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BLACK FEMINIST AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: HOW IDENTITY CAN AFFECT PEER REVIEW PRACTICES IN THE COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOM

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BLACK FEMINIST AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: HOW IDENTITY CAN AFFECT
PEER REVIEW PRACTICES IN THE COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOM

BY

EILEEN M. JAMES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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OF

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the importance of embodied teaching pedagogy as it relates to peer review practices in the college writing classroom. This work uses autoethnography as a research method, exploring issues of (dis)embodiment and experiences with collaborative learning in classrooms. In addition to a review of applicable literature focused on peer review practices, writing pedagogy, and Black Feminist Autoethnography, this dissertation contains narrative sections from the viewpoint of the subject--a Black woman--as a student, an instructor, and a researcher working to examine her experiences and how they demonstrate the need for embodied approaches in the classroom. The purpose of this project is to find ways to critique, disrupt, and reconstruct disembodied approaches to college writing instruction, specifically in the collaborative work of peer review.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project, the result of a long and sometimes painful academic and personal journey, reflects the kind of growth that, at one time, I would have never imagined I was capable of accomplishing. I want to express my gratitude to those who have helped me along the way.

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even know.) This has been quite a journey, and, Scarecrow, I think I'll miss you most of all.

Next, to my daughters, Waverly and Olivia Findlay, thank you for having no doubts that I would finish what I began back when you were still girls in high school. In many ways, you have grown up alongside this project, and now, you are impressive young women, striking out to write your own lives. Anything that I have which is worth passing down probably lives within these pages. I hope you know that my stories are in your blood.

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PRE-CHAPTER NOTE

Use your Ears and Just Listen

Before I was in kindergarten, I had to visit the pediatric dentist because I had some serious issues with my teeth. These experiences are some of my first memories. I was a little brown girl, tiny against the colorful mural in the waiting room of animals and trees and flowers and sunshine. The dentist had a name, but I will not use it. He was a tall, grandfatherly looking white man with a bushy, friendly moustache. The hygienist and dental assistants were pretty white ladies who always smiled and presented me with the cardboard treasure box before I left the dental chair. Because needles were always an issue, the dentist decided that I should have some laughing gas to relax me during the Novocain injections. I remember lying back in the vinyl chair so many times with the bright light hanging over me. A pretty lady in a white outfit pulled a rubber contraption down over my head. It had a cup that fit snugly over my nose, and she asked me to close my mouth and breathe. The rubber made the air smell funny and the way it was blowing out into my nose felt uncomfortable. So, I did breathe, but out of my mouth. The nurse and dentist continued coaxing me to breathe through my nose. I didn't know about the benefits of nitrous oxide at the time, so I continued breathing out of my wide-open mouth. Just then, the dentist placed a thick hand over the bottom part of my face. Then his other hand worked with the first to block out any air that I tried to inhale through my small, needy lips.

I didn't like feeling that pressure on my jaw, and I wanted to be afraid. But I really liked him and wanted him to like me. Really, I just wanted to be good, but the

taste of his hand made me feel like I had done something wrong. I wouldn't cry, though; that would only make things worse. The need to breathe forced me to use my nose, and desperate gusts of rubber air smelled bad, but eventually I grew used to the flow of the laughing gas and relied on it until the dentist finally moved his hand away, I imagine. Then it all continued until the drill sound was a soothing buzz and the soft rock playing through the speakers in the ceiling washed over me in light waves. I remembered that I was going to start kindergarten after the summer was over.

When the procedure was finished, a white-aproned lady led me to the waiting room, where one of my parents balanced me in a chair, while I heard someone talk to the dentist about me and then to the lady behind the glass about payments. My dentist and his tactics were not meant to hurt, probably, and no one else knew what happened within the tight walls of that dental room. I couldn't object; I was raised to respect authority. Plus, I was always too high when it was over to remember to tell someone in my family what he did. And the dental assistant was there, but she didn't say anything. Did my mouth betray me? Maybe this wasn't about betrayal. But children do not have much bodily autonomy and even less power. Most of childhood is spent in classrooms under the care of people who might or might not.

Teachers held a space in my small universe, much like my dentist—and like all other adults; they were the ones in charge. School should not be painful. It should be a place where everyone is safe and where anyone can be successful at what they are successful at. Things that happen in the classroom need to be safe or at least they shouldn't do harm. Things that happen in classrooms should acknowledge the whole student, not just the lessons and outcomes. This is how I arrive at peer review.

Sometimes peer review practices don't include attention to the identity of learning writers. Every student embodies their own experiences, and the ability to have one's identity be honored is something teachers should maybe work harder to do. I don't know, though. I became a teacher, and even with the best intentions, it can take time to learn. And it takes much effort and humility to truthfully assess one's classroom practice, see where there are problems, and try to do better.

My work as a college writing instructor at a large New England community college involves continued reassessment of my methods to be sure that students are engaged in a meaningful and efficacious coursework. Writing instruction is such an important part of college students' growth; expressing ideas effectively in writing is a necessary skill that students need in order to succeed in higher education and beyond. Most people involved in education could easily agree that careful attention to best practices and new developments in a field should guide the curricular choices made by instructors even when the choice involves an activity that some find messy, complicated, or too risky.

CHAPTER 1

The Problem with Disembodied Peer Review in the College Writing Classroom

In all kinds of U.S. classrooms, in higher education and elsewhere, students share and comment upon one another's in-progress writings. Conventionally, this workshop-based pedagogical practice is called "peer review." Originating, in part, as a means for making the process of writing education more collaborative, the peer review workshop in college composition classes has frequently been celebrated as a means for multiplying learning writers' perspectives on their practice. Yet, as peer review is commonly conducted, students and teachers seldom attend to writers' lived and embodied identities as potentially essential constituents of—and critically important factors within—this kind of collaborative pedagogy. Building upon critiques of academic writing classrooms as spaces hostile to underrepresented and minoritized students, this dissertation investigates how identity affects peer review pedagogy and practices in the writing classroom. Such an investigation is a necessary first step toward the effort to critique, disrupt, and reconstruct what this dissertation calls *disembodied* peer review pedagogies.

The Purpose of All This

What happens when one wants to engage with a field when she feels like the field is limited in resources, interest, energy, or space to sincerely engage back meaningfully to her concerns? Perhaps she finds a way to enter the field on its terms and work to carve out a satisfactory path for engagement that can benefit the entire field. As a Black American woman teaching first-year writing at a large Northeast

community college, I, like many other members of the field, look to the literature of Rhetoric and Writing Studies to guide my work in the composition classroom with the hope that my work as an educator is as efficacious and effective as possible for my students, who are diverse in a wide range of areas (e.g., age, gender identity, race, socioeconomic status, ability, etc.).

In Rhetoric and Writing Studies, embracing these issues of identity has been a major area of development at least since the 1990s, which came during “a time of stock-taking in the discipline” when the field shifted some of its energy to issues of diversity (Reynolds et al. 13). Some examples of the scholarly discourse, which attended to these kinds of evolving concerns, addressed issues like white evaluators providing sometimes problematic feedback to students; the ethics of ignoring lived experiences of students outside the dominant culture; and how literacy narratives could provide authoritative agency to linguistically and/or culturally minorized student writers (Friend 548-67; Harber 622; Soliday 511-26).

The field’s embrace of diversity, equity, and inclusion did not appear overnight with a loud declaration of inclusiveness for all; it came in small pieces as different groups sought specific changes for populations outside of the dominant academic culture. Yet, research in Rhetoric and Writing Studies shows that these well-meaning intentions need to be extended further so that these principles can engage with common classroom practices. Specifically, there was a push by some to consider issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion when (re)evaluating core classroom practices. Peer review is one such core classroom practice impacted by these issues of identity. Much scholarship in Rhetoric and Writing Studies has moved toward

pursuing a more inclusive agenda, and research into this area exploring practical classroom applications continues.

The Premise Behind What I Want to Tell Y'all

The manner of peer work referred to in this project can be referred to by many terms, among which are peer evaluation, peer review, or peer collaboration. However, for the purposes of clarity, I will use the term *peer review* to define the process in which meaningful peer-to-peer feedback, based on a specified set of criteria, is applied to any part of a composition and is usually completed in small groups within a classroom where the instructor is available to provide any needed guidance. Furthermore, a premise of this project holds that the most meaningful feedback in such peer review sessions involve higher order concerns (HOCs), "such as the development of ideas, organization, and the overall focus" on the student-writer's purpose (Keh 296). It should be stressed that a goal for feedback is to focus on HOCs as opposed to cursory editing for lower order concerns (LOCs), such as errors in basic grammar, punctuation, and spelling, which can certainly distract from student-writers' overall purposes and could be a part of the review process. However, the aim of effective peer review is not for student-readers simply to serve as final proofreaders.

Consisting mainly of classroom or online activities in which student writers read and respond to one another's drafts, peer review has been a mainstay of classroom activities in writing courses since the 1970s. Furthermore, as time passed and societal concerns demanded continued attention to more inclusive approaches, questions continued to be raised about the issues connected to race, ethnicity, and identity. These vital concerns touched the advancement of peer review practices. For

instance, there were serious “attempts to show how social class affects peer responders, and provides evidence of the trend to focus on diversity and social demographics in this decade” (Day 8). Also, peer review scholarship and its expanded focus on marginalized populations like English language learners, people with disabilities, and people of color began to emerge (Kirsch 25; Mendonca and Johnson 745-69; Reynolds et al. 13-7). Although more attention was paid to the role of identity and its importance in learning communities, more work is still needed to address problematic issues with peer review practices in current college writing classrooms.

The best practices developed by researchers and practitioners from the field counter the problematic issues that can result from disembodied approaches to peer review. Consider one such example of disembodied teaching practices: when peer review workshops are held just one time for each writing project and only as a summative form of assessment, typically taking place at the end of students’ writing process. The summative nature of this kind of approach means that students present whole drafts of nearly completed writing projects to each other, and the collaborative work toward improvement takes place in isolation, completely cut out from the writing process. This summative approach to improvement—the one-shot peer review workshop that comes at the end of students’ initial drafting of a complete writing project and almost like an afterthought—is disconnected from the student’s writing process. This contradicts Shute’s belief that peer review should be formative in nature, that is, completed as an ongoing practice throughout and within the writing process (153-89). According to best practices, a formative approach to peer review, on the other hand, involves holding several peer review workshops over the span of each

writing project, thus allowing students a more organic and recursive means to engage in the writing process.

Experts point to several other concerns that can arise from a disembodied approach to peer review. One of these concerns is students having adequate preparation for and a clear understanding of peer review tasks. For instance, as peer reviewers, students often follow an instructor's guide to evaluate each other's writing. Sometimes these guides are prompts or checklists focused on both higher order concerns (HOCs) and lower order concerns (LOCs), which might usually involve a clear thesis, adequate evidence, and proper use of standard English grammars and mechanics (Barron 24-34; Fernsten 33-41; Reid). Then peers are usually expected take a pen to each other's drafts with divergent results. Some students write exhaustively on others' work offering constructive criticism or sometimes just criticism; some even attempt to correct grammar or spelling errors on peers' work with varying levels of success, while others might leave a hasty "*great job.*" These kinds of disconnected approaches have proven to be problematic for a variety of reasons and suggest the need for a more embodied approach to peer review.

Overall, an embodied approach to peer review that I refer to in this project has three main purposes: 1) to help student-writers use feedback on HOCs when applying "both declarative knowledge about texts and their features and procedural...knowledge such as strategies for making revisions" (Flowers et al. 19); 2) to support student-writers in the process of reflecting on their written work as well as on the process that led to the written work; and 3) to help students (as both writers and readers) identify and apply both the knowledge of effective writing and the criteria specific to particular

assignments. Additionally, in order to focus on ways to critique, disrupt, and reconstruct disembodied approaches to peer review, this project needs to clarify the best practices that have been developed by experts over time. These research-based practices are those which can provide writing instructors with both a clear context and a variety of strategies for approaching, designing, and implementing peer review activities in meaningful, effective, and engaging ways for learning writers. I hope to contribute to this field with attention to a more embodied approach to peer review practices by focusing on the importance of identity and lived experiences that students carry within their frames.

Practical Applications

Many scholars believe that a most “[...]important part of learning to be a writer is learning to assess one’s own writing and the writing of colleagues, learning to give and to receive effective feedback” (McLeod et al. 489). The most natural environment for guided peer-to-peer feedback of writing would be the college writing classroom. Because peer review can be beneficial to developing writers in the classroom, this practice would seem like a good location in which to ground this examination. Peer review workshops encourage students to approach writing as an individual, multistep process. Many instructors of college writing courses face the challenge of instilling into students that writing is a process, and this process involves a continual cycle of considering and reconsidering ideas until a written piece is a clear reflection of the writer’s purpose. Although most college students come from secondary education programs that teach writing as a process that includes prewriting, composing, editing and revising, it can still be a struggle for college composition

instructors to convince newly-minted freshmen that academic writing involves more than just one session of carefully composing an assignment, then printing it out, turning it in for corrections, receiving it back marked up, and then resubmitting the piece with changes that attend to most of the red annotations. To help students evaluate their own compositions and to practice applying their knowledge of effective elements of writing, one valuable method involves peer-to-peer collaboration as part of the writing process (Bruffee 635-52).

The field has not really grappled with identity and hegemony effectively in regard to peer review, and this project suggests that there are resulting problematic issues with the current paradigm. Practical approaches to and supporting theories of effective peer review practices illustrate how the aforementioned issues with racial identity and hegemony in academia play major roles in the efforts to study, teach, and apply peer review, as well as to teach efficacious feedback moves to students in the college writing classroom.

Peer review, as it has been established, is a valuable exercise for student writers in the composition classroom, yet this pedagogical practice is sometimes viewed as problematic for both students and instructors for a variety of reasons. Peer collaboration in many of its forms can seem daunting to some instructors, especially those who are not very familiar with the best practices of some activities and pedagogical approaches. Lindsey Jesnek sums up the problem with praxis and peer review, stating, "while the ideas behind peer review are valid in theory, composition teachers continue to encounter several problems while putting them into practice" (17). Likewise, Ron Barron summarized his approach to early attempts at peer review by

stating an idea that many practitioners can relate to: “I merely assigned students to groups and expected them to know what to do” (24). Much of the literature points to the need for student preparation before attempting peer review in the classroom. Instructors in the field have relied upon the work of scholars to guide their practices. There are many influential works that explore the benefits, process, and theory of peer-to-peer review in the composition classroom.

Heather Byland is one of many scholars who stresses the need for students to understand the purpose of peer review. In addition, she argues that students need to be taught how to respond, such as avoiding vague comments, and citing Barron, she agrees that teacher participation is necessary as is students’ active participation (62). To Byland, handouts “are crucial in peer review because they keep students focused...and reinforce the idea of providing specific feedback,” while helping responders prioritize items to address (62). Byland and Barron are not the only scholars who feels strongly about preparing students ahead of time to engage in peer review. Nancy Grimm presents the guidelines she hands out in her classes in preparation for this collaborative work among students. The guidelines, ten for student responders and three for student writers, are validated by clear explanations of their benefits. By addressing preparation (reviewing written guidelines for responders and writers), organization of students (four to five members in a group), time allotted (two fifty-minute class periods wherein students independently manage their own their own agendas), and procedures (oral reviews and small group discussion in class and written reviews to peer work for homework), Grimm clarifies how a structured approach is needed for successful peer review (92).

Like Byland and Grimm, Linda Nilson, an advocate of using carefully-designed forms for responders to complete, shares some specific identification tasks and general questions that can guide student readers, such as having responders identify main ideas, name supporting evidence, and share their personal reactions (1). The literature notes that these types of reviews seem to lack a judgmental tone, which can eliminate the emotional turmoil that has the potential to arise when peers evaluate each other's work. Nilson argues that writers have a better chance to evaluate the effectiveness of their work "when peer feedback focuses on identification tasks and personal reactions" (2). Jesnek's study also addresses using handouts to guide the peer review process, concluding that there is no uniform form that can work for all situations or that can satisfy all participants (21). The idea that instructors must be flexible with peer review activities could be daunting to some instructors.

Sullivan and Porter view "research as a set of critical practices (praxis) that acknowledge the rhetorical situatedness of participants, writing technologies, and technology design and that recognize research as a form of political and ethical action" (15). Along these lines, this project seeks to narrow the scope of this study to recognize the specific situation, particular challenges, and unique needs that emerge when addressing peer review in the college writing classroom. This project has the potential to advance writing pedagogy and allow students to make the most of this writing classroom practice by highlighting effective criteria for peer feedback as well as allowing practitioners access to a series of pedagogical approaches that can help them purposefully reject disembodied approaches.

The Trouble

As documented in the literature, instructors and students sometimes face problematic issues with peer review, such as the need for necessary guidance, the need for systematic procedures, and the need for quality peer comments. However, the benefits of having peers read and respond to each other's work have been clearly recognized by many scholars such as James Berlin, Kenneth Bruffee, Peter Elbow, and Linda Flower et al. Countless composition instructors have shared ways in which they are confounded by peer review in the college classroom. The many issues that can arise in practice are as well-established as the theoretical benefits of peer review. The list of daunting issues is long and includes such concerns as how to structure sessions, how to manage personalities, how to get participants to buy into the process, how to prepare students to offer meaningful feedback, and how to view the roles of teacher, student-reader, and student-writer (Newkirk 301-11, Nilson 1-2). One remedy for improving the use of a valuable activity like peer review is to base implementation on research and, as anyone with teaching experience can attest, research and practice do not always connect easily in the classroom for a variety of reasons.

Some of the field's research into peer review has emphasized problematic aspects of this practice for students and has shown the ways disjointed methods can separate editing, revision, and evaluation from the process of composing. Additionally, when applied as a summative exercise, students have reported feeling overwhelmed when faced with revising and having to make major changes such as adjusting paragraph order in a larger writing project or when having to revise an entire work because of an issue, that if addressed earlier, could have been avoided (Keh 294-304; Shute 153-89). However, a more serious and insidious—and under-appreciated—

problem is the one that I call *disembodied peer review*. Historically, peer review practices have been conceived in the terms of Kenneth Bruffee's "Conversation of Mankind," a "conversation" in which intellects and minds, not bodies and identities, take precedence (###). Approached in this disembodied manner, peer review disregards the integral role of individual and social embodiment, experience, and identity in writing activity.

Regrettably, a disembodied approach neither stresses the benefits of reviewing peer writing nor helps the writer reflect on the recursive process of composing and revising. With this problematic summative approach, the writer rarely has the agency to participate in meaningful peer discourse about her process of composing an assigned writing project *during* her writing process because she and her whole lived experience are separated *from* the writing process. When instructors approach peer review in such an identity-neutral kind of way—oftentimes in a "color-blind" way—students can be harmed from this disembodied approach. For underrepresented and minoritized students in particular, such practices silence the lived experience, remove agency from those outsiders, and allow for the erasure of certain groups based on their identities in relation to the dominant culture. These disembodied practices are often related to the politicization of issues that address identity—including but not limited to race, gender, ability, class, sexuality, and professional status—and the added burden to those outside the dominant culture in academia.

The development of writing pedagogy from the 1970 and beyond demonstrates the manner in which praxis becomes a major challenge for those outside of the dominant culture in academia, and this challenge is yet another example of

disembodiment. These ideas reflect a gradual move toward more social and less cognitive concerns in the field. At the beginning of this path forward, the view of the body seemed symbolic—bodies of students were simply vessels for their minds, and this abstract space was differentiated from the complex organ of the brain. Writing began to be seen as less of a task focused on a final product and more of a process that prioritized the autonomy of the writer, and the 1970s and 1980s saw an epistemic approach to this practice through the work of Pike, Becker, Young, Lauer, Flower and Hayes. Perceptions of embodiment at this time did not seem to consider race as a factor of how differently raced bodies experience writing and its consequences differently. However, as the field moved toward the end the twentieth century, perceptions began to change.

One such change came with Peter Elbow and his seminal 1998 text *Writing Without Teachers*, which reflects the culmination of the work, attitudes, and research that developed over the previous twenty years of college writing. Elbow’s text offers an insightful view into the theory and methods behind his approach to writing instruction and the collaborative work he believes is necessary for positive outcomes. Elbow’s groundbreaking text takes an expressivist approach to writing instructing as he contends that students need more authority and power (agency) over their work in the classroom in order to develop fully into what he calls *truthful* writers. Elbow views writing as a collaborative, discursive process of freewriting, rewriting, and revising drafts that involves a “kind of meshing into one configuration, then coming apart, then coming together and meshing into a different configuration” (63). This was certainly a different way of approaching writing instruction. The importance of students’ agency

and the ability for them to collaborate, which brings to the table their lived experiences, identities, and preferences was a move toward a more embodied approach at the time.

Although there had been much work developed around the importance of collaborative peer work, countless composition instructors are still confounded by the idea of peer review in the college classroom. I was one of those instructors. The many issues that can arise in practice are as well established as the theoretical benefits of peer review. The list of daunting issues is long and includes such concerns as how to structure sessions, how to manage personalities, how to get participants to buy into the process, how to prepare students to offer meaningful feedback, and how to view the roles of teacher, student-reader, and student-writer. As a composition instructor, constantly looking for ways to improve my use of peer review, I know that such a valuable activity should be implemented based on research and best practices, and as anyone with teaching experience can attest, research and practice do not always connect easily during implementation in the classroom for a variety of reasons

The focus on problematic peer review practices in the college writing classroom demonstrates the need for instructors to guide students through the process of peer-to-peer writing feedback using a more embodied approach that acknowledges and honors the identities and writing practices of all participants.

In this project, the description of embodiment draws from the work of Johnson et al.:

“Embodiment encourages a methodological approach that addresses the reflexive acknowledgement of the researcher from feminist traditions and conveys an awareness or consciousness about how bodies—our own and others’—figure in our work...[and] considerations of our positions as researchers are critical to understanding our individual and collective commitments to arguments about the role of bodies and rhetoric, our bodies inform our ways of knowing” (38).

This definition can help frame the ideas in this project, considering all the developments that happen in any academic field. For instance, in Rhetoric and Writing Studies, some research has responded to the challenge of making inclusive practices more specific by focusing on identity and embodiment. According to such research, Rhetoric and Writing Studies should focus on dismantling researchers' and teachers' dependence on disembodied practices, which are those that focus on a dominant culture and relegate those outside of the dominant culture to remain outside of the norm (Buyserie and Ramírez 193-202; King 95-115; Moro et al. 229-51; Naraian 1-16). According to such accounts, disembodied practices erect barriers for many participants and create limits for the entire field. Wenger explores the importance of looking beyond the lore of writing instruction as an epistemic practice of composing products with little attention to one's inner self, and stress that "[i]n contrast, by starting from the perspective of the body, embodied writing pedagogy represents a hopeful alternative to mainstream methods that deny a writer's corporeality by entextualising it" (46). Unfortunately, when denied of such an opportunity, student writers can find themselves feeling limited, unheard, and undervalued. Hence, the problem with disembodied practices, such as peer review, is that they are disconnected from pedagogical praxis, can suppress pertinent issues of personal and social identity, and are often detached from applicable research from the field.

In addition, Rhetoric and Writing Studies is a field concerned with the power of effective, ethical, and purposeful uses of language as seen in the influential work of Barthes, Burke, Prendergast, and Tuhiwai Smith. It is important to note that

disembodied practices are not limited to the writing classroom, however. They also operate within the current labor paradigm in academia (Bartholomae 180-244; Hairston 76-88; James A2-9; Jaschick; Ran and Sanders). Because there are echoes of such problematic approaches interwoven within the fabric of academia, it follows that critical and personal views of the academic landscape can help to critique, disrupt, and reconstruct the ways in which disembodied pedagogical practices operate.

Exploring concerns that arise from such disembodied approaches can help to expand the ways in which we consider, prioritize, and address issues in the college writing classroom and beyond. The field has long engaged in ways to explore how the process of writing can best help participants navigate meaningfully through the practical and the intellectual work of the writing classroom as reflected in the works of such scholars as Foucault, Reynolds, McLaren, and Ellis. Yet more attention is needed because many disembodied practices in the writing classroom often place too much stress on evaluating how a text or its writer conforms with sociocultural norms of a dominant culture, which can limit what is accepted as a valued and respected voice, ultimately limiting individuals and the field from expanding in new progressive directions.

The practice of peer review in the college writing classroom serves as a clear example of a valuable exercise limited by disembodied approaches. The value of and approaches to peer review processes in the writing classroom have long been documented by many scholars (Byland 56-67; Bruffee 635-52; Flowers et al. 16-55; Grim 91-4; Henry and Ledbetter 4-14; Jesnek 17-24; Newkirk 301-11, Nilson 1-2). Although peer review has long been a credible and accepted practice in college writing

pedagogy, the implementation of disembodied peer review practices reflects the problematic issues in the current academic paradigm of the college writing classroom. The scarcity of information addressing the problems with disembodied peer review practices in college writing classrooms drives this project and calls for inventive action.

The Physical Structure

This project's design is organized to begin with an introduction that provides the critical map for the entire project and that further clarifies the problem of disembodiment in peer review practices. The preliminary review of the essential literature will be followed by the purpose of and the critical vocabulary that will be used in the project. The second chapter, on methodology and method, grounds the chapters that follow in the scholarship of Black Feminist Autoethnography. Specifically, this second chapter explains how this narrative method offers opportunities for Rhetoric and Writing Studies pedagogy to create a more expansive and inclusive set of teaching practices. The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters will consist of autoethnographic data and analysis—that is, personal stories from the researcher's experiences both as a student and as an instructor as well as discussions of the stories' meanings. These personal narratives will also track the discovery of Black Feminist Autoethnography and how an initial reluctance of this approach reflects many of the concerns that initiated this project in the first place. Finally, the last chapter of this project will discuss the implications of actively trying to build a more embodied approach to peer review pedagogy and, most importantly, how this work can contribute to strengthening the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies through

the privileging of a Black woman's voice. Finally, this concluding chapter discusses opportunities for continued study and growth of more embodied approaches to and strategies for peer review pedagogy in the college writing classroom. Interchapter Notes flesh out the body of this work and serve as the muscles, or better yet the connective tissue, that allows for motion and movement.

INTERCHAPTER NOTE

Arrangement

I sat at the drive-through window, waiting my turn to receive my prescriptions. However, the driver side window couldn't go down any further, but I needed something to open more, so my words wouldn't just hover in the air between me and the dismissive white woman at the drugstore drive-through. Something needed to help me communicate more clearly with the pharmacy tech who was standing in the way of my ability to fill my prescription and get home.

“The prescription I just gave you is for the tablet, not the time-release capsule,” I implored in my most patient voice, not wanting to support any stereotype she might have of me as a Black woman; afraid she would think I wanted this medication too much--suspiciously too much. I continued, “I usually get them filled together, but the tablets weren't in stock last week, so—”

“Wait,” the pharmacy tech raised her palm and eyebrows, sighing loudly as she cut me off. “Exactly, we filled this prescription last week, and this one can't be filled for another month.”

“Listen,” I said, feeling a familiar and uncomfortable force rising in my throat. “Please check the computer. I need the tablets because they are part of my treatment. Or just kindly ask the pharmacist to come to the window because you are not listening to me, and you are not allowing me to get this legitimate prescription filled. I would rather not have to park my car and come inside.” At this point, I think I might be shouting. I am afraid this woman, with her entry-level position, has the power to deny

me my needed medication just because when she looks at me, she does not see an equal. She sees me as someone inferior, someone to view with suspicion, someone not entitled to the benefit of the doubt.

She rolls her eyes and mumbles words that I don't care to listen to and turns her attention to the computer, typing forcefully and squinting at the screen. This manufacturer's shortage of the tablets at my local pharmacy has resulted in this issue for several months now, and each time I go to the window during this shortage, I have been questioned by a different pharmacy tech as if I was a drug addict who is trying to scam the system to get medication. I really need this medication to help me manage my severe anxiety. And I want to cry because I feel helpless, and I am a 49-year-old woman who needs to get home and finish grading papers for my early-morning college composition class. In addition, I need to shuffle through the homework assignments from my afternoon public speaking class to see what important points I will need to reinforce to my students. Above all, I feel ashamed to have raised my voice and to have gotten so frustrated with this woman.

"Good news," she calls brightly from the drive-through window as if she is doing me a favor that I don't deserve. "It is available, so we can fill it. It will be like an hour, but I'm just glad I can get it for you," she lies, and then she slides the drive-through window closed. Silently, I drive away to wait in the parking lot. I put the car in park and let the tears wash away the rage and sadness.

In 1977, Audre Lorde delivered a paper at a Modern Language Association conference in which she shared a statement about Black women and silence that reflects the countless times I have faced situations that left me needlessly frustrated

and secretly teary because of the way society acts upon me. As Black women, and by extension, anyone in a marginalized group, “we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for the final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us” (Lorde 3). In the moment, however, such situations are difficult to navigate. For me, I had to listen to another woman, who did not see me as one of her own, respond to me with the expectation that I would listen to her. She had no intention of affording me the same consideration, and life still continued. She silenced me, but once she realized her mistake, under the threat of involving her pharmacist, she believed she could rectify the situation without any worry about my feelings and therefore my humanity. There was no apology because she clearly did not believe one was warranted. She acted like I was not guaranteed the services she is paid to provide me as a customer. She created an awful situation that left me worried, frustrated, and helpless, but I was the one who needed to live with the consequences.

Now, I understand that this situation could be interpreted in a different way depending on the life experiences of those examining the situation as described. There are always skeptics, and I am used to continually having to justify my point of view, while having to accept the points of view of those who are a part of the dominant culture. This is how hegemony works. I will no longer give credence to the many excuses that I have encountered when dealing with these kinds of situations in the world. Too many times have I had to listen to defensive excuses by people who dismiss what I have experienced. It’s tiring. Actually, it is exhausting and feels unending, sometimes.

CHAPTER TWO

Employing Black Feminist Autoethnography

Real progress in the field can be made by not just saying we need to be more inclusive, but by actually working to change the landscape of academia into a more inclusive space. Attending to issues that can create this more inclusive paradigm can allow Rhetoric and Writing Studies to continue evolving its rich pedagogical tradition of ethical approaches to meaningful, powerful, and purposeful writing instruction. In order to do so equitably and more inclusively, it must be with the understanding that disembodied practices need to be acknowledged, addressed, and rejected.

One way to begin the work of critiquing, disrupting, and reconstructing disembodied peer review practices is through the analysis of (dis)embodied experiences of participants in these practices. This dissertation contributes to this work by beginning with the experiences of the researcher, who is also reflecting on herself as a subject. In a field that values language and its innate power, Rhetoric and Writing Studies allows for the possibility that a narrative research structure “asserts relevance, identifies influence and qualifies importance” (Birmingham #). The necessity of elevating underrepresented voices can dismantle ideas about what it means to be at *the center* of any academic or cultural discourse. Autoethnography, a qualitative inquiry method, is defined by Ellis as “research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political” (xix). This genre is still finding its footing as a method because of the personal nature of the work. Autoethnography can achieve the goal of “subverting dominant discourses” through

this approach (Muncey 69). Efforts to create a truly inclusive academic environment have the potential to promote truly inclusive campus communities, which can affect positive change in the wider paradigm of academia. By affording all classroom participants the opportunity to work as unencumbered as possible by avoidable societal barriers connected to, instructors can reshape their classroom communities in ways that allow more learners to reach their potentials. This could go a long way toward encouraging the development and growth of new ideas that can disrupt the status quo and embrace innovation in the field.

This Rhetoric and Writing Studies project seeks to deconstruct the current paradigm in research, theory, and practice in order to fulfill the promise of scholarship: to make meaning, to discover new ideas, and to disseminate this knowledge. The transformative nature of this project elicits a conversation connecting Krista Ratcliffe's ideas about whiteness, gender, and rhetorical listening; Cheryl Glenn and her work on the power in rhetorical silence; Linda Tuhiwai Smith's groundbreaking contributions about the importance of decolonizing research methodologies; bell hooks' work on the potential of theory to be liberating for those willing to create through disruption; and Gloria Anzaldúa's demonstration of the necessity in valuing marginalized voices. Bold steps are being taken by Cultural Rhetorics scholars who are dismantling traditional, hegemonic approaches to research, voice, and the narrative, while setting examples of what is possible with an innovative, truthful recasting of what are acceptable and valuable ways to share knowledge through personal stories (Cedillo et al.; Levy 4; Powell et al). With this autoethnographic approach, the expectation of an inclusive lens can afford meaningful engagement with issues that

emerge, and this project can contribute to efforts to advance the peer review pedagogy beyond what is possible under the current limits. This work explores autoethnography as a methodology with which to research the lived experience of a Black woman in academia, and more specifically in the field of rhetoric and writing studies.

It is important to note that some of the literature on this subject fall outside of or adjacent to the field and often focuses on social sciences, intersectional feminism, counseling psychology, or critical theory. This comes as no surprise, however.

Rhetoric and Writing Studies has grown to continue to allow more diverse voices to expand on what we know and care about, while making room for other voices to carve out new divergent paths of inquiry and epistemic concern. The interdisciplinary nature of this subject comes from a wide range of sources able to reflect the many issues at play. It is necessary and important to tune into the lived experiences of Black American women to find value in what and how minoritized bodies negotiate through the societal landscape to pose their own questions and make their own meaning. These experiences expand the field's ability to learn more about how language functions and is operationalized in society. It is important to acknowledge the harm in and resistance to reducing the description of society's treatment of Black American women as an effect beyond the control of Black American women. It is most important to counter a characterization of this work as a body of lesser academic victim narratives by a group lacking agency and being *acted upon* by the 'othering' forces woven into the American fabric (e.g., racism, sexism, colorism, classism, etc.). Moreover, readings on the subject are often too broad to capture "the peculiarities and particularities" of this specific kind of experience (Egeli 5). The autoethnography as a genre can work to

personalize and humanize such experiences in order to demand a greater understanding of and action toward providing equity and access. Therefore, in the autoethnography, research becomes an act demanding justice and social consciousness (Adams and Holman Jones, 373-90). Autoethnography in Rhetoric and Writing Studies can approach the political and social in order to put research into action and use the genre to illustrate the research process with an expectation of action-based solutions.

How I Found Black Feminist Autoethnography

You see, I began wanting to approach this work using the kinds of mixed methods I'd read about in the texts I bought for my methodology course. There was much to be learned about the tactics many women of color were using to subvert research in their fields. Although there was much to explore and some great opportunities for me to take in my own work, I still had to reconcile with the fact that I would still be within the gaze of a dominant culture for which I am not a member. I wanted to use the tactics that feminists have been using throughout history to navigate through a sometimes violent and dangerous world.

One way I could begin the work of critiquing, disrupting, and reconstructing disembodied peer review practices would be through the analysis of embodied experiences of participants in these practices. To counter the problematic existing paradigm, I decided that Black Feminist Autoethnography would be the research conduit for this work. The epistemological impulse of this methodological approach serves as the catalyst for this autoethnographic research project about a woman living outside of the dominant culture in contemporary American academic culture. This

project is designed to reflect the vitality and necessity of respecting and contributing to a body of personal stories from underrepresented experiences in the way that Baker-Bell grounded her autoethnography “For Loretta” in the tradition of Black feminist-womanist storytelling in her efforts to explore the ways that she was “continuously sacrificing [her] spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental health to juggle the excessive demands associated with [her] academic career and family” (526). In this vein, my work should be embraced as what Robin Boylorn calls “Blackgirl autoethnography... [which is a means to discuss] ...embodied, critical, and culturally situated research that begins and/or ends at home, in the bodies we live in, the people we live with, and the social circumstances we live through” (46). Uncovering and reflecting on disembodied peer review practices in this personal manner offers opportunities to reconsider new approaches.

From this method and its corresponding methodology, meaningful patterns about language and its connected actions can emerge, and such patterns could allow for action-based reviews that might work against hegemonic impulses, while providing legitimacy to the typically silenced personal experience of the marginalized. In order to use this autoethnographic approach to demonstrate the problematic issues with and negative effects of disembodiment, I intend to explore my experiences as a Black American woman in contemporary academia dealing with the limits of a hegemonic system, while I pursue an interest in peer review processes and efficacious feedback moves in the first-year college writing classroom. Peer review can provide a concrete point of access to the subject in order to explore how issues of identity and

pedagogy function together and to what ends these issues impact the subject's experience.

Autoethnography in Rhetoric and Writing studies can approach the political and social in order to put research into action and use the genre to illustrate the research process with an expectation of action-based solutions. This is also a personal and academic pursuit for me because it is extremely difficult to separate one's scholarly interests from the reasons why feels one has no choice but to address such issues in the first place. Chapman-Clarke explains that for "researchers and autoethnographic writers, our secrets are disclosed and histories made known" through this qualitative method of inquiry (12). In particular, my personal stories will touch upon a variety of experiences that demonstrate the necessity of abandoning disembodied practices starting in the college writing classroom. My experiences as a Black woman in academia as both a part-time and tenure-track professor will guide my growth as an educator wanting to serve all students in an environment that often resists inclusiveness. The development of an approach toward an embodied method of offering meaningful peer review workshops will drive this autoethnographic project. This personal approach, when merged with research from the field and from related fields (e.g., education, psychology, social sciences, English language learning, etc.), "situates participants and researchers in the narratives that are generated...provid[ing] the guiding perspective for the research narrative" (Lafrance and Nichols 137). For the researcher/subject, this project promises many potential challenges and offers many potential rewards. Exploring the problems encountered with the current paradigm can bring focus to the politicization of identity on those outside the dominant culture, the

hegemonic disregard of the outsider identities, and the resulting effects on peer review practices in first-year college composition classrooms.

Black Feminist Autoethnography emerged from the very human need to value the voices and lived experiences of those often suppressed by the larger, dominant society. Black Feminist Autoethnography is not a move to encapsulate the Black female experience into a marginalized area of study. This approach has to do with historical systemic structures of power and dominance in a society that continues to grapple with the resulting issues of oppression for those outside—and sometimes those inside—the dominant culture. Durham explains that this method of Black autoethnographic work is a relatable and valuable practice to the wider community because the idea of being Black considers the possibility that Blackness “?can flesh the felt-sense self as a part of the marked cultural body, can story relational experiences that are inventive and transgressive in its work to democratize forms and humanize the other in cocreated encounters, and can serve as an ontology of resistance in which Blackness is harnessed to understand the ubiquitous and generative nature of power—the power to shape identity and experience, and the power employed by the autoethnographer to author or rescript new ones”? (21-31).

Black feminist thought can contribute to a clearer picture of how our societies function from the macrocosm of American culture to the microcosm of the college writing classroom. This approach is not new, however. Black feminist thought can be traced back, as Guy-Sheftall points out, to the 1850s when Sojourner Truth asserted “Ain’t I a Woman?”

Black feminism can be situated within the history of (white) feminism, which during its first two waves focused on the concerns of women within the dominant (white) culture. Crenshaw explains that white feminism was guided by the problems facing white women, and “when you can’t see a problem, you pretty much can’t solve it” (8). I would further that idea by stating without hearing or valuing the voices of nonwhite feminists, there is no reason to imagine that problems exist at all for others. Therefore, Black Feminist Autoethnography provides a space for those undervalued voices to bring forward insights that could provide meaningful contributions to scholarly approaches in and out of the classroom.

The overall approach for me is to try my hardest to find my voice as a member of this field. It is difficult to break from a system you have chosen to be a part of. I intend for this work to be an expression of my voice as a researcher. I really want to tell the story of how I chose this methodology, but it is frightening to step outside of the prescribed boundaries for this part of this project. The credibility and clarity that come from a solid chapter on methodology is something I really wish I could share. The problem is that I am frustrated with myself for wanting to present this dry, typical chapter. However, in all of my concern about the outcome of this project, I am afraid that this chapter demonstrates why I need to tell stories within this work. Perhaps this chapter reflects my body struggling to peel off one layer of skin while simultaneously trying to slip into a new skin. You see, I worked hard for that old layer, even though it was too tight and didn’t always fit me. Sometimes, it actually hurt, but I soldiered through. Now, I am trying on a new skin. I need something that can handle this body and my sharp angles and my broad curves. I want to be able to breathe full breaths

comfortably. This new skin could be amazing. Shedding the old one still involves mourning, though. Change is difficult and painful and still joyful. I think this is what I want to contribute the most through this work and the methodology that I have chosen: difficult and painful change that leave us feeling joyful, eventually.

INTERCHAPTER NOTE

A Necessary Tangent

Those members of dominant cultures do not really have to think about the additional burdens felt, experienced, and carried by those deemed as different from the norm. In America, white supremacy and misogyny are part of what makes up America's cultural center, the status quo. Of course, everyone is different in some way at some point in their lives because each human being is unique; therefore, most people can find themselves in both positions of power or with a lack of power in a variety of major or minor situations in life. However, power is inherent in a person's ability to ignore someone else's lack of equality, especially if the lack of equality is what keeps that person powerful enough to ignore someone else's lack of equality. For instance, people of color have no option of ignoring problematic issues of race or dismissing the traumatic effects of racism; these issues plague us--sometimes daily, sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes when we are just too tired, too overwhelmed, too busy trying to shop for the perfect brass candlesticks for our moms' birthday gift without being followed around in the store at this point in the history of humanity.

Really, there are times when racist actions are like a sucker punch: never expected and such an extra burden of humiliation, anger, and outrage that confronts a person when least suspected. People use the phrase 'play the race card,' as if people exaggerate instances of racial bias for pleasure. However, for those who experience bias in any form, it feels nothing like a game. It can feel extremely humiliating and daunting, and it does not feel good to have to address someone's racist behavior.

There exists a serious risk of not being believed or having one's experience minimized by someone who possesses the societal power to do so. Additionally, many times when victims have to retell their stories, reliving a situation of being treated inhumanely can be overwhelming and disillusioning.

In higher education and in the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies, a politicized approach to issues of identity in the current academic paradigm limits the ways a multitude of underrepresented voices can both engage *with* and *in* scholarship, thus depriving our field of the potential to build new streams of knowledge beyond hegemonic norms. Furthermore, when the mention of identity (e.g., any consideration of the effects of race, gender, sexuality, age, class, religion, educational attainment, ability, tenure-track status, and the like) in research implies a political--and sometimes even ulterior--motive from the researcher, especially if s/he/they is/are not part of the dominant culture, and when, for instance, research involves the recitation of inequality or inequity, this work can easily be discounted by members (and proponents) of the dominant culture for a host of incongruous reasons. When viewed as a tactic used in academia by members of the dominant culture, who can, have, and continue to overlook issues of identity that are different from issues impacting them and issues that challenge the hegemony that allows them to remain as the dominant culture with all its privileges, the implications of this politicized approach to identity seems to intentionally dismiss underrepresented experiences as less worthy of serious study or as tedious lamentations with little to contribute to the scholarship of the dominant culture (Yee 495-505; Craighead 16-33; hooks 2-3). Although Rhetoric and Writing Studies is not the only field with such an historically problematic approach, Rhetoric

and Writing Studies *is* a field that grew out of the human impulse to uncover truths and create knowledge, and it is a field concerned with the power of effective, ethical, and purposeful uses of language. A wide range of scholars, Barthes, Bizzell and Herzberg, Burke, Prendergast and Tuhiwai Smith, have discussed these issues from as far back as the middle 1960s. These ideas are what drew me to this field. Students' lived experiences, the opportunity for them to become invested in their own work as writers, with their whole selves—all were disconnected from everything that makes language powerful. That power was the thing that pulled me, fascinated, toward the classroom.

For a more lucid example of this abstract theorizing, this premise about hegemony and power can be applied to the institutionalized racism that is woven throughout American society and the manner in which racism benefits white people whether or not they want it to benefit them. Overall, the system of normalized whiteness only permits most white people the ability to see racism as a weapon that one yields. When well-meaning white folks use a line like, 'I don't see color,' this demonstrates a worldview that sees racism as something they (white people) have the power to choose to offer attention to or not. In this instance, giving attention is implied to be something negative, and any connected discourse is often silenced. In addition, when white people do not have the tools to engage in discussions about race, there is a tendency for them to define racism (or similar kinds of prejudices) as a purposeful choice made by individuals on a personal basis (Elias and Jones). Therefore, this belief can result in a white person deciding that affording any effort to issues of race is

analogous to racism because they have no other experience but that of ignoring race in American life.

The most difficult part of this undertaking has been the constant attention to language and having to use it in all its forms and with all of its power to construct, make meaning, signify, remember, re-remember, misremember, devastate. And I am not good at following deadlines and procedures anymore. I didn't get very far when I was a skilled adherent. Anyhow, I committed myself to this chapter because a self-portrait could contribute to the wider projects' goals or could enhance the readers' understanding in a softly explicit manner. I'll tell you about me as I explore my attention to the problematic issues of disembodiment that drive this entire work. Just know, I'm going to share the significant points and offer stories and words with purpose and sincerity. You see, my data for this project involves a sometimes frustratingly exhausting exercise in sharing the whole self unflinchingly and a stance and opportunity, gingerly. Honestly, it is difficult reliving and constructing meaningful connections, analyses, and interpretations out of memories and secondary research, and it's all mainly primary sources anyway. This process can be frightening.

That which follow are sets of personal stories that explore peer collaborative experiences and the damage that can come from disembodied approaches in the classroom. The first set of stories is told from the point-of-view of the student experiencing problematic approaches to peer collaboration, while the second set of stories follows a writing instructor grappling with peer review and hoping to find solutions that discourage disembodied approaches. Voices also include the graduate student and the fledgling researcher. Through these stories, insights can emerge about

the importance of classroom practices that encourage the very human concerns of being valued and of having one's bodily experience validated.

CHAPTER THREE

The Student Body

“Collaborative learning provides a social context in which students can experience and practice the kinds of conversation valued by college teachers.”

— Kenneth Bruffee, “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’” 1984

The above quotation is like a mirror to me. I want to see myself reflected back through the lens of someone else’s words, especially if that someone else is important. I have always been a people-pleaser, needing to satisfy those around me. Placate the angry. Soothe the rankled. Whether it’s white colleagues chaffing at the idea of hiring more than one faculty of color at a time in a department where I am the only one, or whether it’s students frantic about their grades, although they know they could have followed the schedule better and reached out for help earlier. I learned to find ways to put people around me at ease when I wanted. This came from my mother and her Americanized upbringing from her parents’ sensible Eastern European principles. There was value to be gained and freedom to construct for oneself through hard work and attention to etiquette. I was my white mother’s Black child whom she did not know how to raise in the 1970s, except to arm me with the ability to comfort those around me and to learn how to try to fit in whenever possible. I could use humor to extinguish a heated situation. I could problem-solve in ways that contributed to resolving the troubles of those around me, especially adults¹. And especially in school,

¹ I also skillfully learned the converse— how to make a room squirm in discomfort, but more about that another time.

the place where I was dropped into—little, brown, and alone. It was during elementary school that I first realized that my light brown skin, bushy hair, and wide nose were somehow problems out of my control. These three traits set me apart from all the other children in my grade and all the grownups who were charged with taking care of us and teaching us. School was where there was no control for me or for my mother, so she taught me how to navigate in a way that allowed me to survive. Only, I'm not sure she was aware of this. Manners, she explained to me, were not to point out others' faults or mistakes. Manners were to make everyone comfortable. Manners were to satisfy those around us. It was our collective duty to placate and soothe and right wrongs in situations, even if we were not the ones responsible for getting us into such a terrible situation in the first place. It was important to please. Sensible Eastern European values also demanded that one do so with solemnity and a sense of duty. Swallow one's own feelings and work hard the right way. I still scrub the kitchen floor on my hands and knees with a thick-bristled brush, bucket of water, and a dependable rag because why use a mop to just push filthy water around the floor? Get down there and clean it. Use elbow grease. Try harder.

That Bruffee quote at the top of this chapter was part of a statement I'd once read to a first-year college writing class before our first peer review session when I was an adjunct English instructor at a school known for training the chefs of tomorrow. I'd found the quote in a beloved hardcover tome honoring the rhetorical tradition. Tradition was so important. Then I realized that my story begins much earlier than that time when I was full-grown and trying to figure out how to navigate my career in

academia. It began earlier than that—when I was in graduate school at Brown University, which sounds impressive, but might not have been so.

I was accepted to the MFA program focused on poetry. This was such a valuable opportunity for me, who grew up in a working-class home where hard work was the expectation and anything less was considered laziness and throwing away one's chance to make something out of life. So, my father, who worked with his hands and was an expert oil burner service man, wasn't really sure what to make of my acceptance into this impressive institution for graduate school. My mother had taken college classes throughout my life. For her, it was piece by piece, class by class, and semester by semester until she finally received a degree in electrical engineering once I was grown. My father took classes at a trade college, and he was a master of the trades- plumbing, electricity, heating. To him, graduate school was either for successful doctors or lawyers with clear career paths and great salaries to be made or for those still-living-at-home, eccentric, unemployed adult sons of my dad's wealthier customers. He chuckled about them at the dinner table, amazed that with "all that school and a fancy PhD in philosophy or astrophysics or something and get this: no job. All that time and money in the Ivy League and no job in sight." He would punctuate his amusement with shoulders raised in disbelief and a kind, calloused hand pointed in my direction.

"Be sure to pick a field where you can find a job when you go to college," he instructed. And now, here I was, going to Brown University. When I was first notified that I had been accepted to this program I told my dad, explaining that the handful of students in my cohort all received full tuition scholarships.

“So, what are you going to do when you finish? Work at one of those poetry companies?” He smiled at his own cleverness, and he still relays this story often, happy that I found a job teaching, so as not to waste all that time in school. This graduate program made me the first person in my family to pursue a master’s degree. This program was a two-year experience, allowing for time to work on one’s craft, take a few courses of one’s interest, and prepare for whatever people planned for during graduate school. I had no particular path to follow—no game plan.

The program involved classmates and poetry workshops, which were basically critiques of each other’s work. At my most naïve and ambitious, this program sounded like a prestigious path to fame and fortune as a poet. At my most introspective and anxious, it was a way to end up like those weird, highly-educated men, living in bedrooms rooms next to the furnaces in their mothers’ basements. But it was an opportunity, it was mine, and it made my family proud of me.

Before this move to the Ivy League, my time in poetry workshops as an undergraduate were pretty satisfying; my work was solid. It was trite at times as it reflected my age, lack of life experience, but it did signal a cleverness in understanding the importance of reading and writing a lot. And listening to feedback from my professors, all great writers, whom my friends and I read and reread. We’d convince the professors to go out for drinks after class, hoping that some of their talent and luck would brush off on us, or to practice talking and “working” a table of writers. I learned what stirred an audience of my college-aged peers and how a carefully placed word could capture the eye or ear or interest of the reader, whether professor or student. I felt that there was something tragically exciting and romantic about being an

artist ready to present her heartfelt work to an audience that was going to discuss it and dissect it and the painful and hassle-filled labor of finding an open copy machine that was in service and needing a pocketful of silver coins to make maybe like twenty-eight photocopies of a couple pages for workshop before the days of quick, ubiquitous laser printers. Plus, I read aloud well and used the three years of community theater experience when I was in high school to guide the way I presented poetry during workshops, where classmates followed the words on the xeroxed copy as the writer read from the page.

Depending on the topic, I would adjust the way I ended the piece before the professor would open up the class for comments. If it was a love poem that felt like champagne bubbles rising against the sultry backdrop of a jazzy, cosmopolitan city night, I would end by continuing to stare down at the page for a noticeable beat before lifting my shy doe eyes up Princess Diana-like toward the professor. Or if it was a more militant piece with thoughtful figurative language representing some important 1990's political point, I would just sit up at the end of my reading and peer out in a friendly, yet serious, manner at my classmates, seeming open to hear their thoughts. If it was about sex or sexuality, I had a whole different way to position myself and these words. I was also tall, thin, and cute. That definitely made my classmates more open to listening and empathizing. And I am Black—light-skinned with a broad nose, high cheekbones, and back then with the youthful spark of being in my early twenties, it was easy to navigate these instances of peer review. Every now and again, there would be another Black student in class or another person of color, but not often. I probably

leaned into being an impressive curiosity because I probably didn't know how else to be. Mainly undergrad workshops were comfortable.

It's also important to understand that I when I graduated, I won both critical and creative writing awards offered in the English department of my state college. Paired with the announcement of my acceptance to Brown's writing program and the knowledge that I was being asked to read my poetry at several Providence and Boston venues (some of which even paid for gas money or a few groceries) during the spoken word revival of the mid 1990s, going to college for poetry seemed to be an appropriate path for me, the most impressive curiosity of all in the English department.

Brown University was beautiful. One of my aunts and I would venture out to Providence when I was in high school. We'd browse the thrift shops for cool clothes, eat nachos in the polished dark wood booth at Spat's, and generally walk around Brown's swanky, hip city block on the east side of Providence like we fit in with those ambitious, rich Brown students or like we belonged among the artsy Rhode Island School of Design kids who shared this neighborhood with the Brown students. We belonged there on the street, but I never imagined having access to those ivy-covered buildings and being a part of that glorious tradition. I was an outsider there. Until I wasn't.

When I arrived on campus to meet my classmates, I realized that there was nothing special about me among this group of grad school poets, some widely published; others soon to be published. Most were expected to be somebody. And this group was as diverse as a group of smiling cartoon children on a UNICEF card; plus, they were also talented. I wanted to be a worthy addition and contribute to the group,

but it was hard. There was no gentle guidance of each person's work; no delicate soothing of a poet's exposed soul. In other words, people were tough. People called each other's work trite. Some name-dropped famous poets they knew, has worked with, or were related to. I was pretty lacking when it came to my connections; I was out of my depths. I already assumed that my classmates were not impressed by my state-college-down-the-street pedigree. Maybe they didn't care. I'm not sure if that would have mattered. What mattered the most was how I thought they perceived me.

Brett Staples is a writer, famous in undergraduate courses for his essay about ways he must manage others' perceptions of him in public because, as a Black man, his body can represent something dangerous that needs to be feared in our society. That is a terrible burden to shoulder. No matter whether his tactic of whistling classical music was to distract with cognitive dissidence or to disarm through the social position of classical music, he had to make adjustments with his physical presence to shake off a dehumanizing perception placed on him. To many readers, Staples offers an enlightening essay, helping those who are ignorant—whether willfully or not—of the plight of a Black man, whose mere presence evokes the same fears of Black men that American society has continually instilled in our culture as means to control Black men. It is necessary to note that in the entire span of American history, Black men have been a group whose narratives have been controlled by the fear of white supremacist ideology. This control has been interwoven into a society that offers limited opportunities to some people and many privileges to others. Brett Staples wrote about what happens when a human being is forced to embody qualities

he does not possess when just trying to live his life. All that was expressed by a man just trying to navigate his own community.

We all wear what we need to, I suppose. Countee Cullen called this wearing the mask. Sometimes we need to embody the code-switch because it can be a reliable compass. Understanding the markers that have been placed on us by society can allow us to work against those expectations. Working against those expectations, especially if they are negative, can make life safer and filled with less strife, at times. This evaluating and reevaluating, this adjusting and readjusting equates to a stressful existence of constantly apologizing for oneself even if one is guilty of just being alive. In an undergrad composition class, I wrote a short essay about keeping my hands in plain view when I went into CVS to avoid being viewed as a suspicious shoplifter. I hadn't read Staple's essay yet, but I suppose his theme was nothing new: he was a just compelling and gifted writer who sent his message into the universe via publishing. I remember that I read my essay aloud in class, but I don't recall any specific reviews from peers. I feel like the professor responded positively, and if there would have been any dismissive remarks by peers, I would have probably remembered because even the smallest dismissal of a painful experience contributes to the overall trauma of racism. I do know that I felt empowered and valued when relating one facet of my lived experience with classmates in that first-year composition course whether or not they had ever experienced what I experienced.

I feel compelled to state that this work is not about victimization or lamentation or blame. However, I shouldn't be compelled to make the reader comfortable with my discomfort. After all, this work could very well be about those

things. Victimization, lamentation, and blame often result in dehumanization. When power results in victimization, victims lament, and blame is warranted. Because American society has not yet fully reconciled the way that power structures, such as white supremacy, sexism, homo/transphobia, classism, ableism, and the like, are deeply interwoven into our cultural makeup, those in dominant cultures might not be naturally obliged to recognize the ways their social positions of power rely upon and continue the suppression of the powerless. The idea that an honest assessment of what happens to people outside of the dominant culture is so shocking and can be so easily dismissed to those in the dominant culture that a sheepish preface and promise to not be playing “the race card” against the dominant culture demonstrates how entrenched and complicit American society is in those supremacist tenants which define the dominant culture.

The professors at Brown were distinguished and cutting-edge, but I presumed that they felt like I did about myself: that I wasn't as exciting or compelling as my peers. I lacked confidence, and it was noticeable. Overall, writing workshops were different from my days as an undergraduate at Rhode Island College. The best I felt about being in graduate school at Brown seemed to be the times when I was off campus and someone asked where I went to school or if I found a great parking spot on jampacked College Hill. During poetry workshops, I didn't want to be too silent or too wordy. But I was always awkward. And one day, a classmate who I will call Jane shared her poem about a girl, I think, eating yellow rice at a family potluck, and I was into it. I had a few good weeks of sharing my ideas and sharing my work, and I wanted to fit in, but I wasn't sure I was as good as everyone else. No one wants to be

the weakest member of any group, so I took a deep breath and began. I went in too deep, compared the rice to someone's first communion.

As I was going into ways that the rice was a metaphor for a holy sacrament, the professor, an amazing poet who I had enrolled in the school to work with, laughed out loud, rolling her eyes at Jane, my peer, and then some others laughed. I don't remember what the professor's exact words were, but I do remember that it felt like I was being swallowed whole but couldn't disappear. After sitting through the little bit of teasing about my over-analysis, I was stuck in that moment. My professor, this famous working poet with collection after collection of work, had no reason to be impressed by me. I wore this humiliation. My cheeks stung with the hot blush of shame as I sat with the others in that rather generic seminar space: an unused whiteboard. Clean, heavy laminate tables with grey speckled tops pushed together to fit us all. New looking. Nice chairs. The kinds of prestigious views out of windows that one would expect to find on this storied campus. I'm sure the others in class were over this moment of me overanalyzing Jane's work. I was still in it, however. I don't remember everything, but I do recall feeling angry with myself for not knowing better. For not feeling as strong as I did as a big fish in my little college pond or maybe I used to feel like a glimmering faraway star in a specific and lovely patch of night sky. Now, I felt like I couldn't speak and that I shouldn't.

What kind of conversation was mankind expecting people to have, anyway? Probably one on his terms—mankind's terms, that is. What do you call it when the eyes you see out of are not seen as the default of mankind? I was never the default. I was slender and lovely—with my yellowish tan skin flushed to a pink that I could feel.

I would say that I wished I could go back in time and redo that moment, act the way I would do today—be witty, know what to say—but I’m afraid that would be betraying the truth and erasing my foundation. My brain betrayed me, but this wasn’t obvious to anyone—they didn’t know me and my discomfort hung on my shoulders and tightened in the back of my neck. Even being Black betrayed me. I’m a light-skinned Black woman, and I can get noticeably red in the face when I blush from embarrassment. My scarlet cheeks were still hot, and I think they were probably noticeable. This was not like my past, when I was able to navigate so many other experiences in classrooms when my brain saved me and my words helped me through the landscape.

Unlike me, my peers, it seemed, knew people in the text personally. I mean, they’d eaten dinner or visited these people with their families. They seemed to navigate graduate school easily without having anxiety attacks when just trying to walk across the campus green after passing under the big iron gates holding in all those brownstone buildings.

So many things about me betray myself, like my mind and words with grad school peers. That was back when my poems were not presented with the kind of enthusiasm that would make them well-received in class. Sometimes the body betrays, and we just have to carry it. I wonder if this was all that different from how my hair betrayed me in the second grade during a test when the teacher, who I will call Mrs. embraced this betrayal. From what I can remember, my mother, being white, had a difficult time styling (I’ll go as far as use the word *managing*) my hair. Her solution on this day was to take a silk hair scarf from her closet, one I really loved with bright

polka dots on it. She folded it in a triangle and saddled it over my bushy hair. She knotted it in the back on the nape of my neck. I remember feeling good.

Then during class with Mrs., we had a test. It was a typical second-grade test. Maybe spelling words or multiple choice. The test was something with words, probably, and I was prepared because it was the second grade, and second grade is not exceedingly difficult. I probably remember that the silence of the room mixed with the scratches of thick, number-two pencils on answer sheets. Ten questions, it must have been. I mean, it was second grade. No one would give children in the second grade more than ten problems on a test, right? I remember filling in the answers when the knot in the scarf slipped undone, and my bushy little afro was set free, the scarf resting foolishly and open on the top of my head. I reached up to tie it back down, so I could finish my test. While I was struggling, Mrs. told me to put my hands down and finish my work. And the scarf—precarious on my young head—distracted me and made me feel hot in my face. There was something in Mrs.'s eyes that I learned later in life to describe as a lustful sadism, a powerful cruelty that was subtle and satisfied in itself. It seemed impossible to explain to someone who did not understand; and it felt shameful and embarrassing. And I was sitting there, small and noticeable, while some students chuckled at my predicament. Mrs. allowed them to laugh until she told them to get back to work. Then the test was over. I was able to tie down my hair with the scarf. Only now, I didn't feel so good about it.

When I switched papers with the boy next to me who had chuckled at my humiliation earlier, I knew that I would have the right answers. The cruelty of late 1970's elementary public-school pedagogy in pre-FERPA times allowed students to

switch test papers and mark each other's work according to the answers the teacher called out. After grading each other's work with either a curly checkmark for correct or a heavy x for the wrong answer, we were then required to announce each other's scores out loud, so Mrs. (or any teacher, really) could mark it in the gradebook. The young man next to me, the one who laughed, did not do well at all. I remember feeling bad for him when I had to announce his awful grade to everyone, and some other students laughed. I didn't. My grade was 100. My hair betrayed me, but my schoolwork did not. But this is probably all I remember about being in the second grade.

Recently, I had to complete a college reference for one of the young women in my community college introduction to poetry class. I was pleased to use the Common App because it means writing fewer letters for the same student applying to a variety of colleges. The list of personal and academic traits on which a reference must rate the student contains the word *confidence*. I wish it didn't. Sometimes confidence is difficult to muster.

In poetry writing workshops at Brown, I used to listen and try to be helpful. Working with these peers was overwhelming. Sometimes peer collaboration just might not have the desired effects. And in that brownstone classroom, built by enslaved Rhode Islanders and providing me, the descendant of enslaved people with a free ride and amazing medical benefits and the ability to say that I was accepted into the Ivy League, my words betrayed me. My confidence betrayed me. Betrayal can be so different in the classroom depending on the peers and what they are collaborating to do.

INTERCHAPTER NOTE

Justification from an Imposter

I had to rush to the databases to find support for my feelings: research shows that students of color fare better in classrooms when they have teachers of the same race. The results were as follows with authors names followed by the dates: Lindsay and Hart 2017, Gershenson et al. 2017, Egalite et al. 2015, Holt and Gershenson 2015, Dee 2007, Dee 2005, Dee 2004. Therefore, issues of white supremacy, institutionalized racism, and identity affect my teaching practice and affects the lives of students of color. Most importantly, the additional effort needed to navigate through these issues of identity adds stress. Rhetoric and Writing Studies includes many people like me, who want to do the work of the field, but these issues keep getting in the way. This is not to say every day is harrowing and every moment frustrating. I pack my stories with citations and evidence to prove that I am credible. This emotional work will be driven by logic.

In classes, my presence is often welcomed by white students, both male and female, who have expressed their desire to know more people in the world. Most of them want to live in the world they were promised having grown up in a world where the results of white privilege were rarely discussed and were often mistaken for earnings. The myth that meritocracy rewards success for those who put in hard work is very much alive in American culture (McNamee and Miller). These white students often face cognitive dissonance when trying to achieve through their own merits but notice that the world does not always give others the same opportunities. I have met

many entitled white students in my twenty years of work in the classroom. However, most white students I have met want our American society to reflect the promise of the founders as ‘a more perfect union.’ They do not want breaks because they are white. They just do not often have the vocabulary or experience to navigate or even understand their own whiteness.

There are, however, challenges in using language effectively to address issues reflecting identity when such issues are easily disparaged or dismissed by those whose identities are seen, felt, and acted upon as the norm. That is when an issue like white supremacy becomes dangerously problematic. When whiteness is at the center, society privileges silence about race because these issues might be misunderstood, might be confusing, or might make some people uncomfortable. Part of this silence is erasure. This erasure of the lived experience contradicts the power of language to empower and express. For instance, the ability to discount someone’s lived experience is akin to the promotion of white racial superiority as seen in works by David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Hume’s footnote in the second edition of his essay “Of National Character” states his beliefs that “...negroes, and in general all the other species of men...to be naturally inferior to the whites.” He follows this declaration with reasons why whites are superior, listing many falsehoods that are still part of Western culture some centuries later, such as a lack of contributions to science and letters, as well as a lack of creating stable governments. Hume’s attitudes about race can be attributed to the zeitgeist of the Enlightenment when Europeans viewed their ideas and writing about Africans as the final word about Africans. Little attention was paid to the actual words and ideas from Africans about themselves.

This silencing of the truth about Africans led to the normalization of European ideas about African inferiority. The normalization of misinformation about a group of people also results in an erasure of their humanity. Consider Kant's response to Hume's essay ten years later wherein he states, "negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling." This idea, that even the emotions and feelings of nonwhites are inferior, remains at the center of white supremacy. Indeed, it is still reflected in contemporary society. In an article published in 2016, Hoffman et al. discuss the problems that Black patients face when white people are assessing their pain. According to their studies, about 46 percent of their sample of white people, including medical students and residents, believed many misconceptions about biological differences between Black and white people, from such beliefs that white people's brains are bigger than Black people's brains to "Blacks' nerve endings are less sensitive than whites'" (#). These century-old ideas result in clearly unfair and potentially inhumane outcomes for Black folks. As serious as this example of the power of white supremacist language and ideas to negatively affect the lives of its targets is, there are still other situations wherein the dominant culture has the power to avoid or even erase experiences of others, especially those who they find uncomfortable.

Progress is Hard

One assumption often made by members of dominant groups is that everyone experiences the world the way they do. It is just the result of never being required to know about anyone outside of the dominant culture or even consciously register that there are others. This lack of recognition is another reason why the silencing of

personal experiences by those outside of the dominant culture leads to the cycle we currently experience; this cycle results in a system where power and societal views favor a dominant group, and any participation in the system continues the cycle (Maher and Tetreault). In our society, on a large scale, many white people have not yet been given the ability, language, or perspective to approach the problem of race without connecting it to guilt, defensiveness, and/or exhaustion. They might not be able to comprehend or might not be willing to believe the experiences of people of color who do not have the benefit of ignoring race in a world in which racism, discrimination, and other related practices are often foisted upon those with nonwhite statuses *because of* their nonwhite status.

The lack of discussion outside of academia in our larger society about whiteness, what it means, and how it operates institutionally demonstrates the way the dominant white culture can deny the existence of whiteness, white supremacy, and the problems they pose to those who are not white. Unfortunately, the idea of institutionalized racism continues to be challenged or dismissed by many people in America. In fact, according to a 2016 report from the Pew Research Center, “whites are more likely to point to individual prejudice rather than institutional racism as the bigger problem...[with]...70% citing individual prejudice vs. 19% saying institutional racism...”, which demonstrates that racism is still not seen as an overarching societal problem to many white people (#). Therefore, it is difficult to get people to address an issue they don’t believe exists, and it is even more difficult for people to work to make changes that they don’t feel need to be changed. A 2017 Pew Research Center survey reported that of 4,971 respondents, “...46% of whites say whites benefit at least a fair

amount from advantages in society that Blacks don't have..." while "...[a]n overwhelming majority of Blacks (92%) say whites benefit a great deal or a fair amount from advantages that Blacks do not have..."", which demonstrates that views about white privilege are not universally accepted by those benefiting from it (#). Again, hegemony is difficult to overcome when there is little agreement over the major issues in society.

What might be less debatable is that in our society, the amount of agency one is allowed and how much one feels empowered to speak and to be heard contributes strongly to how a person navigates through the world. If we want to consider language's power and how attitudes are expressed through words, then we need to think about the power of language to sway people's actions. "[S]erious consideration... [must be taken] to discourage egregious, marginalizing language and practices [and necessary actions] must be rooted in real change..." so in the future, it becomes the norm that "...disparaging language will simply not be tolerated" (McZeal Walters 65). Ideas about language and the resulting actions come into play for all members outside of dominant groups and only come into play for members of the dominant group if those privileged members allow them to.

The college composition classroom, with its focus on writing as a meaning-making process, can become a site of learning and of understanding the rhetoric of hegemony and how language can power attitudes and beliefs. Krista Ratcliffe explores moves that instructors can make in the classroom to help all students realize that "language functions...as culturally coded tropes that...inform how we see, order, analyze, and make meaning in the world" (147). It is important to realize the power of

language and how ingrained implicitly biased beliefs are in our society. Ratcliffe suggests using the classroom to approach the way language is coded to describe issues like race (150-1). For instance, exploring how the word *thug* is used in this manner to refer to someone who is Black, even when the Black person is innocent of wrongdoing (as one would assume of a troublemaking thug), there is an opportunity to help students recognize the way these kinds of ideas become normalized and can contribute to institutionalized racism. Ratcliffe views this work in the classroom with optimism, hoping that understanding how coded language functions and drives many of our actions can allow us to recognize that “the terms that define us are fluid in ways that enable them to be redefined and enable us to redefine ourselves in our own eyes and in the eyes of others” (151). The work is time-consuming and difficult, especially if trying to work in an environment with little support or interest in such work.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Body of Work

“Writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry.”

— Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A method of inquiry,” 2000

Early in my career as an adjunct composition instructor, I met with a tenured English professor, who served as a mentor to me. As I lamented over the issues I experienced during peer review sessions in one of my classes, my mentor said she had recently come across some research suggesting the effectiveness of having students work together in groups of three. I was intrigued by her comment, not because of the helpful information that I could apply to my classroom practice, but because I had not considered that scholars were studying peer review in the composition classroom. This news was both surprising and enlightening to me. As it turns out, my tenured colleague held a Ph.D. in Writing and Rhetoric. However, my background, like many other writing instructors in higher education, is in English. When I was hired to teach college courses part-time, my inexperience led me to assume that working in an English department would certainly involve literary analysis and interpretation of great literature. I soon learned that the writing classroom was where I—and most of my contingent faculty peers—would spend most of our teaching time. I was beginning to realize the problems with the status quo in English departments and writing courses.

Currently, it is no secret that adjunct faculty positions continue to grow and tenured faculty positions decrease, and many of these positions in English departments involve teaching writing courses. These courses are often taught by well-meaning

professionals who are experts in literary study, but not schooled in teaching college composition.

My fingers tapped across the keyboard to find evidence that would credence to my voice. Do you know what I found? According to a 2007 report by the Modern Language Association and its Association of Departments of English, roughly 82 percent of all first-year writing courses are housed within English departments, and about 78 percent of these courses are taught by those other than tenured or tenure-track faculty (“*Education*”). Furthermore, only 50 percent of non-tenure-track faculty members hold an M.A. in English (an additional 15 percent hold an M.F.A.), and many of our countries “master’s programs [in English] aren’t necessarily designed to train people to teach college writing” (Jaschik). Therefore, just as I did, many contingent college writing instructors entered into the field without a clear sense of the pedagogy and theory behind the most effective practices for the writing classroom.

Sincerity from Deep Within

Please do not misinterpret my direction here: I am thoroughly engaged in my practice as a community college English instructor who teaches a majority of writing courses, in addition to a course in poetry and one in African American literature, of which the latter two were my master’s degree’s focus. At the time, I worked hard to provide students with the necessary guidance to succeed, and I would even venture boldly to say that I was clear, organized, helpful, empathetic, and (usually) well-liked.

So, when my continual attempts at peer review were never consistent and usually frustrating, I needed to find out why. Although there were times when peer review worked well for a particular group of students, it seemed like those times could

have been the result of mere coincidences of compatibility—students to each other, students to assignments, students to me. Many times, peer review was met with frustration by students who did not find the experience worthwhile. Other times, I was frustrated by the quality of feedback students gave and received. There were a variety of reasons why this practice was not working well in my classroom. However, I was most frustrated by my inability to adequately address this issue. With a background in English and with a focus on poetry, I thought I knew where to find research; I was skilled and knowledgeable. And I have always been a good writer. Therefore, problem-solving should have been easy. However, my background did not always translate into solutions when I encountered problems specific to the many composition classes that I was assigned.

Learning that Rhetoric and Writing Studies was a field different than English or literature had a liberating effect on me and offered me the opportunity to get as close to a calling as I ever imagined that I would get. This part-time work motivated me to pursue an English PhD, specializing in writing and rhetoric. I knew that language was powerful: wars are started with words; people can be brought to the heights of emotion by words; progress and positive change can happen, riding on the backs of words. In the college classroom, I could help students communicate their ideas as efficaciously as possible through skilled writing instruction.

In the adjunct office (and later in full-time faculty offices) where I worked part time, there were not many English department members aware of Rhetoric and Writing Studies as its own field. Many instructors were good writers themselves, so they taught what worked for them. Some who were not fond of writing often focused

on grammar and mechanics because those were measurable outcomes that relied less upon subjective assessment of student writing. Because first-year college writing courses are plentiful and most students need to enroll regardless of major, these courses were deemed by some instructors and administrators as classes anyone could teach with minimal preparation. The feeling I got from discussing writing pedagogy with fellow instructors who were not schooled in composition studies was along the lines of “I mean, we all know how to write. How hard could it be?”

Watch with the Eyes

Picture this: I assembled students into groups for peer review. I directed them to do as I said, showed them how to read each other’s writing, and told them how to respond. I had a goal for them: to evaluate the evidence in the body of classmates’ writing projects. I was very surgical about it. Like there was one formula for making this work. Collaborative learning is good, I knew; aside from the research and literature from the field, I’d read about the benefits before in a few graduate classes. I wanted to be like Peter Elbow and Jones Royster and Freire. I wanted to step into pedagogy like it was an energy, a space where the perfect approach would allow all students to flourish equally. I expected students to bring original work that they’d composed, but I never really allowed them full ownership of their writing.

You see, in the beginning, I passed out checklists that I worked hard to reinvent in my own image until I adapted these lists of important criteria into worksheets for peer review for peers I did not have. They were not my peers, and I was approaching this activity in the least authentic manner: pretending that they were empowered in this process. They should have brought their own questions, but I was

not yet ready to see them as writers with concerns about their work. They followed along, thoughtfully, for the most part. Students just followed my lead and viewed the intimacies of writing through my lens. I imagined that my approach—a broad overview of what I privileged—included a misuse of my idea of equality. As I worked in this manner, I realized that to me, students were not individuals; they were a monolith that I knew how to handle with worksheets in one-size-for-all, and I could complete my checklist, standardizing an experience that instead needed more flexibility. And all the while, everything that framed this time in the classroom felt so homogenous and stifling. I bet eagerness can slowly turn jaded without much notice. Or is that complacency? Those emotions might work the same way.

Early on, I knew I was afraid of potential mayhem in peer review workshops, so I organized short, quiet peer review exercises that made me feel effective. My students completed these exercises without complaint, but the exercises probably did little to help those students participate in collaborative work as individuals. Students were engaged in my work, but they were disengaged from their own experiences as writers. The autonomy, inclusivity, and potentials that exist with the arrangement of ideas into words embodied a liberated approach, and I needed to do better. I needed to spend less time over-managing peer review workshops and needed to begin guiding writers to engage with their own work and with peers' work on their own terms.

Now, dig this: with colleagues or friends who teach, I have often insisted that when an instructor can raise the level of discourse in a class, students often follow, becoming more invested learners. In fact, the instructor can become a more invested learner, too.

The first time I asked a class of composition students to review only each other's working thesis statements for a new thesis-based writing project, I braced for each group of three-to-four members to quickly read over each statement and offer a brief response to each other. I expected the time allotted to be too long, but I pushed along anyway. Instead of a negative experience, I noticed how students took the activity seriously within their peer review groups. The small, community college classroom with its plain, beige walls and heavy fluorescent lights felt less stark, and the voices were bustling, and the energy spun around words and how they were arranged and what they were proposing and how the ideas behind them mattered—even if only until the end of the exercise.

I wish I would have recorded what I heard in the classroom on this day. I imagine that it was along the lines of “This is what I want to say—” and “You just need to—” and “What do you think about—?” It all sounded good, and the writers attended to their work and talked about their working thesis statements and their writing processes with each other. After this experience, I began to feel more comfortable with this flexible process, and I wanted more.

Account (transcript from MSWord Dictation) 11:27 am

I believe it is important to note that before I wound up on the tenure-track in a full-time position in an English department, I worked as an adjunct instructor at a number of colleges in my small, New England state. Working in a variety of institutions gave me lots of flexibility in my family life. My husband's career provided typical employment benefits, so my part time work status helped me stay involved in my daughter's lives from their time in middle school until their high school

graduations. My work as an adjunct instructor afforded us a lifestyle with few worries that our daughters would be left up to their own devices or wouldn't have all the opportunities to pursue their outside interests. As a Black mother, I needed to do all I could to see that my daughters would be safe in the world and to help prepare them for the times when they would not be. When working as an adjunct, there's never a guarantee of being assigned classes. I found that being reliable and open to teaching courses during times unpopular with a specific school's fulltime usually resulted in picking up a class or two at a few different places. Quilting together a schedule that changed from semester to semester sometimes left me disconnected from the wider culture on each campus. At first, this was easy to accept, and it was nice to be able to drive around from school to school independently, the only culture I needed to focus on was my classroom culture. I felt little pressure when walk into a variety of academic buildings with autonomy knowing that I was trusted by the institution to teach my course and leave.

I knew that was not a major part of the community because it's hard to really know or have relationships with permanent faculty members, and I did feel like an inferior member of the staff sometimes. I think I assumed that those pertinent faculty experienced their time in the classroom like I did. I did not know the importance of involved in the workings of the college. When I learned about issues like committee work or about how one's promotion and tenure of file had to be built, I felt even more disconnected from the spaces I was occupying in classrooms. I didn't know about institutional politics or the frustrating nature of department meetings. I also didn't know about the ability to contribute to the direction of curriculum. What did reassure

me was that everything that I was expected to know, I did. A person can't understand the innerworkings of something without the knowledge of and access to those innerworkings. I didn't know about any of those fulltime issues, I just pulled into faculty parking lots feeling pretty good about myself.

Honestly, I come from a background where many people viewed higher education as impressive, but really only useful if it served a practical function, like provided reliable preparation for a proven pathway into a specific career or trade. So, I felt validated when people in my social and family circles finally seemed impressed that I was doing something with my education that they could understand. For much of the time that I spent pursuing education beyond high school, some of my older relatives, the ones I looked up to and emulated because I was the oldest grandchild and had no older siblings, would jokingly accuse me of staying in school to avoid growing up. Growing up, in these cases, referred to holding down a job with a forty-hour workweek and, if not that, at least, having a baby and trying to make it work with the baby's father. I mean, I didn't have my babies until after I got married. I was twenty-seven. To some in the family, that was seen as later than expected. Later than usual. I have never been good with deadlines. I have always been reminded of this fact.

"So, you don't have a boyfriend, honey?" she asked, the concern in her voice rose from within the telephone receiver. I was an undergraduate living far away from the family's hometown. It was in the early 1990s, so telephones were still tethered to walls with coiled rubber cords. Eventually, things would eventually break free. For now, I would answer faithfully, missing home and the comfortable, lively Sunday dinners at my grandmother's house busy with cousins and aunts.

“No one special, really,” I sighed. My response felt distracted, and I knew that the physical distance between us that could be measured by miles could also be measured by other means. I tried to tell her about Prufrock and T.S. Eliot and the great paper I wrote for this one professor’s literature class, but I couldn’t communicate very well. I told her there was going to be a party later that night.

“Well, you be good, honey,” she instructed. “Have a good time but be safe. I love you.” And she did.

At that earlier time, when I was leaving home, she did not understand me and my plans for life, but once I started teaching, she afforded me a quiet respect that involved less interest in my future as a wife and a mother, and more interest in what I was becoming.

Over time, I realized that working as a part time instructor meant that I was not really part of the faculty or the institution. Being part time meant not having an assigned space for one's personal stuff. It meant having a cubicle for an office and a cubicle, might I add, that is shared with unseen others. Being an adjunct meant occupying a space in academia where bodies were replaceable, and spaces were painfully dynamic and never reliable. It involved a professional life without a set structure. Adjuncts were like mannequins; pull on another curriculum like a sweater and be trusted to let it hang there. The most painful parts involved being trusted to deliver curriculum but not being valuable enough to have a hand in curriculum decisions. This work could make one feel as if she were perceived as unqualified or undeserving enough to be a faculty member who received things like health benefits or guarantees of work every semester. And maybe a desk that wasn’t shared with anyone

else. It was annoying to have to keep all my course materials in the trunk of my car instead of in a dedicated location inside of a building. It was humiliating to deal with feelings of exclusion when just wanting to be part of an academic community and wanting to be acknowledged as a contributor to the work of an institution. That is not how it works, though, and life is hard, sometimes.

What does this have to do with my concerns about this field—my field—Rhetoric and Writing Studies? Well, as a practitioner working hard to apply theory to my work in the community college writing classroom, it matters a lot. It has much to do with my identity: an educated, Black woman working at a community college in New England in an English department, at first, without other people of color in the department. I believe I am the first Black woman hired as full-time faculty at this college since it's opening over fifty years ago, and recently, our college faculty has expanded to include a more diverse group of educators. This matters to the students of color who pass through my classroom semester after semester, many who amaze at having a Black woman as a professor and who see my presence as a signal that they are somehow safer, somehow more acknowledged, somehow more able to succeed.

I once made an appointment to see a department chair in a college where I was an adjunct for several years. I wanted to ask how I could be considered for a full-time position. I did notice the lack of diversity on the faculty of this college with its diverse student body, but I did not bring up this point. I did not need to. From the articles I had read in higher ed publications and the statements by professional organizations and conferences about the need for more inclusive and equitable hiring practices for faculty, surely, he would be excited to have the opportunity to diversify his large

homogeneous English department. Actually, there was really no interest. He explained to me that there was no system and no guarantee for adjunct faculty to be given any preference in hiring. When positions opened, he continued explaining, hiring was done by a committee of the English faculty, so he did not have the power to hire me unilaterally. When a position opened up, I would have to put my CV into the ring like all other applicants, whether adjuncts or outsiders. Then the committee of potential peers would choose who they thought would be best to join the department. He did reiterate that there was no specific path or guarantee for part time faculty to move onto the tenure track. There was no written policy about this issue, I learned.

I must state that many years later when I received a tenure-track position on this English faculty, I had heard many colleagues' origin stories—the ways they got hired for their positions during this same period when I was around. In many of these stories, an adjunct instructor solicited a member of the department in the parking lot or over a glass of wine or through a friend who was already on the faculty and then received an informal assurance that they would be chosen for a fulltime position during the next hiring round. So many faculty members—some my age, some younger, some with fewer qualifications, no publications, or less teaching experience than me—had been hired years before I was hired, and they seemed to benefit from some unspoken system that privileged some applicants and excluded others. It bears repeating: for the life of the department, from its beginning in the late 1960s until decades later in 2017, no hiring committee of English faculty at this community college ever thought it important enough to make space for even one faculty member who looked like the many Black and brown students that populated the campus. Also,

worth noting, once some years passed and several faculty of color were chosen by one of the hiring committees, there was an undercurrent of shock, white fragility, and a suddenly open loyalty to adjunct instructors. This reaction also brought with it microaggressions in the form of discussion: ‘I can’t imagine getting hired right away, like they did. I had to work my way up from part-time to get my position’ or ‘I hope they fit in; I mean, I would not want to work in a place where people thought I got my job unfairly’ or ‘It’s a shame that they completely overlooked all of the adjuncts to hire the new people.’ One would think that well into the start of the twenty-first century that more equitable approaches to accepting a variety of bodies into spaces where they could benefit an entire system would be the norm.

Therefore, despite current calls for diversity in both our field's literature and academic hiring practices, the current paradigm seems almost deliberate in supporting and upholding this problematic hegemony instead of embracing the work from a wider variety of scholars who possess the potential to expand the field in exciting new directions. And some people, like me during my time, were just happy to have a role on the faculty, to teach classes, while eventually assuming that being hired permanently would never come.

Wear the Truth Ethically

I became passionate about the power that language and writing offers, and I wanted this passion to become part of how I designed and delivered my courses. I learned that peer review workshops offered opportunities to approach strategies for working with others to improve one’s own writing. My continued effort in developing effective coursework led me to realize that peer review could be embedded into

writing instruction and become the embodiment of the power and potential of language and purposeful communication. Furthermore, peer review's inquiry into choices writers make in their pursuits of effective written expression could reflect a writer's sense of agency, purpose, and self. This is where the power comes from. This is what was so wonderful to experience when I experienced it—when students raised the level of their discourse to engage with and about their writing with peers. Anyone who has stepped foot into any classroom with the intention of trying something new or teaching from a place of honesty and respect could easily agree that this work is not easy. In my experience, trial and error in the quest for finding the ‘perfect’ structure for every peer review workshop for every class resulted in the realization that there is no perfect structure; sometimes—like in rhetoric—it is all depends upon the situation.

Peep this: during my time as an adjunct instructor, I went for coffee with my fulltime faculty mentor. She shared some information from an article that she’d read about the benefits of having students in small peer groups of three or four read their work aloud to their group members. I was eager to put research into practice and wanted to feel more confident in my peer review workshops, so I tried this approach with a class. In fact, this became the standard way I had people share their work with each other. Writers often noticed typos or heard how awkward a section of their writing sounded. The classroom was filled with voices, which made me feel productive and skilled as an educator. That is, until one class when we were debriefing the workshop, someone expressed their dislike of reading to the members of their group. When I asked if others felt the same way, some students spoke up.

“Reading out loud takes too much time,” someone declared, and I couldn’t ignore the point. As part of my peer review protocol, a writer would read aloud while peers listened, and then listeners were required to complete a handout that asked them to respond to significant issues and writerly moves of their peers.

“I hate reading in front of people.”

“Too much was going on,” someone must have remarked about the chaotic energy buzzing through the air.

There were over half a dozen small islands of desks, pushed together tightly, and I wasn’t worried about the way groups had to negotiate sound in this enclosed space with boisterous voices competing to be heard and needing to be heard. The classroom was noisy. It was a lot.

Sometimes, groups needed me to weave my way through the unkempt classroom landscape just to clarify or reassure that this little group was on the right path. This was important work. I wasn’t worried about this particular classroom. After all, it was just another Saturday morning, and this college composition class had work to do. I would see to it. I could steer this classroom in a focused direction.

After that, I had a difficult decision to make: do I direct students to read aloud or not to read aloud? An additional option also emerged that frightened me: letting each group decide on their own. I found it scary at first to leave the process up to the students. It is still scary now, but with clear expectations and guidance, students tend to engage in the peer review process earnestly. Still, it can be anxiety-provoking to go to class and expect an organic and authentic peer review session led by the students.

Another concern that often comes up when planning peer review workshops is how to group students. I was never a fan of random grouping because my experience in the classroom demonstrated that sometimes some people should not work together. The power of good grouping is something I had to consider, especially in classes in the early days of a term, when everyone is still getting to know each other. Although I hate to admit this, I had, in the past, grouped students together for reasons that had little to do with anything but my own pleasure. In a freshman writing course at a local university, I partnered a rather shy young man with two lovely female coeds just so he would have had the opportunity to talk to them. Aside from my presumptuousness in assuming he liked women and that he had any interest in either of them, I thought I could serve as a benevolent force, breaking this introvert out of his shell and into an exciting new experience of enjoyable teenage drama and fun. I envisioned a fun musical montage of the three enjoying time around coffee shops and memorable college parties with dancing and on cool spots in the city where they could build significant memories together as they continued growing into adulthood. Really, I was that serious about this situation. I reluctantly share this embarrassing confession, but I believe in transparency and will, therefore, live with the consequences.

I eventually decided that my social experiments were not contributing anything to the work at hand, so I did look for more systematic and beneficial methods of grouping students for collaborative work. Before that, however, I did put two young men with the name Elvis (actually, not their actual name) into a group because they both had never met another person named Elvis before, and I thought they should be able to have the opportunity to. The direction I wanted to take in grouping students

might seem like it is all about emotional connections and other touchy-feely things that some people don't always believe appropriate for the classroom. You see, I am all about respecting students in my classroom and treating them as individuals with dignity. Actually, that is very easy to say, and I don't know many educators who would disagree and state in public that dignity and respect of individual students are of little importance to them. It is important to stress that who you choose to be in a group with or who chooses you to be in a group with matters. Deciding how to look critically at one's own practice to make meaningful improvements can be challenging. At least, it is challenging for me.

Learning How to Give a Self-Exam

It is harder to put these ideas into practice, especially when assuming that one is a superstar of student support. I did make some mistakes before realizing any flaws in my system. Sometimes things worked out beautifully, like this one time, when I decided to group three older women together during a peer review workshop of their narrative projects. The older women gathered in the corner of the classroom with their travel mugs of coffee and impeccably organized materials, balanced precariously on the small desktops. There were three of them. Their voices became part of the constant din of the other student groups reading their work to each other. When I approached their group with my rolling chair, they had just finished sharing their feedback with each other. One of the women was reaching into her purse to pass around tissues because they had all been crying. Apparently, the narratives they had shared were extremely personal, and in addition to sharing feedback on how they could have

improved the writing, they also shared emotional support with each other. I could only sit back and watch, glad that I had grouped them together.

The other students, mainly eighteen or nineteen years old, or around that age, might not have been able to provide the kind of meaningful interaction that these older women offered each other. I wanted to replicate the chemistry that those women had with each other, but over the years, I found that it was not possible to force people to respond in the way that I wish. Life would be so much easier if people did, though.

It is difficult to reassess oneself and admit that something needs to change. However, that has to be one sign of an educator who wants to be better. Closing off one's classroom and continuing in the same fashion forever should not be acceptable. In the most alarmist way, it's dangerous. It impedes the progress of everyone involved: instructors plateau; students are limited by these plateaus. These disembodied approaches can reflect both the troubling experiences in daily life and the small ways power can be dangerous to those without it.

Veins Pump Blood Regardless

It's hard to go out into the world sometimes when it inflicts painful situations on a person. Furthermore, it is even more disheartening when facing similar situations in the academic world, where education and progress should work to defeat the kinds of unconscious biases and microaggressions that are rampant in the outside world. Sadly, these same issues are alive and well in academia. Perhaps because there is a deep-seated belief in meritocracy or because academics from the dominant cultures have had to work hard for a place on their own faculties, there might be a belief that everyone working on a faculty belongs there and because of the liberal nature of

colleges, academia is a space of equality and equity. I want to freely share a story, but I have the urge to pepper my narrative with important information from scholarly texts that would support my point. You probably understand why. I'd rather not discuss it right now. But anyway, of all American college and university faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, around 7 percent are African Americans, and African American women make up only 3 percent of this population (National Center for Educational Statistics 2017). Therefore, there is not always a wide pool of support on campuses or even large numbers of people who understand their roles in maintaining the status quo.

Comment: Gotchas (transcript from MSWord Dictation) Quarter of Twelve

So this one time. I had to go to a DEI meeting. I mean, I didn't really have to go. I wanted to go. I was invited to go, and I was still a pretty new full time faculty member. I wanted to work hard and be an active participant in positive initiatives on campus, so I pressed the automatic reply. At first, I was flattered that I was invited to so many meetings and events and roundtables. I was one of the few women of color at the institution, and I wanted to believe that I was a worthy, valuable colleague. Beyond that, I'd hoped to be someone that other people at work were happy to see, or, at least, I'd hoped to be someone that people were not disappointed to see. So, here I was having to go to a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion meeting, and this meeting had the best intentions of creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments. I was on board. This group, sanctioned by the administration and populated with thoughtful advocates and allies thoughtfully attempted to address some of the issues that have concerned me. I was willing to attend this meeting with others concerned

about addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion systematically. But that's difficult, though. Can we really change the system without changing the system?

Probably not. But I opened the email and had to be a thoughtful colleague and lend my presence to the meeting. One would think that my presence at a DEI meeting would afford me much ethos from fellow participants. It is important to understand that my schedule at the time was overextended. I was already on too many committees and involved in too many projects to the point where I sometimes had an attitude and private resentment about the unpaid labor I offered my college, even though I was never asked to offer myself this way. The additional intellectual and strategic work I contributed to my school was supposed to help me be present myself as a safe, smart, and effective member of the faculty. I'm still in love with my job.

So, there I was in the diversity, equity, and inclusion meeting that offered space for people who were interested in creating a conversation about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the school. The fact that the population of students of color was growing, and the faculty did not reflect the student body made this meeting a priority to me, so I pressed on the link to join the Zoom meeting invite.

From the comfort of our homes, the facilitator led us through the agenda, presenting information via engaging and correct PowerPoint slides. I really did not learn anything new from the presentation, but I appreciated the effort of the earnest white facilitator. She was not an academic, but she belonged in academia. I remember imagining this because she was right there on my computer screen, guiding an entire faculty workshop and getting paid for it. After segments on microaggressions, unconscious biases, and unbiased vocabulary, it was time for the attendees to ask any

questions about the presentation. Some people shared thoughtful questions, and there were a few people who shared insightful anecdotes about experiences in their classrooms that touched on some of the issues we were exploring in this workshop.

A voice came through with some pressing questions. This was someone who I couldn't see because there was no camera, just audio. The voice shared a variety of classroom scenarios as conduits for expressing his concerns.

For each of the classroom scenarios, he had a similar question that seemed to center around the idea that people were waiting to catch him.

“Can they get you if you do this?” he asked after each scenario.

Because the facilitator did not pick up on his implication that this was all a game of sorts, and he felt powerless against woke people who were out to get him with a power that they could hold above him like a weapon.

“No one is watching you, and hoping you slip up. You really are not the party typically hurt by racism. Perhaps if you realized this, you would feel better,” I stated from behind my screen without raising my Zoom hand. He meekly thanked me and then muted his microphone. At that moment, I realized that I probably should not have attended the meeting. It was probably supposed to be a safe space for white faculty and staff. My camera was on, and the lights in my home office were bright. I muted myself for the rest of the meeting.

I was listening because I was sitting there, and I wasn't mad because I don't think he had evil intentions. Actually, I'll give him the benefit of the doubt because he was most likely a member of the dominant culture who didn't have any reason to believe that the way he saw the world was not necessarily the way everyone else saw

the world. It seemed like to him the idea of being accused of being a racist was more serious and dangerous than the results of racist actions and beliefs. His concern was focused around about his words being misconstrued as racist by people of color hiding in the shadows, waiting to pounce on him for a reasonable faux pas. People can't know what they don't know or understand. Actually, the fear of being treated as poorly as someone outside of the dominant culture could be a driving factor for resistance to anti-racist practices. Who's to say? Feelings and impulses drive human action. This is what we are taught from history books.

Body of Evidence

When I was ten years old, I had to have an operation on my left leg. Below my knee, there was a bone that grew with a bump on it and basically the doctors had to shave down the bump. Actually slice open my leg—my ten year-old left leg—shave down the bone. Make sure it's clean. Sew my flesh back up, so I could go back home to my family after staying overnight in the hospital. Then, I would go home, and they would take care of me over the summer with reasonable aftercare of the stitches and pain medication, but it might not have been enough pain medication when I needed it.

At the time, there were television shows that I couldn't help but see: it was 1980 and all the 1980s had were five television stations in my area. Cable didn't arrive in my home until late in 1981. There was *Quincy* with a horrific episode that had to do with someone in the hospital. The whole point was how vulnerable they looked. Remember, I was ten, and I realized the subtle nuances of the camera angles and all the sophisticated dialogue that left me concerned about my upcoming surgery overnight in the hospital. In addition to *Quincy's* gritty drama, there was also a

disturbing commercial for a film called *Coma*. I wasn't sure what a coma was, but the commercial showed a body laid out on a gurney or a hospital bed or a stretcher with a johnnie on like I would have to wear in the hospital, so I knew that going to the hospital could be risky.

My mom made sure that she was as supportive as she could be. She went to the public library and got a kit with items that was probably supposed to make one's child feel at ease when going in for surgery. Inside sat was a *Curious George* book, a stethoscope that I enjoyed playing with, a selection of large dark x-rays of a ribcage, fingers, and other bones that were easy to identify and did not seem as scary as the one of my leg that the doctor displayed on the lighted board to show my mom the problem that needed a surgical fix. I'm sure there was probably other information that my mom read to me to make me feel better about being in the hospital overnight and probably something else like a blood pressure cuff—just things to make little kids feel better. She tried to comfort me and told me to be brave. I tried. Still, I went to the hospital remembering *Quincy* and *Coma* and everything sinister that could possibly happen to me in the dreaded hospital.

After being prepped and rolled into the operating room, I was coaxed to sleep by a voice from behind a mask telling me to count backwards from twenty. So I tried.

What I remember next was feeling pain in my leg and not being able to open my eyes. The terror of being alone and confused seized my body, and I just knew that I was in a coma and a bunch of doctors were cutting into my leg, but they didn't know that I was conscious. They thought I was still sleeping. The shot must have worn off, and I would probably die on that table unless I let the medical team know of my

distress. So, I let them know by yelling to them in my drowsy, slurred ten-year-old voice.

“Wait! I’m awake. Please stop cutting! Stop cutting!”

I still couldn’t open my eyes and really needed help. I missed my mom and dad most of all. I remember feeling the most scared that I had ever felt in my life and wished that my mom was with me holding my hand. She wouldn’t have let them continue slicing my skin and shaving down my bone.

“Wait! I’m awake. Please stop cutting! Stop cutting!”

"Shut up!" a woman's sharp voice shouted at me, and this urged my eyes open. She, a nurse, explained with no empathy that I was in the recovery room and my surgery was over and other people were trying to get some rest, and they couldn’t do that if I was going to keep making noise and carrying on like an animal. I snapped my eyes closed, and, in a drowsy silence, I cried softly to myself waiting to get rolled back to my hospital bed where my mom was waiting for me. I realized that this was nothing that I could ever tell my mother. It was too degrading to let her know that I must have done something to solicit that kind of treatment. I didn’t want the nurse to be mad at me. Just being there in my body was enough for me to have deserved that treatment. I was ashamed, but mostly, I was scared. The nurse's harsh voice was all I could think of then. All I can think of now is her power. I wanted my mother and the protection that she brought. We need to be careful and thoughtful with power. It can affect our health, our bodies, our minds. The hospital for me was a one-time situation. Consider the potential for those in power to help or to harm in classrooms. *That’s scary.*

Luckily, if people are encouraged and embraced by educators who want to help them collaborate with others, they can learn how to best advocate for themselves and have the ability to pursue forward-moving ideas that could contribute to strengthening our world. Because this kind of effort involves communication and purposeful uses of language, peer review of college writing is an apt reflection of the power dynamics present in undergraduate classrooms.

Writing is so important in the development of people like us, and you know what I mean when I write ‘people like us.’ We are the ones who realize how difficult it is to live in an equitable, thoughtful, safe, and verdant world unless we all afford the effort to do things like ‘learn from the past,’ and to be sure that history doesn't repeat itself. We are the ones who put in the effort. Like prominent buildings and important institutions within, people's bodies carry markers, and we have to acknowledge these markers because we hold ourselves back when we honor what the markers are pointing to—what they portray. And interestingly enough, when we say we don't want history to repeat itself, we clearly mean the bad parts. The things we did wrong. The times when America as a collective force (of just those with enough power and/or influence to swing the pendulum of how we would live and see others and manage information and manage how we act and decide ways to apply power) decided to make progress, decided to step forward into history with significant change.

Positive changes have moved society forward. Attitudes and understanding about equity, social constructs, and morality make us better: closer to racial equality, closer to gender equality, closer to access to economic equality. When issues of personal identity are entwined with disembodied approaches to how we live our lives,

how we do our jobs, and how we use education to shape the rest of us—the youngest group of educators yet, we approach significant American happenings like slavery and sexism and classism and white lady suffrage and acknowledging people as individuals in ways that help us all be better. Get the most out of humanity and especially from those in the schools. Humans keep getting better in some ways and get worse in others. I like those times when we progressed, looked at what we knew as a different perspective, and then decided to move forward anyway. Those are ways that I don't mind history being repeated.

Funny how we sometimes get nostalgic about the past, and yet sometimes we get angry about the mistakes of the past. Can we only remember in a binary manner? Probably, because the body can remember and withhold both the terrifying things and the best things.

In my community college classroom, I first thought all my colleagues—shucks even the whole field, and probably all of academia—stepped into this work with good intentions and a desire to grow as an educator. It's easy to forget that academia is a specific section of people (you remember, people like us) who might harbor specific ideas and probably are impressed by thoughtful interpretations and innovative strategies and researched-based practices that are effective (or efficacious at the least). I wear my Works Cited like a fashion accessory—the most golden possession that provides proof. It brings out the deep brown of my eyes in the way that you finally remember how comfortable and familiar and lovely brown is. But I digress.

In classrooms all over this country, there is a power that is innate because those who run the classes mold the students in whatever way the instructors' actions guide them. In peer review, as with other classroom practices, power plays a role.

One concern that I had early on in peer review was how to group people. There was a young man who seemed to have difficulties understanding social cues and was socially awkward at times but he was a solid writing student needed to have a peer who could provide thoughtful feedback in a thoughtful manner. A middle-aged woman was awesome in class and because she was probably close to my age I saw her as a nurturing mother figure. And that was a mistake. I really had no reason for projecting my expectations onto these two individuals and thinking that they needed or were in need of each other and that they could somehow work together because I willed it and that they'd team up in the way that I would work with him as an instructor.

And I knew this because during the peer review workshop, the young man got up to use the restroom or get a drink or something and his partner, the older woman, came to me to say she could not work with him because he was not following my directions for this activity. Most likely, this peer review workshop involved pairs reading each other's compositions and responding to a brief list of prompts that would guide students' evaluation of each other's writing. A typical task was each pair finding the claim in the other's argumentative writing project to be sure these statements were focused and debatable. Perhaps they needed to share each other's annotated bibliographies and follow a rubric or checklist to ensure the entries were formatted correctly and as expected. Unfortunately, the young man was scrutinizing her work for

issues outside of our focus. He was correcting grammar and punctuation errors that were not errors at all. This woman was close to tears, and the young man would be back soon from wherever he went. I felt bad because she was having an annoying time and was clearly not gaining anything from this peer review activity. I did not want to make the situation worse because, after all, I paired them up them ineffectively or maybe I didn't clearly explain the protocol and procedures, which should have provided a structure that encourages thoughtful and meaningful feedback.

On reflection, I don't think I really considered the older woman's needs, but instead I projected my expectations on to her. She was a prepared and insightful student—a grown woman in class with younger folks, and I completely took it upon myself to imagine that she would respond to him in the same way I would respond because she was similar in age to me. It was as if every expectation that I had for myself as a was suddenly bequeathed to her. It was not her job to manage the behavior of a rude classmate. Through my power as the instructor, I easily projected the expectations that I had for myself onto her. I knew better than that. Students were human beings with autonomy and not fun puzzles that I could connect any ways that I wanted to.

Part of taking an embodied approach in the classroom is to consider reasons behind the choices and actions made by those in power. An embodied approach to teaching should include honoring all students as multidimensional human beings deserving of sensitivity toward and respect for their experience. One important step toward a more embodied college writing pedagogy could be acknowledging that language is valuable for anyone outside the dominant group. The way one expresses

oneself, whether it is through vernacular language or not, can be a valuable means to express one's experience. It is important for instructors and student to understand the importance of respecting a variety of standard American Englishes. It might seem challenging to get some faculty on board with embracing anything other than the typical standard American English used by members of the dominant culture.

Entry (transcript from MSWord Dictation) 10:33 pm

Something reminded me of a former classmate's concern about an assignment she had heard about over coffee with another instructor. My classmate was angry because students were encouraged to write personal narratives about a challenging experience in their lives. She made a good point. Depending on who students were, their difficult experiences might vary from feeling annoyed because the airline lost the luggage for one day during a family trip to Cancun to having to describe the time someone's brother was an innocent bystander shot in crossfire by gang members. Some students of color were told to really dig deep to create a compelling narrative. My classmate found it disgraceful that some students were encouraged to write personal stories in a way that would situate themselves as downtrodden victims, and therefore outsiders, grateful for the opportunity to study with a better class of students. It seems like a nauseatingly unethical idea that any students from socioeconomic circumstances that should be expected to participate in what could be described as poverty porn.

We need to get to a place where truly respecting students' language cultures is a norm and all faculty members understand the importance of centering minoritized student writers' experiences in the same way student writers of the dominant culture are allowed to express their experiences with ease and the expectation that their

approaches to language are regular, normal, acceptable. The idea that some identities and the writing that emerges from them are inferior to others can be operationalized by students toward each other, which is where danger lies.

Treatment of peers can be significant and powerful. Once way back as an undergraduate, a white classmate, a guy who clearly expected to be a writer, dropped his copy of my poem from our workshop with his ink pen notes and feedback sprawled where he pleased. Class had ended and I eagerly read through the feedback. His comments suggested that my choice of words and how they reflected my experience were too ethnic, too specific for all readers to enjoy. A poem about some concern in my life was not seem as universal enough for him. All the while, I was expected to see his work as completely relatable and nothing out of the ordinary. I wanted to disrupt the entitlement that existed around valuable language. This should be an expectation. A necessity. A goal. A must. A priority. An evolution. I made a love poem with a silver mirror shine and words as reflections. Better to see me with, my dear.

Readjustments

The current paradigm, our status quo, is hard to get away from as many of the concepts and ideas have been woven into our societal mores. As an educator interested in helping students become more efficacious writers, I need to find ways to address the issues of prejudice and privilege in the classroom. I need to be sure I am not acting in ways that contribute to the hegemonic nature of our society. A rhetoric-based approach to writing instruction is helpful to build a classroom community of people interested in language and its purposes and its power. This approach privileges a

process of meaning-making and uncovering truth over a focus on grammar rules and teaching lore and final products. According to Cicero and Quintilian, arrangement involves careful consideration of the placement of language--ideas and words-- for maximum impact. As a concept used in writing instruction, considering arrangement can help students consider the organization of their ideas to be as successful as possible in achieving the purpose of their writing. This work should be presented in a manner that makes the process meaningful and allows skills and writing habits transferable to other writing tasks. Students should understand the necessity of arrangement and its ability to help writers 1) be effective in achieving their purposes for writing, 2) to consider the ways word choice can affect the outcome of a writing project, 3) engage with language purposefully and meaningfully, and 4) make appropriate choices and moves as a writer. Arrangement can and should be able to be applied to other areas in the writing classroom. Consider how the arrangement of furniture or technology or how the organization of bodies impacts the learning environment.

Now consider a story reported by CNN on January, 24, 2020 about the arrangement of bodies in a classroom and how serious this placement can become. According to reporters Asmelash and McDonnell, a Black senior Sultan Benson entered his economic classroom at Ball State University to find another student sitting in his usual seat. The professor, Sheehan Borna, told him to sit at an empty seat a few rows back, and Benson did. A short time later, the student sitting in Benson's original seat left class, which provoked the professor to ask Benson to move back to his regular seat. However, Benson had his materials out and his laptop set up in his new seat, so

he told the professor that he's rather stay in the seat he was in. The professor then demanded that he move up. "When Benson asked why he had to move, the situation escalated" and Borna then threatened to call the campus police on the student for not complying with instructions in the classroom (Asmelash and McDonnell). The arrangement of bodies in Borna's classroom and his ability to limit the agency of the student was obviously something the professor felt strongly enough about as he eventually summoned the campus police. Upon the arrival of the officer, other students came to Benson's defense, but the damage had been done. Benson was forced to leave the classroom with a police officer just to explain his side of the story. After the administration learned of the situation, the college president Geoffrey Means issued a statement calling the professor's behavior "a gross error of judgment, and it was simply an unwarranted overreaction" (Asmelash and McDonnell). Although Benson changed classes and the professor issued an apology, Benson's major concern was the way the professor called the authorities with little consideration of the current climate for Black people who can feel threatened by police action for trivial and even nonexistent reasons. Benson refers to the anxiety and panic he now faces from that experience, and the faculty member still has his job. Arrangement in the classroom was enough for the professor to seek out assistance from the police.

That incident demonstrates that the problem with white supremacy is that Black bodies are not given the same consideration as other bodies. In a report from 2019, 63 percent of white respondents believed that Black folks are treated less fairly in situations involving the police, while 84 percent of Black respondents saw unfair treatment by police officers ("Race in America 2019"). The disparity between views

from both groups demonstrates how difficult it is for those in the dominant group to understand the difficulties experienced by those outside of the dominant group. More problems arise when one realizes how complicit one is in the hegemonic system. We can be consciously aware of how we want to behave, but still replicate the system unconsciously. I want to see myself as someone standing firmly against the white supremacy that dominates our society, and at the same time, I must confess that I have been an active participant in replicating the hegemony of the dominant culture albeit unconsciously. And then I had to figure out a way to address my behavior and make changes. After all, I was no Professor Borna, calling police on Black students and behaving in a blatantly unacceptable manner. But still I was part of the problem. It happened in a class as I was breaking students into groups of four for an activity. As I was guiding students to move their seats and assigning people to groups, I heard the voice of a young woman in the first group getting louder and louder.

I turned around to see what was happening, and I noticed that the young woman, blond and white, was staring angrily at a tall, tan Latino student who was shrugging and trying to downplay the conflict. When I asked what was happening, the young woman explained that she was in another class with this young man and that they did not get along. The young man responded that it really wasn't that much of an issue and that they should just let everyone get back to the task at hand, so they could begin the group work. The young woman looked very upset, and I ask if it would be better if they didn't work together. The young man shrugged and didn't look very concerned, while the young woman wanted something done about the situation. To quickly work out this situation and get the class back on track, I asked if someone

could join the first group. When a white male student in a group in the back of the room raised his hand, I asked him to take the place of the Latino student. The Latino student looked surprised and confused as he gathered his items and asked why he was the one who had to move.

My response was a weak excuse about keeping the genders in each group balanced. He switched seats, and the small groups worked successfully on the activity. It wasn't until I reflected on the situation later that I realized that I privileged the white woman's feelings over the Latino man's feelings. My concern was that I might have taken her disapproval of him as something that needed to be addressed. After all, she was the one being loud and causing a conflict, while he was trying to downplay the situation and was willing to work with her. I wondered if I saw him as a threat to her because he was much taller, darker, and male. I also knew the young woman from a previous class, and she could be rather outspoken and argumentative when classmates disagreed with her ideas during discussions. Even so, I still made him put the physical effort into moving seats, while she was able to sit comfortably and watch him leave the group because she didn't want him in the group. I believe that the protective manner that I treated her was me participating in the system of white supremacy; I had to protect the most vulnerable member of our society (a white woman) from a dangerous and menacing nonwhite male. Although this incident only lasted for about three minutes, I still needed to address this issue. I was afraid to address the entire class because I did not want to draw any more attention to the situation, so I decided to atone to the young man before the start of the next class. I was concerned because I admitting I was wrong could have changed the dynamic of the classroom. What if the

young man did not accept my apology? What if the young woman wanted to remain fixed on her conflict with him?

I met him outside of our classroom and explained how I realized it was unfair to ask him to move seats during the previous class. He looked thoughtful as he listened to my explanation and apology. Then he thanked me and shook my hand before we entered the classroom. I learned about myself from that experience, and I also realized how difficult it can be to notice when we are wrong, how difficult it is to admit it, and how difficult it can be to address it. I am currently considering *arrangement* in the classroom in new ways. I am also realizing how hard it must be for people who are unfamiliar with the harmful ways they are complicit in advancing white supremacy to see how hard it can be to notice ways they/we are compliant with a system we can be very much against. The work is hard, but just like writing, we can be revised, be improved upon, be more effective, be better.

INTERCHAPTER NOTE

“If You Don’t Know, Now You Know”

—Christopher Wallace, “Juicy,” 1994

There is evidence that some instructors spend the early part of their teaching careers finding a comfortable cadence to their approach to the writing curriculum. Those English literature majors without formal instruction in writing pedagogy typically piece together a curriculum from what they personally experienced, what they feel interested in enough to research on their own, and from what works for them. Many might not be familiar with composition studies or the role of rhetoric in the writing instruction, so they end up teaching from lore. Because of the independent nature of college teaching, there is often minimal oversight in the specific practices of writing instructors. Most of the required college composition courses are most likely taught by an adjunct instructor than a full-time, tenure track faculty member. The problem then becomes that those without time, resources, and support are expected to prepare class after class of students to become competent college writers. The undervaluing of writing pedagogy contributes to the inconsistencies that plague college composition instruction.

In 2000, out of over 5,000 doctoral programs at U.S. universities, only 65 doctoral programs focused on rhetoric and writing studies in the college classroom (Brown et al.). Fortunately, twenty years later, in 2020, there are over eighty institutions that belong to the Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition. Hopefully, more instructors who entered the field the way I did are

learning about this field. After having taught for over twenty years as an English instructor, it is sometimes startling to me that I was not fully aware of this field with its many names and forms: Composition Studies, Writing Studies, Rhetoric and Writing Studies. Uncovering information about this field, its purposes, goals, and history was an enlightening experience that energized me as a practitioner. However, once I learned of this body of scholarly work focused on the pedagogy of college writing, I assumed it would be easy to address any issue that came up in class. Since I knew where to look and had access to so much information about sound pedagogical principles and researched-based approaches to writing instruction, I believed the information would somehow bring easy solutions to any issues I would face in the classroom.

However, I was often overwhelmed with the answers I found to even the most basic questions because implementing useful ideas one reads in a peer-reviewed journal is not always as easy as it might seem. Much effort was expended figuring out ways to apply what I was learning. Some attempts at peer review did not work well at all. This exciting, but complicated, turn of events certainly guided my professional development and helped me to set short- and long-term goals for my teaching practice. However, this did not improve the immediate outlook for peer review in my classroom.

Like me, many instructors of college composition courses face the challenge of instilling into students that writing is a process, and this process involves a continual cycle of considering and reconsidering ideas until a written piece is a clear reflection of the writer's purpose. Most college students come from secondary

education programs that teach them writing is a process, which includes prewriting, composing, editing and revising. Composition instructors can still struggle to convince newly-minted college freshmen that academic writing involves more than just one session of carefully composing an assignment, then printing it out, turning it in for corrections, receiving it back marked up, and then resubmitting the piece with changes that attend to most of the red annotations. To help students evaluate their own compositions and practice applying their knowledge of effective elements of writing, I became convinced that peer-to-peer collaboration was a necessary and valuable part of the writing process. The benefits of having peers read and respond to each other's work have been clearly recognized by many scholars, but I saw the potential of this practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Anatomy of Swiftiness

“These bodies are life infused, self-actualized, structured units of gathered dust...”

—Hendrith Smith, *The Wealth Reference Guide: An American Classic*, 2012

Coalition is the name for a group of cheetahs. They are fast and can command each muscle’s movement, and they seem nonchalantly aware of the power they possess. But at this time, I am not with cheetahs; I am at a table in as a member of a PhD program using a laptop with these women. My mother died a few weeks before. She lived in California. I had to miss this graduate course to fly across the country to help my sister settle my mother’s affairs. Some of the women in this class remind me of cheetahs: they’re fast. Maybe a more graceful creature would better represent, but I couldn’t think straight through the grief. The women in my class sent me a sympathy card in the mail, and they all signed it. I imagine it must have been a few awkward moments as women who had only met me three weeks earlier me tried to think of meaningful messages to jot on the inside of the card. Losing one’s mother after her short battle with brain cancer is an uncomfortable situation to share with others. I did not want to be so generous with my private place, that spot where my mother’s body filled up everything about me.

All of this happened when I was becoming an overgrown woman beginning a PhD program. Who would attempt this at my age? I decided that, although it would be frightening to occupy spaces between educator and student, I could occupy the space of an outsider while maneuvering on the inside. I was entering this field from the

backdoor, and sometimes it felt very sloppy and mismanaged. I did have the urge to move forward. Maybe because it was possible. I never wanted to seem too eager to ambitious because I didn't think I could pull it off skillfully. I ordered books from so many sources. I organized materials and schedules. Before I began my final foray into educational work toward a degree, I asked for the permission of a prominent educator and scholar to enroll in a few of her graduate courses to see if I could pursue this program while continuing to work in the most liminal position in academia (the invisible adjunct). Each late afternoon, I left my house or a faculty parking lot to go to a class with a notebook and working pen. Maybe a coffee or a water. I can still feel the quickness of how it would hit me. It was deep in a place I could reach. Not like an itch on the back that is out of reach until a ruler or caring fingernails soothed that smallest torture. When I pulled onto the university campus, (here it came) I felt shame and embarrassment having to park like an undergraduate--all far away and without respect for and attention to one's time and stress level. And in the dark, the bright blue emergency rape call buttons only distracted me from my surroundings, but I guess that was never really a problem for me.

Sometimes, I got an attitude about being so old while pursuing this degree with some impressive scholars. Early on, I didn't socialize much in these classes; I needed to get home to my family and get ready for the next day's classes. A few semesters passed, and I realized how much I enjoyed the coursework and the theory and the readings and the discussion. I was encouraged by an amazing professor and scholar to apply to the program. I was familiar with another professor's work, so I thought I would try to meet with her to see what she thought about my potential

application to the program. Like any fan girl, I probably had stars in my pupils as I sat with someone closer to my age than I'd imagine and more accomplished in this field than I would ever be. After our meeting, I probably stopped at the market for food or picked up dinner for the family. I probably sat with my husband, who's a great guy, and watched something good on television.

When my mother passed away, my value was just out of range at my part time institutions. My status as a contingent instructor left me occupying a space that felt invisible. As has happened to many other part time instructors, there was no acknowledgement of such a significant loss and no support for such a tragic event. I was part time and caught between the thin veil of those whose matters don't really matter to the institutions. I just taught an odd mix of writing courses. It was a liminal space. This unexpected death brought me to a place where I decided to leave my adjunct positions and focus on this new PhD program. There were many students in this program who expertly navigated this space between. I was sure to watch them to see how they managed.

Gazelles

I just wanted to run with them and watch. I wanted to see if I could keep up. And it was fun early on. I was inspired and energized, and I didn't try to make friends or socialize in classes. No one called me unless it was to share notes and have work sessions, and that was perfect for me. I imagined they knew where they were running to, and they were so fast. I wanted that kind of speed and grace.

Mostly, at the start of my PhD program, I worked all day and then came to class. Throughout this process, my daughters were finishing high school and taking

their next steps as I began this pursuit. My daughters as previously noted are twins, which is pretty cool, but there few students in my program, either teaching or learning, who had grown-ass children, which set me apart from the others in the program. This was uncool. I felt inconsequential and tragic, like the weakest member of the team or the least valuable during conversation. Sometimes in class, we would discuss the implications of what we were studying and how the topic might inform our college teaching practice. I felt like when I spoke in seminar, my breath just hovered along the edges, all hazy and making the room stuffy. This has nothing to do with anyone else in any of the classrooms, but it could. Mainly, it was about me sitting in these rooms.

Now, before this seems like a lamentation and complaint manifesto, I need to use a situation to demonstrate that the dominant culture of hegemony, and in this case white supremacy, is alive in classrooms even with folks who truly believe in their intentions to navigate the world as open-minded activist scholars. This situation took place in a classroom before class started. There were only three people in the room during this pre-class time--the instructor, a female assistant professor; my classmate, a female student; and me. My fellow student brought up the issue of Black Lives Matter, concerned about why it was not called All Lives Matter. She was weighing each side and trying to figure out what worked for her and what opinion she should form about this topic. The young professor, who like my classmate was not Black, supportively deliberated the issues with her in a conversation for two. When I decided that I needed to add my voice to this discourse because they were not approaching the topic from the standpoint of the people marching in the streets, who were trying to get the rest of the country to understand that there was an epidemic of Black folks dying by the

hands of police officers in the kinds of situations that, when involving white suspects, usually did not turn deadly. When I made my point with a thoughtful tone, there was silence. There was no support from the professor. No response from anyone. I don't even recall receiving eye contact from either woman. It was clear that they saw their discussion as an issue of word choice and rhetoric, not a human rights issue. And if they did see it as a human rights issue, they chose not to engage with me. It felt like if they allowed me to enter their conversation, I would have dragged down their discourse or muddied up their intellectual exercise with complicated issues that they only saw as vague concepts that they really didn't have to face. It was discouraging and humiliating. I wanted to crawl out of that hole of silence and creep along the old wooden hall and down the stairs and through the campus grass and to the parking lot and into my car, so I could choke down that same uncomfortable, familiar feeling that was swelling in my throat. The professor spoke up and changed the subject completely, leaving me deep in that alone place with humiliation and frustration swirling around my head. I am sure that I did not participate in the discussion once the class began because I probably feared that I would end up yelling or crying. This was not always the norm when I was a student at all levels, but it was a very typical experience.

Replaceable Figures

Once, I was mistaken for someone else when I arrived in class at the start of a semester. I had been newly accepted to the graduate school and was still serving as an English adjunct at a couple of local schools. I was one of the older women in the class, was not the only woman of color in the room, did have more experience teaching first-year writing than most in the class, and, at this point, one of my daughters was

attending this college as an undergraduate. I knew that after class, when I returned to my car in its stealthy and illegal parking spot, there would be a bright yellow laundry bag filled with my daughter's dirty laundry, ready for me to take home and wash. A female classmate introduced me to the small group of early arrivals to this class. Within this introduction of me, my classmate confused me with a different woman who had not yet arrived in class. The introduction mistakenly stated that I had two master's degrees at the time, and before I could correct this misinformation, one woman, new to me, white and closer to my age than the others, sat up straight and cleared her throat lightly.

"Looks like I beat you," she said, with a saccharin smile, not really to me, but more toward everyone else in class. She listed her degrees, being sure that I was aware that she had more than two graduate degrees. Her pointed remark and the ease with which she openly felt entitled to share her academic achievements in order to demean mine reminded me to keep my whole being guarded against the competitive nature of those who easily and effortlessly sought to diminish my value. Right there. In public. I am not sure if I ever corrected this misinformation. I'd like to imagine that I did: I'd explained how I had only one graduate degree, an MFA from Brown University. Then I'd clear the air by further explaining that I had a variety of teaching certifications for high school English, secondary special education, and post-secondary education. I probably didn't clarify because I got sick of apologizing for other people long before I came to this classroom. I probably didn't have time for this nonsense; the question of whether or not there was laundry detergent at home probably flashed through my brain.

This is where classmates, the ones with quickness, fit in. They were the ones who were smart and organized and impressive. Many were much younger than me, and some had less experience in front of a classroom. Collaborating with this group of skillful scholars was a boon and provided me with a community that I didn't know I needed. I mostly wrapped up in my family life and our plans, but the ability to engage in this tiny discourse community was insightful. The small group of women I attended classes with were not close friends of mine then or now. We did some work together. We had a professor who guided us through some coursework and some projects—me and those gazelles. We were involved in some projects and then we wrote about it. We sat at tables in libraries and in rooms on campus and at coffee shops off campus, which might seem neither significant nor particularly exciting. The collaboration was the part that mattered so much. The ability to work with others offered the potential to gain so much from each other's strengths and ideas. The complicated process of collaboration involved listening to others' ideas and negotiating issues in ways that resulted in progress. Sometimes collaboration required navigating feelings and egos. Sometimes the feelings were stressful; sometimes the ego was my own.

Whenever I faced a conflict like experiencing a microaggression or getting tongue-tied during class when trying to address some mildly disrespectful action or carelessly offensive comment, I had difficulty processing it in the moment perhaps because I never expect to be treated poorly. These kinds of conflicts are like a sucker punch, although I am never really surprised after the fact. I do wish I was constantly armed with sharp-edged responses, but under the fluorescent bulbs or in storied classrooms, I couldn't always concentrate. Usually, I forgot to be on guard. Maybe

might have been shocked and appalled, but never really surprised. That's one of the lessons I learned in school. Other lessons I learned drew me toward teaching in order to negate situations that I experienced in classrooms as a student who wanted just to be. My feelings hurt sometimes, but I think I am just sensitive.

Liminal Spaces

Once in graduate school I worked on a collaborative project with a small group of white female peers. They were bright, focused, and driven. Most of the time, I felt engaged and motivated when working with them. During most meetings, everything ran smoothly, but there were times when egos or impatience or persistence overpowered the work. Once during a group writing session, it was my turn to add my notes to our shared screen. After I pasted my section to the document, in a shocking move to me, but not seemingly to any of the others, the classmate sitting next to me actually took the keyboard from my hands and began rewriting my contribution to the work. I suggested that we read it first and slid the keyboard toward me. After careful evaluation of my writing, little, if any, changes were needed, if I remember correctly.

When none of the other group members could work on submitting a proposal for an important conference because they all had other commitments limiting their time to work on this project, I volunteered to do this work. I probably worked harder on this project than I planned to because I wanted to be accepted as a worthy peer. This was back when I had the energy to worry about my insecurities. As it turns out, ironically, the proposal I composed on my own was accepted, and the group was excited for the opportunities that the conference would bring. We never really discussed the

submission process as a group; we were on to the next step. I couldn't blame them for overlooking my work; I did not advocate for myself.

Sometimes I was trapped in these kinds of uncomfortable places, sometimes the spaces were too big and overwhelming and other times they were so tight that it could make a person dizzy or anxious for breath. There was comfort in this space at times because it was semi-permanent; I could hover along the edges without too much fear of unwanted attention or any kind of admission that I did not possess the potential of fellow classmates. Feeling like an imposter is typical of many people, so I don't know why I am including this idea like I deserve some special consideration or unrequited pity for feeling as crummy and as insecure as a lot of us do sometimes.

Peace Corpse

Ethics and truth are important parts of the energy needed to participate meaningfully in Writing and Rhetoric™ no matter whether an instructor or a student. This is a belief that I would stress if I were in a position of wide influence or if someone asked me about important tenets of my teaching philosophy. In fact, any stakeholder in any post-secondary writing course should embrace the importance of and need to examine ethics and power as influential concepts that shape how language is received. I mean, the body of information in reputable libraries points to the importance of truthful and ethical approaches to life in general and the problems that occur when people ignore the truth or refuse to accept it or even create a truth of their own. Classrooms are powerful spaces, especially for students. I used to believe that with more education, people would become better people—morally, rationally, and

emotionally. I am disappointed that I am wrong. I still intend to try to be better. At least, I'd like to believe I try.

One time in class, I saw what happened when someone else made a faux pas, like I sometimes made or was expected to make even when I was knocking it out the park with insightful points. The situation went something a lot like this. We were in seminar, and the professor introduced the five canons of rhetoric--invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. A classmate, a mostly sweet younger white woman, blurted out how she was shocked that she had never heard of these concepts before and went on in breathless detail about the indignation she felt about the lack of attention to these concepts. She then told our bemused professor that we should all write papers on the five canons to let other people in the field know about this important piece of information. The professor let her finish before explaining that her diatribe wasn't necessary because we were going to explore this topic by using literature from the field. The professor pointed to the rather large reading assignment of articles and chapters that we were expected to complete by the next class. My classmate looked devastated for a little while, but the professor seemed empathetic and found a way to encourage her and coax her back into the discussion. Quickly, my classmate's misstep slipped away, and she was back at the table in her typically confident manner. She was like most of the others who seemed entitled to respect and encouragement and support and their money's worth as grad student/customers of this PhD program. I have never felt entitled to anything as a student in the classroom, but I wish I did.

I took away two things from this experience. The first was how important the five canons are to my fount of knowledge as a composition instructor. I went home and made an 8x40 inch wall hanging that listed the five canons all in a professional sans serif. It now hangs on the wall in my tenure-track office in the English Department where I work. Because there are few faculty in my English department trained in Rhetoric and Writing Studies, not many coworkers acknowledge my list. It is nice, though. It has a colorful background with each term in black ink on its own white rectangle. I think it's rather sharp.

The second thing I took away from my classmate's bungle was seeing how quickly she was allowed by everyone to recover from her words. I knew that when I said something questionable in discussions during seminars, I usually never received the benefit of the doubt or a quick recovery back into the discourse popping off at the table during class. Sometimes it was definitely societal; other times it was definitely me. Like many people outside of the dominant culture, I am sometimes seen as something that I am not. To realize that others see one's physical presence and can have a whole belief system built around incorrect ideas that are woven throughout American culture is frightening.

What makes it scary is how helpless it can feel: powerless is a good descriptor of what happens when many ideas are wrong, and those being viewed (me, us, we) have little influence on affecting perceptions until after the fact. Example: a young professor asked me if it was difficult to be a single mother. At the time of this writing, I have been married to my daughters' father for twenty-five years. Sigh. I didn't press the issue because she made it clear that she was in power. It was also apparent that she

had a very limited view of and experience with people who looked like me. But she still worked at this university where there were students from diverse backgrounds. She also seemed very comfortable being dismissive at times. This same professor told me that I needed to find sources from peer reviewed academic journals instead of just Googling topics and grabbing information from unreliable websites and blogs. This situation came about when we were casually chatting during a break in class, and I mentioned that I was glad to be able to research online. Because of my age, I was referring to using the university's online databases for research as opposed to having to visit the library in person as was the case in the past. This professor clearly did not see me as someone worthy of being in a PhD program because she actually gave me the same lecture that I often gave to undergraduate classes when we were beginning research projects, and we discussed the importance of applying the CRAAP test to evaluate sources. This was very hurtful and embarrassing.

Really, it is very difficult to wrap my head around the fact that this professor believed I had finished an undergrad degree and a graduate degree and the majority of coursework in a PhD program by using Wikipedia-like Internet sources for my research. It is always shocking to realize that someone's perception of me is so wrong. If she could affect me in this pernicious manner, I can't imagine the potential for harm that existed for undergraduates who shared my background. I always remember the feelings of powerlessness. I turn it into empathy, and this is what I always carry into the classroom in order to avoid doing harm. In that liminal space of being a graduate student engaged in teaching a few undergraduate courses, it was not necessary to put forth the effort to make change or contribute to the greater good (or actually any kind

of good—even the smallest good). Doing so was a choice that took effort, and it was risky to invest effort into situations that could result in negative attention or being overlooked when opportunities arose. Sometimes, the best thing to do was to leave issues alone and move forward.

This one time, there was a classmate in a course outside of my department who made me question myself and how I perceive others. I'll describe the situation like this: she was an international student, and she stated in a discussion how people from her country were the most accepting and least racist ever. I did not respond. No one did. I didn't know any of the others in the class, so I was not sure how to respond. How could I? I couldn't share the first page of results from my phone's Google Scholar results about racism, colorism, and bigotry in her country. It would have been rude to use my phone in class. (But of course, if my search for serious research on this topic, I would have gone to the databases, not Google.) However, the results were from peer reviewed sources and were pretty recent. Even though I understood why she needed to be protective of her home country, I was still irked that she wanted to make it seem like her country was better than America. In addition, she was denying her country's racist legacy, and I felt frustrated because I have never denied the role of racism in my country. Certainly, I know all about my country and our amazing and problematic founders/enslavers/rebels, but I still get patriotic because I believe our society has the potential to keep moving forward. We just need to be honest and see clearly. I didn't respond to this woman in class. I let her say what she said, but I wondered if she really believed what she said she believed. Maybe I have the same longing to see my country as something better than it is. I have always been the first

one to complain when in spaces with people who I felt for safe, so maybe I am just like every contradiction that annoys me. I can be as hypocritical as the next person; I'm probably skilled in whining hypocrisy. I bet I could win a contest.

I share a birthday with my major professor, which is a corny enough situation to be cool. During some casual conversation, I asked this major professor of mine if he ever worked as an adjunct instructor. I guess I must have wanted to share some story about something that was happening in one of the classrooms I taught in part-time. I never heard him answer any question so quickly. I remember feeling disappointed in myself for forgetting that we were not the same. He was one of the regular academics. He went straight through school and came from a family of people who made it possible for this to be a path he could have visualized. I don't mean that there is anything bad about this. It is just a part of him. It's nice to share something random with him like a birthday. In my immediately family of four, we celebrate only three birthdays. My husband's, which is the day before Halloween; mine, which falls deep in the summer; and my twin daughter's birthdays on a day in late February. On their birthday, I always blast the Beatles' "Birthday" because of the lyrics "...it's your birthday/it's my birthday too..." I now could text my major professor on his birthday with a link to this song. He's my birthday twin, except he's way younger and white. Our birthday passed, but I did not send the link to the song. I felt like it wouldn't be cool after all. He means well and has a wife who introduced me to the term 'oppression Olympics' before I'd heard it from other thoughtful people at swanky bars or the hippest cocktail parties. It's ironic that this man has been so integral to this BIPOC project. In choosing him for this role, I judged him by the content of his

character and quality of his scholarship. Also, I don't think there was anyone left teaching in the program from when I began.

See, the PhD program was shutting down, so I found another liminal space to occupy in the program for a while. Floating just outside of the realm of grad student within a cohort, I remained, dislocated from my program. Luckily, two tenure-track English positions opened at the local community college where I had served as a part time instructor, and I was fortunate enough to have received one of them. This position provided me with both a sense of professional purpose and a feeling of personal pride. The job market is tight for people in this field. Before I applied for the position, I was told by a professor whom I once respected that I was going to have it easy on the job market as a Black woman. I never responded to the remark with the most obvious question: "Where are all the people of color in your program?" Some people love the idea of diversity and progress until they actually have to do the work required.

So, I am trying to be honest and transparent in this work. It's difficult because we can't always know how people will take what we tell them. One can read many texts on subjects like social skills, white fragility, Black rage, and other helpfully applicable topics, yet one never knows the ideas people hold deep within them. Sometimes, a liberal academic environment leaves little room for honesty about some issues. Even issues that are clear to see and should be immediately addressed. I was going to list many statistics here about who works in colleges and how there are still mostly white people in tenure track teaching positions in higher education. I sometimes want to focus on blame and simplify the situation into something that

makes it easy for me to stay mad. Instead, I will describe a situation from the time I was in the PhD program and a few of us, as current grad students, were asked to go to lunch and engage with the candidates who were coming from all over the country.

Specifically, I will mention the time after lunch. First of all, we had to walk from the building all the way to the cafeteria, and I was not fond of walking. I didn't mind Spending time with these young professionals who were deciding whether or not this program was right for them. The group of prospective faculty members was not all white. After the long march uphill toward our department's office, we congregated in a scattered group on the lawn in front of the building. Work was being done in the building, and some workmen, all white, were getting back to work on the scaffolding. One worker in stained-paint overalls approached me and complimented me on my hair. He used the word locs, not dreads, which I appreciated. I nodded and replied with a humbled thanks., and as I turned to address the other members of my group, the worker reached out and took some of my hair into his hand. I know I was not expecting to be touched, and I know how much of a violation it is for white people to touch anyone nonwhite as if they are entitled to use our bodies to satisfy their needs. In this case, it was a man's curiosity. I did not appreciate the attention from the people in my group, some who audibly gasped as if they'd never been socially violated before. Our department was on the third floor, and I knew the walk up three flights was going to press me. I would make it upstairs huffing and sweaty and unable to participate in breezy chatter as we traverse the stairs because I would be gasping for breath. Then, this guy was touching me.

I reached out to his greasy hair and took a handful. I acted surprised and intrigued by his hair. He began to jerk away from my grasp, but instead, he let go of my hair. I let go of his. I sighed loudly and broke away from the group. I took the elevator up to the third floor. When the rest of the group arrived, a Black candidate approached me privately and asked me about the situation with the worker. I could only shrug, look her in the eyes, and tell her she already knew. The program still has no Black women teaching in it. Those who work in the program seem to want BIPOC on the faculty. Few apply and none accept, I have been told. This is all hearsay, though. I never asked a Black candidate why they didn't accept the position. I am not sure the answer would make a difference in my life.

Importance of the Midsection

There was a pregnant student with a baby in class before COVID. I wanted to be sure that I encouraged her as she sought to complete her education, while having a baby. I would playfully tease her from time to time about a birth plan since she was in class, and we could be delivering the baby if worst came to worst, I explained. Her plan was to leave class, have her baby and receive an incomplete in class until she made up her work. Actually, she missed two classes before the spring recess and returned with a baby in a stroller. I was impressed by her determination and frustrated with some of the others who just seemed downright lazy compared to her. I hadn't spent much time around babies during this period of my life, so that new baby was a calm and welcome presence in class. I didn't mind holding the baby or feeding it from a bottle when the mom was trying to get some work done on her laptop. The pastel baby carrier that sat atop the stroller had a tiny tent zipped up around the baby when it

slept, which was most of the time. That baby did not cry. I don't ever remember it being a distraction in class. Once after class, I asked her how she did it. She looked at me with serious eyes and answered.

“I don't have any other choice.”

GOATS

Sometimes, I found that liminal space in the classroom to be a place that afforded enough freedom to make mistakes and enough structure to feel like I was contributing to the school's mission. I enjoyed the relaxed environment and expectations of students that they would learn something from me. I had a teaching assistantship, so I was usually the instructor of record for a few undergraduate classes. They never really asked about my employment status- many probably didn't know the difference between being a graduate student worker, an adjunct instructor, or a fulltime professor. Unless they were from a family in academia, most undergraduates were unaware of the ranking system along the tenure track. They just seemed to come to class and expect that the person in the front was going to teach in class.

By this time in the semester, the students had formed a classroom culture, and some had already formed little groups and neighboring desks. I spent time explaining the exercise, its purpose, and the manner in which groups would be formed. I really had no specific plan but probably because they were a sociable group of people, vocal and easygoing for the most part. I believed I asked students to form groups of three or four members.

Students moved their desks into little private pods, so they could get to work, the metal feet of the chairs and desk legs scrapped against the worn floor, probably

linoleum tile that seemed spiffy and impressive when it was first installed. There was a gentle chaos in the room with moving furniture and students beginning to work. I scanned the room to see if there were any students having a difficult time finding a group to work in. I was on the lookout for the shy, the awkward, and the bored, but the students seemed to be getting focused and looked engaged in their work together.

The sports boys understood their task of finding meaningful ways to connect their individual topics for a collaborative research project. They sat active in their tasks just like the other groups were working. As time passed, I noticed that the sports boys began doing more laughing than discussing research project plans. I weaved my way across the room to see the progress, if any, from this group. They were athletes, tall, young white men with clean baseball hats and sincere effort. They seemed polite, but I assumed that they had not attended to their work so quickly.

Two of them had male sports figures for their topics, and the third boy had a racehorse. When I asked them how they were planning on connecting their topics into an overarching focus, one of the young men volunteered to answer for the group.

“They’re all goats,” he said through a grin, which could have been cocky or goofy, but I couldn’t really tell.

I was frustrated because I thought this comment was a brazen move to insult me or challenge me or just have fun at my expense. The tightness in my throat was offset by an uneasiness growing within my chest. In a hushed voice and serious tone, I shared a mildly elaborate response about my disappointment in their work and my concern that they were not taking the group task seriously. This was the day that I overlooked the fact that goat was the acronym for Greatest Of All Time, and each

young man's subject was considered to be such at one point in their lives. People don't like being accused especially if they're actually innocent. It is discouraging and dehumanizing sometimes; the potential helplessness of never being believed could be enraging. Sometimes it is just annoying and embarrassing. Sometimes feeling embarrassed for someone else is worse than one's own private shame. I realized that a transparent approach to this kind of situation could make for a drama-free teaching life and could minimize the kinds of conflict that would result in all sorts of issues with power dynamics.

Work in the classroom was engaging, and I enjoyed applying my PhD studies to the couple of courses I was responsible for teaching. I wanted meaningful interactions in the classroom, and I realized that actively practicing humility and approaching pedagogy ethically and reflectively could allow for what felt like honest and positive exchanges in the classroom. Sometimes, I had to admit that even though I could overlook even the Greatest Of All Time, I could thoughtfully listen and learn along with students. At least, I could try to. I mean, it should be all about growth: a body of knowledge, a set of skills, the act of understanding, the attention to emotions.

Coursing Through

In her Black Feminist Autoethnography about a year of living through chronic pain, Mynta Anthym explores Edwards, Fillingim, and Keefe's 2001 work on "the relationship between race, ethnicity, and pain" (#). She notes that their research shows how late in the twentieth century, the conscious effort to use the idea of equality as something already attained, resulted in a medical field that minimized attention to nonwhite populations. Using equality as a way to deny equality is a hegemonic tactic

used in the 1960s to focus medical research on white folks over other by simply saying, “we’re all equal human beings,” while attending to white bodies as representatives of humanity. This tactic is still used today (the 2020s) in the All Lives Matter issue, which has people crying out for equality against the focus on Black bodies in the Black Lives Matter movement, which is about Black folks not getting killed by police in situations that rarely ever find white folks in fatal incidents. All in all, in the dominant American culture, the Black body is less valued, less worth paying attention to, less worth knowing about in any situation: in classrooms, in the presence of police, in the world of medicine.

INTERCHAPTER NOTE

Utility and Praxis

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It is necessary to discuss, explain, and model what qualifies as appropriate language for a particular writing project. This will help students respect approaches that are different than theirs and can deflate the idea of a dominant culture's language being superior to other kinds of language. Writing instructors who build their teaching practices to include a variety of peer review strategies and who avoid a strict, standardized approach usually see positive results and positive student feedback about peer review workshops. Flexibility and support on the part of the instructor is often reflected in students' attitudes about the value of peer review in the college writing classroom.

One example of a beneficial peer review protocol, the literature told me, contains a set of procedures that instructors can prepare classes to follow, so the reviewer and writer both feel that this peer review work is valid and meaningful. Discussing and modeling useful feedback should also be an important part of preparing students to engage in peer review workshops.

After the careful review of literature from within the field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies as well as from related areas such as education, English language learning, psychology, linguistics, and social work, five traits emerged that could benefit the peer review process for students. As observed by behavioral scientists Ghazal et al., methodological approaches to assessing the quality of teacher feedback

of student writing are minimal. Therefore, it is not surprising that approaches to assessing students' peer feedback are also lacking. In addition to considering the nature of peer feedback, scholars have also focused on traits that are seen as effective or at least efficacious in peer review. Studies from Patchanet al., Patchan and Schunn, and Novakovich demonstrate that students need to understand both the purpose of their feedback and the ways that they can clearly and effectively express themselves in doing so. A study by scholars in higher education, Van den Berg et al. focuses on peer feedback when little to no structure is provided to students ahead of time. Their results demonstrate the need for students to be provided with structure and clear expectations that would result in the desired function of the feedback. Similarly, foreign language and linguistic expert, Rahimi recommends that students are provided with prompts that offer purpose to their review of peer writing and examples that model expectations because "when it comes to more complex and sophisticated tasks...students need to be trained to acquire the necessary skills" (13).

Training Wheels Keep the Body Safe

What follows is a description of my approach to peer review in my first-year composition classroom. This approach came from years of scouring relevant literature, applying techniques from practitioners and theory from scholars. I have isolated some favored traits and have tried to create—for myself and my students—a more streamlined and systematic approach to peer review. I will share the results in this chapter with a clear understanding that the procedure(s) that I created could be defined as the epitome of a disembodied method. However, I have to stress that it can be seen as disembodied *sometimes*. Sometimes. Other times, with adapting, adjusting, and

readjusting, it can work like magic and can offer classrooms of learning writers an opportunity to strengthen their writing and consider a variety of ideas about revising their own writing. This is what makes this work and any approach messy and tricky. The ability to keep an open mind and a willingness to be flexible is necessary, but difficult.

For instructors, it can be hard to change direction on the spot, broaden an approach or activity, and try to personalize the peer review workshop to meet the needs of all students. An embodied approach might assume that all students are prepared, able, and motivated to make the most of the most flexible, writer-guided peer review procedure. Sometimes, students need to have procedures modeled in order to know what they want to gain from a particular peer review workshop. Furthermore, some might need to practice the procedures and be guided through the process. It like using training wheels: figure out how to balance one's body just right for the task at hand. The practice provides the potential for growth. Only after that is it possible to gather momentum. Pump the pedals to just speed along. Push those brakes when needed. Pop wheelies. Skid out in the coolest ways. Therefore, the following ideas were my starting point. This is my foundation built of principles that I must constantly revise and bend and dismantle and redo.

So, before I realized that much of what I was doing in peer review workshops could be defined as disembodied, I did a lot of research on peer review practices, and I really got into it. I learned that in order to help students behave like writers, peer review as a procedure should be presented in a manner that makes the process meaningful and allows skills and writing habits transferable to other writing tasks. To

be successful peer reviewers, who always had revision on their minds, I wanted students to do the following:

- to be most effective in achieving purpose for writing
- to consider word choice and engaging with language in purposefully
- to make appropriate choices and moves as a writer.

I spent time developing a list that I called Five Favored Traits of Peer Review Feedback to prepare students for meaningful peer review workshops. These approaches had been discussed by a variety of scholars from across disciplines. These traits include feedback that seems focused on issues that have been addressed by the instructor, feedback that offers praise as well as suggestions. There seems to be an interest in the rhetorical purpose of feedback and finding ways to help students provide feedback that meets those needs. Like those from within Rhetoric and Writing Studies, helping students to make the appropriate rhetorical moves to fulfill the intended purpose of a peer review session is also a concern of those outside of the field. It is important discuss the nature of comments that reflect the kinds of review language deemed most efficacious in feedback, which in sum are evaluative—critical comments that offer a judgment, instructive—directive comments that provide suggestions. An additional category seems to be needed to describe comments that are both evaluative and instructive—constructive.

From across disciplines, I have identified and organized these five traits based on the premise that an instructor prompt has been carefully crafted to support student feedback. The traits consist of the following:

1. feedback that focuses on higher order concerns (HOC), such as organization and evidence, over lower order concerns (LOC), such as format or punctuation;
2. feedback that is guided by a prompt, either repeating terms from the prompt or attending to ideas in the prompt;
3. feedback that contains specific rhetorical moves that are evaluative, instructive, or constructive (i.e., both evaluative and instructive); for example, an evaluative feedback statement provides a judgment about the writing, such as “Your thesis statement is appropriate for this argumentative topic.” An instructive feedback statement offers a revision suggestion to the writer, such as “Your thesis statement should be more focused.” A constructive feedback statement is both evaluative and instructive, such as “The thesis statement for your argumentative essay would be more effective if it was focused and debatable.”
4. feedback that is positive in nature; that is to say, feedback that lacks a tone that could be seen as judgmental and overtly discouraging;
5. feedback in which word count matters; in other words, responses to prompts that contain more than brief phrases or one-word comments.

The literature about efficacious peer review practices also points to the necessity of focusing on higher order concerns over lower order concerns. Reviewers get the most out of this practice by considering issues with organization, unity, and clarity that they can apply to their own approaches to writing. Focusing on concerns

like grammar and punctuation reduces the practice of peer review to a punitive exercise in editing for mistakes.

A guided approach to peer review is necessary and can be helped with a prompt for or a worksheet on which writers can share their concerns as a means to guide their readers. Instead of marking up a peer's work, which is very intrusive and awkward, a separate sheet can provide enough space for comments that do not have to be squeezed into margins or between lines of text. Depending on the skill level of students, instructor-written questions/concerns can also be included to guide reviewers and serve as models of questions and concerns one might have. The heuristic, rubric, or worksheet offers peer reviewers a guide that focuses their attention on relevant points. This becomes a model for students. In addition, these guides should contain an area wherein writers can express their concerns and expect that their peer reviewers will address their concerns as writers.

The most important piece of this puzzle comes with an acceptance of discussions and debriefing from students. There are many benefits to giving students the opportunity to share their own experiences and attitudes about what they are going through while engaging in the writing process. By creating a classroom culture that truly respects and prioritizes students' takes on such topics as their ideas about the peer review process, their individual writing processes, how they experienced drafting their work, the positive elements that they noticed in other people's work and how they can try to create a similar effect in their own writing, and how they intend to revise their work, instructors can help students see the value in their own perspectives and see the worth in others' perspectives. Normalizing the idea that listening to peers'

ideas about peer review, for instance, can help students understand more about themselves and about others, while practicing methods of listening to others.

Hopefully these kinds of strategies can foster a classroom climate that respects each individual and allows for the growth of a more embodied approach to working collaboratively and individually as writers.

CHAPTER SIX

In Medias Res: The Patriot

“Of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful,” said John Dewey in 1925, and I was okay with it.

That’s me. I’m the patriot. I am patriotic about being an American, although this country hasn’t always done its best by me. All the American things that an American is supposed to do, I did. I went to school; didn’t have babies early; found a good partner (a good man); bought property; read books; avoid crime; pay taxes; had babies (had two at once because sometimes I know my limits and being pregnant didn’t suit me); shared, expelled, and gently nudged words and made sure my voice was heard. I went to Brown; it is an Ivy League school that I worked hard to get into. I did some time on the Boston/Providence spoken word circuit in the early to mid-1990s. I wrote a lot about race and how it affected me. But sometimes I didn’t. Sometimes my words sounded like a meditation on how soft a mother’s palm could be right in the middle of a desperate storm that needed settling. Or it might have sounded like an admonition to the cruel lover who gave you feelings that you didn’t expect and didn’t really want—and especially in the humidity of a deep ocean summer, for instance. Or it might have been or could still be about the way a song in the jukebox at some dive bar from my twenties enveloped all of us—made us more alive or connected or something.

So, I love being American. Being *we the people*. I can recite the Preamble to the Constitution from memory on command.

--does it--

But it is hard to think that America loves me back. It always gives love after the fact—once it's too late. Like Dr. King. Today, there are few Americans who have harsh words about Dr. King. Little do people remember how he was a troublemaker. And a troublemaker so controversial, so dangerous-thinking that he was murdered. Gunned down. Assassinated. Many of us expected Obama to experience so many attempts on his life. But even he was safer, and you know how people are. Sometimes some Americans can't be trusted. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was something. He was way more Antifa than Antifa. He was way more Black Live Matter than even Black Lives Matter could imagine. He was louder than the genuine Kimberly Jones. People sometimes forget, I notice. America makes us work for its love and gets off on this, I expect.

[JD asked about my choice of the word *loud*. Chuck D and Public Enemy gave us “Louder than a Bomb.” Notice in the song that the refrain “cause I’m louder than a bomb” is whispered. No matter the volume, it’s still loud. The ideas evolve long after people and a movement. There are always more people and continual motion. Today, Dr. King has been silenced, right? It’s Flanderization. The idea that the multitudes comfortably flocked to him and his perfect message of racial equality and nonviolence. Then, to the white people scared of change, he was red hot danger. Deserving to take a bullet for just trying to find ways for all Americans to live without the constant danger of violent terrorism; to live without the humiliation of being discounted and limited; to live without the demand of having to contribute equally without a guarantee of receiving the benefits of your hard work equitably. That’s what he wanted. That’s why

so many Americans resisted him. That is why he was killed. Remember that. JD reminded me of that. Loudly. We both heard it. He knows why I chose the word *loud*; he just didn't know why he knew why. Or might not have been too concerned at the time. How was he supposed to know?

I didn't want to bore him by forcing him to watch a video, but my therapist called to confirm our next appointment. I just let the Jones video play. Then when I hung up, I went back to the Zoom and was ready to stop the video, but JD was clear.

"Let it play," he said stoically. So, I did.

I know what is loud and everything that come from it. Well, no matter, children. It seems like we can't trust it.]

So, I listen to Aretha Franklin because there is a National Geographic series about geniuses in the world currently airing. The first season was about Albert Einstein. The second season was about Pablo Picasso. And this third season is about Aretha Franklin. Her song "I Never Loved a Man the Way that I Love You" reminds me not of any intimate relationship that I have ever had with another person, but instead reflects the relationship that I have with my first love from 1976 when I was six years old, and the summer was bicentennial. Everyone around me was happy and patriotic. They waved flags and smoked cigarettes and peeled open cans of beer. And red, white, and blue. I liked how freedom was supposed to feel. I wish America were like my husband. My husband is everything America is supposed to be: dependable, supportive, solid. Like my father. This idea about what America should be is in my veins because when I hear it, I think of my relationship with America. "God shed his grace on thee," said Prince. But America was unfaithful. I wasn't. I've always been

here for you, America. Live up to your charge: be a “more perfect union.” I try to hold myself to the same standard. I try to become better all the time. At least I think I try. For me, it results in learning things about myself and the world and saying sorry sometimes. Or accepting an apology that you don’t want to accept and wrestling with your insides to be sure you mean it when you accept it.

I'm so deep into this country, from way back in 1619 all the way up until tomorrow infinity and then like a few weeks after that. I ain't never used the word *ain't* in any kind of communique. Except now. Me and America are like a Ralph Bashir film. Me and America going to be together forever. Me and America are like something written by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Me and America are all about the kind of love that can only be found among the likes of Lynyrd Skynyrd songs about knowing a just little about love and not being very worried about it because “baby, I can guess the rest.” I know this. America’s done me wrong so many times, and here I stay.

Then Aretha sang to a hurtful man the way I say to America (my love):

“You're a no good heartbreaker/You're a liar and you're a cheat/
And I don't know why/I let you do these things to me/
My friends keep telling me/That you ain't no good/
But oh, they don't know/That I would leave you if I could...”

And in that song, I saw myself: me reaching for the perfect balance of notes and fire in some torch song to this enclave, to this location, to this civil unrest. If America was my man, he’d been treating me so badly, but I’m stuck on him and will always try to hold him down. It's a toxic relationship where I’m always left heartbroken (shouldn’t America want me?), but I’m still ready to work hard to keep him.

[Shouldn’t I show and not tell? But more importantly, why would anyone care?]

All I have are words, so I really try not to fail. I want to make magic with them or create order from them or conjure knowledge through them. Here, like this: I tried to shake off the rain, but it soaked deeper into my skin. America had a dull bronze and grey countenance this afternoon, staring back at me through the pane or just sitting there jaunty among the trees and full browns, leaden greens and the orange pine needles. I couldn't get dry while watching the weather through the window. America means all God's children have wings. America holds freedom and truth and justice and the other things that manifest themselves into goodness. The breezes that provide lift and beyond. And I notice the trees and the newscasts and the social contract. And sunshine. Even the piercing comfort of the perfect note. Sounds that slide and envelop. My country, my America, hurts me. I will always love you, though. I am a patriot. I am your patriot, America. I'm the patriot. I am the real deal. The real real.

3/27-31/2021

Infatuation: America, the Beautiful and the Hendrix Parts

In 1975, I was five. In 1974, I was four. In 1983, thirteen, I should turn to be. That is a long ways away.

Infatuation is quick flutters and lovely. It's a deep gaze and deep breaths. Like the way summer is all stars and a deep sky that holds you in. Like my mother's arms. They were the tightest. Daddy's were the safest. I am four, and everything is imagination and protection. And I am too young to remember. No one is more helpless than a little brown girl who doesn't know what being brown means. Grass does nurture tiny feet under a smiling sun, though. Now, watch night roll in easy after the summer day. Slide back into this smooth embrace under a warm moon, little one.

There is laughing. There is a transistor radio. There is a pile of our shoes, socks, sandals on the cement steps. Lean back onto the crocheted blanket, little one; smoke swirls from the mouths, the fingertips of these people. They have wine. I am not scared of this dark. I am holding my mother's hand. And Daddy's stories are thick silver and sticky like the branches and the bark and leaves in loose air and other voices mingling with the humidity. Clouds settle along the tops of the trees. I am four, and my eyes want to sleep, but the sky: oh my God, it's full of stars.

We lived on Robins Drive. I remember that or maybe it's just remembering what I saw in those home movies my dad played for us with flimsy film reels and a loud metal projector. Watch: diapered me down a slide. Being a toddler in the grass. Making a silly face. Falling into my mother's arms. There was no sound. Imagine me crying every time we watched them when I got older because I was homesick for that past etched out before us on the silent wall in moving pictures. I probably did that.

Look at us: the daddy—a skinny white boy, like nineteen or twenty. Worn denim. Tacklebox nearby. He has shiny Black hair, like real Black. Not like my hair. I'm Black, but my hair is brown, but his is really Black, shiny Black. I looked like no one. My mom was pink and sweet; she was sunshine—I loved being her shadow. Long wisps of her hair fall in straight light brown, auburn specks, golden love. Tickles my baby skin. These little girl arms. I don't remember being that small. But maybe I do remember feeling like that.

That was the best love, I insist. The deepest love. I didn't even remember being that loved. A little brown girl and those two. Just the three of us and the breeze and the leaves. I remember everything was so verdant and skillful. Sometimes we

whispered. Sleepy green is moss and alive. It's like coming in from the storm. And thanking the rain for the dampness creeping on the back of the neck. It reminds us of everything all at once.

When I was five years old, my mom got real big and slower and softer. She was twenty-one and had a new baby growing inside of her. My dad, Alan, sat me down for a serious talk; he stood nodding and sizing me up to be sure that I was enough. He was about to teach me something. My dad is a code guy. Meaning he has pride and an earnest handshake. Meaning that he would keep his word even if the world didn't honor his honor. And often times, it didn't. So, what had happened was he fell in love with my mother who was already pregnant with me. And she tried to explain that the father was some Black cat from down South somewhere, not ready to stick by this pregnant white girl (I mean, he *was* young). So now Alan was going to father that baby. He meant what he said and figured America could live with it if he could. He gave his word about raising this baby because a man had purpose and principles. So, he would. And he could. And he did. And his side of the family would live with it because they've lived with much worse, and they never seemed to question any damn thing thrown their goddamned way—they just kept moving forward. Besides, how could anyone not love a baby? My dad was taught to believe that if you stay on the path and put in an honest day's work, then an honest living was coming your way. White people like him were supposed to have a good life. Just put in the hard work, right? He did. For him, being a good worker, a good neighbor, a good father, and a good sport should get you a good life. Sometime that was true, but mostly, it wasn't.

My dad saw Jimi Hendrix shoot up once. I never cared about that story. I liked the music more. The way that leaving home was inevitable and allowed for everything to be swallowed up or built out or the way a person goes back home all successful, strong, meaningful. Beyond Horatio Alger.

Everyone sad and ashamed for pushing and starting the hurt to begin with. Why, that person showed everybody up after all the bad things they had said, after all the ways they treated a person wrong. Come back, show what a person has become. Then go on to leave. Maybe a person hears their train and works their way out again. Those Hendrix songs were the stories I liked the best. My dad can still tell everything real good. I mean, skillfully wraps a tale tight. I defer to those words.

Sometimes, some of us never work our way out fully. Alan still tries. And back then he tried, too. Back then was now, and he and my mother were having their own baby, and we were getting extremely excited for all this to happen.

“I don’t even know what jealous means, Daddy.” I think he believed me. I mean, my baby sister was coming. Their baby. I needed him to believe me. Or maybe this was the first expectation that he had ever placed on me. But who’s to say, really? Memories are not always trustworthy. I was five.

The past stands on a thick foundation. A purple school bus my dad bought. Alan and Mickey had a purple school bus and a little mulatto girl and a new baby. They were also happy. Look at them. Watch words bring the power of action. Words make truth. Be careful when crafting them: people can really get hurt. There are already too many names and too many more to add and keep adding. Words divine language into movement. Move away from me, please, unless you promise no harm. I

live under that thick gaze, too, so don't feel bad if you yearn for it; I do. I lean into it; try to master it; accept it. This makes me a masochist, right? I'm exhausted from peeling back my skin and exposing everything inside. My muscles and veins are slick and open. Spread me apart wide. Probe with your fingers. I don't mind. I can always look away.

America, mein herr, America: that's the best direct address I could muster. I'm still weak for you, and I want to be epistolary. But I'm too weary to relive this symptom, rehash this trauma, reshuffle this situation. Stop asking me to. I can't keep doing it: I don't like it anymore. My fingers are cramped, and the dulllest lead skates across the surface. My lessons are always scratched out in messy handwriting. It's mine. I never had time to worry about anything other than what the words were saying. No time for concerns of penmanship or lofty cursive. I just couldn't. There was never enough time. You know the power that language has, right? It humbles me. In its presence, I fall down low; I tremble. Oh my God, it's full of words.

3/31-4/9/2021

Heartbreak: Very American

The more stories, the more truth, and realizing that it's all trauma sometimes. This is very American. I don't know if I am ever going to feel good again. I can't imagine out from under this blanket, but it happens with scar tissue hidden neatly under street clothes. Being functional. Wanting to scream. However, people were there, and we need to represent well. I always tip around 30 percent to avenge my race in restaurants. 25 percent at the bar. There is the swelling madness or it could be suffering or it could be all those tiny nicks. They stay irritated some days. There are no

easy backdoors to slip out of. Got to stand in a way that makes everyone around us comfortable when there is little thought given to our grating joints and buckling vertebrae. Just be cool, right? Cool like back when we could fix our shop-bought coffee right there in public: lightening it; sweetening it within inches of a stranger's hand. I don't even miss that; now, the thought of it makes the disgust tighten in my stomach. I get skittish when the books are lined up too tightly on the shelves or when there are no shelves at all. Too many words, all so heavy. Like a bunch of Cassandras, we know what's up, but they are all Tenebrae and Levertov: they are not listening. But we have these eyes that go on forever. I just want sleep to ease into me. It's like seeing too much. It is seeing too much. It is too much. But always it is. Ignorance must be motherfucking bliss. I can't really say that I blame them.

4/10/2021

Know: Did You? Can You? Will You?

I behaved horribly once. And then many times after that. Usually, I'm called on it. Some of us don't get the benefit of the doubt even when we behave. Some other people just get to move forward and bloom. Aren't we *so* proud of them? Their buds are vivid and well-nourished, and we are supposed to see our faces reflected there even if we're not. I'm afraid to be even a little satisfied, but that's just me. Intentions should be acknowledged like garden petals are once spring is full-on and winter has promised itself away. Press through the blue air sky. Glass jar posies languish on the porch and the worn paint: watch for splinters. They hurt the smallest feet. Some people don't have to watch out. They feet always smooth on gentle ground. They're so

lucky and don't even know it. I mean, I think they don't know it. What do I know? It's probably easier to just go out in the world and get right back home.

[Keep the shoulders back. Quit whining.]

“Don't ever call a child a liar,” my dad told me once. *But what if they lie?*

“Not about extra cookies or unfinished chores; not trite or childish things,” he told me with his serious palms on these small solemn shoulders. “It's so important, kiddo.”

Okay. Got it. But that was him. Think: how about you?

[Insert your story here.]

I would be lying if I said a lot of things that would comfort you. So, instead, think about looking over here for a while. Try hard and deep. Were you ever like me: woke up fingering the phone or rolled over feeling for the pulse of the remote—just to drown in the ubiquitous: network news, pop history, culture lessons, messy Internet, sour trends, those things that people had done to me and maybe to you (or at least to each other)? I go daily and willing into that abyss. This is how I was designed.

Did you know that bullies don't necessary hurt people because they feel bad about themselves? Sometimes bullies give pain because they feel like they're entitled to.

[Harken scenes at a lunchbox bus stop where there is nothing that can be done but acquiesce with tiny fruitless fists or live like this within a linoleum hallway's wooden doors with its water fountains or a room with a big-faced clock with hands that cannot protest or an infuriating street of sneakers and school shoes trying to make it home safe or the relentless smirk and tip of the tongue from a teasing stoop where angry tears are the only weapons and everything hurts.] I read in a peer-reviewed

journal once that although some bullies have low self-esteem, that is not always the case. Some bullies feel so good about themselves that they do unto others with reckless satisfaction. Whether encouraged to or not, many believe they have the right to hurt others. So, they do. When I read what those researchers found, I wasn't incredibly surprised. All those elementary schoolyard teachers were so wrong. They just wanted us to run off and leave them alone. Sipping from ceramic mugs, they admired the students worth admiring, while the Blacktop terrorizes.

Pain remains in those you've hurt. Did you know that the brain reacts to physical and emotional pain the same way? I read in a peer-reviewed medical journal from a college library database that researchers took science pictures and saw people's brains light up, and the sparks looked the same no matter the kind of pain: sticks or words or stones.

[Imagine that.]

Not to guilt you, but you should be a little guilty. You shoved on the playground. And the scraped flesh wasn't yours. You didn't feel the iodine burn on the knees when gritty soot from the bloody ground was wiped away and plastered with antiseptic gauze. I'm always running from guilt even when I don't realize it. I'm so dumb. You should get running, too; find a way to be more human. You probably could be successful if you don't backslide.

Go on, now. Pay homage to the voices that have always been but have never been acknowledged. Listen, the words don't lie.

[Stay quiet. It means you're safe right now.]

I want to help you, but I don't think I'm supposed to like it. I'm always making an effort to display how clean I keep these cramped nimble digits. You, work harder. Wash your hands often. You know they dirty.

4/15-4/19/2021

INTERCHAPTER NOTE

The Center Can Hold the Heart

Vulnerable is a word that makes me angry at times or ashamed or helpless. So, I'm not going to use that word. I will feel around for a different word. Maybe I'd pick scared. I will use it. I am not scared of ghosts or spiders. I am not scared of my home going into foreclosure. I'm not scared of criminals breaching the doors of our home. I have already been fifty years old. I just want so much sometimes. Other times, I can't catalog it all and just want some peace.

I'm tired of persistent demands for my attention to concerns that I wish I could just shake off. And twenty-five years ago, I locked my hair and settled on an oil-based shampoo because fuck a curling iron. It's so much extra work. It will burn the skin on your ear if you're not careful. Maybe even both ears. I'm too tired for that. Honestly, I can't help how this feels.

Organization

We keep chickens at my house because that's where they live and walk around and lay eggs. Within the fenced acre, they have limits to how much mischief they will accept from the two sociopathic kittens, playfully consumed with learning to pounce. Clearly annoyed, a hen bobs her head and forcefully pecks a dramatic beak, reminding those kittens of boundaries. Those two turn their attention from the grazing chickens to the family dogs barreling out of the back door into the yard. Three mutts, personable dispositions, rescue dogs, all engaged in a variety of concerns: one peeing in the grass and keeping a casual eye on a low-flying sparrow; one investigating the

fence line using her energetic paws and smells with sincere determination and acute attention; and the big one—the most patient one—digging to uncover a warm plot of deep brown earth among one of the large patches of leafy foliage, perfect for circling around and around and around and around and around and around on before finding the best position to ease into safe dark soil with sincere deliberation and tranquil purpose.

But not me. I look to the far corner of the daytime sky because I know night dances against the golden dark, which is sharp, and I am scared about how close it is and how it's never really out of my periphery.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Listen to the Canon: The Sounds Intersect Then Colonize My Body

"What a curious power words have."

—Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, 1946

This conclusion provides some pragmatic strategies and information that writing instructors could employ in their own practices. An explanation of suggested strategies for peer review workshops aggregated from the research can provide a jumping off point for instructors who want to clarify for themselves and their students the overall objectives of peer review. Then, each instructor needs to create her own path away from disembodied practices. A clear understanding of a concept like the five favored traits of peer review feedback can offer a framework that instructors can use as they introduce the process of peer review to their classes. In addition, examples of prompts for peer review workshops for specific items such as thesis statements, body paragraphs, specific genre concerns, introductions, and conclusions could benefit readers interested in some specific tools to strengthen their own peer review practices.

Once students understand the purpose of review, how it benefits them, and how it contributes to their revision practices, an instructor can guide students through the process with an eye toward a more embodied approach. It might feel precarious at first, and honestly, it might feel precarious forever. An embodied approach demands flexibility, a pocketful of strategies, respect, and trust. Students need to trust instructors. Instructors need to trust themselves. All participants need to be flexible and accept that talking through processes and trying new methods are necessary parts

of the process. Respect for participants' voices and experiences matter when pursuing this work.

My optimistic nature leads me to feel that this work can and should contribute to the whole of peer review practices. In my stories, I have shared experiences when I was engaged in critiquing, disrupting, and reconstructing my peer review practices for the benefit of my students. I have learned that promoting a more embodied approach to peer review demands a consistent, research-based approach that assumes continual adaptation to each group of students. This consistent approach involves explaining the expectations for, reasoning behind, and guidelines of peer review to students before engaging in the work. This can help them remove any negative ideas or anticipation about ineffective peer review they might have experienced in the past. In addition, a formative approach works best with reviews embedded into the composition schedule. For example, in a thesis-driven work, students can present their working thesis statements early in the writing process. Concerns specific to classes, like worries about how to construct a conclusion, can result in having students bring in their conclusions for reviews. Peer review workshops should address issues throughout the writing process to help students feel empowered and engaged in their writing. A final summative use of peer review could come at the end, but if organized and planned throughout the time given for a writing assignment, formative, focused peer review workshops are more helpful than a final review. The problem with the one-time summative review is that it can work like an afterthought.

How can a writer, who has already engaged in the recursive process of writing, benefit from peer feedback on a nearly completed piece of writing? Must the writer go

back to the beginning and address issues that could have been addressed earlier? After all the time allotted for writing, summative peer review usually comes close to a deadline for the assignment, which forces the writer to rush through the work of attending to peer feedback. If a writer's argument is based on faulty logic, wouldn't it have been better to look at the argument before having the writer engage in poor writing practice for the entire writing project? If there are issues with organization or structure of a piece of writing, wouldn't it benefit the writer if the issues were brought to light earlier? Strong writing habits can only come from instruction that offers meaningful opportunities for writers to engage in the practice of exercising their own writing process. Otherwise, peer review, with all its potential, could seem like a cruel exercise or meaningless busywork. Like any activity presented to help students learn, peer review as a collaborative practice diminishes in value when disembodied approaches are used by instructors in the classroom. Discussing and modeling useful feedback should also be an important part of preparing students to engage in peer review workshops.

Growth

Peer review workshops are most beneficial when students are engaging in the writing process. I told this to one of my colleagues, who I was friendly with. In fact, I served as her mentor in a program for our department. She was upset about her developmental community college composition course and the results of their first writing projects. She knew her charge was to help students be prepared for the credit-bearing requisite first year college writing class. She assigned a thesis-based writing assignment, provided a due date, and worked on additional course topics, while

students were left to their own devices composing their writing assignments. In the meantime, she provided lessons meant to help students along the way. She gave a lecture on the thesis statement, one on outlining a writing project another on how to integrate quotations according to the MLA system, and another that stressed the importance of proofreading and revising. To her dismay and annoyance, when she received their completed projects, a few pages long and stapled together earnestly, she reviewed the assignments only to find that few students had suitable or coherent thesis statements. She was frustrated at the class and criticized their inability to craft a focused thesis to drive their projects. She said she was afraid it would happen with their next major writing projects.

I asked her to consider checking in with the class and having them share and comment on each other's thesis statements early in the project's writing process, so she could be sure that students were heading in the right direction and anyone needing help could seek it out. She was skeptical because she thought they should be able to develop their own thesis statements and be evaluated for their first attempt. I suggested that a collaborative activity, specifically a streamlined peer review workshop in which students offer up only one sentence, the thesis statement that this particular assignment required. She agreed to work with me to develop a short peer review workshop protocol and a one-page thesis peer review guide with a checklist and a few focused response questions for students to use to provide helpful, essential feedback on each other's thesis statements. We connected a few weeks later, and she seemed to be in better spirits about her class's writing projects.

Although she found attempting something new to be stressful, she did find that there were far fewer problematic thesis statements in this batch of student projects. There were still other issues that the class needed to work on, she explained, but she found that the thesis peer review session beneficial to her students and herself. The lessons she was providing during the weeks students were working on the projects outside of class had the potential to be helpful. She noted that once students actually participated in a recursive process of sharing and receiving feedback with each other, they seemed more engaged in writing projects and more aware of their emerging voices as writers.

Admission

Although I and many others can attest that not every peer review workshop runs smoothly and efficiently, the more practice, deliberate planning, and preparation for a more embodied approach to writing pedagogy can only strengthen an instructor's craft.

It might seem overwhelming to restructure one's writing course to emphasize peer review workshops for major writing projects. However, the outcome from this work can help students stay focused and engaged in writerly pursuits. With relevant and clear expectations, students can better gauge their progress and can better provide meaningful feedback about their peers' writing.

These kinds of measures can help students respect approaches to writing and peer evaluation that are different than theirs and can deflate the idea of a dominant culture's language being superior to other kinds of language. Writing instructors who build their teaching practices to include a variety of peer review strategies and who

avoid a strict, standardized approach usually see positive results and positive student feedback about peer review workshops. Flexibility and support on the part of the instructor is often reflected in students' attitudes about the value of peer review in the college writing classroom.

Conclusive Beginnings

From Black Feminist Autoethnography, strategies emerge that promote and encourage voices outside the dominant culture to be heard in manner that privileges the lived experience and the vital nature of identity. The same principles from the Black Feminist Autoethnographical tradition could be applied to writing pedagogy to support instructors helping students outside the dominant culture feel comfortable, competent, and valued using their own voices in their writing pursuits. Peer review activities approached in a more inclusive and efficacious manner can provide meaningful opportunities to help all students better understand the value of each other's writing and the ways in which identity contributes to their voices as writers. Guided activities should include modeling feedback moves and practicing ways to review a variety of voices from in and out of the dominant culture. What can this do for those outside? What can be done for those in the dominant culture? It is critically necessary to seek out or build alternatives to the disembodied peer review procedures that have limited the field's support of learning writers for so long.

What I Do

What I have found most helpful in any classroom is creating a culture of discussing writing. Early on, I explain to students that I want to know how they approach their writing assignments and that I want to talk about this as a class.

Walking around the room, I ask students about how they start any writing assignment. I tell them to be honest and often share with them an example of a time when my process was panicked procrastination. I often ask if people make outlines or use graphic organizers or (like me) make lists on paper. I ask the straight-to-the-keyboard people to be patient, while I ask the pen-to-paper people to describe their particular processes. Then I open the discussion to the word processors, who choose to type and right on the screen first. I have seen students anticipate me telling them that one technique is better or that I am going to demand that they follow the process that I set out for them. However, I explain that there is no process that works for everyone. And then I explain that in our composition class, part of the work is for them to find the process that works for them. We discuss places where some folks get stuck in their writing processes. A good example that I see time and time again is what I'll call the inability to begin. This is when a student opens up the laptop or pulls out a fresh piece of paper to begin an exciting introduction that does all the things that they've been taught an introduction should do. But because sometimes it is difficult to begin at the beginning, some students end up closing the laptop or crumpling up the paper and putting off the writing until it's the last minute and has become a dreaded, painful undertaking. I explain that there are other ways to begin writing.

One Process

I begin by explaining that we are going to work together to complete a rhetorical analysis of an advertisement. I explain the lengths requirements. We read and discuss the rhetorical situation and the many rhetorical tools available to them as they make choices as writers. Usually, students buy into this because good writers

don't mind discussing writing, and hesitant writers seem to enjoy a process of taking away the mystique of writing. I also explain that I am going to provide them with an assignment sheet for an analysis they will be needing to work on. I then tell them that they will be working as in groups to review the assignment sheet to be sure they know exactly what is expected of them. Typically, I ask them to consider the purpose of the assignment, what I am looking for as a product, and what step they would each take to begin. I tell them that they should all come up with at least three preliminary steps that they will take individually when they begin this writing project. This work is very helpful for practicing group work dynamics in class. Students tend to be engaged, and if someone cannot decide what they would do to begin, they tend to ask someone in their group. Sometimes, people volunteer suggestions to others. This framework is a helpful way for them to begin collaborating as writers.

Once it is time for the groups to share what they came up with, students are encouraged to change their steps if they hear something that sounds better from another student. I explain that these kinds of exchanges are most helpful because if they don't already have a writing process that works for them, they can figure out one with the help of the class.

Next, I explain that we are going to spend much time completing peer review exercises throughout the process of completing this first writing project. This is when the discussion of the recursive nature of writing comes in and how we revise and edit as we are writing. This writing project is thesis-driven, unlike every project, so when it is time for the class to begin composing their own projects outside of class, I ask them to first bring in a working thesis statement and some main points that they plan to use

to support this thesis in their body paragraphs. I pass out forms for the rounds of peer review that we complete for this first project. We begin with the thesis statement, then we review each body paragraph, usually one or two per session, depending on the skill level or motivation of the particular group. The final pieces we review are the introduction and conclusion. I ask them to compose out of order at first to be sure that their body of information is organized, complete, and clear. Some students dislike writing this way, but I do tell them they can compose in any order, but I just want us to tackle the ‘meatiest’ parts of their projects first. It is also important to note that although the peer review forms need to be filled out by reviewers, there are spaces for the writer to list any concern or areas they would like attention given, as well as an area for the student to create a revision plan for whatever was reviewed during the session. I ask students not to write on each other’s work, not to cross things out, and not to attend to issues with grammar (those LOCs). The most important piece, I do explain, is not for them to have to fix each other’s work, but instead to learn from each other’s work.

I find when peer review sessions are focused on one or two specific areas for students to review, they tend to be very engaged on those issues and do not feel overwhelmed or bored or overly critical. Usually, during our debriefing periods, I hear that students want to replicate the good things they saw in other’s writing. It is also helpful if students have the opportunity to articulate or be given the opportunity to practice articulating those good writing moves. When there are complaints or concerns with what I have listed on the form, which is usually one page per item or paragraph, I ask what might work better for them, and then I change it. It is important that this

process be dynamic and meet the needs and concerns of each class. The powerful part of our first attempts at peer review for the first writing project usually comes with the second writing project, which does not have as much peer review baked into the daily schedule. However, some students want to review all pieces of their work with each other, so I provide forms for them and they sometimes do it outside of class. Other times, students want to talk about writing and their writerly concerns with assignments from other classes. I want to provide a space where students can discuss what they need to write in other courses and offer each other feedback and ideas. This collaborative piece, where every voice is respected and heard allows students to embody their texts and feel confident and competent in what they create with words.

Affirmation (transcript from MSWord Dictation) 8:46

This work of mine, and my constantly evolving reconsiderations of what should happen in college composition courses, only reflect a preliminary step in a larger process. It is, for real, an earnest call--my earnest call--to prioritize this conversation. In fact, it's an invitation to consider (or reconsider) how instructors' inclusive approaches have the power to strengthen the effectiveness of writing pedagogy. Teaching peer review feedback moves in an intentionally embodied manner is a viable tactic to disrupt the marginalization of many student populations and make the most of collaborative learning in the college writing classroom.

FINAL NOTE

The Importance of Anatomy

I'm in the hospital in the summer of 2021 because of a gallbladder issue. The gallbladder needs to come out. This involves anesthesia and intravenous needles in my tiny veins. The nurse pumps me full of pain medication through the IV needle in my bruised left arm. Then she tells me that the phlebotomist is coming around to put an IV needle into my right arm for the surgery. I hate needles because I have very small veins that tend to take nurses a long time to find and plunge a tiny needle into. The phlebotomist arrives and looks concerned. She is a white woman with dirty blond hair and an earnest expression. After several unsuccessful attempts, she tells me that she is going to call for a different phlebotomist who might have more success. The new phlebotomist arrives looking rather tired and annoyed. She is a dark-skinned Black woman, who immediately places her basket of needles and tubes and alcohol wipes and bandages on the table next to my bed. She picks up my right arm and straightens it out; her finger smooth over the area where the arm bends, and before I realize she's done, she's done. I am surprised at her quick success in getting this IV into my other arm. I ask her how she did it so quickly. I mean, the other woman's several attempts were fruitless. She explains that the white woman saw that I was Black and felt that she couldn't see my veins through my skin. I look down at my very light skin and can clearly see the veins. I don't understand.

The phlebotomist explains that some of the white people doing this job get panicked when faced with dark skin. They cannot see the veins, so they do not know

how to manage their jobs when the skin is too dark for them. Therefore, many of them feel flustered about dark skin from so many unsuccessful experiences. She explains that to those women, skin tone does not matter. Even when it comes to working with light skin like mine, many of those white phlebotomists still seem to get overwhelmed. I guess to them all black skin is the same, even if it isn't.

“How do you find the veins on dark skin?” I ask, feeling too comfortable from the pain medication pushing through the tiny needle in my left arm.

She explains that she worked through touch. Instead of being dependent on sight for every patient, she uses her fingertips to feel where the veins are, how wide they are, and where the needle will slide in best. She will not turn away from people who are seen as problematic to the white folks she worked with. The black bodies, of all shades, are worth paying attention to, are worth probing, have value. Maybe, the white bodies should begin to see themselves in a new way: part of human progress in some situations; problematic and without consequences in other situations. I doubt it will happen, though. Some bodies remain troublesome for others. Some for good reason. Others for no good reason at all.

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