

Narratives of Joy and Failure in Antiracist Assessment

Exploring Collaborative Writing
Assessments



Edited by Asao B. Inoue
and Kristin DeMint Bailey

NARRATIVES OF JOY AND FAILURE IN ANTIRACIST ASSESSMENT

EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE
WRITING ASSESSMENTS

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NARRATIVES OF JOY AND FAILURE IN ANTIRACIST ASSESSMENT

EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE
WRITING ASSESSMENTS

Introduction

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The central themes that run through this collection focus on interrogations of two interconnected areas: (1) the agents who embody antiracist assessment in the classroom and the politics of judgement that form through their interactions; and (2) the stories of joy and failure that offer teachers lessons about the methods and outcomes of collaborative antiracist assessment work with students in classrooms. When teachers with antiracist goals invite students to help them create rubrics, evaluate each other's writing, and reflect upon standards and methods of writing assessment, they open up possibilities to reflect upon their own and their students' politics and subjectivities, as well as explore methods for collaborative assessments. To guide readers, we offer some initial questions: How might writing teachers and students account for their own intersectional embodied subjectivities in collaborative writing assessment practices? What roles do the politics of judgement play in assessment ecologies where students collaborate with the teacher? More broadly speaking, how might writing teachers and students with antiracist goals navigate the complexities and tensions that arise through collaborative writing assessment practices?

Initially, we (Kristin and Asao) intended for this book to be a student-facing collection of chapters and activities that would help students practice meaningful writing assessment that focused on social justice goals and outcomes. For us, this meant assessment that has tangible value in a course, that cultivates student agency, that challenges standard language ideology, and invites critique of and deliberation about all expectations used to judge writing in classrooms. Meaningful writing assessment, in our minds, is collaborative, and engages deeply with the racial and other politics of language, a range of different expectations, and the varying habits of language that always exist in any group of people. And this means that good writing assessment in classrooms also engages with the intersectional subjectivities in those ecologies.

We wanted a collection of voices that would offer writing students and teachers critical practices and insights into antiracist and other social justice language work that good collaborative assessment in classrooms affords. As proposals and chapter drafts came in, our understanding of what the collection could be evolved. And so we leaned into what we got. Regretfully, the collection moved away from students as its primary audience and toward teachers. It shifted from mostly practical to part practical and part reflective.

Early drafts of chapter submissions reinforced our belief that we teachers *must* be able to reflect on our embodied subject positionings in meaningful, nuanced ways if we are going to do antiracist assessment with students. That is, we embody our languaging,¹ as well as the judgements² we make through that languaging as teachers, in a number of ways that affect students' experiences in our courses. This is especially important when discussing our pedagogies. If we can't name our subjectivities in racialized, gendered, and other meaningful social and political ways, then how can we recognize the full extent of what our pedagogies do, or the ways our students can do that work with us? How can we be antiracist if we cannot name the ways our embodied languaging is socially implicated in our expectations and acts of judgement?

Five of our fourteen contributors are teachers of color. Ten are women, and four of those contributors are women of color. These numbers are likely a function of the Whiteness of the discipline of writing studies and writing assessment rhetoric, as well as of who teaches writing courses in U.S. colleges and universities today. Or perhaps these numbers suggest who in our discipline is interested, willing, or feel they can speak to (safely) the topics of this collection. But such demographics of our contributors illustrate other patterns that may be more pervasive in writing classrooms and the discipline of rhetoric and composition, patterns we want to make more salient to readers.

As our contributors revised their chapters, we realized how difficult it is for many White teachers to engage with their own racialized subjectivities in relation to their teaching and assessment practices beyond referencing those subjectivities. Most of the teacher-scholars in this collection had a hard time implicating their Whiteness in their assessment work, or found it difficult to make sense of the racialized power relations that determine assessment practices and their outcomes. This difficulty, combined with the vital insights contributors had about their classes as they dug deeper into this reflective work, led us to change our intended audience and purpose for the collection. This collection is intended for writing teachers who are looking to understand the relationship between their

1. We use the term "languaging" in the same ways that Inoue has in other places (Inoue, 2021). The statement, "Toward Antiracist First-Year Composition Goals" offers a good definition of the term: "'Languaging' refers to the understanding of language as an embodied set of linguistic, performative, and material habits and behaviors that often are called 'writing,' 'speaking,' or 'communicating.' The statement uses this term, 'language,' because it is broader and linked to a wide array of embodied practices that are also connected to the ways humans enact and know ourselves. Languaging also increasingly includes digital technologies" (Beavers et al., 2021, p. 2).

2. In this Introduction, we use the spelling "judgement," with the "e" left in the term, for the reasons Asao has detailed in another place (Inoue, 2021). In short, this spelling that preserves the "e" in the noun, judgement, calls attention to the judge (person) who judges (action) in judgement. Judgements are never abstract, nor completely separate from judges who make them. Judgements are always a function of embodied actions by people.

own racialized subjectivities and their antiracist assessment work with students, who themselves embody intersectional subjectivities.

We saw great need for developing this kind of reflective analysis in the multiple drafts of chapters we received. We also saw value in offering examples of language teachers reflecting on collaborative classroom assessments while foregrounding their embodied subject positionings. At the same time, we realized that our field (writing studies and writing assessment) lacks robust analytical, reflective tools for teachers to do that work in collaborative assessment ecologies. Moreover, few antiracist approaches to writing assessment go beyond collaborative rubric creation. Rubrics, while important, are just one part of a much larger assessment ecology.

As we were asking contributors to develop their chapters with an attention to their own subjectivities, Whitney Lew James, one of our original contributors who had to withdraw from the collection, raised vital questions about requiring teachers of color to address their positionality for a field of mostly White readers. On February 21, 2021, she wrote in an email to us:

As a person of color, I wonder when discussing my positionality becomes performing for White audiences? Indeed, while White people often need to be reminded of their positionality, people of color do not. . . . In the many, many workshops of positionality and teaching that I've attended, people of color and other marginalized individuals are often asked to relive some of the most traumatizing experiences of their lives or to recount the daily and weekly reminders of their precarity to a room full of White people . . . so that White people can learn about oppression. What advice would you give specifically to writers of color contributing to this collection? How do you want us to address our positionality without performing it for White audiences? . . . My thoughts on your call for more directly addressing positionality in my chapter are tied up with many other requests—or demands—to interrogate my positionality, often framed with White people as the primary audience for and benefactors of such interrogations.

James raises important questions about the harmful performative nature of discussing one's positionality, particularly for BIPOC writers and teachers. We wrestled with this paradox. On the one hand, it's unfair to ask teachers of color to disclose something that may subject them to yet more risk or trauma. On the other hand, it may very well be vital to the larger cause of antiracist teaching, assessing, and academic work, vital to mentoring and guiding those who come after us. That is, the very reflective act of understanding one's positionality in front of others can be both savagely harmful and deeply helpful in our work with students, depending on who you are, where you come from, and what your relation to educational institutions and the people in them have been.

And yet, the nature of the performance is also important to this dynamic of harm and help. We certainly do not advocate for BIPOC teachers to rehearse trauma they cannot hold or reveal, at least at this moment, through such subjectivity performances in collections like this. We also know that social justice work is not fair. It is not evenly distributed. It has uneven effects on various people who are racially embodied in a range of ways. It is not even in the lifts each of us must take on, and it's often uncomfortable work. There is no easy answer to this paradox, except perhaps that we must all be as brave as we can and as compassionate as possible with ourselves and each other. We must listen on others' terms, like James'. The truth is, we aren't sure how to do this work without being honest and open about our positionality in the classroom. We don't know a way out except through, as painful and unfair and uneven as that is for BIPOC teachers next to our White colleagues. It's the compassionate thing to do, which means we cannot expect everyone else to follow suit, even as we are confident that it is the best response.

Despite the inevitability that there's some measure of risk for contributors just in engaging in this work, we hoped that being published as part of a *collection* of voices might help to mitigate any risks for contributors in precarious positions. We also tried to mitigate those risks with our own voices as editors of this collection. We tried to do in our chapters what we asked of our contributors. Further, although the reality is that most readers will probably be White, we tried to push back against that assumption, encouraging contributors of color to center BIPOC academic readers in their chapters. While this collection by no means transcends the very real inequities that James identifies, we hope that it provides solidarity for the many teacher-scholars in precarious positions working bravely to transform themselves and their working contexts. We offer this collection as one way to help fellow teachers reflect on how our own and our students' embodied subject positions impact the always-embodied antiracist work we *can* do through our assessment ecologies.

Why Writing Teachers Need to Examine Their Racialized and Embodied Subject Positions

The difficulties of reflecting on our embodied subjectivities that we found when working with our contributors appears to be a product of the field of writing studies and writing teachers more generally. This problem creates a purpose or need for this collection beyond, of course, hearing from teachers on their experiences with enacting collaborative antiracist writing assessments. Thus, the title of this section is really an imperative for all writing teachers, one tied to the antiracist work that this collection centers on. We don't feel we need to make the argument that either collaborative assessment or antiracist assessment practices more generally should be considered and reflected upon by teachers and students. We all know the importance of that work. We also think that when collaborative

antiracist assessments are a part of our writing courses, writing teachers should consider carefully the influence and effects of their own embodied subject positions and those of their students when they take stock in what happened and how well things worked out. Were their collaborative antiracist assessment practices meaningful or effective? If so (or if not), what role did the bodies in the course play? How did the teachers' and students' embodiments affect assessment? Having answers to these kinds of questions can help us understand how replicable our antiracist assessment practices can be.

We should say that we know that many writing teachers do this work already, or have little choice in doing it, as they are confronted with the ways their bodies and their embodiments in their teaching exist and function outside of often expected elite, White, masculine, able bodied, heterosexual, and neurotypical norms. For years, Black feminist scholars in composition have discussed the ways racialized, gendered, and classed embodiment affects their teaching. For instance, in 2003, Simone A. James Alexander offers a compelling account of the ways that her Black, Caribbean-born (Guyanese), middle-class, female body, who is multilingual, affects the ways she engages in discussions of race in her writing classrooms. Her racialized and gendered embodiment also are read by her mostly White students in ways that affect her "authoritative presence" to them (2003, p. 106). She explains that "[t]he subject of classroom debates [on race] can become the object of her students' gaze" (pp. 106-107). That is, she becomes the racialized and gendered object of her students' gaze. Illustrating this tension through an exchange with a White male student in her class who claimed that White people often are afraid to take blood from Black people because of sickle cell anemia, Alexander cites the Black female academic, Carla Peterson: "the 'body is never simply matter, for it is never divorced from perception and interpretation . . . and it is subject to examination and speculation' . . . My body is always already a 'highly contested site of meaning'" (2003, p. 108). If our bodies are always highly contested sites of meaning, then they must be accounted for in the central meaning-making processes of any writing course, that is our assessment processes. Our assessments are often how meaning is contested in classrooms between teachers and students, as well as students and students, or students and texts.

Thus we can always use more guidance and models for such hard and brave work, especially work that intersects with collaborative antiracist writing assessment work. So, for the purposes of understanding the need for this collection, we ask: In what ways do writing teachers take into account the various bodies in the course and the ways those people are embodied when they design, enact, or reflect upon their collaborative antiracist assessment work with students? While we do not intend for racialized embodiment to be the center of the collection, we do think it is central to a lot of what we can do, or reflect upon, in our classrooms' assessment ecologies.

Even without an antiracist orientation or goal for our assessments, most writing teachers use collaborative activities that engage students together and with

the teacher to accomplish the goals of the course. We believe that these practices too require an understanding of how the bodies and embodiments of teachers and students make their classroom ecologies antiracist in orientation or not. But when we look at collaborative antiracist writing assessment, as the contributors do in this collection, important issues of racialized embodied subject positionings become more obvious, and perhaps more salient and open for understanding more generally. This is not intuitive nor easy work. We don't even think that all of the chapters here accomplish everything they might along these lines, but each one does attempt in significant ways this work.

Why is this kind of reflective work so difficult for writing teachers, teachers who are arguably the best positioned to do it? Despite the good work of Black and White feminist scholars from at least the early 2000s, it isn't clear that the field of composition studies has done enough to help teachers investigate their own bodies and embodiments in their assessments and pedagogies. We just don't have enough practice at it. Or maybe, we just have not taken up this challenge consistently enough, offered enough models, and made it a deep part of how we all get trained and do our teaching work.

In 2015, drawing on Michelle Payne's discussion of the failures of her own writing pedagogies because of her own female body and issues of authority in her classrooms in the early 1990s, Leslie Erin Bartlett made the argument that "the scholarship had not yet accounted for the profound difference the teacher's body makes as part of the rhetorical context in which teachers teach" (p. 47). Similarly, Shari Stenberg offered one early attempt (2002) to account for bodies in writing classrooms in "Embodied Classrooms, Embodied Knowledges: Re-Thinking the Mind/Body Split." Stenberg argued that we too often "deny embodiment in scholarly and pedagogical sites, and the related tendency to conflate disembodiment with authority and freedom" (2002, p. 44). To translate for our discussion's purposes, we not only avoid or ignore the ways our embodiments mediate our classroom assessment ecologies, but we also conflate the ways we avoid our embodiments in our assessment practices with authoritative assessment or authoritative judgement practices. Let's put that another way: When it seems our bodies are not there, we think our assessments are fair. To appear to be bodiless often is assumed to equate to neutrality, objectivity, and authority. These attributes, when attached to judgements or judges, are usually assumed to be the definition of fairness. But these are also habits of White language that participate in White language supremacy (Inoue, 2021). Our collection's chapters suggest that bodiless judgement is simply not a reality, nor is it attainable, or even worth striving for in human languaging interactions.

Performance studies is one way that scholars and teachers have attempted to explain the subject positioning of the writing teacher. The slow turn toward performance in the field of composition studies that Bartlett explains can be seen at least as far back as Lad Tobin's work in the 1990s. Such orientations in scholarship ramped up in the early to mid-2000s (Bartlett, 2015). Important to note in

this scholarship, as Bartlett observes, is that the language that described teachers went “from *being* to *doing*” (2015, p. 43). What Bartlett suggests is that discussions of the ways teachers were embodied as subjects in the classroom became more about what they did or what they couldn’t do. This makes sense, as much of the field of composition studies is focused on pedagogy, which tends to be about what teachers do (or don’t do) in the classroom.

In many important ways, we are what we do. Bartlett argues that writing teachers might learn a lot from understanding the ways they are embodied in the classroom by focusing on performance theories. That is, one way to read Bartlett’s discussion is as one that asks us to consider the subject of the teacher in terms of that body’s performance of “the appropriate” and/or “the possible” writing teacher (2015, p. 42). She argues that “careful attention to pedagogical performance has the potential for liberatory effects for both teachers and students,” and understanding pedagogy as performance “invites . . . a wider range of available performances for teachers and students” (2015, p. 41). This wider range of teaching performances occurs when we understand the difference between the possible and the appropriate in our writing and in our teaching. As many of the following chapters illustrate, we wonder, how *possible* are our collaborative antiracist assessments? To pose this question another way, we might ask: How *inappropriate* can our antiracist assessments be?

While Bartlett is not explicitly defining or thinking about embodiment as a construct, she tacitly draws on such discussions by focusing on performance as important to who the teacher is or can be. However, we are much more than what we do in front of our students. And different bodies do things differently, or are perceived so, thus they are experienced in a wide range of ways, as Bartlett’s discussion of Payne illustrates. Our bodies, their affordances and limitations, their shapes and styles, their sounds and silences, are important to what we do and how that doing is experienced by the doer and understood by those around them.

In their concept statement on embodiment from feminist traditions, Maureen Johnson and colleagues ask: “what if we could *recontextualize* bodies and experience the physical body as an entity with its own rhetorical agency?” (2015, p. 39). What we hear in their question is a kind of separation for reflection’s sake in classrooms that practice collaborative assessment ecologies with students. That is, the body having its own rhetorical agency, perhaps as something separate from the agency we tend to locate in people as agents who make decisions and do things through intention and will, may offer teachers a way to understand their own embodied subjectivities and the ways those subjectivities are understood by students. This includes making sense of the various unintended consequences or outcomes in their assessment ecologies and pedagogies. Considering our bodies as having agency may help some make sense of their antiracist pedagogies when it appears things go wrong, or when students don’t act “appropriately” or in expected ways, or when a person, their words and actions, are read in ways unexpected. This happens a lot in the chapters—just about every one of them. How do

we see the potential, as Bartlett claims, in our collaborative antiracist work when it seems the bodies around us do not “get” what we hoped they might, or do not perform in the ways we think they should?

One possibility that we offer to readers, and that we offered to the contributors of this collection as they revised their drafts, is to ruminate on their body and its politicized subject positioning in the classroom next to other bodies and positionings. We felt that doing this could help our contributors consider the limits and affordances of their own particular antiracist collaborative assessment ecologies in their places with the students in front of them. What kind of agency in antiracist assessment work does a White female teacher’s body have, a body that is also in some chronic pain? How is that body experienced by students? What about the agency and choices for a Black female teacher’s body, one that is able bodied? Again, Johnson et al. provide a way to begin this line of reflecting by defining the body itself. They say:

the physical body carries meaning through discourse about or by a body. But embodiment theories suggest that meaning can be articulated beyond language. *All bodies* do rhetoric through texture, shape, color, consistency, movement, and function. 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. Just as 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. (2015, p. 39)

It isn’t hard to hear in their words that our bodies not only “inform our ways of knowing” but also circumscribe the ways we design, teach, and judge in classrooms. Our bodies are a critical component to any assessment ecology, particularly when those ecologies are collaborative in nature, when they call our students to do assessment with us. In other words, to consider the ways we are embodied in our antiracist assessment work in classrooms is to understand that such assessment work is embodied body-work. This adds some complexity to questions about how a White, able-bodied, heteronormative, male teacher, for instance, can do collaborative antiracist assessment. This is not a rhetorical question. It’s posing the embodied body-work problem that antiracist assessment presents to any one of us.

Johnson et al. also argue that the material body carries both “rhetorical power” and “signifying power” through its various cultural, gendered, social, linguistic and racial affiliations (2015, p. 40). For these scholars, this also means an “ethical reading of bodies . . . [is a] recognition of bodies as *people*—not objects” in the rhetorical work we do (2015, p. 40). For the purposes of this collection, we add to this idea that our reflective and pedagogical work as teachers requires us to

ethically read our bodies as people, which includes ethically reading our students' bodies as people too. This is not just reading our students in a fully humane way. That, of course, is important.

What we hear in Johnson et al.'s claim to read bodies as people is to read bodies as people who are more complex in a number of ways. They explain that “[j]ust as we call for *bodies* to be seen for their multiplicity as conglomerates of intricate layers, forces, and parts, so too should we experience *rhetorics*. Both are assemblers of and assembled by their orientations to larger cultural forces” (2015, p. 42). This layered connection between a body and the rhetorics circulating around it that both make it and are made by it, is one that can be meaningful for teachers and students. It has bearing on antiracist writing assessment ecologies. If assessment is anything, it is rhetorical work, the kind that Johnson et al. connect to “intricate layers, forces, and parts” that compose bodies. One way to hear their call to read bodies as people, then, is to hear that the judgements we circulate, which usually are our words, our languaging, our rhetoric, call upon “larger cultural forces” to “assemble” the bodies of our students, perhaps first in the draft, but that always fingers out to the material body of the student. We never (are never perceived to) simply judge students' words. If judging is part of the larger cultural forces and rhetorics around us, then it too assembles our embodiments in classrooms.

One important aspect of bodies, and therefore important to the ways we are embodied in classrooms, is our skin. While ambiguous and never clear about what it means, our skin is one of the most obvious and noticeable features of most people. Feminist theorists have asked us to consider our skin as more than simply the outermost part of our bodies, or where our bodies end or begin. They urge us to ask: Are our bodies contained by our epidermis, thus is our embodiment circumscribed by skin? Donna Haraway talks about our skin as a kind of boundary, but asks “[w]hy should our bodies end at the skin” (1991, p. 178)? Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey call skin “the fleshy interface between bodies and worlds,” and they argue for a politics that “thinks through the skin” (2001, p. 1). They explain this idea:

Thinking Through the Skin poses the question of how skin becomes, rather than simply is, meaningful. To ask such a question is to suggest that the skin is always open to being read. If the skin is always open to being read (and being read differently), we can also consider the ways in which these various techniques for reading produce skins in specific and determinate ways. (2001, p. 1)

What we hear in Ahmed and Stacey's explanation of “thinking through the skin” is a racialized reading process that accounts for skin. All reading processes are judgement processes. If our skin is “always open to being read (and being read differently),” and such reading processes “produce skin in specific and determinate

ways,” then skin-producing processes are also assessment processes, and vice versa. Ahmed and Stacey ask: “How does the skin come to be written and narrated? How is the skin managed by subjects, others and nations” (2001, p. 2)? Such questions are ones about judgement and decisions. They are questions about the nature of assessments. Assessments make decisions and knowledge. Through our assessments, through the various ways we enact judgement in a classroom, skin “becomes . . . meaningful” through our acts of reading and languaging about it in that classroom. How do our judgements, then, in such places become antiracist readings of skin? How are our skin-producing processes of assessment explicitly antiracist in orientation? Can skin, as one layer of embodiment, *become* antiracist?

While a body’s skin suggests separation from other bodies, this too is not so clear in classrooms. The boundaries between bodies and contexts are more permeable than we may initially realize. One thing that assessment as ecology has shown us is that we are all interconnected (Inoue, 2015), that what we do, who we are, and where we are, are all aspects of the same question. In other words, we might also consider the ways our various embodiments in the classroom signal ways we are all interconnected, bound to each other through our shared purposes, desires, and the places we commune.

Abby Knoblauch and Marie Moeller illustrate the ways our bodies are interconnected by explaining how the body, and embodiment, are much more fluid and complex than typically thought of (2022). They discuss Brennen’s *The Transmission of Affect* that refers to the changes in body chemistry through merely entering a room (2022); Elizabeth Wilson’s *Gut Feminism* that discusses the ways in which the human gut is literally an “organ of the mind” (2015, pp. 4-5); and Margaret Price’s “*bodymind*” that is “a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power-and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience” (2015, p. 271; as cited in Knoblauch & Moeller, 2022, p. 5). And as we might expect, Knoblauch and Moeller’s discussion tacitly turns to assessment and judgement.

When explaining Gail Weiss’ argument that any body is always framed in ways that are raced, classed, gendered, among other social frames, such as motherhood, they sum up Weiss’ ideas: “These bodies are judged, controlled, mediated, medicated, incarcerated, all in unequal ways, as those in power react/respond to the physical characteristics of the specific and culturally coded body itself. Bodies are always judged in concert with contexts” (2022, p. 5). Bodies are never read as just a body. They are read as Alexander says as “highly contested sites” (2003, p. 108), but those sites themselves are also in context. That is, our bodies are read next to other bodies and situated in particular places and times, all of which accumulate meaning associated with the body. And so, we are interconnected not just with each other but with our environments and through the ways we are judged or made through judgement.

Citing Eleanor Rosch, Knoblauch and Moeller remind us that “the body” is not the same as “embodiment” (Rosch, p. xxxvi; as cited in Knoblauch & Moeller,

2022, p. 7). Drawing on a range of feminist theorists, Knoblauch and Moeller define embodiment as “the process of being a person in a body” (2022, p. 7). And so, embodiment, at least for Knoblauch and Moeller, is a collection of processes that happen through time and space in places with other bodies. They nuance this, however, using Elizabeth Grosz’ idea that embodiment is a phenomenon in which a person “lives the body,” and not simply “lives in a body” (2022, p. 7). Our bodies make our living not just possible but make it. Living doesn’t happen without a body. They further suggest that “the space between body and embodying seems to hinge, at least in part, on motion” (2022, p. 7). This is not simply a reference to performance theory. Our bodies move, even at rest, meaning that “air and blood circulate, bacteria mill about, autonomic reflexes twitch—the body moves without conscious effort, but not without bodily effort” (2022, p. 7).

To avoid the ableist framing of embodiment as mostly motion, they draw on Gail Weiss again, explaining that embodiment is not “private,” rather it is “always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies” (2022, p. 8). This means our embodiments are not just the motions our bodies engage in. They are also connected to, and mediated by, the world and people around us. Ironically, this interconnection signals various ways our embodiments make up differences in the world. To be embodied means that our body is “mediated by,” our contexts and “interactions with other human and non-human bodies” around us (Knoblauch & Moeller, 2022, p. 8). Such mediated contexts and interactions make present differences between bodies. One is different from other bodies only in so much as that person’s body embodies difference in ways mediated by those around the body of difference in contexts that make such a body among other bodies different. We know. It sounds circular. Embodied differences are understood by perceived markers of racial, cultural, linguistic, and other social characteristics that circulate not simply around bodies but in narratives that have messages about such bodily markers and bodies.

One mediated aspect of our embodiments in our courses with students are the texts that we offer students, the assignments and feedback that we initiate and circulate, as well as the requirements of texts to be assessed—that is, the requirements that make the conditions under which any assessment can happen at all. This is typically things like assignment guidelines, due dates or methods of turning in work, but it could also be rubrics, or something as simple as what font or line spacing requirements a teacher imposes on students. These elements make up a part of one’s embodiment in writing assessments, and show up in several chapters in this collection.

Vyshali Manivannan offers insight into how such seemingly superficial elements of a course’s assessment ecology can be harmful, ableist, and racist. She describes herself as a BIPOC writer and scholar who has “written and published for several years with fibromyalgia, an incurable, nonprogressive chronic pain condition characterized by widespread pain, heightened pain sensitivity, affective dysfunction, and fatigue” (2022, p. 183). Drawing on Price’s idea of “bodymind,”

Manivannan argues that the textual requirements of scholarly publication and other academic texts creates “eugenic” conditions for people embodied like her, “reproducing the illusion of homogeneous (able-bodyminded) academic writers with Western/rationalist notions of legitimate expertise” (2022, p. 184). Furthermore, Manivannan explains that

Academic knowledge making, from drafting to publication, vanishes the epistemology and ontology of the chronically pained body, cultivating ableist genre conventions like linearity and clinical language, denying chronically pained authors a presence in scholarship. The able body is represented in scholarly craft as the able mind, while the pained subject, to readers and to academic culture, is a liability. (2022, p. 185-186)

The way texts and fonts are formatted, she explains, “operate to maintain and administer the dominance of Western epistemology” (2022, p. 188). Quoting Ames Hawkins’ discussion of the Times New Roman font, Manivannan says that such serif fonts have “created a visual frame for the legacy of masculine, colonialist, ‘civilized’ (i.e., not unruly) epistemology, conveying authority, clarity, objective truth, and dispassionate distance” (2022, p. 188). Thus there may be ways in our assessment ecologies in which we erase those students embodied in disabled or dis-eased ways through our textual requirements, or by ignoring our own pain in composing texts for our students, giving them only clean, Times New Roman drafts. Echoing Grosz and Weiss, Manivannan draws on disability theory, explaining further: “How you choose to read says a lot about your politics of knowledge” (2022, p. 189). We add that the textual requirements that make our assessments possible also assemble the bodies of our students, embody them. If our requirements are too strict, this may lead to some students being unable to be embodied, or dis-embodied, or outside of what it means to be embodied in the work we ask of students.

What Manivannan reveals to us is that our embodiments can often be imposed on students unknowingly in ways we do not fully realize or want. The “basic requirements” of an assignment, or the ways we present our own judgements to students, can erase some students’ embodiments or impose a way of being in the world that is ill-fitting to some. Students may not always know how to respond to such requirements, except to blame themselves for not being able to meet them. While no chapters take this concern up at any length, we hear it underneath some discussions, or perhaps behind the words. We don’t mean to read what isn’t there, or may not be there, rather we see this kind of reading of the chapters in light of Stenberg’s ideas around possible performances (as opposed to appropriate ones). We read into such absences or silences as a way to perform a *meaningful possible reading*, one that explores potential meanings and lessons from the embodied reflections the contributors can offer at this moment of publication.

To close this section, we turn to a classroom, Stenberg’s. While we don’t offer her discussion as “the way” to investigate with students the ways and implications

of our embodied subjectivities, we find Stenberg's return to her own writing classroom instructive in a few ways. Her discussion glosses the work of this collection in how it tacitly references the assessment ecologies she and her students participate in, without ever discussing assessment outright. Further, it suggests how important the embodiments of herself and her students are to those ecologies and their mutual work together. Stenberg reflects:

As I write this, I am working to integrate questions of specific, embodied identity into my first-year composition course, to create moments when we consider how we read bodies as signs, how we learn our own embodied identities, and how our readings of the world and each other are dependent upon our own embodied lens. I have, for instance, designed an assignment in which students study a medium (cable channel, magazine, radio station, college catalogs) targeted at some aspect of their identities, to examine how it constructs an identity for them—teaching them to “be” a particular way—as well as to consider how they resist and accede to that identity. I want them to examine the role culture plays in schooling them as embodied subjects, teaching them who to be and how to understand themselves. And I want us to imagine ways of intervening in this cultural inscription. But I don't want to approach identity or the body as merely discursive, as if we are all equally entitled to re-write ourselves at will. Cultural structures “limit” some bodies more than others, teaching us that we must deny certain aspects of our identity if we want to embrace another. Nor do I want to pretend that we exist apart from readers, who bring their own sets of assumptions to each textual interaction. (2002, p. 57)

Stenberg could easily be describing an antiracist assessment ecology, its aims and goals, one that centers on the relationship between students' embodied subjectivities and judgements that circulate around them in cultural texts and practices. Like all the chapters in this collection in some way, we also hear in Stenberg's reflection an important question for all teachers and students: How do our collaborative antiracist assessment ecologies construct the identities of our students, “teaching them to ‘be’ a particular way”? In what ways do our assessments teach our students “to be and understand themselves” in certain ways? What these questions point to is the power that assessment has in shaping students in racialized, gendered, classed, neurotypical, or able-bodied ways because our cognitive and linguistic expectations, our standards and processes of assessment, and our instructions to students are all necessarily tied to our embodiments in the classroom. Our assessments make embodied languagelings. We might even say they make the ways we all become embodied as languagelings in the world. Is that too bold? Perhaps, but we believe that writing teachers play an important role in such embodied subject shaping.

The bottom line: Our politicized embodiments as teachers and students affect our assessment ecologies, which include their products, or the intended and unintended outcomes. Our embodied subjectivities affect how we and our students act and interact in any assessment ecology. But what opportunities have we taken as writing teachers to notice, collect information, and reflect upon the complicated ways our embodiments and those of our students are made by and influence the collaborative work we do with them? While our collection may not always fully address such important questions, the chapters can be read in ways that suggest responses and perhaps suggest important work reader-teachers might do in their own collaborative antiracist work with students.

Some Important Definitions

Several chapters in this collection use different terms for similar things. We didn't want to make uniform all the references to things like "historically White universities" or "predominantly White institutions," so we didn't ask authors to change many of their terms. We felt that maintaining the diversity in the ways authors represent ideas and other things was important for the collection. This preserves deeply contextual terms and ways of knowing. We also wanted to honor the different languaging that comes from different kinds of embodied teachers in different contexts. So there will be references in chapters that point to similar or the same things that other chapters call something else. We accept this ambiguity as an important part of how languaging works among diverse languagelings who work in different places.

While most chapters contextualize and define their own uses of particular terms that are important to this collection and its call, we still wish to offer our explanations of a few recurring terms. We offer some discussion of these shared terms below that we think will help many readers along the way. While not all chapters work from the same understandings of these terms, we feel our understanding of them here offers readers a way to read those references when they appear.

Assessment ecologies. This term references a theoretical framework for classroom assessment discussed in Asao's previous book, *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing for A Socially Just Future* (2015). All writing courses have assessment ecologies, often numerous ones, from the larger ecology that produces course grades or learning that students walk away with to smaller ecologies that form the languaging around an essay or another assignment. All assessment ecologies are complex systems that are "more than" the sum of what constitutes them (Inoue, 2015, p. 86). This means that to enact antiracist assessment in a course, you cannot just plug-and-play a practice or a rubric or some other process that in another complex system appears to be antiracist in its outcomes. Assessment ecologies also are interconnected, with elements at times sharing properties of each other or morphing into other elements (Inoue, 2015).

For instance, a rubric may start as something in the ecology that represents writing expectations, but later in the process of peer review becomes a heuristic that makes a process of response, so it may form reading processes or even learning outcomes, that is, products of the ecology.

Assessment ecologies have at least seven elements that constitute them and that can be mapped and designed explicitly (see Inoue, 2015, p. 176 for a representation of the seven elements of assessment ecologies). The seven elements of any assessment ecology, antiracist or otherwise, are listed below with questions that help explain what each element identifies about the assessment ecology:

- **Purposes** – What is the purpose or goal of the assessment? Why is this assessment happening, or what are the reasons or goals for assessment?
- **Processes** – What processes are used to do assessment? How are judgements accomplished, and what happens with them? What steps or actions are taken?
- **Parts** – What are the main or significant parts of the assessment ecology? What are the codes, scripts, constructs, and artifacts used and produced?
- **Places** – What are the places created in the ecology and the people made in those places? What material and figurative sites are created that affect, organize, and influence people in the ecology?
- **People** – Who is involved in judging, and what are their embodied language and other capacities? Where do these capacities come from in each case? How are people made by the places of assessment?
- **Products** – What are the learning products of the ecology? What indirect and direct consequences are produced or expected from what happens and from the judgements that circulate around any products students produce? What are the expected and unexpected organic outcomes of assessment?
- **Power** – How does power circulate in the ecology? In what ways are disciplining, control, and norming (to some standard) enacted? How do power, hierarchies, and control circulate?

In our working with authors on their chapters, we assumed an assessment ecology framework, so the biases of this framework often show up in their discussions; however, most of the chapters do not explicitly use this framework to discuss their assessments. Many gesture to it. But we still believe that the framework is useful for readers to use as heuristic, or a reflective device when considering what the chapters offer.

Habits of White language (HOWL). Over the last decade or so, Asao has offered various articulations of what he now terms HOWL, but the concept began as “White *habitus*” or “White discourse” (Inoue, 2015, pp. 47-49; 2019, pp. 399-400; 2021, pp. 22-28). This term came from two places: Pierre Bourdieu and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. Asao first articulated this idea as an “epistemology of racism” in his dissertation at Washington State University. To do this, he used Bourdieu’s

idea of *habitus* and other rhetorical and Marxian ideas about common sense in practices, policies, and institutions. Asao argued that together, *habitus* and common sense form an epistemology of racism (Inoue, 2005) that is historical in nature and both inside of us and outside of us. Whiteness is central to both sides of this dialectic. Flash forward almost ten years and Asao was using “White *habitus*” in his first-year writing courses with students. By 2019, he rested on “habits of White language,” or HOWL, since this term was more understandable and useful for students.

It should be emphasized that HOWL is more than simply habits or markers in a text or speech act that elite, masculine, heteronormative, able bodied, White(ly) people have historically controlled and dictated through English language instruction in the US. The “habits” in the term is Bourdieu’s *habitus*. This means that HOWL is both inside of us and outside of us, marked on us and performed by us. It is discursive and material. It is a deep part of academic and “professional” embodiment. It is also structurally determined in many ways around us, yet we still have agency to language and judge through language in particular ways or directions. That is, HOWL references both the languageling who does language as an agent making idiosyncratic decisions, and a range of material structures, or a range of language practices, policies, and institutions that form our historical languaging conditions. These conditions are structures that provide the languageling with both boundaries, or limits, and pressure in particular hegemonic directions. This language theorizing is really Marxian determination (see Williams, 1977, p. 87).

As Bourdieu defines it, *habitus* is a set of ingrained and habitual dispositions and structures that tacitly make us who we are. They are structural and everyday, working on us and marking us, making us as we make them. This means that elite forms of heteronormative, masculine Whiteness are central to any dominant set of language habits we expect in classrooms or boardrooms. This is the historical politics of the English language. Bourdieu, however, does not inflect his concept explicitly with race. His concept is mostly about class, and he explains the idea this way:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (1977, p. 72)

As we hope you can hear in Bourdieu’s account of *habitus*, the structuring structures, the durable dispositions that are marked on our bodies and words, are systems both in and around us that share in multiple social and historical dimensions of people.

Bonilla-Silva’s use of “White *habitus*” also draws on Bourdieu’s term. In his study of how White people talk about race, Bonilla-Silva explains White *habitus*

as, “a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* Whites’ racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters” (2003/2018, p. 121). Thus HOWL is more than a description of the common ways an elite White dominant society has done English languaging. It is also itself a set of structures that are a part of everyone’s conditions, making us as we make those structures, so much so that it is difficult to see HOWL as anything other than neutral language expectations or standards. This makes them a deep part of all assessment ecologies and writing teachers’ embodied subjectivities, regardless of how those teachers identify themselves. These habits often seem like just how anyone would communicate effectively and consistently. But this ignores the *habitus* in the habits. It ignores the history and normative nature of elite, White, masculine, heteronormative, ableist dominance in societies, schools, and academic disciplines.

HOWL boils down to the following heuristic, which references six habits of language often found in some combination in dominant English languaging that usually comes out of elite, White, heteronormative, ableist, masculine language groups.³

- Unseen, Naturalized Orientation to the World
- Hyperindividualism
- Stance of Neutrality, Objectivity, and Apoliticality
- Individualized, Rational, Controlled Self
- Rule-Governed, Contractual Relationships
- Clarity, Order, and Control

You may note the ways we (the editors of this collection) as well as the chapter authors participate in HOWL. This is not a mark of White language supremacy or racism. It is an indication that we’ve been indoctrinated into racist and White language supremacist systems. Most of us do not get to avoid HOWL completely. But as the next term identifies, our degree of participation in White language supremacy hinges on how our HOWLing circulates in the ecologies in which it is present.

White language supremacy (WLS). Asao first used “White language supremacy” in his 2019 Chair’s Address for the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Pittsburgh (2019), but he didn’t clearly define it in that talk. During his tenure as the chair of that organization, Asao tasked a group of CCCC members to research and draft a CCCC statement on White language

3. You can find a handout that offers a fuller description of HOWL, with references, in a gdoc that Asao created and uses with students and teachers (<https://tinyurl.com/HOWLhandout6>). For a discussion of HOWL on his blog, see Asao B. Inoue, “Blogbook – The Habits of White Language,” *Infrequent Words*, website and blog. (2021, July 3), accessed at <https://asaobinoue.blogspot.com/2021/07/blogbook-habits-of-white-language-howl.html>.

supremacy, which was completed and published in June 2021. In October of 2021, Asao published a discussion and definition of the term in *Above the Well: An Antiracist Argument from a Boy of Color*. In the book, Asao explains the term as:

The condition in classrooms, schools, and society where rewards are given in determined ways to people who can most easily reach them, because those people have more access to the preferred embodied White language habits and practices. These White language habits are so because they historically have come from White racial groups in the US who have had the power to make such standards and enforce them in schools, civic spaces, governments, and businesses. Part of the conditions of White language supremacy is an assumption in most systems that what is reachable at a given moment for the normative, White, middle- and upper-class, monolingual English user is reachable for all. (Inoue, 2021, p. 15)

For Asao, WLS always draws from HOWL, but the first habit, an “unseen naturalized orientation to the world,” is central and necessary to WLS. Its presence in an assessment ecology creates a particular kind of circulation, one that is hierarchical in nature and tends to privilege elite, White, masculine, able bodied, neurotypical languagelings.

The habit of an unseen naturalized orientation to the world is taken from Sara Ahmed’s article, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” in which she draws from Edmund Husserl and Franz Fanon to explain the ways in which Whiteness is a starting point, an orientation in the world, one that also presumes a similar proximity to things, ideas, actions, and other phenomena in the world as a given and as reachable by all. Ahmed explains it this way:

We inherit the reachability of some objects, those that are ‘given’ to us, or at least made available to us, within the ‘what’ that is around . . . Whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach. By objects, we would include not just physical objects, but also styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits. Race becomes, in this model, a question of what is within reach, what is available to perceive and to do “things” with. (Inoue, 2021, 154)

What might be heard in her description of Whiteness as an orientation is the way in which it is thoroughly embodied in nature. Some bodies may inherit this orientation even if they don’t exercise it. Most importantly, while some habits within HOWL may be circulating in a writing classroom’s assessment ecology, that ecology may not be participating in WLS if this first habit is not centrally operating as the way in which important decisions are made, such as grades. In the CCCC statement on WLS, the authors link WLS with White supremacy,

saying that WLS serves White supremacy more generally.⁴ Drawing also on Eric Pritchard’s work (2017), the statement explains that

WLS assists White supremacy by using language to control reality and resources by defining and evaluating people, places, things, reading, writing, rhetoric, pedagogies, and processes in multiple ways that damage our students and our democracy. It imposes a worldview that is simultaneously pro-White, cisgender, male, heteronormative, patriarchal, ableist, racist, and capitalist. (Inoue, 2021, n.p.)

The authors also identify HOWL as a part of the structures that make WLS in classrooms and emphasize that the presence of the first habit is necessary, “always present,” and “required” for WLS. They also emphasize the second habit in HOWL, hyperindividualism, as significant, particularly as it justifies colorblind logics and “the ideology of individualism as it works with meritocracy to disguise the role of language in racial capitalism and legitimize the failure of whole groups of BIPOC by pointing to exceptional individuals” (Conference on College Composition and Communication Contributors, 2021, n.p.).

What should be clear is that WLS does not identify bad teachers or bad people. It highlights the conditions and histories we live in and assess writing in. It helps us understand the White supremacist structures that need dismantling in our assessment ecologies and perhaps even ourselves. As the CCCC statement explains, these conditions, this White language supremacy, is intersectional in nature, having “pro-White, cisgender, male, heteronormative, patriarchal, ableist, racist, and capitalist” preferences, biases, and consequences, all of which are uneven (2021, n.p.). These conditions also suggest orientations that teachers and students might actively try to embody in order to oppose WLS. None of it is easy to do, nor even easy to figure out while a teacher is in the middle of a semester, or in a classroom discussion, or reading a student’s paper. But with practice and awareness, we believe more writing teachers can meaningfully and sustainably work against WLS, and this is what we hear and see happening in the chapters in this collection.

The Ethical Use of Student Voices

Many of the chapters in this collection, such as our own, summarize or use recollected student voices, but do not necessarily quote students. Usually this is

4. The authors of the CCCC Statement on White Language Supremacy” are listed in this order: Elaine Richardson, Asao Inoue, Denise Troutman, Qwo-Li Driskill, Bonnie Williams, Austin Jackson, Isabel Baca, Ana Celia Zentella, Victor Villanueva, Rashidah Muhammad, Kim B. Lovejoy, David F. Green, and Geneva Smitherman. The statement can be accessed on the NCTE/CCCC website.

because we do not have access to those students any longer to get their permission to use their exact words or names. So authors do not use those words in their chapters. If students did not wish to be represented, we made sure chapters honored those student requests too. But this is also a collection that examines teacher subjectivity and experiences, so the teachers' stories of students, if treated and offered ethically, are important to tell. Because of this, we worked hard to honor and respect the voices, words, and intentions that all of our students embody in different ways, ways oftentimes a teacher simply does not have access to. We also strive to help the teacher-authors of this collection offer their stories of students in ethical, respectful, honest, and compassionate ways.

We are aware of the ethical concerns around the use of student voices, particularly their words, intentions, or work that is produced for learning purposes in our courses, and not intended for scholarly discussion, such as this collection. As one of the reviewers of this collection reminded us, it is our ethical responsibility as scholars to make clear when ideas, words, and interactions of students represented in these chapters are the actual words and intentions voiced by our students and when a teacher-author is telling their version of such things, when what is offered is really a teacher's interpretation of their students' words and actions. When such summarizing of students' voices or intentions happen, we have asked authors to make as clear as they can that such observations are theirs, not necessarily the ideas, words, or intentions of their students.

Toward these ethics, we took that same reviewer's advice and tried to guide authors in their efforts to represent their students. In some cases, this meant prompting authors to reveal the evidence they have for their interpretations of students and their actions. It may also have meant a deeper reexamination of what the teacher-author was doing with their representations of students in their chapter. The bottom line is that we worked with all the contributors of this collection to faithfully respect the expressed wishes of our students, and ethically, respectfully, and compassionately represent our students, their ideas, and their actions.

The Chapters

The chapters collected here are organized in two sections: "Embodied Politics and Agency in Collaborative Spaces," and "Collaborative Anti-Oppressive Pedagogies." These groupings place the chapters in dialogue with each other, but there are also three larger themes that run through most of the chapters in both sections. We articulate these themes as questions that readers might ask themselves as they read all of the chapters in this collection. These larger themes are:

- What significance does a **teacher's embodied subjectivity** have in antiracist collaborative assessment practices with students?
- How do students and teachers in language classrooms manage or learn about the **politics of languaging**, which includes the politics of judgement?

- In what ways might **failure to accomplish** socially just or collaborative assessment in classrooms open up meaningfulness for teachers and students and perhaps still bring joy to the assessment ecology?

In the first section, chapters focus on the politics of race in collaborative writing assessment ecologies, with an attention to student and teacher agency and power relations. The second section turns to various anti-oppression assessment frameworks and orientations that come out of the teachers and classrooms discussed in the chapters. Part of our organizational strategy aims to counter the assumption of a White audience and the foregrounding of White teachers in our field. BIPOC scholars are leading antiracist work, and *thour*⁵ voices, successes, constraints, and insights need to be amplified. So we put chapters by BIPOC scholars in prominent positions.

Part One: Embodied Politics and Agency in Collaborative Spaces

Although all the chapters in this book engage with the authors' racialized subjectivities, the chapters in this section do so as their primary purpose. Each chapter explores the challenges of doing collaborative assessment for the purposes of antiracism from the particular subjectivity of its writer(s) working within their particular institution, and these conditions and people inevitably raise questions about agency and power.

In Chapter 1, Asao Inoue offers a reflection on his recollection of an interaction with a Black female student in his assessment ecology that centered on explorations of HOWL in assessments of students' writing. It considers the ambiguity of his own failures as an antiracist teacher and alternatives to read the embodied ways his student responds in the ecology, as well as his own embodiment in feedback. Ultimately, he wonders how Black linguistic freedom can be exercised or even noticed in any classroom, antiracist or otherwise.

In Chapter 2, Wonderful Faison reflects on the problematics of teaching writing courses at an HBCU that requires her to be complicit in reproducing HOWL as a Black female professor. Comparing HOWL in writing pedagogies and assessment to "Foucault's theoretical connections between discipline, punishment, and crime," Faison focuses on how HBCUs can enforce and reinforce White supremacist language practices. This includes Black students' own self-disciplining. She says that her students "believed that assimilationist language and rhetoric (using HOWL) gave them the better chance to speak truth to power." We feel this urge in students shouldn't be dismissed, while also realizing that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," as Audre Lorde tells us (pg. 110-111). Faison's chapter is a call for educators to identify and

5. We use "thour" here to note that one of us is racially White and one Brown. This means that the pronoun "their" doesn't work for one of us, but does for the other. So we've joined the pronouns their and our to language a new pronoun for our purposes: "thour."

challenge assimilationist rhetoric, especially in places designed in part to honor and invest in minoritized students.

In Chapter 3, Megan McIntyre reflects on her early attempts at co-creating feedback guidelines with students, identifying her “unseen, naturalized orientation to the world” (HOWL #1) as a catalyst for failure. She then considers her “own language histor[y] and practic[e] as rooted in particular racial and class-based identities,” which informs her current practice of co-creating feedback guidelines with students. She concludes the chapter with a brief case study of her revised approach to this antiracist practice, in which she explicitly acknowledges the racist and colonialist histories of academic literacies and her own positionality as a White woman.

In Chapter 4, Lizbett Tinoco and Sonya Eddy discuss their experiences and concerns about attempting to disrupt White mainstream English (standardized American English) in a Hispanic-Serving Institution by engaging students in classroom assessment processes. Although Tinoco and Eddy both use labor-based assessment in their courses, they implemented a series of assignments on the rhetoric of rubrics to engage students in critical discussions about rubrics and what they represent. This process led students to create their own rubrics to help guide their writing practices. Although most students claimed the process had a positive impact on their writing, Tinoco and Eddy found that the use of rubrics was more complicated and nuanced than they anticipated since students continued to use White mainstream English. One observation they make from their assessment work with students is that “student agency in writing assessment does not necessarily equate to social and linguistic justice in assessment.”

In Chapter 5, Kefaya Diab discusses the political tensions with students, colleagues, and administrators within White supremacy culture that challenged her antiracist pedagogy as a woman of color and non-native English speaker. Diab focuses on her own implementation of labor-based contracts, community-based learning, and antiracist writing assessment approaches in her writing courses, illuminating what she calls a “rhetoric of injury” that happens in White supremacy culture to minoritized teachers like herself. She attempts to answer questions about who tends to perpetuate rhetorics of injury, how they are encouraged or validated for doing it, and why no one notices the injuries. Her chapter ends by inviting White colleagues to systematically act as allies to racially minoritized teachers who implement critical and radical pedagogies.

In the final chapter of the section, written specially with graduate students and first-time writing teachers in mind, Alison R. Moore contemplates the impacts of her own raced and gendered subjectivities as a “White girl writing instructor” on her practice of composing writing assessment tools with students. She reflects on the ways that she and other White writing teachers often, even if unintentionally and with diverse and equitable practices in mind, still reproduce White, standardized discourses subject to teachers’ judgements. Moore argues that this critical self-reflection and deconstruction of HOWL should be fundamental to

writing teacher training and models how White writing scholars and teachers can engage in the same kinds of critical self-reflective work they so often ask of their students.

Part Two: Collaborative Anti-Oppressive Pedagogies

The chapters in Section Two offer (and complicate) different approaches to developing anti-oppressive and socially just classroom assessment ecologies. Each of the chapters discusses a teacher's (or, in one case, writing center workers') experiences with various pedagogical strategies or theoretical frameworks that helped them rethink how assessment might work in their classrooms.

In Chapter 7, Kristin DeMint Bailey unpacks the teaching failure that led to this collection, one in which a carefully orchestrated approach to collaborative assessment designed to amplify *students'* priorities went awry. Through the retelling of this experience, DeMint Bailey explores the ways that *Whiteness*, which Marilyn Frye defines as “a deeply ingrained way of being in the world” (Bell and Blumenfeld 1995, p. 117) and Dae-Joong Kim and Bobbi Olson add is an “epistemological worldview, a lens of judgment” (2017, p. 124), impacted the assessment ecology. Part of this exploration involves centering her own history with White working-class subjectivity in order to reveal how it obscured her own *Whiteness* in an assessment approach she developed to produce antiracist results. She concludes the chapter by sharing the lessons learned while reflecting on this assessment ecology through the lens of *Whiteness*.

In Chapter 8, Louis M. Maraj demonstrates how “assessment,” particularly quantitative assessment, and sport statistics work in concert in historically White universities to force Black being into a value system, which rehearses transatlantic slavery logics. Maraj looks closely at a “Workshop in Composition” course at an eastern U.S. university. The course, which enrolls student athletes, uses a collaborative assessment practice in which students “game the system.” The assessment ecology encourages students to build strategies that subvert anti-Black logics and steal back Black rhetorical agency from the classroom and university. Playing with traditional assessment models, as Maraj illustrates, allows glimpses at Black students' meaning-making agency by asking: What might assessment look like if borne out of experience rather than deficit?

In Chapter 9, Gavin P. Johnson focuses on composing differently oriented assessment ecologies with students and, specifically, calls for an intentional, iterative recognition of and engagement with assessment's affective attachments. Grounded by course documents from a digital media composing course at a Historically White Institution, Johnson zooms in and out of an assessment ecology detached from traditional grading regimes. He positions “queer” as a signifier of disruptive action wherein oppressive practices are exposed and replaced with assessment ecologies oriented by the affective attachments carried by students and teachers.

In Chapter 10, Sarah Prielipp draws on Shawn Wilson's (2008) Indigenous research paradigm as a framework for thinking about assessment as relational, accountable, and reciprocal. At the same time, Prielipp critiques her own positionality and how it affects her work within a settler colonial space, drawing attention to some of the complexities of antiracist work. She explains, "I use this Indigenous paradigm to frame my argument because, if we are going to say that Indigenous ways of knowing and doing are important to decolonization, to giving the land back and to Indigenous sovereignty, then we have to model that for our students whether we are White or non-White, and we need to practice our truths." Prielipp builds on Wilson's framework to develop a reflective participatory assessment that emphasizes these qualities.

In the final chapter of this section, three (at the time of this writing) full-time writing center administrators and one graduate assistant—Christopher Basgier, Amy Cicchino, Katharine H. Brown, and Megan Haskins—share their writing center's antiracist professional development curriculum and experiences in order to critique their practices and outcomes. With this curriculum, the authors aimed to deepen peer consultants' engagement with antiracism and prepare consultants to do an antiracist assessment of the curriculum's resources, such as training modules and workshop materials. The writers interrogate their approach, exploring ways they continued to recenter Whiteness by emphasizing inclusivity at the expense of antiracism and forcing additional labor on BIPOC consultants.

The collection ends with an afterword by Jesse Stommel that argues to dismantle grading systems that have harmed students and teachers, especially, and perhaps most critically, BIPOC and other minoritized students, which includes students with housing and food insecurities. Ultimately, he calls for a "co-intentional assessment" space that comes out of Freire's discussion in *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Such assessment spaces in classrooms are ones created together by teachers and students. They entail embodied and political work. Such assessment, Stommel reminds us, is treating our students as fully human.

Conclusion

As we've learned in the classroom, through developing this collection, and by learning from other teacher-scholars, antiracist work is brave, vulnerable, and embodied work. It's compassionate work. It's love work. Because love is recognizing our interdependence and acting from that deep awareness. And what's more vulnerable, yet sustainable, than interdependence? We need each other to do this work. We are always stronger when we do it together. Not coincidentally, we (all of us involved in the production of this book) have needed each other to develop the collection that lies before you, as we wrestled together with the ideas, interpretations, and takeaways that emerged through extensive revision. Like the teaching and assessing it discusses, this collection was a labor of love. We encourage you to read it as a constellation of interdependent voices, all of which can

help us to think more critically about the antiracist work of language assessment in our various institutional contexts from our diverse positionalities, and with a good share of love.

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Part One. Embodied Politics and Agency in Collaborative Spaces

Chapter I. More than a Story of Antiracist Failure and Hope

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Several years ago, I was working with a student of mine in a first-year writing course. I'll call her Brea. That wasn't her name. She was Black and from a working-class family in the Seattle-Tacoma area. Now, I do not have written permission to use Brea's exact words in this account because I don't know how to get a hold of her anymore. I did have a prominent note in my syllabus about using materials from that class in my research and scholarship. But because I cannot ask her explicitly if I can use her exact words or name, I will not use them in my story here. Instead, I'll do my best to represent her words with my own, but of course, this is my rendition of her and her words, not her actual words or motives. And so, take my account with a grain of salt, knowing that I'm trying to be faithful and respectful to her and her work in my course. This also includes her colleague, Adam (not his name either), whom I mention as well. Both students may have different ways to account for or explain what happened, and this chapter is my version of things, my reflection on that past course. Brea's and Adam's sentiments and responses, then, are from my recollection and perspective, and from that perspective, they seem not uncommon in my courses.

Brea was diligent in her work in our course throughout the entire term, always up for doing the labors asked of her in the spirit that they were given. She consistently labored and paid attention to how she labored during the term. She dutifully filled in her labor log and reflected in her labor journal each week. But at the time, I left our exchange feeling that Brea and I had failed at the antiracist language assessment work we'd given ourselves to do. Our job was to investigate the politics of languaging and its judgement by looking carefully at readers' feedback on Brea's draft. We also used HOWL to do this work.

Today, I'm not sure we failed in the ways I originally thought, just as I'm not sure we succeeded either. Our very different embodied subject positions, one a young, working class, Black woman, and the other a middle-aged, middle class Brown man, were not well accounted for in our work. Much of this was my fault. I designed the ecology, one I thought about as an ecology as I designed it and as the term proceeded.

Just to be clear, the term "assessment ecology" is very specific to my own theory and practice of antiracist classroom assessment. It references a theoretical framework that I discuss in *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing for a Socially Just Future* (2015). In short, all writing courses have

assessment ecologies, often numerous ones, from the larger ecology that produces course grades or learning through the entire term to smaller ecologies that form the languaging around an essay or another assignment, such as the one I discuss below with Brea and Adam. These ecologies are composed of at least seven elements (see Inoue, 2015, p. 176 for a representation of the seven elements of assessment ecologies), which can be used to design antiracist assessments or reflect upon them in an analytical way. The seven elements are: purposes (what is the purpose or goal of this assessment?), processes (what processes are used to make judgements, that is, what steps or actions are taken?), parts (what are the main or significant parts, or the codes, scripts, constructs, and artifacts used and produced?), places (what material and figurative sites are created that affect, organize, influence, and embody people in the ecology?), people (who is involved in judging, and what are their embodied language and other capacities?), products (what indirect and direct consequences are produced or expected from the judgements that circulate around any products students produce?), and power (in what ways are disciplining, control, and norming to some standard enacted?).

Furthermore, all assessment ecologies are complex systems that are “more than” the sum of what constitutes them (Inoue, 2015, p. 86). This means that to enact antiracist assessment in a course as Brea and I tried to do, we cannot just plug-and-play a practice or a rubric or some other process that in another complex system appears to be antiracist in its outcomes. The system is complex, as our failures and perhaps misunderstandings illustrate, at least from my recollections.

Assessment ecologies also are interconnected, with elements at times sharing properties of each other or morphing into other elements (Inoue, 2015). For instance, a rubric may start as something in the ecology that represents writing expectations, but later in the process of peer review becomes a heuristic that makes a process of response. It may form reading processes or even learning outcomes, that is, products of the ecology. In fact, I used this interconnection among assessment elements in order to design processes that offered opportunities for students to reflect upon their own relations to larger racialized languaging next to who they understood themselves to be as embodied writers. In the case with Brea, as I discuss below, our heuristic based on habits of White language (HOWL) was initially used to reflect upon colleagues’ assessments of their essays. In that process, students confronted in various ways how they participated in elements of HOWL through their judgements of their colleagues’ writing. HOWL turned from a set of languaging habits, discursive structures we could see “out there,” to a part of their own embodiments as readers and writers in the classroom.

After Brea’s writing group had given her feedback on a paper she’d written about the complexities and significance of rap music, I asked students to pose problems about language and its judgement in letter form to me. They would do this in two ways: through comparisons of conflicting judgements on their papers and through considerations of the ways HOWL operated in all those judgements. First, I asked students to find a few conflicting judgements from the assessment

letters that their peers had written to them. These judgements would be things that their peers said about their paper that seemed to say different things about the same aspect of the paper. They were to think more deeply about that feedback as languaging, as a paradox where there is no right answer, just different ways to experience the paper. Additionally, they were to use HOWL as a heuristic in order to understand some of the languaging dispositions being used in these divergent judgements. In labor instructions, I included a process to help them consider ways that HOWL may be operating in their colleagues' feedback letters. I'll say more about that process below.

The goal or ecological purpose of this activity was for students to have a discussion with me in letter form about the politics of languaging that was occurring in their writing groups. I prompted them in labor instructions not to blame anyone or look for "the correct" interpretation of their writing, rather they were to acknowledge multiple ways of languaging, or multiple ways of reading their drafts, while also considering how readers may participate in HOWL. In preparation, we discussed HOWL in class, and looked at examples of the ways everyone participates in HOWL all the time. We read excerpts from Sara Ahmed's article, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" (2007) and Catherine Myser's short article, "Differences from Somewhere: The Normativity of Whiteness in Bioethics in the United States" (2003). We also looked at Vershawn A. Young's "Should Writers Use Their Own English" (2010), which resists using HOWL in some obvious ways and uses Black English to make its point. So we'd been having conversations in class about HOWL and the ways everyone participates in it.

To apply HOWL to their colleagues' feedback, students made a table. This table was meant to be an antiracist ecological part, one that linked four different elements: (1) a rubric dimension from our collaboratively developed rubric; (2) a judgement by a colleague-reader on that dimension in the paper; (3) the colleague's explanation of their judgement; and (4) at least one habit of White language that seems to be operating in the judgement or explanation. Each of these elements made a column of the table. I instructed students to use their tables to draft the letter to me about a problem of judgement they are noticing through their reading of their colleagues' feedback. The building of the table was meant as an invention process that would slow their thinking down and help us notice the language of judgement that their colleagues offered them and where that languaging came from, then link it to specific habits identified in HOWL. These parts and processes were meant to connect students/readers (people) to the dominant language habits (HOWL) that we paradoxically participate in unevenly and that likely constrain or even oppress many of us (in hegemonic power relations) in the institutional place of the writing classroom.

The differences in judgement would be most clear when students considered where those judgements came from in the lives of their readers. Where did each reader get their expectations and why are those important to have in this moment in their reading of the paper? We had some access to these things because in

order to write their original assessment letters, each reader was prompted in the labor instructions to identify their judgements and explain in detail where they got their ideas about such languaging, which included offering a textual model or two that might be in their heads. But I also suggested that students may have to fill in blanks, hypothesize.

Additionally, readers' responsibilities were to offer rich descriptions of their readings of their colleagues' papers. Writers, on the other hand, had a responsibility to listen humbly and compassionately to their readers and work to understand those readers' habits of language in nuanced ways. So the ecological purpose of giving and getting feedback was not to revise the papers. It was to understand the politics of languaging and find HOWL in the languaging circulating in their writing groups. Thus the original drafts were simply an occasion for making judgements of language that we could investigate together.

Now, I do not think that I made this ecological purpose clear to my students when they wrote their original drafts or during the assessment letters on those drafts. I did try, but of course, habitual ways of doing such work may have had more power over many students' processes. I'm guessing most assumed that their feedback was meant to help the writer revise or improve their writing or draft in some way, even though we discussed how and why readers were not to tell any writer what they should do or how to revise a draft. The assessment letter's labor instructions were very clear that the purpose of their feedback was to offer a rich description of their experience of reading the text. Like most of my writing courses, our course motto was: "Good writers don't take orders, they make decisions from rich information, so good readers don't give orders, they offer thick descriptions of their reading of a text."

Let me emphasize that this is not a typical goal or purpose for feedback in writing classrooms. Typically, students read feedback on their writing and ask: What do I change in my paper to satisfy my readers' expectations? From my own vantage point as teacher who has done this activity many times over the years, I find it is always difficult for everyone. Even conscientious students like Brea have a hard time shifting their reading of their peers' feedback away from this revision question and toward one about understanding the politics of languaging that circulate around their papers and in their writing groups. Because I didn't emphasize this shift in purpose for reading their assessment letters, many students read their peers' feedback as blueprints of what to change or revise in their papers, even after we discussed the labor instruction's caution not to do this. So once Brea got her colleagues' feedback, her purpose in our collaborative assessment work was different from past purposes for similar activities. She now had to ask: How did my colleagues read my paper, and why did they read it that way? She was not asking, "what do I change to meet their expectations?"

Another way to put our new goal in the problem-posing letter activity might be: What expectations and language habits do my readers have and where did they get them? The problem-posing letter exchange would be the way my students and

I would dialogue about these questions. Ultimately, knowing the answers to these questions could give Brea and her colleagues in the class much valuable and flexible information to make informed decisions in a wide range of rhetorical situations later, but it would do it in a non-hierarchical judging ecology, one that didn't use a single standard (like my expectations or a conventional standards-based rubric) to evaluate languaging, instead it used five different sets of judgements (one from each of her four group members and mine). Equally important, this ecology was gradeless, so everyone's assessment letters could be read on more equal footing. Readers' thick descriptions of their readings of papers hopefully would offer enough information so that writers could reflect upon the racial and other politics that travel with language habits and rhetorical situations.¹

In retrospect, I'm now less sure about my judgement of Brea's work. The problem-posing letter activity asked Brea to read her colleagues' feedback as mostly descriptions of their reading experiences, and resist reading that feedback as judgements of a text or orders to follow. This was so that we could talk about languaging and judgement, not what to do next with a draft. But even with such explicit explanations of the assessment activity in our labor instructions, this was very difficult for about half of the class to do, including Brea. In other words, I didn't see Brea doing the critical antiracist assessment work I understood then that the problem-posing assignment was trying to produce, and she didn't do it in the analytical ways I was hoping she would through the use of the HOWL heuristic. Mostly, I thought she was avoiding all of this work.

At the time, I couldn't see how I was falling into the trap that Catherine Fox identifies in many critical pedagogies (2002). I may have been imposing my own version of an analytical "critical thinking" onto Brea. This imposition, and my ideas about "critical thinking," are informed by Whiteness that Fox and others talk about. Fox explains that feminist and critical teachers often use ideas like "critical thinking" as god terms that explain the "right way" to understand things, which then leads to "a race to truth whose telos is the same as that of the traditional pedagogies criticized for using transmission models of language, knowledge, and learning" (2002, p. 201). Ultimately, Fox argues that we must "disarticulate" whiteness and Whiteness from our ideas of "critical thinking" (2002, p. 204). Instead of a race to some truth I had in mind before Brea even considered her colleagues' words, instead of my version of Brea's antiracist investigating, Fox suggests that I might have read and responded to Brea with a more transformative and organic goal. Fox explains:

Instructors will always bring to the classroom ideologies that drive our pedagogical choices. However, if we are committed to questioning the conflation of critical thinking with one

1. I have published another version of the problem-posing letter assignment, which discusses it in another writing course of mine. See Inoue (2019).

ideological stance and to positing critical thinking as a pragmatic process of knowing, acting, being, and reflecting, we may begin to move from revolutionary cycles to spaces of transformation. (2002, p. 207)

When I look back at our exchange now, I hear in my words ways that I was doing what Fox warns critical and feminist teachers against.

Brea's initial letter focused on feedback by two colleagues who both discussed a dimension from our collaboratively written rubric, which the class put together as they started their project drafts. The dimension her readers focused on was: "How does the project use evidence effectively to back up or explore claims/arguments?" This was their language. Most of Brea's discussion was on Adam's work (again, not his actual name). Adam was a White, middle class, male colleague, quiet in class but always offered lots of feedback in writing. Brea identified Adam's concerns that she include some quotes from poetry to provide evidence for the claim she was making about the poetic nature of rap. However, Brea explained that she didn't understand why Adam would ask for such evidence since her focus was on rap, not on poetry. She didn't see a need to quote poetry or discussions of poetry. Her argument was that everyone already knows about poetry, but not rap. Rap was her focus, so her evidence and quotes were of rap music. Brea's main example was Childish Gambino's work. Adam's contention was that it would be nice to see some poetry as a way to compare similar things, a poem next to a rap song.

In my response to Brea, I asked her to think more about Adam's comments and why he would want some quotes from poetry next to her material from Childish Gambino. I wasn't saying he was correct, only asking: How do you think he got to that judgement? Brea responded to me by mostly quoting her original paper. Her paper makes a claim that Childish Gambino is not taken seriously like most poetry is. She suggested that maybe part of the reason is that "childish" is part of his name, and listeners and others associate that attribute with his music. This is the place in Brea's paper that Adam was commenting on, and it could be read that he didn't understand that Brea was making the argument that Childish Gambino was not taken seriously as an artist, so her evidence would need to show his music as serious music. Poetry as a comparison had nothing to do with this argument, or the nature of poetry was so understood by her audience that there was no need to show poetry.

In her response to me, Brea reiterates this. She still doesn't understand why Adam would want evidence in this area of her paper where we see and read about Childish Gambino, and get references about poetry, but no poetry itself. She suggests that maybe Adam didn't read the paper very carefully. She doesn't know for sure.

Looking back on this exchange, perhaps Brea read Adam's comments as a guide to revision. What is she supposed to do with Adam's feedback? Revise, of course. Why else do you get feedback? And so she reads his feedback asking: Do

I agree with Adam or not? And because she did not, she focused on the fact that she disagreed or couldn't see how he would ask for quotes of poetry. But it could have been that she was struggling to explain to me that she did not know how to read Adam's languaging as HOWLing, or that his feedback was simply him not fully understanding her purposes for the draft. How could she do much else with his words if he was not understanding her purpose, a purpose centered in the Blackness of her central example and in herself as a Black writer? She could have been saying that we (Adam and Brea) don't understand each other. Meanwhile, I was asking her to keep thinking about his languaging in ways that may have been confusing or even baffling to her. I was asking her to put her disagreement aside, and try to experience her own text from Adam's point of view, not to adopt it but to understand where he was coming from.

The first step in this process is to understand Adam's habits of language that led him to his judgement. Adam was drawing on HOWL, just as I was in my similar instructions to letter-writers. Adam wanted to "see" the comparison, just as I wanted letter writers to quote their colleagues' responses so that we both could see and compare language, think deeply and specifically about it. That is, I and Adam wanted quoted language as ocular artifacts to compare. We both thought (and I still do) that this can be a powerful language tactic for antiracist ends. I wanted to see Brea's readers' judgements next to each other in her letter to me. Adam wanted to see poetry next to rap in her paper. We were participating in a habit of language that projects a particular kind of individualized, rational, controlled self onto Brea as well, a self that assumes a primary way to understand something is to *see* it. Brea seemed to resist. As Fox suggests, I could have disarticulated my own ideas of antiracist language assessment from my own Whiteness by calling attention to the ways my response to her HOWLed at her and how my HOWLing may have contradicted some language habits of her own, but I didn't.

While I did offer her a way to look beyond agreement with Adam, I still failed in my own responses to her because I didn't see her own orientation as a young Black woman who has likely lived a life in which her habits of language have been denied, devalued, or questioned consistently in a number of ways. I couldn't feel clearly how the HOWLing of my assignment matched pretty closely the HOWLing of Adam, her responder. The echo of those HOWLs may have been too much for her, even if she may not have been able to name this problem exactly in this way. Perhaps I could have pointed out this problem I was having with her responses to my questions, not in a way that suggested that she was doing the labors wrong—I don't think she was—but in a way that invited her to think with me about my limited notions of criticality and hers. That is, I could have framed this problem as *my problem of reading her kind of criticality*, not simply her problem of reading Adam.

Doing such disarticulating might have helped us both let go of our initial intentions for her draft and my problem-posing letter assignment. Had I been able to be more vulnerable in this way, I might have been able to model a more open-ended criticality, one that could have explained how I was seeing her

criticality working (or not), and invite her to explain my criticality from her view. Or maybe Brea wasn't ready to take on such an orientation. Maybe she too was conditioned by past English courses to read feedback as only "how to" guides for revising drafts. Or maybe, she just got tired of all the HOWLING. This was her resistance in a place where she felt she could resist the HOWL.

What is most striking now in Brea's letter and response to me is that she never uses HOWL, never references it all. And even after she'd followed the labor instructions, and pasted the table she created with HOWL labeled in it. But HOWL does not come up in her discussion and reflection of the judgements she is posing problems about. In my reply to Brea, I offer this:

I hear Adam saying that he doesn't read Childish Gambino as childish or lacking in seriousness just because of his name, and so he wonders: do you have proof for such a claim about other people who do not listen to rap, which could be heard by him as many White people (he is White and may feel that he is being unjustly placed into such a category).

This is about a reader's needs for evidence for particular kinds of claims. Do you think this fits into the White habit of hyperindividualism, or maybe it is associated with rational, controlled self? I can see this as a need for a certain kind of rationality that is dominant in our society: Don't talk about others unless you have some evidence outside yourself to prove any claims you make about those people's views of things.

My last comment was not an imperative pointed at Brea. It was a translation of an impulse in HOWL. I'm nudging her toward HOWL and the embodied politics that go with it when someone like Adam or I use it, even in the compassionate ways we both do in our gradeless assessment ecology. But again, what I was asking her to do was an analytical antiracist languaging, and I kind of predetermined what I thought that would look like. But it wasn't what she was doing, which was pointing out a key way her reader misunderstood her.

I end my response above by moving away from Adam's judgement and directing Brea to see the bigger picture about the assignment, which is that we are not trying to justify or defend our own decisions as writers, which I heard her doing, but trying to understand the landscape of judgement that our colleagues' feedback represents. So I was trying to engage Brea with questions about the politics of language. I was offering one set of dominant politics that were present, HOWL, so that she could better understand the strong pull of those habits of language, that orientation toward language. And I was assuming that if she used HOWL in this way, she would be antiracist and critical. Brea did not take me up on this call, at least as I can recall and read in our textual exchanges now. She never discussed HOWL directly in her letter.

Given that both Brea and I couldn't come to a problem-posing of Adam's languaging in the predefined ways I understood the assignment asking for, nor could we find common terms to do that kind of language work in front of us, we both failed to do our job in this collaborative assessment work—at least, that was what I thought after the course was over. She didn't seem able to accept Adam's languaging, nor engage with HOWL to understand his or anyone else's languaging. I too was unable to be vulnerable and show her my own HOWLing in a way that could invite her to keep thinking. I couldn't see the ways my languaging framed the antiracist language work as primarily a Whitely, analytical, antiracist languaging, one perhaps that she felt rubbing her wrong, perhaps because it felt like an attack on her embodied Black self as a writer, maybe. Again, I can only speculate here. I knew that I could not force her to see, feel, or take on my orientation to language, nor my practices of criticality, but I didn't have a way to open up our misunderstandings in transformative ways.

But maybe Brea was doing other critical work that I just didn't notice at that time. Maybe she was doing other important assessment work that my alleged antiracist assessment activity was not designed to accommodate very well. Brea is talking about race, gender, and class indirectly in her paper. She is Black, female, working-class, and looking toward an interdisciplinary humanities major. Adam, a White, middle-class, male student looking to be a science major, is questioning the means by which she makes her arguments, but not the arguments themselves. He expects an argument that offers textual evidence for particular kinds of claims, ones that establish the facts of the case. But for Brea, those facts are not only assumed to be already established by a Black audience perhaps, but not important to the central claims she makes about rap music. Why should rap music, a Black language form, have to be validated or measured next to poetry, arguably an elite White language form? To a Black writer, this could feel like having to measure up to White expectations in order to be accepted or validated. This paradigm sounds familiar, culturally and racially dismissive, and oppressive to me.

On top of this, her professor (me) could be seen as asking her to side with Adam. While I embody HOWL in a number of ways in the labor instructions and in class, it is clear from the first day when I read my introduction about myself to the class that I'm a former student of color from the projects, who was a remedial English student through most of his public education in North Las Vegas. I'm not White. I'm not Black. Yet I'm not completely Brown either. I've also got this crazy name with too many vowels in it that doesn't look or sound Anglo in any way, because it's Japanese. I slip into my former English, a Black English I mostly have forgotten, at times in class discussions. I know students notice.

I also think that maybe a student like Brea notices these things too, and they are experienced as contradictions. No English prof is supposed to sound or look or be named like me. Why is he telling me to side with the White kid? And maybe there is an age thing also happening between Brea and me. I'm easily as old, if not older, than her own father. She's 18. I'm just about 50 at that time. And then, there

is the reality that I've not lived in the projects, in poverty, since my childhood, that my White, working-poor mom's access to things, while quite limited in many ways, still gave some access, access that maybe Brea and her family didn't have. I don't know. I don't want to make assumptions about Brea's life or living situation, but I know that many students on that campus were living precarious lives, often with food and housing insecurities. So here's a Japanese professor teaching her writing and telling her to listen more closely to the White kid next to her, the one marked with White male privilege, and to also consider how we all HOWL, how we all got some White in us. Contradictions. Paradoxes.

Today, I wonder more about the ways Brea's subjectivity and her sense of audience in her draft may have caused our misunderstandings and even some cognitive dissonance for her. Is she writing to a Black female audience, or a Black working-class audience? Or maybe she's fed up with catering to White middle-class male audiences, so fed up with HOWL that she won't engage with it at this moment when she knows she doesn't have to. Why give HOWL more time, more words, even in a reflection letter about it? Maybe Brea was reacting to my own HOWLING response to her. I didn't acknowledge the way I was also asking her to show me something by asking her to respond to Adam's expectations for visual, textual evidence in the paper. That's pretty ocular in orientation—you know, "seeing is believing"—and so participates in HOWL.

But I should be clear. Because neither I nor my ecology demanded that Brea understand or take on this ocular orientation toward evidence in her paper, I cannot say that our ecology participated in White language supremacy, at least not in this moment. We may have been HOWLING our individualized, rational, controlled selves but I didn't demand that she accept my version of things, nor was our ecology structured in a way that coerced her into accepting any of it. One paradox here, perhaps, is that Brea may have missed something important, something meaningful, for her languaging, but she also was afforded the power to make that decision, to deny matching Adam's and my HOWLING because there were no grades to be awarded, just labor to be done, which no one could deny she didn't do.

I'd like to think that Brea was exercising some Black power in the face of HOWL, a power relation designed into my assessment ecology specifically as one that affords antiracist outcomes. Given her own history in school and society, given what she likely saw around her all the time, she may have felt unwilling to acknowledge Adam's HOWLING expectations as valid in a paper about Black languaging from Black bodies, written by a Black woman. We might say that Adam, like myself, did not read her paper closely enough, or we did not have the ability to do so because of our own HOWLING politics, at least not in that moment. In a way, one could say, Brea was arguing for Black linguistic justice, demanding her Black languaging be accepted on its own terms, and she may have experienced the feedback, including my own, as HOWLING that only appeared to be self-aware and critical, but ultimately reinforced all the same outcomes as before: write White; HOWL or fail.

Flash back to the first day of the semester. We all introduce ourselves with a short one-page narrative. I do one too. In mine, I tell Brea and her colleagues that I grew up in a poor, single-parent household in an all-Black neighborhood in North Las Vegas and then a White working-class neighborhood. I explain that I was a remedial English student of color throughout most of my schooling. But language was important to me at home:

In school, I didn't care much for writing or giving my writing to my teachers, because I knew what they'd do with it. They'd circle errors and put a red letter on it, a grade. I yearned for real dialogue over my language, like I got from my brother, who was the most intimate and trusting reader I could ever hope for. He was my twin brother, the one person in the world I could say was like writing to myself. It was safe. I knew he'd read each word as lovingly as I'd written it, care for them and even criticize them in a compassionate way. But mostly, I realize now, what I valued most about my brother's reading of my words from that Signature typewriter was how clearly and obviously he paid attention to my words, how fully present he was with me and my stories, he paid attention to my words and that was a compassionate act that I think we all want and made me the kind of writer I am today. We all want to be truly and deeply and compassionately listened to.

In these introductory narratives, I asked students to come to a few personal goals they had for their experience of the class. My last line above was one of my goals.

I wanted to develop a truly deep and compassionate reading practice for my students, just like I remembered my brother doing for me in our childhoods. Doing that feels like one aspect of antiracist languaging. Did I achieve this with Brea? Surely I set up the ecology in a way that kept my HOWLING from harming her chances at success in the class on her own terms, even if I did not fully understand those terms during the semester. Was our conditions, the assessment ecology, a transformative one? How could I have done more transformative work with Brea? Maybe being compassionate to Brea by being vulnerable with her—suffering with her. I mean, I could have disarticulated my own Whiteness from my analytical sense of antiracist languaging in the HOWL heuristic. I could have searched harder for ways to understand her own responses to me as informed by her own embodied Black female working-classness, when I heard her repeat her refrains about her draft's purpose. Maybe she could have then built her own version of critical, antiracist, feminist Blackness, or maybe I could have seen it better.

Or maybe none of what Brea did was an exercise of her Black linguistic freedom. I don't know, and I'm less sure now how I'd figure that out. Collaborative antiracist assessment ain't easy. But it's necessary. That is, it's necessary if we hope to cultivate Black and Brown linguistic justice with our students. If we hope to

dismantle White language supremacy in our own practices and classrooms, as well as equip our students, all of them, with antiracist practices and strategies for their own futures. And if we hope to do more than hope in our collaborative antiracist assessment ecologies.

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Chapter 2. Speaking Truth to Power (Or Not): A Black Teacher and Her Students on Assessing Writing

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If this is about speaking truth to power, and White people are the power, then you gotta know that one, that White people don't listen—not when it comes to nothin like race. And two, White people won't even attempt to listen if you don't talk to them like they be talking to you.¹

Ecological Position

Readers should know that as a Black, lesbian, working-class professor working in a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), I don't feel the need to state my positionality. In fact, to some degree I think it is harmful to ask BIPOC to show they are “credible” or state their “right” to enter a certain community. However, not wanting to state my positionality in one area does not deter me from stating my positionality in another area: the professorship. As a professor, BIPOC or not, I have authority/power over the students I teach. As Asao Inoue posits, “The first and perhaps most important element of any antiracist writing assessment ecology that might be considered and developed consciously is power” (2015, p. 121).

It is within this context that I recognize that at various times in my teaching I have been complicit in the reproduction of racist pedagogical practices, especially when I had to assess student writing, specifically African American students in freshman composition classes. Much like Alison Moore (2024), many—though not all—of the authors I read in my first-year composition training course (Angela Lunsford, Peter Elbow, James Berlin, etc.) “had one thing in common: they were White writing scholars” (p. 151). While I recognize this training contributed to my unethical (at times) assessment of student writing, I also recognize that once I knew a better way to assess, I did not always use that better way to assess.

However, as a Black, working-class lesbian teaching Black working-class students, I could no longer continue to assess them using tools meant to assess one type of student—White—while disenfranchising those who do not conform: People of Color (POC). That just seemed unfair. But if “[c]lassrooms are also places in which power is constructed to discipline students and teachers” (Inoue,

1. All student quotations in this chapter are not verbatim quotes, but are remembered by me and so are approximations of their words.

2015, p. 122), then I could use my power as an instructor to discipline students into creating and receiving antiracist writing assessment and to discipline myself into providing it.

Assessment is Judgement: A Black Professor Professin all the Wrong Things

It is my firm belief that teaching writing is about teaching power relationships. Conversely, assessing writing is about navigating and making those power relationships visible through assessment tools. As an African American writing pedagogue and scholar working at an HBCU, I am as conflicted about teaching and assessing English, or academic writing, or college writing, or composition and rhetoric—however named—as my students are about producing it. I find myself frustrated at what I perceive as my students’ inability to communicate effectively across multiple genres of writing. However, at the same time, I intellectually berate myself for insisting they be disciplined—broken—in this way. It’s a double consciousness affect:

I judge my students by White standards of written discourse, and I judge myself (every day) for wanting my students to mimic these White standards of written discourse.

This breaking, this disciplining, demands they engage “idiosyncratically with structured language systems that confine and pressure” (Inoue, 2022, p. 21) them into “uneven power relations, relations that are mediated by our varied racialized, gendered, and linguistic embodiments” (2022, p. 21). Language does not function outside of context, culture, history, and politics. I know this now and have known this for several years. Yet, I was not making my students aware of this “known.” My former students at the time of this writing, most of whom are Black, stated that college writing is formal, without slang or creativity. College writing was, to them, a White discourse practice, one outside of their normal written language and rhetorical practices.

I did not dissuade them.

And so—

The linguistic and language disciplining that I practiced in the classroom was what “sociolinguists and language scholars have for decades described” as “the harm an uncritical language education has on Black students’ racial and linguistic identities” (Baker-Bell, 2019, pp. 1-2). College (formal) writing is not without context, culture, history, or politics. But if my students saw it as such, then what they saw were the ways in which formal writing continued to exclude not only their linguistic and rhetorical meaning-making practices, but also the linguistic and rhetorical “meaning-making” practices of Black people. I was perpetuating this harm, excluding Black English, even though I had the knowledge to provide Black students with a critical language education.

How, then, should I begin to engage my students in critical language awareness? Once developing critical language awareness, what, if any, changes to writing assessment might students make?

Black “Errors and Expectations”

My ideas of disciplining students into “good writing” or at least “good writing practices” are born from Michel Foucault’s theoretical connections between discipline, punishment, and crime. And in an analysis of the essay rubrics that I constructed myself, the highest “crime” was often students’ *poor* grammar and mechanics. And due to this “crime,” the penalty had “. . . to conform as closely as possible to the nature of the offence [sic], so that the fear of punishment diverts the mind” (Baccaria, n.d., as cited in Foucault, 1995, p. 104) from desiring to commit the offense.

The offense is linguistic and rhetorical variance. Should that variance deviate too far from the norm—what Inoue (2021) calls Habits of White Language (HOWL)—then the punishment could be severe, ranging from failing an essay to failing a course. Even though I knew what I knew about linguistic violence and the intersectionality of language, I treated student “errors” as crimes because in some sense, even now with all my knowledge of the racism inherent in academic writing, I acted in ways that showed my students that error or linguistic variance was a crime, and they needed to be punished for it. I was reading students’ papers “with a lawyer’s eyes, searching for flaws” (Shaughnessey, 1977, p. 391), aghast at the horror show unfolding in front of my eyes. Error was at the forefront of my mind.

Williams (1981) would say I saw error as “a flawed verbal transaction between a writer and a reader” (p. 153). And that when one begins seeing that, “the matter of error turns less on a handbook definition than on the reader’s response, because it is that response—‘detestable,’ ‘horrible’—that defines the seriousness of the error and its expected amendment” (p. 153). Clearly, language variance was the error that I noticed needed amending. Anson (2000) posits the following in “Response and the social construction of error”:

What we notice when we notice error, therefore, is a product of temporal, internalized sets of rules, rules that are both “out there” in the complex and shifting norms of the language and “in here,” in an individual’s knowledge of those rules, level of tolerance for their violation, and idiosyncrasies as a reader. Even more complex are the ways in which all these personally and socially contingent rule systems shift and change depending on the rhetorical situation of the text and its reading, including its genre and level of formality, the writer’s persona, and the intention of the interaction between writer and reader. (p. 7)

However, what Williams and Anson do not address are the ways that the race and class of the instructor also impact how instructors see error. The multiple jeopardies² I have in being Black, female, somewhere between working- and middle-class impact not only how I see a perceived error in student writing, but also how I respond to that “error” in Black students³ writing. And since ideas of “error in writing” are based on HOWL, Williams provides little answer for how I (or other instructors) should respond to that error in pedagogical approach.

Additionally, Williams (1981) argues, “to fully account for the contempt that some errors of usage arouse, we will have to understand better than we do the relationship between language, order, and those deep psychic forces that perceived linguistic violations seem to arouse in otherwise amiable people” (p. 153). What Williams leaves unsaid is that the contempt that some errors of usage arouse in teachers and students has to do with the relationship between the language of the powerless, the oppressive order under which those who practice that language must live, and the fear of retaliation an oppressed person may face for being linguistically different from *otherwise amiable people*.

This fear of being linguistically different from “otherwise amiable people” has a very real impact on Black writers. Mina Shaughnessy (1977) argues that “so absolute is the importance of error in the mind of many writers that ‘good’ writing to them meant ‘correct’ writing” (p. 392). I argue that so absolute was the importance of error in my mind as a writing teacher, so justified was I in my belief that I was protecting Black students from White malevolence *that I felt I was liberating them and showing them how to speak truth to power* by producing “good, correct” writing, and “correct” writing meant showing them how to write *White*. Writing *White* is direct, to the point, without emotion, overly detailed, bereft of personal opinion, highly dependent on someone else’s data or someone else’s opinion, and a reduction of metaphorical language that leads to a boring word choice and a matter-of-fact writing style, which connects back to Inoue’s principles of HOWL.

Residue: Jim Crow & HBCUs

What makes my students’ situation unique is that they attend an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). Scholars such as Carmen Kynard and Sonya Eddy (2009) highlight this situation, noting that “HBCUs’ calculated and conscious charge for ameliorating the education debt by committing to black students represents a unique literacy politics” (p. 25). This uniqueness affords

2. This ideology has “competing demands (each requiring its own set of resistances to multiple forms of oppression) are a primary influence on the black woman’s definition of her womanhood, and her relationships to the people around her” (Kind, 1988, p. 298).

3. Apparently this possessive case (the missing apostrophe) is a linguistic “issue” in Black language speakers (Rickford & Rickford, 2000, p. 112). I intentionally left it this way. It’s an apostrophe. Don’t trip.

HBCUs the ability to create “a critical space in which the cultural identities of black college students have pedagogical consequence inside of the arenas of racial inequality in the United States” (Kynard & Eddy, 2009, p. 24). Despite the critical space of an HBCU representing a unique set of literacy politics with pedagogical consequences, HBCUs existence are also fraught with tension. HBCUs exist because Black people fought to be educated, but they also exist because of educational segregation: White people 1) did not want us to be educated and 2) did not want us to be educated alongside them. And while HBCUs exist to create Black intellectuals, they also exist as a tool to help Whiteness maintain its status—by setting the Jim Crow separate-but-equal policies and rules by which Black students must be educated.

The resistance to Black language⁴ and African American rhetoric in academic writing is political, racist, and classist and is meant to maintain the social order. Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richardson (2001) show that to maintain the order/status quo, conservatives often:

discourage vernacular usage in schools, usually with an argument that they are preparing so-called minorities for success in the marketplace, all while many of the most successful people in the market place [sic] are running odd with fresh stacks of pretty little green ones accumulated to the advertising beat of hip hop. (p. 38)

Black language and/or African and African American rhetoric can be commodified for monetary gain by those in power. Accordingly, those same people limit the power minority speakers can wield in using their language and rhetorical practices in an educational setting, specifically the composition classroom.

Therefore, the residue of Jim Crow separate-but-equal policies still affects and inhibits not only the HBCU, but also the full actualization of Black intellectualism through systemic educational government defunding, failed educational initiatives, and a linguistic ghettoization of public schools. Essentially, when the dominant culture sets the standards and policies by which HBCUs must adhere, and the overall standard of academic writing is White language supremacist (WLS) or HOWL, then HBCUs, normally a buffer from systemic racism, are forced to engage in systemically racist assessment practices.

Policies aside, I was at an institution that believed that producing well-educated Black writers meant removing all markings or remnants of linguistic diversity from students’ writing. Administrators told us that our students have low literacy skills, are underprepared for college, are poor, and lack the educational foundation to be successful. Administrators demanded that we “help” them.

At most HBCUs, this “help” has translated into grammar-based English courses, common exams, and a push for directive-grammar-based tutoring,

4. See Smitherman (1997).

none of which I am convinced help Black students as much as they help the institution validate itself to Whately accrediting bodies. These “practices” serve to uphold the institution as a colonized, and colonizing, space. The classroom in turn criminalizes the Black languages present in order to uphold the established colonizing practices.

For the institution, writing assessment functions to show to what degree students meet or do not meet preconceived marks. For me, conventional assessment is, and has always been, an inadequate tool for measuring learning, and to a lesser degree, writing proficiency. David Green (2016) posits:

[t]he evaluation of student writing, thus, is a complex negotiation driven by institutional context and teacher knowledge, both of which are reinforced by the curricula and evaluative materials developed and implemented by writing programs. (p. 152)

Black students negotiate the differences between their languaging and the language expected of them in the curriculum daily. Moreso, Black students branded as developmental, largely due to their linguistic voracity, are keenly aware that formal language excludes linguistic diversity, and in turn, excludes them.

The policies of my former HBCU do not dissuade students from this belief. As chair of the English department, I was directed by the dean to focus on improving the co-requisite and general education programs. The co-requisite program gave developmental writers the ability to take credit-bearing English Composition I courses while receiving some form of additional support. In response, our department began restructuring all its Composition I and Composition II courses to an embedded tutor model. These writing tutors attended class once a week and helped students complete designated writing assignments.

However, the administration believed that the role of a writing tutor was to improve the poor grammar and language skills of Black students. This belief changed my perception of my role not only as the department chair, but also as a teacher. It seemed that my role as both chair and professor was clear: ensure that English faculty upheld WLS, and thereby colonialism, through its general education English courses. Once I realized the linguistic violence of this approach, I was no longer conflicted. I was enraged. I wanted to find another way to resist language assessment. I wanted my students to use rubrics as tools for growth. I wanted to stop perpetuating linguistic violence, and in fact, actively encourage them to resist it. This work started with me.

Self-Deprogramming through Self-Reflection

To become a better assessor of Black language and rhetorical styles in essay writing, I reflected on what I believed writing should do and how that belief led to the way I assess. At its most basic, writing is a form of communication. When I write or read, I do these acts as a Black, cis-gendered, working-class lesbian. I engage in

communication acts that happen in and are shaped by historical contexts, cultural shifts, and political dynamics, all of which not only limit and produce meaning through the interaction, but also limit the production of *different* meanings through that same interaction. Breakdowns in written communication can be a disconnect between context and culture. However, when considering the rubrics I designed and (sometimes) had students help me design, this written communication disconnect was not presented in these rubrics. There was little in the rubrics to affirm (or rather legitimize) their cultural, linguistic, and language practices. Instead, the rubrics focused on three distinct language products: (1) content, (2) organization, as well as (3) style, grammar, and mechanics (language usage). I understood my own perception of writing and writing assessment; I needed to understand how my students perceived writing and writing assessment.

Writing assessment at my previous HBCU was fraught with tension. The majority of students, faculty, and administration are African American or BIPOC. Black language flows on the campus as the waters of the river Nile. However, students are still being told (implicitly, if not explicitly so) by teachers, advisors, and administrators (all well-meaning middle-class BIPOC like me) that an HBCU is the only place and space for Ebonics—their position on Black language is as antiquated as the term they use to name it. Yet, the want of faculty, administrators, and advisors to remove Black language from these students' tongues remains.

The reason this need remains is rooted in the raced and classed nature of writing. Black people were historically restricted from writing, extensive reading, and any formalized schooling for over 200 years. During this time, their language practices (amongst other things) were bastardized, ridiculed, deemed undesirable, and considered inferior by White people (the ruling racial class). It stands to reason that to feel or perceive oneself as equal, one would attempt to root out and remove that which marks one as “inferior”: language.

The vast majority of my past students were educated in the Oklahoma public school system, which is 43rd in national education for “K-12 school quality” (Elkins, 2021). Many of these students are poor, working, and taking care of other family responsibilities. They have witnessed significant violence, i.e., gang violence, gun violence, etc. Education is a priority for them, but not a number one priority for them.

Their number one priority is usually family. If they had to babysit while a parent was at work and babysitting overlapped with school, they chose to babysit. If they had to work and work overlapped with class, students chose work. They wanted professors to accommodate, but if professors did not, students still chose work, family, friends, or community loyalty over school. The time these students choose to devote to school can never equal the time they devote to what mattered more. And shouldn't family, friends, and community matter more than education. Moreover, since my Black and Brown students were quite used to conforming and not having their language practices valued in any academic space, “it's no wonder that it is difficult or impossible for Black, Latinx, Indigenous students and

other students of color to trust faculty who ask for their input and participation” (McIntyre, 2024, p. 81) in designing assessments for their coursework.

Many times I perceived that their experience with literacy—or rather the educational systems’ accepted literate practices—was much like mine: I was a Black “. . . teacher who loved school and excelled at reading and writing, I presumed my students shared my experiences and my view of the classroom as a productive, supportive space” (McIntyre, 2024, p. 80). I could not see my own raced and classed assumptions: I was a part of the Black middle class which, for good or not, linguistically conformed publicly, even if we did not linguistically conform privately.

Yet, I understood this clash between what I can only call a public performance of literacy and a private practice of languaging. This clash I had between literacy and languaging at home, but having to change that in educational spaces to ascend—to be accepted as the “good Black”—is why I also was in concert with my students and bemoaned the academy’s focus on reading, reading, reading. I have watched T.V. all my life, especially as a child. Falcon Crest, Knots Landing, Unsolved Mysteries, this was my literacy, and these were my educators. I too hated the books they made us read in school.

Excerpt.

I loved the box of books my mother dropped in my room as a child. I read them all. When coming out, I watched my fair share of movies, but it was Kate Delafield mysteries and Dean Koontz that I voraciously read on the subways to school. I, having sold myself as the African American working-class lesbian, was attempting to reject all that I had become—highly literate, well-educated, and with some social mobility to climb the class ladder. I rejected my becoming to remember what and who I once was: the daughter of a farmer and industry man with a mom who never graduated high school. There is still no place for this part of me in the academy, and so I understand the landmines of academic discourse these students shudder or outright refuse to engage. This is the effect of the clash.

A Conversation with Students: What Makes for “Good” Academic Writing?

When I asked students what constitutes good academic writing, most associated academic writing with educated writing, and educated writing with reading, as in reading books, which they did not like to do, not from a lack of desire (though for some this is certainly true) but from a lack of *time*. Reading, at least reading literature to any great extent, takes time, something these students have so little of with taking care of multiple siblings, helping pay bills, taking care of their own children. Reading is for people who can afford for someone else to take care of the everydayness of life. Reading takes time.

Writing also takes time. Therefore, reading and writing are middle-class practices. Due to the lengthy and systemic exclusion of African Americans from writing and some forms of reading, reading and writing have been, and seem still to be

thought of as, inherently White and middle-class practices for my Black students. *Time* is a White, middle-class resource that the oppressed usually do not have.

What African American Students Want

My frustrations with “disciplining” predominantly poor, Black students into these uneven power relations led me to research ways to give them agency not only in their writing, but also in the ways their writing was assessed. If, as Inoue (2019) argues, “making slaves is making people do what you want them to do for your purposes” (p. 25), then making pathways to freedom is providing people with the opportunity to do what they need to do to meet their individual and community goals, which may not be the same as the institution’s or the instructor’s. It is with this understanding I began to question how I could make the teaching and learning of writing a less exploitative practice for underserved, poor, Black students.

In the spring semester of 2020, I worked with my freshman composition students to create rubrics for each essay in the course. It was also my hope that this practice with students would foster their writing and eliminate language/linguistic violence, consequently decriminalizing linguistic variance. Through this work with students, I learned that they just wanted to find ways (sometimes the easiest ways) to meet my standards. They did not, necessarily, want to set those standards.

To some degree, this flattening of hierarchies—making students participants in their own assessment—was uncomfortable and unnerving to them. Teachers are experts. They are taught to assess. Students are not experts. How could they know how to assess? If a teacher needs students to help them create assessment tools, is the instructor competent to teach the class? Or so their reasoning went. This is not flawed logic, as much as it is the logic of the enslaved mind. How one reasons, justifies, and rationalizes the uneven power relations that keep them linguistically enslaved.

How students value assessment is critical to understand. Assessment is a means to an end for most students, regardless of whether they question its means or are suspicious of its end. When I asked students in the first two weeks of class to help me create a rubric for their first major project, the annotated bibliography, how grammar should be assessed weighed heavy on their minds.

Students were not thrilled to have Black language recognized as academic, as much as they wanted someone who was from the same/similar linguistic background to teach them the White language code (or rather, to be able to write in whiteface⁵)—a Black person giving a White performance of written discourse. It is mimicry, not mockery.

For these students, good grammar is intrinsically tied to good academic writing. For some of my former students this notion was reinforced in the

5. See Fanon (1967).

classroom, where skill-and-drill grammar activities and tests were a common pedagogical practice for some of their professors. These students, so conditioned to testing, were also conditioned to punish themselves for being linguistically different from the White standards of language expected of them in school. This conditioning is what I hoped to begin changing by including students in the assessment creation process.

Setting Student Assessment Goals in Class

After a bad Spring 2020 semester where multiple students failed and it seemed like I couldn't do nothing to motivate them or get them engaged, I decided to start talking with students the fall 2020 semester about grades. Specifically, how I graded their papers. I spoke with them about their experiences with writing and writing assessment (what teachers noticed about their writing). Students who had positive memories of writing in/for school also had positive memories of writing assessment. Conversely, students who had negative memories of writing in/for school also had negative memories of writing assessment.

Sometimes students internalized the negative writing assessment they received and believed they were poor writers. Yet, many others compartmentalized the negative feedback, finding a way to maintain a love for the writing they do at home, in their diary, and on their personal time, while differentiating it from the formalized writing they are required to do for school. After we discussed their experiences with writing, and once we were ready to begin creating rubrics for their essays, we started with the guiding questions I asked myself:

- *What are some of the reasons you write?*

Students stated that they write because they have something to say, they have an assignment to complete, or they want to express themselves. We then were able to connect their reasons for writing within the essay genre of *Content* (what the essay is about).

- *What are some of the reasons that you read?*

Students reported that they read for entertainment, for an assignment, and to learn about a topic. I asked students if it was possible to also write for entertainment, as well as to learn or teach? Most of the students said yes. I was hoping to show students that the reasons we read are also the reasons we write. After talking with them about the reasons we read and write, they believed their ideas aligned within the essay genre of *Context*.

- *What should you learn about essay writing from an introductory college composition course?*

Students said they should learn to add detail and “not be all over the place,” to use an expanded vocabulary, and to research/incorporate

research in their writing with citations. These ideas were placed in the Organization category.

- *How important is the intent of the chosen grammar and language usage in essay writing?*

I asked students, if they used Black language and its rhetorical practices to make a point in their essay, how would they like that assessment to occur? This question caused students significant angst. As one student said, “our language isn’t formal, so I don’t think it belongs there.” Others said if it was there, it was ok as long as it wasn’t too much. We placed these ideas in the style, grammar, and language use category.

It appeared that students wanted me to punish them if they used incorrect grammar or linguistic variants. This kind of internalized oppression over the validity of Black language and rhetorical practices in academic writing manifested itself in the ways students wanted it to be assessed. I did not know if I could participate in this practice that was perpetuating linguistic racism.

But honestly

I failed.

I failed when I did not take up my reservations with them. Maybe we were doing this wrong. What students envisioned and what we created was not an anti-racist rubric, but a rubric that found ways to reproduce linguistic racism and reset HOWL and the standard that all students must mimic and adhere to.

This result concerned me because “critical language scholars in English Education have consistently argued that ELA teachers must shift their pedagogies and practices to better support the rich linguistic resources that Black students, and other linguistically and racially diverse students, bring with them to classrooms” (Baker-Bell, 2019, p. 3). How could I make this shift if students were so willing to participate in their continued oppression?

These rubrics showed that students still maintained “negative attitudes about their linguistic, racial, cultural, and intellectual identities” (p. 3). There was still some underlying belief that Black language “is deficient, wrong, and unintelligent” (p. 3). My focus had been on collaboratively designing expectations and assessments with students. I thought that this collaboration was inherently freeing/liberatory for students, when in reality it only freed me of some control and responsibility. Expectations and standards are only as “freeing” as the minds of the people who create them.

If, as Baker-Bell says, students, faculty, and administrators are indoctrinated by “anti-black, deficit theories, and monolingual ideologies that view [Black language] as a barrier to Black students’ literacy education” (2019, p. 3), then their comfort with being punished for using it in academic writing made sense. Additionally, many of these students, even the honors students, were used to being labeled deficient, having failed to meet some arbitrary ACT or SAT score, thus

marking them as remedial. What these rubrics showed was trauma. Damage. An altered psyche. Rubrics were, or at least for my students, the means to an end: the brutal whip upon which academic writing(ers) is made.

Lowered Expectations

My expectation was that these collaborative rubrics and expectations would get me closer to the goal of assessing writing as a less exploitative practice. Yet, my collaborative rubrics and expectations do not do that. If anything, they were more exploitative than before. These rubrics exposed not only how much students desired to conform to White racial habitus (Inoue, 2015) and were willing to be punished for non-conforming, but also how much I was willing to comply with their punishments.

I had to make some kind of change because one thing became clear: I could no longer justify this pedagogy of compliance to students with tired platitudes of structure, and how there is no world without order, or by attempting to connect it with some intrinsic skill they would learn about the importance of meeting deadlines because one day they would all have bosses. If they learned any of these intrinsic skills from this rubric, great. However, in truth, the compliance categories come down to curriculum restrictions and when all instructors must submit their final grades to the registrar, all issues that students have no control over. Essentially, their compliance is about me and my need to meet the demands of my bosses at a Black university.

Thus, I began to see that the process of forming/developing rubrics with my Black students did not work for me and did not work for my students—not if the goal was to give students agency by creating a less exploitative rubric. Rubrics are, after all, the main way we enforce “common standards” (Balester, 2012, p. 63) and become a “means of defining a standard in the service of inter-rater reliability” (p. 63). And I intended to make a rubric that showed not only the “instruction in the dominant forms of academic discourse” (Balester, 2012, p. 71), but also that the power of rhetoric happens by navigating and incorporating “different texts, genres, languages, audiences or dialects.” (Balester, 2012, p. 71).

However, the agency I saw was not in the development of the rubric because I was still stuck. Instead, agency came in the conversations we had about language and power. Students were able to articulate some of the class biases around “slang” and “Ebonics.” Through the collaborative process of creating rubrics with my students, I uncovered what students think about the place of Black language and rhetoric in college writing. Students believed that assimilationist language and rhetoric (using HOWL) gave them the better chance to speak truth to power. This perceived better chance cannot be dismissed because of Black people’s continued struggle for equal rights from an imperialist machine.

This need for these Black students to speak truth to power in an attempt to be seen as equal or gain rights is assimilationist thinking and rhetoric. But the

struggle to break free from this thinking is complex. In the struggle for equality, Black people have gained rights by appealing and speaking truth to power using the tools that those in power understand. The administrators, faculty, and advisors reinforce this belief in students. This reinforcement shows how my prior HBCU can and does work as an imperialist mechanism that promotes White language supremacy.

The two questions which I continued to ask were how do I affirm Black language in writing, and how do I as a Black woman teacher of Black students grapple with the (presumed) competing responsibilities of assessment and supporting Black students' agency in academic writing? From this experience I learned that the responsibilities are not competing.

Scholars mentioned previously in this chapter have published academic articles, chapters, and books using Black language and its rhetorical practices. I have used Black language and its rhetorical practices in this chapter. What (or rather who) legitimizes it there and here, but not in a composition classroom? Could it be about trust or experience? Or maybe how we (or rather I) saw students: inexperienced, lacking intent, lacking the knowledge to know their intent, and lacking discipline.

What we must do is continue to find various ways to affirm linguistic diversity. Be it through rubrics, though they sometimes fail, or pedagogical changes, the charge is to affirm language, linguistic diversity, and rhetoric/rhetorical practices as they present in academic writing. This affirmation can come through having discussions with students about the power dynamics within language and collaborating with students on articulating the types of linguistic diversity they want affirmed when instructors assess their writing. Additionally, we can create rubrics that affirm the language and linguistic diversity of our students' writing. We can no longer fear having conversations with our students about the power dynamics in language and how those power dynamics present in rubrics. We can no longer fear what our students have to say when they write and when they talk about writing.

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Chapter 3. One White Woman Stumbles Toward Equity in Student Feedback Processes

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The first time I asked students to tell me how to grade them, it did not go well. It was my fourth year teaching as a Ph.D. student at a large, research-intensive university in the Southeast. The course was an undergraduate advanced composition class that was required for English majors in the professional and technical writing track. The class was twenty-five students. I'd taught the class once before, and it had gone fairly well. But I wanted to try new things, and I'd begun seriously thinking about assessment in light of my commitments to critical pedagogy/postpedagogy.¹ I amended my syllabus with some vague language about "deciding together" how assignments would be graded and mostly left it at that. As I thought about the first time we'd "decide together," I imagined an empowering and productive conversation: I would open the floor to students, ask some vague guiding questions, and students would intuitively know what things they could ask for feedback on and what mattered for each assignment. If you've ever undertaken a similar conversation about grading/assessment/feedback, you can likely imagine the sound of the classroom that day: absolute silence.

There were any number of problems with my approach the first time I tried to include students in the assessment of their own work, but there's one that stands out above the others: my questions were vague and seemingly out of nowhere; I hadn't done anything to create a context or foundation for having that conversation. I hadn't provided resources or readings about how language practices are embedded in histories and constructed by ideologies. I hadn't asked students to think deeply about what they wanted from the class or their work. I hadn't asked students to think about what success or effectiveness look like. I hadn't done enough work to help students think about genres, audiences, or expectations. And I certainly hadn't done the work necessary to help students feel like they had the right and ability to decide for themselves what mattered for our class. Instead, as a White woman teacher who loved school and excelled at reading and writing,

1. As I have argued elsewhere (McIntyre, 2018), postpedagogy is characterized by an emphasis on creativity, student-directed inquiry, space for messiness/failure, and deep reflection. It shares many characteristics with critical pedagogy, but the primary mode of engagement is not critique; rather, through limited constraints and deep reflection, it encourages experimentation and creation.

I presumed my students shared my experiences and my view of the classroom as a productive, supportive space. This presumption is, notably, the first of Asao Inoue's (2021) *Habits of White Language (HOWL)*, and the insidious invisibility of these kinds of presumptions is one of the reasons that so many literacy educators continue to demand adherence to a single standard of language correctness: we don't see our own language histories and practices as rooted in particular racial and class-based identities. Instead, the racial and socioeconomic dimensions of these language practices are rendered invisible as those practices are naturalized and universalized.

As a first-generation, rural, working-class, White woman, there were certainly times I was excluded by the practices of the academy, particularly the tacit, social knowledge about how to connect with my peers and professors and the assumptions about what it means to "sound educated." But in literacy classrooms, because my own language education had taught me early how to assimilate and had rewarded me for doing so, I found (or perhaps made) a home. It's certainly the case that my access to White language practices and my early willingness to eliminate my accent and the related vocabulary were necessary prerequisites to this kind of acceptance. But this comfort, and the relative privilege of my position as a White woman, was the main feature of my teacherly persona, and I assumed that giving students the opportunity to participate would be enough to make my assessment process more equitable—because by the time I made it to a college literacy classroom, getting such an opportunity was enough for me.

But it's not nearly enough. It's not enough because our educational systems (literacy and English classrooms, in particular) teach minoritized students, particularly Black students speaking and writing Black English, that their language habits and rhetorical practices are inappropriate for classrooms or wrong, full-stop. Given these previous literacy and other classroom experiences, it's no wonder that it is difficult or impossible for Black, Latinx, Indigenous students and other students of color to trust faculty who ask for their input and participation in this way; that mistrust is an entirely reasonable and appropriate response to the harm that White faculty just like me have done. By the time I reached college, my experiences in literacy classrooms were almost universally positive ones; any personal language or literacy practices that were outside of HOWL's expectations had long been discarded, and I saw myself reflected in significant parts of the reading material for those college literacy classes. But, in part because of the ways that HOWL renders itself invisible and seemingly objective (Inoue, 2021), I failed to recognize, during those first forays into co-creation, that those positive experiences were very likely not shared by my students.

In those early attempts at co-creation and collaboration with my students, I failed to recognize the systemic, structural ways that racism, sexism, and classism shape and are shaped by our language practices, policies, and educational approaches. As Inoue (2015) persuasively argues in his *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies*, "Racism seen and understood as structural, instead, reveals

the ways that systems, like the ecology of the classroom, already work to create failure in particular places and associate it with particular bodies” (p. 4). Our “standard academic English” language expectations are White; as Geneva Smitherman (1999) reminds us, “academic English” (as a generalized discourse/set of expectations) is itself a product of the backlash against civil rights advances and the increased diversity at many colleges and universities in the 1960s and 1970s. Recognizing and attempting to redress the harm caused by our racist language expectations isn’t enough to create more equitable and just educational spaces, though. As April Baker-Bell (2020) argues, we instead need to fight for Black linguistic justice, which can’t be found in conformist or assimilationist approaches to teaching English. Even in classrooms in which the majority of students aren’t Black, Baker-Bell’s emphasis on Black linguistic justice (rather than just diversity or inclusion) and her rejection of assimilationist approaches to language diversity are vital to creating more just literacy classrooms for all students of color. Linguistic justice begins, then, with centering historically marginalized (particularly Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other students of color) students’ experiences and needs instead of only an elite White monolingual set of languaging practices. These calls for centering students and their communities also have a historical precedent. They align with the normal school tradition (particularly the Black normal schools most prevalent in the southeastern US) that Iris Ruiz (2016) offers as an alternative foundation for the discipline of rhetoric and composition/writing studies: “student-centered learning, collaborative approaches, as well as approaches that considered the backgrounds of students . . . were especially prevalent in black normal schools” (p. 196).

De-Centering My Own White Subjectivity as Teacher

Co-creating expectations, guidelines, and ways of giving feedback is one small step forward, but only as part of a wider ecological view of writing assessment (Inoue, 2015) that includes ongoing reflection, flexible attendance and late work policies, and readings, assignments, and discussions that interrogate racist language practices and the role of Whiteness and White supremacy in systemic preferences for so-called Standard English. This is what I mean by ecology: for writing classes, which are primarily focused on writing processes that include modeling, practice, feedback, and revision, assessment, evaluation, and judgment are part of nearly everything we do, and so our policies about attendance, for example, impact students’ abilities to participate in the class in ways that also impact feedback and assessment. All of our decisions about the course—and policies and expectations from outside the course—impact one another. I’d note, too, that my own position as a White woman educator working toward antiracist ends but still participating in institutions and systems built on and continuing to perpetuate White supremacy, makes this work more complex and makes my own ongoing reflection vitally important. When left to my own, unreflective devices, I have perpetuated

the notion that “Standard English” is somehow objective or neutral. I also note that my geographical location at the time of this writing (California) and the identities of my students (the majority of whom are students of color, including Black, Latinx, and Asian/Pacific Islander students) make this work both easier (because of the lack of explicit pressure to ban critical race theory and teaching about racism from high school and college classrooms) and more immediately necessary (because of the ongoing harm done by California’s secondary school systems to minoritized students, particularly multilingual writers and speakers or those perceived to be multilingual speakers). See Juan Cristian Tamayo’s (2022) “Some of the Words Are Theirs: Teaching Narrative and Storytelling through Hip Hop Pedagogy in College Writing and Composition Courses,” in which he relates his own experiences from elementary school through college (all in California) of being singled out and degraded in literacy classrooms:

I was literally removed from the classroom on a weekly basis. The entire class grinded to a halt when the teacher paused mid-sentence and turned his attention to the back of the room where a head peered in, letting in with it a ray of bright white light that was an assault on the eyes. No words were exchanged, just glances. The dead air weighed on the students. Eyes shifting toward the usual culprits. This is how the ceremony of degradation commences . . . If we felt like outcasts before this only served as a confirmation, solidifying it, reminding us of our own inadequacy and inability to fit in and meet the standard. (p. 44)

Tamayo certainly wasn’t alone in his experiences or the feelings that result from these kinds of fundamentally dehumanizing institutional behaviors. In the chapter that follows this one, “Disrupting White Mainstream English in a Hispanic-Serving Institution: Reflections from Two Latina Writing Instructors,” Sonya Barrera Eddy describes how settler-colonial logics othered her in college classrooms:

Even though my family has been in Texas for longer than Texas has been a state, I was seen as a foreigner, so much so that I was offered ESL classes in elementary school . . . My professor seemed to understand and was sensitive to the history of Native Americans in our class, but she couldn’t conceptualize anything outside of the narrow framework of settler colonialism . . . My response was simple, I said, “I am from Texas.” I have spent my life trying to prove the validity of my existence and also judging and policing my own language in the process.

Part of the work of equitable literacy instruction relies on a too-often-unarticulated but widely-held belief: writing situations are specific and contextual. Genres and approaches are adapted to particular communication situations; new

genres are assembled to respond to new and changing contexts. This is, I believe, a fairly uncontroversial assertion in writing and rhetoric, and yet, too often, our assessment of students' writing/work ignores this reality in favor of some sort of "standard" approach or assessment. As Chris Anson and colleagues (2012) note in their discussion of programmatic assessments, one of the problems with generic assessment, including single-standard rubrics (as opposed to more open-ended tools like heuristics or shared sets of questions), is that they ignore the contextual, "in situ" ways that genres are constantly constructed and reconstructed. In addition, such practices also ignore the ways that the invisible framework of HOWL overlays all of our expectations in academic settings. We miss the ways that students communicate in sophisticated and contextually-appropriate ways when we demand adherence to generic (White) language standards.

How, then, can I reckon with the ways that my own language background and experiences (as a White, rural, first-generation college student) have shaped and continue to shape my pedagogy and policies? Can I reorient my classroom to center the experiences and goals of my students without simply reproducing the same HOWL that have almost certainly shaped students' perceptions of success and failure in literacy classrooms throughout their education? If so, how? And what structural barriers and institutional practices inhibit this work? In what ways can collaboration and community create space for students to articulate their own goals and values? And in what ways do those same practices run the risk of simply reinforcing the same problematic and racist attitudes about language variation and rhetorical practices, particularly those practices that don't match the White, middle-class language practices that form the foundation for so-called academic writing?

The answers to so many of these questions are intensely complicated. It's not possible to escape the ways that HOWL structures the larger institutions in which I work and my students learn. But what I can do is demand rigorous honesty and careful reflection from myself. I/we must work to account for the ways that our positionality shapes the decisions we make when we design our courses. I must consider how HOWL shapes my perceptions of myself, the students I work with, and literacy classes more generally. I must find ways to actively confront and dismantle hidden curricula and expectations that (often invisibly) reinforce HOWL. I need to articulate my positionality to my students, offer a wide array of texts that lay bare the White supremacy inherent in our standards and habits of language, and ask students to contemplate how their schooling has been shaped by these forces. These actions and processes are not one-time measures either; they must be consistent and ongoing. I also can't imagine that these shifts on my part automatically mean that students will respond differently to my pedagogies and practices; students have complex lives, histories, goals, and educational experiences.

In addition to the actions above, I've also looked to develop concrete, in-class practices that help me decenter my own judgments about students' work: co-creating feedback guidelines (which I use to give feedback to students over

the course of the writing project and which students use to give each other feedback and which shape students' end-of-project reflections). These guidelines both allow me to dilute my own language judgments while inviting students to think deeply and write reflectively about their own language goals and experiences. I think these concrete practices are immensely valuable, but what is even more valuable are the deep moments of reflection and rethinking they facilitate for me, and sometimes, for students, too. When combined with readings that lay bare the White supremacist foundations of so-called "academic English" and others that explore the value, sophistication, and rhetorical success of other Englishes, this process is one (imperfect) step toward challenging the HOWL that permeate literacy education at the postsecondary level. That step, though, is not necessarily bound up only in the practices I describe but in the rethinking, recentering, and reimagining that they allow me to participate in with the students in my courses. In particular, this chapter outlines my practice of co-creating feedback guidelines with students in both my first-year writing courses and my graduate composition courses. Co-creating feedback guidelines allows me to

1. Engage students in conversations about how their experiences with school-based literacy, almost certainly including feedback tied to evaluation tied to numerical assessments, have impacted them as language users and how the standards they encountered were shaped by HOWL.
2. Interrupt discourses, in both first-year and graduate writing classrooms, about "correctness" and "good writing," which are inextricably linked to HOWL and articulate those connections to students.
3. Complicate students' expectations about the subject, experience, and priorities of writing classes and, for graduate students in pedagogically-focused courses, about why and how we teach writing courses at the college level. This too is about making visible to myself and my students the invisible HOWL-based standards and expectations of the classroom in order to rethink our relationship to language and expand our notions of what it means to write in academic spaces.
4. Acknowledge and help my students recognize that there are myriad ways to accomplish our communication goals and that the narrowness of so-called academic writing offers one set of tools, which, like all language tools, has its own history and politics. In the case of academic writing, that history is explicitly exclusionary and racist.
5. Explicitly articulate my position in relation to HOWL and power in academic settings and acknowledge the extent to which my proximity to and comfort with HOWL have protected me.

What I've learned through these practices is that HOWL structures every part of the writing courses I teach and the discipline in which I participate. They are the all-too-often unacknowledged foundation for the work at the very heart of

writing studies' disciplinary identity. Challenging that requires seeing clearly how HOWL operate in classrooms and their assessment practices and working with students to imagine something new.

Examining My Subjectivity in an Assessment Ecology

It's not enough to tell students that things are different in our classrooms; we must do the work to demonstrate that difference and offer students opportunities to examine and reevaluate the way they think about assessment altogether. As Jesse Stommel (2018) argues, "Students are increasingly conditioned to work within a system that emphasizes objective measures of performance, ranking, and quantitative marks" ("How I Don't Grade"). The system we all work within is structured by White supremacy, and the language practices privileged by the academy reflect HOWL. In particular, the emphasis on detached objectivity and clarity above all else (both HOWL) intentionally excludes languaging practices that humanize writers and value personal experience and community knowledge. The collaborative creation of feedback guidelines, which I describe below, does not magically erase the primacy of HOWL in my classroom. It, along with an honest articulation of my own positionality, explicit discussions of racism in our institutions, humane course policies, flexible, open-ended assignments, and an ungrading approach to assessment, allows me to invite students to build from their own habits of language. These are all parts of my classroom assessment ecology.

This section, then, describes my work with collaborative assessment and first-year students at a previous institution, a selective private liberal arts college in the northeastern United States. Through this experience, I learned that co-creating feedback guidelines, when combined with ungrading and framed with readings and discussions that explicitly name linguistic racism in academic settings, creates a more equitable assessment ecology, a term Inoue (2015) coins to represent the interrelated elements of the classroom that, when combined, produce assessments: "it is the system, the ecology as a whole, that determines what possible outcomes, effects, changes, or products there will be" (p. 120). But I also learned that I have long ignored how my specific subjectivity has shaped my approach to the classroom. The goal of these practices is to explicitly center students' voices, needs, and perspectives and make space for students who have long been excluded from institutions and the language practices that those institutions enforce, but I can't properly do that if I don't acknowledge my own position and privilege. By also assigning work on diverse literacies, linguistic justice, and antiracist language and literacy practices, I can do more than make space; I can explicitly acknowledge and reflect on my positionality, the privileges that it has afforded me, and the ways that my positionality and literacy experiences are different from those of the White, Asian, and African American students I worked with at a selective liberal arts institution in the Northeast. And through that reflection, I can

make intentional choices to assign texts that offer diverse perspectives on literacy, ask students to compose texts that explore how HOWL structures school-based literacy experiences, and create feedback cycles that emphasize students' own goals for their work, all while being transparent about how our classroom and I as a teacher participate in the institutions that further White supremacist ends. I can construct my classroom as a place that prioritizes and celebrates the diverse literacy experiences my students bring with them without pretending that institutions (or those of us who work within these institutions, including myself) are actually predisposed to support or celebrate those diverse literacies.

My approach to co-creating assessment materials (in this case, a rubric) with students followed these general principles:

- **My assignments have few constraints.** As I've written elsewhere (McIntyre, 2018), asking students to experiment with new approaches, technologies, and genres is a cornerstone of critical, creative, equitable pedagogy. When paired with frequent and substantial reflection, this approach can also contribute to students' positive self-perception, self-efficacy, and even knowledge transfer (Abrami & Barrett, 2005; DePalma, 2015; Nicolaidou, 2012). Over time, however, I've also learned that my own subjectivity and the hidden, often invisible expectation set by HOWL structure even these less constrained assignments.
- **Both the assignment itself and the class-based creation of feedback guidelines include multiple opportunities for substantial reflection.** As you'll see in the sample assignments and project timelines below, students are asked to reflect multiple times on their work and on the process of creating guidelines for feedback. For the definitional text assignment (which I assign in my first-year writing classes), this reflection takes multiple forms over the course of the project: students compose proposals, revision plans, cover letters for later drafts, and project reflections. End-of-class reflections² on days when we discuss, compose, review, revise, or apply the guidelines are focused on that experience.
- **End-of-class reflections frequently ask students to make connections between the work we do in the class, the guidelines we create for feedback, and their communication practices outside of class.** These reflections encourage students to think about what successful communication practices look like at home, at work, with their families, in their communities and in other parts of their lives and then consider how those experiences might influence both the criteria we create and how they approach their work in the class. Here, I'm following Django Paris and H. Samy Alim's (2017) culturally sustaining pedagogy model, which, as

2. At the end of each class meeting, I ask students to spend 10 minutes writing reflectively about our work that day and how it connects to the larger work of the class and their writing and speaking in other contexts.

Paris argued in an interview with EdWeek, positions education as “a site for sustaining—rather than eradicating—the cultural ways of being of communities of color” (Ferlazzo, 2017). But I’m also asking students—and myself—to be explicit about how and why we value particular communication practices and how our subjectivities are related to those values. I pair this work with readings from Gloria Anzaldúa and Luci Tapahonso, and we talk about lived experiences and community/family practices as knowledge-making.

- **Prior to creation of feedback guidelines, we read and discuss work that explores themes of linguistic justice and White language supremacy.** In first-year classes, we read Vershawn Ashanti Young’s “Should Writers Use They Own English?” James Baldwin’s “If Black English Isn’t a Language, Then What Is?” and work from Jamila Lyscott and Gloria Anzaldúa. We talk about what we mean by “correct” and “academic” writing and where our definitions of those terms come from. In graduate classes, we read some of the same work, but we also read April Baker-Bell, Asao B. Inoue, Geneva Smitherman, Victor Villanueva, and others. We have the same conversation about so-called correctness and the myth of academic writing, but we also talk about the ways that the myth is perpetuated intentionally by English and writing pedagogies. And we make connections between all that and our own lived experiences as language users (on the one hand) and the HOWL that structures institutional power.
- **Guidelines are revisable throughout the life of the assignment.** As I note above, this process doesn’t begin until students have drafted their proposals for the project or started working on a draft; I want them to have begun envisioning their work/approach before we start talking about assessment so that their approaches shape the guidelines instead of the guidelines fully shaping their approach. My hope is that, over the course of the class, as our own understanding grows of how subjectivities, experiences, and communities shape our literacy practices, those ideas will also shape and reshape the guidelines we create.
- **Students draft both the guidelines and the explanations of the guidelines, including a description of what success looks like.**³ As I also note above, students create both the guidelines and the explanations for what it looks like to do something well, adequately, and not so adequately. Much of the process I discuss here and in the following section reflects previous work in writing assessment and pedagogy, particularly Inoue’s

3. As I plan for subsequent semesters, I’m thinking a lot about how to include both success and failure in our discussions of these guidelines and how I might ask students to reflect on their ideas, prior to fully completing the project, of what it would look like to fail.

(2005) “Community-based Assessment Pedagogy.” In that article, Inoue argues that asking students to build and reflect on assessment tools and approaches is part of a community-based assessment pedagogy, that integrates assessment with the teaching of writing so that students not only learn to assess themselves, taking active learning stances in the classroom, but they begin to articulate how assessment and writing work in their own practices—theorize—that is, they begin to be more self-conscious, reflective writers (2005).

This approach “resists in theory and denies in practice the traditional way evaluation, assessment, and grading happen in the classroom,” including displacing the teacher from their positions as “the evaluator or assessor in the classroom” (Inoue, 2005, p. 223, emphasis in original). In my version of this community-based approach, I work to practice Inoue’s emphasis on co-creation in service of deep reflection and also rely on a completion-based approach to grading in which I separate the feedback process (facilitated by the guidelines students create) from grading, which is based entirely on completion and is, I’d argue, a form of ungrading.⁴ I see my practice here as combining the upgrading approaches of scholars like Alfie Kohn or Stommel with Inoue’s work: namely, I wish to, as much as possible, remove the extrinsic pressure of grades and grading and replace that grading process with a collaborative approach to feedback. I want to highlight Inoue’s (2005) discussion of the connections among literacy development, thoughtful and ongoing reflection, and student-led and -centered assessment and feedback practices here because they mirror my own commitments and the values (student-centeredness, care, thoughtfulness, community) that influenced my decision to take this approach in my own classroom.

Looking Closely at Whiteness in a Specific Assignment

To better understand how this works in practice, let me walk through how a particular assignment results in a particular set of feedback guidelines from students. Here’s one of the assignments from my first-year writing course, a “Definitional Text” assignment:

For our final project, you will choose and define a term that seems vital to your understanding of our course content. This definition may take nearly any form you like except one: you may not compose a traditional essay for this project. In fact, you may use no more than 300 written words in the final draft of this project. You may, however, use as many spoken words,

4. Inoue (2005) also notes the deep and abiding problem with teacher-based evaluations and grading, noting that these practices “play very little part” in his approach to teaching writing (p. 210).

images, video clips, etc., as you like (within fair-use guidelines and in accordance with copyright law). You will compose a project cover letter, addressed to me, that introduces your definitional project and speaks to the project guidelines we create as a class. You will revise your project draft (including your cover letter) at least twice in response to feedback from me and from your peers.

The process I describe below is a result of the kinds of failed attempts I describe in the opening section. The process also reflects my sense that, especially as a White woman educator whose languaging has largely been accepted as appropriate in academic spaces, an iterative, reflective process that brings students into the conversation about assessment early and often is vital to my own reflection and to creating a more equitable process. In other words, I need the number of check-ins I describe below because without them I've had the tendency to substitute my experiences for my students' and make assumptions about how humane and equitable the process is for them.

This process takes the whole semester, and it starts for me on day one. On the first day of class, I note that being successful in the class will mean making substantive revisions to their work; that I want them to know that they'll have the opportunity to determine what kinds of things I and their peers give them feedback on and what success looks like on a particular project. Then, in the weeks that follow, I invite students to ask questions about the approach to feedback and grading in the class. I also talk to students (via readings, class discussions, and reflective writing assignments) about the concepts of audience, purpose, genre, evidence, language identity, and language bias. My goal here is to make sure students have a wide array of examples of successful rhetorical participation. This means that it's absolutely vital that my reading list reflect that variety and reflect lots of work that has largely been cast as non-academic or outside "standard" English. During the class meeting in which I introduce a new project, we discuss the specific process for developing feedback guidelines for that project, and I invite them, as they write their proposal for the project, to think about the broad strokes of what they'll be creating and what they'll want feedback on. In subsequent classes, we'll begin developing categories and descriptions of the kinds of feedback they want on the project, and after students complete peer review using the guidelines we develop, I ask them to reflect on how the guidelines did or didn't work. What do we need to change? Eliminate? Clarify? Expand? These reflections are the basis for subsequent revisions to the project guidelines. And throughout the process, we continue reading and discussing texts that challenge Standard English and its primacy. These texts help shape the guidelines as we revise them over the life of the project.

Based on these processes, my students create grids of a sort. Here's part of one from my first-year writing class in the winter of 2016. It refers to the Definitional Text Assignment described above:

Criteria	What does it look like to do this well?	What does it look like to do this adequately?	What does it look like to do this poorly?
Text is visually and/or aurally appealing and/or visually and/or aurally interesting	The text displays a high level of creativity. It is clear that the author put a good amount of effort into the presentation and is actively trying to entertain and educate the reader/viewer.	While the author still put in some effort into the visual aspect of the text, it is clear from the audience's perspective that more could be done creatively to make the text more engaging.	The text has little to no evidence of creative effort at all. The author just wrote out the information with little thought or care in how it should be presented. Typical 12pt font Times New Roman. Creatively void.
Definitional text content is appropriate for the message and audience	Content is persuasive, entertaining, or informative, depending on its target audience. It gives the target audience a clear idea of the definition of the chosen term.	Content is relevant, but the choice of content can be more focused or appropriate depending on the audience	Content is vague, irrelevant, and does not relate to the author's definition and the term they chose
Cover letter discusses and justifies rhetorical decisions	Cover letter cites specific examples from the definition text to support claims made about rhetorical decisions. Discussion of decisions is clear and makes sense for the intended audience.	Cover letter talks about rhetorical decisions, but it lacks specific examples from the definitional text. It is not completely clear why some choices were made in the definitional text.	Cover letter touches on the overall structure of the definitional text, but there is no mention of rhetorical decisions. Readers are not able to figure out why the definitional text is written and there is no justification of choices made.

There's so much I could talk about here: how these first-year students have reproduced some of the terms we might expect to see in faculty-created criteria, the breadth and depth of students' view of the project, students' insistence on using "interesting" and "appealing" even though these are slippery terms. But I want to focus instead on how clearly students have articulated writing and creation as context-dependent processes. This was certainly a key point of discussion in our class, and we talked about things like audience and purpose frequently and at some length. But until we created this set of guidelines for our final project, I wasn't entirely certain that students had really understood the importance or complexity of these concepts. Certainly, though, these guidelines (and the process of creating and using them) are not without their problems. Slippery terms like the ones featured in both of the examples I share in this chapter have the potential of simply reinforcing existing racist views of language practice by allowing

readers to continue to base their definitions of such terms on the HOWL that continue to structure most literacy education. I haven't discovered a surefire way to avoid this vexing problem. What I can (and do) do, though, is assign texts and facilitate class discussions about work (from Vershawn Ashanti Young, Jamila Lyscott, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others) that complicates views of what writing can do, ask students to think about their own rhetorical histories and practices as valid and successful, and use the feedback guidelines we create together as a starting point for ongoing reflection both about the writing project they're working on and about their literacy experiences, past, present, and future.

I also want to note the absence of any specific grammatical or stylistic criteria. With the exception of "clear and concise" as part of the explanation for the "Definitional text medium is appropriate for message and audience" guidelines, none of the student-drafted guidelines specifically attend to sentence-level issues. When given the choice, students focused on creativity, audience, context, evidence, and other higher order concerns.

This is certainly not to say that there's not all sorts of HOWL reflected here; students have completed at least a dozen years of literacy education before they reach a first-year composition classroom. And they're absolutely continuing to encounter those same kinds of HOWL-based writing expectations in other classrooms at the same time they're participating in this work with me. And I'll also note my own complicity here: though I imagined myself to practicing a more equitable even antiracist assessment practice here, I didn't take one of the most important steps I could and should have: I didn't explicitly call our attention to how HOWL and White language standards maintain power via supposed objectivity and invisibility. I was (and remain, to some extent) proud of the lack of attention to grammar and style. But I failed to recognize the ways that the invisibility of those conventions also maintains White language supremacy.

Do I think this process moved me closer to equitable writing assessment? I do. But the nagging flaw remains: I didn't do (nor ask students to do) nearly enough of the kind of explicit reflection on the role of race and racism on shaping language judgements that is necessary for antiracist practice, which demands an unflinching acknowledgement of the ways that racism shapes habits, judgements, expectations, and measures of success and failure. I'm reminded here of what Louis M. Maraj, in his chapter in this collection, "Gaming the System: Assessing 'Basic' Writing with Black Male Student-Athletes," says about the rhetorical power of disturbances, disruptions, and interruptions: "What I'm tryna say is, while, for Bartholomae, students invent academic discourses through their approximations, this study demonstrates how disturbing the uses of institutional mechanisms culturing those approximations might shift relationships with assessment." That's what's missing from my own practices here.

As I said at the outset, this process of co-creating guidelines with students is neither quick nor intuitive. And it doesn't automatically redress the harms of White language supremacy. Instead, as my students have noted, it's the

combination of readings that lay bare the racist foundations of “standard” and “academic” English in combination with the opportunity to craft the criteria that moves us toward a more antiracist writing assessment practice. Reading work that challenges internalized notions of correctness is a necessary first step; otherwise, even student-created criteria will simply perpetuate Whitestream ways of doing English. This work is, of course, complicated by my positionality: as a White woman talking to students of color about their literacy experiences, particularly their experiences in my own classroom, part of this process necessarily involves (1) acknowledging both my privilege and complicity in a system that valorizes White language, (2) talking to students about the ways that the policies (around attendance, deadlines, and grading, in particular) and practices of our class are intended to push back on that same system, (3) asking students to reflect on their own positionality and literacy experiences, and (4) making space (in class and via more anonymous means) for students to clarify, question, interrogate, and/or criticize the work and of our class and my approach. And thinking now about how HOWL structures classrooms and institutions via invisibility, naturalization, and claims to objectivity, this process must also include multiple explicit discussions of how our own internalized standards, goals, and practices have been shaped by White language supremacy. In particular, as a White educator whose goals include centering and celebrating the experiences and expertises of students of color, I must be consistently open to feedback from students about whether the course is actually working for them. And then I must implement that feedback. But first, I have to make a space that such feedback is even possible, and that begins with being honest and open about my own position as White woman educator and about the ways the institutions I’ve spent my life in are shaped by White supremacy.

The practice discussed here is one part of a larger ecological approach to grappling with the real harm that single-standard assessments still do to all students, particularly students of color and multilingual students, whose literacy practices don’t align with the White, middle-class English language and literacy practices that underpin notions of academic English. Guidelines like the ones created by first-year students in my courses interrupt some (though certainly not all) of the problematic assessment and feedback practices that so often define postsecondary literacy education. The process of creating these guidelines, when combined with readings that challenge the hegemony of Standard English and invisibility of the racial and socioeconomic dimensions of so-called Academic English, allows me to open space to explore and experiment with language practices that are meaningful to them. And as I learn more about students’ language values and practices, it becomes easier to see how HOWL and White supremacy have structured (and continue to structure) my expectations for myself and my students. The more clearly I see them, the more clearly I see myself and the institution and the ways the both I and the institution are shaped by HOWL and White language supremacy.

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Chapter 4. Disrupting White Mainstream English in a Hispanic- Serving Institution: Reflections from Two Latina Writing Instructors

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Sonya: *Everything about me has been questioned and assessed for validity. I am a Tejana who grew up in Arizona. Let me begin with a conversation that was formative for me pedagogically as an instructor at the university level. I recall sitting in an undergraduate food and nutrition class at Northern Arizona University; when we were having a discussion about culture and food, the professor asked the class to raise their hands if they immigrated. She then asked students whose parents immigrated to raise their hands. She went to grandparents, then great grandparents, and only three students remained with their hands down, me and two Diné students. The professor seemed a little exasperated with me. She turned to me and said, “I know why these two didn’t raise their hands, but what’s your excuse?”*

Asao Inoue (2021a) argues “words have real effects on us, emotionally, physically, even spiritually” (p. 8). Maybe that is the reason that a single line of spoken language has stayed with me all this time. I remember it clearly. I can hear the tone and inflection, even though it was not said out of malice. The weight of the sentence comes from the fact that she questioned the validity of my entire existence with one word: “excuse.” I was asked to provide an excuse for my existence. This professor couldn’t see beyond her own colonial frameworks to understand that the Southwest in particular had a history beyond “American” colonization. My family has been in the area that was once known as the territories of Coahuila y Tejas since 1760. I am a fifth generation U.S. citizen, because one of my relatives was born in Starr County in 1852. Even though my family has been in Texas for longer than Texas has been a state, I was seen as a foreigner, so much so that I was offered ESL classes in elementary school. Now, as an instructor at the university level, I understand what my professor was trying to communicate through this activity. She was trying to make the point that there are many things about food that are cultural and that we must take into account these cultural aspects of food when we are talking about supporting the nutritional needs of diverse populations. My professor seemed to understand and was sensitive to the history of Native Americans in our class, but she couldn’t conceptualize anything outside of the narrow framework of settler colonialism. I think maybe she wanted to know what wrench I was trying to throw into her world view. I wasn’t trying to be rebellious or divisive. I was naive and didn’t understand

the question. My response was simple, I said, “I am from Texas.” I have spent my life trying to prove the validity of my existence and also judging and policing my own language in the process.

Liz: “I’m sorry, I don’t understand Spanish.” “¿Me puedes traducir lo que dice esta señora?” As I reflect on my language experiences as a first-generation Mexican-American Latina whose first language is Spanish, I don’t ever recall a moment where my family or I weren’t judged, or assessed, by our language practices. I clearly remember the many times we would get phone calls, after spending hours leaving business cards for my mom’s housekeeping business around all the beach homes in Oxnard, California, only for my brother and me to translate for my mom. See, these moments of translation were a means of survival for my family—this meant work for my mom and the ability for my parents to pay bills, buy food, and other basic necessities. However, there were times when I would get on the phone to translate, and the person on the line was not interested in hiring someone who didn’t speak English. Even worse were the instances when I would come along with my mom to consultations, only to witness how rude and racist some of the White women were due to her “broken English.” “Sorocco?” as one woman stated, pronouncing my mom’s name wrong. However, not all of my early childhood memories around language were negative. The one thing I remember is that all of these moments of translation would happen in community—with family. If I didn’t know a word or phrase, I could lean on this community, knowing they wouldn’t judge.

Our narratives throughout this chapter give you glimpses of how our past experiences influence what we do in the classroom, especially when it comes to assessment. For the two of us, assessing a student’s writing is a complicated and fraught topic at best, and is more complicated when the academic system we work in asks us to assess and judge students’ personal language and culture, all while we are constantly forced to validate our own existence in academic spaces. Our past lived experiences take on additional weight for us both and we are highly affected by the sociopolitical and economical context of the city and state in which we live and teach. Though we come from different backgrounds, we are both Latinas who teach at Texas A&M-San Antonio (A&M-SA). We work in a department where we are surrounded by colleagues who are dedicated, like we are, to developing antiracist and decolonial writing pedagogies, assessment practices, and curriculum. A&M-SA is a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) with over 72 percent of students who identify as Hispanic. As our adopted College of Arts and Sciences land acknowledgement states, we are a university that is located on the Yanaguana, named for the life-giving waters of the San Antonio River. It is on the homelands of many indigenous people, including the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation, Payaya, Coahuilteca, Lipan Apache, and Comanche, as well as other diasporic peoples from the southern Plains, eastern United States, and Mexico. Due to the physical and cultural violence of colonialism in the area on which the university is situated, on the ranchlands of the former Mission San Francisco de

la Espada and former Mission San Antonio de Valero, these colonial legacies are deeply sewed into the mission of the university. The idea of “mission” can be seen in various ways, from our university slogan to the architecture of our buildings to the ways in which students are expected to perform White standard language practices.

Our university writing programs have begun to identify how White standard language ideology permeates through our curriculum and pedagogy and to challenge ourselves to find ways to resist and enact more socially just writing curricula. As a department, we are constantly looking to implement more equitable writing assessment practices, and as a result of these often difficult but necessary conversations, many faculty in our writing programs have moved towards implementing community-based pedagogies, in particular labor-based assessment in their courses (Tinoco et al., 2020). Like our colleagues, we have been using and reflecting on this form of assessment for several years, and in conversations with them, we both continually raise the questions: What are student experiences with labor-based assessment? Do students perceive this form of assessment as antiracist and socially just? We do this because we feel that students’ voices are important and we both believe that students should always be at the center of best practices. If we discount student voices in determining best practices in our situational context, we risk simply reforming White language ideologies into newer shinier systems of oppression. As we are working with other faculty towards creating antiracist and decolonial writing programs, we must remind them that we are firmly rooted in community and collaborative based pedagogies. For us, as two Latinas, these concepts are deeply rooted in cultural and familial experiences (Yosso, 2005) and not simply academic frameworks. We both work best in community and in collaboration with others, including students, so throughout this chapter, you will have glimpses of our personal experiences through short narratives about our implementation of collaborative assessment practices.

We must acknowledge at this point that this work is never ending. Antiracist work is constant work. For years before we arrived at our institution, this work was done quietly, and our colleagues shied away from writing about this work because it seemed messy and incomplete. We have written previously about the spirit of *comadrisimo* (Ribero & Arellano, 2019) that exists between us as Latinas in academia, and with that spirit, we have embraced the messiness of our work and become determined to write about it. We know that we are only making small strides, but we are willing to perform that *comadrisimo* for a wider audience in order to be transparent, allowing others to see that this work is emotionally and physically taxing and requires constant reflection. Nevertheless, we continue to actively work towards a better future for our students and our communities.

For years, scholars (Huot, 2002; Inoue, 2005; Litterio, 2018; White, 1994) have advocated for community-based assessment, which gives students the opportunity to be involved in the assessment process. According to Inoue, community-based assessment pedagogy “integrates assessment with the teaching of writing so that

students not only learn to assess themselves, taking active learning stances in the classroom, but they begin to articulate how assessment and writing work in their own writing practices” (2005, p. 209). One feature of Inoue’s community-based assessment pedagogy is that students develop rubrics for their assignments in conversation with their peers (2005). Moreover, Eric Turley and Chris Gallagher (2008) argue rubrics are a “product of a particular community of writers” (p. 90). They argue for us to move away from the binary of viewing rubrics as good or bad, but rather move to understand what they do, how they shape our practices, and who they benefit. More recently, Joe Cirio (2019) argued that the negotiation process hinges on three aspects: “[that] students know what their own values are, that students have a language to articulate tacit writing values, and that students’ explicit language is robust enough to account for the complexity of their writing” (p. 101). In reading these scholars, we discussed the language of rubrics, the use and misuse of rubrics, and the ways in which we have used rubrics.

Liz: I came to recognize the harm enacted by rubrics and instructors who assess using a single standard during my graduate program, at a HSI with over 83 percent Latinx students, many who speak Spanish and live along the US-Mexico border. In this FYC program, student writing was assessed using standardized rubrics and expected to approximate White mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020). During my first two years as a teaching assistant in this program, I asked myself “Why wouldn’t a program draw from the rich linguistic knowledge students bring with them to the classroom? Why would students’ grades be penalized if their writing showed evidence of Spanish?” My personal trauma from previous experiences with assessment and language, which I won’t rehash here, were brought back to the forefront of my teaching, and I felt ill-equipped as a graduate student to address these critical linguistic questions.

As someone who speaks both English and Spanish, I often communicated and related writing concepts to them in Spanish. I learned that for some students, speaking Spanish, code meshing, and code switching were all needed as they navigated school, work, and even, crossing the border. I listened to students terrified about losing scholarships or their student visas, not being able to afford paying to retake a class, or their dreams at their career and socioeconomic advancement for themselves and their families shattered if they did not pass their writing courses with certain grades. I listened to other instructors, who didn’t understand Spanish, constantly complain about students in their courses speaking Spanish. As I heard the numerous stories from students about their experiences with being judged and their intelligence questioned due to their English writing and speaking skills, I found it important to push back on the assessment practices used by the first-year composition program that drew from best practices in the discipline.

As I continued my graduate school journey, I did not want to participate in a practice that was racist and harmful to students. During this time, the first-year composition program was going through a transition, so I was able to advocate and

design a class that incorporated community-based assessment pedagogy (Inoue, 2005). Student buy-in was difficult because as Beatrice Mendez-Newman (2007) describes, young adults in traditional Hispanic families are often raised not to question authority figures and to accept the judgments (grades) by teachers. In order to get student-buy in, students collaborated in creating their assessment tools—the rubrics. Collaborative rubrics prompted more student agency, and students were more comfortable talking about assessment with their peers and instructors (Tinoco & Lawrence, 2018).

Sonya: *For me rubrics were essential in learning how to write academically. I earned my BA back in the 1990s in creative writing and worked in copy writing and public affairs prior to moving home to San Antonio in 2007. I started graduate school in 2009. This was a pivotal moment for our economy and for my family. My husband lost his job in the recession, and I became the sole provider for our family. I went from working part-time and attending graduate school to working full-time while taking my teaching certification courses and attending graduate school. It was this experience of entering graduate school at the same time that I was taking my teacher certification that planted the seed for this research. I was floundering in my first academic courses at a time when I was learning how to teach. One of the tools I was learning to use was a rubric. I was being taught how to use the rubric to teach students what to expect. At the time, I did not analyze the White habitus (Inoue, 2015) in the conventions or the White mainstream English or WME (Baker-Bell, 2020). I simply knew that by learning to develop these rubrics for my students, I was learning what the expectations were for me in graduate school. This idea was in my mind as Liz and I discussed community-based assessment and the idea that students could develop rubrics in conversation with their peers.*

The above conversation solidified our understanding that our own pedagogical praxis could not help but be informed by our lived experiences and we realized the same must be true for our students. This led us to not only find ways to include students and their experiences in various dimensions of our courses, more specifically, in assessment, at our current institution, A&M-SA, but to find ways to take tools that are traditionally used to discipline or police language, and use them to empower students to make personal choices. This came about as a result of our desire to ask students to be critical of their language education, even though we were aware that for many students this language education is vital to upward mobility and job security in a system that was not designed for them. We built on the work of scholars who have advocated for community-based, collaborative, and antiracist assessment practices.

Our work here is influenced by Cruz Medina and Kenneth Walker's (2018) call for a social justice turn to assessment as

evaluation and assessment should both work to critique the exercise of privilege and be inclusive of non-White students with

varying levels of privilege. It is not enough to commit to an exercise of critique of the systems that we navigate if we cannot give them concrete ways to navigate these systems. Simply drawing attention to racism and oppression for students who are experiencing these marginalizations can result in a learned helplessness that perpetuates the systems. (p. 47)

To counteract this learned helplessness, we decided to use the most ubiquitous tool students are often handed, the rubric.

We decided on the rubric for several reasons. First, we thought that students' understanding of how and why they were being assessed would open the lines of communication and help them feel comfortable discussing assessment with other instructors. We also felt it would help them learn conventions of different writing genre. We also felt it would give them a more active role in their assessment instead of being passive about the grades they've earned in other classes. We hoped that understanding assessment in this way would increase their confidence and thereby increase their risk-taking ability in their writing process. You can see from our narratives that rubrics have had both positive and negative effects on us as individuals. We teach students how to create rubrics and teach them how to use them for their own benefit, instead of having rubrics used against them. In the Fall of 2020, we conducted an IRB approved study on Latinx students and their use of collaborative rubrics. For this study, we positioned ourselves as teacher-researchers and used our own classes to learn how rubrics could encourage students to make choices in their own writing (Tinoco & Eddy, 2023). What follows is our critical reflection of what we learned as teacher-researchers.

Although the Latinx students in this study were open to being active members of the assessment process and engaging in discussions about structural racist assessment practices used to make judgments on student's writing, participants engaged in behaviors which were rooted in upholding a grade and writing in Standard Academic English. One of the most important things we learned from this study is that student agency in writing assessment does not equate to social and linguistic justice in assessment if students continue to hold dominant habits of White language (Inoue, 2021b).

One of the first things we did in our lesson plan was to ask students to critically engage with a discussion about the assessment ecology in the classroom. For us, assessment ecology has many moving parts and it is always changing, never static. First, there is an assessment ecology in each of our classrooms, which operates within the structure of our university. Furthermore, the university assessment ecology also operates within the legislative regulations, such as placement and testing. Lastly, and most importantly we must recognize that students and instructors bring all of their lived experiences with them into the each of these various nodes of the assessment ecology, adding to its complexity. For this reason,

we embrace Inoue's (2015) idea that systems work in relation to each other and assessment ecologies have a component of sustainability. As Inoue (2015) argues,

If our writing assessment ecologies in our classrooms don't pay attention to the dialectical way those ecologies affect students and the students affect them or the way they affect and change us as teachers, they may simply be ecologies of measurement, mechanism of pure accountability. (p. 80)

To open this conversation about assessment ecologies we first invited students to begin a discussion about language and power through a reflection and creation of rubrics.

Sonya: I first began by laying the groundwork and talking about the different types of code switching that students do in the classroom. We discussed our different types of literacies (Kalantzis et al., 2016) as well as the types of code switching (Auer, 2013) that we often engage in in these differing rhetorical situations. Students didn't seem to have any trouble making these connections with code switching. They felt comfortable discussing the ways in which they engaged in this practice. We then discussed code meshing (Young & Barrett, 2018), and this is where students began to struggle with our discussion. They often spoke about the freedom that codemeshing allowed and were in support of it, but then their practice in the classroom was markedly different. I noticed this when we did our first discussion of rubrics. We used the Rubristar website which is designed for teachers to build rubrics without having to deeply understand the content area. It is a tool with built-in language and teachers can simply choose different categories they want to assess and the program creates the rubric breakdown for them.

Liz: I implemented the same activity in an upper division course, Introduction to Composition Studies, and a graduate course, Theory and Practice of Teaching Writing. I asked students to read Asao B. Inoue's (2015) "The Function of Race in Writing Assessment," and although the majority of students agree with Inoue's claims that assessing everyone's writing by the same standards is racist, they all discussed how their pedagogy is often in conflict with what is required from their current or future jobs as teachers. For example, one graduate student who is a teacher at a local high school on the east side of San Antonio, a predominately African American community, mentioned how she teaches in ways that are culturally responsive to the students, but then has to make a switch to teach curriculum and assess student writing the way it would be assessed on standardized state tests. This student discussed the real impact these test scores have on students' educational experiences and her own working conditions. This impact shows up for teachers in the form of job performance evaluations and funding for the entire school, which is often based on test scores. We then shifted the conversation to discuss how writing assessment has been used to assess their own writing. Students seemed excited to be creating a rubric as a means to provide feedback to their peers, instead of using a rubric that

would be used to judge their writing in order to earn a grade. One student mentioned that reading their peer's draft and not having a direction on what to comment on was overwhelming and anxiety inducing. This student discussed how the peer revision process is sometimes a "free-for-all" process. They recalled having received papers with tons of marks and comments and not knowing where to get started on revisions. Thus, the collaborative rubrics created within their writing groups would give them guidance on two or three things they needed to hone in on during the revision process. Like Sonya, I also invited students to use Rubistar, but many opted out of using the program because they didn't like the prescriptive language used, and instead, they created rubrics using their own language practices to provide more targeted feedback for their peers.

In following our lesson plans and inviting students to be active participants of the assessment ecology of our classrooms, we at least initiated a critical discussion about White mainstream English habits and practices. We opened up our classroom spaces and invited students to be vulnerable while critically examining how racist discourse produces false narratives and deficit thinking about their writing practices. But all of these critical discussions were not transferred into the assessment tools they created. Students were candid and vulnerable in discussion, but fell into a system of creating rubrics that the instructor wanted to see.

Sonya: I began by discussing examples of rubrics from other classes. The students ranked these rubrics and placed them in two categories "appropriate to evaluate the task at hand" and "Not appropriate to evaluate the task at hand." We had wonderful discussions in class about what types of rubrics work and why. We discussed how we might use the rubric to guide our writing. The student-created rubrics that would allow each author to visualize what they felt was important in their writing. This would give the peer evaluator an idea of what to read/look for. With the idea that a rubric is a guide created by the author to help the peer in evaluation of the work we began our work. The students agreed that creating the rubrics was critical to their prewriting and planning stages. After our initial discussions I noticed that students did not create their own rubrics and give them to their peers at our first workshop.

When I questioned the students, a few were brave enough to explain that they were unsure how to create their own rubrics. I created a template and planned scaffolding that would guide the students to rubric creation with a gradual release of responsibility from the instructor to the students, so that they could gain skills in rubric creation. Students were enthusiastic and began using the rubric, however very few of the students took the rubrics that were given to them and made them their own. Once I no longer provided the scaffolding and students were able to create their own rubrics, in any format they wished, many simply reverted back to the original rubric scaffolding I provided or replicated the types of rubrics that they were familiar with from high school. These were the very types of rubrics that they critiqued early in the class. These rubrics turned up attached to their essay for peer

evaluation with WME conventions being weighted heavily and included categories such as “grammar” and “spelling.”

I have contemplated why students reverted to “traditional” rubrics that they were familiar with from high school, because I feel like there could be several reasons this happened: Students could have simply found themselves overwhelmed by their work in their college courses and as progressed in the semester they could have spent less time thinking about their writing and evaluation of their writing because of their workload. Having students turn in the rubric along with their essays conforms with the conventional use of rubrics as a grading tool. Students could have then been confused by the purpose of the rubric and not seen it as a tool and guide for themselves but a tool for grading. I think some of our data reflects this confusion. I think that we were overestimating the impact that these discussions can have on students. It seems like it will take more than a few good conversations in a class to undo the years of being raised in the secondary education system and being acculturated to accept WME as the standard of writing.

Liz: Sonya, you allowed your students to have time in groups to view different rubrics and to build their own rubrics, so did I. I was surprised by the fact that after so much animated and supportive discussion of code meshing, students in your class were reluctant to be critical of the rubrics. They often spoke in support of White mainstream English and how having an “academic standard” helped the teacher to evaluate them and to succeed. I didn’t expect this dissonance. It appears students were grappling with the fact that they knew they would be evaluated and judged on their language practices, and they were self policing and choosing the very types of assessment practices you were asking them to be critical of through this activity.

The issue my classes faced was moving away from the hierarchy that exists with rubrics. Visually, students didn’t like how rubrics, including those from Rubistar, create hierarchical relationships between content. To help alleviate this issue, some students did not assign point values to these different categories, and some groups even moved away from the traditional table structure of rubrics.

From the data in our study, graduate students and upper division undergraduates who had more exposure to antiracist frameworks in our program had a better understanding of what we were trying to accomplish and were less likely to reinforce White language norms. Graduate students were able to create the collaborative rubrics as a way to provide feedback to their peers, but there was a minimal number of lower division undergraduate students who understood the value of the practice of writing rubrics or to use it as a tool to plan their own writing in the way that we were hoping. However, we don’t want to assume a false equivalency that more exposure to antiracist practices led students to engage less in habits of White language. The increase in student’s confidence could be that students were familiar in navigating different assessment ecologies and our institutional space.

We both learned so much from involving students in the assessment process. Both of us would often get together and discuss the complexities about this practice, and we hope to capture some of the major takeaways in this reflective portion of the chapter where we speak to how this practice has changed our approach to assessment. Let us first start by saying that we don't use collaborative rubrics in the classroom—as a matter of fact, we both completely stopped using rubrics since students were still using rubrics as a way to approximate White mainstream English. The discussions around them, while fruitful, did not transfer directly into action for students and we are reminded of Audre Lorde's (2007) admonition that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 112). We feel as if it would take much more time and exposure for students to get to a place where they could use the tool of the rubric in a different way than we have time for in an introduction to composition course. This is also confusing for students who are just beginning to be exposed to antiracist pedagogical frameworks. Using a tool of racism in an antiracist way is a very different and nuanced approach and students can easily be confused and think that we are teaching how to build and use rubrics in the way that they are used in WME.

Another major reason for moving away from rubrics was to create a classroom environment and community where students are encouraged to take risks. By taking risks, we mean asking students to approach writing assignments in the best way they see fit, instead of worrying how their writing is going to be assessed with a rubric. For us, risk-taking really gets at the core of creating a growth mindset (Dweck, 2012) for students. This means constantly iterating to students that if a part of the writing process did not go as they intended, it doesn't mean they should give up. Risk-taking doesn't have to be negative, and it can take on many forms for students. For some students, taking a risk can mean asking us or their peers more questions, being more open to feedback, collaborating with peers, or reflecting on why a part of the writing process did not go as planned.

One of the things that we discovered as we reflected on this study is that student agency in writing assessment does not necessarily equate to social and linguistic justice in assessment. Many students continue to hold dominant habits of White language (Inoue, 2021b) and also find it difficult to let these standards go. As Wonderful Faison writes in Chapter 2 of this collection, student's resistance to Black English, or in our case, Spanglish, "is political, racist, and classist and is meant to maintain the social order." Many students have a need to become proficient in White mainstream English because they view these habits and practices as their pathway to success, acceptance, and social mobility. These students have a very real fear that they will be rejected from jobs, promotions, and excluded in many different ways if they are unable to engage in these White habits of language. Although the two of us use antiracist and social justice pedagogies in our classrooms (Baker-Bell, 2020; Chavez, 2020; Inoue, 2015; Kendi, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017), seeing how many students uphold White mainstream English in their work can be exhausting and cause emotional fatigue. In addition, constantly

discussing the racial and linguistic injustices Black, Latinx, and other minoritized students experience in education can be overwhelming. This means that as Latinas, every semester, in an effort to be transparent and foster trust we must often disclose our experiences and trauma associated with our literacy practice, which makes this work very personal. These are traumas and experiences that we share with students but that we will not explicate here, in order to avoid trauma porn. What we wish to emphasize here is not our personal experiences, but the reality that students recognize the need to be able to use White mainstream English. As much as we might want to dismantle the system, the system still exists, and these students know that they must exist and work within that system when they exit our classroom. They might feel confident in discussion and doing this work in the protected setting of our classes, but will not take such risks when their graduation, access to jobs or graduate programs, or promotions are on the line.

For the students who are resistant to such practices and insistence on using WME frameworks, we can cause them to disengage from the process of writing and learning by our insistence that they participate in our view of socially just writing. For these students, it becomes critical that we allow them to engage in the part of socially just assessment practices that they are comfortable with, even if it means that they fall back into White mainstream English practices. At the same time, we must continue to provide access to these important ideas, and places for these important discussions, to allow students the space to understand and begin engaging in more socially just writing practices (Villanueva, 1997). Even if they are not in a place where they want to confront or interrogate their own practices, we can still invite them into these conversations, but we cannot force them into accepting our views or ideas. Watching students, especially minoritized students, buy into a racist system is exhausting and can often feel like we are not doing enough.

Which brings us back to the title of this article, “Disrupting White Mainstream English.” We want to address practical ways that instructors can disrupt WME and empower students when it comes to assessment. When different instructors think about disrupting White mainstream English, they may think about different social and cultural norms that are associated with Whiteness that neither of us have considered. We have learned through this project that the way people interact with WME is as varied and individualistic as their writing process. Some of the things that instructors should think about are:

- How does your writing pedagogy disrupt or uphold WME practices?
- Do you have a diverse representation of varieties of English and languages in the texts you incorporate in your classes?
- Are you presenting students with varied culturally diverse rhetorical practices, beyond western rhetorical practices?
- Are students able to see themselves reflected in the academic work you are presenting them?

- Are you presenting students with models of writing that disrupt WME or disciplinary standards?
- Are your assessment practices truly disrupting WME, or are you simply “adopting” assessment practices that others have deemed “antiracist” without critical thought to your application or student population?

We present the reader with questions instead of solutions because we have found that the choice to disrupt or not to disrupt WME is something that is done individually for every student. Very much in the same way that each student must find their own voice as a writer, they will also find their own ways to accept or disrupt WME at the time that they are or are not willing to engage in this work. Their willingness to disrupt WME may change over time. We acknowledge that while writing is socially constructed, it is our job as instructors to frankly describe what WME is so students have a clear picture of what it is and how it functions in their own lives and the lives of others. Then, we must step back and allow students to engage with that information, understanding that as instructors we are unable to prescribe students ways to “disrupt” because disruption, like antiracism, is a personal practice and process.

Oftentimes, we question some of our pedagogical choices and the reasons for doing disruptive work, but we have to constantly remind ourselves of the value of the work we are doing and the importance of continuing towards more antiracist and socially just practices in academia. As Latinas in writing studies, we also have to acknowledge and confront our complicity in systemic racism. Being antiracist educators means that we are constantly aware that there are tensions between our theoretical and pedagogical frameworks as antiracist educators and the disciplinary frameworks we engage with as professionals in writing studies. These tensions keep in the forefront of our minds the fact that we are complicit in the system due to the long history of linguistic violence enacted by our discipline, while working to dismantle this system to create a more socially just education experience for students of color. We remind ourselves constantly that the tension we are feeling IS the work. We must question, critically analyze, and do the best we can at each moment, in each aspect of our work from creating reading lists, to lesson planning, assessment, to our own research and writing. We remind ourselves daily that we may not see the fruits of our labor. We must keep in mind that the impact we have on the system may not become evident until our students replace us in the academy.

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Chapter 5. Between the Hammer and Anvil: The Implementation of Anti-Racist Labor-Based Contracts and Critical Pedagogy Amid Political Tensions

و السن دا نبين الم طر قة

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As an educator in the U.S. higher education, I often experience myself trapped under two pressures: a hammer and anvil. Students have power over me in their day-to-day resistance to my teaching and end-of-semester evaluations. Administrators have power over me in claiming particular theories and pedagogies to be the right ones and justifying what they do or request by mandated assessment regulations. This chapter is about this conundrum and the consequences of assessment that might hinder the learning experience of students and debilitate the minority teacher's critical pedagogy and growth as an educator. The assessment I discuss here is regarding a minority teacher's judgment of her students' writing, as well as the students' and administrators' judgment of the teacher and her pedagogy.

This chapter illustrates my experience as a racially minoritized teacher and foreigner in a non-tenured track (NTT) position in the U.S. White academy. While I narrate particular incidents that I encountered in my teaching, I don't aim to single out students and administrators, but rather point out patterns of White supremacy culture enacted in the U.S. higher education institutions. I center the chapter on my implementation of labor-based contracts, community-based learning, and antiracist writing assessment approaches in my writing courses amid political tensions with students, colleagues, and administrators within White supremacy culture. As I summarize, narrate, and highlight particular encounters, I rely on my memory and impressions about what students and administrators said, how they acted, and how I responded. I understand that my interpretations of and judgment about these encounters are influenced by a complicated rhetorical ecology that includes my background as a woman of color, an Arab/Palestinian, and a past student and teacher in Jordan, the country where I was born and raised. That background does not only influence my own interpretation of my encounters with students and administrators, but likely influences my values as a teacher, which might clash with students' and administrators' values and attitudes.

While I pursued my Ph.D. in rhetoric and professional communication, housed in an English department at a Southwest, R2 Hispanic-serving Institution (HSI), I struggled with students' resistance of me as a teacher, an authority of knowledge, and an expert in the subject matter who is not native to the language of writing that she teaches. Often my TA peers spoke about promoting democracy, negotiation of the student-teacher authority, and student agency in their classes. I, however, always felt their practices and pedagogies didn't apply to my situation simply because I had no authority in the classroom, to begin with.

I was always aware to some extent of my difference as a foreign body, although not fully aware of how White supremacy or White privilege operated in academia against me as a minority teacher and graduate student. As I progressed in my Ph.D. program and teaching I started recognizing that my students, colleagues, and administrators embodied an institutional White supremacy culture that perpetuates "The idea (ideology) that White people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of White people are superior to People of color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions" (Jones & Okun, 2001, p. 19). Within that culture, students and colleagues claimed to be harmed and injured whenever my pedagogy challenged White norms and standards, a response that I call a *rhetoric of injury*. This rhetoric of injury enacted daily violence that claimed me as a risky and violent body and injured *me* as a minoritized and racialized body in U.S. academia. Students, colleagues, and administrators claiming injury while causing it to me made the development and implementation of my teacherly mission very challenging in my classes. Below, I point out the rhetoric of injury that happens in White supremacy culture to minoritized teachers like me. Doing so reveals important questions that antiracist work attempts to address: who participates in the rhetoric of injury, how are they encouraged or validated for their participation, and why do so few people notice the injuries? In naming the rhetoric of injury, my goal is to highlight the structural oppression that affords such a rhetoric to circulate in the first place. In that sense, the concept is useful for both revealing and explaining such structural conditions. For White colleagues,¹ recognizing the rhetoric of injury is an invitation to contribute to effecting change in the world as collective and cumulative. I invite White colleagues to systematically act as allies to racially minoritized teachers who implement critical and radical pedagogies.

Tensions of Student-Teacher Authority

I often faced resistance from students for implementing a critical pedagogy inspired by Paulo Freire's (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, where I engaged students in questions of identity, power hierarchies, positionality, intersectionality,

1. For BIPOC, this might not be surprising or new to you, but I hope it would give you a chance to reflect on my experiences in a way that helps you approach similar moments in your lives productively while protecting your well-being.

and individual and collective responsibility. That is, my mission as a teacher has never been to prepare students for the job market or make them better writers per se, but rather to equip them with critical tools to enact citizenship and responsibility toward making the world a better place of living. But as a TA and later a postdoctoral fellow, my political agenda was subject to resistance by some of my students, who wrongly assumed rhetoric and writing to be apolitical, and by some colleagues and administrators who promoted different political agendas from mine in the classroom.

Becoming *Dr. Diab* for the first time among my colleagues and students felt empowering. I thought that my new academic title would resemble and grant me the authority of knowledge and expertise in the eyes of my students and administrators, which I felt I lacked as a graduate student in previous years. Moreover, beginning a postdoctoral fellowship in a Midwest R1 predominantly White institution (PWI) seemed like a promising move. At the beginning that felt true, I was amazed by my colleagues' hospitality. The faculty in the department seemed very friendly, welcoming, and responsive to my efforts to socialize with them. Tenured colleagues insisted that I was an equal peer. They invited me to the rhetoric and composition faculty meetings. Tenure-track (TT) faculty were open to communication and sharing advice as I began a new stage in my academic journey. Likewise, students in my two sections of professional writing showed politeness, respect, and motivation toward learning. They took notes, asked questions, and engaged in day-to-day learning activities.

As the semester started to progress, I started wondering whether students, in their apparent politeness and respect, were mainly motivated by and attached to grades rather than learning as I assumed. Students, for instance, often asked too many questions about minor things, which I perceived as a lack of critical thinking and fear of mistakes that might deduct points. When I noted to them these concerns, they expressed that I was disrespectful. My attempts to help students use reasoning and critical thinking to learn often upset students for not answering their questions directly. Take, for instance, this in-class group work-related scenario, where students needed to write a memo to a local non-profit organization that they've been working with to report their research findings:²

Amanda: Dr. Diab, in the memo, do we need to write the date when we write the memo or when we send it?

Me: What do you think? What purpose does the date serve?

Amanda: [immediately] I don't know, that's why I asked!

Me: Yes, I know that, but I want you to think of the rhetorical

2. The dialogues in this chapter are meant to be illustrations of the kinds of interactions in my courses as I remember them with the limitations that any memory bears. The names I use to represent students are imaginary, and I chose them randomly.

reason for the date; I trust that with some thinking, you'll find the answer.

[Pause]

Me: Let's say that you finished the memo one day and then sent it to the reader one week after; what date would be appropriate to write on the memo and why? [Pause] What might the date mean to the receiver? Which date would be more helpful to them?

[At this point, the other two group members are agitated, rolling their eyes with sighs. The surrounding groups listen to the conversation.]

Kayla: [speaking to me with an upset tone and loud voice] She just asked you a simple question, so why don't you just answer it?!

From there, I got upset; I told them they needed to think for themselves and not think of genres as templates or equations. I reminded them that they were college students and that they wouldn't have their supervisor available to answer every question about every detail in the workplace. To students, the problem remained that I was confrontational and refused to answer a student's simple question, and they noted that in their course evaluations.

In another situation, I was talking to a senior student—who already landed a job—about his resume during an in-class workshop:

Justin: Dr. Diab, do I have to include my group work volunteering for the XYZ organization, which we did in this class?

Me: Yes, you do. This is already mentioned in the assignment sheet, and I also noted it in my feedback to you on your first draft.

Justin: But this is not how we learned to write resumes in business school! We didn't have to include coursework in our resumes.

Me: Well, there are several approaches to writing a resume. Here we're taking a different rhetorical approach. Also, remember, you don't need to portray your work with the organization as coursework; it was volunteer work, wasn't it? So you can include it under the "Volunteer Work" section because it relates to the job you're applying to in the assignment.

Justin: So, you want me to delete important work from my resume to make room for what I did in this class?!

Me: You're revising your resume for a particular job as an exercise. I understand your old resume worked for the job you just got, but you're writing this other resume in response to another job advertisement. After all, just do it for the sake of exercise. You can do whatever you want out of this class.

Although Justin resisted my authority and expertise beyond asking a simple question, I did my best to show the reasoning behind what the assignment entailed. In the end, Justin did what the assignment asked him to do, but I wondered: Was he being critically minded or open to trying something new, or was he simply avoiding a point deduction?

These repeated situations where students question my competency, pedagogy, and expertise and claim injury consume my time and energy and often drain my enthusiasm for teaching, even if only temporarily. Students often compare what I teach them with what they learned somewhere else. Given what I see around me (mostly White male and monolingual English faculty), I feel students' questioning comes out of my gendered and racialized embodiment. I do not match my students' expectations for what an authority figure or teacher is. While it might prove challenging to find the motives behind students' reactions, the fact remains that demographically, I was the only faculty member of color in rhetoric and composition in my department. As my students noted, faculty members of color in their higher education were minimal. By virtue of the demographics, White faculty members' presence and authority in the classroom become the norm, and anything else becomes abnormal. As Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. González (2012) put it: "not only the demographics but the culture of academia is distinctly White, heterosexual, and middle- and upper-middle class. Those who differ from this norm find themselves, to [a] greater or lesser degree, 'presumed incompetent' by students, colleagues, and administrators" (p. 3). In response to students' expressions of dissatisfaction and rhetoric of injury, I repeatedly explain to them that learning multiple approaches to tackle the same issue from various disciplinary points of view is necessary for college education. However, the classroom became a battlefield rather than a joyful and enabling environment of learning and growth.

Students' feedback in end-of-semester evaluations reflected the conflicts that occurred during that semester, maintaining themselves as victims to their teacher. I was aware of past research criticism of student evaluations for their potential bias against women, minority teachers, and teachers of color (Amin, 1997; Flaherty, 2018; Lilienfeld, 2016; Pittman, 2010). Yet, I wanted to improve as a teacher, and was eager to speak to someone from my department about my teaching experience that semester to advise me how to proceed and what to do differently.

On one occasion, I tried to speak to a White male senior tenured colleague about my students' feedback. His reaction was unintentionally dismissive: "We all receive bad evaluations." He probably meant to assure me that nothing was

wrong with how I taught, but I needed to voice my concerns without interruption. My tenured colleague's response ignored the material effects that the evaluations would potentially have on me, whether in impacting my mental health and teacherly performance or in affecting future job applications that might require student evaluations. I wished that he would acknowledge our differences in positionality, be more patient in listening to me, and offer concrete advice about how to deal with the situation. However, with that brief interrupted conversation, I felt the deep gap of privilege between the both of us.

My White colleague's response resembles the denial of White supremacy culture, a denial that a problem exists with how minoritized and racialized faculty are treated in the academy. American political activist, feminist, and professor Bettina Aptheker (2012) reminds us of that denial, arguing that although evidence is overwhelming about implicit bias against women faculty and faculty of color in academia, "[s]ome, who even declare themselves liberals or feminists, continue to deny every statistical, sociological, and political study of actual, verifiable discrimination based on race and/or gender" (p. xiii). My colleague's response equalized all faculty's experiences with student evaluations, thus dismissing the potential that my experience was related to the minoritized identity that I embody.

A Radical Approach to Assessment

Among the cases where students challenged my expertise was their disagreement with my assessment of their texts. In many cases, students disagreed with their grades and often angrily negotiated. Although I assumed students' disagreements to be at least partially due to my positionality, I also felt my inherited assessment approach promoted conflict with students instead of motivating their learning and growth as writers. I found it problematic to be the sole authority in assessing students' texts, considering that different teachers will often assess the same text differently. It troubled me to construct and use rubrics as measures of the quality of texts when these rubrics fell short in accounting for the complexity of writing and judgment processes. These rubrics also promoted racist standards that disagreed with the cultural and linguistic heritages of many of my students. Considering that students' comfort levels and experience with academic writing varied, holding them all accountable for one set of expectations seemed to fail those who entered my classes least prepared for what I would teach them.

Given the field's questioning of conventional grading and assessments (Elbow, 1997; Tchudi, 1997) and discussions around rubrics in writing classrooms (Athon, 2019; Balester, 2012; Broad, 2003), several questions haunted me about the legitimacy of the teacher solely creating a rubric and assessing students' work:

- When I grade a text, am I assessing what a student learned in my class, or the knowledge/skills they brought with them?

- Outside of school, how helpful is it to divide the act of writing into categories, as we do with rubrics in classrooms?
- Do rubrics help students learn how to write? What if, in students' attempts to revise and meet the rubrics, their texts still don't meet the criteria I detail in the rubric?
- What if my students disagree with my own interpretation and judgment of their writing? What if they disagree with the rubrics I use, to begin with?
- How could I construct assessment criteria that would encourage students' growth as writers while shifting their attention from the grade to taking risks in their writing?

In my attempts to respond to these questions, I adapted and revised many of the sample rubrics passed on to me by the writing program administrator (WPA), composition scholars, and colleagues. Later, I tried to engage students in assignment rubric construction, as I learned in professional development workshops and conference panels. At some point, I experimented with the contract grading suggested by Peter Elbow (1997) and Jane Danielewicz and Elbow (2009).³ Yet, I remained the sole authority of judgment, and students continued to resist my evaluation of their work.

Around that time, Asao Inoue's *Labor-Based Grading Contracts* (2019) came out. I was eager to learn more about labor-based contracts and antiracist writing assessment. Although I was aware of Inoue's labor-based learning and antiracist writing assessment work through his publications and keynote speeches, his 2019 book provided me with clear, comprehensive, and legitimate answers and resolutions to my questions and concerns about assessment. It offered a strategy that responds to student resistance to my evaluations of their texts and engages students in writing as a social and collective process of revision and interaction.

Inoue (2019) foregrounds labor-based grading contracts as a fair approach for student assessment that refuses to use biased language standards as a measure of student success. While raising attention to the inherited structural bias and White supremacy in Standard English, Inoue introduces labor-based learning and community-based assessment as practices that promote antiracist writing assessment and equal access to grades in the writing classroom. Inoue suggests that students construct assessment criteria themselves from the beginning of their writing processes, and the teacher asks questions that challenge and help develop those criteria. Students continually revise these criteria while assessing

3. Danielewicz and Elbow (2009) suggest an assessment model that combines no grades with grades to motivate student learning. They allow completion of assignments to grant students a grade up to B but then hold the authority as teachers to decide the quality of coursework that satisfies a grade of A. In implementing that model in two of my courses I found the approach didn't resolve the problem of rubrics and assessment because it kept the sole authority of granting the grade of A in the hands of the teacher.

each other's work throughout the semester. Inoue argues that shifting students' focus from the quality of the final product to the labor they invest in their writing makes grades equally accessible to all students and "allows . . . classroom assessment ecologies to engage in larger social justice projects" (2019, p. 3). All these arguments and others resonated with me and offered resolutions to my conflicting feelings and thoughts about writing assessment. I felt for the first time that I grasped an approach to writing assessment that seemed specific, pragmatic, and fair. The approach exemplified the social nature of writing and revision, critiqued inherited language bias, and facilitated more equitable access to grades. As a teacher of color and Arab woman who adopts critical pedagogy, I found that Inoue's approach resonated with my activist-scholar-teacher agenda. It allowed me to redirect my energy from arguing with students about their grades toward critiquing systems of oppression and engaging students in writing projects to challenge and contribute to dismantling these systems.

I recall starting reading that book online in the afternoon and continuing to read it on my phone, in bed, until three o'clock in the morning. That happened right before the Spring 2019 semester, when I was to teach in my second semester as a postdoc. The next morning, I started revising my two syllabi for a first-year writing course and an advanced expository writing course oriented toward non-native English-speaking students. Although I was excited about implementing the model of labor-based contracts and antiracist writing assessment suggested by Inoue (2019), I was also wary of possible consequences.

As a NTT faculty member, I was aware of my lack of power compared to the tenured and TT faculty. As a woman of color implementing antiracist pedagogy, I was aware of White supremacy culture in the U.S. academy and the rhetoric of injury and *White fragility* among my students, administrators, and colleagues. Robin DiAngelo (2016) defines White fragility as:

a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate White racial equilibrium. Racial stress results from an interruption to what is racially familiar. (p. 247)

Because an antiracist assessment approach would interrupt the racially familiar system in U.S. academia, I expected defensive moves and argumentation from my colleagues. I was wary of being perceived as the subordinate non-tenure-track colleague who brought a pedagogy that faulted other current pedagogies that reinforce Standard English. My expectations were especially charged by recent public attacks by senior scholars on the writing program administration listserv (WPA-L) against two established scholars, Vershawn Ashanti Young and Inoue

himself, for their theories and practices concerning code-meshing and antiracist writing ecologies. Therefore, whenever I talked to my colleagues about implementing the Inoue (2019) approach in my classes, I dropped off its antiracist aspect and focused on its labor-based learning side.

My past White students' reactions to my critical pedagogy and authority already resembled White fragility. Despite their different subject position within the academy, students still occupied a position of power, given the White supremacy culture in U.S. academia. Therefore, when I began implementing antiracist writing assessment in my classes, I expected from mainstream students defensive moves of anger and argumentation, which DiAngelo lists as symptoms of White fragility. Similarly to Wonderful Faison's experience articulated in Chapter 2 of this book, I expected students to perceive me as their main source of knowledge, which stood as a barrier against critiquing the racist roots of the very standard that they expect me to teach. I also anticipated multilingual students' investment in Standard English to learn how to write *properly* as an urgently and critically needed tool of power and success in academia.

Therefore, to better serve students and minimize potential conflicts with them and administrators, I did two things. I focused on the community-based learning aspect of the labor-based grading contracts instead of highlighting the antiracist aspect of it. I also included more opportunities for me to provide one-on-one feedback to students beyond what Inoue's (2019) labor-based approach suggested.

Using Rhetorical Ecologies and Agency Theories to Co-Construct Assessment Heuristics

Informed by my life experience and research, I embody theories of rhetorical ecologies and rhetorical agency in my teaching. By rhetorical ecologies, I point to Jenny Edbauer's (2005) concept that recognizes "public rhetorics (and rhetoric's publicness) as circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events" (p. 9). Resulting from rhetorical ecologies, I adopt theories of rhetorical agency⁴ that perceive the capability of effecting change as emergent from many actors (humans and non-humans) over space and time (Bennett, 2010; Cooper, 2011; Herndl & Licona, 2007; Koerber, 2006; Latour, 1996; Miller, 2007). These theories, along with my critical pedagogy, help me show students the complexity of writing as a recursive process and social interaction and impact the assessment processes in my courses. By introducing simple articulations of these theories, I invite students to question the power hierarchy, in and out of the classroom, which

4. I assign a textbook chapter, Diab (2016), concerning re-claiming agency in delivery and multimedia composition, which forward these theories in a simple way to first-year writing students. The chapter serves as an introduction to our semester-long conversations about collective agency and rhetorical ecologies.

influences the definitions of good writing, good writers, good students, and good teachers. As a result, a community-based assessment model becomes a productive collaborative and ecological model for leading the learning process in the classroom and contributing positive change in the world.

I present rhetorical ecologies as a dynamic system of various interacting elements, through which agency emerges. The dynamic system doesn't function by the movement of any singular element but rather from the whole movement of the elements together. In the context of the class learning community, I promote collective actions—including collective assessment—as a strategy to achieve our goals. The rhetorical ecologies model helps me explain to students why claims of individual capacities are not accurate and how these claims result in an unjust system of reward and punishment in the education system. Thus, the theory of rhetorical ecologies allows me to de-center the individual actor's authority in my classes, including myself, for the sake of collective actions and the community's well-being. That decentralization appears in multiple ways as my students and I enact it:

- I contribute the terminology and definitions of (late, complete, incomplete, ignored, etc.) adapted from Inoue (2019), while students collectively decide the consequences of each.
- I provide students with sample unconventional texts that don't adhere to White language standards. Students analyze and critique the texts to develop rubrics without attaching points to any criterion.
- Students exchange peer feedback using the rubrics that they created.
- Students evaluate the feedback that they receive from each other and from me in order to decide what feedback was helpful and what was not for their purposes of revision. They are not obligated to incorporate any feedback, including mine, rather asked to be intentional about their revision processes.
- Students decide what they found effective and ineffective in the rubrics and revise them accordingly as they draft and revise their texts.

Students act and contribute in multiple ways to the decision-making within our writing assessment ecologies. Their collaborative efforts evince how writing is a social and collective process, proving also to students why one expert person cannot account for the complexity experienced from a range of responses to their writing.

By the end of the first semester of implementing the labor-based learning approach, the experience seemed reasonable. In the self-growth letters and end-of-the-semester evaluations, in my two courses, 23 out of 34 students (70%) either found labor a better measure for their learning than the traditional way of grading or felt neutral about it. Noting their appreciation of the approach, students praised the fairness of the grading process, the boost of their sense of agency, the in-depth process of revision they experienced, and the creativity and risk-taking that the approach encouraged. However, 11 students (30%) disagreed with the

labor-based learning model and found the assessment approaches they grew up with more adequate. I found that result satisfying in my first attempt at implementing a new assessment approach, and I had anticipated that the approach would satisfy more students in the following semesters with some changes in response to student feedback and my observations.

Backfire

One student who praised the labor-based learning approach in his self-growth letter and a final one-on-one meeting with me changed his mind when he received his failing grade. He attacked the labor-based learning contract detailed in my syllabus and appealed to administrators his C- grade claiming that he deserved an A. The appeal reached a particular colleague-administrator, a White female junior TT faculty member. When she spoke to me about it, I explained that the student submitted too many incomplete assignments, ignored others, and missed too many class sessions. Instead of investigating the legitimacy of the student complaint, the colleague, who reviewed the course syllabus, attacked the labor-based learning approach and my adequacy as a teacher. During two meetings with me about the appeal, the colleague shifted the focus from evaluating the student complaint to confronting me for not constructing rubrics that centralized thesis statements and topic sentences in judging students' work. She claimed that changing my pedagogy would save administrators' time by preventing future student complaints. She mentioned it was the first time she had received a complaint from a student appealing a grade implying something was wrong with what I did as a teacher. Thus, the administrator legitimized the student complaint although he contributed to negotiating the labor-based contract terms at the beginning of the semester, and agreed to the number of assignments and class sessions that he missed. The administrator also failed to recognize the power conflict between me as a woman of color and the student as an entitled man who believed he deserved an A despite his poor performance. Both the student and administrator enacted a rhetoric of injury exemplifying me, the teacher, as a body that causes harm to students by applying a learning approach that both the student and administrators rejected.

Malea Powell calls administrative rhetorics such as my colleague's "the second wave of genocide" (1999, p. 4). This violence, as Powell argues, is committed by Whiteness academics and administrators who judge by using a dominant White set of values and standards. While Powell speaks of genocide against Indigenous scholars in the US as treated in White academia, her argument remains true for scholars of color in general. My colleague ignored that only one out of 34 students complained about the labor-based learning approach in my two classes. She gave one male student the benefit of the doubt and assumed I was at fault before reviewing the situation thoroughly. She overlooked how the student injured my authority as an expert when he discredited my contribution to assessing his work,

even though I shared my authority with him and his classmates throughout the course assessment processes. My colleague's judgment of my pedagogy internalized White supremacy culture as the norm and minimized everything else to less than adequate. Demonstrating *White fragility* (DiAngelo, 2016), she attacked the theory, pedagogy, and teaching approach that I adopted when they disagreed with her White norm instead of accepting our differences as normal and healthy variation in the academy. In a way, her judgment expressed an injury of White values and rules that centralize Standard English in the teaching of writing.

Under pressure from the colleague administrator, I implemented changes in the next semester's syllabi. I assigned numerical grades to the major writing assignments and planned on designing rubrics myself with a focus on labor. However, later, I felt that I was giving in too quickly. Therefore, I requested a meeting with both the colleague-administrator and the WPA to present a scholarly case for my assessment approach. In preparation, I spent over 15 hours working on a conference-presentation-like handout indicating:

1. my concerns about assessment throughout my years of teaching,
2. the theory that governs the labor-based contracts approach, and how that theory connects to my pedagogy and teaching-related beliefs,
3. the process of how I adapted the approach and what I changed,
4. the way I implemented the labor-based learning approach,
5. what students said about the approach in their self-growth letters, final meetings with me, and end-of-semester anonymous evaluation survey, and
6. what I learned from my implementation and how I reflected on that to revise the next semester's course material.

While the WPA, a White male tenured faculty, showed satisfaction with the approach as a scholarly one informed by research and theory, the colleague-administrator continued to ridicule me and my approach without counter-theory or evidence. Despite the actual outcomes of my teaching as students' responses showed, she insisted that what I was doing was *utopian* and *nice* in theory, but wasn't going to work in reality. In spite of my presence, the colleague spoke to the WPA about me being the first postdoctoral fellow in the department and wondered if, from that time on, the department should show future postdoctoral fellows how to teach their courses. She also prompted me to *learn from other colleagues* in the department and across the university, implying that their approaches, most probably lacking focus on the antiracist aspect, are more adequate than the theories I embodied. She assumed my NTT position indicated the magnitude of my knowledge and expertise rather than acknowledging that White supremacy in academic culture continues to marginalize women of color by denying them TT positions.⁵

5. See Harris and González. (2012, p. 2) for statistics about women of color in U.S. academia.

Although the WPA was respectful of me and my pedagogy, he didn't defend me against my colleague's attack. He didn't criticize her selectivity in paying attention to the individual student complaint as opposed to the majority of students' more positive responses. He didn't point out that her rhetoric insulted me, her claimed equal colleague in the department. Neither did he use his higher administrative authority to challenge her. His politeness toward the offending colleague resembles White supremacy culture, which according to Tema Okun (2001), prompts people to avoid confrontation and "open conflict" where pointing out a problem becomes the problem (p. 33).

In the next semester, I started avoiding teaching FYW courses because of all the institutional constraints that come with them. Likewise, I decided to avoid teaching multilingual writing courses. My colleague oversaw these courses, and I feared the potential of being pressured by her to follow pedagogies that I believe are colonial and treat second language writing as a response to students' language deficit.

More than a Utopian Dream: Success Outside of First-Year Composition

In Spring 2020, I chose to teach a 200-level course of professional writing and a 300-level course of advanced expository writing oriented toward mainstream students. My experience in the first course was reasonably fine, but the second was magically productive, successful, and enjoyable for both students and me. The exemplary success of the labor-based learning contracts wasn't an imaginary or utopian fairy tale, as my colleague-administrator portrayed it, but it was a real experience. For the first time in my teaching life, almost all my students were fully open to learning and challenging themselves. Students were very responsive to my critical pedagogy, which prompted them to recognize their implications in the social construct of racism and oppression. Students showed eagerness to improve their writing and collaborate while working on social service-learning projects to make the world a better place for living.

I constructed the advanced expository class around digital rhetorics and multimedia composition for social change. Social justice, civic engagement, and community-based course projects have been all at the core of any course I taught since the fall of 2013. However, the labor-based approach provided a cohesive framework that allowed my pedagogy to center and prioritize service-learning among students over ranking and receiving a grade. As the semester progressed, students and I grew closer as community members. Students showed a growing appreciation of the labor-based learning and antiracist writing assessment. Several of them, from education majors, expressed that they would implement antiracist writing assessment and labor-based learning contracts in their future classes. Thus, I felt comfortable enough to share with students part of my narrative as a minoritized, vulnerable body in the predominantly White academy.

During that semester, the college of arts and sciences at my institution hosted multiple workshops and talks led by Inoue about labor-based learning and antiracist writing assessment. At one event, I was surprised to see the same administrator-colleague who attacked me for implementing the labor-based grading contracts in my courses, introducing Inoue before his keynote and praising his antiracist writing assessment approach. When Asao finished his keynote, I raised my hand to talk about my experience adapting and implementing Asao's approach in my courses. Without naming names, I hinted at how I faced administrative tension in my department. I critiqued those who attacked the antiracist approach behind closed doors and then praised it publicly. Then, I asked what White faculty in my institution should do so that NTT faculty and BIPOC faculty, like me, could implement critical pedagogies in their classes and receive credit for it. Several faculty from rhetoric and composition in my department were present, including the WPA and others whom I told about the pressures I was under by my colleague-administrator. All these faculty remained silent to my notes and question. None of them talked to me about it after the keynote.

In contrast with the faculty's silence, my students in the advanced expository course showed support and understanding when I shared the keynote incident as an example of oppression in academia. Students' positive attitudes toward my openness sharing my personal stories made me feel in place and in a community I belonged to. However, I wasn't delusional about that successful class experience. I was aware, as I am still now, that teaching is like any social phenomenon. It is ecological and interactive. We often define students, teachers, and pedagogies from within the binary of good or bad, but as rhetoric scholars, we should know better. As Edbauer (2005) illustrates, rhetorical ecologies are dynamic and in continued flux as they interact with each other. If we view the teaching-learning process as ecological, we should pay attention to the dynamic interaction among the teacher, students, pedagogy, political environment, curriculum, and culture. A teacher and students who are in harmony with each other in values, beliefs, and openness for cooperation might make a particular teacher, student, or pedagogy seem good at a time. But change one element, bring a few resistant students to the pedagogy and collaborative enactment of authority, and the whole class might become less meaningful or chaotic. Thus, I didn't imagine in that semester that I found the secret for teaching a successful class, nor did I think that the following classes were to be as satisfying to my future students or me.

Students' Assessment of their Teacher

In my next semester, Fall 2020, inspired by Aja Martinez's *Counterstory* (2020), I revised the expository writing course material to promote counter-narratives as a strategy to resist dominant narratives. I designated each week to discuss a dominant narrative and potential counter-narratives about an issue of oppression. The issues included narratives around good/bad teachers focusing on structurally

marginalized teachers.⁶ When students shared difficult personal experiences in their first project, I responded by speaking about my own experience as a minority woman of color, a non-native English speaker, and a non-American citizen in the U.S. academy. I also invited a guest speaker, Dr. Sarah L. Wibb, a Black American activist against colorism in the U.S. and an assistant professor in the Department of English and Modern Languages at the University of Illinois Springfield at that time, to talk about her activist and academic experience as a woman of color in the U.S.

I raised systematic problems by pointing out the end-of-semester evaluation surveys as oppressive tools against racially minoritized teachers in the White U.S. academy. To forward research as a crucial tool for asking questions and challenging assumptions, I used the departmental end-of-semester survey to analyze the assumptions or dominant narrative(s) behind the questions it contained. I asked students to conclude the research question that the survey aimed to answer. Many identified the research question as something along the line of: “How effective was the teacher in their teaching?” Then, I asked about the assumptions or dominant narratives behind the research question. My goal was to show the contradiction between views about learning/teaching as ecological and collaborative among students and teachers, and the end-of-semester survey that centralizes the teacher as the sole element that promotes or hinders the learning process.

Yet again, in the anonymous end-of-semester evaluations, some students critiqued me for sharing my personal stories. Students described me as being *inappropriate*, *unprofessional*, *unfit*, and making them feel *uncomfortable*. Some notes criticized my politics and complained that *not all students are liberal*. Despite my careful planning of the readings and lesson plans, some students expressed that my curriculum, especially the survey activity, attempted to make them feel guilty to give me better evaluations.

In my reflection on the students’ evaluations I wondered “have my personal stories confronted students with their White privilege and made them feel uncomfortable?” I asked, “Was it possible that students compared me to their White teachers, who might have appeared to be more professional and seemingly apolitical by not involving personal stories of vulnerability?”; “Did my narrated experiences, through my body and voice, contradict the image of the teacher as portrayed by White teachers who dominate academia?” At that time, I felt that my body became subject to daily violence by my students who continually enacted a rhetoric of injury as a result of the same pedagogy that I followed in the previous successful semester. The students I taught in the fall of 2020 were different from those I taught in the spring, and that change in the teaching ecologies changed the whole experience.

Dissatisfied students’ reactions might be better understood in light of the political climate that Trump’s presidency fostered starting in 2016. By the time

6. I selected an array of articles from Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. (2012) and other readings to demonstrate women of color faculty’s experiences in the U.S. academia.

Trump was running for president for the second time, in fall 2020, a White supremacy culture had surfaced more pronouncedly. That culture allowed many people to express values and beliefs that they were less likely to show publicly before Trump's administration. That time witnessed a peak of that culture and police brutality against Black bodies. In the previous summer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a White policeman, Derek Chauvin, murdered a Black man, Mr. George Floyd, by pressing his knee on Floyd's neck for almost nine full minutes while one of the witnesses, a 17-year-old young woman Darnella Frazier, filmed the murder. Mass protests occupied the streets nationwide, and Trump and his supporters described many of these protests as riots. That description resembles White supremacy culture that values White bodies, property, and lives over Black bodies and lives.

Likewise, students in their harsh feedback rehearsed another kind of White supremacist culture violence against my alien body that was different from both their bodies and their other White teachers'. Okun (2001) argues that White supremacy culture dictates ways of thinking and doing that are damaging through its everyday presence, which at the same time is hard to recognize and identify. According to Okun, the characteristics of White supremacy culture that appear in various organizations include silence as a politeness act, where pointing out a problem becomes the problem itself.⁷ In many ways, my pointing out structural problems in White supremacy culture in the U.S. academy disrupted students' peace and made *me* the problem, a dangerous, risky body that violates and causes injury to White(ly) students.

On the Violence Inherent in the Rhetoric of Injury

When expressed in the end-of-semester evaluations, a rhetoric of injury gains more force as a violent act that injures me as a racially minoritized teacher and contributes to the "second wave of genocide" (1999, p. 4) that Powell points out in White academia. Administrators are likely to find in students' input evidence to support their attack of critical pedagogies. Thus end-of-semester evaluations continue to perform as oppressive political tools against women and racialized faculty, especially in institutions where no other tools for teacher evaluation exist, such as peer and administrators' reviews of the syllabi, learning activities, and teaching practices, or even teacher narratives of their teaching.

Whenever I am confronted with such rhetoric by my students, *I* feel injured. The injury gets into my skin. I feel a chill when I see an email from a hostile student in my mailbox. Even before I open and read it, I experience a fear of student attacks, and I feel vulnerable and subject to risk and harm. But these feelings are nothing to talk about with my colleagues. I can't take that risk when I have no mentors,

7. See also Ahmed (2016), where she raises our attention that the feminist who points out a problem is considered in White feminist environments a "feminist killjoy" (p. 11).

supporters, or allies in my program to vent to or ask for advice. Whomever I reach out to, I do so at the risk of being looked down upon as a weak and unprofessional teacher. The chill in my body then becomes the problem, a defect in my own body and mind, not in the hostile student bodies and minds that caused me injury, pain, and fear. However, when students use the rhetoric of injury to complain, many administrators are likely to consider the defect, not in the students' bodies but, rather, in the body of the minoritized teacher subject of injury.

As a woman of color, it is easy to assume my body as a dangerous and hostile body toward my students in that case. As a teacher, I am assumed by both administrators and students to occupy the position of power in my class and have the capacity to effect harm rather than be harmed. As an Arab woman, I am also marked by centuries of orientalism and colonization as a strange body that's irrational, passive, risky, and terrorizing all together. As a foreigner, I am a stranger where strangers "are not simply those who are not known. . . . but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognized as not belonging*, as being out of place." (Ahmed, 2000, p. 21, emphasis in original). Strange bodies, like mine, Ahmed (2000) points out, have particular emotions of fear stuck to them by others. By virtue of the demographic statistics that show women of color in academia are scarce, my body in the classroom is already a strange one. My strange presence in academia and the classroom makes my body perceived as hostile even before I talk or act, and Whately bodies often respond to my presence in hostile and violent ways, which is part of the rhetoric of injury.

On How Things Might Change

When I proposed this chapter, I asked, "How could minority educators maintain themselves as expert authorities in the eyes of their students and administrators while giving students more power in the assessment process?" In reality, oftentimes, minority educators don't have the tools to maintain such a balance between such conflicting authorities. To assume that they can achieve such a balance places daunting and stressful burdens on minority educators' shoulders, causing tremendous emotional labor and physical and mental health crises. In this chapter, I haven't endeavored to show how to maintain that balance successfully, nor have I attempted to report a success story about implementing critical pedagogy and antiracist writing assessment. On the contrary, this chapter traces the process and struggle that a minority educator went through when implementing a pedagogy that the educator's colleagues, students, and administrators considered too radical or risky.

Oftentimes we're introduced to pedagogies that sound promising, we get excited, and we want to implement them. However, promoting pedagogies without accounting for the processes and politics that govern their implementation can be harmful to those who sincerely want to do their best for students. Pedagogies don't work on their own; they function within a political context and rhetorical

ecologies that grant those pedagogies success or failure. In other words, it is not that any pedagogy succeeds or fails; rather, failure or success emerges from the multitude of actors within rhetorical ecologies that include pedagogies as only one component in the education process.

Therefore, implementing radical pedagogies requires privileged educators to contribute to the rhetorical ecologies in education by doing antiracist work themselves and normalizing radical antiracist curricula in their departments. Tenured and TT educators need to be on the front line in communicating with administrators who have power over *who* implements *what* in the classroom. WPAs, especially those who believe in such radical pedagogies, need to do the hard work of advocating for these pedagogies so that minority educators don't have to do it all. After all, the violence of White supremacy culture in academia against minoritized teachers and their students echoes the street violence and police brutality against racialized bodies. My recognition of that connection compels me to maintain critical pedagogy and antiracist writing assessment in my classes. It also compelled me to take the risk of writing this chapter.

The advocacy I call for means that my White colleagues trade and sacrifice some of their privileges to support minoritized bodies in the academy. My experience would have been very different if colleagues in my department had acknowledged my lack of power as a NTT faculty of color and assigned me a mentor to reach out to me and check on my progress and well-being periodically. It would have been empowering if my friendly White colleagues had listened to me when I reached out to them and brought my concerns to the department meetings as a first step for action. It would have been empowering if the White tenured WPA had stopped the violence he witnessed in his office against me by the junior TT White administrator when she insulted me and my pedagogy. It would have been revolutionary if he accepted my offer to conduct a series of workshops about labor-based grading contracts for writing instructors in the department. But the reality was different. I was left totally alone in my department, out of place, and without a community to belong to.

Why I Speak

Yet, I continue my journey in implementing a critical pedagogy and antiracist writing assessment. What keeps me motivated and inspired are my students and the change I could affect in the world. The classroom, to me, as it is to hooks (2004), “remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (p. 12), and the positive responses I receive from many students keep me going. On the final day of my FYW course of Spring 2021, I had a conversation with my students about two movies I assigned related to our course topics. We discussed how the films connected with our course theme about fighting the fight to promote justice. That final meeting was the best I could have hoped for in the last class session. Students engaged critically with the discussion, and the conversation

continued even after our class period ended. About ten students remained in the Zoom classroom, eager to continue the conversation about what we, as educated citizens, could do next to resist oppression.

A few days later, a student from that class, a young woman of color, met with me to discuss a few assignments. The meeting ended with her compliments about my teaching, and later she wrote to my department head asking him to retain me and telling him how she, as a student of color, needs to see more women of color teachers like me in the department. Through her action,⁸ the student embodied all that she learned during the semester about rhetoric, writing, and contributing to social justice. In her written words, she became evidence of why we need to focus on critical literacy and radical pedagogies in our rhetoric and composition classes. That student letter will always remain a reason that compels me as a teacher to keep pushing my critical pedagogy and agendas forward in the U.S. academy.

Audre Lorde's (2017) book, *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, is always alive inside me. In my case, silence is what will always hurt me. Speaking might not get me in the short-term closer to what I want. Talking about my antiracist writing assessment pedagogy at conferences, invited talks, job interviews, or publications might not get me the recognition or the opportunity that I seek. In the short term, I might lose an opportunity for a job, recognition, or promotion, which would result in me also losing an opportunity to effect change in academia. Moreover, as Whitney Lew James who is cited in the introduction of this book, reflected about the potential harm that comes about by White audiences interpreting minorities' positionalities as a performance of trauma, I reflected too. I was mostly worried about how White readers, especially in my tenure committee, might perceive my struggle in teaching and emphasis on my positionality as a minority member in a PWI. Would they think that I am a defective teacher who is looking for excuses to justify her failure? This concern didn't occur to me when thinking of BIPOC readers, as they likely go through similar experiences; thus, they are likely to relate to mine. In that sense, I encourage White readers to reflect on this to likewise interrogate the ways Whiteness and White supremacy culture suffuse themselves into the ways they interpret BIPOC struggles. Indeed, the questions and suggestions I offer throughout this chapter serve as starting points for this hard but important work.

That said, my long-term goal of resisting oppression wherever I encounter it makes it impossible for me to remain silent—because if silence is to protect my individual self, it is likely to harm others, including my students. I have, as Lorde had before me, “come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it

8. The student, Athziry Marrufo, gave me permission to publish her letter to my department head with her full name on my personal website. You can access the letter here: <https://kefayadiab.weebly.com/a-student-letter-by-athziry.html>.

bruised or misunderstood” (2017, p. 1), where the risk of being bruised or misunderstood extends beyond the rhetoric to the rhetor.

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Chapter 6. I'm the Problem, It's Me: A Story of Reflection and Failure from a White Girl Writing Teacher

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I tell myself that I am an intersectional feminist and that I am not like others—unaware of my privileges and insistent that I am not part of the Whiteness problem that permeates our society and the fields of knowledge-making like liberal arts, and especially writing and composition. I say that I am aware of and account for the intersectional aspects of myself: I am a White, late-thirties, graduate school educated, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered female from the suburbs in Northern California. I also consider myself an antiracist writing studies scholar. An intersectional, antiracist, White girl writing scholar and teacher. Is that even possible? I say yes, of course. And, that it *must* be possible. I feel that because of my positionality—a White scholar in a predominantly White field—my writing pedagogy *must* be intersectional and antiracist. These are not practices that are additive or something we can delve into if we feel like specializing in them. They are foundational to the field and our practices. I provide these details about my scholarly commitments to acknowledge that I am invested and seeking accomplice-level engagement when it comes to dismantling White supremacy and Whiteness in my daily life and in my writing pedagogy (Green, 2020).¹ However, I have often failed. How radical can a White girl writing teacher really be?

Because of my privileged positionalities, I see calling out and challenging Whiteness in writing pedagogy as my most important responsibility. As White writing scholars, “we have to acknowledge our multiple identities (within ourselves and across the classroom community), our particular disciplinary lenses within an interdisciplinary context, and pedagogical tools to foster that shift in our students, and also to help them figure out what power and hope they have to work toward social justice” (Ortiz et. al., 2018, p. 110). I have to harness that shift for students through my own teaching practices while also occupying and benefiting from many spaces of privilege in my daily life and in the university.

1. In “Letters on Moving from Ally to Accomplice,” Neisha-Anne S. Green coins the term “accomplice” in order to draw a distinction between the performative allyship of White writing scholars and teachers and the necessary participatory activism needed to enact concrete, material equity. Green argues that “accomplices take the necessary risks that really move towards inclusivity, diversity, equity, and equality” (2020, p. 288).

I acknowledge that I, like everyone to some degree, have work to do, and that's okay. So, I must be in constant conversation with myself asking: How is it that, even with the best of intentions and investments in diversity and equity, I still perpetuate White language supremacy in my writing pedagogy? To address this question, the chapter explores how writing scholars and teachers like me, a White cis-gendered female, can engage in critical self-reflective work in order to cultivate intersectional, interdisciplinary, and, antiracist writing pedagogies.

A Failed Attempt at Creating a Collaborative Assessment Ecology

In my writing courses, I draw from Paulo Freire's and Ira Shor's notions of liberatory, student-centered collaborative learning; Gloria Anzaldúa's work on the fluidity of identity, language diversity and intersectionality; and Asao Inoue's constructions of antiracist writing assessment ecologies and their push against habits of White language (HOWL). For me, when I think about and attempt to cultivate collaborative assessment ecologies, I acknowledge that our courses still operate within university/institutional expectations and curriculums that we know uphold White language supremacy (WLS). So, while I use a version of a grading contract that emphasizes feedback and revision rather than points and percentage-chasing grading, I must still award students letter grades at the end. I am beholden to university and department language and practices, in the end, even if what we do in the classroom attempts to disrupt those practices. Because of this, my first step in creating a collaborative assessment ecology is having students engage with and create an awareness of the inextricable associations between race and language, illustrating a need for our writing assessments to be antiracist and equitable at their core (Inoue, 2015a, p. 29). So, in an attempt to combat my complicity in WLS, in myself and in my writing pedagogy, I build collaborative processes of providing feedback and revision into my courses. I, like you, know that writing assessment teaches students how to write—and that I teach my students how to write more through feedback than anything else. So, I thought, if assessment is crucial to understanding how to write, then why are students often left out of the process?

Collaborative Rubric Design Activity

For each major project in my writing courses, a rubric catered to the specific task is created. The rubric is the main assessment tool for all stages of the particular assignment and students will use it as a guide for composing their writing, as a template for giving peer feedback during writing workshops, and I use it to provide students feedback on the drafts of the project that they turn in to me. Since I frontload my first-year writing courses with Freire, Anzaldúa, and Inoue, I signal to my students (through readings and discussions) that White thinking

and White stories are *not* the center of knowledge-making and language.² I come from the camp that students can handle these kinds of texts and these kinds of conversations—and they do—every time. Reading diverse texts is often the first place students are expected to engage with/in a student-driven classroom and they do so by working closely with academic texts writing instructors work with. An approach like this is essentially what Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle discuss in *Writing About Writing* (2020), where students explore assumptions about writing and do research on different kinds of writing, making writing itself the subject to focus on rather than other topics or issues. I also want to note that, in a chapter and collection focused on judgment, I have included various student reactions and voices without direct quotations or names, so it is still me interpreting their responses and reflecting on them. I have tried to stay as true to their words as possible.

Drafting the Rubric, Stage One: Analyzing and Deconstructing the Prompt

In the first stages of the collaborative rubric activity, students are introduced to the prompt, a literacy narrative that asks students to compose a narrative about something that mattered to them as a child and connect that object, experience, or person to their development as readers and writers. It tells them that narratives should have a beginning, middle, and end, and that the narrative can be written, visual, aural, or a combination. Students are asked to first read the prompt to understand what it's asking and then ask them to read it again and annotate it like they would an article or essay we read for class and summarize its rhetorical situation. In stage one, students simply read the prompt and do so twice, in different ways. The first reading should be done *with the grain*, which instructs students to seek comprehension: What's the argument? What am I looking for? What immediately stands out? Then, students go back and read *against the grain*, which instructs students to interrogate the text: What's confusing? What doesn't seem to make sense? What don't I know that I need to know?³ Students have previously done this reading exercise with the Freire, Anzaldúa, and Inoue texts we read in the first few weeks so they come into rubric design familiar with such practices.

All three of these critical scholars help frame critical reading and thinking through practice. Freire (1970) asks students to think about the systems of power they're in in higher education and how those structures impose dominant group

2. I usually assign, say, Chapter 2 of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Anzaldúa's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" chapter from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), and the Intro/Chapter 1 and Appendices from Inoue's *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* (2015a).

3. This is what Peter Elbow explains as the "believing and doubting game" in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973).

norms (re: White) and exclude marginalized voices (p. 80-81). Anzaldúa (1987) gets teachers and students to think about but through the lens of language being inextricably tied to one's intersectional identity—and, especially, important—her assertion that robbing a person of their language is a violent act; one that strips someone of their personhood. Her text switches between English and Chicana Spanish—a direct challenge to reading with the grain, since through her text, students must read against and challenge their notions of traditional, normed academic work (p. 58-59). And Inoue specifically asks students *and* teachers to think about how they replicate those dominant, White, power systems when we grade and assess language. Each scholar not only gives students and teachers critical perspectives from which to think about language and writing but also gives them critical practices to use in teaching and composing. So, when we go into analyzing a prompt, for instance, it's my aim that students will now be thinking about systems of education, language practices, and identity in deconstructing, intersectional ways.⁴ However, at this moment, they are still mostly thinking rather than doing.

After reading and analyzing the prompt, students individually annotate the prompt, taking note of anything that stands out or seems important in order to achieve the task at hand. They only learn to identify the purpose, audience, voice, tone, and genre for the project but also think critically about how such components of language are dictated by the dominant, normative, elite, White, ableist habits of language (Inoue, 2015a). Students have read pieces of Inoue's first chapter in *Anti-racist Writing Assessment Ecologies* so they get a history of what he terms a White racial habitus that permeates language and writing assessment.⁵ Having conversations with students about how audience and audience expectations have been decided and controlled predominantly by White male administrators and others in similar positions of power opens up discussion of subjectivity and positionality organically and in connection with who and how we assess and practice language.

Drafting the Rubric, Stage Two: Putting the Rubric Together Collaboratively

In the second stage, students form small groups and individually share their summaries of the prompt with each other. After each person shares, it's up to the group to come up with a list of what the prompt I've created is asking them to

4. It's important for me to note that most of the campuses I've taught at have large White and Latinx student populations and a small Black student population. One larger omission from this curriculum is Black writing scholars, and while not intentional, it illustrates how readings that we teach matter in exploring the intersectionality of identity and language.

5. Students are also introduced to antiracist writing assessment via the grading contracts that I used in my courses, so from the beginning of the course they are already immersed in such language and histories.

do (like three to four bullet points) and then another list with how they can go about accomplishing those things. These two lists become the basis for the rubric we create. They consist of two key components: what's being asked and how to demonstrate those things. At the end of the generative small group work, students then choose one or two representatives from their group to write their lists on an open google doc projected to the whole class.

As a class, we look for trends across groups and formally decide two main categories for the rubric. Interestingly, students have created essentially two categories for assessment. Category 1 includes *what* will be evaluated, a checklist of sorts, and Category 2 includes a scale for *how* each item on that checklist will be evaluated, meaning what kind of feedback they're looking for and how they'd like their writing assessed and/or what would be most valuable to them. I then take what they've constructed, place it in the rubric function on Canvas—maybe add words or phrases for clarification (this is where my expertise, and yes, implicit bias comes in)—and prepare to show it to the whole class the next day. On that final day, we review how it looks in its final form in Canvas and make any changes we see fit. We've moved a bit into doing things in this stage rather than just thinking about language diversity—but are we doing things that matter? Are we making an actual antiracist assessment ecology, or just saying that we are?

Drafting the Rubric, Stage Three: Instructor Revision, HOWL, and Critical-Self Reflection

While I set out to include and collaborate with students in this assessment practice, it turns out that most of this assessment ecology that I'd claimed to be inclusive and collaborative is still mostly dictated by me. I've created the prompt that they read and base their rubric creation from and then I still have the last say in the final form of the rubric that I'll ultimately use to assess their writing. The only inclusion I've done is ask them to deconstruct *my* prompt, put together rubric criteria, and then review it again myself before I use it. Most of this assessment ecology is *me* doing the assessment even though students get to help create the rubric. Again, we can describe my own positionality in relation to Marilyn Frye's (1992) notion of Whiteness and its paternalistic power hoarding, two characteristics of White supremacy culture and White language supremacy. Essentially, even in my good intentions, students in this ecology are being measured and judged and, in turn, I'm using their work for my own purposes.

For me, the major goal of collaborative rubric design is to engage with the demographic of students currently in front of me and their academic, career, and personal goals and move away from what Inoue calls Habits of White Language, or HOWL.⁶ These habits are conditioned and constitute ways of doing language

6. See an extensive breakdown of HOWL in Inoue's *Above the Well: An Antiracist Argument from a Boy of Color* (2021).

and its practices. Habits such as an “Unseen, Naturalized Orientation to the World” illustrate how Whiteness operates as the default way of being in language practices. It’s “an orientation, a starting point, of one’s body in time and space that makes certain habits, capacities, practices, languages, and ideas reachable” and “it assumes, or takes as universal, its own proximities or capabilities to act and do things that are inherited through one’s shared space” (Inoue, *Habits of White Language*). White language, as seen in this definition, often takes precedent in teaching and assessing language. English departments and writing programs were developed on the basis of standardized, White discourses, and students—regardless of their own intersecting identities and language habits—are taught that in order to be considered literate, they also needed to learn and perform HOWL. White language supremacy is not thought of as an add-on or addition to the curriculum compared to equitable and fairness-based practices like antiracist writing assessment; White language supremacy is foundational, which makes anti-White language supremacy practices essential pedagogical practices for White teachers and scholars of assessment.

Much of what the collaborative rubric activity engages with is this first habit of White language as I, the White girl/teacher subjectivity, am leading. The activity illuminated how much “university speak” (i.e., HOWL) and discourse is reflected in *my* writing prompt, not just in the students’ writing because they were really still just reiterating how well a task or skill was being done according to my own internalized White language supremacy rather than investigating the social and ideological constructs that lead to assessing writing in certain ways. Because I have not framed the purpose of the activity and our interrogation of language and assessment practices in such ways, students do what they’ve been trained to do and perform the language of the university by using the language of the writing prompt in the rubric. And I’m the one that created the prompt. Since I don’t frame the assessment activity, it makes sense when I consider I’ve performed the language of the university and of standardized education my entire life because I am still, in various ways, acting as a White girl scholar. The two most prominent HOWL in the rubric that students created are Ruled Governed, Contractual Relationships and Clarity, Order, and Control.

The first HOWL apparent in my rubric design activity: Rule Governed, Contractual Relationships attaches importance to “laws, rules, fairness as sameness and consistency so fair classrooms and other spaces are understood to be ones that treat every individual exactly the same regardless of who they are, how they got there, where they came from, or what their individual circumstances are” while little to no importance is given to “interconnectedness with others, relatedness, or feelings in such classrooms or in other arrangements, activities, and relationships (Inoue, *Habits of White Language*). Individuals keep difficulties and problems to themselves because the important thing is the contractual agreement made, which is about consistent (the same for everyone) policy” (Inoue, *Habits of White Language*). My students were simply highlighting the White discourse

I was promoting them for in the classroom. Here's the rubric we created for the literacy narrative prompt:

Rubric for Literacy Narrative:

1. How well does the content of the narrative provide detailed descriptions of event(s) using imagery and descriptive language?
2. How well does the structure of the narrative follow logical chronological order of events and/or processes? Does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and ending?
3. How well does the writing demonstrate a use of voice/tone appropriate for a narrative?
4. How well does the narrative forward an important claim or observation with which the reader should walk away?

I am trying to engage the literacy conversations from the texts we begin the class with by asking students to reflect on their histories and relationships with literacy. However, when re-examining the rubric we produced as a class, the “how well does this do that” kind of question still ends up activating my own HOWLing. That kind of question depends on my own judgments and assessments of students’ writing, maintaining a hierarchy of judgment in which the reader, the instructor, dictates the habits of language most valued. It reads like every other rubric my students have seen in writing classes like this one.

Despite its attempts to work dimensionally, as Inoue (2015a) describes it, and guide “readers (judges) to explain their observations and demands that multiple readers read and provide observations” and to “not assume that there is a standard by which we can judge or rank any dimension of writing” (para. 6), focusing on just the design of the rubric and not *how* it will be implemented caused the activity to fall short of active antiracist engagement. I had created a rubric that involved students, sure, but I had ended my practice at creating the rubric (including their diverse voices) and not thought much about how then it would be implemented to support antiracist assessment ecologies. Students, then, in my collaborative rubric activity, reproduced the standardized English I was seeking to deconstruct and dismantle but am still, essentially, complicit in it. Students have been so trained and immersed in White language supremacy that they fear going against it. During this activity, students often reiterated that they just want to get an A, however possible.

Letter grading concerns were at the forefront of students’ minds, placing an immense amount of power in the hands of the instructor. Students see the instructor as the gatekeeper of their grades that the university expects them to have in order to be considered successful and worthy. And, as a producer of HOWL myself, I almost instinctively “cleaned up” the rubric in order for it to be in line with student learning outcomes and my own White teacher positionality. While students have done exactly what was asked of them—they picked apart the

language of the prompt in order to put the same language in the rubric—it doesn't give much leeway for addressing the prompt in any *other* way. It's still essentially my way because I have final say in its edits and application. I am still the power that will use and apply the rubric to assign students an assessment or grade so they can fit into the criteria of the program or the institution. The rubric students created also HOWLs, as Inoue puts it, since the prompt itself is rooted in habits of White language.

However, my reflections move beyond the White language habits embedded in my prompt and rubric. The failed attempt, here, is more about the assessment ecology itself and who is doing the judging and how those judgments circulate in that ecology. My White girl habitus *is* the nature of my judgments in general and in the writing classroom—and those judgments are still used and circulated by students. They are still listening to me HOWL at them and the ecology encourages them to stay in line with me and be conditioned in my ways. Since the rubric assumes my position as final judge and, therefore, my own HOWLing, it aids in circulating my HOWLing as well.

Additionally, the activity reinforces another White language habit: Clarity, Order and Control. This habit, according to Inoue's HOWL (2021) asserts that "rigor, order, clarity, and consistency are all valued highly and tightly prescribed, often using a dominant, standardized English language that comes from a White, middle-to-upper-class group of people" and does the opposite of what Anzaldúa argues, forcing "language [to] be separated from those who offer it" while little value given to "sensual experiences, considerations of the body, sensations, and feelings" (para. 16). Standardized English, as Baker-Bell (2020b) points out, relies on and reinforces White discourse as the preferred, formal, normal, articulate way of doing language—the epitome of literacy. Phrases such as "detailed descriptions," "beginning, middle, end," indicate that students understand a set of rhetorical conventions and style, if that style is rooted in a five-paragraph essay format and doesn't really consider multiple genres or modalities of writing as it assumes one kind of structure and logic in the reader's head, my head. A beginning, middle, and end, essentially, is a discourse that's influenced by a Westernized and White linear sense of order that can and should be chronologically composed.

In the construction of my own prompt, I'd assumed a White supremacist notion of order and narrative, something that likely happens often, considering the prevalence of White writing teachers in universities today. Including students in the process of creating assessment tools does loop them directly into the writing process and allows them to explore the relationships between identity, language, and power. Inclusion in the rubric design process gives students a chance to be included in their assessments. I thought that simply including students in the process usually attributed solely to the instructor would pretty much magically do the work of removing racial bias through the osmosis of it not being only White folks in the room. I thought that it's the nature of their inclusion—their ways of knowing and being—in the assessment ecology that does the critical work of

antiracist and anti-exclusionary language practices. I was kinda right. But also pretty wrong. As Inoue notes in the first chapter of this collection, “a rubric may start as something in the ecology that represents writing expectations, but later in the process of peer review becomes a heuristic that makes a process of response,” essentially training students in judgment. And, since these kinds of rubric design activities “[offer] opportunities for students to reflect upon their own relations to larger racialized languaging next to who they understood themselves to be as embodied writers,” I’d achieved my purpose of awareness and engagement in understanding linguistic diversity, HOWL, and WLS.

However, like Megan McIntyre’s experiences as a White writing teacher in Chapter 3, I haven’t particularly been left out of the academy and its HOWL, but rather, I have been raised in and reinforced them, making my assessment practices and judgements *rooted* in them. We didn’t necessarily have a lot of money when I was growing up, but I was always considered “good” at reading and writing because my positionality in the world reinforced that a White, settler colonial language was constructed as the superior language. I had access to it and it was reinforced my entire life. I had the luxury of having rather positive and joyful experiences with writing throughout school and it wasn’t until graduate school that I was introduced to my complicity WLS. And this is where I first ran into trouble in the creation of a collaborative assessment ecology. I really had no idea how much I was reinforcing WLS habits through my own linguistics practices and overall acceptance of and lack of challenges to the system. I was behaving more like a typical White liberal elitist, thinking that my essentially superficial and performative notions of inclusion were enough to absolve me of responsibility. Like McIntyre, who “assumed that giving students the opportunity to participate would be enough to make [the] assessment process more equitable,” I was influenced by my good memories of writing and reading as a White student. I’d never been taught that my “language habits and rhetorical practices are inappropriate for classrooms or wrong” like Black and Latine students have throughout their lives—and that’s where a necessary component of my pedagogy, as a White girl writing teacher, is critical self-reflection, especially when it comes to my built-in WLS judgment.

A White Girl in the Writing Classroom

In the summer of 2018, I spent a week in a seminar at the RSA Summer Institute. It was my first institute ever, as a newly-minted Ph.D. candidate, and the seminar I’d been lucky enough to get accepted into was called “At the Intersection of Rhetorics and Feminisms.” I was struck the most by the presence of White women scholars, myself included, in a seminar focused on feminism and *intersectionality* as rhetorical theory and praxis. Perhaps the generic conception of intersectionality as a cross of rhetoric and feminism rather than a theory that examines intersecting and interlocking axis of identity, systemic structures, and how bodies

interact with material things like policies and resources resulted in a co-opting and mainstreaming of a people of color theory for White folks' ends. The White women in the seminar seemed to be both aware and unaware of their Whiteness and the material conditions that Whiteness created. It was easier for us to ignore the ways our own Whiteness created particular consequences; they, we, in our minds, were part of the solution, not the problem.⁷ We, as self-proclaimed intersectional feminists and antiracist scholars, led with how we were different from other White women scholars—we were *not* ready to discuss or focus on how we were still complicit in those norms and discourses, even as we were being called out for them in real time. When the few scholars of color in the seminar spoke up, often to tell of an experience with racism in their careers or at their universities, I could *feel* the White women in the room disconnect from the conversation. We're not *those* White folks, we thought.

In this seminar, a woman of color spoke up about her feelings of being shut down during small group discussions. The dismissive behavior toward her had been enough for her to tell the seminar leaders that she did not want to continue participating in the seminar. I know all of this because, when she returned, she spoke to the entire room about it. She told the room how she felt slighted, shut down, and silenced by White group members during small discussions—as if she and her work didn't merit the same breath and time of other scholars in the groups. While watching others like me in the room recoil in discomfort, I caught myself putting my head down and disengaging from the conversation. I felt more ashamed than accountable. I recoiled, not wholly in an act of disagreement, but rather from discomfort.

The theme of the institute that year was hospitality, so the irony astounds that this seminar would lead to some of the most difficult and uncomfortable discussions of racism and sexism. The seminar had the *intent* to be hospitable but, here, our traditional (re: White, Eurocentric) rhetorical practices were actually still furthering inhospitable spaces and othering. Because of what they embody, White bodies like mine are often silencing, belittling, loud, exclusionary, interruptive, disrespectful—and often get cast under the veil of “well I'm here so at least I'm trying” or, “we're all bad feminists, that's the point!” Or, even “we can mess up and know we'll be forgiven because that's the point of feminism!” All utterances of what I heard White women scholars say at some point in the seminar. Most of us sitting there and thinking that simply by being in the seminar that made us not part of the problem. These are declarations that many of us make in academia, myself included, especially when it comes to our approaches to teaching and assessing writing.

7. It's easy and almost like a reflex for White women to scapegoat White men without applying the same critical lenses to ourselves. A majority of White women voting for Trump in 2016 illustrates how we'll often choose the securities awarded to Whiteness and misogyny.

Most spaces are hospitable to White bodies and our practices and policies reflect that. This is the problem with holding onto our righteous authority or expertise. That authority, as Marilyn Frye's notion of Whiteness describes, and/or expertise has been conditioned in standardized English language practices and is most apparent in how we assess student writing according to a standardized, White discourse and conventions (Inoue, 2015a). In "White Woman Feminist," (1992) she had been taught and conditioned to be a judge and overseer of societal norms. She writes that,

Whitely people generally consider themselves to be benevolent and good-willed, fair, honest and ethical. The judge, preacher, peacemaker, martyr, socialist, professional, moral majority, liberal, radical, conservative, working men and women—nobody admits to being prejudiced, everybody has earned every cent they ever had, doesn't take sides, doesn't hate anybody, and always votes for the person they think best qualified for the job, regardless of the candidates' race, sex, religion or national origin, maybe even regardless of their sexual preferences. (p. 85)

In this Whiteness, White folks can and do excuse a lot of problematic behavior and ways in which they've been conditioned to reinforce or police structures of Whiteness and norms. Such norms, as Frye explains, teach Whitely and Christian folks like herself that they know right from wrong and that they had "the responsibility to see to it right was done; that there were others who did not know what is right and wrong and should be advised, instructed, helped and directed by us," leading to a conditioned behavior that people should "await the judgment or instruction of another (White) person who does" (p. 85). These conditions and norms influence, of course, are reflected in the ways in which we teach and assess language and writing.

Since our positionalities, our ways of knowing and being, intersect with one another through our judgments of and with language in classrooms, involving students in writing assessment brings our various and ever-changing intersectional and politicized subjectivities into play in conspicuous or self-conscious ways. However, the example I've illustrated in the previous sections is not a successful example of student-teacher assessment collaboration—and that matters. The failed attempt led to my own reflection and awareness of how, even in my best of intentions, I still perpetuate the White supremacist language practices our departments and universities are immersed in. This chapter provides a template for how White writing scholars and teachers can engage in the same kinds of critical self-reflective work they so often ask of their students in order to cultivate antiracist writing pedagogies.

My White girl subjectivity and other intersecting positionalities matter in how I, as the writing teacher, am situated in and perpetuate White, mainstream, normative discourse. So, then, each student's own intersectional positionality

matters to how they are situated and constituted in the assessment ecology. Altering the nature of the assessment ecology shifts power dynamics and, in an attempt to challenge my own White girl subjectivity, I invite students in to design the rubrics we'll use in class to assess writing in various stages. The idea of including students in rubric design works to deconstruct the teacher-as-authority and students-as-receptors relationship. And, I wanted to create an assessment ecology that would challenge my own and my students White language supremacy habits.

When I took my first teaching composition course in the early 2010s, those whose work I read as experts in the field were scholars like Peter Elbow, Linda Flower, Donald Murray. They had one thing in common: they were White writing scholars. Many of these scholars discuss the importance of collaborative and inclusive work but without specific engagement with our own subjectivities, say, in the way scholars of color like Freire or Anzaldúa do. Even recently, the popular *Naming What We Know* (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) provides excellent threshold concepts for composition pedagogy yet doesn't discuss subject positioning in relation to the key threshold concepts, thus creating a revision of those concepts just a few years later. In the 2020 revision, *(Re) Considering What We Know*, J. W. Hammond and colleagues assert that *writing assessment must be ethical*. Meaning, writing assessment practices must be centered around fairness. Since many writing programs are still largely made up of White writing instructors, many programs might make their assessments of students' writing—their assessment ecologies—unfair and unintentionally unethical. If we place fairness at the center of writing assessment practice, then we require White writing instructors and scholars of assessment to intentionally and critically reflect on their own Whiteness.

In his 2016 CWWA plenary address, Inoue argued that, “race and language are closely associated, and when we judge language in order to categorize and rank, the act of judgment becomes racist in our world. It's racism by consequence, not by intention” (p. 135). Race and language go hand in hand because they remain in a constant power struggle and ask non-White students to continuously perform the dominant White discourse in order to be successful in and beyond the university. And, since White scholars still make up the vast majority of writing programs, White writing teachers need anti-White supremacist language practices just as much as, if not more than, students. The typical writing student has become more diverse, but faculty has not. White writing scholars' ability to navigate shifting complexities in identity are crucial to doing meaningful antiracist and intersectional assessment work in writing pedagogy because without these kinds of practices we remain complicit. White writing instructors might have good intentions, but our actions can still be racist despite those intentions as our White bodies that replicate and perpetuate Whiteness are always there, and we might reproduce harmful linguistic practices out of our own conditioning, whether intentionally or not.

It's our job, then, as teachers of language and self-proclaimed inventors and promoters of linguistic diversity to be *accomplices, co-conspirators*, not complicit

or compliant (Chávez et al., 2012). The writing classroom offers a unique space for the disconnect between ally and accomplice to be addressed because of our status as a knowledge-making field. And, because of our close interactions with students, one way to accomplish this kind of work is *with* the students we have in front of us. Diversity efforts might appear in universities and writing programs. For instance, there has been a significant paradigm shift in recent years to even acknowledge Black Lives Matter and other social justice movements and include them in the narratives of a university. Even with such changes, there still remains a disconnect between acknowledgement/intention and lack of tangible progress and change in those universities and writing programs invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is easy to make claims that you're acting in diverse ways or with inclusion in mind without substantial programmatic and pedagogical changes. Writing programs and writing teachers may make proclamations that their courses are focused on antiracist practices, yet still reinforce White language supremacy through various policies and grading policies, in particular. Since the writing classroom offers a space where knowledge, identity, and language intersect, it becomes an essential place to enact intersectional and antiracist practices that lead to changes in how we construct and use language. Despite many writing teachers' best efforts, intersections of identity still come into conflict and clash against a normed, standardized White discourse.

When You Know Better, Do Better

Of the three large, West Coast writing programs I have taught in, two have majority Latinx student populations and a majority White faculty population that's reflected in the writing program hiring and student population dynamic, which puts White language experiences, material conditions, perspectives, and how they language at the forefront of language practices and pedagogies.⁸ Literacy, as we know from Chicana scholars like Anzaldúa, is inextricably tied to our identities. As Baker-Bell (2020a) argues,

By linking the racial classifications of Black and White to language, I am challenging you, the reader, to see how linguistic hierarchies and racial hierarchies are interconnected. That is, people's language experiences are not separate from their racial experiences. Indeed, the way a Black child's language is devalued in school reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world. Similarly, the way a White child's language is privileged and deemed the norm in school is directly connected to the ways that White culture is deemed normal, neutral and similar in the world. (p. 2)

8. Student and faculty demographic information taken from Sacramento State University website and University of California, Merced website.

Baker-Bell's argument, here, is that how we treat language in the classroom reflects how we treat people through their language outside of the classroom. There is little separation between identity and language, as Anzaldúa argued, to take away one's language is to take away their identity—an act of violence against a person's being in the world.

White instructors, then, are embedded in the privileged ways in which Westernized, settler-colonial societies view standardized discourse, making antiracist and anti-White supremacist language practices—such as critical and reflective subjectivity work—essential for White scholars and teachers in order to create antiracist assessment ecologies in which students can thrive. My students, in their deconstructions of the rubric and the language used, weren't so much highlighting what *they* thought was most important to do in the project, they were highlighting what I, the instructor, deemed most important in the prompt. I'm beholden to student and program learning outcomes that are beholden to university initiatives. How radical could I really be, then? In what ways has the White language supremacy of my classroom, outcomes, discipline created immovable boundaries so that myself and my student just go along with the herd? Or, really, how compliant in HOWL/university speak am I, still?⁹ Or, really, *really*, how willing am I to risk the safety of my White body in the university? My most important finding—the practice of engaging students in rubric design—forced *me* to see how *I'm* complicit in White language practices, even though I believed myself to be challenging and radical in allowing students to participate in assessment but they're involvement was still minimal, at best, and tethered to my own HOWLING and the White language supremacy of course outcomes and academic discourses that influence the development of the course as a whole.

Each criterion on the rubric we created is what I'd initially conceived of as a problem-posing question. However, through further research and reflection, I understand that, sure, each question on the rubric is a good question but not necessarily a problem-posing question in relation to antiracist writing assessment. Each question doesn't actually pose a problem about language or its judgment. And, for Freire, to problem- pose is to pose questions that help us investigate two or more interconnected views. In the case of this rubric and in antiracist writing assessment practices, the problem-posing questions the rubric should get at are the relationships between identity and language. As Inoue (2015a) explains, one part of the problem-posing question investigates structural and social ideas of language while the other part of the question considers the personal and individual aspects of language. Here, we see again, the paradox of the White girl subjectivity I've traced throughout this chapter. The rubric illustrates what's expected

9. Joy James and Edmund T. Gordon have a really great chapter on how we function in the academy that relates to what I gesture at here. "Afterword: Activist Scholars or Radical Subjects?" *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*. Eds. C. R. Hale & C. Calhoun. University of California Press, 2008.

because of normed writing conventions and student outcomes and it should also grapple with the ways that each student and teacher want to exercise their own agency in language.

Take, for example, one of the rubric dimensions: “How well does the structure of the narrative follow logical chronological order of events and/or processes? Does the narrative have a beginning, middle, and ending?” In order to actually problem-pose, the question on the rubric should help both the instructor and the students consider where a convention like “logical chronological order” comes from, what they are in contrast to, *and* set those findings next to how we perform that convention in our own writing. Instead, the rubric could consider questions that pose questions about language and its judgment, not just how well something is done. Questions like: What structure does the narrative take? What is its order and what expectations of order does it adapt or resist? That Freire chapter they read at the beginning of the course popped up again and again in rubric design. I consistently heard from students that they liked and related to the notion of asking open-ended questions because it helped them “totally think better” to quote one specific first-year student, yet I still wasn’t getting at the root of anti-White supremacy language practices because I was using Freire and the problem-posing method superficially.

How Radical Can a White Girl Writing Teacher Be?

As White writing instructors, critical self-reflection on our own positionalities and how they interfere with and contradict our intentions to be antiracist and intersectional is necessary work. It’s a reminder that we have work to do, and that’s okay. Part of enacting antiracist, intersectional language practices is to know your role in complicity and working to get out of it. Not only did my prompt need some serious intersectional feminist and antiracist (decolonizing, queering, etc.) framework and centering, but I also needed to add a key component that upheld my antiracist intentions—critical self-reflection. I found that I needed a kind of discourse analysis reflection component in my collaborative rubric design effort.

What I mean by this is that it would’ve helped if students and myself took more substantial time to *reflect* on the rubric design process themselves. Using HOWL as a tool for deconstructing standardized discourse, in the ways I’ve illustrated in this chapter, would help guide students and teachers in the kind of critical self-reflection needed in collaborative rubric activity. Getting students and teachers to examine habits of White language works to deconstruct those habits even in White, homogeneous classrooms, as it puts the focus on critiquing the exclusionary practices of White language habits instead of adding on and adding in diversity or diverse voices performatively. Essentially, the same structure could be implemented: the instructor, in collaboration with students, would interrogate and investigate the prompt for HOWL and then we’d revise the prompt based on what we’d discovered, with the goal of removing that “university speak” prior to

engaging in rubric design, as an initial step, but overall, working to alter the writing assessment ecology of the writing classroom.

How much more beneficial would it be to discuss *how* and *why* we're reproducing and valuing the privileged literacy of the university? This is, after all, some of the arguments that the scholars we read early on (Freire, Anzaldúa, Inoue) vehemently call out. If we develop these practices early, say in teacher training, then they become foundational to learning and teaching and dismantling White supremacist discourses through writing pedagogy. I'm not the only one who stands to benefit from such an activity. I know, now, that this needs to be part of my intersectional and antiracist practices in my writing pedagogy and have since added it to the overall activity. My argument, here, is to show that the critical self-reflection and examination and deconstruction of habits of White language is necessary for White writing instructors to combat and dismantle their own complicity in the White, Eurocentric traditions on which the field was founded. The work continues.

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Part Two. Collaborative and Anti- Oppressive Pedagogies

Chapter 7. Attending to the Elephant: Whiteness in Collaborative Assessment

Kristin DeMint Bailey

Despite my best efforts to lead with a story centering anything other than White perspectives, I open this chapter autobiographically. I do so with hesitant deliberateness, if such a thing exists, knowing that even if as a writer I deliberately center something other than White racial identity, *I* am the one doing the centering. It is *my* voice, a voice informed by experiences of being racialized White—the racial identity that is normalized as *no* racial identity—that’s being amplified. “That’s the . . . steel cage we’re in,” Asao Inoue once said (2019, p. 357). And that is a privilege attended by great responsibility. And while I don’t want to belabor the biographical details that paved the way for the teaching story I tell in this chapter, those details matter. Asao and I discussed this dilemma a lot as we developed this collection: Sometimes, we *need* to center the experiences of White racial subjects in order to reflect upon and problematize them. People who’ve benefited from White racial subjectivity *especially* need to do this work—yet so many of us who actively fight racism and self-identify as antiracists avoid talking about our experiences with subjectivity in meaningful, productive ways. We leave out important details in the service of “antiracism,” when it very well might be that the most impactful antiracist actions White people can take involve shining a light on how our subjective histories influence our perspectives—and, for educators, our pedagogies, curricular decisions, and habits of judgement. Perhaps one key, then, is to know when to center one’s White positionality and when to set it aside.

In the section that follows, I share a good deal of relevant biographical background to provide context for my shifting orientation toward antiracism when I was part of the assessment ecology I reflect on throughout the rest of the chapter. The chapter focuses on one particular assessment ecology because the radical approach I took to assessment that semester, and the palpable failures and lessons of that approach, are what inspired this collection.

A Biographical Foundation

Although I didn’t recognize them as such until my 30s, I’ve been attuned to the material and psychological impacts of systemic racism, especially racism, from adolescence. I am a White cis-gender woman who grew up in a racially diverse, working-class neighborhood in Kankakee, Illinois, 60 miles south of Chicago. Despite the fact that “a White person stating her race is often a further demonstration of White privilege (Ahmed, 2004)” (Kim & Olson, 2017, p. 132), I believe in the necessity of “declar[ing] my race and other identity markers because

ignoring the ways in which my race manifests itself is also an act of White privilege. To work against the racist structures I benefit from, I must ‘stay implicated in what [I] critique’ (Ahmed, 2004, n.p.)” (Kim & Olson, 2017, p. 132). For that reason, throughout this reflection I attempt to call out my racialized experiences and perspective while also trying to avoid centering Whiteness, something I have struggled to do and continue to practice.

As I entered middle school in the early 1990s, I began to notice that our school district was stigmatized for its violence and underachievement and that the stigma was connected to race. We had police security and metal detectors before the Columbine massacre, when school shootings became a thing. To be honest, I’m not sure which came first: the escalating violence, or the daily presence of police in our hallways. In high school I witnessed the impacts of racial stress—usually bloody fights—nearly every day, but I witnessed that stress and those fights as a bystander. Knowing kids my age were experiencing such profound stress was deeply unsettling to me, but I did not believe I could do anything to relieve it, nor did I understand it. I in no way understood how I might be contributing to it—the central concern for me now as someone who strives toward antiracism in life, including my teaching.

Fast forward 20 years, when in graduate school I began to study critical race theory (CRT), which “set[s] out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). CRT fundamentally changed my understanding of race and racism, shifting my attention to the structural, systemic, and often hidden ways that racial signifiers or meanings are linked to social structures and everyday experiences, what Michael Omi and Howard Winant call “racial projects” (2015).

Reflecting on my past and present experiences through the lens of CRT helped me begin to recognize how I’ve participated in and/or benefited from *racist* projects. For example, I began to notice the expectations I had for being exempted from punishment when I could not get a parking ticket overturned. I also started noticing that my conception of violence failed to account for the less visible but systemic ways that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are injured and abused by White supremacy. My conception of violence had been limited to acts of aggression that I could see and/or hear and that were usually accompanied by outrage—acts that most often were associated with Black people in the news and in my schools growing up.

These realizations gave new meaning to a memory I previously had dismissed as absurd: in a whole-school assembly during “Silence the Violence” week in my high school, Black students argued that African American history should be offered as an alternative to our required U.S. history course—which told only a whitewashed history of European colonization—or should at least comprise a huge part of that course. Some kids got in a fistfight during that assembly, which I always thought was ironic. But CRT shows me that the real irony was the inherent violence—the structural, “silent” violence—of “Silence the Violence” week itself. That institutional focus aimed to address and extinguish only one kind of

violence, the intentional, physical violence that had been used to stigmatize Black students. In a chapter about the violence of assessment, Josh Lederman and Nicole Warwick emphasize one problem with this narrow lens: “[W]hen one looks only for intentional harm as indicating violence, the existence of structural violence becomes invisible. Focusing on intent may actually misdirect our attention from the indirect, structural violence that exists in these systems” (2018, p. 234). What I could not see at the time is that “Silence the Violence” week obscured systemic issues: not only the very curricular issue Black students in the assembly were raising but also the theme’s role in perpetuating racist tropes about Black students. Those tropes pointed to Black students’ behaviors as the primary issue administrators needed to contend with instead of the everyday, systemic violence Black students endured and the support they needed and deserved to thrive.

The Black Lives Matter movement, which began as I was learning about and reflecting on CRT in grad school, further catalyzed this realization and made me aware of the urgency of antiracism. The 2014 and 2015 Ferguson and Baltimore riots compelled me to think critically about the “silent” violences that sparked and fueled those riots in the first place: the racist assumptions people make about Black men, the prison industrial complex, the disproportionate number of childbirth-related deaths of Black women and disproportionately high Black infant mortality rates, and more. Around this time, I also took a graduate course in sociolinguistics, where I learned about standard language ideology and its role in discrimination through the work of Rosina Lippi-Green (2011). These events and studies were kindling for a sort of internal revolution, and Inoue’s chair’s address at the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) lit a match.

The Best-Laid Plans . . .

In Fall 2019, I began a one-year visiting assistant professorship at a large community college in a wealthy, predominantly White Chicago suburb. As I planned my courses that summer, I thought about the racial and ethnic diversity of the students at this college (48% White, 27% Hispanic/Latino, 12% Asian, 7% Black or African American) and the lack of such diversity among the administration and faculty, who were predominantly White. I knew that my subject position as a White teacher of mostly BIPOC students was part of the problem of White supremacy, and I obsessively ruminated on something Inoue said to White teachers in his CCCC chair’s address:

You perpetuate White language supremacy in your classrooms because you are White and stand in front of students, as many White teachers have before you, judging, assessing, grading, professing on the same kinds of language standards, standards that came from your group of people. It’s the truth. It ain’t fair, but it’s the truth. Your body perpetuates racism, just as Black

bodies attract unwarranted police aggression by being Black. Neither dynamic is preferred, neither is right, but that's the shit—the steel cage—we're in. The sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we can get to cutting the bars. (2019, p. 357)

I wrestled with how to account in my teaching for the racist violence tied to my White body. Part of me figured the only way to avoid perpetuating this violence would be to find a new vocation. Yet I knew that antiracist writing instruction is seriously needed, especially in the first-year composition courses that most students are required to take and that community colleges offer as affordable alternatives to gen-eds at four-year institutions. Having been trained to think critically about racialization, racism, and languaging, I felt responsible for doing this work, compelled to do it. So avoiding it wasn't an option, something Inoue made clear when he said, "The sooner we can accept this fact, the sooner we can get to cutting the bars" (2019, p. 357). I had to find ways to counter that violence by decentering my authority and by decentering Whiteness.

Inspired by Ibram Kendi's definitions of racism and antiracism, which he argues are "a marriage of . . . policies . . . and ideas," I decided to apply what I learned in graduate school in a comprehensive way, something I hadn't done before (2019, pp. 17-18). I developed a course theme of the intersections among language, identity, and power and prioritized three pedagogical strategies that I thought would counteract systemic racism in writing courses. I tried to:

- Focus readings and assignments on diverse languages, identities, and power relations. Most of our readings would decenter Whiteness through the perspectives and voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- Create conditions that construct students as decision-makers and agents of assessment, thereby decentering my authority. They would create our grading policy, together. I would serve as a sort of sounding board through the process, asking questions and identifying potential problems to help us aim for fairness and accountability. Ultimately, I would let them decide what policy would best achieve that goal.
- Center judgement and assessment as students' processes of learning (see Huot, 2002; and Inoue, 2004), which would help us to challenge and, I hoped, intentionally decenter White standards. Students would share authority over how their writing would be assessed. I would train students through assignments and activities to read and evaluate each others' work generously yet critically. I would ensure that these assignments and activities would help students meet the department's mandatory course objectives, but students would meet them mostly through their practices of assessment, that is, through the languaging they brought to the classroom. I knew that having those objectives in the first place was antithetical to student agency, but I hoped that we could find a radical way to upend them, fulfilling them even as we critiqued them.

I thought that the best approach to decentering the authority attached to my White body would be one centered in collaboration, which I knew I couldn't force but felt I should try to cultivate. I thought the co-creation of a grading policy with students would both 1) disrupt the racial hierarchy created through the act of grading that the White(ly) teacher of predominantly BIPOC students usually engages in and 2) provide opportunities for discussing racism in writing assessment. I hoped students would tie their grades only to completing/submitting the work I'd assigned, not to the assessment mechanisms we would co-create. I also hoped that our assessment practices would develop students' awareness of the judgements they make about their own and others' languaging, revealing to them how racism functions in writing assessment. To facilitate students' development of this critical language awareness, I would teach them about standard language ideology and its racist logic from Lippi-Green's work (2011), asking them to reflect critically on the assessment standards, metrics, and materials that, together, we produced. I envisioned a vibrant class, energized by discussions of identity and power and the differential stakes our language use held for us. And for several weeks in the Fall of 2019, my vision seemed to materialize.

For the first two weeks of class, students and I read about, discussed, and wrote about the problem of grades and some potential solutions, like ungrading and labor-based grading. Together, we created a grading policy that accounted, as much as we could, for students' individual and collective desires. To do this, students wrote about the ideas that most appealed to them and about their desires for our class, and they discussed them in small, self-selected groups of three to four students. Each group then negotiated a proposed grading policy. In a whole-class discussion, we used those small-group policies to negotiate our class policy. We did this work over a few class periods. During our work, I asked questions and posed problems to clarify details and fill gaps. Our co-created policy would be open to revision if needed but would give us a solid start.

One of the challenges I encountered in these first couple of weeks was students' desire for the external motivator of teacher-graded writing. Students—who were primarily BIPOC—wanted to know “how they were doing,” saying that teacher-given grades tied to assessments of the quality of their writing were what motivated them. But antiracism required me to unsettle not only that traditional power dynamic but also judgements of writing based on standards that reflect White middle-class values as well as connections between those judgements and students' grades (as indicators of success). So I tried to strike a compromise with them, one where my assessments had tangible value (their request) but upheld my commitment to delinking my judgements about their “real” writing (which I considered to be only their major assignments) and their grades: I would assess their assessments. For each of our major writing projects, 25 percent of their grade would come from their peers' assessment of their writing, and 75 percent would come from my assessment of *their* assessment of others' work. I created a rubric for my part of the evaluation that we used for the whole semester. If it

sounds complicated, it was. But I thought I could make it work, even though I wanted so badly to avoid tying grades to judgements about writing. This was the best compromise I could come up with on the fly.

From there, we began to read, talk, and write about the course theme, with which students were really engaged. I decided what their first major project would be (a cultural identity narrative), but students chose their modes and media for completing the project. My goal with this open-ended assignment was to expand students' ideas of what counts as "writing" in our digital era and make space for rhetorical practices not traditionally seen as "academic." We read texts by diverse authors (including Gloria Anzaldúa, Louise Erdrich, Amy Tan, and Vershawn Ashanti Young, among others) that inspired the first project and decided together, through a process like the creation of our grading policy, what we'd like to see in such a narrative. We then created a rubric that we'd use to assess each others' drafts at multiple stages. Students used this rubric to write their own narrative and to assess their peers' narratives. Their peer assessments would consist of completing that rubric and writing a letter explaining their assessment to the writer.

I tried to make our assessment metrics, materials, and processes clear. Before students ever did their peer assessments, I created a rubric that I would use to assess their assessments. I shared this rubric with them and solicited their feedback on it in class, making changes to the language for "clarity" and "fairness" (concepts I now recognize as HOWL) based on their responses. I gave the "final" rubric to them ahead of time, so they would know exactly what I was looking for in the assessment letters they were writing for their peers. This way, I hoped that they would be able to write their narratives however they liked, that they would not feel constrained by typical academic expectations for standardized American English (what Alim & Smitherman, 2012, refer to as White mainstream English) or for specific genre features and modes.

We did a practice round of assessment, which I gave feedback on just like I would for the graded assessment. Together, we looked at some examples of their assessment letters alongside my feedback, discussing where the assessment writer made the moves identified in my rubric, where they started to make those moves but didn't do them fully or well, and where they didn't do them at all. But students were so confused. They didn't understand what I was looking for or how that might translate into their writing. I thought that most of them did, because the feedback I got through various formative course-assessment tools indicated that they did, and because students generally didn't ask questions about what we were doing no matter how I invited those questions (anonymously and not, in writing and in discussion, independently and in groups, and so on). But I was wrong.

Halfway through the semester, my class sort of internally combusted. After our official (graded) round of assessments for the cultural identity narrative resulted in low grades on this first project—grades that students insisted should be tied to the assessment of their writing—students were frustrated and stressed

out. Many of them felt like failures. I found out through an exit slip (a formative assessment tool for surveying students), and I remember feeling sidelined, distressed, worried about how I'd salvage the class's morale and my end-of-term student evaluations. Because of my precarity as a visiting assistant professor on a one-year term, these evaluations mattered—a lot. But more than that, the *work* mattered. I didn't want students having a negative experience with something meant to support and motivate them, to *build* their confidence.

Inspired by Inoue's 2019 address—in which he framed compassion as “asking the deep attending and problematizing question: Am I causing you to suffer?” (p. 366)—I planned a listening session for our next class. I would practice what he called “deep attending,” “open[ing] space for those of us who have only been listening but would like to speak, and be heard.” (p. 363). In email two days before the session, I acknowledged students' frustrations and concerns, told them those frustrations and concerns were important to me, and explained my goal for the listening session: to recalibrate our expectations of the class and each other, together, and figure out where we wanted to go from there. I asked questions for students to think about and come prepared to discuss; shared a brief version of my perspective as a writing teacher working within a system that requires course objectives and grades; and told them we'd spend the rest of the class session discussing their questions and deciding whether and how we wanted to revise the writing projects portion of our grading policy.

The next class was one of the most meaningful teaching experiences I've ever had. Most students participated, sharing their concerns and frustrations with the implications of our co-created policy, and I shared with them the tensions between my teaching values and institutional constraints. Together, we negotiated a revised grading policy, changing the assignments portion to completion grades only (with ungraded, formative feedback) and leaving the attendance and participation policies the same. By the end of class, the affect in the room seemed to have shifted profoundly, at least from my perspective. I felt much more at ease than I was before class began, and students were more talkative and lighthearted. For me, the dynamic shifted because students were finally speaking up, opening up—I could finally hear their perspectives. For students, predominantly Black and Latinx students across gender lines, the dynamic shifted because they felt heard. Something they said stuck with me: They *assumed* that people don't listen to them, and even if people do allegedly listen, these students' words don't *matter*. This was another kind of “silent” violence they were accustomed to, the violence of being ignored, of educational authorities insisting on the superiority of our own perspectives to theirs.

... Sometimes Offer Unexpected Failures/Lessons

As I reflect on that assessment ecology, I see how *Whiteness*, which Marilyn Frye (1992) defines as “a deeply ingrained way of being in the world” (n.p.) and Dae-Joong Kim and Bobbi Olson add is an “epistemological worldview, a lens of judgment” (2017, p. 124), impacted the ecology. The racial power dynamic remained

unchallenged until the semester was halfway done, and the grading policies and assessment practices “we” made early on merely reproduced the racist structures I was trying to unsettle. My purposes were antiracist, but other elements of the ecology (the parts and processes) were not. As I write this, I see the following (undoubtedly incomplete list of) failures in my process and design of an antiracist assessment ecology and the lessons those failures produced.

Acceptance (But Not Resignation) Is a Responsibility

I did not understand or do what Inoue meant when he suggested White teachers must *accept* the reality that we “perpetuate White language supremacy in [our] classrooms because [we are] White and stand in front of students” so that we can begin dismantling it. I was ignorant of the fundamental distinctions between how racism is perpetuated by my [White] body, which I can’t control (2019, p. 357), and by Whiteness, which I can work to control. Although I was aware of the racial power dynamic in the classroom and the tension that’s inevitable when a White person has authority over BIPOC students, I did not want to accept that this dynamic will *always* exist given our history with power and racialization. I became so preoccupied with trying to change something over which I have no control—how BIPOC students would respond to my White body and its relationship to power in our assessment ecology—that I missed what I *could* control: the policies in our class that reproduced White language supremacy.

Whiteness Is a Critical Concept that Requires Deep Understanding

I lacked a deep understanding of Whiteness and what it means to center Whiteness—that is, White perspectives and behaviors. As a result, I failed to see how I was centering my perspective—one that ignored the significance of my race in my experiences as a college student who would’ve loved to make the policy determining my grades—in my teaching. I wanted a democratic policy-making experience in my class, but I subconsciously minimized the authoritarian regime BIPOC students are accustomed to in the U.S. education system. In turn, I subconsciously minimized the significance of the histories with White teachers that many BIPOC students would bring to our class and that would greatly impact the assessment ecology. In all actuality, I’m another White woman teacher telling students I’m listening, that things are different in my class, but to them it probably all looks and feels the same as it always has. The power I tried to hand over to them likely felt superficial. I suspect that my radical approach to assessment didn’t work because students didn’t trust my White self to hold up my end of the deal and/or didn’t trust that they would learn under this grading system. I also suspect that my White body’s linkages to Whiteness led students to believe their words didn’t matter in our class, even while I thought I was communicating the opposite. Students’ perspectives matter, and we cannot quickly reframe them. Full stop.

Other Shared Identities Don't Alleviate Racial Disparities

I made the decision to explore a new alternative to Inoue's antiracist, labor-based grading (2019) based on a shallow understanding of what labor-based grading is and could be. I was vaguely familiar with his approach and rationale, but I had not read about it in depth and did not have time to do so right then. I assumed that labor was necessarily measured in time spent and quantity produced, which I as a working-class student would have found overwhelming, possibly debilitating. Time was a resource I did not have much of nor did I know how to manage well as a first-generation woman college student and oldest of four children who shared many of the family and work responsibilities that community college students face. I assumed that because I had personally experienced these pressures, I could accurately anticipate my students' anxieties and make a judgement that labor-based grading would not work for them. I failed to recognize how this Whiteness tendency to co-identify with students who were raced differently from me made me overlook or minimize pressures I hadn't personally experienced due to White privilege—pressures to write in ways that felt unnatural, even oppressive, to me, pressures that labor-based grading eliminates. As a result, the decisions I made reinforced my own White agency as teacher and judge in this assessment ecology, even as I was consciously trying to do the opposite.

Whiteness Is Not Limited to White People

I devised my alternative approach to collaborative assessment on a faulty premise: that if students controlled the assessment ecology, and the majority of the students were BIPOC, then the ecology would be antiracist. This premise wrongly assumes that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color are unlikely to reproduce *de facto* Whiteness. In other words, I assumed that because BIPOC students were likely aware of how race impacted their experiences in school, they would also understand—and be ready, comfortable, and willing to speak out against—how grading systems and traditional assessment practices preserve a racist status quo. I also wrongly assumed students *could* control the ecology, that their agency was not impacted by *my* body's affective attachment to Whiteness, as I discuss above. In hindsight, I see that I was trying with this collaborative approach to *circumvent* racist power relations, something I cannot do because of how deeply ingrained Whiteness is in the U.S., instead of making those power relations present with students, noticing them in the ecology for students to critique and perhaps counter.

The Central Issue Is the Linkage Between Judgements and Value

I enabled a grading policy where my judgements about writing were still connected to *value* (i.e., grades), and this evaluation impacted students' lives. I had not

considered students' written assessments that I agreed to evaluate and grade as legitimate "writing," but students considered them as such. So while I thought I was sufficiently decoupling the judgements of a White authority figure from the writing that mattered, all the while giving students the graded assessments from a teacher that they said they wanted, I was not challenging the racist structure that let *me* decide which writing mattered and which writing didn't. Even students' thinking and reading—their *judgements*—were being judged and graded by a White woman. I was also working within a system that dictates what students must learn (and demonstrate that they've learned) from a particular elite, White, monolingual vantage point. For example, the departmental course objectives influencing my assessments reproduced HOWL, largely because of their references to "appropriateness" and "suitability," terms that assume a Whiteness "unseen, naturalized orientation to the world" (Inoue, 2021, n.p.). They demonstrated other HOWL as well. As course-wide objectives, they "assume[d] or invoke[d] a voice (and body), or its own discourse, as neutral and apolitical, as non-racial and non-gendered . . . a view that is outside the person speaking or expressing the ideas" (Inoue, 2021, n.p.). As is the case for all department-wide course objectives I've ever seen, there was no accounting for the identities of the people who created the objectives and the contexts and histories that they invoke, no recognition of the legacies they reproduce. They focused on the individual student's expected abilities by the end of the course, and not on the evolution of the class community. I de-prioritized these objectives in the syllabus, placing them near the end, but they still impacted our assessment ecology because they existed.

Change Takes Time—For Everyone

I assumed students could resist conditioned ways of thinking about grades in the span of a few weeks. Students were conditioned to see grades as measures of learning, and punitive assessment was most likely all they had been used to; how could I expect them to "problematiz[e] their existential writing assessment situation" (Inoue, 2015, p. 134) in such a short amount of time well enough that they could use it to devise an antiracist grading policy?

The Benefits of Hindsight

In short, this whole experience of finding that my antiracist purposes for an assessment ecology were counteracted by the people, places, and parts of that ecology has yielded ever-deepening insights about my own Whiteness, even though I try hard to change it. Whiteness is why I trusted my experiential knowledge about grades without sufficiently problematizing how White privilege impacted that knowledge. Whiteness is why I prioritized this personal experiential knowledge over the carefully theorized, constructed, and tested recommendations of an assessment scholar and critical race theorist of Color. Whiteness is why I could not come to terms

with the necessity of using the power I was given in a racist system to make anti-racist policy decisions. But here's the rub: antiracists, by definition and regardless of whether their power was unearned, use that power to draw attention to racial inequities in policies and counteract *the policies themselves* (Kendi, 2019). They do this because as Inoue's ecological theory helps us see, policies create people—their biases and dispositions—who in turn create policies. That is, by changing racist policies, which means changing the ways power circulates in the ecology, we change the rhetorical contexts within which our assessment practices happen—the Places element of the assessment ecology. In so doing, we change the People, because “people who inhabit places in a writing assessment ecology tend to be influenced by those locations” (Inoue, 2015, p. 139). In this way, every action we take, including antiracist actions, reverberates throughout the ecology.

Having witnessed the implications of assessment-ecology elements working against each other, I see my reluctance to use my teacherly authority to change racist policies as a kind of “silent violence” in itself. Instead of redressing the violence of assessment by decoupling grades from judgements about students' writing, that is, I let the harmful policies get created and play out. Although my discomfort with being a White woman teacher of BIPOC students was grounded in a simplistic understanding of Whiteness (and admittedly was tinged by White shame and guilt), I prioritized my discomfort over the antiracist responsibilities I have to BIPOC students. This silent violence, in short, resulted from my own White agency as teacher and judge in this assessment ecology, even as I was consciously trying to dismantle these things.

“Like fighting an addiction,” writes Kendi, “being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination” (2019, p. 23). So what is the significance of my subjectivity in my collaborative assessment ecologies, ecologies that have explicit social justice or antiracist goals? My subjectivity defines my alignment with racist structures and the ways in which I can and must challenge those structures—as well as the ways I can't and shouldn't. For me as a White teacher, it means I must trust my training and all that I've learned from BIPOC scholars, to humbly acknowledge what I do and don't know and make sure to account for the impacts of how I am raced, and to make antiracism the primary focus of every element of a writing assessment ecology—even when I feel uncomfortable using unearned power to do this work. Our subjectivities matter because they inform what we focus on, why we do what we do, and how we go about doing it. And part of being an antiracist accomplice means I defer to the wisdom of teacher-scholars of color who are showing me how to do this work, who are telling me that we all need to become comfortable with chaos and humbly find a way through it. For the purposes of grading and assessment, that means I decouple grades from all assessments of writing quality from here on out, regardless of who my students are and no matter how deeply they desire graded assessments. I work with students to determine how their labor should be measured. As I do this work, I ask questions for clarification and

give students time to respond, intentionally resisting the urge to fill the silence I find so uncomfortable—the silence that maybe is inevitable when BIPOC students are determining whether and how open they should be with a White teacher. I wait for and attend to *students'* languaging, their “agency—. . . an act with consequences” (Morrison, 1993, para. 11), and I respond generously, bearing in mind my tendency toward HOWL and actively resisting it in mind and in word.

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Chapter 8. Gaming the System: Assessing Basic Writing with Black Male Student-Athletes

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The scenes featured below arise from memories, with all dialogue reconstructed of rubbled lived experiences. Dear reader, please understand them in a “language of beholding,” as Black feminist theorist Christina Sharpe (2016) asks in waking afterlives of transatlantic slavery, that ongoing hold: “How are we beholden to and beholders of each other in ways that change across time and place and space and yet remain?” (p. 101).

Some stroll in, hoodie completely over face, mumbling a greeting I cannot hear. Some enter the physical classroom in groups, mid-conversation, as though our shared space were an old space where they’d always been. Momentarily a spectator, I learn about whose ankle musta been torn up juking who else’s sorry attempt at a tackle. Some greet me enthusiastically, even shake my hand, making whatever name they’ll call me: “Mr. Lou,” “Mr. Maraj,” “Professor,” “Dr. Lou,” or my favorite, “Mr. Teach.” In my emails with administration, they’re known as “the guys,” and the guys will all share individuated experiences with writing on a spectrum including experiences as the lone translator for their immigrant African family, to accounts of private tutoring in English, to admissions of never really caring about school—and not really caring about this class, too—with their minds on the National Football League (NFL). On Zoom, they learn to clown me by not turning on cameras and saying “ayo what’s up Mr. Maraj” and having me guess who exactly I should respond to. When I guess wrong, they say I’m messed up because they don’t sound alike. They are my students, many of them Black male student-athletes—football players—in Workshop in Composition, who sometimes follow me to Seminar in Composition, and then elsewhere in the historically White university of an Eastern-US city. Yet “the guys” represent more than a monolith, some fresh out of predominantly White private high schools, some from the rural US South, some highly-recruited prospects from the same Eastern U.S. state. Most of them know of Trinidad and Tobago, where I’m from, tangentially, with the “ain’t that where Nicki Minaj from?”

Sometimes they talk over me, whether I’m at the front of the room, whether across their different Zoom screens at each other, or by Zoom-bombing their teammates to interject their own flow into a particular day’s discussion. But, for the most part, they let me do my thing, and one of the guys will be the talker, the question-asker, the one building rapport with me that pays off when I get

the late-in-the-semester email about if we “all good” for him to submit his paper later cuz you know how “fighting demons” be. I know, as a Black im/migrant in the US, the importance of names, of individuation from cultural stereotypes, so I learn the name of each of these Black men, sometimes more than one name per person, understanding that “Big Mike” is not the same as Michael, for instance. As an international undergraduate student, I fought hard to ensure that others said my name, Louis, with the silent French “s” pronunciation I grew up with, until one White woman psychology professor told me (in front of everyone) even that was “wrong”; so, I moved on as “Lou,” far easier for Americans to deal with. I learn their stories too—of their names, about whose locked-up cousin motivates whom, about whose single mother took them to practices amid evictions and hunger, about who got dozens of offers from big-name athletic programs and Ivy-league schools. But “the guys” somehow manifest as a collective in missives about late work, about catching up during finals week, about scheduling my class for the upcoming semester since they really enjoy taking my classes because I connect with “them” in ways others do not. A fraught tension between the group identity and the individual characters of these young men ebbs and flows throughout my times with them, but especially in the Workshop course. It’s always messy in Workshop where assessment seems prefigured.

Workshop, as it turns out, equates to “basic” or “Basic Writing:” a seemingly taboo term for a while now—as some argue tensions around those labeled “basic writers” have been in circulation as long as the field of composition has (Otte & Mlynarczyk, 2010), with particular contentions with the entire enterprise dating back to the 1990s (Shor, 1997). The remedial connotations and praxis around the title “basic” and such courses’ racialized dimensions acting as an institutional barrier for Black and Brown students (Poe et al., 2014; Hodara & Jaggars, 2014; Poe et al., 2019; Nastal, 2019) have warranted a shift in how institutions name these courses, yet in some cases their operation bears out their traditional dynamics. Recent moves to do away with or replace remedial writing structures altogether have introduced arrangements designed to rapidly move students through composition requirements (Glau, 2007; Rigolino & Freel, 2007; Adams et al., 2009;). In light of these changes, Rachel Ihara (2020) questions whether “by unsettling the boundary between ‘remedial’ and ‘regular’ college writers, mainstreaming programs ultimately challenge us to rethink the goals of college writing writ large,” as these initiatives’ consequences might inadvertently make First-Year Writing into Basic Writing and/or “underscore equity issues that have troubled basic writing from the beginning” (p. 86). And, of course, the utility of both courses remains under consistent question by universities who fuel our work’s precarity by exploiting a vast number of our adjunct colleagues as contingent labor (Kynard, 2022).

Within this larger backdrop and in these specific parts, a particular history cultures this “Workshop.” This history brought the fields of rhetoric and writing studies Dave Bartholomae’s (1986) famous “Inventing the University” and its

arguments that estimations of academic discourse in such spaces “invent” the university through writing. This essay, then, sets out not to categorically or structurally challenge that “university” invented as such—the settler-colonial, racist, neoliberal machine using students and their writing as its raw material for formulating itself a function of that machine—but to find ephemerally fugitive means within its oppressive spaces for Black meaning-making. It demonstrates how those opportunities for rhetorical agency might be offered to those racially objectified for the university’s profit. And it undertakes this endeavor in the face of traditional assessment’s use as a mechanism for gatekeeping and surveillance in “basic” writing classrooms. What I’m tryna say is, while, for Bartholomae, students invent academic discourses through their approximations, this study demonstrates how disturbing the uses of institutional mechanisms culturing those approximations might shift relationships with assessment. These different relationships make the assessment model raw material for fugitive purposes in contrast to Bartholomae’s understanding of student writing as raw material for hegemonic means (the invention of so-called “academic” discourse and the university writ large).

My chapter responds to scholarship on the fallout of various writing assessments on students of color (White & Thomas, 1981; Sternglass, 1997; Fox, 1999; Inoue, 2015, 2019; Inoue & Poe, 2012), particularly continuing a line of inquiring into the racial politics of “remediation” in “remedial” writing classes and assessment by Mary Soliday (2002). Building on Black feminist thought (Lorde, 1984; McKittrick, 2014; Sharpe, 2016) and my previous work on the notion of *rhetorical reclamation* (Maraj, 2020a), this study lays bare what Katherine McKittrick (2014) calls the “mathematics of the unliving”—that, I emphasize, constitutes the racialized roles of Black male student-athletes at historically White universities—to undercut a traditional assessment model by *gaming the system* of writing assessment.

In what follows, I unpack the critical framework for this argument by demonstrating how “assessment”—particularly quantitative assessment—and sport stats work hand in hand in historically White universities to force Black being into a value system animating transatlantic slavery logics. These logics then map on to Black male bodies in developing writing classes in ways congruent with how White academic spaces overall culture them. Next, I offer micro-contexts for the particular intervention my Workshop course seeks and the Black feminist framework therein. This essay then outlines and analyzes the assessment practices involved in gaming the system as a means to steal back from the historically White university for Black rhetorical agency through a motivational tactic working insidiously beside a traditional assessment model. Playing with (as in toying) traditional assessment models allows brief glimpses at students’ meaning-making agency different from playing for those models. And, yes, that does involve mobilizing the oppressive systems that govern gameplay, but for different purposes. These fugitive purposes seek to misappropriate these systems’ logics to enter into a kind of “undercommons” of the university, as philosophers Stephano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) call them.

The Sum of Our Parts: Mathematically Assessing Blackness

In order to grasp the contexts for how (classroom) assessment extends antiBlack thought and logics, we might gloss the ways U.S. media and audiences historically view Black athletes. For decades, conservative media commentators and White sport fans have deployed the mantra “shut up and play” whenever activism enters a sporting arena or its adjacent spaces, especially when Black athletes articulate that activism. Famous examples range the experiences of Muhammad Ali, John Carlos, Tommie Smith, LeBron James, and Colin Kaepernick. But these (racist) White folks find ways to critique athletes’ bodies and playing styles without them sending “overtly” political messages too—think quickly of Serena Williams’ trials with tennis officials and the policing of her Black woman’s body by them, fellow players, and tennis fans. As visual studies scholar Nicole Fleetwood highlights, “From very early in the [Williams] sisters’ careers, journalists and critics made comments about their clothing and hairstyles (especially the signature braids and beads of their teenage years) as much as on their aggressive playing style” (2015, p. 99). The Black body and Blackness, thus, always already function politically and remain heavily policed in the making of Whiteness. A functioning logic behind this racism as well as behind the idea that athletes should entertain and should not “campaign” politically derives from understanding the Black body as object, as commodity, as for mere consumption rather than agential existence.

In the final chapter of Fleetwood’s (2015) *On Racial Icons*, the Black feminist excavates how Black athletes become iconized and consumed, highlighting their objectification. The drafting, trading, and valuation of Black athletes by sport industries, along with fetishization of them by sports commentators, represent only some ways in which this objectification has become “routine public discourse” (p. 81). Together with gendered and sexualized dimensions of such discourse and their racialized qualitative assessments—how commonplace it might be to hear “he’s a beast!” and “what a stud” in a sports bar—especially in professional football (Oates, 2007), the use of mathematical assessment in determining and selling Black male value pervades public rhetoric in statistical sports analysis.

In an earlier article on the antiBlack workings of American (fantasy) football, I highlight how statistics-based digital fantasy sport games animate the aftermaths of transatlantic slavery (Maraj, 2020b). When mostly White male audiences use number-crunching for pleasure or money-making (through sports betting) through these games, they assess a real-life Black man’s value based on their on-field yardage and scoring outputs. Assessments of Black men that saturate U.S. culture, particularly quantitative assessment of them, renders them as disposable objects for the pleasure of, and investment in, Whiteness and hyper-capitalism.

These kinds of objectifying assessments, which cannot be divorced from the White racial habitus of our classroom spaces (Inoue, 2015), take us into what Sharpe (2016) calls the “wake,” the afterlives of transatlantic slavery that curtail Black diasporic being. As I illustrate through my analysis of fantasy football’s use

of slave-trade logics, the tabulation of Black male value in these ways re/minds us of stocktaking ledgers/documents of the plantation, the slave port, and the slave auction block where Black bodies were listed alongside livestock and machinery with their cost assessed as objects (Maraj, 2020b). In reckoning with ways to move beyond this math, McKittrick (2014) emphasizes that “this is where we begin, this is where historic blackness comes from: the list, the breathless numbers, the absolutely economic, the *mathematics of the unliving*” (p. 17, emphasis added). And for the Black student-athlete, because of the “farm system” nature of collegiate athletics in the US, the math of it all represents a calculated risk. While professional athletes might get their bag by breaking their body to accumulate numeric value(s) for potentially millions of dollars, the Black student-athletes in my Workshop classes invest in the gamble of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) industry—they take their chances at practice and on the field for years as commodity-objects without financial reward. And let’s not pretend that only the NCAA gains; universities gain substantially from student-athletes as commodities—the game tickets, the merchandise, and even the marketing “brand” of these institutions that they sell to potential student and parent fans.

But these are not the only ways that the collegiate athletic system engage the afterlives of transatlantic slavery and the US racial caste system. As Alvin Logan et al. (2015) show, the restrictions and parameters of a student-athlete’s movement from school to school bear similarities to the plantation model. Victoria L. Jackson (2018), a former Division 1 track and field athlete, compares college sports to Jim Crow logics, explaining that “non-revenue” athletes “runners, tennis players, golfers, gymnasts, swimmers—can both play *and* study” as they participate in mostly historically White sports while “the professionalism required of big-time college football and basketball athletes leaves no time for the “student” part of the student-athlete equation.” The capitalist “use”—for lack of a better word—of these mostly Black student athletes by these institutions creates a particular culture around Blackness and specifically Black masculinity on historically White campuses: one that values Black bodies as more squarely revenue-generating than others.

Education scholars T. Elon Dancy et al. (2018) explain that the plantation politics of historically White universities reveal that “Black male bodies on college campuses are seen as primarily generators of income and properties of entertainment,” while “testimonies of Black male non-student-athletes attest to the academy’s rejection of Black men as intellectual and unwelcome in the classroom” (p. 184).¹ Black men, therefore, whether student-athletes or not, fall prey to racist histories and cultures of stereotypical Black maleness on these campuses. These men’s presence as commodities for the consumption of White peers sustain legacies of antiBlackness. Racist perceptions of them continue

1. On the latter, see also Vershawn Ashanti Young’s book *Your Average Nigga: Performing Race, Literacy, and Masculinity* (Wayne State University Press, 2007).

to circulate as media representations of Black athletes still widely promulgate racial essentialism through the binary of “black-brawn versus White brains” (Hughey and Goss, 2015).

Enter the writing classroom, and, particularly, one designed for the “developing” writer that, like the ideology of colorblindness, has sought to move away from the language of problematics without addressing problematics—if we don’t say “basic” then we don’t think “basic,” right? Black men, who historically White universities view and (actively attempt to) culture as revenue generators and not students, thinkers, or intellectuals, come to these spaces often with varying levels of lowered confidence in their writing. Some, because of their enculturation by educational institutions to know their “worth” as entertainment, grapple with how writing might be useful in forwarding this idea. Many a time, the first assignment in Workshop leads to reflections on why writing might be useful for engaging social media publics, how it might be wise to finetune one’s “brand” by paying attention to writing (its own negotiation of capitalism, mind you). I recall one student in particular—a highly-recruited freshman wide receiver, dreadlocks down to his shoulders, with a big personality, who first resisted our writing assignments—changing tune and explaining to me after class one day how useful it might be to know how to “deal with the haters” on social media if he only could learn to use writing for that. Regardless of these students’ motivations and perceptions of the course’s usefulness, the general air of “not good enough” that comes with the “basic” of “basic writing” looms thick.

Given this cultural context, fraught tensions surround both the qualitative and quantitative assessment of Black men’s writing and performance in Workshop in Composition. Some come to course material knowing that systems exist within the university that allow for them to “focus” on their sport. Some approach writing suspiciously, acknowledging that they have not historically done well with it. Some have no roadmap for their path toward writing in the university and do not know that Workshop stands as a prerequisite to Seminar in Composition, the standard “first-year writing” course. So how does one work with this population of students to assess their own writing and writing processes? What methods exist for undercutting the racialized, gendered, and classed problematics laid out in bringing these men to our Workshop classroom?

The next section lays the groundwork for responding to these questions by offering the institutional micro-context for my specific “Basic Writing”-come-Workshop classes. It works through the history of this class at its institution and how that history racializes the course and its assessment. Then, it offers my attempt at addressing that history through the building of a cohort model for moving students interested in writing about sport through a sequence of writing classes—a sequence that begins with Workshop in Composition. In that sequence’s structuring, I situate assessment practices geared toward *gaming the system* in these courses’ particular philosophical drive to “define to empower” identity, culture, and writing and their interrelationships.

The Athletic Writing Sequence and “Culturing” Process

Let’s throw it back for a mo’ for some institutional background. I’ve just given a job talk for a position in “African American Rhetoric” about the intellectual capacities of Black storytelling and language—particularly for Black graduate students—in rhetoric and writing studies at Eastern-City U. It seems strange that I’m fielding questions about European poetic form immediately after having delivered a talk that negotiates Black diasporic masculinity triangulated through the “n-word,” but it’s all good. As questions roll on and begin to address the content of my research, a senior White male scholar asks how I could possibly make an argument about antiBlack racism as a source of intellectual exclusion for Black students and scholars at various levels in these fields. He claims the only valid site of antiBlack racism in rhetorical and writing studies is the “basic writing” classroom. Of course, I could not deny that antiBlackness pervades those classrooms, but I had to make it clear how omnipresent antiBlackness in fact is—it functions as the engine that drives the Western world, so offering examples of it elsewhere in writing studies’ exclusionary spaces was easy. I share this anecdote to illustrate a dynamic of White supremacist thought in academia and in our field more discretely: some White scholars (and non-White scholars too) often believe that racism might be contained to particular spaces and snuffed out by simply changing those spaces or alleviating the “problem” of Black languaging in them. Racism, and by extension Blackness, within this frame, is perceived as a “problem” to be “fixed,” localized to Black people not understanding language (and therefore cordoned to “Basic Writing” classrooms), independent of its interrelations with the normalized workings of U.S. society.

This type of thinking fundamentally misrecognizes antiBlack racism as a localized wound to be sutured rather than the blood that fuels the body that is hyper-capitalism. The solution offered by this soon-to-be senior colleague profoundly demonstrates what Black feminist activist, thinker, and poet Audre Lorde (1984) calls “the first patriarchal lesson” (p. 112). In “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House,” Lorde (1984) urges, “In this world, divide and conquer must become define and empower,” with the former being “the failure . . . to recognize difference as a crucial strength” (p. 112). Instead of characterizing Blackness and difference writ large as “problems,” and a kind of problem endemic to lacking the currency to enter academic discourse communities, we could seek to foreground differences, racial and otherwise, and what social change might be generated through engaging them. It also means unearthing the potentials of literacies already extant and alive in our students’ previous engagement with the world (Gilyard, 1991; Guerra, 1998). This work means delving deeply into what one already knows of the self’s relation to their surroundings and systems of power at work in that dialectic. As Black feminist, antiracist, and decolonial pedagogical practice, it means providing space for students to reflect on what intersectional identities, multiliteracies, and experiences they

bring to classroom spaces, since their linguistic and sociocultural agency might come from what they already understand of the world and their engagements with it. It means thinking through and from those complex identities (the politics of their privileges and marginalizations), multiliteracies, and experiences as grounds for using writing for making knowledge and experiences “otherwise,” as Beverly Moss (2003) and others have argued for decades. Before approaching a description of the structural retooling—and assessment strategies therein—that attempts to open space for empowerment through definition, I’ll work to define the historical space in which I taught “Workshop in Composition.”

In conversation with definitions of “basic writing” and “basic writers” by contemporaneous scholars like Pat Bizzell and Mina Shaughnessy, Dave Bartholomae’s (1986) “Inventing the University” contends that error should not be the sole basis for understanding these categories, while insisting that entry, or approximation to entry, into an academic discourse community by students determines where they are in relation to the university. Bartholomae, in assessing student essays at the same Eastern-City University where I taught Workshop in Composition, writes, “I think that all writers, in order to write, must imagine for themselves the privilege of being ‘insiders’—that is, of being both inside an established and powerful discourse, and of being granted a special right to speak” (p. 10). But what of those historically cultured as objects denied the agency of speaking? What of those denied “special” rights, who represent the antithesis of insiders? How might one imagine oneself a part of a discourse foreclosed to them when the White habitus of our classrooms, and indeed, US society, says “shut up and play!”? What might assessment look like if borne out of experience rather than deficit?

In a recent essay in *Journal of Basic Writing* that Bartholomae (2020) titles “Back to Basics,” the composition studies doyen reflects on his experiences teaching Workshop in his final year at the same institution. He makes no qualms about equating “Basic Writing” with “Workshop,” opening with, “I retired from teaching in August, 2018. In my last year, I taught two of the courses I taught in 1975, my first year . . . One of them was Basic Writing, now titled ‘Workshop in Composition’” (p. 91). It seems that while much tension and conversation have pressured many into changing their relationships with the idea of “basic writing,” in almost half a century, an expert in the area believes mainly words, not practices, to have evolved when it comes to it. Bartholomae (2020) admits despite the gap of forty-plus years, the structure of 2017 and 2018 courses remained “exactly like” the courses he taught in the 1970s (p. 93). And while he deployed different language like “Metropolitan English”—a choice noted as strategic—to stand in as some unraced equivalent for what he at no point refers to as *White U.S. Standardized English*—the essay does highlight differences in student populations from the jump. He writes, “In 1975, my Basic Writing students were almost all working class, most were Black. They came from Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and small towns in between. In the Fall Term, 2017, my students were all Chinese.

Many, but not all, came from privileged families” (p. 91). So, this recent course is an English as a Second Language section, and the essay goes on to express deep admiration for these international students, their sacrifice, their resolve, all while noting, “The room looked like an ad for J. Crew” (p. 91). It proffers no sustained attention to stark differences between these populations or a reading about what these differences might reveal. Nonetheless, the article still uses these students and their experiences as fetishized commodity-objects to illustrate what it means to “get back to basics.” In doing so, it relates how students *still* faced weekly assignments designed to find (and I would posit assess) “common errors” (p. 93), with “basic writing” routinely referred to as a “problem.”

The essay ends on the following revelation, which echoes his earlier epistemological orientation to academic discourse from “Inventing the University:”

What I have learned late in my career is to see the importance of bringing our energies to the fundamental problems of writing in a global context, and there is no better testing ground than undergraduate courses that combine travel and travel writing, where the opening assignment, for example, may be to write about South Africa, to write about South Africa without being South African. (p. 125)

We might gather, then, that students should (still) estimate at “insider-ness” in order to learn writing, and, from this example, that insider-ness should take no heed of historical and ongoing violences perpetually perpetrated against the Global South and its peoples. These cultures remain spaces for colonization, testing-grounds within which to gauge and assess how “well” a writer might grasp at writing as difficulty, as struggle, as “problem.” In the example, South Africa (and its peoples) represent objects that fund White frames of learning. But what, again, of the position of commodity-object? Of the lived experiences of those whose breaking bodies fuel the university, the economy, and the global White supremacist project?

Growing up in the Caribbean, I experienced colonialism, racism, and globalization quite differently from my Black male U.S. students. I saw colorism in full effect in clashes between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians and was spoonfed ideas of British English and British-styled schooling as “superior” to attempts at a native tongue or conscience. But when approached to work with the particular population of Black male student-athletes by a graduate student on my job visit at Eastern-City U, my approach was to find ways, in course design, pedagogy, and assessment, to animate educational processes that *define and empower*. In my mind, this approach directly contrasts the divide and conquer philosophy of asking students to feign insider-ness by understanding as precept, really, their “outsider-ness” to the world of writing, or South Africa, or academic discourse.

In order to do so, I designed a sequence of courses around sport-writing and social justice that spoke to the lived experiences of athletes, their histories

of activism, and their writing on various topics. Thinking ecologically, the sequence, its class activities, assignments and assessment mobilize the antiracist thrust of define-and-empower outlined earlier, where understanding difference in relation to power stays key. As we are well aware, the racialized dynamics of standardized placement testing disadvantage students of color in their lead up to higher-education spaces (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Madaus & Clarke, 2001; Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001). Because many Black student-athletes test into Workshop, the sequence starts there, with a cohort of students (both student-athletes and non-student-athletes) following me, if they so desire, to Seminar in Composition: Sports, and then on to Writing for the Public: The Public Athlete—the last a general education writing requirement focusing on public sport-writing across various informational, creative, professional, and journalistic genres. In the two years of the sequence's existence, a large percentage of students who have followed it are Black male student-athletes, many football players. The cohort model aims to provide space for students interested in these types of writing to pursue coursework in it together in a supportive environment that speaks directly to their extant multiliteracies, while also attuning students of color to opportunities in writing classes and majors that align with their interests. Crucial to these courses' implementation is fostering a critical racial consciousness about the role of athletes and, in particular, Black athletes in facing antiBlack racism and engaging public activism in relation to writing. Working in concert with this aim, the assessment approach of *gaming the system* functioned as the basis for offering students means to define and empower, particularly in our Workshop course.

Gaming the System: Betting on Ourselves and Each Other

The approach of *gaming the system* offers a fairly simple framework for engaging assessment to offer Black student-athletes in this particular classroom an empowered—even if fleetingly empowered—position by turning the oppressive conditions of their racialized being on its head into motivation. An important background activity for this assessment practice, our positionality activity that starts the semester of Workshop asks students to begin by naming their identities in relation to systems of power. It then asks them to think through the role of writing in those relationships by manifesting lived experiences that reflect on access (privilege) and marginalization (oppressive lack of access).² I share my stories first: I describe instances where my maleness and relative command of written English allows students to perceive me as an authority at the front of the classroom, while describing how that authority is undercut and complicated by my Caribbean background, my status as a migrant worker in the US, my “foreign”

2. This activity forms the basis for a “proactive” antiracist approach to teaching writing that is fully described and contextualized in an article-length manuscript under consideration at the time of this writing.

accent, my Blackness, and by my languaging. I also open up about violent encounters with White authorities in various spaces and how those encounters shape my outgoing experiences—particularly noting that it does not matter how many degrees I might have, in the eyes of police and other White authorities I am just a Black man, an object to deploy in their brutal imaginations. Students respond with their reflections, telling their stories to culture the space of our classroom with our various identities. My Black student-athletes often open up here about their identities as “athlete” or “football players,” alongside their racial identities, and how they might be perceived as “slow” or intellectually inadequate because of them. Some share memories of how football teams offered opportunities to escape their single-parent family’s housing-insecurity. Others described what being the one Black male on private White high-school campuses was like. These exchanges vitally form the grounds from which we think through assessment for the semester on the first class day and then again at the midpoint and end-point of the semester.

In framing the exercise of “betting on ourselves,” we have an extended and often winding conversation about what motivates these students and how that motivation manifests in their daily lives. Some point to figures like LeBron James, Michael Jordan, or Colin Kaepernick as role models whose success and influence drive them to “do better.” Some cite their mothers, who spent years getting them to practices and through trials that I cannot imagine. Mostly, though, these students note that routine weigh-ins motivate them, that “putting up stats,” and having favorable win-loss records as a team help them to envision where and who they want to be. Importantly, these “stats”—whether tied directly to their physical bodies (like their weight and other measurements) or to their athletic performance (like yards carried on the football field or tackles made)—represent currencies that hold very tangible stakes for their future potentials as professional sports players. Many, therefore, claim their motivation comes from “playing on a Sunday,” from the idea that someday they will play in the NFL: “you gon watch us then Mr. Teach? We got a game this weekend.”

These stats and my students’ awareness of their importance reflect the tangible ways in which they are constantly being assessed based on numbers. In the athletic facility, on the field, by NFL scouts, and in the classroom, these men know the importance of numbers and how these assigned values align with their “worth,” for better or for worse. As discussed earlier, this kind of valuation reminds us of the wake of transatlantic slavery, where White logics and antiBlack systems of humanity mean that Black bodies hold significance as commodity-objects and production based on the cold logics of capitalism. Numerical assessment, then, becomes a particularly fraught enterprise for this group of students. So, we tackle these ideas and conversations head on. In our discussion of assessment, one exchange that my question “what do you think defines who you are?” elicited in Fall 2019 was about individual game statistics versus grades. When faced with the comment that “Mr. Lou, grades ain’t gon’ mean nothing when I’m

ballin' in the NFL,” I ask, “Instead of thinking about which is worth more, could you say why either [stats or grades] is important? What makes them important?” Another student interjected with “Well it’s kinda about value, right, and who makes it?”, which veered into a discussion of who ascribes values to particular bodies and how they produce it. I used this particular opening to talk about the literal trade of Black bodies in transatlantic slavery, to provoke the generative comparisons between that trade and trading in sports industries,³ as well as to prime the group for discussing our assessment circumstances.

We return on the following class day to the syllabus to discuss how we will engage the “traditional” assessment metrics for the course. After all, the university uses this kind of system of assessment—at the end of the course, I’ll have to enter grades on a typical A-F scale, where A-F reflect percentages between 100-60. While I am tasked with coming up with the rubrics for class assignments and the letter grades for these assignments, for this particular class, students must demonstrate to an external committee that they have made a passing grade to move on to Seminar in Composition. At the end of the semester, I must furnish a portfolio of student work from my “least developed/borderline writers” that includes student drafts and revised drafts for a committee of Workshop in Composition instructors and the Undergraduate Composition Director. Alongside these I must send to the Director a table indicating who has passed the course and who has failed before officially entering final grades. Because of the hyper-surveillance involved in who passes through this particular gate at this institution,⁴ who can have this “special” right to the insider-ness of academic discourse in first year writing proper (a la Bartholomae [1986, 2020]), I explain all of these dynamics to my students upfront and throughout the semester.

After all, these quantitative and qualitative assessments will ascribe a particular value to their knowledge, and to pretend otherwise does us no good. We discuss how these systems of power—the university, racism, systems of value tied to capitalism—might culture us to understand the purpose of “putting up numbers” as an individuated “everyone for themselves” activity. Despite their playing team sports, the drive to be scouted by NFL teams incites a particular kind of individualism utilized by the university in selling narratives about these team sports rooted in “family” and “togetherness” as a basis for profiting off these student athletes via ticketing and merchandise. Some of the questions that prompt this discussion include: “What does ‘success’ mean to you?” and “How do you think you can achieve success in this class and outside of it?” For this activity, students can respond creatively—by writing a poem or rap, sketching

3. Later, for students who followed the sequence to Writing for the Public, the inherent historical comparisons became more fleshed out when we watched the 2018 documentary *Student Athlete*, which spotlights the NCAA’s exploitation of young athletes, making clear their commitments to plantationscape of college athletics.

4. I have railed against this structure to little avail.

a drawing, or—when we engaged through video call—finding an object around them that illustrates the idea of “success” and saying why. Sometimes, responses featured trophies or game jerseys and what they mean. One poem I remember vividly repeated the phrase “getting my bag.” Through these multiliteracies, by recognizing these students’ lived experiences as legit, we discussed neoliberalism and its fallouts—how thinking only about ourselves and our kin means that we’ll be used for each other’s detriment. Indeed, the structure in place where the students with the lowest grades have their work externally assessed fosters this scenario and breeds a toxic culture of competition. They know these ideas all too well: if a player does better statistically, oftentimes they will start over another teammate at that position—numerical assessments of their value form the basis for direct competition between them, fueling divide-and-conquer logics. Unfortunately, players will get injured, which means that coaches will be prepared to replace one body with the next to keep the machine going. That machine sells the tickets, markets the university, and offers the best “product” to the NFL, while casting away the injured and/or the not good enough. So, how can we resist the bind that as Black people our bodies, their accumulation, and the breaking of them fund White institutions, a reality acutely represented in the Black student-athlete experience? As we develop a critical consciousness of how all these dynamics overlap, in what ways might we engage assessment *as a collective* that would foster *motivation* toward writing in the face of so much against us? The answer lies in collectives rather than the individual—in the move to definition for empowerment rather than division and individualism or insiderness versus outsidership.

The approach of gaming the system asks these students to contribute toward coming up with a class average on assignments at the mid-term point of the semester. We decide on this average by students noting what they believe they can individually contribute (with a percentage number used to indicate this) with a short explanation of why based on what they think they offer when it comes to writing. So, hypothetically, if I had five students (in total enrolled in a class) and they shared they could achieve a 75, 75, 80, 85 and 85 as their respective final grades, I calculate the average of this number (80), and we agree that if they can all hit this average, everyone gets extra credit toward their final grade. Students might aim to hit their individual numbers, for which they receive a smaller degree of extra credit at the midterm point, but the greater stakes remain in the collective effort. The process of sharing individual numbers with each other demands vulnerability, and, though difficult, cultivates an environment where students understand the importance of their relations and relationships to each other in the community cohort. At the mid-term point, we actively revise our individual and group numbers, checking in to imagine where we might be at the end of the semester. This allows the chance to sit with our processes to that point and to assess where we still might go from that juncture. We work through the process of “betting on ourselves” again, where students assess their own propensity for

contributing to the group effort and reflect on aspects of writing they feel better about and where they would like to go from there in our remaining time.

So how does the “betting on ourselves” tactic work to change the capitalist logic that each student’s individual body of work equates to the worth of their individual intelligence? Well, it sadly can’t. The structures in place at this institution do not offer space within the Workshop assessment to challenge that principle outright. The tactic, however, offers a way to subtly steal back affects, motivations, and investments from the university in a coalitional approach that draws on the particular lived experiences of this group of students. Its importance lies not in its replicability, but that it draws from intimate aspects of these students’ lives and reclaims those aspects shaping the oppressive conditions of their experiences through collective frameworks. We define ourselves and empower each other to deal with the strain of the racist, hetreosexist, ableist, colonial, capitalist machine that makes us objects of our own demise. This act of theft embraces Harney and Moten’s (2013) ideas in *The Undercommons* that the only possible relationship to the university today is a criminal one, that “one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony . . . to be in but not of—this is the path of the subversive intellectual in the modern university” (p. 26). Being *in* but not drawing motivation *of* the university (but of something else that was collectively constructed) conjures space to imagine coalitional relationships. So, in my exchanges with these students, in understanding parts of their lives, their multiliteracies, their rhetorics and experiences, together we understand how these might be lifted up as legit—its own kinda intellectual bag, its own kinda discourses not seeking entry into the “insider” spaces that the academy and its “special” discourses it believes itself to contain.

The classroom space, with our assessment strategy based on offering something outside of what might be “achieved” as part of its ecology, particularly with its embrace of non-standard languages and languages of the Global South, became a kind of fugitive space, a space where we could descend into our undercommons. We move into our “underground, the downlow lowdown maroon community of the university, into the *undercommons of enlightenment*, where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still Black, still strong” (Harney ^ Moten, 2013 p. 26). We do this all the while giving the White folks what they want: the show, the performance of intelligence, the evidence to the committee who says pass or fail beyond any of our controls. Sometimes the affective thrust of motivation to get through the bullshit that is hyper-capitalism is all we have and the “gaming the system” tactic uses the system’s metrics for our communal purposes. The emails showing gratitude, the teaching evals noting how engaging, how fun, how exciting it was to just come to class, the daps in the hallways and the “Mr. Teach!”-s hurled from across moving traffic, all tell me the system was gamed for some #BlackBoyJoy.

Given the constraints of the traditional grading metrics, the histories of Black people being raced, used, and disposed by White institutions, and the specific

dynamics that Black student-athletes face as pawn pieces for these institutions and White audiences, the gaming the system approach seeks to find means to define and empower possibilities for subverting these conditions. By naming and characterizing our social positions and positionalities in relation to each other, while discussing the distinct ways in which we remain caught up in the workings of systems of power, these students come to understand themselves as intimately implicated in them. By understating numerical assessment of themselves as a means to use the oppressive conditions that such assessment has forced on to them and their bodies, “betting on ourselves” lays bare the “mathematics of the unliving” as well as the clean-cut neoliberal bootstraps ideology of individual meritocracy. More than that, it might provide these student-athletes some, even minor, versions of agency and self-determination in writing classrooms that constantly race and characterize them as on the “outside” of “academic discourse” finding their way in.

We Are Not Your Problem: (Re)claiming Ecological Space How(ever) We Can

Of course, there remain the day-to-day struggles of student-athlete realities, the politics of “basic writing” in relation to academic discourse, and, the most brutal constant, the antiBlackness that pervades the Western world, college campuses, and our writing classrooms. The assessment model described here might offer mere fleeting, fugitive relief from these conditions; its affective payoffs—the motivation of students cultured as deficient—may work through the span of the sequence but dry up in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges. I know it does when I get the emails from former students on how much they miss our spaces. Nevertheless, making flexible the ways in which assessment practices might be made attuned to the lived experiences of students—and particularly Black students—deserves field-wide attention if we strive to help students unearth their critical racial consciousness as part of their writing educations. With a consistent focus on imparting “knowledge of the wake” and how the aftermaths of transatlantic slavery impinge on the everyday workings of discourse, experience, and education, students could come to understand the deep ecologies of antiBlackness (Maraj, 2020a) operating around them.

In addressing such ecologies elsewhere, I have suggested rhetorical reclamation as a means by which Black people on White college campuses might use their presence to do antiracist work. These acts, “gestures, performances, language use, embodiment” turn stigmatizing racialized attention back on to White institutions by openly asserting and, therefore, destabilizing racialized meaning in moments where racist but colorblind discourse continue to fund White supremacy” (Maraj, 2020a, p. 16). The moment under scrutiny through this study, the “basic” of “basic writing” in particular relation to Black male student athletes attempts

to race them congruent to their previous experiences with (White) academics and as intellectuals. Gaming the system, then, allows room to play with the “basic” math of assessment, with the math that coaches and scouts may take up to value a Black body, that a football fan may dispose of once a Black body breaks. So how do we move from these classrooms, move about into the Western world, as the antiBlack engine keeps churning? The pedagogical takeaway lies in asking ourselves how our classroom/assessment ecologies could be re/claimed for the multiliteracies and experiences of those in it, even while operating in oppressive spaces: how might we engage a consciousness of question-asking where “re/claiming” means we “turn once more to a demanding question in the process of possibly meaning” (Maraj, 2020, p. 138)? We must keep questioning our pedagogies, our assessment practices and metrics, ourselves and our identities if we seek to learn and live otherwise.

Understanding the politics of assessment metrics in this way, gaming the system holds to the numbers, as Katherine McKittrick (2012) desires, because the numbers represent a kind of proof of what has transpired. Yet,

The numbers set the stage for our stories of survival—what is not there is *living*. The numbers, the arithmetic of the skin, the shadow of the whip, inspire our insurgency as they demonstrate the ways in which our present genre of the human is flawed. (p. 23-24)

Each application of these numbers toward *different* stories, *alternate* narratives, then, could act as unmaking why and how we look at writing in ways that serve those humans who see us only as numbers. Escape in these ways—Black sociality, Black joy—sometimes, for us, suffices.

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Chapter 9. Assessment's Affective Attachments

Gavin P. Johnson

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-COMMERCE

When interrogating my affective attachments to writing and literacy assessment, I often share one of my earliest classroom memories: failing a spelling test in first grade and being punished by my mom for failing that test (Johnson, 2020). The shame of failing that test sticks to me. I still feel like the effort I put in didn't matter . . . perhaps even I didn't matter. My mom's well-intended fixation with my grades stems from her own belief that being academically successful is the only way to achieve *the good life* (Berlant, 2011). Coming from a small, rural town in southeast Louisiana and a working poor family, attaining the good life through education was always the goal. Wrapped up in the classist expectations of good grades leading to academic success and the good life—a sentiment certainly not exclusive to my single mother of two—are a range of ideas that uphold and facilitate the White supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchal, and ableist practices that sustain the institutions I occupy as a White, cis, queer, neurodivergent man. Over the years, that experience deeply influenced my attitudes toward writing, assessment, education, and my own worth. And while failing a first-grade spelling test certainly didn't make or break the rest of my life, the affective attachments I developed to learning, literacy, and assessment in that classroom continually influence my orientations, as Paulo Freire might say, to the word and the world (1968/1972).

Our affective attachments reveal historical processes, organize present embodied actions, and orient future possibilities. In this chapter, I ask, when can and where should we attend to assessment's affective attachments? I am concerned with assessment's affective attachments because I want to think about the ways our attachment to certain assessment practices “come to make sense or no longer make sense, yet remain powerful as they work against the flourishing of particular and collective beings” (Berlant, 2011, p. 13). Moreover, I want to consider how teachers and students, collaboratively, might disrupt those well-maintained but dangerously limiting assessment structures and work toward queerly-oriented assessment ecologies.

One assessment practice worth disrupting and thinking beyond and otherwise is traditional grading schemes that exclude student engagement in the creation of more robust classroom assessment ecologies. I've written about my suspicions of grading regimes before, explaining, “Grades are an imperfect system of communication and corrupt technology of surveillance that serve a neoliberal university that values control, individualism, and financial gains above the critical, creative, and rhetorical education of its students” (Johnson, 2021, p.

56). Grades and related punitive assessment models enshrine racist, sexist, classist, ableist, colonial, cis-heteronormative gatekeeping practices. Full stop. More specifically, as Stephanie West-Puckett, Nicole I. Caswell, and William P. Banks (2023) argue, “Writing assessments have also been built on and from these power systems, often designed as gatekeeping mechanisms to dissuade (and at time to actively prevent) anyone not White, male, or financially secure from crossing the academic threshold” (p. 21). Even so, our collective attachment to grading systems steams from the role such systems play in maintaining a fantasy wherein good grades signal a quality education that leads to a high-paying career, upward mobility, and “that moral-intimate-economic thing called ‘the good life’” (Berlant, 2011, p. 2). Such an affective attachment creates an impasse wherein students are oriented away from critical worldmaking tools and possibilities.

Recent scholarship in antiracist writing assessment and ungrading suggest various ways out of this impasse through assessment ecologies that are removed from traditional grading schemes and are purposeful in their engagement with students. For example, Asao B. Inoue’s (2015) ecological model for antiracist writing assessment engages students in discussions of labor and language ideology to critique the *White racial habitus* of writing assignments and assessments. Jesse Stommel (2020), for a second example, uses “process letters” for students to self-evaluate and engage in dialogue with him “not just about the course, but about their learning and about how learning happens” (p. 35). These two approaches, among others, influence the assessment work students and I undertake. Going further, I believe that engaging students in assessment, encouraging their disidentification—working on and against (Muñoz, 1999)—from comfortable assessment models, and pushing them to think critically about how and why they participate in the enterprise of formal education requires attending to assessment’s affective attachments.

This chapter theorizes and demonstrates how affect might inform an understanding of our collective attachments to certain assessment models as well as a critical tool when inviting students into the design and implementation of a queerly-oriented assessment ecology. I begin by briefly defining affect using queer relational theories that name the power of affect in the possibilities for action it generates. Then I turn to two major concerns teacher-scholars should consider when approaching the entanglements of affect and assessment. With these considerations, I take a moment to consider the affective range of assessment as well as the risks in pursuing affect within assessment ecologies. In Part II, I reflect on how students and I pursued and examined affective attachments during a digital media composing course at a primarily White institution (PWI). In that course, students and I collaboratively detached our digital composing from traditional grading structures and made space for interrogating our affective attachments in, what I now understand as, a queerly-oriented assessment ecology. I zoom in on a specific project within the course and use course documents to illustrate the affective work of assessment that occurs when building collective learning around the negotiated goals of students. Part III acts not as a conclusion but rather a call

to think about affect as a way(s) of moving assessment beyond its current attachments and attaching anew¹ through intentional processes that are beyond and otherwise queer.

To help me articulate this affective labor, I employ the seven interconnected elements of an antiracist assessment ecology: purpose, process, power, parts, people, places, and products (Inoue, 2015). These overlapping elements, according to Inoue and Mya Poe (2020), should be considered when redressing the racist oppressions and traumas of assessment practices. Inoue and Poe's seven elements of an antiracist assessment ecology, which are defined fully in this collection's introduction, open the possibility to see how and where assessment's affective attachments reorient how students and teachers engage in learning with each other. Each of these elements are bound up in affective attachments worthy of investigation, and attending to these affective attachments within the context of this chapter will help blend and bond antiracist assessment scholarship with queer theories in disruptive and generative ways.

Throughout I use relational theories of affect to frame how students recognized and engaged assessment's affective attachments with me through queerly-oriented assessment ecologies. To be queerly oriented, Sara Ahmed (2006) suggests, is to “keep open the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can respond with joy to what goes astray” (p. 178). Queer, here, works as a signifier of both disruptive troubling and generative possibility wherein oppressive practices are exposed and replaced with coalition and socially just, life-affirming practices. I must be careful here because my entangling of queer and assessment is different from important previously published scholarship wherein “queer” is near-synonymous to LGBTQ identities (Caswell & Banks, 2018). This chapter is not an investigation of the assessment of LGBTQ students but rather is an attempt to queerly-orient assessment, or to see assessment's queer orientations, through affect. Entangling queer and assessment in these ways builds on and is informed by the ecological work of antiracist assessments insofar as it calls for an ongoing recognition of and engagement with assessment's affective attachments.

Part I: They Feel It. We Feel It, Too.

Attending to the entanglement of affect and assessment requires attending to the concept of affect, first. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) suggest that affect is the *force* or *forces of encounter* that make it possible for bodies (human and non-human) to act and be acted upon. However, affects also attach and accumulate to form distinct textures—what Ahmed (2010) calls a preserving

1. Antonio Byrd gave me this phrase while we were preparing for a conference panel presentation on “alternative assessment.” This chapter was revised with input from colleagues and panel attendees. Thank you.

stickiness—that help us feel our connections (see also Sedgwick, 2003). Affect, therefore, is more than an individual (or individual’s) feeling or emotion, it is “intensely relational, working as a connector or conduit between bodies, their histories, and their emergent possibilities” (Niccolini, 2016, p. 7). Affect sticks to us, moves us, and orients us in different ways based on the specific histories, objects, bodies, and others we are positioned alongside—attached to. These differing attachments open spaces for encounters that draw attention to and reorient our ways of collective being; that is, affect invites us to consider how we are attached to each other and what becomes possible when we recognize these attachments.

Studying affect in relation to education (and in this chapter, writing assessment), according to Bessie Dernikos et al. (2020), reveals hidden connections or yet to be made connections that can move students and teachers to learning *otherwise*. In rhetoric and writing studies, work with affect has been varied, but scholars acknowledge that our entanglement with affect calls us to act—to write—but also to trouble the domain of writing and writing instruction (Edbauer, 2008; Micciche, 2006; Nelson, 2016; Williams, 2019). In my affective troubling of the rhetoric and writing classroom, I focus on how assessment’s affective attachments come to stick to students, teachers, institutions, and curricula. If the critical power of engaging affect is the ability to render visible the connections that draw bodies to act and be acted upon, then thinking about assessment’s affective attachments invites a consideration of how attachments to certain assessment models might allow or disallow certain actions (pedagogies, learning scenarios, experimentation) and technologies on the part of teachers and students.

When attending to the entanglement of assessment and affect, there are two important considerations. First, **when we perform assessment, we are not merely reviewing words on a page or compositions on a screen; instead, we are referencing a dense ecology of histories, emotions, bodies, technologies, and ideologies.** Recognizing these attachments are key when building our classroom ecologies because, as Inoue (2015) argues, “classroom writing assessment is more important than pedagogy because it always trumps what you say or what you attempt to do with your students. And students know this. *They feel it* [emphasis added]” (p. 9). With this consideration, we must be cautious not to assume that all students *feel* the same way about our assessment model or are able to access their affective attachments from their particular raced, gendered, disabled, classed, sexual, geographic positions. Indeed, scholarly understandings of affect have been dominated by and often reflect White, Western, cis-heteronormative orientations as universal (Berg & Ramos-Zayas, 2015; Garcia-Rojas, 2016; Ritchie, 2021).

Second, **in recognizing the complex affects of assessment and its attachments, we exceed the typical arguments for objectivity and measurability that lock assessment into a double bind with judgment and punitive evaluation.** This much is clear when considering a teacher’s affective tensions, which Nicole I. Caswell (2018) defines as “the (un)conscious negotiation teachers experience between what they *feel* they should do (mostly driven from a pedagogical

perspective) and what they are *expected* to do (mostly driven by an institutional perspective) when responding” (p. 71). With this consideration, it is important, again, to be cautious with how teachers, from positions of power, might assume or even project onto students their affective attachments to certain forms of assessment. Teachers carry dense attachments to assessment that they are often called upon to present in *straight-forward* terms (on syllabi, in teaching philosophies, through scholar conversations) even when the affective complexity of their attachments push them into material conflict with standardized models.

With these two considerations—and their respective cautions—in mind, how do we think about assessment's affective attachments in ways that push teachers, students, and scholars “to attend to affect's promise and threat so that things might feel and become otherwise?” (Dernikos et al., 2020). My suggestion is tapping into the connections assessment creates through affect between teachers and students to encourage disidentification, or a “mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather . . . a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 11). Affect, as a relational force, aids the examination of the overlapping affects teachers and students feel through/during/after assessments. Beyond examination, however, affect's ability to generate possibility and thinking otherwise makes it a necessary tool when composing assessment ecologies. Simply put, affect is a queer tool of assessment praxis.

In Part II, I reflect on the queer orientations and affective attachments of a digital media composing course's assessment ecology at a PWI. I deploy an antiracist assessment ecological framework (Inoue, 2015; Inoue & Poe, 2020) as an analytical tool to make sense of the work students and I were doing. The seven elements—purpose, process, power, parts, people, places, and products—provide a lexicon from which I can examine affect's role in our assessment ecology. Each of these seven elements are affective attachments that generate connections in ways that holistically impact the assessment ecology. When I taught this digital media composing course in the fall of 2018, I did not use this lexicon with students; nevertheless, the students and I built our course and assessment ecologies in ways that troubled assessment models we previously experienced and carried with us into the classroom. Thus, for this chapter, I'm using Inoue and Poe's seven elements alongside the concept of affective attachments to render visible the worldmaking students and I undertook.

Part II: Queerly-Orienting Assessment Ecologies for a Digital Media Composing Course

Inviting Students into Digital Media Composing: Purposes and Power

In the fall of 2018, I taught a digital media composing course themed as “Composing with Mobile Technologies.” The theme for the sophomore-level, general

education course was collaboratively developed with my colleague Laura L. Allen who simultaneously taught her own section. We composed a thematic description driven by the entanglement of our ethical and affective commitments and invited students to consider how “mobile devices, such as smartphones, computer tablets, and wearable devices, are ubiquitous, rhetorical technologies that we use daily to compose.” With this particular theme, we wanted students to think about the rhetorical work of composing beyond static notions of writers at desks and explore the growing influence mobile technologies exert on the way we engage with this world. More importantly, however, our thematic/curricular purpose was to invite students into conversations examining the intersections of identity, mobile technologies, and digital composition. As we explained in the course description, “Our goal is to not only discuss the possibilities available when composing with mobile technologies but also provide you with a new way to think critically about yourself, your communities, and your mobile devices.” We recognized that mobile technologies are carried and carry us in the world where our bodies—in their raced, sexed, disabled, classed complexities—become otherwise composed differently.

As I thought about the course theme, I began to wonder about *what had to be* versus *what could be* achieved in this digital media composing course focused on mobile technologies. By carrying a general education visual and performing arts credit, the course included two university-mandated learning outcomes: “analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant works of art” and “engage in informed observation and/or active participation within the visual, spatial, and performing arts.” These learning outcomes were attached to the course and challenged me, as a teacher, to think about what kind of work students and I could compose that would attend to these outcomes in ways meaningful to us. I was particularly interested in inviting students to consider how significance is determined, and challenged, in a culture dominated by mobile technologies. That is, how do our mobile technologies help us understand digital, cultural significance and how might we use those technologies to compose in ways that are significant to us and our communities?

To make learning more specific, I began to outline my own goals for the course. Through conversations with Laura, reviewing syllabi developed by colleagues, and considering my own understanding of what could be accomplished in a semester, I offered these goals for students:

1. have a nuanced understanding of how to compose with mobile technologies;
2. be comfortable thinking critically about mobile technologies;
3. be able to make connections between technologies & culture, especially the influence of mobile technologies on identities;
4. understand how rhetoric is deployed when composing via mobile technologies;

5. understand how access and design influence our mobile technologies use;
6. apply fundamental principles of rhetoric and design when producing digital texts;
7. grasp the ethical implications of composing digitally, especially in terms of intellectual property, citation, and remix;
8. respect and honor the complex ways various peoples, cultures and institutions use rhetoric and mobile technologies to compose.

With these goals, I wanted students to develop mobile digital composing practices grounded not only in technical ability but attentive to their identities in ways that were rhetorically affective. Teaching this course as a White, cis, queer, neurodivergent man in a PWI, I recognized the necessity of centering thinking that problematized prevailing narratives about mobile technologies and their neutrality as well as my own embedded assumptions about what are “fundamental principles” of successful digital compositions. As I considered the ways we often present mobile technologies as neutral communicative tools, I also contemplated how common course assessment models oriented by a punitive grading regime are often presented as neutral and objective. I decided that I wanted my curricular commitments to be mirrored in my assessment practices, and I desired to experiment with decentering course grades and co-developing the course projects and assessments with students in the course. I began thinking about the digital media composing course as a way to trouble institutionalized expectations by queerly-orienting the course’s assessment ecology. Laura had her own goals for the course, and we decided that we would both teach the course theme of “Composing *with* Mobile Technologies” but would develop separate pedagogical and assessment approaches.

As I continued developing the course, I felt strongly that a traditional grade-oriented assessment model would not accomplish this work because of its static, one-dimensional nature (Tchudi, 1997). The purpose of the course’s assessment ecology needed to be parallel to the curricular purpose of studying and challenging the ever-changing way mobile devices mediate identity and inform how we digitally compose ourselves and our communities. I oriented away from traditional grading structures and toward a “gradeless,” or “ungrading” (Blum, 2020), assessment model. To orient the course’s “gradelessness” and invite students into the building of a queerly-oriented assessment ecology, I addressed the move in the syllabus by explaining my understanding of grades as surveillance, the limitations they place on learning, and the nasty habits so many students foster just to “get the A.” However, I also clearly noted my understanding that grades do carry material impacts on students and the attachments that are affected by grades—scholarships, majors, future jobs, and the ability to graduate—and *the good life* such attachments promise (Berlant, 2011). In articulating these points to students in the syllabus, I asked them to consider the ways grades, as a limited form of assessment, become attached to us and our understanding of learning while inviting them to co-create a queerly-oriented assessment ecology.

We implemented a “feedback and labor model,” which replaced the traditional grade on each assignment, and was explained as such: “You will receive (a lot of) feedback from me and your peers throughout the semester with the expectation that you use that feedback to continually revise, rethink, and remix your work. For the most part, the only ‘grade’ you will receive during the semester will be a ‘complete/incomplete.’” Recognizing that the university would demand a final grade, I proposed an alternative method for translating the semester’s work into a final grade:

At the end of the semester, we will meet to discuss what you’ve produced, your labor, and the effect of this course on your thinking and daily practices. At that meeting, we will review your work, my various responses to your work throughout the semester, your attempts to compose something of quality, and your general fortitude and determine a final grade using the standard [University] grading scale.

When distributing the syllabus and engaging students in early conversations, I was proud of my pre-semester work, but I now recognize that I was bound up in my own negative affective attachments to grading. In my syllabus statements, I see suspicion, concern, distaste, and shame but I also see an optimism that students would work with me to detach the learning and assessments in the course from traditional grading regimes. However, the power remains with me as the teacher.

Power informs and is informed by affect. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010) point out, a common way of understanding affect is the “hidden-in-plain-sight politically engaged work . . . that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera[1]” practices of power that occur and create “potentials for realizing a world” otherwise conceived (p. 7). Even with my intention to disrupt . . . trouble . . . queer normalized grading practices, simply replacing one assessment model with another maintained a power structure that excluded students and made no meaningful difference in their affective and material experiences in the course. Furthermore, a wholesale replacement of the assessment structures still preserved my own internalized commitments to disciplinary regimes and unspoken assumptions about what “success” looks like in a classroom. In building a queerly-oriented assessment ecology, I needed to “re-distribute power in equitable ways” by inviting students into the development of the assessment ecology (Inoue & Poe, 2020, p. 2). As the semester began, I invited students into the development of the assessment ecology through early conversations in our classroom that forced students to confront how their attachments to grades, learning, and assessment were not equal or even similarly accessible. We attempted collaboratively composing learning goals for the course, but our earliest attempts mirror the same difficulties and awkward silences Megan McIntyre recounts in her contribution to this collection. Students were uncomfortable

stating their own goals for the class or explaining why they maintained certain expectations—they just *felt* like this is what was expected of them.

As we moved into the semester, I continually attempted redistributing power to students in ways, I thought, made possible through the “gradeless/ungrading” model. Assessment in the digital media composing course, then, relied heavily on conversations, negotiations, and reflections from and between the students and me. These processes happened in class, through discussion boards, during peer reviews, and in written feedback. Often the process began with students in small groups considering a short project description provided in the course syllabus. Descriptions, though, seem like an overstatement as I did very little describing. More accurately, students read and contemplated short statements proposing possible projects. After sharing my proposal with the class, they would gather and discuss their ideas on the project, the technologies they wanted to learn, the goals they wanted to set, and how they could assess/be assessed. In conversation, we took time to unpack some of the potential unspoken affects and implications of the goals we attempted to set. Why this goal? What does that goal communicate, and to whom? Does this goal support or disrupt cultural narratives about race, gender, sexuality, disability, class, and geographic locale? Is setting this goal closing off or opening up a horizon for our learning? The assessment ecology for this course relied heavily on response and reflective affective attachments between students, their small working groups, the collective class, and myself. Our aim was to shift the power of assessment from me toward a collective sense of support and accountability.

Zooming In on Composition in Motion: Processes, Parts, Places, People

From our initial conversations, it became clear that students were willing to—at least to some extent—engage with a differently oriented assessment model even though they maintained some affective attachments and cautious emotions about it. We negotiated and examined our collective desires, following a minimally sketched-out set of assignments for the semester and, at the beginning of each unit, considered, shaped, and set goals *in situ* while holding space for difference and. The major parts of our assessments consisted of in class conversations, discussion board responses, peer reviews, and instructor response. Our process began with a series of conversations wherein students and I negotiated project goals and assessment criteria based on what we were learning from the course content and our in-class experiments composing with mobile technologies. These parts and processes were revisited and remade with each assignment. In the following paragraphs, I zoom in on the second project in the course, Composition in Motion. Zooming in on this project offers insight on the various ways the students and I engaged in and built an ecosystem within our larger assessment ecology that was responsive to the learning goals we individually developed and collectively negotiated.

For the second major project in the course, we considered the question, “What makes a technology mobile?” However, the students desired a project that pushed beyond what we accomplished in the first project and addressed what was left out. The first project, a mobile digital literacy narrative, asked students to maintain the goals I had set in the assignment sheet, which included closely examining how they came to learn how to use mobile technologies while also contemplating how their identities intersect with technologies. Students were, in essence, asked to compose a narrative that exposed and explored how they use technologies to mediate their embodied realities. This assignment prompt, which Laura and I collaboratively drafted, also left space for students to experiment with the technologies and genres they could use to accomplish the assignment goals, and students were invested in their agency as digital composers. For each subsequent project, the students retained this agency (the ability to choose their own technologies and genres) while collectively building and interrogating goals that focused their thinking in other ways.

When we began discussing *Composition in Motion*, students worked together in small groups before returning to a larger group discussion. Interestingly, the question that rose to the top of our conversation was “how is this project different from the first?” The students, in their questioning, demonstrated a desire to move beyond—orient away from—what they saw as goals too similar to the previous project. The need to take risks emerged, and engaging in “deliberate practice” addressed that need. According to Colleen A. Reilly and Anthony T. Atkins (2013) a “deliberate practice,” especially when assessing student’s digital composing work, “requires a process that includes trial and error, the experience of which leads to expanding proficiencies and developing expertise” (*Deliberate Practice as Process* section) and, furthermore, “assessment practices play a significant role in the development of proficiencies from the perspective of deliberate practice” (*From Rules to Risk-taking* section). The students and I moved forward with a trial-and-error period where we continued thinking about the possibilities of our next digital media project.

After our initial class conversation, students continued conversations about their goals for the *Composition in Motion* project. The discussion board was a different place where our assessment ecology could be built. Beyond the classroom itself, which is often dominated by only a few voices, the discussion board provided a space for students to articulate their thinking before engaging with their classmates. In that discussion board, I provided students with our course learning goals (previously available in the syllabus and discussed in class) as well as a bare-bones description of *Composition in Motion* that reflected the framework our previous in class discussions produced. The discussion board then prompted:

What I would like for you to do, **either individually or in collaboration with your working group**, is review these two

documents, consider how the Composition in Motion project may help you reach some of these learning goals, and provide the following:

1. An updated list of your personal goals for this project—this may include wanting to refine your video making skills, learning a new technology, exploring a new topic related to mobile technologies, etc. Be specific with these goals.
2. A short list or paragraph explaining what your expectations are for this project. This may include statements like, “I expect this project to _____,” “A strong project will _____,” etc.
3. A list or short paragraph explaining how your personal goals might line up, differ from, complicate, or compliment the “stated” learning objectives and course goals. It is okay to want something different from what the university or I said you “should want.” It is also okay to agree with the objectives and goals provided.
4. An update on your project. What are you doing? How are you doing? What have you drafted? Where are you stuck? How are you feeling? What technologies are you using? What is the next step?
5. Finally, provide a list of questions, concerns, and/or suggestions. (Optional)

With this discussion, students continued to participate in the development of the project and the assessment ecology. Here students considered where they were in the course and negotiated their attachments to the provided learning goals and considered how/if/why they would orient through their digital composing.

First, students returned to the goals set for them by the university and their instructor without ignoring their own learning goals for the project. I like considering tasks 1 and 3 together because these tasks invite students to interrogate how goals for a project (and course) are created—how desires are articulated. In some instances, students saw their own goals line up with the outcomes and goals set in the syllabus. For others, the affective strain of working within the confines of predetermined outcomes pushed (sometimes exhausted) their thinking. Second, students were asked specifically about their expectations for Composition in Motion (task 2). For some students this task translated into defining the genre of their project—“we want to produce a video trailer for a mobile app”—whereas others wrote more broadly—“I expect this project to be a unique creation.” Here we had the opportunity to analyze the ways students are defining these expectations for themselves while also working on and against concepts like “uniqueness” within the context of digital composing. Some students encouraged classmates to elaborate, which led to interesting interrogations of the affective attachments being rendered visible through the negotiation of project goals. Finally, this discussion

asked for an update on the project but oriented that update toward affect. I didn't just ask what students were drafting but how they feel about what they are drafting and the process within the large conversations of our class. Being attentive to affect, in this instance, is being attentive to the present and the ways students were orienting to, by, and through their digital composing.

From this discussion post, I found students in different places and differently affected. While the general consensus pointed toward a desire to test and improve their skills over the previous project, what I found in their discussion posts were intentional assessments of where they were, how they got there, where they wanted to go, and why they wanted to go there. The dense networks of attachments that would later appear in student projects started emerging. However, this post did not generate a stable criteria for evaluation. While students certainly made clear what they desired from the project, I could not use their responses to, for example, develop a rubric. This is a point where it became obvious to me that engaging affect within the context of learning goals and assessment does not lead to measurable criteria for evaluation but rather demands responsiveness.

As students continued their projects, we made space for formal and informal review where they offered feedback on each other's work. We often began classes with students sharing updates on their projects. These informal updates provided the digital composer's an opportunity to explain their thinking and the ways they felt inspired, excited, stuck, or unsure about what they were undertaking. Often students would explain the various composing technologies (e.g., mobile apps for video, audio, or image editing) they were engaging with, which led to discussions and demonstrations that provided different possibilities for everyone in the class. I also engaged in this collective sharing as I was often simultaneously learning different composing technologies and techniques. For more formal peer review sessions, students worked in a hybrid space: in class, small groups of students talked through ideas with each other while viewing and commenting on student projects through our class' learning management system (LMS) peer review portal.

Peer review fits into the queerly-oriented assessment ecology of my digital media composing course because it brings attention to the people composing, their intentions, and the peer reviewer's own attachments to what they are experiencing. Because the goals for this project were not enshrined through stable criteria but rather the shifting expectations and attachments of each digital composer, a traditional peer review session in which students would offer feedback aimed at improvement or use an evaluative rubric was not possible. Instead, we worked with a peer review model based on the concept of exchange. The model, based on Scott Lloyd DeWitt et al. (2016) Writer's Exchange (WEx), asked students to engage the writing through three distinct processes: *describe*→*assess*→*suggest*. For each process, the students were asked to review their peer's work slowly and with intention. When describing the work, students were prompted to provide a concise description that "capture[ed] the gist or essence of the writer's work [but

did] not rewrite or interpret the piece” (DeWitt, et al., 2016, p. 12). The process of assessing asked students to comment on what they believed were the strengths and weaknesses of the piece but also demanded that the reviewer explain how they, as a reader, defined success in the specific aspects they were commenting on. The final process, Suggest, asked the reviewer to make clear suggestions to the composer based on their previous descriptions and assessments. Specifically, reviewers were tasked with explaining why they made this suggestion and “how [they thought] the suggestion could rhetorically affect the writing” (DeWitt, et al., 2016, p. 14).

Looking back, I find this approach to peer review similar to Timothy Oleksiak’s recent call for “slow peer review” as a queer praxis. Oleksiak (2020) argues that peer review can be a space for queer worldbuilding when it is performed with intention, and he calls for us to be attentive to the attachments we carry for the “improvement imperative,” which he relates to Berlant’s cruel optimism. In the *describe*→*assess*→*suggest* model used in my digital media course, we did not manage to detach from the improvement imperative; however, our peer reviews made space for intentional reflection on how we define improvement and how we might determine success or failure beyond the limits of a traditional assessment structure. That is, the peer review process undertaken made the affective attachments students have toward certain conceptualizations of success more visible and, in turn, allowed the composers (and me) to ruminate on the affective impact of the Composition in Motion assignment.

With encouragement from the students, I used the *describe*→*assess*→*suggest* model as the base of my response to their compositions. Detaching myself from previous models of response that placed my teacherly voice above the rest of the class helped me approach each project as a fellow digital composer and someone aware of the various ways students negotiated their expectations and attachments. My own intentionality, then, contributed to a collective understanding with the students that the ways we orient ourselves toward success and failure are always influenced by the affective attachments we carry.

Zooming Out: “Final” Products and Assessments

When it came time to compose final assessments, the students, in their small working groups, met with me. Prior to the meetings, students were asked to write “reflective technologies.” This brief reflection, again, was a chance for students to consider their own work and the ways they recognized and/or developed new attachments to mobile technologies, identities, and composing practices. As they composed their reflective technologies, I additionally prompted them to consider the course goals and queried:

Have we achieved these goals? When and how? Are we still in the process of achieving? Have we failed? What have we learned, and what have we not learned? Where’s next?

With these questions, students are invited to respond to the affective attachments we had negotiated throughout the semester. This, I think, is different from simply asking students to evaluate themselves and assign a final grade for the semester, which has become a popular practice. Instead, students confront the end of one learning event without foreclosing learning beyond and otherwise.

In their reflective technologies and in meetings, students articulated—through experience and examples—the various ways they met *their* goals and *our* goals, and the instances that could be called “failure.” Meeting in the working groups—groups that had become collaborators, friends, and colleagues—relieved pressure from “final conferences with the teacher.” Students reminded one another of times when they taught each other how to edit a video transition or times they made sense of a difficult reading. They commiserated about the difficulties they experienced and the projects that didn’t get there but still got *somewhere*. The meetings, for me, became a space where the dual purposes of the course most clearly combined into a learning event queerly oriented. Students produced provocative projects demonstrating intentional digital media composing practices meant to illuminate the ways mobile technologies inform and are informed by our identities and our communities. Students also co-created an assessment ecology invested in learning beyond the purposes of a grade. Assessment, in this case, was the work of negotiating expectations, holding space for difference, and making the most out of the possibilities generated through the variously mediated conversations between students and their instructor. Attending to affect’s attachments through the slow, iterative, and intentional interrogation of our learning produced, what I would now call, a queerly-oriented assessment ecology.

Part III: Affective Attachments Beyond and Otherwise

In the previous pages, I argued for taking affective attachments seriously when collaboratively composing a queerly-oriented assessment ecology with students. For some, I know, this account will not present itself as “queer” or, even if so, “not queer enough.” Indeed, one reviewer suggested that this approach “resonates better with expressive pedagogy than queer pedagogy.” I understand this critique; it is something I’ve often accused myself of. Many of us who pursue queer (or critical or antiracist or feminist or crip or some combination thereof) pedagogies often feel our work fails to be radical enough in dislodging the affective, material, and ideological practices embedded in the late-capitalist, neoliberal, colonial, racist, and necropolitical university.

As I continue to reflect on how students and I engaged assessment (and each other) during the fall of 2018, I attend to the ways in which my positionality influenced the way I navigated assessment *with* students. I was a White, cis, queer, neurodivergent graduate student teaching a new course and working toward a dissertation project that was infinitely impacted by the affective attachments to literacy, technology, education, and assessment. How did my reading of queer

theory and writing studies—notoriously White scholarly spaces—impact my practices? I was teaching this course at a PWI with a class of students who carried variously overlapping but often different attachments. How did this environment reinforce my Whiteness instead of troubling it? Because these attachments “do things,” which “involves an interweaving of the personal with the social, the affective with the mediated” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 28), assessment’s affective attachments are never just an individual student’s response to a teacher’s “objective” evaluation. Assessment’s affective attachments, and the labor it takes to recognize and engage those attachments in responsible and ethical ways, move us toward a collective need for queerly-oriented assessment ecologies within larger systems of learning and literacy *beyond and otherwise* but still attentive to the here-and-now. According to West-Puckett, Caswell, and Banks (2023), this is the work of the *assessment killjoy*, who seeks not only to tear down but to “investigate the writing construct(s) we know and to challenge those models that do not yet reflect the nuanced and complex spaces of writing we value” (p. 18). Intentionally being an assessment killjoy and inviting students to do the same—in a late-capitalist, neo-liberal, colonial, racist, and necropolitical university—is queer.

One aspect I’ve addressed, but certainly not enough, in this chapter is the affective, material, and ideological complexities that digital media, itself, poses to the work of assessment. In an original draft of this chapter, I did more to highlight the *queerness* of digital media for assessment, but reoriented toward the collaborative assessment that students and I intentionally engaged in. I do still think about one student who, in a post-course interview for my dissertation, suggested that the alternative assessment model worked well for a digital media composing course because the kinds of projects we composed were so much more personal than projects in her other courses. I’m still trying to unpack this particular affective attachment and its implications.

The purposes and power attached to our curricular designs and assessment practices are bound up in each other, and to create a socially just version of one requires the same of the other. Recognizing the possibilities for learning experiences *beyond and otherwise* means troubling the ways we have attached our bodyminds to certain narratives about technology and communication but also concepts like “success” and “failure” and reimagining those attachments together. To move toward a queerly-oriented assessment ecology, we—all of us involved in the literacy learning endeavor—must *collectively* find ways of being that respect and honor students and the affective attachments they carry while also disidentifying with (Muñoz, 1999) prevailing systemic, political schemes that ignore affect in favor of mythical objectivity. Assessment, we must understand, is made of innumerable affective attachments that stick to us and orient how we interact with all of our other affective histories, stories, emotions, ideologies, and ways of being. A queerly-oriented assessment ecology is, in part, about recognizing assessment is never just feedback on a project or a grade on a transcript. Because assessment’s affective attachments matter. And students know this. They feel it.

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Chapter 10. Tensions and Failures: A Story of Assessment

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As Shawn Wilson (2008) writes, “Relationality requires that you know a lot more about me before you can begin to understand my work” (p. 12). This is my positionality: I am White, middle-aged, female, mother, wife, daughter, middle-class background, first generation college educated, student, cis-gendered, heterosexual. Like Kristin DeMint Bailey, I state my positionality not to claim White privilege, but to acknowledge the privileges I have due to these positionalities. I grew up in the lands of the Anishinaabeg—the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples—and I attended graduate school at a land-grant university on land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. I was still new to Alaska, and I was still learning about this place and the Indigenous peoples of this land, but I am honored to have lived and worked on the land of the Dena’ina. I am an outsider-insider where I lived, and most insiders have a strong sense of state pride. They loved to tell me stories of how things are different in Alaska from the “lower 48.” Being an outsider meant I had to work to earn the trust of my students. This trust, I have learned, is cultivated through building relationships with the students—listening to their stories and acknowledging their connections to this place through the land and the people. I had to be willing to become a student about all things Alaska and as I built relationships with my students and my own connections to this place, students felt more comfortable trusting me about writing. In other words, I had to acknowledge and respect their expertise in order for them to acknowledge and respect mine. It is a reciprocal relationship.

It is, however, a relationship with an inherent power dynamic that is bestowed upon my position by the institution and by my Whiteness. This power dynamic can be difficult to navigate when trying to enact an antiracist, engaged pedagogy. I want my students to feel comfortable taking risks and being honest about their learning, but I am concerned about how the institutional power dynamic limits them and me. As I build relationships and trust with students, I attempt to counteract these power dynamics by inviting students to participate in the course—readjusting deadlines as needed, helping to select topics, navigating coursework together—decentering me and centering students as much as possible. Despite students’ inclusion in the course design, as the instructor in this course, there is a tension that exists for me as I feel accountable to the institution’s expectations which are often racist and colonizing. In an attempt to disrupt the classroom and create conditions for student agency, like Alison R. Moore, I failed.

At my previous institution, I tried to implement assessment practices that asked students to focus on something they wanted to learn about writing. I wanted students to focus on concepts and ideas that they wanted to explore and play with throughout the semester rather than listing a grade, yet many students responded with earning an A as their learning goal. They seemed to believe that this letter represents “learning” rather than my judgment of their performance on specific tasks. While high grades may earn students financial rewards via scholarships and entry into specific programs, it doesn’t necessarily show learning or suggest a goal for what students hope to gain from our writing courses. This creates one of the first tensions between what I was hoping to do in my classrooms and what could (and did) actually happen: students want the highest grades and administration expects me to assign grades which show what students have learned, but I don’t know that most grading systems represent learning. Rather grades often feel like a subjective system that rewards certain White behaviors more than learning, yet students and the institution equate grades and learning. I feel that I am accountable to both my institution and my students to assign grades even when I might disagree with these systems.

Teaching is relational, and assessment is part of the relationship that students build with the course, and it holds me accountable to my institution’s expectations. However, assessment has not traditionally been about relationship-building and accountability to students’ learning; it has been more about gatekeeping as Gavin P. Johnson in this volume notes as well. In this chapter, I interrogate these tensions through my own story of assessment and failure, drawing on the work of Jack Halberstam (2011).

In my classes, I draw on Wilson’s Indigenous research paradigm as a useful framework for practicing antiracist pedagogies. He defines a research paradigm as “the beliefs that guide our actions,” and his paradigm explains that our truths are relational, accountable, and reciprocal; we can’t disconnect our epistemology, ontology, methodology, and axiology (Wilson, 2008, p. 13). I center Wilson’s work not to co-opt or to “become without becoming,” or to enact cultural appropriation (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 14). Rather, I center Wilson and other Indigenous scholars in my teaching and research to give power back to Indigenous ways of knowing, thinking, and doing. As Wilson says, “[a]n Indigenous research paradigm is research that follows an ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology that is Indigenous,” and it must also come from an Indigenous perspective, which he argues is not necessarily an Indigenous person but is someone who “leave[s] behind dominant paradigms” (2008, p. 38). I attempt to disrupt colonizing power structures and focus on the qualities of relationality, accountability, and reciprocity in my teaching and in assessment practices, which aim to leave behind dominant—White supremacist—paradigms of assessment by inviting students to participate in how their learning is assessed. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) explain, this disruption of classroom power structures is only one step in critical consciousness although it does not actually disrupt settler colonialism.

While assessment may not be a way to give land back, framing assessment with an Indigenous paradigm makes visible ways of knowing that have been erased through settler colonialism, and it makes students' voices visible in their learning. These are, albeit small, decolonizing acts.

Using Wilson's Indigenous paradigm to frame my work, as a White woman, as someone who tries to be a co-conspirator, is complicated by my Whiteness and by the settler colonial institutions where I teach. I present my work here to show the ways that antiracist work can be unsettling and complicated, and I use this Indigenous paradigm to frame my argument because, if we are going to say that Indigenous ways of knowing and doing are important to decolonization, to giving the land back and to Indigenous sovereignty, then we have to model that for our students whether we are White or non-White, and we need to practice our truths. This is a story of assessment, and failure. Like Johnson, I have long wondered how to make grades more meaningful and reflective of students' learning, because current systems of White—based rubrics and Western paradigms—and our affective attachment to these systems—that require performativity and “correctness” don't fit my truth about teaching and learning; as Johnson writes, “Grades and related punitive assessment models enshrine racist, sexist, classist, ableist, colonial, cis-heteronormative gatekeeping practices.” Yet, my positionality as a tenure-track assistant professor in a White-dominated institution causes me to try to fit my truths into the racist and colonizing structures that allow me to stay in my job. I feel that I can only push the limits so far. I think this is a real tension that many well-intentioned new professors feel.

Relational, Accountable, and Reciprocal

While presented in a linear arc, it is important to note that this Indigenous research paradigm is recursive, too, or as Wilson (2008) explains: relational, accountable, and reciprocal. These are the qualities of his Indigenous research framework, and the qualities that I draw on for teaching and to practice assessment in my classes. Relationality means developing relationships, or making connections, with people, places, ideas. As Asao Inoue (2015) explains, these relationships affect our interactions in the classroom ecology. If my students perceive me as uncaring or if I penalize their grades for every White Standard English grammatical error, we are not going to have a positive relationship that is focused on their learning rather than their ability to conform to “the rules.” In assessment, relationality refers to the ways students make connections between their learning and the grades they receive: how well does one reflect the other? This relationship is also reciprocal in that learning and grades should reflect one another, be a give and take, but reciprocity also includes the ways that students participate in the assessment or grading process.

I believe that students should be invited into the assessment process. When I provide feedback on students' work, I begin by thanking students for sharing

their stories because I want them to know that their words, their stories, are important. This is a first step in developing a relationship with the student: I acknowledge their stories and the work they did to tell them. And I will often ask questions in my comments that encourage the student to respond either in their writing or in private messages/comments via the LMS. For example, Taylor,¹ a student who self-identified as being from a rural village in Alaska, responded to a question by stating that they did not “learn anything” that week because they were “behind” in their writing background:

I tried my absolute best to understand what I was being asked to do and carry out that request efficiently, yet I always felt two steps behind. To be perfectly honest, although I’m not using this as an excuse, my high school education was terrible and I’m sinfully underprepared for this entire course.

Taylor’s honesty in their reflection invited me to continue the conversation and to begin to offer resources to build their confidence in their writing because someone, somewhere along the way, has clearly told Taylor that they aren’t a “good writer” or that they are underprepared for higher education. I want students like Taylor to know that they are capable and to provide the support that they need to succeed in my class and in the institution through a continued reflective dialogue. In online courses, conversations like this help me begin to develop a relationship with the student and to help them develop a relationship with course concepts that will hopefully transfer beyond our time together.

The ability to dialogue without that conversation penalizing their final grade is essential because it makes the student’s voice visible. It brings them into the decision-making process and invites them to explain their judgment of the writing task and their labor by asking them to think about their learning and how they understood it in their writing—where the concepts worked, where they were unsure, and what they want to keep practicing. Ultimately, the student assigns a grade in their reflection—a grade which asks them to make claims about their learning and to show it with evidence from the course materials and their writing—then I record that grade (or a higher grade as some students, like Taylor, underestimate their abilities) as long as they have completed the work. By asking students to make connections between the course work and the writing that practices those concepts (e.g., citing sources, genre formatting expectations such as memos or letters, audience, tone), I am asking them to think about the relationality of what we are discussing and writing and their own learning. I want them to explain which concepts are important to them and how they might apply those ideas in their work now and in the future. These conversations also help

1. In their informed consent, students selected how they wanted to be referred to in publications. Some chose their first names while others gave themselves pseudonyms. I will not be identifying which class they were enrolled in to further protect their privacy.

students take responsibility for their labor (Inoue, 2015). I do expect students to support their claims about their learning with evidence—general references or quotes from course readings and lectures, discussions, or writing activities. This evidence helps me to see that they have done the work while their final product shows how they are practicing their learning. The student’s written reflection asks them to grade themselves based on their learning and labor. It is difficult to demonstrate that they’ve learned something about course concepts if they didn’t do the work.

Assessment also demonstrates a shared accountable relationship between me and the institution—and this is another area of tension. For example, there are institutional expectations for me and the students: grade submissions, learning outcomes, standards to meet. I am told that students have a right to expect that their instructors are meeting institutional expectations; that every section of a class has shared learning outcomes; that they will receive meaningful grades that reflect their learning. But, for many first-generation students, like myself and for many of my students now, academia is a new community with new rules, and students don’t always know these expectations or relationships; it is my job to help students find the relationships among these institutional expectations, their learning, and how that learning is assessed. I made a complicated and conscious decision to help students navigate this institutional colonized space, and Tuck and Yang (2012) might consider this a settler move to innocence. By teaching students how to survive in these colonized spaces, I can remove my own guilt of “directly and indirectly benefiting from the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous peoples” (Tuck & Yang, 2012 p. 9). And Inoue (2015) would add that I am replicating the White racial *habitus* of these settler colonial places or ecologies. I see this decision as making visible this settler colonial space and the practices which have sought to erase and exclude non-White peoples. And my decision to make this move is further complicated because I have to concede the ways I am now complicit in this settler colonial space. Just as I acknowledge the labor my students perform in this space, I have to acknowledge that I am laboring in this place, too, and that my continued labor is, in part, contingent upon being accountable to institutional expectations even as I think about how I might work to change this space for my students now and in the future. I can try to disrupt the settler colonial space through antiracist pedagogies and assessment practices but my positionality also makes me complicit. How can making racist institutional practices visible allow students to thrive despite a system, an ecology, that was designed to exclude and erase them?

An Ontology: What Do We Value as True?

When I consider what is real or true about assessment, my ontology, I have to acknowledge that most classroom assessment is based on artificial, White supremacist paradigms, and I am guilty of this, too, as I have held students accountable

to SLOs and asked them to frame their learning around White supremacist language. As Inoue (2021) points out in his blog post, “What gets reproduced in the use of SLOs are the habits of White, middle- to upper class, monolingual English language users . . . which then reproduces people with just those language habits in future teachers and administrators.” But this does not describe many of my previous institution’s student backgrounds: just over half of our student body of 12,202 are White, about 7.5 percent are Hispanic/Latinx, less than 3 percent are Black, almost 7 percent are Asian, 5 percent are Native American or Alaska Native, nearly 3 percent are Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and almost 12 percent identify as two or more races (University of Alaska [UAA], 2021). The makeup of the institution nearly mirrors the overall makeup of our community, although Alaska Natives make up almost 16 percent of the state’s population and are severely underrepresented at the institution (DataUSA, 2021). Yet a 2018 study reported in a local newspaper that there are 101 languages spoken in Anchorage homes (Hanlon, 2018). There is a long history of this settler colonization which has made Alaska Natives and their languages a “minority” within their own lands.²

The SLOs do not fully reflect this linguistic or cultural diversity, although the 200-level writing courses do include a SLO that asks students to “apply their understanding of writing [humanities, professions, or sciences] to the uniqueness of Alaskan or Pacific Rim perspectives.” As an outsider-insider, this SLO was difficult for me to achieve, and I mostly tried to incorporate it through readings by Alaska Native authors such as Velma Wallis and Ernestine Hayes who I brought into conversations with other Indigenous scholars like Wilson, Thomas King, Malea Powell, Andrea Riley-Mukavetz, and Qwo-Li Driskill. It was not enough, I know, but no one was able to explain how I as a non-Alaska Native and non-Pacific Rim White person should teach this “unique perspective” beyond being encouraged to include some texts by authors who are Alaska Native/Pacific Rim. Since my own positionality does not include these “unique perspectives,” I had to let their voices speak through the Indigenous scholars that I included to honor and respect my relationships with these scholars. My truth is that, like Taylor, I was “sinfully underprepared” to meet this SLO, and I worry that I did more harm than good in attempting to meet this SLO because, overall, the SLO promotes multiple settler moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Like Tuck (in Tuck & Yang, 2012), my presentation of Alaska Native voices was often misunderstood, first, because I am not Alaska Native/Pacific Rim, and, second, because this SLO does not consider the “problematic point of evidence about the reach of the settler colonial erasure” (p. 8). Indeed, it continues to erase Alaska Native/Pacific Rim voices by situating them within settler colonial discourses.

In her final reflection, Ruby acknowledged how I have attempted to address this SLO and also demonstrates how I bungled this SLO, “This is one thing that I

2. See Haigh (2021) for a draft manuscript, bibliography, and timeline of Alaska Native history.

feel that I have learned a lot more about. There's uniqueness with Alaskan/Pacific Rim perspectives because the writing is based more on community and living in smaller communities. There's a closer connection to nature and natural paths in life." Ruby was responding to some of the course texts by Alaska Native authors and supplemental materials on Indigenous feminism. And in a later reflection in response to the same SLO, Ruby reflected, "I learned so much about cultural writings . . . I am proud of learning more about writing about other people, other genders, and other communities."

Her learning is problematic for me, though, because it doesn't necessarily help her "understand the uniqueness of Alaskan or Pacific Rim perspectives" nor does she necessarily "apply" those perspectives in her writing for the humanities, professions, or sciences. Rather, Ruby practices open-mindedness (Picower, 2021). She enjoyed reading (consuming) these texts but she isn't yet doing anything with them to give power back to the Indigenous voices. This is the colonial space that this SLO kept me and my students in. The SLO demands that we include Alaska Native and Pacific Rim voices or perspectives, but it doesn't really ask us to do much with them beyond consumption, a rather colonizing act in itself.

Furthermore, this SLO asks instructors to fit these Indigenous perspectives into academic genres of writing that are not relational, reciprocal, or accountable to the perspectives being shared. In asking students like Ruby to think about how these texts might apply within an academic discipline and asking students to write about these texts using disciplinary/academic genres, we have "met" the intent of the learning outcome. What we haven't done is ask students to center these Indigenous voices within their own Indigenous perspectives, their own "genres" because this SLO centers Whiteness more than it centers the Alaska Native and Pacific Rim perspectives it is intended to help students learn about.

While we must also consider what we are teaching and how those concepts and ideas decolonize our classrooms by giving land/power back to those from whom it was stolen, we also need to be cognizant about how we enact those colonizing ideals, e.g., rewarding higher academic acculturation with higher grades and following SLOs which we know are racist and colonizing. For example, traditional letter-based grading creates a hierarchy of knowledge with those who have the most academic acculturation performing at the top of the grading tier whereas those who are historically excluded do not always see their effort and labor rewarded with higher grades. I have had students who struggle with writing a traditional academic argument because they have explained that arguing against elders/scholars would not be allowed in their culture. However, am I remiss in not teaching them, then, how to write a traditional argument with naysayers and rebuttals because other classes might expect them to know this White-centered academic genre? There is a tension between what the institution demands from a first-year writing class—those traditional, White-centered "rules"—and what (at least one) SLO suggests it wants.

An Epistemology: Our Stories Are Our Truth

Epistemology is “how we come to have knowledge, or how we know that we know something” (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Like Wilson (2008), Powell et al. (2014), Lee Maracle (1990), and King (2003), I believe that our lived experiences—our stories—shape our reality. We know what we know because our bodies, minds, and spirits have experienced them and our relationship with these experiences has shown us what is real and true for us. Within an Indigenous ontology, this, of course, means that there are multiple truths because every person has to find their own truth through their own experiences and relationships. Unfortunately, a lot of students, particularly those who have been historically excluded, seem to have the story that they are not “good writers,” that they aren’t good learners. Their experiences have told them that writing is difficult, and they worry that they’ll never know the rules that earn As. Jane shows this in her reflection, “I think learning how to write is important to me. As stupid as this sounds, I truly don’t understand English grammar and the importance of why essays and formal letters or whatever have to be written in such a way to please someone.” It isn’t that Jane wasn’t capable of doing the work or that she was a “bad” writer, although her truth seems to be that she is not a good writer because she doesn’t know the “rules.” Although Jane seems to believe that following the rules equals “good” writing, she also questioned why those rules were in place and who made those rules. Her comment is further complicated because I don’t grade on these grammatical rules that she is most concerned with. I do focus on “pleasing someone,” though, in that my classes focus on rhetorical situations and that audience awareness is important to “good” writing. In Jane’s lived experience, Jane suggests that good writing is a set of rules to be followed even while she questions the true purpose of those rules.

My epistemology began to shift as I understood that grades were not actually relational to students’ learning. I wanted a grading model that changed the focus from “what the teacher wants” to “what am I learning” for my students, that encouraged risk-taking in writing by focusing the grade on labor and metacognition. Rosie wrote, “Even writing these [reflections], I have never done something like this for a class before (maybe once for a project) and I am learning a lot about my writing and how to write with a purpose in mind.” Students like Rosie were actually engaging with their writing and learning through metacognition. However, my grading model was flawed.

A Methodology and Axiology, or How I Failed

In order to develop a relational assessment practice that centered students’ learning, I designed a more reflective participatory assessment that gives students more agency in determining their course grades. Students wrote a reflection on their learning after each final project and at the end of the course by responding

to a series of questions that asked them to think about how they had practiced SLOs, what they learned about writing, what the SLOs did *not* show about their learning, and then I asked them to “grade” their learning and writing process (not just their final product) throughout this project and to explain why they felt they had earned that grade. To receive the grade they suggested, I expected students to support their claims about learning with evidence from their work and course materials, which helped to show that they were doing the work. A video lecture about the learning reflections and sample responses showed students what I hoped to see in their reflections. Their labor was the ultimate factor in whether or not they received the grade they recommended.

Sometimes students were too hard on themselves, and I proposed a higher grade because their work and their reflections showed that they were practicing the outcomes, which I would explain with specific evidence in my feedback to each student on their reflection. Grades could also be lowered if they did not actually do the work but still recommended a higher grade (for example, one student recommended an A for their final grade but only completed two of three projects which, per my syllabus, stated that they could not earn higher than a C). While project grades helped students see where they were currently, only the final learning reflection provided the actual final grade as I encouraged students to reflect on what didn’t work, too, and how they learned through that “failure.” For the most part, students received the grade they recommended.

I thought that this model of assessment helped me develop relationships with students through feedback and coaching rather than penalizing them for their ability to follow rules, and I believed that students would develop their own relationships with the course content by applying the content to their own learning goals, the course outcomes, and predicting how what they had learned about writing would help them in their future academic and professional goals. I was trying to let students show how these SLOs were actually practiced and measurable. To be honest, it didn’t fully work.

The piece that didn’t work was my methodology, which still focused on SLOs because I felt that helped me remain accountable to the institution, an accountability which I know firsthand is necessary for keeping a job but also forces new teachers like myself to perform in ways that contradict what we know is true and right. That focus on SLOs didn’t help me stay accountable to my students, though, which brings me to my axiology: what is worth knowing? When I think about my assessment axiology, I felt like I had to uphold the institutional SLOs even when I knew they were upholding racist/settler colonial paradigms because that was part of the stated expectations for my continued employment and tenure track. First, I liked my job, and I wanted to keep it. Through past experiences, I’ve learned that following the rules in these places is important to staying employed, but that’s another story. Secondly, I think there needs to be some commonalities among courses with different instructors, and SLOs give the illusion of providing commonalities, or so I thought. Despite these factors, I also believed that

my department's SLOs didn't fully reflect our institution or our community. Our SLOs focused on standard White supremacist writing concepts and practices:

- Establish credibility and persuasive power for an audience;
- Demonstrate understanding that composing is a process;
- Demonstrate consistent use of a broad range of conventions and genres that conform to the goals of writing in the professions, humanities, or sciences;
- And, as explained earlier, understand the uniqueness of Alaskan or Pacific Rim perspectives.

Since these were the standards to which I was being held accountable as an “effective” teacher, I tried to incorporate the SLOs and to unpack what they might mean with/to my students. What I learned is that you cannot make a set of racist and settler colonial standards into something they are not.

As I read students' learning reflections, I saw how my methodology for assessment made teaching and learning more relational, reciprocal, and accountable in some ways but it failed in other ways: I asked students to tell their own story of learning throughout the semester, to explain their relationships with concepts, course materials, and learning activities; however, I asked them to frame it in a way that was not student or learning focused. Their judgments were still anchored in dominant White language habits (HOWL). Additionally, I still maintained power over their final grade; it was my judgment on whether or not they received the grade they recommended. I tried to maintain an equitable ecology that focused on their labor, but some students didn't represent their labor as well as others when asked to show their learning in relationship to the SLOs.

I found the students' responses to be affirming in that they were understanding important course concepts about writing from rhetorical situations to more “nuts and bolts” tasks like organizing their essays and avoiding logical fallacies. And several mentioned that their writing had “improved” or that they were “stronger writers.” Rosie explains after the first project in their course, “This writing project helped me improve my writing style and sentence structure. I cannot pull exact evidence, but I am sure you can see from my rough drafts and final drafts, there is a difference.” And Tina writes at the end of the course, “I think I have improved a lot from the start of the course and shown real growth in my writing skills. At the beginning I was not confident and now I feel better about my writing and want to continue writing.”

Even when students did not fully understand these SLOs, they found their own space—their own pockets of meaning and connections to what they were learning—to think about what their writing and how this learning might apply to other courses and other areas of their lives by acknowledging what the SLOs *didn't* show. Some students focused more on what they learned about the topics they had chosen for their written assignments because that learning was important

to their goals while others focused on their overall growth. Andre wrote in their final reflection,

The learning outcomes failed to show the general expansion of my writing knowledge. Until I started taking college courses, I was very hesitant about my writing skills, and writing was one of my least favorite subjects. Through my three college semesters, I have been [writing] a substantial amount more than middle school, and I expect to do a lot more, so it is imperative to be confident in my writing. . . . I believe [this course] significantly increased my writing confidence, and greatly expanded my knowledge of scholarly articles in particular.

Carter adds, “The learning outcomes show a general idea of what is learned in the project. What I learned aside from those was primarily that writing takes time, research, and multiple drafts.” In retrospect, this confidence and growth in their writing *should* be the focus of their learning and reflected in their final grade. Shayenne writes, “The learning outcomes don’t give room to explain my opinions on humanities, which I feel is also important.” They want to show that their own ideas, their own meaning-making, is relevant to the course even though it is not captured through the SLOs.

A Few Lessons in Teaching and Learning

So, what comes next? Like Carter said, “writing takes time, research, and multiple drafts,” and so does assessment. My ontology and epistemology didn’t change; I knew that traditional grading practices were holding back some students, often those who have been historically excluded. In my own post-semester reflections, I realized that the way I had presented the SLOs to students may have led to some of their misunderstanding and confusion, and I began to think about how I might revise my methodology to better fit with what my students had taught me. Their reflections shifted my axiology that accountability meant being accountable to institutional SLOs; instead, I realized that students learned a lot more about writing than what was captured in four statements that upheld “habits of White, middle- to upper class, monolingual English language users”—which is my own positionality (Inoue, 2021, “The White Supremacy of SLOs,” para. 2). In order to truly decenter Whiteness in my assessment practices, I have to decenter the SLOs and my White-centered methodology. I have to listen to my students.

I will continue to refine my teaching and assessment as I keep moving away from SLOs as the center of learning and, instead, truly focus on students’ learning and writing goals. Ultimately, I want students’ final grades to show how they have grown as a writer and learner, so even if they “failed” at a concept or assignment, they learned through it. J-Co was a confident student in my fall 2020 courses, frequently pointing out that they had taken AP courses in high school

where they had already “covered” these concepts, but their writing did not always meet the levels of their confidence. Despite some “failures” in final projects, J-Co connected course materials and activities to show that they were learning the concepts—even when they did not practice it in their final written projects. In the second project reflection, J-Co explained, “Despite the recent revision, I still feel that some of my points are lacking evidences. My paragraphs may not have some smooth transitions and some incorporation of the quotes may have been awkwardly placed.” This comment demonstrates how J-Co is aware of some of the concepts we talked about during the project—claims and evidence, transitions, including source quotes and documentation—which they know are not fully developed in their final written product. They may have had difficulty practicing those concepts in their own writing, but J-Co could also look at their writing and identify what was still needed to “make it better.” Allowing students to learn from “failure” will become an even more critical component of my assessment that further shows how students are practicing relationality and reciprocity.

I’ve tried to make sure that students can claim their own space in their learning about writing by creating conditions which afford more agency to participate in how their learning is represented within the institution through continued changes to my grading practices. I want to empower students to develop their own reciprocal and accountable relationships with their learning. We do this by collaboratively crafting the ecology in which judgments and assessments of their learning and languaging take place. Rather than focusing on SLOs, I now ask students to measure their success by their own learning goals: What did you want to learn? How did you do it? What worked and didn’t work? What do you still want to learn? Their language determines how they will be assessed, and this focus on the students’ goals for their assessment holds me more accountable to their learning needs as we adjust what we should do in class based on their goals. I have to be more relational as I begin to understand and know my students more deeply. There is more give-and-take in this relationship, more reciprocity, as both students and I have to communicate what we want to happen in the classroom and how those things will be assessed. Like my students, I, too, must learn from my failure and continually seek to improve my practice.

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Chapter 11. (De)Centering Whiteness in Writing Center Assessment

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In summer 2020, we witnessed state-sanctioned murders of Black Americans at the hands of police, continued to grieve the tragedies of lives lost due to racism, and took part in protests in support of the lives of Black Americans against a backdrop of a presidential administration that encouraged White supremacy to maintain the violent, racist status quo. In our writing center at a large, research-based, predominantly White institution in the southeastern United States, we wanted to give a meaningful response to these moments, so in fall 2020, we implemented a new professional development curriculum that aimed to deepen writing center peer consultants' engagement with antiracism. We also invited them to use what they learned to assess our program's resources, such as training modules and workshop materials, from an antiracist perspective. Peer consultants worked alongside us to create a rubric that we hoped would identify antiracist values for our program; at the end of the semester, they used this rubric to conduct a programmatic assessment of materials and documents created by our office.

However, as we explain throughout this chapter, we did not implement a fully articulated antiracist assessment ecology. In writing this chapter, we follow Asao Inoue (2015) in defining assessment ecology from a "holistic" perspective, recognizing "the interconnectedness of all people and things" that can impact the judgment of language (p. 77). Had we taken this holistic perspective in our antiracist assessment project, we could have been more mindful of the ways Whiteness continued to assert itself, "without denying or eliding linguistic, cultural, or racial diversity, and the politics inherent in all uneven social formations" (Inoue, 2015, p. 77), including in our writing center. Instead, the rubric we created with our staff, as well as interactions among peer consultants, forwarded inclusivity rather than antiracism.

No doubt our positionality played a role in the outcome of our assessment efforts. Three of us were full-time administrators and one of us was a graduate

assistant. All four of us identify as White. Throughout this IRB-approved study, we reflected on the ways Whiteness influenced our project. The Whiteness of our institution and program also impacted our design for curriculum and assessment. In fall 2020, 77 percent of students at our institution identified as White. Nonresident aliens (the institutional term) were the second largest demographic, at 8 percent. Only 5 percent of students identified as Black or African American, despite the fact that nearly 27 percent of our state's residents are Black—a disparity the institution is working to address through recruitment, scholarships, and ongoing mentoring and support. When we implemented the curriculum, we employed 35 mostly White undergraduate and graduate peer consultants from various majors and programs.

In retrospect, we recognize that, despite our efforts to organize the curriculum to incorporate scholarship by BIPOC voices, we continued to center Whiteness by assuming peer consultants would be unfamiliar with the intersections among race, language, and writing, an assumption that ignored the experiences of our few BIPOC peer consultants. We put the onus on BIPOC peer consultants to do the extra labor of supporting one another rather than unpacking the White racial *habitus* that was at work within our writing center, as well as within writing center studies more broadly. We also privileged White peer consultants' agency, and our own comfort, when we failed to call out some peer consultants' tendency to deflect from discussing race by focusing instead on nationality or broad issues of inclusivity—a tendency we continue to wrestle with ourselves. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to move training and professional development to Zoom, which created another barrier for cultivating the empathy and relationships that are crucial for an antiracist assessment ecology.

Nevertheless, we share our experiences and materials in this chapter so program administrators might adapt the materials for their own local contexts while finding ways to be more deeply antiracist. We also aim to model and embrace a recursive and iterative process of program assessment that makes space for moments of reflection and failure. Such ongoing reflection is a crucial component of what Inoue (2021) called “an antiracist orientation” that casts “the meaning and significance of our work, ourselves, and lives” in specifically racialized terms so that we can continually work against racist systems.

Planning an Antiracist Curriculum and Assessment

Initially, we did not plan to focus specifically on antiracism in peer consultant professional development; we had planned to collaboratively design a rubric to assess the extent to which faculty reflected principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their writing assignments. We anticipated that peer consultants would need training in how to recognize different ways positionality plays out in language, consulting practice, and eventually assignment design, and we organized readings and activities to lay a broad DEI foundation, with attention to race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and multilingual writers.

As we were piloting the broader DEI curriculum with a subset of our staff, the events of summer 2020 unfolded—the protests, marches, and demonstrations about police violence and the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless other Black Americans. Locally, Black students used social media to name their experiences of racism in our community. Then, a student-led group organized protests and crafted demands for the university administration, including increased funding for Black student support, promoting antiracism and justice in campus culture, better community education about race and racism, and structural changes to university funding and governance. Conversations and controversies about these proposals have been ongoing ever since, occasionally making their way into the press.

Given these contexts, we saw good reasons for centering professional development on race. We speculated that peer consultants would have few formal opportunities to discuss race in their coursework, and we anticipated that they would be eager to do so. We also recognized that BIPOC students represented a higher proportion of our writing center clients than our staff or the wider institution. Whereas 77 percent of students at our institution are White, about 62 percent of our clientele is White. Historically, the writing center has served approximately 5 percent of African American and Asian-American students at our institution, and 9 percent of Nonresident Aliens (again, the institutional term), compared with just 3 percent of White students. By centering race and antiracism, we hoped to be in a better position to support the learning and safety of our racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse clientele.

As we reflected, we also realized that we had neglected to fully consider the impact of our Whiteness on our programming. To what extent were we reflecting on our White identities and learning about and enacting antiracist principles ourselves? Our program is responsible not only for writing center consultations, but also campus-wide writing workshops and faculty development. No doubt our Whiteness influenced how we designed and ran these services, too. Just as Megan McIntyre writes in her chapter “One White Woman Stumbles Toward Equity in Student Feedback Processes” in part one of this collection, we wanted to go beyond just saying our writing center was inclusive because we personally valued inclusion; we needed to intentionally practice those differences to enact the changes we imagined. We realized we needed to pause external assessment and instead implement a process akin to an *equity audit*, which “specifically looks at policies, programs, and practices that directly or indirectly impact students or staff relative to their race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, color, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, or other socio-culturally significant factors” (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, 2021, p. 1). An equity audit promotes “an inquiry stance that asks teachers to be on the lookout for whose knowledge is of most (and least) worth, whose power (and oppression) is reinforced by how schools and classrooms are organized, and whose voices are included (and excluded) in decision making” (Dodman et al.,

2019, p. 7). In our case, we wanted to inquire into the ways our program's worksheets, handouts, training materials, protocols, and processes racialized writing and devalued or excluded BIPOC writers' language practices, knowledge, and voices. After all, to echo Inoue (2015), even materials that were not explicitly focused on White language practices still rendered judgments about language. When a workshop discussed the writing process, for instance, it was still teaching "reading processes [that] are writing processes, judgment processes," and therefore served as a site for reinscribing racism or practicing antiracism (Inoue, 2015, p. 154). Therefore, we set out to design a professional development curriculum that investigated the intersections among race, racism, antiracism, language, and writing, with the goal of naming antiracist practices and policies that we could implement in our program. A weekly schedule of readings, key terms, and central questions is included in the Appendix.

This new focus immediately felt like a better fit for supporting peer consultants' agency: they could learn more about our goals and activities beyond the writing center, and, by providing feedback to us, potentially develop a greater sense of ownership over our activities and how we represented and engaged with students, and especially students of color. In this way, we could reorient power, and peer consultants' labor, towards antiracism, inviting them to "problematize the judgment of discourses and language" in the writing center and in our programmatic materials (Inoue, 2015, p. 124). However, as we will show, our original DEI focus, as well as our own and our staff's Whiteness, continued to creep back into our assessment ecology in ways we did not anticipate.

Curriculum Overview

To prepare peer consultants to collaboratively design a rubric and perform the assessment, we wanted to give a foundation in antiracism and maximize their learning within the limited hours allotted for professional development. Our core means of ongoing, paid professional development included weekly meetings, either as an entire staff or in "circles" (Marshall, 2008) of five to eight consultants, which we held on Zoom in fall 2020. Peer consultants prepared for these meetings by reading writing studies scholarship or completing hands-on activities with sample student writing. They typically did this work when they were on the clock between appointments, so we limited the number and length of readings and activities required during any given week.

The semester began with a rationale for the curriculum, utilizing local exigencies as well as scholarship that articulated the need for antiracism in writing centers (Geller et al., 2007). The full staff of administrators and peer consultants met to define terms and reflect on their reactions to the semester-long focus on antiracism. We also reflected on our identities, especially our racial positions (Aikens, 2019), by working with one of our institution's DEI specialists on identity and allyship and by reading about White privilege (McIntosh, 1990). Each

week thereafter, peer consultants completed readings focused on BIPOC voices and writing center theories that took up race and antiracism. These readings were the most visible parts (Inoue, 2015) of the assessment ecology we were building. We included readings that we thought were best positioned to offer ourselves and peer consultants an antiracist praxis for program administration, tutoring appointments, and the assessment of our program materials.

Circles included other peer consultants, a lead consultant, and an administrator, with the lead consultant and the administrator facilitating discussion. During each circle meeting, circles discussed the reading(s) while lead consultants took notes on a common document. These notes traced discussion topics, key concepts, peer consultants' reactions to the materials, and thoughts on how we might apply what we were reading in consultations, programmatic protocols, or conversations about writing across campus. Early on, these notes served as products of the assessment ecology, a record of "the learning that occurs because of the ecology," but, as we explain below, they also were "circulated back into the ecology as parts" (Inoue, 2015, p. 158) because they fed into the rubric, which we developed collaboratively with peer consultants in the final four weeks of the semester.

Because peer consultants' demographics closely resembled those of our predominantly White institution, we wanted discussions of readings to raise awareness of the ways the writing center mostly mirrored the predominantly White spaces in our university. In an effort to provide evidence of the ways that BIPOC writers experience racism through writing instruction and evaluation, we included BIPOC scholars who wrote about their traumatic experiences as testimony to White consultants. These decisions were centered on the learning experience of our White consultants, and we failed to consider BIPOC peer consultants, who we believe were already aware of the coding of academic spaces as White.

We attempted to mitigate harm to BIPOC consultants by establishing empathy as a common value and setting ground rules for the semester. We urged our staff to practice empathetic listening, which we defined as a practice of seeking to understand someone else's perspective and communicating back with understanding, without judgment, to build goodwill and clarify meaning. Although we think this definition is basically true, it sidesteps the potential contradiction in asserting nonjudgmental listening when the writing center is inherently in the business of judging language. In writing center studies, this conversation typically takes the form of a debate over directive versus nondirective feedback, which we had discussed with peer consultants in prior semesters. In asserting this definition of empathetic listening, we missed the opportunity to open a conversation about the role of racialized judgments in the ways we listened to one another. Our definition of empathetic listening also missed the embodied nature of empathy and compassion. According to Inoue (2019), "*feelings of empathy follow actions*," including "[b]odily position, eye contact, touch, [and] the movements we make" (p. 185, emphasis in original), all of which were difficult

to enact on Zoom with many peer consultants' cameras off. We also shared the following ground rules:

- No one is required to speak for an entire group.
- Everyone deserves space to pause and reflect.
- Focus on words and behaviors, not people.
- Give the same level of attention you want to receive.
- Err on the side of calling in instead of calling out.
- Everyone should feel empowered to enforce these guidelines.
- Everyone should feel empowered to offer new or propose changes to these guidelines.

As with our definition of empathetic listening, we think these ground rules are basically good ones, but, aside from an invitation to discuss or add to them during our first staff meeting, we never made them a key touchstone for discussion and reflection during the semester. Inoue (2019), in contrast, invited students to an intellectual process of “making lists of behaviors and actions that will encourage a culture of compassion” (p. 177), and then “each week we vote on two or three compassionate actions we’ll most focus on in our work that week” (p. 178). Without this kind of active, reflective practice, we believe some enacted a polite professionalism characteristic of White culture.

Indeed, as the semester progressed, Mila, a peer consultant of color, told us that our project carried an emotional toll; we believe that our centering of Whiteness greatly impacted her experience during the professional development process. We didn’t adequately consider what we wanted BIPOC peer consultants to learn through this experience or the emotional impact of witnessing White peers deflecting conversation away from antiracism or doubting some claims in the assigned literature. Our curricular choices assumed a White audience, emphasized that BIPOC learners experience oppression, and did not include enough celebration of BIPOC identities and linguistic diversity. Wonderful Faison (2019), for instance, urged writing centers to recognize “Black Language and linguistic oppression” alongside the myriad ways Black consultants “form solidarity through Black Language” practices such as musicality and nonverbal communication (para. 43). For Faison (2019), essential discussions “on Black Language . . . as a benefit and not a detriment in writing,” as well as issues like “gender and power dynamics, cultural insensitivity, and the power of names and naming” (para. 35) can open writing center spaces to antiracist orientations towards language.

In addition to the emotional toll placed on our BIPOC peer consultants, our curriculum lacked full representation of Black language in writing studies and exposed our own unfamiliarity with the canon. In retrospect, we could have better celebrated diverse, racialized language practices by incorporating materials such as April Baker-Bell and colleagues’ (2021) *Black Language Syllabus*, which aimed “to *celebrate* the beauty of Blackness and Black Language, *fight* for Black

Linguistic Justice, and *provide* critical intellectual resources that promote the collective study of Black Language” (emphases in original).

Designing an Assessment with Peer Consultants

In the penultimate circle meeting, we began with a modified version of dynamic criteria mapping (DCM; Broad, 2003). Peer consultants read through the notes from each other’s circles (now serving as ecological parts) in a shared digital document and began to identify patterns of repetition, similarity, and contrast across the circles, an activity Chris adapted from David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen’s (2011) *Writing Analytically*. With this activity, we missed a crucial opportunity for critical reflection on the circle notes, which reiterated inclusion and centered Whiteness through avoiding naming race, racism, or antiracism. Thus, we enabled a White racial *habitus* to feed forward into the ecological assessment process.

The following week, peer consultants created visual concept maps (The Learning Center, n.d.) that illustrated how they conceptualized the relationships among recurring ideas they identified in the shared document. During the final circle, peer consultants compared their individual maps and reconciled them into a single map representing their circle’s ideas. Our goal was to help peer consultants see how these recurring ideas related to antiracist values. Concept maps can aid assessment efforts because they visualize the relationships among values and concepts that circulate in an assessment ecology.

In one map, peer consultants identified recurring ideas around empowering writers, like respecting a student’s authority over their own voice, giving them an informed choice for making language decisions, and instilling confidence in their voice and writing. While we appreciate these values, we are concerned that these concepts are not inherently antiracist, especially in the absence of explicit acknowledgment of the impact of racism on empowerment. For instance, students may see SEAE as the only valid language form in academia, a learned perspective which limits use of their own voices and dialects. In seeking to empower writers, peer consultants should be aware of how race shapes their own and others’ thinking, choices, and pathways to empowerment. An antiracist orientation to mapping should involve examining conceptual relationships and bringing racialized tensions to the forefront of our observations for examination and critique.

In the final weeks of the semester, we reconvened as a full staff and began a collaborative effort to craft an antiracist assessment rubric from the maps. We began by soliciting ideas for top-level rubric categories before a staff meeting, using a shared online document. During the staff meeting, we split peer consultants into breakout groups and asked them to develop potential criteria for each category. Between staff meetings, we condensed and clarified peer consultants’ draft criteria so the rubric could be used more easily. In the final staff meeting, we shared a new version of the rubric, solicited revisions, and asked peer

consultants to practice using the rubric to evaluate materials from our Personal Brand in ePortfolios workshop. Based on that experience, we then revised the rubric a final time in preparation for assessing program materials in an assessment institute.

As one of our peer consultants would later point out, the creation of a shared rubric had benefits and limitations. DCM helped peer consultants collaboratively develop rubric criteria, and the rubric became a usable tool for assessing program materials. However, at the end of this process, we were led to question how well a rubric could create the programmatic change we initially imagined. As Faison wrote in her chapter in this collection, “Speaking Truth to Power (Or Not): A Black Teacher and Her Students on Assessing Writing,” we should strive to create rubrics that affirm linguistic diversity; however, that is difficult when rubrics are often used to enforce common standards. Inoue (2015) argued that rubrics are only one part of a wider assessment ecology; rubrics often reinscribe “a dominant White racial *habitus*” (p. 127), but they are not the sole cause of that *habitus*, which is equally reinforced via other elements of the ecology. Indeed, we can see a White racial *habitus* at work in the top-level rubric categories we developed with our peer consultants:

- Empowerment through agency over writing choices
- Welcoming learning environment
- Inclusive and diverse representation of writers and languages

These categories retreat into comfortable, Whiteness language, rather than directly naming the ways racist systems circumscribe empowerment, render BIPOC students’ languages unwelcome, and tokenize diverse representation to avoid deeper change. As White administrators, we have learned that we need to continue to facilitate conversations and engage in training specific to antiracism, as well as find new ways to disrupt racism and address the limitations of our own thinking.

Assessment Institute Overview

At the conclusion of fall 2020, seven peer consultants chose to assist in a programmatic assessment of our office using the rubric created through the professional development curriculum. These peer consultants participated in a paid Assessment Institute over two half-days, during which they applied the rubric to programmatic materials, including workshop presentations, handouts, and writing center training materials. We wanted the Assessment Institute to flip the assessment narrative by empowering peer consultants to assess and evaluate our materials, inform the work of our office, and contribute to a larger conversation about the institutional culture of writing.

On day one, we began by reviewing the reason for the Assessment Institute—an effort to evaluate and elevate our office’s enactment of antiracist principles in workshops, trainings, and resources—as well as key takeaways from the

semester's professional development readings. Then, we reviewed the rubric and, as a group, practiced applying the rubric to our oral communication workshop materials, after which we discussed both the materials and peer consultants' experiences using the rubric.

On day two, peer consultants practiced using the rubric once more on the same set of materials. During this "dress rehearsal," they followed the protocols for scoring materials individually and then adjudicated their scores in groups of three to four. To preserve multiple, possibly conflicting viewpoints, we collected both individual and group scores for the documents. At the end of the day, we reconvened the groups and held a debrief discussion of their experiences and insights. Peer consultants also completed a post-survey and follow-up interview. We reflect upon their artifacts and voices below.

Based on their feedback, we made meaningful revisions to program materials. Peer consultants suggested we more clearly name and discuss the tension between honoring students' voices and the real pressure they might feel to conform to SEAE and help students advocate for the use of their own language with faculty. We have also included more explicit recognition of racialized systems of privilege, power, and language.

Still, in conveying the findings of what is an imperfect project, we want to emphasize that the shortcomings of this project matter just as much as the successes. Neisha-Anne Green (2018) wrote that White folks in the room need to "stop being an ally; instead be an accomplice" by "support[ing] and help[ing] through word and deed" and "tak[ing] the risk" (p. 29). We had taken a risk in undertaking antiracist work in our program and had attempted to sacrifice some privilege as administrators by giving over materials to peer consultants for antiracist critique. However, we failed to incorporate practices that centered the experiences and needs of our BIPOC peer consultants, and we did not adequately challenge our own and White peer consultants' recurrent tendency to defer to a more comfortable DEI vocabulary instead of an antiracist one. To be the accomplice Green called us to be, we see as an initial step a need to acknowledge imperfection and even failure with humility as we continue to center antiracism in our professional development, programmatic resources, and policies.

Student Voices on Inclusion and Antiracism

The voices featured in this section speak to the tensions, successes, and limitations we observed in peer consultants' responses to the curriculum. While we do offer some commentary on the trends we see in peer consultants' thinking, this section centers on their range of thinking and learning over the semester. The majority of peer consultants who participated in the study are White women. All names used in this section are pseudonyms.

While we did not observe widespread resistance to the curriculum, Mila described a moment in a circle meeting that we interpret as a White peer consultant

resisting concepts such as systemic racism:

I remember that there was one point where someone, um, in my circle had said something in response to something I said about an article, and this person thought that the article we read was being very discriminatory against White people—and I was like, I don’t—I disagree. But I said that in my head. I felt very—I felt very uncomfortable [pause] calling that out because [pause] it’s hard to be the only person of color in a group, especially in a group where you’re like, I still have to work with these people next semester. [brief laugh]. (Post-Interview)

In response, Mila described feeling as if she were “walking on eggshells around topics as to not make people feel discomfited or upset” in circle discussions about racism with White peers. Mila discussed this moment with the administrator of her circle following the meeting, but this did not result in change to circle discussions. This showed the reality of the racial trauma that occurs even when professional spaces are intending to do antiracist work (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). As we previously discussed, we did not adequately support our ground rules with discussions centered on a compassionate ethic, which Inoue (2019) argued can support bravery in the face of discomfort: “Knowing that everyone is trying to be compassionate in our mutual labors makes it easier to be brave, rather than comfortable” (p. 170). Some peer consultants acknowledged the necessity of empathy and contemplation over the semester, but we did not engage the staff as a whole in the work of practicing a compassionate ethic. As White administrators, it was our duty to be aware of the potential for racial trauma, implement compassion practices, facilitate conversations on brave spaces at the very beginning, and then revisit these conversations regularly, so that peer consultants like Mila felt supported in speaking out rather than afraid of upsetting others.

The rest of this section speaks to unevenness across peer consultants’ conceptual and practical understanding of antiracism. As mentioned previously, some White peer consultants struggled to differentiate antiracism, specifically, from inclusion more generally, which we attribute to the gaps in the antiracist assessment ecology we have discussed. For example, in her final reflective prompt, Mary described this blanket inclusivity with the context of consulting, writing that “being inclusive and treating clients equally means preparing resources that are applicable to many different types of appointments/projects and accessible to every client,” including “those who may be overlooked otherwise.” This trend in the responses often took up ideas of equal or “fair” treatment and the recognition that everyone was different; those ideas did not get beyond meritocratic perspectives.

To overcome the tendency towards inclusivity, reflective questions can create opportunities to “unmask the difficult dialogue” by providing pointed challenges, questions, and commentary to individual responses (Sue, 2015): What are the differences among fairness, equality, and equity? Where do your ideas about fairness,

equality, and equity come from? What do they look like in practice? What does unfair and unequal treatment look like? In your experience, who is typically the beneficiary of fairness? Who isn't? What about equality and equity? And, more directly, what role might your race play in your notions of fairness, equality, and equity? These conversations might reveal that "fairness," from the perspective of a White racial *habitus*, involves judging everyone according to SEAE. Within that same *habitus*, we might read equality as "equality of opportunity," as giving students the same course materials, assignments, and writing center services, and then assuming it is up to the individual student to succeed. From an antiracist orientation, we might recognize how these terms mask inequities, such as uneven access to and facility with SEAE that renders a single language standard distinctly *unfair*. We might also discuss what it might mean to judge all languages as inherently worthy and valid, despite racist assumptions about the worth of Englishes other than SEAE.

Other peer consultants made connections between oppression and language but did not always distinguish between race and nationality. Many mentioned applying what they learned from antiracist scholars to their appointments with multilingual writers, the majority of whom are international students (BIPOC and White) at our institution. In her post-interview, Emily said the "international students" she worked with often "want to sound professional or they want to sound natural," and she said she had developed strategies to affirm them by explaining, "it's okay to sound like you're from wherever you're from like that, as part of your identity, I don't want to completely like take away your voice." Emily's affirmations can function as a form of advocacy for international students. Her references to "professional" and "natural" sounding language represented a common tension consultants experienced between, on the one hand, acknowledging the White supremacist structures that perpetuate a right/wrong approach to grammar, and, on the other hand, supporting students' own goals and their academic success.

Future conversations should equip peer consultants to navigate conversations about structural White supremacy in language by sharing the origins of ideologies about professionalism and fluency, discussing the realities of the system that privileges White, academic language practices over others, and co-creating a solution alongside the student.

Similarly, in a reflection, Mary wrote, "the closest I have come to apply[ing] the information I have learned is when students with English as a second language have told me that their advisors are not understanding to this fact or call their writing 'wrong,' when really they mean that it sounds unconventional." She sought to "reassure them" by explaining "that their writing is not 'wrong' or 'bad' if it sounds different or their professor asks them to revise" (Reflective Prompt 3). Peer consultants like Mary seemed to consider language differences as valid, not the result of error. Still, we wonder if the move to discuss multilingual writers may be a way to avoid talking about the more uncomfortable topic of race and

its impact on consulting practices. We could redirect their attention back to race by, for example, asking how these realizations about multilingual writers might intersect with “model minority” stereotypes about Asian-Americans; how Black Americans might receive different criticisms from professors compared with international students; or even how differently racialized assumptions might underlie the same feedback.

We also attribute the conflation between antiracism and inclusion and race and SEAE fluency to another element of the assessment ecology: we believe that many of our White peer consultants had never had another opportunity to think critically about racial difference, privilege, and systemic forms of oppression before participating in our professional development. As Inoue (2015) wrote, “People, social pressures, and institutions define the purposes of writing assessment ecologies” (p. 138), so when White peer consultants and administrators do not have the experience, opportunity, or tools to investigate their own positionality, and especially to name their own Whiteness, they will bring the concepts to which they have been exposed in the past. That said, our peer consultants’ interviews and reflections showed many of them confronting their privilege and engaging in important self-reflection.

For example, we saw some changes in Caty’s understanding over the semester. In her second reflective prompt, she wrote, “I need to not automatically assume that Standard English should be used. I learned in the articles about code meshing that I should always tell students that not one form of English is more valuable than others, and that they should be able to write in whatever dialect they please, but that I would be happy to help if they do wish to conform to Standard English for their own reasons.” While we were pleased to see Caty recognize the value of code-meshing and multiple Englishes, we remain troubled that the larger context of academia puts the onus on writers—and the peer consultants who help them meet their goals—to “conform” to SEAE. In fact, recognition of academia’s insistence on SEAE and a desire to empower writers to succeed within existing structures appeared to leave consultants feeling unsure of what may constitute an antiracist orientation to consulting. To be sure, non-directive, writer-centered approaches to consulting are *de rigueur* in most writing centers, and for good reason—they invite students to take up agency—but without an antiracist orientation, they risk perpetuating racist systems and assumptions about language. A writer-centered approach may perpetuate a “one right way” approach to what should be a collaborative and responsive space (Okun, 2021), one that involves both the client and the peer consultant in a complex process of collaboration and dissensus, especially when racist ideas and language practices become a point of discussion (Inoue, 2019).

Later in the semester, Caty seemed to wrestle with her own imbrication in racist systems. In her third reflection, she wrote, “I have learned that anti-racist writing consultation requires a lot of empathy, contemplation, introspection, and being uncomfortable. I have been forced to confront my own biases.” She

elaborated on this sentiment in her post-interview, when she explained, “I didn’t expect to, um, see everything that I saw within myself about like how much I was a part of the problem.” Even as we confront systemic injustices, we have internal work to do as well, since none of us is wholly separate from the systems we would like to replace.

While some peer consultants began to explain their newfound reflections on language and consulting practice, others seemed to express a sense of conflict. Bethany, for example, began her second reflection by noting “that the work of being anti-racist can be really complicated.” She explained that she agreed with the basic need for antiracism, but she was left with a number of unanswered, “moral” questions about the relationship between antiracism and academic writing:

Is it racist to ask writers to use certain set of grammar principles, or to conform to the standards of Mainstream American English? Is there a way to empower writers to do that without discriminating against their right to their own language? Is there any way for writers to find common ground of understanding each other while still staying true to their own flavors of English?

Rather than give Bethany clear consulting practices she might use to resolve such paradoxes, our curriculum seemed to show her “how deeply anti-racism has to cut in order for it to be true anti-racism” (Reflective Prompt 2).

By the end of the semester, some peer consultants’ reflections and interviews included clearer ideas about how antiracist work can be enacted in the writing center and across an institution. For example, while Bethany seemed to experience conflict towards the middle of the semester, she elaborated on her understanding of antiracism later on. In her final reflection, she explained that she used to think racism was simply a matter of “individual perspectives,” but came to understand that “systems have been built for so long on racist principles,” which means that “engaging with antiracist work involves rebuilding all of those systems and thinking critically about what is truly the best way to serve and equip and empower all students and all writing” (Reflective Prompt 3). She explained that the process of using readings to build and test the rubric had a direct impact on this realization because it required her to think concretely about the ways racist ideas might manifest in “tangible resources and documents.” We believe that the work of reexamining everyday practices from an antiracist lens invited growth in awareness of the systemic racism in which we are all existing.

While peer consultants’ reflections and interviews appeared to reflect growth in conceptualizing antiracist work in writing centers, they also revealed tensions—including institutional, programmatic, and cultural judgments of language—that hampered their ability to take antiracist action. Some peer consultants expressed readiness to take antiracist action in consultations, accompanied with uncertainty about appropriate moments for this work. Grace shared that she

envisioned antiracist consulting as a response to expressed racism: “My thought had been, you know, if . . . my client says something or is writing about something that could be related to our antiracism education, then I could be like, ‘Oh, this is just like this thing that we’re learning and you should know.’ But I didn’t have any papers like that” (Post Interview).

Additionally, peer consultants seemed worried about how writers would perceive them if they were to confront a writer’s racism; Caty shared, “it’s a delicate balance I guess, between not wanting to be rude to someone, but also not wanting to like just let something like that go, because . . . that’s going to keep contributing to the system that they’re benefiting from” (Post Interview). Caty appeared to have a tacit understanding of the “right to comfort,” a feature of White supremacy culture that centers the comfort of those in power (Okun, 2021). These tensions highlighted by peer consultants identify the difficulty of doing antiracist work without a thoroughgoing antiracist assessment ecology, the partnership of the full institution, and opportunities to improve the curriculum to help peer consultants conceptualize “how antiracism permeates through everything” (Caty, Post Interview).

While several peer consultants identified tensions that hampered their antiracist action, they also identified practical, antiracist strategies they could use during their consultations, like addressing issues of systemic racism that impact clients’ writing choices (Anthony, Reflective Prompt 3) and celebrating the “ideas and unique expression[s] of language” by clients who may “have been belittled for their writing in the past” (Becca, Reflective Prompt 2). Mila, for instance, emphasized talking with clients about antiracist citation practices. In her post-interview, she told us,

I think words have power, [pause] and [pause] writing serves as a medium for those who are either unable to speak about it or are forced to write about it, to communicate ideas or beliefs in, you know, their own way, and I think that carries across with anti-racism in actively searching for and choosing research done by people who don’t look like you. Or, if you are gathering testimonies for something, make sure to gather testimonies from everyone, and not just the people you sit around.

Similarly, Sophia found cause not only to recognize linguistic variety, but also to celebrate it:

Sometimes it’s realizing like, oh, this is how this person legitimately expresses themselves and like that’s their writer’s choice and, like you not only have to respect that, but like try to learn, like the beauty of that and, like why they chose it and, like listen to their perspective on like why that’s valuable to them and not just sit here and say like, oh I’m the superior one because I have the best grammar and the best punctuation knowledge and um,

you know, not . . . not prioritize like that um like Standard English above other legitimate forms of expression.

In this interview response, Sophia described the limits of SEAE and the legitimacy and beauty of other Englishes. In both Mila and Sophia, we see consultants who have tools they can use to expand writers' understanding of effective writing in ways that can have antiracist results.

Finally, several peer consultants mentioned the practice of "calling in versus calling out," a resource developed by Rebecca Haslam (2019) on interrupting bias by "calling out" intolerable words and actions and "calling in" to foster understanding and mutual learning. In his post-interview, Anthony told us,

I was able to use [calling in] I think during like one consultation, where like someone had where did something questionably that seemed like not the kindest towards like poor communities and like majority-minority areas. And I was like, "Um . . . I think this is how it comes across. Did you mean it like this, or do you mean it like this?" You know, so kind of using that like "calling in" conversational aspect.

While Anthony practiced calling in, Mila grew more confident calling out racism. Reflecting on the past, she described herself as "complacent" in the face of racism because she felt she couldn't do anything about it. She described our curriculum and the Assessment Institute as helping her recognize opportunities to use her voice to call out racism:

And while I still think with most situations there's nothing I can actually do about it, there is a lot I can say about it. If I make enough noise eventually something will get done [nodding, laughing]. And so, yeah, I think I just came out of it with more confidence to be *not* [emphatically] okay with things not being okay. Rather than always being okay with things not being okay. I think that's the biggest thing I came out of this with. (Post Interview)

We interpret Mila's increased confidence to voice her beliefs about racism as a commitment to practicing calling out. However, not all peer consultants were similarly positioned. Mila did not have as far to go as many of her White peers to understand the inexorable power of systemic racism. Peer consultants' spectrum of beliefs speaks to the fact that antiracism is an ongoing practice that requires attention, reflection, and multiple angles of approach.

Parting Reflections

To be frank, we initially worried about our ability to do this work as a WAC/WID program at a predominantly White institution that employed student workers

from across the disciplines. We wondered if we could engage with antiracist scholarship deeply enough within the time constraint of one hour per week across a semester to see how the theory can inform their practices. Despite constraints in timing and context, we feel antiracist professional development can be done in staff and circle meetings. We hope similarly positioned writing centers will take up this work. We also want to add some words of caution.

First, we did spend significant time defining terms, revisiting core ideas and values, and unpacking some of the more complex ideas in the readings. We found that White peer consultants needed redirection throughout the semester, whether that was a review of key concepts and ideas or a reminder of how linguistic values connect to legacies of systemic racism. These challenges have been echoed in Dan Melzer's (2019) article on negotiating White privilege in tutor education.

However, in taking these steps to ensure White peer consultants were learning, we failed to deeply consider how recurring introductory conversations and expressions of resistance and racist ideas would affect BIPOC peer consultants. Mila expressed hurt and frustration from a conversation that took place during a circle meeting. Prior to the semester, we had discussed exempting students of color from professional development and grouping all peer consultants of color into a single circle, but we rejected these ideas, lest BIPOC consultants lose out on work hours or be segregated from their White peers. Ultimately, we decided to offer additional opportunities for peer consultants of color to come together in community and solidarity to discuss their experiences with the curriculum. These opportunities included periodic meetings with Chris to discuss how they were experiencing the curriculum, as well as an invitation to meet separately—without a White administrator present—to support one another. However, none of these solutions is satisfactory. Rather, they are further examples of the ways we continued to center Whiteness: we put the onus on BIPOC peer consultants to take on the extra labor of informing a White administrator about their experiences and struggles with the curriculum, as well as the extra labor of finding time to meet with one another in an affinity group and decide for themselves how they would use that time productively. Compassion and mutual support became their responsibility, not ours or our entire staff's. Reflection on their racial positionality became their responsibility, not White peer consultants'.

We also saw the tendency to slip from topics of race and racism into broader discussions about multilingualism/translingualism, inclusion, and intersectional identities, even before we noticed the trend in the student voices included above. In the most striking example of this tendency, race does not appear on the rubric, despite its focus in the curriculum. Put simply: it is not an antiracist rubric. We had not set up a thoroughgoing antiracist assessment ecology, so we were unable to lead our staff to create one. We had prioritized the agency of our predominantly White staff by following their lead when they named categories and criteria that were more broadly inclusive. And to be honest, we accepted the polite substitution of inclusive practice for the messier and more difficult topic of racism.

Whiteness has a powerful influence over our curriculum design, assessment, judgment, and thinking in general. Like our consultants, we still find ourselves sliding along a range of orientations towards antiracism, some days vocally committed, other days retreating to the safer language of inclusivity. To aid us in this work, we continue to follow the expertise of BIPOC scholars in rhetoric, composition, and writing studies; specifically, we have learned from scholarship by Shelia Carter-Tod, Sherri Craig, Wonderful Faison, Genevieve García de Müeller, Laura Gonzales, Neisha-Anne Green, Natasha Jones, Zandra Jordan, and Asao Inoue. We also continue to refer to lists by Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyay (2021) and Andrew Hollinger (2021), which feature multiply marginalized and underrepresented scholars and antiracist pedagogies.

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Appendix: Curriculum Timeline

Week 1

Central question: What is the role of a writing center in practicing antiracism?

Key terms: racism, antiracism, institutional racism in education, systemic oppression, intersectionality, BIPOC, empathetic listening

Reading: Geller, A.E., et al. (2007). "Everyday racism: Anti-racism work and writing center practice."

Week 2

Central questions: How do our identities affect how we see the world? How can we discuss racially charged issues with care and intentionality?

Key terms: Identity, inclusivity, allyship

Speaker: DEI specialist gave an introductory reflective workshop on identity, inclusivity, allyship, and terminology as well as strategies for discussing difficult issues of identity with care and intentionality.

Week 3

Central questions: What is White privilege, and how does it appear in the writing center? What strategies can we use to respond to racism?

Key terms: White privilege, calling out vs. calling in

Readings: McIntosh, P. (1990). "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack." Haslam, R. E. (2019). "Interrupting bias: Calling out vs. calling in."

Week 4

Central question: How have the writing center, institutions, and individuals perpetuated (or disrupted) the myth that there is one correct way of speaking and writing?

Key terms: Standardized Edited Academic English, linguistic diversity, internalized racism

Readings: Pattanayak, A. (2017). “There is one correct way of writing and speaking.”

Bell, S. (2017). “Whiteboys’: Contact zone, pedagogy, internalized racism, and composition at the university’s gateway.” (Excerpt: Section “Attachment to Error”)

Week 5

Central question: How do language and power intersect in specifically racialized ways?

Key terms: language, race, and power

Readings: Lyiscott, J. (2018, May 23). “Why English class is silencing students of color.”

Diab, R., Godbee, B., Ferrel, T. & Simpkins, N. (2012). “A multi-dimensional pedagogy for racial justice in writing centers.” (Condensed to focus on three scenarios from the text.)

Week 6

Central question: How can peer consultants recognize and challenge oppressive language when they see it?

Key terms: oppression, challenging oppression, racial diversity

Readings: Suhr-Sytsma, M., & Brown, S. E. (2011). “Theory in/to practice: Addressing the everyday language of oppression in the writing center.” (Converted into a handout.)

Baron, N., & Grimm, N. (2002). “Addressing racial diversity in the writing center: Stories and lessons from two beginners.”

Week 7

Central questions: How does grammar become racialized, and how does this impact students at the institution? How do diversity and antiracism statements challenge or perpetuate racism?

Key terms: grammar, racism, diversity statements

Readings: Inoue, A. (2017, Feb 27). “Is grammar racist?” Examine diversity and anti-racist statements by institutions, corporations, etc., and identify which ones work well and which ones do not.

Week 8

Central question: What is code meshing, and how might it inform conversations with clients?

Key terms: code meshing, allyship

Reading: Green, N. A. S. (2016). “The re-education of Neisha-Anne S. Green:

A close look at the damaging effects of ‘a standard approach,’ the benefits of code-meshing, and the role allies play in this work.”

Supplementary reading: Young, V.A. (2011). “Should writers use they own English?”

Week 9

Central question: How might racially diverse clients feel invalidated during consultations because of assumptions about race and language? How might we validate and amplify their voices?

Key terms: voice, resistance

Reading: Isaac, R. (2018). “Sacred pages: Writing as a discursive political act.”

Week 10

Central question: How has the writing center operated as a White space, and what actions might we take to challenge the assumption that it is, by default, a White space?

Key terms: Whiteness, monoculture, monolingual

Reading: Alvarez, N. (2018). “On letting the brown bodies speak (and write).”

Week 11

Examine notes from circle discussions; identify patterns and begin dynamic criteria mapping (Broad, 2003).

Week 12

Individuals draft sample concept maps based on lists of values; create collaborative maps in circles.

Week 13

Begin collaborative rubric design by identifying rubric categories from DCM and drafting criteria to describe each category.

Week 14

Finalize criteria map and test on sample materials.

December 9 & 10

Post-semester Assessment Institute.

Afterword. Co-intentional Assessment

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So much of our educational system approaches grades and standardized approaches to assessment as though they are inevitable. Maxine Greene asks us to “imagine the world as though it might be otherwise,” and this is the work that I see driving this collection. In her story, Kristin DeMint Bailey writes, “Our subjectivities matter because they inform what we focus on, why we do what we do, and how we go about doing it.” The stories told throughout this collection are deeply idiosyncratic, because each of us bring different perspectives, different contexts, and different bodies to the work of teaching. However, the chapters here also sit alongside one another, creating intersections and frictions, “a constellation of interdependent voices” in productive dialogue.

I’ve written extensively about ungrading. In short, the word “ungrading” means raising an eyebrow at grades as a systemic practice, distinct from simply “not grading.” The word is a present participle, an ongoing process, not a static set of practices. The work of ungrading is focused on asking critical questions about assessment with the goal of dismantling a dysfunctional system that does harm to students, and also teachers. In “When We Talk About Grades, We Are Talking About People,” Sean Michael Morris writes, “Deciding to ungrade has to come from somewhere, has to do more than ring a bell, it has to have pedagogical purpose, and to be part of a larger picture of how and why we teach” (2021). The books I was reading when I first learned to teach, when I began to devise my own approaches to assessment, were bell hooks’s *Teaching to Transgress* and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Their words on critical pedagogy echo inside my own thinking about grades, pushing me to ask hard questions of myself and my practice.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire argues against the banking model of education, “an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor.” (1970, p. 58). In place of the banking model, Freire advocates for “problem-posing education,” in which a classroom or learning environment becomes a space for asking questions—a space of cognition not information. Critical pedagogy is focused on helping students become “readers of their world,” in the words of Freire. hooks extends this in her advocacy for “continual self-evaluation,” both of a student by the student and of a teacher by the teacher. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she writes, “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (1994, p. 13). This means acknowledging the full and complex humanity of students and also

working to mitigate the harm done by systems that too often fail to see students and teachers as full humans.

In his chapter from this collection, Asao B. Inoue, expresses the need to “equip our students, all of them, with antiracist practices and strategies for their own futures.” The work of this collection asks teachers to reflect honestly on our own educations, our own experiences of privilege and marginalization, and the origins of our pedagogical practices, and how those practices have evolved (and will continue to evolve). More than anything, this collection asks us to do this work together with students. Martin Bickman writes, “We often ignore the best resource for informed change, one that is right in front of our noses every day—our students, for whom the most is at stake.”

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Many students were born into a system of crude quantification. I don’t say “born into” flippantly. I have a 6-year-old, and I’ve watched her growth quantified in discrete ways since the day she was born. She’s adopted, Black, and has two gay dads, so her “development” has always been a subject of peculiar discussion. She’s had wonderful doctors, who see and engage her as the full (and rowdy) human that she is, but she is also regularly reduced to a data point, plotted upon a chart pre-determined before she came into the world. Assumptions are made about her because she’s Black, because she’s adopted, because she’s a girl, because she has two dads. But the data already being collected about her has little to do with the full and lovely human being my daughter actually is in the world.

In a *Time* magazine article, “All Teachers Should Be Trained to Overcome Their Hidden Biases,” Soraya Chemaly gathers and reflects upon data about how girls (and girls of color, in particular) encounter their education. In that piece, she cites a study showing Black girls are twelve times more likely than their White peers to be suspended. While Black children make up less than 20 percent of preschoolers, they make up more than half of out-of-school suspensions. Each time I read or share this data I find myself shocked, wondering at when and how a preschooler would or could find themselves *suspended*. My shock, though, is a point of privilege. I can’t fathom being suspended from preschool, because I showed up for preschool in a White, male, not-yet-recognizably queer body, and my disability is invisible. My experience of school was different from the experience of my BIPOC classmates, different from the experience my daughter will have.

This is the world my assessment practice lives within, and it’s not a world where easy answers, or universalized best practices, are useful—or possible. Inoue writes about what he calls, “divergent judgments,” which suggests that assessment must be a “critical dialogue” in the words of Freire. A student in the class I’m ungrading might be the very same student who was suspended from preschool because she was a girl of color. Every bit of who students have been, and the material circumstances they face, influences how they do (and can) engage. This is why I’ve written with Sara Goldrick-Rab (2018) that we need to

teach the students we have, not the students we wish we had . . . Today's college students are the most overburdened and undersupported in American history. More than one in four have a child, almost three in four are employed, and more than half receive Pell Grants but are left far short of the funds required to pay for college.

One hundred ninety-five thousand college students responded to the Hope Center's 2020 #RealCollege Survey. Nearly three in five experienced basic needs insecurity. Just over one-third of students experienced moderate to severe depression. Students from marginalized groups are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity. Seventy percent of Black students, 75 percent of Indigenous students, and 65 percent of LGBTQ students experienced basic needs insecurity. Female students were seven percentage points more likely than male students to experience basic needs insecurity.

A meta-analysis from John M. Malouff and Einar B. Thorsteinsson, which included data from 20 studies of 1,935 graders, found that "bias can occur in subjective grading when graders are aware of irrelevant information about the students" (2016, p. 1). What they call "irrelevant information" included sex, race, disability, physical attractiveness, or knowledge of prior performance. The authors ultimately suggest "blind grading," the practice of grading with no identifying information about students beyond the work being assessed. But I'd argue that race, gender, and ability do not constitute "irrelevant information." We can't counter bias by ignoring it. Who students are is exactly relevant, and their specific contexts need to be accounted for in our approach to assessment.

Consider some examples. Amarendra Sharma and Abigail Carr found that "food insecurity is a significant factor in determining the average Math-SAT score. An increase in food insecurity lowers the students' Math-SAT scores." Chad Cotti and colleagues (2018) found that students perform more poorly on exams when they are several weeks removed from receiving food-stamp benefits. So, it's not just *whether* students are food insecure that influences test scores, but the likelihood that they have received support and how recently they received that support. Jennifer A. Heissel and colleagues ("Testing, Stress, and Performance: How Students Respond Physiologically to High-Stakes Testing") found that "children displayed a statistically significant increase in cortisol level in anticipation of high-stakes testing. Large decreases and large increases in cortisol were associated with underperformance on the high-stakes test" (2021, p. 199). Acute stress leads to a large increase in cortisol, which has a direct negative effect on performance. And trauma, which often leads to dissociation, can cause a significant decrease in cortisol, also leading to lower performance. COVID-19 has certainly exacerbated anxieties around performance and testing. But the students most likely to be struggling now were struggling even before the pandemic. And those students (and so many of us) will continue to struggle.

Grades are more than just a bureaucratic abuse. I don't use the word "abuse" lightly. I was a victim of abuse, and I bristle when I see the word "abuse" used as a metaphor. The voices of students, and the specific stories I've heard students tell over the years, inhabit my work. Over the 22 years I've done research on grades and assessment, I've talked to hundreds of students about their educational experiences and hundreds of teachers about their experiences as students. I've heard from too many students who didn't get help when they were struggling:

Part of the reason why I never asked for help was because I saw what my professors thought of those who did.

I dropped out of college, in large part due to the hoops I had to jump through to get my disabilities recognized.

It's a lot easier to stay motivated when you're not made to feel like you're stupid or a liar. It's a lot easier to focus on studying when you're not focused on having to justify yourself.

I often begin workshops about grades and assessment with the questions, "how does it feel to grade? how does it feel to be graded?" The answers I've gotten back have been startling. And, even where I find myself unsurprised by the answers, I am struck by the emotional language and by the accounts of trauma that arise within almost every conversation I've had about grades. Conversations about grades are, ultimately, conversations about power, which is why they are so often fraught, especially given how many of us have specific traumatic experiences of both grading and being graded. In this volume, Wonderful Faison writes, "Teaching writing is about teaching power relationships. Conversely, assessing writing is about navigating and making those power relationships visible through assessment tools."

A few years ago, I read a *New York Times* article that summarized the findings of a recent study. The title alone was enough to clench my stomach: "When Report Cards Go Out on Fridays, Child Abuse Increases on Saturdays, Study Finds" (Jacobs, 2018). The study (specifically of primary-school-aged children) tracked calls made to the Florida Department of Children and Families child abuse hotline alongside dates when report cards were released by public schools throughout the state. The increase in abuse following the release of a report card was pronounced when the report cards were released on a Friday, as opposed to other days of the week. This finding led one of the researchers to offer a "practical solution" (in their account of the study to *The New York Times*): release report cards earlier in the week, as though the timing of the grade reports was the problem and not the nature of the reports. Nowhere in the study itself or in *The New York Times* article does the grading system itself get a sufficient sidelong glance.

Early in 2020, educational institutions across the US (and around the world) were having discussions about how to grade in the midst of a pandemic, something I heard repeatedly described as "compassionate grading." For at least a single

term, many institutions offered some version of a pass/fail approach to grading, but the majority of these conversations also failed to adequately inspect grades as a system or acknowledge the ways that already marginalized students are more likely to be marginalized by standardized assessment. From the start, I wondered why institutions hadn't been talking about "compassionate grading" prior to the pandemic. And as institutions began pivoting back to so-called "business as usual," I have found myself wondering why all these supposedly compassionate policies wouldn't simply continue. Is cruelty a necessary precondition for grades?

When the institution where I taught in early 2020 began its own decision-making process about shifting to some variation of a pass/fail system, input from faculty was collected in a Google document. The document produced was 13 single-spaced pages with just under 7,000 words. The most common word is "students," which appears 138 times. The word "GPA" appears 20 times. The word "struggling" appears nine times. The word "stress" appears eight times.

I wrote in that document:

I would encourage us to make sure to center student voices as much as possible in this discussion. Many of us are talking to students and trying hard to help, but the students most likely to be in close communication with us are the students who are best able to cope with this situation. Many other students are overwhelmed and have gone quiet. Those are most likely the students already marginalized to begin with, queer students, disabled students, first generation students, Black students, students already experiencing basic needs insecurity, etc. In the last two weeks, I've heard from students who are food insecure, LGBTQ students struggling to find a support system, students who have lost their jobs, students afraid they might lose scholarships, students with intense anxiety. For those students, business as usual is not possible, and it's not even possible to fake it.

Initially, students were not asked to contribute in any meaningful way to this decision-making process. They quickly assembled their own Google document, arguing that the institution and its faculty were "clearly lacking student input on this critical decision." The student document grew to 48 single-spaced pages with almost 26,000 words. The most common word in that document is also "students," appearing 327 times. The word "health" appears 50 times. "Stress" appears 64 times. "Struggle" appears 52 times. "Anxiety" appears 18 times. "Access" appears 26 times. And "worry" appears 30 times. At least three students write in the document about being food insecure, two reference being housing insecure, and 11 write about their own disability or concern for other students with disabilities. The word "GPA" appears 77 times in that student feedback document, which I still find heartbreaking. In March 2020, worry about how a compassionate (in this case, pass/fail) grading policy would affect their GPAs was at the top of students'

minds. Students were also worried about whether pass/fail grades would be accepted for transfer or as prerequisites for medical school.

Put simply, if an institution continued grading-as-usual during the pandemic, here's what all those grades have been measuring: how well students and teachers "pivoted" to working online, whether students had necessary access to course materials and meetings and support at home, whether students had homes from which to "shelter in place," and how capable students were of "performing" in a crisis. What all those grades mostly weren't measuring: student learning, engagement, and/or content knowledge. But this is not unique to grading in the midst of a pandemic. Nor was my former institution's decision to not include students in a conversation about a compassionate grading policy. The biggest cruelty of grades as a system is that they frustrate the already tenuous relationships between students and teachers, and between teachers and their institutions.

Compassionate grading in a pandemic (or anytime) isn't just about rewriting policies. It has to be about engaging students more fully and critically in conversations about their own education. At the start of the first pandemic lockdown, I wrote to all the students in my classes, "I'm here to support you however I can. Take care of yourself and your family first. Our class should not be your priority. Everything about this class is flexible. Whatever happens, we will work it out." A few months later, I wrote a piece for *Academe* about my own experience of the pandemic. I wrote about my husband being laid off from his job, about our cat dying, about my mom's brain hemorrhage, about telling our daughter that her grandma might die. I wrote, "I've heard from teachers around the world that they aren't sure they want to be teachers anymore if this is what the work continues to look and feel like . . . and I've talked to students who've found that the challenges of just living have made their schoolwork an afterthought." What kind of assessment approach does our current moment warrant? How do we address the fact that grades as a system disrupt the already fragile communities we are working to build in education? How do we push back against those systems without putting ourselves and our own livelihood at risk? In the face of rules and restrictions that seem insurmountable, what is our ethical responsibility to students?

We do need to restructure our policies. However, as we find new ways to reach out to students asking for help, and not just in the midst of a pandemic, we also need new (more direct, more honest) ways to draw students into conversation about our pedagogies, not just the *what* of teaching, but the *how* and *why*. Ultimately, grading and assessment can't be "compassionate," unless it's work we do with students rather than something that happens to them.

~ ~ ~

In *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire describes "dialogue" as "a horizontal relationship" that pushes back actively upon "vertical relationships," which he describes as "loveless, arrogant, hopeless, mistrustful, and acritical" (2021, pp. 40-41). This is the work of centering students, but not at the expense of teachers.

Both play an active role in and through this process. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he writes,

A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. (1970, p. 56)

Co-intentional education is the shared examination of education with the goal of making space for teachers and students to define and redefine that space together. Our pedagogies become something we develop with (not for) students. This depends on each of us being what Freire calls “teacher-student with students-teachers,” teaching each other, “mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are ‘owned’ by the teacher” (1970, p. 80). Freire’s use of the word “owned” here is important, because so many of the bureaucracies of education, grades in particular, function within a system of currency (where grades and GPAs have something akin to “exchange rates”). It isn’t enough to empower students within that system (and perhaps fruitless even as an attempt); rather, students must be drawn into the construction and reconstruction of that system.

Freire is not speaking explicitly about assessment here. Students becoming “readers of their world” means they can critically interpret their material and political circumstances in order to make effective change. Assessment is a tool teachers use in education to help (or hinder) this process. There is little room for agency or critical interpretation of material and political circumstances when power structures and crude hierarchies are reproduced or reinforced within education, with grades as the most direct mechanism for this. Simply, students can’t learn to make effective change in their world from within an educational system they are discouraged from interrogating and powerless to change. Drawing students into critical conversation about assessment, then, is a way of helping them become readers of their world, but more specifically, readers of their own education. This is a necessary precursor for co-intentional education.

The work of drawing students into the construction of courses, curricula, and assessment is especially important for students who are marginalized by institutions and systems. As a disabled, queer student, I might have attempted to assert agency over my own education, but almost always in the face of systems designed to strip me of that agency. Entering into conversation about my power as a student within those systems would have been predicated on my full personhood being recognized and acknowledged, which I have occasionally felt personally throughout my education, but never structurally. And, now, as a White male teacher with a different relationship to power in a classroom, I can grapple with my own educational history while also interrogating my own privilege and working to dismantle the structures I currently benefit from. I can only do this effectively if I do it alongside the students, and colleagues, with whom I work.

It's far too rare that teachers (or educational institutions) bring students fully into conversation about the what, how, and why of teaching. In my own practice, I have asked students to reflect on their own learning, and to grade themselves. The work of metacognition and self-reflection, though, means more than just having students process their learning; it means asking them (and ceding space for them to) engage in much deeper questions about education and the nature of educational institutions. I've long said, "we need to stop having conversations about the future of education without students in the room." To that I've added, "if students don't feel welcome within conversations about pedagogy, teachers need to ask ourselves what we've done to make these conversations hostile to them." We need to do intentional, critical work to dismantle traditional and standardized approaches to assessment. We can't do this work without understanding the specific contexts of the students we work with. This means we have to start by seeing students as full humans. We have to design for and with our most marginalized students. For our work to be equitable, pedagogical, we can't merely ask students to grade themselves, but must work together to interrogate and dismantle grades as a system.

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Narratives of Joy and Failure

When teachers with antiracist goals invite students to share in assessment practices, they open up possibilities to reflect on their own and their students' politics and subjectivities. The contributors to *Narratives of Joy and Failure in Antiracist Assessment* share their reflections on their efforts to engage in this collaboration. The chapters in this edited collection consider three central questions: How might writing teachers and students account for their own intersectional embodied subjectivities in collaborative writing assessment practices? What roles do the politics of judgement play in assessment ecologies where students collaborate with the teacher? Broadly speaking, how might writing teachers and students with antiracist goals navigate the complexities and tensions that arise through collaborative writing assessment practices?

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PRACTICES & POSSIBILITIES

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