relationship as chair and pre-tenure faculty. At the same time, it really chafes, and I find myself working against it. Most of the time, it doesn't feel like "mentorship"; rather, I know some stuff, and I'm sharing it with the great colleague in the office next to mine. But Ritika may not see it that way. I suspect that our mentoring relationship is disproportionately conditioned by my own informal attitude and style of collegiality. The crux of the mentoring relationship at all times is the extent to which the mentee is free to (and feels free to) reject the advice of the mentor, and I can't lose sight of that, informality notwithstanding. Ideally, every mentor fits their style to the needs of the mentee, and if my casual style had been an issue for Ritika, I would have adjusted my level of formality.

Rp: It can be difficult to arrive at the informality in a relationship. Perhaps this is where Meg and I diverge. It is true that Meg's personality has allowed for our dynamic to be that of friend-colleagues from the start. However, in previous formal mentoring relations there was a cost to not heeding the advice. The cost could sometimes even be severe. One way in which I have overcome the tendency to mimic hierarchy is to think of the impermanence of mentoring. Investing and building long-lasting relationships is key, but relationships evolve. The terms do not have to be permanently defined and fixed.

Whether enduring or not, ultimately, for any mentoring relationship to be an enriching experience, mentors and mentees should share the same set of responsibilities: Honesty, mutual respect, clarity of expectations, transparency, generosity, empathy. These responsibilities, when taken seriously, can even foretell the end of the mentoring relationship—regardless of shifting power dynamics—and set the conditions under which the relationship may be transformed into something new.

Chapter 10. Pitch Mode: Acquiring Reflexivity in Scholarly Journal Editing

Christopher D. M. Andrews
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY–CORPUS CHRISTI

First Things First

- I am an educated white man with tenure at my R2 institution.
- I am a first-generation student—my father and I graduated from college at about the same time. I live in a slightly less red region of a deeply red state.
- I have most of the correct politics for the academy.
- I have three children, who I raised with my wife of almost twenty years. My kids are teenagers, so it was (mostly) easy to make time to write this chapter.
- We have serious chronic illness in the family. We also have great health insurance.
- I'm the chair of my English department. I'm busy. We're all busy.
- My PhD is in technical communication, and I teach and study online writing practices and technical communication university programs.
- I'm a co-managing editor (alongside my other co-, the brilliant Erin K. Bahl) at the longest continuously running open-access scholarly multimedia journal, where I've worked for more than a decade.

I like bullet lists—which sounds like a silly aside, but they're a good symbol of all the weird intersections in my identity. Accessible design is important, but so is efficiency. Hierarchy doesn't matter so much to me, but that's easy to say when you're in the empowered group. I acknowledge that I have an immense privilege to choose what I work on, when, and where. I am self-reflexively aware that because of the things that I am, and not just the manner in which I do those things, I have considerable influence and direct, institutionally-backed power to make decisions about other people's experiences, learning, and careers. I keep a paper journal—most of the time—to help me reflect on my preconceptions, and try to intentionally seek out collaboration to ensure that my own assumptions are not the only ones I hear. I also have to work extra-hard, I've found, to be reflexive, to self-check and find where I enact invisible, unintentional, but oh-so whiteboy agendas.

Be Quiet and Listen

It's February in Chicago, Illinois. It's cold and snowy. (I'm from humid, grungy coastal Texas; I'm used to winters around 65 degrees and sunny, though I do

appreciate the opportunity to use my winter coat for more than an afternoon or two.) It's late, and conference goers are off doing the variety of things we do in the evenings. (Anything after 7:00 pm is questionable in my comfortable middle agedness.) I pass quietly through the multilayer lower level of the Hilton Chicago's conference area—through the lobby, into the silent main auditorium, through a side door, then back out and around the corner on the lobby level because that was wrong, then around more corners, down a half-flight of stairs, through a foyer jammed with tables usually populated by event staff and sticker-wielding groups through the day but empty now except for discarded flyers and poster tripods, and into the echoing chamber that is Continental C.

Michael Faris and I have volunteered to represent *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* at a Cross-Caucus/Cross-SIG Engagement Event at the 2023 4Cs Annual Convention. As framed by the invitation email, this was to be a mingle and network and pitch event for a loosely-structured set of groups from Caucuses and Special Interest Groups who would come to brainstorm projects and research proposals. Invited journal editor representatives would act as “judges” for proposals that we might be interested in mentoring through conceptualization.

When I described my conference plans to another colleague earlier in the year, he jokingly referred to it as “Academic Journal *Shark Tank*” and the idea had, for good or ill, kind of stuck in my brain. And so mental leviathans circled below the surface of my imagination as I met Michael at the bottom of the stairs to the overly large banquet room where this social event was scheduled. Were there even a dozen of us in a room set up for hundreds? It was sparsely attended as only an academic conference event can be, with a few micro groups of people who sort of knew each other, a few pairs that knew each other well, but little overlap. The original organizers ended up having to cancel their trip to 4C's, and so the event was being run by another colleague willing to stand in: someone who knew the original plan but wasn't over-committed to it. Some of the other editors that appeared on the convention program were, well, no-shows. Noting the sparse attendance (representatives from four journals, and five attendees from caucuses), editors decided to flip the script and just have an open, round-table style mentoring conversation about scholarly publishing. We circled up chairs and tables, introduced representatives from journals, and invited folks to talk about their ideas and experiences with publishing in rhetoric and composition. I can see now in my memory what I didn't see then: journal representatives on one side, caucus attendees on the other. Giant gutters of space between journals and scholars.

During the round of introductions and the usual editors' patter about what each journal focuses on and what each person's role is there, one participant characterized scholarly publishing in composition and rhetoric studies as a love-fest, using warm, almost familial terms to describe a more-often-than-not inclusive set of publications and experiences. Insert the requisite nodding from other journal representatives. Almost immediately, three other attendees (ones not attached

to the journals represented there, all women from identity caucuses and visually presenting as from marginalized groups) disagreed, pushing back against that version of the discipline and dramatizing through sharing various clipped acquisition and peer review stories that scholarly publishing—even in our beloved writing studies—is exclusionary of authors, cultures, methodologies, and modes of research that don't fit within traditional limits of writing studies scholarship.

Perhaps primed by the event's description but certainly inhabited easily by the mentality of an acquisitions editor always seeking a great new piece, myself and other editors in the room snapped quickly into pitch mode. "If you did that at *Kairos*, you could include these stories, and work with digital photos in this way, and we just expanded our editorial board in these other ways to combat just the kind of unjust reviewing you've been describing." Around the room we went, describing the different angles that could be highlighted inside our different publications. Nearly shaking, another participant held up a hand to stop us. To speak up and remind us something important: that her colleague wasn't telling us her story because it needed to be published. Instead, she was telling us because—clearly—we needed to hear it. I won't share those women's stories here—not because I don't remember them, but because sneaking their stories in as my own publication isn't the point. Because they're not my stories to tell. A hush fell on the room. Recognition. Listening?

Pitch Mode

As an editor focused on the acquisitions, intake, and review end of a scholarly journal, and one who is committed to mentoring authors and drumming up new authors and interesting ideas for scholarly work to the journal, it can be exceptionally hard to get out of what I've come to call "pitch mode." Pitch mode is a sometimes-useful state of mind where anything and everything is a cool idea for a publication. Someone tells you about a course project they did. Oh, if you did X, Y, and Z you could totally turn that into an excellent scholarly text. Give a good presentation at a conference? Hey you should totally submit that as a webtext for *Kairos*. Someone howls about something on Twitter or shares an idea for a side project they've been holding on to a long time and haven't seen a good outlet for yet? Hey, wouldn't it be cool to turn that into a *Kairos* piece! And so forth.

Pitch mode is necessary for facilitating research and scholarly excellence in our field. As editors of research publications, it's our job to amplify scholarship, to facilitate and help bring conversations into being, to connect communities, to help authors crystallize ideas and guide them through the publication process. But as with all organizations, there's another, more pragmatic way to describe this necessity: it's our job to fill journal issues, to be expedient consumers of ideas. And pitch mode helps with that, too.

Pitch mode is a great mode to slip into at the (mostly) regular *Kairos Open House* sessions we held throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Open Houses were

Zoom-mediated hours where we were trying to make ourselves accessible and inclusive, with an explicit turn to mentoring named as one of our journal's goals following the fall 2020 Technical & Professional Communication journal editor's Listening Sessions on inclusivity in scholarly publishing (Ball, "Logging On," *Kairos* 25.2). In our Open House sessions, potential authors, new authors, and just the webtextually-curious were invited to ask questions about journal practices and policies, pick editors' brains about the viability of research ideas or how to frame something specific for publication, or even make pitches for ideas they're working on. The editorial staff in each open house, a rotating cast of senior and section editors drawn from different parts of the journal staff hierarchy, is invited to respond, providing ideas, encouragement, and in-the-moment mentoring. Because *Kairos* publishes multimodal webtexts that center design and interactivity in ways that traditional journals don't, potential authors often ask questions about how to create arguments that demand or necessitate interactivity and seek feedback about their conceptual ideas. We encourage questions like how to get started with creating a webtext or what makes particular sections and genres in our journal distinct from one another, and we often share examples of pieces in our responses. First-time authors often want to know how to write a query letter to an editor, and are concerned about how design requirements can be a high bar; they also come in with questions about how to shape their pieces. I've definitely learned how to listen for when authors indicate they're receptive to our ideas, and when, as editors, we can push a little too hard on how we might design a piece ourselves and need to settle back into encouraging rather than generating. That's one of the tricky components of the open house—balancing the author's ideas with the editors'. Ultimately, these meetings are designed around pitch mode, where any idea, no matter how weird or unconventional or unformed, is a good one. I adopt the pitch mode mentality a lot when I'm responding to email queries for the journal (and though I can't speak for my co-editors and collaborators, I think they do, too): authors with a rough draft and ideas for a webtext who just need some advice and affirmation before they really commit to the laborious process of authoring (not to mention multimodal digital authoring) an entire scholarly work. "Hey, do you think this will work?" Pitch mode answers with an emphatic yes!, suggests three ideas, asks a question, and definitely encourages you to follow up with any questions or issues.

When I recall how easy it was on that Thursday night in February to slip into acquisitions instead of having a first reaction to sit, listen, and take ownership, I think about the conflicted identities and representations of editors in our scholarship. Robert Connors referred to editors as "gates." Melissa Ianetta wrote about the behind-the-scenes nature of editors' work and has characterized the editor as mostly invisible—she describes lots of fantastic and colorful characters in the variety of roles editors inhabit, but invisible sticks out to me the most. I've always edited the journal at a distance. *Kairos* is an independent and fully-digital journal that doesn't live at a specific institution with a press named after a state

university or anything like that. It's always been email, Yahoo! Groups, Google Groups, Slack, Zoom video, and probably Discord in the future, but always and again yet more email. I don't meet authors very much, personally, and am happily unseen in my quiet editing cave. Editors are behind the scenes folks and, in my experience, largely expect to be that way. Invisible, we acquire and consume the work and stories of others. For me, personally, when editing is so much correspondence rather than the scents of rooms, the coldness of the weather, the stares of not-potential authors, it's easy to slip into pitch mode, to let it take over. I forget myself, and thus let myself run rampant.

One important tool among many that we've added to our publishing inclusivity toolkit at *Kairos* to push back against just these sorts of tendencies is the "Anti-Racist Scholarly Reviewing Practices" heuristic for editors and reviewers; it has played an outsized role individually for me and is proving to be so organizationally for the journal.

Working with and Responding to the Heuristic

Over the last five years, the journal has been intentionally working on our inclusivity practices and actions, including forming a task force, a committee, and a public-facing Inclusivity Action Plan. Each of these pieces (they're published, you can read about them at the journal's website, so I won't overspend my time on all of them here)—along with our long-formed editorial habit to team up and work through most everything collectively or collaboratively—plays a significant role in ensuring that (we hope) the journal is not just effective but also inclusive.

I've found that for me—always expediency-minded—one of the hardest things to move past is a long-engrained desire (bound deeply in my sense of busy-ness) to say "we're ahead of the game, because I can identify how we do these things already." When you're volunteering and teaching and writing and all the other things, being efficient and spending just enough time on tasks to meet due diligence is a siren call. I love that phrase—siren call. It suggests a duality, connoting both something that distracts you from a goal by calling you away and also something that pulls your head up and tells you to get out of other people's way.

Taking up the authors' calls to endorse, adopt, commit and use the heuristic, in January of 2023 the journal's newly-formed DEI committee (a mixed group of review board members along with senior and newer editors) formally adapted the document as a reflexive analytical tool. Each week, committee members identified a section of the heuristic to reflect on and comment individually in a shared Google document; as a group we would come together on Zoom to discuss each item in turn. Each subsection, made up of 5-12 bullet-listed active verb commitment statements, promotes self-examination on multiple layers of the editorial workflow. Looking back at my comments as I write this, I notice that nearly all of my additions are "we do this, we do that, we do it already." "Reviewers and editors frame reviewer comments to support author revisions." *Check*. "Editors

proactively contact reviewers to offer deadline extensions or new deadlines.” *Check*. “Editors send all reviewer feedback and editorial framing of reviews to authors and reviewers, while applying anti-racist editorial judgment on if and how to send the feedback in cases of racist reviews.” *Check, check, check*. Moving on.

Thankfully, my voice is not the only one doing this work. With each “We do this” is a follow-up from someone else on the team: How? Where? Are you sure? Along with the heuristic, that’s the second (maybe the first) most important tool: collaboration and community on everything. As an academic, as a technical communicator, and as a parent, this is—and has to be—a running theme. All of my most memorable and exciting research projects, publications, and program-building events have been collaborative, often in a large team. My first publication as a doctoral student was co-authored with 12 people; when my peers voted to put me in charge of managing everyone’s assignments and helping to ensure all the individual pieces were composed in a connected way was an important lesson in considering discovery, drafting, and editing as a massive task of “co-”. Another important moment in collaboration was as new faculty member at my current institution. In that first year, the writing studies faculty started a project to design and develop an innovative new graduate program. My new faculty mentor pulled me in as a co-editor of the proposal and application, and I was introduced to writing and working with eight other faculty members at an array of positionalities on and off the tenure track as well as a range of partners across the university (from the provost’s office to the library). I was particularly invested in course design and naming the program, but I had to quickly learn as a shiny new PhD in Technical Communication that my vision could not only be my own. Even working with my daughter’s medical care partners (16 different specialists in 6 different fields over 16 years, along with uncountable nurses, technicians, and office staff members) has taught me the value of many hands. Working as co-managing editor, instead of the sole arbitrator of authority on any given text, means I must be open to feedback and correction and sharing of vision, whether it comes from one of our senior editors, my co-managing editor Erin Bahl, or folks on the journal’s team of section editors. I must be open to another point of view. Self-reflexivity alone is not enough—the good will of individuals is important, but working against systematic oppression requires collective action.

Pitch mode is a tricky component of an editorial mindset, one factor in the delicate balancing act between authorship, collaboration, and editorship. Editing is entrepreneurial—it’s looking for value in ideas, balancing the risk of time and resources and completion and expectations about how peer reviewers will, won’t, or might act against the author’s career needs and visions for their work, against the author’s desires to contribute to conversations and say their piece. The pitch mentality is important for sustaining submissions and ensuring research projects get wider impact through publication. Simultaneously, pitch mode can be oblivious and even white supremacist in its desire to relentlessly gobble up stories for future tables of contents. It is easy for editors and reviewers to red-line their way

through a submission with perspectives and feedback that ultimately turn the author's piece into the reviewer's piece—when we ask authors to straighten out a crooked passage, or when we pile on suggested citations and ask for significant revisions that depart from the author's original vision. Editors work within ecologies of reviewer and editor guidelines, journal editorial policies, workflows and procedures, staff hierarchies, and disciplinary networks. Within all of that, and hidden behind signature lines in correspondence, it's vital that editors—that I—get out from behind the pile of documents and emails, talk to authors, and most importantly, shut up and listen when they wave their hands in my face and say “wait, that's wrong; no, this isn't for you.” The work is not your own, in more ways than one.

Section 3. Between Disciplines

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.

Chapter 11. “Quadeesh hathi?”: Negotiating Positionality as a Transnational Filmmaker

Kefaya Diab

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHARLOTTE

In 2019, I was in Tunis City in Tunisia conducting interviews for my research project around the role of affects (emotions) in pushing people to revolt and protest in the streets in 2010-11. During one of my breaks, I went shopping at the old market in the city, accompanied by a Tunisian guide and friend, Montasar. Cautioning me about merchants’ tendency to raise prices for foreigners, Montasar suggested that I didn’t speak to the shop owners and workers and let him manage the bargaining part. As I paid attention to Montasar’s Tunisian Arabic dialect, which is different from my urban Jordanian-Palestinian Arabic dialect, I picked up some of the bargaining phrases, so I started communicating with merchants by asking “Qadeesh hathi?” which meant “how much is this?” While Montasar was impressed by my attempts to speak the Tunisian dialect, one shop owner recognized my non-Tunisian accent immediately and asked, “Where are you from?” I answered, “I am Palestinian, born and raised in Jordan.” And that was like a magical answer. His face lit up, and with a wide smile on his face, he shook my hand enthusiastically with both hands welcoming me warmly. From there, the man gave me huge discounts on the clothes I bought, which left Montasar amazed and speechless. After that, in other shops, I got out of my silence, and spoke proudly and confidently in my Jordanian-Palestinian accent, revealing my identity whenever I was asked where I was from.

That incident summarizes the Tunisian hospitality toward me. Although initially Montasar cautioned me of introducing myself as a researcher in the U.S. academia, I found people very welcoming to me as soon as they knew I was Palestinian-Jordanian. It helped that there are strong ties and a shared history between Tunisians and Palestinians. That is, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was welcomed in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, after it was kicked out of Beirut-Lebanon in the early eighties. During their residency in Tunis, Israel massacred Palestinian members of the PLO and Tunisian citizens in what is known as the Hammam Al Shat massacre on October 1, 1985. In my interviews with Tunisians, they indicated that the massacre was one where the Palestinian and Tunisian blood mixed, which strengthened their bond as Arabs in resistance to Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

My initial research project in Tunisia inspired me to work on a documentary film about the Tunisian revolution in the winter of 2022. As I reflect on my

communication with Tunisians as a Palestinian-Jordanian scholar and documentary filmmaker, I recognize how privileged I was, as my research experience in Tunisia was all facilitated by my identity and positionality as a scholar of Palestinian origin. This positionality granted me positive connections with Tunisians who were eager to help with my project. Yet, while I succeeded in prioritizing my relationship with the research and documentary film participants over the final products, I also fell short in some areas. Specifically, I felt that what Tunisian citizens gained from my projects was less than what I earned. In this chapter, I reflect on three areas of my research relationship with Tunisian citizens responding to Shawn Wilson's emphasis on the researcher's "relational accountability" (2001, p.177). The three areas are monetary compensation, authorship, and intellectual property ownership. I then illustrate how I attempted to sustain a positive relationship with my research participants after the end of some research and documentary film phases, despite the hiccups throughout the research and documentary filmmaking processes.

A Research Context

In my research and documentary film design, I was inspired by indigenous research methodology, articulated by Shawn Wilson (2001; 2020). Wilson emphasizes "relational accountability" where a researcher needs to continually think of and question their role and responsibility toward their research participants (2001, p.177). I was aware of the ways researchers dehumanize and colonize their research subjects. Despite the Institutional Research Board (IRB) regulations, more often than not, researchers gain the benefits of publicity, promotion, recognition, and tenure while leaving their subjects without any benefits. Therefore, I was determined to treat Tunisian citizens as partners in my research and, later, my documentary film project.

In the summer of 2019, I traveled to Tunisia to interview Tunisian citizens who contributed to the Tunisian revolution of 2010-11 to be part of my monograph. My friend and PhD student colleague, at that time, Akram, put me in contact with his friend, Montassar, in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. In his turn, Montassar helped me locate research participants and accompanied me during my travels in Tunisia's various cities and towns, all for no compensation other than my extended friendship. Another person, my host, Maryam, who I rented a room from, also helped me connect with her friend Hayat, who also connected me to other participants. Tunisian citizens showed high generosity in welcoming me and introducing me to more citizens, which supported my research project and contributed to its success.

The idea for the documentary film arose in that summer where many Tunisians told me they were dissatisfied with mainstream Arabs and Western media coverage of their revolution. These coverages, Tunisians critiqued, left out many important factors and participants that contributed to the revolution, such as

women and inner cities population. Thus, I decided to go back to Tunisia to film and produce a documentary film, narrated by those who contributed to the Tunisian revolution across the country in 2010-11.

I wanted to make a documentary film with Tunisians rather than about them. I wanted Tunisians to be the ones who decided the storyline and documentary focus. I envisioned Tunisian citizens filming the interviews and other footage and asking the interview questions they found adequate. I expected the project to take a few years and to start with me and, perhaps, another filmmaker from Tunisia, to train a group of 4-6 Tunisians from various areas of Tunisia on the basics of filmmaking. The training was to include conducting interviews, filming, audio recording, and video editing. The group and I were going to decide a storyline for the documentary together, film the documentary interviews for a year, and finally work with a professional Tunisian video editor to compose the footage into the story that we drew. Such a project seemed ambitious, but I was confident in making it happen with the main challenge of securing adequate funds to pay Tunisian novice filmmakers and documentary participants stipends to compensate their labor.

Working on the Documentary

In the summer of 2022, I returned to Tunisia to conduct more interviews for my monograph and gauge interest among Tunisians for making the documentary film. With the help of Montassar, I found through the Ministry of Culture that foreign filmmakers were not allowed to make any films on their own but rather in collaboration with Tunisian filmmakers and film production companies. Thus, my mission became finding a Tunisian film production company with which to collaborate.

That's where I got lucky. Maryam's boyfriend, Taher, connected me with his filmmaker friend, Maher. Maher suggested that a collective documentary with many filmmakers wasn't practical. As he insisted, the documentary needed one leader with a clear vision to guide the process of filmmaking. He highlighted the logistic difficulties that would arise from relying on multiple novice filmmakers to capture the interviews and form the storyline. Maher invited me to watch his documentary about one hundred years of resistance in Tunisia, titled "Karama Be Doon Tarkhees" in English, "Dignity without a License." I was astonished by the documentary's level of professionalism. The well-made documentary enhanced Maher's credibility in suggesting that I be the sole director of the documentary film while he would provide the filming and video-editing equipment, take care of the paperwork, and acquire a filming license from the Ministry of Culture.

With a humble budget of \$7,000 left over from my startup money at UNC Charlotte, I decided to proceed with the documentary film in collaboration with Maher. From Charlotte, NC, I met with Maher via Zoom for a few months to prepare for the film. My vision was to make a documentary to track the progress of the Tunisian revolution through narratives about Tunisians' emotions throughout the revolution. Working on the storyboard, Maher gave so much input that I decided

he should be a co-director of the film, as his contribution exceeded the role of renting me his company's equipment. While I thought the film needed to be made in stages, Maher insisted on filming and editing the footage into a short documentary of 20 minutes during my next visit to Tunisia. I thought that was not fair to Maher and the rest of the crew he would hire, as my budget was too humble. I suggested to Maher that we do only the first stage of filming with the budget we had, then with the plan to secure more external funds to finish filming and then edit the footage into a documentary film. However, being unemployed for a long time in the documentary filmmaking industry in Tunisia, Maher was eager to demonstrate his talents and capabilities with the hope that the film would bring him more work. Under his pressure, I gave in and agreed to make the full film at once, and that is what he committed to in the contract between him and the UNC at Charlotte.

Monetary Compensation

Because I agreed to rush into the project without securing adequate funds, I couldn't compensate the interviewees in exchange for their labor. However, since we arranged to meet several interviewees at filming locations other than their homes, I was determined to pay participants for their transportation out of pocket. Some interviewees accepted my offer with hesitance, while others welcomed it. In other cases, Maher cautioned me against offering compensation as it could be culturally offensive and inappropriate. On one hand, as an Arab myself, I understood how sensitive Arabs can be about money, where they insist on offering their service for free even when they are in financial need. At the same time, residing in the U.S. for 13 years, at that time, I became more straightforward about money. Also, I was aware that many of our interviewees were in tight situations financially, but even if they weren't, I thought that monetary compensation was the right thing to do. Perhaps if I had already prepared the transportation money in envelopes affirming that they were within a research budget provided by my institution, I would have spared everybody the discomfort of speaking about money. As a way to show appreciation for the Tunisian citizens' contribution, however, I insisted whenever we had time to invite them to nearby restaurants and cafes for meals and drinks.

What I learned from that experience is that I always needed to include interviewees compensation as an essential element in any research fund that I acquire. However, I also noticed that monetary compensation is not the only way to recognize research participants' contributions. Including the participants in both the research and film agendas is as important to produce research and documentary films that reflect ordinary people's agendas and needs.

Authorship

My original plan was to make a documentary film with Tunisians rather than about them. However, I let logistical considerations deter me from that direction.

Ideally, I needed to invest more time meeting with the documentary film participants, explaining my story idea to them, and asking them for their input. I needed to meet with them several times and prepare them for the camera before I filmed the interviews. Instead of doing that, my work with Maher went without enough collaboration with the documentary participants.

This lack of collaboration appeared during the filmed interviews as the interviewees often didn't directly answer the interview questions and told other stories that we didn't ask about. However, to honor their stories, and despite logistics, I made sure to give the interviewees all the time they needed to narrate their own stories, even when they didn't comply with the story that I wanted to tell. I knew that such flexibility was going to be costly during the production process. For instance, moving the filmed interviews from the camera storage devices onto external hard disks was going to cost us long hours. Also, editing the footage to extract a few minutes from hours-long interviews and synchronizing the recorded sounds with the footage was going to be labor-intensive. For all these reasons, it became impossible to finish the full 20-minute documentary film within the month that I spent in Tunisia. Thus, I had to work hard to make the case to my department chair and college Dean to compensate Maher by paying him the full \$7,000 for filming the footage without editing it into a documentary. Making that case was stressful, time-consuming, and put me in a position of conflict with my department chair, but it was an ethical choice that I had to make.

As I started watching the footage after I returned to the U.S., I recognized the richness of the unplanned stories that could have been elaborated on by the Tunisian interviewees, had I spent more time planning the documentary film with them. Therefore, I contacted all the participants back in Tunisia to apologize to them for rushing the project and promised them to proceed with more consultations with them about the stories that they wished to tell about their revolution, even with me being the film director.

Ownership and Intellectual Property

Although non-academic documentary films don't require a consent form, they require a videography and photography release form as a legal document to guarantee the filmmaker permission to publish and distribute human interviews. For my documentary film in Tunisia, I adapted a release from a previous one that I used in the past when I worked for New Mexico State University (NMSU). The older form granted full ownership and intellectual property to the university and none to the interviewees. When I worked on documentary films for NMSU, I didn't question the ethicality of that videography/ photography release form, but I started questioning it when I used it with Tunisian interviewees.

I recall one particular interviewee's reaction, Tarek, who read the release form out loudly in a sarcastic voice, critiquing how it left the documentary film participants without any rights. Yet he signed the form at the end. Hosting us at

his home, he and his wife, Dalenda offered me and Maher tea, cake, and good conversations. Tarek showed us his impressive artwork, and when I asked to take photos of his work and maybe include it in the documentary film, he questioned who would have the intellectual property of his work in that case, and that made me feel ashamed of that release form that I circulated among the Tunisian interviewees.

The trust and hospitality that Tarek and Dalenda showed Maher and me contrasted the lack of trust that I showed them using that release form that gave me all the rights and gave them nothing. The form became an oppressive document and tool that I employed to affirm that the labor Tarek and the rest of the interviewees invested in the interviews was not worthy of intellectual property. If the documentary film was to win an award, for instance, it would be Maher and I who were to receive the award, and the interviewees would be reduced to subjects used to make a compelling argument in a documentary film. I understood of course, that I inherited the release form from others before me who created and circulated videography/photography release forms mostly to protect themselves from legal liability. However, I still own my mistake of choosing such a legally abusive document that reinforced the hierarchy between me and the film interviewees. Reworking the whole plan of the documentary film, I redesigned the consent form to distribute the intellectual property among the film participants and me equitably.

Moving Forward

While thinking of how to go back and rework my relationships with Tunisian participants, I understand that it should not happen as a list of actions. Rather, I need to follow a framework that dismantles the hierarchy between my research participants and me. I need to internalize and embody my communication with the research participants as a process of interaction with equal partners, where I make things with them, not about or for them. That applies not only to documentary films but also to any research-based project. I want the memories that my communication creates with the research partners to be positive, full of respect, enthusiasm, and engagement in a way where participants experience the benefits of the projects they contribute to.

It might not be possible for me at this point to secure funds to compensate previous Tunisian research and documentary film participants. However, I'll reach out to the Tunisian participants, explaining to them my reflection on the past. I'll commit to them that if I win any monetary or non-monetary awards, I will share the awards with them and always acknowledge their valuable contribution in any occasion where such acknowledgment is possible.

Research is public-facing work that requires genuine interest and care toward research participants before the research outcome itself. As academics, we will always benefit from our research, whether it is for publication, awards,

recognition, and/ or promotion. We can leave our research partners vulnerable even if we comply with the IRB requirements. The IRB doesn't ask us to maintain positive relationships during and after we conduct our research, but ethical considerations and compassion compel us to.

My research and documentary filmmaking experience in Tunisia made me recognize the importance of maintaining relationships after the end of the research project. I continue to try to implant that recognition in my students in their relationships with their research and documentary film partners.

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Chapter 12. Networking the Self and Subjects through Writing

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As a feminist rhetorical historiographer, I think about my positionality in relation to the historical subjects I recover as networked across space and time. Recently, my research has focused on the labor rhetorics of women who lived and worked in Chicago's West Side garment district in the early 20th century. There is vast space and time between me and my research subjects, and more differences of identity and experience than shared ones. This remains true even though my great-great grandmother, Tekla Maztak, was a garment worker who immigrated to Chicago in 1900. Though she and I share a familial lineage, I was not at first sure how my workplace labor of research, writing, and teaching might be in conversation with Tekla's garment making. Yet, as my research progressed, I noticed we were connected through how we related to the rhetorical modes we used to express the value and condition of labor. Specifically, my research subjects and I were networked—connected in patterned ways, though not through direct or linear relationships—by our access to and uses of writing.

As a writing professor, it has been at times all too easy for me to understand my workplace labor of writing as offering me a path to class mobility and transformation. What I better appreciated from studying historical women garment workers like my great-great grandmother is that many, including myself, experience writing as a fraught mode of expression because it is a site of inequitable access—it requires time, space, and materials to learn, produce and circulate—and is thus as much a barrier to claiming a middle-class identity and entry into a professional field as it is a pathway. Instead of writing, many garment workers favored embodied public actions such as protests, pickets, and parades to communicate their workplace labor was undervalued and exploited. Learning about women garment workers' relationships to writing helped me to reimagine my own. Instead of thinking of writing as a workplace product that made class mobility possible, I began to imagine it more as a process through which to build community, share and compare information, and support others in inquiry. For example, by talking with other writing professors about the difficulties of accessing the time, space, and resources needed for writing, I noticed that what seemed to be my individual workplace difficulties were in fact shared, as was the process of advocating for better conditions. In this way, I felt my own relationship to writing become more complicated and connected to the struggles and joys of other writers past and present.

Simultaneously, I began to understand that the promise of writing as a path to middle-class mobility was generational. As I learned more about my great-great-grandmother through the few records I could find about her life, I could glimpse her using writing to craft her own progress narrative into the American middle class. In 1900, Tekla was a machine operator, was married, and had recently immigrated from Poland at 20 years old. By 1910, Tekla Maztak had changed her name to Tillie Miller, and reported to a Census enumerator that she was a dressmaker, divorced, and had moved to a new, better tenement. Reading these reported details, I imagined Tekla using the Census enumerators' writing to memorialize her assimilationist and economic progress narrative in her Americanized name, specialized work role, and physical movement across the city. While Tekla was not writing herself, she used writing and bureaucratic processes to narrate her own transformation and mobility. This personal connection helped me to be more imaginative in noticing how other garment workers were using writing to narrate what their own progress looked like.

I hope other researchers might also notice how they are networked to the historical subjects they recover through their relationships to writing. When considering positionality, researchers might think about how their own values and beliefs about writing circulate in networks alongside those held by their research subjects. Ultimately, writing is a kind of labor, and noticing its accessibility and value across different moments of history is part of creating solidarity with research subjects.

Chapter 13. Between the Camera and the Self: Positionality and Reflexivity as a Scholar-Maker

Margaret Baker Ndwandwe
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The car pushed through the mist as I pulled in for the early morning interview. As the dew dried, the participant and I climbed the stairs of the home, opened the doors to the porch, pulled chairs for the conversation. We lightly chatted, and I unzipped my backpack to reveal the camera to set it up between us. She sat down, wringing her hands. The air shifted and anxiety entered the space. This is no ordinary home - this is Rose Hill Plantation State Historic Site, the former home of Secessionist South Carolina Governor William H. Gist and the nearly 200 enslaved members of his household. I am interviewing Enfinitee Irving, the Park Interpreter at the site and a Black South Carolinian (Baker, 2024).

As I sat across from Enfinitee, camera rolling between us, I felt a palpable tension arise. In that moment, I acutely felt my privilege and the power present in the act of filming. I needed to name this moment. My Whiteness, and my identity as a filmmaker collided with the weight of the plantation setting and Enfinitee's lived experiences as a Black woman with deep roots in South Carolina, and as a park interpreter at a plantation site. Naming the historical oppressions that framed our interaction to set the tone for an honest, respectful, sensitive and reflective dialogue. Creating a space of integrity, care and respect for Enfinitee required voicing the ongoing impacts of marginalization on her community.

As the interview began, Enfinitee shared stories not simply as narratives of the past but as lived experiences that inform the ethos of her work, and these stories directed the flow and content of our interview. I see this type of learning from Enfinitee as a way to challenge the perpetuation of structural violence often created by traditional modes of knowledge production.

As a filmmaker, I actively frame stories in a way that consciously molds viewers' perceptions. Directing the lens, choosing moments to capture, and sculpting the narrative places me in a powerful position that mediates how audiences connect with the participant. Through a participatory approach to filmmaking, I work to shift that balance of power. In asking participants to provide feedback at multiple points in the process - during planning, by watching their raw interview footage, and by commenting on drafts of the film - participants and I engage in transparent and critical dialogue about how they want to be represented. Thus, the film becomes a shared space where histories are not just told but are actively interpreted and reinterpreted. Rather than capturing

and presenting a static moment, filmmaking becomes a place of active co-creation and meaning-making.

Many limitations exist in this type of work. Despite my best efforts at true collaboration, my voice shapes the final narrative. The medium of film itself constrains the ability to fully capture the depth and nuance of complex histories and lived experiences, presenting an oversimplified portrayal. The act of filmmaking can reinforce existing power structures by framing stories through a limited lens. Reflexivity can help to answer these limitations by naming the complexities of positionality. Reflexivity is more than just a box to check off - it is a crucial practice that helps us actively engage with the identities we bring to our work. Through constant negotiation of our positionalities, I and other scholar-markers aspire to craft visual stories that, like bridges, not only connect past to present but also traverse the distance between teller and listener, fostering a collective sense of heritage and shared humanity.

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Section 4. Dissertation Writing

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.

Chapter 14. Positions of Change: How a Coupled Collaboration Disrupted the Dissertation System

Laura Mangini

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA

Sabatino Mangini

DELAWARE COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

If the shoe doesn't fit, must we change the foot?

– Gloria Steinem

The two of us wait in a narrow hallway. We are seated in separate chairs—our bodies situated shoulder to shoulder, our backs against the yellowing beige brick wall—and we look toward the small room where minutes earlier we concluded our five-chapter dissertation defense. The door to the room remains closed. We know our dissertation committee is discussing our presentation—our final shared act of a years-long process where we have positioned ourselves as the first-ever co-researchers in composition studies to collaborate throughout each stage of the dissertation process.

In a hotel room just miles from us, Laura's mother watches our two-year-old daughter, Elyse. Here, in a seemingly unpopulated campus building of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, we anticipate the moment our dissertation chair will emerge from the defense room, and we will learn if our non-traditional dissertation meets our institution's doctoral credentialing criteria—and if we have re-positioned ourselves as new PhD scholars in the academy.

In the silence of the hall, we read through part of the presentation that opened our defense:

Laura Mangini's dissertation text—*Collaborative Dissertations in Composition: A Feminist Disruption of the Status Quo*—communicates intertextually with Sabatino's dissertation text: *Composition and The Cooperative Dissertation Study: Our Collaborative Resistance*.

As co-researchers, we enacted what we are calling a *cooperative dissertation study*—a social constructionist narrative inquiry that responded to these main research questions:

- How does a collaborative dissertation challenge the status quo in composition?

- When two people collaborate on a composition dissertation, what experiential data can they gather through narrative inquiry?

As researcher-participants, we collaborated throughout the processes of researching and writing our dissertation chapters and intertexts (in-between chapters) as we composed two separate dissertation texts that shared the same data.

We positioned our “independent” dissertations as intertextual artifacts that worked together, sharing the same epistemology, methods, and critical-feminist advocacy for collaborative dissertations in composition.

Ahead, we step back a bit from our five-chapter defense day to show our *coupled collaboration* in action, demonstrating how composition’s resistance to a collaborative dissertation is real, contextual, and can be negotiated. We then define coupled collaboration, reflecting how our lived dissertation experiences had to happen first before we could identify, name, and understand this positioning of ourselves and our research.

And the chapter ends where it began, with us: a blending of then and now and the ongoing nature of our continued collaborations in work and life.

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From the start of our shared dissertation journey, we knew our status as ABD students would limit the scope of our agency—given how we were questioning and resisting a hierarchical system designed to evaluate and, potentially, credential us. We also knew our roles as researcher-participants would play an integral part in not only getting our research proposal approved but also in generating the narrative data we needed to resist the status quo of solo-authored dissertations.

We had to interpret how our doctoral program and graduate school system constructed rhetorical situations and genres that privileged specific ways of being, doing, and knowing—and constrained the worldviews and actions we wanted to explore in our dissertation research.

Below are the “eight steps” of our institution’s traditional composition dissertation model where one PhD student:

1. selects research topic;
2. invites three scholars to sit on his dissertation committee;
3. writes and submits a Research Topic Approval Form;
4. submits an Institutional Review Board Application;
5. writes the first three chapters of the dissertation;
6. participates in a three-chapter defense where the three-person committee determines if the student receives a rating of pass, revise, or fail;

7. writes chapters four and five; and
8. participates in a final defense of the dissertation.

Our proposed collaborative dissertation would not fit into this traditional model. So, we crafted a proposal that articulated how a reimagining of the dissertation genre—processes and products—could not only create situated spaces for our inquiry but also yield rich data to inform the graduate school’s future decisions to approve or not approve collaborative work at the dissertation level.

When the Dean of Graduate Studies rejected our initial proposal for a collaborative dissertation—one study, one text—he suggested we collaborate on the research and then write two “independent” dissertation texts. Agreeing with this suggestion would have displaced us and our work: ushering us into the paradigm of lone authors working in different dissertation spaces.

In response, we requested and were granted an in-person meeting, which, ultimately, included the graduate school dean, the assistant dean, the assistant dean for administration, and a member of our proposed dissertation committee. At the meeting, we presented our rationale: if we wish to answer our research questions about the experiences of two ABD students collaborating through a narrative inquiry to collect experiential data about the dissertation system’s resistance to our positionality, we must situate ourselves as researcher-participants who partnered throughout each of the eight steps provided above.

From there, our dissertation chair joined us in negotiating a common ground with the graduate school dean: we were permitted to collaborate throughout the processes of writing and researching the dissertation if we also composed two separate, individually titled texts that were clearly labeled to illustrate 60 percent solo-authorship.

One dissertation study, two dissertation texts.

For our three-chapter and five-chapter defenses, we would meet with our committee at the same time to enact a joint defense, a phenomenon our dissertation chair noted had never occurred before in our doctoral program.

Within this new landscape, we restarted our dissertation process by creating two distinct “paper trails” through the submission of individually titled and written Research Topic Approval Forms and Institutional Review Board forms—a nontraditional process of dual submissions that further distinguished our work as “independent.”

Upon completing this process, our initial research explored whether our dissertation was still collaborative, co-authored, or something else altogether.

In time, we decided on the term *cooperative*. We considered this term to be the most accurate way to position our work—as it included both co-authored and collaborative writing and research.

It wasn’t long before we posted a sign on the wall of our home office that read: collaborative processes + co-authored texts = cooperative study.

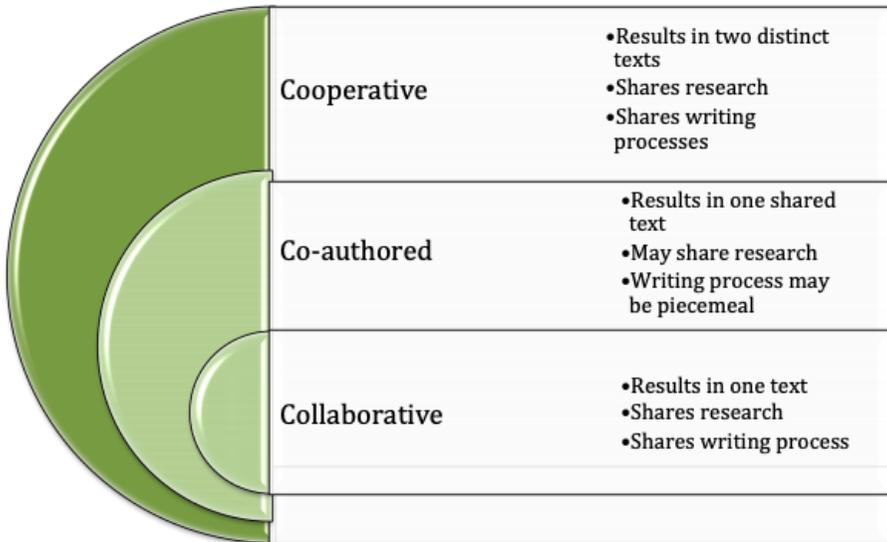


Figure 14.1. A graphic representation of cooperative, co-authored, and collaborative within the context of our dissertation study

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In terms of the dissertation products, the primary five chapters in each of our “independent” texts are both collaboratively and individually written. To identify “authorship” in the dissertation texts, we used a script-like format to distinguish between each of our voices with our collaborative third voice. We labeled the sections of our writing as *Sabatino*, *Laura*, or *Collaborative*.

We also authored 10 total intertexts, in-between chapters, that shared the varied genres and processes we used to talk and write, agree and disagree, and collect and analyze data. Two of these intertexts were collaboratively written. Of the remaining eight, four solo-authored intertexts appeared in Sabatino’s dissertation and four other solo-authored intertexts appeared in Laura’s dissertation.

If Chapters 1-3 positioned us as academic writers engaged in traditional dissertation practices—standard academic discourse, rational argumentation, contextualizing and locating gaps in the literature—then Chapters 4 and 5 and our intertexts allowed us to bring our full selves to the study.

Chapters 4 and 5 were formatted as roundtable discussions. We continued our use of the script format from Chapters 1-3 but now added the voices of our research participants and secondary sources. Throughout these pages, we interweaved our semi-structured interviews, conference roundtable discussion, and emailed follow-up questions and responses into a multivocal dialogue where we added our voices to the ongoing conversation about collaboration at the dissertation level.

Our intertexts became immersive, multigenre spaces that animated our coupled collaboration: lists, private voice memo transcriptions, research journal

entries, writing process descriptions and reflections, dissertation blog posts, images, excerpts of our co-authored annotated bibliography, photos of handwritten notes in book margins, doodles, transcription processes, and on.

The intertextual spaces positioned our dissertation processes and products—the seen and unseen work of the research and writing, how we inhabited our coupled collaboration—within the pages of our cooperative texts, and allowed us to express who we are, what we value, and why.

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Our coupled collaboration, among many dissertation practices and experiences, allowed us to co-motivate each other, support our sense of belonging as we worked from home, advocate for the social nature of authorship and intellectual property, demonstrate how our non-traditional dissertation did not impede our careers, and further cultivate our relationships as husband and wife, new parents, fellow professors, and collaborative writers.

Below we share a lived experience that narrates these themes. Following this story, we explore two important concepts we developed and applied in our study: our *power check-ins* and our *coupled collaboration*. What we learned from this narrative data is the necessity of cultivating a communicative relationship in our partnership. We also learned the importance of being attentive to each other's malleable positions within the collaboration and being adaptable within the professional and personal spaces that shaped our ways of working together. We hope that by sharing what we have learned from our research we can provide a supportive resource for those who wish to collaborate in their own settings.

Our story: Just two years shy of our dissertation completion deadline, Laura faced challenges with postpartum depression that significantly impacted her ability to work on our dissertation. Laura's symptoms mirrored textbook postpartum experiences: feeling overwhelmed, numb, hopeless, and at times, even suicidal. These feelings were intensified by the pressures of staying on track with a dissertation already facing resistance.

In her private journal, four months postpartum, Laura shared the impact on her dissertation work. She described feeling unable to concentrate, overwhelmed by guilt, and avoiding the topic altogether to cope. And, due to the stigma attached to mental health issues, Laura delayed getting treatment. During this time before seeking help, Laura shared in her journal:

It's like I've lost my ability to read more than two sentences. My mind can't stay on one thought before I start to spiral. What else should I be doing? Was that Elyse crying? Is she breathing? What if I drop her when I'm walking down the stairs? I'm scared I won't be able to write anymore. I'm scared I'm ruining this for Sabatino. Our collaboration isn't supposed to be like this.

Elyse was almost a year old when Laura admitted the depth of her experience to Sabatino and sought treatment.

It was a challenging time for both of us. Getting mental health treatment was tough for Laura. There were long waiting lists, and some doctors didn't want to "deal" with postpartum issues. And it wasn't just Laura dealing with it—Sabatino felt the pressure too, often hesitant to discuss the dissertation with Laura for fear of worsening her condition. When he worked on it alone during Laura's tough times, he too felt isolated. It was hard for him to share ideas or progress unless he caught Laura in a rare moment of feeling hopeful. We both struggled to be productive scholars while our focus was on supporting each other through a tough time.

As we experienced postpartum depression together while working on our dissertation study, our positionality within academia and parenthood influenced our journey. Coupled collaboration became part of Laura's path to recovery. She acknowledges that without a partner—someone relying on her to contribute and stay active as a scholar, all while maintaining empathy for her as a mother, a wife, and a human being—she might have abandoned the dissertation entirely. With talk therapy, medication, and the support of her partner, she was ultimately able to return with enthusiasm to our work with a renewed appreciation for the merits of collaboration.

Our power check-ins: The material realities of our personal and professional lives—from the severity of postpartum depression to the ongoing responsibilities of job schedules and childcare commitments, etc.—posed a recurring challenge for us to collaborate in the same place, at the same time. This meant each of us occupied spaces and different roles at different times, in all areas of our lives, which impacted our partnership.

Even when we agreed on concepts related to our dissertation, for example, we had to negotiate power dynamics in our collaboration. Perhaps one of us had read a bit more about a theory or had transcribed more of a particular interview or had built off a previous idea we were working through to introduce a new idea—by the nature of his or her more situated knowledge on the subject this person would then gain more ethos in that moment of the conversation.

In our dissertation, we documented the processes we used to negotiate these shifts in our shared roles, but we relied mostly on what we called *power check-ins* as a meta-mechanism to help us sustain an equitable approach to our coupled collaboration.

Whether in person or writing, we found it most helpful when we asked each other questions, such as:

- “Am I overtaking the direction of the work here?”
- “Do you feel as if you've been able to voice your ideas in full?”
- “Should we take some time to reflect on this and talk again later?”
- “You didn't respond to my comments. Does that mean you do or do not agree? Do you need more time to process this?”

- “When I revise this section, should I note in the margins the concepts we just shared so we use the same contextual lens to view the work?”

This type of open dialogue helped us inhabit the mindful, empathetic spaces we needed to sustain our coupled collaboration in ways that were equitable and shared.

Our coupled collaboration: We feel that through our research and conversations with our participants, we developed a better understanding of the myriad ways scholars define collaboration. Here, we add our definition of a coupled collaboration, which occurs when the construct is:

- *intimate* (two people are romantically involved, sharing their lives, and enacting an equitable and empathetic partnership);
- *inhabited* (two people live together while working on the same project);
- *indefinite* (two people cannot delineate when and where the collaboration ends).

Our criteria are contextual, fluid, and interconnected. The definition presented here is not the sole form of what a coupled collaboration could be; we encourage scholars to adapt or redefine our definition to fit their coupled collaborative situations. In the context of our cooperative dissertation study, our coupled collaboration was:

- *intimate* because of our
 - marriage;
 - mutual dependence on completing the dissertation due to shared livelihoods;
 - social and emotional interconnectedness of dissertating and living together;
- *inhabited* because of our
 - physical proximity in our collaborative efforts, as we live in the same home;
 - shared workspace, whether in our home office or at the dining table;
 - collaboration beyond work hours, feeling how the dissertation stays with us at all times, influencing our daily life and conversations;
- *indefinite* because of our
 - joint undertaking of every aspect of the dissertation, reflecting the open-ended nature of our collaboration;
 - ongoing process of sharing thoughts, considerations, definitions, sources, and even word choices in our writing without a need for one of us to claim ownership over any of these contributions;
 - partnership not ending with the five-chapter defense, as evidenced by this book chapter.

From the time of our dissertation until now, we have learned that our coupled collaboration has benefitted not only our shared scholarship but also our shared

lives, namely how we interact with and speak to each other as husband and wife—and, as parents, with our children (Elyse and Caius, our son, born one year after our five-chapter defense). We believe the affordances of such an intimate, inhabited, and indefinite collaboration are abundant and worthy of further research.

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The door opens. We stand. Our dissertation chair walks toward us. With a large smile, he takes turns shaking our hands and says, “Congratulations, Doctor Mangini and Doctor Mangini. You both passed with distinction.”

The rest of the committee joins us to hug and celebrate. In time, the two of us walk outside into Oak Grove, a part of campus that is filled with lush green grass and sky-reaching trees and past times we shared as doctoral students. In this moment, as we hold hands and take in the June sun, we do not know the future. We aren’t moving into the days ahead: a time when our ongoing coupled collaboration will help us in our journey toward tenured professorship. We aren’t thinking about how we will integrate classroom pedagogies that meet students where they are, or how we will craft college-wide writing curricula that promote inclusivity and diversity. On this day, we are most eager to reunite with Elyse, so much a part of our dissertation story, and the life story we will continue to write together.

Chapter 15. From Positionality Statement to Motivating Positionality Story

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SUNY BUFFALO STATE UNIVERSITY

When I attended a small, private, liberal arts college as an undergraduate, none of my professors knew that I was a first-generation college student. They didn't know that I received the maximum, need-based Federal Pell Grant each year. No one knew that I had been home schooled by my parents—one Scottish permanent resident and one American citizen—in a small town in southern West Virginia, that I have a GED instead of a traditional high school diploma, or that I got my first job at 14 to start saving for school.

Despite what they didn't know, my professors had a variety of mostly positive assumptions about my educational background, odds at success, and prior knowledge. Those assumptions were informed by visible and invisible aspects of my identity: I am a white woman. I was born in the U.S. and English is my first language. People tell me I don't sound at all like a hillbilly.

Although my professors seemed to think it was only natural that I would attend and succeed in a predominantly white institution like theirs, I wasn't sure I belonged, and I had a lot of questions about how college worked. I also had plenty of assumptions of my own: I thought everyone else was better prepared and more confident than I was, and that they already understood how to succeed in college.

To earn my work-study funds, I took a second campus job as a writing center tutor and finally met other students who were as anxious, doubtful, and confused as I was. I also noticed that other students, especially Black, international, and other multilingual or multidialectal students, didn't seem to benefit from the same set of instructor assumptions that I did. In instructor feedback, I was told to edit more carefully. They were told their work was unreadable and that they should try harder or "get fixed" by visiting the writing center. I was deeply frustrated and confused by this. My own feelings of imposter syndrome made me wonder why faculty hadn't found out yet that I believed double-spacing meant pressing the spacebar twice between every word on a page. I couldn't understand why so many faculty didn't seem to recognize the incredible talent and bravery of students who pursued a college degree in a strange country thousands of miles away from home and in their second or even fourth language. And I didn't understand how so many highly trained experts seemed unable to read and understand their students' writing—writing that I, a novice, understood rather easily.

My early experiences in the writing center impelled me to become a writing teacher-scholar, but it took me more than a decade to fully understand and articulate the origins of my vocation.

As a doctoral candidate, I felt stuck trying to figure out how (and frankly, why) to write a dissertation, a seemingly rigid and depersonalized academic genre. In my prospectus, I had written a mostly surface-level listing of my identities, privileges, and relationships to power. That *positionality statement* wasn't helping me, and it felt like a hollow exercise.

Late one evening, unable to compose anything "academic" at my computer, I instead made an audio recording that eventually became a longer version of the personal, narrative history I shared above that traced the throughline from my early educational experiences to my doctoral research interests in prior knowledge assumptions. Before telling myself my own story, I thought my dissertation topic emerged from general frustration during my candidacy exam reading; an annoyed sense that transfer scholarship needed to pay more attention to the identities and cultural repertoires that comprise part of students' prior knowledge. Somewhat ironically, I later realized that some of my frustrations stemmed from the need to more authentically recognize my own identities and cultural repertoires, too. Speaking and writing through, rather than about, my positionality story enabled me to see that my research interests were always deeply rooted in my experiences and upbringing. In fact, *needing* to begin my dissertation with oral storytelling is a clear marker of the Appalachian identity that I thought I needed to scrub away in order to succeed as an undergraduate and member of the academic community.

The rest of dissertation writing came more easily to me once I shared my positionality story with my advisor and committee, who embraced and invited more storytelling throughout the project. Interweaving stories (my own and participants'), data, traditional analysis, and personal reflections helped me with everything from managing project scope to generating the kinds of theoretical and practical interventions I ultimately want my academic work to produce.

Even beyond the dissertation, telling myself and others my positionality story as a personal history has expanded how I understand myself, find meaning in my work, and relate to my students and colleagues. I encourage the students I teach and advise to develop positionality stories as an ongoing narrative practice that connects their identities, experiences, prior knowledge, and communities to the questions they ask and the work they pursue.

Chapter 16. I Feel You: A Shared User eXperience as a Racial Storytelling of Positionality

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Remembering the Storm ...

Sitting in my kitchen on my swivel cooking stool, peering out of the window at summer rain drops rapidly hitting a nearby carport, I removed the scrunchy holding a high bun. I ran my fingers through to my scalp, then further down my dreadlocks as if to soothe my brain from maximum overload. Today, I finished conducting the last of ten two-staged interviews for my dissertation, which went well beyond the hour and a half allotted. What was shared during these candid conversations hung in the air molecules. Still hearing the voices echoing in harmony, an eerie silence interfered as I began to swing my legs to the rhythm of the rain. Within the silence, I continued to watch clouds move in, covering the sun almost entirely. I replayed each voice recalling a myriad of racialized encounters, with compositionists and writing teachers alike, speaking of the dehumanizing and denigrating ways their prose was fragmented as unauthorized or untenable, how their writing was devalued: *you didn't write this; your stories are uninteresting; you need to up your diction*. During our conversations, I worked to keep a neutral composure. Yet, listening to their stories disintegrated my quasi-armor. Their journeys through commonplaces of composition—the very sites meant for access—perilously exposed their Black bodies to the toxic undercurrent of violence still present in the work of composition. As their former dual enrollment teacher and writing tutor, and in my present stasis as a doctoral graduate and writing instructor, hearing the trauma experienced with composition at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) turned theories into bullshit. Hearing their experiences uncovered my own reflection as a 40-year old Black woman returning college student sharing the insurmountable disparages students of color encounter in the name of literacy learning. During my time as a student, I experienced similar scrutiny, accusations, and evaluation as a (*mis*)user of composition.

As I annotated my data, I knew these stories of *Black students user experiences with composition* would be incredibly valuable to the field's purposes and missions of inclusion. Due to liminal scholarship in the field centering Black students' experiences told by Black students, Black teachers, or Black literacy scholars, it's important to me to include racial stories, including my own, to critically disrupt traditional ways our stories are often told through the white gaze. Racial

storytelling is the modality of my master's thesis where the user experiences of this same group, who were high school students, are the pith. Centralizing racial stories of Black student experiences in higher education at predominantly white institutions is imperative to the work I do as a Black woman literacy teacher-scholar-activist. My work is grounded in user experience (UX) and racial storytelling to ensure the stories I tell are by those who lived them. The intersection of UX as racial storytelling is a method to present and preserve the stories and the storytellers—a pillar of cultural rhetorics, centering the maker and the making of the human experience. My dissertation is a longitudinal extension of my master's research seeking to learn of Black dual enrollment students' experiences with composition at PWIs. For my dissertation, my former dual enrollment students-mentees-turned-research-participants trust me to hear and tell their stories honestly and fervently, requiring the utmost care and respect of each story, each reflection, each compelling account as they, too, understand the assignment, and the criticality of inclusion.

Earning their trust began in high school dual enrollment and continued throughout their academic journeys, which at this point in my research spanned a decade. Now, well into their adult lives and experiences, I was honored by their willingness to share intimate and often traumatic moments with composition for the sake of research. Our relationships mattered, and it was critical that I be as intentional and integral as humanly possible to conserve the thoughts, feelings, sayings, and doings of the storytellers, as well as situate my researcher positionality. I knew many of the experiences that were shared, but from a different point of view—the white high school English teacher with accusations of plagiarism, to the only Black student, and the Black literature instructor who shared their drafts as examples of failures without permission. I assumed what I knew and essentially observed of their experiences could possibly present a barrier to the depth, detail, and willingness to share. I was prepared to stay behind the veil as a researcher, where my line of questions refrained from over-reaching into my own recollection. However, the stories shared during the hours-long conversations posed a unique and emotional challenge I was unaware would occur during this process.

Pain and Conviction

Completing my notes to self, I slowly closed my MacBook, tracing the Apple logo with my finger as I stared aimlessly at the silver finish. I realized what I just heard were more than recollections of Black students' past experiences with a few rapacious writing teachers. What I heard in gut-wrenching detail were witness testimonies declaring a nefarious assault at the hands of agents of literacy—all in the name of disciplinarity—and to my own astonishment, revealing I, too, am guilty of contributing to their harm. The weight of this revelation felt palpable as I rubbed my eyes under my glasses and began thinking what they described seemed way more intentional than coincidental. Realizing my role

in upholding underpinnings of composition's supremacist practices tipped the scale from researcher to accomplice. The storytellers disclosed multiple racialized experiences with composition instructors in high school and at multiple universities. Their stories were an egregiously missing perspective from composition research—narratives of Black students' racialized encounters at composition's thresholds. While I knew I had to tell it like it t-i-is, because not doing so would leave these stories constellating in The Void, providing ample space for these narratives as the GPS, I first had to navigate the sudden tsunami of self-conviction. I allowed self-questioning to materialize, as I suddenly began feeling unexpected emotion swelling in my veins. The idea of my being the cause of *any* student devaluing, and essentially an accessory to abandoning their agency, autonomy, and authority in the name of so-called "disciplinary expectations"—especially Black students—made me literally sick to my stomach. I thought, *how can I as a Black teacher, Black woman, intentionally or unintentionally cause and/or carry out harm to any student?* As I attempted to repent these thoughts, my embodied response suddenly reached its peak as my eyes became blurry with tears that paralyzed my writing. I let my Apple pencil drop, rolling onto my iPad as I continued to sit and gaze at the raindrops on my kitchen window falling in sync with my now-flowing tears.

Attempting to bring such imperative stories to light as research displayed undeniable implications for my positionality. The stories illuminated ways writing assessment caused irreparable harm to my former students, influencing how they currently see writing and themselves as writers. I recalled looking at each of their faces, explaining methods they invoked navigating terrain between self-efficacy and extrinsic performance expectations where feedback and interactions unequivocally left unwarranted impressions upon their writerly bodies reminiscent of the scars of insolence endured by our ancestors. Succumbing to my emotions, I closed my eyes, removed my glasses, and took a deep cleansing breath that led to shaking my head back and forth in disgust, as I thought about how I became a representative of the very tenets that continue to sustain composition's hubris of whiteness. While I viewed myself fighting against the regime of classist, racist, gatekeeping practices that still plague the enterprise of composition, my participants were fighting on the same grounds where they were completely unprepared and unaware as casualties.

Their stories—stories of being racialized, dehumanized, interacting at and across thresholds, different institutional spaces, encountering those who present as skin folk—convicted my own role of unintended but glaring espionage. I accompanied them during moments of struggling, disbelief, and surrender, yet my orientation as an agent of the discipline had no view. This group was my assignment as Black students seeking privilege of access to the very institutions built by and on the backs and bodies of our ancestors, while my disciplinary presupposition inserts the same scold's bridle used in my own shackling. My own agency, autonomy, and authority wasn't encouraged as a Black student, until

graduate school. As a practitioner of literacy teaching, whose intrinsic motivation is equality in the literacy classroom, my English language arts (ELA) and composition praxis endorsed the same supremacy I and my former students flagrantly endured. As a Black teacher, my own Black body had and still experiences a continuum of consternation, including my writing performance. As the self-proclaimed advocate and activist of Black students' learning experiences, I unequivocally contributed to the systemic and systematic oppression of composition's existing underpinnings for the freedom of Black voices. I am complicit in subjugating the violence of literacy. It was reliving the calamity of their trials and tribulations that brought on my embodiment. I attempted to diverge from my emotion by continuing to watch the rain, only to find the weather's inability to disrupt my mind from catastrophizing the detriment I inadvertently caused students, my students. An attempt at reconciling my relationality led me to the point of sliding down the rabbit hole of despair, as I questioned my lack of purview, asking how could *I* have done *this*?

(re)Positionality

The sound of the rain became louder, allowing me to regain my presence as the final tears of the moment ran down my flushed cheeks before wiping them away. I sat in my moment, replaying contemplations of the conversations. As if the rain somehow encouraged it, what materialized was a reorientated view of where these stories, our stories, could take this research. I suddenly imagined my positionalities and identities were in conversation with the positionalities and identities of my participants, essentially becoming the connective tissue. UX mapping as visual storytelling is the foundational method I used, but I had a different type of story to tell where the journeys, racialized experiences, and now positionalities are prevalent. I needed these stories to be front and center.

Initially, I wasn't concerned with our existing relationship causing a conflict with my positionality. Our rapport afforded me as a point of contact across their academic, and now adult life experiences. I allowed myself some latitude here because I absolutely value these connections which reach far beyond where and how we met. Maintaining an appropriate researcher "distance" was challenging when the people answering my questions were people I have watched and reared through multiple life stages, from high school, to college, to grad school, to first careers, to second careers, entrepreneurship, marriage, and parenthood. I believed that our conversations, albeit ontological, could still uncover something relevant to the arguments I was attempting to make.

I knew coming into this project that there would be some sensitive navigating to fortify boundaries of the researcher-participant relationship, which is why I was constantly checking protocol at each interview. What I was not prepared for was how the interviews unveiled the perspective fault lines which ran between us, revealing a symmetrical and asymmetrical viewpoint simultaneously that

suddenly became visible. Returning to earlier annotations of the interviews, I saw something in the data that I did not see before—another perspective. While my teacher-tutor perspective was complicit in confirming the same colonial strongholds of systemic and institutional underpinnings on behalf of the discipline, as an adult returning college *student*, whose undergraduate to graduate matriculation was happening at the *same time*, and at one of the *same* university locations, I realized I, too, was racialized at some of the *same* thresholds within composition.

Acknowledging a physical response to these memories, I began biting my bottom lip, recollecting the inexplicable commentary I received: *your writing is pithy, your perspective seems sophisticated, why don't you use an Oxford comma?* As an observer and advocate of this particular group of former dual enrollment students, hearing their stories and ways in which they reflect, theorize, and in some cases, rationalize negotiating their identities with composition triggered me to reflect on my own trauma that exposed a similar violence. Identical to all of the interviewees, I was racialized and interrogated about the ways I chose to author my lived experiences as I matriculated as an adult returning college student. Every time I spoke, wrote, or walked the neutral-washed hallways with any sense of self-actualization, writing professors and instructors, Lit professors, and English education professors often applied their writing assessment with the hand of white supremacist-writing disciplinarity. As I listened to the accounts of my interviewees' interactions, I was able to recall writing professors and discipline teachers alike evaluating me, my Black life experiences, and my prose for similar *validation*.

Yet, as I thought further into the ways our experiences are parallel, I began to imagine including these intersections of our experiences and what these collective perspectives could bring into focus for the field's (re)alignment with its purposes. Our racial stories provide a missing view into the journeys that many diverse students must take toward literacy learning and the (un)intended barriers included. What became most interesting is how our stories collectively became even more critical to the research narrative. Our realities as Black students—our execrable interactions at composition's thresholds—are snapshots of our unknowing infiltration of disciplinary boundaries. After my additional passthrough was completed, it was painfully apparent my experiences with composition—the racialization as a Black woman teacher, Black woman student, and now, Black woman faculty—were in conversation with the racialized experiences my participants shared.

Joys of Disorientation

While I knew I had some extraordinary stories to tell, due to my positionality, I found myself critically questioning if my personal stories were somehow irrelevant. I didn't want to complicate things or have my stories disrupt the main narrative. I already had a specific design plan and was eager to follow through. I

questioned what my positionalities could offer my research. As usual, I convinced myself momentarily that I didn't possess the agency, autonomy, or authority to tell our stories the way I believe they should be told—an indelible and self-defeating practice I find often plagues me as a scholarly writer. I wax and wane about what's the best way and the most effective way to ensure the stories, as well as illuminate the voices in the stories, while protecting the tellers at all costs. But trying to find an optimum way to add my *Happy Trees* to the canvas left me strolling in the weeds, lost in the possibilities until I could no longer see clear blue sky.

Due to this *Well, damn!* moment, I knew the stories I had to tell essentially became paramount even more so, which meant I had to be precise how I wanted the stories to be told to do the most effective work. What I began imagining is how our stories illuminated different perspectives in multiple dimensions of our journey with composition at PWI's, and how these perspectives would add value to the ways we, as a field of rhetors, would find these stories invaluable to the missions and purpose for composition. Our positionalities in the stories shared in my research, as users of composition, reflect interacting with composition's usability as Black students, and as Black writers where our experiences illuminate a continuum of discriminatory encounters with composition's embedded gatekeeping, especially at PWI's. I began to see the benefits in using our stories as a lens in which to view narratives of Black students as users and our experiences with the assessment practices, policies, and procedures of composition. It was here where I realized I needed a specific method of storytelling for our stories to live and breathe.

After another passthrough of the interviews, transcribing data while also navigating my emotional upheaval through another good cry, I watched the clouds part with glimpses of the sky. Learning of Black dual enrollment students' user experiences with composition is the thesis from which this research emerged. As a UX consultant and researcher, I saw limitations in journey mapping's ability as a method newly entering into writing studies research, where defining characteristics that are based on social causes are used in other research paradigms to describe and define human behavior. Racial identity is used to create, qualify, and justify systems of power, privilege, and disenfranchisement, where the intentional socialization of race often used in research critically ignores Black embodiment. Black students' experiences with composition, as users, are a missing yet valuable purview into the ways we understand our interactions with historically racialized students as researchers and teachers. Learning of ways writing assessment continues to reaffirm whiteness in literacy learning will benefit our pedagogical efforts. As a UX professional within industry spaces, as well as non-tenure-track online composition faculty, I have a working knowledge of visual tools that can represent behaviors of human-centered interactions. Combining nostalgic and memorial storytelling methods of user experience with journey mapping as a new method of racial storytelling, user experience as racial storytelling (UXRS) functions as a visual representation to bring Black narratives within conversations of compositions usability.

Final Thoughts ...

As I reflect on this research journey culminating in my dissertation, *Voices From The Void: Dual Enrollment User Experience with Composition*, I marvel at the emotions, epiphanies, responses, and revelations that became evident during this process. After this research experience, crucial and unmistakable aspects impacted my positionality, including how important it is to examine multiple personal perspectives as a kaleidoscope of possibilities. My researcher positionality prior to the interviews had no purview of my complicity or was unknowingly shrouded by the work of composition. It was during the interviews that the hood of disciplinarity was slowly removed by their stories of perseverance.

As a Black woman literacy researcher, not seeing value in my own positionality as a worthwhile contribution, even when conspicuous implications develop, almost resulted in my leaving too much on the table. I became disorientated due to unpredictability of what emotionally could occur, as the interviews revealed way more than I had anticipated. This disorientation ultimately resulted in a reflexive redirect that allowed me the opportunity to bring forth the kind of stories I believe need to be heard. Our collective stories, as racial storytelling—my participants, as well as my own—serve as narratives of racialized experiences present across composition's contexts, spaces, and commonplaces. Centering my positionalities in concert reifies the supposition of the impermeable barriers of race and identity plaguing literacy learning, and critically attests to the fault lines, blind spots, and extent boundaries acting upon any sincere efforts of institutional transformation by way of inclusion.

Chapter 17. Navigating Formality and Familiarity: Balancing Research and Relationships in Your Own Community

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In November 2021, I began data collection for my dissertation with an interview with my uncle. “Could you tell me what happened when your Chinese school was closed?” I asked.

My research focused on the experiences of Thai Chinese elders who studied in Chinese schools during the suppressive periods against the Chinese in Thailand. I used narrative inquiry and ethnography to capture and amplify the experiences and voices of minorities, prioritizing the experiences of the Thai Chinese elders, some of whom are my relatives. During their storytelling, I observed a subtle shift in their demeanor, especially in my uncles. Rather than addressing themselves in the familiar terms typically used within family circles, they adopted a more formal tone, employing pronouns such as “Phom” (which means “I” in Thai) to refer to themselves. Their formality forced me to confront my positionality within the community, drawing a line between me as a researcher and my original connection with them as their niece.

Similar instances occurred with other relatives over subsequent months as I continued interviewing them. Through close observation and frequent visits, I realized that their formality may have stemmed from unfamiliarity with being interviewed and interactions with recording devices, not as a cue that excluded or separated me from the community. As our rapport strengthened and familiarity grew, these barriers gradually dissipated. Allowing ample time for them to acclimate to my presence, which included the device and the academic responsibility I carried, helped foster a sense of trust and openness.

A year later, when I returned to Thailand for follow-up interviews, I witnessed a transformation in my participants’ attitudes as their familiarity with my work grew. The use of “Phom” decreased, replaced by the kinship terms we typically used. This was a big relief for me as it represented the trust we had rebuilt, as a researcher and participants, over time. Our conversations contained more details and emotions. However, the increased familiarity also led to their eagerness to assist, which occasionally turned into overcompensation and potential biases in the data collected. To reduce this familiarity bias, I supplemented my research with archival sources and perspectives from individuals outside the immediate community.

In addition to addressing familiarity bias, I faced another dimension of tension arising from the power dynamics inherent in my role as a younger member

of the community. In my culture, asking older people a lot of questions might be considered disrespectful. My aunt once frowned when I asked my uncle about his parents and his family's literacy. This made me uneasy about prying into their lives or questioning senior relatives. To navigate this dynamic, I facilitated conversations involving multiple family or community members, allowing for a more organic exchange of information. While this approach enriched the discourse and provided diverse perspectives, it posed challenges in transcription and occasionally diverted the narrative trajectory.

To address these power dynamics and the navigation of familiarity and formality, I highlighted my positionality and approach in both my dissertation and articles. I aim to demonstrate the unavoidable potential biases inherent in research involving humans, especially within your own community, and honor transparency regarding my relationship with participants.

In conclusion, navigating the complexities of fieldwork and balancing the formality and familiarity allowed me to learn and evolve, forging connections that bridge academic inquiry with personal understanding. This experience not only enriched my research but also reflected the reality of working with people closely connected to us.

Chapter 18. Voicing Resilience: A Written Journey Through Infertility and IVF

Daniela Merlos

INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

Every time I revisit these memories, I drown in sorrow. In my mourning, I find myself adrift in a realm where only the echoes of a dream linger. It's a place I frequent often, where those dreams still hold substance. Here, I cradle my children close, gazing into their eyes. But then the darkness descends, abruptly jolting me back to reality, to grieve anew. In an instant, I am consumed by a torrent of anger, my eyes wide open to the stark reality before me. I stare into the abyss, struggling to comprehend the chasm between where I stand and where I ache to be—with them. With their visage imprinted in my mind, I settle down and commit pen to paper. I pour out my grief, pain, frustration, and fury onto the page. Writing becomes my solace, the vessel through which I breathe life into my emotions. I write because the weight of silence is intolerable, and I refuse to let it keep its suffocating hold. I write because it is through writing that I can reconnect with those ephemeral dreams. I write because it is only through writing that I can reconnect with those ephemeral dreams—dreams that fade as the harsh light of reality inches ever closer. I write so that individuals like me may emerge from the shadows and be recognized. I write to challenge the silence that surrounds the struggles of infertility for so many. I write because, in the act of writing, I find a semblance of solace amidst the storm of emotions that rages within me. Simply put, I write.

Writing for Legitimacy: Charting the Path

To clarify, the writing I refer to here is a dissertation. In mine, I utilized autoethnography as a methodological framework to investigate my IVF (in vitro fertilization) journey, placing my personal experiences at the core of the study. Honestly, the thought of writing about them, the embryos which were a product of this whole ordeal, or even about myself, initially never crossed my mind. But before we delve into that, let's rewind to the beginning. It was in 2021 when I was confronted with the harsh reality of infertility. The diagnosis hit me like a tidal wave, leaving me to grapple with the weight of its implications. And soon after, I found myself staring down the bitter disappointment of a failed IVF attempt. In the aftermath, as I mourned what could have been, I was confronted with the profound absence of the children I had so fervently hoped for. Navigating the turbulent waters of infertility, I felt utterly adrift, engulfed by a silence that seemed impenetrable. In those moments, my hands were filled with cold, clinical facts and harsh truths delivered by medical professionals.

During these conversations, the same medical professionals outlined the meticulous process of IVF, breaking it down into its four stages: ovarian stimulation, egg retrieval, fertilization and embryo culture, and embryo transfer. During ovarian stimulation, a cocktail of medications is administered to coax the ovaries into producing an abundance of eggs for retrieval. Once mature, these eggs are harvested and fertilized in a laboratory setting. The resulting embryos may or may not undergo genetic testing to identify any abnormalities, with viable embryos then frozen for future use. Again, all of this was laid out before me in stark detail, each step a reminder of the clinical nature of my circumstances. Yet, amidst the sterile facts and figures, I found myself yearning for something more. I longed for a narrative that captured the raw, visceral experience of infertility—one that went beyond the confines of medical jargon and statistical data.

Soon, I came to a sobering realization: narratives like mine were glaringly absent from the academic discourse surrounding infertility. It then dawned on me that the only way to articulate the complexity of my emotions was to transcribe them onto paper. And so, I began to write. With each word, I sought to peel back the layers of silence that shrouded my experience, daring to confront the complexities of infertility with honesty and vulnerability. I found solace in writing as it became my refuge in the storm—a means of reclaiming agency and forging connection within the loneliness of infertility. And so, with trembling hands and a heavy heart, I embraced the daunting task of telling my story—one fraught with pain but also infused with resilience and hope.

By recounting my story, I stood as an eyewitness to these experiences. Enveloped within the sterile confines of medical examination rooms, I could speak to the probing scrutiny of doctors, who treated my reproductive system as if it were a machine in need of repair. Immersed in the arduous process of IVF, I found myself thrust into a battleground where my body became the unwilling participant in a perilous experiment. Despite the lack of guarantees, I remained present, fully immersed in the ordeal. To me, reducing these experiences to mere clinical facts fails to capture the true essence of the struggle. Simple words cannot convey the sheer terror of being informed that one's body does not conform to expectations. Statistics cannot encapsulate the profound grief of being confronted with the near impossibility of conceiving. The data remains stoic and unfeeling, indifferent to the emotional turmoil that accompanies the journey through IVF. It is but a facade, a veil drawn over the raw humanity that lies beneath. The information functions as a muzzle, stifling the tumultuous emotions that accompany infertility and IVF.

To clarify, I possessed a basic understanding of the science behind IVF. However, what eluded me was the extent to which my body would be objectified and stripped of its intrinsic value. It was then I observed a notable absence in the discourse surrounding IVF treatment—the emotional toll, the profound sense of loss, and the isolation experienced by individuals undergoing this process were scarcely acknowledged. So, I sought out personal accounts of other women who

had traversed the path of IVF, hoping to find solace in shared experiences. As a Latina woman, I found myself starved for representation, yearning for narratives that reflected my reality. Yet, my search yielded very little, as the overwhelming majority of stories about IVF centered around white bodies, authored by individuals who did not share my lived experience.

Faced with this stark reality, I took it upon myself to fill the void. I wrote. I chronicled my experiences, shedding light on the ways in which IVF differed for individuals like me. I wrote until I had birthed a narrative that demanded to be heard. Again, though I never envisioned myself as the protagonist of my research narrative, I found myself thrust into that role. Initially, I grappled with fear and uncertainty. Would I be judged for sharing the intimate details of my struggle with infertility? Would I be perceived as a legitimate scholar if I dared to make myself the subject of my research? For so long, I had been conditioned to believe that scholarship necessitated detachment and objectivity. I had been led to believe that stories like mine could only be told from a third-party perspective to be deemed legitimate and authentic. These questions gnawed at me as I embarked on my journey into autoethnography. The very act of placing myself at the center of my research felt both empowering and precarious. In academia, where objectivity and detachment are often prized, my decision to weave personal narrative into scholarly discourse seemed daring, even subversive. Would my peers view my work as rigorous and scholarly, or dismiss it as overly subjective and self-indulgent? Could I navigate the fine line between vulnerability and academic rigor—between personal revelation and scholarly analysis?

These tensions were not just intellectual but deeply personal. They echoed my own struggles with identity and legitimacy—as a researcher, as a woman grappling with infertility, as someone daring to challenge the conventional boundaries of academic inquiry. Yet, amidst these doubts, I found resolve. My experiences were not just anecdotes; they were lenses through which broader societal issues could be examined and understood. By situating myself within the narrative, I aimed to illuminate the complexities of infertility, to give voice to those silenced by stigma, and to challenge the dominant narratives that exclude personal experience from scholarly discourse. In embracing autoethnography, I acknowledged the power dynamics inherent in research—the choices we make in how we position ourselves and our subjects, and the implications of those choices. My positionalities—as a researcher, as a woman, as someone who has experienced infertility—shaped the lens through which I viewed my research questions and interpreted my findings. Ultimately, the decision to make myself the subject of my research was not just an academic choice but a personal and ethical one. It required courage to confront the potential judgments and criticisms, but it also offered a path to authenticity and a deeper understanding of me and the world around me.

Realizing this led me to a discovery much more profound: Research feels. It feels deeply, resonating with the raw emotions that define the human experience. It transcends the sterile confines of statistical analysis, embracing the messy,

complex reality of the lived experience. Through my writing, I seek to contribute to a broader conversation about the legitimacy of personal narrative in academic research and the transformative potential of embracing our own stories as legitimate subjects of study. And so, I wrote. I wrote to reclaim my voice and to assert my presence within academic discourse. I wrote to challenge the prevailing narratives, to demand recognition for the myriad ways in which identity shapes our experiences. In doing so, I found not only validation but *liberation*. Liberation from the constraints of conventional scholarship, from the stifling expectation of objectivity. I found that my voice, my story, had the power to disrupt the status quo, to amplify voices that had long been silenced. And so, I wrote.

Dancing with Academia: The Balancing Act of Dissertation Writing

To put it mildly, writing a dissertation is no easy feat. This process is not merely an intellectual endeavor; it is an intricate dance between adhering to academic and institutional requirements while staying attuned to the self. This complex interplay often manifests as both a profound challenge and a transformative journey. The physical act of writing a dissertation demands long hours of focused work and extensive research, analysis, and synthesis of vast amounts of information—an effort that is often exhausting. The intellectual rigor required to produce original, coherent, and impactful scholarship can strain the mind and body, pushing the boundaries of endurance. Simultaneously, the emotional labor of writing a dissertation is profound, especially when the subject matter is as deeply personal as mine was. The act of reliving and documenting painful experiences requires immense emotional resilience and discipline. Each word penned is not just an academic exercise but also a piece of the heart and soul laid bare. The emotional toll is exacerbated by the need to balance vulnerability with the objective tone often demanded by academic conventions. The pressure to conform to academic expectations and standards can create a dissonance between the desire to convey the raw truth of personal experience and the necessity to fit within established scholarly frameworks. This dissonance forces a negotiation between authenticity and adherence to academic norms, often requiring creative solutions to bridge the gap.

But, as I said before, research feels. Allowing oneself to feel and process emotions in research can lead to more authentic and impactful scholarship. The integration of external constraints and inner needs involves finding a rhythm that respects both. For me, this meant allowing my personal narrative to guide my research while ensuring that it met academic standards. It required a delicate balance of vulnerability and rigor, of sharing my truth without compromising scholarly integrity. This balance was not easy to achieve, but it was necessary for producing work that was both personally meaningful and academically valid. Through this process, I learned that research is as much about personal growth as

it is about scholarly contribution. By embracing both the external constraints and the inner needs, researchers can create narratives that are authentic, impactful, and true to their experiences. And so, I wrote some more.

Writing the Untold: My Story, Our Voice

In writing, I poured out my experiences, encapsulating every moment of my infertility and IVF journey. I embarked on a fervent quest to unveil why my narrative seemed to vanish amidst the clinical data, IVF pamphlets, and medical reports. Then, I understood that the true essence of my story lay hidden within the moments of clinical indifference, crushed beneath surgical reports and DNA profiles that obscured my lived reality. Quickly, exhaustion set in as I navigated through an overwhelming sea of information, bearing the weight of my memories and emotions. My exhaustion soon morphed into anger as I contemplated the notion of someone else co-opting my story and molding it into something detached from my essence. How could anyone tell my story authentically without intimately knowing the depths of my experience?

The answer became abundantly clear—no one could authentically tell my story but me. My identity shapes my worldview, endowing me with a perspective that is wholly unique. Negotiating the relationship between my identity as a Latina woman and my academic inclinations became imperative as I sought to navigate both realms while retaining credibility in each. Thus, as a researcher and participant in my own PhD dissertation, I wove together my lived experiences, crafting a narrative that remained grounded in factual data while retaining its humanity. The process was anything but easy; I became my own confidant and adversary, grappling with the delicate balance of what I wished to reveal to the world. As both a researcher and participant, I straddled the line between outsider and insider, bridging the gap between scholarly research, cultural significance, and personal awareness. Without me, this story would cease to exist, devoid of the human connection that lies at the core of all research. Research must acknowledge the humanity that resides beneath the veneer of data and structure. To reveal who I am and the journey I endured, to forge the connection between myself and academic research, I wrote.

Conclusion

While certainly not an endeavor for the faint of heart, I made the conscious decision to harness my story for the greater good. I embarked on the challenging task of crafting an autoethnographic account of infertility and IVF as my dissertation study. As I penned my dissertation, drawing upon my own experiences with IVF, it felt as though I was reliving my journey all over again. Tears welled in my eyes as I poured my heart onto the page, pushing myself to the brink of endurance. In a way, I laid bare my soul within those pages, revealing to my readers the gaps that

persist in infertility research and treatment for Latinas. Yet, I didn't stop there. I endeavored to show my readers why these gaps mattered. I recounted what I had endured, how it had felt, what I had witnessed and heard. Through the raw honesty of my words, I invited them into the darkest corners of my life, allowing them to glimpse the profound impact of medical and social exclusion on women like me. I made a human connection by laying bare my story, my struggles, and my fervent desire to support others facing similar challenges in communities that may not fully understand or accept them.

In conclusion, I harbor no shame in admitting that I channeled my pain into a creation that I hope will resonate with countless individuals. I aimed to be a beacon of solidarity for those navigating similar journeys, providing a lifeline amid the vast sea of impartiality that often characterizes academic discourse. Our stories are vanishing amidst the pursuit of legitimacy, risking exclusion from ongoing conversations. We cannot allow our voices to fade into obscurity in the name of scholarly validation. As I've emphasized before, research is imbued with emotion, and we must not be complicit in stifling the potential for understanding and connection. For me, this meant crafting an autoethnographic account of my encounter with infertility. For you, it may take a different form. Yet, I implore you to share your story, to illuminate the richness of your experiences and teach others through your insights. I write, and now, I urge you to do the same.

Section 5. Teacher Practice

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.

Chapter 19. Taking Up Space to Take a Position

Sarah Young

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I grew up in the 1980's with my mom and brother in the basement of my grandparent's home in Kansas City, USA. Our family ethos was very working class, and I was the first to go to college. As a child, I had an older brother who had no problem speaking out, but I was praised for being a "good girl," making life easier for everyone by spending my time writing comic books in a quiet corner rather than rallying against authority.

As I grew up, I internalized the urge to conform to others' expectations and blend in by following the rules. When I did have to stand out, say for a speech in communications class, visibility made me uncomfortable. The surveillance from others made my heart race. I didn't want to tell others what I thought. Maybe I would say the wrong thing! Decades into life and now working non-tenure track at a university, the safety of blending in is still enticing (but admittedly also a privilege often afforded to my body). There is comfort in listening to others instead of speaking out. There is comfort in putting one's head down to "just do the work," and sometimes it can be easier to just stay quiet and agree to what others say.

But being invisible at a university only gets one so far. Not only is academia an industry that privileges public writing and the "right" bodies who stand out, but, as I have learned, student engagement also relies on layers of visibility. When I create a list of readings and solidify them in a written syllabus, this reflects my own beliefs, pedagogy, and positionality and is a first layer of being seen without me even opening my mouth. When I do talk about these materials, like say, why I chose research surveillance or chose a reading about workplace privacy and gender, I give away a second layer of visibility by further revealing my own background and positionality as a first generation, white woman from a working-class family who grew up hearing my grandpa talk about management's watchful eye as he transported pesticides around a factory. Finally, when I ask my students to engage with this coursework that I crafted, to share their own perspectives, my visibility encourages them to be visible. I ask them to tell me who they are.

It is in this space then, positionality is disruptive, especially to trying to be unnoticed. To take a position is to take up space and be seen. While understanding or asserting one's positionality can be a struggle for those frequently praised for not taking up space such as women (Bordo, 1993), like when I was praised for doing what I was told, those from working-class backgrounds (Warnock, 2016) like my family who generationally did what their parents did before them without

question, or those working in precarious academic positions (Burton & Bowman, 2022) like me that find it easy to blend into the department rather than make waves, I find that taking a position and being seen is essential for making informed decisions, choosing the best materials, connecting to the students, and creating critical engagement. Without making myself visible, I can't expect others to do so, too, which really makes the classroom a dynamic place when we're comfortable. It is only when I articulate who I am, however, that I can begin to understand those around me and ensure that there is space for them, too.

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Chapter 20. Confessions of a Full-time Professor/Part-time Researcher

Jessica Lipsey
DAYTONA STATE COLLEGE

Sunday March 3rd

3:05 pm, EDT

I've been at my computer all weekend preparing for a "Jr. Researcher" Seminar that I will attend during Spring Break. Well, that's not true. I spent Saturday reviewing essays and preparing a B term course that will start the Monday after Spring Break. Preparation for the seminar includes doing some reflective writing about my methodological choices and sending that off to the facilitators by the deadline—today. I put this off until after reviewing essays and setting up the course because I thought it would be a simple task. I'm studying my own classrooms, and I spend so much of my time there. How is reflecting about my methodological choices so hard??

6 something

I'm really regretting not working in the office today because I have a map of my research plan in a binder on my bookshelf that may make what I'm doing today easier. I also regret putting this off because I will have no time this week to do anything not related to work, and work does not include research. I'm an Associate Professor at a State College with a 3/3 teaching load and a 2/2 release to facilitate a professional development program for faculty. I also teach part-time at another local institution.

Sometime after 8

Queue existential crisis.

I've spent the entire day trying to reconnect to my research methodology. I started collecting data last semester. I wrote the IRB proposal the Spring Semester before that, which is more than a year ago from today, but how can I remember so little? I've been reading about mixed-methodology and reviewing scholarship that I'm sure I used as models, yet I still can't answer the questions. Did I even set up the study correctly if I can't seem to remember how to do it now? Are the concerns I have about the study now related to a shoddy set up? Do I even understand triangulation or validation or why I'm using mixed methodology?

Tuesday, March 12th

2:07 pm, CET

I'm on a train from Paris to Lille, France, finishing the assigned pre-seminar readings. My son, who is my travel companion for this "work" trip sees the title of the article that I'm reading and half jokingly, half seriously says "I know you love your job, but is 'passions in empirical qualitative research' even a thing?" It really is:).

2:36 pm, CET

After a week of severe imposter syndrome, I'm now remembering how thorough I was with planning the study—how thoughtful I was with methodological choices. I can see why I chose to collect the kinds of data that I'm collecting and the way it all works together to answer my questions. Ok. I'm a researcher.

But first: I'm a teacher. I want the best for my learners, who happen to be my participants as well. I realize in this moment that my positionality as a full-time teacher, part-time researcher changes as priorities shift but always comes from a passion for doing research to improve the learning experience.

I've finished my pre-seminar reading with time leftover to enjoy the view. And still, there's a pang of guilt for spending a precious train hour reading and writing about my research instead of reviewing the student essays I've had for more than a week.

Chapter 21. Who Tells Your Story: The Power of Counterstory and Conversations of Positionality in First-Year Writing

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS RIO GRANDE
VALLEY, OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

Several years ago, after teaching at the university level for a while, I decided that I wanted to pursue my doctoral degree at Old Dominion University, so I spent the next year excitedly and expectantly prepping my materials for the application due date. I submitted my hard work by the deadline, proud of all the parts of me I put into it, and excitedly waited ... then I found out I was waitlisted.

A few weeks after that I was denied outright.

It was all at once a devastating and humiliating experience, for it fed right into the doubts that had been festering under my enthusiasm and anticipation of acceptance into the doctoral program. You see, I grew up as a young, Hispanic child in some of the poorest parts of the already low-income area that we reside in known as the Rio Grande Valley, which sits at the very bottom of Texas right along the border of Mexico from where most of my immediate relatives hailed. My family has a long history of members dropping out of school very early to be what are known as “migrant farmers”, those who would travel north during the picking season to work in the fields. As such, education was put on the back-burner for most of my family members, meaning that any type of advanced degree like the one I was trying to obtain was non-existent. After my rejection, my mind began to feed into those doubts again and started to ask itself: have you gone as far as you deserve to go? Who are you to think you’re good enough to get this type of degree anyway, when it’s never been done in our family before? Wouldn’t it be better for you to just stay in your lane?

It took a while to get those thoughts out of my head, and after a year of hard work to beef up my CV and better explain my scholarly pursuits, I reapplied and finally got in. I’ve been pursuing my doctoral degree ever since.

But all this to say that I’ve been the student who has been filled with doubts of my worthiness in occupying a space in academia; and because I now teach at the same institution I attended, I see students whose lives, identities, and stories very much mirror my own, with similar experiences of “less-than-perfect” journeys that led to my First Year Writing (FYW) courses. Journeys that have often been filled with people or practices that have told them that they just aren’t quite

welcome in academia in some form or fashion, whether that be a teacher that harshly criticized their writing or a state-mandated standardized test that labeled them as “not college-ready” and sent them to classes that are often labeled “remedial” or “developmental.”

Because of this, what I often hear from my students are apologies for not being “good” at writing or reading which saddens me deeply every time because then I often witness these feelings of inadequacy stymie their confidence and appreciation of their own voices despite proving their brilliance in class again and again. I began to wonder if there might be a way to help them to see that their doubts and fears do not come from their supposed inadequacies but rather from outside and often insidious forces in academia that imply that the “ideal” college student has to fit a certain type of identity to be worthy of the space.

The answer came when I took a doctoral course focused on social justice in pedagogy. It was there that I was introduced to a book called, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory (Studies in Writing and Rhetoric)* by writing scholar Aja Y. Martinez. In it, she talks about the concept of counterstory, which is a practice that seeks to disrupt the dominant narratives from the very privileged of our society by bringing back stories from marginalized groups back into center focus. It is a practice that is also deeply rooted in critical race theory, where counterstory can be used as a method to push the theory forward by bringing minoritized voices to the center of conversations in order to disrupt racial biases in society. It was an incredibly eye-opening concept and I was immediately drawn to the idea of using it to empower my own students through the notion of being able to share their own stories that are often underrepresented and underappreciated. It was my hope that I could bring these conversations about identity, positionality, and counterstory into my classroom so that students can begin to investigate their own complex thoughts and identities.

To that end, I decided to use the Rhetoric & Composition II (or ENGL 1302) course I teach, where we’re allowed to theme the course to our liking so long as we have students produce a portfolio and accomplish program outcomes, as a space to implement counterstory-themed projects for my students. They were sequenced as follows:

- A Counterstory Reflections Podcast, where students are asked to engage in a conversation about a counterstory-related topic of their choosing to demonstrate their understanding of the concept that has just been introduced to them
- A Counterstory Article, where students engage in research over a topic related to identity/positionality that is then aided by the use of counterstory and shared in a traditional research paper
- A Public Counterstory Remix Artifact, where students are asked to take conversations that they’ve had in their articles, make rhetorical decisions about the counterstory-related messages that they think need to be shared,

and then transform those conversations into a multimodal presentation that they then share with an audience of students in developmental writing classes that would have those students engage in the same conversations that my students have been having throughout the semester

- A Reflection Video, where students are asked to think back on what discoveries they have made about counterstory and its significance in their academic journeys

I have been running this themed course for about six semesters now and the myriad of topics and conversations students delve into have been remarkable and illuminating. Just to highlight a few, I had one student talk about the problematic practices of machismo, or a strong sense of pride based in masculinity, that permeates through his job as a car mechanic and car culture within the Hispanic community in general, which he notices often prevents his female relatives from being to participate. Another student talked about beauty standards related to skin tone and how it can lead to identity and cultural crises if one is made to feel like they are not an acceptable color to be identified as a certain race or ethnicity. Another addressed religion and culture and what problems may be caused when the two are so intertwined that if you don't identify as one you might be ostracized from the other.

All of these incredibly important conversations that these students explore were born from our conversations about counterstory and its ties to positionality, which we, as a class, approached as the way all the various parts of your identity shape how you see the world and how the world sees you. Students then pick one or multiple parts of their identity where they can identify an issue, and ultimately a line of inquiry, that they can explore and aid with the use of counterstories.

But beyond just a means of framing the goals of the work they produce for their portfolios, these conversations about identity, positionality, counterstory, and the rhetoric that shapes it all become so much more. I have seen them become revelations for many students who start to make sense of the concepts in relation to themselves and their own feelings about how they see the world and how the world also sees them. They begin to see how being aware of their own and other's positionalities helps them in recognizing problematic situations, how counterstory also sees identity as a catalyst for the ways various communities are treated and viewed, and how disrupting any of those ongoing narratives that perpetuate those damaging practices is so vital.

Throughout the semester, students work with these concepts, weaving them together to piece how they fit and what meaning they create for themselves and the larger conversations they are entering when creating their projects. And because they are now aware of the concept of positionality and how it situates them and their own stories in a variety of ways, I notice that they start to investigate not only the topics that they choose for their projects but also their own internalized feelings of uncertainty over their own self-worth. From the class

readings and their own research, they begin to question the origins of the practices that have instilled in them these doubts and start to scrutinize the systemic practices which lead to those feelings, which they then discover are rooted in racist or prejudiced practices that are still entrenched in parts of academia. They then see that those feelings come from far more complex places rather than from anything that would definitively prove that they are not “college-ready” as they were made to believe, and slowly but surely the hesitancy to add their voice to these conversations, both in class and globally through their research, starts to slough off of them to reveal the highly capable and valuable academic that they always deserved to feel like.

One of the most powerful ways I’ve seen all this come to fruition is when I introduce the concept of deficit-thinking, which we define as the assumption by instructors that they must focus on supposed student deficiencies or flaws that need fixing rather than the opposite where students are encouraged to believe in their own strengths that simply need to be fostered. Because of those deficit-thinking practices that instructors engage in, students are often made to only focus on those supposed deficiencies which only further feeds into those doubts about their academic worthiness. After grasping the concept, students start to share their own experiences, most of which shock their peers and myself, like the story of a student whose math teacher once told him that he expected to see him on the streets pretty soon because he definitely wasn’t going to succeed in school. After they come to realize deficit-thinking’s deeply problematic origins in inequitable and often racist educational practices through these egregious examples, they then dive deep into designing a presentation that addresses it through conversations that they feel that other university students need to hear in order to disrupt any negative beliefs they might hold about themselves as well. We then present those conversations to a public audience at a university-wide undergraduate research symposium where I’ve seen my students engage in conversations with other students they’ve never met over topics like problematic professor practices and where that stems from, how to overcome educational anxiety, the need for educational reform, just to name a few. All visitors they chat with leave the presentation incredibly impressed and my students return to class after the presentations expressing their surprise at how knowledgeable they felt about the topic and how proud they are of themselves for being able to share so passionately about their chosen topics.

So suddenly my students, who are often members of marginalized communities themselves (people of color, lower income, ESL speakers, neurodivergent, etc.), are having their stories being told in an academic space that they often would say doesn’t feel made for them, and through the work they produce and the conversations they have start to see their ideas and their voices have value and recognition. By the semester’s end when I take a look at their reflections, the proclamations of “I’m not good enough” that I had heard early in the semester aren’t expressed, and instead I see declarations of how much they feel they have

learned and accomplished and how proud they are of themselves after having proved to be more capable than they assumed they were before. One student, for example, even shared that at the beginning of the semester that she wasn't sure if she was going to be able to grasp such a seemingly difficult concept like counterstory but that by semester's end she surprised herself completely by not only understanding the idea but also caring about it enough to share her discoveries with her friends. It all seems to become a very healing process for them.

But, perhaps selfishly, it becomes a healing process for me, too. Right along with my students, I investigate my own positionality over and over and come to recognize both the privilege and complications that my position in the classroom has on shaping these spaces. On the one hand, to have such a similar history and, more often than not, ethnic identity as my students I think gives me great insight into their struggles because I have felt and continue to feel those same feelings of doubt about my academic worthiness, especially as I climb higher and higher up the academic ladder with my doctoral studies and see less and less people that match my own identity and familial history. I think it's because of these insights that I was able to get the notion to theme the course through a lens of a practice that positions me as an ally in their educational journey who only seeks to empower them rather than lord over them like other professors might be tempted to do with their own power.

On the other hand, famed author Audre Lorde once said, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"; but as a professor who is hired by the academic system to teach within it, the master's tools are mostly what I've been provided. The power dynamics of me as the professor, "in charge" of the class, and them as the students tasked with going along with my instructor are ingrained into the positionality of our labels and cannot be completely broken without dismantling the house which at the moment cannot be undone by one classroom or one teacher alone. As the roles have to stand, so too does the slight removal of my standing with the students to where we can never quite be on equal foot. By virtue of the various amounts of privilege I knew in my life (loving parents, free education thanks to my status as a low-income student, etc.) that got me to what some would call a very successful position, I wield the master's tools whether I want to or not.

So the question becomes how can positionality be recognized and used to help dismantle that master's house to as much of a degree as we can? I think the answer lies, first and foremost, in the recognition of positionality and the myriad of identities that make up the mosaic of ourselves as humans existing within this world. Then from there I think it is a matter of storytelling and deciding from which parts of your identity you would like to share stories from. Will it be the part of your identity that is privileged, that will gladly glom onto any semblance of power that society has designed itself around so that systemic practices will continue to suit you? Or will it be the parts of your positionality that recognize the need for change; the need to hear from the most vulnerable communities and push for change so that their stories can become better and happier ones over time?

I know that the answer for myself is that I intend to use the parts of my storied positionality that recognizes the need to continually fight for equality and justice. But beyond just recognizing, I hope my actions truly reflect that desire as well. That is why I should like to continue this work of counterstory and centering it around conversations of positionality with my students, not only because I have been where they stood but because I truly do believe that if students, especially Freshmen students, can engage in these conversations early, they can go forward with the confidence of knowing that their voices matter and that they truly belong in this academic space and beyond. And hopefully from there, they can start to create their own tools that will do the work of dismantling the master's house and rebuilding it with stories from all communities once and for all.

Chapter 22. When Writing Hurts: Positionality, Recovery, and Distance When Forming and Maintaining a Research Identity

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Whenever there's a need to visualize the writing process, the steps—often drawn with arrows or sometimes circles for zest—are tidy. You think about things. You write about things. You revisit things. Then, you publish things. And, always, writing is what moves it all forward.

While most of us acknowledge a neat, linear process is about as grounded in reality as dragons or unicorns, we often aren't transparent about what real writing processes look like, especially when one's positionality is integral to the work, such as when researching difficult, sensitive, traumatic, or personally meaningful topics. Rather than tidy lines, this chapter tells our stories about messy research and writing after our dissertations, about processes that don't follow neat lines but instead require decompression and distance. Positionality influences not only how we collect and interpret findings but also the important time we need to make sense of our research and communicate our understanding.

As an example of how positionality affects research and writing, we draw from our own, 4-year collaboration to highlight how we have had to bargain with the gains of making progress on our research versus the very real physically and mentally exhaustive demands of this time, our individual identities, and our connections to our work. And, to resituate how we teach writing and research for personally meaningful or difficult topics, we also offer recommendations for graduate students and early career researchers on the role of recovery in research projects requiring deep emotional, mental, and/or physical commitment, especially in the writing and sharing of these experiences.

Finding Our Positions: Our Own Messy Lines During a 4-Year Collaboration

We collaborated on a research article, stemming from our dissertations, that took about 4 years to publish. Our dissertations were not on similar topics: Kathleen

explored issues of silencing and violence in youth athletic training, and Leah did an accessible design study for users with affective disorders. Despite the difference in subject matter, our research personally impacted us in parallel ways. Strangers before starting this project, we were brought together by a shared mentor who saw similar questions in our work and encouraged us to explore these tensions further together. Our dissertations, both deeply connected to our positionalities, left us with many questions about the tensions between researcher subjectivity, personal connections to our research communities, the value and risks of emotional commitment, and the corporeal consequences of this commitment. While we were both excited about the project, and anticipated completing it in a single academic term, more than 3 years would pass before we completed a full draft of our article and submitted it for journal consideration.

The Fall of 2020, when we began our collaboration, was a tumultuous time. At the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we had defended our dissertations via Zoom that summer and celebrated completing our degrees as much as social isolation would allow, but the entire process had left us both exhausted and with complicated feelings about our research and our connection to it. We needed time for recovery and decompression from research projects that required deep emotional, mental, and even physical commitment, as well as from the general “overdrive” mode of dissertating. But, at that time, we did not factor rest for the weary into our research agendas.

Our own positionality as researchers, storytellers, collaborators, and survivors of dissertations on difficult and sensitive topics is therefore at the heart of our decision to write this chapter together and support the editors’ call for “positionality-as-practice.” Before discussing pedagogical approaches, we first want to share some of the struggles we’ve encountered with positionality during our own writing process, as we believe the sharing of imperfect stories to be an important pedagogical approach in and of itself. While this story has a “happy” ending (the article has recently been published!), we feel it is important to share our experience to destigmatize slow writing and demonstrate how even no writing is an important and necessary part of the research process. We hope our stories of this research collaboration—both exhausting and delightful—reflect how positionality exists with and through the writing process, both before and after a dissertation defense, and encourage other emergent scholars who feel they do not reach the benchmarks of the “ideal researcher.”

Leah’s Story: Breaking Up with My Research Trajectory

My research, for the most part, centers around disability, mental illness, and/or Madness. Like many disability researchers, I’m drawn to this area because of my lived experience: I am bipolar and identify as mentally ill. I wrote my dissertation on affective disorders and have spent a few dedicated years to thinking, reading, and writing about mental illness or adjacent topics.

Shortly before I defended my dissertation, the pandemic and self-isolating began. Isolating, in addition to moving and starting a new tenure-track position during the height of quarantine, drove me deep into a depressive cycle. When it is hard to just brush your teeth, it is even harder to reflect and process research on mental illness—research that requires regular self-examination on your own relationship to your bodymind. Trying to revisit my dissertation on depression, while depressed, actively enabled a negative feedback loop that was not sustainable.

Nevertheless, for my first few years as an assistant professor, I still tried to write when my mind and my body were actively telling me that doing so would be cutting a few corners on my hierarchy of needs. As a result, trying to prepare my research felt like having a tire stuck in the mud that was spinning over and over with nowhere to go. The act of writing did not move anything forward for me; it often felt like trying to do so only entrenched me further. I started to feel apprehensive toward my own work, and as a result, very little felt feasible or possible through my research. I began hating writing in general and would go months without opening a document because doing so only made me feel worse. At a certain point, I made the decision to temporarily give up writing in my main area of research, and instead started other projects in less personally demanding areas. This move has allowed me to slowly repair my relationship to writing. For my own well-being, I had to break-up with my work to make any difference with it.

Kathleen's Story: Perfect Imperfect Timing

In hindsight, I see now that I was not emotionally prepared for my dissertation subject and methodology. Prompted by my own daughter's experiences as a young gymnast (and, frankly, by a lot of anger), I interrogated systems and rhetorics of silencing in sports training using the case study of the Larry Nassar abuse scandal at Michigan State University and within USA Gymnastics. Before my dissertation, I had not studied issues of sexual violence and certainly not cases involving primarily child victims.

I watched, transcribed, and analyzed hours of testimony from Nassar's trials—often by myself and isolated from my loved ones. This included 181 victims' voices and more than 600 pages of text. In the end, the mental toll of countless hours spent alone listening to and reading horrific stories of child sexual abuse is hard to describe. This process carried an enormous emotional burden, just as I was emotionally invested in the research.

Looking back, I see many of my "positions" in life contributing to our article's elongated timeline, such being a mother, daughter, spouse, teacher, writer, friend, and colleague. And, not long into our collaboration, my job position literally changed, as I transitioned from my teaching position of 6 years at a small, private, business-focused college to a public, STEM-only university. Personally, this was a beneficial move. But as a researcher, my position declined, as I no longer received credit or course release for my research activities. I found myself in the position

of many non-tenure-track and contingent faculty—conducting research because it is critically important to me but also while handling a larger course load than my colleagues and without institutional recognition or support. Even so, in the years that followed, I took my dissertation from book proposal to publication, accepting the extra work I really did not have time for and pushing through emotional exhaustion because the topic just meant that much to me.

Always hanging on in the background of the changes and challenges during that time was the project with Leah—the revivals, the lulls, the near death of the project, and the furious pushes. And through it all was a desire to see this project to publication, in part, because it directly addresses the very same issues that plagued our progress. In the end, I see our long timeline, in all of its glorious messiness, as perfect timing.

Our project “emerged from the pit,” so to speak, after we encountered a very relevant special issue call for proposals (CFP) in March 2023 that seemed to be a perfect fit for our article. This CFP gave us the sense of purpose and direction we needed to move forward with the project. So, while we do interrogate timelines in this chapter, we also acknowledge that structure, purpose, and even certain pressures can be motivational and perhaps necessary to researchers. And in the end, our own messy lines of pause, break, and postponement were actually kairotic in that they led us to the right moment to pursue publication.

Unfortunately, taking our time with our work, including time to process, rest, and heal from difficult projects, often conflicts with an academic culture that encourages researchers to hide their “shortcomings” and shuns “unproductive” behavior. Therefore, we now offer reflections to help graduate students and early career scholars negotiate their own positionalities, timelines, and need for distance from their research.

From Messy Lines to Messy Nets: Teaching for Recovery and Community in Writing

While we both felt well-prepared for the dissertation process, and both of us benefited from positive and supportive mentorship while working on our research, we could not possibly have anticipated the challenges of transitioning from graduate students to post-graduates in a pandemic world, nor the long-term effects of our relationships to our work. In this limbo realm post-defense, we were deeply missing the community of scholars and academic discourse we had enjoyed while in a graduate program. We were struggling to self-motivate, especially to revisit dissertation work that had been emotionally and physically exhausting. We were navigating challenging new work situations, sometimes in isolation. And, inevitably, deadlines loomed and time pressure demanded outputs.

When we were outlining notes for this chapter, one line written in passing kept staring back at us from the page: Why are we killing ourselves for this? We highlighted it in yellow and added a dozen more question marks. Why are we

literally hurting ourselves to meet writing deadlines others set, comply with tenure and promotion cycles (or in other cases write without institutional support), and internalize or ignore the very real consequences of our research? Unfortunately, we still do not have a good answer for this question (and maybe we never will), but we believe part of the solution is being honest about the emotional, physical, and psychological toll of our research and making that pain visible to other scholars. To conclude this chapter, we offer reflections and suggestions for reworking the writing and research process away from models that prioritize production and deliverables over individual identities and needs.

Leah's Reflections and Suggestions: Plateaued Progress and Relearning Yourself through Research

On the academic job market, one of the most common questions you're asked is what's the 5-year plan: what grants are you going to go after, what are your publication plans for your dissertation, and where would you like your career to be by the time you reach the point for tenure review? In the winter of 2019, as I was drafting my job materials, I made very clear roadmaps for myself: I was going to write a book, target journals x-y-z, and apply for one of the numerous acronym soup grants. It turns out I was a liar. This is okay.

Part of building a research trajectory that is integrally linked to your identity is that said research often necessitates a relearning of how you understand yourself and your thinking. Numerous scholars have written more eloquently on the self-transformative effect of research, but I wonder how this strange phenomenon of negotiation might be understood when preparing graduate researchers and early career scholars not just to start projects that are intimately connected to their various positionalities but also to sustain themselves throughout fluctuating demands and limits while doing so.

While a culminating project, article, or conference presentation are deliverables with set parameters and end points, a continuing relationship to one's personally meaningful research lacks such clearly defined boundaries. When doing work connected to your positionality, there is a fundamental difference between research projects, that is, the things you facilitate or make, and research identity, the intrinsic parts that manifest and carry you through the research and writing process in the long-term. The latter is always in flux, and sometimes it is difficult to reconcile institutional expectations and their strict timetables against the need to process, rest, and relearn. In teaching new researchers to embark on significant research projects, it's important to make and prepare for this distinction. It is entirely possible that positionality interferes with productivity, and readings, training, or practices of embodied listening—of knowing your limits, of knowing what exhaustion is telling you—is a critical part for maintaining a trajectory that sometimes requires a plateau to get out of the ditch. What distance from my work did for me is it helped me stop being frustrated at the lack of forward

progress, and made me more intentional about where I allocate my time and energy—so that research becomes an act of sustenance rather than endurance.

Kathleen's Reflections and Suggestions: It's Okay Not to Be Okay

In my dissertation, I critique sports training techniques that force athletes to separate and repress their own mind and self from the expected emotional and physical responses to their training and competition. In the texts I studied, many gymnasts reported that they could not safely express emotions like fear and pain and needed to detach and suppress these natural responses from their physical performances. I found these reports deeply troubling, especially as the mother of a young gymnast. Ironically, through my subsequent interrogation of my own dissertation process, I now see that I often hesitated to express my own natural physical, psychological, and emotional responses to my research. I worried about the vulnerability of this personal disclosure and that I would be judged as too subjective or too sensitive. This research has taught me that it's okay not to be okay, and that we should not shy away from making our stress, pain, and emotion visible in our research.

I see the value of resisting emotionally neutral and productivity-driven models of scholarship and instead promoting teaching practices that destigmatize the need to take time with our writing. Graduate students and early career researchers would benefit from open, non-judgmental spaces where they can discuss their embodied reactions to difficult research, which supports an overall community of academic care. I see creating distance and taking time away from difficult research as one potential solution to protecting a researcher's well-being, and I encourage researchers to re-envision their research timelines in light of their own bodily and mental thresholds. However, I am well aware that timelines and research demands—and the stigma around not meeting imposed deadlines—cannot change unless institutions change. On the individual level, though, I see mentorship, peer-to-peer collaboration, and debriefing opportunities as important tools for building communities of care that respect individual timelines, needs, and positionalities within research. For me, distance from my research, combined with the opportunity to share concerns with friendly and knowledgeable collaborators, helped me reconsider both my role as a researcher and my relationship to that research in extremely helpful and sustaining ways.

So, we conclude this chapter where we began: with a messy, chaotic writing process that was perfectly slow and necessarily long. The collaboration story we share in these pages is in itself an example of the communities of care we seek. We both benefited from positive mentorship experiences that respected our vulnerability and embodied reactions to difficult research—and that ultimately connected us to collaborate and explore these issues together. While we took our time with that project (about 3.5 years longer than expected), we have also learned to respect the value and power of not doing anything when writing.

Chapter 23. What Is She Doing Here?

Jessica Batychenko
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

The first time I led oral history programming in high school history classrooms, I was terrified. I spent months learning to conduct oral histories under the direction of the historical director of a local nonprofit. I prepared teaching materials in collaboration with a history teacher and archivists. However, standing in front of a room full of students, I was suddenly hyper-conscious of everything I was not: I was not a seasoned oral historian. I was not a history teacher. I was not an expert on local histories.

As students filed into the class, some looked at me curiously, others with shrugged disinterest, with the occasional “*what is she doing here?*” muttered to a neighboring student. Once the bell rang, the teacher introduced me as an expert. He told the students I was a teacher from a well-known research institution, pursuing a PhD (highlighting that this is the highest degree one can obtain), and gestured to my affiliation with a local heritage nonprofit.

I understood this introduction as a way for the teacher to hand over the classroom space to me. However, this authority-evoking introduction gave me pause. As a novice oral historian and university writing teacher, I was very much a non-expert on the subject at hand. It was also immediately apparent that, as an academic, I came from a space of privilege, a position that positioned me as an outsider in the school and community.

What I did not recognize the first time I ran the programming is that the students did not need an expert. They needed a facilitator. When I taught students to conduct oral histories, I shared my own blunders: Asking only yes/no questions during my first interview, my hands shaking as I fumbled with a microphone that wouldn't pick up sound. When practicing mock interviews, students participated in a low-stakes activity where, as a class, they asked me questions about myself as a way to experiment with and reflect on what it means to be a responsible and responsive interviewer. Sometimes students got into a flow, built rapport, and asked open questions that led to detailed stories. Other times, they questioned me on topics that made me uncomfortable and asked questions that received one-word answers.

When tasked with conducting an oral history of their own, students chose their narrators, composed their own questions, and shaped the direction of their interviews. Students initially responded with anxiety: “I don't know anyone of historical significance.” However, after interviewing parents, grandparents, teachers, and coaches, anxiety gave way to enthusiasm: “We need to talk to ... !” This shift allowed for productive conversations about the value

of local and community histories and the knowledge that arises from these spaces.

As a teacher, I entered the classroom as a learner, prepared to engage in a dialog through student-led discussions and activities that centered experiential knowledge. bell hooks calls this a “radical commitment to openness,” in which teachers enter classrooms prepared to acknowledge what they do not know (2009), an orientation which aligns with oral history practices and pedagogies that views oral history as a dialog that hinges on relationships.

My status as an “expert” has not changed: I still am not a seasoned oral historian, I am still not a history teacher, and I am still not an expert in local histories. However, by entering classrooms with the mentality of an oral historian, I can seek spaces of deep listening and dialog where we co-create knowledge grounded in humility and respect for lived experience and everyday epistemologies.

Reference

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Section 6. Insider/Outsider

The *Insider/Outsider* section provides insight into authors' experiences dealing with positional differences and their impact on research practices.

Chapter 24. Balancing an Insider and Outsider Perspective: Positionality as a Practice of Mindfulness

Elizabeth Hurst Marold
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

It's January 6, 2021. I have been following the news religiously as part of my dissertation. I see that the Capitol is being stormed as an attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election. As the news unfolds, I must hop on a Zoom call to interview one of my participants. We begin talking about the insurrection. She tells me that the election was rigged. It has long been my belief that as a qualitative researcher, I am to listen and be empathetic, and I am to find ways to connect with my participants. In that moment, balancing what was happening in Washington D.C., and what I was hearing from my participant, I struggled. This interview was the most difficult one I have ever conducted. It was more important than ever to listen empathetically and thus turn off the natural instinct for rebuttal.

My dissertation, *Navigating Political Identity in the Big Red Dot: Political Conversations among Rural Oklahoman College Students*, was about how rural students underwent political socialization and identity development through political conversations in the lead-up to the 2020 Presidential Elections. Actively listening to my participants required empathy. The year 2020 and early 2021, when I was writing my dissertation, was difficult for many. My interview and focus group questions revolved around the political conversations that my participants were involved in. As a researcher, I could not approach these conversations from a right/wrong or us/them dichotomous approach; rather, I recognized my own political and often moral positions and practiced mindfulness. I approached my participants from a shared experience of changing spaces, from a rural hometown to a college town, rather than as being right or wrong.

From its onset, as I developed my dissertation topic through writing up the findings, I felt a connection with my study participants. My participants all identified as "rural." They came from rural hometowns to a college campus in the middle of Oklahoma. Their political conversations, the focus of this dissertation, were largely inspired by social media, classroom assignments, and news stories. Many of them were first-time voters. Some held the same beliefs as their parents, and some held differing beliefs. On campus, some of my participants found themselves in groups of friends with a variety of political beliefs, and others found friends who shared the same beliefs. Regardless, a similar theme emerged among my participants. They all described the tension of finding belonging.

As I worked with my participants, and reflected on my personal experiences and time in Oklahoma, I positioned myself as both an insider and an outsider. I grew up in rural Appalachia, and like the experiences of many of my college participants, going away to college exposed me to a variety of political ideas. In many ways, I could position myself as an insider. However, I also had to recognize ways in which I was an outsider; as such, other aspects of my identity were important to recognize as I worked on this dissertation. I am a White, college-educated, multiple-degree-holding, millennial, woman. Several of my participants were Native American, and their experiences of rural-ness were inherently different than my own. My participants came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and none of them had yet received a college degree, though they were all in college. I also received my primary socialization in a different rural culture. I originally conceptualized “rural-ness” as constituting a unique culture within the United States. In writing this dissertation, spending time with participants, and reflecting on my time spent in Oklahoma, I came to the understanding that the rural Oklahoman experience, created through the passing down of history and traditions, was distinctively different than what I had experienced in Appalachia.

As both an insider and an outsider, I was uniquely positioned to tell the story of political identity transformation in rural Oklahoman college students. My experiences resonated with those of my participants, but they were not the same. Doing this research taught me about balance. If I relied too much on my own experiences, seeking only for my participants to confirm my position, I would not have been able to tell their story. Ultimately, the writing of this dissertation was a great practice of mindfulness. I was forced to be mindful of how my unique identities, values, and beliefs shaped every aspect of my dissertation. It shaped what I decided to write on, the selection of theories on which this study was scaffolded, how I interacted with participants, my relationship with the data, and how I ultimately told my participants’ stories of transformation. I had to recognize the role of self in research.

Chapter 25. The Dynamics of Experiencing Multiple Positionalities in Qualitative Research: Reflecting on Relationships with Research Participants

Kristin D. Pickering

TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

A few years ago, I found myself in the middle of a conflict between my community and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. I had lived in this community for about 15 years, and my family and I were familiar with nearby “Grey Cliffs,” a Corps-managed recreational lake area where the community could hike, fish, swim, camp, and even hold baptisms. This area bordered our small farm, and my husband and I, along with two young children, visited this beautiful, beloved geographic space, as well. We attended Fourth of July fireworks celebrations there and enjoyed the beautiful area, along with members of the community. However, we were not fully aware of the environmental damage and criminal activity taking place there and getting worse over time. When we were contacted by a local community grassroots organizer named “Norma” about a town hall meeting being held with the community, Corps, and other government officials to discuss possibly closing the area, we were concerned and wanted to learn more about what was occurring almost literally in our backyard.

At the first town hall meeting that Norma organized, the Resource Manager communicated data and statistics from a sheriff’s report he had received that documented the crime taking place, and he described the details of environmental damage he himself had observed. As the community listened to the Corps narrative, many of them couldn’t help but recall a generally negative relationship with the Corps when it bought out local family farms to build the dam that created the lake many years ago. With this cultural history in mind, the community responded with great hostility to the Resource Manager’s claims about the damage and crime and said they were “lies.” The Resource Manager, surprised by the hostile responses from the community, quickly pivoted and began using modified rhetorical appeals that would reach these community members and motivate them to alter their behavior so that Grey Cliffs could remain open, which is what everyone ultimately wanted.

Observing these changing rhetorical dynamics prompted me to profile this conflict as a book-length case study of ways community members and the Corps as a government organization might work together toward a common goal, despite initially very different value orientations and narratives used to discuss

them. I found myself witnessing the type of dichotomy that Herndl et al. (2018) discussed when referring to differing communication goals between scientists and farmers: While the Corps Resource Manager talked about statistics from the sheriff's report and failure to follow regulations that emphasized his removed role as a "technician" and engineer, the community expressed stories that valued their positive, lived, everyday experiences they had gained through Grey Cliffs' environment, such as teaching children to swim and gathering for family reunions.

I chose the ethnographic, observational case study method because I realized how unique some of these problematic dynamics were: This was my local community where I had lived for many years, with its own personal cultural history with the area and with the Corps. I anticipated that focusing on this case, while highly specific and individualized, could yield information, narratives, and strategies that might help other organizations and communities in conflict, even if all details may not be the same. I also wanted to study specific stories from the Resource Manager and community members. While living in the area, I did not consider myself to have the same history and experiences with Grey Cliffs as community members who had lived here for generations; I wanted to observe and document, making sure all voices in this conflict could be heard.

The goal of my chapter is to explore and complicate the dynamics of managing many different positionalities within one research project, including my own positionality and relationships with community members. I identified as a white woman, community member, academic researcher, a member of what might be considered the middle class, and a relative newcomer compared to other community members who had lived in the area all of their lives. While some of these positionalities I could easily identify and understand, I had difficulty negotiating other positionalities, especially in relation to the community participants I interviewed.

One of these difficulties included an experience I labeled as a failure on my part as a researcher, one pertaining to the female grassroots organizer, Norma, and her treatment by the community. As a female researcher myself, I would have thought before these events that I would not have accepted some community members' characterizations of her uncritically, but that is what I had done. Norma became one of my research participants who generously consented to an interview with me, but before I had a chance to hear her story, I found myself biased by other interviewees' experiences with her, as expressed in their interviews.

In addition, I realized that my embodied experiences at Grey Cliffs differed from those of community members whose families had lived there for generations and that these differing perceptions could impact my research. My embodied positionality in the "pre research phase" was positively connected to this geographic space through creating memories of spending time at a beautiful geographic space and connecting with family. To an even greater degree, those who had lived there for generations had many more positive, embodied experiences at Grey Cliffs, including stories about those experiences that had become part of family histories over a much longer period of time. These experiences

contrasted sharply with the embodied stories of the Corps Research Manager, as he observed the negative impacts of off-roading and collected trash from the lake shore, including needles and syringes as evidence of drug use.

Listening to and Gaining the Trust of Interviewees as They Told Their Stories

As I listened to community members during the town hall meetings talk about their love for the area, all of the family reunions and baptisms that had been held there, and all of the efforts (such as paving roads) that had built the area into what it is today, I truly empathized with them as they argued for their ability to continue accessing the area. I also found myself empathizing with the Corps of Engineers Resource Manager and also with Norma, as she led the community discussion as a grassroots organizer. Everyone was so passionate about Grey Cliffs: The Resource Manager wanted to protect the area from further environmental damage and crime, and the community didn't want their access to be limited.

After I obtained IRB approval from my institution and officially began collecting data and interviewing community members, I felt that my academic positionality made me an outsider within this predominantly working-class community (similar to what Dunn [2019] describes in her research with white working-class communities of which she was a part), in addition to my lack of generational history the other community members had. I felt privileged in many ways because I had not undergone the hardships this community had experienced with the Corps land takeovers in the 1930s and 1940s, and my family history did not include stories about losing farmland during that time. I also felt distant from community members based on my educational background and institutional work as a professor. However, I believe that I mitigated this outsidership to some degree by actually "being there" as I conducted this ethnographic, observational case study. I had read Rai and Druschke's (2018) essay about "being there" when conducting qualitative research and thought their work tied in to my approach, since I was an involved community member in the conflict, attended all of the community town hall meetings, and allowed myself to be fully absorbed in the events surrounding the conflict while also acting as a researcher. While the characteristics that made me privileged and somewhat of an outsider did not go away just because I was there, my interest and presence appeared to gain the trust of the community members in such a way that they agreed to participate in interviews that became a key part of my book.

The community members appreciated my efforts to document their stories and perspectives as a valued part of my research. Because this community is such a rural one and Grey Cliffs such a remote area, I'm not sure this community had experienced this type of empathy and attention before, especially from someone who was not originally from the area and, as a result, did not already know the cultural-historical background of Grey Cliffs and its community. As I

met with these community members, I explained the goals of my research, along with the informed consent form, and I was surprised that so many agreed to be interviewed. They seemed eager to tell their stories, and my hope was that, even though there were some distancing characteristics between us, the community members could sense my interest in their storied experiences, as Martinez (2020) refers to them. I knew I could learn so much from these community members' own, embodied experiences, as revealed in their narratives.

Unexpected Reactions to Norma and Enlightening Criticisms

The most complicated and unexpected positionality relationship transpired with one of the community members I interviewed: Norma. Interviewing Norma was essential to my research, from my perspective, because she organized and managed all of the town hall meetings that began the negotiation process between the community and the Corps. Due to health issues, she agreed to an email interview.

Right from the beginning, as I explained my research and the types of questions I was interested in, Norma questioned my research methodology and challenged one of my research questions about the role of emotion in communication. Norma was trained in the sciences, and I believe part of the difference in research orientation related to her training in quantitative research whereas my ethnographic, qualitative research explored a lot of different perspectives. My intention in my work was to highlight multiple cultural views, attending to themes and questions as they emerged and revising them as I progressed. From my perspective, I was only at the data gathering stage, although I was using guided questions in the semi-structured interviews. Only after future reflection and analysis did I realize myself exactly what themes were growing out of my research. In retrospect, I wondered if this different research orientation seemed very foreign to Norma, who was likely trained to highlight more controlled and focused research questions from the outset, given her more quantitative research background.

In addition, conducting the interview by email was probably not the best medium, since Norma may have intended her comments to be benign and observational, but I interpreted some of her criticisms as hostile toward my research design (or somewhat of a lack of one, at that point). I was puzzled by her critique of my research to begin with, since we were from different fields and were not really collaborating beyond the interview. Regardless of her objections, Norma consented to participate in the research, and some of her email responses to me sounded frustrated as she narrated her experiences of trying to rally the community behind the causes she thought the community should be focused on in this conflict, mainly that the community should create a nonprofit organization because that was the only type of organization that could negotiate legally with the Corps. Both Norma's in-person and email demeanors were strong, opinionated, and somewhat combative, from my perspective. Looking back on the

interviews, I realize that part of her demeanor was simply reflecting her discouragement resulting from trying to lead a community to act, and the community ultimately had rejected her leadership.

With this interview experience fresh in my mind, I then continued conducting face-to-face interviews with the other community members I had recruited, a couple of whom were male community members who “took over” after Norma retreated to a back-seat role, due to the community’s rejection. As I interviewed these community members, I found myself agreeing with and identifying with their reactions to Norma’s strong, opinionated, and curt persona; while some interviewees had supported Norma, a few of them did not take kindly to her ethos, and, without fully thinking through the complexities of the communication dynamics going on in the town hall meetings, I accepted and agreed with these community members’ characterizations of Norma because they resonated somewhat with the demeanor I encountered during my email interview with her.

I wrote a chapter in my book that focused on Norma’s leadership role, and in it, I presented her rejection as “status quo,” since my interactions with Norma were similar to the ones some of the community members had. Months later, I received feedback on my manuscript draft, and both reviewers thought I could complicate my discussion of Norma, rather than present her in what they viewed as an unflattering, reductive manner. I had not initially thought of my treatment of Norma as reductive, but one of the reviewers said that they couldn’t help but think Norma would not be pleased with how I had presented her in the chapter and that, even if some of the community reactions to her were justified, those reactions should be presented more objectively, rather than as conclusions I had drawn. This reviewer also made a point that hinted at something I had not fully considered in my desire to finish the manuscript: I was thinking of the interview more as a process that was completed, but the impact of my representation of the interview could extend beyond my initial writing about it. Norma might read my work and object to my unflattering portrayal of her. While her statements may have contributed to my construction of her persona in my mind, the reviewer cautioned against my non-objective view of her, which seemed to be influenced by my other interviewees. Conveying what the interviewees had said was one thing, but allowing that feedback to contribute to my interpretation and representation of Norma in my discussion of her could be judged as biased by others.

As I considered the manuscript reviewers’ feedback, I realized that, while I had spent much time and space in the manuscript expanding on the Corps Resource Manager’s values and community values that impacted all participants involved in this conflict, I had not done the same for Norma. Plus, I had completely ignored the possibility that “environmental sexism,” which I had learned about from reviewing sources such as Gaard (2018), MacGregor (2021), and Taylor (2014), could be impacting how we all viewed Norma’s role as a grassroots organizer. I felt humbled by the reviewers’ feedback and suggestions and used their comments as an opportunity to analyze Norma’s values in depth and discuss the unfortunate dynamics of

her rejection. I saw these constructive criticisms as ways to complicate my positionality not only in relation to Norma but in relation to the other community members' perspectives, as well, as I continued to revise my manuscript.

A Growing Understanding of Multiple Positionalities

I'm happy to say that the Corps and community were able to reach an informal agreement about how to manage Grey Cliffs to allow for environmental rejuvenation as well as continued community access. Now that the conflict has been resolved and the book project has been completed, I find myself continuing to reflect on positionality dynamics related to this work. I am grateful to have become somewhat of an insider to this community's despair of possibly losing access to a beloved geographic space that meant so much to them. However, I continue to feel some dissonance as I realize that my perspective on these community members' stories may not ever be a "true" representation of their ideas and voices, even though I have tried to foreground their voices and words as much as possible. By believing community members and documenting their stories through my book, my positionality as researcher helped them trust me as I attempted to legitimate their stories, beliefs, and hopes in ways I'm not sure would have been possible otherwise. Even though uncomfortable, these varied, "messy" positionality dynamics were worth engaging. Being willing to try to navigate these different identities provided so many opportunities to learn and understand than I ever would have gained if I had not found the courage to at least try.

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Chapter 26. Neighbor or Researcher? Fluid Positionality in Community-Engaged Research

Ania Payne

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We host our inaugural Front Porch Chat, a community conversation series developed with a local Habitat for Humanity affiliate, on the last warm day of fall. A group of ten neighbors sit around a crackling bonfire as the sky dims. One neighbor scrutinizes Josh, Habitat's Executive Director. "You're not trying to build Habitat homes in our neighborhood, right? And what exactly will you be doing with our writing?" she says, turning to me as she bites into a slice of banana bread.

My role in this conversation series is to lead neighbors in a writing activity where they reflect on how their neighborhood brings them joy, which we'll later compile into an interactive StoryMap of our downtown neighborhoods. Josh reassures this neighbor that there's no plan to build affordable housing units on her street, and I explain that the micro-essays I'm asking them to write will contribute to a collaborative community narrative that highlights the charms of our often-overlooked downtown neighborhoods. We developed the prompt for these micro-essays from questions rooted in appreciative inquiry because we wanted neighbors to write about what they love about their neighborhoods, rather than falling into the default mode of complaining about what's wrong with their neighborhoods. I also mention that I'm an Assistant Professor of Writing at the local university and she nods, sharing that her late husband was also a professor. Satisfied, she leans back in her Adirondack chair and begins writing. But another neighbor tosses my micro-essay prompt aside, muttering that she only "takes practical surveys" and doesn't "write touchy-feely things" about joy, happiness, and appreciation.

Though I'm not a resident, I've been granted access to this neighborhood by a friend who lives here. Her neighbors—who are all white, mostly retired, college-educated, and own remodeled, historic homes—initially seemed skeptical about sharing their life stories with outsiders. In fact, in one micro-essay, a neighbor wrote about how great it was when everyone on the block collectively purchased a home that went up for sale, allowing residents to actually choose their new neighbor. Without my university credentials, I ponder their willingness to share such stories with me. But clearly my university credentials aren't enough to earn trust and respect from all of the neighbors, and I can't help but wonder: does my identity as a racially ambiguous woman in her mid-30s enable some neighbors to disregard my writing exercise so openly?

Our second Front Porch Chat takes place in my neighborhood. Perhaps because I am a familiar face who has lived around the corner for seven years, my neighbors freely share their everyday joys of walking to the library, chatting with Tom the mail carrier, and strolling through City Park. However, introducing the QR code for the writing prompt confuses a man in his 70s who squints, holds the paper up to the sun, and says he's never seen anything like this before. Kelly, a local artist, shows him how to scan the code. When the micro-essay prompts pop up on his phone, he asks how he's supposed to write in the text boxes. Kelly offers to type out his responses as he speaks, and I realize that I should've brought a notepad as a writing option for some neighbors.

Because this is also my neighborhood, I write about the delights of planting a native pollinator garden and seeing children smile when they notice the chickens in our red coop. Nobody cares about my role at the university or my age or ethnicity at this Front Porch Chat; here, what matters is that I live in the yellow house with the chickens out front.

The next Front Porch Chat will be on the southern side of downtown, several miles from my home. I don't know if those neighbors will be eager to write micro-essays, or if I'll need to mention my position at the university, or my egg-laying chickens, or my Asian background, or the fact that I've lived in this town for seven years, or if I'll need to share entirely different stories about my life, but I know that people, rightly, will not share their writing with me if I offer them nothing but a sterile IRB form to sign.

Chapter 27. “I Believe in the Future of Agriculture ... and Composition”: Abiding in Positional Differences through Educating Rural Students

Hanna Sanders
TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Fact #1: Roughly one in five grade students in America attend a rural public school.

Fact #2: Rural grade students who make it to college are more likely to drop out than their urban counterparts.

Fact #3: Those who don't drop out are often plagued with struggles due to knowledge gaps linked to lack of K-12 public-school resources.

These statements reflect a difficult truth: a student's background affects their life-long learning and orientation.

I myself am a rural student who later became a writing teacher in the city, though I admittedly had an advantage throughout my early education. Both parents completed graduate programs and taught me to love learning. I attended the local public high school in my East Texas town and from there went to a small religious college in the region and continued living a blissful life behind the “pine curtain.” However, I felt like I was living in a liminal space, caught in between the past I loved in ETX and the future I craved in academia. After all, it seemed bigger cities alone had the resources I needed. Would I ever feel at home in either place? Why were they so different?

While I'd become aware of the unique situations rural students experience while in high school, I did not understand them until I became a graduate student. My educational experience was marked by lack of access to stable internet, due to geographic location, low budgets at my Title I school system, and fewer school sponsored activities as a result of these wanting budgets. I now carry a longing to reconcile my love for the educational environment I grew up with to the academic privilege I have gained—for me and my students of similar backgrounds. This desire goes deeper than just understanding what rural students have experienced. Experience, to me, is passive; it is what has been done to me. My positionality, however, is an active force that affects how I perceive reality and the steps I take to control my own educational future.

To be proactive, I encourage my students to draw from their positionalities when deciding on project topics and lean into what has made them unique while learning tools for clear communication in my classroom. One of my favorite assignments I've given involves students considering where they grew up and who they are as a result. Some have told me afterward they felt heard in a different way than they had in writing classes before. It means a lot, as if I'm getting to see the fruits of the labor from all who poured into me blooming in my students.

I once thought I would see these results in what I myself produced in the academy. I operated under the assumption that who I became as a teacher and a student would be in spite of my background, not because of it. It is an honor to support my rural learners like I was supported and meet every student where they are. I get the privilege of teaching them how to utilize their pasts to create a powerful future.

To revisit my earlier questions, I do feel at home as a rural learner and academic but only because I realized I cannot live without either part. They weren't really different when I looked at them critically; both taught me to slow down and enjoy where I am and what I do. I am a rural academic—proudly. It is a joy to pass on this sentiment to my students.

Chapter 28. Living Adjacent and Approaching Askew: Pathways for Building a Research Agenda

Lynée Lewis Gaillet
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

After decades of researching and teaching with primary materials, I've found that positionality (including relationships to community stakeholders, group memberships, personal history, networking, serendipity, and location) provides the origin for nearly every project I take on. For example, I've studied the organizational strategies of Georgia women's marches (from the perspective of an invested community archivist and scholar who regularly teaches with the expansive women's collections housed on my campus); complicated the reputation of Susannah Wesley, the "Methodist Madonna" (blending my positions as a feminist recovery scholar and chapter leader of United Methodist Women); researched Scottish rhetoric (as a likely Ulster descendant); and produced course designs, public scholarship, and feminist publications surrounding girl-detective Nancy Drew (stemming from my childhood interest in this series).

Like contributors to Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan's *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process* (Southern Illinois UP, 2008), I have long explored ways in which archives and historical research becomes enlivened when connected to the researcher's positionality. I am particularly interested in how the backstory of a project provides new avenues for exploring cultural, political, and colonial histories, along with ethical considerations required when the researcher is only marginally connected to communities of study. While I often disclose my positionality in presentations and published articles on a wide variety of topics, I welcome the opportunity provided in this volume to delve deeper into these experiences, to highlight the liminal spaces I occupy within and preconceived notions I bring to positionality-inspired investigations, as a participant-witness and archival researcher.

Below, I explore my (sometimes) conflicting emotions while engaged in research stemming from the personal and demonstrate ways that rapprochement can occur when community lore meets archival investigation. I also show how unexpected project (re)sources might arise from the researcher's perspective, experiences, relationships, and plain old good luck. Throughout these sections, I weave in examples that demonstrate how considering a researcher's position can help find opportunities to expand our list of professional deliverables, enrich our teaching, and build a research agenda by snowballing project ideas from inception and curiosity to dissemination. I've also found that I enjoy writing and

teaching more when one activity feeds another, and that blurring distinctions between my parallel personal and professional lives can be exciting and fun when I use positionality as a heuristic to determine new research areas.

Unexpected Projects

Recently, I investigated the abiding legacy between two long-time partners, stemming from a small act of kindness. Following their forced migration during the US 1830s Trail of Tears, the Choctaw Nation donated \$170 in 1847 (\$6,719.60 in 2026) to address Irish poverty resulting from the potato famine. This partnership expanded as the collaborators celebrated the initial gift and built a living partnership that is ongoing, 179 years later. While this project may appeal to readers interested in rhetorical history, indigenous and Irish studies, and cultural relationships, the global partnership grounded in two specific communities resonates personally with me, as a settler scholar only tangentially connected to both communities.

My personal connections to this topic guided my research and attitudes about this project. I was reared in Mississippi at the origin point of the 19th-century evacuation of the Choctaw Nation from their lands, and my county includes many Ulster descendants. I grew up a fifteen-minute drive from the sacred, spiritual, and political Nanih Waiya tribal mound (source of Choctaw creation stories) and even edited my high school yearbook titled *Nanih Waiya* (a HS that Choctaw students didn't attend). Furthermore, the local Golden Moon and Silver Star Casino owned by the Choctaw community encompasses the Dancing Rabbit Golf Club and Inn, a name serving as an ever-present reminder of the contentious Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek (stipulating that the Mississippi Choctaw people cede lands to the US government in exchange for holdings west of the Mississippi River). Longitudinal repercussions of this legislation played out in racial relationships in my home county against the shift of wealth associated with the advent of the casino-resort, specifically for Choctaw families who elected to remain in Mississippi. In addition to growing up alongside the Choctaw community, I am a long-time researcher of British rhetorical history. These unique relationships piqued my interests on multiple fronts and allowed me to step back and examine the dynamics of my hometown while simultaneously expanding my academic purview.

While I don't belong to either of these communities, I have long lived alongside one group (as an observer) and studied the other from the related perspective of researching countries that would eventually become part of the United Kingdom (as a scholar). I felt some trepidation as I began this project as an outsider, particularly since as an archivist/primary researcher I understand the ramifications, ethical concerns, and pitfalls of writing about communities to which one doesn't belong. Serendipitously, an opportunity to address these issues arose from another personal connection, allowing me to flesh out my initial hometown community

experiences and tangential scholarship. I found an opportunity to participate in a writing group that specifically recruited participants from my university. I presented an early version of this study at Emory University's "Europe and Beyond Seminar Series," an interdisciplinary, international, and intercollegiate 10-month colloquium opened to a broad swath of scholars, students, and public professionals. This group provided valuable feedback regarding the approach I was taking and suggested additional scholarship for improving the scope and reach of this inquiry. In road testing my hybrid research methods and findings with scholars squarely located in Irish and Native American disciplines, I articulated my concerns about working outside my primary research fields and my position as a non-community member. The Emory project participants helped me to negotiate those pathways indirectly as I considered their advice for including my stance and position in the essay and broadening my background reading before submitting this work for publication.

Positionality and Project Resources

I've found that my memberships and familiarity with local communities suggests not only new topics to research but also corollary resources, especially as an archival researcher. When my now-adult children were small, we went on an annual family vacation to St. Simons Island (a group trip to Epworth by the Sea: A Conference, Retreat & Vacation Center). We swam, ate, and biked all over the island, but for all the years we attended with members of our church congregation, I never bothered going to the library on campus until the year I just couldn't take the beach anymore (as a redhead with blue eyes). Hiding from the sun, I wandered into the little museum and discovered that the Arthur J. Moore special collections housed John Wesley's diaries and journals from his time in Georgia. Over the next few years, I researched, presented, and published works about this remarkable stash of 18th-century artifacts and materials. While I've had other lucky archival finds over the years, this opportunity came specifically from a community membership and recurring experience—one that I (finally) recognized and grabbed.

Similarly, I discovered a treasure trove of feminist archives at MOMA, all because I have limited capacity for shuffling through museums with my art historian daughter. I love museums, but I can spend only so many consecutive hours art gazing; however, I am stalwart when it comes to investigating archives and visiting special collections, and I can tenaciously sift through boxes for days. In preparation for our visit to NYC museums, I planned half-day side trips to take a load off and pleurably dive into museum archives while my daughter studied art at her own pace. While researching MOMA's history, I became fascinated by the founder's wife, Margaret Scolari Barr, and her collaborations with the WWII Emergency Relief Fund. After talking with the archivist, I began photographing resources and gathering materials to expand my initial research into other

holdings. I wouldn't have undertaken this research if I didn't learn from my daughter and then merge her interests with my own to seek out local archives. Furthermore, I crafted this piece for a feature in *Peitho*, one that specifically called for shorter articles that introduce (not fully explore) novel archival holdings; the specifications of this feature seemed doable to me as an administrator who had limited time to start new projects. Blurring the professional and the personal yet again revealed unexpected research pathways.

In another unforeseen series of events, I've partnered with my childhood literary friend Nancy Drew on adventures that are ongoing. As a child in Mississippi (with only homegrown amusements), books were my steady companions. I read voraciously, saving my money for the next installment of the yellow-bound mysteries, annotating each volume in my horrid handwriting, and wishing I could have similar adventures with my two best friends. Fast forward, I grew up and moved past Carolyn Keene and Stratemeyer Syndicate series to find scarier, bigger, literary thrillers. Little did I know that I would eventually embark on new adventures with Nancy. As my long-time friend Beth Battles was organizing a SAMLA session on detective fiction (long after I had moved from lit studies to rhet/comp, from girl detective stories to 19th-century feminist fiction), she convinced me to revisit Nancy, just this once, and a love was rekindled. I dug deep into ND feminist theory, product licensing, Wildred Wirt's archival papers, and pedagogical approaches for introducing ND to new audiences. I designed a rhet/comp course surrounding what I came to learn was a multi-faceted and complicated Nancy, blending my personal, research, and teaching interests and obligations. In turn, many of the students in the course expanded the ND assignments to include young adult and children's series they had read along the way. In writing our positionality statements for the course and sharing them with one another—the first assignment listed on the syllabus, we began collectively to understand ways to harness our personal interests, curiosities, and even friendships (positionality) in ways that led to unique course projects, research to deliver at conferences, and in some cases published documents.

Interdisciplinary Venues for Growing a Research Agenda and Disseminating Findings

Once I began researching and writing about topics that held personal interest for me (rather than just working within traditionally accepted parameters of rhetoric and composition scholarship), I found that (1) I was never at a loss for something to research and write about and (2) I had many more venues for disseminating my research. Like most academics, I found that over the course of my career, these two issues had occasionally served as obstacles as I tried to create a research agenda (once I had exhausted projects from my dissertation as a beginning Assistant Professor, as I sought promotion from overworked/stalled Associate Professor/WPA to promotion to Full, and again as I recently stepped down from

decades of service and returned to classroom/research full time). By focusing on subjects that I already understood, that stemmed from communities to which I belonged, or that resonated with my personal curiosities, establishing a research trajectory became much easier. I also knew from award-winning and highly acclaimed research such as Beverly Moss's investigations into African American preaching and Wendy Sharer's explorations of suffrage organizations (both projects grounded in familial associations) that studies connected to researcher positionality could also garner critical academic acclaim.

As a spiritual and academic woman, for decades I have taught classes in my church, served as education chair of my congregation, and designed original curriculum for limited studies; however, more recently, I have begun trying out ideas for scholarly research projects (particularly feminist studies) on fellow United Methodist Women (UMW)—those committed to “Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors” philosophies. These explorations often begin as extensions of UMW issues and figures but quickly morph into academic projects. For example, I led a study of Susannah Wesley at my church but expanded that study of Wesley's diaries and letters into an examination of Wesley as a precursor to bluestocking intellectuals and female preachers for presentations and publications. While I like to keep my parallel lives separate and experienced a bit of trepidation as I began sharing my academic research with my church colleagues, those CV lines likely would not have materialized if I had not first talked about my ideas with non-academic groups that I belonged to.

The mix of scholarly and spiritual conversations and feedback helped me to seamlessly blend academic and religious dissemination paths. Most recently, I designed a UMW study based on “Lessons from Proverbs and Barbie,” a project that I am now thinking about expanding around feminist and social circulation theories for academic readers. Writing for dual audiences helps me to expand both the scope of my work and target publications available for publishing this research. Likewise, I road-tested my early inquiry into the Choctaw-Irish partnership with the UMW Circle. These smart women posed insightful questions into the origins of the initial gift, suggested scenarios about how the Choctaw citizens might have learned of the plight of Irish during the famine, and queried the (religious) infrastructure necessary to get the funds to Ireland in the 19th century. In both projects, pitching this work to women's group audiences early in the process helped me determine research directions and provided additional CV and institutional annual report entries, including community teaching and service items.

Coauthoring with current and former students, blending our positionalities and emerging interests, also leads to hybrid methodologies and new places to pitch projects. Collaborating with Women and Gender Studies colleagues, as well as archivist friends, has led to publications in interdisciplinary feminist journals and collections, invitations to speak at women's conferences and archival events, and opportunities to write blog posts for feminist organizations—opportunities

that I likely would not have pursued solo. These partnerships encourage me to get out of my comfort zone by providing an experienced guide who understands the parameters of other disciplines' methods and publishing practices, and those collaborators in turn disseminate their work within my field with us taking turns as lead authors and project managers.

Final Thoughts

Am I a religion scholar, an art historian, an indigenous studies expert, a children's lit specialist, a library archivist, or a labor activist? Absolutely not! Does publishing in these areas make me a fraud, a poacher, a Dodo bird? On occasion, I think maybe. However, by blending positionality and scholarship, learning from my students (and my friends and children), and writing about the communities I observe, join, and am born into, I've not only avoided burnout but also wake up excited about new projects that I am taking on (after 40 years of teaching). If we clarify our stance and focus on situated storytelling that privileges experiences of stakeholders, then we can bridge research methods and positionality in ways that encourage ethical adjacent and askew research trajectories. My experiences writing from personal positions while foregrounding the communities and individuals I've researched have proved fruitful throughout my career. During times of personal stress (giving birth with no maternity leave, overwhelming fatigue from serving as an administrator for 22 years) and professional urgency (finishing my dissertation while having a baby and outrunning a narrow window of graduate funding, repeatedly trying to beat the tenure/promotion clock), I've relied upon group memberships, friends, and colleagues to discover research avenues and sustain intellectual projects. Positionality (along with a heavy dose of serendipity) suggests unique ventures, ones I tackle from an individual perspective. That stance coupled with primary and archival research provides new ideas for teaching and research, ones that help avoid burnout and contribute to an ever-shifting research profile.

Section 7. Marginalized Perspectives

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.

Chapter 29. Embracing Tensions in Critical Qualitative Research: Letters from a Friend

Ana Isabel Terminel Iberri
SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY

January 21, 2024

Dear Friend,

I'm writing this letter to you because I heard you are preparing a new research project but feel hesitation about how to engage in this process. I've been there before, so I'm writing to tell you about my own experience with research. More specifically, I want to share about the research I did with an organization that supports high school students that have experienced the foster care system, most of whom are Latinx. This organization offers a series of workshops, mentorship opportunities, and a residential summer program to empower students to see themselves in higher education. After working the inaugural residential summer program, I knew that my relationship with this organization and with the students would extend beyond the summer, however, I vowed to keep my involvement separate from my research. I didn't want my relationships to become work or the subject of study. Then, 2020 came and life as we knew it changed drastically.

People around the world were forced to adjust to a new life as we faced the threat of a virus that we knew very little about. As schools and businesses around the country began to shut down, the organization was forced to reimagine engagement with students. I was invited to collaborate with program staff to brainstorm different ways to engage students. Given my history with the organization, my doctoral studies in Communication, and my interest in pedagogy outside of the classroom, the Director of the organization encouraged me to consider doing my research here. I expressed my gratitude but declined citing concerns about how my role as a researcher would impact my relationships with the students. She asked again, urging me to use the tools I had gathered in my doctoral studies and the close relationships I had with the students to support their well-being. I remained skeptical but began to wonder the potential this context would offer all of us, and eventually accepted. In this project, I had the privilege of experiencing the possibilities of critical and liberatory pedagogies outside of the classroom through a Chicana/Latina feminist methodology called *pláticas*.

To say that I enjoyed doing this research project is an understatement. This was one of my favorite life experiences, and even though I defended my dissertation in 2023, this project continues to shape my understanding of research and

who I want to be in the world. And yet, I struggled *a lot*. I often found myself questioning whether I knew what I was doing, if I was causing harm to the students, and what the purpose of my project was. I felt lost, confused, and extremely skeptical. I share this with you because I know you might be feeling something similar. I want to share with you some of the challenges I experienced to let you know that it is okay to feel tension, and in fact, to emphasize that tension can be generative in research.

Choosing a culturally relevant research design that was critical and qualitative, I had the opportunity to spend time with the youth in many different contexts; virtually, outside of their homes, at community service events, during programming with the organization, and at a college campus. I loved this part of my work because it allowed me to continue building relationships with the youth, to learn about their lives, their hobbies, and who they are as people. I was also able to share with them who I am, the struggles I was experiencing as a graduate student, my favorite foods, and more serious things like my encounters with border patrol agents and the process of applying for a visa. Over a 15-month period, we engaged in numerous pláticas that allowed us to talk about power, oppression, resistance, and identity through our own embodied experiences. Our time together was unstructured but extremely generative, and because we shared a cultural background, we were able to connect on numerous points including lessons we learned growing up, comidas we love to eat, and different customs and traditions.

As our relationships continued to blossom, I started to feel tension which came up frequently in my field notes. This tension was about many aspects of my involvement with this organization but specifically focused on my role in this research project. I saw myself first and foremost as a mentor to these students, a role that mattered more to me than that of a researcher. But what did it mean for me to have power in the lives of these youths as a researcher? Power in terms of the role I played, in terms of what would be included or excluded in my dissertation, and how these youth would be portrayed. I struggled and frequently asked myself how I would make decisions. Because this tension was connected to ethical concerns in research, I felt like I couldn't write. Have you felt this, too?

Talk more soon,

Ana

~ ~ ~

March 1, 2024

Hi again,

Last time I wrote, I was happy to share details about my research with you and the beginning of the tension I experienced. Today, I want to elaborate more on the tension that continued to animate my project. Each day my field notes had fewer thick descriptions and more questions; questions about my commitments to the

project and to the youth, about my role in their lives, and about the way I would report my findings. I was stuck, and I felt like I was making no progress. Frustrated and confused, I met with my advisor at our favorite coffee shop. Having an advisor who understood the vision of my work and the politic shaping it was essential. She encouraged me to sit in the tension that I was experiencing, rather than to turn away from it. To *feel it* and see what might come of it. So, I did just that. I intentionally wrote about this tension, specifically turning to performance studies to embrace embodied tension as a type of knowledge that was not only important in my experience but also critical in my research. I finally let myself feel. This process allowed me to shift my relationship to this tension and to understand it differently. In my research notes, I captured how this tension shifted for me.

Through every stage of this project, I have come to find pages inundated with tension. Tension about the limits of what I can do, about my inability to change the material realities of the teens I care deeply about, tension about the harm I might accidentally cause, or the possibility of misrepresenting the beauty that I witnessed. I have learned to understand this tension as my trusty companion, she who will never leave my side and who shows up when I need her most. The one whose presence reminds me to proceed with care, to refuse to tell the stories that don't belong to me, to shift my commitment from the academy to the community. She reminds me that hope in a different future lies not in the walls of the ivory tower, or the minutes spent presenting my work at a conference; but rather in the relationships we build outside of it, in the commitments we make to show up for each other, and in the everyday acts of care we choose

Rather than seeing tension as my enemy, it became a critical part of how I made decisions throughout the research process. I felt tension about the personal stories the teens would share with me, and whether I should include them in my research. I chose not to. I share this with you because I truly believe that sitting with and feeling that tension in our bodies can be extremely generative and can help us decide how we want to proceed. Rather than turning away from it, I encourage you to lean in, to feel it, and to let it guide and shape the decision you make. Don't be afraid to write it down and include it in your research, after all, there are likely others who, just like you, are trying to decide what to do with their own tension. I hope that my choice to share the tension I experienced gives you permission to sit in yours, too.

Take care, saludos!

Ana

~ ~ ~

April 2, 2024

Hola friend,

I'm grateful for the space you're offering me as I share my struggles with research. While my hope was to offer you support, you're doing the same for me. I'm glad to know that hearing about tensions in my work is helping you figure out yours. The tension I want to tell you about today is failure. Because my project was situated in the critical paradigm, it was imperative for me to pay attention to my positionality, to understand how power was ebbing and flowing in different contexts, and to center the voices and experiences of the youth. Many of my research notes and the conversations I had with friends and colleagues were focused on this, and what it meant to conduct my research through a politic that was humanizing, intersectional, and that placed community over the academy. In focusing on these politics, it was also critical for me to acknowledge my social position and the way it shaped my project.

As a Mexican immigrant, I have spent time thinking about the ways that I am both privileged and marginalized simultaneously, depending on the context in which I find myself. Most scholars committed to projects in the critical paradigm will emphasize this, so I was careful in paying attention to my positionality, taking notes, and talking with close friends and colleagues. The youth and I also talked about this, specifically the way that ideas about race, class, gender, and sexuality were taught to us at an early age and continue to be reinforced in everyday interactions. We discussed the importance of unlearning these ideas so that we could be intentional in how we navigate the world. I felt confident that I was being critically reflexive and understood how my positionality was shaping my project and how I made sense of what I was observing.

In November of 2021, however, I had a critical realization about the way I was perceiving the caretakers in the lives of the youth. I had just returned home after visiting some of the youth at their homes. Because the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting the organization's programming and engagement with the students, I began doing home visits with some of the program staff as a way to create additional touchpoints with the students, where we could check in, connect, and provide support. On this night, I came home and realized how I was feeling. Rather than describing it to you, I want to share another excerpt from my research notes.

I just walked into my home from doing a home visit and I feel like I'm trying to find my grounding. I feel sad, or confused? From what I can remember, the last time I saw this student was for a home visit in March, about 8 months ago. Last week, his caretaker finally responded saying we could do a home visit, that he was still enrolled in school, and that he was struggling with depression. We quickly arranged for a home visit today. Seeing him today was exciting. He was even wearing his program

apparel and had a big smile on his face. He shared with us how bored he has been at school, which was no surprise to me since this is online, and I know how he feels about virtual learning. One of his family members came out, he was playing with her curly hair while telling us how smart she is; that although she is only two, she is already potty training. He speaks of her like she is his own and I see him prioritizing her over everything else. I sometimes wonder if he does this so that she can have a different childhood than he did. I know he loves her so much. It is in moments like this that I struggle being judgmental. I see the way the state functions, the way it is racialized, gendered, anti-Black, and the way it targets low-income families. And yet, in this context, I feel myself judging his caretakers. I feel angry at them for not making him the priority, for not stepping in and allowing him to focus on school and having a childhood. I catch myself judging without actually knowing them or the specifics of their situation. I know I don't know everything, and yet I have strong feelings towards them. I claim to be a humanizing scholar, and yet I am actively dehumanizing them. Guess there are limits to the way I embrace this approach. It's a process, and not a place at which one arrives. Well, I'm in the process. I need to revisit the work of scholars that I respect, pedagogues, qualitative researchers, and philosophers who don't shy away from a realization like this. What does reflexivity look like in this scenario? Rather, how have my assumptions and values shaped the way I engage this project generally, and the individual students and caretakers specifically? How are these values and assumptions reflecting those of the state? I am failing.

This was difficult to share, gracias for the space.

Ana

~ ~ ~

May 12, 2024

Hello dear amigx,

How are you? Last time I wrote and shared the excerpt from my research notes, I was reminded of the shame I felt after writing about this failure. How did I not realize that my perceptions were helping maintain systems of oppression? By making assumptions about the youth's caretakers, I ignored the way that structures of oppression shape people's experiences and choices and instead individualized the situation. I felt tension, except this time, it was manifested as failure; failure to account for my position as someone who has not experienced

the foster care system, failure to live up to the politic I was claiming, and failure to acknowledge my complicity in the oppression of others as they exercise agency when navigating systems of oppression. To be honest, I still feel embarrassed to talk about this. At the same time, I do so because it is important to be transparent in the work that we do. I sat with this tension for weeks and thanks to my advisor Loretta LeMaster's work on failure I learned to see it as a series of structural constraints animated by oppressive ideologies. The embrace of failure then became an opportunity, a new point of departure to improvise new ways of being with one another. She taught me through her actions and her own work that failure serves as an opportunity to actualize change. This embrace deepened my understanding of structural inequality and the way everyday mundane communication upholds systems of oppression.

I share this because I want you to know that the research process is messy and complex. Often there are no right answers, but there will be instances where we encounter failure. This failure can be connected to the design of our projects, to our writing, to the way we collect data, and more. Rather than seeing failure as absolute, I learned to see it as an opportunity to continue refining what I do and how I do it. In moments where you feel like you are failing or have failed, I encourage you to embrace it as an opportunity.

I offer my thoughts and research notes humbly, not as a know-it-all expert in research but as a person who is committed to humanizing work, especially given the colonial roots of the academy. The research process is messy, uncomfortable, and always unfinished. For me, having clarity in the politic(s) that shape my work was instrumental, as I consistently turned back to these to see if my work was aligning with them. When I realized I wasn't living up to what I was claiming, I chose to lean into the tension. Rather than turning away, I was transparent and dedicated a chapter of my dissertation to the tensions I experienced, exploring the role of refusal, failure, and emotions in my project. In doing so, I hoped to create intentional space, both in my project and in the academy, to contend with the ethics of doing research with marginalized youth.

One of the most important lessons I have learned is to turn to my community, a community that you've become a part of. The research process can feel lonely and can cause significant uncertainty. While we are responsible for our own projects, finding a community shaped by critical care is imperative. Rather than facing tension alone, I had several people with whom I could sit. Their role wasn't to advise me or tell me what to do, instead they sat in the moment with me, offering space to listen and process what I was working through. I hope you are able to find those who will sit with you, too, and know that you can count on me. Lean into the mess, feel the tension, and sit with failure. You'll be better for it.

Sending you my best,

Ana Isabel Terminel Iberri

Chapter 30. Beyond the Headlines: A Muslim Professor in the USA

Mohamed Yacoub

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

As a Muslim teacher, I tend to bring as much of my identity and positionality as it is necessary to clear any misconceptions or misunderstandings about Muslims. In first year composition courses, teachers generally leave a room for students to choose a movie of their own interest to watch and review. I chose a movie called *The Citizen*. This movie narrates the story of an immigration-lottery-winning Lebanese immigrant who arrived in New York on the eve of the infamous event of 9/11. Ibrahim, the protagonist, goes through a cascade of hardships and troubles. He was arrested as a suspect of 9/11 terroristic event, thrown into jail, toughly interrogated, but was, several months later, released; however, he had hard time finding a job after seeing stores owned by Muslims being vandalized and seeing Muslims changing their names in order to be able to get hired. In his long quest to attain citizenship, Ibrahim was stereotyped for his brown skin-color, ‘accent’ in English, and religion as a Muslim. Eventually, Ibrahim was successfully able to take the oath of allegiance and became a citizen of the United States of America.

I challenged my students to review this movie critically and to reflect on their own—probably invisible—biases, understanding, and perception of immigration, people of color, religious diversity, and discrimination. To my surprise, most of my students, who were at the time freshmen, liked the assignment and liked how they were challenged. However, some of them walked to me and said, “I don’t know what I can write.” Some others questioned the meaning of “critical” in such a review. When I started reading students’ submissions, I got to know much of their own personal life stories: Some were immigrants, some from immigrant parents, some had a Muslim relative, and some were even Muslims but told nobody in class. They only revealed in the assignment. Other students talked about their own “ignorance—” as they named it—or biases or practices that might be harming others.

Reflecting on my own positionality, I realize that my identity as a Muslim teacher profoundly influences my approach to teaching. Having personally experienced anti-Muslim rhetoric and sentiment, I understand the importance of addressing and challenging such biases in the classroom. My decision to select *The Citizen* was not merely an academic choice but a reflection of my own journey and the struggles I have witnessed within my community. By sharing this part of myself with my students, I aim to create a learning environment where diversity is acknowledged and respected.

It is my Muslim identity that fuels my passion for such transformative educational practices. By integrating my personal experiences and perspectives into my teaching, I hope to inspire my students to become more aware, compassionate, and socially responsible individuals.

Chapter 3 I. Caught in Between: A View of Positionality and Marginalization from the Middle

Rosanna M. Vail
TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

During summer 2022, I took a course called “Positionality in Research,” taught by Dr. Rebecca Rickly at Texas Tech University. I knew the course would be “mission-critical” for me as a doctoral student considering a dissertation that would involve my home community in Hawai‘i. What I didn’t anticipate was that I would be crying all semester—not just a few tears but heaving sobs that became the backdrop to writing my weekly reading responses—because my positionality was changing. While positionality will always be fluid, this chapter serves as a snapshot of where I am situated now and the moves that got me here. It’s a story about facing hard truths, changing perspectives, and embracing the messiness of being in the middle.

Early in the course, I needed to write a positionality statement. In it, I explained that I was born and raised on the island of Kaua‘i and had never traveled outside of Hawai‘i until I was 18 years old and left to pursue a degree in English/Writing. I am not of Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) genealogy, though many people outside of Hawai‘i assume I am and have mistakenly referred to me as “Hawaiian.” I am a fourth-generation settler to Hawai‘i, the first biracial person in my family—half Japanese and half Portuguese—whose ancestors came to Hawai‘i as plantation laborers. I can speak “Pidgin” (Hawai‘i Creole English) but am not fluent in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language). I grew up around but have limited knowledge of or experience with Kanaka Maoli cultural practices and traditions.

The initial draft of my positionality statement established my status as an insider-outsider for research relating to Hawai‘i, which I could readily accept. But where exactly was I in the middle? In different situations and contexts, I seemed to be in different places in relation to my home community, ever shifting. I felt fraudulent and not wholly anything. This liminal space, what I thought of as a “murky middle,” was difficult to understand and navigate. I was adrift and grasping, not able to get my bearings. What helped me was writing everything down—and then returning to it.

A Journey Through Positionality Journals

The following selected passages are from my positionality journals during the course. These musings made some of the struggles with my identity and relational

connection to my home community more tangible. While my writing today uses ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i diacritical marks, these entries have been included as originally written.

June 14, 2022

Check yourself before you wreck yourself,
but “don’t make it all about you!”

It’s so hard to be a researcher. We’re always in the middle of this work we’re trying to do—can’t possibly get out of the way of it, needing to articulate where/who we are and why that’s meaningful all the time—and yet, we’re trying so hard not to make it all about ourselves. I have a particular insecurity with a ‘both/and’ existence (e.g., for me: biracial, Hawaii/mainland, English/other languages, industry/academia, arts/sciences, etc.) where I never quite feel 100% belonging at any given moment in any given area. It’s all very fluid—certainly not exclusive to me, but it’s hard to grapple with even when others do have similar experiences.

In this entry, I recalled the resonance of Dr. Cana Itchuaqiyaq’s words, “don’t make it all about you,” from a presentation at our institution a month earlier. I recognized the starting point as always-already striving toward a balance of self and research.

June 29, 2022

Keep calm and keep a “puke ho‘omana‘o” (journal)

It just so happens that I learned the Hawaiian word for ‘journal’ this week. Keeping a journal is not something that comes naturally to me. In fact, aside from course requirements, the only time I write in a journal is as a last resort to try and process my emotions that I don’t want to deal with—a stress response of sorts. At this moment, I feel like my identity is noticeably shifting. I’ve been quite immersed in all things Hawaii, not as much as during my childhood there but definitely a lot more than before. Part of it is because I’m considering delving deeper into research related to this place on a larger scale, and part of it is because I feel I’m catching up to what I’ve missed out on for a long time by pushing away. So in feeling like my identity is in a bit of a state of flux, the way it is shaping how I think about research is also shifting, especially as we continue to learn about indigenous methodologies.

During this week's entry, journal writing became an accountability move, serving as a process of understanding myself by textualizing what I did and didn't know. Recognizing what I was (still) learning proved that I was further from understanding many cultural aspects of my home community than I had thought.

July 4, 2022

“No [researcher] is an island”

I see an opportunity and a responsibility to voice ... concerns in research from the ever-fluid position of insider/outsider. But at the same time, I have to acknowledge that reflexivity and relationality and all these tasks toward ethical research approaches are all so absolutely exhausting, especially for those of us who sometimes need to recharge in our own ways. For this reason, I really value building trust with researchers and those outside of scholarly work who can tell me openly but kindly if, when, what, where, how I need to shift. Who know what I'm aiming for and how far I am from the mark. In addition to listening to, working with/in, and being accountable to a community, I want to apply those same approaches to how I interact with other researchers, as a give-and-take practice of reciprocity (our favorite word). It's sometimes really easy to feel isolated in what we're doing.

This entry, inspired by the John Donne poem, “No Man Is an Island,” felt like I was coming up for air—a crucial reset wherein I realized that I can and must do my part to both listen and share. Suddenly, there were many in the “murky middle,” moving in our own ways, but together.

July 19, 2022

Has anyone seen my rug? It got pulled out from under me

Last week and this week were very hard for me because in addition to [the] reading[s], I read some book chapters related to my in-progress paper that abruptly changed the way I see myself in relation to power, positionality, and privilege. To preface, you all have likely heard me talk or write about the aspect of my positionality specifying that I am from Hawai‘i but am not Native Hawaiian. I knew enough about Hawai‘i's plantation history to realize that no one in my family on either side was native to that land but rather came over 100+ years ago for the specific purpose of working as laborers in the fields. I was perhaps naïve and just plain inattentive, but I always saw Hawai‘i—my home and the

only place I would ever call home—as an intriguing melting pot where we came over because we were meeting a need, and now we largely all get along within our local culture that we all contributed to. We were invited ... weren't we? We were helping ... right? This diversity and co-existence is proof of 'success'? We all come together for the strength of our lāhui (nation/people)?

This entry opened the door to a clearer understanding of settler migration history, complicity in relation to Kānaka Maoli, and necessary humility before I could continue my research trajectory. Never before had I questioned or acknowledged the (inadvertent) harm that I was a part of within a colonial system. The feeling of increased separation, of being understandably forever at arm's length from the only place I could call home, destabilized everything. Through the end of the class, I focused on making sense of it.

August 3, 2022 Not me crying ...

I spent ... this class crying from the readings, which focused heavily on decolonizing methodologies that I had not encountered before—ideas that resonated with me so much as I constantly struggle with being and feeling always-already someplace in between. I am moved to tears very easily, which is fine ... While this summer has been extremely emotional for me, it has also been extremely valuable. Probably the most exciting part of the class/summer was the additional readings I did into Native Hawaiian research methodologies. I still have quite a lot of caution about jumping into and/or committing to research connecting to where I'm from. I have done much soul-searching and learning about my heritage(s) and the areas I want/need to focus on to address my cultural knowledge gaps and limitations as a researcher, regardless of whether my research interests continue in this area. In reading about the Hawaiian methodologies, there was so much that I connected with regarding how I approach life in general; to see this worldview applied to research was both invigorating and reassuring to me about who I am and where I come from, even if I will always be partly outsider because of not being Indigenous. Learning from those methodology books in tandem with our weekly readings was really helpful, and I felt an infectious desire to keep reading and learning about those methodologies. It may seem a strange way to describe it, but those texts almost felt alive to me. They are not static ideas; they are living and breathing.

The most difficult part of the class/summer was when I stumbled upon additional readings that shed light on the Asian settler colonial role from Hawaii's plantation days, in which my ancestors on both sides were complicit in the ongoing and now multi-layered subjugation of Native Hawaiians. It made me rethink my formerly casual usage of words such as 'local' to describe myself and 'my roots' to describe the land where I am 'from.' These words are much more loaded than I had previously afforded the space for them to be properly delineated in my writing and casual descriptions of myself. I am not entitled to occupy that space just because much time has passed since the events leading my family to reside there. These are the areas of my initially drafted positionality statement that I would and do plan to change. There needs to be some other way to explain my and my family's situation as non-white settlers while still establishing our longstanding residency and commitment to the place, people, and culture."

I know I cannot beat myself up over this, but it does feel strange to regret the way I wrote something when, even from one week to the next, I am making quite large-scale realizations that immediately affect what I am doing and writing. One thing is for sure—I am so excited to push the boundaries of including and even centering positionality in scholarly works because these types of readings have been what I am learning the most from these days. The researcher 'failures,' the reflections and lessons learned, the admitting of the need to pivot for the sake of strengthening ethical research approaches—that I as the researcher do not and cannot know without relational commitments to other people and lands. But in all of this, I promise to still have a careful and thoughtful approach during all processes of busting down walls. And to keep Kleenex nearby, just in case."

Making Sense from the Middle

The positionality course was the first time I had allowed myself to be radically honest as well as willingly and intentionally vulnerable amidst the difficult histories and complex cultural relationships that influence how I view the world and, in turn, how I would (inadvertently) affect my research. While it was easy for me to accept that I can never truly be an insider researcher in Hawai'i, I faced frustration and embarrassment in finally realizing and acknowledging my complicity in Asian settler colonialism in Hawai'i. I came to terms with my own identity and history, which was difficult but necessary. I recognized that there is

so much I don't know and can never know. I needed these shifts in perspective to go forward with my research, and I came to these conclusions transparently with the rest of my class reading about it. I'm not a risk-taker and am not particularly keen on being vulnerable, but I saw a safe space to have my reckoning, and I took the leap. Here is what came out of it.

I am both marginalized and marginalizing. Reading my positionality journals reflexively has helped me to consider how my research is always entwined with the histories and stories of other people. As I think back to the dominant cultural narratives I grew up with, it bothers me that the groups I descended from did not (and largely still do not) prioritize a returning of power to Kānaka Maoli in their own land. I recognize that I do have an important story to tell—as a biracial Asian woman from Kaua'i—but it is one that inherently threatens to become yet another narrative that eclipses Kānaka Maoli stories and voices. I know my story matters, but I don't think it matters *more than*.

While I am considered multiply-marginalized where I am now, and in academia broadly, my Asian settler heritage places me in a majority of many sociopolitical contexts in Hawai'i. I am caught in between, wondering what happens when a counterstory from the middle starts to cut two ways—disrupting a dominant narrative while also taking up the space of another marginalized group. My very existence is situationally marginalized and marginalizing. How should a story like mine be told, if at all? What is my responsibility, and who am I held accountable to? It feels selfish of me to even wonder where this leaves me—with more questions than answers—but my hope is that this introduces an important scholarly discussion. I am not the only one in this position, right here and right now.

Balance and bravery defeat doubt. I want to represent myself and my connections appropriately, but it's hard to strike a balance between the expectation to articulate who I am in the research while not making it all about me. Even as I take measures to de-center myself, I can't fully prevent my imprint from being on everything I do as the researcher. Thus, especially in research relating to Hawai'i, I need to disclose both who I am and why I am the one to tell a particular research story. I need to be thorough and relevant, without overdoing it. I need to try and situate myself in the murkiness, make it as clear as it can be. There are many times that I don't know whether I'm capable of it.

What scares me, as a graduate student and novice researcher, is the likelihood of writing it all wrong—of scholars in my field deeming my articulations of positionality insufficient or even problematic. I need and appreciate such scholarly accountability, and I expect my writerly life to be a monumental mess of iterations, but I am completely intimidated. Additionally, I'm worried that instead of doing something good with the knowledge and perspective I've gained about my positionality and how to articulate it, I won't be able to discern certain methodological boundaries—that I will inevitably make mistakes and learn lessons, but that those failures will be inexcusable. Self-doubt permeated my journal entries

and my thoughts, but the more I revised my positionality statement, throughout the course and afterward, the less worried I became. More people read it by way of peer review. I kept changing it as I myself kept changing. I read what others wrote and gave feedback too. Give and take, and editing.

I admit that during the ongoing process of trying to understand myself and articulate my positionality, my frequent crying turned to wallowing, to journaling, to questioning all my choices, to changing my dissertation direction, and will most likely move back to more crying. What I learned is that I can embrace the uncertainty, even as I keep grasping to make sense of where I am. I can question whether to keep pursuing a particular line of research because of my positionality. I can pivot. The middle will always be confusing, but the middle is home.

I encourage engaging fearlessly with positionality in research. Come find me in the middle. We'll be brave there.

Chapter 32. Seeking the “Self” in Relation to “Others”: Negotiating with Multiple Selves of an IPV Researcher

Pooja Ichplani

FLORIDA INSTITUTE FOR CHILD WELFARE

I came to Florida State University to explore the sociological aspects of communication. As a non-immigrant, Indian woman-of-color, I took up the onus of designing a prevention program against intimate partner violence (IPV) in Florida.

My curiosity to understand how a relationship founded on love becomes abusive and controlling began upon witnessing certain controlling incidents as a child, drove me to share research space with women survivors of IPV. I recognize the privilege I hold in their eyes as someone not privy to what it means to be a survivor IPV. The power struggles between a researcher and participants made me scrutinize each decision to be ethically responsible.

I explore the role of interpersonal network ties (INTs) for two groups of women: survivors, and for those who are at-risk.¹ By comparing insights about their INTs, I emphasize on linkages between social support and women’s willingness for disclosure about abuse, which has program implications in protecting women and organizing communities for social change.

During conceptualization, I believed that (1) my identity as a woman can resonate with participants to confide in me; (2) my field experience in India with closely related issues put me at a topical advantage; and (3) my unfamiliarity with nuances of an intimate relationship may act as a barrier to share vulnerabilities with women and bring “othering” to surface, inadvertently widening the researcher-participant communicative distance. I present two distinct anecdotes that disrupted my comfort with research whilst strengthening my positionality as an IPV researcher.

Ethical Language of Consent

Arshiya asked me to keep her identity anonymous over text. In my response, I summarized the confidentiality clause from informed consent. During our

1. INTs are operationally defined as known, trusted, and more readily available individuals to women than are formal sources of help, and those who are the reference group for these women when it comes to their willingness for disclosure about relationship difficulties or distress, including any type of abuse. By “survivors,” I mean women who have navigated an abusive intimate/romantic relationship. “At-risk” indicates women who have ever been in an intimate/romantic relationship for at least three months, that is when the signs of abuse begin to appear.

scheduled zoom call, we both saw each other's faces recognizing the similarity in our appearances and our English accents. We do not hail from the same country, but we had an unsaid shared understanding about talking in our native language (Hindi/Urdu). Her name was a major giveaway to presume her country of origin was Pakistan. Momentarily, I contemplated explaining the consent in Hindi, but it would have been inappropriate to deviate from the ethical protocol and initiate an interaction in Hindi so, I refrained myself.

Arshiya seemed apprehensive about her identity as we went over the consent. Understandably, she made the same request, but this time in Hindi, referring to my "familiarity with our cultures" and how tabooed partner abuse is. She established a connection between us with two short sentences. Reciprocating in "our" language, I assured her there is no one (except me/Principal Investigator) who has access to participant identifiers. Empathizing with her, I understood her hesitation and calmed her.

An epiphany dawned upon me. I was responsible for protecting this respondent's anonymity—as a researcher and a South Asian. I was compelled by the connection between our respective countries of origin, which facilitated the interaction that ensued. We still talked in English, but this brief conversation pivoted the course of the survey administration that followed. I felt myself being more patient in clarifying the purpose and intentions of questions in Hindi, when necessary—which blurred the researcher-participant dichotomy and probably closed the communicative distance. This incident is telling of the power that subjective perception about a researcher holds over this process, as my ascribed identity was more trustworthy than the IRB-approved research procedure detailed in the informed consent.

Clearly, motivation for each participant is a function of circumstances, apprehensions, and incentives—which brings me to the next incident.

Bureaucracy of Incentivization

I called Nina, notifying her of her research eligibility and requested a 90-minute time block for the interview. Misunderstanding my request, she began narrating her story enunciating "gun" and "drug use," but I did not interrupt her emotional expression. It was after 2-3 minutes that I emphasized that an in-person meeting might be a better way to talk, and she obliged.

As a graduate student, I was limited in ways in which I could provide incentives. Although I informed Nina about \$25 Amazon gift card, she only accepted to participate for cash. She texted me she "can't really do much with \$25 card" as she had "a lot going in life [so] it would just be best if [she] declined."

Inspired by Peshkin's subjective I's, I grappled with my different selves: bureaucratic expectation of adhering to pre-approved incentive payment method; researcher's hunger for diversity emerging from awareness of Nina's socio-economic status as an unemployed college-dropout-woman-of-color; and

civically-responsible citizen who did not want to aggravate drug (ab)use that sub-consciously came from her short disclosure over phone. I considered Nina's effort to text when she could have easily "not showed up." She did not feel entitled to receive cash, she felt comfortable expressing her discomfort in the incentive type, indicating her interest to participate. Her preliminary trust obligated me to navigate this situation without giving up on her participation.

Recognizing my own blind spots, I first discarded the bureaucratic expectation which could widen power distance between researcher (as FSU representative) and participant, whilst silencing both our voices. With an hour until the scheduled interview, I called my major professor, who challenged my assumption about Nina's drug use, and that it is possible that Nina "simply does not shop on Amazon" helping me suppress my civically-responsible voice. While I saw Nina's narrative as critical for IPV scholarship, I did not let my researcher-self objectify her as a "means" for data collection. The knowledge that research logistics are not compatible for her circumstances warranted an attempt to find avenues to make that participation possible. I felt accountable for equitable incentivization to my participants, and I refused to enforce a singular type of incentive.

Taken together, my resonance with Arshiya's geographical origin and shared language (homophily), and intuition about Nina's seeming desire to participate (empathy) decreased communicative distance between "us." I learnt how mental contestations driven by normative expectations and internalizations awakened me. That said, humanizing participants and suppressing (to some extent) subliminal power hierarchies inherent to research made the whole process more rewarding.

Section 8. Bridging Cultures

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.

Chapter 33. Interpositionality of Emotionality: How My Monolingual Taiwanese Nationality Intersects with Dual Citizenship of Taiwanese Americanness

Meng-Hsien Neal Liu
WASHBURN UNIVERSITY

As the spring semester of 2023 drew to a close, one of my participants generously allocated two hours to share her multi-legged migratory journey from China to Taiwan to the United States. My dissertation work explores the experiences of Taiwanese Americans who navigate complex transmigration trajectories, examining how they are ethnonationalized along the way. During our virtual interview, tears streamed down her cheeks as she recounted her initial years in the U.S. She tearfully described the racialized bullying and social ostracization she endured. I found myself shedding tears with her, deeply moved. In that moment, I realized “research” cannot contain the vulnerability and humanism within and about us. As a Taiwanese researcher, I have personally encountered moments in the U.S., where I have felt pressured to identify with Chinese heritage and experienced alienation as a racialized foreigner. This shared sense of displacement fostered an emotional bond between us as transnational subjects.

As a mono-national Taiwanese, however, I do not enjoy the privilege of dual nationality compared to my Taiwanese American participants—especially the freedom of unrestricted travel across borders. I returned to Taiwan for ethnographic work following my research interview. Just before boarding my flight, I received the devastating news of my maternal grandfather’s passing. My participants have dual nationality that affords them flexibility in crossing borders; however, my F-1 student visa restricts me to the confines of my school campus during terms and mandates return to Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, to maintain my visa status. The emotional toll of transnational mobility I must navigate was highlighted by my inability to physically grieve with my family in Taiwan. Instead, I mourned my grandfather’s loss through digital messages exchanged over seven thousand miles, constrained by temporal limitations on my ability to be physically present.

Reflecting on my emotional positionality in relation to my participants, I pondered our shared experiences as Taiwanese transmigrants labeled as “exotic foreigners.” Yet our mobilities differ significantly; while my participants can freely

cross the U.S. border, I am constrained by visa regulations that shape my daily emotions and connections to my family. Differentiated mobilities within transnational communities underscore disparities in mobility rights and privileges. While dual nationals may enjoy relatively seamless border crossings, individuals like myself face bureaucratic hurdles that influence emotional experiences and familial connections. These disparities underscore the need for researchers to critically engage with how mobility—and its constraints—affects emotional lives and research dynamics.

This divergence prompts critical questions: When the inter-emotional-relationality between the researcher and the researched forms differentiated mobilities (e.g., border-crossing capability by citizenship status), how does the researcher negotiate with the writing, analysis, and “experiencing” of the data? How does our writing intersect with the emotion generated through confronting our different citizenship positionalities and alignments with institutions (e.g., border customs)? How can the researcher better understand such inter-emotional-relationality through the movement across and into different spatial and temporal environments?

In examining these themes, I am reminded of the interconnectedness of personal narratives and scholarly inquiry. The emotional bonds forged between researcher and participant underscore the human dimensions of research, challenging traditional boundaries between observer and observed. Yet the sharedness can never be replicated, as emotional and relational dynamics between researcher and participant arise from their varied citizenship statuses and institutional alignment, such as border customs. These reflections offer insights into the complexities of transmigration experiences and the emotional landscapes they entail.

Chapter 34. Reckoning The Privilege of White Multilingualism

Analeigh E. Horton

FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY

I recently attended the 68th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations as an NGO delegate. Accessibility-wise, it was easy for me to attend. I took the Subway to the UN. I used my home language, English. I showed my driver's license for entry. This diverged from the Zimbabwean women I met. They traveled for 24 hours to New York. They spoke English as an additional language; Ndebele was their first. They required passports and visas. A delegation of white women tried cutting them in line but not me. Later, we all sat in the Trusteeship Council listening to Secretary-General António Guterres speak with Portuguese-accented English. I watched three tiers of translators interpret for attendees who donned earpieces to listen to his keynote in French, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and more. I observed on-screen captions and ASL interpretation. I noticed questioners assume the lingua franca while the Secretary-General received his own ear-pieced translation before answering in his second language. I encountered more non-English and non-US culture in a singular space than I ever have anywhere before.

I couldn't help but notice my linguistic, racial, and national privilege. As a white English professor, I am leery of English's role in imperialism, colonialism, and racism; I can't help but question my own complicity. The UN is designed to unite nations, but English, the US, and whiteness directed the Headquarters' norms. It forefronted how my multilingualism and multiliteracies weren't actually needed, at least not in the ways they were required for foreign delegates.

My multilingualism began in sixth grade Spanish in suburban Georgia. Instruction included children's songs to learn letters and numbers while sampling chips and salsa. My entire schooling, including most Spanish classes, was taught in English, almost exclusively by white, US-born educators. I studied Spanish because it thrilled me more than extra math or gym classes; I continued Spanish because it afforded travel and a resume line.

At the UN, my mind's ongoing hum amplified its reminder that many people are forced to learn English to access education, immigrate or seek asylum, or get hired. Whereas my multilingualism and intercultural competence is routinely praised as an incredible skill, people from marginalized communities are incessantly criticized that their other languages aren't good enough. My multilingualism has unfairly flung agape exquisite doors, but for too many, multilingualism is essential for prying open rudimentary entryways.

Reckoning literacy discrimination is complicated in systems designed to reinforce it. As a professor, I decide the boundaries of prescriptivism and assign grades. As a researcher, I determine if the potential participant using high school-level Spanish 2 counts as multilingual, especially compared to the Indian girls raised in Dubai speaking Arabic, English, Hindi, and Malayalam. As a writing program administrator, I establish linguistic requirements for placement into developmental versus mainstream courses. The inequities of literacy granted me this authority where I broker my future without having it restricted by my skin, tongue, or birthplace, and also influence others' linguistic experiences. The computer randomly assigned my first Spanish class, but literacy's weaponization has never been accidental. This knowledge holds me accountable to highlighting its injustices and disrupting its power across my work.

My teacher-scholar-activist philosophy is forever molded by my Zimbabwean friends, now among countless other sociolinguistic influencers sitting metaphorically atop my shoulder shaping my activity and reflexivity. I'm grateful for English's ability to connect us; language unites peoples in ways that monolingualism never can. I therefore continue my sociolinguistic work. Unfortunately, I can't undo centuries of language-based violence, but I can employ my sphere of influence to deconstruct the systemic privileges, pursuing linguistic justice as an act of peace.

Chapter 35. Positioning Our Shared- Leadership Research and Practice: Multivoicing Our Multiculture of Writing at an Historically Hispanic-Serving Institution

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Texas A&M University, Kingsville (TAMUK) is a Hispanic-Serving Institution. About 75% of our students are Hispanic (one of the highest percentages in the country) and, since 2015, about 55% of our students have been first-generation. At TAMUK, writing center tutors have played the pivotal role in working with multicultural writers and faculty. Tutors have taken on functional leadership roles including visiting classrooms for informational visits and writing workshops; overseeing the day-to-day ebb and flow of student visitors to our center; managing the schedule; and serving as peer mentors to other tutors, especially newly hired tutors. In short, student tutors and administrative assistants have realized crucial shared, functional leadership roles in all our undertakings. We believe it's important to share our shared-leadership stories. Our chapter features short narratives written by diverse peer tutors working with fellow writers.



Figure 35.1. UWC staff “sending up Js.” (Our university’s unique mascot is the Javelina). Photo by Steven J. Corbett

We will describe our impressions of working with writers—especially our views on the social-justice work we do in relation to our individual identities and positionalities. We hope our vignettes illustrate how if directors use their authority to foster a communal identity and positionality, where authority and leadership are shared, it complicates and enriches the notion of what it means to lead and to be(come) a leader.

“An Environment of Shared Leadership and Trust”: Steven

Identity matters. And learning from other people’s identities matters a lot. In 2016, I was hired to direct TAMUK’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a crucial part

of our regional reaccreditation.¹ Our QEP involved the founding of the University Writing Center (UWC) as well as the implementation of the writing-intensive courses. From the moment I hit the ground at TAMUK, I began interacting with tutors and administrative assistants that blew me away with their intelligence, caring, and willingness to work together toward our common goals. My past experiences administering writing programs, teaching in the classroom, and publishing had taught me that, if you give students a chance to show what they can do in leadership positions, they will often prove more than up to the task.

After almost twenty years of experience, I had come to truly believe that a peer-centered model for shared writing center leadership offers an approach in-line with many of our long-held power-displacing, feminist, inclusive, and collaborative educational philosophies and practices—and I wanted to put those practices into effect immediately. This is exactly what happened at TAMUK. I began to lean more heavily upon the administrative assistants to run the day-to-day hustle and bustle of students in and out of our increasingly busy Center. I began to replace some of the readings on tutor training with more observations and discussions from experienced tutors. I offered and encouraged more experienced tutors to take on increasingly more responsibility for all aspects of the UWC's operations. I began to, first, invite students into conference presentations then, later, happily watch as they began to submit their own proposals (and later even co-author papers for publication with me and each other).

Over the years, this approach really paid off. We started gaining a reputation around campus with faculty, staff, administration, and—most importantly—students. Faculty began to see and hear confident students taking ownership of their abilities to help fellow students. The word increasingly spread among students that our Center was a place they could visit where they would meet fellow students they could trust, peers that looked like them, acted like them, and (they would come to find out) even shared many of their own insecurities about writing and talking about writing. We'll continue this multilogue with our friend Shelby, since her leadership roles have had an enormous influence on the rest of us. Shelby's impact demonstrates how one person's positionality can have a positive and lasting ripple-effect on so many others.

“Understanding, Courageous, Intelligent, and ... Compassionate”: Shelby

I was a tutor at the University Writing Center (UWC) from the spring of 2019 to spring 2022. I was flabbergasted when I was invited to work at the UWC by my English 1302 professor (and director of the UWC), Dr. Steven Corbett. My degree is in Civil Engineering, and I have two learning disabilities, Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia. At first, I was sure Dr.

1. See <https://tinyurl.com/ycxt5xfn> on Google Drive for the full report.

Corbett emailed the wrong student and was adamant he found a more qualified individual. However, despite my initial protest, Dr. Corbett urged me to apply and said that he saw so much potential during our class time. I decided to take the job, which I consider to be one of the best decisions of my life. I did not see it then, but my misperception of myself, as a disabled and underqualified student, was limiting me in my potential. Despite my negative experiences with disclosing my neurodiversity at a young age, my positive experiences as a tutor have proven that the benefits are far greater. Students who also struggle with similar neurodiversities need to see that it is possible to be a good writer—sometimes even a good writing tutor—despite their “disability.”

Growing up, I had many encounters with educators that resulted in me feeling inadequate in my skills and incapable of catching up with my peers. Often in grade school I was told that I needed to do things the “right way” and “just write,” but the programs and methods didn’t seem designed for me. I feel I missed out on years of personal development and exploration to fit their perception of what a good writer, or student, does. A perfect example of this was in eighth grade. I was reading an article and taking notes in preparation for a writing assignment, and I used every color of highlighter with many notes and arrows that lead to notes I had. When my instructor saw my handout, she scolded me for making a mess of it and forced me to redo it with less color. I would avoid using colors to help make parts of passages stand out and only make notes in black ink. I didn’t score well in her class, and I sure didn’t learn as much as I could have if she had worked with me instead of against me.

My initial reservation about Dr. Corbett’s job offer stemmed from my misperception of a writing center’s role and, by default, the tutor’s role in the writing process. Before I was a tutor, I was a student who could have significantly benefited from the writing center services; however, my initial misunderstanding made me fearful of going in for help. At the time, I did not know that the writing center was a place that promoted neurodiversity.

Personally, I wanted to avoid experiencing anxiety and the potential to be judged for something out of my control. On the other hand, this risk presents neurodivergent tutors with the opportunity to be challenged by their inhibitions and, perhaps, to even learn to embrace leadership roles. Often, tutors with ADHD or dyslexia have had to work harder to create coping mechanisms yet still fall short in their assignments.

Currently, I am recently-married and working as a civil engineer in Kansas City. In my last year working at the writing center my leadership role developed beyond the tutor-student relationship to include my coworkers. Looking back, I was very aware and purposeful in sharing with the next generation of tutors my coping mechanisms and compassionate approach to each appointment that was inclusive for neurodivergent minds but were beneficial to any student. With first-hand knowledge, I know that the next generation of student writing tutors at TAMUK are understanding, courageous, intelligent, and capable of being compassionate to any and all minds they encounter.

“Pointing a Person in a Right Direction”: Alyssa

What makes a leader? When diving deep into this question, we can say that being a leader is pointing a person in a right direction. Those who look up to leaders are putting their trust in the leader, and that is something we should not take for granted. Being a tutor at the TAMUK University Writing Center has taught me a plethora of skills that I will take with me long after I have gone.

But I did not learn these skills all by myself. Other tutors took me along and helped train me while I observed them during tutoring appointments. Tutors who significantly impacted the way I tutor were Shelby and Jaziel. Shelby taught me that it's okay to be different in your approach when helping a student because we are all different. She also taught me to be bold when students are not cooperating and are looking to have their essays written for them. Jaziel was very quiet but also outgoing and that taught me to not be afraid to be my truest self. I have taken what they have shown me and apply it still in the way I tutor and lead.

I am a Hispanic woman with anxiety. Anxiety significantly impacts the way that I act during tutoring appointments. I might start sweating, fidgeting with things, picking at my nails and cuticles, and/ or stuttering, but I know that I can take a minute to gather myself if needed. When we are open with the students about what we struggle with, they are more likely to feel comfortable. I also try and throw in the conversation that I am also still a student like them because that serves as a reminder that I am in their shoes.

“Students Can See My Personality”: Angelica

Coming to TAMUK in the Spring of 2022 as a naive transfer student looking for a part-time job, I was fortunate to find a home with the UWC. Within the first few weeks, I was immersed in a new culture of leadership, work ethic, and determination. Shelby was the first person I met during the new-hire phase. Shelby shaped how I go about appointments and how I present myself—as more than just a tutor, but a real person.

Shelby was open about her identity and all the qualities that made her Shelby. A quality I deeply admire about Shelby is that she was honest in her sessions and let the students know that, at times, she struggled due to her dyslexia and ADHD. However, this never kept her from being one of the writing center's greatest assets. When I find myself stuck and uncertain about the path to take with an appointment, I always ask myself, “WWSD,” what would Shelby do?

From then on, I started my appointments by asking the students how their day was going, what they were up to, or how they had been. Once the student and I found some common ground, both being college students trying to stay afloat, I would then ask basic background questions regarding the assignment.

Due to this initial “ice breaker,” the students can see my personality. This would humanize me just like Shelby, so they knew I was not necessarily a superior but a helpful peer. I felt comfortable using her strategies in each session. For example, I would always take a blank sheet of paper with me into the session in case any notes needed to be written for the student to have a better visual understanding of the paper at hand.

I identify as a 22-year-old Hispanic woman who is an extroverted introvert. That personality combo allows me to judge how to navigate certain appointments and communicate with coworkers. Being Hispanic helped me connect with many students who might have been raised in the same region and culture as me. But I have also gained a vast amount of leadership qualities from Shelby, qualities that helped me provide (in turn) a helping hand to my coworkers.

“The Opportunity to Prove My Worth within Myself”: Larisa

As I came into this new world of peer tutoring, I had a number of hindrances occurring all within my life. I was diagnosed with OCD and Borderline Personality Disorder. The weight of these diagnoses affected my mental health tremendously. When I was younger, something always felt a little off within my own self, and I didn’t know how to explain it or find the accommodations to make everyday tasks more accessible for me. Every item on my itinerary was a chore, and it made me feel as if I could not accomplish the same things as my peers. Getting out of bed in the morning was so hard; it got to the point where my mother would have to drag me out of it.

Once I was offered this job, I was given a new sense of worth and identity. I poured myself into my tutoring and writing. I felt as though I could be the best at what I did if I dedicated my full self to it. However, the way I went about my tutoring process was a struggle, so I began gathering resources and viewing my peers’ appointments a little more closely.

Specifically, I looked to Shelby and Linda—two of our fellow tutors in the writing center who have graduated now. I did not directly ask them for help; however, I did pay closer attention to what it was that they would say or do within their appointments. They constantly displayed how to take control of your appointments and express your thoughts in an organized way. I learned how to talk to and boost students’ confidence, along with the way to go about your critiques as well. Due to their mentorship, I had a much easier time managing the way my appointments went. The flow was better, and I could more thoroughly help and explain the concerns of each student.

Leadership and helping others for me have always been a dream. I was not just given the opportunity to help others, I was given the opportunity to prove my worth within myself.

“I Knew there Was Still Much to Learn”: Annette

As a Hispanic woman in college, I seek to meet people I can relate to and learn from. This was especially important to me when becoming a tutor at our writing center in 2021, where I met individuals I now view as leaders. Although I was still new to tutoring, I noticed how some clients had this presumption that tutors would do the work for them, especially me and fellow female tutors. Rather than asking how to improve their paper, I was handed it and expected to fix it for them. It was difficult to communicate with these students who seemed clearly disengaged and then suddenly became engaged with a male tutor. While there might be several factors as to why this has been a common theme, I knew there was still much to learn.

I was grateful to work alongside people who have heavily influenced how I handle these issues. Someone that I view as one of our notable leaders in the center is Shelby. Shelby, despite having dyslexia and ADHD, taught me how to make each session a collaborative experience. She provided strategies to capture a client's attention, especially for those that could be neurodivergent like herself. One of these strategies included disclosing having dyslexia and ADHD to the client. This was significant in that I learned how it could help clients feel more comfortable and engaged in the session. Another strategy included taking notes on paper during the session to provide for the client after the appointment finished. She told me that rather than simply listing off what needed to be improved during an appointment, this strategy helped her process each piece of information before moving on to the next.

We'd like to end our multilogue with our friend Casidy, a person who, even though she never had the opportunity to work directly with Shelby, has felt the lasting ripple-effects of her leadership nonetheless.

“Amazing People to Learn From”: Casidy

I began working at the UWC in Fall 2022 and was slightly apprehensive and didn't realize that I was stepping into a leadership role. In the past, I've suffered from anxiety, lack of confidence, and a hard time finding my voice. But I've been able to overcome so many of those struggles. I've found a confidence in myself that I didn't know I had, which has affected so much of my life, including improving my grades. I've also been able to find my own voice and communicate with others much better and overcome so much of my anxiety. The UWC has allowed me to grow in so many aspects of my life.

As a Latina student, it can seem like there are not many opportunities to step into leadership roles or find other Latinas to look up to, learn from, and work with. Being given a position at the writing center, I was excited to know I would be working alongside and learning from other tutors, the majority Latina. Working alongside tutors that double as administrative assistants, such as Annette,

Alyssa, and Angelica, has taught me so much about leadership and what a leader looks like. I've gained amazing people to learn from, work with, and have become fast-friends with.

Allowing students to have leadership positions and become role models on campus is so important when working with other students who need someone that they can relate to and feel comfortable around. A lot of students that come in for the first time can be nervous and scared that their papers will be judged harshly, and when they work with tutors who are kind, understanding, and helpful they begin feeling more confident in their writing and more comfortable coming back for help on future assignments.

The more we wish to send the most positive writing-centered ripples of change across our campuses, the more we should embrace a collaborative, shared model of leadership.

Chapter 36. Positionality as a Simulacrum

Shiva Mainaly
UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

On December 16, 2022, I tucked my notebook under my arm, squinting in the bright Indian sun at Khajuraho, a tiny town in Madhya Pradesh, India. As a doctoral candidate studying rhetoric and composition at the University of Louisville, I had to make a field visit to these famous Hindu and Jain monument complexes—sprawling across a 20-kilometer area of Khajuraho—in search of authentic evidence of lost ambient rhetoric in the Indian subcontinent. To me, the intricate carvings along the behemoth monuments’ exteriors hinted at creativity par excellence, offering a matchless model of a homespun alternative ambient rhetoric in India. Of these monuments, Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Lakshmana, and Devi Jagadamba stunned me to bits because no monument had demonstrated such an audacity to trigger rhetorical affectability around its vicinity. To my utter dismay, I felt my pulse quicken. The nagging doubt driving my research, which aimed to explore the ambient rhetoric of sandstone materiality native to Khajuraho monument complexes, tended to be acute in that I had the challenge of ushering in almost a fragment of lost Indian rhetorical practice as part of my doctoral dissertation.

I had stacked my dissertation on the notion that a researcher’s positionality concerning their subjects was a carefully crafted narrative. A simulation only! At the University of Louisville, my PhD cohorts once argued that a researcher’s positionality indelibly shapes the questions they ask, methods they employ, and conclusions they draw, whether conscious of it or not. But I had my doubts. Roaming around the monument complex’s entire site, hearing from the mouths of locals about dozens of reasons behind the construction of controversial monuments, and seeing evidence of how meaning shifts over time, I inched closer to finding evidence of the simulacrum I believed positionality to be.

Stepping inside the first shrine, I observed bas-reliefs depicting divine beings alongside everyday acts: Gods and goddesses amid courtship, music, and battle scenes. I drifted toward carvings of nymphs in sensuous precision, erotic prowess, and profane pristineness. Their delicate stone limbs intertwined with medieval warriors, elite courtiers, and kings in acts of visceral pleasure and intimacy. “My position as Nepal-born, Louisville-based doctoral candidate shapes all facets of my inquiry,” I effusively whispered. Those identifiers felt evanescent during my fantastic foray into the ambient rhetoric of the Khajuraho monument complexes.

As my observation deepened, I moved toward the next monument, tentatively built around 1000 AC when Khajuraho was the political and cultural heart of the Chandel. It came to my attention that my positionality should fade before these magnificent scenes of a lost empire, thousands of miles and years away. I gazed into a massive stone yoni, the abstract female counterpart of the lingam. Head tilted back, I traced its concentric upward rings. More than a coherent tenor of my thoughts, it is the messy and meandering impressions that my field visit brought on in my mind because I faced the same question every visitor has been asking since time immemorial: why is the sacred space desecrated? And to what end? Instantaneously, it came to my mind that the longer I remained in India, the more tenuous that position felt, the reason being that a variegated affects and emotions tended to overwhelm me in a manner most uncanny. Roaming observantly and curiously through temple after temple in reflective solitude, I watched light and shadow converge on princes and princesses dancing, celestial nymphs bathing, and gods battling demons. At this juncture, I pondered scholars' fierce defense of positionality as I grew aware of the very transient and flimsy nature of the subject-object spectrum.

At Khajuraho, there was no Kentucky soul, no Nepali immigrant ... only vivid human figures exuding their affectability from a medieval realm inscribed on monuments' exterior and interior walls. The essence of those carvings, sculptures, and iconographies came not from what others named them but from the truth their artists instilled in cold sandstone materiality. As a rich amber sunset crowned the Western Group, I ended where I had begun. With my Americanized Nepalese scholarly disposition at odds with Khajuraho dialect and Hindi language-based communication, a nagging impulse stirred once more, like the first time I had questioned positionality. Identities that had seemed solid back home now struck me as fragile constructs, as coreless fabrications: No more than a mirage. If such a core part of positionality as a researcher could feel so ephemeral and contingent, what did that make of claims that position indelibly shapes perspective?

Chapter 37. A Tale of Two Democracies: Writing Studies Between the US and India

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INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

The Ghosts of Papers Past

There are rewards to being a hoarder. You can revisit exactly what you wrote in your First Semester English Exam in the Fall of 1997, in your home city of Delhi, when you were in 11th grade. You can mourn the loss of your neat and precise cursive and see that the longest answer you ever wrote was about a page-and-a-half long. You can see that you had correctly answered the question of what the eagle symbolized in Tennyson's *The Eagle* (correct answer: power and majesty).

You can see that questions involved testing how effectively you could use the words “grace and dignity” and “to my surprise” in a sentence; your answer to the second “I had thought the English paper would be two hours long, but later, *to my surprise* I found out that its duration was 3 hours.”

Time, ah yes, *time*.

You can remember that almost everything that you wrote in school up to that point was produced under timed-writing conditions: anxiety-provoking, stress-inducing timed writing. You can remember that you had never, not once, written a take-home essay on which you received feedback, based on which you then made revisions. You had never drafted. This game was one-shot and on-the-spot.

And because you are a hoarder you can see exactly what you wrote to your friends back home in Delhi about an English paper that you wrote in the Spring of 1998, in the Second Semester of 11th grade. By January of that year, you had moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, with your parents, and without half your heart. A reluctant relocation that felt to your self-indulgent teenage self like moving to the moon.

To your friends you wrote a good deal that is unmentionable, as well as the following, “In English I’m doing a researched essay on ‘A Streetcar Named Desire’—its (sic) come pretty good and took tonnes of work—I had to write 6 drafts for it and read 5 critical books and essays. I have to read too many books! Gosh! ... I have two English classes, so I have to read about four books a week, while the kids who have 1 class only have to read 2!)”

Doubtless, you were exaggerating, about the six drafts and the four books, but you know that it is in this moment, and in this movement—overnight, from

Delhi to Raleigh, from a one-shot system to a many-draft system, from rote-based learning to reasoning-based learning—that the writing pedagogue in you was born. The shock of switching schools, educational systems, and of course countries so swiftly created a unique positionality and pedagogy, crafted between two worlds, and it is this positionality that informs so much of what you do today.

Just as to being a hoarder, there are rewards to being an anthropologist. You can look back on the products of your hoarding and call them data. You can then analyze your data reflexively to attempt to understand how they inform your commitments to and insights regarding Writing Studies today, between India and the USA.

Before I enumerate some of my positionality-derived, or positionality-influenced positions on teaching writing at the university level, I provide a bit more of the conventional professional-biographical narrative of what I did after that foundational, fateful, high-school era move.

The Making of Positionalities in the Present

This is my story in the field of Writing Studies: In 2010 I completed a PhD in Anthropology, and failing to secure tenure-track employment in my discipline, found my way into Writing Studies. My first teaching job post-PhD was at UPenn's outstanding Critical Writing Program, where I taught first-year writing seminars in the disciplines over the course of 5 mostly happy and productive years. I first fell, quite incidentally, into Writing Studies, but then slowly I began to fall in love with the field. This was both unexpected and delightful.

I realized I was a generalist over a specialist, a process-oriented teacher over a product oriented-teacher, and that I genuinely enjoyed teaching first-year students from across the disciplines how to think, rather than what to think. I also realized that Writing Studies and Anthropology were closely connected, so I felt few schisms between my life as a teacher of writing and a teacher of anthropology. Both fields of practice and inquiry enhanced each other and challenged each other in the productive and exasperating ways that keep the mind hungry and engaged.

In 2015, home called. A brand-new university was being built in New Delhi—Ashoka University—and that university needed both Writing Pedagogues, as well as Anthropologists.

Luckily, I could fill both slots, and I arrived at Ashoka as the university's first Director of Writing, as well as an Assistant Professor of Anthropology. Once there, I played a central role in setting up Ashoka's undergraduate and postgraduate Writing Programs; in training a cohort of Writing Instructors (whose work in the field now, happily, exceeds my own); and in crafting new curricula and teaching methods uniquely adapted to India's particular educational contexts.

These contexts involved taking a new set of steps towards moving Indian education ever further away from lingering colonial legacies of mimicry rather than creativity, particularly in humanities and social sciences education at high school

and undergraduate levels, as well as moving away from primarily exam-based assessment to more open-ended and qualitative forms.

In many ways, I arrived in India at a moment where many past orthodoxies with regard to education were being dismantled and questioned, and so this was a deeply exciting moment—one that brought home for me, most decisively, the importance and purpose of the humanities and social sciences, not only for the creation of new knowledge but also for engaged and critical democratic citizenship. And within humanities and social sciences education, I realized increasingly the absolutely critical role played by writing studies and pedagogy. I arrived in India at a moment of the creation of a relatively new field of study—that of writing studies and pedagogy in the country—and was deeply fortunate to get to play a role in crafting that field..

In this, I was accompanied, aided, helped, guided, and often lead by the extraordinary generosity and collaborative spirit of colleagues who played a leading role in establishing the nascent field of Writing Studies in India—Anannya Dasgupta then at Jindal (and now at Krea), Madhura Lohokare at Jindal, Ashwin Kumar at Ahmedabad University, Subhasree Chakravarty, Anuj Gupta, Aruni Kashyap and Aditi Sriram at Ashoka, and many others. Most continue to work in India, taking the field forward, and when my daughter turns 18, I hope to join them in the important work of deepening formal engagements with writing, reasoning, and critical thinking in Indian classrooms, even as a continual informal tradition of conversation, deliberation, and debate that I grew up with in the country—and that is now under considerable threat—remains one of my largest sources of inspiration as a writing pedagogue. A future dream-positionality is as someone who is able to travel across the country conducting informal flash-Writing-Seminars in multiple contexts, with multiple types of learners, and in multiple languages, for, as many genealogies of our field have it, a training in rhetoric, and in oratory, is a training for democratic citizenship itself.

Speaking of democracy, I would be remiss not to mention Val Ross, generous and brilliant mentor whose own positionality and journey might well have played a role in prompting her to craft an exceptionally inclusive Writing Program at Penn. When I started teaching writing in 2010, I was deeply inspired by Val's informal mantra, 'everyone should have an Ivy league education,' as well as the many steps she took to attempt to achieve this end. Accordingly, our training at Penn shaped us to teach a diverse range of learners in as inclusive a manner as possible, both inside the formal classroom, and without. Val's approach was to continually expand the walls of the ivory tower, both locally and globally, and under her leadership, Penn formally partnered with us at Ashoka for an unprecedented free transfer of all of Penn's instructional materials in Writing Studies. These continue to be used, adapted, and circulated among learners across India. Over my years in India from 2015-2021, here I saw Writing Studies being crafted and re-crafted, transferred and adapted, between the world's two largest democracies. And I got to play a key part in that process, all before the age of 40. Now that was a ride.

When I think back to my eight years in Delhi building Ashoka, a very large range of emotions crop up. Those were years of deep personal loss and professional joy, though even that joy came with a generous side of difficulty, as most new and large endeavors do. Those were also years—according to many expert commentators—of the stifling of critique and dissent in the country, and of significant democratic backsliding. But it was the larger political and social context that made the work itself so vital, so purposeful, and so joyful. Far from being undervalued areas of study, teaching writing and critical thinking made enormous sense in that context.

I had moved from one country where the humanities and social sciences were being systematically undermined, and where, to be honest, the situation was quite gloomy for most social science and humanities PhDs, to one where—admittedly, though only in very few elite university contexts,—they were embraced, enhanced, celebrated and supported. The latter situation gave me much hope, and a very clear sense of purpose.

Post-pandemic, for family reasons, I had to move back to the USA. Once again, reluctantly, and once again, with half of my heart, as well as much uncompleted work, left behind. In the US, I found myself in a work environment that seemed to me as closed and elitist, on a new and uncertain stage in my journey, but with some insights collected along the way that I will take the rest of this meandering essay to share:

The first, that the still-raging STEM versus Humanities debate that I found myself inserted into upon my return to the US, when viewed from the vantage point of India, looks as ridiculous as a fun-house mirror version of itself.

Here in the United States, in the present-day, from some quarters there is a push away from a Liberal Arts education, towards STEM education, purportedly to prepare young people for future job markets. As US Universities, faced with multiple crises, begin to strip themselves of supposedly ‘disposable’ Humanities and Social Science disciplines, you see previously-STEM-focused universities in India expand themselves into the Humanities and the Social Sciences. While they didn’t start out this way, all of India’s previously-solely-tech-focused IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) have now become full universities, with recently-created departments across the Humanities and Social Sciences.

In India, the push is in the opposite direction, towards the Liberal Arts. Sixty years of STEM-focused education has not sufficiently prepared Indian students for an increasingly dynamic job market, or for the many challenges of citizenship in the era of social media. In addition to the expansion of the Liberal Arts into previously-STEM-focused institutions, India is creating new Liberal Arts Universities at breakneck speed to make up for the lag, and I was involved in the creation and founding of one of these universities. In this case the U.S. might need to learn from India’s experience to appreciate what it already has, rather than acting to decimate it. In terms of positionality, educators and administrators who are making these harmful decisions should spend significant time and

analysis considering the reverse-direction being charted by India, and indeed China, before committing to their program-cutting ends.

Another insight that arises from my positionality between both countries is how central and indispensable Writing Pedagogy is for developing analytical and critical thinking abilities within formal systems of education. I mean, I know that y'all in the US already know this, but I still don't think the scale of significance is fully visible. A core insight of anthropology is that humans within a particular culture may not be able to fully comprehend aspects of its significance while being immersed within it. A fuller picture of significance emerges through thinking with difference. Let us then apply what I call a "Difference Filter" from outside the US to a very specific area of Writing Studies scholarship within the US—the "5-paragraph essay."

Forgive me now for moving from the very broad focus of the above sections to a very specific case of a particular writing genre, and how very differently this genre is viewed in two distinct educational contexts. This close zooming in might be helpful though, because it helps to crystallize some of the very broad-ranging insights arrived at through my bi-continental experiences in one concrete case.

Several recent studies have raised significant alarm bells around this genre of writing, particularly at the University level, with titles that call for "killing" and "challenging the tyranny" of the 5-paragraph essay. My 17-year-old self, coming from a no-paragraph-essay situation would have found all this alarm to be rather baffling.

I'm not saying that the 5-paragraph model cannot be improved upon, of course not, but rather that employing such violent language towards the 5-para essay (one that I hear repeatedly in my current environment) actually inhibits students from improving upon it. A "killing"-approach is similar to the 'Banking model of education' that groundbreaking educator Paulo Freire so strongly critiques. This is a model that views students as empty accounts that are to be filled with knowledge by the authoritative figure of the teacher, rather than as learners who come in with significant amounts of pre-existing knowledge that is to be both built upon and learnt from. Rather than seeing the 5-para genre as an enemy that must be "killed," a Difference Filter applied from India suggests that it is a sapling, from which better and more-complex writing and thinking can be carefully cultivated. This is but one example of the ways in which cross-cultural conversations around writing studies can possibly lead to greater understanding of both self, as well as other.

My high school self, experiencing for the first time the process of drafting, revision, structuring, and the great amount that can be iteratively learnt from this process, would agree. And while said high school self was incredibly proud of her first 5-para essay on *A Streetcar Named Desire* as product, this later self can see that essay as the beginning of a valuable, situated process that continues to unfold to this day.

Positionality though, consists not only of our professional self. Each of us are many, and after my most-recent, pandemic-and-personal-life necessitated move

back to the US, I find myself in many ways at sea. Immigration has not been easy, either then, or now. What I'm hoping for is to be part of something in this country as overwhelmingly purposeful and joyful as what I had found in India—and specifically found in the art of university-building. Through the looking glass of university-building in another country, I am able to perceive the strengths that universities already possess in the US, as well as understand how important it is to hold on to these strengths and nurture and bolster them. It is folly to decimate that which already exists and holds such promise. I see purpose in a joyful reclamation of the essential role of the social sciences and the humanities within the US academy, in conversation with, and in concert with, STEM. Always putting the two in opposition, as the case of India shows us, is a classic false dilemma, one that doesn't hold up. We need the humanities and social sciences because the teaching of writing, reasoning, and critical thinking remains as urgent now in the US as it ever has. Perhaps at this particular moment, more.

Section 9. Embodiment

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.

Chapter 38. Disclosing Eating Disorder Recovery: The Pursuit of Credibility and the Pressure of Representation

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When I was 28, I spent an afternoon in my friend Denise's¹ apartment, chatting about what it felt like to speak at eating disorder recovery events. At the time, she had written a book about eating disorder recovery and traveled to promote it with speaking engagements. I popped over to her place to borrow her portable sound system for a gig I was playing later that week. I was a singer-songwriter who mixed coffee shop gigs with events at spiritual retreats or lifelong learning centers where I would talk about my experiences with recovery and mental health. I saw myself as an upstart and Denise as the experienced speaker.

I had a lot to learn, but it was not the first time in my life I had spoken publicly about my own recovery. As a teenager, I performed as a singer and spoke to community and school groups about my experience in recovery. The difference between then and my time with Denise was that, as a teen, I was still struggling mightily with the eating disorder even while I spoke about how well I was doing. I was a living contradiction. By my late 20s, I had done much more work, and my recovery was strong but not “perfect.” Because I felt I had failed as a representative of recovery in my youth, I sometimes second-guessed my ability to be a good representative of eating disorder recovery as an adult even though I had made significant strides.

On that afternoon in Denise's apartment, we discussed how we had not believed recovery was real when we were in the eating disorder. We had struggled so much and had so many relapses that we assumed no one really recovered—and if they said they had recovered, they were either lying or experiencing a temporary remission of sorts. Such honeymoon periods are common during the early years of recovery, and we had once doubted any kind of real recovery existed beyond those short periods of remission. Thankfully, Denise and I both stuck it out. Our lives were now totally different, to the point where we were performing, writing, and enjoying life.

Then, Denise said something about the believability of recovery speakers that stuck with me. I'm paraphrasing from memory, but she said something like, “Remember when Miss America came out a few years ago with an eating disorder recovery platform?” I remembered Kirsten Haglund appearing on talk shows,

1. Denise and Catarina (who will appear later) are pseudonyms.

blond and beautiful. Denise continued, “She started a foundation and still travels everywhere talking about what recovery is like. She’s doing great work, but I know a lot of people look at her and think, ‘That kind of recovery can’t be possible for me. I’ll never look like her.’ People tend to believe in recovery more when it comes from someone like you or me. That’s attainable.”

Two thoughts came to my mind: (1) Had my friend just called me ugly? And (2) that seems about right.

At the time, my views on recovery were based on my own experience rather than formal research. I knew Denise didn’t mean I was ugly. She was just acknowledging that we were both solidly “average” looking and “average” sized human beings. Of course, I have a bone to pick with the word “average” here, but I’m trusting readers to understand what I mean. We were not super beautiful by beauty-pageant measures. We weren’t threatening or outside the norm. We looked like normal people who had a healthy relationship with food and their bodies.

Certainly, Denise and I both knew that people who recover from eating disorders are all very different, but we also knew how tempting it is to judge recovery based on appearances. Although medical professionals have good reasons to be concerned about bodies on the extreme edges of size, recovery cannot be exclusively measured by external factors. Recovery is about living a life that feels authentic, healthy, and increasingly free of shame and guilt around food, exercise, and body size. Everyone in recovery has different bodies, personalities, and styles, and those aspects of ourselves constantly shift. By age 28, I had already been all sorts of sizes and shapes—physically, emotionally, and psychologically. I would argue that accepting the shifting nature of bodies and selves is a critical part of recovery. But understanding that “healthy” means different things to different people is not the same as believing that other people will set aside judgments of appearance when choosing to trust someone offering advice. We knew the way we looked impacted how people received the message we were offering.

How we felt as representatives was based on the pressures we had put on ourselves and the beliefs we held about how someone in a position of influence should appear in the world. When I was new to recovery, I distrusted most people who tried to help me. I believed treatment providers were trying to make me fat. I was afraid of becoming fat, which at the time would have meant I had lost control of my body—the one thing I felt I could control in an overwhelming world. Appearance might have been a stand-in for other, more significant fears, but appearance mattered. If someone who didn’t look the way I wanted to look had approached me with a message of recovery, I’m not sure I would have listened to them in those early days.

Now, I’ve grown up. I’ve been fat. I’ve been thin. I’ve been through life events that have changed me. And as a researcher, I now know that people with eating disorders tend to be more critical of themselves rather than others. Our audiences were probably much less likely to judge us than we were to judge ourselves. But

research often doesn't matter to the feeling person. Experience matters. Denise and I understood credibility based on personal experience and did not take time to support our ideas with objective research. Later, when I started down the academic path, I thought I needed to flip that approach on its head, valuing only credibility earned through empirical means. But I would soon learn that academic credibility is much more complicated to measure.

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Although I eventually completed a dissertation focused on eating disorder recovery rhetoric, I had no intention of studying eating disorder recovery when I started my graduate studies. Between the conversation with Denise and my first graduate class in rhetoric six years later, I had stopped doing eating disorder-related speaking engagements. The pressure to be a model of recovery—whether internally or externally applied—was too much. At that point in my career, I was a digital content manager who wanted a graduate degree. Interestingly, however, that drive for a graduate degree centered around the same sort of search for credibility I had been on when advocating for recovery.

I was a woman, and I looked young. Those were problems when vying for promotions at work. I was repeatedly viewed as “just a writer” even though I was the manager of our content team, had spent a decade as an editor, and had earned certifications in user-interface design, an expertise I was growing as part of my company's user experience team. My appearance and my introverted nature were getting in the way of upward movement. Again, I did not have any peer-reviewed data to prove such things were happening to me, but I thought that maybe, if I earned an advanced degree, executives and prospective employers might see me in a more respectable light. At some level, the need to earn a higher degree was still related to how I appeared on the outside.

After heading to Texas Tech University to study technical communication and rhetoric (workplace communication and usability, specifically), I ended up trading the chase for workplace credibility for the pursuit of academic credibility. Then, unexpectedly, I found myself face-to-face with the pressures to be a representative of recovery I thought I'd left behind.

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Because telling people I was in recovery from an eating disorder felt like an invitation for people to view me critically, I was unsure about researching anything related to recovery. But my complicated thoughts around telling people I was recovered led me to think a lot about the language people used to describe eating disorder recovery. I was curious about how people did or did not use the terms “recovered” or “in recovery.” I talked to friends in recovery every day, and this issue came up regularly. Because of my own history around having “perfect” or “full” recovery, I saw an opportunity in the field of rhetoric to investigate

something I knew mattered in my community. Even if I never studied eating disorder rhetoric again, I wanted my dissertation to mean something to me. I knew I would never get my precious time as a graduate student back, and I didn't know where my career would go after graduate school. The dissertation had to be more than a device to get a job I might not even want. It had to mean something in the moment, and at the time, recovery mattered a lot.

Two years into my time at Texas Tech, I became very involved in the university's Center for Collegiate Recovery Communities (CRC). They partially funded my graduate studies, and I worked with other people in recovery there. But choosing eating disorder recovery as a dissertation topic meant I would have to tell colleagues straight up that I had recovered from an eating disorder. At the time, friends at the CRC knew about my recovery but not people in the English department. I didn't want to pretend a disconnection from the subject matter with my dissertation committee while being open about recovery everywhere else.

Predictably, disclosing that I had recovered from an eating disorder was no big deal to anyone except me. But what disclosure meant to me was significant. It not only opened me up to a meaningful avenue of research, but it also made me think about scholarship differently. I wondered how many other scholars had gone through the same internal conflict about disclosing their personal histories for fear of having to represent some kind of group or cause.

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I also thought about study participants and whether they, too, struggle with seeing themselves as representatives of whatever phenomena we are studying. Several of my dissertation participants disclosed that they thought a great deal about what it means to be a representative. My willingness to expose my own vulnerability as a researcher-representative helped me connect to them as participant-representatives. I learned to sense when an interviewee was unsure about opening up and would often reveal that I had also recovered from an eating disorder. Many of my participants already suspected my personal connection to the research, and several asked me outright whether I was in recovery before I volunteered to share. Whatever the case, once my positionality was on the table, participants visibly relaxed.

For example, Catarina, a participant in my dissertation study, was also a PhD student working on scholarship related to eating disorders. She was an advocate for eating disorder recovery and body positivity. Catarina had recovered into what she called a "larger body," and she told me she wondered if people with eating disorders, who saw her as a representative of recovery, would have an aversion to her story because she was bigger. We were able to talk about this in depth because I had struggled with this question during times in my recovery when I had been larger. This conversation led me to ask future participants more directly about

their feelings about recovering into a larger body, a fruitful avenue of research that would not have opened up without our shared vulnerability.

Catarina and I connected over our academic work and the sad truth that fat people have a hard time being representatives of anything. People don't listen to fat people, and peer-reviewed studies demonstrate as much. Would someone in early recovery listen to someone who looks like Catarina? Would someone on an academic search committee hire someone who looks like Catarina? Questions about representing eating disorder recovery overlap with questions around representing oneself as an academic. It isn't a matter of imposter syndrome. Catarina and I both knew we belonged in the eating disorder recovery community and in academia, but we did not know if our work would be accepted. People tend to underestimate women who are fat, new to academia, or engaged in qualitative studies that emphasize researcher and participant vulnerability rather than objectivity. These are real issues that even the most well-meaning group, academic advisor, or hiring committee may not be able to escape.

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It is challenging to tell a story of recovering from any kind of mental illness. Revealing a mental illness exposes a chink in the armor of the self. As an academic whose job is to use her brain, to admit my brain has issues is terrifying and potentially career-ending, particularly if one faces a judgmental tenure committee.

Certainly, there are things about my mental health history I do not share with anyone outside my closest circle of friends. I am not an open book because, as Margaret Price (author of *Mad at School*) asserts, disclosing the entirety of one's positionality is risky, both career-wise and psychologically. But I do consider the moment when I chose to disclose my eating disorder history in my dissertation an important milestone.

I deeply wanted people to know about my history with eating disorders. I was curious if I would be accepted or treated differently when I admitted how personal the topic of recovery was for me. My choice was to admit it and to write an entire dissertation chapter explaining my recovery experience. I also chose to disclose to many of my participants because my own experience of recovery made the interview space safer. I also believe that my experience gave me more credibility as a researcher, not less. I exposed my views in the dissertation so people could see the differences between what I believed and what my participants said. I was not pushing my own agenda; I was showcasing diverse voices.

At the same time, I knew to be on the lookout for my invisible biases. I am aware that I carry a history of beliefs grounded in experience rather than academic research, and I don't know how much that experience blinds me to reality. What I do know is, when my friend Denise talked about our credibility, she was pointing out that it is hard to believe recovery is real if you have not experienced

it. Representatives of recovery gain credibility not because of academic research but because people see markers of recovery in our lives and on our bodies.

Similarly, academic work can be hard, and we need scholarly models that feel real, attainable, and grounded in experience. Graduate students read polished, beauty-pageant-ready articles and see tenured professors speak at conferences without seeing the messy path from idea to publication or graduate student to tenure. Disclosing positionality is one way for researchers to open up and admit that nothing is perfect. No one is perfectly objective. We all bring our pasts, presents, bodies, and mental health into our work.

Whether or not researchers choose to disclose their positionality, grappling with the challenge disclosure presents is a seminal moment with the potential to enrich future research and career decisions. After contending with positionality myself, I now see the myriad stories behind the articles other scholars publish, and I am a more critical, more incisive, and more compassionate scholar. I may, in fact, be a representative of recovery, but that is only one part of a much more complicated and ever-changing person.

Chapter 39. (Dis)Association - Writing and Reclaiming Agency Through Feminist Solidarity

Ana Julia Eriquezzo
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Act I

Imagine if I wasn't me for a minute or maybe two. Nothingness is part of my being—time dripping in the surrounds of my emptiness. I stand in front of a mirror just to stare at the hole I made in this world built to massacre every fiber of my existence. History wasn't meant for me. So, I drip away with time surrounding my emptiness.

The sensation that carries my life in its shoulder is of heaviness followed by the tingling sensation of fatigue. It comes from the left side of my body. From the little joint on my tinny toes to the top of my eyes. It hurts constantly, a non-stop pulsation with a mix of fever followed by stabbing pain. I carry it with me since I understand myself as an adult in this world. But now it makes my left side numb. I can't feel much anymore. I'm done. The brain is next, I guess.

Isn't that beautiful? A ghost as a writer instructor. Not tenured, still a candidate.

Act II

It's my first time teaching junior writing. No previous instruction was given on how I should tackle this teaching assignment. Did I panic? No. I did what I always do when life is about to kick my ass: I (Dis)Associate. My disability always comes in waves and dyslexia is performed as my second language.

Born and raised in Brazil in a high middle-class private educational system where I could only belong by passing as so. Was my family financially stable at any point in life? No. But God we passed as. Three jobs as a rule and mimicking others even when we couldn't understand much of their day-to-day dynamic. We were successful with the help of Dad's resilience and Mom's charisma.

I always knew from the beginning that we were others pretending to be them. It hurt not being enough from birth. But what one could do? Survive—In the name of love for the humans who surround you with love and care.

Then, life strikes again. I'm built to be a smart kiddo, but I lack the ability to act on it. I need to keep the scholarship my dad's job provided for me. But what can I do when I can't write properly even when the knowledge passed on to me

stays trapped inside? I can't mimic ability. *Could I?* Be able in my disability? Hard to say. But remember—survival is a must. I love them too much to see them lose.

Instead of facing facts as they were and feeling as enabled as I should feel, I start a side narrative of my existence—one that becomes the law in my internal world. I'm magic! That's it. Born to be magic I was. And act on magic. As charming as any powerful witch, I was there to show the world how rich I am in kindness, thoughtfulness, and internal creative life that can spill from my skin to touch others' sensibilities. That's my power and mission in life. I was born with a purpose, and nothing could stop me.

Poetry becomes a gate to show it with no parameters to be followed. I'm not a formalist. I'm tropical modernity born from Caetano's and Bethania's hip bones. I'm the personification of cultural chaos as a response to imperial/colonial/hegemonic metrics. You name it—you name it.

Act III

But now breathe! Breathe. In this suffocating atmosphere, I made it to a PhD program where I was accepted despite writing in my second language. How? There's no simple answer to this hurtful question. Skepticism and imposter syndrome are the shadow monsters that follow me wherever I go. The fact is I'm a ghostly human being and in shadow, I also walk. I know the path where my fears were born, and I'm not afraid to touch them to the point that I can access our wounds. I'm here to be pain personified in womanhood.

In this context of (a) life—I became, desire. And I desired to be more than human. I dreamed of power and the flame it encapsulates. In Foucault's narrative, I live in the shadow of bio-power. But the desire to not only be part of—but to break with any social norm that ever existed, I became a flame that burns in (dis)associative power towards freedom. I claimed my womanhood and, as a shadow worker in a world of catastrophes, the intent was to not only survive but co-exist in peace among nature.

As a writing instructor who has a limited education in composition theory and no idea of how alphabetization happens for an undiagnosed dyslexic kid, I stand staring at the syllabus while reflecting on its content. The despise for grammarology or the idea that what culturally was defined as good writing or academic writing should be taught grew in my chest. How can I be responsible for that? The violence that hurt me to the point of (Dis)Association is here asking me to perpetrate its principles. And what do I do in response? Yeah, I (Dis)Associate.

For a minute or two I become Victor Frankenstein—I cut and reassemble the syllabus provided. Writing without literacy gets thrown out of those pages. No mercy. No shame. And then, the fun starts. Remember—I'm magic, and those pages were about to get filled with my flames. No one is looking. I'm a ghostly human walking in the shadows—no one even cares where I stand. They only see what I allow them to. I'm the master of reflecting to others what they want to see.

The reality is that the image is just power dust put into place by a strategic act of a survivalist.

Cut. Cut. Cut. Take. Give. Fake. Add. Add. Add.

Add. Add. Add. Fake. Give. Take. Cut. Cut. Cut.

Survive.

Act IV

Monster. I'm other. A monster. And the syllabus that is an extension of my magical being is also perceived as one. The difference is that I deeply care for it. I didn't abandon it to be in darkness by itself. In its companionship, we help each other to be visible, and touchable in a classroom filled with young souls—young blood—young humans. It's sad to see how scared they are to be perceived as illiterate, incapable, or disabled. As puppies, pleading for attention and care, they demand to be taught to write as a professional.

And I sit there. I stare at them. I'm disabled and I write. Is it professional writing? Is it good writing? What are the standards? I don't know. But I do write and now I'm expected to teach it. But what are the standards? Ableism. Simply. Stone cold. Let me repeat it to you: ableism. Write as white. Write as rich. Write as elite. Write as cis. Write as a man. Just f* write a PR note to make the social media see us as an equal. Make me cool. Make me be seen. Teach a recipe.

I won't.

Act VI

I'm a ghostly human creature (Dis)Associating at all times. Fleshly floating around. (Dis)Association carries two potentials for meaning-making: 1) the potential to become an act of association or a cooperative link through disability; 2) the potential to go beyond what is understood as concrete, an ontological reality imposed by ableist rhetoric as an act of dissociation, as an act of resistance against the imposed negative connotation of a humane condition. The term holds two different worlds that exist side by side and share rhetorical space in the lives of people who live on the margins of a normative, ableist, social reality.

Disability + Association = (Dis)Association

The art of dissociating in a creative way is a way to resist. And where did I learn that you might ask? In the kitchen of course. In solidarity. In womanhood. In sisterhood. As the women in my life taught me to exist on our terms, we might need to put our imagination to work. That means going against every representation that presents reductionism. That means diving into madness and emotional turmoil as a gate to create catharsis—Inside out. In madness and sadness, we recognize each other. In creativity and art, we create scope to question this reality that hurts so many beings.

In childhood memories, I reconcile pain and resistance in composition. I compose a life that I'm willing to live by writing and teaching writing as a gate to the abolition of colonial practices. In our kitchen, I remember our radio playing—Mom & Grandma singing *Tudo de Novo* interpreted by Maria Bethania alongside Caetano Veloso—who, by the way, also is the writer. I follow along chatting magic from our coven to the universe. Please, dear reader, stop what you are doing right now. Stop reading, and just listen to the song.

Feel the magic! (Dis)Associate.

Act VII

Transatlantic solidarity. Grandma in Italy. Mom & I in Brazil.

Trans-cosmic solidarity. Grandma in heaven. Mom in Brazil. I'm in the U.S.

Transnational solidarity. Brazil-U.S. It composed me to be (dis) association.

Green card. F1. Brazilian Citizenship.

Portuguese-English.

Disability comes in waves!

As Della Pollock once stated in *Performing Writing* (1998), performative method is writing as praxis. As a homo-performer, I act in writing, and writing acts on me. In the classroom, I challenge my students not to just write but to act on their writing. Find a purpose, find a voice. Allow themselves to be engaged with the world—to be curious and be in conversation with others. There's no writing without errors. Try to at least know more about how complicated, multiple, and engaging living can be. That's what I encourage.

As a disclaimer and a way to break with classroom expectations and hierarchies, I disclose my disability. I'm dyslexic. I live with a mental illness and an autoimmune disease. And I'm a colored woman. And I'm here as your writing instructor and as a person ready to find you in solidarity and care. If you want to learn about writing literacy and the power of communicating through cultural grounds and differences, please stay. You will always be welcomed among these walls.

I always wait for them to leave or words of challenge. But they never left, and the words never came. Together we decide to be publishers, editors, and colleagues. We don't do it for the grade. We do it for the sake of being able to resist. We write together, we peer-review and we develop our magazine—*uncomplicated*. The intent is to un-complicate our lives through communication. The intent is to (Dis)Associate. In vulnerability, we find ourselves stronger and we allow ourselves to try reaching for others recognition of a future that might go beyond inclusion.

Together we write. Together we stand.

Disability comes in waves. And care for difference became our second language.

In sum, a junior writing course isn't designed to encapsulate the possibilities writing can provide to one's soul. The act of resistance starts by acknowledging it. We, students in our own right, aren't here to bow to the walls and regiments of the university grounds. We are here to take the space while creating a sense of belonging that transcends its mercenary policies. And that starts with a simple statement a *la Magritte**:

*This is not a pipe. Is this an academic course?
That's for others to know.
You, as others. Others, like you.*

Final Act

Born in a covenant. We are all witches. The grandma is the matriarch. Mom is our north. Me as our south. Magic flows around composing and putting positionality into question. There's no me without them and no them without me. We survived in solidarity. We dreamed of better lives, and when it didn't come to our encounter, we together, (dis)associate.

Grandma was a writer, but her words were lost in time. Mom is a writer, but her words don't leave our home. I'm an academic writer, and my words were meant to travel the world. However, in its path, there is no composition without them. In every writing, I share their words; they're always with me. In solidarity and magic, we stand. For its genealogy, find in our DNA a source. I refuse to be understood under the rituals of scientific positivism.

And please remember, as a ghostly human I stand. As a monster. As the other. I'm not running from the narrative life imposed on me, but I'm open to reframing it in a manner that allows historically excluded communities to live peacefully among all beings. I'm not here to teach you about proper writing. I'm here to exist in disability and difference and claim my positionality as a north to be held dear in the hearts of the ones who resist everyday erasures.

Here I stand. Here I float.

Here I (Dis)Associate my positionality.²

2. Rene Magritte (1898-1967), Belgian artist and grand reference of the Surrealist Movement. The *Treachery of Images* (1929) represents a three-way paradox for exposing the conventional notion of objects that simply responds to words and images as a form, an illustration of description or definition. The painting proclaims 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe', 'This is not a pipe' as a description of an illustration of a pipe. Then, the painting is not a pipe but rather an image of a pipe.

Chapter 40. When Your Work Is Good, but It's Not Good for You: Navigating Career Pivots

Liz Angeli

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

I have always had one foot inside and one foot outside of academia. Alongside being a graduate student and now tenured professor, I was a veterinary assistant, Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and entrepreneur who owned three businesses related to my academic research. Currently, I am also a spiritual director and earning graduate certificates in pastoral leadership and Christian spirituality.

As an academic, I prioritized community-engaged research for the first 12 years of my career while researching technical communication, rhetoric of health and medicine, and emergency medical services (EMS). Drawing on my EMT experience, my then-growing EMS writing scholarship illustrated that medical report writing needed an overhaul. To do that, I collaborated with EMS organizations to conduct research, wrote publications and presentations for writing studies and EMS venues, and applied my findings to develop three businesses focused on EMS writing in initial training, continuing education, and on the job. Despite the EMS community's enthusiasm, good intentions, and agreement that report writing needed improvement, writing wasn't a priority, leading to stalled projects, fizzled out partnerships, and my feelings of disappointment, discouragement, anger, and hopelessness.

During this time, my spiritual director, someone trained to listen to our sacred stories, asked me, "The EMS work you're doing is good. But is it good work for you?" Slowly, I began to see reality for what it was, not as I hoped it would be. My EMS research was no longer sustainable, and I ended it with no clear next step. No academic models existed to help me know how to translate my writing and rhetoric expertise to my then-emerging research interests in public humanities, graduate education, and discernment. Grounded in the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola, discernment is an intentional, life-long process of determining what brings a person closer to integrity and authenticity. So, I drew on my position as a spiritual director to create my own models, like the Discernment Map (Angeli et al.), prioritizing my inner life, heart, and intuition. I then considered not what I wanted to do but how I wanted to feel. That foundation supported my re-assessment of the next steps.

I reflected on key moments of my EMS research, focusing on how I felt as I recalled each moment's details. A pattern emerged: My jaw became tight, my shoulders stiff. I felt an urgency that was not my own. I also reflected on my

feelings as a spiritual director meeting with clients and integrating discernment practices into my writing classes. My body felt open, peaceful, and excited with possibility. There was no urgency. Although there was no clear path ahead of me with this possibility like there was with EMS, that uncertainty comforted me.

While following that uncertainty, a clear path emerged. I was invited to create discernment classes and workshops for students, faculty, and community members. This work delightfully blurred the lines of research, teaching, and service, and I continue to enjoy it. Yet, my EMS work felt unfinished, over a decade of dreams and work collecting virtual dust on my hard drive. I imagined what re-engaging with EMS could look like while maintaining the joy I felt with my discernment work. Instead of building my own businesses like I had as an entrepreneur, I partnered with already-established EMS companies, and I felt different in a more grounded, less frantic way; that feeling confirmed I was listening to my inner life. However, after a few months, the familiar, misaligned feelings returned, and I realized that, despite my hopes, EMS research no longer aligned with my long-term goals, taking me away from time I could spend on discernment work. I pivoted away from EMS and put my energy into work that would fuel the next chapter of my career, not knowing exactly what the next chapter would be. I moved forward into a new, promising uncertainty.

Chapter 41. The Autistic Me and Advocacy Research for Neurodiverse Writers

C. Scott Wyatt
TEMPLE COLLEGE

“We don’t need no Autistics here.”

An administrator assured me a department colleague was merely making a harmless and witty movie reference. The words sounded sincere to me, though. A series of events and statements by coworkers clarified that I was unwelcome among people I had hoped would be colleagues, mentors, and friends. The department chair said I needed to be more collegial and outgoing. The lengthy list of concerns in my annual evaluation was an inventory of Autistic traits.

To coworkers, I was a problematic new hire, constantly asking questions and getting confused. I avoided social events, attended no sporting events, and demonstrated no “school spirit.”

Though I had accepted the suggestion of our dean to continue an autism-focused research agenda, colleagues recommended that I find a more “appealing” topic. I abandoned a study of blogs by Autistics, which was designed to build on my dissertation. I regret not completing that project, which might have demonstrated common experiences and writing traits among adult Autistics. Not pursuing more publications during my first year on the job was a mistake. I was deemed unproductive.

“Not a good fit,” the dean noted during my review. Autistics hear that often. We don’t fit. When we try to belong by mimicking others, we make more mistakes. I focused on teaching and doing precisely what was asked of me. I failed to identify what was *expected* of me, the unstated assumptions that other new junior faculty might have known. The university made a separation offer that I accepted. Halfway into my contract, I was no longer on the tenure track. The loss of that first and only tenure-track post devastated my confidence.

As an Autistic writer, I assumed my passions for writing pedagogy and technology would ensure success in higher education. Autistic perseveration—intense focus on a narrow special interest—made me an outstanding student and good researcher. My social traits and physical mannerisms, however, were an impediment to employment.

An opportunity to establish a career in higher education instead left my wife and me in a strange city, in a state far from most friends and family. My Autistic traits had resulted in misunderstandings and isolation. I hated being Autistic.

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How could I do this to my wife, getting us trapped so far from home?

Pursuing a teaching career is my Sisyphean punishment for being Neurodiverse.

In first grade, I declared myself a writer. I write almost daily. In a single week, I might work on a stage play, a story, an essay on technology, a scholarly article, and a poem. By sixth grade, I knew I wanted to teach; teachers share their passions with students. Words and technology are my passions. In junior high, I coded a text editor so I could type stories. In the 1990s, I designed digital typefaces and visual elements for an internet service.

My undergraduate degrees are in print journalism and English education. My dream was to teach classes in newspaper, yearbook, and photography while writing. The first setback came when the professor overseeing student teachers said I was off-putting and odd. In her judgment, I shouldn't teach.

Told repeatedly that Autistic traits reflect a lack of self-control and maturity, I sought to change myself. I was treated for ADHD, migraines, and seizures in the 1990s. My personal failings persisted. Why would someone so flawed insist on teaching? A psychologist said I was obsessive, in an unhealthy way, about writing and publishing technologies. I reasoned that being obsessive was perfect for graduate school. If I shouldn't teach high school, maybe I should teach at a university.

When I entered a master's program in 2004, my ambition was to study the technology of writing and publishing. My thesis explored how the design of a learning management system (LMS) exacerbated the social distances between students and instructors. Though my research did not focus on Autistic students, its origins were based on my experiences. Some Autistics find online spaces more accessible to navigate socially than physical spaces. Written expression empowers us, while spoken language includes unspoken meaning.

Completing my master's degree with honors, I entered a doctoral program in Rhetoric, Scientific, and Technical Communication. The department managed an online writing center, which I wanted to study. I wondered how students and tutors interacted and perceived each other through the platform's interface. My wife and I moved more than 2000 miles. I had to succeed—for her, my amazing partner.

Again, the boulder rolled back over me ... several times.

Many people are uncomfortable around Autistics, with our lack of eye contact, poor vocal control, and unexpected movements. Erb-Duchenne palsy, base membrane dystrophy, and a history of Jacksonian seizures also complicate my movements. I also have ADHD, which is common among Autistics. I applied to work in the on-campus writing center but was advised that my tapping and rocking were distracting. For my involuntary movements and anxiety, I also faced a disciplinary hearing. A professor asserted that if I could stop the jerking, shaking, and rocking, people might not be afraid of me. After several weeks, the university cleared me of being a threat.

When I sought accommodations, the university required medical evaluations, including new brain scans, an electroencephalogram (EEG), and psychological screening. In November 2006, I endured two days of neuropsychological evaluation. The diagnostic criteria of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition—Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR)*, brought the Autistic me into existence. Was this just another label? For an assignment in a digital composition course, I composed a blog post trying to understand the label “Autistic.” That blog eventually became *The Autistic Me*.

As I completed my coursework, the Department of Rhetoric dissolved, another disorienting blow. To complete the doctorate, I had accepted my committee’s suggestion to embrace Autism-related research for my dissertation. Now, half the committee needed to be replaced. I simply wanted to graduate. Completing the doctorate *almost* helped me move on from the traumatic experience of disciplinary hearings.

I quickly accepted that first tenure-track post. We moved another 1000 miles from our native California, believing this was a dream come true. But, as you read, it was just another boulder I pushed up another hill.

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After exiting the tenure-track post, I applied for posts at nearby colleges and universities, securing a visiting assistant professorship at a prestigious university for the next two years. I taught communication within the business school, which allowed me to focus on visual design as much as writing.

After my visiting appointment ended, I returned to graduate school to pursue a dream degree: an MFA in Film and Digital Technology with an emphasis on digital typography. Surely the MFA would ensure a path forward in visual and digital media, the path I had wanted to follow. I interviewed for posts in mass communication, digital media, and film. One of the schools at which I interviewed for a media production post extended an offer ... teaching first-year composition.

We now had two daughters. I needed this job. Unfortunately, the combined stresses of a full teaching load, a long commute, and complicated family matters made masking my Autistic traits challenging. I recognized signs that I wasn’t a “fit” within the English department. My wife and I decided to move and start over yet again. I would again chase the dream of teaching high school media courses.

Colleagues noticed me reading computer programming and economics texts. Without pause or reflection, I replied that I wanted to teach media production, programming, computer repair, or business classes. I simply had to pass the exams and complete an alternative teaching credential program.

“And you’re going to pass all those exams? In those subjects?”

“Of course.”

The unstated question was, “Then why are you in an English department?”

I formed no personal or professional connections at the university. Any spare time and energy went into studying and practicing for the exams. From

programming exercises in Java to solving statistics problems, I focused on a seemingly more secure path. Public schools in the Southwest face staffing shortages in technology courses, while universities increasingly rely on adjuncts and contingent faculty. If I wanted a teaching career, K12 seemed more promising than cobbling together a set of adjunct positions.

I passed the exams. We moved to Texas. I had not anticipated that school districts would request recommendations from previous teaching posts. Confident in my knowledge and skills, I had failed at something more important: networking. I secured only one letter of reference from a friend and colleague who had knowledge of my teaching.

Despite stellar teaching evaluations, kind notes from students, and positive observation reports, I struggle beyond the classroom. When my teaching schedule overlaps department meetings, I sigh with relief. Autistic academics connect on social media, where we share our passion for learning and our frustrations with academia. Being good at learning and passing exams rarely helps us navigate the social settings of higher education. Instead, our intensity becomes a barrier to success.

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Throughout these experiences, I maintained *The Autistic Me* blog. I launched the podcast while teaching business communications. I also created social media accounts to promote the content. When teaching communications, I recommend that students avoid posting details about their families or jobs. Some students asked why I blog and host a podcast, contradicting my own advice.

No matter my employment status, no matter where we have been, *The Autistic Me* content connects me to a community. I hadn't intended to continue the blog after completing the digital composition course, but I started receiving messages from Autistic adults. We shared experiences of being diagnosed and relabeled after decades of being called lazy, overly sensitive, moody, and far worse. *The Autistic Me* reaches thousands of readers and listeners. Some of my online connections work in education and have suffered repeated setbacks similar to those I've shared online.

As a first-generation university graduate, I experience "imposter syndrome" in two ways. Like other Autistics, I am an imposter in social situations and workplaces. We have internalized decades of negative comments and traumatic experiences. We cope through masking, using our emotional and physical energy to act "normal" and suppress our Autistic traits. In public situations, I mask; I do not stop being Autistic. Social challenges persist, and my misunderstandings continue to cause conflicts. Some days, an Autistic masks so well that people question the Autistic's self-identity. When a colleague says I don't seem Autistic, is that a compliment or an accusation? On other days, with too many inputs and stressors, that same Autistic melts down and cannot function. That is Autistic burnout, the result of exhaustion from masking and pushing through painful stimuli.

On Facebook, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn, #ActuallyAutistic colleagues and support each other. Among colleagues using the #AutisticInAcademia hashtag, I find encouragement to embrace an Autistic-friendly and Autistic-supportive research agenda. Some of these Autistics have joined me on the podcast, too, including Temple Grandin, Alex Plank, and Jude Morrow. This community encourages me to continue in higher education and research *because* I'm Autistic. "Nothing about us without us," Autistic self-advocates proclaim.

During past academic job interviews, hiring committee members had mentioned my blog and podcast. If I stopped creating autism-related content and archived *The Autistic Me*, would I have more success? Then, I consider my daughters. Do I want them to hide who they are? *The Autistic Me* is important to its audience and to my family.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I set aside my ambitions and became a full-time homeschool teacher. Homeschooling the girls was the best decision I've made as a parent and educator. After the pandemic, we continued homeschooling for another academic year. The girls made dramatic progress academically, returning to school ahead of many peers. I shared our experiences on the blog and podcast.

Parenthood reinforces my commitment to Neurodiversity, especially in education. Our youngest has ADHD and sensory processing disorder. A teacher banished her to the "wobble table." How does that help a student succeed? My oldest and I share many traits. She wears a back brace for scoliosis, as I did. She has diagnoses of autism and ADHD. Already, she has endured unsupportive teachers and isolation. She also earns straight As in honors courses. I see myself in her, and I worry. Thankfully, she has friends who help her navigate school.

The girls have become self-advocates, joining my podcast and others, speaking confidently about their experiences. When a Neurodiverse 10-year-old describes the "wobble table," people pay attention.

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After teaching my daughters, I did not want to work in another field. One of my friends chairs an academic department and has been on hiring committees. He suggested we work on interview scripts I could follow. Many Autistics use social scripts, so why not me? We practiced honest, if incomplete, answers and socially polite responses. During this job search, I resisted responding to offensive comments and inappropriate questions from potential colleagues. I actively reminded myself to accept the questions and respond politely.

"I didn't know Autistics could teach writing," I heard someone say during a teaching demonstration. The comment demonstrated ignorance, but I remained calm. I had an answer planned.

"I am a writer," I responded, "and I enjoy helping others discover their words." I also added that I know Autistic reporters, science writers, screenwriters, playwrights, and novelists.

“Can an Autistic connect to students?”

Nobody intends to be rude, I reminded myself; they simply don't understand autism.

Relying on the rehearsed interview script, I discussed how my autism and ADHD contribute to my teaching effectiveness. Teaching includes everything we do in our classrooms. I try to teach patience and understanding alongside any subject content I am expected to deliver. Students appreciate the flexibility and natural accommodations I adopt.

The structure and support that I had to create for myself as a Neurodiverse student, I provide for all students. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, I posted all lecture notes and slides online. I prepared podcasts and screencasts of lectures, so students could listen as many times as they needed. Those practices continue, along with flexible revision policies.

I had several job interviews in 2023. Each committee asked about online education. Twice, committee members mentioned having read *The Autistic Me*. One mentioned listening to podcast episodes, including the discussion with Temple Grandin. I accepted a one-year contract at a flagship research university.

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The experiences of Neurodiverse individuals who desire careers in higher education suggest several potential research projects. I know several Autistics with doctorate degrees in rhetoric, composition studies, literature, and creative writing. How did we complete writing-intensive programs while other Autistics did not? We need evidence-based pedagogies that accommodate Neurodiversity, which means exploring how Autistic academics navigated their programs. I do not know if we share common strategies for success in graduate programs, but surveys and ethnographic research might reveal some commonalities. Neurodiverse students need advocates and mentors who share their perspectives, but many Neurodiverse potential educators and researchers leave higher education.

Once hired, too many of my Autistic colleagues have struggled to remain in education. Every university at which I have worked trains faculty to support Neurodiverse students, especially Autistic individuals. However, schools rarely consider training our colleagues to support Neurodiverse faculty. We need research projects addressing how to support Neurodiverse faculty. Also, Autistics did not lead the student-focused training sessions I attended. We are the experts on Neurodiversity and the misleadingly described “spectrum” of Autistic traits, which differ by context.

Also, I would like to revive, with careful consideration of the ethical context, a study of Autistic digital creators. Autistics face rejection within seconds, for reasons still unclear to researchers. Some suggest our language choices and speech patterns might distance us from peers. Does our writing have identifiable patterns and commonalities across the Neurodiverse community? Do we tend to

embrace first-person language more often than other writers? Do we use fewer idioms and less figurative language? The online words of Autistics are less likely to have been edited when compared to books by Autistics.

I have a list of research project concepts I hope an Autistic will lead. However, as a lecturer, my annual review will be based on teaching effectiveness, not scholarly production. Maybe I'm still pushing the boulder uphill. I will continue writing about Neurodiversity and engage in what research I can while teaching full-time. Research is a responsibility I have to other Neurodiverse students and aspiring educators; it is my advocacy for the community.

Chapter 42. Evolution of Positionality: A Personal Journey Towards Social Justice in Research and Teaching

Hua Wang
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

On a Saturday evening in December 2019, due to severe back pain, I went to the ER at a small local hospital, where I was diagnosed with a slipped lumbar disc pressing on nerves. After staying in the ER overnight, an emergency surgery was arranged with a neurologist at a larger hospital two hours away. I was transported to the hospital by ambulance around noon and waited in the ER the entire afternoon. As an international PhD student, lying alone in the ER far from my university, I found myself without any company.

The neurologist, a middle-aged white man, with his assistant, eventually came in to discuss my scheduled surgery. During the conversation, I noticed that the neurologist did not make eye contact. He spoke with his head tilted away at a 30-degree angle, which initially didn't concern me, but, as time passed, I became increasingly uncomfortable and upset, as I had never experienced a situation where someone did not maintain eye contact while speaking to me. In the evening, when the physician assistant came to my room for my physical checkup, I couldn't help but ask her why the neurologist didn't look at me, which I found rude. She explained that it was his social style.

The next day, as I was wheeled into the operating room, I noticed that the neurologist was already there, engaged in conversation and laughter with other medical staff. I observed that he did maintain eye contact when speaking with them. This led me to believe that he held racial biases and was prejudiced against me as an Asian woman. The following day, during his routine visit after the surgery, I intentionally asked him about the pronunciation of his last name and whether he or his parents originated from France, given the French resemblance of his last name. My intention was to initiate a friendly conversation in the hope that he would make eye contact when speaking with me. While he did answer my questions, the level of eye contact remained somewhat distant. When I shared my unpleasant experience with my American friends, they expressed sympathy and told me that some medical professionals were notorious for their interactions with patients. This prompted my curiosity about racism in American healthcare.

Upon conducting a search on racism and healthcare, I found that the results were shocking: a plethora of scholarship highlighting how people of color have been subjected to unfair medical treatment in the USA over the past decades. This revelation served as a pivotal moment of awakening for me, igniting a passion

to become a feminist scholar. With this renewed perspective, I embarked on a research journey enacting social justice through academic research. Realizing that my experience could serve as a bridge to understanding the struggles faced by marginalized Chinese women, I felt inspired to advocate for their voices to be heard and recognized in academic discourse. I began researching how Chinese women with constrained rhetorical agency leverage social media to assert their rhetorical agency and promote social justice. My work has been published in prestigious conference proceedings, journals, and books. As a new faculty member in the College of Engineering at an Ivy League university, I noticed a gap in the exposure of engineering students to underrepresented groups and social justice issues and started engaging my students in community-based learning practices, investigating how engineering and technology have negatively impacted marginalized cultural groups and raising awareness of ethics and societal impacts among my students. As a teacher-scholar, my positionality has been dedicated to social justice practices in both my research and my teaching.

Section 10. Queering Binaries

Writers in the *Queering Binaries* section disrupt black-and-white thinking about the affiliations and identities sometimes bound up in discussions of positionality.

Chapter 43. A Case for Causing a Little Trouble: Developing Queer Positionality Through Disciplinary Homemaking

Molly Ryan
VIRGINIA TECH

In a 2024 talk given at Virginia Tech University, Michael J. Faris described, quite beautifully, the process of learning a discipline as congruent, or parallel, to learning to become queer. It was a moment I found myself almost unable to scribble quickly enough in my notebook, I was so struck by the analogy. It was as though he'd peeked into my brain and laid my positionality within the field of writing studies bare.

Matriculating to writing studies was, simply put, an experience of becoming queer. This is not to say I was not *very* queer already, but my queerness, in my mind, lived in a radically different lifeworld from that of my professional persona. It was not so much that, prior to entering graduate school, I did not see queerness as a part of a professional life—rather, I did not, or perhaps chose not, to see how queerness was inextricably entwined with who *I* was as a researcher, a learning scholar, a teacher, a student. In short, I was in a strange situation of heavy-handed, unintentional, subconscious self-rejection. This denial was so engrained, and had created such a separatist viewpoint in my psyche, that unlearning this gap and rebuilding the bridge between my positionalities was a caterpillar-esque mode of transformation, shedding one form for a radically different new imagining of self.

As I entered graduate school, the field of writing studies was not necessarily blinking brightly to me. In reality, coming from a Student Affairs background, I was uncertain of where exactly I would end up in the mapping of English studies. It was during my first semester of my master's degree, when I inadvertently wandered into a PhD-level rhetorical theory seminar, that I simultaneously stumbled over the threshold of the Wonderland of writing studies as a field. From that first day, I suddenly felt as though I'd stepped into a technicolor world that was completely new to me but somehow has been waiting for me all along. So too, the field of writing studies embodied its own unique queerness, existing in somewhat of a disciplinary liminal space, transformational, fluid, and organically tractile. There was no truer realization of this fieldly queerness, in my experience, than the first-year writing classroom, which operates as the nomadic, chameleonic, conventionally rejected and independently joyful offshoot of English as a disciplinary moniker.

I felt *seen* by writing and rhetoric, welcomed by a cosmology of theoretical and literal disciplinary elders into a home built for me. And thus, my positionality

evolved from its caterpillar body, into a bright, flaming, gay butterfly. What I did not predict, however, is that this transformation, this ownership of a queer body in a queer field, would draw attention—and, to some extent, come with the label of troublemaker. Some felt I was much too bold. Others that my approach unsettled the powers that be. Still more that the risks I took were too great.

Troublemaking as positionality involves taking bold possession of self. Showing up wholly and bravely. Burning bright, even if the light unsettles others. Queerness is difference, but it is also embodiment of that difference: and that, in my experience, is what unsettles the conventional and the normative. Queerness as positionality is teaching with radical empathy and care, stating dauntlessly, whether explicitly or implicitly, that you are no subordinate to normativity. It is bold worldbuilding, even if that world must be burned first.

I'm a troublemaker. I'm proud of that label. And so to you, reader, I say: don't be afraid to make good trouble. Challenge the system. Be brave.

Chapter 44. Bisexual Research Frameworks: Navigating Insider-Outsider Identities of Power

Beth Buyserie
UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

In my mid-30s, I experienced a shift in my sexuality, from straight to queer. While fulfilling in many ways, this unexpected change in my identity required much internal processing, ranging from exhausting to affirming. Because I was not yet an insider to any queer communities, I sought academic sources to help me navigate my new bisexual identity. However, even this process of reading affirming research-based texts was complex: bisexual scholars highlighted concerns of bisexual erasure, of not being fully accepted as queer within queer communities, of being accused of perpetuating normative gender binaries (Serano; Yoshino). During this same time, my professional identity also shifted. I was working part-time on my PhD in Cultural Studies while serving as a full-time WPA at my former institution, a role that never required me to engage in formal research. Once I graduated and accepted a tenure-track position, research, for the first time in my 15-year contingent-faculty career, became essential to my identity—a shift that was also affirming and exhausting. As a newly queer and newly tenure-track researcher, I discovered that these developing aspects of my identity shape each other in powerful ways.

In this chapter, I provide a critical approach for foregrounding bisexuality as a researcher. To clarify, my analysis relies not only on my positionality as a researcher who identifies as bisexual but also as a scholar who intentionally applies a framework of bisexuality—that is, a method for navigating insider and outsider identities—to uncover inherent forms of power within research. While I recognize that multiple affirming career trajectories exist, here I focus on shifting to the role of tenure-track faculty, as that has been my lived experience to date. Given the length of this brief chapter, I focus on three aspects central to research and my storied positionality: complicating insider-outsider perspectives, questioning power in research design, and disrupting binaries of rejection and acceptance for publication. In each section, I provide emerging researchers with approaches they can use to examine the complexities and tensions within their own intersecting identities, particularly as they shift from graduate student or contingent faculty to a new research-centered positionality.

A Bisexual Framework: Complicating Insider-Outsider Perspectives

When I first began my role as tenure-track WPA, I soon realized that one of my identity markers had involuntarily shifted, a shift that came with some loss: I could no longer use the pronoun “we” when speaking with either graduate students or lecturers. An early lesson for many graduate students of critical pedagogy is to question: “Who do we mean when we say ‘we’? Who is being privileged? Whose perspective ‘counts’? Whose is overlooked or dismissed?” As a long-term contingent faculty member, I was used to questioning certain power structures within academia, including hierarchies inherent in a tenured/contingent labor binary. The “we” I used at that point in my career signaled both a critique of power and immense pride in belonging to a group with deep expertise in teaching.

While I have a long history of being a contingent faculty member, I do not hold that same insider status now—and yet my role as WPA affords me with daily opportunities to collaborate with contingent faculty. I must constantly—and with care—navigate this insider-outsider positionality in ways that honor the fact that my previous embodiment as a lecturer cannot be equated with current lecturer or graduate student lived experiences. Yet I do not want to uncritically suggest that I am now on the “opposite” side of the power binary. Instead, I am occupying an alternative (and lonelier) space: one where I can draw on past lived experiences and use them to guide and critique my responses to current and, in many ways, unearned privilege.

As a researcher who is white and who teaches graduate courses influenced by both queer theory and critical race theory (the actual theories that promote critical analysis—not the misrepresentations of these theories), relying on shifting identities is crucial for examining systems of power that typically remain fixed or unquestioned. The change in my sexuality to an arguably less-privileged position requires that I simultaneously work to challenge whiteness and other forms of privilege within graduate research practices. Given the recent national conversations both decrying and affirming CRT and queer theory, including conversations within my own state of Utah, I recognize that challenging such binaries carry various forms of risk for different bodies and positionalities.

However, scholars like Stephanie L. Young, who identifies as both bisexual and biracial, provide us with additional models for how to engage with a bisexual research framework and navigate this simultaneous insider-outsider status. As Young writes, “To be a ‘bi- and bi-’ queer woman of color means continuously managing, communicating, and performing multifaceted identities” (p. 45). Young emphasizes that “queering is about transgression and subversion and a means for addressing the contradictions, tensions, and dissonances in our daily lives” (p. 46). For example, as my sexuality shifted, I became aware of a new tension, one that Young would agree required continuous negotiation: leaving my new sexuality

unmarked could potentially be used as a strategy to resist oppressive systems; however, leaving my whiteness unmarked communicates a very different meaning. Through intentional reflection, a bisexual framework allows me as both a newly queer person and a newly tenure-track person to continuously monitor contradictions and power imbalances within my multiple insider-outsider identities. With similar critical reflection, graduate students can also draw from their own shifting insider-outsider positionalities to help them navigate power in research.

Who Does Research? Questioning Power in Research Design

In seeking to foreground a bisexual framework, one that questions various forms of power and intersecting positionalities, my goals now as a researcher are to help both graduate students and contingent faculty navigate their own position with research—something I recommend those who are transitioning to a tenure-track position also prepare for. At our university, lecturers typically do not have a research expectation. This has created, in my view, a harmful separation between those who do research and those who “do not,” particularly within a writing program where teachers naturally engage in various forms of classroom and participatory action research. This research may often be informal and formative—but it is deeply valuable when communicating the expertise of a composition program to the university.

Because a binary has been created around who “does research” and who doesn’t, those new to the tenure-track role will have to be intentional about deconstructing this binary. For example, I designed several professional development sessions where we introduced action research in the classroom, identified areas where we as teachers already engage in meaningful research, and discussed how the sharing of our data, both formally and informally, could enhance the composition program. I invited IRB to present on classroom research, which also provided lecturers the opportunity to meet with IRB about their individual research interests—a conversation that does not always occur given power differences between contingent faculty and campus offices created to support research faculty.

Answering questions of who does research also requires navigating institutional barriers. At our university, only research faculty are allowed to submit an IRB; lecturers who want to be a PI must seek an exception through our Associate Dean of Research. Recently, the Associate Dean asked which composition teachers should qualify for this exception—and I said “all of them.” Our institution is fortunately quite supportive, and so all lecturers in our department are now fully qualified to lead an IRB study. This was an important advocacy move, yet my experience as a former contingent faculty member allowed me to understand when not all lecturers felt the same about this new status: while some wanted to pursue research (both formal and informal) and were excited about the support, others

interpreted suggestions of formal research as an implicit expectation for unpaid labor not required of their role—and they were naturally concerned. To address these concerns, we discussed how all forms of research, including simply learning about research, are helpful for our teaching; we also clarified that research need not be published in order for it to “count” as research. Graduate students whose career paths will include partnering with contingent faculty can engage in similar conversations and actions to disrupt binaries of who “counts” as a researcher.

Submitting Your Research for Publication: Disrupting Binaries of Rejection and Acceptance

Disrupting binaries in research takes many forms. When I first began sharing my new sexuality with close friends and family, I was (I realize now) giving them all the power to affirm—or reject—my identity. Fortunately, most times when I confided in someone, the response was positive. Once, however, the answer, from someone who also identified as queer, was not affirming. I have written elsewhere about how shattering that response was for me, but here I highlight how my *framing* of both types of responses, a dualism of either positive or negative, was equally problematic for my identity as a researcher.

Several years ago, I submitted a manuscript on bisexual literacies to a journal on queer literacies. This was one of my initial articles, and because of the content and venue, the stakes were personally and professionally very high. I do not remember the specific feedback I received from reviewers, other than I needed to make significant revisions, but I deeply remember my embodied physical reaction: a panic attack, one that lasted several weeks. Only in retrospect can I understand why my body reacted this way. My new identity as a researcher was deeply shaped by the additional expectation to *publish* my research—which often equates to publicly disclosing multiple aspects of my identity and offering that knowledge to anonymous peer reviewers and multiple unknown readers.

Just as I once gave others the power to affirm or reject my identity, I now realize I was treating any review *of my research* in a similar manner: as a way for outsiders to decree whether or not I belonged on this tenure-track path, to determine whether or not I “counted” as a researcher, to bestow upon me the honor of someone who had insider status in this academic identity. I also categorized their feedback as an equally unforgiving binary: enthusiastic acceptances with few requests for revision were “positive”; requests for major revision or outright rejections were “negative.” Notice how the need for revision and full rejection were equated in my mind, leaving no room for complexity—or learning. This harmful categorization not only conflated the range of nuanced and thoughtful (and, admittedly, sometimes not-so-thoughtful) responses from reviewers, but it also hindered my ability to develop my own nuanced identity as a researcher—one who could simultaneously learn from the experiences and perspectives of others *and* one who has embodied expertise of her own to share.

I have written elsewhere that a bisexual identity, rather than reinforcing a perceived gender binary, might actually mean that those who identify broadly as bisexual have deep expertise in *questioning and complicating* binaries (Buyserie, 2022). Therefore, instead of reinforcing a harmful binary of authentic researcher/broken researcher (which is unfortunately still my knee-jerk reaction), I am cognizant of my need to actively challenge this narrative each time I interact with editors and peer reviewers. Therefore, I have developed strategies to help me read feedback through a bisexual research framework—to actively question binaries, whether established by others or those I create for myself. Below are three questions I ask graduate researchers as they engage with the “final” step in the research process.

Are You in a Receptive Space to Receive Feedback?

Some people, from a variety of identities and backgrounds, can read peer reviewer criticism or requests for revision through a more “objective” frame of mind. I cannot. My background and my research content, which often reflects my identities, are too intertwined to ever be able to simply compartmentalize the emotional labor of reading an editor’s feedback. If you are like me, I recommend *not* reading an editor’s feedback the moment it arrives in your inbox. Instead, ask yourself: am I in both the mental and physical space needed to be receptive to their feedback? To prepare myself to read their feedback and not lose a sense of who I am? What can I do to create a productive space?

Can a Supportive Colleague Help You Interpret the Response?

I often initially interpret reviewer feedback as “we do not want or value your research.” To clarify, this is *not* what the feedback usually means (although one memorable reviewer could certainly have framed their feedback differently). Unfortunately, I once conveyed my (mis)interpretation of reviewer feedback to trusted colleagues solely to ask if I should withdraw my work from consideration. Withdrawing an article can be a legitimate strategy, so I do not want to suggest that a new researcher should never take this tactic, particularly when the reviews dismiss or belittle one’s lived experiences. However, new (and experienced) researchers can also be untrustworthy readers of reviewer feedback. Therefore, I recommend first asking a colleague to read and interpret the response so that the conversation can foreground the potential of your research.

Can You Frame the Editor as a Collaborator on Your Research?

In the instance above, I wrote to the editors to thank them for their feedback and to respectfully let them know that I would be withdrawing my article to pursue other venues. They responded by saying they were saddened I had withdrawn my research, and they hoped I would reconsider; they also encouraged us to meet

so that we could discuss my decision. During that conversation, these particular individuals helped me understand the true role of an editor: to serve as a research mentor, regardless of the result of the final product. From them, I learned my interpretation of the reviewers' feedback was not completely accurate—and even in the places where I interpreted their feedback correctly, that I did not have to default to the binary of acceptance/rejection.

Not every editorial team will be so generous, so I do *not* recommend withdrawing a submission in hopes that someone reaches out. I have been in other situations where the response from reviewers was very clearly a “rejection,” so I also do not share this story to simply tout one success (or pretend that rejections aren't real). Instead, I want to stress the importance of reaching out to editors for their guidance and collaboration: is the narrative that is running through my/your head an accurate narrative of the potential for the research? Can the editor please interpret what this feedback means? How does the editor suggest that I apply the reviewer feedback in a way that still allows me to communicate my message and honor my lived experiences? We teach these concepts to students every day in our writing classes, but we often need to learn these lessons anew when we begin our careers as researchers.

Conclusion: Framing Your Own Narrative

Graduate students are often encouraged to draw from their lived experiences, and we rightfully seek to foreground perspectives that are often erased, tokenized, or silenced. However, the shift in my sexuality and faculty status inspired me to ask additional questions about the role of our lived experiences, ones that I hope are transformative for graduate researchers: What does it mean for a new researcher to question their whole worldview in the process of their research? To recognize that their lived experiences are shifting and perhaps temporary? To be in a constant state of flux between insider and outsider status, between holding privilege and negotiating simultaneous marginalization?

These questions are challenging to answer—and perhaps even more challenging to ask. Yet my goal with this chapter has been to provide graduate researchers with tools to ask these types of questions and to apply their possible responses to their research journey. As a bisexual researcher whose sexuality *and* career shifted quite unexpectedly, I recognize the need for additional models to do this work. Rather than merely decry the lack of affirming bisexual frameworks, I hope my positionality story helps expand existing conversations on research practices—and that graduate researchers learn more about frameworks that can help us navigate and question our research practices.

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Chapter 45. A Queer Perspective on Teaching Positionality and Objectivity in Journalistic Writing

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For over a decade now, I've worked as a journalism educator, and during that time, I've noted a change in how students wish to discuss objectivity in their work. Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. capital have further complicated my students' thinking about using objectivity in journalism. Students feel pressure to separate balanced reporting from a "both sides" approach that can aid in the propagation of half-truths and disinformation.

In and of itself, objectivity is a position. Taking "an outside" or "objective" position places some value in understanding where reporters locate themselves to their story and audience. Objectivity stems from the assumption that reporting will always be neutral when covering a story. However, I often ask my students whose position is considered neutral in constructing an objective story. In my experience, there is an answer to this question, especially for journalists with identities like my own.

I am Bisexual, and as such, I am a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. When I was a young reporter, being "out" was considered a hindrance to many hiring editors. As a journalism student, I was warned that my "outside activities," including attending Pride events or going out with other Queer people, might present a problem for getting a job. My sexuality, perceived or real, potentially reflected a bias in my reporting. My classmates were not always questioned about where and who they spent their time with, including religious affiliations or organizations that potentially held a political perspective to their reporting. These experiences forever shaped how I engaged with the concept of objectivity in journalism, which has continued into my teaching.

While I do not think of myself as a capital Q—Queer theorist or Queer researcher—my identity, as is true for my heterosexual colleagues, shapes my perspectives, analyses, and writing. And in my opinion, that is not a hindrance but an advantage to my ability to find and write stories that are often neglected or underserved. Initially, I would not discuss my identity openly with my students, but I have recently changed this practice. Not only do I "out" myself each semester, but I also use both critical media literacy and feminist approaches to examine objectivity in all my lessons. I include questions about whose position is viewed as objective from a historical lens and in current coverage. I aim to push students to think of objectivity as part of positionality in journalistic writing.

It is a disservice in today's political environment not to discuss positionality in reporting. Objectivity has become a weapon against reporters actively seeking truth. An inconvenient fact counter to political rhetoric is frequently questioned as an example of a reporter's bias. While I left the profession many years ago, I see students struggling with this critique, especially when there are so many notable national examples of presidential candidates and congressional representatives referring to the press as biased, inaccurate, or slanted.

A few years ago, a student in my journalism history course told me they believed they could not double major in journalism and social justice because the two had different professional aims. I was astonished that the student had come to view journalism as outside the work of social justice when there were many examples we had discussed in the class of reporters using their coverage to call attention to injustices and corruption, from muckrakers to the reporters covering the Anti-War and Civil Rights movements.

Journalists are also community members. Those communities are drawn along geographic, social, and, yes, political lines. Asking students to examine who they are and what they seek to report is a vital first step in addressing their position in their reporting. Evaluating how the audience will be positioned in their reporting is also important. Through my own experiences, I encourage my students to evaluate their position against that of the "objective" position their critics wish them to occupy. My Queer identity positions me differently than my heterosexual colleagues, but my reporting is not any more biased than theirs by virtue of our identities alone. Through me, my students have found it is not a question of finding a neutral perspective but rather a balanced one that offers critical insights into their reporting.

Section I I. Tensions of Disclosure

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.

Chapter 46. Privileged Entanglements

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MUHLENBERG COLLEGE

Timothy Oleksiak
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

As editors of the collection, *Adequate: Rewriting the Logics of Success in Rhetoric and Composition* (2026), we have occasionally been tasked with articulating—sometimes by friends, sometimes by contributors, often by ourselves—what gives us the right to talk, or be the editors and thus gatekeepers of a collection, about labor, success, working conditions, and working inequities. Especially a collection that seeks to reclaim mediocrity, laziness, and unproductivity as subjectivities full of agentive possibility. Does the world really need a collection edited by two white guys declaring their intention to do less?

Fair enough.

If you say it like that, we can see that we should account for ourselves in some way. And we think that we have done so. In our introduction, we lay out our vision of adequacy informed by Black feminism and queer theory, describing our collection as an addition to the already well-trodden economic critiques of higher education's labor practices by exploring the particular intertwining of neoliberalism and the affective demands of Rhetoric and Composition as a discipline. As we explain, it is precisely through our field's collective sense of responsibility to students and our extensive knowledge of best practices in teaching writing that we get cajoled into seeing ourselves as inadequate. Institutions exploit our internalized sense of inadequacy to do more with less in the name of helping students, and we see a real need to call attention to it and work, with collaborators, toward finding solutions on how to reject these expectations. That finding those solutions—or embracing them—might be easier for us because of our various positions in social hierarchies *is* a feature worth drawing attention to, not hiding from.

Part of how we do so is by discussing our own positions in the academy—positions that can feel adequate. We are doing the work we need to maintain both our employment and a vision of ourselves in the profession. And yet, our perspectives on work in the academy come from listening deeply to those with longer career experiences telling us that the university will never love us back. Timothy was told early in his career that academic management's job is to ask people to do things. He has said “yes” when he didn't want to, but he's learned how to say “no” better and more frequently. Joshua's perspective on work and labor is informed in many ways from his working-class background, where the idea of “love” and “labor” being in the same sentence feels like an error of grammar more so than a

reasonable aspiration. For him, academia is a way to pay the bills—a more enjoyable way of paying the bills than working in the Pennsylvania coal mines he grew up near, he assumes, but a way of paying the bills all the same.

And yet, we find ourselves in positions where the constant call to compensate for institutional failures is profound—a call that, we think, comes both from inside the house as much as from the nameless bureaucrats, capitalists, and administrators that are usually blamed in collections about labor. To what extent, we ask, can we reject the call to do more work in the first place? To take up adequacy is to challenge the demand for greater production. Our hope is that adequacy could become a coalitional possibility by which we as laborers can pivot from simply refusing to do work, which more often than not displaces work onto another body, to a more structural question: asking “does this work *really* need to be done?”

As we crafted our CFP and began reviewing proposals, we noticed that many of our potential contributors were haunted by the question of who can be adequate. Interlocking systems of oppression make the decision for adequate work a complicated question. One way for contributors to exorcise this haunting has been to ground their perspectives in a recognition that they/we are privileged. Privilege statements—typically couched as positionality statements—often take on direct comparisons between the writer, usually the person professing more privilege, and some imagined group that is generally assumed to be less powerful than the writer. In the proposals we received and in the first round of chapter drafts, our contributors were earnest and eager to mark their understanding of their own privilege. For example, a very well-published and well-resourced contributor stated that they have more privilege than contingent faculty. One contributor—whose underpaid tenure-track job seems deeply exploitative and psychologically unsustainable—acknowledged that she at least had it better than her comparatively lesser paid NTT colleagues and grad students. Multiple straight, white folks talked about how they knew queer folks and people of color had it harder. Such rhetorical gestures make sense given what we know to be true in our discipline: standpoint and positionality (informed in no small part by the work of Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought*) shape reception and production of knowledge. Where we stand dictates the truth claims we produce. Privilege statements are a way to foreground experiential knowledge and indicate for others our awareness of these limits.

And yet, as we read manuscripts and considered the privilege statements in context with the authors’ own arguments, something about their rhetorical positioning struck us as odd. The privilege statements did not seem to advance the ideas within the writing. Rather, it seemed to us that these acontextualized privilege statements were emerging out of an anxiety of experiential knowledge and not a nuancing of truth claims. There’s something stable, possessive, and anti-relational about privilege statements that function as rhetorical buttresses against potential attack rather than as epistemic throughlines into an argument. That is to

say, we worry that by describing positionality as merely a limitation of one's own knowledge, we undermine the more complex relationship positionality has in developing our ideas. The rhetorical work of the positionality statement does not strengthen an idea or an audience's ability to understand how an idea was arrived at, but instead abdicates responsibility to account for the multiple ways privilege affects how we think.

Privilege, as an aspect of positionality, is especially complex because it has the markings of truth while also occluding more difficult realities. For example, many of our contributors wanted to mark their whiteness as a privilege in an inherently white supremacist higher education economy. But what does this mean in context? We can imagine a space where our whiteness creates barriers to our understanding; drawing attention to one's whiteness does not overcome that barrier, nor does it free one of the culpability to do anti-racist work. Without attending to a contextualized argument, positional statements are theatrical. This theater suggests that I can see beyond the harms of my privileges without evidencing requisite action necessary for transformation.

Other contributors wanted to talk about how their position within higher education hierarchies affords them privilege, but this privilege can be local and specific. Tenure at a struggling SLAC that's nearing bankruptcy and which has laid off tenured folks in the past is a worse spot to be in than a reasonably comfortable NTT position at a well-endowed and prestigious university. A unionized NTT position might be more comfortable, more secure, and more powerful than a tenure-track position in a state where legislators are trying to ban tenure and where austerity has meant raises haven't been given in years.

We also note that privilege is fluid and changeable and sometimes contradictory. Joshua, for example, grew up poor and carries with him the trauma of poverty, but also is fully a member of the middle class now, with all of the hallmarks of comfortable middle-class life: stable employment, in a dual income couple, and homeownership in a metropolitan region. He thus embodies middle class privilege *and* working-class baggage simultaneously in his movements, in his ways of speaking and being, in his performance of professionalism. Sometimes it matters and sometimes it doesn't. To pretend as though he's *always* poor would be to deny the reality of his life experiences just as much as denying that he's ever been poor. Timothy has no trauma to report. He grew up in a comfortable, working-class liberal Midwestern United States family. The son of a social worker and a United Auto Workers union committeeman, he remembers being dragged to protests and election days as a kid. But as an adult he goes to protests and votes. He thrived in an environment where other's emotions and feelings weren't threats but opportunities to listen and be in community. So, when he moved from a proto-gay kid to a gay adult to a sometimes queer guy, he did so in the contexts of emotional safety and security and with bravery that comes from a supportive family unit and an ability to run away from unentertaining superficiality. The physical and emotional violence experienced as a result of Timothy's

faggotry wasn't there or, as is more likely, he was just too stupid to notice it. The truth, however, is he knows in a deeply felt way that his effeminacy puts him in danger as he moves away from his chosen families and friends. Sometimes this matters and sometimes it doesn't. To pretend that his effeminacy always puts him under threat is to deny the ways that his movement through space and time has attracted as much as it has repelled.

All told, then, we were worried by our contributors' need to perform awareness of privilege and how it related to their pieces. Privilege is an acknowledgement of experiential standpoint, which can be a great thing to say when it makes a meaningful difference in our arguments, but can also risk being stable, flat, acontextual, and treated as a possession rather than a relationship toward others, audiences, and structures. As editors, we want to discourage writers from engaging with privilege as separate from their practices of writing and meaning-making.

Guided with a deep belief that privilege makes sense in the concrete and specific political economic conditions that surround truth-claims but also aware of the cultural moment we are in, we wanted to create space to circumvent the need for such acontextualized statements of privilege that pit one person against an idealized version of some group they believe to be at a disadvantage comparatively. As a result, in our first round of feedback, we encouraged our contributors to remove any statements of privilege in their revisions unless necessary for the argument they were developing. In exchange, we promised to include a version of this note about privilege in our editors' introduction that read,

As editors of this collection, we saw many links and connections among contributors. One such link was the need for our colleagues to assert their own privilege either via direct statements or by noting how others are less privileged. We brought this insight to their attention and asked them to remove such statements with the promise that we would create this note in our introduction. Each and every one of them recognizes that they have some form of privilege that makes their lives less burdensome. As we noticed these moments in their chapters where they felt the need to assert their privileges, we asked them to remove those lines unless necessary for the point they are making. We did this for several reasons. First, it is our belief that unless you are making an argument about privilege and its consequences, to suggest that one group is less privileged than you can feel defensive or theatrical to many readers. So much of this collection is about asserting our rights to be adequate in an era of unhinged capitalism. We asked our contributors to trust their boldness, and we will defend their experiences and that boldness as worthy and important scholarly contributions. Second, privilege and disadvantage are complicated and relational, felt

by everyone depending on the contexts in which rhetors and their audiences/writers and their readers interact. The arguments and stories herein are of a specific context. If we place any one of these contributors in a different context, their relationships to privilege and disadvantage shifts. As readers we ask for your generosity on this one key point: Contributors know, as we know, the basic and fundamental operations of privilege and understand its effects.

We believe that this statement in our editor's introduction to *Adequate* is the kind of statement we need to see more of in *Rhetoric and Composition*. To our mind, such statements make our editorial values transparent. They hopefully ease the anxieties of our contributors by taking some of the pressure off them to mark privilege while also granting them the right to include it in more nuanced, contextualized ways. Finally, they make requests of readers to sit with the very notion of privilege as a practice of writing. This last part is particularly important as we consider the reception of our ideas. How do we ask for more generous reads even as audiences are under no obligation to receive and respond generously? We acknowledge the risk in asking for better attention to privilege statements. What might it mean to even ask you this question? What gendered, racialized, disabled assumptions are underneath such requests? Sometimes it feels as if we need to have everything perfectly articulated and presented before we can begin to see our ideas circulate. What is ultimately driving our editor's statement on privilege is a call to begin writing like we've learned the thing. We need to not just acknowledge that we know something, but instead write as if we have listened. Unless privilege marks itself as a category of meaningful difference in the arguments we build, we need to risk setting it aside.

Chapter 47. Stories from the Field: When Worlds Collide and the Research Hits Close to Home

Callie F. Kostelich
BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

On the day I became “Dr. Kostelich,” I presented my research to a crowded room of committee members, family, and friends. It was a successful, celebratory defense. I overviewed my rural-focused work, highlighting how agricultural literacies are sponsored/suppressed within neoliberal contexts, particularly using an example of big agribusiness’ impact. I carefully positioned myself as an insider to this world, which I was and am, and I also critiqued it heavily and with academicese—a secondary discourse I had acquired but kept confined to academic spaces and dissertation pages.

This was the first time my family had heard my research. I come from a rural community who collectively raised me and an agriculturally producing family whose love is embodied in my very being. They raised me to know that my roots run deep, and they taught me that when it gets tough—and it will—to keep my plow firmly in the ground and to keep on tilling. This phrase—this mantra of my life—was modeled time and time again, and when the rain didn’t come and cattle prices dropped and bills were hard to pay, we kept going, brains and bodies.

My worlds collided the day of my dissertation defense. I had found a research niche where I could reconcile my rural essence with academic inquiry and a dissertation project on agricultural literacies that had real, tangible impacts. I could be part of the community and critique it—or so I naively thought. When the formalized portion of the defense was over—and we know who the intended audience was: my committee who determined my doctoral fate—I found myself at lunch with family as they began to ask me questions. I could not hide behind phrases like, “critical agricultural literacies,” “suppression by neoliberal sponsors,” and “sponsoring organization ideologies.” I could no longer use academicese to articulate an argument that called into question aspects of how we do rural life and the powerful organizations who sponsor our livelihoods. In my post-defense haze, I was met with a shocking realization. I may have successfully defended the dissertation to my committee, but I had just begun the true challenge of my work: to articulate these concepts to audiences both in and outside of the ivory tower. I would have to learn how to articulate my work in a way that contributes to conversations in the field, literally and figuratively. What was—and is—at risk is potential alienation, for scholarly critique—particularly in our current political

climate—is often met with suspicion, rejection, and/or distrust, even from those who know and love us well.

This experience served as a brutal reminder that there is no abstract distance between myself and my work. My work and my home community—the essence of who I am and where I am from—will collide, and I must, for the sake of my own convictions, forge a path where I don't forsake one for the other. I choose both: to make a commitment to my scholarly work and a commitment to maintaining relationships with those whose lived experiences coincide with my study. This can be excruciating labor, and I know that I'm not alone in the quest. Explicitly situating our positionalities in our scholarship and in our lived experiences is a much-needed avenue for grappling with the labors involved when the research hits close to home. Questions to ask ourselves as we grapple: How do we do this hard but oh-so important bridging work? And how do we care for ourselves and others in the process?*

*The author has spent a good amount of time in therapy and has taken six years to process before putting these brief words on a page.

Chapter 48. Learning How Much to Say and Troubling Positionality as a Form of Disclosure

Jennifer Burke Reifman
SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

I am drafting yet another version of a diversity statement for yet another job application. The prompt for the statement is vague and unhelpful, asking me to, “describe my commitment to diversity and equity” and “my experience working with diverse students.” I can detail my work at community colleges, my research working alongside students to understand issues of inequity, and my administrative work advocating for resources and more just approaches. “My commitment to diverse students comes from my experience growing up in a poor, rural town in a blue-collar family,” I write. I could continue on. I could describe my high school, the overcrowding pushing us all into trailers in the parking lot, the way all the teachers knew my last name because my family had preceded me. I could describe the town, the shops dead for years, the people nodding out on the front stoops of the main drag. I could tell you what it was like after leaving, the family who thought I was a snob for going to college, the many classmates who died of overdoses—but I don’t. You don’t need to say so much.

In my experience claiming or centering positionality, there is a fine line between naming our identities and experiences and exemplifying them in detail. It often doesn’t seem enough to say that the town I grew up in was poor and rural, so I tend to add details that bring these ideas to life but leave the listener more comfortable. I will typically reference the Billy Joel song, “Allentown,” to convey to people the image of the dying factory town set in the valleys of the Appalachian Mountains but leave the visceral details to the side. This is the complicated nature of disclosure in a positionality statement. What should we reveal and what should we leave out? In this case, I consider the comfort of the reader or the listener, but how do we account for our own comfort in how much of our story we reveal?

The practice of exploring your positionality as a researcher and academic is crucial, for it reveals our humanity and how our very real experiences impact the work we do in Higher Education. As a part of the diversity statement, it isn’t generally a requirement. In fact, most diversity statements are prompted in a way that asks very little by way of disclosure or details of personal identity. However,

I continually struggle with how to glaze over my positionality and the ways it has informed my work and commitment to diversity. I read Tuck and Yang's (2014) "R-words: Refusing research" and their discussion of humanizing research reminds us of "the fixation social science research has exhibited in eliciting pain stories from communities that are not White, not wealthy, and not straight" (p. 227). I wonder if I am playing into this paradigm. I want to be authentically who I am in these moments, and I want to own my experiences; they are so formative to the work I do—but I am always wondering if it is too vulnerable.

When my faithful second reader looks over the diversity statement for obvious errors or things I have missed, he corrects "poor" to "socioeconomically disadvantaged." Then, we argue. I didn't feel disadvantaged—I felt poor. Scraping food together, hand-me-downs from cousins, heating the house by wood fire poor. My father breaking his back on a roof and coming home smelling like tar. My mother up all night slinging drinks and returning as we wake for school. He knows all this, but he reminds me: you don't need to say so much.

Disclosure is a complex practice that a person doesn't really have to consider unless the information being disclosed is somehow dangerous or precarious. There is, of course, the personal danger of being found out in academia as something outside the norm. I practiced this form of strategic disclosure for many years; before I even had the words to describe myself as a first-generation student, I was hiding this information about myself. People would talk about where their parents went to school, and I would simply go quiet. The further I have gone along in my work as a teacher and graduate student, the less concerned I became with this disclosure. Yes, first-generation—proudly. But other parts, I still can't quite claim in the same way. The personal danger that disclosure exposes you to can leave you vulnerable to a number of assumptions by people, which make you want to carefully craft your personal narrative. When people have learned about how I grew up, they have made assumptions about my parents, my relationships with my family, and my understanding of the world. I spent an entire graduate course countering the idea that growing up poor and going to college meant that I was the pride and joy of my community; those who were used to a specific narrative about poverty and education as the means to socioeconomic improvement did not want to hear how leaving for college had actually made me a pariah.

The second danger in disclosure comes to those who are outed in your own revealing of information. How do I explain my complicated relationship with the term "first-generation college student," without revealing very specific information about my family? Even now, I toe the line for what I say directly and what I leave buried. Disclosure, in this case, extends beyond the personal—it is communal and shared. I do not solely own every story I tell, no matter how much

it impacts me. Am I then using my families' and communities' stories to make myself worthy?

I have just completed my qualifying exam and advanced to candidacy. I see my Dad afterward, and I am crying from relief. He's so proud, and when I explain why what I just did feels so incredible, he is angry, deflated, betrayed. I try to contextualize and provide statistics about the likelihood that a child of a parent who did not complete high school would be on their way to a doctorate. "It is just so unlikely that I would get here," I say, but all he can hear is his failure. All he can hear is me having to live past his failure. I don't need to say so much, I tell myself.

Moments like these have taught me about the complicated nature of disclosing this information, among other things that I cannot and will not detail here. There are things that deeply impact my identity that I would like to speak to, but I do not own these alone. The call for positionality in research statements, while important and well-intended, does not always consider the way positionality is owned by many people and the way it may not be a personal imperative. To this point, why disclose at all? At whose benefit do I share these stories?

On the other hand, I find trouble in disclosure as a form of currency. This is the third danger in disclosure: how does sharing a particular identity grant me access to certain spaces and do I use it inappropriately? I am reminded of conversations with my sister who is disabled and has spent a lifetime considering disclosure about disability. We talk about the utility of disclosure, how it can grant you access or cause you to be excluded. She reminds me of the privilege to hide an identity—something she hasn't been able to do in her own disability—and the ways in which accessing certain spaces as a person with a disability is fraught with tension around what can be seen and what can't. When I read a text about it, I send her this quote: disclosure is complex, contextual, and can "become strategic to accomplish certain goals" (Miller et al., 2017, p. 124). What does disclosure get us that we are not entitled to?

I am in a meeting for first-generation graduate mentors, a program I've been paid a small stipend to participate in. I am there with the other graduate student mentors who are talking about their intersecting identities, telling stories of immigration, recounting their experiences with racism, and speaking to their exhaustion with needing to sound a certain way as a multilingual person. I sit there in my English native speaking whiteness. I wonder whose space I've taken up by being there. They ask me about my experiences as a first-generation student, and I am brief and hesitant. I don't need to say so much.

When we ask people to reveal slices of their identity, especially the easily hidden or obscured parts, we are asking them to participate in a particular process

of disclosure. Positionality, then, becomes a process of navigating particular dangers: dangers to oneself, danger to the community, danger in invading spaces that are not really yours. I champion those who choose to engage in this form of disclosure and who can own their truths without fear; I similarly uphold the sanctity of privacy for those who choose otherwise and who question the airing of personal stories for the sake of credibility or access. Positionality is a tool in many parts of academia as it allows us to locate our personal contexts and to hold us accountable for how our lived experiences may or may not align with the intellectual work we create. It can also be a weapon that is wielded against you or those who trust you and this requires careful consideration of how much to disclose and for what reasons.

I finish my diversity statement, even though I'm uneasy about how much to disclose. I've labored over the exact wording for hours. I've consulted friends in how they wrote their own and am only more confused by how some people choose to say everything, while others nothing at all. Surely the people hiring me need to know this part of me, right? It's such a large part of who I am as a scholar, a teacher, a human. It drives so much of my work. The Word Document has the squiggly lines under certain phrases and words. It underlines "socioeconomically disadvantaged" and suggests "poor." Ok, I think. I'll say that much.

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Section 12. Troubled Times

Troubled Times authors offer perspectives on failure narratives, managing emotions and balancing perspectives during research, and reckoning with positionality in academic spaces.

Chapter 49. Debunking the Flunking-Forward Myth: Towards Position-based Failure Narratives

Wally Suphap

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, BARD COLLEGE

Here I offer a set of personal episodes of failure that, taken together, have led me to interrogate the value of “hard lessons” and better understand how to wield my own positionality as a writing teacher.

I. I Failed First-Grade English.

My first-grade teacher in Bangkok, Kru Daeng, assigned daily translation recitations. Each morning at the start of class, she'd write on the chalkboard five new English words, and their corresponding Thai translations: “Dog” is สุนัข. “Elephant” is ช้าง. “Red” is สีแดง. “Smile” is ยิ้ม. “Love” is รัก. At half past eleven, we had to stand in line in front of her desk and recite those translations from memory. If we got all five translations correct (she was a stickler for “proper” pronunciation), we were dismissed to go down to lunch. One by one, my classmates would complete the recitation and be given permission to leave class and head to the cafeteria.

Despite my best efforts, I was usually last to complete the recitation. English was by far my worst subject, and I made a point to be the final student in line so I could have more time to study the words on the board. “Dog” is สุนัข, I'd start. ช้าง is Ele ... le ... umm-umm...font? I'd stumble and start again. Sometimes it'd take me three or four attempts to get it right. I recalled pleading with Kru Daeng to give me a pass. *Can't I get credit for trying?* She never gave in. Most days by the time I joined my classmates at the cafeteria they were midway through their lunch; some already finished their meals and were kicking balls on the playground.

This was my first memory of academic failure. Every day I dreaded that late-morning hour of English lessons which I spent nervously anticipating my sweaty-messy self in front of the teacher, stumbling, fumbling, hungry to identify the correct answers. I don't remember my teacher being overly cruel, and to her credit, I assume she meant well. I could see, from her perspective, how the quizzes were employed as a carrot, for our own good, to motivate us to memorize the vocabulary and study harder. But from my six-year-old perspective, I couldn't help but feel starved by those quizzes; to me, they operated like sticks, pounding away at my confidence.

Decades later, I still haven't completely shaken off the shame of those repeated flops. They are the subjects of my worst nightmares, even now as a lawyer-turned-writer and college writing professor. I emigrated to the States when I was seven years old, and during my first grade at a public school in Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley (I was forced to repeat a grade after my immigration), I could barely string together a sentence; instead, I resorted to using make-shift sign language to communicate with my teachers and classmates. In elementary school, after discovering how to make vocabulary flashcards, I managed to catch up to my peers. By middle school, I was drafting coherent essays.

One of those early essays was a reported profile of my mother for an assignment in eighth grade. I interviewed her and wrote about her divorce and becoming a single mother, her former undocumented immigrant status, her grit and entrepreneurship in opening up one of the first Thai restaurants in the San Fernando Valley. It was the first essay where I felt a sense of writerly control. I chose the topic. I chose the style. I chose a persona. It was a revelation. For the first time, I enjoyed the freedom, the thrill, of bringing myself into my writing.

When I reflect on my personal history of English education, I shift between dueling accounts. One version gives credit for the punishing protocols adopted by the likes of the stern Kru Daeng, and thanks them for teaching with might and instilling me with a fear of failure. This version sees failure as critical and necessary, an impetus for later successes. But another version sees those failures as harsh punishments, as cruel beyond helpful. While I acknowledge those series of failures pushed me to study harder, I cannot deny that my daily translation battles at an early age cultivated an uneasy relationship with the English language extending well beyond my childhood.

Truth be told, I wish to hold space for both versions, or rather, an amalgamated version. In this hybrid rendition, the instances of setbacks generate dual effects: motivating *and* harming, all at once. Yes, I've learned the lessons, but at what costs? Looking back, those lessons have left lasting wounds. I still have sweaty nightmares about those failed daily quizzes, and I clam up when I'm forced to recite something. We often talk about "hard lessons," but what about those that are *beyond* hard? So hard that they become internalized and embodied, scars forever affixed to the body. As one who carries those deep wounds alongside my successes as a writer, this double-sided version seems closest to an accurate archive of my trials with writing and language.

II. I Failed to Account for My Privilege.

Historically, pedagogical approaches to failure in writing have emphasized the importance of setbacks. Proponents of this notion of "generative failure" offer up snazzy mottos. *You have to fail to grow. You learn by failing. There's merit to failing. You can't achieve anything without failure. Failure is a necessary part of the path to success. Failure can be overcome. Fail better. Fail forward. Fail successfully.*

While I consider myself an optimist, I remain skeptical of these glass-half-full narratives. For one, they neglect the downsides associated with failure—the variations on the themes of hurt, shame, wounds—and overestimate the chances of future success. In fact, they often misleadingly paint success as an inevitability. *Work hard enough and eventually you'll get there.* Experienced writers know, though, that not all pieces we start will be successful or even completed. We writers miss the mark. We misfire.

More troubling, failure narratives often ignore the privileged positionality of the narrator. Take, for example, J.K. Rowling's famous commencement speech at Harvard University in 2008. Lauded as among the most brilliant and prescient, the speech espouses the “fringe benefits” of failure, elaborating on how she “failed on an epic scale” before she became the best-selling author of the *Harry Potter* series. By hitting “rock bottom”—she was divorced, single parenting, unemployed—Rowling says she was set free to rebuild herself. A phoenix rising up from the ashes of disappointments. To an audience of Ivy League crimson-clad graduates, Rowling preached from her perch: “Failure gave me an inner security that I had never attained by passing examinations. Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way.”

But who has the *privilege* of failing successfully? Implicit in Rowling's arc of generative failure is a two-step calculation: a personal reckoning followed by a bouncing back. Absent from this concept of failure is the acknowledgment that the latter step—the recovery—isn't guaranteed for everyone, nor is it all within a person's control. For example, all things being equal, the likelihood of a successful bounce-back is substantially higher for a Harvard graduate than most. Which is to say: Some people's “rock bottom” comes with a generous built-in cushion.

We see an example of this cushion in the fallout of Rowling's controversial comments on gender and trans rights—which itself is an act of failure to acknowledge privilege. Even though she's received backlash from some of her fans, and even actors in the *Harry Potter* films and other writers, she still maintains a special status in the literary world and the culture at large, a status that virtually shields her from ever regressing to a “rock-bottom” state. Certainly, her wealth and popularity might diminish, her reputation tarnished; yet, she remains a multimillionaire and one of the most successful writers. As of June 2025, Rowling has 14.3 million followers on X (formerly, Twitter), and in 2022, her book sales increased by 35% despite the calls to boycott her works due to her offensive comments.

In defending her position, Rowling has pointed to her own challenges with sexuality as a young woman and her own history of domestic abuse and sexual assault. In other words, she's staking her claim to the debate based on her unique positionality. Yet, it's a carefully-curated, cherry-picked positionality. In making these statements, as with her Harvard commencement speech, Rowling often deploys her personal narrative without due criticality or interrogation of the material conditions and systems that support her, not to mention her relative position vis-à-vis her audience and those whom she is attacking.

A few years ago, I was invited to be an alumni guest speaker for Columbia College's network for first-generation, low-income students. I spoke about my first career as a corporate lawyer and the transition to my second (and current) career as a writer-teacher. I cautioned against selling out, and encouraged a passion-filled career. During the question-and-answer session, an Asian-American student raised her hand and said she wanted to do non-profit work but was concerned about financial security and was now considering law school. She asked for advice on how she could obtain financial stability and support her immigrant parents, while still pursuing work that was meaningful to her and her community. Coming from a low-income family, she saw a corporate legal career as the safest pathway toward climbing up the social ladder.

In that moment, I realized I had neglected to account for my own privilege in my storytelling. I had already achieved a certain level of financial security and status as a corporate lawyer. I had a safety net, a soft cushion to land on if I fall. But to someone just starting out their career and coming from a marginalized background, was I not myopic in urging them to forgo the safety and comforts from a corporate job, the kind of job I had enjoyed and taken for granted?

Yes, I want to tell my students they can be a successful writer, as successful as the likes of J.K. Rowling, if that's what they want. I want to tell myself that, too. But aspirations do not always translate to reality. As a teacher and writer, I want to hold space for the plentitude of variations on the themes of hurt, shame, and wounds. I want to share stories that honestly acknowledge both my areas of disadvantage *and* privilege.

III. I Failed to Bring My True Self to Class.

When I first started teaching, I was reluctant to assign anything by writers who were Asian or queer or from immigrant backgrounds. I didn't want to be judged as demonstrating partiality toward writers of "my own kind."

A year ago, several colleagues in my department were assigning Cathy Park Hong's essay, "Bad English." It traced Hong's personal journey from her childhood shame of her once "broken English" to self-acceptance. I loved the essay, not least because it held space for the hurt and pain she experienced as a Korean-American while reclaiming the power in writing her own narrative. And still, I didn't assign it at first for fear of students accusing me of personal bias. I didn't want to be *that* non-native English speaker who assigns works by other non-native English speakers.

But in trying to break the mold, I trapped myself in another cookie-cutter mold. I often quote Oscar Wilde to my students: "Be yourself, everyone else is taken." I encourage them to apply Wilde's ethos to their writing: *Write in your voice, your style. Tell stories that matter to you, in ways that only YOU can tell it. Write about YOUR passions, interests, obsessions, haunts. Bring YOURSELF into your writing.*

Ironically, I was not taking my own advice. I brought instead to the classroom an entirely made-up—and radically unrealistic—“objective” teacher, a cardboard cut-out version that masked my identities and my minority status. It’s not that I outright denied my identities, but I was purposely muting them, their free expressions at least, steering clear from raising any personal experiences in class that highlighted my race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

When I finally assigned Hong’s essay (in my second year of teaching, upon the encouragement of a colleague), it was met with great enthusiasm and interest from my students, many of whom were non-native English speakers or else had struggles with writing growing up. During the in-class discussions of Hong’s essay, I spoke about my own struggles with learning English in Bangkok, recounting my failures with the daily recitation exercises. In turn, many students shared their own stories of how, growing up, they were made to believe their English was “broken,” “inferior,” or “inauthentic.” The essay resonated with my students, just as it resonated with me. Hong gave voice and narrative to the shame, and as a class, we individually and collectively recognized her shame as if it were our own. What’s more, she gave us permission to reclaim our “broken” English as a badge of honor, as homage to our ancestors and cultural heritage.

Like most writing teachers, I ask students to complete multiple drafts of an essay, starting with freewriting and outlining to an exploratory draft and a formal draft, before submitting a final draft for a grade. Along the way, they engage in peer review, applying the agreed-upon community standards of tenderness and rigor. I also offer my comments, most frequently a variation on one of these themes: *Write more of this! Expand here! We are losing your voice!*

When a student tells me they are struggling to convert their exploratory draft to a formal draft, I tell them to keep going. What I am actually telling them, in an exclamatory yet tender voice, is this: *Keep being yourself! Stay true!* It’s a mantra that I recite to myself, as a reminder to stay true to my own voice as a teacher.

IV. Can We Fail a Little Differently?¹

One of the lessons I teach to my first-year undergraduates covers the topic of writerly authority. I begin by asking students to do a timed free-writing exercise based on a prompt: *What constitutes authority in a piece of writing?* After the free-write I ask students to volunteer to share out. Their responses often follow a familiar refrain. Authority, they say, is synonymous with confidence, forcefulness, expertise—offering compelling evidence to reach a firm conclusion. Authority, in their eyes, is associated with hardness, a certain toughness and might.

But what if authority is derived from *softer* components, I ask my students? What if the components that most express authority are actually the antonyms

1. Adapted from the last lines of Chen Chen’s poem, “Circle ‘C’ If You Just Don’t Know”: “Can we go another way, another now? Can we / go, can we fail, a little differently?”

of the aspects they wrote down? Not (necessarily) confidence, forcefulness, or expertise, but rather, say, humility, gentleness, and a novice-mindset. What if it's not about so much forcefully pushing an argument but acknowledging the merits of counterarguments, recognizing the limitations of one's own perspective, accepting the possibility of being wrong? When I ask students to consider the assigned essays, and which ones exude the most authority, they often point to essays exhibiting these "softer" components of authority. They point to essays that lead not with fear or force but with tenderness and humanity.

This "softer" type of authority acknowledges, most of all, this: where one speaks and writes from, whether it's from a position of privilege or marginalization, or somewhere in-between. This is where I feel compelled to disclose my own position. Like all my prior pedagogical works, I write from a matrix of positions: a writing teacher AND a pupil; a benefactor of elite socio-educational institutions and systems AND a vocal critic of the same; an American AND an immigrant—among other identities.

When I think about the failure narratives I want to share with my students, I think about sharing stories from these hybrid positions—positions that affirm and interrogate my intersecting positionality, the privileges propelling my career path as a writer-teacher as well as the setbacks encountered in my English classes in Thailand and my initial years upon emigrating to the States. I think about translating my war stories to account for the nuances and caveats: narrated not from the all-knowing position of the ultimate victor but rather as one among countless bruised warriors still figuring things out—forging forward, banded together.

Chapter 50. Flailings and Failings: Managing Emotions and Balancing Perspectives as an Emerging Researcher

Megan Heise
UTAH TECH UNIVERSITY

In my 2023 dissertation, “Transmodal zine-making with resettled refugee youth,” I knew it was important to name my positionality, particularly as a white, adult, U.S. citizen who has never been a refugee, working alongside BIPOC refugee-background teens. My goal, though, was never to be the focal point of the study; given that refugee teens are often ignored as experts on their own experiences, I wanted to center my participants’ artwork and perceptions over mine. In that, I was successful, but it came at the cost of more holistically owning my relationality to the participants in ways beyond superficial asides. In this snapshot, I use a framework of flailings and failings to grapple with questions around how and to what extent my own body and voice as a researcher was and should be present in my research alongside refugee youth.

One aspect I identify as a flailing—different from a failing because there was an attempt at self-reflexivity—was writing about my own embodied experience of being a graduate student conducting an IRB-backed empirical study for the first time and being quite nervous for my first interview. My anxiety was compounded because I knew this student’s family used one phone, which I was tying up for 60-90 minutes, and I wasn’t sure whether a Dari interpreter would be available for the call. As a result, I didn’t follow up on her initial responses, allowing her to provide relatively surface-level answers, and ignoring the questions these responses prompted in my mind, yielding data that was much sparser than that of the following two participants. In writing reflexively about this flailing in my dissertation itself, I was able to mark my own self and embodied emotionality as present in the study.

On the other hand, I failed to name my positionality or embodied emotionality on numerous occasions. Out of fear of centering myself, I sometimes hid myself entirely from the narrative. The metaphor I return to time and again is one of stepping to the side and shining a spotlight on, or turning up the microphone of, refugee-background youth who choose to share their stories and art. However, as any post-structural researcher would contend, there is simply no way to remove oneself from the narrative. I ultimately made a number of decisions on how to curate my participants’ work, how to interpret their art, and how to make sense of their interview feedback in a cohesive narrative in my dissertation. However, I did not name this, or the inherent power dynamics within it, potentially replicating the very silencing structures I sought to counter.

Moving forward, I still don't have any concrete answers. I know others' stories are not mine to tell, and that the work I do is deeply relational; there's no way for me to tell my story without including the relationships I've built. I've flailed and failed to acknowledge aspects of my own positionality and embodied emotionality, and I suspect that trend will continue as I keep striving for a better balance in representing my own role in the research I conduct. Graduate students and early career researchers are fighting compounded narratives—including imposter syndrome, mentor relationships, and a difficult job market—that portray failure as something to be avoided or pre-empted. If I've learned one thing, it's to lean into the failings and flailings, the messy and embodied emotions, instead; they are, perhaps, our greatest teachers.

Chapter 5 | Yes, and: Reckoning with Positionality in the Academic Workplace

Jenn Fishman
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

A colleague who is also a dear friend describes herself as a “glass half-full” kind of person, and I am not. But I’m not a “glass half-empty” type either. I want to know: How much water is there? Who thinks it’s theirs? What are their plans for it? And where does that leave us, all of us connected via the water and the glass?

For over a decade, any finalist for a tenure-line job in our department may have seen us do the “Water Glass Routine.” It was pretty good schtick, and it delivered a good, if deliberately mixed message. A glass half-full is a welcome sight. But seeing it that way is an act of will, as is learning to “grow where you’re planted,” which is another colleague-friendism. My refusal to go halves on the water may have seemed less inviting, not an open hand but a closed fist. Yet critically situating the glass is another kind of campus survival strategy. It’s a matter of identifying available resources as a precursor to action. In this, I have learned a great deal from multiply-marginalized colleagues who have been telling and telling how they withstand, even flourish, in the face of microaggressions, macroaggressions, and the institutional conditions that grow them. Listening to their stories, I picture our campuses as hothouses that almost all have busted thermostats.

But glasses and plants are not my metaphors, even though both help us keep going while we stay put. Instead, I choose the many *entendres* of the compass to tell my cis white girl story, which is not my story alone. With one foot planted, I sketch some of the theatrics that have played out over my career arc—all events that recur in our profession even if they aren’t discussed much in professional publics. In grad school, I was not the only one who had to learn it’s okay to remove a bully from a dissertation committee. Early on, I became a card-carrying member of the tenure denial club, and more recently I witnessed the sudden but paradoxically slow death of the writing program I directed. It may be counterintuitive to cast these situations as commonplaces. My list may seem unlikely, especially to early career colleagues and nonacademic readers, and it may be missing what others would list first, second, and third.

I nod in response. My affirmative, “Yes, and” follows the logic of theatrical improvisation, including the example set by the legendary Compass Players, who founded the first improv theater in the U.S. Improv embraces the difficulty involved in seeing beyond our own positionalities by asking participants to continuously relate and recalibrate. The golden rule of improv is “yes, and.” It’s

acceptance and momentum. It's additive invention. In this spirit, I tell the story of the third "crucible moment" on my list, the end of the writing program I directed. I tell it as my story and something more: something and. I also give fair warning: I've read just enough Aristotle to be dangerous. I started with *The Poetics*, including eighteenth-century translations that stray wildly from the Greek in an effort to reflect going ideas about story, character, and good theater. *The Rhetoric*, which came later for me, always seemed haunted by actors, orators, and everyone else whose arts resist the discipline of certain kinds of epigraphically-ordered minds.

As a result, what follows is not tragedy or comedy or epic. Instead, I try to track some of the multiple lines of activity linking the present and that time my writing program got dead. To be sure, this chapter comes with a beginning or two, maybe even three; some middle; and at least a sense of an ending. It's hard to divide drama into anything but thirds, and it's equally tough not to see professional formation, like life and chronology, as progression. Nonetheless, for my next trick, I attempt a series of feedback loop-de-loops in order to showcase how much words and play can encompass, especially if we understand positionality as a compass: one foot planted, the other ready to move.

One Thursday in August

It is a Thursday in mid-August, two working days before orientation for new First-Year Writing (FYW) teachers. Usually, there are ten to twelve MAs and PhDs in attendance, but this year the group is double in size and includes half grads, half new non-tenure-track (NTT) hires.

The institutional bollix that preceded this moment is well known to college-level writing program administrators (WPAs). The incoming first-year class was larger than anticipated, an unexpected percentage of those students needed to take FYW, and most could not or would not wait until spring. As a result, June and July included a cluster of full- and part-time adjunct hires, including former high school teachers and administrators, EFL instructors recently returned state-side, at least one MFA, and a couple of ABDs from other programs.

This kind of thing happens all the time elsewhere, but none of us could recall anything quite like it. So, for weeks I was immersed in issues technically beyond my scope as a tenure-track faculty member with an add-on administrative role: namely, budgeting, hiring, and fielding the ire of upper administrators convinced FYW was a cost center. Maybe that's why it took until early August for me to see a silver lining. What a boon for our students, I finally realized, and what a good thing for the writing program, the department, and the university. For at least a little while, we would be this remarkably robust teaching community. Truly, what better time to implement, program-wide, a previously piloted course that gave student writers 15 weeks of carefully scaffolded problem-driven, solution-seeking multimodal writing? How well-prepared would we be when, the following year, that same course slotted into the new "core" or gen ed curriculum?

I was finalizing orientation packets and feeling hopeful when the department chair came into my office carrying two red Solo cups and a bottle of dead red wine from the second-floor refrigerator. She came right from a meeting that marked the end of a months' long, regularly scheduled department review, and she had news. The headlines began with the imminent shutdown of our MA along with changes to our PhD, and they ended with the elimination of FYW as a program. After all, the new core would have only one writing course, and there would be fewer graduate teachers to oversee.

In the moment, I was both gobsmacked and stunningly unsurprised. That summer, I had been reading *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, an edited collection that offers a masterclass in decoding neoliberal corporate-minded decision making in higher ed. It was Nancy Welch's chapter in particular that helped me ID almost immediately the differences between my situation and, say, the majority portrayed in scholarly literature. Neither the finest examples of stewardship nor the richest data-driven arguments are effective in the new economy, Nancy explained, as if writing right to me. That triennial report I filed, with its empirical evidence of student learning and persistence? That had no currency in the current scheme, nor did the fact that we had wrangled that rarest of curricular beasts: a first-year writing course that incorporated a complete undergraduate research arc.

None of that mattered at the time, and it doesn't matter now, not really. Years have passed, and FYW has been renamed, rebuilt, and recast. A straight-line version of this story might rehearse the curricular changes that have taken place, while a braided narrative might interweave commentary on the macroeconomics of austerity, the material consequences of local, petty politics, and all that the 2020 pandemics taught us about writing education. But this is a positionality story, or two or three, and it dramatizes what was a crucible moment for me. So, the questions to address, one foot planted, the other ready to move, include: What happened next? What did I do? And what did that make me?

One Thursday in August, Redux

To begin again, I was hired as an advanced assistant professor to direct FYW after P&T even though neither my offer letter nor my contract said so explicitly. At the time, I had either no relevant experience or years of it. Although I had not previously served as a WPA, I was a participant-observer of one program's phoenix-like rise from the ashes, and with another I conducted grant-supported research that informed award-winning curricular revisions reported in refereed scholarship.

Nevertheless, the arrangement seemed clear enough, and I used it to chart my course on campus. If having a coffee, attending an event, or serving on a committee might help me lead FYW, then I was a yes; if not, then no. My earliest and most regular collaborators were the library and the campus social innovation initiative. The former made it possible to build undergraduate research and

multimodal remixes into the curriculum; the latter was an intellectual partner and a steady source of resources. In fact, just as the FYW program got the ax, social innovation was preparing to offer seed grants to first-year writers ready to turn their research into action.

But no. Instead, in August the night before new teacher orientation, I emailed my in-field colleagues: “Short Notice/Quick Rhet-Comp Get-Together,” and the next afternoon we raised plastic glasses of prosecco to our dead program walking. In the coming year, I told the group, the first priority would be FYW students. We owed them an experience untouched by whatever backstage chaos might ensue. Next came program faculty, who deserved respect and support in a situation where neither was institutionally forthcoming. My tied-for-third priorities, assessment and research, were quickly lost. In a moribund program, data and teaching materials decompensate fast. At best, they are props for postmortems that might usefully inform others’ ongoing praxes. Otherwise, like the video we submitted as finalists for an external innovation prize, program artifacts pile up as so many broken links, obsolete e-files, and mountains of hardcopy records that should be shredded, then recycled.

If this were a villanelle in the style of Elizabeth Bishop, a list of additional losses might follow, with off-rhymes calling out points of contrast. To be sure, there were instructors who resented how in the new course research and remix left no time for lit crit. There were also tenured and tenure-track colleagues who believed the austerity augurs and who feared (Write it!) they might have to teach “Jenn’s FYW.” Never mind that never came to pass. Never mind “my course” was co-authored by eight with input from another twenty-five.

In the end, this is not a rhyming poem written in tercets and concluding with a neat quatrain. It’s a story about how I responded when, as the clock ran down, a colleague stopped me in the hall and said: “So, this totally ruined your research agenda.” Was it a statement or a question? I still don’t know, and it doesn’t matter, not really. On one hand, as I took that first sip from the Solo cup, a good half of my plans were already wrecked. On the other hand, the other half were just as good, and they remained unaffected. Maybe if my “one art” were either of those most popular -isms, optim or pessim, I might have a better answer. But I still don’t see things that way. Instead, a student of Viola Spolin’s Theater Games, I accept the glass and the water offered, and then I improvise. I take a sip and do a spit take. I dip my pen to fill it, and then I write watery calligraphy across the wall. I rub the side of the glass as if to conjure a genie, and when that doesn’t work I fling out the remaining contents, yelling, “More, we need more!” and I offer the glass, curious to discover what comes next.

Full Circle

A compass is both a navigation tool and a drawing instrument. One involves magnets and truth telling. The other hinges on two arms plus a steady hand and

is usually plural, like shoes. In a pair of compasses, one is more needle or trash picker with a sharp point; the other grasps a pencil or its equivalent and is used to draw circles or trace arcs.

When I look down, it does and does not surprise me to see one foot planted almost exactly where it was that Thursday in mid-August, when I started firing emails and texts to the people, colleagues and friends, I trust most in a pinch. A year or two later, Carmen Kynard would offer “job,” “work,” and “hustle” as categories that might have helped me regroup. Instead, part coder, part archaeologist, I saw my situation as nodes of possibility in layers of timespace. On the surface, most immediately: my employer and the campus where I did my job(s). Just beneath: the intradiscipline that sponsors my work as an educator, including teaching, research, leadership, and service. Another fathom or five: the many archives, repertoires, and deep sources that ground me and keep me energized.

Letting go of FYW as a measuring stick, I reevaluated campus opportunities. It turns out, they were surprisingly easy to discern. I didn’t—and still don’t—see myself as furniture or the star of an off-brand cop show (e.g., *Milwaukee Vice Chair, 3nglish*). I also didn’t—and still don’t—have a dog in most fights. I’m more a cat person than a political animal. From some standpoints, that means I selfishly packed up my toys and went home instead of getting down off my hobby or high horse, take your pick, to play ball. My favorite among the mixed metaphors lobbed at me: I am not a team player. Never mind it’s not all sportsball. Some play chess or run track, while others make the NFL, the National Forensic League, via debate and speech team.

Look close, and the surface is not where my foot is planted although from a bird’s eye view it can seem that way. In my capacity as “chief capacitor,” a nonce-title given to me by a disciplinary colleague I esteem, I embrace the endlessly innovative work of working with others to make space, connections, and resources. This is what I pursue through symposia that spawn publications and launch satellites. It is also what draws me to scholarly editing, which is similarly formative and formidable intellectual labor whether the subject is undergraduate research, longitudinal research, or community listening. Presently, I headline in the writing center, where “co-director” doesn’t begin to capture the way I am positioned, one foot deep in intradisciplinary articulations of writing education, the other pivoting to help writers, peer tutors, and others arc toward countless possibilities.

If this is the kind of story that comes with a moral or a lesson, it’s probably best set to music: maybe a harpsichord and tin whistles or bagpipes, maybe Chicago drill. Whatever the case, the chorus is something about taking the high road or going high when they go low. It was the First Lady who reminded us the former is not about “losing the urgency or the passion or the rage, especially when you are justified in it.” This pathway is lit by problem-driven, solution-seeking energy. The result is momentum, a “yes, and” directed true north and shaped by a pair of compasses: one foot planted, the other poised, always ready to draw the next curve.

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Chapter 52. Multiracial Rhetorics of Representation: Enduring Ecologies and Destabilizing Ideas of Positionality

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Despite how often they appear in our day-to-day lives, most people never had a parent or guardian sit us down to discuss how to fill out the race and ethnicity question on survey forms. I was no different. Why would they discuss it with us? The answer to such a question seems like something children should just pick up on. Like placing block shapes into the correct hole—we somehow just *know* how to categorize ourselves. No need for detailed instruction. Unless you're me. Then it somehow became a production when I took standardized tests in Mr. Fulton's sixth-grade classroom as not only the only Black person but also as the only Asian person in my all-white elementary school in Tampa Bay, Florida (excluding my younger brother in the grade below). Logically, I knew I wasn't the only person in the world with an Asian mother and a Black father; if I was, I thought the newspapers would've interviewed me by now for my singularly rare status. So, while I knew I wasn't the only kid born to two minority parents, I still felt like the only Chinese Jamaican and Black kid in Florida, if not the entire United States. My parents didn't have the language to describe what being a minority-minority multiracial person was like in the early 2000s, and neither did I at age 10.

Filling out the race and ethnicity question on tests became symbolic for how I would walk through the rest of my life, both personally and academically. As a child, I didn't know if I could fill in multiple boxes or if I had to pick one race or ethnicity as my main identity. This caused child-me deep concern. Would I be indicating a parental preference if I picked one race over another? Would I get into trouble for excluding a portion of my racial identity? Would people even take my identities seriously, or would I always be made to feel less than my monoracial peers? One year I thought I solved my identity dilemma and checked only Pacific Islander to encompass what I thought were all my identities. At that time, I didn't know the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea weren't the same thing; there was no way I was equipped to answer the question of my ethnicity when I could barely comprehend its amalgamation myself. I would sometimes resort to asking Mr. Fulton for help on the race question, and it always derived mild confusion. He told me to fill in whatever I felt was correct, but I wouldn't have asked if I felt that anything was correct. Eventually, I learned to fill out the box with the amorphous term "Other" when it was made available. And at that point, it felt right. I could only describe myself as an Othered entity.

Nowadays, I can articulate that I am both a Black and Chinese Jamaican Writing Studies scholar with some confidence; at least more than I felt as a child. The simple act of acknowledging the combination of my identities and the perceived rift between myself and the majority monoracial world of academia can, at times, soothe the gnawing sensation of never fitting in when I walk into a room. And as I went through life, it became easier to draw upon my identities, to the point that I found myself advertising my identities to showcase that even if I didn't appear the way I thought I should, my writing and my work would appear on my behalf. This came from countless instances of other scholars and even my own students not taking my identities seriously. In my mind, I didn't look like the mental image one conjures when thinking of an Asian woman, nor did I think I acted in a way that signaled that I was "part of the Culture"—a.k.a, a full-fledged member of the Black community. I came to recognize that my mental images and signaling were merely social constructions and generalizations that had more to do with other people's perceptions of what constitutes being either Asian or Black than my lived reality as a multiracial person and as a scholar. Eventually, I came to see my own academic peacocking as tiresome and entirely unhelpful to the work I was doing. So now I work alongside my feeling of Otherness, not for recognition and acceptance but as a site of inquiry and as a resource to navigate the teaching of writing.

As an instructor one standout moment occurred at the beginning of my teaching career when I was working with my students on what effective peer review would look like in our first-year writing classroom. As a fresh graduate student without a collection of student examples to show current-students, I had the students peer-review my own writing masqueraded as a student example. This admittedly occurred out of necessity, but to my credit the topic I had written about—the linguistic practices of a white pop star who purportedly used African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in their lyrics—would hopefully be engaging to my writing class. What I didn't realize at the time was that I had unwittingly placed my classroom into what Mary Louise Pratt calls the contact-zone. At the time, I was a graduate teaching assistant at a Southern R1 university where most of the student population was white and middle-class. I also had the added benefit of having students who were very enthusiastic about pop culture and deeply enmeshed with popular slang. I simply thought they would read this anonymous and hopefully entertaining "student" paper and we would discuss how to give substantial feedback to one's peers.

Our class discussion derailed from what I thought should be the focused and generic feedback students wrote down into a discussion on race, popular media influences, and the ownership of language. Then students began to make presumptions about the author of the paper: most students guessed female or at least assigned female at birth but couldn't discern the race of the author and how that would've influenced their overall argument. One student pointed out that they felt they could give more specific feedback if they knew the author was someone who was an avid AAVE user and more of an authority on the topic as it

related to grammar structures. Another added that the paper spent so much time giving examples of AAVE usage, that when the conclusion wasn't to charge the pop star with using a "blaccent", they were somewhat let down as a reader. They said it felt like the author didn't feel comfortable sticking with their argument. Another rightfully asked that the paper should have given more information on language appropriation, since the author assumed the readers would possess the same information and understanding on the intersections of language and race. These comments alone were a lot to take in as a newly appointed graduate teaching assistant; I just wanted to give them an entertaining student example! At that time, I was unable to consider that despite removing my name from the "student example", I was still very much embedded within my writing as the author—the writing didn't become neutral once I deleted my name from the page.

But my students did what I had asked them to do even if I didn't realize it at the time; they gave specific and focused feedback to the writer. I hadn't even planned to tell my students it was my own paper after they completed the activity, but something became obvious to me after numerous students engaged in asking meaningful questions as readers. The conversion couldn't *just* be about giving feedback. We were talking about peer review. I recognized then that it was an embodied process that couldn't be free of subjectivity. My students taught me that engaging with the writer and their identities would bring more context to readers and increase the clarity of one's arguments. They also taught me that our academic and personal habitus influences the types of arguments we may make, something even I'm not excluded from.

In current iterations of this activity, I've accompanied modeling peer review to my students with a conversation on positionality because they're not separate entities. Of course, I continue to keep the paper anonymous for the first half of the activity because I enjoy seeing their shocked faces when I tell them the paper is mine. After the initial shock is over, I enjoy having a conversation on how who we are as people influences who we are as writers. We talk about giving helpful feedback without being overly critical or tearing someone down. We talk about considering identities other than our own when reading others' writing: especially so for people with varying cultural-racial-sociolinguistic identities. I ask all students to include positionality statements on their in-progress and final drafts, so that their peers and I have context to their own personal and academic habitus. I try to teach that writing on a page may sometimes seem homogenous when its writers are anything but.

As a scholar a standout moment occurred while co-writing a paper with four other graduate students in my department. We wanted to examine the intersections of the normalization of Standard Academic English (SAE) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices in writing programs. While the experience wasn't frustrating, it became apparent early on that we each came to the project with different ideas based on our research interests. One group member wanted to focus on how linguistic justice is discussed in the broader field of Composition

and Rhetoric, while another wanted to interrogate the history behind standard language ideology in American education. Another co-author wanted to explore how the international/immigrant body navigates being institutionalized in higher education via language assimilation. Meanwhile, I wanted to discuss the importance of cultivating critical language awareness as a writing program administrator for multilingual and multidialectal students. Whenever we discussed organizing the paper, it felt like we all agreed on what scholarship to cite and agreed on the overall sentiment of the paper, but our lines of approaching the topic felt disjointed and misaligned. I wanted to take charge and alleviate our organizational malaise.

What I really wanted was for everyone to agree on my sub-topic, and I was prepared to argue my line of thinking into becoming everyone's shared thinking. It didn't occur to me that I wanted to engage in the same behavior that frustrated me for some long in academia. I was used to engaging with learning and cooperation through a monoracial lens—the lens that surmised everyone had the same background and commonplaces, without any of the contradictions or complexities I typically experienced. The same lens that assumed I would see things from a singular point of view and adhere to a generalized epistemology. My individual work actively sought to dismantle that notion, and there I was ready to ignore it for the sake of my version of cohesion. I was prepared to exclude other epistemologies and subsume my co-authors under my version of reality when I should've taken a note from my own experiences as a minority-minority mixed race person to approach topics from a site of inquiry. So instead of pushing my sub-topic, I did the opposite and suggested writing positionality statements to not only clarify ourselves to one another but also to our future readers as well. Sitting down and discussing why we cared helped me look deeper into my peers' experiences, since I could only vaguely guess as to why each person wanted to approach the topic from their own standpoints. The ensuing revelations were enlightening.

The first co-author described herself as a white, English-speaking American scholar who noticed the disparate treatment between herself and her peers as she moved through higher education. She recognized how she was never asked to prove her language ability on applications or in classes because of her nationality, and that her partner and the international students she worked with didn't receive the same benefit. Her goal was to use her privilege to critique racist and xenophobic language requirements in higher education. The second co-author identified himself as a Chinese-Chamorro multiracial scholar who observed the assimilatory language practices placed upon his own parents, and saw the same practices being replicated in the Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) he taught at. His aim was to intervene in these assimilatory practices to reclaim linguistic identity. The third author identified himself as an international graduate teaching assistant who felt his learning of English was an act of colonization over his identity and wanted to engage in reclaiming linguistic justice for himself and other IGTAs. And the final author was a Hmong-American scholar whose

work involved preserving Hmong cultural practices and stood firmly opposed to assimilatory language practices in the writing classroom. While I knew some of my group member's identities and interests, I wasn't aware of all of them. If we hadn't shared our positionalities and how it brought us to care about the varying intersections of linguistic justice and DEI work, I would have bulldozed my co-authors into my singular vision. Instead, after sharing our statements, we agreed to keep our sections focused on our individual sub-topics but worked on our introduction and conclusion to draw parallels between our shared concerns about SAE and language assimilation practices in higher education. We even included an author's note on intentionally not making the paper's tone cohesive in the effort to not flatten our individual voices. In the end, I think the paper turned out all the better for it.

Nowadays I hold many identities—both the ones I've been wrestling with since childhood and new ones—mainly being the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Assistant director at a different R1 university. The position fulfills my other academic passion after researching racial literacy practices and teaching writing. As a WAC practitioner, I love working with faculty across different departments on how writing assignments can help their students learn and communicate disciplinarily. Throughout my time in this position, I always saw racial literacy and WAC as two separate entities. Yes, they could intersect, but I didn't feel like everyone was ready to have that conversation—in my mind there were more important things to push for, mainly encouraging a culture of writing without the confusing politics of race and linguistic justice. As a scholar, I was making myself fill out the race and ethnicity survey question again on a larger scale. I was trying to make myself pick one race—or in this case, pick one scholarly interest, when I could and should have always embraced both. Furthermore, I care about WAC and racial literacy for similar reasons—I think there is much to learn through difference, whether that's how our racial-ethnic identities were formed or how we write in different disciplines.

Currently, my advisor and my boss, the WAC Director, are both encouraging me to not treat WAC outreach and racial literacy as two separate entities. They can be enmeshed, and they can both coexist in a research question without being seen as fraught or unsightly. The same way it's not weird that the Chinese came to Jamaica and contributed to the island's rich culture that we all know and admire. It might not be talked about often, but it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. My academic pursuits and collaborations do not need to be subject to binary ways of thinking—they're not checkboxes on a survey. There is the option of the Other, and that is okay.

When it comes to acknowledging my positionality as a scholar, it's still a fraught process. There are many contradictions and discoveries I'm making about myself, my place in the field, and how it impacts my interactions with peers and students. It's not something I have entirely figured out, but I'm willing to learn and have others hold a mirror to myself to help me see beyond my nose.

Even if it's confusing, enlightening, and sometimes painful, I will continue to do this reflexive work because it's necessary that I contextualize myself as a teacher, administrator, and a scholar.

All of the work that we do—teaching, mentoring, research, and writing—does not occur in a single, sterile bubble. And despite the historically homogeneity of academia and the field as a whole, the field continues to demonstrate that it's a living organism that continues to adapt and grow to include us in all our multitudes. We just have to be willing to consider our whole selves and continuously, authentically bring that to the table.

Section 13. Pedagogy

Contributors to the *Pedagogy* section 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.

Chapter 53. “Reflexivity Memos” in Undergraduate Research-Based Writing: Opening Spaces to Value Students’ Experiences and Stories in Research

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“In high school, I was taught never to use the “I” in research papers.”

“Can I use my story in my paper?”

“Can I include my language in my research paper?”

These are a few of the questions first-year students often ask me as they embark on the first drafts of the research paper. Students often arrive to the classroom with the perception that “good” research-based writing should be written in “standard” English and void of first-person in order to remain “objective” as they “distance” themselves from the research topic. These questions are not limited to undergraduate student experiences; I also struggled with similar questions when writing my own dissertation. In responding to the above student questions, I wanted to share with students what I learned through my dissertation experience—explicitly engaging in on-going reflection of one’s researcher stance or positionality (i.e., thinking about the “I” in research) is indeed valuable throughout the research process, offering new insights to the research. This chapter introduces an assignment that was inspired by these conversations about the “I” in research, the “Reflexivity Memo,” an in-process writing exercise where one explores their researcher positionality. The memo is a scaffolded opportunity for students to explore the nuanced ways their lived experiences, language backgrounds and worldviews are what both affords them a particular way of seeing or approaching a research problem and/or complicates or limits their approach.

The assignment actively encourages students to explore how their embodied socialized practices shape their research stance, drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and reflexivity and “its evolution over time” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 111) When students begin to reimagine their positionality through “one’s body [which] defines a point of location relative to others,” they begin to gain “a sense of where from which one can act through language” (Peter Vandenberg et al., 2006, p. 12). Through the practice of memo-ing, which takes the form of guided writing and composing practices, I encourage a positionality-as-practice approach to research and hopefully spark important conversations about what languages and modalities are privileged in the research, writing and publication processes.

Reflexive memos, thus, take a “free form” feel, creating space for diverse rhetorical crafts such as storytelling and the possible use of different languages.

In the following sections, I walk you through my steps of “teaching” positionality as a space for students to explore their identities and embodied stances that shape their research. Students, alongside all researchers and writers, bring with them a wealth of linguistic and cultural assets and experiences from their home communities that shape their researcher positionalities. This assignment, ideally implemented in the first few weeks of the research process, allows students to see their stories as valuable in an academic context.

Part I. Encouraging Vulnerability: Sharing Reflexive Moments with Students

I was angry at the literature for ignoring the language learning narratives of my parents and other Deaf people. I was angry with my parents for giving in to the medical and educational discourses that encouraged them to use voice and not signs with my hearing sisters and me in an effort to make sure we would “speak English properly.”

– *Excerpt from my reflexive memo weaved into my dissertation expressing frustration with the existing literature missing the second language learning narratives of my parents and with the monolingual, ableist societal structures that shaped my home language experiences (Johnson, 2015)*

Reflexive memo-writing exercises, adopted from writing practices in critical ethnography and counterstory, include an important element of vulnerability. If we ask our students to explore their identities and positionalities in a research conversation, so must we. Thus, my praxis begins by sharing my own story of navigating a reflexive stance in my multilingual and multimodal ethnographic dissertation research which explored deaf-hearing interactions in a preschool context as it intersected with my identity as an abled-bodied hearing person and CODA (Child of Deaf Adults).

I, too, remembered how it felt to enter a silent space: watch your parents’ hands move, feel the vibrations of a hand hitting a table or hear the sound of a laugh sharply breaking the silence.

– *Excerpt from a published article describing embodied connection with my interviewee, a hearing mother’s experience with her deaf child (Johnson, 2019, p. 19)*

To model the importance of researcher vulnerability in exploring positionality, I share excerpts from my published writing with students. In sharing these snippets alongside my experiences as a graduate student conducting field work and an extensive literature review for the first time, I discuss the affective ways my experiences growing up as a CODA shaped the questions I asked, how I engaged

on the margins of the articles I read and the ways my positionality as a hearing-able-bodied person shaped the relationships with the teachers, deaf children and hearing mothers in my research context. I also talk about how my research stance changed over time as I learned from the literature, from listening to my participants, and through the participant observations in the classroom. Alongside sharing positionality moments throughout my research, I share snippets from former student examples of reflexive memos which are produced in a range of genres and modalities to challenge the linearity of academic writing and to encourage students to see their own lived and embodied experiences and multilingual identities as shaping their research.

Part 2. Framing Reflexivity: Bridging Theory and Lived Experience

My first step in introducing this assignment is to unpack approaches to positionality in research with students. I first explain my own stance. Reflexive approaches in research publications continue to be, at times, limited to surface level acknowledgements of one's researcher stance, often taking the form of positionality statements in the methods section of publications. Reflexive interrogations in research are also often void of disability and linguistic underpinnings which may broaden avenues for diverse stories. A disability framework, for example, provides a valuable lens as it often centers the writer's embodied experience, dismissing the notion of critical distance. A framework of linguistic justice works towards dismantling hierarchies of languages and creates spaces for diverse linguistic repertoires. All in all, introducing these frameworks prompt some on-going questions I aim to engage students with: How does one's embodied experience shape one's positionality? How does one's multilingualism shape the writing and research process? How does the modality that one composes in offer different pathways to expressing one's stance? In my view, introducing an approach to teaching positionality that encompasses linguistic and disability lenses reiterates a pedagogical commitment of working towards access and inclusion and should be woven into the fabric of teaching writing, critical thinking, and research.

As a language learner of Japanese in my 8 years in Japan, I learned, albeit with much awkwardness and embarrassment, how to fit my habitus, my disposition and ways of being, into a Japanese context. I tried to understand the mismatch of my habitus in Japanese culture - a mismatch that was material, imagined and imposed all at once. Being trapped in the myth of the "native English speaker" at the same time I was reproducing it, and being critical of the hegemonic American-ness of English Education in Japan at the same time I was teaching it filled me with unsettling contradictions.

– Excerpt from my own reflexivity memo detailing my application of Bourdieu's notion of habitus to my experience

The second step in the framing the assignment on reflexivity is anchoring our discussion with theory. Theory, in this sense, is a window or camera lens, a way to make sense of your own lived experiences. While we start by defining habitus through Bourdieu's own words: "We carry a living memory pad" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 68) & "system of dispositions- a past that survives in the present" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 82), we move to sharing personal examples to illustrate the concept of "habitus" in practice. In pairs, students are asked to reflect on their habitus and consider a time when their habitus felt fractured, creating a mismatch with their environment that allowed them to, more explicitly, see the ways they were socialized—through language, family and schooling. Through this low-stakes story-sharing activity anchored by an exploration of habitus, students thus begin the work of bridging their histories and languages' broader social structures. Understanding one's habitus thus cultivates an understanding of reflexive knowledge as a critical, aware, evaluative relationship of one's position in relation to others, situated in specific contexts and histories.

Part 3. Drafting the Reflexivity Memo: Exploring Researcher Positionality

While steps 1 and 2 frame the approach, step 3 involves drafting the memo. Memo-writing as a free-from style of writing is a common practice in research. Qualitative researchers use memo writing (also called observational, methodological and theoretical notes) to explore in-process research observations and questions. Pedagogically, the practice is valuable as a vehicle for critical thinking and writing allowing students to synthesize theory and their own lived experiences. I share the origins of this methodological tradition explicitly with students, as it sometimes is the first-time undergraduates are introduced to the practices involved in qualitative research, which are often, regrettably, sometimes framed as "less rigorous" or "anecdotal." I then review with students how we can think of our researcher positionality as the various identities or positionalities that shape 1) our research questions, 2) how we read the literature and 3) our engagement with research participants and 4) the biases and vantage point we bring to our research. While this is introduced as a writing exercise, opening up the writing process to other modalities and giving students additional time outside class to complete the assignment also offers different access points to one's reflexive moments.

Below I've outlined the student-facing directions/prompts for the assignment.

The Reflexivity Memo

Directions: Working from the free-write prompts below, compose a 300-500 reflexivity memo. While we will begin in class today, you may continue to work on it outside class. You may choose to shape your responses through stories or examples that grow from your experience, using the languages and languaging

of your choice. For example, you might recall a dialogue with a family member in a language other than English and prefer to retain the language or origin. Or you might mix two languages. Also, in the spirit of open and equal access—since oftentimes writing privileges the “visual” modality that presupposes a certain kind of writing body—you may craft a “memo” that uses another genre, medium, or modality¹.

Free write #1 (10 minutes)

Habitus. Consider your habitus. How has your home, school and community socialized you in specific ways?

Identities. How do your various identities, including your linguistic identity, intersect with the questions you ask in your research?

Your Research Question. What have you experienced that allows you to ask the questions you do? Influence the way you interpret the literature? Or the way you might question the literature (For example, what do you notice is missing from the literature? What narratives are NOT included?)

Your audience. Do you think this is important for your audience to understand your positionality? Why or why not?

Free write #2 (10 minutes)

Unique Vantage Points. What affordances are you offered by your positionality? What particular vantage point do you have that is unique from others?

Biases. Now think about how your positionality might present you with certain biases or limitations in exploring your research. Describe these limited stances or viewpoints you bring to your research. How will you work through these viewpoints in your writing and research?

~ ~ ~

Following the in-class memo drafting, students break into small groups and share out 1-2 aspects of their positionality that shape their research. In the share out conversations, students collaboratively value each other’s connections between their histories and research. In conversations with peers, students may come to the realization that they are best positioned to ask the questions they do. Also, as they consider their habituses, they also start to notice different relationships of power vis a vis their positionality. For example, they notice how a specific privilege may shift relationships with participants and ways of seeing their data or reading the literature. They may notice the limitations of their viewpoints.

1. I initially developed this reflexivity assignment as a writing assignment in 2015. Much gratitude to my colleague, Lindsey Felt, for recent discussions around modality and giving me the inspiration to open up how students compose their final “memos”. During the pandemic, this was particularly well-received, as students leveraged different mediums and modalities to compose.

Part Four: A Student Example: Reflexivity through Multiple Languages

Un resumen de monolingüismo Inglés: A little girl stands at the stove, helping her abuelita roll enchiladas for dinner. She always cherishes this time where she feels truly connected to her grandma and her culture. Her cousin taps her on her shoulder, telling her in Spanish that he wants to play the card game UNO but doesn't know the rules. "¿Puedes explicarlos?" The girl's face turns bright red, and her heart starts pounding. "No, no puedo." A disappointed pause follows. "¿Por qué no sabes español?" her cousin asks. She looks down at her feet and repeats what she always says when asked this. "No sé."

– Excerpt from undergraduate student writer in her paper
 “¿Por Qué no Sabes Español?: Pressured Monolingualism
 and Its Impacts on Mexican Americans” (Uribe, 2021)

Gabriela, a student in my writing class who published her final research paper (excerpt above), began by exploring the stories that propelled her question, “How do parents make the decision of whether or not to raise their children as monolingual?” She follows, “The way I not only enter this conversation but add to it is through my positionality as a Mexican American college student who struggles with her personal ethnic identity. The little girl in the first story was me ...” The above is a small example that demonstrates how reflexive memo-ing becomes a starting point for sharing the stories that motivate our research, viewing our researcher stance as intertwined with an embodied, affective stance. The exercise also gives students room to creatively play with storytelling, languaging and genres to situate themselves in their research on their terms and through their languages. Opening up the language and rhetorical choices allows students to tell better stories.

In closing, I hope this assignment may inspire other instructors to think about ways to engage students around their positionality in research. Returning to the initial questions from first year students at the start of this chapter, here's how I answered:

Making the “I” or the story visible to your reader is a rhetorical and personal choice. Reflexivity memos will help you explore your connections, your embodied stance, your lived experiences and understand how they shape your research stance. Understanding these relationships through the memo process ultimately allows you to ask sharper questions and approach these questions with nuance. Your positionality and the embodied stance you bring to your research are uniquely yours. Take the time to understand how it shapes the process.

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Chapter 54. Teaching Tolerance, Teaching Positionality

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I am a white, straight, cisgendered woman of average height. I am (temporarily) able-bodied, married, educated. I am the second biological daughter of a white cisgendered man and a white cisgendered woman, both of whom were born in the Midwest region of the United States where they raised my sister and me. From an early age, I perceived myself as different—at school, in extracurriculars I begged to join and later quit, and most painfully, in my family of origin. I learned to keep this feeling to myself because I was conditioned to do so while exposed to multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences. I was not always successful at managing what was happening between my ears without upsetting my family's capricious dynamic. I used the only strategies I could muster: controlling my behaviors and ignoring my internal cues.

While the social identity categories (SIC) I possess that influence how others perceive me are “inside” American culture's heteronormative standards (i.e., my ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, and physical ability). My invisible disabilities, which affect my entire life, make me feel “othered.” If I am tolerated at all it is because I make fun of myself to ease others' tension at my presence and I upkeep a socially accepted, culturally desired feminine appearance. The former is a consequence of my hyperalertness and low self-esteem: in being the first to say something self-deprecating I think I can stave off criticism and (my own and others') discomfort; the latter is a consequence of my multi-decade battle with eating disorders, patriarchy, and misogyny, which are, of course, indelibly intertwined. I personally but rarely publicly identify as disabled because, as a master's student, I was instructed to fear the reception of this positionality, given the consequences it elicited. I fear what having admitted to it here could do to my contingent appointments for a profession that requires me to be “of sound mind” to influence “young minds.” But simultaneously, I aim to live Audre Lorde's (1984/2007) contention that “To refuse to be conscious of what we are feeling at any time, however comfortable that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd” (p. 59).

Inspired by Lorde's philosophy and transparent positionality—and the vow I made myself on my 40th birthday to never again abandon myself—the aspect of my positionality I identify with most strongly is as an outsider, which makes me hyper-aware of how positionality stories are received—a topic rarely explored in the academic literature. Being an outsider and spotlighting missing/hidden considerations—or as members of my chosen family fondly refer to it “saying the

quiet part out loud,” is a strength I bring to teaching and hopefully this chapter. But as I have experienced, it is not always tolerated.

Tolerance, for others and myself, is my greatest hope because I have felt others’ intolerance for me, fueled by ableism, sexism, capitalism, and fatphobia, which affect everyone in society—some more than others. I teach positionality because I see it as one small but important effort I can make to teach tolerance and empathy for difference. After all, education is activism; what happens in the classroom can foster revolution.

I have been teaching at the postsecondary level for 15 years; for the last four I have taught a positionality module in online, asynchronous courses I created as a lecturer at multiple universities of differing types (i.e., for-profit, research), for undergraduate and graduate courses ranging in topics from research methods to scholarly writing to Veterans Studies. By sharing my pedagogy, I contend that awareness of one’s positionality affords us mindfulness (i.e., curiosity) and allows ourselves and others (those who read our positionality statements) to play the believing game (Elbow, 2008), which can be defined as finding value in an unpopular or foreign idea via a sophisticated method I’ll reduce to the cliché (sorry) “walking a mile in someone’s shoes.” The goal of these efforts is, for me, to promote equal rights for all by first producing the seeds of tolerance in ourselves and others.

Positionality Module

I teach fully asynchronous online courses (a consequence/benefit of my disabilities) through the university’s learning management system (e.g., Canvas), which organizes course content by modules. For a 10-week term, students are assigned one module per week (plus a final “exam”). The positionality module falls sometime after week one and before midterms to best equip students with mindfulness and tolerance for the rest of the term as they explore ideas, people, and cultures different from theirs. While the module is the first and most explicit instruction on positionality, other modules and assigned media reinforce and extend (though not shared herein) the concentrated examination of the specific positionality module, to keep content in mind and encourage continued application and reexamination. Course modules are comprised of four components:

1. An overview page that introduces the module sections (list items 2-4), learning objectives, and rationale;
2. A lecture video page for lecture videos I make and videos I retrieve from YouTube or elsewhere;
3. An assigned media page with details, links, and/or PDFs students are instructed to cite in assignments; and
4. A graded discussion board assignment where students write a longer initial post engaging with the assigned media/lectures, and two or more responses to peers’ posts.

Module Items

Module Overview Page. I identify the module's goal by explaining how it relates to the main purpose of the course, depending on the course topic and level. While I have taught a positionality module in graduate-level research methods courses, I only teach undergraduate-level courses in Veterans Studies now. Thus, all the information below is for an undergraduate-level course. Because I perceive what undergraduate students do as research, though less intense than at the graduate level, I stress to students the importance of identifying their positionality as they research the course topic. I use this rationale to explain the module's goal and how it relates to the rest of the course:

The purpose of identifying and stating one's positionality, comprised of various, intersecting SICs (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), is akin to passing the binoculars or letting someone else look through the microscope, where the lenses used to view the vista or specimen are SICs. A positionality statement aims to identify how one's SICs intersect to influence one's lived experience and resulting worldviews. Considering another's positionality/worldview requires curiosity and the suspension of judgment, in turn, we receive the gift of perspective.

Learning Outcomes. The following five learning outcomes orient students to the module and assignment: (a) Recall the meaning of foundational course terms: social identity/ SICs, intersectionality, and positionality; (b) Categorize oneself (and others) using SICs; (c) Apply social identity (SI) theory and intersectionality to oneself and others; (d) Recognize the human impulses of stereotyping, prejudice, and tribalism; and (e) describe your positionality.

Lectures. I rely on two lectures to help define terms and elucidate the learning outcomes. To explain intersectionality, a three-minute video by *The Advocate* (2018; LGBTQ magazine) succinctly introduces and reinforces important course elements (curiosity, tolerance, respect, listening, diversity) including but not limited to its main claim: "Understanding intersectionality can make us more empathetic and more equal" (2:24-2:27).

A 14-minute lecture I created on social identity theory (SIT) and intersectionality reinforces and expands on ideas from *The Advocate* (2018). I also include examples from popular media, but I double down on stereotypes and prejudice. In my experience, students' "knowing" comes from widely reinforced nonfiction and fictional media based on stereotypes and misinformation; thus, the positionality module aims to encourage students to make new connections with unexamined ideologies/tropes they hold. I explain how and why people stereotype others and how stereotypes, while grounded in observation, prevent us from understanding others and being understood by others. When students grasp the commonality and danger of stereotypes (i.e., prejudice, tribalism), they may see

others they perceive as different with more nuance than stereotypes allow. Simultaneously, they intuit the desire for others to see them beyond stereotypes related to the SICs they possess. Dredging up the ubiquity and danger of stereotypes is important to my main goal of teaching tolerance and equal rights for all. It is also because research, both experimental and experiential, shows that people regularly respond to the voices of those they perceive as different by parroting common, media-produced tropes as a way of trying to understand, and this “understanding” prevents us from authentically learning about others.

Assigned Media. As an outspoken advocate for Universal Design for Learning (UDL, i.e., using variety and options for engagement to enhance accessibility and eliminate obstacles) in teaching and research, I offer multiple forms of engagement and representation through multimedia, which simultaneously allow for many voices, many views on a topic, further reinforcing my main goal of tolerance.

Songs. (a) Joni Mitchell’s “Both sides, now”; (b) Beyoncé’s “Formation.”

Photography. Devin Mitchell’s Veteran Vision Project.

Journal Articles. For graduate students: Grohowski (2017), Holmes (2020), and Naples (2003). For both undergraduate and graduate students: Jacobson and Mustafa’s (2019) “Social identity map” (see also Worksheet section below).

Example Statements. I provide positionality statements written by previous students (shared with permission) that demonstrate self-reflexivity, a range of viewpoints, and avoid instantiating the status quo. I learned to use my students’ statements over found examples (i.e., Duval et al., 2021) after observing how provided statements inspire the scope of students’ statements.

Worksheet/Activities for Prewriting. Guided by the three principles of UDL (engagement, representation, and action and expression), I use a combination of activities from online resources to help students write positionality statements. Importantly, I ask students to engage with these activities (i.e., worksheets) but make these activities optional (though highly encouraged); I do not require students to submit this work to me because it can elicit personal self-exploration. My hyperawareness of reception, based on my lived experience in an outside of classrooms, informs me that some students may fear how their personal, raw, unpolished details could be received; and therefore, that they may not want to share so intimately with me—especially considering inherent power dynamics in the student-teacher relationship and the timing of this assignment, which in my classes is early in the academic term, before we have had much of a chance to connect. I do, however, hope they explore the nuances of their positionalities on their own, which I believe these worksheets inspire; thus, I explain to them in a lecture how the activities facilitate the crafting of a positionality statement. I also model my process (in a lecture and sharing my work) by completing the worksheets to develop my own positionality statement.

I draw most heavily on the Program on Intergroup Relations and Spectrum Center’s (PIRSC; 2024a) two-page “Social identity wheel handout.” Although

there are no explicit instructions on the handout itself, how one completes the handout is fairly intuitive. Page one depicts a wheel segmented by 11 SICs. In the center of the wheel are five questions asking the reader to consider the identities they possess that are top of mind (to themselves and others) as well as those that are of little concern (to themselves and others).

Jacobson and Mustafa's (2019) "social identity map," while similar to PIRSC's (2024a) wheel, encourages a drilling down to specifics that first-time writers of positionality stories (i.e., my students) have reported being of most help. Perhaps the authors' map is helpful to students because it facilitates introspection and the compilation of evidence via students' lived experiences. In reviewing students' statements who also share a completed map, and in completing it on my own, I can attest to it fostering nuance due to its three-tiered feature (see Figure 54.1 below). Indeed, completing the map is akin to creating an outline for a positionality statement that may be very helpful for some writers/students.

Assignment. As previously stated, students participate in a graded discussion board assignment each module (week). I elected to have students share their statements publicly in the discussion space after testing other submission methods. In doing so I witnessed that when students posted their statements to the group (I share one too), everyone witnessed the diverse, potentially infinite possibilities of how a statement could be written; students also intuitively offered feedback, almost like peer review or a writing workshop. Often, students made connections with their own positionalities or asked respectful questions about a classmate's. I hope that having students share their statements in the group encourages tolerance.

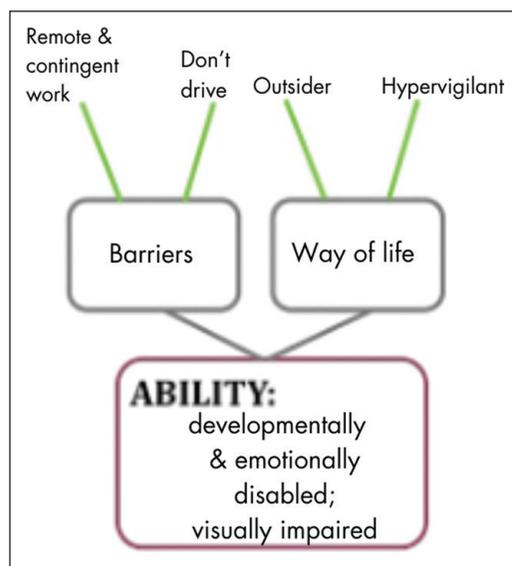


Figure 54.1. A segment of Jacobson & Mustafa's (2019) map applying an aspect of my positionality

My instructions ask writers to *acknowledge*, in 300 words or more, *the social group identities/categories they possess (racial, religious, etc.) that may impact their studies [of course topic]. Identify personal preferences, strengths, or limitations (such as beliefs and previous experiences) that could influence your understanding of [course topic]. Your statement should also address strategies you may use as a consequence of these limits and identify strengths you bring to our studies given your background/identities.*

I have adapted the instructions several times, most importantly by asking students to identify strengths that their positionality provides after reading too many statements coming from a scarcity or deficit model and knowing instead, the important work a teacher can do to remind students to self-advocate, recognize their agency, and identify their inherent assets.

I also invite students to opt out of this assignment if it challenges their beliefs. Because of the nuances of the online, asynchronous “classroom,” students do not have to alert me of their decision, they simply do not complete the assignment. I practice tolerance and neutrality by not prying, and they respect my pedagogy and their peers’ learning experience by opting out of the activities and discussion. This approach may smell to some as ignorance (or something worse) rather than tolerance, but I see it as a live-and-let-live practice of tolerance. Due to my grading practices, students can miss two of the 10 discussions without it negatively affecting their grade (I also give a lot of extra credit).

Conclusion

I have revealed my positionality, sharing how, as a person with invisible disabilities, I identify as an outsider, which benefits how I see the world and teach students in online asynchronous courses on a range of topics that include a module on positionality statements. I have shared materials for a module I hope other instructors can use with ease and enjoyment. I have also spotlighted the importance of reception to positionality statements. Additionally, I hope I encouraged readers to consider tolerance in discussions of positionality statements, including but not limited to intolerance or resistance to receiving and sharing statements. As I have learned, we must tolerate students’ decision to opt out of the assignment due to their beliefs if we truly believe, as I do, in equal rights for all, and in making space for all parts of all people, rather than allowing some parts and people while exiling other parts and people when the allure of fear compels us. To combat such fear, I trust in the power of sharing and tolerating differences to cultivate our shared humanity.

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Jenn Fishman is a writing educator whose research, teaching, and leadership span undergraduate research, longitudinal research, and community listening. Her work reflects her feminist commitments, including her latest projects, which take up storymethods, artifacts and archives, and the culinary arts. A recipient of the Braddock Award and the Coalition for Community Writing Book Award, she has published *The Naylor Report on Undergraduate Research in Writing Studies* (2020), *Telling Stories: Perspectives on Longitudinal Research in Writing Studies* (2023), and *Community Listening: Haunting, Stories, Possibilities* (2025) as well as special issues of *CCC Online*, *Community Literacy Journal*, and *Peitho*. Currently, she is Professor of English and Co-Director of the Ott Memorial Writing Center at Marquette University.

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Sarah Young studies the technical and science communication of emerging and quantum technologies, as well as their social impacts, particularly on privacy and surveillance, and technology's implications for humans, ethics, justice, policy, and standardization. She is a first-generation academic.

Storied Practices

The contributors to *Storied Practices: Positionality in Writing Studies* explore how the various identities and lived experiences of scholars shape their professional personas, research methodologies, and teaching practices. The chapters in this edited collection employ reflexivity and storytelling in ways that can help emerging and experienced scholar-teachers rethink their conception of academic work. The result is a book that serves as an intersection point from which more scholarship about positionality can grow.

Kristine Acosta is Assistant Teaching Professor of Writing and Rhetoric and the Student Success Coordinator for the English Department at Florida International University. Her research focuses on how technical communication and rhetoric impact communities. **Michelle Cowan** is Assistant Professor of Business Administration at Washington and Lee University. Her research focuses on rhetorics of health and medicine, corporate care discourse, and assessment practices in the workplace and the classroom. **Rebecca J. Rickly** is Professor Emeritus of Rhetoric and Technical Communication at Texas Tech University. Her publications include *The Online Writing Classroom* and *Performing Feminism and Administration in Rhetoric and Composition Studies* as well as articles and book chapters. **Nancy Small** is Associate Professor of English at the University of Wyoming. Her primary research focus is the rhetorical structures and power of everyday storytelling and narrative. She is the author of *A Rhetoric of Becoming: US American Women in Qatar* as well as articles and book chapters. **Erica M. Stone** is a content designer and researcher with experience in academia and industry. Her writing can be found in scholarly journals including *Journal of Technical Writing & Communication*, *Technical Communication*, *Writing Program Administration*, and *Kairos* as well as in edited collections.

PRACTICES & POSSIBILITIES

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