Not White/Straight/ Male/Healthy Enough

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Being "Other" in the Academy

Edited by
Michael Moreno,
Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez
and Michele Shaul

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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL A. MORENO,
KATHRYN QUINN-SÁNCHEZ
AND MICHELE SHAUL

Every fall, a new crop of college freshmen arrives on campuses eager to acquire skills that will prepare them for the workplace, to join organizations that support causes they care about, and to establish meaningful relationships with their peers. Less visible but no less enthusiastic are the new professors who aspire to make a difference in students' lives, make ground-breaking discoveries, publish scholarship that influences their fields and forge lifelong collaborations with colleagues. Most importantly, these millions of students and faculty seek acceptance beyond admittance and employment. While this desire for acceptance is universal, there is no guarantee of achieving it. The academy—despite its rhetoric about equal opportunity for education and public commitment to diversity and inclusion—prioritizes protecting itself over protecting its most vulnerable students and faculty members. Those who arrive at the door of the academy through conventional routes may settle in with minimal difficulty. Meanwhile, for racial and ethnic minorities, first-generation students, veterans, adult learners, the disabled and members of the LGBT community, simply settling in often is not possible. After fighting tooth and nail to break into these institutions, which were, by all accounts, not designed by or for people like them, they cannot afford to let down their guards. For admittance and employment alone do not wipe the slate clean and do not ensure fair treatment, respect, understanding or kindness. Getting that letter of admittance or offer of employment is not the end of the fight; it's just the beginning of a new phase of it.

This anthology discloses the experiences of members of the academic community who know this fight all too well. By taking a deep dive into the minds and hearts of students and faculty members who identify as "other" and by disclosing their awkward, funny and painful experiences, the book aims to caution newcomers to the academy, to equip teachers to

identify and discuss inequity in the classroom, to call out perpetrators and perpetuators of injustice, and to provoke change, if not in the academic community as a whole then in each individual reader. The essays in this collection explore triumphs and failures in classrooms and committee meetings. They illustrate research outcomes with personal observations and reflections. They divulge fears, some warranted and some not, about competency and effectiveness. They examine unearned privilege and shame. Taken together, they underscore the need for less lip service and more introspection on the part of campus administrators; appropriate accommodations and support structures; and willingness on the part of every campus community member to do better and be better to others.

Recognizing that the case for doing and being better cannot be made with statistics alone, this book uses storytelling to bring to light the impact of discrimination on a very personal level. After all, there is no shortage of research and data on discrimination in the academy, and yet inequity and exclusion persist. The academy doesn't need another book to review dropout or tenure rates among the underrepresented or disadvantaged. The academy knows those numbers are dismal and that it's not doing enough. What the academy does need is more public disclosure—more stories by those affected deeply by prejudice. Discussions about outright discrimination and everyday discomfort most often are reserved for human resources offices, task forces, closed-door meetings, support groups and therapists' offices. In other words, these are private matters that the larger academic community doesn't have to worry about every day. But those who are "other" do have to worry about them every day. They have to worry every minute of every day. The writers in this collection put their stories out there to remind readers that others like them suffer in silence. If data points and longitudinal studies won't make people do and be better, perhaps, over time, making public that which has been private will.

PART I:

ENTRANCES AND EXITS
(TO THE ACADEMY)

ACADEMIC ROCK STAR

RACHEL BURGESS

Dear _____:

Thank you for submitting your application for the tenure-track/lecturer position in _____.

At this time, we are unable to take a chance on you. While you do show a bit of promise, you have a weak publication record, a nonexistent research agenda, and no academic accolades that set you apart from the other applicants. The committee has decided against advancing your application because you are merely a mediocre mid-level academic. Additionally, you are on the wrong side of African American, and we already have a "queer" faculty member. However, we do see that you are a phenomenal teacher. Your teaching portfolio was exemplary, and we'll likely steal some of the ideas from your teaching philosophy to use in our own writing program materials.

If, perchance, you had actually been an academic rock star, then we would have considered your application. For the record, such stars publish books, win prizes, receive fellowships, and have Web and brick-and-mortar presences of significant proportions. You appear unable to keep up with the rigor academe expects. That is not our fault. Whatever chance we take must be taken on the strongest, most exceptional candidates. You are not among them. Thank you for your interest in this position.

Sincerely,

The Selection Committees

Dear Selection Committees:

I'd like to register a correction.

I don't know how you discerned the absence of any kind of rock-starishness from my written materials, but I've never thought I'm an academic rock star. Seriously. I thought I was going places, but I didn't think I was a heavyweight academic. You know—the ones who write all the books that are on my Works Cited page, the ones who get invited to be keynote speakers, the ones who get endowed-chair positions—the ones who make it. They're all super-smart, highly intellectual, and magnificently practiced at it. I was just applying for a job. I also didn't know that I was on the "wrong side of African American." There are plenty of other blacker, queerer "African American" women who are on the very right side of everything you want them to be (though I haven't heard that any of them are being hired, either).

Incidentally, I hope your department's queer faculty don't know you're counting them. And please consider removing that bullshit lie about encouraging "women and minorities" (and whoever else you don't really want to hire) to apply. That's only to diversify the applicant pool (and cover your ass) so that you can say, "Well, at least some 'women and minorities' did apply." Also, if you're going to hire internally, then you should put that in your job description. And don't tell me you can't because of some obligatory legality. Plenty of job calls use the phrase "internal applicants only." I do hope the rest of your search yields your department its strongest, most exceptional candidate. It's probably a good thing it isn't me.

Best,

Rachel Burgess, Ph.D.

PARALYSIS

DEMELZA CHAMPAGNE

My professor left in a flurry, scuttled out of there to be taken to her hospitalized husband. Several people followed her. She had become the victim. I was left alone as I watched her moving farther and farther away from me, breathing my relief, in and out, in and out.

I walked out of her office and rushed into the bathroom. By then the tears were streaming down my face, so I hid. But Pema, a friend from my graduate school cohort, came out of the bathroom with a huge smile for me. Her expression quickly changed once she saw my tears. “What’s going on?" she asked. She took me into a small hidden room in the department, somewhere nobody would find us. I cried to her and told her everything that had just happened.

A few weeks later, I am alone in my apartment. I am worried about my inability to write, and I stare at the blank computer screen. My body begins to shake; tremors that I can’t control. I am fully conscious of what is happening, and while I desperately want my body to stop, it is impossible to do so. I begin to cry, and it makes the tremors even worse, like a thrashing through the body. The panic attack is aggravated by how much I need it to end. I know Ben, my boyfriend, whom I live with, is returning soon with our friend Corey, so I try to roll a cigarette in hopes that it will calm me. My hands are shaky, and this is a difficult task. *What is wrong with me?* A poorly formed cigarette is produced. Still shaking, I wrap myself in a jacket and make it onto the fire escape. I am shaking so badly that I have to hold onto the railing and bend down. I’m not able to stand up straight, nor am I grounded. With one shaky hand, I am able to smoke the cigarette. By the end, the tremors roll slowly through my body. When it stops, I feel empty and exhausted. No writing gets done that night.

Corey and Ben return, and I act as if nothing happened. They’re laughing and telling me stories about their night at the bar, and I try to go through the motions of being social with people I love. I feel strange, disembodied, and crazy.

Incidences like these plague me for the next three months after the experience in my professor's office.

One month later, I break up with Ben because I don't think he could understand what I am going through. He and I go our separate ways, breaking up the home we had created.

Years later, I learn that panic attacks shoot adrenalin through your body, leaving you to feel tired, vulnerable, and empty for days later.

What had happened to me in my professor's office was verbal abuse, but at the time I was too confused to understand that. When it was happening, I was unable to comprehend her anger and what provoked it. I knew some of the things she said were ridiculous and simple criticisms, but it was her unprovoked anger and a sense of testing me that made me confused. In retrospect, I can see that her outburst invoked in me the incoherent violence of colonialism, the violence that my grandfathers experienced at the Native American boarding schools they were sent to.

I started to see a therapist whose name I never learned. I spent an hour a week in her cold office decorated with pictures of cats. I didn't know what I was doing there. I went because of the panic attacks after the incident, but half the time I recounted stories of bad dates I'd been on or just complained about my roommates. We talked about my family and the way I was brought up. At the time I was resistant to making the connection between what had happened in the professor's office and my family. I wanted to focus on how I felt like the world was going to end if I didn't get into the Ph.D. program, if I didn't finish my essay, or my writing wasn't absolutely perfect. The only response I could find to the level of anxiety I felt was to give up.

So I did.

I gave up on graduate school: I couldn't do the coursework, I turned in mediocre papers. My grades reflected the mediocre work I turned in.

The graduate process at the New School is a careful culling—you are first accepted into their master's program, and then you apply to continue into their Ph.D. program. Not all the students accepted into the master's program continue, and, therefore, the program itself creates constant competition among the students.

I was ashamed when I found out I didn't get into the Ph.D. program, but my therapist was excited when I told her that I had told my father and stepmom about my failure. "That's great that you were able to tell them," she said. Several years later, I could begin to see how my feelings of

shame about my academic performance connected to my family history, but at the time I didn't understand it.

I am well acquainted with panic attacks. At first, when I was 12, I didn't know what they were. They used to hit me late at night while I was watching television. But most vividly, they hit me twice on an airplane. Right when the plane had landed. Both attacks—at age 12 then 13—happened when I was about to visit my mother for the summer.

I've never been able to tell my mom that I didn't make it into the Ph.D. program—or any Ph.D. program, for that matter. My last semester at the New School for Social Research coincided with my birthday. That year, my mother sent me an iPad, a gift that I had told her I wanted. She got the iPad engraved: "with love to my daughter Demelza, the next Dr. Champagne." It felt like a slap in the face. I've thought about scratching out the engraving. I am worried anytime I think someone might see it that I'll have to explain how I never got my Ph.D. but my mom thinks I did, and how I just let her think that. We don't talk much these days; my mom doesn't know who I am or what I do.

When I was 14, my older sister had her first daughter. In celebration, our mom came to visit. My mom would carry around the baby and call her "the next Dr. Champagne." It was silly, mostly because my sister had taken her husband's name and those kids could never be the next doctor with our last name. My parents had both received their Ph.Ds at Harvard in the late '70s. It stung when my mother said these things about "the next Dr. Champagne," because it felt like she thought that couldn't be me. I was bookish and smart. That was how I got my dad's attention and made my mom proud. Even as a teenager, I had my sights set on getting my doctorate. Years later, on a beach, my sister and I talked about mom, and my sister admitted that mom had often commented on her being stupid. Mom's favorite was our brother. She would pit us against one another: my brother the favorite, my sister the least favorite, and me somewhere in between the two of them. My mom could never really love any of us in the ways that we needed her to.

After the incident, my therapist with no name suggested I talk to one of the professors who I thought could understand. I did it even though I was a little unsure about the whole thing. But it all flowed out in the office of Sarasi, a professor who had been supportive and friendly to me and my ideas. She seemed disgusted with the Abusive Professor after that, and there was a perceivable tension around the department between the two of

them. Later on, when I didn't get into the Ph.D. program, I sat with Sarasi, and she said she was sorry that I didn't get in, but she didn't think the New School was the place for me. She asked me to think about why I wanted a Ph.D. I remember her saying over and over: *Don't get a Ph.D. just because you're clever.* Back then, those words confused me, but now I find comfort in them. She was telling me that I was smart but that I didn't have to get a Ph.D. to prove it. She was helping me to carefully think about who I was and my future.

At first it seemed like the cohort at the New School had congealed, that we were friends, supportive of one another. I base this on the chocolate bars that were passed around. At least a few times a week someone would bring in a chocolate bar and pass it through the circle of students. We were left-leaning anthropology students; by sharing, I thought, we were enacting support and care for one another, sharing and support which was an act against neo-liberalism. But it was all just a show.

Every year the M.A. students in the anthropology department at the New School put on a conference. The Abusive Professor talked this up. The subtle indication was that the students who put together the conference would be selected for the Ph.D. program. But those students were shady like sharks. There were three of them: two white guys and a white girl who took over, holding secret meetings and making sure the rest of us didn't know. And it was true: The three of them made it into the Ph.D. program. The three shady white students made it into the Ph.D. program, to the detriment of the three women of color who were not selected.

But what were we thinking? People of color in an anthropology department at a private school located in the northeast of the United States? Did we really think anthropology had progressed to finally let us, the other, into the discipline?

Some of us are at a bar. Dan has his arm around me and is trying to make me take a drink of Jameson, which I am denying him. He's married, but his wife isn't there with the rest of us. He finally stops, once I purposely spit the Jameson down his Nirvana shirt. That gets him off me. I laugh at him.

He wanted to study Indians on the Pine Ridge reservation.

There's a lot I hate about him, though some of it could have been jealousy. The way he walked into the department with his white boy

bravado, as if he had never heard the term humble. I hate the way he flirted with the Abusive Professor, and she'd fall for it.

He was one of the shady white students who got into the anthropology doctorate program, and I resent it. The white boy who wanted to study Indians, as if the world needed another white boy to study Indians, to throw all his faults (alcoholism, white supremacy) onto.

People whispered that the Abusive Professor was a feminist, but she wasn't. She was especially difficult on her female students.

My graduate school experience hit upon a deeper level of historical trauma that had been ingrained in me since I was young. My maternal and paternal grandfathers were taken away from their families on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa reservation when they were children and placed into Indian boarding schools. I've never talked to my grandparents about it. But those schools were built to indoctrinate the Indian students into a white way of life. Students were isolated from their families and communities. They were shamed for displaying anything that was culturally Indian. They were physically, sexually, and emotionally abused.

Some boarding school students have told their stories while others have folded the pain of the experience inside themselves. Especially difficult pain usually lives in silence, showing only in our unconscious actions or strange affective responses toward each other. Nobody in my family talks about my grandparents' experiences; but I can see the pain of it enfolded inside of them, the shame, guilt, and humiliation to only unfold slowly throughout their lives, then to reproduce itself through the generations. In the boarding schools, children were indoctrinated into a narcissistic society. That's how I view our current neo-liberal society: one ruled by competition, one in which people are not taught the value of empathy, one that is narcissistic.

My paternal grandfather used to say that Indians were good for nothing, except for maybe sports. He learned this attitude at the boarding schools. Despite my grandfather's attempts to distance himself from his ancestry, my father threw in a hand of tobacco to be buried alongside him at his funeral.

I was sitting in the office of my professor while she paced and smoked. She was supposed to be helping me with a fellowship application, but

instead, she was having an episode in front of me. Mostly she was telling me how bad my writing was, how my sentences didn't make sense.

She'd read one out loud and out of context and ask me what it meant. She asked me if I read the newspaper, then told me I needed to copy the ways journalists wrote. I don't remember much after that. Her words were paralyzing, and I was thrown into a haze, concentrating on the swirls of smoke from her cigarette. *She wants my tears, but I refuse to give them to her.* I can't tell you what she said. *Just breathe, just breathe*, I told myself. All I wanted to do was walk out, but I didn't know how to, so I left my body and my feelings there. I refused to really listen to what she was saying. I was there for 45 minutes, for an appointment that was only supposed to last 15 minutes. I didn't know how to exit. I kept on hoping the next student would knock on the door for their appointment. It only ended when someone came in to take her to her husband, who had recently had a stroke and was in the hospital. In only a few seconds time, she became the worried and grieving wife, the victim. A complete role reversal.

I wasn't getting into the Ph.D. program, and it was a godsend, though I didn't realize it at the time.

We have patterns in our lives, some patterns we are born into, some that we create from our circumstances, and changing these patterns is difficult work. The Tohono O'odham people have a character in their folklore called "the man in the maze." The maze is a metaphor for life; the end of the maze is the center. As you walk through the maze, you often make wrong turns, ones that take you either further away from your center or closer to it. Inevitably, you will have to turn around and attend to the demons you thought you had left behind. I can see a circular, but non-linear, narrative about what happened to me in graduate school. A narrative that includes not only me but also my parents and my grandparents. My experiences at the New School for Social Research ended up being a clearing of a familiar and familial pattern. While it may be something that echoes within my life as I move on, the experience has pushed me closer to my center, able to see a more viable reality.

My center, which is something I get closer to each time I share and write.

THE GAGA BOOK PROPOSAL

TAMARA MC

Dear Co-Collaborators,

My name is Tamara MC aka Doc MC, my "rapper"/academic pseudonym. I am the Lady Gaga of academia. My research is original, unabashed, and wild.

J. Jack Halberstam (2013) in *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal (Queer Ideas/Queer Action)* defines the gaga feminist as one who "cannot settle into the house that culture has built for her. S/he has to tear it down, reimagine the very meaning of the house in form and function and only then can s/he rebuild" (p. xiv). What does "gaga" mean? According to Halberstam, it is a word "associated with nonsense, madness (going gaga), surrealism (Dada), the avant-garde, pop" (p. xxv).

I am a gaga feminist in both ways. I will not settle for the status quo and what has been done before me simply because of tradition. Therefore, I have to break down, tear apart, gash, slash, and destroy what has already been, so that I can create anew and afresh—renovating form and function. I am not imprudent, though. I do not demolish everything, only those outdated parts of the house that no longer function.

My philosophy lends itself to hysteria, strangeness, the everyday artifact, and juxtaposition. I push boundaries and promote radical social change. In my work, the word "gaga" is the first utterance, the child word. It is also the word that has multiple meanings but not one true meaning. Gaga, perhaps, seizes sound with the truest and most distilled meaning—that of nothing and everything.

Besides being an academic rebel, I am also a teacher, a position I highly esteem. Teaching for me is just as important as doing research. Being in the classroom, face to face with my students, makes me feel like a superstar and confirms that I have true meaning and purpose in life. I currently teach full time at the University of Arizona at the Center for English as a Second Language in the Intensive English Program (IEP) to the most amazing group of students (whom I adore and could go on and on

about!). Also, I am fortunate to be a teacher trainer to new and seasoned teachers and professors.

I am a recent graduate from the University of Arizona with a Ph.D. in second-language acquisition and teaching. I majored in pedagogy and minored in Middle Eastern and North African studies. I focused on language, culture, and identity—specifically my hybrid identity of being both Jewish and Muslim.

In the two book proposals I am sending, I am setting out to solve the conundrum of 21st century dissertation writing and argue that the current state of dissertation writing is soon to be obsolete—for two reasons, predominantly. First, because institutions are not taking into account that more and more minorities are getting Ph.Ds., and second because institutions are also not taking full advantage of multimedia and the many ways the Internet can enhance the dissertation. Both manuscripts are informed debates about the practical challenges of today's emergent worlds.

My books contend that there is not only one way to write a dissertation, and surely the way that has been presented, and is currently being presented to Ph.D. students, favors white males and a privileged class. So, how then do "Others" write dissertations? How do those whose lived experiences do not mimic the majority write dissertations? My two books speak to the inequality of dissertation writing. The dissertations I am presenting are holistic and consider a Ph.D. student's whole and academic lived experience. These dissertations are unconventional, but they capture self-reflection, creativity, passion, and last, but not least—rigor.

The unfortunately neglected story I am planning to tell is about me. I am not white, not male, not traditionally educated (I was homeschooled, as well as schooled in a lower- to middle-class-income public school), come from a household of a single mother, am from two minority religions (Judaism and Islam), was born into a household where English was not the first language, am the first in my family to be educated in doctoral coursework, and the list goes on. However, this story is not just about me. It is about others like me who are not the traditional Ph.D. students of yore. How then can we (us "Others") write dissertations that are blueprints of everything we are not?

My books are different from all other books because they address this issue—how do "Other" students write dissertations that reflect, capture, and accentuate their unique, dynamic, and vivid experiences fully, completely, and unapologetically? This has not yet been done, and my books will be the first. These books matter to all of academia because the

system of the Ph.D. is archaic and favors a certain race, class, culture, gender, religion, and ability. Not only does this matter to scholars in the field, it matters to the current, as well as prospective student. If we are accepting greater diversity into our college campuses, our campuses then need to change to mold to the new student population. The Ph.D. is one way campuses have not yet included their minority class students. The current format of the Ph.D. holds students of color (and hybrid identities) back from succeeding.

My epistemological work critiques the Ph.D. dissertation and seeks to intervene in conversations about the origin, nature, methods, and limits of this age-old document. The two manuscripts I am sending proposals for break taboos, work toward progressive change, create a space for plurality, and command the need for an urgent dialogue about what has been, and what will become of dissertation writing. While my manuscripts are non-conformist, they are embodied and a catalyst for a paradigm shift in thinking about the Ph.D. My two books have enduring appeal because they are the first of their kind.

Additionally, they are timely because of the nature of the topic—a book on alternative dissertation writing has yet to be published. Also, because anything related to the Jewish and Muslim question is (unfortunately) timeless.

Why might you want to publish my works? I understand publishing is about salability, and I do believe my works can be sold to wide audiences because they bridge academia and popular culture, as well as various disciplines, and topics. Likewise, they touch on such themes as language, culture, gender, and identity—universally discussed concepts. The manuscripts I am presenting are not only for specialists in my field of applied linguistics—they bridge several domains. First, my degree is interdisciplinary and spans across multiple disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. Additionally, my books are written for the educated general reader, as well as the scholar, and can be considered trade books for readers without a specialized knowledge in my area. Therefore, my books do not have to be housed only on an academic press website, they can also be found in a Barnes and Noble on a physical bookshelf and likewise on a virtual bookshelf online on Amazon, for example.

Additionally, at a brick and mortar bookstore, like a Barnes and Noble, I see them housed in the sections of Women's Studies, Social Science, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Religion, Philosophy, Self-Transformation, and Biography. Online, the categories on Amazon would be Education and Teaching, Religion and Spirituality, and Politics and Social Sciences. On

an academic press website, my manuscripts could fit into the subject categories of Gender Studies, Higher Education, Jewish Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Mind, Body, Spirit, Philosophy, Religion, and Postcolonial Studies. My books are both scholarly and serious nonfiction and explore the many facets of human behavior—this includes the individual, as well as social complexities of living—from spirituality to divorce and decease.

M.A. or Ph.D. students might use these books as templates to show how marginal dissertations may look. My manuscripts are not definitive guides, but examples that students can read and think about and then, with the help of their committee members, create their own unique formats for their individual and vibrant dissertations. My academic monographs provide another perspective on a convergent landscape for disenfranchised students. They are critical of the doctoral dissertation and show a commitment to the entwined struggle of race, power, culture, identity, gender, and class.

The two book proposals I am sending are a destabilization and reconceptualization of one of academia's most untouched and forbidden topics—the dissertation! Both argue that the current state of the dissertation and dissertation writing is crumbling and moldy. I am sending you book proposals for two separate, but interlaced projects: *The diss-HER-tation: The Anti Dissertation* and *The Trans-Dissertation: The Dissertation of the 21st Century for the Hybridentity*. Both projects are meta-philosophical analyses of dissertation writing, and both question what a dissertation has been and will become.

The first was Version IX of my dissertation (not accepted by my committee, but still my lovely, and told I should publish it after my dissertation) and the latter was Version XXVII+ post-dissertation. From the get-go, before I even began my Ph.D., I always knew my dissertation would be a book ready to publish. I wrote the many versions (30+) of my dissertation as autobiographies, memoirs, and testimonios—as life-writing pieces. I did not write them for a purely academic crowd (quite to the contrary), but, still, I wrote them with an academic tone and mood, though this can also be arguable.

In addition to bringing forth a discussion and disruption of dissertation writing, they also illuminate different forms/formats for teaching ESL, English, and/or writing using life writing and new media. I will include links at the end of this letter in case you choose to read them, although I understand this is not customary in a book proposal. Both projects advocate for "I" writing, also called "self-writing," and propose that all academic writing is indeed autobiographical, even when the "I" is hidden.

Additionally, both projects delve headfirst into identity and those with trans-identities made up of trans-religions, spiritualties, and languages. I use myself as the subject. I name myself the trans-ject.

I do not find any direct competition to my manuscripts, but I do find complementary titles that support my manuscripts; therefore, if someone read one of the titles below, they may also want to read my books. So, rather than competition, I see the relationship as corollary. Also, I see life as abundance, and I sincerely believe that there is enough for everyone, and that if my manuscripts are well-written and strike a chord with my co-collaborators, then I will in turn help other authors in similar fields and vice versa. Energetically, there will be a sharing of knowledge, and this is what I hope for my books—I want to collaborate with creative thinkers and share space with them. Therefore, I do not write about my competition, but about my co-creation. My manuscripts may be comparable to and capture the same audiences as books such as:

Qualitative research books, especially those that deal with autoethnography, are complementary texts to mine. In *Interpretive Autoethnography* (2013) by Norman K. Denzin, he writes, "In short, interpretive first-person texts have returned to the human disciplines" (ix). Here he supports my arguments that the first person, who is undone and remade, is becoming more elevated in academia. He also recognizes that, for instance, "Indigenous persons in colonized spaces turn to oral history, myth, and performance narratives to make sense of their lives, themselves, and their collective histories" (viii, as cited in L.T. Smith, 2012). Denzin is stating that there are alternative ways of writing that support human agency and personhood that engage and elevate communities that are, or have been, marginalized.

Therefore, *Interpretive Autoethnography* says what I am saying; however, I am not only writing about autoethnography, I am performing autoethnography.

Additionally, I am writing an autoethnography while writing my dissertation—therefore my dissertation becomes a resistance narrative, a *diss-HER-tation* and *Trans-Dissertation* and a decolonizing autoethnography. Both texts become radical feminist texts that tell a story despite domination and power. They abandon the patriarchal system in an attempt to produce an epiphany in oppositions, trusts and mistrusts, and storytelling. *Being the Other: an Autoethnography* by Kedar Eve (2015) uses vignettes to present the act of being othered as an agent of change. This is very similar to what I am doing in my work. I am using my status of "other" to be an instrument that testifies and affirms that the current format for dissertation writing is myopic.

Dear World: Contemporary Uses of the Diary by Kylie Cardell argues that the use of the personal diary has been replaced with the digital diary, and additionally that the notion of subjectivity and truth are being reevaluated. *Dear World* looks at a familiar topic, the diary, and reexamines it, positing that new and innovative techniques have emerged due to the Internet. Therefore, the private and public are becoming closer and closer. My work is similar to this because my dissertation is too a "diary" and argues that dissertations are ready to revolutionize and become less traditional and private and more innovative and public—hooray!!!

My dissertation is written in academic language, but it is not exclusively written for my committee. When I wrote my dissertation, I opened up and expanded my audience by using everyday "diary" language allowing my co-collaborators to join me on an academic and self-transformative journey. Additionally, my dissertation is written with the notion of "everydayness," meaning that what I wrote then was written for a time and period and that it was transitory and too would change, just like the writing in a diary that takes on new hues depending on the mood, time, and place of the diarist. Both Cardell's work and my work look at how the Internet has provided new arenas for making writing more accessible; however, Cardell is exclusively speaking about uses of the diary, whereas my *diss-HER-tation* and *Trans-Dissertation* move beyond the diary and include the dissertation as yet another form of the diary.

Speaking of the diary, I cannot leave out my heroine, Anaïs Nin. From the moment I read her, I felt as if I was one with her. We share different histories, but we share the similarity that both of us are transgressive writers. She wrote about topics that had not yet been discussed, and she wrote from a place of rawness. Anaïs Nin was brave in writing the unsaid, and writing about the erotic, which many consider the grotesque. In these ways, my manuscripts share similarities with Anaïs Nin's. I write about what troubles me, which is often ugly. I don't believe in wrapping a chicken bone in red velvet cloth and tying it with a bow hiding its contents. Rather, I prefer to take the little bone, package it in see□thru cellophane, and then wrap it with a gorgeous rosette pink bow proving that even a chicken bone can be beautiful. I will be intrigued by Anaïs Nin and her writings eternally. I will question what fiction or nonfiction is—and whether there is ever a real divide between the two. I will also think about what is left out in writing, as well as what is said with inflation and accouterment.

Other texts that may support mine are *My Struggle* by Karl Ove Knausgaard because of his "over" exposure of the private in his autobiographical novels that pierce through the concept of genre—fiction

and nonfiction, and other texts that spring forth the ideas of "otherness," which may include those by bell hooks, Judith Butler, and Edward W. Said. Additionally, my work may resemble and borrow from feminist poets and writers such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Anne Waldman, Bhanu Kapil, Eileen Myles, Susan Sontag in *Against Interpretation*, Arielle Greenberg in describing the concept of "Gurlesque," and, one of my faves, Yoko Ono in "Cut," where she instructs audience members to cut pieces of her clothing off to showcase the reciprocity of artist and viewer. Additionally, my style has been compared to that of Iris Apfel, the "rare bird of fashion."

While my work is not traditional, ordinary, and 100 percent academic, it is provocative, fresh, idiosyncratic, and relentless. I write about what is hidden, and hopefully this in turn captures people's attention and rouses them to want to respond. I wrench open the ineffable and say the unspoken. I write with conviction because I believe in change and hope for a better world. My work is a form of social activism and justice and comes from the deepest place in my soul. I am an academic who is not all head and a whole lot of heart.

Both manuscripts are complete and ready to publish, and each is roughly 350 pages long and between 72,000 and 81,000 words. I am including both manuscripts so that you can get a feel for each, as they are different in subtle, and not so subtle ways.

The first manuscript, *diss-HER-tation* was written first and is more edgy in some ways. *Trans-Dissertation* was written later and is more "academic" and includes figures for the concepts I propose, as well as photos (lots of selfies!). The photos and figures can easily be removed if you choose not to include them.

Toward the last one-third of each manuscript, much of the material is the same; however, if both were published, I could easily remove the repetition and include additional information, as I have more material that can still be included. In addition to these two manuscripts, I also have Version I of the dissertation, which includes 300+ pages of additional research (anti-dissertation writing). I have named Version I the *Choose Your Own Dissertation*, as it can follow the nonlinear path of a collaborator choosing what, how, when, and where to read, like a *Choose Your Own Adventure* book. An editor friend suggested that I could publish each version as three separate books showing the process of trans-dissertation writing, with each highlighting different work. Also, there could be the possibility of combining the two manuscripts of my book proposal into one.

Just as the publishing world is changing at rapid speeds, so too will the dissertation. The format for the dissertation will transform as our world takes on new challenges. With increased accessibility and the meshing and molding of once separate domains, dissertation writing is about to explode in new and innovative ways. My books write to the burgeoning fields of dissertation writing, as well as life writing.

My work bridges, as well as bursts open, the divide between academic and popular. It makes available academe to readers who are not only scholars in their fields but also scholars in life.

In addition to what I am sending you, I also have at least eight completed manuscripts of poetry and prose and many more projects that are in various phases of completion. Also, I would like to mention that I am an efficient worker and enjoy the revision process. I welcome any suggestions you may have and look forward to working alongside you in the editing process. Additionally, I would like to state that I am approaching multiple publishers simultaneously.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my work. I look forward to hearing back from you in the near future.

Sincerely,
Tamara MC, Ph.D.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: CHALLENGES AND PREJUDICE IN THE ACADEMY

DONNA MARIE PETERS, ELIZABETH L. SWEET, KAREN M. TURNER AND KIMMIKA WILLIAMS-WITHERSPOON

Situation 1: Teaching White Privilege

As an African American female professor, I am often plagued by students' preconceived notions of my worth as a teacher, which is directly related to my social identity as an African American woman. These perceptions can be validated by an appraisal of my fifteen years of accumulated student evaluations. I am the diametrical opposite of the hot young male professor with movie star looks that gets a red pepper next to his name on RateMyProfessor. This is an aspect of prejudice in the academy.

I primarily teach courses that address issues of race to primarily freshmen students who are required to take a course on race that is a general education requirement that most of them enroll into unwillingly. The study of race is not the type of class that students feel will in any way prepare them for the career path that they have chosen, nor do they recognize how it might benefit them. In class discussions during the years Barack Obama was in office, a significant number of students felt their generation to be post-racial and used the election of this country's first black president as proof that we have moved forward (or are moving forward) as a nation and now practice the democratic creed of equal opportunity. However, not all students view the situation through the same lens. This particular semester a white male student had been adamant that African Americans have exercised advantages over whites as a result of affirmative action. He pointed out that he is at Temple only because he was unable get into the university of his choice because an African

American student with lower SAT scores took his place. An African American male student remarked that affirmative action is stigmatizing because his peers assume that he is less qualified than they are and presume that his presence results from the university's affirmative action policy and not his academic achievements.

Teaching the topic of white privilege has been particularly challenging. One semester, I decided to try something new to combat student pushback on this extremely sensitive topic. First, I provided the students with a working definition of the concept of privilege with a powerful video, pictorial illustrations, and a PowerPoint presentation on the concept. The lecture focused on all types of privileges to get student buy-in before introducing the sensitive and contested issue of racial privilege to them. I attempted to soften the impact of the words "white privilege" on overly sensitive eardrums by first discussing social identity theory. I stressed that individuals have multiple identities and defined for them the concept of intersectionality. Next, I asked students to break into small groups and asked them to reflect deeply about their own social identities and social location in society. I asked them to explore the following topics: commonalities and differences within and across social identity groups; the meaning and impact of social identities for self and others; and social identities and societal power/status of their own social identity group. I passed out lists of privileges linked to religion, class, race, sexuality, and gender to further the discussion. I concluded by directing a penetrating discussion on unearned racial privilege. As anticipated, the atmosphere in the room fell from lukewarm to freezing.

Prepared for the pushback, I had one more lesson to teach them that would be led by Austin, a white Ph.D. student who entered the room just as I concluded my remarks that made many of the students feel extremely uncomfortable. I introduced Austin to the class as a doctoral student in philosophy, and then he proceeded to present a ten-minute lecture on Aristotle's philosophy of race. The graduate student spoke with authority, stood straight, and was the embodiment of self-assuredness. He used convoluted, philosophical terminology and mixed metaphors that didn't make even a modicum of sense. He spoke gracefully, though illogically, and did not ramble on and on. The only thing that was the least bit accurate was his ability to enunciate the incorrect words that he used to impress his audience. Students sat behind their rows of tables with an air of acceptance and with furrowed brows as they tried to contemplate deeply the philosophical truths of what they perceived to be a very clear and cogent argument. At the completion of the lecture directly following the applause, I had students fill out evaluations, instructing them to give the

oration a grade of 1 through 5, with one indicating weakness, and 5 indicating excellence. Austin was given a 5 by each of the racially and ethnically diverse students in the class. I informed them that they all gave a 5 to the lecturer who purposely presented ideas that did not make any sense. Furthermore, I explained that this ruse was invented as the most dramatic way that I could think of to demonstrate to them unearned white privilege. I gave the students a few seconds for self-realization to sink in. Looking out at the sea of faces in the room, I could see the light in their eyes begin to flicker. – *DONNA MARIE PETERS*

Situation 2: Devil in the White City

I was teaching an introductory urban planning class to 200 students. Urban planning by its nature has a lot to do with race and gender. If you teach it without addressing race and gender concerns, you are missing a big part of the story. In this class, I had units titled "The Mothers and Fathers of Urban Planning" and "Discrimination by Design." I really wanted to get across the idea that planning was enveloped in inequality and that, as future planners, students needed to think about and undo the bias and discrimination that had too often guided urban planning. But I also had many guest lecturers who did not bring issues of inequality into their presentations about transportation, technology, and economic development.

As one of my assigned readings under "The Mothers and Fathers of Urban Planning," I had several chapters from the book *The Devil in the White City*, a nonfiction historical novel that documents Daniel Burnham's journey creating the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. At the same time, it details a serial killer who was murdering women prior to and during the fair. Since all buildings constructed for the World's Fair were white, it became known as the White City.

Shortly before we were scheduled to read sections of *The Devil in the White City*, I was summoned to the chair of my department's office. He informed me a group of students went to the dean's office and complained my class was focused on race and feminism and not urban planning. They told the dean they were sick of reading about racism and refused to even open the document entitled *The Devil in the White City*. They also suggested I was "shoving feminism down their throats." The dean referred the matter to the chair of my department. After reviewing my syllabus, the chair agreed with the students and asked me to adjust the syllabus to "focus more on planning." This was my first semester at this university in

a tenure-track position, after having had more than five years of teaching experience as an adjunct at several other universities.

After the student evaluations were in, and were not very complimentary, including one that said, "Indian bitch," referring to my Native American background, I was told these kinds of negative student evaluations could result in my termination (a loaded term especially for Native Americans) and that I had to improve my teaching. I went to the teaching center and got "help." There I was told that I did not "look" Native American, so my negative evaluations really had nothing to do with my race or gender—that it was in fact my inferior teaching that was the problem.

Needless to say, when my third-year review came up, there was "sufficient" evidence to show that both my teaching and research were not "good enough" for a Research 1 university, and I was terminated in my fourth year. – *ELIZABETH L. SWEET*

Situation 3: Students know best!

Students know best. At least this must be what administrators are thinking. Student evaluations or feedback forms are so very important. It's difficult to comprehend that 18- to 21-year-olds wield such power, but they do. Especially if you're not tenured or on a tenure track, the quality of your teaching is critical to your renewal. Of course, we want to hear from students, but theirs cannot be the only voice. I have been a longtime critic of such student assessments, absent other ways of measuring teaching competency, such as peer evaluations. The research is clear that women, in particular women of color, get negative student evaluations based on gender bias, not actual teaching effectiveness. We are presumed incompetent. We are presumed disorganized. Whenever I get on my soapbox about student evaluations, I talk about two experiences.

The first happened years ago when my father was ill. I usually don't share personal information with students, but I did in this situation. I told them I might have to unexpectedly drive three hours to see my dad. I assured them the course would be covered. As it happened, I missed two classes. One was covered; one was not. Both times I posted messages to the course-management system Blackboard before class, so I kept them informed. When I received my student feedback forms for that semester, I was devastated. The students said I was not organized and was constantly canceling class.

My department chair was aware of the circumstances and knew I arranged to cover my classes. However, there was no official way to